



# Why “Feel-Good” HR Programmes Fail – and How to Save Them

More than ever, employers today struggle to find optimal ways to motivate and retain talent, often implementing new and improved HR programmes that focus on career development, training, rewards, and so on. But some companies go no further than introducing a plan without determining its potential for success. Ultimately, failed programmes result in wasted time and resources, adversely affecting the company’s bottom line along with employee morale. Throwing money at traditional, “feel good” HR approaches that have been proven to fail over time is not the answer.

Why, then, do companies continue to implement such programmes? And how can such benefits be designed to succeed?

## **Reason 1. No Accountability or Measurement**

In some situations, the HR professionals who are responsible for operating the programmes might be newcomers, with little or no practical experience in developing and implementing them. Exacerbating these scenarios, management oversight might be minimal where

overworked managers have no time, budget, or even interest in the matter. Further, leadership may only pay “lip service” to offering such programmes to the workforce. Without oversight or support from leadership, there may be no means to evaluate and measure the success of these programmes and the outcomes they engender.

Organisations require accountability from leaders at all levels when it comes to people management. There is no point in designing an HR programme if leadership does not truly support it, does not understand how it works, does not care whether it is effective, and does not believe in it. But the need for accountability also extends to employees, who should take charge of, and be accountable for, their personal and career development, as well as discovery of what they lack in terms of self-knowledge. Without such ownership, it is easy to understand why many career development, reward, and other such programmes do not provide the performance results that many companies seek.

**”Accountability, a long-term vision, incorporation of employee input into organisational plans, and informed decision-making based on concrete information are all essential factors in ensuring the company’s future growth.”**



### **Reason 2. Too Much Emphasis on Trends**

HR practitioners, as with professionals in all other fields, monitor market trends. To retain valuable talent, they believe that the company should keep up with such trends, particularly if industry peers do so – often without determining whether the programme is suitable for the company.

Introducing a new programme in its infancy stage, untried and unproven, often leads to failed endeavours and negative results. Simply following the lead of one's competitors is not the answer. In fact, the very concept of "trend" is something that eventually goes away. HR needs to develop programmes that have staying power and provide concrete results.

### **Reason 3. Misalignment Between Employee and Employer/Programme**

Many organisations misuse far too many resources on hiring, developing, retaining, and rewarding "the wrong people" through so-called feel-good programmes that might only result in incremental improvement. If employees' personal needs and interests are not compatible with the company's mission, they are unlikely to contribute to the success of the

company or benefit from any HR programmes offered by leadership. The more that employees are aware of their capabilities and wants, and the more that they align with a company's business requirements (technical and cultural), the organisation should be able to outperform the competition.

Companies today are redefining and transforming organisational roles as they seek new ways to become more efficient and cost-effective. Consumer behaviour is also undergoing change by expecting more from businesses and providing clear feedback (both positive and negative). Further, technology is driving change in many parts of company operations, from product/service design to delivery and thereafter. To help the company meet these challenges necessitates HR programmes that work to motivate and develop individual employees, who should be working in tandem with the employer.

Misalignment is also a problem between the employee and the HR programmes that are offered. Sustainable and successful strategies demand in-depth research, thoughtful planning, and effective implementation. What good is a programme that no longer meets the needs of its employees when market demands, demographics, and other factors



change? Short-term success is a missed opportunity, a band-aid, a quick fix. The key to creating a sustainable strategy is understanding what makes the HR framework viable and responsive to the changing needs of the workforce. And only leadership – in conjunction with representatives from different segments of the employee population – can determine that answer.

#### **Reason 4. Not Forward Looking**

Markets change, as do the skills and talents of the workforce necessary to sustain organisational growth. This constant evolution of the external environment demands monitoring by leadership to efficiently and effectively provide the products and services desired by clients. Without the right talent, the company cannot satisfy customer needs. Although the workforce, lacking the appropriate skills, may somehow be able to supply the products and services, the end result may not be reliable, high-quality, or without mistakes.

Lack of skills inevitably leads to dissatisfied clients, which heads straight down the road to long-term trouble and a gloomy forecast for the company's survival. If managers do not know their subordinates – their skills and talents, along with their desired skills and talent – the ability to transform

the company as demands change will not exist. Is the HR function sufficiently versed in what the company needs going forward in terms of talent and skills? Objective research on what the workforce is, what it needs to be, and how it needs to get there are essential steps toward company growth. Such proactive effort paves the way to uncover workforce requirements that will satisfy leadership goals while developing talented employees.

Short-term thinking is present today in many organisations at all levels, from top to bottom. Unfortunately, without long-term vision and strategy, employers cannot design successful career development or reward programmes either. If management does not know what it wants to achieve in the future, how can the company attract and hire the requisite talent?

#### **Reason 5. Little or Ignored Feedback**

Communication is key for any HR programme to succeed. Completing the design of a sustainable programme is useless without providing clarity about the plan to the very people who are going to benefit from it. All the time and effort in designing the programme is wasted effort if leadership does not recognise that different segments of the workforce may



view the programme differently, even negatively. Some groups may even require different means to access the programme due to work schedules, skills and abilities, and other factors.

Successful organisations possess knowledge, expertise, and talent, with emphasis on feedback and open communication about the issues they face and programmes under development. Individuals operating in different functions should work together to resolve difficulties and initiate new ideas. Different stakeholders – leadership, managers, employees, outside parties – have the potential to offer diverse perspectives on the task at hand. Choosing the right team can determine success, failure, or mediocrity. But without consideration of their perspectives, by ignoring useful feedback, the company will suffer.

### **Transforming Failure into Success**

A key ingredient of success for the leadership team is getting to know and understand the true needs and desires of the workforce to ensure positive outcomes from any HR programme. To truly maximise returns on people through the programmes offered, managers should focus time and effort in these five areas:

- Invest in transparent people management practices
- Focus on common senseBuild trust among employees
- Do not tolerate and unknowingly reward self-interest
- Get “only” the right people to do the job

Regardless of whatever programme in place, the company will not – and can not – outperform in the marketplace with individuals who only make the bare minimum of effort. To boost the success and long-lasting effects of organisational strategy, HR must do the homework. Know what makes a programme work, plan the design elements with careful insight, test it, send it out, and monitor its effectiveness as the environment changes. Leadership buy-in is critical for any undertaking that requires efficient use of time and money, effective communication, ongoing training, and long-term sustainability.

Accountability, a long-term vision, incorporation of employee input into organisational plans, and informed decision-making based on concrete information are all essential factors in ensuring the company’s future growth. Together, they create a framework for transforming potential failure into definite success.



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