WayAhead Workplaces

A New World of Hybrid Work

A large tech company experienced rapid growth, both in revenue and employee numbers, prior to the pandemic. The team always had a strong culture of fun, innovation, and self-directed work. The office hosted a range of activities, equipment, and other artefacts to support this – Hot-desks and lounges to work from, a well-stocked kitchen, various games, regular social activities, and a fund to financially support social clubs started by employees.

Various initiatives were implemented to maintain the morale and wellbeing of employees during the lockdown period, including occasional gift boxes, games and drinks organised via Zoom, and webinars. The existing initiatives and activities within the office are still present, but are now underutilised.

Since the lockdowns have come and left, and despite many initiatives having been restarted within the organisation, office attendance has not recovered with an average of 50%.

There has been a high demand from individuals to:
- To work from home (for numerous reasons, including having moved further away from the office, need to care for loved ones)
- Work while travelling (interstate or internationally)
- Drop down on number of days of work (full time staff wanting to go down to 3-4 days a week)

Although demand for services is still high, the organisation has been struggling to keep up with a high workload. This has been exacerbated by a general decrease in employee productivity, difficulty in hiring new staff, and difficulty retaining staff (for a range of reasons, including the desire for individuals to seek higher paying positions).

Despite attempts to maintain and return to their pre-pandemic culture, the organisation has seen only some success. They hope to understand how to maintain their strong culture, recover from their reduced employee performance, and increase retention rates.

Discussion questions:
1. What do you see as the key themes or issues here?
2. What would you like to know about this situation? What key factors would you be interested in measuring?
3. Is this a challenge that you have seen or been faced with? And if so, to what extent?
4. Moving forward – What goals would you like to achieve for this organisation?
5. What steps would you take to achieving a positive outcome for all stakeholders?

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Exploring Key Psychosocial Risks

With numerous events impacting international supply chains and logistics, a medium sized manufacturing and distribution firm has had to adjust by laying off 20% of overall staff. The firm's restructure was completed six months ago. The organisation is also tightening its belts – Reducing discretionary spending, implementing a hiring freeze, and requiring stricter approvals process for any new spending.

Clear and concerted efforts were made to communicate to staff as to why these steps where needed, and in general, staff members understood that these steps were necessary for the survival of the organisation. After these events, managers worked quickly to redistribute the workload across the remaining employees, and return to BAU.

Over the last 6 months, the organisation has seen a small increase in sick leave being taken but has seen little significant changes in workers compensation rates and until now, little increase in turnover. The organisation does have an Employee Assistance Program, but there have been no significant changes in uptake.

In the last few weeks, a number of staff members have resigned. Exit interviews have shown a few trends consistent over several divisions of the organisation:
- From warehousing floor staff to managers within the accounting department, individuals reported that they felt stressed, frustrated, and resentful.
- Employees felt that their roles and work relationships have suffered as a result of the restructure.
- Many communicated that they have been treated poorly, but they didn't feel safe talking about it to anyone about their concerns while they were employed.

The organisation is now discussing next steps. They hope to better understand what underlying issues have led to these trends, what may have been handled poorly, and what can be done to remedy the situation.

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Challenging Central Actors

The customer service branch of a small but well-established insurance provider has experienced sustained problems with the wellbeing of their staff.

Customer Service Representatives are regularly faced with difficult conversations, from delivering difficult news, to receiving anger and abuse from customers. Outside of calls, some staff members struggle to maintain their administrative workload. Many employees work on casual contracts and with inconsistent schedules to cover the centre's operating hours.

The centre sees high turnover, a disengaged culture, and poor overall wellbeing, though minimal data has been collected outside of exit interviews.Many outgoing staff report feeing exhausted, and struggled to manage their emotionally draining interactions. Few initiatives have been implemented in order to manage employee wellbeing, however social relationships between some staff seem to be a positive factor.

Stakeholders throughout the organisation are keenly aware of the problems faced by the centre, however there are some differing perspectives among key actors as to how this should be approached:
- The head office team believes that the middle management and line managers are key to driving and managing change. They want to first increase insights into the situation and employee wellbeing, with a particular focus on examining whether the management has adequate resources to help individuals avoid risk, emphasising protective structural factors and adopting proactive wellbeing strategies.
- Middle management understands the impact of certain risk factors to their employees, however argues that these are inherent parts of the role – Difficult calls, high administrative workload, and varying hours are almost impossible to remove, and efforts should instead go towards the promotion of positive manager and peer relationships, individual wellbeing through an EAP and increased employee benefits.
- Certain long-standing line managers have reservations about the process. They agree with mid-level management that certain risks are inherent to the role, and argue that changes to existing operations would be a risk to output.They are resistant to the idea of collecting employee wellbeing data, and tend to see performance and productivity as an individual concern.

Discussion questions:
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4. Moving forward – What goals would you like to achieve for this organisation?
5. What steps would you take to achieving a positive outcome for all stakeholders?