

The latest ideas on how to approach measurement and evaluation of HR activities

DEPARTMENTS AT A GLANCE

- STRATEGIC COMMENTARY
- e-HR
- HOW TO...
- PRACTITIONER PROFILE
- METRICS
- HR AT WORK
- REWARDS
- RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Measuring behavior change

Most HR and communication professionals share a common belief that that the ultimate goal of their efforts is to facilitate a change in behaviors that directly links to improved business results. But they may have different perspectives on how to effectively measure behavior change in the context of management objectives and often employ different approaches.

Here's a brief look at how one of the world's largest professional services firms is using a combined approach that builds on the talents of communication and HR to develop new and observable leadership communication behaviors and measure their impact on performance.

Step 1. Develop leadership communication behaviors in the context of business objectives.

Meet with senior leaders to review business objectives essential to high performance and work with them to identify the top five to 10 objectives where improvement is most needed. Work across four domains: people, operations, finance and customers. Once key objectives in each area are finalized, the behaviors that map back to these areas need to be examined in depth.

Step 2. Identify observable behaviors that can be linked to key objectives.

From the list of business objectives, it's important to identify relevant behaviors using a rigorous research approach. For our process, we chose to data mine existing published research in business and academic literature to generate an initial set of behaviors with a documented track record as a key driver

for each objective. The HR and communication team could then work together to ensure they translated into directly observable behaviors.

Using this method, measurement is not defined using vague terms such as "create more effective communication." Rather, measurement is defined by concrete and active terminology such as "encourage dialogue that leads to conflict resolution." Actionable measurement terms should help guide survey work and support the team to establish a foundation for predictive capability in the measurement process.

Step 3. Focus on the critical few.

The critical few are a set of the observable behaviors generated in step two. These require a second review in order to select those behaviors that would have most impact on company performance. Here, it's critical to work with a team of senior leaders or internal experts who are knowledgeable about each business unit's objectives. The team reviews the full list of observable behaviors with the goal of eliminating those that don't make sense in that particular environment.

For example, for retention, our research found 22 key leadership communication behaviors, one of which was good face-to-face communication with employees. For this particular company, with a heavy emphasis on virtual teams and a highly mobile workforce, face-to-face communication was almost non-existent. The communication team had to work with HR to set conditions around this type of communication and clearly inform

GAGEN MACDONALD

Patricia Bayerlein is a consultant with Gagen MacDonald LLC, a strategy execution and employee engagement firm. Visit www.gagenmacdonald.com for more information.

employees and managers what to expect in order to measure and improve this communication behavior throughout the company.

Step 4. Measure behaviors and communicate results.

Using the framework of observable behaviors linked to performance objectives, it's possible to identify precisely how much change we can expect around a given business objective by changing specific communication behaviors.

For this particular company, the work to re-assess and add this predictive capability to their employee survey led to collaboration between research, HR and communication. In the end, the HR and communication measurement tools were combined in favor of a single, integrated approach that measured behavior as well as the effectiveness of HR and communication programs. A second phase is underway to evaluate the predictive capability of leadership communication behaviors to create a sound business case for improving them companywide.

Because the success of leadership communication is now measured in terms of behavior change and business performance, management accepts the responsibility to create an environment that facilitates change.