

## Capitalizing on the Value of People

At the core of employee complaints is a lack of feeling; appreciated, listened to, or understood. These complaints span across all industries and time and are key drivers for productivity and retention.

Back in the beginning of the century investigations were underway to address this issue and better understand employee satisfaction and productivity. In 1926, Harvard University conducted the Hawthorne studies. The research began as a simple attempt to study the relationship between office lighting and employee efficiency. The hypothesis proposed that if you increase lighting in the work environment you would increase employee efficiency. That would seem simple enough, except the results of the experiments were mysterious to researchers. What these researchers found was that employee efficiency continued to improve even as the office lighting dimmed to faint moonlight levels while at other times, for unknown reasons, the employee efficiency became worse and productivity dropped.

The researchers decided to interview the employees and find out what was going on. It was these interviews that lead to a dramatic discovery now known as the Hawthorne Effect. What the researchers discovered was that the attention given to employees by the researchers meant that 'finally' someone was paying attention to them. The belief by the employees, that someone was interested in and valued their opinion, changed their behavior and resulted in increased productivity. Could it be that simple? Do we simply need to pay attention and value our employees to positively impact productivity? I would say the answer is yes.

The lessons learned from the Hawthorne Studies are a reminder of the importance of valuing people. Some companies still believe that only money and the work environment are significant motivators for employees. The Hawthorne Effect reminds us that all the bonuses, perks and benefits in the world won't add up to the powerful productivity impact one can have by valuing the employee. This is a switch in thinking from focusing on the business capital to directing some energy towards an organization's human capital.

I cannot overemphasize the need for leaders and facilitators to see and value the potential greatness in group members. To value your human capital means to look beneath the surface at what is latent within the employee – at their truly astounding, untapped capabilities- and see people as they really are. Often we are too prone to put mental straitjackets on people, confining them to a role, a job description or using them as a scapegoat, without ever envisioning their value and what they are capable of doing.

There are three considerations to remember when capitalizing on the value of people.

1. Employees must believe that senior management has a sincere interest in their well-being.
2. Employees must be given challenging work and opportunities to use their skills and talents.
3. Employees must believe that they can make an impact and have appropriate decision-making authority.

Bottom line ..... if you want to increase your business capital you have to increase the way you value your human capital. What are you doing to make this happen in your organization?

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