

WHSmith Travel

WHSmith Travel, part of WHSmith High Street, sells a tailored range of newspapers, magazines, books and confectionery products for people on the move.

Despite recent industry pressures, the Travel business has maintained a healthy performance, but faced potential organisational change as a result of a new Senior Management Team.

WHSmith Travel wanted to understand the impact that the changes might have on its employees. Their key aim was to assess the current company culture and understand employees' ideal culture.

The company selected OPP to work with them because their psychological approach enabled them to present their findings from a unique perspective. Employees were also likely to feel more comfortable responding online, to an external and independent organisation.

What happened

OPP consultants created a questionnaire based on the principles of the psychological contract and organisational fairness. They also examined the impact of the company culture on employees' motivation levels, response to pressure and overall commitment.

To measure the psychological contract, OPP has developed the VORT-X model. This assesses which aspect of the psychological contract is of most importance to individual employees. Organisational fairness shows how fairly people feel they are treated by the organisation. If employees feel that this is lacking, it could impact negatively on their psychological contract and reduce levels of commitment and motivation.

When employees are motivated, they are more likely to give effort beyond what is strictly required of them. However, to maintain this behaviour, employees must feel that they are getting something in return. What an employee values about the organisation provides an important source of support to them during times of pressure. The organisation should therefore consider the impact of changes related to these areas.

The process

All employees were asked to complete the questionnaire. The results identified which area of the VORT-X model was most important to individual employees, how fairly they felt treated, any gap between current and ideal culture, and specific employee issues. They also showed the extent to which employees consider issues to be important and the extent to which they consider that those issues are being satisfactorily addressed. This enabled WHSmith to determine the level of action required.

Conclusions

The results were in general very positive, and OPP made recommendations for changes that would improve the environment further. The final report provided

valuable information about employee engagement and WHSmith realised that maintaining efforts in areas in which employees were very satisfied strengthened the psychological contract and was therefore as important as identifying and implementing changes in other areas.

After discussing these results with OPP, WHSmith determined actions to focus on initially. These included establishing a clear career progression route and ensuring open lines of communication with employees.

What next?

WHSmith Travel is committed to continuously improving its employment proposition. The organisation found this project very valuable: it now feels better able to pre-empt its responses to organisational change and has an enhanced awareness of which areas are regarded as particularly important. Being reassured that employees were in general positive about the organisational culture meant that WHSmith Travel can now approach new challenges from a sound foundation.

An extended version of this case study is available in the OPP newsletter OPPinions. To join the mailing list or to request a copy, email opinions@opp.eu.com