Out of Office
Building Teams for an Agile Future

Executive Summary

About Opportunity Now

Opportunity Now empowers employers to accelerate change for women in the workplace because it makes good business sense. We work with our membership of 350 employers, from the UK's largest to some of the smallest in the private, public and education sectors to offer tailored, practical and pragmatic advice on workplace issues.

Opportunity Now is part of Business in the Community, a registered charity. Business in the Community mobilises business for good. Our members commit to take action on the key issues of today, be they people or planet, and create a unique platform for collaborative action.

www.opportunitynow.org.uk

Foreword

I believe that trust plays a vital role in building organisations where every person is valued and delivers value for their employer. Technology has promised so much in terms of the ability to transform our working lives, but time and time again I see that it has not delivered. I believe that it is a lack of trust, and consequently a reluctance to empower employees to make decisions about the best way that they can deliver value to their employer, that has proved a barrier to organisations grasping the opportunities that technological advances provide.

That is why, as a member of Opportunity Now's Advisory Board, I was personally very keen to lead this research. During my career, I have seen the pivotal role that leaders play in creating this environment of trust. We understand the enormous benefits agility can bring to individuals and organisations but we need to work harder to build the trust which will make this a reality. By living out our organisation's values, by empowering our people to deliver their best and by using a little more imagination about the way that work is done, we can help to create an agile future for our organisations. I believe that this piece of research, the first in a series on this issue, will provide inspiration and insight to employers. The Advisory Board is clear that practical, pragmatic solutions for employers are central to the work of Opportunity Now and these will follow in the second report in this series on trust which will explore the issues raised here through focus groups and interviews in the workplace.

Ed Smith, Chairman of the World Wildlife Fund
and Oppportunity Now Board Member

Executive Summary

Trust is the life blood of organisations. It underpins employees' commitment, engagement and performance. Trust creates an organisational culture where the status quo can be challenged and as a result, creativity and innovation can flourish. This research investigates the status of trust in the workplaces of 13 Opportunity Now employers in both the public and private sectors. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between levels of trust and agile working. Agility, the ability of organisations and individuals to be flexible in terms of time, location and tasks to meet the demands of employees, customers and clients is underpinned by trust.

There are indications that this period of economic turmoil may prove a watershed in terms of both trust and agility. There are reports of shaken trust as organisations go through periods of painful downsizing and of a reversion to traditional models of "command and control" management and presenteeism. There are also contrary indications that some organisations are turning to agility as a route to a more flexible and cost effective use of human resources and real estate and as a way of maintaining employee engagement through a difficult period. This survey of 1219 team members and 330 managers seeks to identify levels of trust in workplace relationships and in leaders and to identify how this affects the performance of agile teams.

Levels of trust are high in Opportunity Now organisations

Overall, employees are positive about the level of trust and respect in their team. Team members trust their managers and feel trusted and empowered by them in return.

- 90% of team members feel trusted by their manager
- 85% trust their managers to support them in their work
- 88% of team members trust their colleagues to support them
- 91% feel trusted by their colleagues in return
- 87% agree that their opinions are listened to and respected at work

Most employees understand and feel affinity with organisational values but less see them acted out in practice

Although team members have high levels of trust in their line managers, they have less faith in the leaders of their organisation. Whilst 75% trust their leaders to make the right decision about their organisation, only just over half (52%) believe that they have the interests of employees high on their agenda and a third do not believe that leaders demonstrate the organisation's values in their behaviour. Managers fare slightly better with 60% believing that the organisation has the interests of employees high on its agenda, but again a third, see a gap between leader's espoused values and their behaviours.

There is also a credibility gap between commitment and behaviours relating to diversity

Most team members believe that their organisation is committed to diversity but just two thirds believe that their organisation values people regardless of their working patterns. Both male and female managers are largely positive about their organisations' commitment towards diversity and agility but are less likely to believe that it is manifested in practice. Over 80% believe that the organisation is committed to diversity but only 63% believe that the performance measurement process encourages them to support agile working. Just 60% agree that their organisation recognises and rewards the talents and contribution of all employees whatever hours they work.

Differences between male and female views tend to be small; where people work is far more significant

Overall the differences between male and female responses throughout the survey are small, whether on questions of trust or on agile working, although in some cases these differences can still be telling. For example, the barrier to implementing agile working most likely to be cited by female managers is that it can cause resentment among those team members with standard office-based working patterns (48% of female managers and 36% of male managers agreed) whereas for male managers the most cited barrier is that they believe that it is more difficult to monitor and control the behaviour of employees who work in an agile way (57% of male and 46% of female managers recognised this as a barrier).

However, it is in relation to working patterns and practices that the most significant and consistent differences in perspective emerge. Team members, who work remotely, whether on an ad hoc or regular/permanent basis, are more positive about almost all aspects of trust, empowerment and agile working and in particular about their relationship with their manager and the rest of their team. They appear to experience a more empowered style of management, being significantly more likely than office-based colleagues to believe that:

- They are encouraged to develop networks outside of their team and organisation
- They have the freedom that they need to do the job
- They can influence decisions in the team
- Challenging team members will be seen as constructive

Where agile workers are the majority in a team, those with remote working patterns are more likely to be positive about trust and empowerment than those in teams where agile workers are in the minority.

Office-based employees have a significantly less positive view of trust and empowerment

Those team members who are permanently office-based have the least positive responses to all questions about trust, empowerment and agility. In teams where over half work in an agile way, office-based team members have the least positive view of all respondents (whereas their remote working colleagues actually have the most positive view of all). This suggests that in the same team, team members can have very different views on whether the team is effective and the support received from colleagues, managers and indeed leaders, depending on whether they have the opportunity to work remotely or not.

Agile working is supported by colleagues and managers but 43% still see career penalties for agile workers

The large majority of team members, including those with alternative (such as part-time working) or remote working patterns, feel that their team is supportive of the way that they work (90% overall) and that they are being judged on their outputs rather than time spent at their desk (87%). However, a significant minority, 43%, believe that people who work flexibly or mostly from home are less likely to progress in their careers and this goes up to 52% for those with alterative working patterns.

Managers appear to be largely supportive of agility and are more likely to perceive benefits from it, particularly in terms of retention and productivity, than they are to view it as a management problem. Overall, 73% agree that agile working makes the team more productive whereas just 53% agree that it is more difficult to monitor and control the behaviour of employees who work in an agile way. However 35% of male and 40% of female managers also recognise the penalty paid by agile workers in terms of career progression. Managers have a greater tendency to see agile working as an opportunity rather than a management problem if they have firsthand experience of it. Managers who work in an agile way themselves or manage a team with agile workers are more likely to see the benefits and less likely to perceive barriers to agility.

Work life balance is not a gender issue but working differently is

Both men and women are equally likely to want better work life balance and shorter hours (33% of team members considered that this would be a significant help). A similar percentage of women want flexibility over the way that they work and are more likely than men to cite flexibility over location and hours of work, as important.

Managers are rewarded for building relationships but almost half believe long hours in the office are important as well

Achieving objectives and developing good relationships throughout the organisation are seen by managers as the route to reward and respect. Spending long hours in the office was the least significant factor for them but was still seen as important by 47% of managers. Managers with experience of remote working were less likely to regard closely managing work and spending long hours in the office as an important management behaviour.

Leadership, transparency and clarity emerge as key enablers for better team working

For team members, transparency over pay and performance, and better communication and knowledge sharing would be most likely to have an impact on their team's effectiveness. For managers, leadership, clear commitment and clear guidelines emerge as most important to helping them manage agile teams. Currently managers believe that little organisational support is available to them, 75% believe that they do not have clear guidelines on managing and assessing performance of agile teams or just do not know whether these are available.

There are differences in the culture of the private and public sector

In many areas team members and managers in the public and private sectors have similar views. However a small number of significant differences do emerge. In the public sector, employees are less likely than their private sector colleagues to feel affinity with their organisation's values and see them demonstrated by their leaders. They are also less likely to consider themselves encouraged to develop networks both outside of their team and outside of their organisation. Managers in the public sector are also less likely than their private sector peers to feel supported to implement agile working by leaders and the performance measurement framework. Public sector managers are more likely to view technology, problems of measuring performance and the fair distribution of workload as barriers to agility. They want more knowledge sharing and transparency about performance assessment to support them in managing their teams.

Business in the Community

Community

Opportunity Now
is part of Business
in the Community

Business in the Community - mobilising business for good.
We inspire, engage, support and challenge
companies on responsible business, working
through four areas: Marketplace, Workplace,
Environment and Community. With more than
850 companies in membership, we represent 1 in 5
of the UK private sector workforce and convene a
network of global partners.

www.opportunitynow.org.uk
opportunitynow@bitc.org.uk

Business in the Community
137 Shepherdess Walk
London N1 7RQ
T +44 (0) 20 7566 8650
F +44 (0) 20 7253 1877
E information@bitc.org.uk

January 2010

THE PRINCE'S CHARITIES

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE