

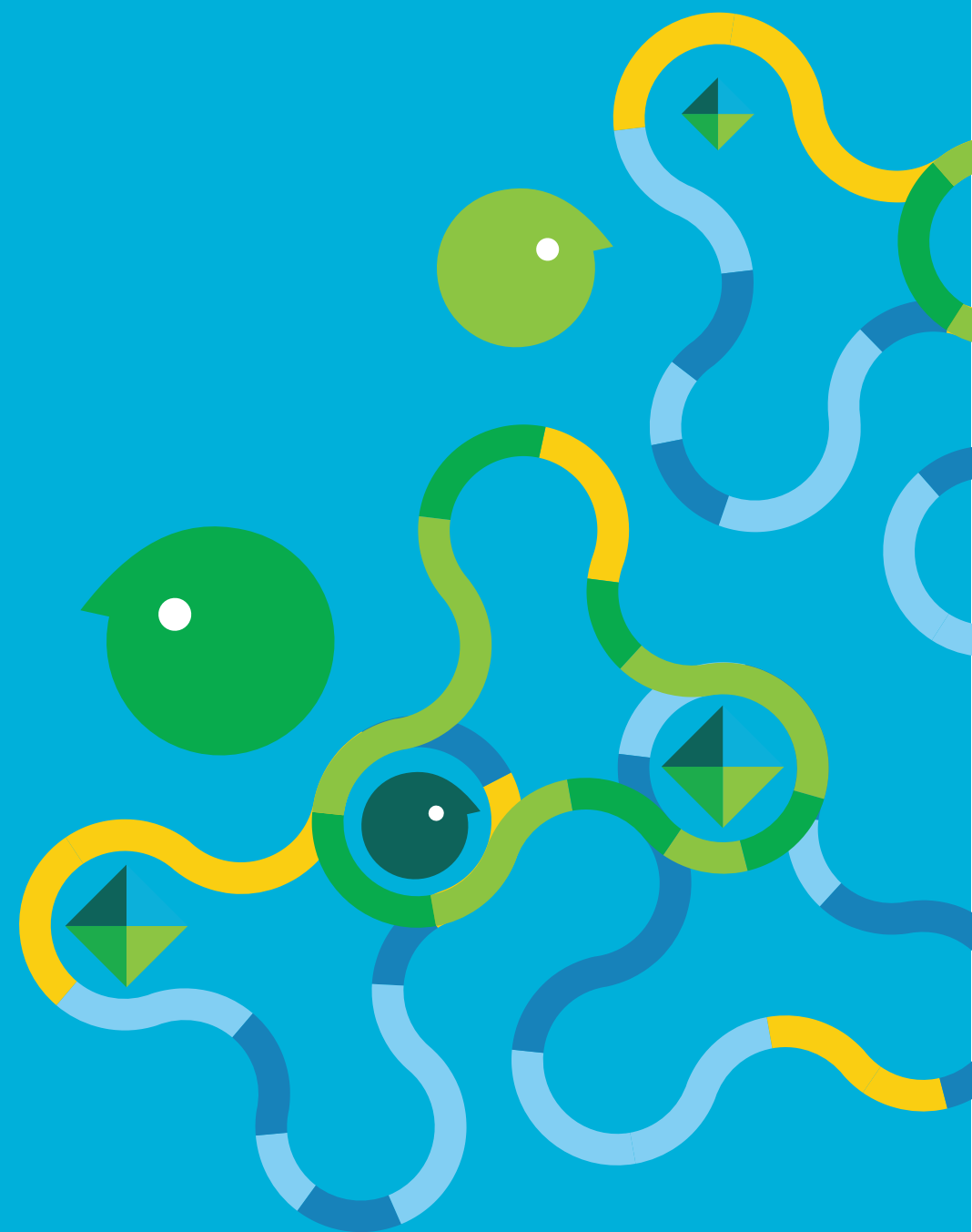


The Rise of Employee Voice:

Harness the Power of Your People

A New Zealand perspective

It's all part of a **Smarter Workforce**





For 16 years, our team has had its finger on the pulse of the New Zealand workforce, building a deep understanding of what it is that motivates and inspires Kiwis to come to work each day and give their best. In 2015 we worked with over 350 organisations, representing nearly 240,000 employees in New Zealand. That's around twelve percent of the entire working population in New Zealand, and we are incredibly proud to have worked with so many organisations who want to listen, act, and improve their performance through their people. Half of these New Zealand organisations participated in our annual IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey, one of the largest engagement databases in the Southern Hemisphere. As well as promoting a culture of engagement and even a bit of friendly competition, the wealth of data in the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey database also allows us to look at trends across industry.

What we've been able to validate through this data is that when employees feel that their wellbeing is cared for, believe that they are valued by their organisation, and have line of sight to the goals and successes of their organisation they are far more likely to be engaged. [IBM research](#) consistently shows a clear link between highly engaged workforces and strong business performance, lower employee absenteeism, and higher retention. Over the past two years we've also seen a growing trend of involvement playing a key role in engaging employees. People want – even expect – to have a voice and know that they have been heard in day-to-day decisions,

and also more holistically in areas like strategy and the future direction of the business. This perception that leaders actually listen to and care about people's views and opinions is something that differentiates high performing organisations. The case studies presented here offer tangible examples of how a culture can be created that reinforces this.

With rapid advances in technology and social media, there is an opportunity for organisations to find new ways to harness and leverage the voice of their people for innovation and continuous improvement, and for senior leaders to become more visible and connected with a greater range of employees – often a challenge in geographically dispersed teams. Through acting on the results of engagement surveys, the stories here describe how four very different organisations have successfully done this. I hope you find inspiration from these stories to think about how you might be able to revisit your own involvement strategies and give your people a voice.

Thank you to all of our clients for enabling this research, and we look forward to partnering with you in the future.

Kelly Bennion
Senior Managing Consultant
IBM Smarter Workforce

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Engagement through Involvement:

The emerging trend driving the New Zealand workforce



Employee engagement: from 'why' to 'how'

The conversation on the topic of employee engagement has evolved. The momentum gained in the mid-2000s was built on the back of strong research, which demonstrated not only the correlation between engagement and a variety of business performance metrics *across* organisations, but also improved engagement driving improved performance over time *within* organisations.

The connections are clear, and it is widely accepted by organisational leaders that engaged employees are much more motivated to apply their discretionary effort to help their organisation achieve its goals. Simply, you get better outcomes when people want to help your organisation succeed.

Attention is clearly focused on what organisations can do to improve engagement and performance outcomes. Based on analysis aligning employee survey feedback with organisations' strategic priorities, the IBM Smarter Workforce team in New Zealand often recommend that our clients focus on opportunities like improving clarity and alignment of vision and strategy, culture and process that support high performance, and genuine care for employee wellness. These are big, important topics, often resulting in initiatives and long programmes of work to address.

As we will demonstrate here using case studies, perhaps the greatest opportunity lies not just in 'the initiative' itself but also in how we do it. Often it is the nature of the process that determines success; when we can use words like 'support,' 'together,' or 'partnership.' We are talking about employee involvement, and it represents a powerful way to capture the wisdom of the crowd, share ownership, and increase the chances of successful organisational change.

Involvement is engaging

Not only can involving your people in decisions that affect their work result in better outcomes, it turns out that the process can itself increase engagement. Key driver analysis of the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces data, which identifies the most influential aspects of a workplace that lead to engagement, has revealed that when an organisation partners with their people to incorporate their feedback, engagement follows.

Over the past two years, the topic of involvement has increased in importance in engaging New Zealanders at work. The survey item 'This organisation is interested in the views and opinions of its people' has recently emerged as a key driver, applicable for both the private and public sectors and across most industries and size categories. The top 10 list of key drivers for the average New Zealand organisation is shown here.

Wellbeing

- This organisation is an enjoyable place to work
- This organisation cares about the wellbeing of its people

Feeling valued

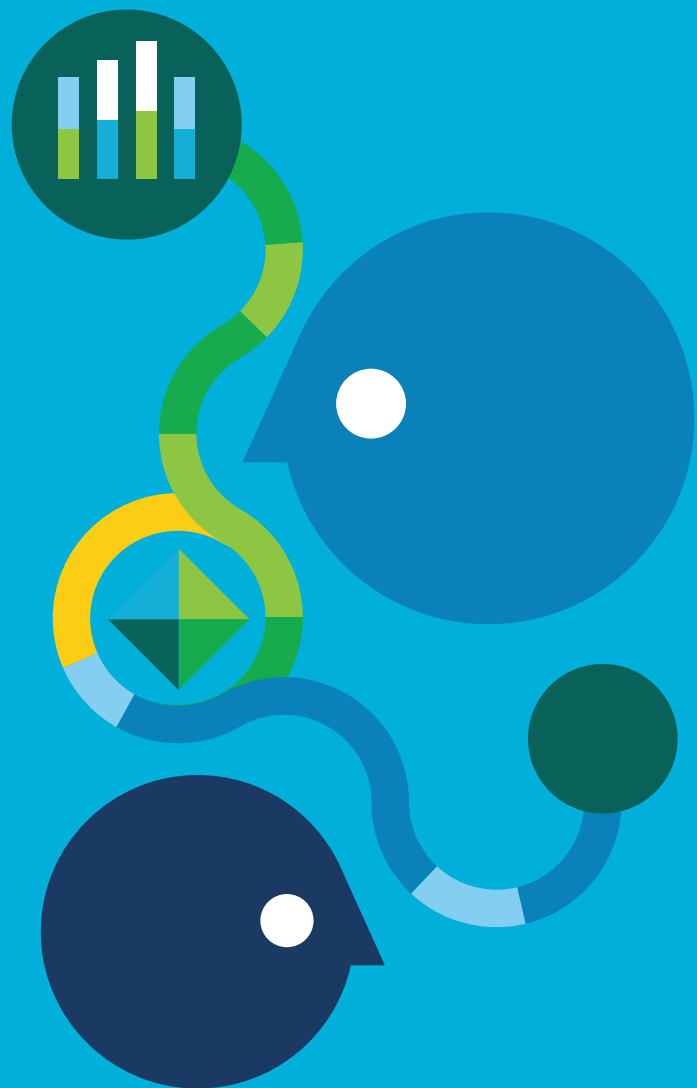
- I feel my contribution is valued in this organisation
- My job gives me a sense of personal achievement
- I get recognition when I do a good job

Connection to the big picture

- There is a sense of 'common purpose' in this organisation
- I have confidence in the senior leadership of this organisation
- I feel I am working for a successful organisation

Involvement

- This organisation is interested in the views and opinions of its people
- I am sufficiently involved in decisions that affect the way I do my job



“Although employee involvement can come in all shapes and forms, in recent years our survey data – as well as conversations with leaders, managers and employees – suggest that it’s moving beyond simply including people in decisions about their day-to-day work,” says Leighton Abbot, Managing Consultant at IBM Smarter Workforce. “It’s more holistic – it’s about people having a say in how they work, how they serve customers, where they are going as an organisation and how they can achieve success together. When people are involved in these bigger strategic decisions, it has the biggest impact on engagement and business results.”

A recent study by IBM into the key success factors for implementing organisational change showed ‘staff involvement’ (ensuring that employee suggestions were sought, considered and acted upon) was seen by business leaders to be among the top contributors for successful change, along with senior management commitment, creating a shared vision and middle-management ownership.

IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces survey data reveals that employees who believe that their organisation is interested in their views and opinions are more confident in senior leadership (90% favourable versus 44%), more likely to believe communication is open and honest (82% favourable versus 22%), and believe that the organisation is making the necessary changes for a successful future (90% favourable versus 48%).

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LEIGHTON ABBOT
Managing Consultant, IBM



The current state of involvement – it depends who you ask

The IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces data in 2015 revealed that more than 85 percent of senior leaders believed that they encouraged ideas and suggestions for improvement, and that the organisation was interested in the voices of its people. In contrast, 73 percent of those in front-line roles felt that their organisation encouraged their suggestions, and just 65 percent believed that their organisation was genuinely interested in what they had to say. This disconnect in perceptions across position levels warranted further investigation.

When we looked at comments made to open-ended survey questions, people in front-line roles often pointed out that – although encouraged – feedback for improvement wasn't necessarily heeded, and that there was lack of visibility on alternative perspectives or the action taken in response to people's feedback. This highlights a mismatch between leaders' intentions to listen and the way they demonstrate it. "Listening needs to be authentic – if you ask a question, prepare to receive an answer and respond," says Leighton. "Our experience tells us that damage can result when an organisation repeatedly asks for people's feedback but does not close the loop with a response and a connection back to the survey results."

Keep involvement on the agenda year-round

Top-performing organisations are more effective at seeking and harnessing the voices of their people. Within these organisations, more than 80 percent of front-line employees believed that their perspectives were not only encouraged, but also acted upon. These organisations have demonstrated that listening is not a once-a-year event, but a conversation that is strongly tied to innovation and daily improvement. These organisations understand how important it is to tap into the power of their most valuable resource – their people – to remain relevant and stay ahead of the competition in this era of constant change and disruption. ■



A new approach to strategy development and organisational design



Industry sector: Crown entity



Staff headcount: 130



Location: Wellington and across NZ



Typical role(s): Career advice, career consultancy, community liaison, finance, IT, marketing, operations, project management, website content and other resource development.



Website: www.careers.govt.nz

About us: Careers New Zealand helps people navigate their learning and work choices. Their role is to improve connections between education and employment, by using their expertise to support organisations and New Zealanders so they are making informed choices about their future employment. Organisations they work with include career professionals, schools and tertiary organisations, community groups, businesses and local government, welfare and support agencies who influence the career choices of others.

A nervous tension was building in the room as the IBM consultant was briefed on the technology involved in the presentation that was about to be delivered. The 130 members of Careers NZ had gathered – in person and by video conference – to hear the results of the 2014 IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey. And while the survey results delivered a very clear message, it was not an easy one to hear.

By the end of the session it was clear that the organisation was at its lowest ebb, with three years of significant declines in employee engagement and a last-placed ranking in the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey. Great passion was expressed across the comments that Careers NZ needed to go through significant organisational change to reverse their current fortune. The IBM consultant concluded that Careers NZ required clear strategic direction, and that people needed to be involved and supported through whatever change was to come.

For incoming Chief Executive Keith Marshall, this was to be the first step in a cathartic organisation-wide process. Less than two months previously, he had joined Careers NZ knowing that it had received the lowest ever recorded scores in a government Performance Improvement Framework (PIF) review. Given this highly critical external feedback and realising that the need for fundamental change was also widely felt within the organisation, Keith encouraged staff members to participate in the survey. “Genuine staff engagement and buy-in is the single greatest driver of organisational success and therefore the starting point for any organisational transformation. If people genuinely throw their effort into something then

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KEITH MARSHALL
CEO, Careers NZ

amazing things are possible. It was that philosophy that drove the whole approach from the outset and was why I was so keen for folk to participate,” reflected Keith.

The survey presentation closed with a few words from Keith. The full survey results, including 38 pages of comments, were to be shared with everyone. Careers NZ had reached a ‘never again’ moment: everyone agreed that things needed to be different – and that they were going to fix it together.

It was a big promise for ‘the new guy’ to make.

One year later, Careers NZ was the Most Improved Small–Medium Workplace in the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Awards 2015. An unprecedented 28 percentage point lift in their Engagement Index put its results on a par with the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces ‘All Organisations’ Benchmark. Almost all their survey scores had improved significantly, but the biggest shift came in areas relating to perceptions of leadership, clarity of vision, change management and communication, with 60 to 80 percentage point improvements. Responses to the open-ended survey questions were extremely consistent – almost all reflecting positively on the change process. Best of all, this revolution in engagement came with increased effectiveness across all performance measures (increased outputs, reach and quality) while conducting a massive structural change, and a financial turnaround equating to 10 percent of revenue.

The ‘conventional wisdom’ of many executive teams and boards is that organisational change inevitably results in engagement decline. By contrast, Careers NZ’s story shows the opposite. So how did the organisation do it? It was a two-pronged approach, focusing on desired culture as well as strategy.

Defining the ‘desired culture’

‘Desired culture’ is about the sort of organisation people would ideally want to work in. Through the survey many issues were highlighted, and the leadership team felt it was important to hear each employee’s feedback in more depth so that everyone could clearly articulate what it was about this ‘never again’ state that wasn’t working, and the workplace they wanted.

In workshops involving all staff members across the country, participants developed a series of negatively worded statements to reflect the challenges they felt they were facing in terms of organisational process, outcomes, values and more. They then turned around these statements and reframed them as positive attributes for ‘Our Tomorrow’ – creating a picture of the kind of organisation employees wanted Careers NZ to be. There was great consistency across the outputs of the various workshops, noted Keith, and also consistent with their key drivers of engagement from the survey.

Developing an inclusive strategy

The same inclusive approach was applied in developing a new strategy. Ten people from across the organisation were recruited to lead the organisation in the development of a new strategy from “absolute bedrock”. They considered the basics of what the organisation was tasked with achieving, what constituted success, and what the organisation needed to do to be more effective and efficient.

This group of 10 employees led workshops to identify key issues and address longstanding ‘elephants in the room’. They also liaised with external stakeholders to check that their ideas were logical and reasonable. Employees from across the business took part in discussions about how the proposed strategy could then be operationalised, and what changes might be required to achieve that.

“The ‘conventional wisdom’ of many executive teams and boards is that organisational change inevitably results in engagement decline. By contrast, Careers NZ’s story shows the opposite.”



Applying a radical restructure

The new strategy required an organisational redesign, and akin to the strategy development, ownership of this work remained with a small team of employees. As an industrial relations process was required as part of the redesign, this development work was closed to the rest of the organisation, and the reasons for this confidentiality were widely shared among employees. An external union organiser sat in on all the organisational design team’s work as an independent observer of the process.

Just nine weeks after the formal consultation, the redesign was carried out which involved a radical restructure and substantial changes to every role in the organisation. Despite the inclusive process that led to the new design, it was still a shock when it was presented to the organisation because, as the 2014 survey had highlighted, the one thing that inspired people to come to work was their teammates – and the proposed new structure involved dissolving many of these teams.

Championing transparency, involvement and trust

This story could easily focus on the uniqueness of the Careers NZ’s transformation - the serious challenges the organisation faced; its unconventional approach to strategy development and organisational redesign; or the trust the Board placed in Keith and the process. But its success could just as easily be linked to three simple beliefs, two of which were directly referenced in their key drivers of engagement. These were transparency, involvement and, as Keith put it, “trust in the process”.

Transparency is probably the most striking feature of Careers NZ’s transformation story. Wherever possible, leaders shared information and perspectives with all

employees. At times, emotions ran high and some feedback was personally challenging. But it all paid off: in the 2015 survey almost 80 percent of employees agreed that communication in the organisation was open and honest (up from just 17 percent a year earlier).

Furthermore, 90 percent of all staff members understood the reasons for change, and more than 80 percent felt there was clarity on the organisation's vision and how it would be achieved. Keith notes that the alignment came from the transparency of the process, as did involving all staff in the conversation from the outset.

Employee involvement in decision making is fundamental to good change management. Not only does it recognise the human desire to have our voices heard, but it also results in better outcomes as the unique perspectives of 'the people doing the work' brings us closer to our customers. "Ten people working together in a room will always give you a better result than one person on their own," Keith noted, and in Careers NZ's experience, this concept could be applied at the level of organisational strategy. Its restructure and role mapping was clearly based on the content and outcomes of the change process, and while initially difficult, the whole organisation contributed to the final logic. It was much more than consultation; it was genuine involvement and partnership.

Finally, the mantra that Keith repeated most often was "trust the process". This wasn't a transformation centred around a single leader or even a leadership team; it was guided by a process that emphasised transparency and involvement. There were some nervous times for Keith and the Board across this 12-month period, but they had faith that the process would deliver the required outcomes together with a high level of support, commitment and pride.

Rather fittingly, the next steps for Careers NZ were made clear by staff in the free-text comments in their 2015

survey feedback. With plenty of promises in the pipeline and the restructure just a few weeks old, they felt that now was the time to deliver. A new 'business as usual' was to be developed, as was new ways of working across the business. A lot of work lay ahead for the organisation to realise 'Our Tomorrow'. But with an organisation that, through process, had been able to genuinely engage its people through a series of significant changes, the survey results showed employees' strong feeling that together they could achieve anything. As one employee commented in the 2015 survey, #wegotthis! ■

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Cultural transformation through people – a co-creation journey



Industry sector: Government department



Staff headcount: Circa 2200



Location: Head office in Wellington, with centres in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin and 45 other sites nationwide.



Typical role(s): Policy advisors, business analysts, passport operations, archivists, customer service.



Website: www.dia.govt.nz

About us: The Department manages a diverse range of services with a diverse range of roles in these areas: operations, policy research, regulatory, corporate services (finance, IT, HR, communications), community, identity services, customer services, charities services, library and archivists, strategy and planning, and project management.

Between 2012 and 2015, the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) went through a remarkable cultural transformation that has seen a 155 percent increase in employee engagement levels over this time. Their results in the IBM Employee Engagement survey moved from near the bottom of the State Sector Benchmark in most categories to being above the State Sector Benchmark.

A marathon, not a sprint, is how DIA describes this transformation journey. The process kicked off in early 2012, when DIA's engagement survey results showed that less than 10 percent of staff felt engaged. People were unclear on where the organisation was going, and felt they lacked a sense of 'common purpose'. Led by CEO Colin

MacDonald, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) saw this situation as a catalyst for change.

"We knew we had to act, and we knew that we couldn't do this without all our people on board at every step of the journey," Colin explained. "So we started with a blank page, to create our future together."

A focus on involving people in creating the future

As a first step, DIA's senior leaders began a dialogue with all staff through a series of 'Creating Our Future' workshops, run over a five-month period. Facilitated by Colin and supported by the ELT, these workshops – 30 in all – were a safe, open environment where people could reflect on what a more positive workplace culture might look like, and what changes were needed to get there. The workshops also allowed people to express their views on how they wanted to work in the future to enable the desired culture.

Some 1,300 people took part in the workshops, generating over 10,000 comments. To keep everyone interested and a buzz going, 'word clouds' were published and updated on DIA's intranet, along with photos and videos. From this inclusive process a new set of principles were developed, along with the underpinning behaviours. Focus groups were run to ensure that the principles were relevant for employees in their day-to-day work.

Over the next year, DIA saw the immediate impact of the 'Creating Our Future' workshops. The results of the 2013 IBM survey gave DIA confidence that things were on the right track – the proportion of engaged staff had almost doubled. Other significant improvements included the way staff perceived the clarity of DIA's vision (up by 14 percentage points), the confidence they felt in its leadership (up by 21 percentage points), and whether DIA



was interested in the views and opinions of its people (up by 22 percentage points).

“We gained buy-in from the people because they were personally invested,” Colin recalled. “[The process] was visibly led by the leaders, so that people could see the commitment from the top to co-create the future.”

A focus on embedding change through leader-led activities

DIA’s ‘Creating Our Future’ workshop program was only the beginning. The 2013 survey results showed that significant staff engagement challenges still remained – including building a stronger sense of ‘common purpose’.

But as Colin pointed out, DIA’s new set of principles united the organisation under a common way of doing things. Now, the challenge was to get the principles off the wall and start living them

To help this take shape, managers facilitated discussions supported by a set of leader-led activities to help people connect the new principles to their everyday behaviour. Managers were able to use these activities to do what they felt was right for the team. “We didn’t want to prescribe – we wanted managers to figure out with their own people the best way to make the principles real, in their own context,” Colin said.

To gauge the impact of this initiative, DIA ran a ‘pulse survey’ in 2014. This revealed that more than 80 percent of employees felt actively involved in team discussions about the principles, and more than 70 percent were participating in activities to improve engagement. This gave the ELT confidence that people were highly engaged in this part of the culture change process.

Natasha Barnett-Hanlon, Project Services Capability Manager, experienced the impact of the culture change first-hand and saw significant improvements in her team. “In every staff meeting, I encouraged my team to talk

“It became less about ‘What can DIA do for me?’ and more about ‘What can we do to change things for the better?’”

NATASHA BARNETT-HANLON
Project Services Capability Manager, DIA



about examples of how they were bringing the principles to life in their everyday behaviour,” she said. People initially found the process a little awkward, but over time, the new principles became part of their daily language, and employees began to feel more comfortable recognising and giving feedback to each other using the principles.

According to Natasha, the principles also provided a framework for shifting mind-set. Instead of focusing on the problems, the team was encouraged to own the problem and be part of the solution.

“I encourage my team to think about how we can ‘make things easy’ and how we can ‘work together’ to fix the problem. Over time, I started noticing a shift in people’s language,” she said. “It became less about ‘What can DIA do for me?’ and more about ‘What can we do to change things for the better?’”

Chris Adams, Christchurch Regional Archivist, also felt that the principles played a valuable role in introducing a common language across DIA. “They make it easier to reinforce the idea that DIA is not anyone else but us – it’s what we do that shapes the culture,” he said.

The leader-led activities helped DIA’s cultural transformation reach a tipping point. Between 2013 and 2015, the sense of ‘common purpose’ increased markedly (up by 18 percentage points). In 2015, the IBM survey results showed that over two-thirds of DIA staff believed the principles are actively lived day-to-day, compared to only half who felt this way in 2014.

A focus on connecting culture and strategy

Creating a common way of doing things through the new principles was a significant step towards strengthening the sense of ‘common purpose’ and paving the road for building a culture of high performance at DIA. It was also important that people connect the work on the culture with the strategy and direction of the organisation, creating a ‘line of sight’ between people’s work and the overall organisational strategy.

In 2013, strategic focus areas framing the department’s goals were introduced, providing people with a longer term view of DIA’s work and bringing people together – taking them out of their silos to make connections across the department. To engage people with this, the ELT led workshops, sharing information about each of the focus areas, encouraging people to think how their work connected to them and sharing feedback.

In parallel to introducing the strategic focus areas, DIA embarked on a series of other people-related strategies to support and embed the culture change.

“We wanted our people to have a consistent and integrated experience throughout their employment journey with DIA, right from the beginning,” said Duane McKibben, Senior Organisational Development Advisor.

“If Phase One of the culture transformation journey was about setting the foundation and making it real, then Phase Two was about taking responsibility and giving it your best – every day,” said Duane. “Our managers played a vital role in unlocking people’s mind-sets and attitudes to help this process along.”

DUANE MCKIBBEN

Senior Organisational Development Advisor, DIA

So how did DIA achieve this?

Consistent language was the key. DIA’s principles are tied into the employee value proposition to strengthen the organisation’s brand. For example, every new employee is now welcomed by a video from the chief executive and staff describing the principles and what makes DIA a great place to work.

The performance management system was reviewed to align with the principles and behaviours. At the same time, a new talent management program was introduced that defined what talent looks like in the context of the new DIA culture. “Wherever possible, we use the same terms and phrases in the principles to define competencies and behaviours required by our people, so they can easily make the links,” Duane explained.

Conversations were central at every step. In the past, people felt that things were ‘put upon them’ in a top-down approach – from values and competencies to performance measures – which resulted in a lack of ownership and buy-in. For this reason, DIA used a co-creation approach when it designed a new capability framework. Managers and employees worked together in focus groups to articulate what ‘good’ might look like for each job type, tying everything back to the principles. The outcome of this approach was a home grown framework that is not only relevant and in tune with employees’ everyday language, but also aligned with DIA’s principles.

Managers had support along the way. To make sure managers felt enabled and empowered to lead the cultural transformation, DIA introduced a series of leadership programmes, tailored to different levels. Managers were given support, from guidance on how to assess ‘cultural fit’ and conduct robust interviews, to toolkits for facilitating discussions around the principles, and how to hold meaningful two-way conversations. “If Phase One of the culture transformation journey was about setting the foundation and making it real, then Phase Two was about taking responsibility and giving it your best – every day,” said Duane. “Our managers played a vital role in unlocking people’s mind-sets & attitudes to help this process along.”

DIA’s cultural transformation is an ongoing journey. What is clear is that while the organisation’s senior leaders initiated the change, it was and will continue to be shaped and owned by employees, every step of the way. “Just get started. Don’t wait too long, do listen and involve your people,” was Colin’s advice on the lessons other organisations could learn from the DIA journey. Sound advice indeed. ■

“Just get started. Don’t wait too long, do listen and involve your people.”

DUANE MCKIBBEN

Senior Organisational Development Advisor, DIA

Keeping Auckland moving through encouragement, empowerment and innovation



Industry sector: Civil engineering, Road construction, Road maintenance



Staff headcount: 180



Location: Greater Auckland Region



Typical Role(s): Asset managers, engineers, intelligent traffic systems (ITS) technicians, labourers, site traffic management supervisors (traffic controllers) and other specialists.



Website: www.aucklandmotorways.com

About us: On 1 October 2008, the Auckland Motorway Alliance (AMA) took over responsibility for maintaining and operating Auckland’s motorway network until 2018. The AMA is made up of the owner participant – the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) – together with alliance participants: Fulton Hogan Ltd, Opus International Consultants Ltd, Beca Infrastructure Ltd, Resolve Group Ltd and Armitage Systems Ltd.

In 2008, the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) formed the Auckland Motorways Alliance (AMA) to manage more than 220 kilometres of motorway, more than 1,000,000 vehicle trips per day and over 140 structures, from small culverts to large bridges.

“As an organisation, we manage assets,” said AMA Director Steve Mutton. “We realised people are our real assets – look after them and they’ll look after the other assets.”

The AMA has been conducting engagement surveys since 2009, and while it has recorded regular year-on-year increases in employee engagement, 2014–2015 saw a marked increase in scores. “As a business, we’re always looking for continuous improvement,” said Loe Askin, AMA’s People and Capability Leader when asked why AMA conducts engagement surveys.

Discovering what people want

In 2014, while re-evaluating AMA’s strategy and vision, the leadership team decided to ‘turn things on their head’ and focus on people – both clients and employees. “We needed to ensure we were aligned with our customers,” Steve said. “We changed direction based on different customer needs. To remain successful, we decided to ask ‘What’s important to you?’ rather than ‘What do you need from us?’.”

Having asked their clients, AMA then turned to its people: What ignited them? What were they passionate about? What did success look like for them? According to Steve, the most-wanted outcome was “to create an environment where people want to do their best, and can do their best”.



To achieve this, each employee was scheduled to attend a half-day workshop. In all, AMA ran three full days of these workshops (11 sessions in total), with members of the Alliance Management Team (AMT) involved and Steve attending each one. In these open forums, employees discussed AMA's vision and its five priorities – what it means for them and how they personally are going to deliver on these. The AMT took away 600 ideas and suggestions from these sessions and identified the key themes.

The AMA then used employee discussions and ideas about how they envisioned 'being successful' to refresh the Alliance's values. People throughout the organisation participated in focus groups and provided feedback on the renewed values. The refreshed values were written in plain language to ensure they were inclusive and easy for all employees to understand – especially important as English is not the first language for many AMA employees. The value 'Speak up and Share' is a good example – these simple words have become a part of each employee's vocabulary.

Enabling leaders through AMA's vision and values

To make sure everyone was involved in reshaping the Alliance's vision and values, people leaders also participated in the 'what's next for AMA?' discussions. "People leaders were involved in rolling out AMA's new vision, values and strategy within the business, and were a great support," Steve explained.

AMT members were keen to understand what prevented people leaders in the field from being the 'perfect' people leader. They were determined to remove any barriers and provide the necessary tools and resources that could help make this ideal situation a reality.

A monthly forum allows field leaders to discuss AMA's new vision, priorities and values – what these are and why they were selected. This enables people leaders on the frontline to feel a much stronger sense of ownership towards the vision and values, empowering them to meaningfully communicate the new tenets to their teams.

"We decided to ask 'What's important to you?' rather than 'What do you need from us?'."

STEVE MUTTON
 Director, Auckland Motorways Alliance

Enabling leaders through AMA's vision and values

To further open discussion channels throughout the business, Steve communicates with employees directly, providing regular interactive workshop-style business updates. These one-hour sessions encourage participation, and everyone speaks in the same language about AMA's vision, values and priorities (as opposed to using corporate jargon). These meetings have helped reduce communication gaps between field leaders and office-based employees, as messages are not forgotten or 'lost in translation'.

Clear communication is crucial for maintaining a safety-conscious work environment. The AMT also regularly creates fun ways to remind people about keeping safe, these are embedded in the Motorway Matters monthly team meetings, and the monthly newsletter – another way of keeping staff updated on AMA's current news.



“I wish I’d done it a lot faster, but the slow pace meant it wasn’t an injection in the arm,” Steve said. “We had time to play with words, to change things – this has benefited us and things have become better embedded.”

STEVE MUTTON

Director, Auckland Motorways Alliance



For AMA, encouraging high levels of employee participation also means creating an environment where people feel comfortable to share feedback and suggestions. As previously mentioned, team members are encouraged to ‘speak up and share’ their suggestions and ideas. These could include improving safety or general procedures as well as recognising the achievements of their peers. Using IBM’s recommendations, AMA now has ‘peer-to-peer recognition postcards’ in every office, so employees can publically recognise their colleagues’ outstanding contributions.

Every month, Steve and the AMT spend a day in the field with a team, engaging in front-line roles such as weed eating and picking up litter on the side of the motorway. Doing this helps the AMT better understand the challenges faced by front-line teams. It also opens up communication channels and makes leaders visible to other employees. Steve believes that leaders need to be seen and in IBM’s experience, high visibility of senior leaders is critical for building confidence in leadership.

The journey has not been without its challenges. “I wish I’d done it a lot faster, but the slow pace meant it wasn’t an

injection in the arm,” Steve said. “We had time to play with words, to change things – this has benefited us and things have become better embedded.”

Keeping people involved

Keeping everyone involved was a mammoth task – AMA is a 24/7 business operating from five different locations. An example of this logistical challenge was AMA’s birthday celebration. To ensure that all staff members – including day and night shift workers – had the opportunity to participate, AMA had two identical celebrations: “Two cakes, two parties, two of everything,” Loe said.

Looking to the future, success for AMA means that everyone within the business has a good ‘line of sight’ to AMA’s newly developed strategy.

“It’s about making sure each individual understands how their contribution counts toward the organisation’s overall success – from the person operating the weed eater to the person in the office,” said Steve. “There aren’t many jobs where you touch a million lives a day. ■



Leadership and common purpose: The foundations for a high performance culture



Industry sector: Local Government



Staff headcount: 300 employees



Location: Throughout New Zealand's Far North District



Typical roles: Community services, infrastructure and asset management, regulatory services, strategic planning and policy



Website: www.fndc.govt.nz

About us: The Far North District Council is responsible for implementing policies and strategies on behalf of Councillors for the benefit of the communities of the Far North region of New Zealand.

CEO Colin Dale in January 2014 by a new Council, who expressed the desire for a new direction. Significant changes started happening including the establishment of a new leadership team.

“We needed to understand where the FNDC was in order to figure out where it was going”, he said. “This allowed us to see just how crucial it was to have leaders committed to fostering a cross-functional and co-operative environment for employees.”

But the leadership team found that realigning the direction of an organisation as diverse as FNDC was a challenging task – one that had to be approached methodically with buy-in from everyone if service disruption was to be prevented. “The three key recommendations that emerged from the 2014 IBM survey were central in guiding our course of action,” Michael said. “Without them we wouldn’t have been able to restructure internally while still serving the public.”

Those three recommendations were defining a common purpose, improving communication and promoting a culture of performance.

Every day, the Far North District Council (FNDC) provides a range of public services to more than 50,000 people. From fixing roads to maintaining libraries, it plays a central role in enabling the success and future of Far North communities.

In 2014, FNDC partnered with IBM to take some baseline measurements of workplace climate and engagement. With some challenging results and clear recommendations from IBM for their next steps, a plan was developed to make some real changes and build positive momentum. One year on, FNDC has recorded an outstanding Engagement Index improvement of 15 percentage points, supported by score increases to every single survey question.

For Michael Boyd, FNDC’s Organisational Development Manager, the turning point was the appointment of acting

“At the heart of this approach was a leadership team committed to embedding a culture where feedback is actively sought and openly received through constructive conversations.”

Defining a common purpose

FNDC’s transformation began with articulating the organisation’s vision and defining a common purpose. Fundamental to this phase was replacing a traditional top-down approach with one that was much more inclusive where every employee shared their view on what the future of the FNDC should look like. “We worked together to define what we aspire to be and we collectively committed to achieving that goal,” Michael recalled.

No direction was given to staff as to what this future should look like, it was a totally exploratory exercise driven by employees. From this collaborative approach, employees’ thoughts and ideas emerged to form FNDC’s mission, values and vision. This powerful vision now aligns everyone, “To be a respected and trusted organisation that consistently delivers high quality services to the community”.

Unsurprisingly, fostering such a culture of involvement not only gave everyone a voice, it also translated into quantifiable positive outcomes with an increase of 15 percentage points in clarity of vision and strategy, while the extent to which employees believe that their suggestions matter rose by 10 percent.



Improving communication

The second challenge FNDC faced was improving the quality of communication across the organisation, which is a foundation of confidence in leadership. The key element in this second phase was adopting an ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ framework for communication, bringing FNDC’s new values to the forefront of every conversation, and challenging people’s mindsets by encouraging solution-based and future-focused discussions.

At the heart of this approach was a leadership team committed to embedding a culture where feedback is actively sought and openly received.

One of the benefits of this culture shift was the transformation of performance appraisal conversations into empowering avenues of open and honest discussion. As a result, the 2015 survey results showed an average boost of 8 percentage points across questions in the Communication and Co-operation section.

“This powerful vision now aligns everyone, ‘To be a respected and trusted organisation that consistently delivers high quality services to the community’.”



Promoting a culture of performance

The third and final area of focus for FNDC was the need to promote a culture of performance – a challenging task given the diversity of jobs, profiles and backgrounds across the organisation. “A shift of focus in service delivery was needed, which was achieved by inspiring employees to love what they do” Michael said. In addressing this challenge, the FNDC launched a succession programme to inspire, develop and grow employees in the areas that best fit their knowledge, skills and passions, and to help them perform to the best of their abilities.

The programme allowed many employees to move into areas of the organisation that were more aligned with their interests, and to even take up key leadership roles within their new teams. Future plans in this space include recognition and award programmes that reinforce the value of individuals’ contributions to the organisation, as well as coaching to support leaders with individual-centred performance management practices.

The overall improvements seen in the 2015 IBM survey suggest that through involvement and empowerment, the FNDC has built solid foundations for a high-performance culture.

The latest round of results clearly show that employees feel they have the tools they need to do a good job, are inspired to give their best and feel more engaged than before. ■

“A shift of focus in service delivery was needed, which was achieved by inspiring employees to love what they do.”

MICHAEL BOYD

Organisational Development Manager,
Far North District Council

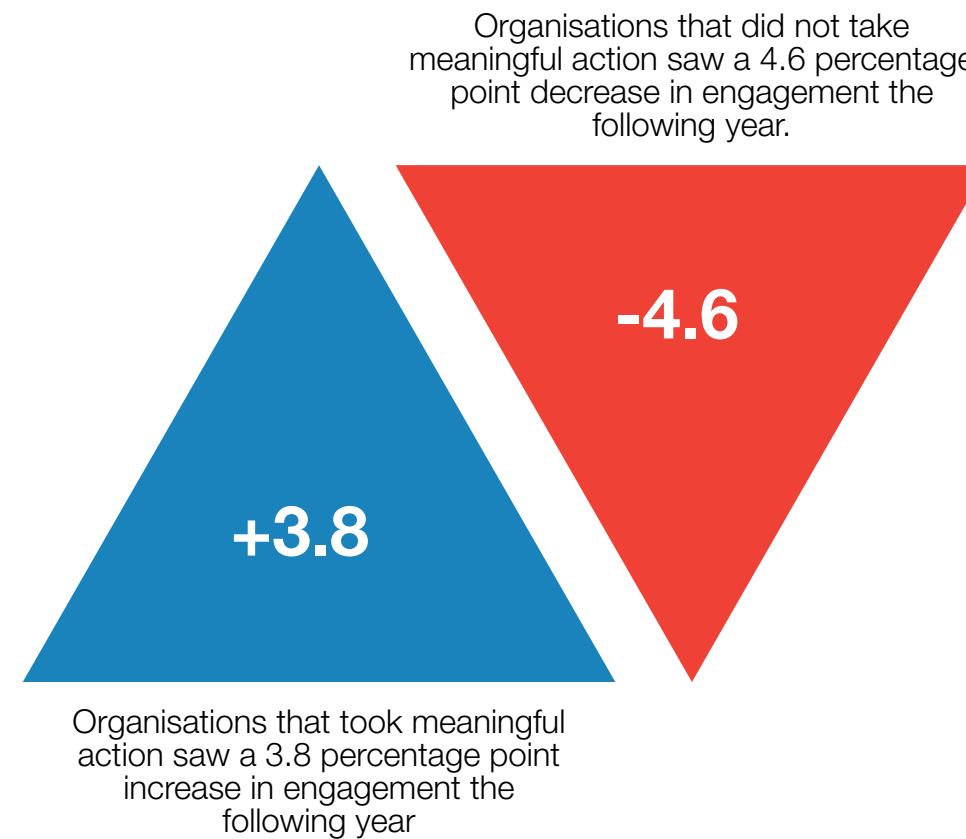
Taking action: Listening is the first step, but don't let it end there

Engagement surveys are just the start of a conversation, and just like every conversation, you need to respond. How you respond after the survey can be the difference between engaging people further, or switching them off.

The IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces 2015 survey shows that taking action has a direct link to engagement, at both individual and organisational levels.

Additionally, employees who felt that positive changes had been made in response to the previous survey were highly engaged (94 percent favourable). In contrast, the engagement index score was low for those who felt positive change hadn't followed the previous survey (42 percent favourable).

More broadly, organisations that had high scores for post-survey action recorded the biggest shift in year-on-year engagement. Conversely, those with low scores for post-survey action showed a decrease in engagement. This suggests that asking people for their feedback through the survey but failing to take visible action can be disengaging.





Best practice action planning

As part of a client summit in [London and New York](#) more than 50 of our clients brainstormed best-in-class action planning practices, aligning with what we see here in New Zealand.

Establish the case before the survey

Effective action planning begins before the survey even starts. Deciding at what level managers will be held accountable for action planning and having realistic and shared expectations of what this looks like will ensure that everyone is prepared post-survey. Managers are more likely to see the benefits of having an engaged team through senior leadership endorsement and connecting survey results to business strategy. Framing the survey as a diagnostic tool that highlights opportunities for improvement can allay potentially defensive reactions when survey results are released.

Action plans alone don't increase engagement; action through involvement does

Ensuring results are seen by all teams and sharing the responsibility for action planning ties everyone to the process, so not only are employees' voices heard in the survey, but they are also involved in the organisational response.

Action planning occurs at three levels: organisation-wide action planning connects employee feedback to business strategy; team-level action planning addresses local factors in teams; and individual involvement empowers employees to make the changes they need to be more engaged.



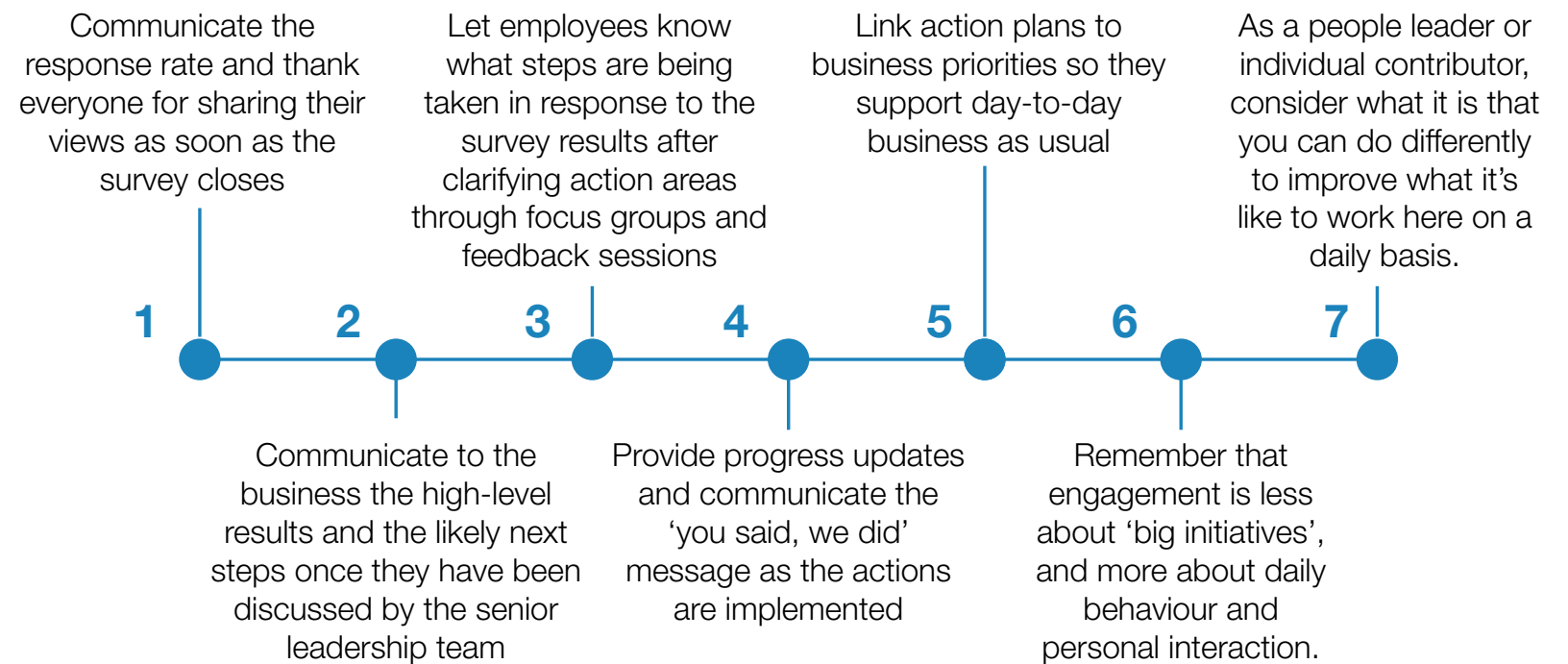
Rather than attempting to fix everything, address two or three areas, and do them well. Holding focus group sessions and feedback meetings (using key drivers as a starting point) can uncover insights about potential action areas. Once two or three areas have been selected in consultation with employees, craft a plan with SMART goals – specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, time-bound.

Even the best action plans won't increase engagement on their own; they need to be followed with visible action. Having a process to track implementation and manager accountability is an effective way to ensure action plans translate to meaningful change. Further, leadership endorsement throughout the process is a powerful way to motivate action and reinforce the importance of employee engagement to the success of the business.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

81 percent of senior management teams believe positive change occurred as a result of the previous survey, yet only just over half of front-line staff agree (56 percent). Engagement surveys represent the employee's voice after all, so communicating what is being done as a result of their feedback is vital to close the feedback loop: ■

Communicate: What and when



IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces 2015: This is what our finalists are doing



IBM **Best Workplaces**

The IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey is New Zealand's largest annual workplace climate/employee engagement survey, and is the most definitive measure of 'employer of choice' and 'best employer' claims in the country.

Here, some of the 2015 finalists share what has made them successful:



AA Insurance

Category: Best and Most Improved Large Workplace

In this year's survey there was a theme of wanting more flexibility in working. In some instances it already happens on an informal basis, but we wanted our people to understand that flexible working is not just about working from home. It can be supporting individuals to take additional paid/unpaid time off work, recognising the need to work away from a busy open plan space from time-to-time, working part-time hours, condensed working weeks, working fixed, set shifts in the contact centre, hot-desking or working from a satellite office and avoiding the costly daily commute into the city.



Fujifilm

Category: Best Small-Medium Workplace

Here at FUJIFILM NZ we formed a cross functional Working Group to work on our common purpose using "Good to Great". "What's Important to Us" at FUJIFILM NZ has been finalised and we are now in launch stage – company meetings, team meetings, poster competition (1st prize is a day off!), desk puzzle for staff, newsletter, intranet – in other words lots of communication. "What's Important to Us" will be the foundation stone for changes to some of our current key initiatives. The possibilities are endless.



Comvita

Category: Best Medium-Large Workplace

This year we incorporated Design School Thinking into our action planning sessions. As a team we celebrated the areas we did really well at, and discussed what we wanted to continue. We then went over the themes that were lower than anticipated, and collaborated to come up with solutions. From there we formed the action plan together for the year, and everyone had buy-in.



Ingham Hyundai

Category: Best Small Workplace

One of the difficulties in a car dealership is getting all the individual departments working together. In 2014 we set a new team goal "To be the Best in 2015". For 6 months, groups went to the gym for an hour every week during work hours, where a trainer led group fitness sessions and team-building exercises. There were awards for best team attendance, punctuality and encouragement. Each group brainstormed ideas to improve our business and the best ideas were implemented. Even though we lost 40 chargeable hours every week, productivity actually increased. The initiative removed barriers we previously had between the front and back of the business. This was a big success and the cost was recovered with increased productivity, a better efficiency between departments and a positive team culture.



Online Republic

Category: Best Small-Medium Workplace

We have worked hard to maintain an agile start-up culture despite trading for 10 years and are proud of the relaxed yet hard working vibe that is evident here. Through the IBM surveys we have identified areas for improvement and acted on them leading to year-on-year improvements in job satisfaction and productivity. We value our staff by providing free health insurance, a generous gym membership subsidy and have regular staff treat days (sushi, cakes, salads, fresh fruit and the hardest working coffee machine in Britomart). We all believe that Online Republic is like no other and definitely one of the best places to work!



Warehouse Stationery

Category: Best Enterprise Workplace

At Warehouse Stationery we cascade survey results with all store and support office teams to ensure we engage every team member across the brand to celebrate our strengths and discuss areas of opportunity. We're so proud of our team and the way we live our Values. We work hard, hold each other to account and drive our business forward every day through our values.



Masterpet

Category: Best Small-Medium Workplace

We have three tips for Action Planning

1. Hold every team accountable for their own results through team action planning at every level.
2. Actions speak louder than words. It's not just about creating an action plan, but seeing it through is important to lifting engagement. An action plan alone isn't going to lift engagement
3. Don't rest on your laurels. Once you've achieved your goals, set the bar higher.

Click here for more information on the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Programme



Russell Gordon Contracting

Category: Best Small-Medium Workplace

Following the last IBM survey we realised we needed a unifying, guiding principle that reflected our multicultural team. Everyone in the organisation undertook training sessions where we challenged ourselves to agree core principles in behaviour and unity.

From this inclusive approach, everyone had buy in to the concept that we are a 'village' - serving and protecting our families and customers. We have a philosophy of abundance and we behave with integrity. In fact these behaviours have been described by all the staff and form the basis of our behavioural score cards that everyone at RGC is measured, coached and rewarded on weekly. From these sessions the RGC village wrote its own Mission Statement of which we are extremely proud: "To create abundance for ALL by honouring our values and providing quality for our customers in a safe environment."



VTNZ

Category Winner: Best Enterprise Workplace

In the four months since taking on driver licencing (a new business for us) we have reduced customer waiting times by a third and have achieved a 69% independent customer service rating (where 70% internationally is the upper quartile of results). This would not have been possible without an engaged team, excellent focus, regular communication and a shared passion for safety on the roads. We are both surprised and delighted by this year's engagement results as it has been a tough year with numerous challenges. The year ahead will be equally as challenging, but we understand that our engagement remains a key enabler in the business and underpins our capability. Our challenge is to keep it in focus while other business opportunities present themselves for attention.

How IBM can help

Today's organisations need to attract and grow top-performing talent, create engaging social and collaborative cultures, and connect the right people to get work done. IBM solutions combine market-leading talent management and social collaboration tools with the power of workforce science and advanced analytics. We help organisations build impassioned and engaged workforces, and deepen client relationships that can lead to measurable business outcomes.

Sitting squarely at the intersection of technology and business, IBM not only has the solutions that enable organisations to stay in touch with employees through cutting edge technology, but also the capabilities to translate it into actionable insights for business success. With breakthrough analytics and the most comprehensive benchmarks in New Zealand, the experienced team of consultants facilitate executive dialogues on people related strategies, and upskill people leaders on building engaged and high performing teams.

To find out more about
how IBM can help your
organisation, contact:

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Your IBM New Zealand Smarter Workforce team

