

ELITE FOCUS

HR Challenge 2000: Spearheading Business Performance

Whether your company employs ten or ten thousand, you require the potential of all those people to be unlocked if your business is to remain competitive into the next millennium. Managing human potential in the face of uncertainty and constant change will be the HR challenge for the year 2000. But while virtually all companies pay lip service to 'winning through people,' few possess the know-how to walk the talk. Partnerships with People, a recent British government study by the Department of Trade and Industry, is shedding light on the HR policies contributing to superior business performance.

This cross-sector report investigates a diverse array of successful organizations; profit and non-profit; from police stations to auto parts manufacturers, interviewing CEOs, top management, and shop floor staff. The findings reveal the winners follow five distinct 'paths to development' emerging as a cogent value system at the heart of their people success and superior performance.

Five Development Paths to A Winning People Policy

The threads linking companies with a winning people policy seem common sense on the surface. The challenge was to find companies who succeeded in putting textbook rhetoric to practical use. The five core development paths were identified as the following:

1) Shared goals:

Understanding the business.

2) Shared culture:

Agreed values binding the workforce together.

3) Shared learning:

A commitment to continuous improvement.

4) Shared effort:

One business driven by flexible teams.

5) Shared communication:

Effective communication throughout the company.

Avoiding Empowerment Pitfalls

If you smell empowerment, you're right. For most successful companies, empowerment has become the dirty word of the nineties, associated with downsizing, chaotic decision-making, and negative employee perceptions. However, all companies agreed the cooperative innovation fundamental to empowerment was essential, but only when coupled with accountability. "We never use the word 'empowerment'. You can't empower people, you can only create the climate and structure in which they will take responsibility," said one manager.

The organizations, which implemented parameters along with the freedom, reaped enormous benefits. Companies came up with programs such as having factory workers design part of their plant layout, or giving truck drivers business cards so they could act as company ambassadors.

Three Stages of Development

Companies will differ as to their level of development along the five paths. Correspondingly, there are three distinct stages that emerge from when a program is first instituted to its final evolution as a dynamic HR tool. Think of the three stages as 'start-

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