

case study

Xerox creates two-way communication with its workforce

When the Information & Consultation Directive came into existence, Xerox, the global leader in document management, recognised the opportunity it created to enhance two-way communication with its workforce.

Unlike many companies, which had fallen into the trap of viewing the directive as a compliance issue, only to be called into effect before making any negative restructuring decisions, Xerox saw the value of finding new ways to gather information from its most valuable source of information – the people working for it. “Critical to the success of creating a new means of informing and consulting with the workforce was to consult all employees initially,” says Myra Clarke, Xerox manager, HR programmes and resourcing.

To determine how its 5,500 UK employees would prefer to hear corporate news and interact with the company, Xerox introduced a survey entitled Your Opinion Counts.

“Overwhelmingly our people wanted to hear corporate news from, and interact with, their immediate managers,” says Clarke.

One of Xerox’s core values is ‘two-way communication’ so there was already a quarterly management meeting system in place. It was decided to use this system to introduce ‘TalkBack’, a consultation system developed in response to ‘Your Opinion Counts’. In future, every manager would receive an information pack with corporate news to disseminate to their team and a topic of the quarter for discussion. Results from discussions would be fed back up the chain and acted upon. Clarke explains, “Each manager attended a workshop explaining TalkBack and was asked to sign up to the new system. They in turn took their teams through it, asking each team member to sign up. We felt that signing on the dotted line showed equal commitment by Xerox and employees.”

The first TalkBack took place with managers spending 20 minutes of an hour-long session disseminating corporate news and the other 40 minutes were spent discussing reward and recognition – a topic identified as popular at the original workshops.

Results were fed back to the HR policy committee, comprising the heads of HR from all Xerox’s UK businesses. “For example, employees identified they wanted to take some reward as holiday entitlement, so as part of our revitalised reward package we included this,” says Clarke.

“For TalkBack to succeed it was considered vital that employees saw their suggestions as being acted on. We found one stumbling block was the sheer volume of information we needed to process so we called in talent management consultants Getfeedback* who were able to take the pain out of the process,” Clarke explains.

Getfeedback advised on the structure of the research, helping the HR policy committee to define questions that would encourage debate on both local and corporate issues. It also rapidly analysed the mountain of quantitative and qualitative data generated, to produce easily communicable reports, keeping the TalkBack loop focussed on discussion that leads to action. As a result, 70 per cent who participated agree that TalkBack is an efficient way to communicate. “84 per cent said they thought it was an opportunity to give constructive views and 75 per cent thought it gave an opportunity to be listened to by management,” says Clarke.

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