

It is estimated that poor levels of engagement at work cost the UK economy around £26 billion in GDP each year. The government backed initiative 'Engage for Success' which was launched in 2012 aimed to address this issue and ultimately provide employers with practical information and tools, which they can utilise to help improve levels of engagement at work. The 2013 Engage for Success report confirmed that by injecting an extra 10% in funding to improve employee engagement, using strategies such as business participation and career development, company profits could be increased by £2,700 per employee, per year.

While engagement has been a significant factor influencing HR strategy for many years, our understanding of its true value, as well as its symbiotic relationship with the concept of wellbeing, is beginning to deepen. HR debates over the last twelve months, for example, have increasingly moved towards highlighting the distinction between what we mean by engagement and wellbeing. Generally speaking, engagement refers to workplace characteristics that support the organisation's goals. Wellbeing on the other hand, is related to an employee's perception of their overall welfare, which is influenced by workplace interventions (or lack of).

An over emphasis on promoting engagement initiatives, many argue, will likely result in a poor understanding of why employees are underperforming. If businesses want to optimise productivity at work, it is further argued that putting the individual's experience of their work firmly at the centre of engagement strategy, will achieve better results. Studies have in fact shown that productivity can double when engagement *and* wellbeing are jointly considered when implementing new work policies. As a result, increasing numbers of organisations now consider employee wellbeing as a strategic advantage.

Last year's winner of the CIPD Engagement and Wellbeing award, Walker Snack Foods in Peterlee, certainly understood the importance of this critical factor. There are obviously a number of actions organisations can take to make a difference to the wellbeing of employees. Implementing policies that seek to improve the environment, shift patterns or personal development are good examples. Although there are universal factors that will make people happy and motivated at work, each organisation is uniquely different and will need to establish its own 'context' for change.

As a snack food business, Walker's chose to focus its wellbeing programme on health and offered its 350+ employees a gym-subsidy, which ran as a 'go more, pay less' scheme. Providing employees, on average, visit a gym twice per week, all membership monies are refunded. Over a third of employees at the Peterlee factory took up the scheme with 90% attending regularly. The scheme was extended to include a healthy-eating canteen programme as well as affiliations with local health service providers.

Communicating clearly the intention to promote employee wellbeing as well as how the origination seeks to improve engagement in the business, at the same time, will ensure that any strategy is a success. Research has shown that quite often, the most important factor is the extent to which employees believe that their organisation has a sincere interest in their wellbeing. At this year's awards we expect organisations with clearly defined, bespoke and well communicated strategies that demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between engagement and wellbeing, to be in contention for this award.