



WATCH THE SPACE

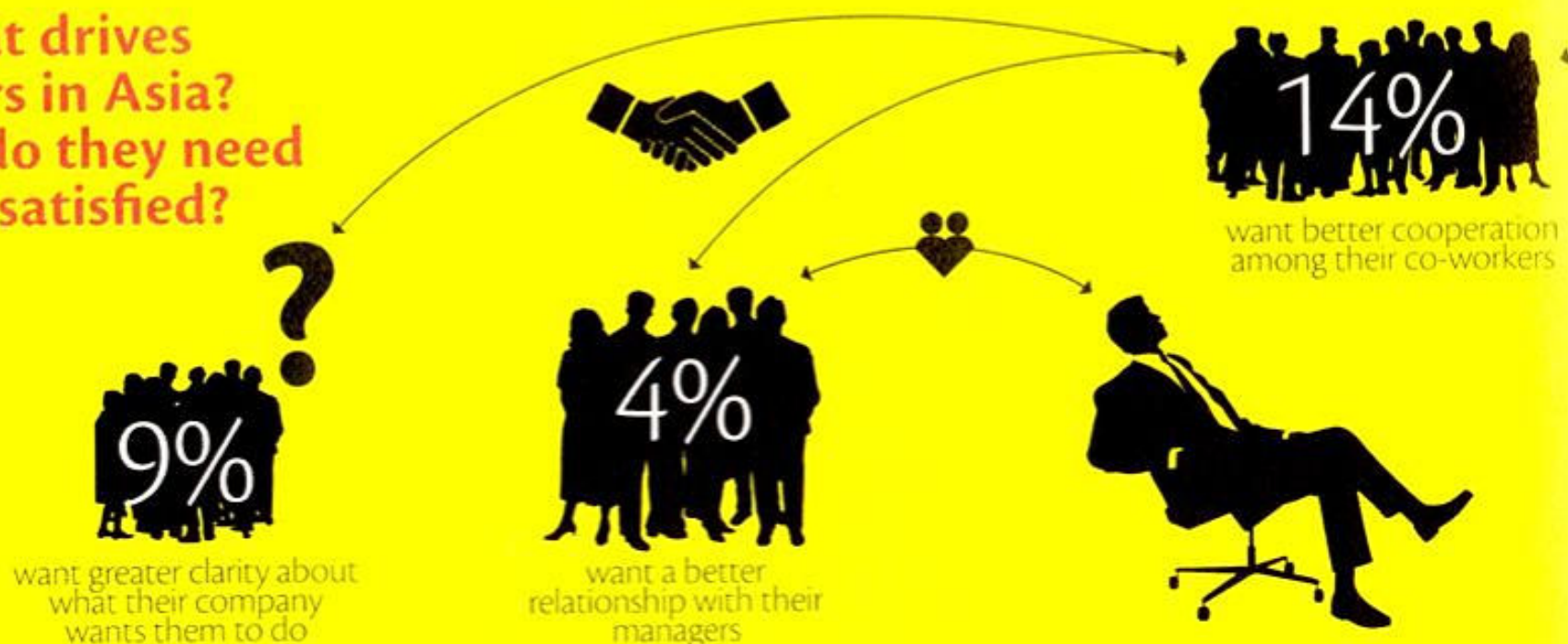
What are the factors that help develop a greater connection between the employee and the organisation?

By **Dom Meli**

Around the world, less than one in five workers are highly engaged. Put simply, most people are not working anywhere near as hard as they could be. More troubling, about 25% of workers are actively disengaged with their companies, while the remaining 55% of workers are somewhere in the middle — doing their job but not really connected to their company.

According to *Blessing White's* 2011 Global Engagement Report, only about 25% of South East Asian workers are engaged. The good news for South East Asia however is that 73% of workers intend to stay with their current company which indicates that they are more engaged than other workers around the world where those committed to staying with their current company's is only 61%.

So what drives workers in Asia? What do they need to feel satisfied?



Not A Simple Task

The key drivers, in the massive emerging economies of China and India, are once again development opportunities and better feedback.

And if providing these things seems simple, the reality is that motivating and engaging your workers is not easy. If you want sustained competitive advantage however, you must find a way to achieve it. Having workers who are engaged in what you and your company is trying to do is not a "nice to have" — it is critical for the 3Ps — Productivity, Performance and Profitability.

When trying to determine if your workforce is motivated and engaged, you should look at three measures of success:

- Your workers will speak positively about your organisation, they are the true believers;
- Your workers will want to stay with your organisation; and
- They will go the extra mile for your organisation, putting in what is called discretionary effort.

These three factors translate to better customer service, lower turnover, lower recruitment and training costs, safer work, higher productivity and greater profitability.

Research on global engagement scores by *Blessing White* puts India at the head of the engagement table while American companies lose between USD\$250 and USD\$350 billion a year because of workers who are not engaged.

Many factors influence an individual's motivation but as Ben Palmer, the CEO of Genos International says, up to 53% of a workers engagement can depend of whether they are working for a boss who demonstrates the type of leadership they find motivating. Further, we know from Gallup research that when people are extremely satisfied with their manager across the organisation there is a corresponding increase in employee engagement and performance, typical of companies who earn 3.9 times greater per share than their competitors. Maybe this is why research from around the world consistently finds that engaging staff is one of the most important challenges facing managers. In fact, a survey by the Corporate Leadership Council of 50,000 workers in 27 countries found that highly engaged employees perform up to 20% better and were 87% less likely to leave.

But the big-ticket items are



greater clarity around their career



want more challenging work



want more flexible job conditions



23%

want career development opportunities and training.



want more opportunities to do what they do best

So how do you improve worker engagement?

1. Improve your organisation's communication, particularly between managers and workers. A Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey of British workers found that giving workers the chance to share their views with bosses was the most important factor. Another study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide found that companies that communicated effectively with their workers were four times more likely to have highly engaged employees. In the same study, the companies that had the most effective communications practices had a 91% return to shareholders compared with only a 62% return for the least effective communicators. What's more, a Mercer survey found it was crucial for managers to communicate the future direction of the company and explain the link between a worker's job and the company's success.
2. Get a better fit between the worker and their job, or a better match between workers skills and interests and the work they do. In short provide work that is interesting to them.
3. Provide an opportunity for workers to really contribute.
4. Offer greater support and genuine work-life balance.
5. Allow employees a degree of autonomy and personal control over certain areas of their work.
6. Provide opportunities for growth, skills development and progression.
7. Ensure the absence of overly stressful or demanding work as this acts as a significant de-motivator, particularly when workers feel they have little control over their work.
8. Demonstrate trust in workers to get the job done.
9. Explain tasks properly so that people know what they are expected to do.
10. Employ better managers.

The Physical Space

Few leaders, managers or business owners appreciate the impact the environment has on worker performance.

In *The Impact of the Physical Environment on the Psychological Well-being of Office Workers*, Klitzman and Stellman, found that adverse environmental conditions, especially poor air quality, noise, ergonomic conditions and lack of privacy may affect worker satisfaction and mental health. Further, research presented in *The Gallup Management Journal* by Jerry Krueger and Emily Killham finds that the less satisfied workers are with the physical work environment — acoustics, ventilation, visual surroundings — the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their jobs. Gallup research also found the physical work environment plays a role in employee engagement and performance. Gallup's data suggests, however, the problem might not be the type of workspace but whether employees are allowed to make that space their own. When Gallup asked employees if they are able to personalise their workspace to make it feel like their own, employees who answered "yes" were 55% more likely to be engaged.

Further, Gallup found workers wanted to be able to see beyond their space to the outdoors and if they could not, they were 86% more likely to be actively disengaged than those who were able to view the outside world from their workspace. Temperature has a similar impact, with workers who are not comfortable only half as likely to be engaged. When it comes to noise, one in three employees indicated that noise in their workplace frequently disturbs their work and these employees were about half as likely to be engaged compared to workers in more comfortable surroundings. In short, there is a strong relationship between worker engagement, financial success and factors like noise, temperature, and pleasing workspaces.

In *Reaching Beyond the Summit: Are We Creating Work Environments for People to Thrive?* Gail M. Staines writes that a well-designed office facilitates getting the job done and references one of the most expansive studies — the Buffalo Organization for Social and Technological Innovation (BOSTI) study. Involving more than 10,000 workers over four years, this study found that aesthetics, noise level, lighting, privacy, and comfort all contribute to the level of employee job satisfaction and performance. Of particular interest is the finding that only 25% of participants were involved in workspace design even though allowing workers to participate in design significantly contributed to job satisfaction and performance.

It is clear that getting the work environment right is crucial in achieving worker satisfaction, engagement, productivity and performance, regardless of the workspace.

Staines also discusses the physical environment where people meet and the impact on job productivity and satisfaction. Staines notes that the characteristics of quality meeting spaces include open and flexible space, good lighting, refreshment facilities, moveable tables and chairs, fresh air, windows, convenient location and appropriate cleanliness and noise levels.

Around the world companies are catching up with the way people work and are adopting activity based work spaces that cater for technology, connectivity, generational differences and the need for greater agility, flexibility and scalability.

Space effects behaviour

'Proximity' refers to the impact that space has on relationships. In the book, *The Influencer*, the authors assert that the frequency and quality of human interaction is largely a function of physical distance. For instance, at the corporate level, bosses who are closest to, and interact most frequently with their subordinates, generally have the best relationships. Conversely, when employees don't meet and chat, poor outcomes ensue — silos form and in-fighting develops. As written in *The Influencer*, 'If you want to predict who doesn't trust or get along in a company, take out a tape measure!'

Distance keeps people from routinely interacting. Conversely, when people bump into each other they ask questions, share ideas and surprisingly often come up with solutions to problems. In this way, savvy leaders use physical space as a means of enhancing interaction.

You need look no further than public housing to see how people's physical environment dramatically affects their behaviour — think the Bronx or the derelict estates of London. In the last two decades there has been a significant rethink in state funded housing — it looks radically different now, it has been beautified, opened up, made brighter and more user friendly. Why? Because when people live in ugly surroundings their behaviour suffers. Creating aesthetically pleasing spaces has an effect on pride, trust, respect and socially appropriate behaviour. ■

