

The situation

Knightstone is a housing association in Somerset and the West of England with around 450 employees. When we started working with them in April 2013, employee engagement levels were incredibly high, with scores across all areas consistently receiving very positive ratings, including recognition, feeling cared about as a person and receiving adequate training.

Knightstone were concerned however that their consistently high engagement levels might drop due to a few major changes that were happening within the business, including a companywide restructure and changing the ways of working, including re-location to one central office and remote working for existing office based employees.

They were keen to retain the current levels of engagement, despite the changes, and therefore wanted to know how the changes were being received by employees; what was working well about the implementation and what areas, if any, could be improved.

What we did

We suggested a series of focus groups, for managers and employees in separate groups at all locations, to check understanding of the changes and gather employee feelings and perspectives about the changes.

This also had the added benefits of:

- helping employees feel part of the change process from an early stage
- ensuring that their suggestions were being considered and built in to the change
- helping to guarantee their support and buy in, as well as make the situation 'real' for people
- capturing any practical fears and concerns from managers and employees about the changes that they would have to make in their working practices

The results

After conducting a series of focus groups we produced a comprehensive report detailing our findings, the areas of strength and our suggestions for improvements that could be made.

There were several key findings that came out of the research, all of which the Knightstone Management Team took on board and actioned. One such finding was that managers and employees were worried about how to maintain the manager/ employee relationship when not necessarily sat next to each other every day. Another very real concern was that people would lose their team identity, team spirit and sense of purpose if not working closely with their colleagues geographically.

To combat this, we designed and delivered a one day workshop to all managers on how to manage remote employees and teams, ensuring engagement levels were maintained and team spirit was maintained and even improved. The combination of some theory, lots of discussion and very practical hints and tips as well as a toolkit to take away and use with their teams ensured that managers felt able to keep their employees engaged and motivated. These resources also helped to ensure the transition to the new ways of working went smoothly and was embraced across the organisation. This approach helped everyone in the organisation to realise the positive benefits of the changes and why they were being introduced, which again helped people move towards a more positive and receptive mindset.

The focus groups and workshop were extremely well received, to the extent that the workshop is now a regular module on Knightstone's Managers Induction Programme.