

LOCAL AUTHORITY EMPLOYEES THRIVE ON GREATER ENGAGEMENT

Local authorities are all about a sense of community, with many making the decision for future planning to encourage sustainable connections and improving the quality of life for everyone who lives within that area. So, a sense of community within the workplace should be as equally important for your employees, according to James Scott, CEO of Thrive.

Some local authority employees can have limited access to resources, company news, health and safety policies, important updates and more – with many 'outdoor', field-based employees having no access to a desktop or company email.

For example, at Meath County Council 35% of council employees had no regular access to work emails or a desktop. Along with the current challenges presented by Covid-19, enhancing communication and promoting employee engagement was essential for the organisation.

Another challenge is communication – not only with members of the public but with colleagues, internally. Consistent and relevant communication is the key to engaging employees in their role, empowering them to carry out their duties effectively and providing appropriate support and recognition, especially with various people across different departments and locations.

FOUR KEY TIPS OF ENGAGEMENT

At Thrive, we have detailed four key tips for enhancing communication and uplifting employee engagement within your local authority: employee feedback; company culture; employee connection to their roles; and digitalisation for the promotion of engagement & communication.



Meath County Council is the first local authority in Ireland to launch an employee engagement app, in partnership with Thrive, the Belfast-based software developer. Meath CEO Jackie Maguire is pictured at the launch of the employee engagement app with council workers Ferenc Dancsa, Kevin Murphy and John Collier.

(1) Employee Feedback

One way to uplift employee engagement is through constructive feedback – in a frequent and personalised and consistent manner. Employees today want to know their individual contributions are being recognised, noticed and appreciated. They also want their voices to be listened to – to be able to share their opinions, collaborate on ideas and get a sense that they are contributing to positive change.

Look for opportunities to encourage questions and answer sessions, run polls and surveys with employees to get regular feedback and promote celebrating success and recognising colleagues in your daily interactions. Use feedback to develop action plans that employees have contributed to are engaged with.

(2) Company Culture

At its heart, culture is often described as a shared set of values that encourages community. Engaged employees recognise culture manifesting itself in the form of:

- Trusted leadership
- Supportive management
- A positive work environment
- Opportunities for growth

Employee communication that engages employees from the perspective of culture should focus not just on publicising company values, but also on encouraging feedback and recognising value-centric actions and behaviours.

Employees should know the company's culture and feel that they are positively contributing to the culture, mission and values each day. Great culture sets the foundations for success of the company as well as its employees and is based on honest, productive conversations as well as access to knowledge and proactive knowledge sharing.

(3) Employee Connection to Their Roles

This can be tricky to do in a work environment that can be isolating – with remote working, distributed teams, social distancing or working from home. And from administrative work to tenancy management to support workers to frontline workers, there is a wide variety of roles within a local authority.



James Scott, CEO and Co-founder with Belfast-based software developer Thrive, says that effective employee engagement has never been so important, as businesses continue to navigate these challenging times.

So, how can you get employees to care on an emotional level about these kinds of jobs?

To feel connected to your organisation, employees need to know their responsibilities and how they play into the greater vision and purpose of the company. The employee should believe their work is meaningful and making a real impact. When that is communicated effectively to employees, they feel elevated from a 'cog in the wheel' position, and their sense of value within the organisation increases.

It is also human nature to crave social connections with other people, this can be challenging when teams are dispersed, and even more challenging with the current effects of Covid-19. Social connectedness is vital for employees to feel happy in their roles. This striving for connection begins at birth and continues throughout our life.

Encouraging employees to share their stories, talk about their feelings, share their hobbies and experiences will create a more personal, social culture which helps each employee to Thrive and creates true engagement for everyone.

(4) Tapping into New Technology

It is great to see many local authorities adopting new technologies that will improve the customer experience. Investing in technologies that improve

efficiency throughout automated processes will improve both the employee experience and employee communication.

It is important for local authority employees to be able to access information 24/7 on a real-time basis – particularly as different departments will work in different locations. Digital tools, such as employee apps, can be used for many things such as:

- Sharing critical health and safety information to everyone at the same time.
- Posting and updating company news.
- Sharing video updates or messages of encouragement from senior leaders.
- Promoting peer-to-peer recognition.
- Running charity events.
- Organising internal events such as training, town halls, seminars, wellbeing sessions.
- Integrated payroll and rota.
- Empowering employee-generated feedback and ideas.
- Sharing policies or procedures.

This list of content is entirely up to you and your organisation and most importantly your employees. Whether you manage Internal Communications, HR, Operations, Health and Safety or the CEO, implementing these suggestions can help you increase engagement and, therefore, productivity, innovation and success.

In summary, the current climate brought to us by Covid-19 has made us re-think how we

communicate with our teams and colleagues. Like many organisations today, local authorities are going through huge amounts of change, people need to be more focused in their roles with adding different skills.

Local authorities are relying on employees to work more productively and they, therefore, need to be engaged with employees as well as acknowledging how they are feeling. Local authorities need to ensure the environments their employees work in are the best so they can deliver what they need to deliver in the most efficient and effective way, the right people with the right skills doing the right work at the right time.

People who are out in the field need to see the same information at the same time as those who are working remotely from home or at a desk to increase employee experience for everyone, everywhere.

A connected culture should ensure inclusivity, support team members and provide a safe environment for employees to be able to give their best. Long standing and effective workforce engagement will lead to a productive, sustainable and effective organisation.



Employee apps can be used to share critical health and safety information to everyone at the same time, provide council news updates, empower employee-generated feedback and ideas, share policies or procedures etc.