

Bank of Ireland employee

January 2010

forum drives engagement agenda

Employee forums, along with the businesses in which they work, are constantly evolving. The challenge is to ensure that the forum remains relevant and engaged in the changes that are taking place, effectively bringing an informed employee voice to bear on the decision making process. Clare Mears, chair of the Partners' Council, the Bank of Ireland employee forum, identified the need to bring the forum closer to the heart of the business when she took on the role in 2007. By introducing an employee audit tool, owned and operated by the forum, the Partners' Council have been able to identify the main issues that face the staff in a very challenging environment.

In 2007 we in Partners' Council saw things changing rapidly in our business. As the world was heading for recession, it became evident that our business in the UK needed to contract. In this turbulent environment, the Council was having less impact than it could, staff were afraid to bring issues forward, and our structure was no longer aligned to the business. We realised that we needed to raise awareness of what the Council could do for both staff and the business. We have several different businesses in Bank of Ireland UK, each with their own employee forum, and as full-time chair, I wanted to improve consistency and cooperation across the forums.

To revitalise the Partners' Council we ran an awareness campaign, we got out to our main buildings and ran a series of clinics and attended as many staff meetings as we could. Through the campaign and discussions at the UK Partners' Council Chairs meetings, we identified a number of ways in which the Partners' Council could improve its impact and influence. There was opportunity and the need for:

- Improved communication between Partners' Council and the business
- Increased Partners' Council involvement and higher profile with managers



- Contribution of Partners' Council in increasing engagement of UK employees

Following discussion with our CEO, the Partners' Council explored the suitability of introducing a Partners' Council Barometer; an audit tool designed to gauge employee engagement and identify issues that might affect employee wellbeing and performance. Through consultation with key stakeholders including Business Managers, HR Business Partners and Internal Communications, we concluded that it would be an effective way to meet the needs identified.

Objectives

The Key Objectives for the barometer were:

- 1 To give managers an employee temperature check which is independent from line management, **measurable** and comparable over time.
- 2 To be a **simple, consistent** feedback method to all managers with UK employees, which can be used to benefit the business at a local or strategic level.
- 3 To give Partners' Council Reps and Chairs an **effective** and recognised mechanism for raising important collective issues or suggestions quickly.
- 4 To be relevant to the business by **aligning feedback** areas with **business strategy**.

- 5 To address some of the main themes raised by **Employee Engagement**, whilst not being directly linked with the survey (budget constraints have prevented a survey this year which has meant a greater importance has been placed on the Barometer)

It remains hugely important for staff to own employee engagement feedback of any kind – we need our feedback to be open and honest for it to work. Our Barometer facilitates this as we have buy in from managers all across the business. We would like to continue to develop this and possibly formally become the 'employee engagement' measurement tool for our business – thus making a massive financial saving for the business. We are very well placed to really give the business a totally open and honest view – we ensure that we have fully engaged reps in all areas to help us with this.

Feedback Areas

It was agreed that there should be a maximum of **five feedback areas**, in order to keep the Barometer simple to use and interpret. Following discussion with the chairs of each of the UK Partners' Councils and key stakeholders the five feedback areas were decided as:

1. **Involvement**
2. **Resources**
3. **Communication**
4. **Employment**
5. **Wellbeing**

These areas are all within the Partners' Council remit as defined under the Partners' Council Constitution, and having researched through past Partners' Council

minutes, the vast majority of issues raised would fall into one of these categories. From the business' perspective, all of these areas relate to employee engagement, and the ability of the Partners' Council to provide objective evidence and analysis on this subject is valuable for their understanding of the workforce.

How it works

Each area of the business has their own Barometer. This is updated monthly by the representatives and presented to the various heads of the business for agreement/discussion before the Group Chair presents an overall Group Barometer to the relevant CEO.

The representatives use various ways of getting the feedback – this can be a constant challenge. It can be done by seeking feedback via email or attending staff meetings for example. Certainly where there is a large geographical spread of units/staff it works best by adopting a

'buddy' system whereby reps nominate a contact person in each unit/department to gather the feedback on their behalf on a regular basis – this person would have to be someone who can reach all the staff in that particular area eg: the compliance officer in each branch

Those areas of the business where the Barometer shows there are issues agree an action plan with the representative which is reviewed regularly to show progress. Historical results will highlight where a particular 'Hot Spot' needs further action.

General Indicators

Each of the feedback areas is given a red, amber or green status, depending on the potential business impact. A green status for a feedback area means that there is either no issues raised or positive feedback was gathered and there is no negative impact on the business. Red, on the other hand, indicates a number of

issues raised during the consultation with the representatives, and the likelihood that if left unchecked, there will be a considerable business impact.

In addition to the three traffic light colours, the barometer includes a gold feedback status which reflects positive feedback. A gold status can be given where, instead of negative comments, there are numerous positive comments being raised and there is a general feeling across the whole constituency that there is true best practice in this area. I must confess it is rather hard to get anyone to put this down – perhaps in better times ahead!

Below is a guide of general indicators. This is the basic overview of the feedback structure; representatives use this tool in conjunction with the further feedback area guidance to assess the 'temperature' of the workforce and give structured feedback.

	GREEN	AMBER	RED
GENERAL	No issues raised/ positive feedback	Several issues raised Potential Business Impact	Numerous issues raised Significant Business impact
Involvement (employee feedback, Consultation, engagement with PC Reps)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with Partners' Council Reps Employee feedback is sought and considered Where formal Consultation has taken place, all correct processes followed 	Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serious issue(s) but action is being taken, or Potentially serious issue needing to be addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No engagement with PC Reps Employee feedback is never sought or considered Where formal Consultation has taken place, correct processes not followed
Resources (People, Equipment, Systems, Processes)	No issues have been raised over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of/Skills of employees Physical equipment System issues Business Processes 		Serious issues have been raised over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of/Skills of employees Physical equipment System issues Business Processes
Communication (information sharing at local level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees are kept well informed by local managers about business plans, performance and change. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of local level communication between employees and managers, which is seriously impacting business.
Employment (Policies, Employee Development, Benefits – excluding pay)	No issues raised over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR policies Training & development Employee Benefits 	Serious issues have been raised over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR policies Training & development Employee Benefits 	
Wellbeing (Work/Life balance, Health and Safety)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worklife balance is respected by managers Good Health & Safety awareness and consideration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worklife balance is not respected by managers Issue raised over Health & Safety 	



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Further Feedback Area Guidance

The further feedback area guidance is designed to support representatives to gather the relevant information under each of the feedback areas; involvement, resources, communication, employment and wellbeing. As well as helping representatives to focus their feedback on the areas where the Partners' Council has an agreed remit, it also gives a clear indication of the benchmarks of good practice for representatives to measure performance against.

So, for example, under the involvement feedback area, representatives are advised to measure employee feedback from managers in the following context:

'Employee feedback - There will regularly be issues where managers will make decisions without employee involvement and Partners' Council Reps acknowledge that it is a manager's role to manage their department. Good employee involvement in these cases is where the manager gives reasons why the decision has been made, details of what other options were considered and there is an opportunity to ask questions.'

As well as establishing benchmarks, the guidance also sets expectations as to the level of feedback to ensure that the issues being raised are of a level that is relevant

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to senior management. Feedback on individual or technical issues is explicitly to be avoided, in favour of the identification of group or systemic issues that may have a noticeable impact on the business. An

example of this is taken from the resources feedback area, which gathers feedback on whether staff have the means to carry out their job effectively;

'If there are systems issues raised, they need to be of a collective nature rather than individual – for example, about the escalation process or general service, not about isolated technical problems.'

Assessment of progress so far

The Partners' Council are now working in partnership with the business. Staff feel they can bring their issues to the Partners' Council and can actually make a difference to their working environment. Of course some things cannot change, but much can, and Bank of Ireland are keen to ensure their staff are working in the best possible environment. Partners' Council reps recognise the strength of the collective voice and the importance of honest and open feedback. They also realise that it must be a true and fair

reflection of the majority of staff and that it can be difficult to get feedback from staff. The Barometer is a good tool but will only work well if it is constantly on everyone's agenda and if feedback is a two-way process. It is therefore important that staff see results. We have seen improvements in areas that used the Barometer.

We would love to see every department in Bank of Ireland using the Barometer as a temperature check and will continue to work towards this.

Conclusion

We have come a long way since 2007 against a backdrop of turbulence and considerable change in financial services. The work we are involved in can be really meaningful and rewarding – we can actually influence our business, we do play a hugely important part in supporting our colleagues. I am very proud of the Partner's Council, my first two years as full time chair has been hugely challenging and rewarding. To now hear management & staff refer to '**The Barometer**' in staff meetings across our business is a great achievement. We have certainly achieved our original objectives.

We are the voice of the staff and we need to use it wisely.

Clare Mears is Chair of the UK Partners' Council at Bank of Ireland Group

It remains hugely important for staff to own employee engagement feedback of any kind

Fact Box

Bank of Ireland is a long established Irish Bank with a strong presence in the UK since the 1970's. Bank of Ireland took over the Bristol & West Building Society in 2004. The Company currently has approximately 2500 UK based employees. There are five staff councils all reporting into one full-time chair, which has a two year tenure. Each of the councils has a chair who get a 15%

weighting on their staff appraisal for the Partners' Council work (1 day per week). There are 45 reps overall and each of these has a 5% weighting (1 day per month). Group Council meets once per quarter with regular updates via conference calls. The local councils meet bi-monthly on average or more often if required.






Ernst & Young criticised over approach to consultation

Shadow work and pensions secretary, Theresa May, criticised administrators Ernst & Young for their failure to allow time for consultation with staff over redundancies at communications company, Nortel.

Over 200 Nortel staff in Maidenhead and Belfast were told they were being made redundant without a consultation period by Ernst & Young after the company went into administration in January 2009.

Ernst & Young claim that the law allows businesses not to consult staff when the situation leading to the need for redundancies is urgent and unexpected.

Following a meeting with employees and Ernst & Young, Theresa May said: "What was of most concern in our discussion with Ernst & Young was a clear indication that they would be very happy to use this strategy again in the future."

"They showed no remorse about having used this approach and I feel the employees have been treated extremely badly."

The law requiring companies to consult over redundancies is intended to find ways to avoid redundancies, or mitigate and reduce their impact. Consultation is regarded as having positive impacts on those staff affected by redundancies as well as the remaining workforce.

New guidelines on time off for reps come into force

The revised Acas Code of Practice on time off for trade union duties and activities came into force on 1 January 2010, providing further advice for employers and employees and examples of good practice.

The Code provides guidance on the provision of cover when union representatives take time off, payment for time off, and the responsibilities of both line managers and union representatives in ensuring time off arrangements are effective.

Ed Sweeney, chair of Acas, said: "Union representatives play an important role in the modern workplace. To carry out their role it is however essential that union representatives receive appropriate time off."

"The new code will help both union representatives and the organisations they work for understand the law relating to time off, and also manage in a fair and effective manner the practical day-to-day issues that arise when requests for time off are made."

You can download the Code of Practice and guides to representative arrangements at www.acas.org.uk/publications

UK Job appointments see biggest rise for 30 months

The number of people finding permanent jobs continued to rise at the end of 2009; December saw the largest rise in permanent placements in two and a half years.

The findings, published by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation and KPMG, were based on a survey of 400 recruitment and employment agencies. The survey also showed that demand for temporary staff had risen.

The report, which separates out employment from unemployment, suggests that confidence is returning to the jobs market, and that employers are beginning to lift hiring freezes. There was also an increase in the number of job vacancies at the end of the year.

At the same time the CIPD predicts that unemployment will peak at 2.8 million this year. Their Chief Economist, John Philpot, argues that unemployment has been lower than expected due to the actions taken by employers and employees to avoid redundancies. There is still concern, however, at the high rate of youth unemployment.