

Category: Employee Engagement

Organisation: Centrica

Date: October 2007

EFA overview

Centrica recognizes the importance of employing an age diverse workforce and 'age' has been a core element of its diversity strategy and policies for a number of years. In preparation for the Age Regulations, Centrica established an 'Age Action Group' to focus on age issues across the business and devised a detailed plan to review policy and practice and to engage, communicate, educate and implement change. They developed a 12 month communications and training programme that has raised awareness - both internally and externally - that Centrica employs workers of all ages, young and old.

Initiative

A 12 month integrated age awareness communications and training programme, including an online learning package based on workplace scenarios.

Aims and purpose

- To raise awareness of and educate employees about age issues
- To promote the benefits of age diversity
- To ensure that employees and managers understand the requirements of the age regulations and how it will affect them
- To share best practice and case studies across the business
- To help prevent age discrimination in the workplace through changing culture

Business drivers

Centrica sees age as an increasingly important issue in society and employment. Age had already featured as a key strand of the company's diversity strategy and policies for a number of years. However, given the changes in demographic trends and impending legislation, Centrica wanted to reconsider its position on age and how it could prepare for these changes to benefit customers, shareholders and employees.

Approach taken

Based on their general approach to age, and findings from an age project conducted by the EFA across the Group, an age action group was set up with representatives from all business units. This group was sponsored by senior business leaders including the Diversity and Inclusion Action Group, chaired by a Board and Managing Director and with membership at a senior level representing all parts of the business.

The age action group conducted a review of policies and practices and drew up a detailed age action plan which proposed a robust training, communication and engagement programme for all employees.

The communications and training programme included:

- Presentations at internal and external conferences
- Messages on pay slips
- Posters (incorporating the EFA logo) in offices and call centres
- Case studies in our internal magazines
- Face-to-face briefings for managers and employees
- A message on our engineers' audio DVD
- Regular features on our intranet
- Classroom training and an e learning 'Age Awareness' programme

The action group was responsible for executing the action plan and the communication and training programme within the business and its brands. A few members of the group were responsible for developing the e-learning programme which includes two modules with tests which required an 80% pass mark. On completion of the assessment, there was an option for a participant to print a certificate.

Workforce communications on age started in 2004 with the initial launch of diversity and inclusion e-learning. Activity increased significantly in June 2005 with a 'warm-up' campaign, in preparation for the legislation, followed by the main training programme in 2006, culminating in the roll out of the 'Age Awareness' e-learning product.

Centrica was also active in promoting the benefits of age diversity externally: including working in partnership with the London Development Agency to produce a video for small businesses, and presenting its age awareness work at the CIPD Age Conference and the JSB Annual Employment Conference.

Elements of the training programme are now incorporated in Centrica's induction processes for new recruits.

Barriers

The main barriers identified were:

- Dispelling the myths surrounding age and fighting cynicism about the legislation which was seen by some as extreme political correctness
- Securing funding for the e-learning product and overcoming resistance to the roll-out of the training programme

The age action group secured the full backing of senior management early on so its main thrust was to engage the rest of business. This was achieved by writing reports and presenting papers on age to the Centrica executive committee, holding briefing sessions with Trade Unions and employee forums. In addition, Centrica sought management and staff input into the development of the e-learning products to ensure they were appropriate for their audience, in terms of language, content and duration.

Centrica also elected age champions at management and staff levels who helped win support for the age action plan and the rollout of the age awareness e-learning programme.

Impact

The campaign successfully engaged all areas of the business challenging them to consider the benefits of age diversity and impact of the legislation. Employees have a greater awareness of age and now ask questions and come up with ideas and initiatives to better serve Centrica's customers, shareholders and employees. Employees also feel more confident raising concerns and challenging colleagues with regard to age issues.

The communication and training programme has:

- educated employees and raised awareness of age issues
- promoted the benefits of an age diversity workplace
- been used to share of best practice both internally and externally

Centrica has also seen an improvement in age-related metrics:

- Nearly 30% of employees are over the age of 45 a (5% increase over the last 2 years, including a 3% increase in Corporate Centre)
- Whilst there has been no overall change in that last couple of years in the proportion of employees under the age of 35 in consolidated Group figures, within the brands there has been a reduction of the age imbalance, e.g. British Gas Business has gone from 75% of employees being under the age of 35 to 70%, whilst Corporate Centre has increased from 25% of employees being under the age of 35 to 37%.
- Centrica's 2006 Employee Engagement Survey saw a positive increase on all of the diversity index questions versus 2005 (on average by 3%).

Monitoring

Analysis by age is carried out across a range of dimensions, including monitoring of:

- recruitment
- employee engagement
- training uptake
- promotion
- turnover
- grievances

Centrica measures the different ways in which staff understand communications and their capacity to process information to enable it to tailor its communications to fit diverse needs. Measurement exercises are conducted electronically through pulse surveys and a learning response tracker.

The Employers Forum on Age

Floor 3, Downstream
1 London Bridge
London
SE1 9BG
T 0845 456 2495

© The Employers Forum on Age 2007

EFA Case Study