

SITUATION

The primary call centre for a large Australian organisation was experiencing above industry standard unplanned leave. We were engaged to uncover the root cause of the issue and identify solutions to create a culture of low unplanned absenteeism.

Driven by the minimum employment conditions outlined in the Fair Work Act, the organisation had implemented a new Sick Leave policy. This policy reduced the sick leave employee entitlements. The leadership team were counting on this new policy to reduce their unplanned leave to industry standard.

The intent of the engagement was for the organisation to not only create a culture of low unplanned leave, but to also identify the systemic leverage points to enable them be a world class call centre, known for its high performing motivated employees delivering the customer experience promise and achieving optimum business results.

APPROACH

A *Collaborative Systems Thinking™* approach was applied to the diagnostic and the solution design. The diagnostic consisted of structured interviews conducted with stakeholders at all levels of the organisation to gather the individual experience and the diversity of perspectives. A Systems Map was developed from the data. The map visually depicted the dynamic relationships between each of the components that were operating in the organisational system, preventing the organisation from delivering its customer promise and business imperatives.

The solution design took a collaborative approach. The insights from the Systems Map were socialised across the organisation to develop a shared understanding of the tensions and the available leverage points to focus on, to create system change. A cross-functional working group was established and a number of collaboration events were run and focused on solution design. This process captured the insights and ideas from all levels of staff. The working group established some new ways of working and operating, based on the wisdom learnt from the collective. The new ways of working, policies and processes were implemented across the business and quickly adopted, as all staff had played a part in the development of the solutions.

OUTCOME

The Systems Map diagnostic painted a clear picture of the unintended consequences of the new sick leave policy. The policy did not address the root cause driving the high levels of unplanned leave. Therefore, by decreasing the sick leave entitlements, in time, there would be an increase of presenteeism, a decrease in staff engagement and an increase in staff turnover; resulting in a further decline of the customer satisfaction and business performance.

A number of high leverage points were identified to deliver sustainable improvement across the system, these included:

- Optimising telephone occupancy rate to manage both stress and boredom
- Empowering and developing People Leaders to adopt an early intervention, preventative approach to absenteeism, providing additional support to employees
- Developing and implementing a collaborative and multifaceted approach to attendance management

Six months following implementation of the recommendation, the organisation's unplanned leave dropped below the industry standard and customer satisfaction exceeded the targets.

