

Brief

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from around the world

Grow: by making work more meaningful for employees and customers

Sodexo as an example of embedding a solid, meaningful and emotional core to driving business

Over the years we have seen a loss of trust in organisations and leaders. Stakeholders (from investors to employees) need more than just a profit-driven business plan to engage them and keep them loyal. That is why businesses have invested so much in developing policies responsibly in the past decade. There is now evidence that meaningfulness matters – not just to employees, but to customers and others. We looked at one example of a business building a careful, long-term approach, aimed at driving growth.

Sodexo is the 18th biggest employer in the world – with turnover of €18bn. It provides services in the competitive outsourcing market ranging from food in schools, hospitals, businesses and the Olympics, to facilities management in student accommodation and army bases.. It designs, sells and delivers these services around the idea of 'Quality of Life'. A partner of the OECD's Better Life Index, Sodexo focuses on the dimensions of Quality of Life that it can influence through its work, including nutrition and well being, a safe and productive environment and motivation. This is consistent with the OECD's focus beyond GDP to a wider view of socio-economic well-being. As a contribution to this more human economy, Sodexo recognises the need to start with its own employees, to make sure they feel part of a greater mission, and valued for their contributions.

There appear to be six reasons why Sodexo's Quality of Life approach is worth learning from:

- 1. Strong emotional and human core – with rational foundations:** CEO Landel says the purpose is to “provide men and women reasons to feel better and more respected. It speeds up their progress, and that of society itself”. It focuses the work of Sodexo on its impact on people. Take, for example, a contract to maintain the boiler room in an office. Instead of the goal being a fully functioning boiler, it is that the working temperature in the building is just right to ensure everyone works at their best.
- 2. At the heart of driving business growth – not just a nice-to-have add-on:** Sodexo says that it is essential to have ethics and growth hand-in-hand to transform business and the wider economy. How seriously it is taken in business terms is shown by how it is used to decide which services to develop, or what to exit.
- 3. Holistic – it connects the many parts of the business, as well as its mission and values:** the Quality of Life concept can be applied in every unit of the business and provides a central focus for employees, whatever their role in the organisation.. It is also used to develop the employee value proposition and the aspects that shape the quality of working life at Sodexo. It is a glue for the company and drives its business strategy
- 4. Meaningful to a full range of stakeholders – and a debate owned by all:** Sodexo believes a power of the concept stems from its importance to everyone, reducing risk of bias to vested interests. It wants Quality of Life issues to be an open public debate and has created forums to encourage it.
- 5. Long-term and sustainable – not just flavour-of-the-month:** Quality of Life stems from the mission of the business when it was founded by Pierre Bellon in Marseille in 1966. It has been developed over the years and is now more concrete and more completely managed.
- 6. Credible – not just 'PR fluff':** partnership with OECD and metrics being developed by Sodexo support its credibility. In the longer-term, Sodexo will need to demonstrate progress through a long-track record of success. This has started: for example at a large US urban school district, a safer, cleaner and more positive environment led to improved attendance, grades and test scores. And: a global IT company beat its employee retention and engagement goals after adding more collaborative and outdoor spaces to its HQ.

Is Sodexo perfect? With 428,000 employees serving 75m customers every day, mistakes are inevitable and not everyone will appreciate Sodexo's role and market-changing Quality of Life ambitions in a highly competitive environment. It will take the solid evidence that Sodexo is developing, business growth, documented improvements in the Quality of Life of the individuals it serves and in the performance of its client organisations.