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Technology changes everything

PIERS BISHOP from WeThrive explains how organisations can succeed despite the changes to engagement

Management is getting harder. Young starters have very different expectations of work and of their managers. Departments and functions are merging, separating or disappearing faster than ever. The project will soon become the key unit of many organisations, but without fixed roles or salary. Staff and subcontractors will bid for places and remuneration.

To complicate things further, modern work involves cognitive tasks that are not amenable to carrot-and-stick motivation so we need new ways to help managers do their jobs. Technology will inevitably be central to this, as top-down processes for 'doing the people stuff' are replaced by something more adaptive to the needs of the staff and the organisation.

One early casualty of this change will be the traditional employee engagement survey. These seemed such a good idea. After all, we have to know what employees are thinking and feeling because that's what determines their motivation (or otherwise).

Engagement surveys arrived at the right time, in theory. Brain scanning studies showed why intelligence varies with emotional state, so we knew how important working culture and conditions could be to profitability. Around the same time this connection started to be acknowledged publicly as companies proclaimed 'our people are our greatest asset'.

In practice, however, something that could have been transformative turned into a compromise of the worst kind. Surveys were often over-long and unwieldy (the full NHS staff survey runs to about 170 questions), or too short to generate useful detail. By the time the results had been analysed and made their way to line management, life had moved on. Never before had a well-meaning exercise gathered so much data and done so little with it.

Technology changes everything, one result being the challengers in the engagement field, WeThrive included, all offering features that



were unthinkable when paper-based engagement surveys began.

Some things come as standard with a tech solution. No analysis delay, real-time data on how your staff feel about their work, sliced up by team, unit, location or any combination of identifiers you choose. However, the really important question is what the surveys eventually do to the relationship between company and staff.

We know what staff need from work: being with people who share a common agenda, being stretched but supported, having the training and resources, knowing precisely what to do, feeling that things are under control, work being interesting and useful, feeling acknowledged, finding work meaningful etc.

We also know that much of the workforce doesn't get that kind of experience. The question for HR is who is getting what from working life, and what is being done to make it better.

The systems that displace the old engagement surveys will be those that provide this information in a form that can

successfully be used to understand what employees are experiencing, without generating a large time or admin burden in the process. They then have to get that information to the managers, and help them hold the coaching interventions that move people into a state of mind where they can be calm and focused, able to communicate well, collaborate and work creatively.

Imagine that working in your company, with data right down to individual level if you wish, so managers can get the inside track on what is and isn't working for every person they look after.

Management from KPIs is always behind the curve – the changes in working conditions and staff attitudes have already happened. Given live data on how staff are feeling you can intervene before any damage is done, before profits or customer relations are dented, and before cynicism is embedded.

This puts employees at the very centre of the picture, as they should be, given that their attitudes are the key drivers of engagement and motivation.

Piers Bishop is co-founder at WeThrive. Find out more: www.wethrive.net



Make me *whole* again

A narrow focus on engagement alone is no longer sufficient. Now it must be considered alongside health, wellbeing and diversity. BY ROB GRAY

In David MacLeod's highly influential 2009 report on employee engagement he raised the issue that there is no one, agreed definition of what the term means. MacLeod actually came across more than 50 terms while researching the report.

What is clear eight years on is that a narrow take on engagement is no longer sufficient. A deeper more holistic approach is needed. Talented people are exposed to opportunities elsewhere almost daily. Sites such as LinkedIn teem with posts about jobs and provide an easy avenue through which professional recruiters and ex-colleagues can reach out to passive candidates with enticing propositions.

Increased opportunity and declining organisational loyalty means engagement has never been of greater significance. Organisations must engage with their people to drive both retention and performance. Yet many are hampered by an outdated and restricted appreciation of how best to go about it; hamstrung by the notion that employees should show their commitment to the workplace without a reciprocal demonstration from the employer.

"Employee engagement has to be much more about how we do what we do rather than being seen as another action to undertake," says MacLeod, co-chair of the Engage for Success movement. "Those who see it as a survey, followed by a command to address the identified issues, will not get very far."

In MacLeod's opinion, where there is frustration around the



topic it stems from the misguided view that people are a problem to be managed. Whereas the reality is that they are a prime source of competitive advantage.

To thrive businesses need to innovate, reduce costs and open up new markets. The best way to meet these challenges is to harness employees in a spirit of mutual respect, empowering them to play their part in deciding what the organisation needs to do.

"This view is often augmented by leaders who see an inverted pyramid of hierarchy where they are at the bottom supporting the levels above them and so on to the front line," adds Macleod. "The job is to bring meaning and purpose to people's working lives."

“ Where there is frustration around the topic it stems from the misguided view that people are a problem to be managed ”

All of this is very much in tune with the thesis of Simon Sinek's bestselling book *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Yet important though it is, the 'why' is only one aspect. Engagement needs to become much more holistic if it is to have a genuinely positive impact on employers and employees. It should involve the whole person and entire employee experience.

"Any good leader in the hospitality sector will tell you that people are key to their business," says Kathryn Austin, chief HR and marketing officer at Pizza Hut Restaurants. "Whether this is in the form of the guests who ▶

come through their door or the people they employ, it is vital to ensure each individual feels valued. But what many forget is that you need to put your own people first.

“By helping to support and nurture talent you can build a happy and enthused workforce where people actually want to work for you. This is the right thing to do, and it also makes business sense; excellent guest service is key to encouraging customer loyalty and developing referrals for future customers.”

Pizza Hut Restaurants, Austin elaborates, has deliberately adopted an approach that gives its people “skills for life”. The belief is that there is value in striking a balance between encouraging employees to develop technical skills while supporting behavioural and emotional development.

Partnerships have been established with the School of Life and Heartstyles to tackle issues such as anxiety, depression, confidence and communication, with a view to driving positive behaviour and values that help build a more constructive and collaborative working culture. In addition, through a partnership with Mental Health UK the restaurant group aims to tackle the taboo around talking about mental health. An open dialogue on the subject is being encouraged as a means of creating and maintaining a supportive workforce.

“Ultimately, all good businesses know that a happy and motivated workforce is the key to success,” says Austin. “By taking a more holistic approach to training and development, businesses can build a more resilient workforce for the future and ensure employees feel engaged and empowered.”

Bringing wellbeing into the mix meets with the approval of Affinity Health at Work director Emma Donaldson-Feilder, who

is a chartered and registered occupational psychologist. She is also co-author of a CIPD guide on managing for sustainable employee engagement.

“Research suggests that employee engagement is good for health and wellbeing,” says Donaldson-Feilder. “However, there is also some initial evidence to suggest that if we focus too much on employee engagement, without considering health and wellbeing, we may create situations in which people are at higher risk of burnout or leaving.”

To achieve engagement that is sustainable over time it is important not only to engage people, but also to create conditions that protect and enhance wellbeing. This is an area that Enterprise Rent-A-Car HR director, UK and Ireland Leigh Lafever-Ayer is exploring. “How do we promote resilience and wellbeing more?” she asks. “We do a lot about health, nutrition, preventative things. But how do we continue to make that part of our employee proposition on a day-to-day basis?”

Lafever-Ayer is a strong proponent of taking a holistic approach. She argues



that promoting people from within is a key indicator of holistic engagement.

Enterprise takes a lot of people “from backpack to briefcase” and prides itself on teaching them soft skills from business etiquette to public speaking – which plays a positive role in social mobility. Lafever-Ayer is also convinced there should be a strong overlap between employee and customer engagement.

Diversity and inclusion is another highly significant strand within the holistic view. When companies talk in cold terms of optimising human capital it is easy to overlook the psychological contract entailing a bond of mutual respect. Employers cannot behave as if everyone is the same. There should be an appreciation of the individual, the person as a whole.

“People have got different needs, different desires, different expectations,” says Global Diversity Practice CEO Farrah Qureshi. “As an employer, if you can create an environment where the message is ‘we celebrate who you are, we celebrate your diversity, your difference, your perspective, the insight that diversity gives you’ – those lenses and filters that you bring to the workplace – it is win-win on both sides. The message should be ‘don’t leave your diversity at the door. Bring it into the workplace and we will recognise it, value it and leverage it.’”

Qureshi cites tech giant Cisco’s ‘More Together’ approach to diversity and inclusion as a terrific holistic example that yields appreciable engagement results.

Valuing difference uncorks potential.

Frost Included principal Stephen Frost, author of books including *Inclusive Talent Management*, says that allowing people to bring their



Colin Watt, group director of employee relations, engagement and people services at Shop Direct



"The more in tune with its people an organisation gets, the more valuable a holistic approach becomes. But by encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work organisations invite new types of requests for help or flexibility, determined by colleagues' personal circumstances. This is the big challenge, but the payoff in engagement, productivity and loyalty can be massive.

"Listening to the needs of your people through different channels – showing how people want to be supported – will give your organisation the answers it needs. The company can then advise those groups and, if necessary, agree a co-ordinated approach on specific issues, but it shouldn't take responsibility away from colleagues.

"We constantly review our engagement strategy. We don't just action good ideas – we test them and review the data we have so we know they'll work. We've been refining engagement and recognition here for some time, but more recently our approach to wellbeing, both physical and emotional, has started to gain momentum.

"We want to create the environment where colleagues can talk about and seek to better understand the subject of emotional and mental wellbeing. We've been able to accelerate some of our initiatives thanks to the positive feedback and encouragement we've received from our colleagues. We always go where the energy of our people takes us."

whole selves to work goes beyond obvious examples "such as gay people in the closet or women having to act masculine to get by". He has encountered many "subtle" examples such as men on all-male executive teams who feel marginalised, perhaps through being more introverted or because they don't like football.

The result is a "really inefficient use of brilliant introverts" to the detriment of the organisation – not to mention to the individual. What is called for is leadership open to engaging everybody.

This is not a zero sum game. In striving to engage everyone it should be made clear that there is no downside for the majority. Quite the contrary. It is a chance to increase the size of the pie for all. "If we can get everybody, including the proverbial dominant group, to understand that different people bringing themselves to work is in their own self-interest as well as the greater interest then we might be on to something," says Frost.

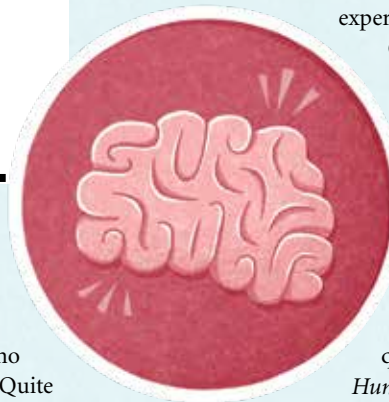
"Psychological factors such

as the alignment between organisational mission and personal values are of even greater importance within the not-for-profit sector," says Martyn Dicker, director of people and learning at The Prince's Trust. "Research published in the *Journal of Economic Psychology* demonstrated that working in not-for-profit organisations significantly increases individuals' satisfaction with their jobs despite [having] lower incomes. The positive effect can be explained by third sector employees enjoying their day-to-day activities more, being effectively happier, and feeling they are playing a useful role in their lives. While many studies found positive effects on average job satisfaction of non-profit workers this study extends this to life satisfaction more generally."

Dicker, as chair of the Engage for Success not-for-profit thought and action group, has been developing a toolkit to highlight good practice. In the context of involving the whole person, says Dicker, employees should be involved, listened to, and invited to contribute their experience, expertise and ideas.

Organisational integrity is likewise crucial. There should be no 'say-do' gap. Promises should be kept – and if this proves impossible, an explanation given as to why.

Nearly nine in 10 (85%) executives questioned for Deloitte's *Human Capital Trends 2016* research rated employee engagement as either very important or important. A key finding of the report is that engagement needs to adopt an 'always on' approach. Annual HR measures or a narrow focus simply won't cut the mustard any longer. Engagement must be re-engineered into something far broader and deeper. **HR**



Head, *heart*, gut

Is it true that a happy employee is an engaged employee? Is more productive? Thinks more creatively? Neuroscience would say yes, finds ROB GRAY

The human brain has not changed that much since our ancestors were out on the savannah. Our understanding of it, however, has moved on immensely.

Although arguably still in its infancy, neuroscience – the study of the nervous system, particularly with respect to behaviour and learning – is shedding light on our subconscious selves. And this insight into what makes people tick deep down has the potential to make a big impact on employee engagement and leadership.

Today, as it was thousands of years ago, survival is the key driver. To survive our brains want to avoid ‘threats’ (the things that might harm us) and seek out ‘rewards’ (things that protect us) making it more likely we will thrive.

Threat is by far the stronger. We can do without rewards such as shelter, food and even water for quite a while. But if a sabre-toothed tiger pounced the brain’s instinctive reaction would be far more immediate...

The way we prioritise such things is easily applied to engagement in the workplace.

“I’m sure we have all had that experience of getting feedback and someone tells us five things we have done really well but one thing we could have done better,” says Hilary Scarlett, author of *Neuroscience for Organizational Change*. “It tends to be that the one criticism stands out far more than the five compliments. That’s the threat response at work – it kicks in faster, has a bigger impact on how we feel, and leaves a more lasting impression.

“We need to be aware of this in the workplace. We need to think about both the timing of giving negative feedback – not doing it just before the employee has to give an important presentation, say – and the balance between negative and positive feedback.”

E-Trinity Consultancy director Frazer Rendell, a member of the Engage for Success special interest group on neuroscience, has worked on engagement in Europe, Asia and America. He is often asked how engagement cuts across cultures. The answer is straightforward: it’s neurological.

“
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Hormones and behaviour

Why did the chicken cross the road? Perhaps in a desperate bid to escape scientist Arnold Adolph Berthold. In a famous experiment conducted in 1849, Berthold castrated young cockerels then reinserted their testicles into a different area of their bodies. These chickens matured into roosters with typical male characteristics, while those that remained poultry eunuchs did not. This proved hormones circulate freely in the bloodstream.

More than 150 years later we know a huge amount about glands that secrete hormones (the endocrine system) and their impact on human behaviour; a field of neuroscience called behavioural endocrinology. Some key hormones linked to engagement are:

- ▶ **Cortisol.** The ‘stress hormone’ secreted by adrenal glands, which plays a vital role in regulating the metabolism. Prolonged high levels of cortisol are an indicator of chronic stress, which impairs cognitive performance and heightens the chances of developing a broad array of physical health problems.
- ▶ **Dopamine.** The ‘pleasure hormone’. A complex neurotransmitter produced in the brain associated with lust and addiction. Praise and recognition for good work releases dopamine, while reduced levels of this chemical are associated with frustration and diminished ability to learn.
- ▶ **Serotonin.** The ‘happiness hormone’. SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors) are a widely-used class of anti-depressants, including Prozac, which work by boosting serotonin levels in the brain. Exercise has been shown to lift serotonin levels naturally.
- ▶ **Melatonin.** The ‘sleep hormone’ made by the pineal gland in the brain at night. Levels increase after sunset. Staring at close bright screens may potentially delay production. To improve the chance of a good night’s sleep don’t use smartphones at bedtime.



Good engagement creates a neurological cocktail of chemicals that helps employees do amazing things to benefit the organisation and its customers. Recognition, at its simplest saying ‘thank you’ for a job well done, is tremendously powerful.

“It is an element that employees tell us they don’t get enough of, while managers tend to feel they give enough,” says Rendell. “However, if managers realised the benefits they would be much more proactive in delivering recognition. Well-structured recognition creates dopamine and oxytocin in the brain. Dopamine helps people deal with information and solve problems. Oxytocin makes us more generous to other people, both employees and customers. (See box, left, for more on hormones).

“A number of pieces of research have shown that unexpected recognition will light up the reward part of the brain more than the annual pay award. As it happens, this is the same part of the brain that lights up when we enjoy chocolate. Conversely, if employees are expecting recognition and don’t get it their brain feels the same type of pain as physical pain.”

Psychology and neuroscience research increasingly

points to the fact that a happy or positive state is a precursor to success, rather than the result of such success. These findings certainly help to explain why engagement is a lead indicator rather than a lag indicator of performance within organisations.

People Lab director Emma Bridger says there is a relatively simple scientific explanation as to why. When experiencing positive emotions our levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine rise. The chemicals make us feel good and enhance the learning centres within our brains, helping us organise new information more effectively, retain it for longer and retrieve it faster. They also enable us to make and sustain more neural connections, allowing us to think quicker and more creatively, see things in a different way, improve problem-solving capability, and analyse complex information more skilfully.

“There is a wealth of evidence to back up these claims,” says Bridger. “For example, in one study doctors primed to be in a positive state before making a diagnosis showed three times more intelligence and creativity than doctors in a neutral, stressed or negative state. They also made accurate diagnoses 19% faster. A team of positive psychologists conducted a meta-analysis to further test this hypothesis, looking at more than 200 studies on 275,000 people worldwide. What they found was that in nearly every domain the findings were the same: happiness and positive emotions lead to success.”

Yet despite such research Bridger feels that ‘happiness’ is often a dirty word within organisations, with a view that if employees are happy they aren’t working hard enough. Engagement surveys continue to dominate, she argues, because they provide the illusion of taking engagement from something that is about people and emotions to “data, numbers and charts, a place where senior leaders can feel more comfortable and in control”.

However, some business leaders intuitively grasp what neuroscience evidence supports. Richard Branson has famously said: “More than any other element, fun is the secret of Virgin’s success.”

Scarlett cites six factors that matter most to our subconscious selves in becoming engaged in the workplace. These are: self-esteem, purpose, autonomy, certainty, equity and social connection. The acronym SPACES is a handy aide memoire for this sextet.

Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology and health at Manchester Business School, sees benefits in delving into neuroscience. But he cautions against making the focus too narrow.

“People in HR want this to be the great magic bullet,” he says. “I wish it was; then it would be easy. But people need more than just to be engaged in decision-making. They need to feel trusted and valued, be managed by praise and reward, not work long hours, be allowed to work more flexibly, and not have emails bothering them outside of office hours. There is a whole load of things that make a person happy or unhappy at work. Engagement is just one of them.” **HR**

Jump in the line

Line managers are the key to reaching all levels of your workforce. But how can you engage with the engagers, asks JENNY ROPER

“Without them there is no engagement.” So says Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology and health at Manchester Business School, on the importance of line managers to employee engagement.

It’s a strong statement, but one many others wholeheartedly agree with. “There is nothing more important. I don’t think it’s possible to engage others if the line manager is not engaged,” says Julia Murrell, director of people and development at Firdale Hotels. “People work for people.”

And yet when it comes to line manager involvement in engagement, Cooper points out: “We haven’t cracked this yet.” To help HR crack this most difficult of nuts, *HR* magazine rounds up the 12 steps to engage line managers in engagement once and for all.

1 Recruit on interpersonal skills

The first hurdle is getting the right people in the first place, says Cooper. “Line managers are not selected for their social interpersonal skills,” he laments. This comes down to wider confusion around job descriptions, explains Charmi Patel, associate professor of HRM at Henley Business School. “A lot of employers, especially for management roles, talk about the role’s responsibilities but forget about skillsets,” she says. However, Corina Forman, HR director at courier APC Overnight, caveats that recruiting a manager with perfectly attuned interpersonal skills isn’t always possible. “It can certainly make life easier, but sometimes you need someone with exceptional

technical skills and they haven’t had the opportunity within their career to develop [interpersonal skills] yet,” she says.

2 Differentiate between people and technical managers

As important as people-centred managers are, technical capability is also critical to a firm’s success. HR director at architecture firm HLM Karen Mosley recommends creating two separate development streams for people leaders and technical leaders. “We’ve suffered in the past from pushing people into management positions because they’re technically competent, but they perhaps lack the people skills or just aren’t interested in that,” she says. “That usually results in disengagement at every level.”

3 Engage managers with company strategy

Emeritus professor of international HRM at Lancaster University Management School Paul Sparrow points out that the role of the manager is two-fold. People feeling inspired by likeable and charismatic managers is important, but so is staff understanding what needs to be achieved. “There needs to be some kind of process that engages managers with the strategy, enabling them to see what people need to engage with,” he says. “There’s no point just making people happy. People need to be competent and happy. There’s a motivational and a sense-making side.”

4 Start from the top

For line managers to understand their company’s strategy and purpose it needs to be clearly communicated from above. Boards must be fully committed to engagement, states Forman. “It does have to come from the top,” she says. “If the senior levels don’t get engagement and aren’t on board then the tier below won’t either.” “This starts from us as directors,” agrees Mosley.

5 Don’t overcomplicate things

Keeping things simple is often best, advises Chris Chinn, executive coach and L&D consultant, and former management development manager at Europcar. “Most managers are doing engagement anyway,” he says. “It’s not training people on skills they haven’t got; it’s raising awareness. Most are aware of having conversations about job roles day to day. But if you’re aware of making more of that conversation it’s even more effective.” Cooper says some managers won’t need much intervention: “Do an assessment of your managers; a third will probably have good interpersonal skills. You don’t necessarily have to do anything with them.”





“It’s about selling why engagement will alleviate rather than exacerbate pressures”

sometimes fail because we haven’t got the key stakeholders involved. That will get their ultimate buy-in.” But again, distinguishing between the behind-the-scenes specialist graft HR should be putting in and the line manager’s role is crucial, she caveats: “The trick is to get people’s ideas, but take that back, put the hard work in and make it happen,” she says.

8 Make training experiential

“Investing in external training can be very valuable, but things like internal mentoring are also useful,” says Forman. “You need more experiential training,” agrees Sparrow, adding this will be critical in managers finding their own style: “You can show people how to find their own way. It often comes down to coaching. The motivational side depends on your personality; some people are good at it naturally. But there are people who might not be the most personally engaging, but are brilliant at getting their teams to know what’s important.” Patel adds that organisations should think more open-mindedly about the classic leadership workshop: “Companies think of leadership training very much as ‘you go only if you want to be a leader’. But every line manager is a leader.” ▶

6 Don’t overload managers with HR concepts and tasks

“Engagement is not an HR task,” says Murrell, reiterating the point that every manager should see engagement as ‘their job’. Key at Firmdale is sharing engagement data with managers, she says. But there’s a crucial balance. “Every department should be in charge of engagement, but there’s a difference between specialist and generalist,” advises Patel. “You can end up loading the most ridiculous set of expectations on people otherwise,” warns Sparrow. It’s important not to overload people with academic HR concepts and jargon, says Cooper. “I don’t think managers should be looking at ‘engagement,’” he says. “That’s what’s got us into trouble; because we have metrics on it now and everyone has an engagement scale, and it goes up half a percent and you’re happy – it becomes a tick-box exercise. I think we have to say to managers: forget the concept of engagement for a minute. Instead think: ‘how do I create an environment where people wake up in the morning and want to come to work?’”

7 Sell the benefits

Engaging managers with engagement is about selling why this

will alleviate rather than exacerbate other pressures, says Chinn. “You need to say: ‘if we get this right we’ll save time,’” he explains. “At Europcar we showed them real-life data on Prudential, who had a core group trained in employee engagement and a group that weren’t. The groups managed by someone who wasn’t trained had high turnover, lower sales and worse customer satisfaction.” “Enormously valuable is gaining the involvement of line managers in the design and implementation of programmes,” adds Forman. “The best ideas

Anatomy of an engaging line manager

- ▶ Good line managers don’t micro-manage, says Williams: “If the purpose is clear and the manager gives sufficient autonomy and trust they can coach the employee to deliver.”
- ▶ “Line managers must be good at listening, so they’re on receive not transmit,” advises Cooper.
- ▶ They genuinely care about the employee’s wellbeing and ambitions, says Patel: “Engagement is about putting an employee’s career and wellbeing first, the organisation second.”
- ▶ “When you have an authentic manager trust and respect follow,” says Mosley. **Self-awareness is key to authenticity.**
- ▶ “Managers need to manage by praise and reward not fault-finding,” says Cooper.
- ▶ Engaging managers assess performance and give feedback intelligently, says Patel: “I think a lot forget when and how to give feedback. It’s not just the number of calls made as a call centre worker, it’s their quality, how happy your customer is and so on.”

The line manager's view: What engagement means to me



“Engagement to me is ensuring that the individual is performing to the best of their abilities and happy within their role, so we can encourage their natural strengths. It’s also very important to engage employees in training. As managers we spend so many hours of the day with our employees and our main responsibilities lie in assuring they can thrive. Firdale managers receive training through the management development programmes. So it’s not just about looking after our employees, but also ensuring managers are effective leaders.”

Jose Adea is reservations manager at Charlotte Street Hotel, a Firdale hotel

“It’s about identifying complementary skills to build a team who enjoy what they do, feel they make a valuable contribution, trust each other, and work well together. It’s important to get to know people to distinguish each person’s skills. I work with each person to determine what would stretch them, but at a speed that works for both of us. It’s important not to force people into situations where they’re so far out of their comfort zone they freeze; if someone’s confidence is badly damaged they can struggle to recover.”

Lorraine Robertson is an associate director at HLM Architects



“I believe the key to any successful organisation is how well it promotes engagement across all functions. This starts with a leader’s awareness of their role in motivating the team. Everybody wants to be part of success and my role is to explain what this looks like. Involving staff in decision-making and problem-solving promotes engagement; communication, training and coaching empower the team to come up with solutions and act on great ideas.”

Austin Sadler is head of hub operations at APC Overnight



9 Revamp competency frameworks

There’s no point creating an engagement culture and training managers if formal assessment structures don’t back this up, says Forman. “It’s got to embrace both the formal and informal communication structures,” she says. “That comes down to investing time developing your own competency framework. You need to build in these attributes and behaviours rather than picking one off the shelf.” What engages people from one organisation to the next will vary, says Cooper: “You have to find out what engagement means to your employees. Ask them: what makes a really good line manager?”

10 Reward engaging managers

The next logical step is rewarding managers who hit these competency objectives, says Forman. “It comes down to who gets promoted and who gets on,” she says. “It’s all well and good recognising someone in their appraisal, but we need to reflect that in succession planning.

It’s not saying the facts and figures can be overlooked, but there has to be a balance.” Chinn points out that recognition can’t always come in the form of promotion or pay rises, and that there are other ways of encouraging the right behaviours. He describes Europcar’s ‘One Challenge’ engagement recognition scheme where winning teams were awarded £500 for a night out, runners up £250, and so on. “That focused people,” he says. “People enjoyed the publicity and recognition they got as individuals and teams. It doesn’t have to be expensive in the bigger scheme of things. We didn’t have to increase people’s pay or say ‘you’re going to be penalised if you don’t do this’”

11 Look to other factors

While managers are critical to engagement they can’t be made solely responsible, feels Christoph Williams, Sony Europe’s strategic content senior manager for leadership, learning, talent and performance management. “The

“The manager gets a lot of attention because if something goes wrong you tend to blame your line manager”

manager gets a lot of attention because if something goes wrong with your colleagues, customers or the organisation – the three other engagement dimensions – you tend to blame your line manager,” he says. “You think: ‘why didn’t my line manager do more to help me resolve the situation?’ It’s completely unfair.” He adds that if wider systems are poor there’s only so much a manager can do. “If other HR things like recruitment and performance management are all lousy there’s a limit to how engaged people will be,” agrees Sparrow.

12 Don’t stand still

It stands to reason that if every organisation is open to constant change, then its engagement strategy should be as well. “I believe that engagement is an area where you have to try different things and find something for everyone,” says Firdale’s Murrell. “As long as engagement is considered as continuously changing, thinking of new ideas and building on what is working, there will be a success.” **HR**

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And yet when it comes to line manager involvement in engagement, Cooper points out: “We haven’t cracked this yet.” To help HR crack this most difficult of nuts, *HR* magazine rounds up the 12 steps to engage line managers in engagement once and for all.

1 Recruit on interpersonal skills

The first hurdle is getting the right people in the first place, says Cooper. “Line managers are not selected for their social interpersonal skills,” he laments. This comes down to wider confusion around job descriptions, explains Charmi Patel, associate professor of HRM at Henley Business School. “A lot of employers, especially for management roles, talk about the role’s responsibilities but forget about skillsets,” she says. However, Corina Forman, HR director at courier APC Overnight, caveats that recruiting a manager with perfectly attuned interpersonal skills isn’t always possible. “It can certainly make life easier, but sometimes you need someone with exceptional

technical skills and they haven’t had the opportunity within their career to develop [interpersonal skills] yet,” she says.

2 Differentiate between people and technical managers

As important as people-centred managers are, technical capability is also critical to a firm’s success. HR director at architecture firm HLM Karen Mosley recommends creating two separate development streams for people leaders and technical leaders. “We’ve suffered in the past from pushing people into management positions because they’re technically competent, but they perhaps lack the people skills or just aren’t interested in that,” she says. “That usually results in disengagement at every level.”

3 Engage managers with company strategy

Emeritus professor of international HRM at Lancaster University Management School Paul Sparrow points out that the role of the manager is two-fold. People feeling inspired by likeable and charismatic managers is important, but so is staff understanding what needs to be achieved. “There needs to be some kind of process that engages managers with the strategy, enabling them to see what people need to engage with,” he says. “There’s no point just making people happy. People need to be competent and happy. There’s a motivational and a sense-making side.”

4 Start from the top

For line managers to understand their company’s strategy and purpose it needs to be clearly communicated from above. Boards must be fully committed to engagement, states Forman. “It does have to come from the top,” she says. “If the senior levels don’t get engagement and aren’t on board then the tier below won’t either.” “This starts from us as directors,” agrees Mosley.

5 Don’t overcomplicate things

Keeping things simple is often best, advises Chris Chinn, executive coach and L&D consultant, and former management development manager at Europcar. “Most managers are doing engagement anyway,” he says. “It’s not training people on skills they haven’t got; it’s raising awareness. Most are aware of having conversations about job roles day to day. But if you’re aware of making more of that conversation it’s even more effective.” Cooper says some managers won’t need much intervention: “Do an assessment of your managers; a third will probably have good interpersonal skills. You don’t necessarily have to do anything with them.”





“It’s about selling why engagement will alleviate rather than exacerbate pressures”

sometimes fail because we haven’t got the key stakeholders involved. That will get their ultimate buy-in.” But again, distinguishing between the behind-the-scenes specialist graft HR should be putting in and the line manager’s role is crucial, she cautions: “The trick is to get people’s ideas, but take that back, put the hard work in and make it happen,” she says.

8 Make training experiential

“Investing in external training can be very valuable, but things like internal mentoring are also useful,” says Forman. “You need more experiential training,” agrees Sparrow, adding this will be critical in managers finding their own style: “You can show people how to find their own way. It often comes down to coaching. The motivational side depends on your personality; some people are good at it naturally. But there are people who might not be the most personally engaging, but are brilliant at getting their teams to know what’s important.” Patel adds that organisations should think more open-mindedly about the classic leadership workshop: “Companies think of leadership training very much as ‘you go only if you want to be a leader’. But every line manager is a leader.” ▶

6 Don’t overload managers with HR concepts and tasks

“Engagement is not an HR task,” says Murrell, reiterating the point that every manager should see engagement as ‘their job’. Key at Firmdale is sharing engagement data with managers, she says. But there’s a crucial balance. “Every department should be in charge of engagement, but there’s a difference between specialist and generalist,” advises Patel. “You can end up loading the most ridiculous set of expectations on people otherwise,” warns Sparrow. It’s important not to overload people with academic HR concepts and jargon, says Cooper. “I don’t think managers should be looking at ‘engagement,’” he says. “That’s what’s got us into trouble; because we have metrics on it now and everyone has an engagement scale, and it goes up half a percent and you’re happy – it becomes a tick-box exercise. I think we have to say to managers: forget the concept of engagement for a minute. Instead think: ‘how do I create an environment where people wake up in the morning and want to come to work?’”

7 Sell the benefits

Engaging managers with engagement is about selling why this

will alleviate rather than exacerbate other pressures, says Chinn. “You need to say: ‘if we get this right we’ll save time,’” he explains. “At Europcar we showed them real-life data on Prudential, who had a core group trained in employee engagement and a group that weren’t. The groups managed by someone who wasn’t trained had high turnover, lower sales and worse customer satisfaction.” “Enormously valuable is gaining the involvement of line managers in the design and implementation of programmes,” adds Forman. “The best ideas

Anatomy of an engaging line manager

- ▶ Good line managers don’t micro-manage, says Williams: “If the purpose is clear and the manager **gives sufficient autonomy and trust** they can coach the employee to deliver.”
- ▶ “Line managers must be **good at listening**, so they’re on receive not transmit,” advises Cooper.
- ▶ They **genuinely care about the employee’s wellbeing** and ambitions, says Patel: “Engagement is about putting an employee’s career and wellbeing first, the organisation second.”
- ▶ “When you have an authentic manager trust and respect follow,” says Mosley. **Self-awareness is key to authenticity.**
- ▶ “Managers need to **manage by praise and reward** not fault-finding,” says Cooper.
- ▶ Engaging managers assess performance and **give feedback intelligently**, says Patel: “I think a lot forget when and how to give feedback. It’s not just the number of calls made as a call centre worker, it’s their quality, how happy your customer is and so on.”

The line manager's view: What engagement means to me



“Engagement to me is ensuring that the individual is performing to the best of their abilities and happy within their role, so we can encourage their natural strengths. It’s also very important to engage employees in training. As managers we spend so many hours of the day with our employees and our main responsibilities lie in assuring they can thrive. Firdale managers receive training through the management development programmes. So it’s not just about looking after our employees, but also ensuring managers are effective leaders.”

Jose Adea is reservations manager at Charlotte Street Hotel, a Firdale hotel

“It’s about identifying complementary skills to build a team who enjoy what they do, feel they make a valuable contribution, trust each other, and work well together. It’s important to get to know people to distinguish each person’s skills. I work with each person to determine what would stretch them, but at a speed that works for both of us. It’s important not to force people into situations where they’re so far out of their comfort zone they freeze; if someone’s confidence is badly damaged they can struggle to recover.”

Lorraine Robertson is an associate director at HLM Architects



“I believe the key to any successful organisation is how well it promotes engagement across all functions. This starts with a leader’s awareness of their role in motivating the team. Everybody wants to be part of success and my role is to explain what this looks like. Involving staff in decision-making and problem-solving promotes engagement; communication, training and coaching empower the team to come up with solutions and act on great ideas.”

Austin Sadler is head of hub operations at APC Overnight



9 Revamp competency frameworks

There’s no point creating an engagement culture and training managers if formal assessment structures don’t back this up, says Forman. “It’s got to embrace both the formal and informal communication structures,” she says. “That comes down to investing time developing your own competency framework. You need to build in these attributes and behaviours rather than picking one off the shelf.” What engages people from one organisation to the next will vary, says Cooper: “You have to find out what engagement means to your employees. Ask them: what makes a really good line manager?”

10 Reward engaging managers

The next logical step is rewarding managers who hit these competency objectives, says Forman. “It comes down to who gets promoted and who gets on,” she says. “It’s all well and good recognising someone in their appraisal, but we need to reflect that in succession planning.

It’s not saying the facts and figures can be overlooked, but there has to be a balance.” Chinn points out that recognition can’t always come in the form of promotion or pay rises, and that there are other ways of encouraging the right behaviours. He describes Europcar’s ‘One Challenge’ engagement recognition scheme where winning teams were awarded £500 for a night out, runners up £250, and so on. “That focused people,” he says. “People enjoyed the publicity and recognition they got as individuals and teams. It doesn’t have to be expensive in the bigger scheme of things. We didn’t have to increase people’s pay or say ‘you’re going to be penalised if you don’t do this’”

11 Look to other factors

While managers are critical to engagement they can’t be made solely responsible, feels Christoph Williams, Sony Europe’s strategic content senior manager for leadership, learning, talent and performance management. “The

“The manager gets a lot of attention because if something goes wrong you tend to blame your line manager”

manager gets a lot of attention because if something goes wrong with your colleagues, customers or the organisation – the three other engagement dimensions – you tend to blame your line manager,” he says. “You think: ‘why didn’t my line manager do more to help me resolve the situation?’ It’s completely unfair.” He adds that if wider systems are poor there’s only so much a manager can do. “If other HR things like recruitment and performance management are all lousy there’s a limit to how engaged people will be,” agrees Sparrow.

12 Don’t stand still

It stands to reason that if every organisation is open to constant change, then its engagement strategy should be as well. “I believe that engagement is an area where you have to try different things and find something for everyone,” says Firdale’s Murrell. “As long as engagement is considered as continuously changing, thinking of new ideas and building on what is working, there will be a success.” **HR**

Out in the open

Engagement surveys are pretty standard now, so the next step is to share more nuanced results, both internally and externally, discovers GABRIELLA JOZWIAK



“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” So said former British prime minister Winston Churchill. These days he would make an unpopular HR director.

Organisations are increasingly seeking to share information, including employee engagement data, more widely. Some are giving employees individual engagement survey reports, while others are handing human capital information to potential investors. HRDs are asking ‘voters’, or rather staff, to say more about how a company is operating and performing. Democratising employee engagement data is the new way.

Harrods is one company implementing this approach. During its annual online employee engagement survey last year it gave staff the option of providing an email address. Two weeks later those who opted in received a report containing their personal results from selected questions benchmarked against departmental and company-wide results. The report also included links to internal and external resources, in case the data prompted questions. For example, if the worker felt they had a poor relationship with a manager they could access information on relationship-building created by Harrods’ learning and development team.

Harrods’ head of employee experience Niall Ryan-Jones says

HR’s aim was to connect with staff at a deeper level about their engagement, and equip them to take control of their own engagement. “After the reports went out we saw a lot more traffic to our information about careers on our intranet,” says Ryan-Jones. “We assume the people who received the individual reports then clicked through to career-related topics.”

No-one in HR saw the reports because a programme managed by employee engagement solution provider Mercer-Sirota generated them automatically. This was intentional, as prior to launching the survey Harrods asked staff for their opinion of the idea. About 30% were concerned about anonymity. As a result, Ryan-Jones is unable to analyse many results from the exercise. “We consciously didn’t ask if anyone had spoken to their manager as a result of reading their report,” he says. He is also unable to tell which departments opted in. However, he knows that of the 4,500 employees who completed the survey 1,300 asked for a personal report. “That gave us an indication people are really interested in wanting to learn more about themselves,” he says. “The second time we do it we will probably take a sensitive step forward and say there’s a great opportunity for you and your manager to have a deeper conversation.”

Mercer-Sirota director of business development EMEA

“One thing HR can do is provide data and enable the individual to find resources to help get re-engaged”

Katerina Psychopaida says only three of her company’s 120 clients are using the personalised engagement reports. She suggests some do not have a culture for this level of sharing, while others are restricted by practical factors; for example staff are unable to access a computer. But although numbers are low now, she believes this survey style will rise in popularity, particularly as younger employees move into the workplace. “Most of them are technology natives,” she explains. “They don’t really like giving feedback without seeing anything coming back.”

Research conducted by Mercer-Sirota last year among more than 1,500 employees, managers and HR executives found more than 95% of employees are aware when they begin to feel disengaged, but only a quarter take steps to re-engage themselves. “One thing HR can do, apart from making sure they hire people who are proactive, is to provide this kind of data and enable the individual to find resources to help themselves get re-engaged,” says Psychopaida.

An employee insight manager from a major UK employer of more than 450,000 staff, who wishes to remain anonymous, tells *HR* magazine his team is currently exploring how to empower individuals to take ownership of their engagement.

HR view: “For this to be effective it depends on the company’s culture”

Richard Roberts is former HRD of Virgin Mobile and an employee engagement consultant for en:Rich



“Employee feedback is a key part of building engaging and positive workplace cultures.

Engagement surveys can do much good. But an organisation should not obsess too much about data unless it has first worked on culture and internal relationships, which build strong engagement.

“When employees and managers discuss overall survey results, in theory these conversations lead to increased engagement and productivity. But it’s far from a given. It’s rare this is done effectively, or that actions are followed up.

“The idea of managers sharing feedback with individuals in comparison to overall results has some merit. But there’s a major pitfall. If an employee knows their individual feedback can

be identified how honest are they going to be? For this idea to be effective it depends on the company’s culture and how trusted staff feel.

“But why are annual survey results needed to stimulate such conversations at all? People managers worth their salt should have these conversations anyway. In companies where I see a high degree of engagement there is little need for surveys.

“Many managers are just not skilled in employee

feedback conversations, which creates problems. They are often promoted for their technical expertise not their ability to people manage. Managers frequently don’t know what is expected of them, are untrained and unsupported. Clients often ask ‘if you could do one thing to increase an organisation’s engagement levels what would it be’? I always answer: ‘Develop your people managers to be great managers of people.’”

However, sensitivities around anonymity, and technological challenges, are holding them back. “This kind of initiative requires a much more blatant identification of the individual, which is a comms journey we’d have to go on with colleagues first,” he says. “We don’t have the infrastructure to deliver something as bespoke yet that identifies the individual and reports on their own scores.”

Colin Watt, director of employee relations, engagement and people services at Shop Direct, says his organisation will not be adopting a personalised report approach. In the past four years Shop Direct’s annual employee engagement survey has shown that 80% of its 4,500 staff are positive about their workplace. This, he says, demonstrates that his company is mature at understanding the tensions and opportunities in the business.

Watt admits the large staff population might mask some individuals who are unhappy within the results. But he believes their concerns are heard by managers through other engagement strategies, including almost-monthly listening groups, action planning sessions and

people forums. “The way that we work really does work for us,” says Watt. “It very much depends how you’ve evolved your engagement strategy.”

The democratisation of employee engagement data is not just an internal issue. Investors are increasingly asking employers to publish human capital information in annual reports, to provide evidence of an organisation’s long-term sustainability. “It’s amazing the amount of companies that say ‘our employees are our greatest asset’ but don’t talk about how they train and develop them, or the culture of their organisation, within their annual report,” says the Investment Association’s director of corporate governance and engagement Andrew Ninian. He suggests employee engagement scores are one way employers can show how they are managing their workforce.

Luke Hildyard, Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association policy lead for stewardship and corporate governance, says HR professionals should provide employee engagement information in

“ This kind of initiative requires a much more blatant identification of the individual ”

relation to their organisation’s underlying strategy and purpose. “It should be presented more in narrative form as an explanation that reflects the individual situation of the company, rather than a long list of metrics and listing a data point against each one,” he suggests.

Move over Churchill. In the employee engagement data democracy age, not only is it time for HRDs to have those conversations with employees, they should also be reporting on what individuals have to say, both internally and publicly. **HR**



Pulse points

Regular engagement surveys can provide a more holistic view of your workforce, but it's not as simple as repeating the same questions more often, discovers PETER CRUSH

Imagine if Twitter, Facebook or Instagram only let you update your thoughts once a year – and then expected you to wait six months before friends could comment. It doesn't make sense in our 24/7 social media world, and increasingly it doesn't make sense in engagement surveys either. With technology enabling real-time analysis and smart presentation of employee survey data, HRDs are now able to run much more regular 'pulse' or temperature-check staff surveys.

But is implementing regular pulse surveys as simple as taking the once-a-year template and rolling it out a bit more often? Not according to practitioners and engagement survey experts.

HR magazine asked for their advice about how to make engagement a more continuous process rather than an annual event. Here's what they said...

Establish what you're doing pulse surveys for

"It sounds simple, but each survey needs an objective," says Michael Silverman, former head of employee insight at Unilever and former associate director at Ipsos MORI. "Running the same questions more regularly lets you track the rise and fall of KPIs more accurately, but surely the whole point of more regular contact is to ask new questions as the year progresses."

But even deciding this needs planning, he says. "You've got to remember (and plan) for the fact some poor bugger has got to look at all this data and decide what to do with it. Sometimes it's only meaningful asking for feedback from specific teams affected by change, but segmenting down to smaller groups also risks not having large enough samples to draw concrete results from."

Choosing a vendor that allows customisation and doesn't shoehorn you down its fixed methodology is essential. "Asking the wrong questions more regularly still delivers the wrong answers," says Andrew Heath, co-founder of employee engagement software business WeThrive.

But he cautions against running a purely targeted pulse survey. "Everything in HR is related," he insists. "Just pulling out one topic to a small group of people isn't always definitive. We have 16 top-line questions that are consistent (on areas like the team, collaboration and so on), but then allow sub-level customisation. This means pulse surveys can still react intelligently to change the



business is going through, but relate answers back to wider data points."

Decide 'what' to ask and 'how' to ask it

A danger pulse surveys present is their ability to create the impression of a bigger problem than actually exists.

"Annual surveys are generally well advertised, are counted down to – in essence they're 'big events' people are prepared for," says Andy Walker, head of talent, GB at Willis Towers Watson. "Pulse surveys can create survey fatigue, so planning how to ask about issues is essential if they're not to create a distorting picture."

Providers are – to their credit – doing their bit to try and work out this 'how' element so that HRDs isolate only what matters. Thymometrics supplies a list of standard factors (including working environment, salary and leadership) that can be customised. But more importantly

than this, staff can give each factor both a 'satisfaction' and 'importance' score (using a sliding scale toolbar). User Linda Holland, head of people team at Red Gate Software, says this is crucial: "Knowing both importance and satisfaction gives a much richer view of how people are feeling, which can help us to focus our efforts in the right areas," she says.

David Godden, director of Thymometrics, explains: "HRDs can see whether something isn't satisfactory, but also if it isn't that important either, allowing them to focus on what is key for people."

"It's important not to think 'always on' tools or pulse surveys provide the whole answer," Holland adds. "They are indicators and support and complement all the other feedback mechanisms that we have."

Knowing what to ask is crucial too, so that the results actually have a benefit. "Often HR hasn't checked that the questions they ask are linked to KPIs or have specific business worth. This needs to be established too," Walker says.

And just because pulse surveys are supposed to be faster, experts argue that doesn't mean the best bits of the annual survey should be forgotten: "We encourage users to ask open-ended qualitative questions too," says Godden. "This creates some of the best truthful feedback."

Work out your technology needs

"We began with our pulse survey provider last May," says Nicola Auret, head of human resources at ICBC Standard Bank. "We had every intention of running more regular surveys, but we don't yet have all our HR management systems in place to link what we're finding to wider metrics." She adds: "More regular surveying can be a double-edged sword. We have so much free-text we need to be able to plough through what we have first before starting the next survey."

According to Tom Wormald, former research director at ICM, now MD of data and software analytics company Deliberata, this is a classic example of needing to think more about wider IT needs from the beginning. "Pulse surveys can do too much and create too much information," he says.

Often HRDs are advised to keep data anonymous and not link it to other data to preserve trust and freedom of expression, but Wormald is a big fan of linking to other data sets, and believes knowing which ones should be established early. "Surely this is the point of getting a holistic picture about an employee?" he asks. "HRDs should want to know about how satisfaction rates affect performance, or whether bonuses improve engagement."

However, others oppose this. "We're anonymous, but can collate data at a divisional, senior manager, and regional level," says Auret. "This is what we feel gets a good [70%] response rate."

Holland says she measures at the team level, and can even study responses by length of service (one, two and five years) – but it's a systems integration question that needs considering. Those who opt for always-on solutions will require greater IT support, and could risk lower response rates. "We do link data to appraisals and retention stats but that's about the capability limit for our systems," says Auret.

Decisions about whether to make surveys app-based on employees' phones and tablets also require a judgement call about whether this extra capability (and cost) is worth it for the response, or the amount/type of data it will produce. A good halfway approach is to build rules into survey scores. If certain groups'/teams' responses fall well below normal satisfaction it can prompt further surveys being sent out, asking them to elaborate further while still maintaining their anonymity.

“**It's important not to think 'always on' tools provide the whole answer. They complement other mechanisms**”



Don't forget about culture

Don't forget, argue practitioners, that pulse surveying is a cultural as much as an IT exercise. "Above all it creates greater expectation of change happening," says Walker. "If change isn't forthcoming all faith will be lost in it. As such it's essential HRDs design their listening strategies too."

This could be IT-related: "We've set a function up that asks people to tick a box if they want a reply to their survey," says Holland.

Technology can also help make the survey more relevant to them. "We've started looking more at dynamic surveys," says Yvonne Murray, head of HR at Cardiff Airport. "This is where people answer top-line questions, but depending on how they answer these their survey changes and they get different questions to respond to – so it's bespoke to each person." She then supports this with employee engagement focus groups who go through the results. Because support is gained for 'why' a survey is done, Murray says this gives her the employee buy-in she needs to start linking survey data to things like individual staff performance (performance-related pay will be implemented soon).

Charmi Patel, an associate professor in human resource management at Henley Business School, adds: "Pulse surveys shouldn't just be to explain relationships now, but to predict ones in the future. HRDs need to make staff comfortable raising a red flag by being promised change. Once surveys don't meet expectation the data becomes stale, and the effort becomes futile."

Murray adds: "Analysing and then making incremental improvements based on results has been our deliberate strategy. Taking data and doing nothing is destructive. Engagement has to be a dynamic process; where everyone feels they are getting some return for the time they spend doing the surveys." **HR**