

Talent Engagement

How to Unlock People's Potential



maynardleigh
associates



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Talent Engagement

Introduction

How to Unlock Potential

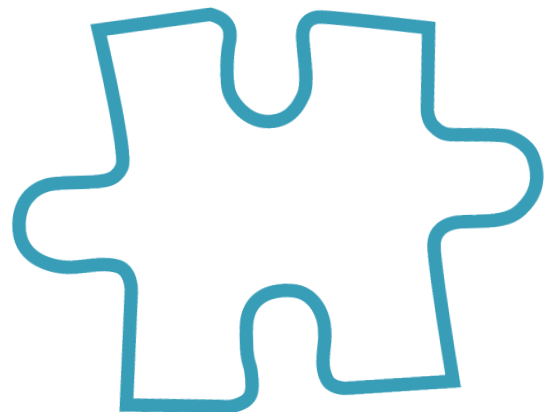
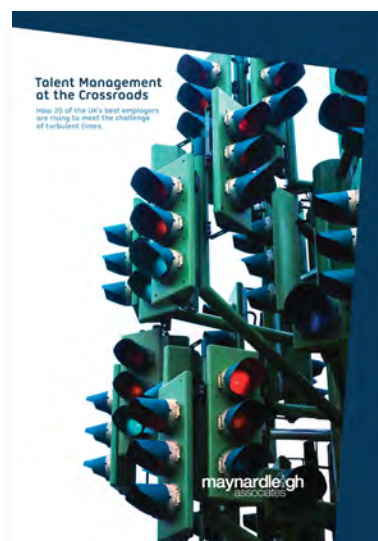
The message to leaders, managers and other stakeholders could not be clearer. If you want to improve organisational performance, then raise your people's level of engagement.

The recent government-sponsored report, *Engaging for Success*, by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke, presents compelling evidence that “employee engagement is the key to better productivity”. This is sound advice for any business struggling to maintain or improve its position in a tough market.

For all of its focus on strategy and targets, MacLeod and Clarke devote less space to telling us the nuts and bolts of how a company can move from being one of the 75 per cent of UK businesses that currently fail to engage their talent to becoming a leader in creativity and innovation. This is more important given the present climate of job cuts and reductions in training and development.

Talent Engagement, a toolkit aid, is Maynard Leigh's response to *Engaging for Success*. We aim to take the debate forward and contribute to raising awareness of the importance of employee engagement nationwide.

With twenty years of experience in the field, Maynard Leigh has helped shape employee development at some of the UK's leading companies. Many of the ideas here are based on the experience of working with these clients. This paper follows on from Maynard Leigh's recent *Talent Management at the Crossroads* report (April 2009) and builds on *Engaging for Success*.





“Where passion and ability meet”

Notes:

we have left some space for you to make some notes throughout...

Beyond Measurement

Whilst there is much discussion about the best way of measuring employee engagement, there is sometimes less emphasis placed on what to do about it. It is as if management believes that simply by asking people to take part in a survey, they are engaging their employees.

At one level, of course, this is true. It is the obvious place to start. Engage people in assessing how engaged they feel. And surveys are clearly the first step. Awareness is the prequel of action. Yet, awareness alone is not enough. Quoted in the *Engaging for Success* report is Andrew Templeman of the Cabinet Office Capability Building Programme, who sums up the issue with his pithy comment, “No one ever got a pig fat by weighing it”.

Theatre of Engagement

Having pioneered the use of theatre techniques in management development for the last twenty years, Maynard Leigh is well placed to explore human interaction in the workplace.

It is clear that the aim of any stage production is to enthrall and inspire. So what are the crucial elements involved in providing such an experience for customers (the audience) and those involved in making and performing the spectacle (the employees)? And what is it that entices such commitment from the cast and crew that they are willing to go that extra mile and exert every effort to make the production an outstanding success?



“No one ever
got a pig fat by
weighing it”

Theatre of Engagement

BRINGING THE SCRIPT ALIVE

The cast and crew of a production turn words on pieces of paper into a potentially thrilling experience in the theatre. *Engaging for Success* is the equivalent of a script that needs enacting and turning into a real-life drama.

TEAMWORK

Theatre depends on people working creatively together in order to deliver something special. They build these teams fast in order to get the show on the road.

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

No theatre ensemble ever sat around committing to a merely competent production. They are always striving for something exceptional and inspirational.

HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

Performers on stage develop a heightened ability to focus their attention so that they are totally aware of what's going on with their fellow performers and the audience.

STORY

As you'll see later in this paper, stories engage because they speak to the human condition. Bringing a compelling narrative to fruition is a wholeheartedly engaging process.

AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE

Audiences are moved by events in a drama when the actors are not pretending, but delivering honest and truthful performances. It is the truth that touches us, and leaders in organisations need to communicate at the same level of honesty.

CENTRE STAGE

It is important that everybody involved in a drama feels that they have an important role to play and are not simply a bit-part player in someone else's production.

TALENT

Theatre focuses on bringing out the best performances from all of its talent. Stage directors use their coaching skills to achieve this.

WILL & SKILL

Actors are often totally engaged in the theatrical endeavour because it's a place where passion and ability meet.

These themes run through the rest of this paper and influence the recommendations for action. It shows how these practical ideas can be applied in the workplace, making talent engagement a reality.

Phoney war for talent

We find it incongruous that some otherwise astute organisations choose to run an elitist system, in which they treat only their high potentials as “the talent” - the stars of the show.

Companies will be more successful if they become more inclusive and see themselves akin to ensembles. An inclusive strategy of employee engagement provides a powerful force for growing everyone's talent, therefore building the organisation. [See Addendum 2 comparing an inclusive approach to talent versus an exclusive one.]

Treating everyone as having talent, however, requires a tailor-made approach to learning and career development, which may require separate definitions of talent such as leadership talent, expertise talent, and entrepreneurial talent.

Organic Organisations

For too long, organisations have been widely viewed as mechanisms, where pulling this lever results in this happening, and that lever triggers something else. This view of organisations inevitably results in people being regarded as mere cogs in the system. The underlying and mistaken assumption is that leaders such as the chairman and CEO are in control of the company. Increasingly, we are realising that organisations are not mechanistic, and that people play a far more central role than mere cogs in the machine. Organisations are organic and complex, the result of many thousands of small actions and interactions. It is impossible to predict what will happen when we cannot really know how things will change.

Leaders in the 21st century wanting to fully engage their talent need a different metaphor for the organisation. As the influential business guru Gary Hamel suggests, organisations need to see themselves as more human in their make-up. They need to be creative, flexible, alive and inspired.

Aspects of Engagement

To understand the process of employee engagement beyond mere research figures, it is worth recalling some basic facts about human nature. This is where Abraham Maslow started nearly eighty years ago with four basic human needs of safety and security, love and belonging, esteem and, at the highest level, what he called self-actualisation. Whatever the labels, his framework helped people understand the elements involved in motivation.

Yet, it falls short in fully explaining engagement. In the late sixties and early seventies, John Humble and others outlined some fundamental needs for every employee. This included, at the highest level, seeking to help others reach their potential.

Since then, we have moved to the present position where there is less talk of employee satisfaction and motivation and more about the fundamentals of engagement. The new thinking builds on this research and updates it.

Thus, talent engagement can be seen as Maslow for the 21st Century.

Leaders can now understand what talent engagement requires of them on a day-to-day basis. They can help generate the conditions in which employees can start to feel valued and developed. Further, they can involve people and inspire them to new heights. This is when people produce outstanding performances. Individual potential is unlocked and, with that, the organisation's potential.



Warning

The document currently in your hands (or on your computer screen) is not for people who aren't already convinced that unlocking people's potential is a good thing. If you are still harbouring doubts about the link between an engaged workforce and your bottom line, then perhaps you should read one of the reports above before proceeding. If the idea of unleashing your organisation's talent remains in the 'nice to have' rather than the 'must have' category, then you are not ready to read on.



“Thus, talent management can be seen as Maslow for the 21st Century”

VIDI

The essential components of employee engagement rest on the foundation of people-centred leadership (see final chapter) and four essential “pillars” in which employees feel valued, involved, developed and inspired.

To support each of these “pillars” requires a range of behaviours and actions by leaders and managers that we describe throughout the rest of this “how to” guide, and which we sum up in the final chapter as people-centred leadership.



VIDI
from the Latin
videre: to see

VALUED	INVOLVED	DEVELOPED	INSPIRED
INDIVIDUALITY Diversity Motivation Well-being	COMMUNICATION Monologue Duologue Dialogue	POTENTIAL Development Coaching Feedback	SUBSTANCE Integrity Values Passion
RELATIONSHIP Attention Trust Belonging	IMPACT Difference Connection Partnership	REVIEWS Goals Action Plans Management - development	IMAGINATION Creativity Stories Energy
FAIRNESS Respect Appreciation Remuneration	PLAY Attitudes Meetings Volunteers	OPPORTUNITY Experiment Experience Responsibility	MEANING Direction Legacy Vision

These also provide a simple route map for the reader as we tackle each area in turn:

[Addendum 1 provides a fuller elaboration of each of these essentials of talent engagement and the necessary behaviour of people-centred leaders.]

BEING VALUED

One of the deepest hungers of the human heart is to be seen and to be understood - in simple terms, to feel valued. This is particularly true in an era when so many people feel alienated and disassociated from the world around them.

In our work on culture and engagement in organisations, we observe that to feel valued, people must feel that their individuality counts, that they actually experience the benefits of positive relationships, and perceive that they are treated fairly.

INDIVIDUALITY

Engaging for Success observes that treating people as individuals is a key to employee engagement. It sees “employees as an integral part of developing and delivering the overall business strategy”.

Toyota’s “individuals that make the difference” approach reflects a profound respect for its members on the assumption that the most valuable asset the company has is its people. The resulting high level of engagement is one of the drivers of continuous product and productivity improvement from the shop floor to the boardroom. Toyota’s engaged people are their competitive advantage.

In practical terms, though, how do you show someone that you see them as an individual? There are three important drivers influencing whether someone feels that their individuality matters. Understanding these forces is not rocket science, and leaders or managers can do many things to leverage them.

Diversity

Firstly, it means embracing the diversity of the people. Just as the biological diversity of an ecosystem increases its stability and productivity,

VALUED
Individuality
Relationship
Fairness

cultural diversity brings together the resources and talents of many people for the shared benefit of all. The leader sets a good example when they:

- **Treat others with respect;**
- **Avoid using stereotypes;**
- **Make it clear that prejudice is wrong;**
- **Don’t allow bigoted comments by others to go unchallenged.**

Motivation

Secondly, it means leaving behind the misguided notion that motivation is something you do to someone. Each person has unique motivations that affect what they think, feel and do. High levels of talent engagement are achieved by tapping into these internal motivations. Managers can uncover these by enquiry and conversation. Dispense with the “Mr. Motivator” image of getting people going as if injecting them with a special kind of life-enhancing substance.

Then, managers can tailor their leadership style to each individual’s needs. This requires a range of styles from directive to delegating, and from autocratic to collaborative. Putting it another way, leadership is not merely situational; it is people-centred.

Well-being

Valuing someone’s unique individuality requires paying attention to their work-life balance. In an era of 24/7 communication, some might argue this is no longer possible. Rather than a work-life balance, we can now only expect a perpetual digital hum governing our existence.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Individuality: Try making every member of your team feel special today and see how they can each excel in their own way.

Diversity: Research what it's like to be a minority in your organisation. Discuss your diversity policy with a person from a minority group and explore their experience in the company.

Difference: Ask around until you can identify the mavericks in the organisation and spend some time with them. Ask them how they see its future.

Motivation: Have conversations with each member of your team and explore what motivates them.

Well-being (1): Check if your team are taking all their holidays and regular break entitlements. Have a conversation about what's happening in their life outside of work.

Well-being (2): Institute well-being days – occasional days people can take (on top of their holiday allowance) for their health and well-being.

Health: Support people in gym membership, fitness pursuits or healthy team activities. Introduce a healthy eating policy in the workplace.

Supporters: Hold a party for people's partners and families to thank them for supporting the employees.

Care: This is not a nice-to-have, but a fundamental approach. What can you do individually and as an organisation to demonstrate care for people? After all, they won't care for your customers unless you care for them.

Such a view is abandoning any responsibility for people's well-being or the need to establish a humane environment in which people can flourish. Paying attention to how employees live their working lives and helping to improve them is a sound investment in talent engagement.

RELATIONSHIP

While some artists, poets and writers achieve high levels of engagement in their work without much human interaction, most high performers in organisations seldom do so entirely alone. They need to engage in productive relationships with a wide range of people - in one-to-one situations, in groups, in teams, and in formal settings such as company meetings and so on.

Much of a modern manager or leader's work is concerned with building healthy relationships with each of their team members. It means

understanding and helping to promote relationships as a way of enabling individuals and teams to perform their best.

What does this mean in practical terms on a daily basis?

Attention

Leaders and managers need to pay close attention to what is going on around them, staying in close touch with what people need in order to succeed. Giving undivided attention to an individual, being fully present with them, creates the feeling of being valued. Not chatting while reading emails, but giving full attention and attuning to the other. If you have a tricky person, spend a whole half-hour just paying attention to them, listening deeply. Seek first to understand and then seek to be understood.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Choose someone in your team with whom you would like an improved relationship. Answer the following questions based on your current knowledge. Guess if you don't know.

- How long have they worked at the company?
- What are they proud of?
- Where do they live?
- What kind of house?
- What is important to them?
- How do they like to be led?
- How do they like to be acknowledged?
- What do they fear?
- What has been a highlight in their career?
- If they were given £100, what would they spend it on?
- What behaviours do they have that mirror your own behaviours?

Now go and find out how many you got right by speaking to the person.

Trust

The ability to build healthy and productive relationships depends on gaining people's trust. This is easier said than done since evidence now confirms that lack of trust permeates organisations across the globe. We are in a trust recession as much as an economic one. It is a useful practice to do an inventory of all promises and agreements that the leader or the company has made and to ensure that they have been delivered.

We were running a workshop recently for the IT division of a global company where the participants spoke of how agreements were continually broken in the organisation. No sooner had senior management announced they wouldn't close a site than, a month later, they closed it. The prevalent story was of broken promises and a consequent lack of trust.

If you want to convince people that the organisation does indeed value them, you must be able to show by your actions and behaviour a degree of humanity and consistency.

Belonging

It has long been a practice of team leaders to run away-days or team-bonding activities. This is useful up to a point. But relationship and the consequent sense of belonging are other important aspects that leaders and managers need to master in their search to raise levels of engagement.

From working on company cultures and engagement, we know that it is perfectly possible to do practical everyday things that contribute to people's sense of belonging.

For example, a large amount of money and effort is invested in social activities in Google as a way of fostering connection, building a team culture and creating a psychological contract between employer and employee; not just a transactional one.

FAIRNESS

The third factor affecting whether people feel valued is the extent to which they feel they are treated fairly. The perception of fairness may need to include:

- showing genuine respect for the individual,
- levels of appreciation that recognise contribution
- and ensuring there exists a balance of remuneration.

Notes:

Respect

"Their prowess at mergers comes from human sensibilities about treating people with respect, not from a magic formula," reveals Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her latest study of Vanguard Companies¹. Respect is not a reward, but a right, and ultimately contributes to making people feel valued.

Engagement is about establishing mutual respect in the workplace and, as MacLeod and Clarke point out, this can be a "triple win: for the individual at work, the enterprise or service, and the country as a whole."

Like motivation, respect is not something you do to people; it is what you give. And how you do it can be as important as what you say. This is why emotional intelligence and insight play such a vital role in raising awareness of what the individual needs in order to feel respected.

Appreciation

Few leaders or managers would deny the importance of acknowledging people's contribution in some form. The trouble is that the research suggests too few of them actually put this knowledge to good use. In a recent study quoted by Hewlett Packard, managers were asked: Do you recognize employees for their performance? Employees, in turn, were asked: Are you recognized by your manager for your performance? The results — managers said they provided recognition almost twice as much as the employees reported receiving it; a big gap between manager intention and employee perception.

Often our work in companies includes creative ways to show the benefits of active acknowledgement. "Catch them doing something right" is as old as management itself, yet it remains a sound basis for acknowledgement in the 21st century.

Acknowledgement may take the form of money, promotion, public praise, training, days off, and so on. Appreciation also involves actively encouraging people in what they are doing — giving them the courage to experiment and voice their idea.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Trust: Make an inventory of any promises or agreements you have made recently and ensure you have kept them.

Belonging: Find someone in your team and show why they are an important part of what you want to achieve and how they fit into the scheme of things.

Humanity: Surprise your staff today with a random act of kindness.

Relationships: Find out about people who are important in your employees' lives. Ask if the company can support them in any way.

Culture: How do people connect with the company? How do they view the current culture? Ask people to choose three words that describe the current culture. Do they describe an organisation they're proud to belong to? If not, which words would they change?

Climate Change: There isn't just a crisis in global warming. Closer to home, many organisations have unhealthy or even toxic environments for their workforce. Take a temperature check and see if your "human" climate needs improving.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Build on (1): During your present working day, be especially alert of any use of the dreaded "Yes but" phrase. Instead, focus on using "Yes and..." in all your communications. If you hear others using the "Yes but" engagement killer, be sure to call them on it.

Build on (2): In your next team meeting, insist that no one can speak after someone else without first acknowledging what the previous person has just said; they must actively build on the earlier contribution before making their own.

Appreciation (1): Include an item in your in-house magazine featuring people in the company who have helped make a difference.

Appreciation (2): Have a regular item on team agendas when people can share successes and appreciate team members' contributions.

Appreciation (3): Have an 'above and beyond' box full of little presents. These can be awarded by anyone in the team to reward someone who has contributed extra effort.

Encouragement: The high performer will always try to do their best on their own accord, but they will try even harder if encouraged. Engaged people thrive on regular encouragement. Find someone who is facing a tough time and needs a little bolstering. See if you can provide some courage.

Remuneration

A truly effective reward as far as an individual is concerned may have several facets to it, which is why increasing engagement seldom comes down to "just pay them more."

The Spirit Level by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (Penguin Books 2009) claims to show why more equal societies almost always do better. Likewise, serious inequality is a factor influencing individual and company performance.

The Royal Bank of Scotland, which is 70 per cent-owned by the taxpayer, recently approved a £9.6 million pay package for new chief executive

Stephen Hester. While the overall pay deal was linked to targets, the size of the amount may have left many entirely competent people in the company feeling distinctly unhappy.

An employee at RBS even on £30,000 a year would need to work 320 years to receive the same remuneration as Hester. Don't even bother to work out what the multiple would be for someone on the minimum wage!



VALUED		
INDIVIDUALITY Diversity Motivation Well-being	RELATIONSHIP Attention Trust Belonging	FAIRNESS Respect Appreciation Remuneration

¹ *Supercorp.*, by Rosabeth Moss Kanter 2009

BEING INVOLVED

Engagement is often the result of being actively involved in what's going on, and there is considerable focus on this throughout *Engaging for Success*. Examples abound of organisations recognising the value of involving employees. The 02 company employs a "head of employee involvement," while at M&S, the retailer's business involvement group (BIG) gives employees an opportunity to voice their views and ideas. The John Lewis partnership has long seen involvement as a key resource for achieving talent engagement.

In the quest for involvement, there is often an excessive reliance on employee surveys as a way of promoting it. Our view is that if you need to conduct a survey to discover what your people are thinking, you are not close enough to them in the first place. Employee surveys on engagement have recently encountered heavy criticism. See, for example, *What Are Your Staff Trying To Tell You?* by Peter Hutton (Brandenergy Research 2009).

In our experience, clients often ask us to tailor development to the issue of involvement and how to achieve it. We remain continually surprised at how often even experienced leaders and managers seem unsure about practical ways, other than surveys, of achieving a genuine sense of involvement.

Three elements can contribute to a sense of involvement:

- an effective, hands-on communication approach,
- ensuring people make an impact and
- adopting what we call "serious play".



INVOLVED
Communication
Impact
Play

COMMUNICATION

If there is an important differentiator that explains why some companies are good at winning involvement and generating engagement and why others are less so, it is almost certainly their ability to communicate.

According to Towers Perrin, only 31 per cent of employees feel that their senior managers communicate openly and honestly. Moreover, only 41 per cent agree that their senior managers try to be visible and accessible. One of the biggest problems identified by MacLeod and Clarke is a "lack of fluidity in communications and knowledge sharing due to rigid communication channels or cultural norms."

Communication strategies need to go beyond the obvious idea of keeping people informed. Often senior leaders in organisations are convinced there is adequate communication when they send out memos, updates, newsletters and the like.

Borrowing from theatre, however, it is clear that effective communication needs a combination of:

- Monologues
- Duologues
- Dialogues

Monologues

Involving people means they need to know what's going on. Presentations, news bulletins, podcasts, DVD recordings, town hall meetings, or even Tweets are essentially monologues that inform people about what is going on in the company. The method will be determined by the content and audience accessibility and might cover such areas as conveying vision, offering simple explanations, talking interestingly and convincingly about values, goals and what matters to the organisation.

The ability to communicate directly in ways that involve people often comes down to a personal ability to talk authentically, using simple language. The authentic monologue, for instance, shows someone how their role fits into the bigger picture. In our experience, many managers and leaders need developmental help in this area.

Duologues

The next level of engaging communication is a two-way conversation. It will involve explanation, questioning and listening. Whether it is coffee meetings, road shows, canteen gatherings or any other form of briefing situations, the presenters need to engage their audience in a conversation. There are ways of using questions and listening that are empathic, that create more of a relationship and lead to a better understanding of the other person so they will feel increasingly connected with the organisation and to what is going on.

Much of our in-company work has been with managers and leaders whose listening skills can benefit from some TLC. Many have forgotten what it

really means to listen and what showing attention even looks like. Correctly, in our view, MacLeod and Clarke argue that "We believe the early benefits of adopting a listening and engaging approach will lead to some quick wins."

Dialogues

Ultimately for people to feel fully engaged, they need to be part of an ongoing, 360-degree, open process of communication. Being involved in these dialogues means that people feel they really are helping to forge the future of the organisation. They are part of it. They are involved in the creation of it.

T-Mobile has pioneered an approach to conversation, which has extended throughout the organisation and led to initiatives to change the management style from command and control to a more coaching approach. Interactive dialogue is the way forward for companies that want to engage their people.

For instance, a large engineering firm wanted to involve their Customer Service Managers in pursuing sales opportunities whilst servicing maintenance contracts, but were concerned that

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Monologue: At the end of this week, ask your management team to produce a two-minute podcast or vodcast. It might have updates about projects, a summary of current issues, and an acknowledgement of the work of individuals. Email the result to a wide selection of people and ask for comments, ideas and feedback.

Listening: At your next meeting, notice where your attention is as you listen. What are you listening out for? Are you looking for opportunities to make your point or to mock the other person who is speaking? Are you listening in search of agreement or to remember the facts and figures? The more you can listen with a positive purpose, the more likely you are to be effective in your communication.

Dialogue: Use these three involvement-type questions of your team: "What do you think?" "What's your opinion?" "How would you go about this?" Use these to spark important conversations.

sales training might meet resistance. They brought us in to help the management develop a strategy to involve their people in the change. We facilitated sessions that prompted dialogue within different departments between all parties. It helped everyone explore and understand the reasons for the change and their own experience of change. Initial scepticism about the company's plans was effectively transformed into much more open and receptive attitudes to change, and the subsequent sales training was highly successful.

IMPACT

If you want people to feel involved, they must believe that what they do matters, that somehow it will make an impact. The bigger the organisation, the harder it becomes to achieve this sense of making an impact, until in some places the point is reached where there is a complete disconnect between the individual and any tangible impact.

Difference

As MacLeod and Clarke put it in *Engaging for Success*, "...in a world where most factors of production are increasingly standardised, where a production line or the goods on a supermarket shelf are much the same the world over, employee engagement is the difference that makes the difference."


Leaders and managers face the daily challenge of converting business goals into ones that the individual can identify with and recognise so that their contribution will be in some way important. A classic example of this occurred in a major logistics company that had the revelation that its most important employees were really its truck drivers. They were the ones who had the most contact with customers and could therefore make or break how the company was seen by its customers.

For the average leader, we might therefore pose

the question: "How easily do you find it to explain to someone on the front line what difference they make to the business?" Knowing that one person makes a difference is an essential ingredient of becoming involved.

Connection

It is all too easy to leave people with a narrow view of the organisation, familiar only with their own department, while the rest of the company is a foreign land, rarely visited, with languages and customs that are not understood. To create an engaging culture, the connections between all parts of the organisation need to be overt and easily identified. It is important to know the whole ecosystem and how every bit interacts with every other bit.



"partnership is an important way of promoting involvement"

Partnership

Partnership is an important way of promoting involvement since it often requires new ways of working, based on the principles of building trust and mutual respect, honesty and transparency. A willingness to learn together and from each other will help establish closer working relationships, enabling emerging issues to be discussed in a timely fashion.

Treating each individual employee as a partner prevents them being seen as a homogeneous group. The rich diversity represented by individuals offers the most opportunity for fresh thinking, new ideas and creative contribution.

The award-winning climate change film *The Age of Stupid* was funded by a legion of small investors. The producers of the movie then nurtured this community by including them in regular updates throughout the filming. They also asked for help on everything from providing resources, extras, locations, promotion, casting, ideas and feedback. They were invited to screenings of sections of the film and became an active and engaged community, with every email addressed to them as "Dear Insiders..."

PLAY

Maynard Leigh once presented to a global computer company an approach to development that included the participants having fun and learning new things. Back came the terse comment that "This company is a serious organisation, we do not do fun." Suitably chastened, we only had to wait a year, however, before watching this dinosaur keel over and face near-extinction.

In contrast, Trayport, a hugely successful software company, has a very engaged workforce and a fun working climate in the offices. The final piece of the jigsaw was to connect the workforce to the clients. They wanted to maintain their characteristically creative and playful working environment whilst helping people understand the bigger picture and introducing higher levels of professionalism, so that employees bring all their energy and playful spirit into everything they do.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Impact: Talk to three frontline people and explain why and how the things they do makes a difference to the business. Without becoming a critic, show them why not turning up has an impact.

Connection: Create the chance for cross-functional sharing so people understand how different functions operate, what they need, where they fit.

Understanding: Promote job shadowing, information sharing. Help individuals see the whole map so that they can learn to navigate through the organisation.

Team: Look for opportunities for interdependent working. This opens the possibility of people becoming more than the sum of their parts and adds value to the organisation.

Links: Highlight overlapping responsibilities - where one person's function impacts on others. Bring the parties together to understand their connection.

Stakeholders: Devise a strategy for stakeholder engagement. Include customers, suppliers, families, shareholders, local communities as well as employees.

Customers: Invite a client or customer in to talk about how they see your organisation.

Attitude

That play and fun can help to promote involvement seems entirely obvious, but it is important to address the unconscious prejudices many of those in authority might harbour about play. Play is not idle, wasteful or frivolous. It is not David Brent in The Office doing a wacky impression of Kermit. It is not infantile, or immature.

It is this misunderstanding about serious play that prompts supervisors or managers, for example, to take a tough stance. "We're not here to have fun; my job is to get things done." Or, "we're here to make money, not play about."

This is a pity, since people are far more productive and involved when encouraged to enjoy the attributes of serious play - which is essentially about active and energetic individuals existing in dynamic relationships with others.

An interesting experiment was recently conducted, for example, in which two teams of adults constructed an IKEA desk from a kit. The team that took the pieces out of the box and played with them completed the task quicker than the one that read the instructions.

Watch children at play and it's clear that for all the outward levity, it's a busy learning experience. Actors play, though seldom thoughtlessly or without attention. All actors seek to produce outstanding performance. They and their directors know that what business leaders need to learn is that serious play is a form of alchemy, transforming ordinary situations into outstanding moments.

Meetings

In the spirit of play, a team at Hewlett Packard decided to hold its next meeting on the London Eye. They booked a pod, turned up and completed the agenda by the time the eye completed its cycle. What made the difference between that experience and the more usual one where employees sit grudgingly around a table watching the second hand

slowly complete another cycle? It was that the meeting was a piece of serious play - an unusual location and a challenge, stimulating the participants to stay on task while also making it enjoyable.

Traditionally, organisations use meetings to promote involvement, and yet these continue to attract much criticism. Our experience is that too few leaders and managers know the basics of how to run inspiring meetings that generate involvement and a sense of engagement. In particular, team meetings are frequently operational rituals in which poor chairing and procedures bore people to tears, and lengthy agenda items turn the gathering into an energy-draining event.

Yet, meetings can be an effective way to promote involvement, and there are plenty of creative approaches that can turn them into enjoyable human interactions.

Volunteers

How is it that some organisations seem to prosper because employees are willing to "go that extra mile", to commit their discretionary effort to the cause? Jean-Paul Sartre said "play is when we are at our most voluntary," and in the search for more involvement, there is another unmistakable trend emerging that employees need to be treated as volunteers.

This change reflects the fact that leaders often no longer have the power to compel people to do as they say and instead must rely on influence, personality and persuasion to get things done.

In organisations where talent engagement is taken seriously, there is a readiness to accept that if you want people's wholehearted involvement, you need to allow them sufficient freedom to take control of the experiment.

Knowledge working, virtual teams, expectations of instant communication, specialist know-how, and other factors are all forcing organisations to accept that they need to treat their people more like volunteers and less like wage slaves.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Play: You can't enforce fun! Yet, you can find ways to produce a playful environment in which your people can thrive and create - where laughter and fun are naturally part of producing outstanding performance. Bring a playful spirit with you and generate some creative energy.

Enliven: Decorate your reception area in a way that makes visitors smile as they enter your workplace.

Spirit: Don't reserve fun activity simply for Comic Relief, Children in Need or other fund-raising exercises. Ask people how to generate the same spirit at other times.

Dress: If you already have a dress-down day, why not have a dress-up day as well?

Meetings: At the next team meeting, give everyone a special role; for example, chief time keeper, action minute taker, energy monitor, chief boredom fighter, listening champion, and so on. And rotate the chairperson role.

Tune-In: Start the next team meeting with a few minutes to ensure everyone is focused and present. Perhaps each share a sentence about current work focus or feelings about what's happening in the organisation right now.

Venue: Hold the next team meeting in an unusual location.

Volunteers: When you interact with team members, try speaking to them as if they had volunteered to come into work and could just as easily decide to go home! Notice whether this view of them helps you alter how you speak to them. If they were partners in the business or volunteers, what would you say to them that you would not normally say?

Summary

INVOLVED

COMMUNICATION

Monologue
Duologue
Dialogue

IMPACT

Difference
Connection
Partnership

PLAY

Attitude
Meetings
Volunteers

BEING DEVELOPED

As children, we can't help but develop. And there's no reason why this should stop the moment we hit adulthood. Growing and developing is a natural human drive. To learn, to mature, to extend oneself is evolutionary. And a focus on development is a powerful way of engaging people.

And here we make a distinction between training and development. Of course, many roles need training. It has its short-term focus on skill acquisition and equips people to perform their jobs efficiently. Development, however, is about investing in someone's long-term growth.

Consequently, companies searching for high levels of engagement need to invest in developing their people.

POTENTIAL

Today, many companies recognise the importance of unlocking their people's potential, even during a downturn. But a Kingston University study, for example, found that around a third of employees in the companies it surveyed said that managers seldom if ever discussed their training and development needs with them, while a similar proportion rarely received feedback on their performance.

IDEA FOR ACTION:

Potential: If people are not using their full potential at work, then their talent and skills are being wasted. Unlocking potential is a way of reducing waste in your organisation.

Ask your people "what talents do you have (that would add value to us) that you're not currently utilising at work?" Then, discuss how they could be developed

DEVELOPED
Potential
Reviews
Opportunity

Development

One-third or more of employees do not feel they are being developed. This represents a considerable amount of wasted human potential still to be unlocked. Development prepares a person to perform better, and it supports the organisation's future needs. It also helps build a vital emotional bond between the individual and the organisation. The importance of such a bond in generating a sense of engagement can be considerable.

For instance, in their report, MacLeod and Clarke quote the Corporate Leadership Council as concluding that "emotional commitment is four times as valuable as rational commitment in producing discretionary effort. Indeed, the search for a high-performance workforce is synonymous with the search for emotional commitment."

That's one of the reasons we always advocate focusing on three complementary areas for development: people's cognitive, emotional and behavioural talents. When each of these is developed, an organisation is more likely to produce outstanding performance.

These are often referred to as the "soft skills." Engaging Success confirms that it is these so-called soft skills that make the difference. And yet, soft skills are often harder to learn and develop.



Development Programmes

Development takes many forms, of course, and those organisations that have an established learning culture will normally provide staff with a wide range of opportunities. Many of our own clients will boast an array of focused interventions relevant to the future growth of the company. Bertelsmann Arvato, for instance, is committed to unlocking the potential of all of their employees. They offer junior staff, at the start of their development, courses in personal impact and how to build productive relationships right through to intense learning experiences such as our Dramatic Shift workshop, which takes place in a theatre and explores people's ability to inspire others.

What is clear is the need to avoid catch-all, sheep-dip type programmes that are offered without any connection to people's personal development plans or the needs of the organisation. Well-targeted, relevant learning and development events play a central role to engaging talent. Whether it is Ernst & Young's *Accelerated Learning Programme*, DHL's *Customer Experience Programme*, Barclaycard's *Leadership 2010*, Aon's *Managers Workshops*, or Audit Commission's *Connecting with Clients*, they are all examples of development courses that add value to the organisation and help engage people.

Coaching

There is no need to constantly direct or monitor engaged people. They just require active support and encouragement in their attempts to perform at their best. As part of the process of development, all successful leaders and managers need to master coaching skills. Again drawing on our in-company work, we note how often even quite senior participants struggle with the subtleties of coaching individuals for high performance.

Whilst a lot of business coaching techniques are derived from improving sporting performance on the one hand and counselling skills on the other, we advocate a different approach. Our

preferred method is based on the techniques used by theatre directors to unlock outstanding performance from actors and is called experiential performance coaching.

This approach helps people experiment and rehearse new behaviours and approaches. One key aspect of it, which underpins the process throughout, is the provision of detailed, accurate and insightful feedback.

Feedback

The absence of feedback creates a vacuum in which people will feel taken for granted, ignored and under valued. For many managers, the technique of giving feedback is something of a dark art and requires careful practice in a safe learning environment. Yet, it can be learnt and mastered and contributes enormously to the engagement agenda.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Development: Each person in your team needs a proper development plan that they have helped to create. Is it time to create these?

Coaching: Consider each of your people and their potential. Make a commitment to provide some time to coach them – to support them in attaining a new level of performance.

Feedback: Find someone on your team who clearly would welcome some feedback. In giving it, make a deliberate effort to be specific with detailed observations and examples.

Culture: Create a learning culture. (a) People returning from development courses should pass on their learning to colleagues; (b) distribute a daily learning point or focus; (c) share ideas and learning about the organisation with fellow team members; (d) get everyone to teach a colleague a skill they have, e.g. a golf swing, counting to 10 in Japanese or how to use Photoshop. (e) At a team meeting, ask people, "What have you learnt since our last meeting?" (f) State publicly that people attending development courses are adding value to the organisation

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Goals: At the next team meeting, ask each individual to say what for them would be a stretch goal over the next six months. Ask the team to give you a stretch goal too.

Evaluate: Monitor progress on personal development goals so that people can assess how they are doing. Don't just leave it till the annual review.

Meeting: At team meetings, have a regular agenda item about collective performance. "How are we doing? What could we do to raise our game?"

Action Plans: Ask to see the development action plan for each member of the team, and talk to each person to find out what they think about it.

Development Plans: Show your personal development plan to a trusted colleague and ask, "What do you think of this plan? How could it be improved?"

REVIEWS

Reviews are akin to a long-running joke in the battlefield of engagement. Everyone knows they are important, but nearly everyone hates doing them. Yet, the annual assessment experience adopted by so many large organisational bureaucracies is mainly a red herring. What really matters is that every day, week and month, people have the chance to learn "how I am doing?"

Goals

Fully engaged people typically respond to goals they understand and believe in and have helped to create. Really effective and inspiring goals promote learning and development, as well as challenge the person to use his full potential. This is why we often encourage our clients to adopt the use of SMART goals, with a variation of the usual headings: Stretching, Measurable, Accepted, Recorded and Time-Limited.

Stretch goals tap into people's natural creativity, generate excitement and help promote a sense of engagement. One of the best-known stretch goals is the UK 10:10 campaign for individuals and whole government departments to achieve a 10-per-cent reduction in their CO2 emissions by 2010.

Action Plans

Being able to answer the question, "how am I doing?" not only often but honestly is an important part of helping people develop. Something that every leader and manager can do in a hands-on manner immediately is to ensure that every direct report has a credible personal development action plan that goes beyond a set of paper commitments and involves new opportunities for learning.

Management Development

Leaders who believe that development is a sound idea for everyone else, but not for themselves, are as much a problem as those who see development as a cost rather than an investment. Such leaders are likely to be defensive or reactionary in the area of developing their people.

The UK spends less per manager than any other European country on management development. Our view is that as a general principle, every leader, regardless of level in the organisation, should have a formal development plan and spend time out from work on personal development issues. They need to become role models for growth, learning and continual improvement.

Notes:

“sense of responsibility
(ability to respond) helps
people take control of
their lives”

OPPORTUNITY

A further factor supporting a person's development is the provision of opportunities for learning. These may take the form of experience, experimentation, or taking on new kinds of responsibilities.

Experiment

When people are really switched on and performing at their best, they must be able to experiment and get things wrong. Therefore, they need a punishment-free environment – a culture or ethos where mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn and improve. Obviously, if people continue to make the same mistake and fail to improve and learn, then it is a performance management issue. However, people's creative juices start flowing when given sufficient space to discover for themselves how best to do their work.

Experience

The fastest way people learn, grow and ultimately perform better is through real-life experiences. Normally, this is on-the-job. However, experiential learning workshops provide opportunities for people to take risks in a safe environment. Participants can experiment and rehearse when nothing is at stake so that they leave better prepared for tackling the real situation in the workplace.

Responsibility

People's prevailing mindset is crucial. Those who see themselves as helpless pawns on the organisational board will be less likely to feel engaged than those who feel more able to take advantage of opportunities or even create new ones.

Leaders and managers can play an important role in helping people move away from feeling like a victim to what's going on around them and realise that they have a choice. Developing their sense of responsibility (ability to respond) helps them take control of their lives. The more responsibility they take, the more effective they tend to be. Supporting people in this journey towards being more proactive is a worthwhile investment. Those with responsibility not only develop more quickly and add value to the enterprise, but they are also more engaged in the organisation's endeavours.

Successful talent engagement stems from giving people sufficient responsibility so they feel excited and accountable, valued and trusted.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Experimentation: Encourage a culture of creativity and innovation. Invite new ideas and give people the opportunities to try things out.

Permission: Provide enough time and room for people to experiment and learn, without constantly monitoring them. How much permission do your people have to try things out? Ask them!

Mistakes: If anyone's made a mistake recently, ask yourself and them, "What have we learnt from this? How can we create value from it?"

Responsibility: Talk one-to-one to members of the team and identify what would get them excited and willing to take on something new.

Experience: Provide opportunities for people to learn from powerful experiences – either on the job or in workshops. Seek exchanges with other departments so that people get a chance to experience what it's like to work elsewhere.

Summary

DEVELOPED

POTENTIAL

Development
Coaching
Feedback

REVIEWS

Goals
Action Plans
Management
Development

OPPORTUNITY

Experiment
Experience
Responsibility

BEING INSPIRED

A leading Dutch telecoms company recently invited Maynard Leigh to assist them in preparing eighteen of its senior managers for boardroom roles. The brief was to develop in these individuals the integrity, passion and values to help them take the company into new markets and focus on a sustainable future.

The client wanted transformational leaders able and willing to think outside the box. Cees de Weerd, consultant to the Dutch firm, puts it another way. "Leadership shouldn't be dictated solely by budgets and deadlines. It can and should be a joy. It should inspire."

The workshop they attended involved participants sharing a piece of writing or music that they found inspiring by presenting it on stage to the group. Maynard Leigh's managing director Stuart Mackenzie explains: "One person presented President Obama's inauguration speech; another played us the U2 hit Beautiful Day. We had people recite passages of Shakespeare: one man wrote and performed a poem. The material was used as a vehicle to explore their authentic inspirational self. They then practised the lessons they had learnt in order to take them back into the workplace so that they could inspire their colleagues."

Inspiration is literally to breathe in and to act with spirit, and is an area in which we have immersed ourselves as a company for two decades. We have seen for ourselves how vital it is for leaders to master this role and observed in many organisations its impressive power to generate high levels of enthusiasm and engagement. As part of our development work, we regularly assist organisational leaders in the discovery of what it means to inhabit their inspirational leadership.

It is easy to dismiss inspiration as fanciful because it is hard to measure and even harder to manage. In practice, there are many actions that leaders and managers can do daily that steadily feed people's need for inspiration, which helps trigger high levels of engagement.

INSPIRED Substance Imagination Meaning

Sir Ken Robinson, internationally renowned educationalist, argues that you should help people discover what they are passionate about and encourage them to reconnect with their natural authentic talent. Then, they are "in their element". Thus, while the focus is often on leadership to provide inspiration in order to engage people, there may be many other sources to fuel this feeling. Talented employees can find inspiration in many aspects of the enterprise they work for. It could be the work they love doing, or the cause they are part of, or the product or service they supply or people they work with.

Inspiring leaders do not necessarily switch on inspiration like turning on a light bulb. Instead, they steadily nurture and tailor it, allowing it to grow within them and spread and radiate from there. Three vital components contributing to this inspirational state of being are:

- Substance,
- Imagination
- Meaning.

SUBSTANCE

Leaders and managers who routinely inspire their people are nearly always people of substance, or what is sometimes called character. This does not mean that only exceptional and charismatic individuals can lead people to feel inspired. Showing substance is both learnable and within the grasp of every human being.

Integrity

It starts by acting with integrity. Integrity can also be described as doing the right things, rather than the more managerial activity of doing things well. Often translated as behaving with consistency, integrity is all about showing who you are and what matters to you. This in turn requires using all three elements that underpin people-centred leadership, namely emotional intelligence, insight and authenticity. (See final section.)

Demonstrating personal integrity is therefore about showing as a leader that you are true to yourself; for example, that you say what you mean and mean what you say.

Values

In practice, when people “get” your integrity, it is seldom a one-off event. Instead, it is usually an accumulation of events such as when you share your values with people and explain why they matter to you, or when you speak from the heart about an issue of importance, or when you react in a way that demonstrates your humanity.

Once people understand a leader’s personal values, they may start by respecting them and perhaps only gradually begin to find them inspiring. An important realisation that leaders often gain in their personal development is trusting that through their integrity, they are feeding people’s need to feel inspired.

Passion

The ability to inspire people is a willingness to talk with passion or vigour about what matters.

So-called scientific management has created the myth that running organisations is best done by emotionless, highly objective human beings whose decision making relies on a relentless application of logic and metrics.

The reality, of course, is entirely different. Yet, there remains a strand within many organisational cultures that it is somehow wrong for leaders and managers to show their passion - that it is a sign of weakness.

Passion itself is a highly emotive word that for many people proves an instant turn-off. For those who find it so, we would merely argue instead that leaders and managers need to be able to find and talk with conviction often about their wholehearted commitment or enthusiasm for what they want to achieve.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Inspiration: You can't inspire others without first being inspired. Connect with your own sources of inspiration. Start making a list of all the things that uplift or excite you. People, poems, songs, art, landscapes, events, films, stories, achievements, books.

Is there a theme to these examples? How can you bring more inspiration into your own life – both at home and at work?

Share: Find ways of sharing inspiration with others. For instance, add a powerful weekly quote at the bottom of emails, invite people to the showing of a film, post a monthly poem on the bulletin board, fill the walls with pictures, draw up a list of inspiring people you'd like to meet and invite one of them to a team meeting.

Integrity: Explain to those whose engagement you want what integrity means to you and to your organisation. Explain to your team why something you are doing is morally right. Communicate what you stand for and where you take a stand.

Test: Challenge yourself with what if? scenarios that help you test your principles.

Values: Identify one personal value that really matters to you, for example honesty, humour, trust, respect, justice, and talk about it with each member of your team. Ask them to do the same. What do they really value? And cite examples of that value being exercised in practice.

Passion: When recruiting, ask people what they are passionate about.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Creativity: Bring lots of different people together (from all the stakeholder groups) to brainstorm ideas for increasing engagement. Use right-brain techniques (e.g. drawing, acting, visualising) to help think differently.

Imagination: Encourage people to imagine what their working life will look like in five years. Start planning for the transition right now.

Fresh thinking: Invite a 15-year-old to come to your next team meeting and talk about future technology.

Story examples: Find a preferably true story about some aspect of the goals of your team that inspires you. Share this story with your team.

Collect Stories: Collect stories that are examples of the organisation at its best - and start telling them.

Communicate Stories: Find ways to spread good stories - newsletters, emails, YouTube, story-telling sessions, bulletin boards, podcasts, etc.

IMAGINATION

Imagination plays an important role in the pursuit of talent engagement. By using natural curiosity and a sense of wonder, you stimulate an approach that seeks possibility rather than what already exists. Imagination triggers leaders' and managers' ability to use creativity to inspire people; to use stories to gain people's attention; and to apply energy and vitality to transform how people feel.

Creativity

A problem is a wake-up call for creativity. The best organisations evolve through constant experiments and that means promoting a culture of entrepreneurship, invention and permissive encouragement. (The latter occurs once there is a high tolerance for failure or for mistakes, as mentioned before in the section on Being Developed.)

Managers normally try and solve problems using logic or left-hemisphere functions. Our traditional education system promotes this. By using creativity and imagination (serious play), we are able to access the right brain and use it to solve the trickiest of problems and to improve our communication.

In a culture that fosters inventiveness or creativity, you will nearly always find inspired people, often on a quest to transform some aspect of the world around them. These people are both inspired and fully engaged.

Much has been made of Google's famous directive that its engineers should spend 25 per cent of their work time on anything they think will benefit the company, work that is not part of their "day job". In fact, many other companies have similar, if less dramatic, arrangements in place and recognise too how a culture that fosters creativity also inspires and generates engagement.

Story

Iconic stories are another useful way of seeding a feeling of inspiration in organisations.

Effective leaders use story-telling a great deal. They develop convincing narratives to create something memorable. And the stories often encapsulate what's important or exciting about their organisation's activities and help bring their values alive. These may include ones that describe the company's distinctive identity; show how the organisation has made decisions according to its principles; acknowledge some supreme effort or achievement; express the company's social purpose; celebrate an individual's heroic commitment. Each organisation will have its legends. The good ones are those that engage and inspire people.

IBM India's response to earthquakes and tsunamis, for instance, shows their values in action, and its managers across the entire global enterprise unquestionably regularly retell these as part of inspiring employees. People remember stories better than they recall facts and figures, and if you want to inspire, learn to tell stories.

Notes:

Energy

A creative culture tends to be one full of vitality. Imagination allows people's creativity to flourish and in turn releases energy that is attractive to others – creating a sort of multiplier effect. The atmosphere does not have to be manic or frenetic. Yet it will have a liveliness that is incredibly engaging to people. Eventually the workplace hums with people full of vitality. Vitality – both vital and spirited.

This is not a culture simply reserved for the obvious organisations such as advertising agencies or R&D departments. It can apply anywhere. As people get engrossed in using their creativity to solve problems and add value to each other, energy levels rise. It is a natural process based on human connection.

“Imagination triggers leaders’ ability to use creativity to inspire people”

MEANING

It is essential for all our lives to have purpose and meaning. As George Bernard Shaw said, "The true joy in life is being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one." The amount of time and energy we dedicate to our working lives deserves to be used for something important.

At Maynard Leigh, we believe that meaningful work stems from promoting values. In our case, it is to bring our core values of vitality, openness, integrity, creativity and care to the workplace. We feel this will create a humane and enjoyable working culture and provide meaning. We happily share these commitments with our clients, and in return they will often share how they see the deeper meaning of the activities being established in their workplaces.

Direction

Meaning is often the result of clear purpose and direction. By providing a clear, compelling narrative, leaders give a sense of direction so that people know where they are heading and what their part in it will be. Using multiple channels of communications, leaders and managers can put people's work in a wider perspective, showing why it has meaning and demonstrating ownership and direction from the top.

Legacy

Inviting people to explore the legacy they would like to leave behind them is a powerful way to concentrate minds around meaning at work. It matters less how grandiose or pedestrian these pictures of the future might be than the fact that people are asked by those in authority to share their aspirations.

In many cases, people may never have even thought about such a prospect, and the nature of the question itself can prove an inspiring experience for them.

Vision

In their report, MacLeod and Clarke talk about the importance of the organisational vision being clear and people being able to see their part in it. But from our work in companies, we note how those in charge often find articulating a convincing vision a challenge. That is partly because they have difficulty finding the right words, but more often it can be the problem of demonstrating sufficient passion and commitment to the vision.

Defining an organisation through its short-term goals can obscure its larger purposes and prevent people connecting with something beyond themselves. That's why every organisation needs a vision — an image of the future they seek to create. And often, where you find people fully engaged in the organisation's activities, you nearly always encounter a clear sense of its vision. People feel they are involved in something special. They may even have a sense of destiny.

There is a debate about how best to create a vision. Some leaders argue that for vision to play its role in inspiring people, it is essential that people have a chance to help define the vision. Others take a more top-down approach. Both can work so long as the vision connects at a visceral level, not merely a cerebral one, and has the potential to transform people's thinking and attitudes.

When leaders talk about it from the heart, in other words when they are being truly authentic, vision has the power to inspire and transform talent engagement. People-centred leaders do this as we shall see in the final section of this paper.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Narrative: Decide on the narrative you will use to explain your people's part in the bigger picture, and discuss it with your team. Invite them to help you refine it.

Legacy: Invite each team member to share with the rest of the group what legacy they would like the team to leave behind it one day. What will people remember of their current activities?

Mission: Get your team to write a campaigning mission statement about the difference they want to make in the world.

Vision: Clarify your vision – your imagined view of an improved future. Think about how you can convey it. Find someone today with whom you can share your vision. Paint a picture of the desired future. Explain to them why it matters so much.

Summary

INSPIRED

SUBSTANCE

Integrity
Values
Passion

IMAGINATION

Creativity
Stories
Energy

MEANING

Direction
Legacy
Vision

PEOPLE-CENTRED LEADERSHIP

People-centred leadership is exercised by managers who place people and humanistic values at the core of their approach. With such leaders, you can expect to find a strong urge for flatter structures, fewer hierarchies, a preference for matrix working and an understanding that organisations are complex and constantly adapting.

Such leaders see engagement as central to their aims, not as a mere add-on. As Sainsbury's CEO Justin King has put it, "In a business of our scale, you don't even get started without engagement." While a people-centred approach comes naturally to some, others struggle and may need help in developing the necessary skills and understanding. For example, according to CIPD research, 80 per cent of all UK managers have been asked to do things at work for which they feel ill-equipped, with managing people at the top of the list.

When the senior leadership at DHL Supply Chain researched world-class organisations, they set about introducing a culture change into a more people-centred style of management. Supported by Maynard Leigh, hundreds of their senior people have attended Active Leadership workshops, helping them develop their coaching skills, emotional and social intelligence, succession planning and cross-cultural working. Whilst the process is ongoing, there are significant signs of change and improvements in employee engagement feedback.

HUMANISTIC VALUES

The distressingly low levels of employee engagement reported by the CIPD and others confirm that many workplaces are anti-people, where human beings cannot readily flourish.

We mentioned earlier that people-centred leaders bring humanity to the workplace. There is nothing fluffy or do-gooding about this. Vanguard Companies like IBM, Procter and Gamble, Publicis Groupe or Google, for example, are successfully leading the way in new approaches to performance, creativity and opening up vital, new business opportunities. To do so, they rely on people-centred leaders who recognise that talent engagement is about assuming people choose to work rather than feeling compelled to do so.

Such leaders want their people at all levels to feel motivated, not controlled. Because of their expectation of a highly talented work force, these executives seek to boost the voluntary component of paid work by entrusting employees with choices, including where, when and with whom they work. In short, they care.

Humanistic values are therefore not so much a luxury as a necessity for an increasing number of leading companies if they are to fully unlock their people's potential. They know that this is what produces creative and innovative breakthroughs, and it allows them to find new markets, adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and handle ambiguity.

Essentials of people-centred leadership

Three meta abilities explain and help define People-Centred Leadership:

Insight Emotional Intelligence Authenticity

These affect all four of the earlier VID1 behaviours and are areas in which Maynard Leigh has worked intensively for over 20 years.

IDEAS FOR ACTION:

Practise developing insight. Take it a step at a time.

Step one: INFORMATION. What do you see in front of you – factually? Collect pure data, without any interpretation.

Step two: INTERPRETATION. How do you interpret what you see? What would Sherlock Holmes make of the evidence? Notice your feelings?

Step three: IMAGINATION. What do you imagine about the person? Use your curiosity and intuition to provoke questions about them.

Insight

Insight is the leader's ability to see accurately and beyond the obvious, past assumptions and to ultimately make meaning out of what they see. Such ability is often mistakenly seen as a magical talent belonging to only gifted and perceptive people who have amazing intuition. This is not the case. Such insight can be learnt, but it takes discipline and practice.

The essence of it resides in being able to notice what blurs our ability to see accurately. We often miss what's really happening because we see through a fog of beliefs, interpretations, prejudices and assumptions. Many of us don't even realise what's happening and so believe that only to find subsequently that it is a distorted view. So, in workshops, we help people distinguish between factual, observable information and personal interpretation.

The third level is where the astute leader is able to build on the information and interpretation, by allowing their curiosity and wonder to begin to enlighten them. This is a very subtle and high level of seeing and is often seen as intuition. As the creative leader lets their imagination and curiosity drive their insight, they get to see beyond the obvious.

At each step, however, people need to keep checking out whether they are accurate or not. This is where it's helpful to have others around us who can offer different perspectives. And, ideally, if your insight is about a human being, you can check it out with them personally.

Emotional Intelligence

Leaders ignore the emotional element of working life at their peril. People's feelings have a massive impact on performance. Yet, many managers are uncomfortable with this area of work and ignore it in the hope that it will sort itself out. Daniel Goleman's research is now conclusive in proving the link between feelings and performance.

The way each person expresses their emotions heavily influences those on the receiving end. To create involvement, for example, leaders need to be able to create rapport with people and a sense of partnership. They must be sensitive to other people's feelings.

Any manager who has responsibility for people needs to focus on helping people arrive at and remain in the emotional state where they can work at their best. It requires social awareness, and one of the ways leaders constantly achieve this, whether they know it or not, is through using emotional intelligence.

Authenticity

People-centred leaders come across as authentic, both in what they say and what they do. Paradoxically, while being totally truthful to themselves, such leaders are also aware of the impact that they are having around them. In consequence, employees feel more ready to do their best for someone who is manifestly behaving in an authentic way.

How do such leaders achieve this result? Essentially, it is through simply being themselves in allowing others to see who they really are. Business tends to have a hand-me-down culture of people working with an adapted mask. The attitude is, "I'm at work, so I don't show this part of me." In contrast, leaders need to make a personal contract: To be myself, my whole self and nothing but myself.

Talent Engagement Strategy

The earlier sections of this guide offer a wide range of down-to-earth tips and advice for talent engagement that people can implement right away. They have a strongly operational bias, an emphasis on action. They answer that perennial challenging question: "Yes, but what can I do on Monday morning?"

Meanwhile, it is also important to ensure that companies adopt a coherent talent engagement strategy that steers managers and leaders towards how they will need to behave. Most competent HR practitioners can map out a route for the organisation to follow in this respect, and there is plenty of external advice available too, including ours.

Implementing an engagement strategy, though, requires more than merely naming the various steps that include:

Working through these various stages can easily become an excuse to avoid more straightforward daily practices such as those we describe earlier. For example, unless leaders model talent engagement in their daily actions, then others will view any formal strategy of engagement as an abstraction.

For many organisations, choosing to adopt a talent engagement strategy constitutes a cultural shift; that is, a "new way of doing things around here." Sustaining a culture shift is less easy than merely mapping out the strategy for one. Our award-winning paper on sustaining culture change identifies some of the key drivers that make any culture change stick. We refer you to this paper rather than reproducing it here.

IDEA FOR ACTION:

There is some personal work leaders can do to clarify their authenticity. It is a sort of personal inventory, a means of developing a high-level self-awareness, self-knowledge. The aim is to help develop integrity, presence and a leadership signature.

Explore each of these questions first with yourself, and then with a trusted colleague:

- How did I create myself to be the leader I am?
- What leaders do I admire?
- What are the qualities that I bring to the workplace?
- What do my reports say about my leadership style?
- What are my values and do I manifest them?



Notes:



And Finally....

There is a crucial final piece in the jigsaw of improving talent engagement in an organisation. It is as much about how you do it as what you do.

By including the elements in the diagram above, and by following the steps outlined in our Sustaining Culture Change paper, you have a practical route map for what needs to happen. You could appoint a head of engagement or an engagement task force to steer the change process. You will need a strategic plan, hard-edged practices, rigorous systems to support the change and soft skills development.

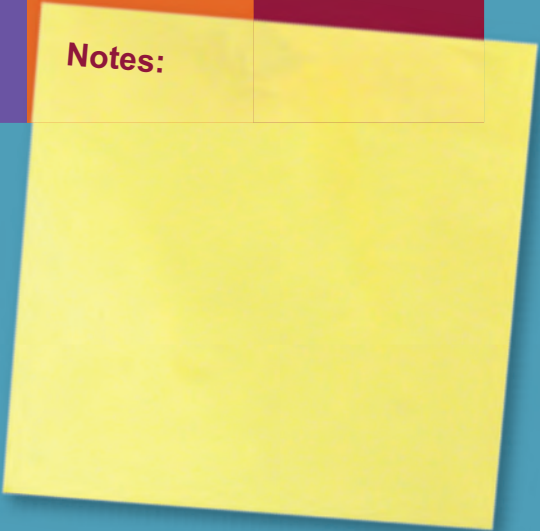
But it is vital that, with a people-centred approach, you engage people in the engagement process. Tautological? Perhaps. However, it is worth highlighting the broken companies cluttered with the litter of misleading employee engagement surveys and failed grand strategies who have forgotten this simple principle.



Addendum 1 -

THE ESSENTIALS OF TALENT ENGAGEMENT

VALUED	INVOLVED	DEVELOPED	INSPIRED
INDIVIDUALITY Diversity Motivation Well-being	COMMUNICATION Monologue Duologue Dialogue	POTENTIAL Development Coaching Feedback	SUBSTANCE Integrity Values Passion
RELATIONSHIP Attention Trust Belonging	IMPACT Difference Connection Partnership	REVIEWS Goals Action Plans Management - development	IMAGINATION Creativity Stories Energy
FAIRNESS Respect Appreciation Remuneration	PLAY Attitudes Meetings Volunteers	OPPORTUNITY Experiment Experience Responsibility	MEANING Direction Legacy Vision
<p>Notes:</p>			



Addendum 2:

Exclusive approach to talent versus inclusive one

HOW THE TWO APPROACHES DIFFER

INCLUSIVE

- Talent is abundant
- Distribute development widely
- See everyone as potentially creative
- High level of trust for everyone
- Widespread experimentation
- Demand high engagement levels everywhere
- Everyone has an equal chance of progress
- People viewed as volunteers
- Mainly promote from within
- Employee is responsible for their own career
- Tell everyone you see them as talented
- Teamworking is more than the sum of the parts
- Believe people can be developed
- Organisation grows by engaging everyone

EXCLUSIVE

- Talent is scarce
- Restrict development to a few
- See only a few as creative
- Restrict high levels of trust to a few
- Focus experimentation narrowly
- Demand high engagement levels from the few
- A few are fast-tracked through the organisation
- People viewed as assets
- Regularly import talent
- Employer will look after your career
- Tell only a few that you see them as talented
- Teams don't really add value
- Believe people have limited scope for improvement
- Organisation grows through efforts of an elite core

Notes:



