



Employee engagement for new ways of working

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What is employment engagement?

“... a desirable condition (that) has an organisational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort and energy.” (Macey & Schneider)

Ways of working may be changing, but people are the same, with the same needs for connection. These models of engagement are for people in any situation

One: Connection, enjoyment, and time

Daniel Stein and collaborators say the academic literature identifies four elements – the extent to which an employee:

- feels committed to an organisation
- identifies with an organisation
- feels satisfied with their job
- feels energized at work.

Stein et al did field work in the US in April and May 2021, as people’s work was impacted by the pandemic. They found 20 drivers of engagement – and identified three critical ones, each with three actions. These actions can be taken in office-based, virtual, and hybrid workplaces.

1. Connect what employees do to what they care about

- a. Revise your organisation’s mission statement to connect with employee values.
- b. Show how an employee’s work is related to the organisation’s purpose.
- c. Encourage and fund employee resources groups (ERGs) that represent diverse interests and goals. (In New Zealand we talk about networks or rōpū.)

2. Make the work less stressful and more enjoyable

- a. Offer employees the flexibility to try new work tasks so they can discover their intrinsic interests
- b. Grant employees more autonomy
- c. Boost employee's confidence.

3. Create time affluence

- a. Reward employees with time in addition to money
- b. Encourage employees to invest in time-saving purchases
- c. Implement tools that discourage after-hours emails.



Two: Narrative, integrity, manager relationships, employee voice

UK-based organisation Engage for Success (engageforsuccess.org) identifies four enablers of engagement:

- **Strategic narrative** – shared by visible and empowering leaders
- **Organisational integrity** – the espoused values are visible every day
- **Engaging managers** – every employee has a relationship with their manager
- **Employee voice** – employees are able to participate in decision making and problem solving, and can express opinions openly

Again, these enablers can be activated in every type of workplace. You might have to use different tools or techniques to bring them to life in hybrid or virtual environments, but it can be done.

Let's look at some actions for each one.

A strategic narrative – it's a story. With a beginning, a middle, and a future. We often talk about people looking to leaders for vision, and this aligns with that: where are you taking me? Engage your people through strategic narrative that includes them.

Organisational integrity – this comes down to trust and consistency. Show you are trustworthy and consistent at every level.

Engaging managers – back to basics: notice what your people are doing, and find something to give positive feedback on as often as possible.

Employee voice – on unconscious bias workshops we ask the question: who gets listened to? Answer that question for your organisation.



Three: Support people's passions

This approach is more about retention than engagement. I include it here because it is centred on flexibility, which is a recurring theme in all the work on engagement.

Lauren Howe and her collaborators are responding to the 'great resignation' and pose the question: What do talented workers want most out of their jobs? The answer: the opportunity to pursue their passions.

Four steps to do that:

1. Work with employees to create flexibility. Pursuing your passion doesn't necessarily fit with a work timetable. Once you've created flexibility for people, you must then ensure they never feel guilty about taking the time.
2. Lead by example. Share your passions and be transparent about the time you take to pursue them.
3. Encourage employees to share their passions with each other. This flows from the previous action – with the important difference that this is normalising the idea that everyone has a life outside work. It's about everyone being comfortable to talk about their passions.
4. Put your money where your mouth is. What about passion development funding?

An example of passion: Green employee engagement

What if your people have a passion for the environment? Green employment engagement is the topic of Doctoral research underway in Sri Lanka.

This research has identified seven dimensions of green engagement: emotional, behavioural, cognitive, preservationist, conservationist, maker and non-polluter. This is not just saying 'you're a greenie' – it is delving in to how that is expressed and seeking to recognise a person's real motivation.

Supporting this passion seems like a win:win for organisations, because the employee actions will contribute to more sustainable workplaces. What actions might you take to encourage engagement through this avenue?



Four: The Ethic of friendship

This approach is built on the idea that trusting relationships are central to employee engagement. It identifies nine factors that contribute to engagement and describes the ethic of friendship – and offers suggestions on how to combine the two to develop relationship-based behaviours.

Nine factors of employee engagement

Some of these are familiar from definitions I've shared earlier. But they break ideas down to a more granular level.

1. Emphasize mission and purpose
2. Honour ethical obligations
3. Inspire by personal example
4. Hire world-class employees
5. Focus on constant learning
6. Recognise employee commitment
7. Reward team achievements
8. Pursue long-term outcomes
9. Demonstrate emotional awareness



The ethic of friendship

The paper defines the ethic of friendship in this paper as:

“The commitment [...] to treat employees as a valued friends, demonstrated by the individual’s commitment to the employees’ unique needs, their desire to grow and improve, and their best interest as members of the organization.”

The paper says the principles of friendship guide behaviours that foster engagement. This isn’t about being friends with team members; it’s about using the same standard of care that you would use for your friends.

Redesigning work

Lynda Gratton is Professor of Management Practice at the London Business School.

Her book 'Redesigning Work' starts with psychologist Kurt Lewin's freeze, unfreeze model. This says that in the normal conditions – where the status quo prevails – organisations are frozen. It takes an external threat to unfreeze.

Gratton applies these states to thinking about where and when work happens – recognising that unfreezing began before the pandemic.

Here's the next beautifully simple bit: thinking about flexibility of time and place.

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 9-5 anywhere | Anytime anywhere |
| 9-5 office | Anytime office |

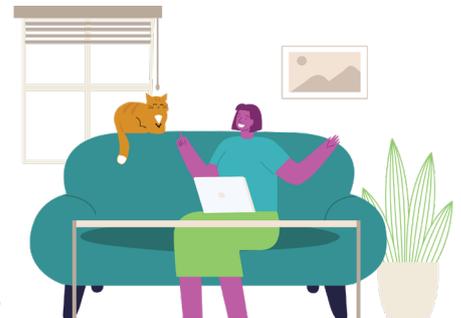
The horizontal axis is time flexibility, while the vertical axis is place flexibility. Bottom left is a 20th century status quo, top right is a complete flexibility.

The pandemic was the unfreeze moment, and brought with it constraints on movement, which meant Bottom right – anytime office was not possible. Our thinking skewed to place flexibility, not time.

A key pandemic response was top left – 9 to 5 anywhere – which meant home. But home isn't the office. There are people there doing different things, there may be children, pets, and there are domestic tasks to be done.

But the reality became top right – Anytime Anywhere – because that was the only way people could fit work around life.

Once you are in this quadrant, the risk is All the time, Everywhere. When does work stop? And what does that mean for engagement?



Gratton describes the challenges and payoffs of these shifts – and offers a four-step process to redesign work. She doesn't use the word engagement, but this approach will foster it. Her four steps are:

1. Understand what matters
2. Reimagine the future
3. Model and test ideas
4. Act on your model and new ways of working.

Time spent at step one is vital. Three things you really need to understand are:

- What knowledge you need to capture
- Where does knowledge get exchanged
- What people want from work



And I leave you with these questions:

- *Do your people know when to stop working?*
- *Do you know when to stop working?*

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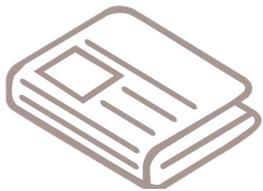
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Thanks for coming!

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