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MORE AWARE, MORE PRESENT, MORE ENGAGED

The difference between conscious engagement
and employee engagement

WHITE PAPER

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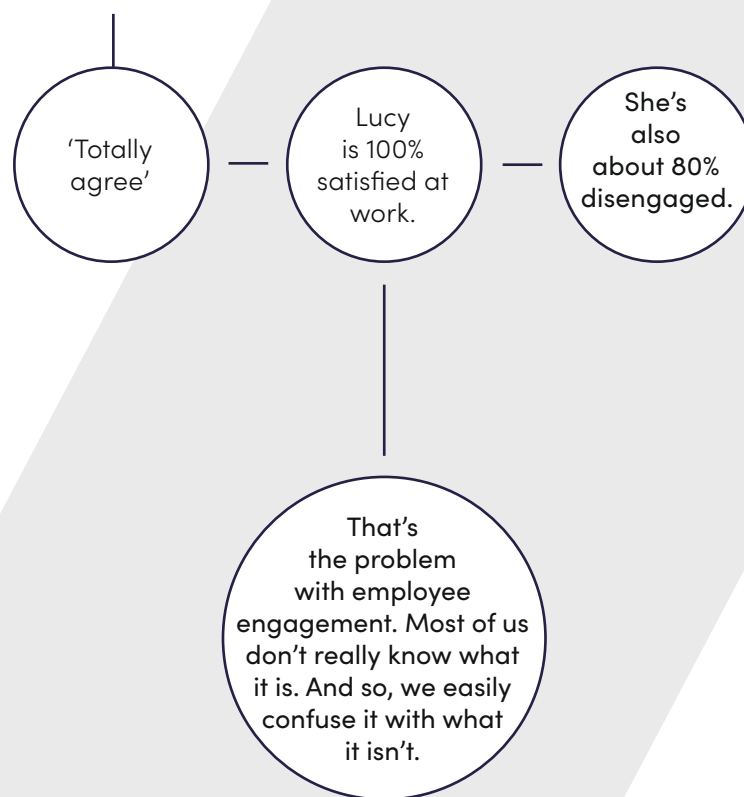
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WHAT ENGAGEMENT ISN'T

Picture the scene: Lucy arrives at work.

She's half an hour late ("Traffic was terrible"). She logs on to her computer and while it's starting up ("It's such a dinosaur"), she heads to the canteen for her usual coffee and muffin ("I'm sleepwalking till my second cup"). She chats to colleagues for an hour and a half ("Have you heard? Simon's having an affair with the new ops manager") before winding her way back to her desk. During the day, Lucy gathers data for the report she's working on. It's two days overdue, but she's not really concerned. Her manager is absent from work ("Again. Does Frank even work here, anymore?"). Before logging off, Lucy completes the survey she was sent from HR. In response to the statement: 'I am satisfied at work', Lucy clicks the 'Totally agree' radial.



Employee engagement is not employee satisfaction, even though there is a correlation between the two. But an employee who is satisfied with their job is not necessarily engaged at work.

So, while they may not be looking for a job elsewhere, they may be less present and less focused at work, and as a result, their contribution may be less than impressive.

So, what is employee engagement, really?

CURRENT DEFINITIONS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Arriving at a universally accepted definition of employee engagement is problematic.

For one, different stakeholders weigh in with different definitions, influenced in large part by their subjective analytical perspectives as academics, consultants and practitioners.

Further complicating the issue is that many organisations arrive at their own interpretations of engagement, making it difficult to measure the effects of engagement objectively, by way of comparison. Still, it's helpful to look at the most widely used definitions of employee engagement:

In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. William Kahn

Employee engagement is about investing oneself, being authentic in the job, and delivering one's work performance with passion, persistence, and energy. Zinta S. Byrne

A desirable condition, has organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy. Macey & Schneider

A distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance. Alan Saks

Engaged employees are those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace. Gallup

Engagement is employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success. Willis Towers Watson

Employee engagement is the level of an employee's psychological investment in their organization. Aon Hewitt

Engagement is the antithesis of burnout. Maslach & Leiter

A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker

As varied as these definitions are, they share a common subject: employees.

It may seem obvious, but organisations easily lose sight of the human beings at the heart of their engagement efforts, focusing instead on the actions and investments they think will create the ideal conditions for employee engagement.

As well-intentioned as these actions and investments may be, ultimately, they are misdirected. Which is why so many organisations – even those motivated by a genuine zeal to engage their employees – fall short in their delivery and fail to produce the results they want.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE EXISTING PARADIGM OF ENGAGEMENT

While 90% of business leaders agree that an employee engagement strategy has an impact on business success, and as many as 78% of companies have a documented employee engagement strategy¹, disengagement continues to be a widespread problem. According to Gallup, an astonishing 70% of employees are not fully committed to deliver their best work.²

The reason employees aren't working to their full potential, we believe, is because investment in employee engagement is driven, almost exclusively, by the pursuit of business value.

Not human value. That's not to say that engagement isn't a business issue, and specifically, a productivity issue. It is. The formula for success is not difficult: Engagement drives performance. Performance delivers results.

But under the pressure to perform, companies easily start to think of, and treat, their employees less as people, and more as economic entities – as resources, means of production, and even intangible assets.

How many annual reports have you come across in which companies proudly proclaim that their people are their “greatest asset”?

Why are companies so bad at treating their employees like people? The answer is deceptively simple: Control.

Traditional organisational models are built for maximum control. They are typified by top-heavy hierarchies that lead to stifling management and bureaucracy. The result? Conformity. Rigidity. Apathy. And culture-killing politicking.

For globally-recognised management thought leader, author and long-serving faculty member of the London School of Business, Professor Gary Hamel, “our organizations were designed to be inhuman”. Bureaucracy, Hamel says, makes for organisations that are inert and “emotional dead zones”.³

Even in organisations trying to flatten their structure and reduce management authority, without a fundamental shift in organisational consciousness – towards a fully, human-centred organisational model, internalised controls and negative peer pressure prevail.

There's still another consequence associated with the control-driven organisation – a lack of employee ownership and accountability.

As if being bound by rules and bureaucracy-laden processes wasn't enough, employees are seldom consulted in the development of the engagement strategy. Lacking a sense of inclusivity and involvement, employees externalise engagement and come to view it as “management's problem”.

Few organisations are aware of how they actually reinforce this externalisation. Look at any employee survey and you're bound to come across questions like, ‘Are you given opportunities to learn and grow?’ and ‘Does your manager encourage your career development?’

What of self-responsibility, and the onus on the employee to advance his or her own learning and development?

End notes:

1 Maritz Motivation Solutions Culture Next® Employee Engagement and Benchmark Study (2017)

2 Gallup, How to Tackle U.S. Employees' Stagnating Engagement, State of the American Workplace report (2013)

3 Gary Hamel & Michele Zanini, Busting Bureaucracy, www.garyhamel.com (2019)

And what of self-direction, and an employee's ability to steer and shape his or her own career path?

Unconsciously, organisations may be contributing to a mindset of increasing passivity among employees. Passivity that can easily lead to apathy and worse ... a sense of entitlement.

We need to realise that in the workplace of today, both employees and employers have agency, and as such they share an equal responsibility: to create a work environment that unleashes human potential and maximises human contribution.

ENGAGEMENT IS A RELATIONSHIP

The employer/employee relationship is evolving.

Traditionally, the balance of power in organisations has weighed in favour of employers, but increasingly power is shifting.

The extent of this shift is best demonstrated in the multi-billion dollar online employment market. One only has to visit company review sites, such as Glassdoor, Comparably and Vault to see the influence – and power – employees exert through their opinions.

Employees' expectations are evolving too.

Today's employees want more humanity from the organisations they choose to work for, and to whom they offer their loyalty. There is a growing call among employees for organisations to do more and be more: more equitable, more ethical, more sustainable.

And employers are listening. As organisations seek out new ways to create and share value, they are identifying a higher and more authentic purpose, one that serves a wider ecosystem and engages a broader range of stakeholders.

This is, of course, the concept of the social enterprise, defined by Deloitte Insights as: '... an organization whose mission combines revenue growth and profitmaking with the need to respect and support its environment and stakeholder network. This includes listening to, investing in, and actively managing the trends that are shaping today's world. It is an organization that shoulders its responsibility to be a good citizen (both inside and outside the organisation), serving as a role model for its peers and promoting a high degree of collaboration at every level of the organisation.'⁴

Endorsing the rise of this higher-purpose, socially-oriented enterprise is a corporate governance statement released by the Business Roundtable in 2019. Signed by 181 global CEOs, it states that serving shareholders can no longer be the primary purpose of a corporation. Instead, it needs to be about serving society, through innovation, commitment to a healthy environment and economic opportunity for all.⁵

Within organisations, the changing structure of power and influence is becoming apparent at an operational level, with digitisation leading to the democratisation of information and communication.

Today, employees are able to 'live chat' with managers and colleagues anytime, anywhere.

They can also conduct peer-to-peer performance reviews and recognition, and access and share knowledge, 24/7.

Increasingly, employers are realising the extent to which they rely on the knowledge of their employees – those at the frontline, gathering insights about customers, as well as those behind

End notes:

4 Deloitte, 2020 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report, The social enterprise at work: Paradox as a path forward.

5 Business Roundtable – Corporate Governance (2019) <https://www.businessroundtable.org/business-roundtable-redefines-the-purpose-of-a-corporation-to-promote-an-economy-that-serves-all-americans>

the scenes, whose in-depth technical knowledge or creative, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are augmenting intelligent technologies, such as AI, machine learning and robotics.

Underlying the evolving employer / employee dynamic is an emergent principle of reciprocity. By mutual understanding, employers and employees accept that they share a relationship – one entered into voluntarily and with the potential to benefit both parties.

Equally, employers and employees acknowledge that they share a responsibility – of sustainable value creation that extends beyond their relationship – in the communities in which they operate, and in the global community, as a corporate citizen contributing towards a better future for all.

ENGAGEMENT IS A CHOICE

What it means to enable and empower employees

More than a decade has passed since the publication of Dan H. Pink's groundbreaking book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, in which he argues that human motivation is largely intrinsic, and that it encompasses three key aspects: autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Yet, employees' experience of work is still disempowering, lacking meaning and autonomy. As much as one-third of employees in the UK are fearful at work in some way, most feel that they have no say over the decisions influencing their working life.⁶

And in another study, nearly 20% of employees have been exposed to a hostile or threatening work environment.⁷

How do we eliminate workplace fear and anxiety? How do we restore dignity, and afford employees real and lasting autonomy?

The answer seems obvious: Enable and empower them.

Only, it's not quite as simple as that. Systemic change never is. But it starts with awareness.

When leaders can see clearly that their organisational structure and / or culture may be stifling, it marks the first step towards conscious, human-centred change.

From gaining awareness, leadership can take action to relinquish such tight control over employees, and give them the mandate to exercise decision-making authority about their work in independent and self-directed ways.

Importantly, self-direction should be developed within a behavioural framework that supports it. A framework in which employees are clear about what is expected of them; in which they receive ongoing feedback; in which they have the right resources and tools to perform their work; and in which they are fairly rewarded for their efforts.

When leaders make a conscious and deliberate decision to empower employees, the effects are immediate, and inspiring. In a meta-analysis of over a hundred studies of leaders empowering employees, employees were found to be more committed to organisational goals, and demonstrated initiative and creativity to achieve them.⁸

The research also revealed that employees were more trusting of empowering leaders, and as a result, were more likely to put in effort and take on more risks.

End notes:

6 Gallie D, Felstead A, Green F and Inanc H (2012) Fear at Work in Britain: First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey, 2012: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.
7 Rand Corporation, Harvard Medical School, University of California study (2015)

Working Conditions in the United States: Results of the 2015 American Working Conditions Survey, Mullen K, Powell D, Wenger J, von Wachter T.
8 A. Lee, S Willis, A Wei Tian, Empowering leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, mediation, and moderation (2017)

For many leaders, especially those who cling to the idea that freedom and control are zero-sum, empowering employees is simply too big an ask. But given the right guidelines, and equipped with the necessary tools and training, autonomy – both in individuals and teams – leads to substantial organisational gains; creativity, productivity and innovation not least among them.

At an individual level, when employees have a say in, and help set the conditions for working at their best, they feel more confident, more committed, and more competent in their abilities.

Engagement is a choice. When given greater autonomy in their work, employees choose, not only to engage, but to make a difference.

ENGAGEMENT IS A CO-CREATED REALITY

Developing awareness

By its most simple definition, an organisation is an assembly of people working together to achieve common goals. An organisation provides a means of using individual strengths within a group to achieve more than can be accomplished by the efforts of group members working individually.

So, it stands to reason that when a particular skill or competency is developed in individuals, there is a corresponding competency-building and strengthening of the whole.

Self-awareness is considered a key competency of leadership and, we believe, when practiced at scale, contributes to conscious engagement.

Research suggests that self-awareness builds our capacity to see through our own biases and blind spots. When we see ourselves more clearly, we make better decisions, build stronger relationships, and communicate more effectively.

From self-awareness comes a 'present-focused consciousness'.⁹ For Dr. Otto Scharmer, co-founder of the Presencing Institute and senior lecturer at the MIT Management Sloan School, presencing links people with their "highest future possibility" and is a practical method for producing "a common capacity for acting from full presence in the now",¹⁰ towards "a state of co-sensing and co-shaping the emerging future".¹¹

In an atmosphere of conscious engagement, with openness and non-judgement, individuals can acknowledge insecurities and shortcomings rather than unconsciously acting them out. As a result, people spend less energy defending their personal value, and more energy creating shared value.

If we accept that engagement is a co-created reality, individually and in combination, employees, managers and leaders have the power to create and foster the optimum conditions for engagement.

By carrying out what Scharmer refers to as "a certain inner work"¹²

- by training in self-awareness and becoming more fully present
- individuals and organisations lay the pathway to fuller, and more conscious engagement.

End notes:

9 Patrick K. Hyland, R. Andrew Lee and Maura J. Mills, *Mindfulness at Work: A New Approach to Improving Individual and Organizational Performance* (2015)
10 Interview with Dr. Claus Otto Scharmer by Werner A. Leeb, *Presencing – A Social Technology of Freedom*, Trigon Themen (2002)

11 C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U, Second Edition: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (2016)

12 Interview with Dr. Claus Otto Scharmer by Werner A. Leeb, *Presencing – A Social Technology of Freedom*, Trigon Themen (2002)

Developing trust

There is compelling research demonstrating the link between trust and organisational performance. Compared with people at low trust companies, employees at high-trust companies report:

- 106% more energy at work
- 50% higher productivity
- 76% more engagement
- 13% fewer sick days
- 74 % less stress
- 40% less burnout
- 40% more satisfaction with their lives¹³

It's not that CEOs don't recognise the importance of trust in building high performing organisations. 55% of CEOs think that a lack of trust is a threat to their organisation's growth.¹⁴

But creating a culture of trust is not an easy task. Foremost, it requires a fundamental shift in perspective among leaders.

Traditionally, management literature focusses on the personal habits and traits of effective leadership: confidence, charisma, commitment ... the list goes on.

Emergent leadership literature has a different, and rather more radical focus. It calls for leaders to 'get themselves out of the way' and empower the people around them.

In their ground-breaking book, *Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader's Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You*, co-authors Frances X. Frei, who is the UPS Foundation Professor of Service Management and the Senior Associate Dean for Executive Education at Harvard Business School, and Anne Morriss, who is the Chief Knowledge Officer at the Concire Leadership Institute, argue that the role of leadership is "to create the conditions for people to fully realise their own capacity and power". They go on to identify three core drivers of trust; namely, authenticity, logic, and empathy.

Trust stems from authenticity

Authenticity asks that people present themselves as themselves – limitations and shortcomings included. In place of false self-projections, people are encouraged to see themselves, and others, as works-in-progress.

And, instead of holding on to a rigid sense of self, people are encouraged to adopt a more fluid approach to identity formation. Doing so, helps people to be more adaptive and prime for learning and growth. Authenticity, it turns out, is less about being one and the same person, fixed in time and place. It's about being a changing person, and stretching the limits of self-knowledge and awareness towards gaining a greater, and more realistic, realisation of self.

Trust is built on logic

A high-functioning organisation is borne of a clearly articulated strategy, a logical plan of execution, and people who understand, and who play their part, in implementing the plan. But when cracks appear in organisational efficiency; when leadership's decision-making seems lop-sided or non-sensical; and when strategy keeps changing or losing focus, trust breaks down. Co-authors, Frei and Morriss are right when they say that logic is a key aspect of trust. When people lose faith in leaders' judgement, they withdraw their trust, and they disengage.

There's truth in the adage that great companies think their way to success. Organisations that pay attention to their internal logic – that encourage people to ask questions, gather evidence, and present coherent points of view – produce better thinkers. Not surprisingly, intelligent organisations also produce better results.

End notes:

¹³ Paul. J. Zak, *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performance Companies* (AMACOM, 2017)
¹⁴ PwC, *19th Annual Global CEO Survey: Redefining business success in a changing world* (2016)

Trust is nurtured by empathy

Much has been written of empathy as a future-proofing skill for leaders and employees, alike. In a recent survey of 150 CEOs, over 80% recognised empathy as key to success.¹⁵

The emphasis on emotional intelligence, and the development of the attributes associated with it, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and empathy comes from extensive research into the contagious nature of emotions in the workplace. Also, of the link between employees' emotional states and job performance.

Empathy – the ability to perceive other people's emotions (and to recognise our own emotions) – enables us to connect with others more authentically, and to form more trusting relationships, which in turn leads to enhanced team and group performance.

Neuroeconomics professor at Claremont Graduate University and author of the book, *The Neuroscience of Trust*, Paul J. Zak has conducted extensive research into the workings of trust in the workplace.

Zak sets out several ways to create a culture of trust: giving people greater control over their work; sharing information and resources; providing challenging, yet achievable goals; enabling professional and personal development at work; and showing vulnerability.

But according to Zak, of all the ways to build trust, recognition has the largest effect. The reason is simple: recognition gives rise to gratitude. And gratitude, research shows, is the 'social glue' that fosters and fortifies human relationships. Borne of authentic, relevant and timely recognition, gratitude improves culture and engagement.¹⁶

Trust and conscious engagement

Few would disagree that trust leads to higher engagement. But trust, we believe, is more than just a condition for engagement. Trust is the cornerstone of conscious engagement, by which we mean that it marks the difference between institutionalised engagement, and truly human-centred engagement.

Trust, we know, is emotionally-based – we feel trust towards others. What's more, research shows that trust is reciprocal – when we feel trusted, we become more trusting of others.¹⁷

To trust is human. It cannot be replicated in any system or process.

Where employee engagement looks to reengineer the external conditions of engagement, and to systematise them, conscious engagement reaches more deeply; into the human experience of engagement – how individuals engage with, and respond to, their work environment; and how, as a collective, organisations skillfully manage their energy for maximum human contribution.

As an evolving construct, conscious engagement can be defined as a state in which employees have self-awareness and empathy; in which they are enthusiastic, alert and focused on their work, and in which, collectively, the organisation's capacity for reflection and reason leads to more principled and ethical decision-making, while its energy and vitality ensure productive, life-affirming results.

End notes:

¹⁵ The Businessolver® State of Workplace Empathy Study, (2020)

¹⁶ S. Allen, *The Science of Gratitude* (2018), Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley

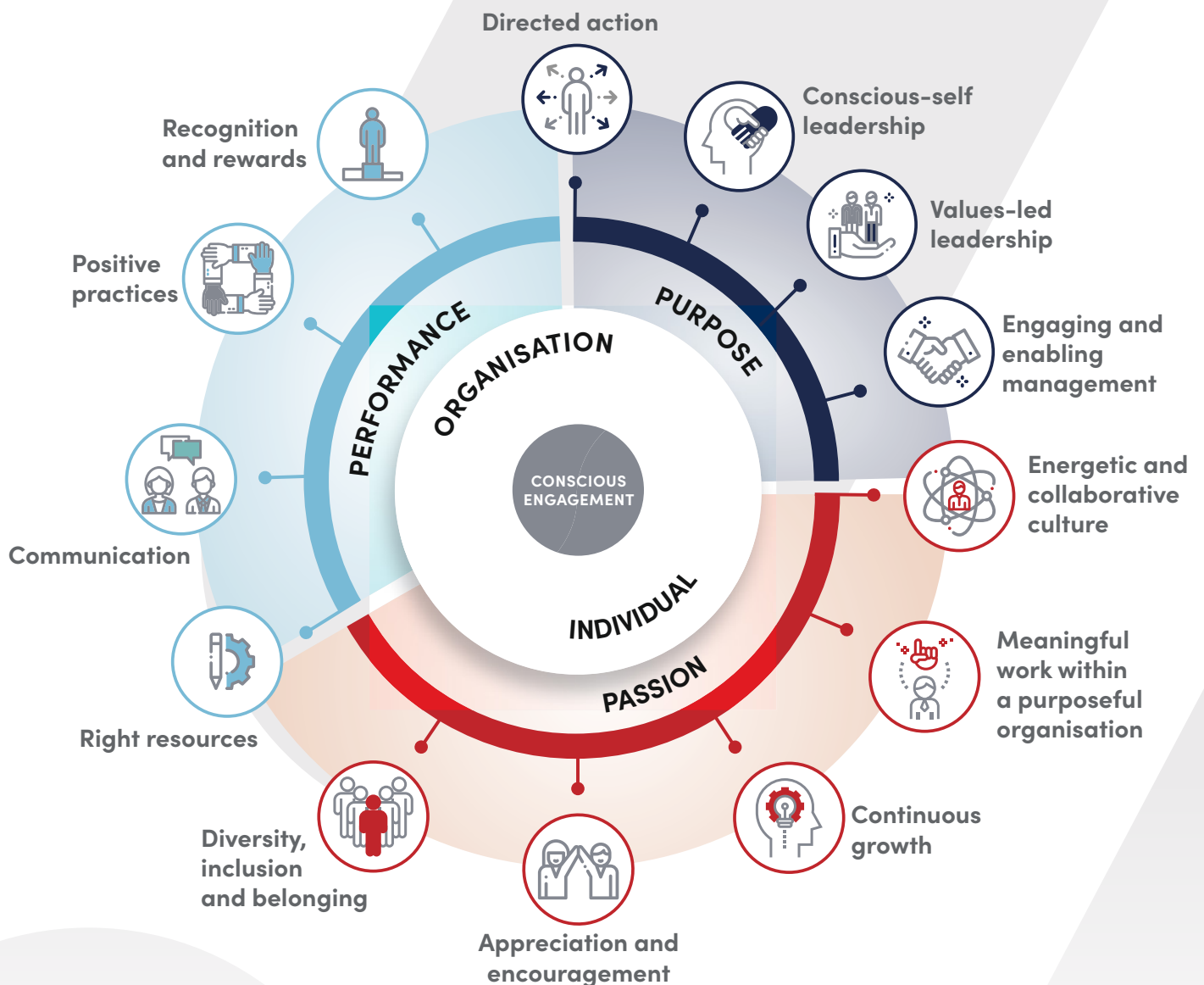
¹⁷ Paul. J. Zak, *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performance Companies* (AMACOM, 2017)

THE PATH TO CONSCIOUS ENGAGEMENT

From surviving to thriving: The conscious engagement model[©]

Based on the thinking that employees exist simultaneously as individuals ('I') and within a collective ('we'), we have developed the conscious engagement model[©] to bring these two distinct, yet mutualistic worlds together in a dynamic symbiosis.

The model calls for both individuals and organisations to engage across 13 dimensions of conscious engagement, towards an outcome-based experience of purpose, passion and performance.



13 dimensions of conscious engagement



1. Directed action

In the consciously engaged organisation, individual roles are linked with the organisation's strategy. People are helped to see how their roles matter, and how their contributions are valued.

Secure in the knowledge that they are valued, individuals exercise personal accountability, which leads to a sense of collective responsibility and comradery. People choose to connect, collaborate and unite.

As such, they are happy to move in the same direction towards the achievement of the organisation's strategic goals and objectives.



2. Conscious self-leadership

Conscious leadership is as much about self-leadership as it is about leading others, which is why it is sanctioned as a practice for all.

To advance personal accountability, individuals are encouraged to develop an open mind, and to question their own beliefs and biases. Active listening and empathy are promoted, as is the practice of becoming more fully conscious and present in the now. Within an environment of authenticity and conscious awareness, trust grows.



3. Values-led leadership

Stemming from a deep sense of organisational purpose, values-driven leaders demonstrate the highest aspects of humanity. They have self-control, they practice empathy, and they instill trust. Through their example, they encourage others to align their personal values with those of the organisation. Values-driven leaders are catalysts for positive action.



4. Engaging and enabling management

Managers provide guidance and support, enabling rather than directing employees' performance. This empowering approach gives people the confidence to be their authentic selves at work – to speak their truth, to listen compassionately and attentively, and to grow in the knowledge that their contributions are valuable, and that they are valued as individuals.

Conscious leadership is as much about self-leadership as it is about leading others.



5. Energetic and collaborative culture

The conscious organisation is a hive of organised activity. A robust information and communication infrastructure facilitates the exchange of information and ideas.

Employees find their work interesting and challenging – it doesn't overwhelm or exhaust. Employees are given the go-ahead to innovate and experiment. So too, to make time for creative play, and rest and recovery.

Employees are fuelled by curiosity and creativity. Actions that cause negative energy, such as gossip, politicking and backstabbing, are recognised and dealt with, positively. Direct and skillful communication is used to surface concerns, and to provide constructive criticism. Always, the emphasis is on arriving at mutual understanding and shared solutions.



6. Meaningful work within a purposeful organisation

Conscious organisations have a clearly stated purpose, one enlivened by conversations among employees about its relevance and realisation. The organisation's purpose inspires employees to make a difference, and to see how their individual efforts impact organisational outcomes. Above all, employees support the organisation's purpose for the way it serves the sustainability agenda, and the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit.



7. Continuous growth

The conscious organisation creates an environment in which employees see the learning potential in every circumstance, and in every person – even when they find them challenging. Every action, project and plan presents an opportunity to develop new competencies and skills.

Also, while employees are encouraged to develop their own pathways to personal mastery, the emphasis is on how individual mastery can help build and bolster the team.

A NEW BENCHMARK FOR ENGAGEMENT: THE CONSCIOUS ENGAGEMENT SURVEY[®]

Along with our conscious engagement model[®], we have developed the conscious engagement survey[®], providing our clients with a benchmark to help map their course towards conscious engagement. The conscious engagement survey[®] comprises a four-tier structure:



THE NEXT STEPS

In developing our conscious engagement model and survey[®], we have looked at the experience of conscious engagement from the point of view of the employee as an individual, and as part of a collective: the organisation.

We have also examined the variable dimensions of conscious engagement. Working in synergy, these dimensions constitute a holistic, human-centred experience of conscious engagement. When put into practice, they become drivers of purpose, passion and performance, transforming organisations into places where people and business thrive.

We look forward to helping your organisation. Our consulting team of researchers, analysts and practical strategists is committed to helping you seize the opportunity of conscious engagement. Using our unique, systems-based design framework, we build, execute and manage engagement solutions in a co-created process that delivers transformational results.

THE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS GROUP CONTRIBUTORS



*Dr Preeya Daya, PhD
Academic & Executive
Director*

Dr. Preeya Daya is an international consultant with extensive experience in inclusive systems, human resource management, and organisational behaviour. She brings a particular sensitivity to the relationship between organisational systems and people's lived experience. She works as a senior and associate academic for four South African business schools. Dr. Daya leads AAGroup's thought leadership team.



*Dane Amyot, BCom
Director of Product*

In his role as DIP, Dane Amyot is a leading thinker and adviser on innovation-led growth. He is the group's foremost expert on new-product development and new business model creation. Dane led the team that created bountiXP, a cloud-based platform that provides a 360-degree, employee-centric experience of recognition and engagement. He also spearheaded the project to design South Africa's best-practice employee recognition and engagement program guide. Today, he is regarded as a thought leader in the space.



*Ron Schiff, CA
Executive Consultant*

Following a successful career in the music and entertainment industry, as well as in corporate finance in London, the Seychelles and South Africa, Ron Schiff joined AAGroup in 2005 as a business analyst and management consultant. He is the founder and CEO of organisational survey management platform, eValue. As part of AAGroup's thought leadership team, his research focuses on the elements for creating and harnessing employee engagement.



*Felicity Hinton, BA
Communications
Strategist, Humanist*

Felicity Hinton bridges the worlds of business and creativity to shape strategies that motivate and engage employees, while delivering business results. She is a certified organisational change manager (UCT), has a bachelor's degree in English (Wits), and has won several awards for her business writing, including a Silver Quill.

AAGroup and bountiXP

bountiXP is an associate company of AAGroup. Its cloud-based employee recognition and engagement platform represents over 40 years of thought leadership in employee motivation and engagement. It was built with the intention of providing business with a comprehensive recognition and engagement solution that delivers improved business results.

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program points issued

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We specialise in end-to-end engagement solutions using a holistic approach that connects employees, sales and channel partners, and customers.

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