



ENGAGE

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The Future of Colleague Engagement



With only 10% of employees engaged at work, the need for innovative approaches to colleague engagement has never been more urgent - a challenge recognised by 87% of businesses across the Western hemisphere. It's clear ways of thinking about engagement need to change.

To explore this, Engage brought together Northern business and HR leaders from a variety of industries for a roundtable on “The Future of Workplace Engagement”, chaired by Michael Taylor, Editor at TheBusinessDesk.com.

The discussion focused on strategies for employee engagement and retention, including the importance of flexible work arrangements, trust in employees, and mental health support. Participants brought their unique expertise on cultivating thriving colleague communities, and leaders from a range of sectors learned from one another's strategies and experiences.



Where should we work?

For some businesses, like law firms Weightmans and Fieldfisher, working from home and hybrid working were normal before COVID. However, the previous culture of workplace engagement has been lost because of the pandemic. As Ian MacArthur, Director at the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter said, *“the solution [to engagement] five years ago might not work now”*.

Nadine Watson, senior lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of Salford, shared that current research suggests forcing colleagues back to the office is detrimental to both engagement and retention. She noted that the perception that people need to be physically present to be engaged is now *“not the case at all”*, and although some colleagues are keen to return to office working, others prefer to work from home.

Interestingly, several of the business leaders shared that some people tend to work best in the office, and younger or newer staff find in-person work more valuable for learning, collaboration, and trust building. Kate Wood, People and Culture Consultant at AMS Accountants Group detailed that AMS also uses “anchor days”, time focused specifically on collaboration whereby all colleagues are in the office together.

The Engage perspective:

Tech provides businesses with instant access to their people at their fingertips, no matter where they are in the world. When businesses prioritise colleague engagement, they can establish a collaborative culture within their office and remote teams. Hybrid working, or what we call a “phygital” approach, can provide businesses with the best of both worlds: it allows your people to be physically together, while also **embracing the latest technologies that stimulate engagement.**



Hand-in-hand:

Digital and in-person engagement



We heard from several business leaders about the strategies they've used to boost colleague engagement and retention. Chris Davis, CEO of MoneyPlus Group, detailed the extensive employee-centric initiatives the business employs, including psychotherapists who are on hand for free appointments during work time to decompress.

Chris described how this service – now used by 25% of MoneyPlus Group's staff – forms part of his ambition to *"give colleagues something that they value"*. This includes a free-to-use office gym and highly subsidised meals from its kitchen. And these measures have had real benefits: 76% of its people are engaged and happy with their work, and 80% said they believe in their management.

Technology can complement these in-person engagement techniques. These businesses use colleague engagement platforms to organise bookings such as appointments or events, and MoneyPlus uses its intranet to distribute kitchen menus each week. By using technology in this way, organising in-person activities for colleagues becomes a much more efficient process. As Nadine Watson said, *"there are definitely digitally enhanced engagement opportunities, and there needs to be buy-in from organisations [to use them]"*.

The Engage perspective:

Incorporating consumer-grade technology can be easier than you think. You can use your colleague platform to streamline business operations and enhance the **in-person experience for your people**, boosting their productivity and happiness at work. Ultimately, it's an investment in attracting, retaining, and engaging your people at every stage of their journey with you.

The one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work

True engagement involves listening to your people and learning what they want and need, whether in-person or digitally. Many of the businesses at the roundtable, including Hall Brown Family Law, Weightmans, and PushON, use pulse surveys to gather their colleagues' opinions.

Pulse surveys are an engaging way of allowing colleague communities to suggest improvements to their workplace culture; they help colleagues feel heard and give the C-suite a comprehensive view of how their people feel. However, people won't engage with pulse surveys if they feel they're being monitored, highlighting the importance of a workplace culture where colleagues feel they can speak freely and trust one another.

Too often there is a one size fits all approach to engagement, and as David Bowcock, Managing Partner and Head of Corporate at Fieldfisher, noted, flexibility is needed when listening and responding to colleague concerns. This is especially relevant to the modern workplace, where more generations work together than ever before. Adopting a personalised, digital-first approach allows businesses to personalise the communications they have with every colleague, meeting employee needs in a way that works for them.

The Engage perspective:

A customised, technology-first approach is vital to connect with and understand your colleagues. Personalising your offering to your people is essential, both in the office and in your online spaces. By showing that you understand them and their needs and welcoming feedback, your people will be more likely to feel valued and stay within the business.



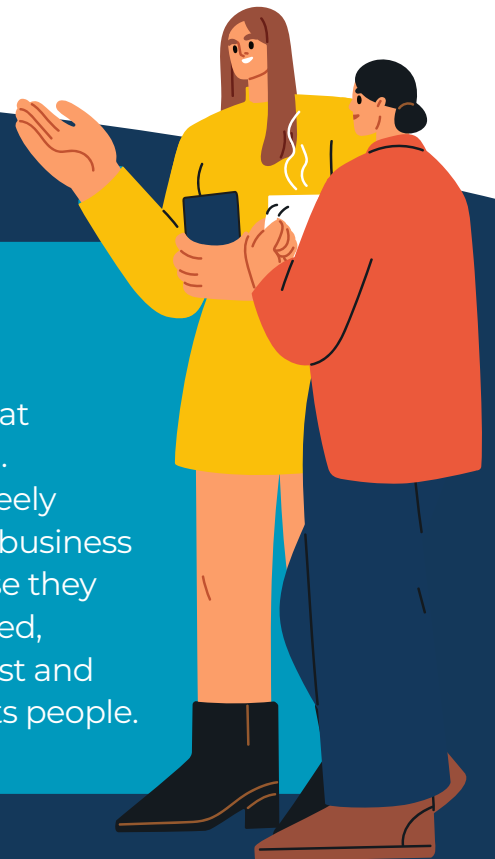
Trust and care above all else

By truly listening to their people, businesses can establish workplaces where colleagues trust and care for one another. Johnathan Massey noted that this is a common factor that cuts across all industries, and both Elizabeth Cameron, an equality, diversity, and inclusion consultant and the D&I Lead at the Chartered Management Institute West Midlands & North West regional board, and Carole Spiller, senior partner of law firm Weightmans underlined that “when people feel trusted, they stay”.

A people-first approach is paramount, and looking after the individuals within a business should be viewed as an investment instead of a cost. Donald Moore, Chair at One+All, explained the practices in his business that exemplify this approach. One+All provides support to its people including offering interest-free loans that teach money management skills, and emergency supplies for those experiencing personal traumas. The business is “*all about trust and care from all sides*”, and this approach has tangible results – the business has retained more than 99% of its colleagues each year for the past ten years.

The Engage perspective:

All colleague engagement begins with trust – trust that opinions and ideas will be heard, respected, and valued. A team that trusts one another can collaborate more freely and productively, providing the best engagement and business results. One+All’s approach has been successful because they understood this – it’s a clear example of how personalised, meaningful engagement, based on a foundation of trust and care, is a win-win for both a business’s operations and its people.



The Engage approach

Engagement in the workplace isn't a sector-specific concern. Businesses need to do more across the board to reap the tangible benefits of engagement. An engaged workforce is 17% more productive, 21% more profitable, and 87% more likely to enjoy higher staff retention.

An unengaged workforce does not perform at their best, and businesses risk losing their best talent. There is clearly a lot at stake, and businesses need to start investing in engaging their people.

By combining an unmatched understanding of engagement in business with consumer-grade technology, our specialists help create thriving communities for colleagues and customers alike. The customisable colleague engagement platform seamlessly integrates all the tools that businesses and their teams rely on. It helps businesses connect with their workforce in a modern and fresh way to fuel positive colleague experiences and happier, more productive people.

If you would like to learn more about our platform and join internationally renowned brands like **Liverpool FC, Itsu, and B&M** in using Engage, speak to one of our engagement experts or visit our website:

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