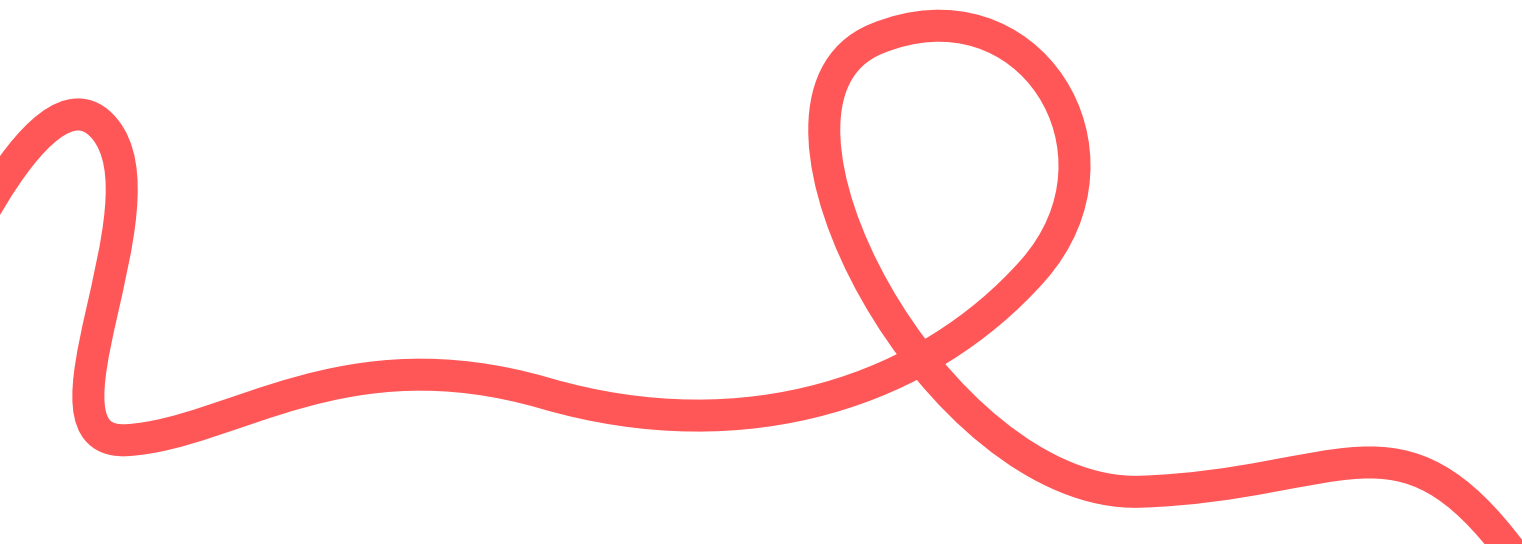# Improve Employee Engagement in 7 Simple Steps

Many organisations struggle to see tangible success from their employee engagement activities. Discover how you can boost staff involvement and reap the benefits of a happier, more productive workforce.

Talkfreely

Contents

Introduction

Employee engagement is a buzzword that means [different things to different people](). For some, it's about innovation and generating new ideas. For others, engagement simply means getting your message out to everyone. From top-level strategy to personal job satisfaction, employee engagement is a thread that runs through your entire organisation.

However you define it, improving employee engagement will help your organisation, and your people, thrive. This guide will help you do just that.

What do we cover in this guide?

As you explore this guide, you'll discover seven best practices to help you improve how your business delivers engaging experiences to your workforce. We'll start with a definition as we understand it, and why you should care. This will give you context for how best practices are deployed. Finally, we explore ways to measure employee engagement, and how the data you gather will help you improve further.

What do we <u>mean</u> by employee engagement?

Defining employee engagement can be a bit of a minefield. We like David MacLeod's definition :

> "(Employee engagement) is about how we create the conditions in which employees offer more of their capability and potential."
>
> **David MacLeod** [1]

This definition is powerful because it puts the onus on the employer to create the right environment, not the employee to do all the legwork.

A focus on the responsibilities of the employer means that they must assume the tasks of promoting, creating, and sustaining engagement, not just instigating it.

[1] MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2009). Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement. [online] Dera.ioe.ac.uk. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1810/1/file52215.pdf [Accessed 23 Oct. 2019].

# Employee engagement can be broken into 8 components

1. Leadership

The role of leadership in employee engagement can't be overstated. Not only must they promote best practice, their actions can have a profound impact on employee engagement.

Employees want meaningful relationships with their line managers and leaders. According to a 2009 McKinsey survey, praise from an immediate manager is considered a more effective motivator than a pay rise.

Business leaders need to drive engagement as part of their company's culture, because the single greatest predictor of employee commitment is their relationships with their managers and praise doesn't cost a thing.

Senior management also needs to drive employee engagement from the top down. A grass-roots engagement scheme that relies on employees to initiate has been proven to be ineffective – successful employee engagement comes from the top, down.
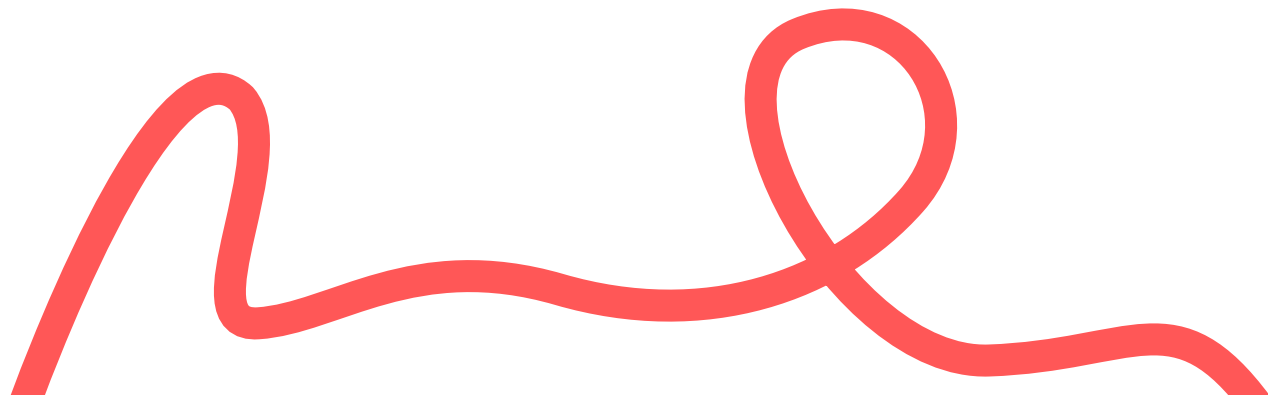
2. Vision and values

Engaged employees understand the big picture and how they fit into it. A clearly communicated vision and statement of core values give employees a flag to rally around.

When staff feel a part of something bigger, they have an emotional stake in the success. This makes it more likely that they will remain committed and driven to deliver results.

3. Corporate social responsibility

Alongside values comes social responsibility. Successful companies tend to be deeply connected with their communities, committed to social outreach, and they encourage employees to participate in worthy causes.

This has a powerful effect on employee engagement, as employees who are proud of the community contributions their organisation makes are twice as engaged as those that aren't.

4. Culture

Company culture is a phrase most commonly associated with employee engagement. That's because culture defines the emotional environment of your workplace. A positive corporate culture means happy employees who want to come to work every morning. On the other hand, a negative culture leads to disenfranchisement and unproductive staff.

5. Communication

How you communicate internal messages is just as important as what you're saying. Effective communication means that everyone in your organisation, even remote workers, are getting the same experience. More so, giving your employees the power to communicate back to you is a vital component of employee engagement. You need to provide staff with the tools they need to engage effectively.

6. Recognition and respect

85% of HR Leaders say an employee recognition program has a positive effect on organisational culture and engagement. A well-defined reward system allows you to effectively differentiate between employee activity and tie benefits directly to the behaviour that matters most to your organisation. What gets recognised gets repeated, so you're able to affect the behaviours of your employees in a way that is beneficial to everyone.

7. Development

The opportunity to develop new skills is important to ambitious employees. Your ability to provide access to training and development will have an impact on how engaged employees are to their work and your business.

8. Accountability and performance

We all like to win. Staff who perform well feel good about themselves —and where they work. People also feel more engaged when they can see the result of their work and how that fits into the bigger picture.

To improve performance, senior management needs to provide honest feedback. Immediate praise reinforces desired behaviours, and timely criticism can help avert future problems.

Why is employee engagement <u>important?</u>

Employee engagement is proven to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity, help retain customers, and increase profits.

How? Because engaged employees are happier, both at work and in their lives. When you're engaged, it infuses everything you do with purpose, energy, and enthusiasm.

And this is more important today than ever. The next-generation workforce expects more from their jobs. They don't just want a place to graft between 9 and 5, they want to have a say in the direction of your business and a stake in the success of your organisation.

Benefits of employee engagement

When you have an environment where employees are engaged by their work, you'll notice:

- A boost to your **profitability**
- Better **retention rates** of your top talent
- An increased sense of **health and well-being**
- And (surprisingly) decreased **healthcare costs**

With the right knowledge, the right tools, and – most importantly – an employee-focused mindset, it can be a powerful way to transform your organisation.

The cost of disengagement

Employee engagement is important because it can affect your bottom line. Disengaged employees cost the economy over £50 billion[2] a year in lost productivity.

Personnel who lack engagement make 100 times more errors[3] than their engaged colleagues and spend less time working; they chat, take more breaks, procrastinate, surf the internet etc.

What's worse, the negativity of disengaged staff rubs off on the people around them, turning potentially engaged employees into non-engaged workers.

43%

of all employees work remotely at least some of the time

Source: Gallup 2018 - The End of the Traditional Manager

[2] CB Benefits. The cost of disengaged employees. [online] Available at: www.cbbenefits.co.uk/just-how-much-are-disengaged-employees-costing-your-business/ [Accessed 23 Oct. 2019].

Challenges to employee engagement include location, devices and more

But, keeping everyone informed and involved is easier said than done. Common barriers include the fact that not every business has...

- A single site
- An entire workforce sitting at a desk with a computer
- An audience of information-hungry, goal-aligned employees
- A board of directors who are bought into the concept of openly communicating

Furthermore, newer barriers are appearing. 43% of all employees now work remotely at least some of the time. Flexible working, changing employee expectations, and new technology are presenting new challenges to internal communications.

Maintaining control of your vision and message is another major challenge for businesses. The "always-on" technology landscape means that information about your business is now available for all your employees to see – before the monthly newsletter is a twinkle in its creator's eye.

But, it's not all bad news, because these challenges also present opportunities. New ways of working and new technology help alleviate traditional problems such as incomplete cascades and the reliance on Line Managers to correctly interpret information.

[3] Catalano, R. (2015). Five ways disengagement threatens your business. [online] HRZone. Available at: https://www.hrzone.com/community-voice/blogs/robcatalano/five-ways-disengagement-threatens-your-business [Accessed 23 Oct. 2019].

7 steps to improving engagement

1. Keep your audience **informed & involved**
2. **Connect** the silos across your organisation
3. **Listen** to your people
4. Create **trust**
5. Be **data-driven**
6. **Focus** on long-term success
7. **Create** brand advocates

1. Keep your audience informed... and involved

Best practice takeaways:

- Start by understanding your **audience** and **audit** the available channels
- Create an internal communications **plan**
- Be prepared to **evolve** your internal communications plan as the working landscape changes
- Investigate new tools that tackle natural barriers and offer an expected **consumer experience**

In order to engage employees, you need to create an internal communications plan to share the strategic direction and company vision. This will help connect Directors with those working at the coalface of your operation.

Directors make decisions on how to run a company daily and employees are the ones who live and breathe the impact of these decisions. Without understanding the what and the why, employees lose their enthusiasm and become disengaged.

Forums and platforms that enable collaboration give management more opportunity to interact with communications and information. This makes the whole process of sharing information more efficient and a two-way experience.

2. Connect the silos across your organisation

Best practice takeaways:

- Choose channels and tools that **facilitate** company-wide collaboration
- Company-wide **alignment** leads to engagement
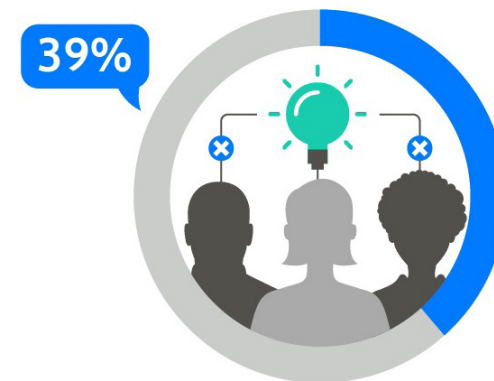- **Champion** employee engagement at the senior-level

Corporate structure aside, the most effective internal communicators have strong relationships with functions throughout the organisation. So often, an "information is power" attitude manifests itself as a reluctance to share and interact. Suddenly silos are popping up all over the place. According to a Queens University study, 39% of employees are feeling the impact of a lack of collaboration.

This becomes more prevalent the larger your organisation becomes. If you open a new office or start franchising out your brand, it becomes harder to maintain business alignment.

The key to effective business alignment is to ensure that everyone knows what the right direction is (the goal) and what their part is in getting there (their role).

Only when your staff see the bigger picture can they align themselves with the goals of your company, and work towards them. When employees feel aligned, it leads to a sense of engagement.

It may sound simple but breaking down barriers can be hard work and needs continual attention. Luckily there are tools and platforms, which can help to facilitate collaboration, and implementing the right ones for your organisation can be a catalyst for cultural change.

39%

of employees surveyed worldwide say people in their organisation don't collaborate enough

Source: Queens University - Communicating in the workplace

To give employee engagement the credibility it deserves, it must be championed at the very top level. Unfortunately, the function rarely has a seat at the high table. However, this doesn't mean the director responsible can't champion the cause and make sure the topic is constantly on the agenda.

An organisation that keeps employee engagement at its heart will create a recipe for success. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy and it starts, as all good culture does, at the top of the business.

3. Listen to your people

Best practice takeaways:

- **Review** feedback mechanisms within the organisation. Are they realistic and engaging? What is the rate of interaction?
- **Question** available channels. Are your employees using alternatives?
- Make it a departmental **objective** to amplify the collective employee

Engagement starts with a feeling of inclusion, which is why letting your employees voice opinions is part of internal communications best practice. It's a great way to check the pulse of what matters at the coal face of your business.

With the popularity of Facebook and Twitter, people expect to be able to engage in a two-way conversation. This presents an interesting challenge for internal communicators, especially given that many organisations haven't adopted this type of channel internally.

The voice of our employees is amplified by our digital society. But only 30% of staff feel like their voices are heard. By becoming a conduit for discourse – in the right forum and on the right topics – you can go a long way towards improving engagement and creating a truly collaborative workplace.

ONLY **3 in 10**

employees strongly agree that their **opinions count at work**

Source: Gallup 2017 - How to Create a Culture of Psychological Safety

Best practice is to create a safe, inclusive environment for people to be heard. The strong personalities will always speak up when asked, but the quieter types also need to be encouraged to participate and contribute.

4. Create trust

Best practice takeaways:

- Equip your Internal Communications team with the **skills** and **knowledge** they need
- Allow the Internal Communications team to operate as **independently** as possible
- Consider stakeholder **management**

The Internal Communications team need to operate from a position of trust to create an environment of effective engagement. To achieve trust from everyone, this department needs to be carefully aligned within your organisation.

Being too closely aligned with one directorate might earn an internal communicator the dubious label of Spin Doctor. On the other hand, being out of touch with the business strategy risks them being considered out of the loop and unreliable.

Trust needs to come from all levels of the organisation

- Leaders need to trust Internal Communications to get things right; to understand when a business can and can't be open and honest.
- Employees need to trust Internal Communications to be an unbiased source of information and a conduit for their feedback.

Achieving trusted advisor status requires more than just communicating effectively. For an Internal Communications team to become trusted, they need to demonstrate experience, a wider business understanding, and the ability to see something from all angles.

They sometimes need to disengage themselves as an employee and try to see things simply as a communicator.

71%
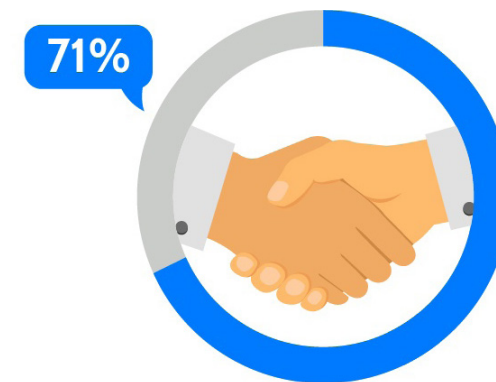
felt that leaders view the IC [internal communications] team as trusted advisors

Source: Gatehouse - State of the Sector 2018

Creating a mechanism that is effective and trustworthy takes maturity and self-respect. Both of which come from being exposed to business decisions, reasoning, and strategy.

Additionally, consider providing stakeholder management training. More so than in other roles, the internal communications team may have to discuss or offer a counter opinion to senior leaders. They need to understand how to do this tactfully and respectfully.

That way, internal communications teams can create effective forums for engagement, based on truth and business strategy.

5. Be data-driven

Best practice takeaways:

- Determine your engagement **deliverables**
- Identify **key messages** for the business-at-large
- Create **reporting** processes

Demonstrating a return on investment, an impact on the bottom line, is a major challenge for something as conceptual as employee engagement. A lack of clear objectives within the organisation creates a grey area that is at risk of being filled with well-intentioned, but ineffective, activity.

Achieving a clear set of actions, tied to results and outcomes, takes discipline. It's critical that these actions revolve around the strategy of the business and contribute, ultimately to the growth of that business.

Traditionally, it's been hard to convince leaders of the value of employee engagement, with the concept seen as a 'nice-to-have'. The fact that 60% of communicators don't measure the effectiveness of their activity demonstrates the low priority internal communications and employee engagement is.

60%
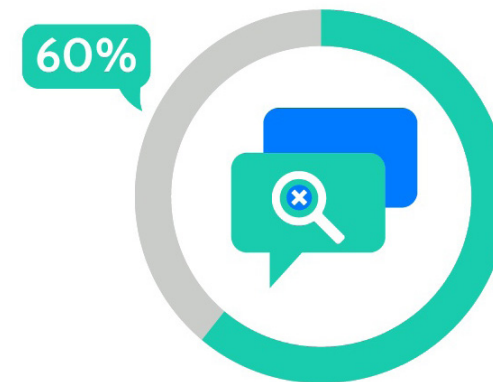
of internal communicators are still not measuring internal communication

Source: Veronika Mazour - How to measure your internal communications' effectiveness?

Employee engagement: what to measure

Determining deliverables is the first step to building a strategic mindset. When it comes to employee engagement deliverables include:

- Feedback
- Recognition
- Happiness
- Relationship with peers
- Relationship with managers
- Personal growth
- Alignment
- Satisfaction
- Wellness
- Ambassadorship

A clear, measurable business strategy should be easy to interpret at all levels of the organisation. Departmental and personal objectives can be derived from it and critical projects or deliverables planned.

6. Focus on long-term success

Best practice takeaways:

- Make sure 'bread-and-butter' processes are **embedded** and **automated**
- Continually **test** and **measure** audience opinion
- Create **reports** about the business value of engagement initiatives

Surveying and measuring employee engagement should never be a one-time event. Once you've launched a new tool or initiative it's essential to get feedback to see if it worked.

You may find that it does, or you may find that it didn't go far enough. Your plan may improve engagement in one department or section but uncover issues in another.

Whether your deliverables are briefings, channel management, or surveys, you should automate processes where possible to help streamline the department.

34%

of internal communications professionals maintain regular dashboards/reports on their activities and their impact

Source: Gatehouse - The definitive survey of the Employee Engagement and Internal Communication landscape 2018

So, in addition to regularly surveying employees, set up a dashboard to track vital success metrics. Compare this data against your survey responses to determine if your changes are contributing to your business goals.

7. Create employee advocates

Best practice takeaways:

- Start simple: look for obvious **advocates** of the brand
- Identify a **channel** to collect stories
- Consider launching an employee advocacy **programme** within your business

Social media blurs the lines between internal and external communication. And brands are increasingly turning to their employees as advocates of their products and services.

Nurturing brand advocates internally gives your messaging an engaging, peer-to-peer channel. So, as well as being a measurement of employee engagement, advocacy can become the catalyst for greater engagement throughout your organisation.

It's been well documented that storytelling is a powerful way of communicating. It affects the human brain differently, making it more memorable. The continual search for content that entertains, engages, and adds value to the buyer journey is a great reason to use storytelling to bring the human touch to a brand.

50%
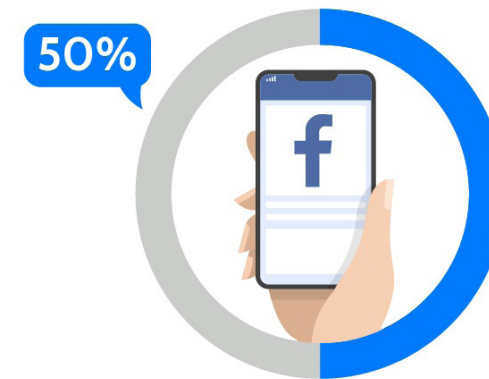
of employees post messages, pictures or videos on social media about their employer

Source: Weber Shandwick - Employee Activism: The next frontier of employee engagement

The Internal Communications team is ideally placed to uncover some of the human angles behind a brand and, in doing so, improve employee engagement by celebrating some of the unsung heroes within your organisation.

Getting involved in advocacy and brand building creates another angle to the internal narrative of a business and creates content that resonates with staff. Those stories are then available to the wider external audience and provides share-worthy material.

This approach creates a rich tapestry of communication with the organisation. This helps build strong internal relationships, breaks down silos, and encourages more meaningful interaction.

Ways to <u>measure</u> employee engagement

There are two ways to measure employee engagement. The first to reach out with surveys and one-to-one meetings with employees (1-2-1s). Using the data collected, you can apply values to your deliverables and turn something as nebulous as sentiment into a mathematic variable.

Surveys

Short, frequent surveys are a fast way to get the pulse on the vibe in your organisation. The trick is to keep it simple. Ask anywhere from 5-10 questions about how people are feeling at work and what (if anything) they would change.

Completion rates are important when it comes to employee surveys. The rate will vary by the size of your business, as seen below:

Company Size	Expected Survey Participation Rate
<50	80-90%
500+	70-80%
1,000+	65-80%

1-2-1s

A way to get 100% participation is to have 1-2-1s with every member of staff. This approach has many advantages but can take more time.

The key advantage of 1-2-1s is collecting feedback in person. Because it's a private, safe conversation, you can get qualitative detail about each issue that's brought up.

But, having regularly scheduled, hour-long meetings with each member of your team can quickly become more costly than its worth for enterprise operations.

The holistic approach

Alternatively, you could choose a holistic approach to measuring employee engagement. Instead of measuring satisfaction and happiness, a holistic approach considers the outcomes that employee engagement produces. These might include productive output, fewer sick days, more shares on business social media posts.

An effective, cloud-based employee network provides both the tools and the environment for employee engagement to benefit your entire organisation. It allows your employees to be effective and more successful. This approach turns employee engagement from a "touchy-feely" HR issue, into a channel tied to specific business outcomes.

Talkfreely: what you need to know

Our mission at Talkfreely is to enable every employee to maximise their individual contribution. We want to help employers unlock the true, often hidden, potential of a disengaged and disconnected workforce.

And since 2005, we've been turning all of that into reality: with our employee communication mobile app. Today, we work with a diverse range of national and international companies, to revolutionise their internal communications and bring their people closer together.

LEARN MORE