

HR2025: The Future of Employee Engagement

Christina Evans



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Engaged With What? Employee Engagement Viewed
Through a Different Lens



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Engaged With What? Employee Engagement Viewed Through a Different Lens
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Contents

	List of Tables	5
	About the author	6
1	Introduction	7
2	Re-tracing the roots of employee engagement	11
3	Vignettes on employee engagement: organizational, teams and work	20
4	Job design and employee engagement – handing back control	31
5	The future of job design and employee engagement	41
6	References	49



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List of Tables

2.1 Levels of employee engagement

4.1 Managing for sustainable employee engagement

5.1 Job crafting – learning from independent practitioners

5.2 Job crafting – some potential fears/tensions for line managers

About the author

Dr. Christina Evans works in the Business School, at the University of Roehampton London, where she teaches and researches in human resource management. Christina's research interests fall into two key areas. She has strong interest in individual career development and the strategies that individuals adopt to build and maintain a successful 'subjective career'. This work on job crafting and engagement fits firmly with this particular research interest. Her other research interest is in organizational approaches aimed at building a diverse workforce. She has research and published several reports and papers on the experiences of women in the Information Technology, Electronics and Computing. Prior to developing a career in academia, Christina spent some time working as a Research Associate at Roffey Park Institute. She began her career working in the Information Technology department at Marks and Spencer.

1 Introduction

Optimization of human capital is virtually every company's goal, with the prize being a level of discretionary effort that results in loyal customers (Gonring 2008: 34).

Employee engagement has become a hot management topic in the last ten to fifteen years, particularly in the knowledge and service economy where organizational performance is positioned as contingent on levels of employee engagement. Engaged employees, who willingly perform beyond what is set out in their job description, are perceived as the new source of competitive advantage. This is particularly the case in the high-contact service sector where employee behaviour can have a critical effect on customer behaviour (e.g. patronage and brand loyalty), as overall on brand reputation. Given the battered brand reputation of some financial services firms, post the recent financial crisis, employee engagement has moved up the managerial agenda, as firms try to re-build trust amongst employees and customers. The relationship between these different stakeholder groups though is interdependent. Why would an employee act as an advocate for the organization if s/he did feel a sense of affiliation and commitment to the organization?

During the 2008/2009 recession employee engagement was seen by many organizations as a key ingredient in the battle for survival. It is not surprising then that this was accompanied by heightened organizational interest and initiatives, aimed at building an engaged workforce. In this time period the employee engagement conference market has continued to thrive, as has the number of features on this topic in managerial/practitioner-focused magazines; each fuelling the interest in identifying the perfect recipe to turn engagement around. Of course there is no perfect recipe. Those who subscribe to a strategic HRM philosophy will be familiar with debates critiquing the notion of universalism. Given the complexities of the business world, and the strategic aims of a specific organization, a contingency approach is advocated, thus reflecting the varying factors (contingencies) affecting the employee relationship in different contexts (Boxall and Purcell 2003). Recent research by McClean and Collins (2011) on the adoption of high-commitment HRM approaches (similar in nature to engagement approaches) in professional services firms suggests that deployment of such approaches may be contingent on the value that organizations ascribe to different categories of employees (e.g. professionals, semi-professionals and lower-skilled workers). In other words firms are more likely to invest in high-commitment HRM practices for employee groups who they perceive are more closely connected to the services that most contribute to a firm's competitive advantage.

But it is not just in private sector organizations that employee engagement has become a hot topic. The growing interest in managerial practices that fall into the broad category of New Public Management has resulted in a similar interest in employee engagement. Delivering high quality public services, especially in the era of austerity measures, equally requires employees who are willing to go beyond the line of duty. Thus employee engagement initiatives are just as likely to be high on the agenda in public sector organizations e.g. health, local government, education, as they are private sector organizations that are competing in the global service economy.

Within the UK, interest in the concept and practice of employee engagement has evolved into a managerial movement, following the investigation by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke into the state of employee engagement in UK businesses; an investigation that was initiated and supported by the UK government. Since the MacLeod and Clarke report on the state of engagement in the UK, and the launch of the Engage for Success website, the topic of employee engagement has captivated the interest of public and private sector employers, trade unions, practitioners, as well as the academic community. To-date thousands of individuals from hundreds of organizations have contributed time, expertise and resources, to help bring the aims of this movement to life (www.engageforsuccess.org). A similar interest can be observed in other parts of the globe as interest in the work of the Engage for Success movement has spread to other countries.

As already mentioned employee engagement has become big business; some even refer to it as ‘industry’ (Purcell 2014). A cursory search on Google for employee engagement solutions provides some sense of what this industry entails. The search highlighted a range of consultancy offerings, the cost of which ranged in price from £6,000 [1] to €100 million [2] and millions of conferences, 31,300,000 conference results for 2014 alone. Yet the employee engagement solutions promoted at conferences (and by consultancies more generally) have been criticized for their lack of conceptual clarity (Simpson 2009; Guest 2014). Many of the concepts that underpin current models employee engagement are not new. They are drawn from existing concepts from the fields of psychology and organizational studies, for example employee motivation and satisfaction, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, employee involvement and participation, organizational and job design, as well as social exchange theory. Denise Rousseau (1985: 11) suggests that a fundamental issue with a number of concepts that gain managerial attention relates to difficulties with underpinning composition models, defined as ‘...the functional relationships between variables at different levels presumed to be functionally similar’; composition models, Rousseau points out, specifies the degree of isomorphism (e.g. similarity) between different levels within a single organization.

Whilst consultancies are optimistic and upbeat about employee engagement solutions, those in the academic community remain sceptical. Some suggest that the concept of employee engagement is no more than the latest offering in a series of management fads, or fashions (Parry and Urwin 2011; Guest 2014). As with other management fashions, there are concerns that the current hype is simple 'old wine in new bottles, since much of the solutions offered are largely repackaged constructs, including job satisfaction, employee involvement and empowerment (Fearon *et al.* 2013). Yet as is often the case with management fashions, the spotlight on a specific aspect of management practice (or activity) is often fuelled by the work of consultancies who promote 'best practice' solutions to complex issue for which there is invariably no simple solution. Slavishly following best practice offerings, without reflecting on the specific challenges that the business is experiencing, could result in HR feeling the brunt of the 'law of unintended consequences'.

Given the image of the ideal worker in the service economy – someone who is cognitively and emotionally involved and willing to go the extra mile – then it is not surprising that organizations want a piece of the employee engagement solutions cake. Interest in the role of emotions in the workplace and how these affect individual performance is not new. Emotions at work has become a growing area of research interest since Arlie Hochschild's (1985) seminal book '*The Managed Heart*', which is based Hochschild's research into the lives of cabin crew attendants and that role that emotional attachment (or exploitation) played in how cabin crew attendants perform their work.

More recent work into the phenomenon of emotions in the workplace surfaces to me a clear link with employee engagement:

Effective management in contemporary workplaces, notably in the service sector, places a high premium on the employee's ability to satisfy the customer by drawing on a wide range of emotional and aesthetic resources. Unlike Henry Ford's workers who were just expected to follow orders and work fast, today's service sector employees are expected, in addition, to physical labour, to perform intellectual...emotional...and even aesthetic labour (Sinha and Gabriel 2013: 89).

and as Bolton and Boyd (2003: 291) comment:

'Philanthropic' emotion management displays how an organizational actor may not only follow organizational prescription but may decide to give that 'little extra' during a social exchange in the workplace.

Increased discretionary effort (typically referred to as going the extra mile) is one of the expected outcomes of engagement initiatives. But it is the words ‘may decide to give that little extra’ in the quote above that should surface a question in practitioners’ minds about the contexts in which individuals are more, or less, likely to exercise discretionary effort. Numerous studies point to the critical role of an employee’s immediate manager in enabling employee engagement, but Bolton and Boyd (2003: 303) offer another perspective on this:

The absence of a ‘manager’ on board highlights the novelty of the aircraft working environment where crews (who regard themselves totally separate from management), are able to interpret, manipulate and implement the managerially-prescribed rules of engagement.

Whether Bolton and Boyd are correct in their observation that the managerial influence on engagement is diminished in some contexts, given the nature of individuals’ work, it does provide further food for thought on the contextual antecedents of employee engagement.

HR professionals regularly come under scrutiny with respect to demonstrating their ‘value add’. Understandably such pressure can lead to seeking out the quickest solution to organizational issues. Yet professional institutions, such as the CIPD, argue that the next generation of HR professionals need to demonstrate that they are curious individuals, who demonstrate the courage to challenge. It is hoped that this ‘book-ett’ will encourage these behaviours, though stimulating a more reflexive perspective on employee engagement.

Some of the questions that this ‘book-ett’ explores are:

- What are the different ways that employee engagement is conceptualized and why does this matter?
- What is it that organizations, and individuals for that matter, want to engage with – the organization, co-workers, customers, work, or the wider ecology that they are part of?
- Is it helpful to view employee engagement as something that organizations can command and control?
- How can HR professionals avoid falling into the trap of a universalist ‘one size fits all’ approach to engagement?
- What would happen if employee engagement was left to individuals to manage for themselves? What would this look like?
- What is the latest thinking on job design and employee engagement? What are the dynamics of this relationship?
- Assuming that employee engagement is important, what might the engaged workforce of the future look like? What might HR’s role be in enabling and supporting this?

2 Re-tracing the roots of employee engagement

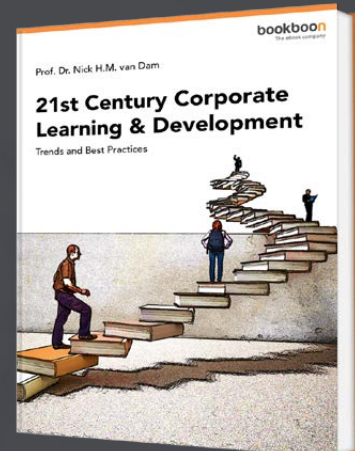
Under the old type of management success depends almost entirely upon getting 'initiative' of the workmen, and it is indeed a rare case in which this initiative is really attained. Under scientific management the 'initiative' of the workmen (that is their hard work, their good-will and their ingenuity) is obtained with absolute uniformity and to a greater extent than is possible under the old system; and in addition improvement on the part of the men, the managers assume new burdens new duties and responsibilities never dreamed off in the past (Taylor 1911: 26–29).

As mentioned in the introduction organizations and consultancies are very upbeat about the concept of employee engagement, seeing engagement as key factor in enhancing organizational performance. The academic community meanwhile is more sceptical, claiming that employee engagement is simply 'old wine in new bottles', thus no more than '...a repacked set of existing constructs including job satisfaction, employee involvement and empowerment' (Fearon *et al.* 2013: 245). Of course there have been similar claims of 'old wine in new bottles' levied against other managerial fads, such as knowledge management and talent management. Should we simply ignore these skeptics, or perhaps take some time to hear them out? There are few reasons why it is worth taking note:

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- Since the economic crisis there has been increasing calls for a greater focus on evidence-based management. As a professional community, the HR profession has often shied away from evidence-based management. Yet increasingly there are aspects of HR's work where it is no longer feasible (or desirable) to ignore the importance of this.
- We can all use the same words (concepts), but perspectives on what this means in practice can differ, and can change over time. The perspective on worker initiative and how to achieve this promoted by Frederick Taylor at the beginning of the twentieth century (see opening quote at the beginning of this chapter) is potentially quite different to how managers think of initiative in the contemporary world of work. However, I am sure that each of you can think of case examples where the perspective on initiative held by existing managers is not dissimilar to that advocated by Taylor.
- Theories and concepts developed in a particular era/context may not be as illuminating when applied to organizational problems arising in a different era. This does not mean that such theories should be discarded, but the limitations should be considered and acknowledged.
- If we adopt an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, then it is important to tease out what knowledge could be extracted from existing theories to perhaps reframe the problem in a slightly different way. An example here of a theory developed in the 1970s, which at the time was very illuminatory, is Levinson's (1978) *Seasons of a Man's Life*. Drawing on life-stage theory, Levinson drew attention to the normative stages of men's career trajectories. A trajectory that was very different to that for women's career experiences. However, changing social demographics, combined with the changing nature of work, means that this theory is now questionable. The notion of an uninterrupted career that involves similar stages (typically referred to as on-time events), is less representative of careers in the contemporary world of work. New theoretical perspectives such as the notion of the boundaryless career (Mirvis and Hall 1994), has become more current. The significance of this point in terms of the topic of employee engagement will become clearer in Chapter 4.

Employee engagement: re-tracing the roots, questioning some assumptions

Whilst there isn't the scope within a book of this size to provide an extensive review of the existing literature on employee engagement, it is important to consider the roots of the concept, and how this has informed different perspectives on the topic. Moreover, it helps tease out key similarities and differences in how employee engagement has been defined and positioned in different genres of literature, for example practitioner-focused versus the scholarly literature. This approach can help surface tensions that could account why employee engagement remains a difficult area for organizations to address.

Something that doesn't appear to get much debate in the practitioner-focused literature though is the distinction between work engagement and organizational engagement. So in what way do these two types of engagement differ? Why is it important for HR to understand the differences?

Work engagement is focused more on individual characteristics and outcomes, whereas organizational engagement invariably is focused more on group interventions, with a specific aim of improving organizational performance. Whilst there is a relationship between these two categories, the HRM practices to support and enable these are likely to vary. Engagement with ones work is very much an individualistic phenomenon. It is not something that HR, or line managers, can command, but it is an individualistic state influenced by a number of factors: personality traits, outlook on work, wellbeing, as well as investment in human capital. Whilst personality traits are considered fairly enduring, outlook on work, or the importance that work plays in individuals' lives is something that is subject to change, as the research on work-life-balance indicates.

In terms of outcomes the main judge, i.e. the person who can answer the question 'How engaged am I?', is the individual him/herself. Of course some individuals could deploy impression management techniques to give the impression that they are perhaps more engaged with their work than they really are. Some examples where this might conceivably be the case include where there is a lack of fit between an individual's knowledge and skills and the scope of the job role, or where an individual finds him/herself in an 'out-of-the box experience'; an experience that still forms an integral part of some organization's talent management process. To turn down an 'out-of-the box experience', may be construed as a lack of organizational engagement. For individuals a disconnect, or suppressed state of work engagement, is likely to have an effect on their overall wellbeing. David Guest (2014) suggests that organizations that subscribe to the resource-based view of the firm should invest in HR policies and processes focused on building and maintaining work engagement. This perspective does of course have implications for line manager selection and capabilities.

In contrast with the academic literature, the practitioner-focused literature is focused more on the notion of organizational engagement. This is perhaps not surprising given the positive messages vis-à-vis organizational performance espoused particularly by consultants. Several consultancies have been influential in shaping HR practices relating to what might be considered engagement as a group, as opposed to an individual, variable. The Gallup Corporation in particular has built a brand reputation for its work on employee engagement, with the Gallup Q12 engagement instrument. This is now used by numerous organizations worldwide. Gallup claim that they their engagement database includes data collected from more than 6.5 million employees, representing more than 815,000 workgroups, in 16 major industries and 70 sub-industries, in 170 countries worldwide. (Gallup 2014). Gallup refer to employee engagement as, employees' positive involvement and satisfaction with work (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002). To achieve a positive state of engagement Gallup advocate managerial interventions consistent with the revival in positive psychology (Csikszentmihaly 1997; Seligman 2011). Viewed from this perspective engagement flows from a focus on identifying and supporting the conditions in which individuals thrive and flourish and where individuals are so pleasurably immersed in their work that they are not aware of how time is passing. Yet the managerial interventions that typically accompany a survey approach to employee engagement operate at the group level. The individual somehow seems to be over looked and is thus left trying to engineer his/her own flow.

We do of course need to be mindful of the dangers of being blinded by positive psychology – given the realities of some individuals working lives e.g. alienation (unable to find work, or work that matches their skills, or aspirations), exploitation (zero-hours, lack of a living wage, the plight of migrant workers (Booth and Pattison 2014; Purcell 2014). Equally we do need to be mindful that many of the solutions proffered in the practitioner-focused literature conceptualizes engagement in a rather narrow way. Solutions tend to focus on enhancing communication and involvement strategies (Gonring 2008; Guest 2014). Whilst communication is an important contextual antecedent (important social exchange mechanism), on its own this is insufficient to build and maintain engagement at the work level.



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Within the scholarly literature, it is Khan (1990) who is attributed with the seminal definition of engagement, drawing attention to related concepts such as motivation ‘...the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s “preferred self” in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence and active full performance (in Guest 2014: 224). If we unpack this definition, then we start to become more aware of the multi-layered influences on the individual state of work engagement, such as the opportunity to be oneself at work, the importance of supportive relationships. Of course what this definition doesn’t address is the relative weighting that an individual might place on these different influencers. Moreover, there is no reference to performance outcomes; something that is a key focus in the practitioner-focused literature. One of the more prominent definitions of engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010) offers a more attitude-oriented definition of the concept, where work engagement is a psychological state that mediates the impact of job and personal resources on organizational outcomes. A definition that is closer to the concept of job crafting, as will be discussed later.

The following definition of employee engagement, taken from research by the CIPD (2012), appears to bridge the concepts of work and organizational engagement:

A combination of a commitment to the organization and its values and a willingness to help out colleagues (organizational citizenship). It goes beyond job satisfaction, and is not simply motivation. Engagement is something the employee has to offer: it cannot be ‘required’ as part of the employment contract (Guest 2014: 148).

Having outlined a number of different definitions and perspectives of employee engagement, some key points can be drawn out:

First, engagement is a complex multi-layered psychological concept, consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that affect an individual’s performance in different ways. The cognitive component, typically relates to the notion of absorption, so how engrossed, or involved at a personal level an individual feels about the work they are doing. As indicated in Table xx, absorption could be gauged through the response to this statement – ‘I focus hard on my work’ – in an engagement survey. Molly Scott Cato (2013) offers a different perspective on how absorption in work arises. In her book *The Bioregional Economy. Land, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Cato refers to the notion of work as ‘...an embodied and embedded process’ (p. 111), supporting this observation with a passage from the work of Sennett (2008), who investigated different forms of craft work, including this observation of the embodied nature of the work of a female glass-blower:

First, she lost awareness of her body making contact with the hot glass and became all-absorbed into the physical material as the end in itself...we are now absorbed in something, no longer self-aware, even of our bodily self. We have become the thing on which we are working (Cato 2013: 111).

How many of us, in the modern workplace, can identify with this type of experience? The emotional component of engagement is multi-faceted, consisting of both positive (e.g. excited, enthusiastic), or negative (lethargic, gloomy) emotions. From an organizational perspective it is positive emotions that are assumed to result in positive behavioural outcomes. But of course as Schaufeli (2014: 31) points out, in conceptualizing engagement as ‘...a unique positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption’, does not address the issue of the consequential outcomes. In other words, although an individual may be absorbed in their work, and thus work hard, if that absorption is not channeled (focused) in the right way, then it may not necessarily align with organizational goals. It could even result in dysfunctional behaviours, for example incivility to colleagues and customers that could have negative outcomes.

Second, as an individual state, there is some debate as to whether engagement is static/enduring state, or more volatile. Some authors suggest that it is an enduring, as opposed to an isolated momentary state. Others though suggest that engagement levels can ebb and flow over time (day, week, month), or possibly even longer, depending on the context, or situation, that an individual finds him/herself in (Sonnetag, Dormann and Demerouti 2010). This is one of the reasons why a ‘diary-studies’ methodology has been deployed to research employee engagement, as this can be more enlightening than survey research. Some aspects e.g. belief in the organization’s values, or purpose, may be relatively stable, however other aspects, relate to specific job may vary. Reflect back to your first job, or your first promotion, you will no doubt have experienced high energy levels and a willingness to put in extra effort (the honeymoon period). Fast forward a few years, particularly if you have worked in the same job/organization for some time, or been subject to yet another change initiative, then perhaps you are aware of a dip in energy levels. In the academic literature this phenomenon is referred to as ‘Affective Shift’ (see Schaufeli *et al.* 2014).

He devoted all his energy to doing as little as possible until retirement, which was now only a couple of years off. After that he would devote all of his time to his grand passion – golf. He had started playing ten years ago...sport has soon become like a poison in his blood. He now regarded his job, in which he had never been terribly interested in the first place, only a disruptive element (Lackberg 2011: 241).

Whilst this account is taken from fiction, it could equally have been gathered from a qualitative investigation into employee engagement. The character, a police officer, with long service in a police force in a rural area, appears neither cognitively, or emotionally, engaged with his work. Although a passage from fiction it does raise some interesting questions about engagement and the social context within which it is elicited. The fictional police officer does not appear to be in a state of what Kahn (1992) refers to as ‘fully present’:

When an individual finds meaning, feels safe, and has the necessary external and internal resources in their work role, personal engagement will result and the individual is stated to be ‘fully present’ (Kahn 1992: 322).

This next exert, this time taken from an historical investigation into the carers of bank clerks, alludes to a similar issue with engagement amongst employees who have plateaued as they have been over-looked for promotion:

Frustration at a career that has plateaued had led to a withdrawal of the deep identification of the individual with the organization. The Bank could expect the continuation of exemplary task performance, but that aside reveals a man who had withdrawn his emotional labour. Petherance [bank teller] had served notice that he would remain *in* but no longer wholly *of* the Bank (McKinlay 2002: 609).

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Recent investigations into employee engagement have drawn on social exchange theory to try and make sense of individual experiences of work engagement (Fearon et al. 2013; Zargar *et al.* 2014; Guest, 2014). Social exchange theory relates to the relationships that exist within the workplace, in particular the mutual obligations in the form of ‘reciprocity or repayment rules’ (Schaufeli 2014: 28). Zargar *et al.* (2014: 281) expand on this referring to contexts where ‘...high-scope jobs will be perceived by individuals with strong growth needs as a valuable “gift” that matches their disposition’. Implicit in this definition is that some individuals have higher growth needs than others. Whilst not a new observation, the challenge for organizations is creating sufficient high-scope jobs, for those employees who have been identified, or identified themselves, as having a high-growth need. This is where engagement initiatives start to overlap with other HR practices including selection, job design, as well career and talent management; areas that will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 4. Perhaps one question that needs to be raised at this point is the extent to which the responsibility for creating high-scope jobs rests solely with the organization, as this implies a dependency relationship. In practice, this needs to be more of an inter-dependency relationship. What it does point to though is good HRM systems for identifying where there is a mis-match between individual needs and the organizational offering; standardized engagement surveys, based on group norms and assumptions are not the right tool to expose this gap.

More recent thinking on engagement and dis-engagement suggests that it might be more helpful to think of these as a more of a continuum, rather than simply bi-polar opposites. This then allows for a more nuanced perspective on the conditions (antecedents) that influence either high, or low, levels of engagement, as distinct from the state of dis-engagement. A combination of positive and negative factors, influence both of these states. Moreover, dis-engagement may not necessarily have longer-term negative performance effects. Where an individual is working in an environment that conforms to the norms of social exchange theory (trust, reciprocity and mutual obligations) then it may be feasible to move from dis-engagement to engagement, without the need to break any institutional ties.

To summarise, when referring to engagement we need to acknowledge this as a concept with multiple levels, summarised in Table 2.1.

Level of engagement	Characteristics	Some typical measures	Outcomes
Organizational	Identification with organization's goals, mission, values	'I speak highly of my organization to friends and family' 'I would recommend my organization as a place to work' 'I would be happy to recommend this organization's products/services to my friends and family' 'My values and the organization's values are similar'	Pride in organization, service quality
Team/group	Identification/attachment to work group	'I feel a strong personal attachment to my department' 'I share the same work values as my colleagues' 'I am willing to help co-workers with work-related problems' 'I try to help others in this organization whenever I can'	Organizational citizenship behavior
Work	Degree of absorption and emotional attachment to work	'I focus hard on my work' 'My job is all consuming' 'I feel positive about my work' 'I am always willing to give extra effort to help this organization succeed.' 'I try to keep abreast of current developments in my area'	Absorption, affective commitment Discretionary behaviour
Ecology/work environment	Work as an embodied and embedded process	'I have become the thing I am working on'	Intrinsic satisfaction, congruent self-identity

Table 2.1: Levels of employee engagement

	<p>Which level of engagement set out in Table 2.1 resonates most with you? Why is this?</p> <p>How would others in your organization respond to this question?</p> <p>To what extent do the engagement practices in your organization reflect these different levels of engagement?</p>
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3 Vignettes on employee engagement: organizational, teams and work

Whilst no evidence of difference has been found between the dynamics of engagement between the private and public sectors, what the literature does reveal is that the variations within sectors are in fact far more significant. In short, it appears that there is a clear distinction between leading edge organizations that are strong in employee engagement and the majority that are either ignorant of the subject, or which are failing to address the matter effectively, irrespective of whether they are in the public or private sector (Scottish Executive Research Council 2007: 30).



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As the quote above suggests some organizations work harder at achieving high levels of employee engagement, seeing this as a critical factor in building and maintaining a successful organization. However the nature of the work, or the profile of the organization, does make a difference in terms of creating and engaging workplace. At the start of this chapter I draw on case examples, from different types of organizations, where the nature of the organization's business does appear to make it easier to build an engaged workforce. The four case examples chose are: a specialist sport holiday provider, an International sport marketing organization, a high-tech company and a not-for-profit organization. One of the reasons for choosing these case examples is that the organizations appear to be doing engagement, but not making a big deal about it.

The specialist sports instructor, cum holiday entertainer and guardian of customer service

Anyone who has been on an active holiday where they have received expert tuition in a particular sport may well identify with this example of how employee engagement can be achieved, in a light touch way.

Picture the scene, a specialist centre on a Greek Island; the sport windsurfing. All of the instructors employed by this specialist centre are passionate about their sport; their lives revolve around sport. Yet this passion has to be balanced with playing their role in helping the organization achieve its main goal: customer service delivered to the highest levels, ensuring the clients' holiday experiences match what is promoted in the marketing material.

Engagement in this environment seems to be achieved in a number of ways:

- Team work – this is clearly emphasized on the organization's website.
- Competitive work environment – the organizations recruits the best and the 'star' performers are featured on the organization's website.
- Equipment – the organization boasts the best and most recent windsurfing kit. Kit that is replenished every year; this adds as an attractor to clients, but no doubt is an attraction for staff too.
- Growth – even those that join in a front of house role, you get the opportunity to develop the skill of windsurfing. Then if the passion takes over, there is the opportunity to train to become an instructor.
- Play time – the work rotas are worked out so that play time on the water is allocated to staff even when they are allocated to land-based duties. Some staff may even be approached for one-to-one coaching sessions with clients, which means more time working, or playing, on the water depending on your perspective.

The fact that the jobs described in the above case are seasonal, perhaps add a different dimension to the challenge of sustaining levels of employee engagement over the longer term. Whilst some staff return home in the winter to recharge their batteries, others simply move on the next full-on job that fuels yet another passion – skiing, or snow-boarding.

Engagement in this next case has a similar theme to that in the case of the specialist sports instructors, where engagement also flows from a personal passion, again with sport. But in the case of individuals working in *CSM Sport & Entertainment*, engagement often comes by association, so being associated with success: be it current, or former, talented sports personalities, or major sporting events.

Employee engagement at CSM Sport & Entertainment

CSM Sport & Entertainment is an International company that provides a range of services to help a sporting brand, federation or governing body grow their business. They provide expertise to plan, market and deliver International sporting events for global clients. The organization employs 13, 500 people worldwide. The organization has a high profile Executive Chairman, Lord Sebastian Coe, plus it benefits from the support of other sports personalities. Some of the major sports events that CSM have been involved in are: 2014 Fifa Worldcup in Brazil, 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, London 2012.

Given the high profile nature of the work that the organization is involved, it is perhaps not surprising that those with an affiliation with sport want to work for the organization. According to the HR Director, the organization receives many unsolicited CVs from people who would like to be part of the organizational action. This interest comes from individuals of all ages, who have a passion for sport, and see working in this type of business as fast pace and fun.

Many of the individuals who aspire to work for the organization are passionate about sport, either because they have played sport in the past, but not reached the performance level required to compete at a professional level, or have had a professional sporting career, but due to injury (or age) are no longer able to play professionally. Working for an organization like CSM, is thus a second career opening, one where individuals can still continue to be part of the sporting action. For this category of employees, going the extra mile is not an issue; they willingly put in extra hours just to be part of the sporting action.

But as the HR Director pointed out, there are other categories of employees where sport is not such a passion. These are employees, who come from a different professional background, such as HR, IT, or Finance, thus the locus of engagement is different. Giving these groups of professionals the opportunity to be part of the action, perhaps by attending part of a major sporting event, can make huge difference. Other strategies for ensuring engagement at the organizational level, is through the use of social media, for example Twitter feeds and Instagram at major sporting events. Through the use of these technologies, employees who are office bound are helped to feel closer to the live atmosphere of sporting events, which helps bring them close to the organization's wider purpose.

Sources: <http://www.csm.com/our-people/>; personal interview with the HR Director.

What is interesting about both of the above case examples is that neither of the organizations uses employee engagement surveys; they seem to have other ways of finding out what engages their employees. The next case picks up a slightly different perspective on engagement – engagement and volunteering.

Learning from difference: engagement in an organization that relies on volunteers

What can we learn about employee engagement from organizations that regularly rely on the goodwill of volunteers, which in engagement language could be interpreted as 'going the extra mile', in order to build a sustainable business.

One organization that fascinates me, not least because I am a sailor and thus feel reassured that there is an organization that takes responsibility for looking after boats, sailors and others who get into difficulty at sea, is the RNLI. Founded in 1824, the organization provides an on call 24-hour lifeboat search and rescue service within the UK and Ireland, as well as a seasonal lifeguard service. The organization operates 236 lifeboat stations, and a fleet of 340 lifeboats. The majority of people that work for the RNLI are volunteers – around 95%. The biggest combined group of volunteers are the lifeboat crew and those that run the lifeboat stations. The lifeboat crew are the people that go out in all weathers to rescue people and boats when they get into difficulty, either at sea, or inland stretches of water. The organization does not receive any government funding, thus relies on donations, fundraising and legacies to remain financially viable.

Traditionally life boat crew volunteers were drawn from local fishing communities, or professional mariners. But in order to ensure a sustainable future the organization has had to cast its net wider to ensure a continuing pipeline of volunteer lifeboat crew volunteers. The diversity of careers that volunteer lifeboat crew come from is really interesting. Several features in the RNLI's *Lifeboat* magazine, highlights the diverse full-time jobs and careers that individuals who volunteer as lifeboat crew members have: airport fireman, police officer, civil engineer, sweet shop owner, embalmer, self-employed scaffolder, electrical contractor, scrapyard foreman, and Headmaster. Volunteers can also have high-tech careers. A news item in *The Guardian* (King 2010), features a volunteer lifeboat crew member who is a freelance web developer.

So what makes individuals, who have demanding full-time careers, volunteer with the RNLI too? A key theme is a connection with the organization's core purpose – '*The charity that saves lives at sea*'. Volunteer lifeboat crew members are clearly very critical to this purpose and are very aware of this. However, rescue operations are only successful if they have the full support of other people working in other key functional areas. A news item on the RNLI's website features a Parts Controller who works in the RNLI's flagship All-Weather Lifeboat Centre. The role involves responsibility for all materials and parts flow to ensure that the right parts are in the right place at the right time, to build and maintain lifeboats (www.rnli.org/lifeboat-building). What attracted this individual to work for the RNLI was "...normally, when you start a job, you arrive into a set environment. Whereas we are setting up the facility from scratch – we can create our own environment. It's a very exciting opportunity". However, what this news item also draws attention to is how critical it is for all those that work with the RNLI (both employees and volunteers) to understand how their job contributes to the organization's mission of saving lives at sea.

Some years ago when I had the opportunity to visit the RNLI's flagship Training Centre in Poole and talk with the HR team, I gained some insights into how the challenges that the organization faces in striking a balance between ensuring engagement at the organizational level and at the job level. They are aware that lifeboat crew members are clearly engaged at the job and team level, as evidenced with the energy that invest in maintaining the specific lifeboat station that they are attached to, and the personal commitment they make balancing a full-time career in another role and as a volunteer. Yet as the HR team acknowledged, sometimes crew members need to be reminded, and encouraged, to get involved in activities that relate to the wider organizational purpose, such as raising funds for the service as a whole.

The HR team at RNLI feel that they play a key role in ensuring that those that everyone that works in the organization, irrespective of their role, gets a clear sense of the organization's purpose and their role in achieving that purpose. For example:

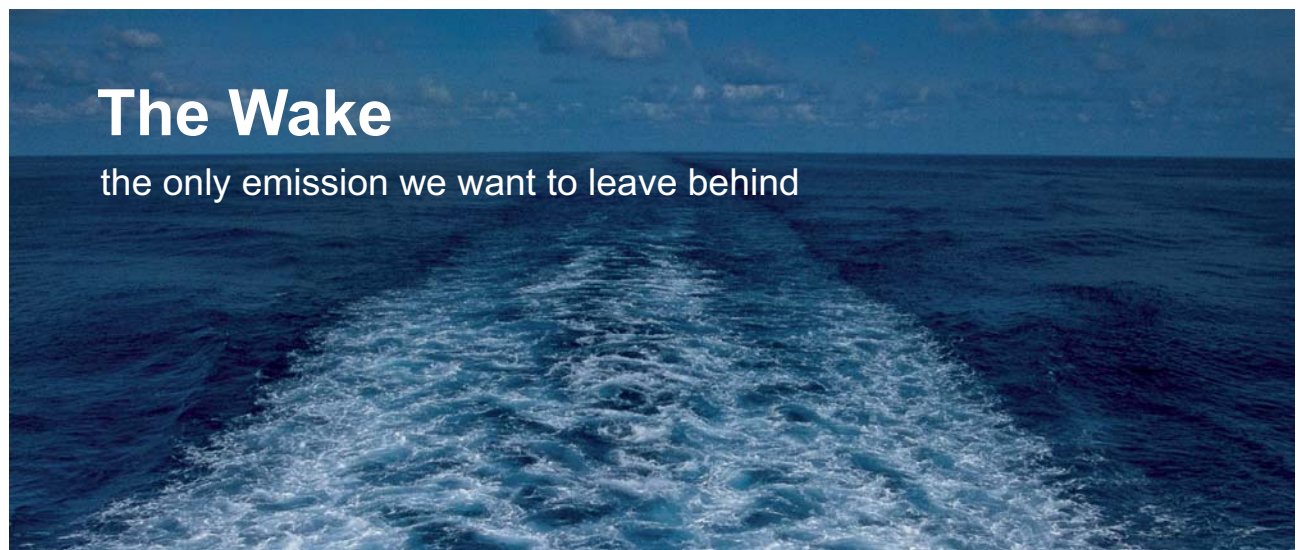
- Encouraging and facilitating storytelling by those directly involved in saving lives at sea, either first hand, or through features in internal and external communications magazines. Equally important is helping people in these roles to see how important this is to building an overall shared sense of purpose and engagement at the organizational level. What seems critical too is that when these rescue stories are told that connections are made with the contributions that people in other roles make to the success of life-threatening rescue operations e.g. engineers, those working in parts stores and fundraisers who raise the income needed to build and maintain the core infrastructure.
- Providing the best and most effective training opportunities possible.
- Encouraging a sense of community and mutual respect, through making it possible for individuals, who are not working in lifeboat stations, to get involved in joint activities that bring people closer to the organization's core purpose.

Reading more about the diversity of the day-jobs that RNLI volunteers come from is fascinating and thought provoking. Some questions that this case example surfaces for me are:

- Are individuals who volunteer to work with the RNLI not as engaged with the work that they do in their main job?
- As we have seen, RNLI volunteers hold diverse day-jobs, many of which could be classified as professional jobs, yet they still volunteer. Do the organizations that these individuals work for full-time not have such a clear purpose that they can either identify with, or commit to?

Sources: RNLI. *Meet Monica Szwat*. <http://rnli.org/lifeboat-building/build/Pages/build-tabs/project-team/meet-monika-szwat.aspx#.VFy3UBtyaHs> [accessed 7/11/2014].

King, M. 2010. *A working life: The lifeboat volunteer*. <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2010/jul/17/lifeboat-volunteer-working-life> [accessed 7/11/2014].



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The case examples above indicate how having a clear and compelling organizational purpose can have a positive effect on engagement, particularly engagement the organizational level. However, even in organizations where there is a clear purpose, for example in the NHS, engagement is not a given. A report commissioned by the Scottish Executive Research Council (2005) highlights how public sector employees, in general, are more satisfied with their jobs than they are with the organization's strategic vision and managerial approach. This may be due to a number of factors: increased pace and nature of change, critical and a cynical view of management, lack of trust in senior management in particular, as well as a lack of belief in organizational communication. Restoring this imbalance in organizational and work engagement in environments like the NHS, for example, requires a focus on wellbeing – employee wellbeing needs to be given equal importance to patient wellbeing. Yet a recent feature in People Management suggests that getting the right balance between staff wellbeing and patient outcomes still needs working on, even in NHS environments where HR have been working in partnership with employees and trade union representatives to try and raise engagement levels. As the engagement lead in this featured NHS trust commented: “We’ve got to be really careful that we are equipping staff to deal with internal and external pressures, and going forward we’ll look at employees’ wellbeing and how we can manage and support that alongside the engagement initiatives.” (People Management 2014: 21).

Organizations that have to work that bit harder at employee engagement

Whilst there are some types of organizations where achieving engagement is potentially easier, given the nature of the work that individuals do, there are others where this is more challenging. In this section I look at two organizational contexts (hospitality and higher education) where engagement is more challenging, but for different reasons.

Staff retention in the hospitality sector has historically been very challenging. Depending on the source, staff turnover reportedly ranges between 23% and 31%. This figure is due in part to the nature of the work, some if it is seasonal, or part-time. But some reports suggest that high staff turnover is due to the career proposition not being attractive enough. This is despite the fact that the sector as a whole is experiencing skills shortages. Given this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that employee engagement has become a key area of practice, as the following case example of Whitbread Inns indicates.

Engagement in Whitbread Inns: focusing on team engagement

Whitbread Inns which includes brands such as Costa Coffee, Beefeater, Brewers Fayre and Premier Inn, employees 43,000 people across its different brands. The company was ranked eighth in the 2014 Sunday Times Best Companies Report.

Given these challenges, it is perhaps not surprising that Employee Engagement has become a key area of focus in the organization in recent years. The organization runs a bi-annual staff survey – ‘Your Say’ – as well as shorter Pulse surveys in some of its brands.

So how is employee engagement approached?

Focus on team engagement: building engagement at the team level is key priority for the organization. In each coffee shop, restaurant location, or hotel environment the focus is on building a cohesive family team. When recruiting the organization focuses on recruiting from local communities, and then building a cohesive team culture. In the 2014 engagement 74% staff agreed that they were working in a family team environment.

Engaging staff in CSR activities to build engagement at the organizational level: staff in Premier Inns, for example, have been actively involved in helping the organization with its carbon footprint, water and waste reduction programme; an initiative that has gained recognition from the Carbon Trust. Sustainability is something that features in staff training programme. In addition staff participate in other community activities, such as raising money for charities, for example Great Ormond Street Children’s Charity and the Costa Foundation.

Creating a KPI around team engagement: data on the number of staff that complete the ‘Your Survey’ is carefully monitored and managers in the different business areas are set team turnover targets. In 2014, the targets were: 40%, group level; 38% Premier Inns; 45% restaurants and 39% Costa.

Grow from within, to enhance engagement at the work level: Whitbread has a people philosophy of recruit locally and grow from within. In 2014 the company had 3,000 staff working as apprentices. In addition the Hotels and Restaurant business provided 4,500 work experience opportunities for individuals of school age. To ensure a future leadership pipeline the company runs a graduate development programme, as well as management development programme.

To strengthen the organization’s commitment to the employee engagement agenda, it has created new roles, such as Internal Communications and Employee Engagement and Employee Engagement Analyst, within its HR function. The goal is to build the capability to manage the employee engagement process in-house.

Sources: <http://www.b.co.uk/Company/Profile/251079>; <http://www.whitbread.co.uk/media/news-press-releases/sustainability-in-action.html>; 2014 Annual Report.

A very different sector where employee engagement is particularly challenging, is the UK Higher Education (HE) sector. This sector has undergone, continues to undergo, and will continue to experience change. Over the past twenty-five years the sector has moved from a model of delivering higher education to the select few to one where, due shifting policy agendas, more and more young people are encouraged to gain a University education. More recently there has been a change in the funding regime; there is now more of a market economy, where state funded providers compete with private funded partners, or public-private partnerships. All of these changes have huge implications for employee engagement.

Engagement in the UK HE sector – the challenges and how HR professionals are responding to these challenges

A succession of policy interventions have resulted in a work culture that is fast-moving, demanding and stressful, not dissimilar to that experienced within the private sector:

We live in interesting, challenging, changing times. Higher Education is facing developments that are radical, fundamental and unpredictable. The new HE world sees a huge injection of competition, an unprecedented focus on the student experience and uncertain pressures to differentiate institutional missions. All this and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), is just around the corner. (Mathew Knight, Chair, Universities Human Resources).

The implications of such deep and pervasive change for the psychological contract and employee engagement within the sector should not be underestimated. Those working in the sector feel that this changing policy agenda has resulted in more standardisation, thus removing the scope for autonomy and discretionary behaviour. An example of this is the restructuring of the academic career. Whereas in the past the academic role was fairly autonomous in the sense that academics were allowed a wide degree of latitude in terms of their teaching and research, the current context is vastly different. Academics now find that they have to wear multiple hats: excellent teacher, world-class researcher, consultant and academic leader, to name but a few.

As higher education becomes more competitive, subject to continuous change and managerialist focused, the pressure to perform is creating tensions for the psychological contract:

Academics would argue that the psychological contract has changed greatly. The ability to pursue an interest now has to provide results. There is a greater need for the delivery of teaching and this teaching has to be more professional. (Senior HRD professional, Universities Human Resources)

The tasks of designing and delivering programmes, conducting research and writing academic papers, now have to fit into bureaucratic processes (where the rationale is not always clear), that are then heavily scrutinised and stifle innovation. Under this New Public Management performance regime, the pressure to perform has created tensions between institutional management and academic life and academic communities. This is somewhat worrying given the importance of reciprocal social exchange relationships when building an engaged workforce. As is now widely acknowledged, when psychological contracts are violated discretionary effort is diminished, or suspended, and engagement undermined. The overall outcome is that of a more transactional employment relationship.

From the debates taking place in institutions such as the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and Universities Human Resources, it is clear that HR professionals in these environments are finding employee engagement a challenge, particularly amongst the academic community. Some specific challenges include:

- How best to respond to the highly critical and sceptical views held by the academic community with regard to sectoral and institutional specific changes
- Distrust in management – us and then culture;
- The individualistic nature of academics' work, and
- The reluctance of many academics to take on leadership roles; a role that is widely acknowledged in the literature as pivotal in building and engaged workforce.

This is all within an employment context where staff turnover would appear to be lower (8.3% in 2011/12) than in the economy as a whole (12.7%), according to UCEA's (2013) Higher Education Workforce Survey. Although it is acknowledge in the report that this low rate of staff turnover, could be due to continuing economic uncertainty. Another explanation though could be related to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which does affect the career mobility of academics; moving just before a REF census, could be career-limiting.

Recognising the challenges that HR sector are facing some HE institutions have begun to see that employee engagement is critical to ensuring a sustainable future. One example here is the University of Lincoln, who won the Universities Human Resources 2012 Awards for Excellence in HR in Higher Education, for their work on employee engagement. Faced with significant changes (e.g. academic portfolio restructure, campus closure, increased TUPE activities, as well as a difficult employee relations climate) the institution uses its bi-annual Employee Engagement survey to assess the impact of these changes on employees. To address the 'longer serving resistance to change employee dynamic' HR introduced coaching to support senior managers in re-establishing better two-way channels of communication. This has taken many forms: breakfast and lunchtime consultations; briefing events, as well as blogs and discussion boards. Other Universities, for example the University of Bristol, are working on their wellbeing offering to help enhance the employee experience.

A survey of HR Directors in HE Institutions by HR Magazine (2013) identified three priorities to enhance levels of employee engagement: ensuring role clarity; setting performance expectations and conducting regular staff appraisals.

Recognising the continuing importance of employee engagement in the HE sector, UCEA are investing in additional resources and support for HR professionals working in the HE sector. Resources include: an enhanced Employee Engagement Toolkit with additional case studies; engagement benchmarking indicators, as well as introducing regional employee engagement networks.

Sources: www.uhr.ac.uk; www.ucea.ac.uk; <http://www.bris.ac.uk/pwe/wellbeing/>; www.hrmagazine.co.uk

The advertisement features a central graphic of three stylized human figures surrounded by gears, all enclosed within a circular arrow indicating a cycle. To the right, the text 'UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT' is written in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below this, the dates 'OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018' and the location 'DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM' are displayed in blue. The bottom of the ad shows a silhouette of the Amsterdam skyline, including a windmill and several buildings. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is visible.

The future for the UK HE sector is undoubtedly likely to be just as uncertain over the next decade or two; public-private partnerships are potentially likely to grow, as is the trend for online education. The academic role in particular is thus likely to be subject to even more flux and uncertainty. HR professionals working in this environment will thus need to ensure that their offering addresses different levels of engagement (work, team and organizational level); a narrow focus, one that is focused predominantly at building engagement at the organizational level, will not be sufficient to build a sustainable future. They need to be mindful too that academics are not immune to behaviours that are not dissimilar to the systematic soldiering observed by Taylor (1911), when developing his theory of scientific management.

Fun at work – the antidote to engagement?

The theme of fun in the workplace is one that features in several accounts of employee engagement – employees are having fun, so they must be engaged? Not necessarily. In workplaces that have high rates of attrition, as already referred to above, encouraging fun at work can help reduce attrition rates, as it can help build a sense of attachment (engagement) with co-workers. In addition, supporting a fun workplace culture can compensate to some extent for the low pay and career enhancing opportunities in sectors like hospitality (Tews, Michel and Allen 2014).

A word of caution though, organizationally sponsored fun events that take place outside work time may be construed as ‘conscripted fun’. Something that may not necessarily be welcomed by all employees particularly where individuals feel this has a negative effect on work- life-balance. In addition with the increased diversity in organizations, fun activities based around drinking means that some employees feel excluded. Although some individuals may actively seek out workplaces where fun at work is encouraged, as Sharon Bolton (2006) points out organizations should address other aspects of the employment relationship, rather than hiding behind the philosophy of ‘fun at work’. A similar view is shared by Ben-Sharer who cautions against confusing fun with happiness.

Although ‘fun activities’ may provide a break from monotonous work routines, they do not necessarily contribute to individuals’ overall sense of happiness. This Ben-Sharer suggests flows from the overall experience of pleasure and meaning that stems from having a meaningful life purpose (Woodward 2014). Shawn Achor makes a similar point in an inspiring TedTalk on *The Happiness Advantage: Research Linking Happiness and Success*. Achor is critical of the pre-occupation with offerings that purport to raise the average levels of phenomenon such as happiness. He sees this as reductionist thinking, thus dysfunctional. He argues that we need to turn the current thinking about happiness on its head – encouraging positivity in the present, rather than associating happiness with goal-achievement orientated future success cycle.



Which of the case vignettes presented in this chapter resonate most with you? Why is this?

How many of the employees that work in your organization feel passionate about the work they do? How would you know this?

How critical is it for all categories of employees to be 'fully present'? As long as employees are meeting their performance targets, do they also need to 'fully present all of the time'?

If you are struggling to provide engaging jobs within your organization, how might encouraging and supporting volunteering outside the workplace help address this?

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4 Job design and employee engagement – handing back control

The craftspeople who fought the advent of the machine, and the deskilling it inevitably brought in its wake, were not defending their rates of pay or even the variety of their work experience; they were seeking to protect a way of life where autonomy, skilfulness and social learning were constitutive of both of the workplace and the wider society (Molly Scot Cato 2013: 123).

Although in this opening quote Molly Scott Cato is referring to an era that pre-dates the knowledge society that we are now firmly rooted in, on closer inspection the issue that she raises seems just as relevant and topical in the contemporary workplace. As I was writing this book-ett, the UK Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) published its latest report – *What do graduates do?* (HESCU 2014). This annual report provides data on the types of roles that graduates enter after leaving University. The good news in the 2014 HESCU report is that the number of graduates entering careers that utilise science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) knowledge, subjects at the heart of the knowledge society, has increased. Yet the report acknowledges that careers in sectors that require such skills, such as construction and engineering, are still contingent on the economic context. The report also draws attention to the fact that, despite the theoretical subject knowledge that STEM graduates bring, employers are still voicing concerns about whether graduates have the broader skills that they require. This is a recurring debate between Higher Education, the providers of career-ready graduates, and the business community. But it is a debate that matters. If employers do not value and utilise the broad range of skills that graduates can offer then it is likely that they will become quickly disengaged.

In their book, *The Mismanagement of Talent*, Brown and Hesketh (2004: 70) draw attention to some of the words used in recruitment advertisements aimed at attracting the best of the graduate crop:

We are looking for talented, confident people, who know where they are going. People who are not content to be a cog in a big machine (NHS Employers).

There are certain things we look for in our employees. We like them to think for themselves. So initiative is important. As is commitment (Consultancy firm).

We aim not only to meet but exceed our clients' expectations. The type of people who can achieve this will have been involved in a variety of activities at university but have juggled their time well and consistently met deadline (Consultancy firm).

Anyone applying to these highly dynamic organizations would of course assume that they would have access to interesting jobs that enable them to demonstrate initiative, and in doing so expand and grow their career. Paradoxically, despite the sophisticated selection methods deployed by such companies, the reality for graduates entering consultancy environments does not necessarily match the promise at the recruitment and selection stage:

The successful candidate is, therefore, someone who is supremely skilled at analysing and calculating in a particular way but who does not, or does not allow themselves, to question or think more broadly (Guerrier 2013: 159).

Of course selection is important, both from an individual's and organization's perspective – identifying the right fit is crucial to both parties. As a former colleague of mine in the Career Coaching industry once pointed out 'There is nothing more frustrating than climbing the career ladder, only to find out that when you get to the top you have been climbing the wrong ladder.'

Whilst some would argue that the ladder analogy of career success is perhaps outdated, Alan McKinlay (2002), suggests that this not necessarily the case. In his investigation into the roots of the notion of a career, particularly as it has applied within the banking sector, McKinlay surfaced some interesting reflections on what a career in this bureaucratic environment felt like. As part of his research McKinlay uncovered some interesting cartoons in one of the staff ledgers in the HBOS Group archives. The cartoon, which McKinlay refers to as 'dead selves', consists of hierarchy of ledgers, each containing a flattened bank clerk, all scrambling to make it to the top of the career ladder. At the top of the ladder is a victory flag; accompanying this flag is a rather pleased looking manager – the inference being that he has made it, whereas the rest have yet to get there. The cartoon was drawn by one of the ledger clerks, who worked for The Bank of Scotland up until the 1930s. It was the caption to this cartoon that struck me as particularly interesting 'We climb upwards on the stepping stones of our own dead selves' (McKinlay 2002: 611). A focus on employee engagement was clearly not something that appears to have been a priority for the bank in that era!. Yet nearly a hundred years later, is the picture any different?

Employee Engagement at HBOS before, during and after the 2008 financial crisis and incorporation into the Lloyds Banking Group

In mid-2000, just before the 2008 financial crisis, HBOS adopted a different approach to employee engagement. This approach involved the development of a partnership agreement between two Trade Unions, Unite and Accord, and the bank's executive committee. This approach then became critical to survival during the financial crisis, where the bank was faced with managing the challenge of disaffected customers and disengaged employees. The organization realised that a focus on employee engagement was key to survival and that this would only be possible through entering a partnership agreement with the trade unions. 'Colleague engagement needed partnership – and partnership needed colleague engagement,' was how the HR leadership at that time viewed the situation.

The agreement, according to the IPA case, went beyond '...holding the company to a set of employment principles' (p5), focusing on issues of dignity at work and the quality of work. Through joint training sessions between branch managers and trade union representatives a more mutual understanding of what partnership working means developed. Trust appeared to be restored and the view of trade unions as key stakeholders in the organization's change strategy was one that managers seemed to come to accept. An interesting comment in this case study by one manager suggests that trade union representatives were operating more like an HR business partner – e.g. involving the union early in strategic decision making, focusing in frontline business issues.

Yet a comment in the IPA case about the outcomes of this partnership approach, suggests that the approach to engagement fits more into the category of 'narrow engagement' (Purcell 2014), as the focus was more on organizational, as opposed to, work engagement: "...the partnership must be seen as success. HBOS had some of the best reward packages in the industry, job security was taken seriously by the business and workforce issues featured prominently on the board's agenda." (p. 13).

Insights into the employee experience at Lloyds Banking Group is something that now forms a key part of the organization's annual responsible business report. The latest report, from 2013, provides data on a number of indices that provide insights into the 'colleague experience'. Data is gathered in three key areas: performance excellence (i.e. belief in the organization's commitment to improving products and service for customers); employee engagement (i.e. extent to which colleagues (employees) are satisfied with Lloyds Banking Group as an employer and willing to be an advocate) and line management index (i.e. perceived level of support from line management). The report makes reference to the progress made in each of these indices, including a reference to benchmarking data, yet the provenance of this benchmarking data is not clear.

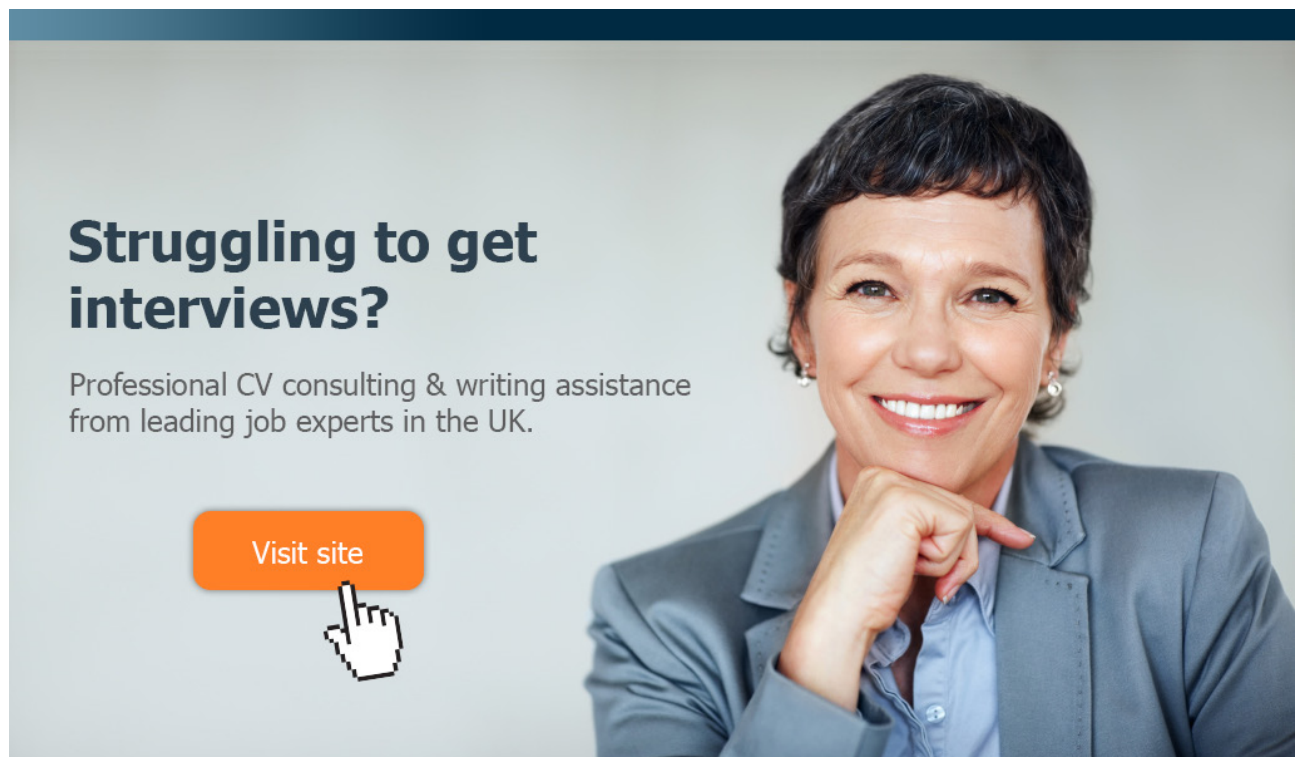
Sources: IPA 2010; ACCORD 2010; Lloyds Banking Group 2011; Lloyds Banking Group 2013

As the above case shows, partnership working is key to re-building trust, following a dip in an organization's performance and reputation. As with many financial services firms at that time, re-aligning the customer and employee experience became a key strategic priority. Part of that process involved going back to basics, including re-assessing what customers want and expect from a retail financial services institution; 'hard sell' was something that was not on the agenda for customers, and was not on the agenda for employees either. Indeed one of the questions asked in the Trade Union's survey of *Working Life Within Lloyd's Banking Group*, relates to whether employees feel under pressure to 'hard sell' to customers to hit targets (Accord 2010).

If we unpack this particular survey question we become more aware of the inter-relationship between job design and employee engagement. In terms of the scope of the job, the question that surfaces for me is what is the primary focus of the job – service, or sales? If working with a strengths-based approach to job design then asking someone whose values, knowledge and skills are more aligned with a service culture, to behave in a way that is more congruent with a sales culture, will inevitably affect an individual's engagement (either emotional, or cognitive).

Although the nature of work has changed considerably given the decline in manufacturing and the subsequent rise in knowledge and service businesses, the thinking on organization and job design lags behind these structural change. Efficiency and control were at the heart of some of the early thinking on job design, as this quote from Frederick Taylor's work on scientific management indicates:

Schmidt started to work, and all day long, and at regular intervals, was told by the man who stood over him with a watch. 'Now pick up a pig iron and walk. Now sit down and rest. Now walk-now rest'. He worked when he was told to work and rested when he was told to rest and at half past five in the afternoon had his 47 and half tons loaded on the car. And he practically never failed to work at this pace and to do the task that was set him (Taylor 1911: 36).



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The ability to think, or exercise discretionary effort, did not feature in Taylor's notion of a 'high class man'. This burden, as Taylor referred to it, was removed from individual workers and the responsibility (or burden of control) passed to supervisors whose job it is was to maintain continuous oversight of the work. As I walk down my local high street and observe groups of men repairing the road and pavements, a similar practice can be observed. There is often a supervisor, distinguishable by a tie and mobile phone, not far away keeping a watchful eye on the work and the workers.

This approach to job design, where jobs are broken down into simple and repetitive tasks, that require little thinking on the part of the worker continued to dominate the thinking and practice of job design up until the 1970/80s. At which point interest in the notion of sociotechnical systems thinking emerged, which emphasised the motivational benefits that can arise from considering both the technological and social aspects when designing work processes and jobs. An early adopter of the sociotechnical systems approach in the car manufacturing sector was Volvo cars, when building a new plant in Uddevalla in Sweden in the mid-1980. In contrast to the assembly-line principle that dominated the approach to work and job design in other car manufacturing plants, Volvo introduced what has been applauded as a more 'human-centred' approach (Sandberg 2007). In contrast to the standardized short-work-cycle approach adopted in most other car manufacturing plants, Volvo experimented with a long-work-cycle approach. What this meant in practice was that the Uddevalla plant was organized around a number of parallel production lines, managed by small autonomous work groups, with a light touch managerial approach; innovative thinking for that time.

The organizational design principles that this approach highlights include:

- Work structures based around the principle of parallelisation of autonomous work teams, as opposed to more traditional standardised long-line assembly working, enabling teams to be more responsive to changing consumer demands for individual product customization.
- Flatter management structures that provided more opportunities for shared learning within, and across, teams, as well as enabling managers to focus more on communication and organizational learning, rather than micro-managing.
- IT systems that supported the needs of autonomous work teams, helping them to manage the work flow in a more engaging and flexible way. Simple changes like referring to component parts by name, as opposed to by number, helped workers see connections.

In re-reading this account of the Uddevalla experiment I am struck by how close this approach to organizational and work design aligns with what the CIPD (2012) defines as a sustainable approach to employee engagement. Based on survey research conducted for the CIPD, by *Affinity Health at Work*, a framework for achieving sustainable employee engagement is set out in Table 4.1.

Competency	Overview
Open, fair, consistent	Managing with integrity. Positive approach in personal interactions
Handling conflict	Using appropriate resources to proactively address employee conflicts
Knowledge, clarity and guidance	Clear communication, that reflects understanding of roles, and responsible decision-making
Building and sustaining relationships	Personal interaction with employees. Empathetic and considerate of needs.
Supporting development	Supporting and arranging career development and progression

Table 4.1: Managing for sustainable employee engagement. Adapted from CIPD (2012)

There has been much debate recently about the variability in the quality of jobs that organizations offer. Job quality is defined as ‘...the extent to which a job has work and employment-related factors that foster beneficial outcomes for the employee, particularly psychological well-being, physical well-being and positive attitudes, such as job satisfaction’ (Holman 2013: 476). Holman suggests that there are a number of factors that influence whether jobs can be classified as either high, or low, quality. These factors include work organization (e.g. degree of job challenge, level of job discretion, social support), wages and payment enhance system, security and flexibility (e.g. permanent, as opposed to contract employment, flexible working hours, though not the extent that the hours worked might fall into the ‘extreme jobs’ categorisation, skills and development (e.g. appropriate use of existing skills, with opportunities for skills enhancement) engagement; although this latter aspect is defined quite narrowly as consultation and voice.

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Many of the defining factors of jobs that sit at the high quality continuum, according to Holman, are similar in some respects with recent thinking on strategic HRM, in particular the best practice-high commitment approach, originally advocated by Pfeffer (1994). In his book *Competitive Advantage Through People*, Pfeffer sets out sixteen areas of HRM practices which he argues, if adopted as a bundle, will result in higher employee commitment and thus ultimately competitive advantage. These practices include employee ownership, participation and empowerment, training and skill development, team and job redesign, promotion from within and an overarching people management philosophy. Yet the relevance of Pfeffer's work has been questioned more recently as it does not appear to reflect experiences in different employment contexts (international, or national), nor does it reflect the fact that to survive in today's highly competitive business world organizations have adopted more flexible and agile ways of working.

Whilst it is more feasible to provide high quality jobs in certain sectors (for example the expanding IT sector), there is a dearth of high quality jobs in other sectors, such as manufacturing, as well as in some service sector jobs. Despite the rhetoric of enlightened, empowered and engaging workplaces, the reality for some workers is a long way from this idealistic view. Efficiency and control remains at the heart of the job design approach. The following excerpts, taken from research conducted in a technology call centre organizations in India, reinforces this view:

Holman *et al.* (2007), in the first large scale international study of call centres, report that a majority of call centres across the seventeen countries they studied, predominantly serve mass-market customers (therefore, being highly standardized and regimented). Their study also shows that the off-shored work tends to be most routinized as it allows for better monitoring (Sinha and Gabriel 2013: 91).

Remote call recordings live call barging and screen capture technology were used to monitor agents' actions and interactions. Such intensive and pervasive surveillance stifled the workers and several of them, interviewed for this study, reported experiencing work to be suffocating and monotonous (Sinha and Gabriel 2013: 99).

To counter-balance this monotonous work routine, some employers have adopted practices that loosely fall into the high commitment bundle of HR practices: team building activities, emphasising a fun work culture and fast-track promotion. In addition, as Sinha and Gabriel (2013) point out, organization's encouraged front-line call centre workers to act professionally. In other words behave rationally and objectively to maintain high levels of customer service and satisfaction. Ironically though, as Sinha and Gabriel point out, the persistent use of micro-management techniques undermines call-centre employees' ability to act professionally.

How can organizations expect individuals to demonstrate organizational commitment, when the jobs on offer are low quality and not intrinsically, or extrinsically, satisfying. It is here that the introduction of new technologies could potentially be of help. The company, Engineered Arts, is developing humanoid robots; robots that not only perform a task with precision, but can also do this with a smile. The market for such robots would appear to be in museums, universities and companies, where standard information needs to be communicated in a particular way. The use of humanoid robots offers a solution to the problem of jobs that require standing in a particular space and repeating the same information, day in and day out, and having to do so with a smile (Hickey 2014); jobs that some people would find soul destroying.

Job, or role, design in some organizations is still a very bureaucratic and detached process, that does not seem to address the factors that affect how psychologically attached an individual may, or may not, be to their work. The NHS is one institution that has been subject to continuous change, requiring both organizational and job design changes. These changes have not always brought positive psychological benefits for employees. In some cases changing role boundaries has resulted in some groups feeling that their professional identity is under threat.

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Role redesign in the NHS

The NHS, established in the 1940s, has undergone extensive restructuring in recent years as result of changing government policies and reforms that involves a managerial approach often referred to as 'New Public Management' (NPM). NPM consists of a variety of management techniques including: target setting and performance measurement; establishing quasi-markets, with separate roles for purchasers and providers, and contracting out of services. These changes have been introduced with the aim of increasing the efficiency of services offered as well as the quality of service provided to users (patients).

A separate body has overseen this transformation (NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement), providing guidance on when roles may need redesigning and how to go about doing this. The main aim of the role design initiative is to improve the patient experience, by revisiting existing job roles and responsibilities. Through this process some jobs have been enlarged or enhanced, whereas others have been reduced, or reshaped. The primary goal has been to design jobs around patient needs.

Whilst the overall the process to role design appears quite rational and clinical, one of the tools – *NHS Change Model* – seems to reflect more recent thinking on job design. The model consists of seven areas: Spread of Innovation; Improvement Methodology; Rigorous Delivery; Transparent Measurement; Engagement to Mobilize and Leadership and Change (www.changemodel.nhs.uk). At the heart of this model is a reference to the notion of shared purpose; a critical aspect of job design and engagement.

But it was the **Engagement to Mobilize** element of this change model that captured my interest, as it contains some interesting ideas to help assess readiness for change, including assessing levels of energy for change.

The five domains of **Engagement to Mobilize** include:

Social: connectivity and sense of belonging with others.

Spiritual: belief in the value of the work being carried; co-constructed picture of the future.

Psychological: feeling trusted and safe with regard to doing things differently and belief in ability to bring about change.

Physical: action, vitality to get things done, but in a flexible way as circumstances change and evolve.


Intellectual: actions that stimulate creativity and encourage focus.

In an organization that is continually evolving and changing, then the notion of 'engagement to mobilize' seems an interesting angle to take.

Sources: www.institute.nhs.uk; www.changemodel.nhs.uk; http://www.institute.nhs.uk/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/role_redesign.html [last accessed 30/7/2014]

<http://www.changemodel.nhs.uk/pg/groups/12155/Engagement+to+mobilise/689?community=Engagement+to+mobilise>

Finally, a more recent example of an organization that does seem to be fully embracing the concept of 'handing back control' to employees is the Dutch community care provider, Buurtzorg. The organization, founded in 2007, now employs 6,500 nurses working in 630 independent teams (Kingsfund 2013). The organizational design philosophy is based around self-organizing teams, with a greater emphasis on roles and activities, rather than processes, and minimal bureaucracy. Traditional managers appear to have been replaced by coaches. The nurses working in Buurtzorg have more autonomy, but have collective accountability. To ensure a high-quality yet flexible service to clients, nurses have to have a broad skill-set; there is greater emphasis on generalist, as opposed to specialist skills. Education is key to this transformed work environment; nursing teams have greater control over the educational budget, so that resources are focused on the needs of a specific team.

	<p>What is the dominant approach to job design in your organization – rational-scientific, or more fluid, flexible and dynamic?</p> <p>If you dug deeply, where might the parallels to McKinlay's 'dead selves' analogy be discovered in your organization?</p> <p>The notion of self-organizing teams has been around for some time, so what is that stops organizations embracing this concept?</p>
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5 The future of job design and employee engagement

These are exciting times for those concerned with job and work design. More than ever before companies are introducing new forms of work organization, often involving major changes in the nature of people's jobs. The opportunity to create more fulfilling and effective work is considerable; but so too is the danger of making it worse (Parker and Wall, ix).

I deliberately left out the date from this quote from Parker and Wall (1998) just to get the reader thinking. Are we in exciting times for job and work design, or has the moment gone? If HR professionals are to live up to the expectation of providing a proactive evidence-based approach to HRM, that genuinely meets the needs of their business, then they must continually push the boundaries of what effective job design looks like. There is no doubt, as already stated, that the nature of work is continually evolving and changing. What individuals expect in terms of work roles is continually changing too. Some years ago when researching the careers of IT consultants, I worked with a company where many of the consultants had begun their career working in a large consultancy environment. What they spoke of was how liberating it was to join a smaller company. The lack of bureaucracy was one thing, but being closer to the strategic decision-making processes was a major factor in how engaged they were.

Much of the traditional thinking on job design has focused more on work design i.e. how independent tasks can be grouped into a coherent job role for an individual, but that also fits within a team structure. In contrast to this top down approach to job design, interest in the notion of job crafting has been growing amongst researchers in the field of occupational psychology. Job crafting can be considered a bottom up approach to job design, one that involves the proactive changes that individuals make to their own job, either on an episodic, or more continuous, basis. Individuals craft in order to derive more meaning from the work they do. Job crafting can take many forms. Perhaps the most obvious (noticeable) is task crafting. This is where individuals, either change the way they carry out particular tasks, focus on specific tasks more so than others, or take on new task that are outside of the scope of their formal role description. Relational crafting is where individuals develop, or change, the way they interact with others as part of their job. This type of crafting is something that can either expand, or contract, an individual's social capital. In some case individuals engage in relational crafting as a means of protecting their work identity. Research has shown that this type of crafting is more likely to occur in contexts where structural change affects existing role boundaries (Evans and Holmes 2013). The final form of job crafting is cognitive crafting. This is where individuals attempt to change other people's perceptions of their job, through the language used to describe what they do. As with relational crafting, cognitive drafting, is deployed in order to protect, or prop up, an individual's work identity.

There are a number of factors that may influence if and when individuals engage in job crafting. One is the significance that work has, in the context of an individual's whole life. Do individuals 'live to work', or 'work to live'? What are their career ambitions? Another factor is the degree of autonomy that individuals have in their work. In jobs where individuals are subject to constant scrutiny and surveillance, or rigid work routines, then there may be less scope for task crafting. Yet it is amazing how resourceful some individuals are. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) provides an interesting example of job crafting drawn from a factory environment that he was researching, in his book *Finding Flow; The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. Whilst most of the welders in this particular factory environment couldn't wait to leave on time every night, Csikszentmihalyi identified one worker who appeared to come alive after his shift had ended. This particular worker used the time after his shift had ended to train himself on how the different pieces of equipment in the factory worked. This proactive behaviour developed into a passion for working out why things didn't work; a passion that spilled over into his home life. Whilst this passion was observed by this individual's co-workers it was not clear from Csikszentmihalyi's accounts as to whether this was noticed, or recognized, by managers in this environment.

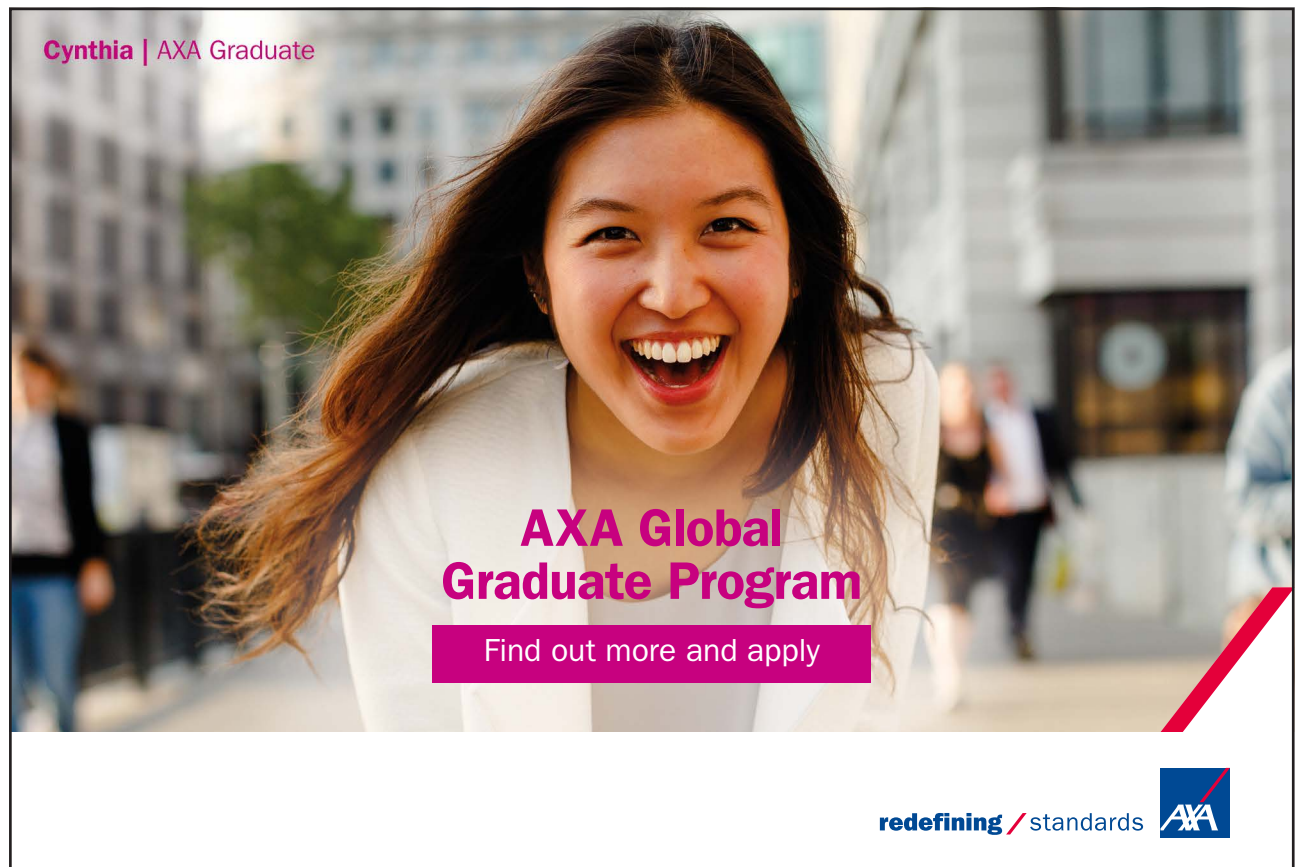
A variation on job crafting can be seen in organizations that are proactively engaged in creating work opportunities for people with some form of disability. One example that comes to mind here is the experience of organizations that are supporting an initiative called Project Search, a US based initiative, aimed at helping young people with learning difficulties secure employment opportunities (www.projectsearch.us). Since the launch of Project Search in 1996, this employment philosophy and approach has been adopted by a number of UK public sector organizations. In 2012 GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) became the first private sector company in the UK to get involved in Project Search (www.bitc.org.uk). Working in partnership with HAFOD (Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability) and West Thames College London, GSK launched a training and employment programme for young people with learning disabilities aimed at helping them gain valuable employability skills, through a combination of training and real work opportunities. This combined approach is aimed at maximising these young people's chances of future employment. Participating in Project Search has challenged the organization's thinking on job design. Instead of working from a deficit model i.e. focusing on what young people with learning are unable to do, HR have become more creative about how jobs are packaged. For example by drawing together tasks from different job roles, to construct a job that matches each young person's abilities and needs, rather than rigidly sticking to an existing job/role description.

In essence then, by designing jobs around the needs and capabilities of employees, HR are deploying a 'job sculpting' approach to job design; as with job crafting, this is an approach which has yet to find its way into mainstream managerial practice. Yet, as Stephen Taylor (2010) suggests, job sculpting may become more widely adopted in the future, especially if we accept the current predictions that to survive in business organizations need build the capacity to be more flexible and agile.

Both job sculpting and job crafting reflect a more innovative approach to job design. An approach that fits with the renewed interest in positive psychology, referred to earlier (Seligman 2011) and the focus on nurturing and supporting a strengths-based approach (Rath and Conche 2008), as opposed to the Cinderella approach – shoe-horning individuals into jobs that they are either not suited, or that result in them becoming quickly dis-engaged. Both these approaches are more progressive in the sense that individuals are actively involved either in sculpting an initial job to ensure a better fit with their strengths, or through re-crafting an existing job to ensure that they continue to have a job that they find engaging (Wrzesniewski, Berg and Dutton 2010).

The benefits of this more liberating approach to job design are multiple. First organizations are better able to attract and retain a diverse talent pool. Second, the organization is better able to develop the capabilities required to become more agile; if individuals are actively involved in crafting their jobs, and engage in continuous crafting, then change is potentially less of an issue. Third, job crafting could be the antidote to variations in levels of work engagement. Although consultancies would have us believe that is possible to have fully engaged employees, all of the time, this optimism has been questioned by others. John Purcell (2014) for example questions whether such an idealistic view of engagement is feasible, for the majority of employees. This brings us back to the point I raised earlier about what type of engagement organizations are seeking. Equally important, what is that employees want to be engaged with? How might this vary over time? How feasible is it for individuals to feel fully engaged at/with work all of the time? Individuals with a high challenge-seeking disposition will invariably find they outgrow their job at some point. Whilst those in low-challenge jobs may not necessarily outgrow their job, they may well experience boredom; boredom, as we know, can be a dangerous thing. Think about what happens when children get bored; they can become mischievous, or deviant. These same behaviours might equally arise in organizations, where individuals do not feel they have any latitude in rebalancing their own sense of engagement. Even professionals are not immune to what others might construe as ‘deviant behaviour’ – the rogue trader, the sun-lighting computer programmer, the academics who teach online in the evenings, or write books in their spare time.

If we accept that engagement levels diminish over time, as Garry Cattamole (2014) suggests, then creating an organizational culture where job crafting is encouraged would seem a win-win situation for individual and organizations. Perhaps then the money that organizations spend on launching and running large-scale employee engagement surveys could be more usefully diverted to developing the managerial competencies needed to build workplaces where approaches to job design such as job sculpting and job crafting are encouraged, nurtured and supported. In this way both the organization and individuals benefit from the positive-dynamic spiral of job crafting and engagement (Bakker and Demerouti 2008). This would shift the engagement agenda beyond what others suggest is a rather narrow and instrumental agenda, given the primary focus on organizational engagement. A feature in HR Magazine by Peter Crush (2001) is somewhat scathing of the HR community. He suggests that HR professionals have put too much faith in engagement surveys, based on the false assumption that it enables them to tick the Ulrich value-add box. A similar criticism has been levied by the academic community, who question why HR professionals continue to ignore calls for a more evidence-based approach (Rousseau 1985; Briner and Walsh 2014).



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So what might job crafting look like in practice? In this next section I draw on some insights from my other research that investigated the lives of independent coaching practitioners (Evans and Lines 2014). What we gleaned from the interviewees with these practitioners was a sense of how moving into an independent career provided a release from the ‘entrapment of organizational life’. One individual referred to being constrained by job descriptions and job titles, as she felt that this defined who you are. Becoming an independent practitioner for this individual was very liberating as she got to write her own role script. Another practitioner referred to how he felt that the organizations that he had worked for had had too much of his soul. Another referred to how being independent meant that he got to choose how to present different aspects of his work in different contexts: ‘...I can be an NLP trainer, I can be a Psychometrician, I can be a counsellor. A whole range of different things, or combination, of all of these’. (Evans and Lines, 2014: 8). In Table 5.1, I draw on Hackman and Oldham’s (1980) seminal work on job design to illustrate how independents craft their work so that is more meaningful to them. Hopefully this provides some insights into what job crafting looks like in practice and provides a sense of why it matters.

Job characteristics	How independent professional practitioners achieve this
Skill variety	They utilise their skills on different types of projects; projects which are broadly of their own choosing.
Task identity	They are typically involved in pitching for work, so they are in a better position to shape task(s) so that there is a better fit between the task(s) required and their professional identity.
Task significance	They learn first-hand how important the work is to the client(s) they are working with.
Autonomy	There may not be much autonomy with the timing of when projects are delivered, but there is autonomy in the spaces between projects and how these spaces could be used. For example, spaces between projects could be used for leisure, networking, research and development, or personal development.
Feedback	Initial feedback from clients is immediate – they don’t hold their punches. Longer term feedback – individuals are not invited back, or do not get recommended for other work.

Table 5.1: Job crafting – learning from independent practitioners

	<p>If you currently work for an organization, spend some time thinking through the questions below:</p> <p>What would you include in the column on the right hand side of Table 5.1?</p> <p>How do you think others, that you work with, might complete this?</p> <p>As an HR professional how might you use this model, to help others initiate conversations around what is important to them in the way they see their job, and how they might shape/craft their work so they feel more engaged?</p>
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Of course line managers may initially feel threatened by the concept of job crafting. Some of the tensions they may experience are set out in Table 5.2.

Fear/tension	Potential response
Individuals will only focus on the things they really enjoy, so gaps will appear in the overall service/operation	This is consistent with a 'strengths-based' approach, it should be encouraged. What is required though is an effective means for identifying where gaps are arising. Managers will need to build a work culture where individuals and team members take responsibility for identifying gaps.
No one in the team will want to do the more mundane repetitive jobs – so some people, by default, will be left to pick these up	Some people may see this as a challenge, thus explore innovative ways to eliminate mundane repetitive work and/or replace with more effective systems.
Performance will be more difficult to manage due to a lack of clarity around who is doing what	Employees should be encouraged to engage in self/peer evaluation of performance to try and avoid this situation. Some individuals may take on the role of boundary spanners, or connectors, thus helping minimise performance issues.
Standards will fall as individuals choose what they want to work on	Where there is an open dialogue around the scope of job crafting, rather than it being practiced below the managerial radar, then this is less likely to happen.

Table 5.2: Job crafting – some potential fears/tensions for line managers

The future of job design – a combination of job sculpting and job crafting

There has been growing interest in the practitioner literature in recent years about the importance of organizations developing the capabilities needed to become more agile and change-ready. The CIPD's (2011) *Shaping the Future Research* and the subsequent Hackathon (www.cipd.co.uk), led by Gary Hamel, both highlight the importance of agile working for sustainable organizational performance.

What is meant by agility and agile working? First there is a structural dimension, the flexible way that modes of production and service delivery are organised and delivered. Second, there is an organizational design dimension, including the way that organizations, departments and teams are structured to support a given organization's mode of business. Third, there is an individual cognitive dimension, so the ability for individuals to demonstrate an agile mindset, one that is open, receptive and willing to adapt to continuing flux and change.

What will this future agile world of work and organizations mean for how jobs are conceived and designed? Will more and more individuals see this as an opportunity to choose more entrepreneurial ways of working; ways that involve pitching for specific projects, or particular types of work that are more aligned their core strengths? Will the majority of individuals expect more traditional forms of employment but expect, or demand, more fluid job descriptions that provide inherent room for growth? Even if individuals continue to expect more traditional job/role specifications, what would happen if these were positioned more as projects, with a timeline of around 18–24 months? How would this type of thinking inform the way that HR professionals and managers think about job design?

Does the lens of volunteering, as in the RNLI case earlier, provide us with a different perspective on what the boundaries of individual's job might look like in the future? The scope to rebalance one's sense of work engagement by crafting a role that combines work within, and outside, the organization has many potential benefits. For professionals, even if I do not necessarily have strong organizational engagement, the freedom to craft a job that involves combining different tasks/roles either inside a single organization, or extends beyond the boundaries of a single organization could have multiple benefits.

The benefits for organizations and individuals of embracing concepts like job sculpting and job crafting in the future are unquestionable. Through job sculpting, organizations would be able to tap into new/alternative sources of talent. For example, embracing talented individuals with some form of disability, who may have been previously overlooked, as discussed earlier is one possibility. Another possibility relates to employment opportunities for older workers. For a variety of reasons e.g. health, capacity, or subjective career needs, older workers may not fit into a traditionally defined job. Moreover, it may help with securing talent that falls into the 'hard to fill' category.

Constructing a job around an individual's skills, aspirations and preferred work pattern, is more likely to ensure higher work engagement, than shoehorning an individual into a standard job role. Yet despite more recent calls, to "...design jobs around what people are good at" (Clegg and Spencer 2007: 336), this practice is far from widespread. Of course having co-created the initial job/role specification, individuals will expect similar levels of involvement (and autonomy) with regard to how they shape their job in the future. In the future, managers will need to become more skilful and comfortable working with the concept of job crafting.

Perhaps job sculpting and job crafting will become part of the future psychological contract; a contract that reflects organizations' needs for committed employees, for as long as they choose to stay with an organization, and individuals needs for meaningful and intrinsically rewarding work, that individuals have more control in shaping.

To conclude, if HR professionals truly want to demonstrate the 'curious behaviour' that features in the CIPD's HR Profession Map (www.cipd.co.uk), then exploring the relationship between job crafting and work engagement is one that certainly ticks that box. Both job sculpting and job crafting involves turning existing management thinking and approaches on its head. HR should be leading the way with this upside down thinking!

Notes

- [1] <http://www.surveylab.co.uk/services/employee-surveys/employee-engagement-surveys/>
[last accessed 14/2/2014].
- [2] <http://www.surveyinitiative.co.uk/2013/04/the-cost-of-employee-engagement/>
[last accessed 14/2/2014].

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