Head Light

10 actions to increase Employee Engagement

part of our Practical Steps series

The Talent Cloud Platform

Developing Skills. Encouraging Performance. Boosting Recognition.

Contents

Getting better at Engagement

In our White Paper – *Driving Engagement through Talent Management* – we highlighted the research demonstrating the positive impact employee engagement has on the profitability and productivity of an organisation and indicated the role 'engagement' plays in the key talent management activities.

This Guide is designed to give those who are now ready to look at ways to improve the engagement levels of their people.

Where to start: the three perspectives of engagement

We suggest that engagement can be looked at usefully from three perspectives

- what the organisation does;
- what line managers do, and
- what individuals do and feel in response.

If low engagement seems to be a problem within your organisation, it may be valuable to look at all three levels to determine where the potential blockers are.

A powerful diagnostic, such as Head Light's En-Gauge can help analyse exactly where the opportunities for change and improvement are and provides practical suggestions as to how you might address some of the issues.

As a starting point, we've developed a short diagnostic checklist below which will help highlight the specific Perspective or focus where the greatest gains may be made from taking action. What follows after this checklist are 10 practical suggestions for you to consider which may help drive up levels of employee engagement.

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The Employee Engagement Checklist

What to do

The checklist is divided into the three Perspectives (Organisation, Manager, and Individual). The three steps below will take you through these areas to help signpost where to focus effort to increase Employee Engagement.

- Read the list of statements and think about whether you could say these statements are genuinely true of your organisation, your manager, and yourself – and mark these in the 'check/tick' column.

- Having done this, look at the Perspective box where you have the least checks/ticks and then use the ten suggestions following as ideas to improve employee engagement levels

   o If your 'Organisation Perspective' box has the least ticks, then take a look at suggestions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9.

   o If it's the 'Manager' box which has the most checks, look at the suggestions numbered 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

   o And if it's the 'Individual' box with the most checks, the suggestions numbered 5, 8, 9 and 10 may be a good starting point.

The Organisation Perspective *What can the organisation and the most senior leaders do to create the conditions for engagement?*	Check/Tick
Provide staff with the right tools and equipment and ensure that there are clear processes and policies in place.	
Ensure performance is managed effectively and that individuals see the link between their work and the organisation's goals.	
Invite and respond to employee feedback.	
Share the mission, strategy and broader objectives with everyone.	
Create a culture of openness and honesty.	
Make the company values clear and ensure senior leaders embody these.	
Create clear career paths, provide opportunities for growth, learning and development.	
Carry out succession planning and promote from within whenever possible.	
Consult and involve employees in decision making.	
Allow staff freedom, autonomy and give them responsibility.	
Look after its employees; put them first.	
Reward people for contribution and effort.	

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The Manager Perspective *What can managers and leaders do to drive up engagement levels in their teams?*	Check/Tick
Manage performance effectively	
Communicate openly and honestly with their teams	
Actively support and encourage people in their career development	
Coach people and ensure they develop knowledge and skills	
Do what they say they are going to do	
Show a genuine interest in people and treat them with respect	
Behave in a way that is consistent with the values of the organisation	
Address conflict in a constructive and timely manner	
Get to know their team and treat people as individuals	
Help people to understand the impact of what they do on colleagues, customers and the broader organisational goals	
Create a positive team spirit; encourage teamwork, collaboration and fun	
Delegate effectively and devolve decision making down the line	
Give people the trust and freedom to achieve their objectives in their own way	
Involve the team in decisions that will affect them	
Provide feedback, give praise when it's due and recognise effort and achievement. Celebrate success.	
Allow people to play to their strengths and to do more of what interests them	
Encourage people to get a good balance between work commitments and outside interests	

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The Individual Perspective *What do people do when they are engaged?* *What can individuals do to increase their own sense of engagement?*	Check/Tick
Give upwards feedback. Openly and honestly share concerns and views.	
Generate and share ideas; pass on knowledge and information to others.	
Participate in projects, corporate initiatives, CSR activities. Volunteer.	
Enjoy their work; experience 'flow' and report high levels of intrinsic interest, motivation and job satisfaction.	
Feel commitment and loyalty.	
Recommend their organisation as a good place to work.	
Embody the values of the organisation in the way they go about their day to day work, how they treat colleagues and clients.	
Demonstrate creative thinking. Innovate.	
Proactively solve problems and remove barriers to performance.	
Help others. Act as good corporate citizens.	
Give discretionary effort; go the extra mile.	
Collaborate and work more effectively with others.	
Make fewer mistakes, are more productive.	
Build positive and supportive relationships with colleagues.	
Understand the impact that their work has on others.	
Feel pride in their work, and in the organisation. Take responsibility and show initiative.	

10 ways to increase Employee Engagement

#1 Measure engagement – and analyse the results!

- How do you measure levels of engagement among your employees?

- Is it part of your annual employee survey?

- Do you measure it at all?

Common sense tells us that simply testing engagement levels via a survey is not enough; if all you do is ask questions about how engaged people are, but do not take positive, visible action based on the results, this is likely to have a negative overall effect.

Take a careful look at how your organisation responds to the feedback it gets from the annual survey, and the survey itself. It is easy to fall into the cognitive trap of asking questions that will reinforce senior leadership's views of how well the organisation is working, and to avoid asking those questions that might elicit less favourable feedback. Are your questions really tapping into engagement and the broad range of factors that influence it? Or do they focus solely on the more traditional areas of satisfaction and commitment?

A good engagement tool will not only measure; it will analyse, help you diagnose key issues and identify opportunities for change and improvement. It will go beyond simply asking questions to giving you practical steps that will lead to increased engagement scores in the next survey.

Head Light's Talent En-Gauge provides a 360-degree look at employee engagement, focusing on three Perspectives:

- How engagement is influenced at an **organisational** level – what does the organisation have in place which impacts on employee engagement? What are the cultural factors that might drive or inhibit the degree to which individuals feel engaged?

- The impact that line **managers** have – what do managers do to influence the levels of engagement within their teams?

- What are the **individual** behavioural markers of engagement? How do employees feel about the organisation and their work? What do they do that indicates that they are engaged (or disengaged?)

By measuring a broad range of factors, at these three levels, and using Head Light's powerful cloud-based Talent® software to generate a number of analytical reports and suggestion actions, an organisation can gain a much richer picture of the engagement opportunities, risks and success stories.

#2 Design and develop positive policies

Arrange a focus group of key stakeholders (from HR and across the business) to review your policies in the key talent management areas of:

- Performance management
- Flexible working
- Training and development
- Career development
- Benefits, incentives, remuneration and rewards
- Equal opportunities
- Recruitment
- Induction and on-boarding
- Communication

Format

1. Split the group into small teams or pairs and ask each team to work on one or two of the policies each

2. Ask them to complete the grid on a flipchart:

Element of policy:	This improves engagement because…	This decreases engagement because…	This seems to have no impact on engagement
xxxx			
xxxx			
xxxx			
xxxx			
xxxx			

3. Ask each team to then look at those aspects of the policy that either decrease engagement or have no impact. Encourage them to think creatively about how those policies could be evolved so as to encourage higher levels of engagement.

4. Get each group to feed their analysis and ideas back to the rest of the group.

5. Have everyone vote on the 3 changes that they think would have the greatest impact.

6. Propose these amendments (with a business case or ROI calculation if investment is required to support the changes) to the decision makers.

7. If agreed, implement the amendments and communicate the changes (and the reasons for them) to the wider organisation.

#3 Show the connections and links between the organisation and each person

How clearly connected are the things you (and your team) do every day to the purpose of the organisation, the values it holds and the promise you make to your customers?

Helping people to understand and see the connection between what they do and what the organisation is trying to achieve can help to increase engagement levels. Try the following things to make these connections clearer and stronger:

1	**Look at your management and leadership training** Do you include input on how to make effective decisions? If so, does this include a reference to the organisational values? How can you use the values to drive and inform better decision making?
2	**Try printing the mission statement or vision at the top of every meeting agenda** This can also help to focus attention and priorities and be referred to when decisions are made or actions agreed.
3	**Look at your performance management process** Does your performance management process reinforce the link between individual objectives and broader goals? When agreeing SMART objectives with your team, explicitly state which strategic imperatives, organisational goal or work stream this contributes to, and discuss the impact it will have.
4	**The link between HR and Marketing** How close are the links between HR and marketing? What messages does your marketing department give to your customers about your organisation? What does the HR team say to prospective employees about the organisation? Is there a mismatch between the two? Review your recruitment and L&D processes to ensure that you are selecting and training people to live up to the promise you provide to your customers.
5	**Your Corporate Social Responsibility** What do you do by way of Corporate Social Responsibility? To what extent are employees able to engage with local communities? What does the organisation stand for, and what does it give back? Are employees able to influence this or make suggestions as to what the organisation can do? Review your CSR activities and look at how employees could be more directly involved.

#4 Borrow with pride

Not all organisations are the same, granted; your company will have a unique culture, set of values, place in the market, people and strategy. Not all good ideas will translate from one organisation to another, but sometimes we can get inspiration from good practice or a great idea that someone else has implemented. Most ideas are evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

One of the most widely talked about initiatives is Google's '20% time'. This refers to every Google employee's right to spend a fifth of their time working on creating or developing something entirely new. Google is seen to be a pioneer in many respects, but this practice has its roots in the middle of the 20th Century, when William McKnight was president and Chairman of 3M. He encouraged his technical staff to spend up to 15% of their time on projects of their choice. It was known as the 'bootlegging policy' and gave birth to an innovation that has impacted most of us; without 3Ms bootlegging time, we might not have Post-it® notes today. Scientist Art Fry had the idea for Post-it® during his 15% time, and the financial and cultural impact of this idea is probably impossible to quantify.

Australian software company Atlassian also embraced this idea before Google became known for it. They introduced quarterly 'FedEx Days', which initially started off as dedicated time to focus on any problem they wanted, even if it wasn't part of their day-to-day job. It would start at 2pm on a Thursday, and then at 4pm on Friday, everyone would show the results of their FedEx time to the rest of the company in an informal, fun meeting. They found that some really useful software fixes and good ideas emerged, that might have otherwise remained undiscovered. Atlassian have since expanded the concept to allow employees to spend 20% of their time on product innovation, fixes or projects of their own direction, to work on what they think is important, regardless of their job description.

20% of each employee's time is a big commitment, but it has its returns. Not only in the creation of new products, new ideas, solutions to problems but also in terms of engagement. Discretionary time, crucially, allows people autonomy, and autonomy is one of the key influencers in how motivated and engaged a person feels. It allows people to explore things that hold intrinsic interest for them, and it demonstrates that the organisation trusts them. It's a structured way of giving people creative space, which benefits both individuals and the organisation.

#5 Play to your strengths

Common sense and positive psychology tell us that we are going to be more effective, more productive, happier and more engaged when we are do things that allow us to employ our natural talents. Doing things on a day-to-day basis which tap in to your biggest strengths has benefits for both individuals and the organisation.

But to what extent is this happening within your organisation?

We've all observed the problems that can arise from the common expert-leader scenario; your best salespeople, creatives, technicians, designers etc., are promoted to management level because there is no other vertical career path available to them. If leading others is not something they value, are personally interested in, or talented at then you get disengagement from both sides – the expert-leader and the team they are managing. Solving this ubiquitous issue might be beyond our immediate reach, but by ensuring that a strengths approach is central to your selection, promotion and development processes, you can help to ensure that employees are involved in things that will allow them to experience 'flow' as often as possible – see suggestion #10.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your **performance management process include an explicit emphasis on strengths**? Or is it mainly focused on gaps and development needs?

- Do **individual contributors have the means to assess their own strengths**? We are not always aware of what these are, so providing a structured means by which people can work out what their real talents are can be a good place to start.

- Does the organisation provide a **repository for this information on key strengths**? Are others in the organisation able to search this information if they want someone with skills, experience or interest in a particular area?

- As an **individual, how well do you know what your real talents are**? What are the things that you are really, really good at?

Many people struggle to articulate their strengths, some have never given this real consideration, others feel that they have yet to discover their true gifts.

There are a number of good strengths-based questionnaires on the market such as Tom Rath's StrengthsFinder 2.0 (based on the Gallup research) which is readily available from Amazon accompanied by a book describing the talents measured by the questionnaire and links to a wide range of resources that can help you to make sure that you are making the most of the things that you are naturally good at.

 Then, at your next job chat or performance review, discuss with your manager how you could make the most of your strengths. Are there special projects you could get involved in, which would require these specific skills? Could you support or coach others to improve their capability in this area? Can your manager delegate any of his or her work to make better use of the strengths of the team? Are there ways in which you could realign or restructure any of your tasks to allow for more room for you to use your talents?

#6 Don't lose the learning – get creative

From working with our clients, we know that training budgets remain tight, and that this is coupled with an increased pressure to demonstrate a clear, measurable return on investment in development activities. The days of being able to send your senior executives off on a two-week leadership development programme may be over and you are likely to be making some difficult decisions about how you prioritise learning and development needs and apportion training budgets across the organisation.

During challenging times, though, it is especially important **not** to call a halt to L&D activities. Being able to learn, grow and develop skills is one of the things that will influence how engaged you feel (and how effective you are) so it is important not to lose the learning. When people see their career path and progression opportunities evaporate, it can be a big demotivator and is a short-sighted approach, leading to skills and capability gaps in the future. If you continue to invest in people development during difficult times, this sends a clear message to the workforce that they are valued and important and that you are taking a longer-term view of the future and sustainability of the organisation.

So, most organisations are getting more creative with their L&D budgets. Many are focusing attention on developing a coaching culture by training managers in coaching and feedback skills. This should have a knock-on effect on productivity by empowering individuals across the board to solve their own problems and to act with greater autonomy, creativity and responsibility.

Encourage individuals and managers to think creatively about engaging in cost-effective learning and development activities, because training courses are only one of many options. Ask yourself, to what extent do you make use of the following:

Self-directed, individual learning activities	
Reading journals/industry publications/magazine articles/do a book review - The material can be read by individuals who can share this with groups, who can then discuss the content and how ideas can be applied.	**Computer Based Training/e-learning** - Again, there is a wealth of material that can be accessed online or purchased. The advantage of e-learning programmes is that they can be completed at a time and pace suitable to the learner.
Audio material - If you spend time travelling, then listening to audio CDs or podcasts are a useful method of learning.	**DVDs/online video material** - There is a vast range of topics which can be bought or rented from training organisations (e.g., Video Arts) on subjects such as assertiveness, teamwork, leadership and motivation.
Self-reflection/keeping a learning journal - Reflecting on experiences, successes and failures and identifying lessons. People who belong to professional bodies are likely to be required to complete a continuing professional development log (CPD), but this can be a useful learning practice for anyone. For example, reflecting on difficult situations, how you handled a crisis or responded to a challenge can be a good way of enhancing your learning from unplanned events.	**Watching/observing** - This is a very simple self-development activity which we are constantly doing, even if unconsciously. You can take a more pro-active approach and select particular people or events which you are going to observe: you could watch how people behave in meetings and pick up on the behaviours of those who are, e.g., demonstrating strong influencing skills.
Distance learning - A flexible course of study, related to an individual career plan.	**Research/data collection** - As a project, or as part of trouble shooting related to a particular problem or

business issue, research can be a cost-effective way of building and broadening knowledge.

Planned learning experiences

Discussion groups/Action Learning Sets/peer coaching groups - These bring a people together either from the same or different specialisms, teams or roles to discuss a particular topic.

Coaching - In simple terms coaching is about getting you from where you are to where you want to be. Coaching is about improving your performance and helping you to learn rather than just to be taught

Experience of other roles - e.g. job rotation, deputising for your manager, lateral transfer, secondment/temporary assignment to another area/organisation.

Work shadowing - A powerful way to learn about other roles. One person 'shadows' another, observing what the other person does and how. It enables the shadower to appreciate a different role, see a potential career path, enhance knowledge and receive feedback on their potential for that role.

Breakfast meetings - The aim is to broaden commercial awareness and provide an opportunity to improve presentation skills. People meet on a regular basis for 'breakfast' and to share business knowledge and practise their own speaking skills.

Brown bag lunches - Often facilitated by a senior leader or manager within the business; people bring their lunches with them and either share knowledge, listen to a leader talk about the business or get to ask them questions or air concerns.

Job swaps - This process involves a mutual exchange of job. This is effective for gaining breadth of knowledge, skills and experience by moving from one area to another.

Mentoring - Where a more experienced person supports someone of less experience outside the normal manager/subordinate relationship. It is different from coaching, since it often involves some 'transfer of expert knowledge', with the mentor being particularly experienced and giving advice in an area that the 'mentee' wishes to develop.

Project groups/taskforces - Project groups are used to achieve a particular goal. They can also have a secondary objective; development, e.g., in project management skills, communication, networking and knowledge building.

Attending presentations/conferences/seminars - To further learning, you could have people attending a seminar and then giving a short presentation to internal colleagues on the topic, increasing ROI on any cost and increasing learning transfer.

Strategic assignments -These can be to do things such as develop new system/service, develop or update a policy, implement strategy recommendations, linked to current business imperatives.

Formal study - e.g. a professional qualification, MBA, Masters degree, post-graduate diploma etc.

Voluntary/community work - Often linked to the organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility policy.

Acting as a coach/mentor - Being coached or mentored are excellent learning experiences but equally, providing this kind of support for others is a form of development in itself. Being a coach or mentor can be a good way of sharpening interpersonal and communication skills.

Internal knowledge sharing activities/meetings - There are a whole host of ways in which you can make knowledge sharing more engaging and interesting for employees. See suggestions http://www.slideshare.net/mik0ton/knowledge-management-tools-techniques

Networking groups/events - Encouraging people to join networking or interest groups can be a good way of helping them to develop interpersonal and networking skills, as well as of gaining ideas on good practice and current thinking on specific topics.

#7 A problem shared...

1. Make a list of all the decisions that need to be made regarding your team and the work that you do.

2. Rank these in order of priority, urgency, or importance.

3. Remove any that are potentially sensitive or involve specific individuals.

4. Then either:

   - Write these up on a whiteboard or flipchart in a place that is visible to all team members (or if your team is remotely located, send an e-mail to everyone).

   - Ask all team members to think about these things and to either jot down ideas and suggestions on the flipchart or put some thoughts in an e-mail.

   - Collate the suggestions and feed these back to the team, asking people to vote for the option they think will be most effective.

   - Also consider whether the responsibility for making these decisions and deciding a course of action can be delegated to one of your team. If this is the case, arrange a session with that individual and provide them with a full briefing, encouraging them to identify how they are going to go about making that decision, how they are going to action it, the conversations they need to have and how they are going to communicate the decision to the rest of the team.

Or

   - Set up a brainstorming session involving the whole team.

   - Present them with the top 3 decisions and explain the context.

   - Use a creative thinking technique such as brain-writing or reverse brainstorming (see www.businessballs.com or similar online resources for information on these processes) to identify a course of action on two or three of the most pressing issues.

   - Delegate any tasks that can reasonably done by team members and set up a further meeting to get back together and review progress.

#8 Read all about it

Clock up a few CPD hours or replace your commute read with a textbook on or around the subject of engagement.

Reading about how other companies have addressed the issue of low engagement levels, understanding more about the psychology of engagement, and considering things from a different perspective might just give you a few good ideas that you could try within your team or organisation.

As you're reading, have some post it notes and page markers ready and highlight the things that resonate with you, or practical suggestions that are worth testing out.

There is a wealth of literature out there, but here are a few recommended reads:

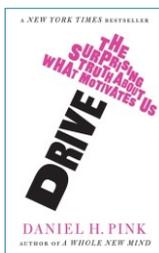**Meaning Inc. – Gurnek Bains et al**
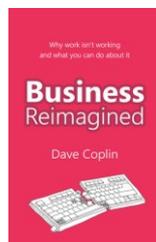
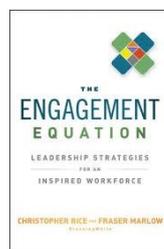**Business Reimagined – Dave Coplin**
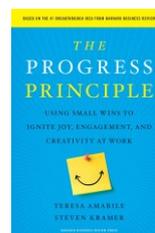
Employee Engagement – William H Macy et al
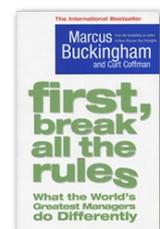
First, Break All The Rules – Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

Drive – Daniel Pink

The Engagement Equation – Christopher Rice et al

The Progress Principle – Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer

#9 Feedback and recognition

The Globoforce 2013 Summer Report looked at attitudes and perspectives on recognition, engagement and performance amongst employees in the US, and found that 94% value being recognised for their efforts. 59% of those that had received positive feedback linked to the organisational values reported a positive change in their productivity. 49% said that they had noted improvements in their working relationships with their colleagues and 43% said that recognition had inspired an increase in their customer service efforts.

But it's not just about being a passive recipient of recognition and gratitude; the survey also found that recognising the good performance and effort of others has a profoundly positive impact on people. People who said that they were able to provide recognition to others were more than twice as likely to feel engaged, compared to those who were not.

Consider the following options for increasing the incidence and impact of feedback on engagement levels.

Start up a 'Thank You' folder. Even if your manager is very good at recognising your effort and achievements, it's nice to hear it from other people and on particularly challenging days it can be difficult to recognise and remember our own worth. Start up an e-mail folder called 'Thank you'. Every time you get an e-mail from a colleague, customer, client or supplier saying 'thank you' for anything, no matter how small, file a copy of it in here. Whenever you get feedback or recognition for something that you have done, put it in this folder. When you're having a bad day or feel that you've not achieved anything, open the folder and read through some of the messages.

Share the love – ensure that any positive feedback you get from clients, customers, stakeholders or managers gets passed on to everyone that was involved in that work. Forward messages and make sure you let your manager know that you've had that feedback, and who made it possible.

Do you have a social networking facility, or individual 'walls' on which people can post their thanks, feedback or comments on their colleagues' efforts? Encourage this 'crowdsourcing' style of informal feedback and recommendation – see LinkedIn's endorsement feature for a good example of this. You are likely to find that this leads to more people 'feeding it forward' and providing their own recommendations and recognition for others' work.

Use the company intranet (especially good if this appears as the first screen that employees see when they switch their PCs on in the morning) to advertise any business successes. Not just sales, new product launches or financial performance, but also any process improvements, new hires and good ideas. Say thank you to all those involved, naming people individually wherever possible, or by team names if not.

Look at the company values – go through each of them and think about who, for you, has embodied each value in the past month. Make a point of telling those individuals, and specifying what it is you've seen them doing that has made them a role model in that particular area. Within your team, consider introducing some sort of monthly informal award or celebration for the person who most deserves recognition, using the values (organisational, or team values, if you have them) as a guide.

Do you train people to give effective feedback? Does development of this skill feature in your training portfolio? Review your development offering and consider introducing this into your induction training to encourage and empower people to provide meaningful feedback to their direct reports, peers and also up the line. Feedback skills are not just for line managers…

#10 Go with the Flow

'Flow' is about being lost in the moment and absorbed in what you are doing. When you experience 'flow', time seems to pass very quickly and you feel motivated, productive and energised.

Give yourself a little flow test, by taking 10 minutes to reflect on the questions below:
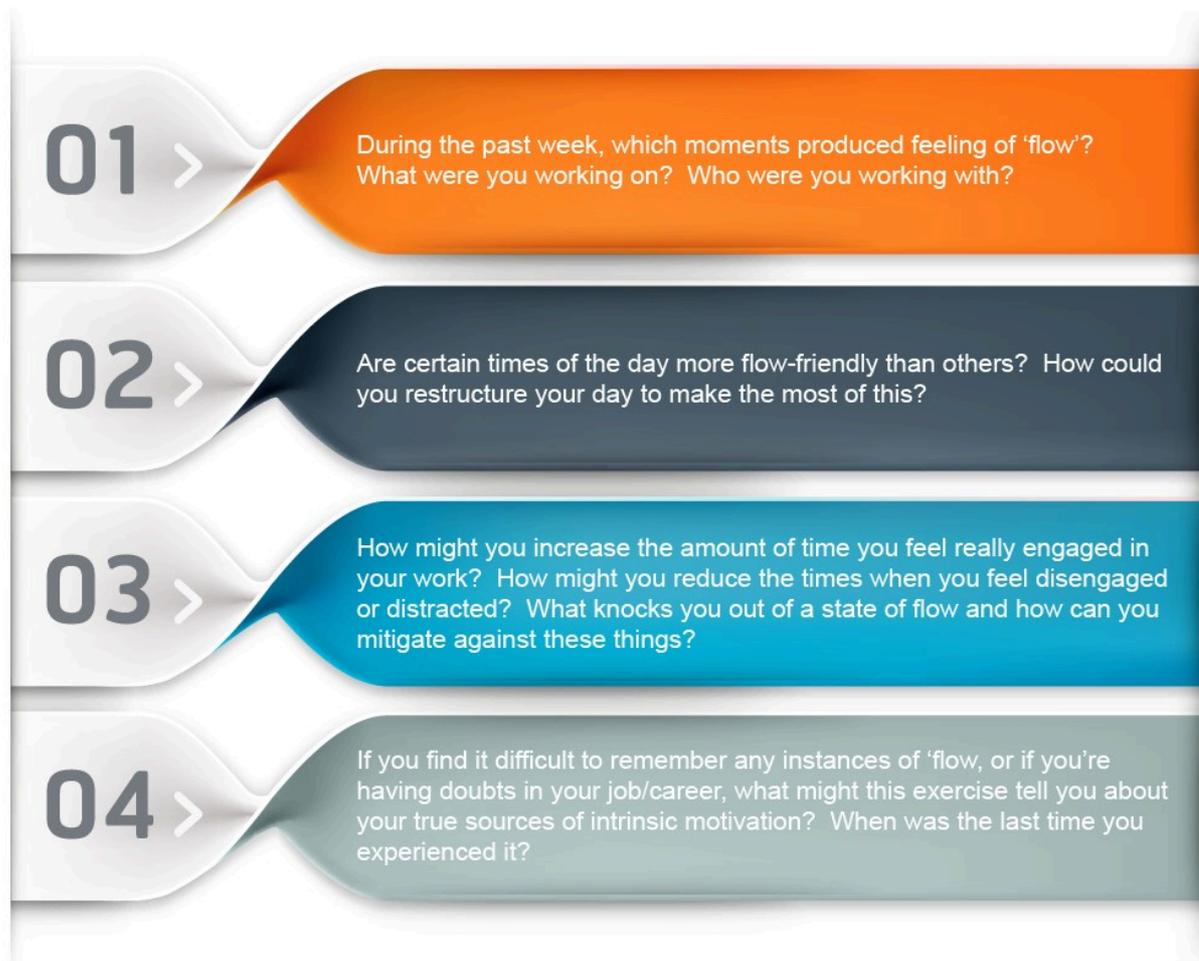
01 > During the past week, which moments produced feeling of 'flow'? What were you working on? Who were you working with?

02 > Are certain times of the day more flow-friendly than others? How could you restructure your day to make the most of this?

03 > How might you increase the amount of time you feel really engaged in your work? How might you reduce the times when you feel disengaged or distracted? What knocks you out of a state of flow and how can you mitigate against these things?

04 > If you find it difficult to remember any instances of 'flow, or if you're having doubts in your job/career, what might this exercise tell you about your true sources of intrinsic motivation? When was the last time you experienced it?

Again, take the time to talk to your manager about this. He or she may be able to identify ways in which you can increase your experiences of flow and help you to avoid the things that take you out of that state.

References and further reading

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Next Steps

If you would like to take a closer look at the Employee Engagement levels within your organisation and the steps you can take to increase this, please get in touch.

About Head Light

Head Light is an award-winning talent management software and consulting firm that works with clients to define and implement impactful talent management strategies.

Talent Cloud® is our cloud-based portfolio of integrated talent management software tools designed for those who expect the maximum return from talent management processes. Our training and consulting services uniquely complement our breakthrough software that engages employees, managers and senior leaders in the selection, development and progression of people in their businesses.

Companies in the FTSE 350, public sector, large and small, from retailers to high tech innovators have all benefitted from our tools, techniques and expertise. Founded in 2004, we are headquartered in the UK.

Head Light has attained the ISO27001 standard for Information Security. Certificate No 217613.

How do I…

transition to Continuous Performance Management

How do I…

introduce robust Succession Planning

How do I...

spot High Potentials and Future Leaders

How do I…

boost Recognition

How do I…

drive Engagement through Career Conversations and Development

How do I…

embed new values and improve culture

How do I…

develop Skills of the Future