

momentum

How you can use the science of human emotion and behaviour to build engagement, adaptability and resilience in your organisation



Momentum: the strength or force that allows something to move forward or to grow stronger or faster as time passes.

In today's competitive and ever-changing marketplace, employees are the lifeblood of any organisation. When engaged, employees impact positively on organisational productivity, agility and profitability due to their increased commitment, creativity, collaboration and performance.

When employees are disengaged however, the costs are huge. The global cost of disengaged employees is estimated to be a staggering **£450 billion** per year. As such, there is a huge prize for leaders to increase engagement within their organisation. But what's in it for us as individuals?

Recent research in neuroscience shows that high levels of engagement have a significant and long-term positive impact on our well-being. Being engaged at work leads to improved health, resilience, confidence, optimism, lower levels of stress and, ultimately, avoids burn-out.

So, getting engagement right is a win-win: good for the organisation and good for us!

But what exactly is 'engagement'?

Engagement is "a distinct and

unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components... associated with individual job performance", (Saks, 2006). When we engage with something, we commit to it physically, mentally and emotionally.

Our research has found that different people can be engaged with different things at different times and for different reasons. Therefore, we can't build engagement at an organisational level, we need to design our engagement activities so they engage people at the individual level.

Traditional employee engagement programmes measure only whether people are engaged or disengaged, not what they are engaged with.

Whilst they might offer some initial success when there is an endemic cultural

problem or very poor levels of engagement to start with, they cannot deliver the level of sustainable results achieved by understanding and improving engagement at an *individual* level.

Knowing the focus of engagement allows organisations to make changes and influence behaviour in a way that has significant positive outcomes for both the organisation and the individual.

What do employees need to be engaged with?

Being engaged with any of the six loci of engagement can enhance organisational benefits but research suggests that, fundamentally, it is engagement with our work which makes the biggest difference to us as individuals and to our organisations.

Our research, conducted in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, has shown that people can be engaged with six different things which we call the '**loci of engagement**'. We choose to engage, or not, with:

1 Our Work.

It's when people are engaged with their work that the organisation really benefits.

2 Our Colleagues.

This could be their immediate team or the informal networks which form in most organisations.

3 External Agencies.

This could include partners, clients, customers, suppliers, etc.

4 A Greater Cause.

Or 'meaning' or 'purpose' which is quite often aligned to personal beliefs or values.

5 A Line Manager or Leader.

Not necessarily a 'charismatic' leader – it could be anyone we admire and aspire to be like.

6 The Organisation

As a whole, which might include vision, values and purpose.



Between stimulus and response lies a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom... Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation.

Victor Frankl
Man's Search for Meaning

When we are engaged with our work we enter a state of 'flow' where we are fully immersed in what we're doing, losing all sense of time and focusing only on the task at hand. To achieve this state of flow, we need to be motivated by our work. We know that whilst different things motivate different people, there are three common factors which underpin work motivation: a need to feel our work is personally meaningful, that we have sufficient control to work in a way that feels right for us, and the ability to make, and to know that we're making, progress.

How do we build engagement then?

The key to building engagement at an individual level is to create a culture within the organisation which enables us to 'make progress with meaningful work' whilst providing

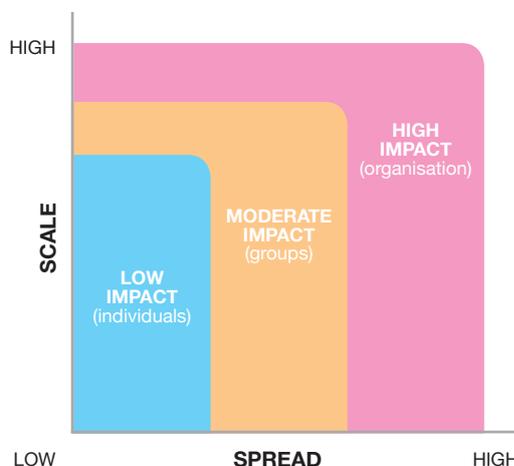
an environment which positively enhances our motivation.

Within every work environment, we are continually experiencing events which can either be positive and enhance our engagement or disruptive and reduce our levels of engagement to some or all of the six loci described earlier. We call these experiences **Activation Events**.

These Activation Events range in terms of their **scale** from small events such as a conversation with someone to large-scale events such as a major change or restructuring; and in terms of their **spread** from low-spread events which might only affect one or two people, to broader events which might impact the whole organisation.

Even small-scale events (e.g. the way feedback is given) can have significant organisational impact on levels of engagement if the spread is large enough (e.g. if the way feedback is given represents a 'cultural norm' across the whole organisation).

So, to build and maintain engagement, leaders and managers need to understand how to create positive Activation Events and how to mitigate the risks associated with disruptive Activation Events. They also need to understand how we react to these events on a personal level.



How the scale and spread of events can have different impacts.

The Momentum programme has been designed to help organisations overcome the inertia which is often the result of disruptive Activation Events.

Why, and how, do we react to Activation Events?

Our response to Activation Events is evolutionary and is based on our brain's most fundamental organising principle: that of maximising reward and minimising threat. This is known as the **approach or avoid** response and it occurs almost entirely unconsciously within milliseconds of the event taking place.

We know that when we experience an **approach** response, it is associated with positive emotions such as love, trust, joy or excitement whereas an **avoid** response is associated with negative emotions such as fear, anger, disgust, shame or sadness.

The model below shows how we react to Activation Events.

When an event activates the **approach** response, our brain provides us with a reward in the form of chemicals (e.g., dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin) which make us experience positive emotions and enhance our sense of engagement. Our thinking becomes broader, more creative and collaborative, and our ability to solve problems improves. The resulting lower levels of stress positively impact on our health and our immune system. We also become more resilient and adaptable which is good for us, and for our organisation.

When an event activates the **avoid** response, our brain reacts by flooding our body with cortisol and adrenaline that raise blood pressure, increase our heart rate and initiate a fight or flight response that inhibits our ability to think. Engagement cannot occur when we are in this psychological state and prolonged exposure to this state has serious detrimental

effects on our health and performance.

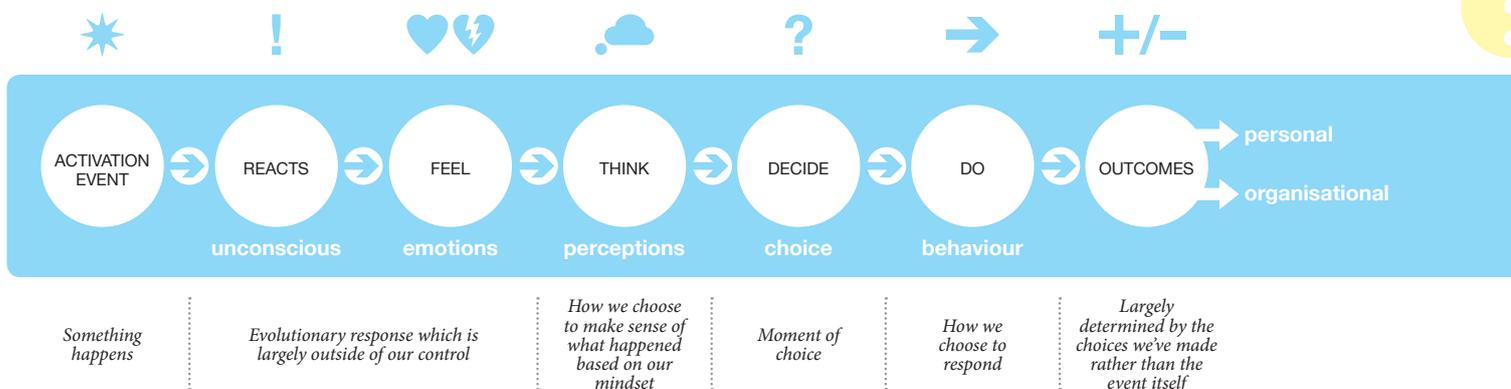
So, it is how we make sense of this emotional response that either enhances or disrupts our sense of engagement, and which will also influence how we may choose to behave in response to our emotional reaction. However, whilst our perception of events will influence our behaviour, it doesn't automatically define it. We decide how to behave and our choice of behaviour will define the outcomes of the Activation Event for both ourselves and for the organisation. It's how we choose to respond to the event, rather than the event itself, that determines the outcomes for ourselves and others.

Our understanding of neuroscience has enabled us to identify the six unconscious domains which, when triggered by an Activation Event, provoke the strongest emotional

response. These domains create our REACTS model which underpins the way we work with organisations to improve engagement and well-being:

THE 'REACTS' DOMAINS

- R = Relatedness**
The sense of safety and security we get from being with 'people like me'.
- E = Equity**
Our perception that we are fairly rewarded for our efforts relative to others.
- A = Advancement**
Our ability to achieve, grow or make progress in something we see as important.
- C = Control**
The extent to which we feel we can personally influence circumstances and events.
- T = Transparency**
Being able to assess situational risk and intent in order to deal positively with ambiguity.
- S = Status**
Our perceived relative importance to others.



What are the implications for engagement and well-being?

By understanding how we respond to Activation Events in our working environment, organisational leaders can create a culture which addresses our unconscious need for *relatedness, equity, advancement, control, transparency* and *status* and encourages us to choose behaviours which contribute positively to organisational performance. By enabling us to experience more positive *approach* emotions in the workplace, leaders and managers also enhance the likelihood of us maintaining a positive psychological state which is so vital to both our psychological and physical well-being.

What are some practical steps to build and retain engagement?

The challenge at an organisational level then is to increase engagement at an individual level by understanding what people are engaged with and by providing motivating and meaningful work in which they can make progress; and then understanding and managing Activation Events to ensure this engagement is maintained.

So, in summary, to build engagement you need to take six steps::

- Understand what people in your organisation are engaged with.
- Build engagement by ensuring people have roles which provide the opportunity to make progress in motivating and meaningful work.
- Understand REACTS and how this impacts on individual engagement.
- Identify how you can minimise disruptive events and maximise positive events.
- Build an environment of trust where people are more likely to have positive perceptions about events when they happen, and are able to make more positive choices about how they respond and behave.
- Develop your understanding of how and why people respond to events, and consider how your own behaviour might create 'events' for others in your organisation.

Resilient, adaptable people make resilient, adaptable organisations.

Momentum

We have created our *Momentum* programme to provide support for you, as leaders and managers, to implement initiatives which create a culture which builds engagement, trust, resilience and adaptability – the basis for enhanced well-being of your people and which will ultimately deliver increased performance and profitability for your organisation.

For more information, contact us today or visit our website:

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Download the full research paper at designed4success.co.uk/research.html

1. Consulting

Helping organisations achieve better and more sustainable outcomes by leveraging the science of human emotions and behaviour.

2. Leadership programme

Providing leaders with the understanding, knowledge and tools they need to build engagement, trust, adaptability and resilience.

3. Coaching for individuals and teams

Helping individuals and teams develop a deeper awareness of how they, and others, respond to events and how this influences outcomes.

4. Psychometrics and tools

Helping organisations create and sustain high levels of work-related engagement, motivation and well-being.