

# Brain at work

Emotions are a potent force, and when harnessed in the right way they can bring huge value to your business.



**Complex feedback loops in the brain can override the hedonistic principle**

Every driver knows that you don't get full power from the engine until the clutch is fully engaged, and every manager knows that their workforce needs to be engaged to release its full potential.

Engaged employees don't just turn up on time and do their job. They love their work and bring all their creativity and energy to it. And if everybody is engaged, they are more than a workforce - they are a team, and they go the extra mile.

Managers are increasingly recognising that emotions are at play here, not just an intellectual recognition that they need to put in a day's work to gain a day's pay. Getting employees emotionally committed to the company's aims and objectives is one of the toughest challenges facing any manager, from line supervisors to chief executives, and our mission at TALTalent is to provide them with the knowledge, skills and tools to get their employees engaged.

TALTalent has built up a wide knowledge of the principles of psychology and experience of the practical tools and methods that are available to build a workplace culture that fosters engagement. The general tenet is that what you think influences what you feel and what you feel influences what you think, and that people are naturally hedonistic, seeking out pleasure and avoiding pain.

However, the latest research in brain imaging is revealing a complex system of feedback loops that govern our behaviour and which can override the hedonistic principle. Our work focuses on understanding and influencing these positive and negative feedback loops that underpin behaviours both as individuals and as organisations.

TALTalent believes strongly that a 'one size fits all' approach is not effective in promoting employee engagement. Every individual is

different, and every organisation has its own unique challenges and requirements.

Our long experience with clients has brought us to an understanding of the behavioural patterns that lead either to engagement, success and a loyal and committed workforce, or to disengagement, a demoralised and fragmented workforce and mediocre performance.

The first step to employee engagement is to understand the individual dynamics of the organisation, as each operates in a different culture and market and has a different structure. These factors will have created a brand that employees may or may not subscribe to, with a direct impact on their commitment. Some companies have strong employee brands that makes it easy to recruit and motivate the best-qualified staff who are proud to work for them.

The next challenge is the organisation's leaders, who may themselves have developed unconsciously into barriers to engagement. Most leaders know how to behave in theory but have developed their own ways of doing things that become comfort zones. Stepping outside those zones activates defence mechanisms that can impede the ability to do the right things. It is our experience that the level of employee engagement in an organisation can be predicted by examining senior management - if they are self aware, flexible, open to change and skilled communicators, they more likely to be motivate employees.

At the employee levels, the indicators of a poorly-motivated, disengaged workforce are clear to see for a leader who knows what to look for.

The main indicator of disengagement is people working to their own agendas who resist new ideas or ways of working. The next is a general decline in enthusiasm and energy levels as a result of lack trust and buy-in to the company and its purpose.

Now look at communication flows within the organisation. Are all the ideas and input coming from the leaders? If the employees do not feel their ideas matter, but simply 'do what the bosses tell them to do', engagement has seriously lapsed.

Are employees defensive? If they tend to be isolationist and protective of their role, they will respond to pressure by keeping their heads under the parapet and getting on with their jobs rather than going on the offensive and seeking solutions to problems. There is a danger that people will rationalise a narrow view of their own job responsibilities, without regard to what might be best for the company at the time.

Larger organisations often have established intelligence networks in the form of employee surveys and appraisals, staff turnover data and so on, and these can give valuable information on levels of engagement.

Engagement is particularly important at times

People are naturally hedonistic, seeking out pleasure and avoiding pain.

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of change, yet it often gets diluted in the general fray of day to day priorities. TALTalent have worked with start-up organisations, with new leaders and teams, in M&A and business transformation situations to ensure engagement remains on the performance management agenda.

**For more information call 020 7378 6884 or email [info@taltalent.com](mailto:info@taltalent.com) web: [www.taltalent.com](http://www.taltalent.com)**

**TALTalent speaker events debating current hot business issues. London April 27th Justin Webb talking about the parallels between the US and the UK elections.**

**London Seminar May 25th "Performance Management from 3 Perspectives": how to maximise it; financial rewards; managing people when things go wrong.**

**These events are free but attendance is by invitation only so please contact us if you are interested in joining us.**

**This article was written by Graham Johnson and Ingrid Blades from TALTalent**

## FIVE INDICATORS OF DISENGAGEMENT TAKING HOLD

- Conflict is avoided, not resolved
- Procrastination rules and decisions are not taken promptly
- More important business information is shared round the water cooler rather than at official meetings
- Correct procedure is more important than success
- People fail to make their expectations clear and then resent the fact that they are not met

## FIVE FEATURES OF AN ENGAGED WORKFORCE

- Employees are loyal - they talk to each other rather than about each other
- Both leaders and individuals challenge each other openly
- People are accountable for their own actions and take pride in their contribution to success
- Individuals support the organisation's brand and work to deliver on what the company promises
- Mistakes are regarded as inevitable incidents on the road to experience, but experience is not the name given to the same mistakes we make over and over again

## SIX WAYS TO PROMOTE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

- Tap into the wealth of experience and ability of the workforce
- Establish a system of recognition and rewards for effective work, that are merit based, emotionally satisfying and not always financial-
- Face up to change as a given and invest in developing employees who can adapt their skills accordingly
- Balance top down and bottom up leadership to create an environment conducive to optimal performance had maximum engagement
- Never assume a message given is the message received -use more than one approach to communicating and always consider employees as individuals
- Make innovation and success everyones issue