The Practitioner's Guide to...

Essential techniques for employee engagement

Tips, tools and practical advice for building a committed workforce

Written by leading employee engagement experts:

- Linda Dulye on Action Teams
- David Grossman on Message Maps
- Tony Quinlan on Storytelling
- Caryn Vanstone on Appreciative Inquiry

MELCRUM

Global research and training for internal communicators

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MELCRUM
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About Melcrum

Melcrum is a research and training business, expert in all aspects of internal communication, with offices in London, Chicago and Sydney. Through our global networks, we connect more than 25,000 professional communicators in sharing what works. Together, we seek to improve the effectiveness and influence of internal communication. Our publications include:

- Strategic Communication Management
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- How to Use Social Media to Engage Employees
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- How to Communicate Business Strategy to Employees
- How to Structure Internal Communication
- Making Managers Better Communicators
- Employee Engagement
- Effective Communication From The Top
- Internal Communication Measurement

Essential techniques for employee engagement

Foreword

Two years ago, much of the discussion around employee engagement was still focused on the meaning of the term, whether it can actually drive business performance, and what the implications might be for internal communication strategy and the function more generally. Things have moved on since then. Organizations now tend to agree that engaged employees – employees who are keen to “go the extra mile” – can have a very strong positive effect on the success of the business, and have been seeking effective techniques that will allow them to build engagement at all levels.

In this publication, leading employee engagement experts guide readers through the four most widely used employee engagement techniques and how to apply them – action teams, Appreciative Inquiry, message maps and storytelling. The focus is on providing a thorough understanding of what the techniques are and processes and tools for applying them.

Also included is a “snapshot” of how organizations are currently approaching employee engagement, what techniques they’re using and what they’re planning in the next 12 months. This data is based on an extensive survey conducted by Melcrum specially for this guide to help readers benchmark their organizations.

Special thanks go to Linda Dulye, David Grossman, Tony Quinlan and Caryn Vanstone, who have kindly shared their practical expertise, methodologies and experiences for this guide, and to Karen Horn for her insightful introduction.

Graeme Ginsberg
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Case study organizations

DRS Technologies, Inc.

Industry: **Defense**
Headquarters: **USA**
Employees: **9,800**
Revenue: **$1.7 billion**

DRS Technologies, Inc. (commonly known as DRS and formerly known as Diagnostic/Retrieval Systems, Inc.) is a supplier of defense electronic products and systems to the United States Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy, aerospace and defense prime contractors, government intelligence agencies, international military forces, and industrial markets. The company is headquartered in Parsippany, New Jersey.

CASE STUDY: 25

McDonald's

Industry: **Retail**
Headquarters: **USA**
Employees: **447,000**
Revenue: **$20.46 billion**

McDonald's is the world's largest chain of fast-food restaurants, primarily selling hamburgers, chicken, french fries, breakfasts and soft drinks. More recently, it also offers salads, fruit, snack wraps and carrot sticks. The business began in 1940, with a restaurant opened by siblings Dick and Mac McDonald in San Bernardino, California. Today, McDonald's restaurants are found in 120 countries and territories around the world and serve nearly 54 million customers each day.

CASE STUDY: 60, 69

O2

Industry: **Telecommunications**
Headquarters: **UK**
Employees: **12,500**
Revenue: **$5.45 billion**

O2 is a leading provider of mobile services to consumers and businesses in the UK. O2 UK is part of the wider O2 group, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Telefónica S.A. O2 comprises mobile network operators in the UK and Ireland, along with integrated fixed/mobile businesses in Germany, the Czech Republic (Telefónica O2 Czech Republic) and the Isle of Man (Manx Telecom). It also owns 50 percent of the Tesco Mobile and Tchibo Mobilfunk, joint venture businesses in the UK and Germany respectively. In addition, O2 includes O2 Airwave, which supplies secure digital communications to the emergency services, including the Police, Ambulance and Fire, as well as other public safety organisations.

CASE STUDY: 49

Rolls-Royce

Industry: **Aerospace and defense**
Headquarters: **UK**
Employees: **38,000**
Revenue: **$14.76 billion**

Rolls-Royce plc is a world-leading provider of power systems and services for use on land, at sea and in the air. The organization operates in four global markets – civil aerospace, defense aerospace, marine and energy – and has a broad customer base comprising 600 airlines, 4,000 corporate and utility aircraft and helicopter operators, 160 armed forces, more than 2,000 marine customers (including 70 navies), and energy customers in 120 countries.

CASE STUDY: 24

Royal Mail

Industry: **Postal service**
Headquarters: **UK**
Employees: **190,000**
Revenue: **$18.68 billion**

Royal Mail is the national postal service of the UK. It delivers 84 million items every working day and has a network of 14,376 post offices throughout the country. Its domestic and European parcels businesses – General Logistics Systems and Parcelforce Worldwide – handle some 360 million parcels each year.

CASE STUDY: 109

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About the authors

Caryn Vanstone, Business Director, Ashridge Consulting
Caryn's practice is influenced by years working as both a line manager and change specialist in industry, working in the post-privatization UK water industry. She consulted on projects including outsourcing and joint ventures, customer centricity, IT system change, individual/team leadership development and major restructuring programs. Since joining Ashridge Consulting in 1999, she has led many highly innovative people engagement projects for corporates, including O2 (the UK's leading mobile telecommunications company), Nokia, NSN (the newly merged Nokia Siemens Networks company), BP and American Express, as well as projects in the NHS and BBC.

Caryn's consulting style draws from complexity theory, psychotherapy and Appreciative Inquiry combined with process re-design and project management, and large group work like Open Space and World Café. She has been invited to speak at strategic change conferences from Florida to Tokyo on her innovative approach to high-engagement strategy formation and implementation. She has an MSc in Organization Consulting and for the last eight years has been a Tutor on the Ashridge Masters in Organization Consulting.

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Linda Dulye, **President and Founder, L.M. Dulye & Co.**
Linda is an internationally recognized business leader and visionary for using two-way communication and employee engagement practices to increase business performance and drive change at some of the world's most admired companies. A former communication leader for GE and Allied Signal, Dulye founded L.M. Dulye & Co. in 1998 with a business process approach for improving communication effectiveness across organizations through effective change management strategies and a groundbreaking engagement methodology that calls for a "Spectator-Free Workforce®".

The New York-based firm's clients include Fortune 500 firms such as Rolls-Royce North America, Lockheed Martin, Chrysler Financial, Tyco International, Intel, Merck, Cigna, Philip Morris and Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Texas, Illinois and New Mexico. Other key clients include DRS Technologies, Inc., Army Corps of Engineers, Unisource and LeasePlan. L.M. Dulye & Co.'s unique and proven two-way communication methodology was nominated to Fast Company's Fast 50 Roster for change leadership.

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About the authors

David Grossman, President & Principal thoughtpartner™, dg&a
David is a pioneer and award-winning industry expert and consultant in internal and leadership communication – acting as an advocate for employees and their communication needs, and as a thought partner to management. He is President & Principal thoughtpartner™ of dg&a, a boutique communications consultancy that helps leaders and teams be at their best, tell their story from the "inside-out", and deliver measurable business results. dg&a's client roster includes Abbott Laboratories, Bayhealth Medical Center, Texas Instruments, Centers for Disease Control, Geisinger Health System, Lockheed Martin, Convergys, McDonald's, Nielsen, and Rockwell Automation. Most recently, David has been helping create what he calls leadercommunicators™, who unleash the power of communication to engage employees and drive performance.

He's known for his thoughtful and personal consulting approach that leverages communication as a strategic business tool. A leader in the field, his methodologies in strategy development and messaging have won him accolades for bringing structure and sound discipline to the practice of communication. His agency, which focuses on organizational consulting and strategic leadership and internal communications, was recently named 2007 Boutique Agency of the Year by *PRWeek* – the second time the firm has won this prestigious honor.

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Tony Quinlan, Principal Consultant and Chief Storyteller, Narrate
Tony is a business alchemist who founded Narrate in 2000 to create more effective, healthier organizational cultures and communications. He's passionate about breaking out of rigid, purely rational communications to create real cultural and behavioral change. A member of the Cognitive Edge network, he is always exploring new ideas and practices, looking at current business practices from a different perspective. From Tony's, if you want 12-step models and the "same old, same old", then you've got the wrong man.

A frequent keynote speaker and conference chair, Tony writes on communications, branding and culture for international publications and blogs semi-regularly at www.thenarrateblog.com. Today, he is a writer, keynote speaker, communications coach, masterclass presenter and international consultant. But he has also been a radio presenter, radar designer, TV tuner, dishwasher, lift attendant, software programmer and presented live public roadshows to 8,000 people at a time. Needless to say, he has stories about all of them.

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Introduction

As internal communication professionals, we quickly learn that our employers really want outcomes. They may have asked us for products, like communication plans, intranet stories, events or speeches, but that's not what they really want. Likely, they've thought they had a problem with "communication" and then self-diagnosed what they need. The smart professional communication will understand that and help them with what they asked for and give them what they need.

The move towards "employee engagement"

For the last 15 to 20 years, most of us as communicators have understood the value we can provide and want to give much more. Most of us have sought ways to show the value of what we contribute. In our effort to prove strategic value, we look for ways to demonstrate that our work has contributed to the business's bottom line.

We adopted the new title of organizational communication, developed scorecards and helped our organizations with becoming an "employer of choice". All of these helped us reach out into process thinking, measurement and surveying. We began to look for relationships between what we do and tangible business results.

Then we moved on to employee "satisfaction," but we were soon arguing that being "satisfied" just isn't enough and that what is needed is employee "engagement". The idea is that engaged employees are more likely to be productive and innovative, and that they will likely stay with the company, reducing turnover.

We know our work helps employees understand the connection between what they do and the business goals. We know we can help people feel their contributions matter.

The concept is actually quite simple. But the work isn't.

Employee engagement is more than just a measurement

Like many professions today, the training, experience and expectations for communicators are broad. Employee engagement can take us into new and exciting areas that may not have been part of our training: surveying and statistics, measurement and metrics, process improvement and maybe Six Sigma methodology, diversity and "events as experiences". However, the lure – and the danger – is to become too involved in any of them and to lose focus on the goal.

Some of us get caught up in thinking, "If I just had 'a number' – like all other departments – then my business leaders would understand the value of what our people do (and the value of my work)." While it's important for us to have measures, I've come to believe that business leaders who already understand the value in what we do are the ones I want to work for. Those who don't value communication probably won't be persuaded by any metric.

Employee engagement is more than a name

Over the past few years, I've seen several heads of internal communication change the names of their teams to "employee engagement". That's great where there's a genuine effort to connect divergent activities into delivering on a measurable model that gives the company a believable measure of employee contribution. But if we're simply renaming our teams and then doing the same work we always did, well, that's just short-term thinking and embracing a fashionable phrase to make ourselves feel better.

A former colleague who was joining a new company told me her boss wanted to call their team something new and "more exciting". She wondered what I thought was the most current and relevant term. I suggested that "employee engagement" remains a crucial concept for internal communication. I also suggested that they consider the notion of "employee experiences", because I think that understanding those key experiences (or relationships or processes) that employees have with the employer are central to understanding "engagement". Those include such things as their relationship with the company, their teams, their manager as well as their potential for career development. This gets into the actionable areas where effective communication is often the difference in the engagement of employees.

Taking employee engagement to the next level

Two years ago, employee engagement was still a relatively new idea for many organizations and, as with any new idea, internal communicators at that time were discussing broader questions around it: what does it mean, what influences and drives it, how you measure it and what are the implications for communication strategy and planning.

Things have moved a great deal since then. Employee engagement is no longer just an idea that organizations are exploring. It's something they've been introducing in a tangible way. In an employee engagement survey conducted in October of 2007 for this practitioner's guide, Melcrum found that employee engagement is on the agenda for 81 percent of organizations globally, and 27 percent of these organizations have a formal employee engagement program in place.

It might be said that employee engagement is "midway" through its cycle – no longer a term that's transparent to early adopters only and hazy to everyone else. But as more people have come online with it, they're asking a more particular, practical question: "We understand what engagement is, but how do you actually achieve it?"

No magic pill for engagement

While I believe there's no magic employee engagement pill – no one single action that will give you instant understanding of employee engagement – I think the journey to that understanding is valuable. But it takes time. Usually communicators don't have responsibility for all of the pieces of building an employee engagement model. Important partnerships and tools need to be built with IT, HR, or whoever is responsible for aspects like human capital metrics and surveying. And you have to have baseline measures to understand trends. It can sound easy, but the trick is in knowing what matters in your environment, measuring effectively and connecting these metrics to business results.

Essential techniques for employee engagement

Although there's no magic pill for employee engagement, there are techniques that have been proven effective. This practitioner's guide focuses on four of the most important and widely used of these: action teams, appreciative inquiry, message maps and storytelling. Remember that no one technique is necessarily "better" than another; these techniques can be applied separately or in combination for an initiative or program, and which technique or combination of techniques is most effective will ultimately depend on the context and the desired outcome.

Keep it simple

At one point, being a communicator meant writing stories for newsletters and planning company meetings. Sometimes today, those same activities are important in building employee engagement, but so are an almost dizzying range of other tactics with measurable results. It's easy to lose sight of the goal when there are so many interesting stops along the way. I think the key to success is to keep it simple, being strategic about what we're doing and why, and focusing on outcomes.

There is tremendous value in all of the progress we've made around employee engagement. But I think our global workplace needs its communication professionals to focus just as strongly on communication basics and to do them very well. Where we've been is just as important as where we're going. In the end, it's an exciting journey, and one well worth taking.

Karen Horn, Senior Vice President, Internal Communication, Washington Mutual

Case studies

1.

Action teams

Linda Dulye, president and founder, L.M. Dulye & Co.

Organizations all too often cascade their communications, pushing them down to front-line employees from the top. This means that those at the end of the pipeline rarely have an opportunity to voice their concerns or opinions. Employee action teams allow organizations to create an active, two-way communication program, ensuring that everyone can add his or her voice to the dialogue.

Chapter Contents

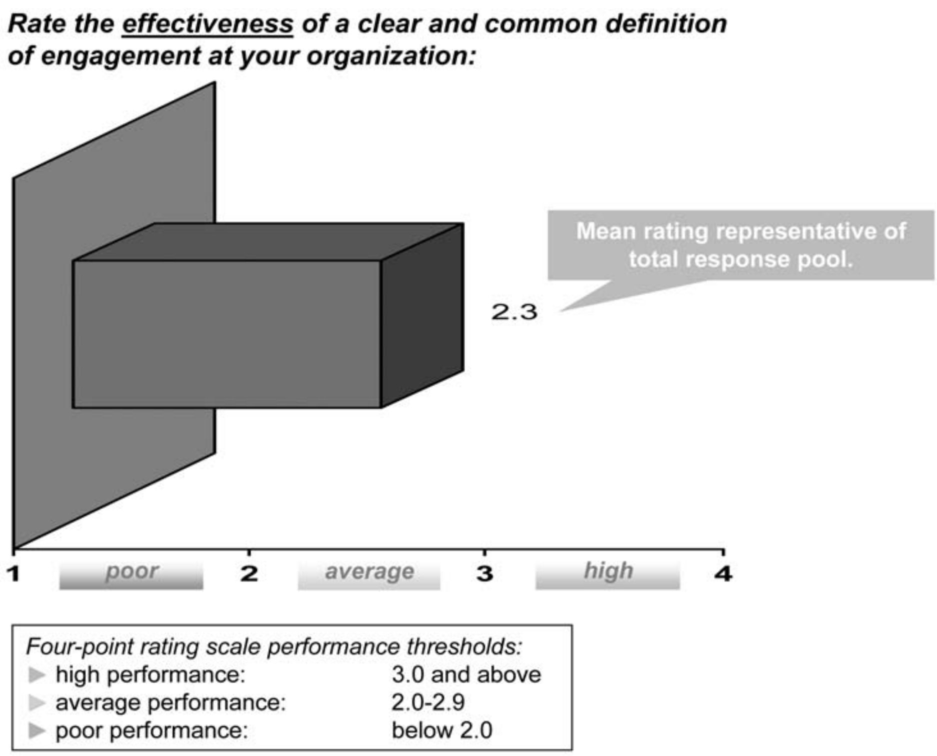
1.1 Setting the stage for employee action teams

No organization can survive today by maintaining the status quo. Even top-performing organizations need to achieve at higher levels to maintain their competitive edge. But it takes more than a new business model or enhanced paradigm to push performance and productivity beyond the norm. What's needed is an engaged workforce.

1.2 What is engagement?

The importance of a clear and common definition
But what does "engagement" really mean? A major difficulty that many organizations fall into is that they don't start out on the same page on how they define engagement. This lack of clarity can cause the initiative to be unsuccessful. In recent research we conducted (see Figure 1.1, below), involving more than 200 communication and HR leaders from leading global organizations, we found that the mean rating respondents attributed to the performance of a clear and common definition of engagement at their organization was only at the lower end of "average".

Fig 1.1: *L.M. Dulye & Co.'s research into the effectiveness of a clear and common definition of engagement*



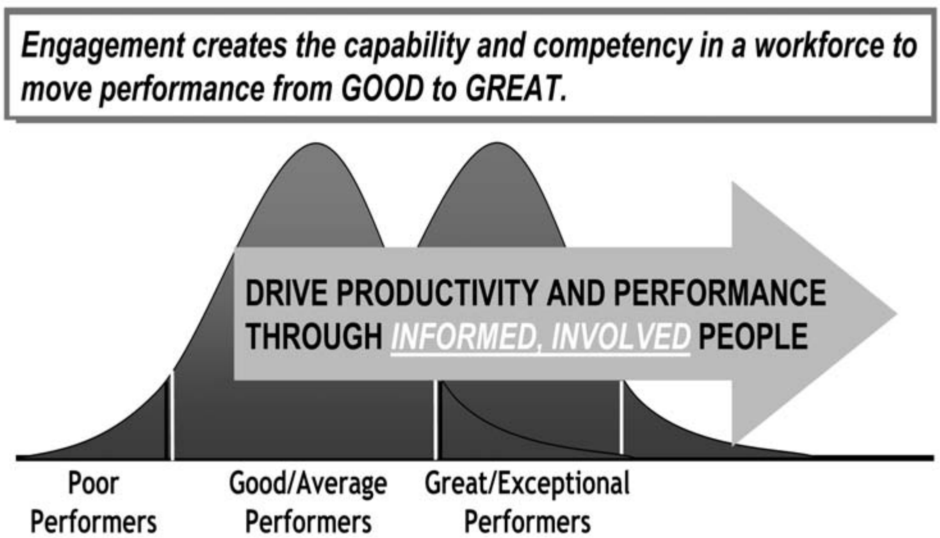
Informed and involved
L.M. Dulye & Co. defines engagement as both an outcome and a process. And an engaged workforce is one that feels fully part of the organization's business goals and plans. Engagement is the act of building communal ownership and accountability, for what your business or organization stands for and must achieve, through an informed and involved workforce of day-to-day work practices and decisions.

The role of leadership
Finally, it's leadership's challenge and responsibility to meaningfully engage the workforce – because the employees are the people who will move an organization from good to great and beyond. This is a fact of modern business life. Leaders at all levels must do more than just tell employees what to do. Instead, they must engage employees in a way that connects them to business goals. In other words, leaders must show employees how their actions will help the organization succeed and how they will benefit from that success.

One way to think about engagement is to consider employees as business partners. Most of us know what happens if one side of a partnership withholds information or doesn't involve the other partner in putting plans into action. The same holds true with your workforce.

Engagement is a business initiative, not a functional one. The purpose for involvement must be business based. Figure 1.2, below, indicates that only a very small percentage of employees in most organizations are truly engaged. The others are either checked out or straddling the fence. The bottom line is that the more engaged an employee is, the better the performance overall.

Fig 1.2: *The impact of engagement on performance*



A total team effort

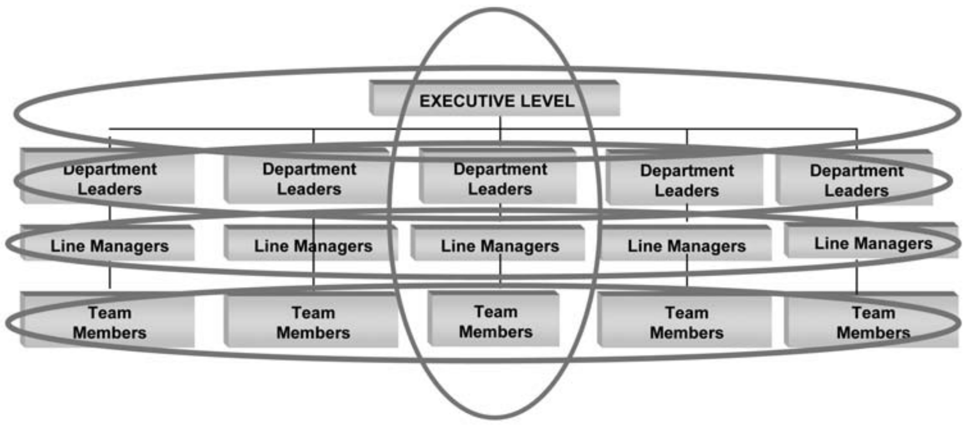
Engagement takes a total team effort and requires the redesign of traditional, top-down practices to support the active involvement of the front line. Every level – and every person – in your organization is accountable for contributing to the effectiveness of your engagement program. No successful organization can have even one spectator. Instead, there needs to be a culture shift so that every leader and employee recognizes that they have a responsibility in the process. Engagement and collaboration must happen between departments and between levels (i.e. horizontally as well as vertically), as shown in Figure 1.3, below.

Whatever the business initiative, productivity and performance can be driven through an informed and involved workforce. Through employee engagement, organizations can instill the necessary capabilities and competencies to push performance far beyond the status quo and improve business results.

Getting employees to be part of the communication process is more than a one-way cascade of information flowing from management. It's about creating a culture where employees help lead the process.

In the coming pages, you will learn about the perfect vehicle to drive productivity and performance among the workforce – employee action teams.

Fig 1.3: *Engagement must happen horizontally as well as vertically within the organization*



1.3 Why use an employee action team?

Remember, an engaged workforce is informed and involved. Yet, most organizations routinely fail to inform and involve employees in one important area – communication. The general model in far too many cases starts with communications cascading from the top of the organization and getting pushed down to the front-line employees. That's a poor tactic because it shuts out employees at the start. Worse yet, the workers on the end of the communication pipeline rarely get an opportunity to voice their concerns or opinions. Fortunately, there's an effective and tested way to create a two-way communication system that involves employees from start to finish – and keeps them informed every step of the process.

Employee action teams provide the perfect way to create an active, two-way communication program that ensures that everyone in the organization can add his or her voice to the dialogue on every issue.

1.4 Action teams and the "3S Engagement Model"

L.M. Dulye & Co.'s three-phase approach to starting employee action teams and sustaining workforce engagement is called the 3S Engagement Model:

- Phase 1: Setup
- Phase 2: Start
- Phase 3: Sustain

This 3S Engagement Model is summarized in Figure 1.4, below.

Phase 1: Setup – lay the groundwork
It all starts with laying the foundation. Engagement programs and action teams are built from the ground up. One essential component of this phase is defining data-driven goals to show the need for engagement. In addition, leaders must show how engagement can reach a set of clearly defined business goals. It's a given that leaders provide a link between the team and overall business strategies and goals, for example, reducing waste or eliminating workplace accidents. The big question to answer here is, "Why and what must we improve?"

Phase 2: Start – engage participants
Engagement starts here. But before anything happens, your organization must decide which employees will help your organization improve. Don't misunderstand that last point. It

Fig 1.4: *L.M. Dulye & Co.'s 3S Engagement Model*

doesn't mean that leadership has free reign to handpick members for an employee action team. Instead, leadership must determine what qualities the team members must display to be successful candidates.

Once the standards are set, it's time to open the nomination process to the workforce. Remember, the choice is theirs on who will represent them on the action teams. Unless your organization's business confidentiality or employees could be harmed by a nominee, what the workforce decides should be final.

Phase 3: Sustain – train, trust and implement
Forming a team is one thing. Keeping it running smoothly and successfully is even more important. For starters, sustainability requires training. Team members must know what their duties are and how they will be held accountable for them. Instilling trust is especially crucial. Leaders must prove to action team members that they will be permitted to perform their responsibilities without interference – as long as the organization's financial, technical and personnel well-being aren't endangered by the team's actions.

Finally, it's time to let the action team start its work. If glitches do arise once the team starts engaging, the question to ask is, "What corrective action must we make to maintain it for the long run?" The answers will provide a road map to progress and success.

1.5 Key steps for starting and sustaining effective employee action teams

This section describes the key steps associated with starting and sustaining effective employee action teams:

1. Establish a sound business need.
2. Establish common definitions.
3. Coach senior leaders and enlist their support.
4. Explain the purpose, process and value to the workforce.
5. Establish the scope of the program.
6. Dedicate resources and funding for long-term support.
7. Select team leaders.
8. Conduct team orientations.
9. Facilitate regular meetings.
10. Establish measurement and reporting processes.
11. Recognize people and progress.

1. Establish a sound business need

Great leaders understand that every action they and their organizations take has a solid business reason behind it. From the onset, you must define the value of the employee action teams. Show how they can improve morale and job satisfaction and increase productivity. Provide a link between the team and overall business strategy and goals such as reducing waste or eliminating workplace accidents. Then discuss how the organization will identify areas of concern and measure ongoing improvement.

2. Establish common definitions

Spell out the definitions for engagement and tirelessly communicate them through the action teams. L.M. Dulye & Co. strongly advocates a "spectator-free" workforce. This belief means that every employee, from the CEO to the newest of front-line staff, must play an active role in the organization's success. From the start, it must be continually stressed that no one can watch from the sidelines.

3. Coach senior leaders and enlist their support

This is a key element. Without the total ongoing commitment of top leaders to "2-way" (L.M. Dulye & Co.'s spelling within its approach) communications and the action team process, engagement will stumble from day one. To get leaders on board, include "2-way" communications training and team building in their development programs, either in groups or one-on-one sessions. Next, be sure that every senior leadership agenda includes engagement as a standing topic. To keep them on track, establish responsibilities for senior management and monitor their compliance to those responsibilities. It's also recommended to tie in financial incentives to help leadership to stay with the program.

4. Explain the purpose, process and value to the workforce

The best way to gain buy-in from employees for "2-way" communication, engagement and action teams is to clearly define the reasons and benefits of each. To do that, establish formal communication plans for senior leaders so that they can take the message to their teams (see Figure 1.5, below, for an example). And make sure that you put human channels of communication first – this gives a face, voice and presence to leaders. Then, identify "communication champions" in top, middle and front-line management to further strengthen the message. Every step of the way, drive the message through "2-way" communication channels, listen to unfiltered feedback and then respond honestly to each and every person involved.

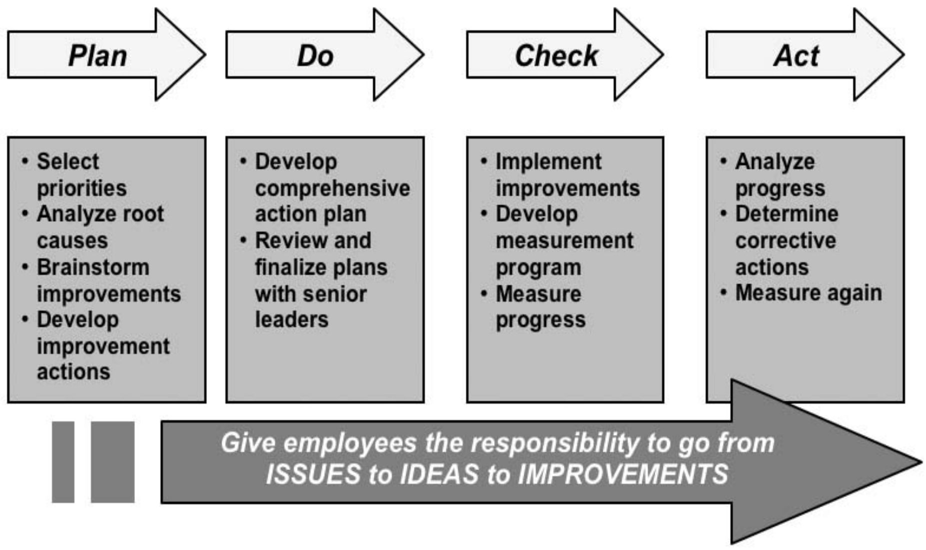
Fig 1.5: *Example of a formal leader communication plan*

WHAT (CHANNEL)	WHEN (FREQUENCY)	WHO (PARTICIPANTS)	WHY (PURPOSE)	HOW (PROCESS)
WORKPLACE WALKAROUND	WEEKLY	1-ON-1 AND INTACT GROUP	LISTEN AND LEARN	INFORMAL
STAFF MEETING	WEEKLY	INTACT GROUP	STATUS PROGRAMS/ SHARE INFO	FORMAL
SKIP LEVEL MEETING	MONTHLY	CROSS-FUNCTIONAL AND INTACT GROUPS	BRIEF BUSINESS UPDATE/ LISTEN AND LEARN	FORMAL
TOWN HALL	MONTHLY	LARGE, CROSS-FUNCTIONAL GROUPS	UPDATE PROGRESS TO GOALS/ LISTEN AND LEARN	FORMAL

5. Establish the scope of the program

The first step is to outline whether the engagement process and action teams cover a broad or narrow focus. Then develop a pilot program that can roll into a broader deployment plan (see Figure 1.6, below, for example). It's imperative to determine the roles and outcomes of leadership and the action team. Decision-making authority must be established for leaders and action teams, while criteria for recommendations for the type, number and budgets of improvement actions are set.

Fig 1.6: *Establish the scope of the program – L.M. Dulye & Co.'s "Plan, Do, Check, Act" (PDCA) approach*



A checklist is provided in Figure 1.7 (opposite) to help you ensure all bases are covered when establishing the program scope.

The action team concept and roles for participants

At this phase in the process, it's also the right time to reinforce the employee action team concept, as well as identify clearly defined roles for all participating.

L.M. Dulye & Co. defines an action team as a cross-functional, diverse advisory team of employees, compiled of around eight to 10 non-management workers, depending on the organization's size. This team assumes a partnering role with executives to provide:

1. Direct, unfiltered feedback on the effectiveness of messages and media.
2. Repair of ideas when communication break-downs occur.
3. Suggestions for leadership communications, such as where to go and what to say during informal practices like workplace walkarounds.

Examples of action team participants' roles are provided in Figure 1.8 (page 18).

Fig 1.7: *Checklist to help you plan the scope of the program*

Get upfront decisions to these requirements:	
1. Line of business, department, or companywide focus	____________________
2. Big-picture focus or narrow focus?	____________________
3. Pilot program with broader deployment plan	____________________
Determine role and outcomes:	
1. Action team role	____________________
2. Decision-making authority	____________________
3. Criteria for recommendations (improvement actions)	____________________
4. Number of recommendations	____________________
Budget requirements for recommendations:	____________________

6. Dedicate resources and funding for long-term support

Step number one here is to determine a “roll-out” process and schedule – and stick to it. After that, establish a project/initiative partnership between line(s) of business and functional departments. Ensure that teams have the tools to do their work by determining procedures, project management tools, training, and communication plan for selecting, supporting and sustaining a team. To fund the process, develop project budgets for internal and external requirements and determine co-funding arrangements.

7. Select team members

First thing to remember, leadership doesn’t handpick team members. Teams are selected using a bottom-up nomination process. Before nominating anyone, set membership criteria, including demographic requirements that ensure teams include a diverse mix of members. During the final selection notification process, involve all senior management. Assign management sponsors to serve in a supporting role to the finalized team and conduct resource planning with immediate managers of selected members to provide on-the-job back-up when they attend team meetings.

And remember, when asking for nominations, be sure to communicate the value of participating in the team. Some value points include:

1. Decision-making authority.
2. Real responsibility.
3. Networking with management and employees.
4. Special training and skills development.
5. Developmental assignment.
6. Learn the business.
7. Attend business reviews and management meetings.
8. Visibility in the organization.

Fig 1.8: *Examples of roles in the action team process*

Company senior leaders	• Review progress in business reviews • Communicate frequently about the process and results • Celebrate successes • Hold site leaders accountable • Provide resources
Site business and functional leaders	• Serve as management sponsors • Dedicate resources (talent, tools, $$) for action teams • Periodically attend action team meetings • Participate in program reviews • Promote high potential candidates from action team • Hold action teams accountable
Front-line employees	• Actively participate on action teams • Get trained in action planning tools and methodology • Conduct local research • Develop action plans with improvements • Provide direct feedback to site senior leadership • Communicate with peers and management via formal/informal channels • Share lessons learned and practices

8. Conduct team orientations

Face-to-face orientation meetings are a must – even for virtual teams. L.M. Dulye & Co. conducts two-day training sessions that combine skills development in problem solving, teambuilding activities and reviews of program standards, work tools and schedules. The orientation session generates team momentum early by establishing ground rules, roles, clear objectives and communication practices.

Involvement of senior management at these sessions is essential for demonstrating their support, discussing their expectations and communicating the direct link between the work of the team and business goals. Their presence also signals the importance of partnership that must be a constant for engagement to succeed. An employee action team is a working partner with its company's leaders. And that's a very different position than most employees have ever been in.

9. Facilitate regular meetings

To ensure effectiveness in time and outcomes, contract an unbiased outside or third-party expert in team facilitation. Team dynamics and problem solving need to be kept in check and on track. A skilled facilitator will foster focus, innovation, open dialogue and constructive outcomes in each team meeting. Team meetings should occur regularly – and at least weekly. A formal meeting schedule should be set in advance and distributed to team members and their immediate supervisors.

10. Establish measurement and reporting processes

Take the temperature of the team often using pulse check measurement practices. Collect and compare data that tracks the effectiveness of team meetings, work tools, management support and decision making opportunities. Make data a constant guidepost for teams. Share the data upward and outward through reporting processes that tie into formal reviews. Remember, what gets measured, gets done. A constant flow of performance data will keep action teams from fizzling out. Data drives accountability.

11. Recognize people and progress

Everyone likes praise for a job well done. So keep employee recognition visible, especially so that front-line and managers notice. In addition, highlight the accomplishments of teams and those supporting team actions. And most important, empower all levels to recognize contributions, big and small.

Figure 1.9, below, provides some closing advice to help you keep the action team process described above on track.

Fig 1.9: *Tips for keeping the process on track*

TIPS FOR KEEPING THE PROCESS ON TRACK

1. Select the “right” people for the action teams from the start.
2. Coach management and educate constantly in delegation, communications skills, team building and change management.
3. Commit significant time and resources to improvement actions – a key but often underestimated point.
4. A disciplined process is often a challenge to implement, but demonstrates results.
5. The management team must remain committed and willing to navigate in a “bottom-up” culture.
6. Communicate progress regularly.
7. Recognize people and celebrate successes, large and small.
8. Remember that implementation is the hardest part.
9. Brand and communicate with no let-up on internal PR.
10. Trust the engagement process and team decisions and actions of employee teams.
11. Always allow for “soak time” for the message and impact of the action team to set in.

1.6 The team toolkit

Once your team is up and running, it will need to measure its effectiveness and progress. This doesn't require a ton of complicated algorithms and formulas. Actually, most of the methods of gathering data are relatively simple. Whatever the form, none takes more than a few minutes to complete. This section provides crucial tools from the L.M. Dulye & Co. kits to help you keep your organization's employee action team on track:

1. Feedback forms.
2. Pulse checks.
3. Status reports.

The combined use of these tools will provide measurable information about an engagement program's effectiveness. More important, that information can be used to bring about even more improvements. The tools must be used in tandem with the action teams to produce ultimate engagement.

1. Feedback forms

This is a quick survey tool that assesses progress against stated goals. The feedback form (a sample is provided in Figure 1.10, opposite) generates data about organizational and operational factors that tie directly to the work of action teams. The data from these forms is important research to the team as well as to the business leadership.

Measurement can determine the barriers and enablers of effective workplace communication practices or a new business initiative that has been introduced to the workforce. A feedback form consists of 15 to 18 multiple choice questions with a rating scale, several open-ended questions and a few demographic questions. You'll get best results when this measurement tool is completed and collected during actual meetings. L.M. Dulye & Co. refers to this as "just-in-time measurement with no intrusion".

2. Pulse Checks

These are short weekly surveys similar to feedback forms, with about half the number of multiple-choice questions and a few open-ended questions. Once again, just-in-time sampling gets data collected, compiled and used fast. The scope of a pulse check is narrower than a feedback form. Rather than measure a half dozen or more dynamics associated with a team and its work, the pulse check focuses on a few only. By keeping the metrics and questions similar week to week, performance trends – highs and lows – can be readily spotted and addressed. Sample pulse check formats can be found in Figure 1.11, page 22, and Figure 1.12, page 23.

3. Status Reports

These are standard reporting tools that capture the highlights, lowlights and work requirements of a team. The report is prepared weekly, preferably by the team facilitator and team leader together, based on data surfaced through the pulse check and team progress toward achieving expected outcomes. The report succinctly identifies what's going well, what's not, any plans to fix problems and immediate deliverables. A sample status report is provided in Figure 1.13, page 23.

Fig 1.10: *Sample Feedback Form*

All-Hands Meeting Feedback Form

Your candid feedback will help to improve future meetings like this.
Please answer all questions by checking the appropriate box. ***Thank you.***

1. Department where I work	Quality	Mfg.	Engineering	Procurement	Finance	Test	Marketing	Other
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. My job classification	Manager/Supervisor	Salaried Employee	Hourly Employee
	☐	☐	☐

3. Based on today's meeting, rate your understanding of your company's:	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
a) organizational structure	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) commitment to the customer	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) financial performance in recent years	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) business strategy	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) aligning our actions with vision and goals	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) link to the corporation	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Rate the quality of today's meeting:	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
a) Topics covered	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Speaker	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Presentation materials	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Video	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Opportunity for participation in discussion/dialogue	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) Direct responses to questions	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) Room set-up and logistics	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Rate the following:	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
a) Relevance of information covered at today's meeting to me in my job	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) My ability to contribute to the business goals identified for our company	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) My confidence in our collective ability to meet our business goals	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) My involvement in customer focus	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) My interest in customer focus	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. What did you learn today about our company that you didn't know before today's meeting?__________

7. What topics would you like to see covered at a future All-Hands Meeting?__________

8. Any additional comments or questions?__________

Please hand in your completed form at the door before you leave the meeting.

Thank you!

Fig 1.11: *Sample pulse check format #1*

ACTION TEAM: WEEK _ PULSE CHECK MEASUREMENT

Business Name: **Team Red Flag Issue:**

1. Rate the effectiveness of these aspects of today's meeting:	1 Very Poor	2 Poor	3 Good	4 Very Good
a) The information covered	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Discussion opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Following the agenda	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Meeting materials	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Overall meeting	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Based on today's meeting:	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
a) I understand the purpose of the Action Team Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) I understand the role of the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) I believe this project will lead to meaningful results.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) I am committed to support this team's success.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) I believe that Senior Leadership at our business demonstrates commitment to the work of this team.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) I believe that my immediate manager demonstrates support for my work on this project and attendance at all team meetings.	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) I know what is expected of me from the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐
h) I have the materials, tools and equipment I need to do my work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
i) My opinions seem to count.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Rate the following dynamics of team members:	**Very Poor**	**Poor**	**Good**	**Very Good**
a) Preparedness for today's meeting.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Ability to work together at today's meeting.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Openness to new ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. What went well today?______________________________

____

5. What could have been improved?______________________________

____

6. Other comments about our work today?______________________________

____

____

____

Name: ______________________________ ***THANK YOU!***

Fig 1.12: *Sample pulse check format #2*

WHAT'S GOING WELL	WHAT'S NOT GOING WELL	HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?

Fig 1.13: *Sample status report*

Weekly Status Report

Action Team Status Report

Reporting Period: Week ending August 24th

Location: xxx

Indicate your current status in the Action Team process: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Going Well *(Areas moving ahead)* *Quick Victory: We are recommending to Senior Management to generate three "key points" from the weekly Senior Management staff meeting, and to distribute these to the workforce via bulletin boards and verbal meetings. We will use future survey to determine effectiveness.* *Comms Team: Boards are installed on each floor and we are starting to get feedback forms from the workforce. We respond to each feedback regardless.*	Corrective Actions *(Fix plans, including dates, for areas not going well)* *Schedule Senior Management representative to attend for first twenty minutes of weekly meeting*
Not Going Well *(Setbacks)* *•We need to engage Senior Management representative better.*	Next Week's Activities *(Upcoming key actions; Questions/concerns for follow-up)* *Complete SWOT analysis and begin root cause; Brief Senior Management representative on "quick victory" recommendation; Finalize power point presentation for brief to workforce on 6 Sept.*

CASE STUDY

ROLLS-ROYCE ENGINE SERVICES

Using action teams to involve front-line employees in the communication process

THE CHALLENGE

When an enterprisewide survey revealed that employees ranked supervisors as poor communicators and stated that they felt left out of the decision-making process, officials at the Rolls-Royce Engine Services in Oakland, California, resolved to create a better system of communication that put front-line employees in control of the process.

SOLUTION – ACTION TEAMS

L.M. Dulye & Co. was called in to help the company develop a two-way communication system, based on a "bottom-up" approach, with employees taking the responsibility for developing and managing how information is conveyed. This new communication effort became part of their Winning Workplace employee engagement program and included these key elements:

1. Employee action teams that scheduled regular walkarounds for leaders to stroll around the plant to informally talk to employees.
2. Continuous learning and development programs for leaders.
3. "Meeting effectiveness" monitoring program to manage information distribution and measure its usefulness for employees.
4. Monday huddles that provided front-line employees and managers the opportunity to discuss job concerns, new work orders, customer visits, safety issues and suggestions for improvement.

5 "Voice of the customer" team that arranged and conducted customer visits to plants, to increase their awareness of the work performed there and to enhance relations between customers and employees.

RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE

As the two-year anniversary of the initiative passed in October 2007, the Rolls-Royce facility celebrated ongoing significant Winning Workplace milestones. First, internal measurements of the Winning Workplace program's success showed an 85-percent favorable response from front-line employees. The business has also seen increases in efficiency and quality. Cross-functional teams reduced error rates by 400% in one area of the facility. A redesign of a product line's footprint led by front-line employees resulted in an increase in output from 3 to 13 engines per month. Further improvements have led to a 19% reduction in engine assembly hours.

Every bit as important, employees now feel part of the big picture when it comes to decision-making and communications.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION IS KEY

"Two-way communication is done correctly when front-line employees have an active role and are involved in the communication process," says Raj Sharma, President, Rolls-Royce Engine Services – Oakland. "They have as much of a responsibility as a senior manager in leading communication. Create cross-functional teams to get people involved. It's your responsibility as a leader to create an environment where everyone will be willing to go that extra mile when it's needed."

ROLLS ROYCE: Using action teams to involve front-line employees in the communication process

CASE STUDY

DRS TECHNOLOGIES, INC. – C4I SEGMENT

Using action teams to align organizational goals

THE CHALLENGE

A diversified, mid-tier defense technology company, DRS Technologies – C4I Segment is preparing for a potential range of challenges, which include the possibility of a future decline in defense spending by the US Department of Defense to a shrinking pool of critical and technical talent. In addition, the company was looking at an innovative, effective way of addressing the feedback received from the annual companywide engagement survey of its employees at 27 US locations.

The most recent survey identified five key areas for DRS-C4I improvement, including business goal alignment, leadership, workplace communication, quality and efficiency.

SOLUTION – ACTION TEAMS

DRS-C4I senior leaders contracted L.M. Dulye & Co. to help it frame a plan to address employee feedback and better serve its customers. In pursuit of those goals, L.M. Dulye & Co. created employee action teams to assist the company in improving the way leadership and front-line workers communicated.

One key move was the commitment of leaders at all levels to better explain the DRS-C4I segment and corporate goals, its performance to those goals and how employee jobs contributed to reaching those goals. Among the tools used to improve communications were:

1. Employee action teams at 20 sites to develop and manage a communication program so that employees are informed of and involved with the company's business goals.
2. Formal training through a nine-step methodology and problem-solving model.
3. Various metrics to gauge employee satisfaction with the program and its progress, including weekly feedback tools and pulse check reporting.

RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE

Since implementing the Employee Action Teams, DRS-C4I has instituted leadership development programs on two-way communications. The teams have been an integral part in sustaining the internal communication processes, as well as collecting and presenting feedback on the program to their senior leadership. In addition, the teams have been instrumental in communicating and enforcing goal alignment in their organizations.

Finally, the program is helping to drive continuous improvement throughout the company, based on ideas generated from front-line employees. One specific example is a site's leadership team implementing an effective meeting template that the local action team developed and recommended.

MAKING ALL EMPLOYEES ACCOUNTABLE

"Everyone has truly embraced this effort," says Tami Gesiskie, vice president human resources, DRS Technologies – C4I Segment. "Before beginning the action team process, our leadership gave this program some careful thought. Now, people at all levels of the workforce are being held accountable for engagement efforts. One way this is evident is by incorporating the process into our quarterly business reviews."

ACTION TEAMS AS PART OF THE CULTURE

"The employee action team process at DRS is something we want to sustain and make part of our culture," Gesiskie continues. "As a result of even initial action team work, we have now implemented new programs for leadership development, personal coaching at all levels, and goal alignment."

DRS TECHNOLOGIES, INC. – C4I SEGMENT: Using action teams to align organizational goals

2.

Appreciative Inquiry

By Caryn Vanstone, Business Director and Consultant

Many leaders and managers focus on "fixing problems", re-engineering and restructuring their organizations as if they were machines. But while problem solving may offer short-term benefits, it can often result in loss of employee engagement. Appreciative Inquiry is a technique that helps organizations focus on building generative capacity and strength, so that they can create energy, foster innovation and inspire employees.

Chapter Contents

2.1 Introduction

The changing business environment

It seems that the potential in organizations for stress, imbalance, disconnection and alienation is growing – and the more technology we put in to "reconnect" and communicate, the less human our experience becomes. This is now beginning to create a major problem for many organizations as their survival depends on changes such as finding a new human relationship with their customers, increasing innovation or the fight to secure increasingly rare and demanding employees.

Succeeding in these changes requires superior levels of human engagement inside the organization itself.

In addition, there's growing evidence that the psychological contract that used to support a sense of commitment and loyalty to an organization has been irreparably broken. In its place is a much more transient quality of engagement, coming from an individual's sense of purpose and satisfaction and the degree to which this can be expressed within the boundaries of what the organization needs him/her to do.

High-performing teams are "happy" teams

Over the last 20 years, research conducted by Dr Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania Department of Psychology, and many others has consistently shown that the one key differentiator between high-performing and low-performing teams, divisions and departments (where all other factors were the same) is "happiness". This is not a "fluffy" definition of happiness – rather, it breaks down into three very tangible elements:

1. Pleasure and joy – connectedness, human relationships, enjoying what you do, having fun. Interestingly, research suggests that this is the least impactful, least long-lasting and least correlating element of happiness – and it's the one that most companies invest most money in, with high-profile, fun events and "jollies"!
2. Engagement – feeling that you're deploying your true, unique strengths to do something that you *feel valued for doing*; using your strengths more often than you're having to use or overcome your weaknesses. Having a voice and real influence in how you work. Having accountable freedom to find worthwhile activity with others, rather than be fitted, machine-like into a predetermined role.
3. Meaning – believing and experiencing that what you're doing has a higher purpose and that you're part of something bigger than just yourself.

Organizations are failing to engage their employees

Sadly, in the last five years, according to a global survey conducted by Gallup, covering hundreds of thousands of people in a wide range of roles and organizations around the world, less than 17 percent in 2005 said that their work is organized "so that they can play to their strengths most of the time". By 2007, this number had dropped to 12 percent. In Europe, this number dips to nearer eight percent and shockingly, when the youngest, new employees (or "Generation Y" as they're often called) are separated out of the sample, the figure is two percent.

This means that most organizations are failing to deliver against the engagement element of the three critical factors above.

What is engagement?
So, we can describe engagement in terms of the extent to which an employee:
- experiences themselves acting from and deploying their unique strengths and human personality in their work;
- experiences themselves in an adult relationship with their work, and feeling all the emotions (both positive and potentially negative) associated with being in "full contact" with the reality of their accountability and freedom;
- offers their "discretionary effort" on top of what is expected and necessary to keep their job, in service of the community in which they're working; and
- feels a connection between what brings them personal meaningfulness and what they're participating in creating in the organization.

In our experience many organizations talk about the desire for engaged employees, without fully understanding what this means. Engagement means excitement, anxiety, ideas, disagreements, diversity, discontinuity, innovation, experimentation, localized decision making, power-sharing across all levels of the organization … all of which can be facilitated through the technique of Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

Projects that focus on engagement itself, in our view, are rarely successful. The very mention of the word (especially when connected with "empowerment", "commitment" or worst of all, "alignment") tends to trigger cynicism and mistrust. Our experience is that if you're seeking to increase the levels of engagement in your organization, the best route is to focus on a substantive topic which has clear meaning and a business imperative – for example, increasing innovation, improving customer retention, facilitating growth – but *do it through an engaging process*. The method *is* the message, as people will learn you're serious about engagement by engaging them on a serious task.

AI is a powerful intervention for achieving this
"Appreciative Inquiry is, in my view, an exciting breakthrough, one that signals a change in the way we think about change … it is something substantive, conceptually strong, not like quick fads. In my view we are looking at something important – AI will be of enduring consequence and energizing innovation for the field. That's my prediction."

So said Richard Beckhard, one of the founding fathers of organization development, at a conference of the US National Academy of Management in 1999. There is now a growing body of OD practitioners and world leading organizations that testify to the accuracy of Beckhard's prediction. In fact, his prediction wasn't clairvoyance – it was grounded in experience. AI isn't a new philosophy – in the US, many organizations have been using it since the early 1980s.

So what exactly is this approach? How is it different from problem solving/gap analysis oriented change, or from communicating a corporate vision, or positive thinking? Is it simply a way of avoiding critical issues? Why should we be interested in it when thinking about engagement?

2.2 What is AI?

A concept originally developed by Drs David Cooperrider, Suresh Srivasta and Frank Barrett at Case Western Reserve University, AI is a strength-based approach to human beings and communities that focuses on the development of capacity, rather than the fixing of problems.

It's "generative" and by that, we mean that it has the impact of creating energy, fostering innovation, being expansive and creating proactivity.

AI makes the assumption that whatever you want to develop, there will already be "seeds" of the right behavior, the right attitude, the right experience happening somewhere, some of the time. So rather than eliminate the occasions of "getting it wrong", we work together to find, understand, learn from and expand the occasions of "getting it right".

AI can also be defined as the art of discovering and valuing those factors that "give life" to an organization, group or individual. By this we mean those things that make them unique, powerful and the best they can be.

AI is more than a method – it's a philosophy, or a way of thinking, which leads to new ways of working together.

Collective "meaning" from real, shared experience

When used well, AI has some fundamental differences to positive thinking. The main one is that it's grounded in real experience rather than wishful thinking. Positive thinking involves the creation of attractive (but often unrealistic and disconnected) future "visions". It encourages optimism but discourages (or even represses) negativity – driving it underground and making it, paradoxically, even more powerful.

With AI, we're working with real stories and examples – things that aren't only possible, but are actually happening already. These *real* examples of best experiences of the past and present are recalled and rigorously understood, primarily through structured conversations and storytelling, to set the stage for well-grounded imagination of what could be possible in the future. These future possibilities are decided upon by the whole group working together, rather than imposed by a few people. They're felt emotionally, as well as understood intellectually.

Through this process people come to make "meaning" of their current experiences, along with collective and genuinely held energy for the potential futures they are imagining together. In particular, they're exploring together how their stories, languages and images facilitate their actions, and for the potential for new dialogue to create new actions.

When working with AI, despite the focus on the positive, difficulty and even pain and distress may come bubbling out as people engage (especially if their voices haven't been listened to much before). While those emotions aren't amplified or made central to the change process, it's important that they're honored and listened to in a way that positive thinking approaches don't allow for.

Positive images of our future guide our actions in the present day

Although in AI we do create "dreams" or "anticipations" of the future – often in rich and descriptive detail – we're not setting these out as if they were plans to be achieved through a roadmap or project plan. AI isn't about implementing a plan to "get somewhere different" – it's about creating collective images and energy that catalyzes us to learn and behave differently *now*. Through changing our practice together, we make certain futures more or less likely to unfold. This is very different to the usual process of communicating a corporate vision and then going on to try to implement it.

We suggest that AI is more like a process of “improvisation” than it is about writing a script and then playing it out perfectly. We’re facilitating a process whereby people come together to start experiments in new ways of being together that lead to improved performance and wellbeing – and engagement.

So, AI is a pragmatic, powerful way to develop individuals and organizations, which leads to a welcome combination of novelty and innovation, alongside preservation of key elements of organizational or individual character. While it draws energy and learning from the past – and stretches forward compelling ideas for the future – the change is always seen within the day-to-day present experience of complex patterns of interactions and conversations between people in the “here and now”.

Collaboration and inclusion
AI is not a management *tool*, nor something that experts or consultants “do to people”. At its heart, it’s a process that engages everyone as adult co-owners and co-authors of the organizational experience. Using AI is, in itself, a commitment to “re-engage” people in a process of mutual self-determination and ownership.

2.3 Why do organizations need AI?

Focusing on “problems” can offer only short-term gains
While problem solving has created many advances in machines, medicine, technology etc, there is increasing evidence that when we apply the same ideas to the processes of human learning, conversing and organizing, we pay an enormous, long-term price, for short-term gains.

The key price we’re beginning to feel very keenly is the loss of human engagement at work.

For many years we’ve constantly re-engineered and restructured our organizations as if they were machines, and people within them, are relegated to being equivalent to “cogs” in that machine. Teams are taken apart, put together differently, bits of the organization are outsourced, human relationships subordinated to processes and procedures – all with increasing speed and a sense of idealism and certainty. Even the individual human being has to “fit” with a model of the ideal “component” that would fit into the “space” in the structure. Complex policies are written to act as control “by proxy” for leaders that employees never see, and when a deficiency in the policy is found, another page or two is added, with more complex caveats and options – to ensure that all conditions are covered.

Worryingly, as the problems created by this (for example, fragmentation, thinking small, self-fulfilling doom scenarios, over-reliance on leaders and experts, exhaustion and stress) appear, we try to solve them from within the same thinking that created them – by thinking up new policies, control systems, leadership visions, electronic manuals on the intranet, and inspiring posters and mouse-mats.

A need for collaborative inquiry and a focus on human interaction and conversation
In our view, these solutions are not the answer. An answer lies in one of humankind’s oldest and surest ways of making meaning and community – the telling of value-laden, appreciative

stories. AI connects people with their own choicefulness and relationship with others through the process of co-creating inspiring images and anticipations, built from these stories.

As a form of collaborative inquiry (i.e. where the people in the organization are their own researchers and analysts, rather than external or centralized experts analyzing them and coming up with solutions for them), AI has the capacity to democratize organizational change and liberate people – re-igniting their sense of engagement.

2.4 AI – a change in the way we think

Problem solving rarely results in transformation
There's an assumption in our modern cultures that the primary – perhaps only – way to improve something is to eradicate defect, errors, bugs and problems. Of course, informed criticism and constructive problem solving can be useful in organizations, particularly in the short term, for example when exposing important flaws in operational processes. But as mentioned before, the long-term impact of applying this thinking to organizations can be disappointing at best and devastating at worst.

Often, when things go well, we celebrate, acknowledge and thank – but we rarely inquire rigorously into the causes of this "rightness" in the same way that we inquire rigorously into "wrongness" and its causes.

But despite countless inquiries into incidents of failures, thousands of pages of reports and recommendations, we rarely, if ever, experience a real transformation in the service under investigation. In fact, often the opposite occurs – the more we inquire into something, the more "wrong" it becomes.

AI takes an alternative approach and key differences between this approach and problem solving are summarized in Figure 2.1 (below).

Fig 2.1: *Problem solving versus Appreciative Inquiry*

PROBLEM SOLVING	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
• Focus on what is wrong or missing	• Focus on examples of excellence
• Inquire into root causes of problems in order to eliminate	• Inquire into what enables and sustains excellence
• Brainstorm, analyze and plan solutions	• Learning and living into possibilities – improvising
• Implementation based on overcoming resistance and barriers to change	• Implementation based on amplification of success
Metaphor: Organization as "problem-to-be-solved"	**Metaphor: Organization as "possibility-to-be-realized"**

Inquiry is self-fulfilling – you get more of what you focus on

Dr Frank Barrett tells a story about an experience he had canoeing as a young man. He spent many hours with the instructor and class in a calm eddy in the river, learning to steer, roll, right himself and all the basic skills needed to make a safe trip down the river. Eventually, the time came for the group to take to more hazardous waters.

Just before he set off into the wide, open river, the instructor called to Barrett and said, "whatever you do, mind that rock in the middle of the river – don't go there!" Suddenly, all Frank could think about was "*Not the rock*", and he watched it carefully to see how close he was getting. Though the river was wide and relatively easy to navigate, Barrett ended up hitting the rock.

This story illustrates that whatever we focus on, we create more of, or move towards – even when we're focusing on it to try to eliminate or avoid it.

This doesn't mean we should ignore the problems we face in organizations – or in Barrett's case, that he should have ignored the rock! The central view expressed by AI practitioners is that we can *reframe* our inquiry to focus on the thing we want rather than the thing we don't want. And, as we ask questions or focus on something, we are transformed by the very act of focusing on it.

So in Barrett's case, if he had been given the instruction "stay in the widest part of the river", this would have been the focus of his attention. This doesn't deny the issue of the rock – it just tries to solve the problem of the rock from the "flip side".

Figure 2.2, below, illustrates that any key aspect of organizational life can be reframed this way.

Fig 2.2: *Reframing aspects of organizational life through an appreciative approach*

Negative cultural trait that an organization might want to eradicate through problem solving approaches	Generative topic that can be discovered, amplified and spread through an appreciative approach
Bullying, harassment and disrespect	Mutuality, respect, great relationships
Risk aversion, command and control, slow routines for change	Innovation, engagement, improvisation, "positive deviancy", change readiness
Stress, illness, absenteeism	Wellness, flourishing, presence

“Quest” rather than “journey” – the meaning of inquiry

Earlier, we said that AI is about change in the here and now, rather than journeying towards some pre-designed future.

Currently, our most common change metaphor in organizations is that of the journey, for example:

- “We’re getting there”
- “We’re moving on now…”
- “How will we know when we’ve got there?”
- “Moving forward”
- “Milestones”
- “Roadmap”
- “Getting from A to B”

The impact of this metaphor is significant, because it means we need to know the destination in advance so that we can “stay on track”. This, essentially, limits the amount of genuine engagement that people can have in the process, because the focus of attention is always towards the future destination or predetermined outcome in the future, rather than paying attention to the way we’re actually working together here and now.

The word “inquiry” comes from Latin roots that mean “quest”. What’s the difference between a quest and a journey? When we quest, we don’t set out with a pre-determined destination. Rather, we recognize that we can never be anywhere else but here and now – and the task is to live and learn differently *in the present moment*. The objectives of a journey and a quest are different. We journey to “get somewhere”, we quest to “learn something”.

We often want to think of change as a journey to a better future because it gives us a sense of control and predictability. Perversely though, many of the findings from a century of psychology and psychotherapy show that the more we think of change as being something in the future to be moved towards, the less we change our actual behaviors. The “diet always starts on Monday”, so to speak. Strong evidence suggests that, paradoxically, real change seems to happen quicker and deeper, by focusing on what we are and do, rather than what we would like to become or do differently.

To quest well, we need to suspend our certainties – to loosen our grip on our assumptions and convictions and look at our experience and possibilities with new eyes. This shift can be challenging.

In organizations, the ability to influence, articulate and present answers from a position of knowing and certainty is generally more prized than the ability to listen, ask great questions and appear curious. To “live” AI well, we need to examine and challenge our own need to appear knowledgeable and in control, and be prepared to share power with others in an atmosphere of curiosity.

Principles that underpin AI
Understanding the underpinning principles of AI is important for anyone wanting to work well with it as an approach in their organization.

The key principles in AI are:
1 The Constructionist Principle
2 The Principle of Simultaneity
3 The Poetic Principle
4 The Anticipatory Principle
5 The Positive Principle
6 The Narrative Principle

1. The Constructionist Principle	Western culture, by and large, makes a separation between talk and action – often associating talk with the opposite of action. But there's a different way of thinking about talk and action, which comes from a philosophy called Social Constructionism. A social constructionist believes that actions and experiences are created, validated, enabled and supported by a "system" of language, metaphors, images and stories, which have themselves grown up through a social process of interaction between people. Through the company we keep, and the way we talk together in that company, we create guiding principles through which we view and act into the world. In different communities, cultures and collections of people, different language, categories and principles will form. What seems to be a given truth in one setting, has no meaning at all in another. So talk isn't "cheap" – it's the very root of organizing action. By working consciously with our talk, we can construct and reconstruct our organizational experience together – ultimately forming and changing the way that we act.
2. The Principle of Simultaneity	To inquire is to change – there's no such thing as a neutral question. This principle explains that human beings move in the direction of what they focus on and study together, and the subject of our attention is always altered by the attention itself. This means that when we ask a question, stimulate a conversation, conduct an inquiry - we are actually intervening, or making a change at the same time, the change does not occur later as a result of knowing the answer.
3. The Poetic Principle	In several sections of this chapter, we've touched on the practice of reframing problems into appreciative topics. The poetic principle (from the Greek *poesis*, meaning to make or create) assumes that organizations are constantly shifting networks of stories and possibilities, open to endless re-authoring from any perspective. This challenges our idea that organizations are things, fixed, to be re-engineered to a given blueprint. Applying this principle means that we can choose to focus on *any* topic within an organization, and that choice should be focused on the kind of world we want to create together.

4. The Anticipatory Principle	This is sometimes referred to in AI literature as the "as if" principle. Our behaviors in the present are conditioned by our image of what we anticipate in the future – so we're behaving now "as if" something was becoming true. If we believe the best years of the organization are behind us and the organization is going to decline, we tend to behave as if this was true – we cut back on new hires, we focus on efficiency rather than growth, we talk about next year being tough, and so on. As a result, people start to leave, less ambitious people join, we take fewer risks with new sales … and before you know it, we're in decline. The anticipatory principle states that our image of the future wasn't a prediction of something that was going to happen, it was what caused that future to happen by altering behavior in the present. So, AI focuses on the generation of positive anticipatory images as a potent tool to create "as if" behaviors in the present that themselves cause change and open up more positive futures. There's increasing evidence that this isn't just a cognitive or intellectual process, not even just an emotional process – but that positive images have the power to change us actually at a physical, cellular level.
5. The Positive Principle	Studies in health, medicine, sport and social and organizational psychology have demonstrated that conversations and experiences embedded in hope, joy, connection, inspiration, play and caring build committed relationships and collaborative action. In addition, when we relate to each other in a generative and positive way, we build energy for change – rather than sap energy, which most change processes tend to do.
6. The Narrative Principle	Through the telling of stories, events in organizations become "the way we do things round here". An incident becomes a myth, a myth becomes a legend and a legend becomes part of the "sacred" understanding of what it means to be a member of this community. Central to the practice of AI is the telling of stories. Stories move us in ways that we often don't understand. This is the reason why every religion (for example) transmits its "codes" through stories. Stories allow us to absorb complex understandings that would simply not translate into bullet points or rules. They illuminate values, and forge connections and bonds between us that go deeper because they're experiential, as well as cognitive.

2.5 Introducing AI into your organization

When introducing AI, we often need to be able to support anxious executives while they learn to share their decision making with people in their organization who are themselves going through a "growing up" process, having been made passive or "entitled" by well meaning but ultimately disempowering change processes in the past.

Helping leaders understand why AI works – positive image, positive action
Change can be unsettling and those senior business leaders, managers and employees who are used to more traditional communication approaches to engagement may be sceptical of AI or concerned about focusing on the positive. Helping people properly understand what's new to them will make them feel comfortable enough to leave their comfort zone and what they're used to.

The preceding section of this chapter has outlined some of the principles of AI – but how do we know that these work? Where's the evidence to support these ideas?

1. The Placebo effect – positive image changes us at all levels
Although the Placebo experiments in the mid 1950s aren't without controversy, it's now medically recognized that between one and two thirds of people will show marked physiological and psychological improvement in symptoms simply by believing that they've been getting an effective treatment. Furthermore, the effect will be even more powerful if the doctor also believes that he or she is prescribing an effective treatment.

This suggests that one of the most powerful influences on our state of health, and our capacity to increase our wellness, is the image and anticipation that we hold of improvement. When others relate to us with the same positive image, the effect is amplified even more.

AI is creating connected and interpersonal meaning based on positive images – and the Placebo Effect suggests that this, in itself, will stimulate positive action and change.

2. The Pygmalion studies – we become the images that others hold about us
The play *Pygmalion*, written by George Bernard Shaw and later adapted for the musical *My Fair Lady*, examines the phenomenon that people tend only to see, and therefore act into, what they've already decided to be true about someone – and that this behavior causes the other person to also act into the same projected image.

The original Pygmalion Studies were conducted in 1968 by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. They tested the IQs of a group of US elementary schoolchildren but then, instead of assigning them performance predictions relative to their IQ, they randomly picked the children for two groups – a group of low potentials and one of high potentials. Teachers assigned to the groups were not given any information about the IQ tests – and were led to believe that the child had been assigned to the high or low group based on valid information. Within a very short time, almost without exception, those labeled low potentials were performing badly and those labeled high potentials were exceling – despite the fact that the labels had no real meaning relative to the formal tests and analysis.

The researchers found that the difference was the behavior of the teachers – who they filmed in interaction with the children. If the teacher genuinely believed that a student was smart and competent, their body language, verbal expressions and so on were unconsciously supportive and encouraging – even when the child got something wrong. But, if they believed a student was less capable, they were unconsciously more terse, perfunctory and dismissive – even when the child got something right. The teachers were completely unaware of the ways they had adapted their behavior and *insisted* that they treated everyone the same.

This suggests very strongly that leaders need to develop an appreciative orientation if they wish to achieve most with their staff. The image they have of people in their organization (good, bad, responsible, incompetent, engaged, disengaged…) is likely to *create* the experience that they imagine.

3. Affirmative competence – noticing yourself getting it right is a faster route to improvement

The sporting world is going through something of a revolution in coaching techniques. It has been proven in sports like golf, ten-pin bowling, football and many others that watching and analyzing video footage of yourself getting it right improves the game faster and more thoroughly than watching footage of mistakes and analyzing and eliminating the causes of getting it wrong. This is because as we constantly re-experience and re-vision the incident of excellence, our body learns how to replicate it. This process of mind-body interaction is at the heart of the *Inner Game of*… series of books by Tim Gallwey.

Meanwhile, Jack Nicklaus argues in his book *Golf My Way* that positive affirmations such as "I am going to hit the ball down the fairway", rather than "I am not going to hit the ball into the woods" lead to a better game. This very much echoes Dr Frank Barrett's canoeing story mentioned in the previous section.

Paradoxically, many of us believe that elimination of failure will improve performance, when exactly the opposite seems to be true. You will get better, faster, by finding, examining and amplifying the few examples of great customer service than you will by eliminating the many and various causes of bad service.

4. Cultural evolution – the organization's image of itself determines its future

In 1973, the Dutch sociologist Fred Polak did a sweeping study of Western Civilization – exploring how and why cultures went into decline. He found that a positive image of the future is the single most important explanatory variable for understanding cultural evolution – particularly its growth. The more negative and destructive the stories were about the culture, and the worse the image was of the civilisation itself, the more the culture declined.

From this, we see that the image that an organization has of itself, is not so much an instrument measuring what currently exists, but is a causality of what it is to become.

Therefore we can assume that a precondition for successful change work – whatever it's focused on – is to shift the focus of conversation and dialogue away from malfunction, pathology and problems towards images of health, vitality and energy.

2.6 The 5D cycle – an AI methodology

AI has been no exception to the human drive to turn first principles into methodology. Various methods and formal structures have developed over the last 20 years to support Cooperrider, Srivasta and Barrett's original AI proposition. Perhaps the best known is the 5D cycle.

What is the 5D cycle?
This structure offers a framework, around which AI interventions can be planned. The stages are listed below and explored in detail on the following pages in Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4.

1. Definition
2. Discovery
3. Dream
4. Design
5. Destiny

Although the 5D cycle has become the best-known manifestation of AI – and often the most accessible early application of it – AI is often at its most powerful when it's allowed to spread virally through ongoing iterations of inquiry and localised improvisation (a combination in effect of Discovery and Destiny), without the heavy infrastructure associated with many projects. By liberating people's capacity to converse and spread stories, topics change and evolve and take on a life of their own, so very little intervention can lead to dramatic shifts over time.

Fig 2.3: *The AI 5D cycle*

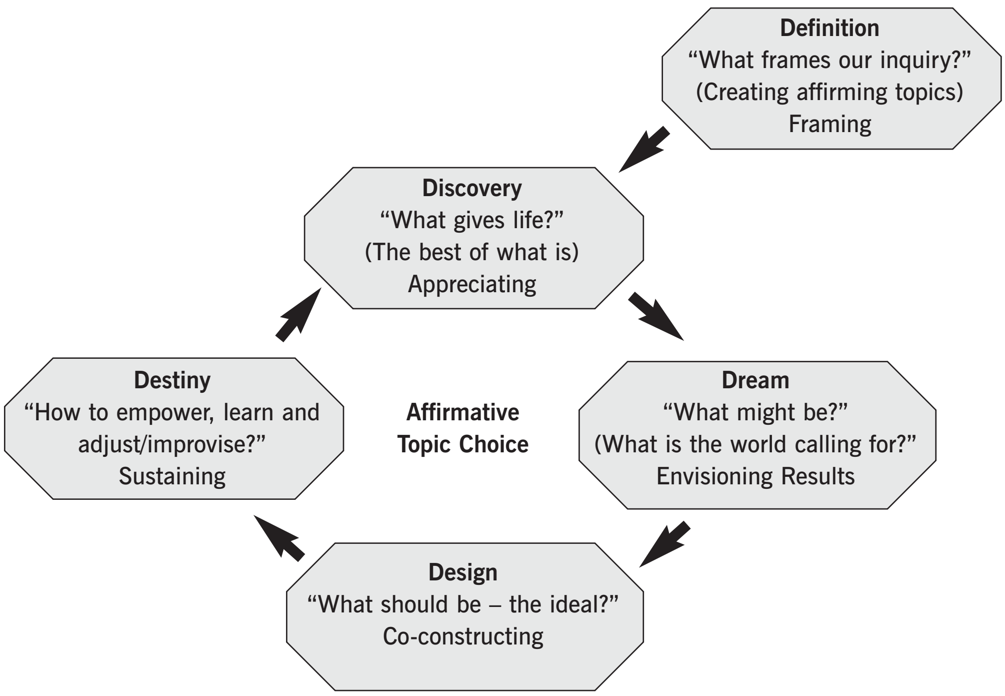


Fig 2.4: *The 5D cycle explained*

Stage	Explanation
1. Definition	As explained before, topic choice is a fateful act – and the desire here is to articulate the focus of inquiry in a way that stimulates desire to work together and articulates well what the people are curious about, and want to see more of. If one of the objects of the exercise is to increase engagement, then the process of coming to your topic(s) must be an engaging experience. This phase can take two different forms: 1. The organization has a "problem" (e.g. poor customer retention) and this phase reframes that problem into an appreciative topic (e.g. "delighted customers that loyally recommend us to their friends and families"). This is what is then inquired into collectively in the Discovery Phase. 2. The organization doesn't have a "problem", but wants to build on success more generally. Then rather than having to reframe a deficit, it starts with an inquiry process seeking out more general high point stories that are not led by a topic. Therefore, people interview each other and are asked to tell stories of their most exceptional moments in the organization. These stories are explored together to find the common denominators – those things that enabled the best experiences to happen – we assume that these "patterns" are amongst the most common reasons for the organization's success, and therefore they become the topics for further inquiry – in order to grow them even more.
2. Discovery	The essence of this phase is to find out what, in the unique context and environment of this particular community or organization, has already made XYZ (the topic) possible? More and more people interview each other in pairs using questions, which help them tell real stories and inquire into high-point experiences relating to the affirmative topics agreed in the Definition phase. This is the heart of the process, and is all about storytelling and generating new meaning, language and understanding. Strengths are uncovered and accomplishments and successes are acknowledged, spread and elevated. In some AI interventions, this process just keeps going on and on – without any formal infrastructure to bring the stories together. The act of inquiring and spreading the stories is enough. Today's interviewees become tomorrow's interviewers, and so the initiative spreads outwards across the organization. Other more formal approaches to AI move into collective events and large group gatherings, often called "Summits", where: • A large group including the interviewers articulates the themes and patterns arising from the stories in a clear and understandable way – everyone in the room understands what really supports and enables these high-point experiences – often called the "positive core". • This deep and thorough understanding becomes the base from which new possibilities are going to be "grown".

3. Dream	The essence of this phase is to call up and engage with the stretching, exciting possibilities – which might be known or hidden; to do XYZ (topic) even better in the future. This is a process of collective innovation and improvisation, where the group starts to describe their ideals of the future. The group takes what they've learned (the themes and patterns) and adds strong provocation, amplification and extension. This builds on the best of the past, while also encouraging the breaking of rules in order to create something new. In these large group events, leaders are *in the room*, and this process is one of ongoing sense making and negotiation. Things are agreed as the group proceeds and there is no sense of "asking someone outside the room" for permission later. The dreams are articulated in both expressive form (i.e. creative, humorous, moving and passionate) and through high-quality, well-thought-through analytical form (i.e. rigorous, clear, and detailed). The Dream phase is not like a traditional visioning process – there's no direct intent that the Dream is describing some "future state" that the organization is going to move towards. The dreams are provocations and energizers that set up the energy and personal shift in both the individual and the collective thinking, which stimulates people to change the way they act immediately in the present.
4. Design	In this phase, the organization starts to translate some of the ideas embedded within the dreams into changes to the infrastructure of the organization. The key question here is: "How do we need to transform our processes, strategies, structures, systems, etc in order to make it most possible that our dreams will flourish?" This might happen through: 1. Identifying particular policies, processes, structures, systems, physical conditions and facilities, etc and re-imagining and re-describing them in ways that are more coherent with the dreams. Some companies use models like McKinsey's 7S (strategy, structure, systems, skills, shared values, staff, style) to organize their thinking and action. 2. Articulating propositions or statements about key ways of working and processes in the organization – for example describing recruitment procedure in a completely new way, a way that's congruent with their images of the future. 3. Generating ideas and mini-projects directly from some of the images and visions expressed in the dreams themselves and supporting them as experiments into action. 4. Asking people to articulate several things they're going to personally experiment with in their own local practice – not as future changes, but things that they can, and intend to, bring about in the present – things that will change the way work gets done now, making it more likely that aspects of their dreams will become living reality.

5. Destiny	The work during this phase is informed by the concept of improvisation. Organizations may be sceptical about this, associating it with "making it up as you go along". However, this is a facilitated process where people are helped to grasp the positive, emergent qualities of experimentation as guided by particular (simple) principles. The groups and individuals are invited to behave more like jazz bands co-creating their own music, rather than a symphony orchestra with pre-written sheet music to follow. This keeps them focused on making incremental, real changes to the living present, rather than planning large-scale changes that will happen "some time in the future". Some infrastructure may need to be established in advance to support groups that will continue to work on a global, virtual basis following the event to bring those projects to fruition. Some ideas fall away – in the formal, official project sense. Many more ideas and changes are also likely to emerge that were not formalized at all, but simply arise from individual changes to behavior, ideals and relationships. These are often the most powerful aspects of the change. A renewed "Discovery" process might be encouraged here – "We haven't finished yet, but are only now finding new topics and connections that can be inquired into, amplified and supported."

Planning an AI intervention

Figure 2.5, below, highlights some key factors to consider when planning your AI intervention.

Fig 2.5: *Key factors when planning an AI intervention*

Factor to consider	Explanation
Agreeing the topic and creating your AI questions	Choosing the topic(s) that you're going to focus on is one of the most important parts of the process – as it becomes self-fulfilling. You'll not only need to decide on the correct articulation of the topic, but who's involved in making these decisions. Our view is that you should involve as many people as possible to build engagement from the start. The topic should be capacity-building (generates hope, confidence and calls people to make something happen together) and should describe what you want *more of*, using positive, inspiring language that people will want to inquire into and build on. This may involve an inquiry process or a reframing process as previously described. The topic should also be of strategic interest – for energy to be maintained in the long term, it must be something important to the whole organization, not imposed based on the agenda of just one department or person. *An example set of AI questions is provided in Figure 2.6 (page 45).*

Keeping people informed	A new approach to change, requires a new approach to communications. The traditional corporate e-mails don't seem to help, so consider new ways of attracting attention and sharing stories. Also think about how you want to connect up across different levels and areas, keeping it as human and "ordinary" as possible.
Deciding on the balance between informal and formal design possibilities	Informal approaches focus attention on working locally with the dynamics of everyday life, conducting inquiries, conversations and amplifying stories that stimulate local experiments and shifts. This can be in single functional areas, or connect up across the "silos", and can be as small or extensive as you like. Formal approaches focus attention on working in "extraordinary" events like Summits and workshops, which essentially take people out of their settings. Most large scale AI work incorporates elements of both.
Selecting participants for the inquiry, and extending your normal "boundaries"	The whole board and other senior managers and process owners should be involved. This is an intervention that will have major repercussions on the organization and how they participate will itself create powerful stories. It's important to get as diverse a group as possible together to carry out interviews with other staff during the Discovery phase and don't only pick the usual suspects who always get involved in projects. Choose employees from different geographic locations, different levels of the hierarchy, male, female, old, young, long servers and newcomers and people who never get invited to anything – for example, the Friday night cleaning crew and the parent who only works evenings in one of your stores … Think in advance about how you might help the interview process to spread. Be creative in thinking about who else could be involved … If your topic is about family-friendly work life – then what about asking your employee's spouse and children to be the "inquirers" with you? If your topic is about customer intimacy – then it might be a great idea to involve your customers throughout, including inviting them to a Summit if you have one. Some companies are initially concerned about involving customers (or any "outsiders") because they feel they may be "washing their dirty linen in public". But the focus on the positive stories ensures that customers see you at your best, and exploring these stories builds even stronger and deeper connections and friendships.
Being stimulated by the best in other organizations	During the Discovery phase, some organizations choose to broaden their interviews to include their people visiting a different organization or community. They then bring these stories back into their organization as potential seeds for innovation and inspiration. This can be particularly useful if the organization is quite static with low staff turnover or if there isn't a lot of diversity. It can also help as a starting point when dealing with an organization that's very distressed or low. This isn't like a traditional exercise in best practice analysis, which tends to be oriented towards finding things that your organization can copy. It's just about finding other stories that your organization can retell and be inspired and stimulated by.

Choosing a venue for your AI summit	If you're going to hold a formal Summit, you'll need to pick a venue carefully. If you're taking a low-key, informal approach then a sports hall, warehouse or any large space with facilities will work. It's important to have large, clean white walls for posting up the graphics and flipchart outputs that are created during the Summit. Comfort is quite important, so although the surroundings might be modest, warmth, convenience, comfortable seating, etc are essential. If you want a high-end, branded environment, it can be more difficult. You need a large, open plan space with lots of natural light which means that many major hotels won't be appropriate – as their largest spaces (often ballrooms) are often underground and ornate. The main "rule of thumb" is that you need to return to your core topic(s) for guidance… if your topic speaks of efficiency and speed – try to find a venue that will inspire those ideas…. if your topic speaks of human relationships and connectedness – try to find a place that makes you feel that way… Whatever you choose, make sure it's off-site because otherwise people will disappear back to their desks and the social interactions that are an essential part of the Summit process will be lost.
Preparing your leaders	Senior leaders and managers are often used to playing two roles – either strongly directing or being facilitative/observational. When working with AI (particularly in the Summit) it's important that they find a new "third" alternative behavior – one that allows them to fully join in and express their ideas (without directing and overpowering) and to fully listen, absorb and rethink things (without dropping into a facilitator mode) at the same time. Helping them to prepare for this is important. During an AI Summit, there will be changes in momentum during the different phases of the 5D cycle and there will be essential dips in energy. Leaders and managers might experience this as "it's going wrong" and will try to get the facilitators to "hype" the group back up. Coach them in advance and explain that this change in energy is part of the AI process and they must let it take its course. Trying to force a high-energy "fix" at the wrong moment reduces the authenticity of the experience and exhausts the participants. You want their energy to be climbing as they leave, not tired out and dropping.
Supporting empowered initiatives that emerge during and after the AI intervention	You'll need to consider how projects (formal and informal) that are developed during the AI process will be taken forward. Who will own them? How will they be supported? Is there a budget available? How are people going to stay in contact with others that they met at the Summit?

Fig 2.6: *Sample AI questions "protocol"*
[See also note in "Agreeing the topic and creating your AI questions" section of Figure 2.5 on page 42]

Topic – Being an exceptional organization full of generative possibility
Discovery AI Interview Protocol

Opening introduction to the interviewee

"Employees are expecting more from their working relationships with organizations than ever before; for example, economic stability, wellbeing, work-life balance and stimulation.

Increasingly, they also expect the companies they work for to contribute positively to societal and environmental good. In short, people want a workplace where they, and others, can do more than survive – they want to flourish and grow.

We each have a wealth of experience and insight about organizations and change to bring to this inquiry. By sharing our personal stories through the inquiry process we will begin to learn together how positive change comes about in organizations today – and in our company in particular. What makes organizations generative experiences of possibility and what can we do to bring this to life even more?"

Question 1 – High point experience in your work

Think back over your experience of work here. There may have been some ups and downs, some high points and some low times. Please reflect on one of the peaks, a high point in your work. Recall a time that particularly stands out as a high point for you – a time when you felt most engaged, alive, effective and proud to be contributing here. A time of professional fulfilment…

A. Please share the story

- What happened? When? Where? Who was involved? How did it feel?
- What was it about you and others around you that made it such a positive experience?

B. Based on this story and others like it, if we now had a conversation with people that know you best and asked them to describe the three best qualities that you bring to your work, what would they say?

Question 2 – We are a generative organization

The capacity for self renewal, for innovation and the expansion of possibilities is much prized in modern organizations. Such capacity can come in many forms: innovation, technological breakthroughs, exceptional personal qualities, corporate social and ecological responsibility, developmental relationships…
We can think of these organizations as "generative" – fertile environments where people and ideas flourish, where life-giving properties of connectivity, intellectual and emotional intelligence are nurtured and cultivated.

A. Please share an example of **when you experienced this generative capacity here**. A time when you had direct experience of the emergence of new possibilities, of ideas and activities, or new capabilities. This may have been happening for an individual, or a group, or it may have enhanced the possibilities and choices for the organization as a whole.

- What were the circumstances?
- What seemed to provoke, cause or enable the generative quality of the situation?
- What was the effect of the experience for individuals and the organization more widely?
- What was your part in the story?

B. Looking back on this experience what, for you, **lay at the heart** of it?

Question 3 – Images of the future

Reflecting on your answers so far, you have shared your experiences of this organization as generative and life-affirming, and given examples of the effect it has on people as they act together.

Now, I'd like you to imagine it is January 2010. You have come back together with the people in this room to share your experiences since you last met in January 2007, having spent the last three years experimenting with some of the learning from these questions.

Your work is flourishing and the themes you discussed here three years ago are truly blossoming in your work.

A. You are describing a piece of work or a project that you are involved in today, January 2010, that is typical of your current practice at its best.

- What is novel or different for you and the people you are working with?
- What sort of work is it?
- How are you spending your time?
- What really stands out for you about how you are working and the role that you have?
- What is different about this organization now compared to three years ago?

B. At their most appreciative, what would your colleagues notice about how your practice has developed over the past three years?

C. Think about the people you work for and with. What are they now doing that they couldn't have imagined doing three years ago?

D. If you could find a metaphor or image that captures the spirit of how you are now working in 2010, what would it be?

Challenges and solutions

We are so used to "change management" approaches that we can tend to approach AI in some of the same ways, and this can present challenges, even risks to the success of an AI project. Figure 2.7, opposite, suggests explains some of these challenges and suggests possible solutions.

Fig 2.7: *Challenges and solutions when using AI*

Challenge	Explanation	Solution
Wanting to present a very "corporate" image in your communications	Leadership often becomes very enthusiastic about AI and/or the topic and change project. They may want to make a big announcement to signal its importance. However, this can come across as "too corporate" to employees, who may feel wary, dismissive or even cynical, viewing it as just another in a long list of initiatives. This is a key problem that can be set up when the first step in a new inquiry process is a lot of "telling and selling" in a very "advocating" way.	Avoid the "hard sell", instead focusing on low-key and viral, "guerrilla" communication. Make any communications look as different as possible from your usual style – for example, use hand-drawn illustrations and raw stories rather than PowerPoint, clip-art and bullets. Establish who are the "gossips" in your organization and tell them about it – the word will soon spread informally and gain natural support from employees. Encouraging those who are collecting stories to tell others what they're doing can also help with this snowball effect.
Leadership may lose interest when there aren't early "big bangs"	Senior leaders and managers often want instant results, but cultural change takes place first and foremost in the local interactions in the workplace – which they rarely get to see.	If leaders mostly spend time with each other, shareholders and in their offices, they won't be *in contact* with employees to see for themselves how things are changing. Encourage them to spend time "on the floor" in stores, call centers or elsewhere in the business, talking to staff and asking how they feel change is taking place. Get them to ask questions based on seeking out the positive examples of change – remember, if they go in asking what isn't working, they'll be influencing it in the direction of it "not working".
Wanting to launch the process with the big event	Projects based on fanfare launch events often fail when employees become disillusioned upon returning to a non-conducive workplace. They return and are greeted with the "he's been on a course, he'll get over it" resistance from colleagues.	Big events like Summits do work very well, but participants need to return to a workplace that has already had investment in the conditions for positive reinforcement of their ideas. This is why we believe starting the work informally is best.

Senior managers can feel out of control when staff become genuinely engaged and empowered	Many organizations have somewhat of a parent/child relationship with their staff. But the space between being a child and becoming a full adult – the teenage years – is full of anxiety, exploration, experimentation and often mistakes. Understandably, senior managers may want to re-impose control if they perceive that people are making risky moves.	AI is an invitation for staff to take responsibility. Think in advance about the areas in which you might see a "teenage" reaction from staff and think about ways in which you might pre-empt it – not to stop it, but to support it with good learning processes. This supports and enables a fast and secure "growing up". Coaching and support needs to be in place to help senior leaders and managers work constructively with employees' emerging sense of adult power. They need to be reassured that the employees aren't "out of control" nor are they "taking control". It's about helping employees understand they have choices and involving them in the decision-making process – these are crucial if the organization is to be successful in engaging its employees. Leaders need to remember, as Dr Frank Barrett says, that "positive stories beget positive action".
Wanting to plan everything out in advance	In order to get budget and management commitment, we often need a detailed business case and a plan. Yet, the very essence of a process whereby people start to make their own engaged and empowered change process happen, is that you can't know everything before you've started.	The key thing here is to have a good enough plan to get started, enough to hold the anxiety of senior management and secure support. Build in the kind of learning loops and ongoing communications that will ensure that as new opportunities emerge and other predetermined ideas fall away, you can make new agreements without this being perceived as not knowing what you are doing. We also need to remember that innovation and change are disruptions to existing patterns of certainty and clarity. It's not possible to get genuine innovation without inviting uncertainty at the same time.

2.7 The 5D cycle in practice

This section provides an extended case study that shows how O2 applied AI.

CASE STUDY

O2
Using AI to engage employees in culture change

When Cellnet relaunched as O2 six years ago, the new brand image immediately resonated with the public and was backed up with major technological and service improvements. O2 went from being unknown to becoming the market leader in the UK.

At that time, the mobile telecommunication industry was dominated by strategies of new customer acquisition, and through new tariff structures and improved systems/network coverage, they were encouraging people to switch providers. Although O2 was winning the battle for new customers, it understood that customer acquisition alone would not create long-term profitability.

FOCUS ON CULTURE

In 2005, the organization decided to focus more of its resources on customer retention as part of its strategy to differentiate through a better customer experience. Leaders knew that their "brand promise" and "image" were highly attractive to new customers, but existing customers remained loyal because of their actual experiences at point of contact with employees, and this meant employees essentially had the power to determine the success or failure of the customer retention strategy. O2 therefore sought to balance its dedication to task and process delivery with an increased focus on internal relationships and culture – if people were going to create an experience leading to "loyal and happy customers", they had to experience the conditions leading to loyalty and happiness themselves, inside the organization.

DIP IN ENERGY

However, a major investment in front line customer experience meant 500 redundancies in back-office and managerial roles. This, combined with the collective effort expended on their three-year push to the top in a competitive market, led to an energy dip across the organization.

Frustration rose as O2's employees (just over 10,000 in 2005) struggled to give the "discretionary effort" required to "live the brand values" and deliver the customer promise. "Behaviors in O2 call centers and shops were driven more by sales and efficiency metrics than by service and relationship building," says Paula Cave, now UK Head of Retail, who led the Better Place project during this period. "Employees wanted customers to know that they cared – but they didn't feel empowered or able to go the extra mile."

CREATING "POSITIVE CHANGE"

O2 appointed Ashridge Consulting and a partnership was formed to:

1. Establish an improved employee experience where people are able to model the brand values – a "people promise" as compelling and loyalty-generating internally as the customer promise was externally.
2. Unlock the pride and passion that already existed for the external brand image by giving employees a powerful

O2: Using AI to engage employees in culture change →

voice in decision making.

3. Translate the resurgent passion, pride and "discretionary effort" into an even better customer experience.

To help O2 create "positive change", Ashridge Consulting designed an AI-based approach that was aligned with the O2 brand values (see Figure 2.8, below).

THE "BETTER PLACE" PROJECT

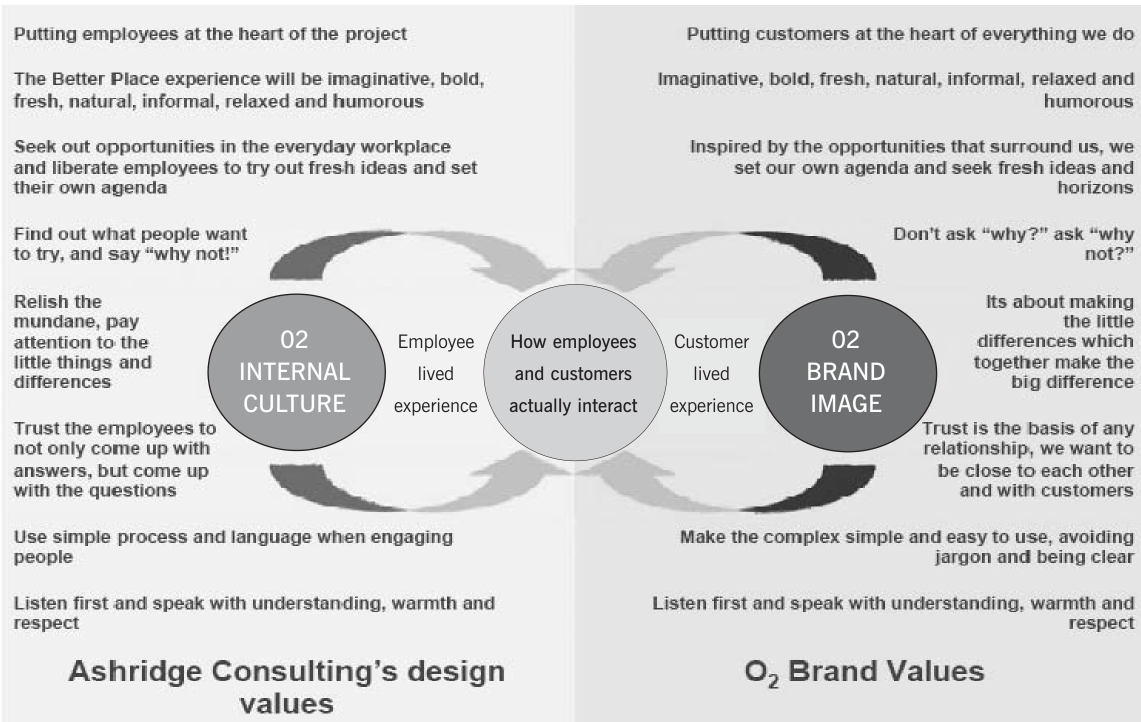
Ashridge Consulting, together with a diverse O2 team, designed and facilitated an innovative change project called "Better Place". This involved two types of change work:

1. *Informal process – working in "the everyday".* This replaced the traditional push of programmatic change with an informal process of conversation and experimentation based on AI. This viral communication stimulated immediate, empowered change in the offices, shops and call centers.
2. *Explicit change plan including an AI Summit.* Once the "movement" had started to grow, the high-profile change process could start, leading to a three-day AI Summit involving 300 employees – including executives, managers, process specialists/owners and front-line employees.

1. The informal process – working in "the everyday"

A viral approach to communication ensured that people spontaneously joined in and were then helped by the team to deliver things already on their to-do list – but modeling the desired culture. "We deliberately communicated through gossip,

Fig 2.8: *The values within Ashridge Consulting's AI approach were aligned with the O2 brand values*



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stories and local stimulation of conversation – rather than corporate emails, posters and other formal "messaging" from the top," says Jo Macbeth, the Experience O2 Manager, and one of the key internal consultants working with Ashridge Consulting on the project. "In the call centers and in retail, they were inspired and supported to start taking initiative outside their normal spans of control to improve the experience for customers and employees."

All departments were invited to work with the AI facilitators on existing agendas. An "issue" in the in-tray of Annabel Sweet, Head of People Strategy and Experience, was the need for greater consistency and high impact induction – for everyone, everywhere in the business. The organization felt there were already lots of great initiatives in local teams but not everyone was getting the benefit. Annabel faced a dilemma:

1. Pull everything structurally back into the center and impose control – leading to consistency, but also to low ownership and engagement locally; or
2. Fragment it completely out to local control – leading to high customization, fit and ownership, but also to rapidly reducing efficiency, consistency and leverage of learning.

With the support of one of the AI consultants, Annabel brought interested parties together in a process which became locally dubbed the "Meeting of Minds". "This ignored structural and procedural solutions to the problem and, instead, developed relationships – creating a network of best practice sharing," Sweet explains. "A new "self-regulating" balance between order/consistency/central control and emergence/ownership/localization was created which yields all the benefits without the downsides."

2. The explicit change plan – the AI Summit

The explicit change plan was based on the AI 5D cycle. Definition and Discovery phases involved a very high proportion of employees, with over a thousand interviews conducted before a large scale Summit in January 2006. Following the Summit a wide range of initiatives, projects and local changes were supported and enabled. The phases as they were experienced in O2 are explained further in Figure 2.9, page 52.

Bringing it all together

How the formal and informal elements of the change process came together over time is shown figuratively in Figure 2.10, page 53.

THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

Macbeth has supported many of the emerging change projects and continued to spread the use of AI as an engagement tool into all aspects of her work in O2. She reports, "From this event, many employee-generated projects impacted the culture for all employees – now numbering 12,500. At an individual level, people increasingly felt liberated to act in the interest of customers and each other with greater business awareness. Over these 20 months, customer retention improved by 32 percent and all indicators in the employee attitude survey, in all departments, have markedly improved. Most importantly, the relationships and knowledge required to sustain the change, and continue to build on it, have been transferred inside O2 where they are continuing to find their own unique way of developing the project."

The Real Directors Project is a radical and challenging project to come out of the AI Summit. Real Directors is a "Shadow Board" of customer facing staff – 15-20

O2: Using AI to engage employees in culture change

people who will take part in strategic decisions that impact on customers. Matthew Key, CEO of O2 UK, says "We {the O2 Board} were making a leap of faith, but this is real people engagement, and we could see that." He believes it will be a differentiating aspect of the O2 culture that customers will see and feel."

SUCCESS FACTORS

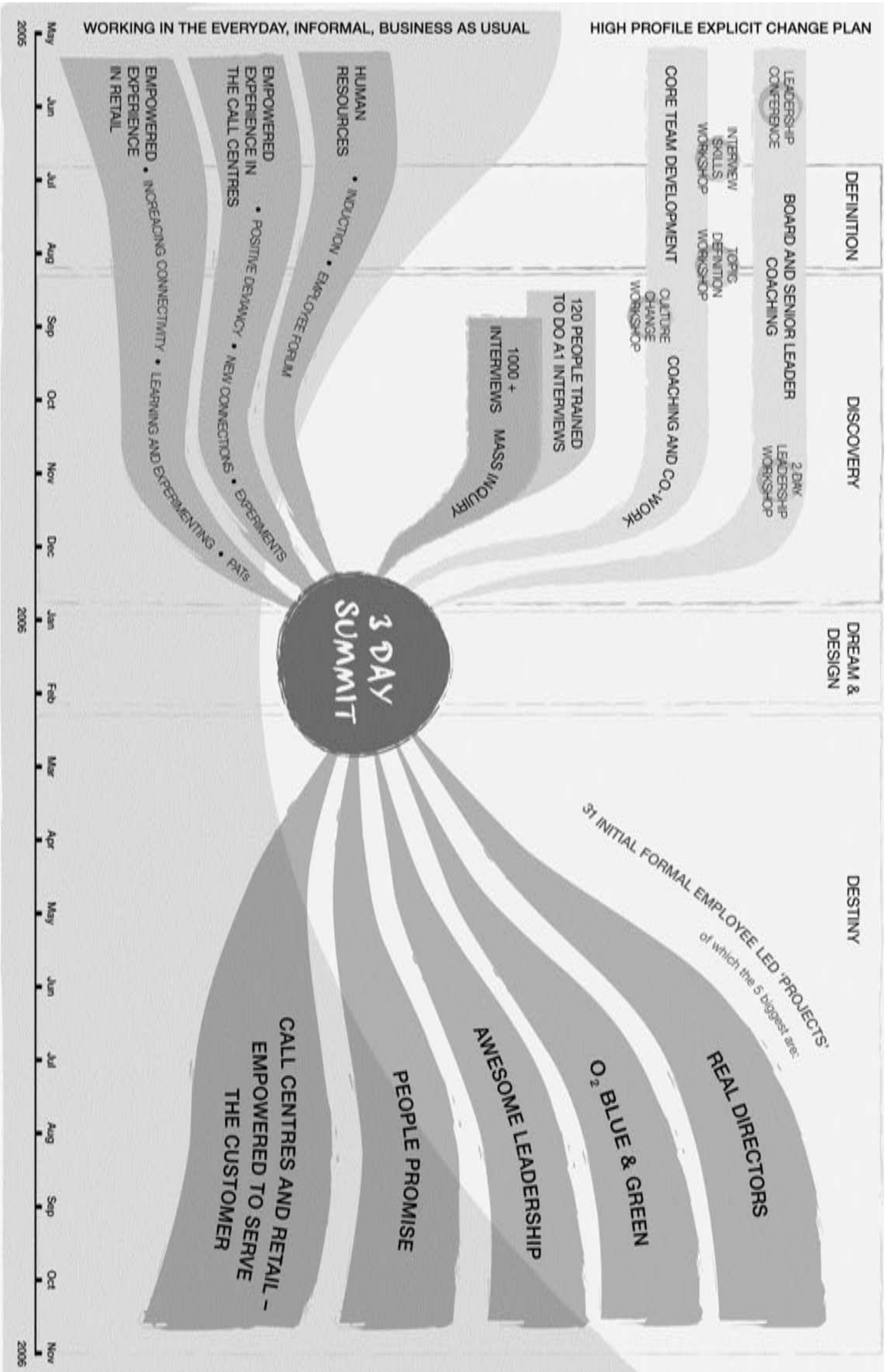
Macbeth identifies certain key success factors:

1. People experienced working together in ways that they hadn't experienced before – it felt bold and fresh, completely in line with the brand values O2 is aspiring towards.
2. They worked together in open, equal ways across the company regardless of role or status.
3. They experienced participation, listening, co-ownership and innovation in a shared-learning environment
4. They continued to feel empowered to be creative and make decisions about the future of O2.

Fig 2.9: *O2's pre Summit work and the AI Summit explained*

1. Definition	The O2 Core Team conducted more than 100 AI interviews throughout the business, collecting stories of O2 at its best. At a Definition workshop, they themed the stories to create six topics (that O2 wanted to see more of in the culture) to define the next phases.
2. Discovery	120 people from all parts of O2 trained as AI interviewers. In a "mass inquiry", they toured the business, finding stories related to the six topics. They conducted over 1,000 conversations and then brought their "data" to the Summit. *Summit day one:* 300 people (including board and senior leaders) discovered O2's unique success factors through the collected stories. "The Summit was a unique experience – without presentations – the whole group learned to work together and create collective understanding from which action could naturally follow," Askham says.
3. Dream and **4. Design**	*Summit day two:* "The Summit attendees collectively imagined provocative visions for the future, articulated in compelling language – a new "DNA" says Askham. "Creative enactments of ideals, combined with rigorous analysis, built emotional and rational support for change."
5. Destiny	*Summit day three:* Anyone was able to launch, gain support for and lead initiatives to bring the new DNA to life. "As they left," says Askham, "they were already starting to implement the changes – both in the initiatives and in their own everyday behavior."

Fig 2.10: *O2's overall change process*



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2.8 Tailoring the 5D cycle to your needs

The 5D methodology is perhaps the most common manifestation of AI, but there are certainly no prescriptions when it comes to the technique – indeed, it would be counter to the principles behind it! Organizations can – and should – adapt the technique to the situation and environment they're facing.

Below, Tim Haynes, Director, Executive Development at GlaxoSmithKline, explains how he incorporates the "spirit" of AI, as well as particular 5D cycle processes and protocols, into his employee engagement work.

TIM HAYNES: Incorporating the "spirit" of AI into your work

In my field of work as a leadership and organizational development specialist, I find that the more rigid AI methodologies are very useful in particular contexts, but it's the "spirit" of AI that flows through the way I approach my work more generally.

The danger of using traditional questions for your employee engagement survey

I've used, and will continue to use, the specific processes and protocols offered by the 5D methodology when I think it will be the most helpful intervention in the context I'm working in. With employee engagement interventions, I often utilize the rigor and structure which typify high-quality AI interview protocols in the design of employee surveys. After all, AI interview protocols are essentially very carefully designed question sets, often used in the Discovery phase of the 5D methodology, which are intended to stimulate a much more envisioned and emotional response in individuals.

It often amazes me when I see examples of so-called employee engagement surveys which, if anything, do more to disengage the poor recipients than anything else. Surely asking your employees a question like, "What percentage of your time at work do you feel demotivated and lacking confidence in the future?", is at best likely to remind your employees that they're not 100 percent happy at work (show me an employee who is), and at worst will positively encourage them to start actively seeking new employment opportunities elsewhere.

Incorporating AI into your employee research to get more valuable feedback

Right now I'm working with GSK's corporate communications team to design a survey and interview process so that we can understand the current levels of employee engagement with a new leadership framework we're rolling out across the corporation. A great question we're sure to include, oozing of AI in it's orientation, might be, "If you had one wish which, if granted, would ensure that the GSK leadership framework is communicated in the most impactful way, what would it be?" Now, there's a positively orientated question which requires individuals to:

1. fully engage with the issue we're really interested in, and
2. to legitimately offer some constructive feedback on what we might be failing to do in our current communications approaches.

Bingo!

Focusing on the "positive" to avert disengagement or turn it into engagement

Another example of what the "spirit" of AI can achieve occurred while I was working in my previous organization, a global energy company with around 100,000 employees. At the time I was working as an internal organizational development (OD) consultant and I was asked by one of the senior HR managers in head office to come and help fix a "problem group" of employees who were seriously disengaged at the time. The whole situation was deteriorating into a potentially high-profile employee relations issue, which could have caused real reputational harm to the company.

Instead of completing a typical OD analysis – which might have involved interviewing all the disengaged employees (a majority) to understand what their "problems" were in order to try and eliminate them – I instead recommended I find and study the minority of employees in this group who *did* feel engaged (i.e. those who were the "positive deviants"). I did this in order to grow and build on the circumstances that made their "being engaged" possible. By helping them to be more powerful and their stories to spread, their practice of being engaged and connected could grow and influence the other less engaged people.

You can apply AI without a complete AI intervention

On reflection, it occurs to me that at the heart of AI is an absolute intent to fully engage people in the process of change. To appreciatively inquire is – in itself – an act of (positive) engagement and, what's more, brings about further positive engagement as a result of the process itself. It's self-reinforcing. As such, communication specialists who help design and lead interventions in organizations to improve levels of engagement would do well to give serious thought to how they can at least keep in mind the spirit of AI, if not the purist methodologies and processes which sit behind it.

Tim Haynes, Director, Executive Development, GlaxoSmithKline

2.9 The future of AI – new technologies

In organizations, whether leaders wish to examine their leadership models or not, I believe we're starting to face the sort of change which breaks entirely with many of our existing rules, mantras and assumptions. New generations of people are no longer willing to work in the same ways as before, and find our current addition to control, authority and hierarchy strange to say the least.

In most medium or large organizations, where leaders are no longer in full, daily contact with employees, we've learned to lead "by proxy" through extensive policies, procedures, rules and imposed value sets – created by experts often in remote, central technocratic functions.

Employee engagement offers employers a much sought after "golden goose" – accountability and freedom to innovate, not just in the R&D department – but throughout the organization. But only if the mindset that created command and control structures, processes and paternalistic intervention is left behind.

Combining AI with social media to build active, collaborative engagement

We now have the change processes – like AI – through which to stimulate this change and we have social media applications (e.g. blogs, wikis, social networks and newsgroups) that allow us to connect up the organization in new, self-organizing and self-regulating ways.

What if organizations were able to strip back their 50-page travel-policy documents into a single page of principles and put it up on a wiki for everyone to engage with, amend, upgrade and innovate into? What if this process was supported by an action inquiry process (like AI), building up a culture of empowerment, engagement, innovation and accountability?

This is precisely what one of the world's largest global finance organizations is embarking upon. In its infancy, this project will transform the working experience from one of passivity to one of active engagement, from controlled to self-disciplined, from entitled to entrepreneurial. HR, communications, finance, procurement and all the staff functions previously accountable for the production of policies and controls, will need to change their roles into facilitators and convenors of the conversations. They'll need to find a new way to bring their expertise and wisdom into the formation and constant reformation of the "right way to do things here", as a collaborative act with the wider organization population.

This exciting project is a the forefront of how virtual, digital workspaces, technology and Appreciative Inquiry change methodologies are set to become a new force in liberating and engaging the organization of the future.

Case studies

McDonald's	60, 69
Fortune 500 Healthcare Company	85

3.

Message maps

David Grossman, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, President & Principal thoughtpartner™, dg&a

Through aligned and strategic messages, leaders are able to engage employees to drive business results. This chapter outlines a process to help you think more strategically about the story you need to communicate, and articulate clear, credible and compelling messages that truly engage your audience.

Chapter Contents

3.1 Introduction

"How powerful would it be if we approached messaging for internal communication in the same way?"

That was the revelation I had, sitting in a "war room" at McDonald's as we were developing messages for one of the latest crises that was impacting the Golden Arches. As director of communications, I was at the table with my external communications peers, along with various subject matter experts from operations, finance, quality assurance and marketing who had gathered just minutes earlier to focus on this issue at hand.

In a few short hours, we understood the details of the crisis and where we stood, and we had developed the core messages that were needed to tell our story. It was incredible to be part of a process that was strategic and dynamic, and yielded significant results.

I recall thinking, "Why don't we take the same approach to key internal issues we want to drive through the organization?" I didn't understand why we weren't using the same process and sense of urgency to address issues such as helping employees understand the company strategy and move them to action, improve engagement or encouraging them to be more effective.

Aren't some of the issues we face on the "inside" of "crisis" proportion, or at least deserve the same amount of care and attention?

Taking a "war room" approach to internal messaging

Today, leading organizations are doing just that – taking a "war room" approach to internal messaging with the same sense of determination and urgency. Many have realized the power and potential of internal communication to drive business results and are borrowing the tried-and-true strategies and approaches that have proven successful in other disciplines. In fact, they've realized that having the right story delivered to the right audiences at the right time can make or break the credibility of a leader, department, program and/or organization.

According to Melcrum's global employee engagement survey conducted in October 2007, only 22 percent of the 1,100 respondents think their leaders are consistent in communicating core messages about their organization, function or a specific initiative. The remainder – nearly 80 percent – feel their leaders are sometimes or not at all consistent in their communications.

The question many communicators face is, "How do you best develop and then consistently tell your story within your organization to drive business results?"

Having a messaging methodology for your organization is a starting point. This process and approach guides individuals and organizations in creating clear, credible and compelling messages that drive awareness, understanding and action for their key audiences.

Engaged employees improve the bottom line

Savvy business leaders have seen first-hand the power of strong messages and how they can drive business success by turning strategy into action. Although communicating is getting easier thanks to new and timely communication channels, helping employees connect the dots is often one of an organization's greatest challenges. In fact, studies have shown that engaged employees can have a significant impact on the bottom line.

For example, as suggested by Watson Wyatt, the human capital and financial management consulting firm, in its "2005/2006 ROI Return on Investment Study":

- Companies that communicate effectively have a 19.4 percent higher market premium than companies that do not.
- Shareholder returns for organizations with the most effective communication were more than 57 percent higher over the last five years (2000 – 2004) than were returns for firms with less effective communication.
- Companies that are highly effective at communication are 20 percent more likely to report lower turnover rates than their peers.

A messaging methodology is essential

A process and approach for developing messages is essential for any organization. In fact, there has been a recent trend toward defining specific methodologies for developing messages within organizations. However, although leading organizations have their own methodologies, those organizations are few and far between.

Today, only 25 percent of organizations use a specific methodology to develop core messages (Melcrum employee engagement survey, October 2007). That leaves an astounding 75 percent of organizations in which communicators are developing messages on an ad hoc basis. In fact, of even those large organizations that use message map methodologies, 80 percent indicated that they spend less than five hours per week using a messaging tool to tell their story – an alarming statistic given the increasing need for ongoing alignment across all levels of an organization.

The ideal situation is one where everyone on the communication team is trained and knows how to facilitate an agreed upon messaging methodology. When it comes time to develop messages, leaders then know what to expect.

Articulating your strategy or vision and aligning the communicatons team

A message map isn't a tool for creating a strategy or a vision; it's a tool for articulating a strategy or a vision. Through aligned and strategic messages, leaders are able to engage employees to drive business results. A message map:

- Defines and prioritizes the audiences that will receive the messages.
- Establishes the current mindset of those audiences so you're better able to influence them.
- Articulates clear, credible and compelling messages.
- Outlines the key behaviors and actions expected of your audiences.
- Aligns the team charged with communicating messages throughout an organization.
- Creates efficiencies when developing communication tools because all agreed-on messages are in one place and ready for use.

This chapter outlines a process to help you think more strategically about how you develop your story, drive alignment and tell your story with impact – whether it's a large organizational story or whether you want to communicate change inside your organization or team. Specifically, it covers:

- The components of a message map.
- An overview of dg&a's messaging methodology.
- How a message map is created.
- How you use a message map.

Making the connection and engaging with employees is no longer a "nice to have" – it's a must have that delivers solid business results by inspiring employees to commit to action.

CASE STUDY

MCDONALD'S

Developing a message map to communicate safety

On December 23, 2003, McDonald's learned about the first US case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) – better known as Mad Cow Disease. The company's top priority was maintaining consumer confidence and sharing its story: McDonald's beef was safe to eat because of long-standing food safety practices.

THE KEY MESSAGES

McDonald's developed its story and key messages using a message map:

1. McDonald's has the highest food safety and quality control standards in the industry and is a recognized leader in this area.
2. McDonald's has provided leadership on beef safety at every level of its food supply chain for decades.
   (a) This single confirmed case of BSE has no connection to McDonald's or its suppliers.
   (b) McDonald's has in place numerous industry-leading safety restrictions specifically aimed at preventing BSE.
3. Working with the world's leading authorities on this issue, McDonald's continues to ensure that our standards meet or surpass all industry and government requirements.

DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Once the map was complete, the team developed and executed an internal communication plan to ensure McDonald's US management, franchisees, restaurant managers and crew could advocate on behalf of the corporation.

The key messages were then used to communicate to key internal and external audiences in a variety of ways, including:

1. A communications resource kit for restaurants that included a letter for customers, brochures, Q&A and fact sheets;
2. Regular briefing calls with corporate and US management as well as communicators;
3. Media statements, press releases, website and third-party outreach; and
4. Messages for management and key internal audiences via email, voicemail and the company intranet.

RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE

According to an internal survey, 99 percent of employees felt they received ample information regarding McDonald's beef safety and 92 percent felt they received enough information to respond appropriately to questions about BSE. Additionally, because of McDonald's efforts, sales were not affected negatively. In fact, during the month of the incident, sales increased 12 percent.

MCDONALD'S: Developing a message map to communicate safety

3.2 What is a message map?

A message map is the foundation for all communications relating to an organization, a specific project or an initiative. It's the most commonly used management tool to develop the core concepts behind a specific topic, before trying to populate messages into a variety of tactics.

Think of the message map as a compass that guides all of your communications. It helps you efficiently capture the core messages for:

- your organization;
- particular strategies or initiatives;
- different departments or organizational functions;
- specific programs, products or announcements; and
- people.

No matter what it's being used for, its purpose is the same. Think of the message map as a way to help you navigate the sometimes rough waters when it comes to corporate and leadership communication. Once it has been developed, a message map serves as the blueprint for all communication on a topic, from management talking points to marketing collateral, website copy and anything else you may need to create.

At their core, message maps help identify several critical dimensions necessary for a successful communications initiative. They help:

1. **Define** and prioritize the audiences who will receive the messages and focus on the common ground between them.
2. **Identify** the current mindset of your key audiences. To address concerns and negative perceptions or to leverage positive assets, it's critical to know what people think and feel about a specific topic. The more you know about what your audience is thinking, the better you're able to influence them.
3. **Articulate** clear, credible and compelling messages about the topic.
4. **Outline** the key behaviors and expectations for each audience receiving the messages. You need to be able to use your messages to drive action. To get there, you need to articulate those messages in a clear way that outlines the specific actions expected of each audience.
5. **Align** the teams charged with communicating messages. Building trust and credibility is about consistency of messaging across different touch points. Without alignment, leaders say what they want without as much focus around strategy.
6. **Validate** the implementation plan and identify any gaps.

COMMON BARRIER #1: "Our team's already aligned on the message"

Barrier: A leader tells you their team is aligned on the messages for a specific topic and there isn't a need to spend the time involved in developing a message map.

Solution: Ask the leader to engage their team in a simple homework assignment, where team members are asked to share what they believe are the key messages on the topic. If the messages shared by each team member are aligned, a messaging session may not be necessary. However, if everyone submits different messages, a messaging session on the topic is necessary.

What a message map is not

Now that we've explained what a message map is, it's also important to understand what a message map is not. For example:

A message map is not…	Why not?
A communication vehicle in and of itself	Messages should be targeted to resonate with the specific audience. Sending the complete repository of messages will most likely lead to confusion and misunderstanding.
Just the key messages	A message map includes data and facts that support and legitimize your main messages, as well as stories that help bring those messages to life.
Created and used only by communicators	Leaders, subject matter experts and others with detailed knowledge about the specific topic must be closely involved with the development of the message map – they're the ones who can provide the details and information that will ensure the messages resonate with audiences. The individuals who help you develop the message map also are the individuals who will be talking about the specific topic the most – it's important to ensure they have the key messages and are integrating them into their communications.
Static	Companies evolve, initiatives change and messages must evolve and change with them to ensure key audiences are getting the information they need.
All-purpose	Once a message map has been developed, it can be customized for a specific audience to target communications for even greater effectiveness.
Meant to be filed away	A consistent drumbeat of the same messages through different channels and from different voices is the best way to drive your audiences to action; use the message map regularly to ensure the right messages are communicated on an ongoing basis.

3.3 What a message map is used for

Message maps are a critical communication tool for individuals, business teams, departments and organizations.

Message maps often are developed for topics that fall into one of two categories:

1. **Organization/key initiative** – This type of message map focuses on the intangible. It's visionary and broad in nature, talking about where an organization, initiative or individual is headed, the roadmap for getting there, etc., in a way that's meaningful for key audiences.

2. **Timely announcement** – These message maps focus on tangible events, initiatives and announcements (e.g. a product launch). They address specific questions by answering the Five Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and the how.

The content of a message map is used in a variety of ways depending on the specific deliverable. Because message maps serve as a guide for consistent messaging, they can shape both internal and external messages.

Communications that can be developed using components of a message map include:

- management talking points;
- marketing collateral (e.g. brochures);
- speeches;
- voicemail and e-mail messages;
- website copy;
- FAQs;
- press releases;
- direct mail; and
- pocket cards.

Sometimes, message maps are customized for different audiences within a particular project. This extra step can enable you to drill down so that targeted communications can be more effective. However, it's important to note that this will only occur after the core messages have been developed.

Who uses message maps?

From senior-level executives to managers responsible for a particular program, the message map is a valuable management tool to help leaders and communicators manage the communication process and ensure alignment at all levels. Users don't necessarily have to be communications professionals, but they need to understand what the message map is for and how it can and should be used.

It's important to note that the message map itself is rarely, if ever, used as a communication deliverable because it's the comprehensive repository of messages for a project. And, because the message map develops the key messages with concepts in mind, different words or phrases can (and often should) be used in different deliverables to meet audience needs as long as they support the key concepts defined in the map.

3.4 How do you know you need a message map?

We've all been in situations where we've sat down to review communications tools that have been developed to announce a program, initiative or change within our organization only to notice that the messages in each vehicle are different.

We may go through the tools and synchronize the messages, but the question then becomes – does management agree with how the messages are being changed?

Then there are times – when a crisis situation hits, for example – when we get the right people together into a war room to talk about the facts we have, what's happening, what we need to do, and develop a game plan up front.

The messaging process was born from the realization that we can make a significant impact on the business by applying the same mindset we use to approach a war room to any other project or initiative. Agreeing on the game plan up front enables us to better communicate on the inside so that we're engaging individuals to drive business results through aligned and strategic messages.

Key indicators that you need a message map include:
- You need to develop multiple communications, all on the same topic.
- There isn't alignment on what needs to be said about a specific project, initiative, etc.
- You need to communicate a specific topic to different audiences.
- Multiple individuals will be communicating on a specific topic.

The case for implementing a messaging methodology
A recent dg&a survey of nearly 100 communicators indicated that one of the biggest gaps between the skills they believe they should have and their current skill set is the ability to build alignment with key leaders to influence outcomes.

Because a messaging methodology can help build alignment, it's essential for any organization to put a common process and approach in place. Furthermore, a common approach to messaging also ensures leaders are able to articulate the core messages that resonate with employees to drive action.

It doesn't matter what methodology an organization uses, as long as it's consistent and repeatable. Ideally, everyone should know how to facilitate the agreed upon methodology so that leaders and others throughout the organization know what to expect when it comes time to develop messages on a specific topic.

In order to get others within the organization on board with the messaging process, it's also important to ensure they understand the benefits of having a core set of messages. Individuals may not always realize that the messaging process and a core set of messages will:
- Help drive alignment between the teams communicating the messages.
- Enable the organization to articulate clear, credible and compelling messages about the topic.
- Outline the key behaviors and expectations for each audience receiving the messages.
- Validate the implementation plan and identify any gaps.

COMMON BARRIER #2: "You can create the messages alone"

Barrier: A leader tells you that as the communication professional, you should create the messages by yourself.

Solution: Although you are the communication professional, you're not the only individual who will be using the messages being developed, nor do you have all the details about the topic at hand. Remind the leader that they'll also be using the messages in their communication, as will subject matter experts on the topic. Reinforce the benefits of the messaging session – especially alignment – and remind the leader that the best way to ensure everyone is on the same page and that a common set of core messages is being used is to develop them as a team.

3.5 The dg&a approach to messaging

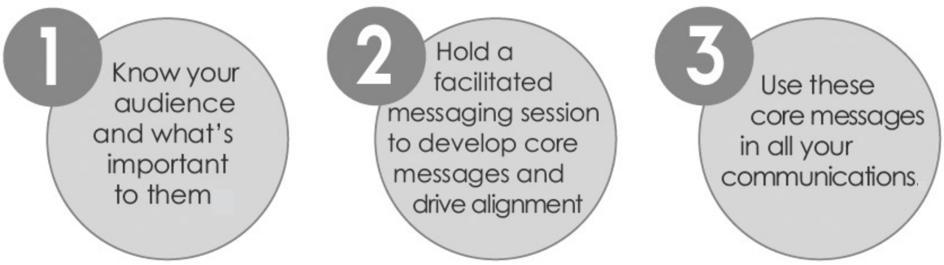
Our messaging methodology is grounded in an overall strategic approach to communication and is built on best practice principles. The process (see Figure 3.1, below) begins by identifying key audiences and what's important to them, then shifts to the development of the core messages and ends with the application of those messages in communications. It's important to note that there are a variety of ways to develop messages. Each organization should use the approach that works best for them. The methodology described in this chapter is one we use and has worked well for many of our client partners.

Critical components of all communications

There are five key steps to creating strategic communications for any audience, and these are absolutely crucial to keep in mind throughout the message development process.

1. **Outcome**
   To engage audiences and drive them to action, you need to be clear about the business outcome you seek, not what you want to say. A common understanding about the desired outcome will ensure the right strategies are developed to drive your key audiences to action and deliver the desired level of performance.

Fig 3.1: *The dg&a messaging process*



2. **Audience**
   It's also important to understand the audience and where they're coming from. The more you know about your audience, the better you'll be able to move them to action. That's why you need to develop a strategy that meets their needs. Breakdowns in communication frequently occur because the sender hasn't been clear about his or her purpose.

3. **Messages**
   People are much more likely to listen or care about what others say if the messages are meaningful to them, or if they're interested in the messages. Include messages that get at your outcome – don't clutter the communication. The fastest way to disengage people is to overwhelm them. Use the outcomes you identified as a filter for the messages that should be included in your communication. The key messages typically cover the basic questions all audiences have – who, what, when, where, why and how.

4. **Tactics**
   Communicators are often great at the tactics and terrific when it comes to creating vehicles to help get the messages out. The key is to ensure the tactics match the outcome, the audience and the messages.

5. **Measurement**
   You need to know how you'll figure out when the messages are successful. What does success look like? Measurement comes in various forms – it doesn't need to be expensive or complex (simple is often best), but it's important to think about how you'll know whether the business outcome you seek and the messages you've developed resonate with your audiences and drive them to action.

Key components of a dg&a messagemap™

The four key components of a dg&a messagemap™ are outlined below.

1. The elevator speech

Every message**map**™ (written as "message**map**" for the remainder of this section) should start with a key message (or elevator speech) that's supported by additional messages, data and stories reinforcing specific components of the main message (see Figure 3.2, opposite). The main message – or elevator speech – should summarize a topic at the 40,000-foot level. This is what someone would say if they were going from floor eight to floor five in an elevator, and were asked, "What's this topic about?"

2. Supporting messages

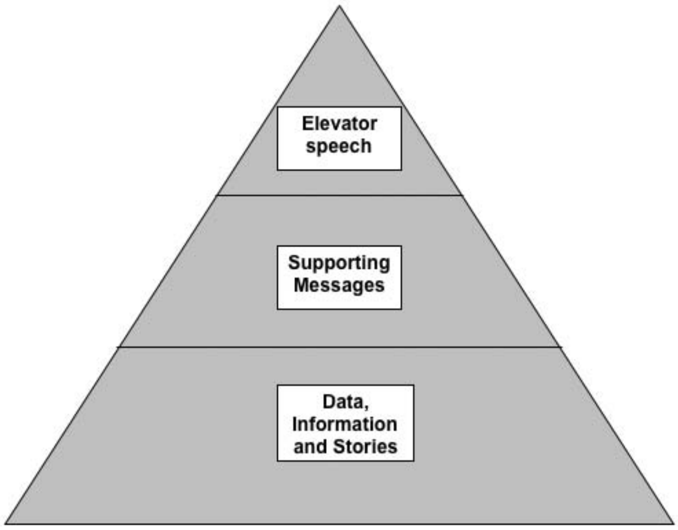
The main message needs to be short, compelling and to the point. In fact, a good outcome of the elevator speech is that someone says, "tell me more."

The "tell me more" part is the supporting messages, which are the next level of what you need to communicate. The elevator speech won't answer every question your key audience may have, which is why the supporting messages are so important.

To capture all of the right information about a topic, you need to ask some tough questions. Supporting messages typically address several main categories, such as:

- what it is (a description of the topic);
- what's happening;
- why it's happening; and
- benefits.

Fig 3.2: *The anatomy of a message***map**



Based on the topic for which you're developing the message**map**, you may have more or different supporting messages. The key is to ensure you think about your audience and the questions they have. It's important to address all their concerns and questions on the topic as part of the message**map**.

3. Data, information and stories
Once you've developed your supporting messages, gather data, information and stories that support and corroborate them. These are the facts, figures and additional messages you would use to build your case and the stories that help create an emotional connection with your audience by bringing the messages to life.

Whenever possible, the message**map** should include testimonials, quotes or specific stories that describe the right behaviors/actions or perhaps even what not to do.

4. Internal branding
An internal brand can enable you to use the messages you've created to continue to tell your story, connect employees to your organization or a specific initiative, and drive the desired actions and behaviors. It's anchored in the business outcomes you hope to achieve and creates shared understanding and a rallying cry for employees.

It's important to note that an internal brand may not always be necessary for every topic or initiative for which a message**map** is developed. However, once you understand your desired outcome and have developed your core messages, consider whether an internal brand will help build momentum for the specific topic. A checklist is provided in Figure 3.3 (page 68).

Fig 3.3: *Checklist to help you evaluate whether you need an internal brand*

Do you need an internal brand?

Ask yourself these simple questions to determine whether you need an internal brand:

	Yes	No
1. Do you rely on employees to deliver your brand promise?	☐	☐
2. Do employees live your brand promise?	☐	☐
3. Do employees believe in the products or services your organization offers?	☐	☐
4. Do employees stand behind the mission of your brand?	☐	☐
5. Are you going through a significant change in your organization?	☐	☐
6. Do you need to rally employees around a key initiative or business priority?	☐	☐

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you will want to consider internal branding as a strategy.

MCDONALD'S

Internal branding reinforces customer-focused behavior

THE CHALLENGE

When McDonald's unveiled its national toll-free telephone number, it needed to help internal audiences understand that local follow-up, speed of response and empathy are critical to winning back dissatisfied customers. McDonald's also needed to coach internal audiences about the crucial role they play in recovering customers every day.

THE SOLUTION

McDonald's branded its toll-free number internally in a way that clearly communicated the actions they wanted to encourage with employees (see Figure 3.4 below). In addition, it developed a comprehensive suite of tools, including a communication toolkit, a custom three-tab clipboard and a video tour of the customer call center to educate franchisees and restaurant managers, and provide mission-critical information about customer recovery.

THE RESULT

Through its internal branding campaign, McDonald's experienced a 100 percent increase in the level of local follow-up with dissatisfied customers.

Fig 3.4: *Logo for branding the toll-free number internally*

MCDONALD'S: Internal branding reinforces customer-focused behavior

3.6 How a message map is created

Message maps aren't created in a vacuum. You need the people who best know the program or initiative for which you're creating messages. In most cases, you're the communication person, not necessarily the subject matter expert, so you need to rely on the very people who are going to help articulate the messages to help you create the messages.

To do that, you'll sit down with the team in a "messaging session" – a forum for you to guide a conversation about the topic and get the information you need to create the map.

It's your job to orchestrate the messaging session, extract the critical information, and mold the information into the tool itself. The end result is a map that clearly and succinctly defines the project, playing back (for the most part) what these subject matter experts told you during the messaging session.

Who should come to a messaging session?
When preparing for a messaging session, the first step is to identify the people that should participate. It's critical to get the right people around the table. These are people that:
1. Know the most about the topic;
2. Will be communicating the messages; and
3. Understand your audiences.

A diverse group enables you to capture a wide variety of information. Having executives from the functional and operating areas of the project means you're speaking with those actually responsible for development and implementation. Their perspective is invaluable because they know the project inside and out.

From the communication side, those team members who will be intimately involved in creating the message map and resulting deliverables should be present because they're critical to the overall assignment. This is important because reading notes and debriefing doesn't give the flavor of facial expressions, voice inflections or arguments.

It's crucial that all the players are at the table during the messaging session because this is a critical opportunity to ensure alignment and engagement. The session provides an opportunity to talk through any issues together so that when everyone walks out of the room, they're all in agreement on "what we're trying to accomplish" and "how we're going to tell that story".

Roles and responsibilities
The individuals participating in a messaging session typically have one of three roles – leader, facilitator or participant. It's important to be sure everyone is clear on their responsibilities coming into the session so that you're able to develop a message map that best tells the story of your topic.

1. The leader's primary role is to set the stage for all the participants so they understand the importance of the topic and why a message map is critical to its success.

2. The facilitator will lead the discussion and keep the group focused on the task at hand. Their main challenge is to get the necessary information from the subject matter experts in order to create the map after the session.

3. The rest of the attendees – the participants – will provide the context for the message map. They need to come to the session prepared to contribute their perspective, thoughts and insights on the topic at hand.

COMMON BARRIER #3: "We don't have time to participate"

Barrier: Members of the team feel they don't have the time to participate in a messaging session.

Solution: Emphasize the long-term benefits of agreeing on the core messages up front. Remind individuals that this process will enable the team to consistently communicate about the topic at hand with the confidence that everyone agrees about what is being said. Without a core set of messages, individuals will have to facilitate the review of communications with management on a case-by-case basis; this will take much more time and be less efficient in the long run.

How long should a messaging session last?

Depending on the size and complexity of the topic, a messaging session can take anywhere from a few hours to an entire day.

If you feel like you need a whole day, you may want to split the time up over several days. This will give you time to drill down into the details of the map so there isn't a need for a lot of follow-up with the participants to fill in extra holes beyond the subsequent sessions.

As you facilitate a messaging session, remember that you're really going to need to push the group, ask tough questions and force them not just to focus on the words but to focus on the concepts, the meaning behind what you're trying to get across.

Preparing for a messaging session

When you conduct a messaging session, there are a lot of details to juggle. Getting them right makes the difference between a session with good dialogue but no alignment, and a session with complete alignment and articulation of the messages.

Some steps to take in advance of scheduling the session are shown in Figure 3.5 (page 72).

Fig 3.5: *Steps to take in advance of scheduling the messaging session*

1. Know the material	• Be prepared by understanding the topic the messages will support. The subject matter experts know their material inside and out, and you need to be able to follow their conversation. Not only does this help you keep up, but more importantly, it helps you guide the discussion and keep it focused. • Before the session, you should already understand the key concepts that need to go in the elevator speech as well as the topics the supporting messages should address.
2. Choose a location	• It's often good to get out of the office – so that participants are away from their computer, the telephone and other colleagues. But if travel or schedules preclude you from holding it elsewhere, do your best to reserve a large conference room and bring the appropriate materials. • Arrive early and prepare the room (seating arrangements, materials, flip charts, snacks, etc.) to your liking.
3. Create an agenda	• An agenda helps you prioritize and be better prepared to handle any sudden changes in the session. It's critical to prioritize the key learnings that need to be extracted before you walk into the room. • Whether or not you share an actual written agenda is up to you. Sometimes, it's a good idea if you're in an all-day session so participants can see starting and ending points throughout the day. • If you do write up an agenda, you may want to share with the lead on the topic in advance (not necessarily the whole team). This will give him or her direction and also gives you validation that you're focused on the right things.
4. What should be in the room?	• Make sure you have an ample amount of flip charts and markers. Participants often reference previous points, so it is good to have these posted after each sheet is used. • Taking notes on flip charts will help guide the conversation and will be invaluable afterward as you create the actual message map. If possible, have a teammate on hand to take notes directly into a laptop, which also can help speed up the writing process. • Depending on when the session is (and how long it lasts), arrange for the appropriate meal to be served. And no matter what time of day, it's always good to have snacks and drinks (particularly sugar and caffeine). These literally provide food for thought!
5. Extending an invitation	• When you extend the invitation for the messaging session, be sure to tell participants in advance what to expect, what their role is, and the outcome of the meeting. • Sending an agenda in advance can also be a great tool for getting everyone on the same page. However, try not to overwhelm participants with a pre-read. Because they are already subject matter experts on the topic, it may not be necessary. Since the goal of the session is to hear about what's on the top of their mind, too much information may cause "analysis paralysis."

3.7 Facilitating a messaging session

Flexibility is especially important when conducting a messaging session. Obviously, there are things you need to achieve to write the message map. But don't be afraid to veer from the agenda if you sense needs have changed or there's something more immediate that needs to be discussed.

A typical messaging session might have the following components, each of which is detailed in the following pages.

1. Introductions
2. Senior leader reinforcement
3. Why are they here?
4. Review meeting goals
5. Identify key audiences
6. What are your message objectives?
7. Elevator speech
8. Supporting messages
9. Data, information and stories
10. Wrap up

1. Introductions
Go around the room and have all participants introduce themselves – this will help you understand the perspectives of all the speakers.

2. Senior leader reinforcement
Take a moment to ask the senior-most person in the room, or the leader in charge, to talk about the importance of communication and his/her vision for the topic as a whole.

Ask them to reinforce the importance of the session, and that this time is critical to help get the building blocks of the messaging needed to take the topic forward.

This does three things:
1. It validates why the session is taking place. (This is particularly important if any participants are not receptive to the session itself.)
2. It goes a long way to driving alignment.
3. It might offer some good nuggets of information on the overall direction of the program that otherwise would not come out.

3. Why are they here?
Next, speak about the overall communications program that you have already begun to outline. Show how the message map is the foundation to all the tools they will soon have at their disposal. It will evolve over time, but it is the first key deliverable.

Once you've facilitated the messaging process once or twice, this is a great opportunity to illustrate what you mean by sharing examples of previous message maps as well as examples of deliverables created from it.

4. Review meeting goals
Next, quickly review the overall meeting goals. This also may be a good opportunity to establish some ground rules for the session, such as encouraging individuals to ask questions, and reminding the team to focus more on the concepts than the specific words.

5. Identify key audiences
Now that you have everyone gathered and engaged, the first step to really unleash the dialogue is to identify the key audiences that are important – the stakeholders you need to reach to have this initiative be successful.

Start by having the group list all of the program's critical audiences. It doesn't need to be a perfect list, nor do they have to be in buckets or categories. You just need to identify all the key audiences that are important to the topic. Figure 3.6, below, provides some thoughts about ways you might identify and segment your audiences according to particular characteristics they might possess.

What you want to have in the message map is common ground. Once you've identified all the key audiences, your next step is to understand where each group is coming from. Because the goal of the message map is to drive your key audiences to action about a specific topic, it's important to remember that the more you know about where your audiences are coming from, the better you'll be able to influence them. Figure 3.7 (opposite) provides some questions to help identify audience perceptions.

6. What are your messaging objectives?
Once you understand the audiences' mindset, you then need to think about what you want this audience to do regarding the topic at hand. There are many different ways to determine how you want to drive an audience to action, or persuade them to act on the specific topic.

It's important to remember that there are typically two ways to persuade your audience to act on a message. You can do it by appealing to reason (by presenting a logical argument or proof of a specific result) or by appealing to emotion. In fact, the ability to change someone's mind often is based on a rather small number of principles (Figure 3.8, right, provides an example set). Once you understand these principles, you can invent your own techniques or approaches to drive your audience to action.

Fig 3.6: *Ways to segment your audience*

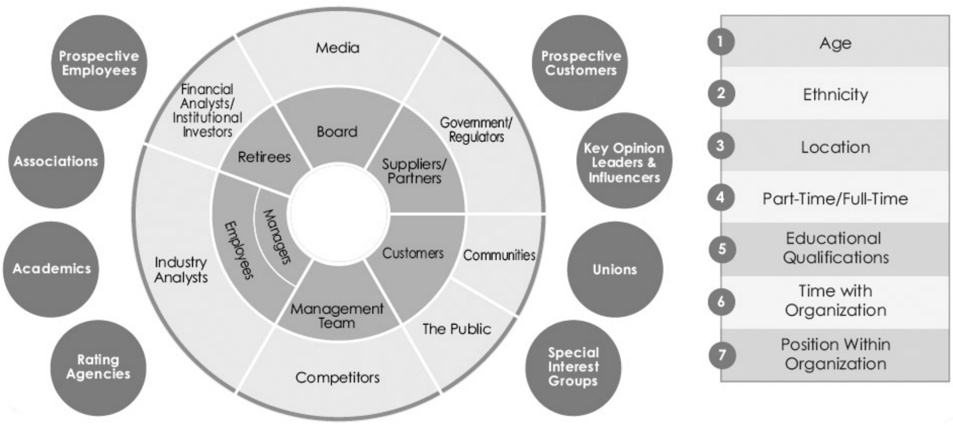


Fig 3.7: *Questions to help identify audience perceptions*

QUESTIONS TO HELP IDENTIFY AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS

1. What's keeping them up at night?
2. Why do they have a particular attitude about the topic?
3. What concerns do they have?
4. What issues are they struggling with?
5. What might the skeptics say?
6. What positive perceptions do they have?
7. What excites them the most?
8. What details or assets can we leverage?
9. What are the realities of their job that may impact what they need from communication or how they get their information?

One exercise that we like to use is "Think, Feel, Do". This is often a good way to get a group thinking about the end result. The concept behind it is that what I think about impacts how I feel about something, which then impacts my action. And finally – and this is often tough because we don't often connect a business initiative to specific actions – what specifically do you want people to do. What's the end goal? What do we want the actions for each audience to be?

It's important to note that the "Think, Feel, Do" model (see Figure 3.9, page 76) most frequently applies to what are often called "high-involvement" decisions – individuals follow this process when evaluating something that's very important to them (e.g. there is a high return on investment or cost associated with a specific topic).

Fig 3.8: *Principles for persuading your audience*

PRINCIPLES FOR PERSUADING YOUR AUDIENCE

1. **Alignment**: When everything lines up, there are no contradictions to cause disagreement.
2. **Amplification**: Make the important bits bigger and other bits smaller.
3. **Consistency**: We like to maintain consistency between what we think, say and do.
4. **Contrast**: We notice and decide by difference between two things, not absolute measures.
5. **Evidence**: I cannot deny what I see with my own eyes.
6. **Framing**: Meaning depends on context. So control the context.
7. **Interest**: If I am interested then I will pay attention.
8. **Logic**: What makes sense must be true.
9. **Objectivity**: Standing back decreases emotion and increases logic.
10. **Repetition**: If something happens often enough, I will eventually be persuaded.
11. **Specificity**: People fill in the gaps in vague statements.
12. **Trust**: If I trust you, I will accept your truth and expose my vulnerabilities.
13. **Understanding**: If I understand you, then I can interact more accurately with you.

Source: http://changingminds.org

Fig 3.9: *The difference between "Think", "Feel" and "Do"*

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "THINK", "FEEL" AND "DO"

Moving your audience to action is about influencing how they think and feel and ultimately, what you want them to do. By understanding the desired outcomes at the start, you'll be able to develop messages that drive our key audiences to action.

THINK: We want to get people thinking about the topic if they're not already, or thinking about the topic differently if there is something new or different they don't know about the topic.

FEEL: Feeling is about connecting an emotion with a topic. Once you get your key audiences to think about something, we want them to feel strongly about the specific topic.

DO: "Do" is about articulating the actions you want key audiences to take. When people feel strongly about something, they're more likely to take action.

If the group is having trouble distinguishing the difference between think, feel and do, share an example. For instance, if you want your target audience to talk to customers about a specific product, they need to think and understand everything about the product. Once they're thinking about the product, they need to feel confident about sharing information with customers. Once they feel confident sharing that information, they'll actually reach out to customers and communicate with them.

It's important to remember that this is a process. Some individuals in your target audience will advance from one step to the other relatively quickly, while it may be a slower process for others.

If the audience perceives the topic on which the messages are being developed as "low-involvement" (e.g. they don't think it will have a significant impact on them, the business, etc.), they may approach the topic in a different order – think, do, feel. In this situation, the individual will most likely learn about a specific topic, then act on it, and finally form an opinion.

Regardless of the order in which your target audience processes the messages you're communicating, it's important to ensure you know exactly what it is that you want them to think, feel and do from the outset.

7. Elevator speech

With your audience's wants and needs articulated, it's now time to create the elevator speech. Remember, this is your core message. It should only be about five to seven seconds long – about the time of a short elevator ride.

As a group, try to identify the key concepts that resonate with everyone – those are the most important ideas about the topic at hand. Take some of the concepts that resonate with the group and try to string them together. Group editing can often be painful, but the purpose of the exercise is not to focus on the words. Rather, it's to get to the most impactful, meaningful way to share your core message.

Figure 3.10, below, provides samples of elevator speeches that have been developed for organizations, departments and specific initiatives.

8. Supporting messages

With the elevator speech in mind, it is now time to flesh out the supporting messages. Earlier, we talked about how the best elevator speech begs another question; so tell me more. The supporting messages then further define each core concept in the elevator speech.

Walking into a messaging session, you probably have a good sense of the topics the supporting messages should address. Begin with the end in mind and use your ideas as a way to guide the conversation and discussion to help move the group along.

Once you know what topics the supporting messages need to address, try and guide the discussion. Spend an appropriate amount of time on each, but make sure you cover them all.

9. Data, information and stories

Up until now, you've really been guiding the conversation, asking the right questions to get the group talking. Now it's time to identify the backup for the supporting messages.

The best way to do this is to go back through the supporting messages and have the participants share their insights on data, information and stories that prove each supporting message.

It's critical to challenge the messages now and ensure they're air tight because others will challenge them down the road. It's better to start asking some of the tough questions behind closed doors – in many cases you'll find that the people around the table may have a different perspective around how to answer some of the questions, and may also find some gaps in some of the data.

Throughout this session, you'll also want to pay careful attention to the examples and stories. Many times, they come out as part of the conversation. It's your job to start to capture and fill in some of those stories.

Fig 3.10: *Sample elevator speeches*

SAMPLE ELEVATOR SPEECHES

The following are samples of elevator speeches (adjusted for a fictitious company, ACME) that have been developed for organizations, departments and specific initiatives.

1. "ACME is the business advocate and direct link between small business owners, corporations and government."

2. "We're unleashing our entrepreneurial spirit to imagine the future and connect it to today."

3. "ACME is introducing Client Service Certification – a global standard for superior client service and strategic business solutions."

4. "ACME keeps people and the environment safe."

When you're thinking about stories, here are some key words of phrases to listen for:
- "Remember when we did…"
- "We had one customer who said…"
- "We decided that, because prices were going up, we had to…"

Stories will naturally come out of the process – listen for them and jot them down so you can fill them in later. Remember that any good story needs certain elements for it to work:
- There needs to be a problem or a challenge that must be overcome.
- There needs to be a solution, some kind of description of how it came about.
- And finally, a result or moral that brings you back to the supporting messages.

Compelling stories typically have five components (see Figure 3.11, below).

Fig 3.11: *Five components of a compelling story*

DEVELOPING A POWERFUL STORY

Compelling stories typically have five components:
1. **Introduction**: Set the stage for the story by providing an appropriate introduction. This is often a good time to tie the story in to the business topic to which it relates.
2. **Main characters**: People often relate to stories because they are able to relate to the individuals in them. There should always be at least one main character, or individual, featured in a story.
3. **Structure**: All stories should have a sequence of events. At its core, a good story always has a beginning, middle and end.
4. **Key facts**: In order to resonate, stories should have key facts that can be easily absorbed – and repeated – by the audience.
5. **Moral**: Every story needs to have a purpose. Most often, this purpose comes in the form of a moral, main message or lesson.

10. Wrap up

Presumably, everyone will be pretty tired from this mental exercise, including you. Quickly wrap up by going over next steps (i.e. developing a draft of the message map, etc.).

The good news is that a lot of the "heavy lifting" is over – you've worked hard to ask some tough questions and drive this group into alignment. Or, in some cases, to let them know where they're not quite in sync and where things still need to be figured out.

It is always important to ask if there is anything else the group would like to discuss, or if there is anything that was missed. Finally, ask what they thought about the session. Try and get them to verbalize successes and immediate value. Was it valuable? What did we accomplish? This will help as you continue to adapt and refine the process for your organization.

EXPERT TIPS: Running a successful messaging session

1. *Be flexible!* Participants' needs and wants can change, even during the session. Always get the information you need, but be open to changing direction quickly. Follow the senior leader's lead.
2. *Create a "parking lot" for things that come up that are important to resolve, but not at this particular time.* You don't want to disregard them, but don't get sidetracked by them either.
3. *Encourage everyone to participate,* to get a full range of ideas.
4. *A good facilitator always asks questions*, rather than making statements or giving opinions. This puts the onus on the team to do the thinking and come up with the answers.
5. *Get up and walk around.* Don't stray far from the flip charts, but use your presence to your advantage.
6. *Silence is ok* … it means the participants are thinking.
7. *Keep your eye on the clock* so you can get through all you need to cover.

3.8 Writing a message map

Once the messaging session is done, it's time to begin writing the message map.

There is no one way to write a message map – everyone has different writing procedures that work best for them. Use the method that works best for you. However, there are some strategies to keep in mind to help you get the first draft as close to completion as quickly as possible. These are listed below, and explained in Figure 3.12 (pages 80 and 81):

1. Use the notes
2. Less is more
3. Audience first
4. Concepts are key
5. Avoid extremes and negativity
6. More information
7. Validation
8. Objective review

Fig 3.12: *Principles to bear in mind when writing a message map*

1. Use the notes	• No matter how well you think you captured all the key messages in your own notes and in your mind, go back and look at the exact words spoken in the session. Individuals want to see their thoughts embedded into the core messages.
2. Less is more	• If it isn't a core concept, don't include it. Our tendency is to try and include as many messages as we can. • Try to get the messages as succinct and finely tuned as possible so that they all fit on one page. If you can't get the messages to fit on one page, review each one individually and look for opportunities to elevate the message so that you can communicate your key point in as few words as possible.
3. Audience first	• Always keep your key audiences in mind. If it won't resonate with them, don't include it. • You may even want to test the messages with a sample group of your key audiences to see if they resonate or if there are ways to refine the messages to "speak" to them. And in some cases, it may be helpful to break out the messages to different audiences as appropriate.
4. Concepts are key	• Concentrate on the concepts before "wordsmithing" the messages. This is exactly what you'll tell the messaging session participants to do as they look at the first draft. Did we hit on all the key points? Are they all supportable? Are they prioritized correctly? • Only include one concept per sentence, and don't repeat concepts. Remember, this is a tool to populate other specific deliverables. It's harder to do that if the messages support several different concepts at once.
5. Avoid extremes and negativity	• Gray areas exist in everything we do, and in general, the workplace is rarely black and white. Message maps should not include extreme language, because that usually paints a product or a program into a corner. Words like "never," "won't" or "can't" are definitive and don't allow for change. And, the map needs to be completely open to change and flexibility. • This isn't the place to dwell on mistakes or problems … these are usually messages around why a particular product or program is going to work and be a success. Like in political campaigns, going negative does a disservice to those communicating the message, rather than the other way around!

6.	**More information**	• It's okay to have blanks and spots for 'need more information.' This is a partnership, and the session participants need to provide you with the necessary materials for you to create this tool. This is especially true with the data, information and stories. When you do leave a placeholder, be as specific as possible about what you need.
7.	**Validation**	• Try to validate – at least internally with team members – as you go along. If you get a good elevator speech down, run it by someone before moving on. This can save time in case you have the wrong concepts at various places on the map.
8.	**Objective review**	• Lastly, before submitting the map to the team, have someone completely independent from the project review it. Does it make sense? Does it flow well? Are all the key concepts from the elevator speech supported in the supporting messages, and so on? • Remember to think about how the map will be used and work with the end in mind. It is a tool and should not itself be shared outside the working team. Only the communication tools that go to the broader audiences with the messages customized to meet their needs. • Would you be able to write a brochure, speech, etc. working solely off the map? If so, you're on the right track.

Structuring your message map
As much as there's no one way to write a message map, there's no one right way to structure it either.

The message map should be organized in a way that guides the reader through the hierarchy of messages so that they understand the topic at a high level before drilling down into the supporting messages, data and stories.

Take into consideration the way your organization communicates as you think about how to best lay out the information. The messages should be organized in a way that makes it easy to identify the key components of the message map – it should be easy to find and repurpose the messages that you or anyone else on the team will need to incorporate into specific tactics.

Figures 3.13 (page 82) and 3.14 (page 83) provide samples of two different ways message maps can be organized. The first example is more visual in nature and reinforces that the elevator speech is at the core of the supporting messages and data. The second example is formatted more like traditional talking points, which may be easier to digest for different audiences, and prioritizes the supporting messages.

Fig 3.13: *Sample message map format #1 – "visual" version, putting the elevator speech at the center*

Supporting Message

ACME aspires to be seen as a trusted and value-added advisor. To retain our clients and drive our business and associates forward, we must raise the bar on how we serve our clients.

- We must face the reality about our current client service and ensure client needs are met — client satisfaction surveys on "value for the investment" and "value added" need to improve.
- Some clients have told us we're not adding the value we could or should, and some have cancelled business for that reason.

Supporting Message

To earn the certificate, employees must complete the required competency assessment and certification in Industry Knowledge and Business Issue, as well as a qualitative certification in Client Servicing.

- We're moving quickly to build a formal framework.
- Specifically, we are:
  1. Gathering input from associates, clients and third-party experts on what to certify.
  2. Developing programs to support the skills identified as key priorities.
- We're examining best practices in training and certification to guide our methodology.
- We're removing/minimizing operations-focused to allow more time for training.

Elevator Speech

ACME is introducing Client Service Certification – a global standard for superior client service and strategic business solutions.

Supporting Message

Global Client Service Certification provides a consistent, measurable client service standard that is a first for our industry.

- Empowers associates to demonstrate their business skills and prove their value.
- Enables us to adequately prepare our people to offer consistently superior service and pinpoint strategic solutions.
- Leverages a "common language" for associates and clients.
- Feedback is positive – Client Service sees the company as taking a longer-term approach versus a "run and gun" short-term revenue hunt.

Supporting Message

A globally consistent, objective approach for Client Service associates will validate their competence in Business Solutions, Product Knowledge and Client Servicing.

- Managers will have a clear understanding of certification and expectations for engaging associates and can objectively identify people's capabilities and potential in current work.
- Clients are assured certified people are on their team.
  - Based on segmentation training, Client Service approached small clients' business issues differently, which resulted in a sale of custom widgets exceeding $100,000.

Fig 3.14: *Sample message map format #2 – "traditional" version, prioritizing the supporting messages*

ACME Supply Chain Message Map

Elevator Speech: Supply Chain Management at ACME is focused on delivering products our customers will value and appreciate, and that enable profitable sales growth.

Supporting Message #1: We must continually reinvent our Supply Chain to create greater value and enhance profitability by enabling us to deliver products customers want.

1. Now more than ever, Supply Chain must provide innovative ways to differentiate ACME from the competition.
2. We can do this by enhancing supply flexibility, supporting the delivery of choice and ensuring our markets have a strategic plan in place.
   - The product development process is now more integrated, helping us accelerate development.
3. This approach enables us to enhance our ability to serve customers and more clearly define our supplier portfolio strategy and measurement goals.
   - Our risk management program resulted in a $.05/lb advantage in the US. In Canada, we consolidated the buy of products, resulting in more predictable pricing.

Supporting Message #2: In our rapidly changing world, we must be able to anticipate and meet our consumers' changing demands and needs.

1. Our business environment has changed; customers expect higher quality, greater variety, better value and more convenience.
2. National economies are giving way to the global economy, presenting new opportunities to leverage raw materials and production capacity across borders and oceans.
3. Today, leading brands are incorporating consumer insights into all parts of the business.
   - Research shows that consumers are looking for quality with an increased focus on price and demanding more variety but rejecting complexity at the same time.

Supporting Message #3: These changes will enable ACME to differentiate itself from the competition and profitably grow its business.

1. We are better equipped to provide the products customers want.
   - Consumers are willing to pay more for products. We can capitalize on this opportunity by selling high-quality products.
2. We will be better able to deliver more profit to the bottom line because we can better predict and manage commodities.
3. It strengthens our customer focus as we continue to meet customers' constantly evolving expectations.
   - It will elevate the ACME's brand image (because seeing is believing), build trust by providing high-quality products, demonstrate transparency in our supplier relationships and differentiate ACME from the competition.

Facilitating the review process
Once you've developed the message map and shared it with the team that participated in the messaging session, the next step in the process is to get the group from the session together again to review the message map and fill in any gaps. Remember, the map is about the messages, but it's also about driving alignment within the core team. They need to be in agreement on, and comfortable with, the message map and specifically how it should be used.

Set a time, ideally in-person, to walk through the map, explaining again its purpose and structure. Use your time together to walk the group through the thinking behind the messages and how it relates to the messaging session. Getting their reaction verbally can get you closer to the final draft more quickly. This is also a good way to remind the participants of anything you still need from their end (i.e., data or stories).

Once again, start with the elevator speech and work your way through the map. Make sure everything has been captured, and captured correctly. Now is the time to add in details that you may not have had time for in the first session, and ask some more tough questions. Force the group to come to consensus around some of the concepts and to fill in those critical gaps.

If you can't get everyone back together due to their schedules, distribute the draft message map and ask for comments and feedback. Remember to remind folks you need all of their input in perspective. Now is the time to get everyone's input and to get those core messages right.

COMMON BARRIER #4: "But this message is also important..."

Barrier: Team members want to include every single point about a topic on the message map.

Solution: The value of the message map lies in its ability to help focus the key messages, which ultimately ensures individuals are consistent in their communications. A message map helps identify and prioritize the most important messages on a topic, and should fit on one piece of paper. If it doesn't, you have too much information. As a group, review the core messages and pare it down to only those messages that are the most important for your key audiences.

FORTUNE 500 HEALTHCARE COMPANY

Helping employees understand budget changes

An information technology (IT) department of a global healthcare company, which assists healthcare professionals with the treatment of complex medical conditions, needed to reduce its overall budget by $30 million across six areas. It needed to communicate the news throughout the company, worldwide, and engage its 45,000 employees to accept and support the changes needed to meet budget expectations.

The IT department didn't have an existing communication process or approach to ensure clear, compelling and coordinated communications. In many ways, IT was starting from scratch when it came to communications.

DEVELOPING KEY MESSAGES

The team developed a global internal communication plan, including a message map and strong internal branding to help employees understand how the changes would affect them. Some of the key messages included:

1. IT is looking very closely at everything it does to increase efficiencies and provide the best, most cost effective services for team members worldwide.
2. Today's business environment demands we work more efficiently, effectively and reduce costs.
3. There are six key areas in which IT is looking to save money and improve services: desktop solutions, e-mail solutions, help desk solutions, telecom solutions and data center solutions.
4. IT solutions are, and will continue to be, implemented strategically over time.
   (a) You'll receive more information in the future about how each initiative affects you.
   (b) Coaching and training will be provided as necessary.

MAKING TECHNICAL TERMS TRANSPARENT

A key part of the assignment was ensuring knowledge transfer of the communication process as the changes were implemented globally and that technical terms could be easily understood by people in non-IT functions.

The IT department met its targets and minimized business interruption caused by implementing the six key initiatives. Today, among other things, it has adopted the message map process and communications philosophy, and uses it to help communicate its key initiatives.

FORTUNE 500 HEALTHCARE COMPANY: Helping employees understand budget changes

3.9 Message testing

Once the message map has been approved and finalized by the session participants, encourage them to begin using the messages with their key audiences – employees, leadership, etc. By taking the time to test the messages up front, before a more formal roll-out, you'll ensure they're on target and resonate.

It's usually best to start with the elevator speech – ask the team to integrate it into daily conversations and casual interactions, as well as more formal communications (group e-mails, voicemails, etc.). By gauging the response, the core team can make necessary changes that will then help the team charged with communicating the messages feel comfortable and ready.

3.10 Using the message map

Once you've finalized the content of your message map, you can begin to use it as a blueprint for all communications – from talking points and FAQs to marketing collateral, web site copy and more.

A message map can be used in many different ways depending on the audience and the specific deliverable. Here are a couple of important reminders to keep in mind as you use a message map to craft your messages:

1. *Keep it brief.* It isn't necessary to include every message from the message map in every tactic. People only remember two or three pieces of information from a typical communication. Identify and use only the most important messages that are relevant to your audience.

2. *Keep it simple.* The words in the message map can be edited to better resonate with your audience. The purpose of the message map is to identify the key concepts that are important to the topic – if there's a better way to say it based on the needs of your audience, use those words instead.

3. *Repetition is key.* One way a message map helps drive alignment is by ensuring the same core messages are consistently repeated, regardless of the tactic. It's a good sign when various different tactics communicate the same message on a topic in similar ways – this will ensure the message gets through to the intended audience.

4. *Make it meaningful.* Every tactic should incorporate some form of the elevator speech. Then, include the appropriate supporting messages and the data, information and stories that corroborate the supporting messages to tell a story that is meaningful and resonates with your audience.

Begin using the message map as you create communications that follow. You'll see how simple it is! And if others will be using the message map, make sure they know how it was created and how best to use those key messages.

TECHNIQUES TO GRAB AND HOLD PEOPLE'S ATTENTION

1. Say it quickly, simply and so your audience members know what's in it for them.
2. Don't try to say too much, or you may risk losing your audience's attention.
3. Ask yourself, "What is the one thing I need the audience to think, feel or do?"
4. Avoid vague concepts.
5. Tell a story – it's the most effective way to get people's attention.

Source: Paul B. Brown and Alison Davis. *Your Attention, Please.*

The payoff

The messaging process is a lot of work, but the rewards are well worth it. Once you've developed a message map, you'll have:

1. An understanding of who your audiences are and what they want and need.
2. Alignment between the core team on the core concepts and what needs to be said to drive your audiences to action.
3. Consistent and credible key messages that can be used throughout any communication vehicle or channel.
4. Core messages/elevator speech the team of leaders and subject matter experts can immediately begin to use and test drive.

It's a good idea to put in place a process for measurement so you can understand how well your messages are meeting your audiences' needs and how close you are to driving toward that business outcome that everyone is aligned around. Without that measurement, you won't be able to change the messages as appropriate.

Nothing in business today is static, and neither is a message map. As the topic it supports changes and priorities shift, so must the map. Audiences evolve as messages become defined, and stories come to life as the project becomes mature. To make this tool as valuable as possible, invest the necessary time and effort to keep it fresh and relevant.

Case studies

4.

Storytelling

Tony Quinlan, Principal and Chief Storyteller, Narrate

Organizations are complex and people rarely base their decisions on “rational” analysis of data. Traditional value lists and mission statements therefore have limited power as communication tools, and organizations need to find new ways to engage their employees. Storytelling is a powerful technique that opens up the possibility for employees to shift their worldview – and subsequently their behavior.

Chapter Contents

4.1 Introduction

Storytelling is a misnomer. It conjures up the image of a passive audience sitting listening to someone with the charismatic, persuasive power to entrance them. It revolves around a carefully constructed story designed to carry you out of the day-to-day to somewhere else and change your thinking while you're there.

To some managers, it sounds like a dream come true. To most of us, however, that would be a nightmare. In an organization, charismatic persuasion and the ability to direct someone's thinking smacks more of cults and propaganda than modern-day work practices. And cults are less effective as organizations – they are typically blind and less resilient.

This chapter offers something far more powerful and positive than that simplistic view. The real opportunities for using stories in organizations to engage employees lie in listening to stories, not telling them – helping employees create their own authentic stories and making sense of the stories told.

4.2 What is engagement?

It's not persuasion, for a start. The desire to see engagement as a one-way communication in which "employees are engaged" is evidence of an old-fashioned mindset – one where power, decisions and control lie high up the organization and people further down the hierarchy are tasked mainly to obey. Here, engagement is merely a means of persuading people, while giving an illusion that the choice is theirs.

This view can't be effective for much longer. Compared with even 10 years ago, people in organizations have changed. In fact, even the "willing, compliant workforce" of yesterday is an illusion. The truth was always that organizations had no actual control over people, only levers of influence.

Now, no longer willing to take at face value what's being told to them by the organization, people have far greater access to information than ever before, and more ways of expressing their own opinions. Equally, they're more experienced at deconstructing any organizational communications – making them sceptical and cynical when it comes to the everyday volley of messages that leadership, managers and internal communicators send them.

In the 80s and 90s, much of the goal of internal communication (such as the function was in those days) was to inspire company loyalty – indeed, I still remember being asked "why I wasn't more loyal to the organization". Yet the idea of inspiring loyalty was fundamentally flawed – it's a two-way thing. Once the organization had proved that it wasn't loyal to you – as most did repeatedly in those times where "downsizing" and "re-engineering" were business as usual – it became apparent to all but the most hardy company people, that loyalty to the organization was not a long-term secure prospect and not an appropriate term to apply.

In the 2000s, we've abandoned the concept of organizational loyalty, been through "internal branding" and are now onto "engagement". But the same applies: engagement is a two-way contract. And while our organizations are very keen to ensure people are engaged, how engaged is the organization with people?

Until the organization becomes engaged and concerned about the well-being of its employees, engagement is going to be a limited concept – and one doomed to fail in the same manner as "loyalty" did.

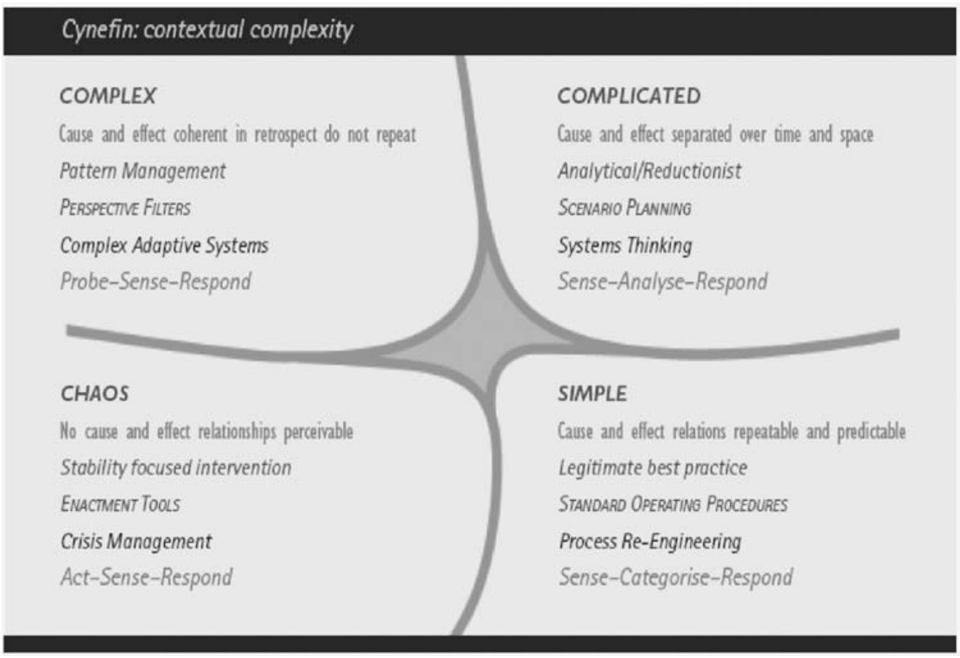
To borrow a truism from knowledge management, "Engagement can only be volunteered, not conscripted." But before that can happen, there must be a level of trust, which itself only arises through a sense of being seen and heard.

4.3 Why use stories?

1. Organizations are complex

A tool we find valuable at Narrate for looking at the nature of organizations is the Cynefin framework (see Figure 4.1, below), created by Dave Snowden, founder and chief scientific officer at business laboratory Cognitive Edge. This decision-making model highlights the different relationships between cause and effect that can exist in certain environments, ranging from "Simple" (where the relationship is obvious to everyone) to "Chaotic" (where there's no perceivable relationship).

Fig 4.1: *The Cynefin decision-making framework*



In a vastly simplified description of this model, culture falls into the "Complex" domain. Here, causality is blurred, many different elements combine to create overall effects and results will never repeat exactly. In this domain, control is impossible, influence essential. Here, patterns of belief and behavior dominate.

It also requires different actions – trying out certain elements, waiting to perceive the results and then acting to reinforce positive emerging patterns or disrupt negative ones. It can be about creating boundaries and attractors, by reinforcing desirable behaviors and disrupting undesirable ones.

By contrast, the “Complicated” domain does have repeatable cause-and-effect chains, although these may be extended through various stages. Here, we can analyze or bring in expert help to identify how results are created and impose processes to repeat them. Too often, we have tried to cram “employee engagement” into this domain.

I suggest that management – based in process, measurement and hierarchy – is more inclined to sit in the complicated domain. Meanwhile, given the vagaries of human behavior and belief, I believe organizational culture sits squarely in the Complex domain. Organizations need to adopt appropriately powerful employee engagement techniques and, if applied correctly, storytelling can certainly provide this.

2. People don’t base their decisions on “rational” analysis of data

After so much research and honing of practice, good communication departments are skilled at producing clear messages, strong copy and straightforward mission statements and values. With such clear direction, excellent data and evidence of what to do next, shouldn’t that be enough?

Sadly not – because neuroscience, psychology and related disciplines show us that people rarely make decisions on the basis of rational analysis of data at the best of times. And when they’re under stress, or being measured against a target, or being asked to change their behavior, then rational argument, instructions and values – however clear they may be – will do little to persuade them.

Thinking otherwise, though tempting, is trying to order human behavior and organizational culture into processes that can be analysed, planned and repeated. We all know from our own experiences that that is patently not the case.

Rather, as Gary Klein suggests in his book *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, people make decisions according to the cognitive patterns they have built up in their heads. Indeed, they don’t even make decisions according to the most appropriate pattern, but rather to the first pattern that the perceived situation fits. If we already have a belief about how the world works, it will take considerable, different quantitative and qualitative data to shift that.

So, in communicating effectively with – indeed, engaging – people within the organization, we must look for ways to bring their cognitive patterns to awareness. Not to change them, but to allow for the possibility of greater understanding and common negotiation of a shared viewpoint.

These cognitive patterns are, from one perspective, simply stories or scripts that predict consequences and inform behavior and decisions – perspective filters that determine how we see the world.

These patterns can be viewed as internal, personal stories, and understanding these stories will take us a long way towards understanding patterns of behavior in the organization. Then, sharing alternative stories, and helping employees see the world through the perspective of a different story, we can open up the possibility for them to shift their worldview – and subsequently their behavior.

3. Mission statements and value lists are often unmemorable

Another core reason for using stories in organizations is the impotence of traditional value lists and mission statements as communication tools. The story in Figure 4.2 (below) about US congressman Lynn Westmoreland shows how even those principles and statements we take for granted as underpinning our culture (societal and organizational) are not as clear or as memorable as we think they are.

Fig 4.2: *Lynn Westmoreland and the Ten Commandments*

Lynn Westmoreland appeared on the "Better Know a District" segment in *The Colbert Report* [satirical US television program] on June 14, 2006. Stephen Colbert noted the fact that the congressman had co-sponsored a bill to place the Ten Commandments in the House of Representatives and the Senate. When asked to name all the Commandments he was only able to remember three – one, "don't lie", was only partially correct (the Ninth Commandment is an injunction against "bearing false witness against your neighbor", and not lying per se). Westmoreland's press secretary claims Westmoreland actually got up to about seven of the Ten Commandments before petering out, but that part was edited out. Said the secretary, "I challenge anybody outside of the clergy to try to (name them all)."

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Westmoreland

This story reinforces something critical in most organizational communication. The Ten Commandments form a solid base for much of the West's legal, moral and ethical practices, regardless of your personal religion and belief, yet few people can actually name them. So, even though an organization might spend ages identifying and defining a list of corporate values/principles/beliefs that encapsulates the organizational ethos, what are the chances the employees will remember them? And what are the chances they'll actually act on them?

Now, parables and stories on the other hand are memorable, understandable and actionable – because they are more in line with the way our brains and behavior patterns work. Furthermore, stories may not, on the surface, seem as powerful as a single mission statement, principle or value, but they carry with them a context and causality that simple principles don't have. After all, they allow audiences to determine when and why actions were or might be taken – unlike principles, which are ordinarily created to be universally applicable and set in stone, stories provide employees with more flexible guidelines that are more in keeping with the looser way people really think and organizations (need to) work.

4.4 Introducing storytelling into the organization

To introduce the concepts of storytelling into the organization, it's more effective to do them rather than talk about them. Discussing the concepts is as effective as learning to swim by reading a book – it'll give you a lifelong fear of the water.

EXPERT TIPS: Introducing storytelling

1. Use an external practitioner
If the board or executive team have a regular half-day or day that includes training, education or new concepts, then invite a current practitioner to run a session of theory and practice. Call it "education" or "training" – not "the start of a project". If it's relevant, they'll pick it up, if not you haven't committed to something ongoing.

2. Use enticing language
When inviting leadership to a workshop or session, never use "story" or "storytelling". Use language that will entice them, without telling them what they are going to be doing. Use phrases and language like "interactive, dynamic workshop", "feeding into the [Leadership/Change/Culture/Innovation] program" instead.

3. Rationalize your budget
It may also be possible, if included as part of the executive team's awayday, to have the cost of any external practitioner taken out of the training budget rather than yours.

4. Form alliances with other stakeholders
Organizational Development (OD) and Knowledge Management (KM) professionals are also using narrative methods to achieve their goals. Elements like story collecting and "sense-making" (see later) will give them useful material – so meet with them, design programs that meet multiple needs and share the costs.

4.5 The storytelling process

When I first started using stories in organizations, it was about crafting narratives to communicate particular messages. But over the years, we have developed a comprehensive

CAVEAT

I'd love to be able to say storytelling is a magic bullet that will inspire employees, change their perspectives and engage them, that there is a simple recipe or standard 12-step process to using stories. But it's not that simple.

There are those who adopt mechanistic approaches to using stories and these may be useful in certain situations and with certain audiences.

However, the story methods and approach I'm describing in this chapter are based on involvement, discovery and ongoing adaptation, rather than prescriptive, top-down plans. It can actually save time, energy and budget, but it can feel uncomfortable to people used to management procedures, hierarchies and Six Sigma-style programs.

Using the templates, tools and checklists in the following pages will help you establish a base layer of using stories in the organization, but even they need to be used consciously, with genuine intent for *two-way engagement* throughout the organization.

Have fun!

approach to the kind of storytelling I have been describing in the previous sections. Narrate's process map for narrative engagements is shown in Figure 4.3 (below) and the stages are explained in Figure 4.4 (page 96).

Fig 4.3: *Narrate's – process map for narrative engagements*

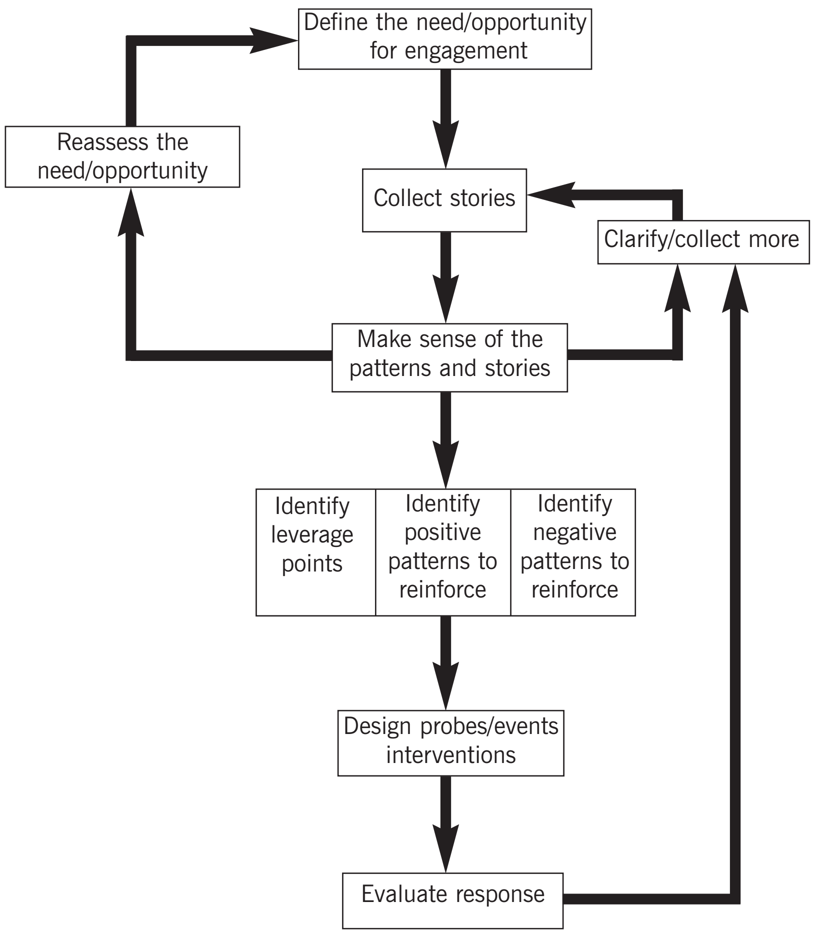


Fig 4.4: *Narrate's process map for narrative engagements explained*

Stage of process	Explanation
1. Define the need/opportunity for engagement	n/a
2. Collect stories (This stage is detailed in section 4.7)	Gather material to map the current perceptions and culture – real, authentic, naturally told stories. It's critical to realize that listening to stories emerge is more useful than crafting stories or telling them in the early stages. No single story will ever give you an accurate picture of the organization – but the patterns that emerge from multiple stories, the shapes of events and beliefs, the archetypical characters that emerge are what provide the most powerful opportunities to view the world as others see it. Similarly, few single stories will engage employees. Better, instead, to support them with multiple viewpoints and perspectives on a situation, and then help them to understand their own roles and stories ahead. Having said that, it's important to note too that even listening or diagnostic events generate expectations among the audience. Every intervention is a diagnostic and every diagnostic is an intervention. *Note that the process of collecting stories is a powerful engagement method in its own right.*
3. Make sense of the patterns and stories (This stage is detailed in section 4.8)	With all this material, key members of the organization need to participate in sense-making exercises. Here, the patterns that emerge may indicate a gap in material, which may lead to more story gathering (stage 2). The patterns will often have implications for the original impetus for the project – which may need reshaping/rescoping as a result, and a return to the beginning of the process.

4. Identify leverage points and patterns to reinforce/disrupt	With a greater understanding of the culture and the opportunity/need for engagement, it's then possible to identify leverage points in the organization where relatively minor actions will produce significantly larger results. At the same time, patterns will have emerged that are healthy/unhealthy and these can be reinforced or disrupted as required.
5. Design probes/events/ interventions	From here, all the range of HR, change and communication tools can be brought to bear on the issue – with narrative clearly playing a part within that.
6. Evaluate response	At the end of the program, responses are measured and this may lead to revisiting earlier stages

4.6 The contents of an engaging story

People talk about stories in organizations frequently, but the object of the discussion is rarely a real example of an influential, appealing story. Too often, it's a disparate series of supposedly important events that happened to a faceless group of people. For the sake of those involved, it usually conforms to the standard organization planning process.

In school, we're taught that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end. This idea originally came from Aristotle's Poetics, so it may seem like a solid basis for thinking about our stories here. However, a beginning, a middle and an end also describes a snake, so perhaps it's not going to give us much idea of what an engaging story really consists of.

The following are key elements in an organizational story.

1. A sympathetic lead character
First, engaging stories are about people and, ideally, there is one person who is the main character – someone with enough in common with the audience to help them empathize with the character.

Organization stories are too often about groups or divisions or, worse still, the overall organizations themselves. We don't engage with these stories because we can't empathize with how it feels to be a corporation or a group – we need an individual as a protagonist. (There are some notable exceptions – sports supporters are a good example of individuals associating with a national or regional identity.)

Then, someone like me is more interesting than someone unlike me. So, when listening to a story about change, I'll be more engaged with a story about someone coming to terms with what the change is about, what it might mean day-to-day, what the chances are of being made redundant, how threatened they are at a personal level by the change, and so on, rather than a story about "meeting stakeholder expectations" and "achieving returns on investment".

2. A clear problem
A story without a problem is just a portrait – and simply isn't engaging.

In Hollywood, they talk about "the inciting incident" – something that means that the setting of the story can no longer remain the same. In an organization, this might be a takeover threat, a fundamental change in the market, etc. – it's not enough for this to be more mundane "making efficiencies".

The inciting incident must matter to the audience (or at least it must obviously matter to the lead character). Without the impetus of a good inciting incident, there's no momentum in the story – and the audience has no reason to care.

3. Tests and obstacles create interest
One of the greatest flaws in most organizational stories is their sense of being sanitized. A good story proceeds from the problem through challenges and obstacles, making and resolving mistakes along the way. Most corporate stories go straight from problem to resolution in a straight line. The lack of mistakes and real obstacles (as opposed to obstacles that are automatically resolved by, for example, "a new product we've just introduced") is what brands these as propaganda.

In most engaging stories, the obstacles increase in difficulty or complexity as the story goes on – increasing a sense of tension and risk. The most interesting, engaging company stories often tend to revolve around those adverse times, where a board or managers made a "bid for resurrection" and "gambled" the company on a bold new strategy.

In his book *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, Robert McKee, the screenwriting guru, talks about story events as being meaningful, chosen moments that illuminate the entire life of a character. The same applies to stories in organizations – they must be chosen moments that illuminate something deeper about the culture. In particular, a story reveals character in those chosen moments through the choices made by the lead protagonist – especially when they're under stress.

So finally, a good story will feature a choice made in a moment of pressure – and that's when the reader learns about the real values of the character in the story.

EXPERT TIPS: Change communication stories

During times of change, the company story must show someone making a choice that goes against what would be expected in the current situation.

For an excellent example of how to tell a personal, engaging story watch Dr Larry Brilliant talk about his work with the World Health Organization eradicating smallpox in the first ten minutes of the video on the Technology Entertainment Design (TED) website: http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/58.

For a simple way to start thinking about the elements in your story and how engaging it might be, see the checklist in Figure 4.5 (opposite).

Fig 4.5: *Checklist to help assess how engaging your story might be*

Story checklist

Rate each story element from 1 – 7 (1=least; 7 =most)

1.	How much empathy will your audience feel for your lead character?	_____
2.	How clear is the inciting incident – is it recognizable and does it give the story impetus? Does it matter?	_____
3.	How many obstacles or problems does the character face that are not trivially surmountable?	_____
4.	How much is at risk for the lead character?	_____
5.	How valuable is the character's goal to the audience?	_____
6.	Does it ever feel that the result is in doubt?	_____
7.	How glossy/corporate was the writing style of the story? (Glossy/corporate = 1)	_____
	Total:	_____ / **50**

4.7 Story collection

Collecting stories and anecdotes is a powerful engagement technique in its own right, although an effective program would include this only within the initial "Discovery" phase.

The table in Figure 4.6 (page 100) shows eight key principles to bear in mind when facilitating story collecting.

Fig 4.6: *Principles for facilitating the collection of stories*

1. Facilitation of all of these techniques calls for a very light touch	It is very easy to inadvertently sway participants. Neutral, observant, but unattached facilitation is essential. Never comment on the stories themselves.
2. Don't ask people with clear biases or allegiances to facilitate	Participants must be able to trust the facilitator and the process. For the participants, the facilitator needs to be an unknown, neutral agent.
3. Avoid the temptation to make observations or analyze the stories yourself	One of the biggest lessons I learned early on in Narrate's work was that my analysis of an organization's stories is warped by my personal worldview and far less valuable than the one that the organization will reach during the next, sense-making stage of the narrative engagement process.
4. Participants should arrive with as few pre-conceptions as possible	If they have a sense of what they'll be doing, they'll fail to turn up, come prepared (which you don't want) or arrive with high levels of cynicism – any of which will bias the results of the exercise.
5. Keep it spontaneous and unrehearsed	Naturalistic stories, told as part of the process, complete with the inconsistencies and grammatical problems of all normal speech, are the most powerful.
6. Encourage participants to feel they're taking part in a process for the sake of the process itself	As soon as they become aware that they have to create some kind of a "product" (i.e. stories) they will adapt their behavior and the results will be less valuable.
7. For group exercises, invite participants from across the organization, but at similar grades or job levels	Seniority disparities will inhibit participation.
8. Don't focus on any one story	No single story is the key – rather, by collecting a quantity of stories or anecdotes, patterns will emerge that represent the true situation within the organization.

Figure 4.7, below, shows the pros and cons of three of the techniques that Narrate uses to collect stories, particularly when it's not initially clear where stories may be or what they may be about. These techniques are explored in turn on the following pages.

Fig 4.7: *Techniques for collecting stories*

Technique	Benefits	Drawbacks
1. Emotional audits	• Uncovers underlying beliefs. • Brings up unconscious patterns. • Allows safe feedback of "dangerous", controversial issues. • More accurate picture of organizational culture than employee survey.	• Time- and resource-intensive. • Material produced is less usable in other contexts.
2. Anecdote circles	• Gathers examples of real-life experience for use in sense-making and communications. • Clarifies community thinking by "triangulation" around abstract themes. • Creates strong bonds among participants. • Allows participants to expand their knowledge – immediate benefit from attending.	• Time- and resource-intensive. • Needs facilitators skilled in complex/"light-touch" techniques.
3. Exit interviews	• Good at picking up lessons learned from past successes. • Lack of seniority concerns can create more frank feedback. • Can be personal interest perspective on uninspiring company stories.	• Can be seen as HR responsibility. • If exit is not by choice, results will be biased.

Other techniques that might also be used are:
- Video booths set up for employees to talk freely.
- Camera crew with a "naive", neutral interviewer meeting employees where they congregate.
- Web-based capture using webcams, Skype and other AV tools.

1. Using emotional audits to collect stories
Emotional audits were one of the first tools that Narrate developed in its work with story. They're highly effective and intuitive tools for uncovering underlying belief patterns about the organization – a way of taking the temperature of the workforce, but not in the traditional, analytical approach of the employee survey.

In fact, it's not unusual to find that the results of emotional audits contradict the results of employee surveys. This is because most employee surveys ask rational questions in an artificial context. The very act of asking the question changes the thought process involved, and the overall context of the survey (it's specific and visible within the organization) increases the likelihood of employees "gaming" the results.

An emotional audit, however, works by de-personalising the process, making it possible to give specific feedback without the threat of repercussions. By moving into more intuitive processes, it also allows the emergence of issues that may not even have been conscious to participants, but nevertheless influence their behavior.

Figure 4.8 (below and next two pages) provides guidelines for running an emotional audit workshop. Note that the workshop requires "initiator stories" – a set of four initiator stories is included in Figure 4.9 (pages 105-108). We've used these stories at Narrate's open workshops in recent years, asking participants to read them with Microsoft in mind because it's an organization that most people have experience of. More examples of initiator stories can be found at the Narrate website: www.narrate.co.uk.

Fig 4.8: *Guidelines for running an emotional audit workshop*

GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING AN EMOTIONAL AUDIT WORKSHOP	
Venue: Preferably away from normal working premises, main room with space for all participants, spaces nearby for break-out sessions. **Props and equipment:** Packs of initiator stories for each participant; audio recording equipment; pen and paper for story creation. **Preparation:** Create four intiator stories. These should reflect the organization, but from radically different perspectives. Imagery should be different in each story, as should the challenges and approaches taken. Stories must be short and use imagery relevant to the regional culture. **NB** To elicit useful patterns from other stakeholders to the organization, emotional audits can be used with partners, customers or any other relevant audience.	
Welcome and set-up	*At this stage, the focus is on creating a safe space in which views can be aired.* 1. Usual welcome and explanation that the workshop is looking at the organizational culture. 2. Clear up anonymity/confidentiality concerns. Explain that although the outputs will be recorded, names of participants and connections to their stories will not be passed on to management.

Shifting to a story mindset	1. Distribute four initiator stories. The instructions as the stories are handed out are: "Read the stories, with [organization name] in mind. You're looking for the story that resonates closest with how you feel about [organization name]." 2. While participants read, take four sheets of flipchart paper and draw rough illustrations of a key character or setting from each story on them. Position the charts around the room. 3. As participants finish reading, repeat the original instruction, adding: "Once you've chosen the story that resonates most strongly, what one thing would you change to make it more true?" 4. Once all participants have finished, ask them to stand up and move to whichever chart represents their chosen story. [At this point, you should have multiple groups – if they all gravitate to a single story, your stories are not diverse enough.] 5. Ask for suggested changes to make the story "more true" of the organization. All responses must be treated neutrally – any judgment or comment will steer future responses and bias the audit results. Beware the temptation to ask for explanations – participants will be very quick to post-rationalize their choices and snap back into a rational/analytical frame of mind.
The real audit	1. Acknowledge that the choice they've made is a false choice – that their "real" story may be different from any of the four they've seen so far. 2. Ask the group to divide into pairs/threes, preferably working with people they haven't previously met. [If the group is particularly large, fours are possible, but smaller groups are preferable, although never individuals alone.] 3. Explain that each group is now to create their own story. There are, however, three rules: • No human beings • Each has a beginning and a middle. • "Pantomime it" – which means exaggerate things. For example: "if you think someone sits in a distant castle tower, we need to know how high the tower is and how far away it is." 4. Set the time limit for the exercise – no shorter than 20 minutes, but no longer than 45 minutes. Point out different areas to work in so that groups spread out enough to be able to work independently. 5. At the halfway mark, walk around, letting each group know how much time is left. Assess how each group is doing – are they light-hearted, struggling, analyzing, etc? Remind any overly serious groups that this is a feeling exercise, not a thinking one. Be careful to keep any comments to their approach to creating the story, not about the story itself. 6. Give more frequent time checks as they reach the time limit – increasing the sense of urgency often provides added impetus to the story process.

Hearing the stories	1. Reconvene all groups in the main area. Check in with the group as a whole, then open the floor to hear the first story. [Tip: A good first question is "So, most important things first – was that fun?"] 2. Use audio recorders to capture stories. Allow groups to volunteer to go next, with the expectation that all stories will be heard eventually. 3. Lead the participants in vigorously applauding each story in turn. Check in at the end of each story – "was that true for all of you?" 4. As you reach the last few stories, ask if people are getting a better sense of how others feel about the organization, having heard their stories.
Close	1. Repeat the reassurance regarding anonymity and confidentiality and explain that the material will be used to inform leadership and communication decisions. [This exercise, like any intervention, will create an expectation among participants.] 2. Close by asking participants to discuss together any themes, patterns or unexpected elements that may have arisen.
Possible workshop extension: If time allows or has been planned, repeat the story creation process, but extend the stories a set period into the future. What will be the situation in five years? [This can be particularly useful around a change program. Don't refer to the change program, but ask for the story extension to just beyond the projected endpoint of the current change.]	

EXPERT TIPS: Facilitating emotional audit workshops

1. Ensure a reasonable cross-section of the organization with multiple workshops covering different levels.

2. If initiator stories are generating low response or a lack of diversity in the responses, replace some with participant-derived stories in subsequent workshops.

3. Check beforehand whether any participants need extra help with the initiator stories (my early experiences included sight and literacy issues.)

4. Don't push people into writing the story – any form of storytelling will work. We've even had puppets and semi-costumes made in under 45 minutes.

The following four stories (Figure 4.9, pages 105-108) are used when Narrate runs public workshops, masterclasses or conference sessions on emotional audits and should be read with Microsoft in mind – the workshop facilitator would ask participants: "Which one of these resonates for you?"

Fig 4.9: *Four initiator stories (to be read with Microsoft in mind)*

The Fox's Tale

Far ago and long away, a crafty fox followed the path through the wood. It sat under a bush and watched the path before deciding that this would be a good place to stay.

It began digging its den in a little hollow by the side of the path. As it dug, the sun went down and a badger emerged from its set beneath a nearby tree. The badger encouraged the fox to dig there by the forest – there were many traveling creatures that came past that both the badger and the fox could feed on. It even helped the fox dig deeper.

The fox woke the next day and watched the path carefully. At this time it was the only route through the forest and there was a steady stream of travelers upon whom the fox could prey.

The fox, however, was not satisfied. "I suspect that there are more travellers in this forest than there are on this path," it thought. "Some are moving through the underbrush elsewhere, while others are creating new paths."

So it dug its den deeper. Deeper and wider. And as it started a family, it set its cubs digging too. Unbeknownst to the badger, the forest floor was soon riddled with tunnels from the fox's den. It also anticipated new paths, digging new dens where it suspected others would travel.

As time went by, more creatures ventured through the forest and their tramping created more and more paths. And wherever there was a path, there was a foxhole fox connected to the great den.

The fox learnt too that attacking and robbing travelers meant that travelers became wary. So it decided to charge a minor toll for every step through the forest. In this way, no one objected for the toll was small, but the fox gathered huge stores of tithes.

Soon there was not a tread on the forest floor that did not owe the fox something. And any that sought to traverse the forest without the fox's knowledge found that the fox had lost no teeth, for all its smiling.

The Honey Bee's Story

Far ago and long away, a lone bee flew through the garden. In these days, bees lived in hives ruled by queens and guarded by soldiers. They flew from flower to flower, collecting pollen and returning to the hive where they fed on the pollen.

The lone bee saw this and stopped at the hives to speak with the worker bees. Wherever it went, it left behind worker bees behaving differently. Some began dancing the story of their pollen search – and their fellows learnt to follow them. Others created experimental meals from their staple diet of pollen.

The queen bees watched all of this unhurriedly. They still ruled their hives and nothing mattered as long as their workers worked and as long as their meals were prepared properly. And the lone bee flew on. Every so often it would return to hives, with new ideas and new suggestions – many of which were quickly pounced upon by the workers as they became more and more productive.

Gradually, however, the queens became uneasy – here was a bee that was changing their hives. Here was a lone bee that had a power of their workers that they envied. What if this outcast chose to persuade their workers to rebel? What if their workers, drunk with this newfound personal power, decided to change of their own volition? Now they saw this loner as a threat to their carefully crafted and controlled society.

Sending secret messages between the hives, they agreed on their actions and the next time the stranger came to visit, soldier bees drove him away from one hive and then the next. Finally, a swarm of soldiers drove him from the garden altogether.

“I was only improving your lives,” the bee cried as it flew over the fence. “The secrets I had helped you – and there were more.”

But the queens had determined that the lone bee threatened them. Which is why, to this day, there is never enough royal jelly to feed all the bees all the time and some will always remain unfulfilled.

The Monster's Story

Far ago and long away, a village sat in the sunshine. Farmers farmed, traders traded, teachers taught and children played – exactly as they always have.

One day, a child playing by the stream looked up and saw, beneath a tree on the far bank, a shadow. As the wind rustled the branches of the tree, the shadow moved – dark tendrils reaching out for her. Startled, the child ran back to the village, crying about the monster she had seen.

When the child reached her father, breathless and wild-eyed, she told him about the great shadow, how it swallowed everything up within it and how it had reached for her. As he listened, his eyes widened and his face paled. A dark creature trying to steal his daughter – surely everyone in the village would be at risk.

Gathering a party of others to him, he armed them with axes and scythes. Together, they stalked down to the stream, his daughter in their midst shouting directions. When they got to the stream, she pointed out the shadow to her father. As she did so, the wind caught the branches again and the shadow reached for them.

The girl, her father and others of the group screamed and ran for the safety of the village. A handful, however, stood their ground.

"No-one will approach the stream while this monster remains," said one. "We must get rid of it if we are to have peace in the village. But how do we kill this thing – it has no heart to stop, no blood to loose, no bones to break."

"The shadow is only the puppet," exclaimed another. "See how the tree controls it – when the tree moves, the shadow reaches for us. If we kill the tree, we will kill the shadow."

Determined now, they waded across the stream, upstream and downstream from the tree so as to avoid its shadow. From either side they approached cautiously, axes raised and, in a frenzy of movement, hacked the tree to splinters.

The Spider's Tale

Far ago and long away, a small spider wove a small web on a small seedling in a small field. As the seedling grew, the spider wove a few more strands between the newly sprouting leaves and strengthened the strands at the core of the seedling. And so the web grew.

As time passed, the seedling became a sapling and eventually became a tree, standing alone in the field, other trees confined to the forest in the valley. The spider, meanwhile, had grown big inside the tree and was doing what spiders do best. It wove its web wider and wider – thin silvery strands extending out to the topmost branches. Soon there was no leaf on the tree that was not touched by one of these silken ties. No insect, no creature could approach the tree without the spider knowing.

As time went by, the tree dropped seeds and they took hold around it - springing up from the lush ground and searching for the sunshine. As each spread its leaves above the ground, thin, invisible threads quickly snaked down to these newcomers. Before they had even grown their first wood, they were entangled in the spider's web.

For weeks, the tree warden struggled against the spider, chopping and slashing at the threads as they poured from the outstretched branches of the tree, strangling the striplings below. For weeks the battle went on, but always in vain. Any growing plant was soon enveloped. Nothing could grow outside the spider's control.

One day a sapling appeared in the far corner of the next-door field. The tree warden saw it and guarded it, hopeful that it could survive beyond the spider's reach.

The next morning, he noticed in the early sunshine, a glint of silver on the leaves – just dew or something else?

CASE STUDY

ROYAL MAIL

Using an emotional audit to create an environment for debate

The new managing director for a division of the Royal Mail was struggling to get his vision accepted and acted upon. The division's work – supporting redundancies elsewhere in the organization – was perceived as dispiriting and the workforce was suffering from low-morale.

DEVELOPING SHARED VALUES
Narrate was invited to the next away day for the division's board, despite the claims that "the board are all on board, it's the rest of the division that's the problem." Following a morning of work to develop shared values and operating principles for the division, we put them through an emotional audit.

Having read through the four specially prepared stories, the board members went to create their own fables in pairs. Initial skepticism was voiced, along with the usual claims of "I have no imagination". Once they had begun to work, however, the noise and energy levels in the room rose as negotiating the story elements and imagery took over.

CREATING FABLES
A radically changed group then re-gathered to share their stories. The managing director talked of "gardeners, cutting out dead wood to allow new growth to come through". Next to him, the divisional financial director stood up: "We're ants and we live in an anthill. And our anthill has just been hit by a meteor. And we're running around like ants do, about to rebuild our anthill, but I can see another meteor coming in over the horizon."

SHARING WITHOUT RECRIMINATIONS
A general wave of understanding passed through the room – discussions and problems of the past six months were suddenly explained. There were no recriminations, and finally the group were able to start real conversations about the issues the division faced.

Afterwards, the divisional finance director was asked why she had never voiced these concerns before. "I'd never really thought about it like that," was the reply. "It's spot on though."

SAFE DEBATE OF THE REAL ISSUES
With internal beliefs and cognitive patterns now made visible to the group, it was easier and more productive to debate the real issues surrounding the division's problems. Yet, by using a distancing technique, it was also possible to open up these issues in a safe environment without recriminations.

ROYAL MAIL: Using an emotional audit to create an environment for debate

2. Using anecdote circles to collect stories

Anecdote circles are a technique from the Cognitive Edge network and are an excellent means of discovering patterns of thinking and belief in the organization, as well as collecting crucial material for future sense-making activities and the development of communications.

For participants, they're valuable exercises in their own right – creating strong bonds in the group, sharing knowledge and making shared sense of issues in a community.

It's worth noting that using anecdote circles at lower levels of an organization and among customers and customer-facing staff produce material that, when replayed to executives, can dramatically shift perceptions and highlight major problems – but in ways that are less threatening to the messenger and more likely to bring about a change in executive mindset.

Figure 4.10 (opposite) provides guidelines for running an anecdote circle.

EMOTIONAL AUDITS VERSUS ANECDOTE CIRCLES

In our experience, emotional audits, by using metaphor and distancing the stories from the reality, are more appropriate in situations where the culture forbids overt criticism or where participants feel that truth-telling will threaten their position or career.

Emotional audits are also useful tools for checking the level of consensus in senior teams. When change is underway, but not happening, an emotional audit done with the senior team can check to what degree each member is engaged with the change, as well as uncovering subtle blockages.

Anecdote circles, by contrast, are very effective tools for collecting stories and sharing best practice. The patterns of stories told will also highlight cultural issues, but a greater volume of stories is usually needed to do so. Usually, stories are collected around specific themes – making them valuable as part of programmes such as "innovation", "change" or "leadership". Anecdote circles are powerful tools for collecting knowledge - making them a good tool to use in conjunction with knowledge management departments.

Anecdote circles, if used cross-silo, will also create better connections and greater understanding between disparate parts of the organization in a very short space of time. And much more effectively than the Christmas party!

Fig 4.10: *Guidelines for running an anecdotal circle*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING AN ANECDOTAL CIRCLE</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Venue: Preferably away from normal working premises, main room with space for tables of 6-12 participants at each. Tables must be reasonably spaced – it's easy for noise from one group to obscure audio recordings of another group.

Props and equipment: Audio recording equipment on each table; hexagonal post-its; separate area set up for video and specialist audio recording as necessary.

Preparation: Consider what stories and anecdotes you are looking to elicit. Prepare a deck of questions to prompt experiences. These should refer to real events, extremes of experience and emotions. They should not be in a set order, but rather thought through so that at the actual circle, options are readily accessible.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Welcome and set-up</td><td>[At this stage, the focus is on creating a "safe" space in which views can be aired.]

1. Usual welcome and explanation that the workshop is looking at the organizational culture. Clear up anonymity/confidentiality concerns. Explain that participants are here because you value their perspectives and their experience – above and beyond the official organization line on issues.

2. Point out the video and audio recording equipment area – suggest that if the group thinks a particular example is worth noting that they encourage the teller to go and record it separately.</td></tr>
<tr><td>The anecdotal circle</td><td>1. Set out the rules for the circle:
• One person recalls an experience at a time.
• The person gives it a title on a hexagonal Post-It note.
• Others write down "what they get" from that anecdote on Post-Its clustered around the title.

2. Start the circle with the first prompting question. Monitor the groups and adapt questions accordingly.

3. With 10-15 minutes left of the workshop, draw the conversations to a close and ask participants to reflect, as a table, on what they've heard. Common themes, unusual elements, etc., are all useful.</td></tr>
</table>

EXPERT TIPS: Running an anecdotal circle

1. *Choose a time for the workshop when people are likely to be more relaxed*.

2. *Hold your nerve*. At my first anecdote circle, I wanted material right from the start. Groups take time to gel and the best material may only emerge in the last 30 minutes of a 90 minute exercise.

3. *Make friends with silence*. Allow the silence to continue until someone starts telling a story again. It always works – and the energy within the group builds naturally.

4. *Steer opinions and judgments back to stories*. “It sounds like you’ve got a particular experience in mind. What happened?”

5. *Use hexagonal post-its*. People behave differently with hexagonal post-its – clustering them rather than putting them in boxes.

6. *Watch for overly vocal participants*. If one person is dominating a group, take them aside either to record their anecdotes or to help with some task you’ve prepared earlier.

7. *Identify resistance to change*. If there are groups or departments that are perceived as being blockages to change, anecdote circles are excellent tools with which to engage them and discover what may be at the heart of the blockage.

8. *Have one facilitator per table and one overall facilitator*, to monitor and redraft questions according to what is emerging on each table. Table facilitators should be invisible except when prompting for the next topic – participants should be telling each other stories, not telling the facilitator.

CASE STUDY

UK GOVERNMENT
Using anecdotal circles to create examples of good leadership

Narrate recently worked with a large UK Government department on establishing common ground between different ideas of "leadership".

CREATING "PEN PICTURES"
In a questionnaire (after the "leadership model" had been published and promoted as the way forward) one of the critical pieces of feedback was "We need pen pictures of examples of leadership." Everyone nominally understood the language but not how it translated into action.

UPLIFTING AND INSPIRING EXERCISE
Using a version of anecdote circles, Narrate brought key decision-makers together in a facilitated exercise solely to relate and share examples of tough decision-making, positive changes, mistakes made, and so on. For the leadership and communication teams, it was a powerful way of collecting stories to feed into sense-making and communication programs.

For the participants it was an uplifting and inspiring exercise in sharing knowledge, building cross-department links and sense-making for themselves. It also opened up possibilities – allowing some to see what they had previously thought impossible.

AUTHENTIC AND RECOGNIZABLE STORIES
Having recorded the sessions, Narrate then had audio and video material to feed into various communication vehicles – all giving the requested "pen pictures" of leadership in real, authentic examples that people could recognize, internalize and then act on themselves.

UK GOVERNMENT: Using anecdotal circles to create examples of good leadership

3. Using exit interviews to collect stories

Exit interviews are a two-edged sword, but can produce very useful story material. People leaving the organization have valuable experience and perspectives on the culture that has developed. Increasingly, knowledge management colleagues may be looking to work with retirees in order to capture and share knowledge, so there may be opportunities for sharing the cost, the resources and the results.

Figure 4.11 (below) contains key components of the story collection process when using exit interviews.

Fig 4.11: *Key components of the story collection process when using exit interviews*

KEY COMPONENTS OF STORY COLLECTION WHEN USING EXIT INTERVIEWS	
1. Identify who in HR looks after leavers	• Payroll and pensions may be a good place to start, as you can be sure they will stop salaries going out as soon as anyone leaves.
2. Are exit interviews already planned?	• If not, is there a reason why not? • If interviews are deemed inappropriate, could you hold an anecdotal circle of leavers?
3. Who carries out exit interviews? Who might carry them out?	• Look for a neutral interviewer that people will trust.
4. Identify key moments/projects/events they were involved with	• This may be difficult.
5. Possible questions that might be included in an exit interview	• What was the best day you ever had? What happened? [Don't ask "why" – the reasons will become evident as they talk.] • What was the worst? • I see you were here when [major event/launch/crisis] happened. What were you doing? • Think of a time you had a lucky escape – what happened? • What, in hindsight, was the best mistake you ever made? • What was your greatest success?
6. Record stories	• For use in communications, knowledge management and sense-making.

EXPERT TIP: Using exit interviews to collect stories

If you're making people compulsorily redundant, exit interviews with these individuals must be handled delicately, if at all. They can, however, be an opportunity for people to reflect on multiple elements of their experience with the organization – positive as well as negative.

4.8 Making sense of collected stories

After the process of story collection, the next step is to make sense of the stories and patterns that have emerged. There are a number of methods used for doing this, including "archetype workshops", Cognitive Edge's Sensemaker software, and so on. Deciding the best way forward depends on the culture and context of the engagement program – and space here doesn't allow setting out all of these.

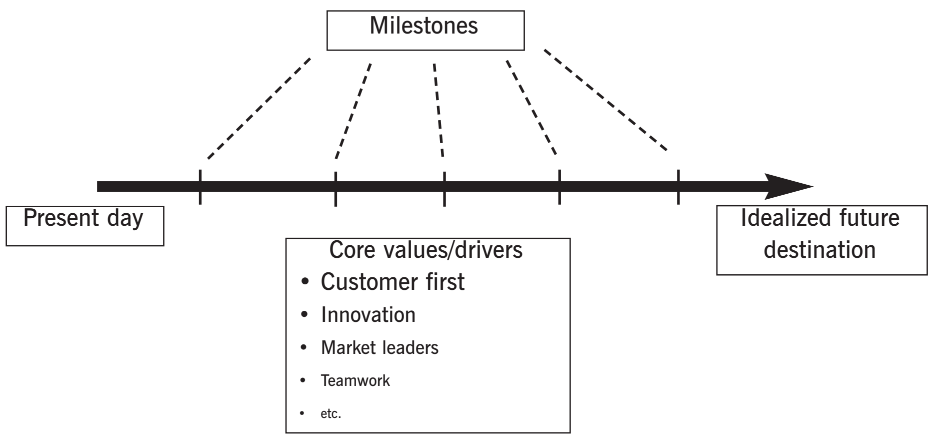
In this section, I will explain how to apply the Narrate "Vision Arc", a tool that we have found particularly effective in situations where the focus is on communication teams and change. However, the following principles are common to all the most effective approaches to sense-making:

1. *Sense-making (which is not the same as analysis) with the collected stories should ideally happen within the organization itself and not be outsourced to "experts".* The stories and anecdotes are culture-specific and can only be fully interpreted within that context. Meanwhile, working with the stories increases an individual's knowledge and understanding of the organization – shadowing an external facilitator is therefore a great opportunity for increasing an individual's knowledge, skills and insight into the organization.
2. *External resources are best used to facilitate the sense-making process.* This ensures that space is created for new belief patterns, without dictating what those belief patterns should be.
3. *Values and actions will emerge as part of the process of making sense in a community – and will be owned and bought into by participants because of that.*

The Narrate Vision Arc

Change is often presented as in Figure 4.12 (below) – a nice straight path from the

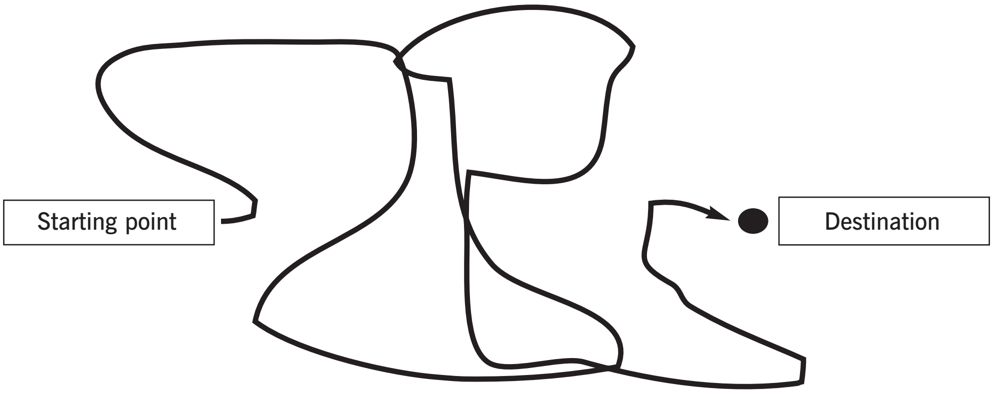
Fig 4.12: *The standard representation of change*



unwanted present to some ideal future. Along the way, there are milestones and a list of the organization's core values.

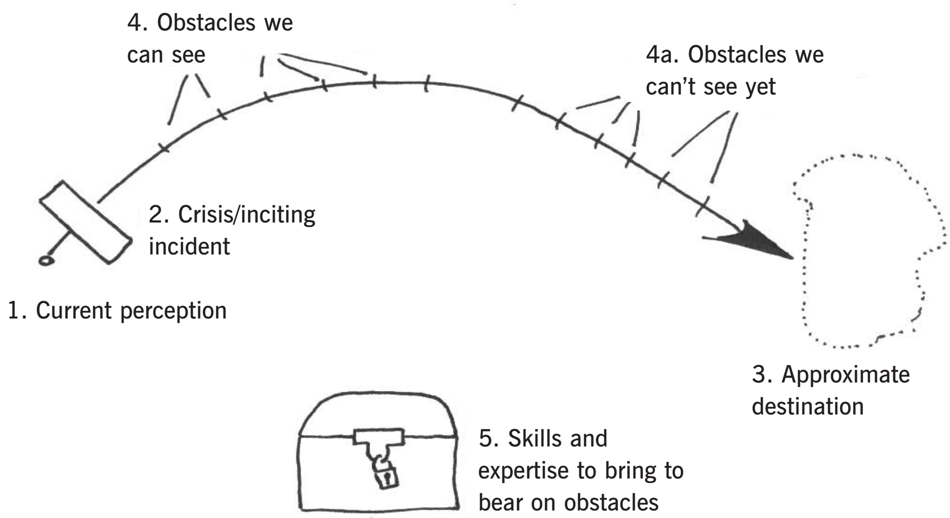
The problem is that most people's experience of change is more like Figure 4.13 (below), and organizations often still communicate as if the change is going to happen as in Figure 4.12. This creates a level of cynicism and disbelief right from the word go and the first response, whether voiced or not, is likely to be: "I can think of three reasons why that'll never happen."

Fig 4.13: *The way people perceive past change*



To help organizations communicate changes more effectively, Narrate developed its "vision arc" tool (see Figure 4.14, below), which is based on the most tried and tested story framework ever – the Hero's Journey. Every culture worldwide has stories based on this framework – stories that depict the quest for something, the journey towards something greater. Our experience has shown that creating an organization-specific vision arc is a powerful way of helping people understand the change, but also it then becomes a useful tool to guide communications itself.

Fig 4.14: *The Narrate Vision Arc*



Our experience has shown that creating an organization-specific vision arc is a powerful way of helping people understand the change, but then it also becomes a useful tool to guide communications itself.

Broadly speaking, the numbered stages in the arc shown in Figure 4.14 fit the basic elements of an engaging story structure (as outlined in Section 4.6), but with some specifically organization-focused elements:

The vision arc must, of course, also revolve around characters – in particular, the individuals creating the vision arc.

If an organization vision arc represents the story, or plot, of a journey of change, then from the overall vision arc it's valuable to allow subsets of the organization (e.g. divisions or departments) to create their own vision arc – a subplot of the larger story. In this way, it's also possible to see where cracks appear between departments' beliefs about change.

The vision arc framework doesn't have to be overt for participants – indeed, the workshop example provided in Figure 4.15 (page 118) uses the vision arc concepts without ever making them explicit.

THE NARRATE VISION ARC FRAMEWORK	
1. Current perception	A concise, but evocative description of the status quo.
2. Crisis	What screenwriting guru Robert McKee would call an "inciting incident". Something – a force/influence/event – that means the status quo can no longer continue unchanged. [Note: this is often where change programs fail. General exhortations are all well and good, but people need more otherwise the desire to ignore the change is too great.]
3. Approximate destination	A general sense of where we want to get to. On Narrate projects, we often ask for a lot of sensory detail when putting the vision arc together, but it's vital not to over-define the endpoint – by the time we get close to it, it will have moved!
4. Obstacles	This is the piece that gets ignored/buried in most change programs in favour of milestones. We all recognize that there will be obstacles – and it's in the getting past obstacles that we find the most interesting stories, anecdotes and learning.
4a. Obstacles we can't see yet	The very nature of uncertainty means that there are things we can't see from where we're standing at the moment. Acknowledging that, but affirming that we will get past even those obstacles regardless, is a powerful message to convey. "Not knowing" is acceptable, but not a reason for failure.
5. The toolbox	With all the obstacles we're facing, the vision arc can feel very negative. The toolbox is an acknowledgement of what skills and resources we can draw upon to get past the obstacles. And, of course, as we pass obstacles on the arc, we add new skills to the toolbox.

EXPERT TIPS: Unearthing stories

Knowing what sort of obstacles you need to focus on helps to identify what stories you need to find and, most helpfully, where to look for them.

A few years ago, in a meeting with WH Smith, we talked about the difficulty of getting hold of good stories about customer service – they were never reported back and couldn't be found. Yet half an hour earlier, in the Swindon branch of WH Smith, I'd been witness to three great examples of customer service – because I knew what the obstacles were, I knew where to look.

Fig 4.15: *Guidelines for running a vision arc workshop*

GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING A VISION ARC WORKSHOP	
Venue: Preferably away from normal working premises; main room with space for all participants seated in groups around tables and a separate room for lunch – a buffet in the room does not work; large flipcharts or blank walls near entrance/exit. Props and equipment: Hexagonal Post-it notes. Preparation: Train in-house facilitators beforehand – enough for one per participant table; ensure diversity in the audience and provide table lists to prevent "the usual suspects" clustering together.	
Welcome and set-up [Focus on introducing the changes planned]	1. Welcome from overall MC, followed by introductions round the table, then the most senior leader available presenting/describing the change. It's critical that the presentation addresses the reason for the change – the inciting incident. 2. This is one of the occasions when themes and models are useful – because the process will force listeners to make them relevant and real.
Table discussions	1. After the presentation and plenary Q&A, the MC puts up one question for a set time to be discussed on the table. Allow about four minutes per person on the tables, with extra for the second question. Facilitators ensure no-one dominates, keep time for the group and take notes on the Post-Its. 2. The questions follow the vision arc sequence. For example: • "What will you be doing differently in [X] years' time?" "How will your role change?" • "What obstacles can you see ahead?" • "What opportunities can you see ahead?"
Lunch	1. While participants have lunch, table facilitators put up Post-Its with the comments made in discussing the questions. One board per question, but Post-Its are placed randomly.

Story preparation	1. To set the scene and put the change in context, have a senior manager – closer in level to the participants than the earlier speaker – talk about their personal experience of change. Talking about their own feelings of uncertainty in the face of change allows participants to recognize their own uncertainty.
Table discussions	1. After the speaker, go back to the tables to discuss the first question: • "How are you going to get round the obstacles you identified this morning?" • At this point there will be resistance – the obstacles were for "the organization" to deal with. This is where the facilitators are clear in asking for ways for the people present to deal with them. This reinforces the need for personal responsibility and action. 2. Using microphones, the MC/facilitator takes one example from each table of something to be done. Ideally these should relate to the principles/themes set out in the presentation from the first morning speaker. 3. Explain that people are already doing parts of the change already, but we need examples. "Give a two-minute recent example of [behavior related to a change theme]. Use at least four key topics/themes from the change program distributed around the room. • Ask each table to decide which was the best example of the behavior on that table. 4. Using microphones, the MC/facilitator again takes one example (story!) from each table. Applaud each one vigorously – others will take their lead from the facilitator. 5. Back on the tables for two final questions, if time allows (over-runs are common at this point if stories have been good.) • "What skills and resources do you already have in place to meet these obstacles?" • "What further support or skills will you need?"
Close	1. Thank participants for their hard work. 2. Once they've left, gather table facilitators together for a short debrief – what's working, what isn't. Check for any amendment needed for future workshops or for any issues that need to be followed up – particularly questions following earlier presentations.

EXPERT TIPS: Running a vision arc workshop

1. The venue should be slightly cramped for the numbers, preferably with a low ceiling. When group exercises are going on, hearing the "buzz" in the room motivates everyone. If the venue is big or has a high ceiling, the buzz dissipates and there is little sense of activity.

2. In the morning session, facilitators are listening – if a participant expects to be doing the same work in the future despite the change, other participants will probably challenge them. If not, let it stand for now – the afternoon session will ensure that they have to confront change.

3. For the second question in the first facilitated table session – i.e. "What obstacles can you see ahead?" – leave extra time as this is an opportunity for participants to "dump". Let them do so.

4. At breaks, check on each table facilitator. It's hard work and they're crucial, so look after them. In particular, make sure they eat and have plenty of fluids.

5. Put on coffee while participants are working at the tables, and let table facilitators decide when the best moment to go is. They can assess when the table needs a break and also when the queues are shortest.

6. The MC/facilitator for the afternoon's exercises must be positive and have an energetic and engaged manner. As the afternoon's activities challenge the participants, he/she will also be the focus for grumbling and criticism. It's better here than focussed at the table facilitator, but they mustn't react to it. It can be useful to have an external facilitator to "take the flak" as they have no long-term in-house career prospects to worry about!

7. After the afternoon speaker, a group exercise is useful. Not the standard, slightly naff ice-breakers, but something that all participants have to respond to, without having to get up or do anything embarrassing. My own favourite is the "energy check" – engages the group instantly. The facilitator gets everyone to assess their energy level on a scale of one to 10 – 10 being wide awake, engaged and "up for it". As the facilitator counts down, participants raise their hands at their number. As the numbers get lower, thank any hand-raisers for their honesty!

8. When tables are working together, have a large countdown clock visible on the screen in the room. Again, time pressure will increase the level of activity.

9. For the example-based questions, have the questions on slips of paper in a sealed envelope. Facilitators or participants then open when told to do so to find out what their question is.

10. Before getting examples from the tables, point out that when participants return to the office, the cynicism will be in full swing. Also that it works in universals like "It'll never happen here", "It always works like…" and that the only way to combat generic cynicism is with specific examples – and these are good ammunition against cynics.

4.9 Using stories

The most important uses of stories are in sense-making, but they are powerful communication elements in their own right. Some of the best – and simplest – uses are included in this section.

Ending out-of-date stories

Change fatigue often comes about because there has been a constant stream of projects or initiatives begun, but never actually closed down. For employees, it's the equivalent of being handed the first chapter of a new book, with a stunning review; and then another first chapter, and another, but never finding out "whodunit" – there are only lots of open loops.

Putting clear endings on all out-of-date projects can be a cathartic act for all concerned. Often, when new ventures have been closed after only a short period, the implicit assumption is that they were a failure. Giving context for the decision to close them can put a very different perspective on the projects – and on those who have gone on to work in other parts of the business:

1. Go back through recent news – intranet, newsletter, events, press releases, etc. Start with the most recent.
2. Identify what projects or initiatives have been started – particularly those with a big opening fanfare.
3. Build a list of these projects – and check one a week as part of your Friday review. Is it still going?
4. If the project has finished, talk to the owner or decision-maker who's closed it down.
   - What changed between the start of the project and its finish?
   - What lessons were learned as part of it?
   - What successes did the team create?
   - What will the learning go into next?
5. Publish the results of the talk – either as a transcript (edited if necessary) or as a podcast.
6. For major projects, arrange a celebration event. (A full Friday afternoon wake has been known, complete with putting all dead project files in a coffin and burying it!)

Stories in standard communication vehicles

Figure 4.16 (page 122) provides an overview of some effective ways stories might be used in standard communication vehicles to engage employees.

Fig 4.16: *Possible ways to use stories in standard communication vehicles*

Vehicle	Benefits	Source of stories	Tips
Induction CDs A multimedia CD for all new starters in the organization – including video/audio personal stories of key moments (past and present) in the organization's history.	• Engage new recruits while they're still feeling very positive towards the organization. • Ensure they hear the key stories from the organization's background. • Start to collect culture through the organization story, not just the anti-story • Reduces need for **senior** team's involvement.	Anecdote circles, exit interviews, customer vox pops, executive broadcasts	• Liaise with HR and other departments to identify everything a joiner needs – access to policies, vacation booking forms, etc. • Task immediate line managers with presenting CD/DVD to joiner within three hours of start. • Pilot it for three months, then hold a review with recent joiners.
The History of the Organization A new and more complete telling of the key moments in the organization's history (should provide significant material for the induction CD).	• Clarify what are seen as the key moments in the history. • Reframe old stories to reinforce current values in the context of action. *[For example, Hewlett-Packard did this a few years ago with a TV advert telling the start-up story of how founders worked in a garage until they'd got the right product for Disney Values: innovation, persistence, customer satisfaction.]* • Bring together elements of merged/acquired organizations by giving them significant weight and celebrating their past as well as the parent organization's.	Anecdote circles, exit interviews, past communication materials	• Talk to any corporate archivists (especially appropriate in the public sector) and long-serving people. • Senior journalists with a long-term remit to watch the organization or the sector will have useful input. • To demonstrate the value of the organization's history, make the physical presentation notable – a bound book, for example, rather than a simple supplement to the newsletter; a DVD in special cases, not just a streaming video. • Make the stories about the people present and the decisions they made and the actions they took, not "What The Company Did Next."
Town hall meetings Using collected stories from key areas of need (i.e. customers, frontline staff, etc.) to prompt discussion and sense-making.	• Force attendees to consider the consequences of actions/policies/procedures from perspectives other than their own. • Social processes across normal organization boundaries can stimulate new working practices and awarenesses. • It is difficult to argue against the truth of a set of anecdotes or stories, where bullet points and statistics will just be fed into existing beliefs.	Naïve interviews, external customer interviews, anecdote circles	• Use video footage from the center, then have audiences work in smaller groups on exercises based on the materials. • Take limited feedback (e.g. one per table) into a plenary session. • Ensure that senior leaders are visibly present and paying attention – preferably doing the exercise themselves.
Executive briefings Feed stories to leaders, especially those who have high-visibility roles or are attending open events.	• Feeds stories naturally back into the organization through social interactions • Enhances leadership styles and perceptions within the organization. • Allows for discussion and messiness in stories – a naturalistic style is more engaging than a sanitized written version.	External customer interviews, anecdote circles	• Ensure that leaders can tell stories – not recite them. Easily done with a little coaching. • If a leader is a stilted communicator, let them use other techniques. • Hone stories by telling and re-telling them in community, not by crafting them in isolation.

5.

Organizations and employee engagement in 2007/08

This chapter contains data from an extensive survey conducted by Melcrum, which shows how organizations are approaching employee engagement, what techniques they're using and what they're planning in the next 12 months.

Survey overview

In October 2007, Melcrum sent an online survey to its network of contacts across the globe. The aim was to get a strong picture of how organizations are currently approaching employee engagement, what techniques they're using and what they're planning in the next 12 months.

The data in this chapter are based on 1,625 responses from professionals working primarily in communication or HR at organizations in a wide range of industries – the geographical and functional breakdown of respondents can be seen in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 (below). Given that smaller and larger organzations often behave differently, we segmented respondents by size. In this chapter, those organizations with more than 10,000 employees are referred to as "large" while "small" refers to organizations with fewer than 10,000.

Please note that the aim of this chapter is to provide readers with snapshot information about what their peer organizations are doing when it comes to employee engagement. There is no analysis of why patterns might exist – these are complex issues that are explored comprehensively in Melcrum's 2005 *Employee Engagement* research report.

Fig 5.1: *Survey respondent breakdown by region*
[All data]

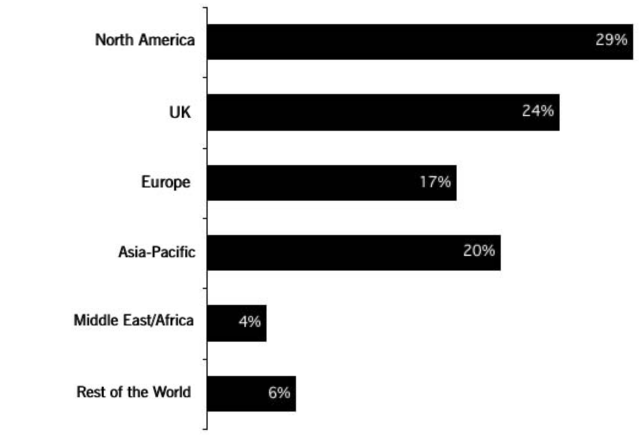
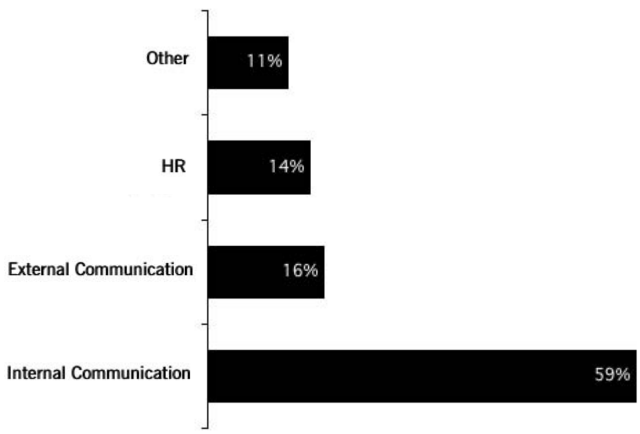


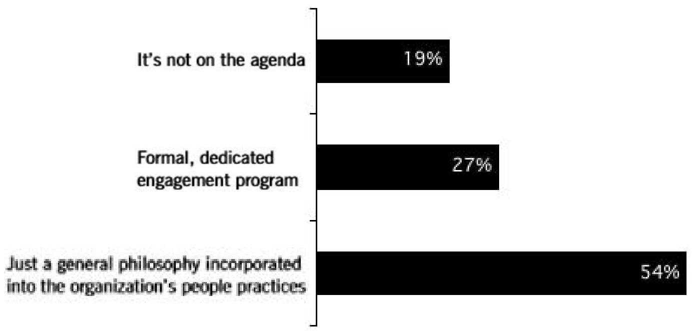
Fig 5.2: *Survey respondent breakdown by function*
[All data]



Organizations' approach to employee engagement
Our survey suggests that 81% of organizations worldwide now have employee engagement on the agenda (see Figure 5.3, below). A quarter of organizations address engagement through a formal engagement program (i.e. a "programmatic" approach), while 54% treat engagement as part of a general philosophy, incorporated into overall people practices (i.e. a "philosophical" approach).

It's worth noting that in Melcrum's employee engagement survey of 2005, only 36% of respondents listed engagement as a priority.

Fig 5.3: *Approach to employee engagement*
[All data]



Large organizations are more likely than small ones to take a "programmatic" approach (see Figure 5.4, below). However, it's worth noting that although nearly 40% of large organizations have a formal program, compared with 23% of small organizations, some 13% of large organizations still don't have employee engagement on the agenda.

Fig 5.4: *Approach to employee engagement*
[All data; large and small organizations]

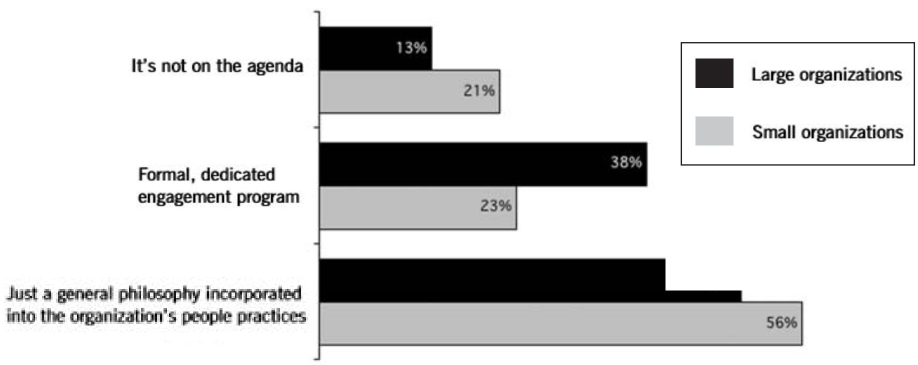
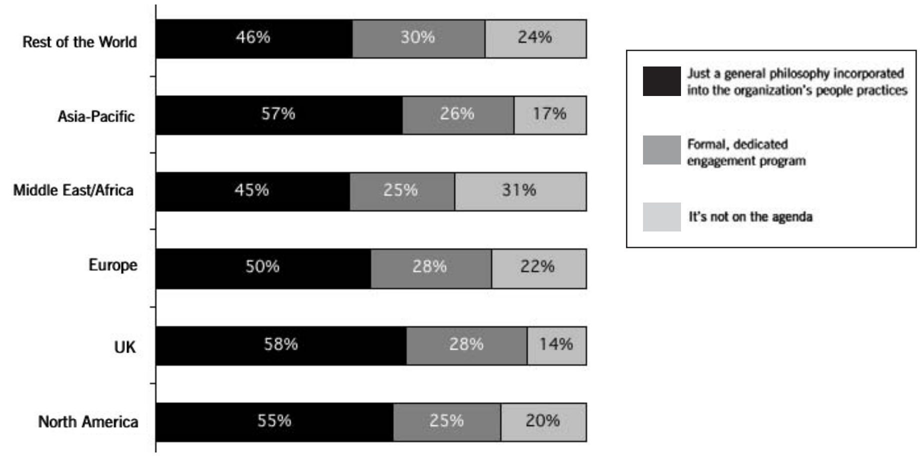


Figure 5.5 below highlights that organizations in the UK, North America and Asia-Pacific region are most likely to have employee engagement on the agenda, and in the UK only 14% of organizations don't. However, similar proportions of organizations in all regions have formal engagement programs.

Not shown in Figure 5.5, employee engagement is particularly prevalent on the agenda in large UK organizations, compared with those in other regions. Only 3% of large UK organizations don't have engagement on the agenda, compared with 17% of large organizations in North America, 18% in Europe and 10% in the Asia-Pacific region.

Fig 5.5: *Approach to employee engagement*
[All data; by region]



When did organizations start focusing on employee engagement?

Figure 5.6, below, shows when organizations with a formal engagement program introduced it. We found that one in five organizations introduced their program before 2001. There seems to have been a "lull" in commitment to a formal program during 2001 and 2002, both there has been a progressive increase since, with 47% of organizations with programs having introduced them during 2005, 2006 or the first nine months of 2007.

Fig 5.6: *What year organizations began to focus on employee engagement*
[All data; organizations with a formal employee engagement program]

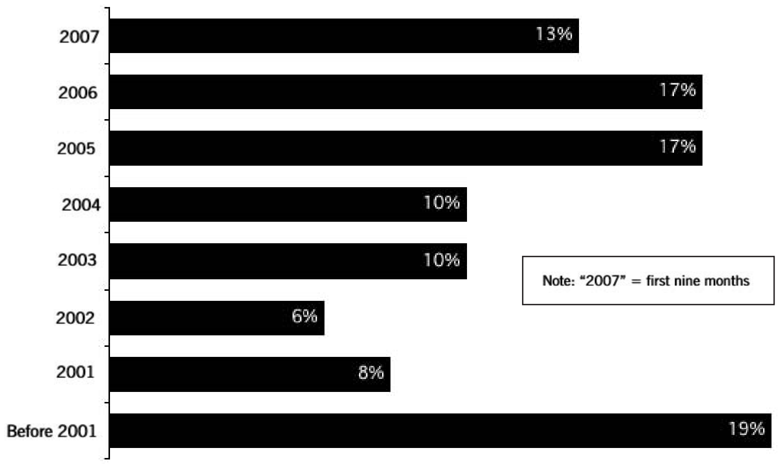
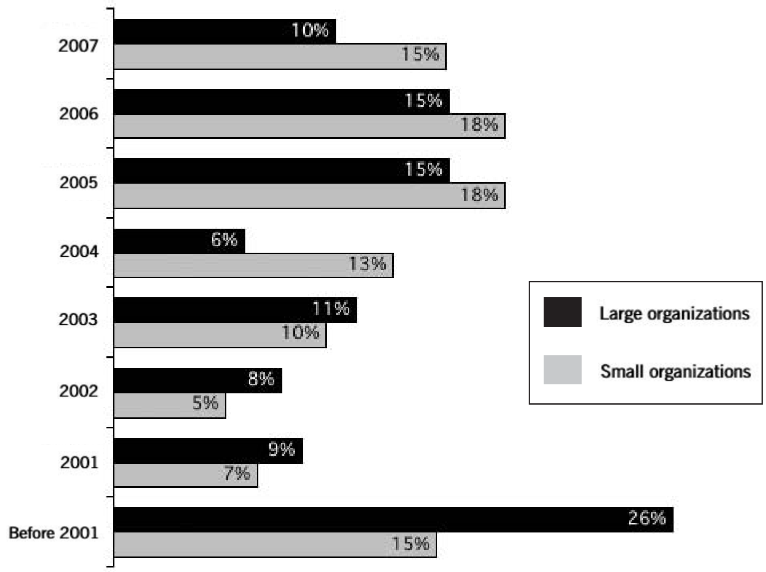


Figure 5.7, below, suggests that small organizations with a formal program have been slower than larger ones to commit to a formal employee engagement program. Some 26% of large organizations with a formal program introduced it before 2001, compared with 15% of small ones. The "lull" and subsequent progressive increase in commitment seems generally to have been experienced similarly by both large and small organizations.

Fig 5.7: *What year organizations began to focus on employee engagement*
[Large and small organizations with a formal employee engagement program]

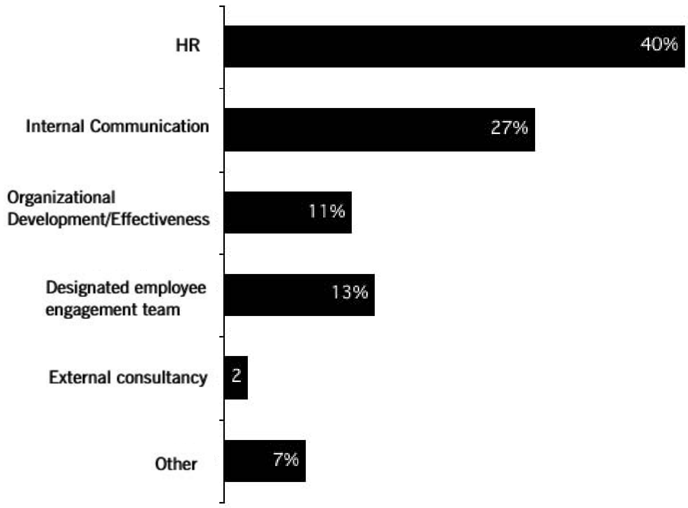


Which functions manage employee engagement?

We asked organizations with a formal engagement program which function is primarily responsible for it. The responses suggest that responsibility more often rests primarily with HR, while internal communication also has considerable ownership. Figure 5.8 (page 128) shows that the employee engagement programs in 40% of organizations worldwide are overseen primarily by HR, while for 27%, internal communication is the key function.

In 13% of organizations, there is a designated employee engagement team overseeing the project.

Fig 5.8: *Function responsible for overseeing employee engagement*
[All data; organizations with a formal employee engagement program]



There's considerable variation when it comes to company size, with internal communication far more likely than HR to be the function responsible in large organizations than small ones and vice versa (see Figure 5.9, below). At the same time, however, a similar proportion of small organizations relative to large ones have a designated team overseeing their formal engagement program.

Fig 5.9: *Function responsible for overseeing employee engagement*
[Large and small organizations with a formal employee engagement program]

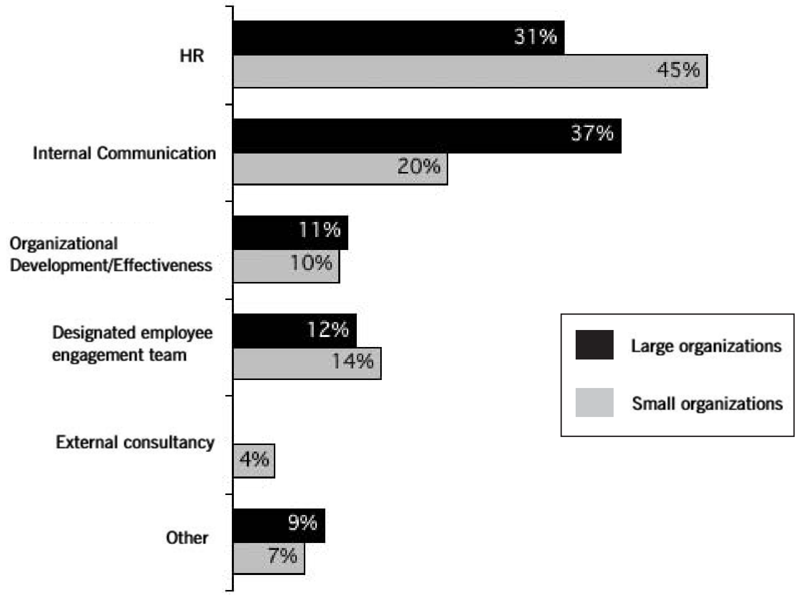
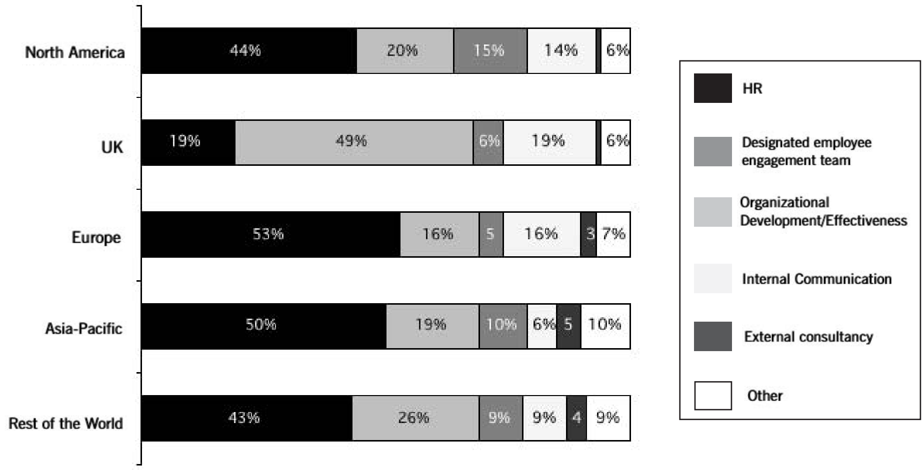


Figure 5.10, below, shows that there's considerable variation in functional responsibility across regions also. In particular, the proportion of UK organizations where internal communication is the primary function responsible for the formal engagement program is far greater than for those organizations in other regions. At the same time, the proportion of organizations where HR is the primary function responsible is far smaller than in other regions.

Fig 5.10: *Function responsible for overseeing employee engagement*
[All data; organizations with formal employee engagement program; by region]



How organizations measure engagement levels

A quarter of organizations that have employee engagement on the agenda don't have a formal method for measuring it (see Figure 5.11, below). Meanwhile, 44% measure engagement levels through their standard opinion survey and 23% have a dedicated engagement survey. Generally (not shown in the figure), those with a formal engagement program are far more likely to use a dedicated survey than those for which engagement is just a general philosophy. However, 7% of those with a dedicated program don't measure engagement levels at all.

Fig 5.11: *How organizations measure levels of employee engagement*
[All data; organizations with a formal employee engagement program]

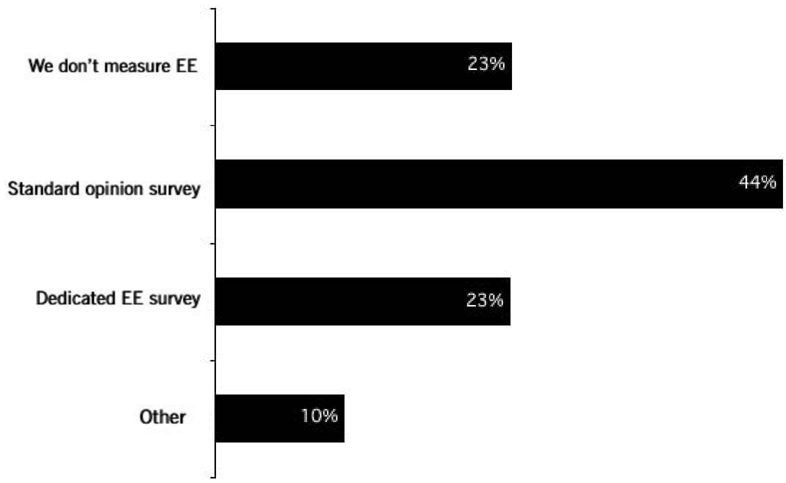
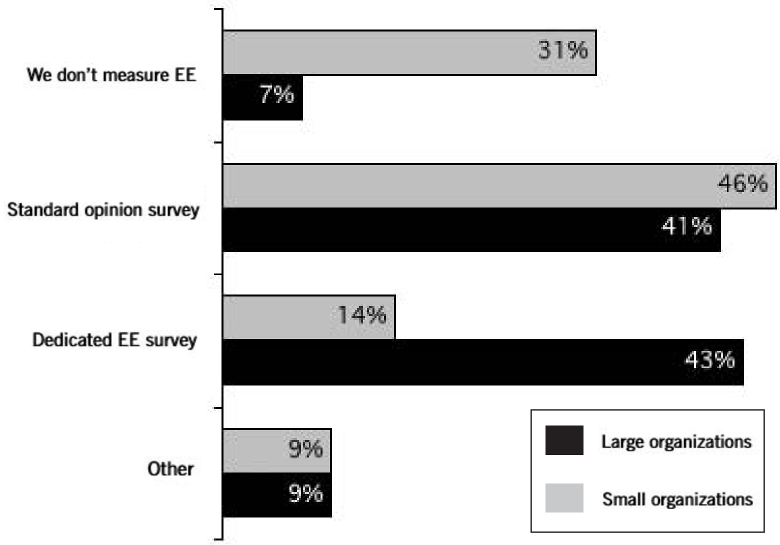


Figure 5.12, below, shows that only 7% of large organizations with a formal engagement program don't measure engagement levels, compared with 31% of small ones. Some 41% of large organizations with a formal program measure engagement levels through a dedicated engagement survey, while only 14% of small organizations do so. Meanwhile, similar proportions of large and small organizations with a formal program measure engagement levels through their standard opinion survey.

Fig 5.12: *How organizations measure levels of employee engagement*
[Large and small organizations with a formal engagement program]



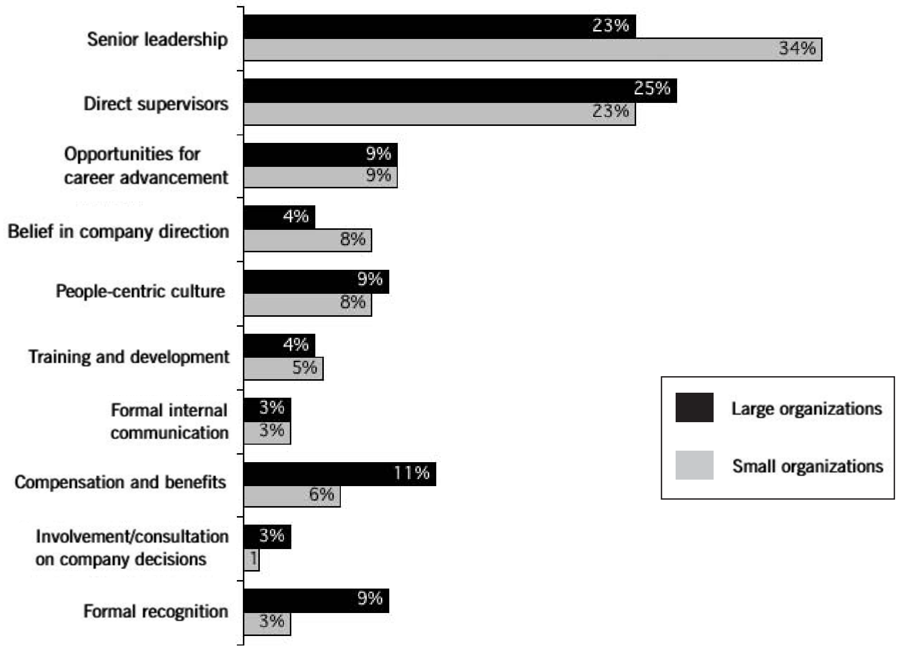
Key drivers of engagement

Employee engagement is complex and likely to be influenced by many (interconnected) factors. Melcrum's research report, *Employee Engagement,* identified a set of 10 key drivers most commonly cited as important, in one form or another, by organizations. In this survey, we found that 33% of organizations with employee engagement on the agenda conduct a key driver analysis and we asked this group to rate drivers from the set of ten in terms of importance.

Figure 5.13 (opposite) shows results segmented by size of organization. Both large and small organizations rated the actions of senior leaders and direct supervisors the most important drivers of employee engagement. However, senior leaders seem to have considerably greater impact on engagement in smaller organizations than in large ones.

It's interesting to note that the percentages for senior leadership and direct supervisors match those in Melcrum's 2005 survey, but in 2005, 18% of respondents working in large organizations rated "belief in company direction" as most important, compared with only 4% in 2007. In addition, only 3% of respondents working in large organizations rated "compensation and benefits" as the most important driver in 2005, compared with 11% in 2007.

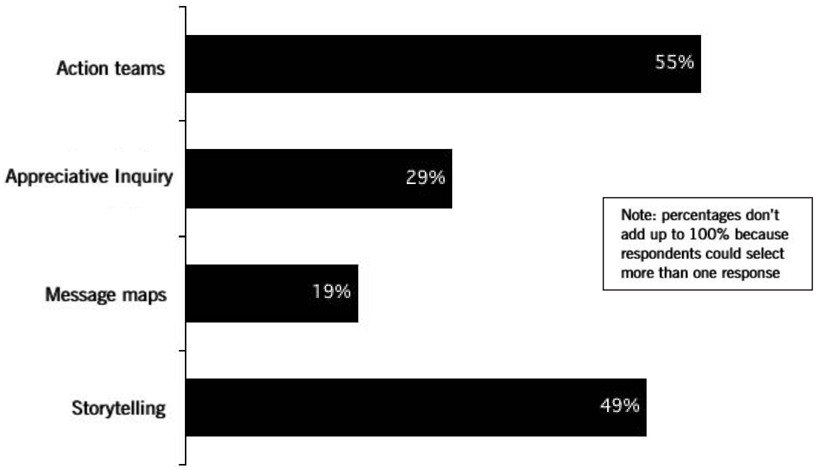
Fig 5.13: *Key drivers of employee engagement*
[Large and small organizations that conduct a key driver analysis]



Which employee engagement techniques are organizations currently using?

Organizations use engagement techniques individually or combine them with their engagement initiatives or program. The survey revealed that 86% of organizations with employee engagement on the agenda are using at least one of the key techniques. Figure 5.14, below, shows proportions of this group of organizations with respect to the four key techniques covered in this guide. The most widely used techniques are action teams and storytelling with 55% of this group of organizations using the former and 49% using the latter. More than a quarter use Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and 19% use message maps.

Fig 5.14: *Techniques used by organizations*
[All data; organizations with employee engagement on the agenda and using at least one of the four key techniques]



There's considerable variation between large and small organizations when it comes to techniques used (see Figure 5.15, below). Similar proportions of large and small organizations use action teams, but large organizations are more likely to be using storytelling than small organizations. Meanwhile, a greater proportion of smaller organizations use AI.

Fig 5.15: *Techniques used by organizations*
[Large and small organizations using at least one of the four key techniques]

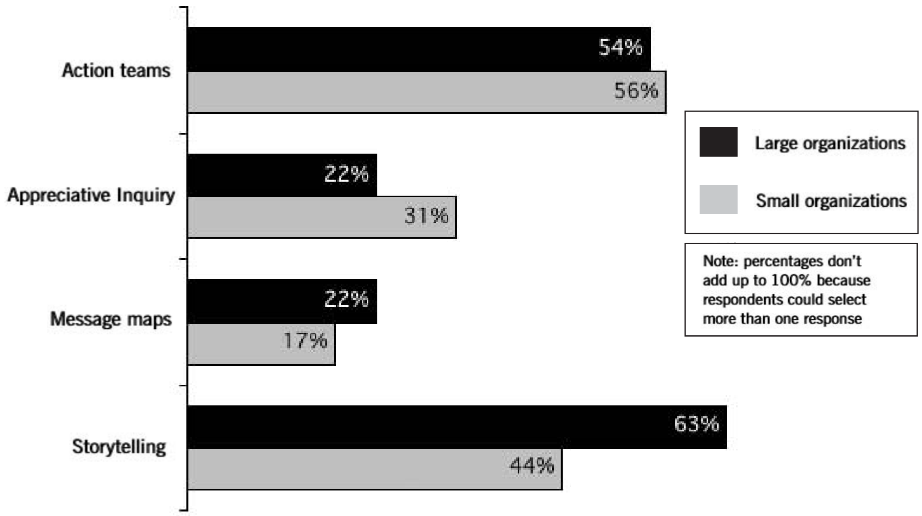
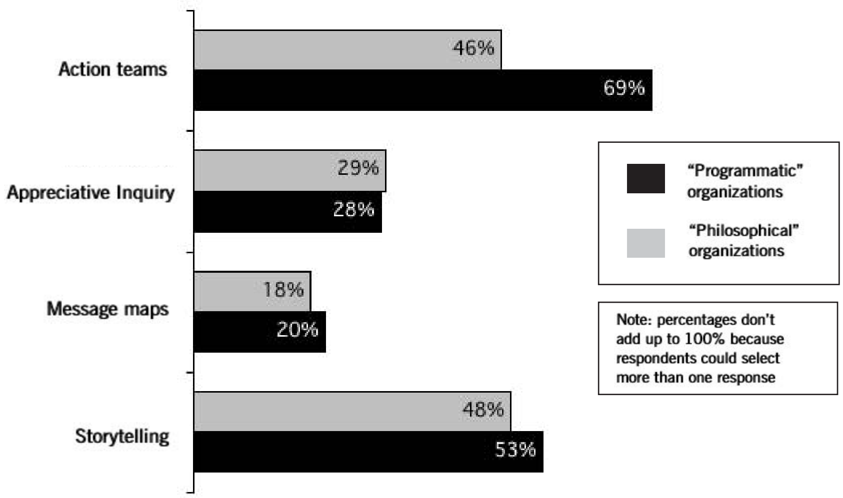


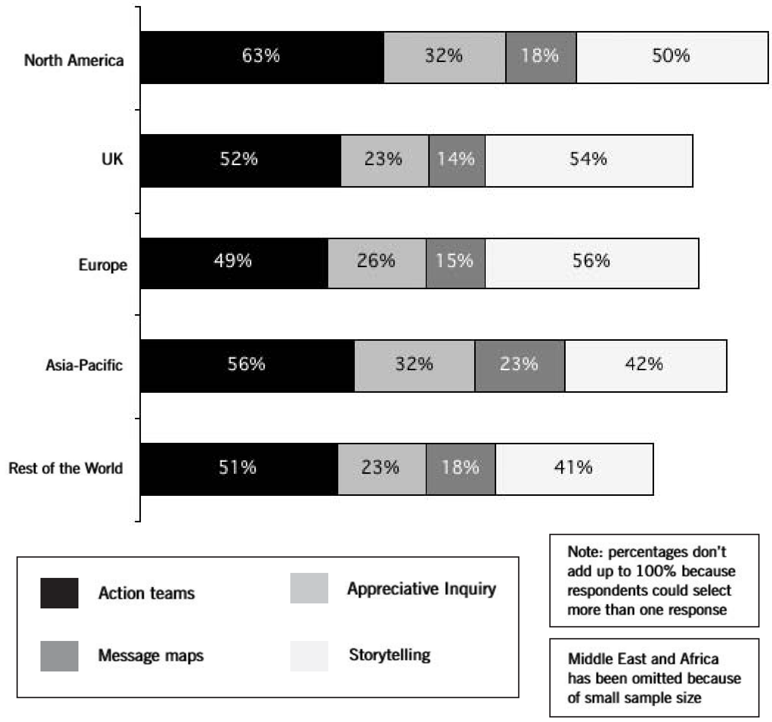
Figure 5.16, below, shows that the use of storytelling, AI and message maps doesn't vary greatly when it comes to organizations' approach to employee engagement. However, 69% of organizations with a formal program use action teams compared with only 46% of "philosophical" organizations.

Fig 5.16: *How organizations measure levels employee engagement*
[All data; organizations with employee engagement on the agenda; segmented by approach to engagement]



There's considerable variation in the use of techniques when it comes to region (see Figure 5.17, below). In particular, organizations in North America are more likely to be making use of action teams than in other regions, while higher proportions of those in North America and Asia-Pacific region have introduced AI. Meanwhile, organizations in North America, the UK and Europe are using storytelling more extensively than those in the Asia-Pacfic region. The latter trend is particularly pronounced among large organizations using these techniques (not shown in Figure 5.17). Some 64%, 76% and 65% of this group of organizations currently use storytelling at least to some extent respectively in North America, the UK and Europe.

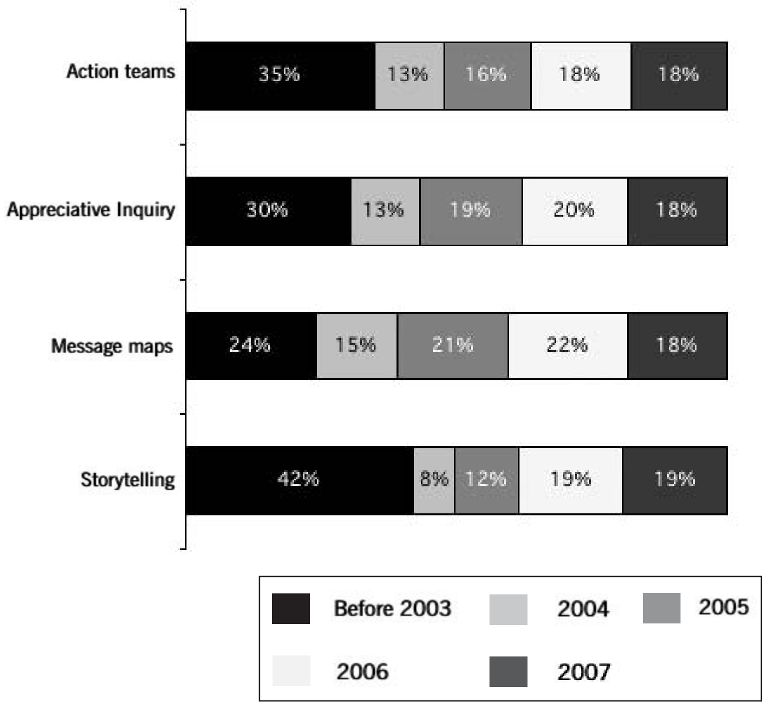
Fig 5.17: *Techniques used by organizations*
[All data; organizations with employee engagement on the agenda and using at least one of the four key techniques]



When did organizations introduce these employee engagement techniques?

Figure 5.18 (page 134) shows when organizations introduced these key techniques. Substantial proportions of those currently using these techniques, particularly storytelling, introduced them before 2003. However, the survey suggests that introduction of the techniques has been steady in the last three years, with more than a third of each technique-using group introducing the technique in 2006 or the first nine months of 2007.

Fig 5.18: *When did organzations introduce these techniques?*
[Large and small organizations with employee engagement on the agenda and using at least one of the four key techniques]



Which employee engagement techniques are organizations planning to introduce?
We asked organizations which of these key employee engagement techniques they're planning to introduce in the next 12 months. Figure 5.19 (opposite) shows responses for all organizations (whether they have engagement currently on the agenda or not) planning to introduce at least one of the techniques. Perhaps unsurprisingly given current patterns of usage, action teams and storytelling are set to experience the greatest adoption out of these techniques, with 43% of this group of organizations planning to introduce the former and 37% the latter in the next 12 months. More than a quarter of those introducing techniques will introduce message maps and/or AI.

But when those organizations which are already using at least one of these techniques are taken out (not shown in the figure), it's interesting to find that contrary to current usage, where action teams and storytelling dominate, a high proportion of organizations will be introducing AI. Furthermore, this is equally weighted between large and small organizations.

Fig 5.19: *Which techniques are organizations planning to introduce?*
[All data]