

Engage for Change

Content is the problem

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Hi everyone and welcome to content is the problem ...



Ruby's

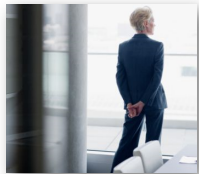


Geraldine's

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Geraldine'swho was told or Ruby's who was engaged and enfranchised?

Geraldine has just returned from a change kick off meeting which had no prior intent communicated. In it a serious man in a suit went through a long PP deck explaining that a secret squirrel team had identified a need for change and worked out all the solutions. The implications were laid out including a consultation process on the 'human asset'. Most people sat through it trying to translate the jargon into English or Dutch or French or German. A couple of obviously planted questions were asked. The atmosphere dropped to ice cold.



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Ruby, as you can see, is looking reflectively out of an office window in lovely downtown North London. She has worked for Total, the French multinational, for 10 years and through their internet she and everyone else has been tracking the decline in fortunes of all 10 business units. The year is 2009. She has just been to a meeting with newish MD Didier Harel. Didier has a mandate from Paris to get profitable again quickly. Normally such a recovery would be carried out in the French dirigiste tradition – just as Geraldine experienced in Bank co. And usually patrician Paris would make allowances. Not this time.

The thing you need to know about Didier is that he hails from Mauretania which is a bit like hailing from Cornwall. In the meetings Didier has reviewed the numbers which everyone is familiar with and the need to cut costs by 40% - he also said that whilst the 40% is a given, the how is open to all. The bottom up approach resulted in the target being attained in 9 months with the truckers saving money on new routes and all departments suggesting efficiencies. Head office recommended sacking themselves and throughout engagement score rose to record levels because people were the source of operational decisions. It was not an engagement programme. It was engagement in an authentic business challenge - Geraldine experienced this...

Geraldine suffered this familiar pattern of command & control communication:

1. Elites decide; often secretly
2. Messages/content formed
3. Messages/content delivered creatively
4. Messages impact checked
5. Messages reinforced

= Command, control, align & coerce

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Internal communication/marketing grew up as the radio station of top down, command and control styles of leadership. Its job was to communicate messages that leaders wanted and needed employees to have to do the jobs, be more generally informed and feel good about what they do. Its job was also to feedback and encourage dialogue.

These are still relevant roles. But the underlying assumption was that power lay with elites and broadly speaking that power went one way, top to bottom. The communicator's role was the alignment of the many with the intentions of a powerful few.

The essence of employee engagement, on the other hand, lies in involving employees more in influencing and shaping big ticket decisions like strategy and change, as well as day to day operational decisions.

Under command and control communication is linear, a lot goes down, a bit goes back up. In organizations where employees are invited to challenge and contribute, communication still needs to convey some top down messaging but much more critically it needs to enable the involvement of many more people in well governed decision forming, once the preserve of elites.

The challenge to this industry is this - are you reinforcing top down, hierarchical styles of leadership communicating content decided by the few to the many. Probably with high production values.

The dilemma is this once content and decisions become policy the engagement with those outside the decision circle inevitably becomes didactic, dirigiste and one way whatever feedback gimmicks are tossed to the crowd. Put another way are you the radio station of the state or the enabler of more mutual leadership?

So what engage you at work, such that you are creative and productive?

What engages you?

- Think of a project/activity in which where you were really engaged, fired up, productive and enjoying it
- What stimulates your engagement?



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Find someone you don't know and get into pairs

And in your pair exchange a time when you were really engaged, committed and fired up. Either in your current role or going way back.

Briefly swap stories and agree what conditions existed that enabled you to fully engage yourselves – was it the leadership at the time, the novelty of the task

The most engaged and productive



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Meantime these are pictures of the self employed...

by and large they choose their hours, work out their business plans and match outgoings with income. And they do this without a manager or an HR department. Nor do they have an engagement plan...wow amazing.

Some leader's still adhere to the view that seniority gives the intellectual authority.....just look at the jury system where generalists solve complex problems

Generalists solve complex problems



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Self organising and highly engaged



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And kids are self organising and self engaging too.

In fact under different labels engagement has been around for ever – take this fellow....

What's new?.....Why now?



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Nelson had his captains rowed out to co-create battle objectives on the eve of action, knowing that when the shooting started his captains would recall the objectives and make up the tactics. On the other side De Villeneuve insisted on top down tactics.

Looking back, to the last century we saw the rigid approaches of Taylorism which espoused the virtues of standardisation and Command and control which was challenged by McGregor's y theory, Ouch's Z theory & the 1990's Empowerment movement. All failed to usurp C&C... will E (employee engagement) theory displace authoritarian, hierarchical capitalism & replace with it more mutual capitalism? Time will tell but there are three factors that were not fully present in the last century..they are

Velvet revolutions



Lech Walesa at Gdansk Shipyard addressing workers

Why now for employee engagement?

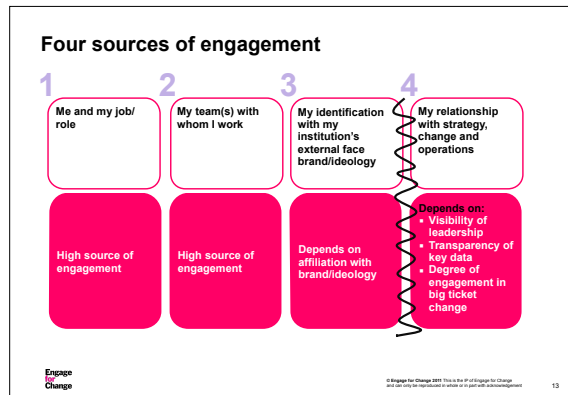
- Loyalty for security → Transactional relationship
- Velvet revolutions → Democratic capitalism
- Power over knowledge → Digital flattens hierarchy

So in a sense it really is a case of ...



Old wine in new bottles... there is another factor encouraging the take up of real engagement and that is coming generations Y, M and Z show all the signs of wanting more say at work. And with economic growth firms will no longer be able to rely on fear – they will have to earn retention by adopting much more mutual styles of leadership.

In doing so they will need to think about the four sources of engagement -

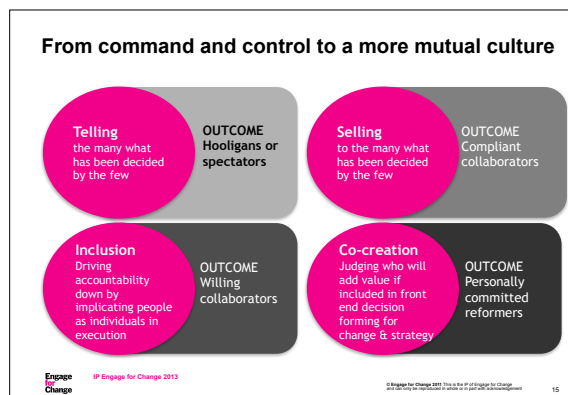


It's the fourth that is often problematic. It is usually the case that the further you are from the boss class the less you are engaged in strategy and big ticket change. Thus change & strategy is often seen as being 'done to us' rather than 'with and through us'. Few of us like to be on the receiving end of an elite's decisions especially if we could have challenged constructively and contributed to better outcomes. And even when we agree with every decision elites make and they have communicated brilliantly, we still don't feel much intellectual ownership and still less emotional ownership. Change needs both intellectual and emotional ownership.....remember Geraldine and Ruby.

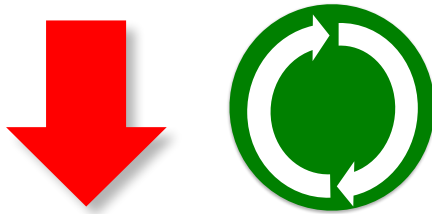
Ruby is a great example of engaging herself....

We engage ourselves when we are invited to safely challenge and to contribute to every day operational decisions and big ticket strategy and change that affects us, which we can improve

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More mutual styles of leadership



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In C&C its top down. The mutual route requires strong leadership to govern the process. And leaders need to be able say what is non negotiable – we call this the PEACH process....

The power of the peach



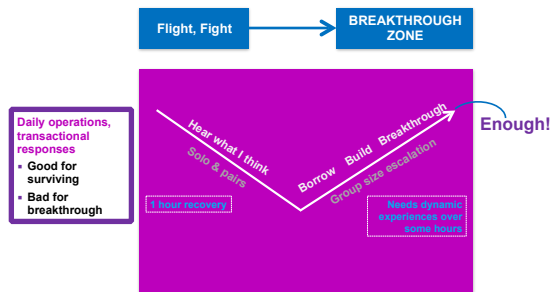
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Where the stone is the non negotiable – defining and agreeing the stone is the C suites task – in doing so the stone shrinks.

Having worked out who will add value it's a question of designing an intervention in which the selected groups or everyone is invited to challenge and contribute. We've heard from others on techniques that bring the best out in people....our view is traditional table groups make much noise but usually just incremental outcomes – to achieve breakthrough thinking people need to work alone addressing the topic at hand to

Getting people into the breakthrough zone



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What it's not

Command and control, hierarchical leadership concealed by

- Turbo charged top down communication
- A bit of engaging social media
- A survey...unless
- Learnt behavioural performances which don't last

Content is the problem – what to do?

- Get in as early as you can
- Explain that to engage they have to decide who should be contributing and commission you/us to design that intervention
- Challenge if it looks like a show and tell with engagement rhetoric
- Review your own self beliefs – what are you selling? - creative packaging or the means to use comms as the context for engagement to take place
- Know when glitz is likely to make it a spectator sport rather than a participative one

Communication to set the context for engagement



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And finally



Sir Wim Bischoff (chair Lloyds Banking Group) as a senior sponsor of Engage for Success

“**employee engagement** is becoming be one of the key health factors to be considered by shareholders”

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