



# PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

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ACT EUROPE LEADERSHIP & HR FORUM





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This guide aims to provide a practical, easy to follow and implementable approach to understanding and addressing people engagement in airports. It does so by focusing on how to create the kind of positive, inclusive, people-oriented environment that can help all those who work in airports to feel motivated and enthusiastic about both their organisations and the work that they do.

The guide is therefore targeted at airport leaders - CEOs, airport management, line managers and HR professionals – who are those primarily responsible for shaping organisational culture. However, it can be shared with any stakeholders who can contribute to creating the desired work environment and atmosphere at airports, including service companies, contractors and employees themselves.

The guide brings together research, discussion, brainstorming and the collective knowledge of best practice among the members of the ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum over the last 5 years. Whilst we have taken into account recent academic developments in research and evidence, our report is heavily influenced by the practical experience of senior airport industry leaders.

People Engagement is a broad concept with a number of different definitions. However, the term 'People Engagement' in general usage relates to the level of an employee's commitment and connection to an organisation - and the potential associated positive impact on performance. It explicitly links the psychological aspects of work with business outcomes.

We have taken this as a useful starting point for this report and have used the Conference Board definition of engagement<sup>1</sup> as our focus:

*'A heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organisation, manager, or co-workers that in turn influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work'.*

Engagement is not the same as job satisfaction. While the terms 'engagement' and 'job satisfaction' are often used interchangeably, there are key differences in the components that contribute to each. The foundations for both engagement and satisfaction are fair approaches to pay, benefits and job security - but these are not enough on their own to create high levels of engagement.

This is because whereas satisfied employees feel contented and gratified, engaged employees tend to be more passionate about their work. They often report feeling focused and intensely involved in the work they do. They are enthusiastic and have a sense of urgency. Engaged behaviour is persistent, proactive and adaptive in ways that expand the job roles as necessary. Engaged people are generally emotionally committed to their organisations and prepared to go beyond the formal requirements of role descriptions to get the work done.

It is not surprising therefore that engagement levels are significantly influenced by leadership, attitudes, trust and recognition, and the immediate work environment.

In fact, 'People Engagement' is an umbrella term which includes a number of more detailed elements, all of which are important in their own right, for example:

- **Work engagement:** this focuses on a psychological state experienced by people at work, commonly described as having three dimensions: vigour towards work, dedication and absorption in work activity
- **Organisational commitment:** in particular looking at people's psychological feelings ('affective' commitment) toward their work and organisation
- **Organisational identification:** how employees psychologically associate with their organisations
- **Work motivation:** factors that lead people to be interested and committed to their job

It is possible to examine each component separately in depth but this risks overcomplication. We have therefore followed another approach recommended by the CIPD and used 'People Engagement' as an umbrella term on a pragmatic basis to inform the kind of people strategy most likely to create a motivated work force<sup>2</sup>.

The way that people are treated at work can make a major difference to organisational performance.

People Engagement has emerged over the last two decades as a critical driver of business success. For example, the comprehensive MacLeod review, 'Engaging for Success' in 2009<sup>3</sup>, provided so many examples of the benefits of people engagement with such strong evidence that the UK Government concluded 'management practice that fosters employee engagement is a better way to work that benefits employees, teams and whole organisations'.

This and other reports have shown that high levels of engagement can promote retention of talent, foster customer loyalty and improve organisational performance and business value. And not only does engagement have the potential to significantly affect employee retention, productivity and loyalty, it can also be the foundation for improving customer satisfaction and reputation.

From the airport perspective, people engagement is critical at the present time for two main reasons:

- **Creating an organisation environment which attracts and retains people**  
Many people were let go in the pandemic as airports sought to reduce costs. If this was done in a way that may have been seen as a breach of trust and the 'psychological contract' between management and staff, engagement levels plummeted. Now that airports are having to rehire large numbers of people as the market recovers in a competitive labour market, this needs to be addressed.
- **Creating an organisation culture which improves the passenger experience**  
Throughout their journey, passengers come into contact with people working in airports whose attitude and approach play a key role in their experience. The 'ACI EUROPE Handbook for Airport Culture' published in 2022<sup>4</sup> emphasises how important it is for those working in airports to be 'ambassadors'. To play this role, staff must be passionate about their work, be prepared to go the extra mile, and have a sense of emotional commitment to their airport and its purpose. The foundation for this is engagement.

The advantage of the people-centred approach implicit in the people engagement paradigm is that it helps build trust between management and staff creating a psychological contract where cooperation rather than conflict is the norm.

Some of the benefits that have been noted from employee engagement interventions, together with a brief explanation of why these are important, are:

- **Higher retention rate**  
Employees join a company with expectations and aspirations. If the employer fails to meet them through providing a good employee experience, people may start looking for a better job. Someone about to leave may work half-heartedly through their transition and their replacement take time to get up to speed, resulting in an extended period of low productivity. Furthermore, the cost of hiring and training a new employee is high. Therefore, working to increase employee engagement can help reduce the cost of turnover and improve retention.
- **Higher motivation**  
Highly engaged people bring spirit and energy to the workplace. Their motivation and drive to succeed are contagious. Engaged employees not only 'go the extra mile' themselves but motivate others to achieve their tasks, develop and grow.
- **Employee advocacy**  
Engaged employees feel a sense of pride in being a part of the organisation. When employees are emotionally attached to the company, they tend to be more loyal. They work towards building the company's culture and become company advocates, actively promoting it in both their work and personal life.
- **Customer care**  
Engaged people are more attentive and friendly. They are more likely to have a general inclination and propensity to develop and foster good customer relationships. Such employees can also be great advocates and will aim to put the company's best face forward.
- **Increased quality of work**  
Employees who feel engaged habitually give of their best when doing their work. They do each task with dedication and precision. Since they enjoy their job, they are more efficient in their work. They constantly come up with new ideas, learn, and work well in teams.
- **Higher productivity**  
When employees feel engaged, they like what they do and find their work meaningful. Engaged people will work harder, faster, smarter and with much more enthusiasm. They are more focused at work, feel connected with their work environment and prepared to go the extra mile to achieve results. Their capacity to complete tasks increases and they may well work faster. Higher engagement levels can therefore increase employee productivity - and company revenues.

- **Higher initiative, creativity and innovation**

Engaged people enjoy their work. It aligns with their beliefs and aspirations. They are concerned about the organisation and want it to be successful. They feel a sense of psychological safety. Therefore, they feel confident to speak up, give innovative ideas, initiate changes, and offer suggestions to advance the company's growth.

- **Improved well-being**

For engaged people with supportive managers, stress at work is likely to be easier to manage and indeed some pressure could even become a motivator. The key is support: because in those circumstances people are not only committed to work but they also feel they are not alone.

The benefits of People Engagement will be different for different organisations depending on their business strategy, the culture and 'mentality' of people, local characteristics, the size of the company, organisational culture and values.

There are of course a range of people matters that need to be addressed to ensure organisational success. The way people are organised and deployed to be aligned with business strategy makes a big difference to performance, as do the quality and capabilities of the workforce. Process (re)-design, IT support and skills training are also likely to be important elements in designing a high-performance culture.

A proper People Engagement strategy provides a solid foundation for all these elements of people strategy and a sound basis for sustainable high performance.



## 5.1 From Human Resources to People Management

In today's competitive labour market and constantly changing environment, engagement is therefore more relevant than ever. Increasingly, organisations are turning to Human Resources departments to set the agenda for people engagement and commitment in order to establish a competitive advantage and organisational resilience.

This has required Human Resources groups to review and reconsider whether their traditional approach, which views people as 'company assets', is sufficient and appropriate to build the levels of engagement that modern organisations and their people are expecting. The word 'resource' refers to the stock or supply of all money, material and people required by an organisation for its proper functioning. Based on this concept, Human Resource management deals with activities like recruitment, labour regulations, internal policies, working time, payroll, taxes, etc.

Experience shows that the traditional way of thinking is not enough to build engagement, though it provides a solid foundation for the basic people necessities. For people engagement to be successful, it is important that employees are treated as people and individuals rather than simply business resources – and that there a focus on how to improve their experience at work and ensuring they are treated fairly as 'partners' in the enterprise. This is summarised in the diagram below.



Taking a more 'people-centred' approach, treating employees as individuals - and paying attention to their needs, expectations and emotions – can make a real difference. This is all about listening, sharing, attitudes, investing in knowledge and skills, providing career opportunities, communication and dialogue. It focuses on improving life and experience within the organisation and beyond.

## 5.2 Considering people as individuals

There is a world of difference between a company with a winning team of employees all pulling together toward a shared goal, and a bunch of people who are just performing their job description obligations. True high performance requires people to show commitment, engagement, creativity, innovation – and to use their personal initiative - as an integral part of their daily working life.

If employees are treated and approached only as “resources” and “costs”, they usually stick to their job description and formal duties. They are unlikely to show much interest in developing their own jobs or company business development, continuity and success. But if they are considered as individuals and even - one step further - are involved in company life and decisions - they are more likely to be interested not only in their pay and working conditions, but also in improving their roles, work environment and performance. They are also more likely to show an interest in the wider business context, challenges, performance and sustainability.

It is therefore important that each and every member of the team is considered as an individual, each with their own set of strengths and weaknesses. This means understanding the experience each of them has in their interactions with the organisation.

## 5.3 The People Experience journey

To truly understand the meaning of “People Experience”, we need to look at the people experience journey. This journey is summarised in the diagram below. Building on a people management approach, it looks at the employee lifecycle and thinks about people’s experience at each stage. The aim is to ensure employees are engaged all along the way, from recruitment through onboarding, administration, performance management, training and development, growth and exit.



How can HR managers and advisers help in practice? Perhaps the most useful role is in coaching, mentoring, developing and encouraging leaders and line managers to interact with the people who work for them in a way consistent with an engagement paradigm.

For example, the following 'hints and tips' have been found to be useful in facilitating the transition to a more people-based culture. These pick-up key points where the personal experience of individuals is likely to be impacted. Remember it's 'what matters to them' which is important, not 'what's the matter with them'.

- Take care when implementing change. Consider every decision you take in your organisation and question:
  - *How will the decision be perceived ?*
  - *How will the change impact your people?*
  - *Has every effort been made to keep people informed and engaged with the change?*
  - *Have you explained properly why the change is necessary?*
  - *Have you explained exactly what the change is?*
  - *Have you explained the benefits of the change and taken steps to mitigate any immediate issues or practical problems?*
- Do not forget – the People Experience begins before the person's first day. The first step is recruitment. People have more choice than ever, and a good recruitment experience could "grab" a candidate away from a competitor and towards your company.
- Leadership is key to a great People Experience. Make sure your leaders receive the training and support they need, so they know how to motivate and engage their teams.
- Encourage transparency throughout the People Experience and encourage open lines of communication. Operate an open-door policy and encourage people to give feedback. Remember that leaders need to be open to – and prepared for - answering difficult questions.
- Keep up-to-date with employee experience trends. As time goes by and technology advances, people will expect different things from their experience, including more flexibility such as the opportunity to work remotely and tailor their hours. Consider this seriously and if this makes sense adjust policy and practice to accommodate these trends.

More generally, there are a number of employee-focused questions that should be explored at each stage of the employee experience journey as a way of monitoring how people feel and providing an indication of where attention might need to be paid. Examples of the kind of questions that can be asked are:

- *Do employees feel treated fairly and equally?*
- *Do they have a positive experience from the very beginning of their journey with the company (selection, recruitment, on-boarding)?*
- *Are new employees made to feel part of the team?*
- *Do new hires know what we expect from them?*
- *Do employees feel they are getting enough feedback?*
- *How often are employees meeting for a one-to-one with their line managers?*
- *Do employees feel supported and encouraged by those around them?*
- *Do employees feel they are part of a well-functioning team?*
- *Do employees feel they have fair and equal access to training and development opportunities?*
- *Is there enough physical and mental well-being support?*
- *Do employees feel valued for their work and the contribution it makes to business results?*
- *Do employees feel that sufficient measures have been put in place to ensure they had a good experience at the company?*
- *Do employees feel fairly treated throughout their employee journey?*

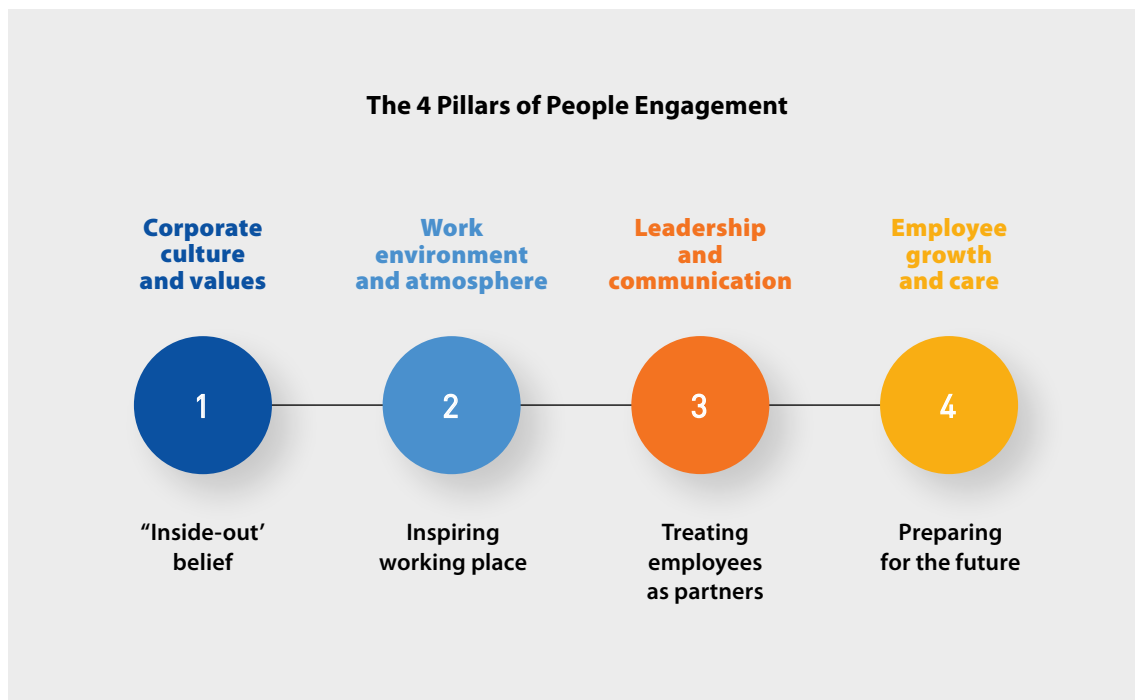
## 6.1 The four pillars of People Engagement

At its heart, engagement is about people - understanding, motivating, and connecting with them. That makes it a complex topic. The deeper you go, the more confusing it can seem, particularly where different parts of an organisation and different leaders have different agendas and approaches.

Only too often, there seems to be a kind of 'line management lottery' to people engagement, where people's experience of the company depends more on the personality of the immediate supervisor than the intention of organisation leaders.

The best way to address this is by ensuring that senior leaders promote and promulgate a coherent and consistent organisation-wide strategy. Members of the ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum identified four key areas through research and experience that it is important for senior airport leaders to address in order to build a strong, sustainable and successful engagement strategy.

These **4 main pillars of People Engagement** indicate the areas for company-wide focus, development and action that will ensure better employee experience and engagement and will help airport leaders take the business to the next level.



### **Corporate culture and values**

The first pillar of People Engagement is to ensure that all those working in the organisation have a clear understanding of the organisation's purpose and a sense of what they are doing and why. Creating this kind of 'inside-out' belief in the company creates a strong foundation for building sustainable relationships and helps build organisational commitment, loyalty and attachment.

### **Work environment and atmosphere**

The second pillar is to focus on the immediate working environment and making every effort to create a 'dream' working place for people – well-organised, safe, well-connected, with good relationships and collegiate support from managers, supervisors and team members. Having the right systems and equipment to do the job well is important. The importance of creating a positive atmosphere, inspiring people to achieve better performance and results, can never be underestimated.

### **Leadership and communication**

Leadership and communication together comprise the third pillar. People working in a people-centred organisation should be treated as colleagues and partners rather than subordinates and servants. Every person should expect to be treated well, fairly and equitably, to understand their role, to be recognised and praised for his/her efforts, and to be managed with trust and respect. Employees should also expect to be informed about what's going on - particularly changes, transformations and new projects. When people know the company's goals, they are more likely to support them and become engaged and involved in their achievement.

### **Employee growth and care**

The more opportunities for training, development and professional growth the company provides, the more likely people are to be engaged. Immediate feedback and coaching on the job is important. Longer term development activities like career planning and mastering competencies are ways to create a culture of engagement, as they make people feel valued and invested in their work.

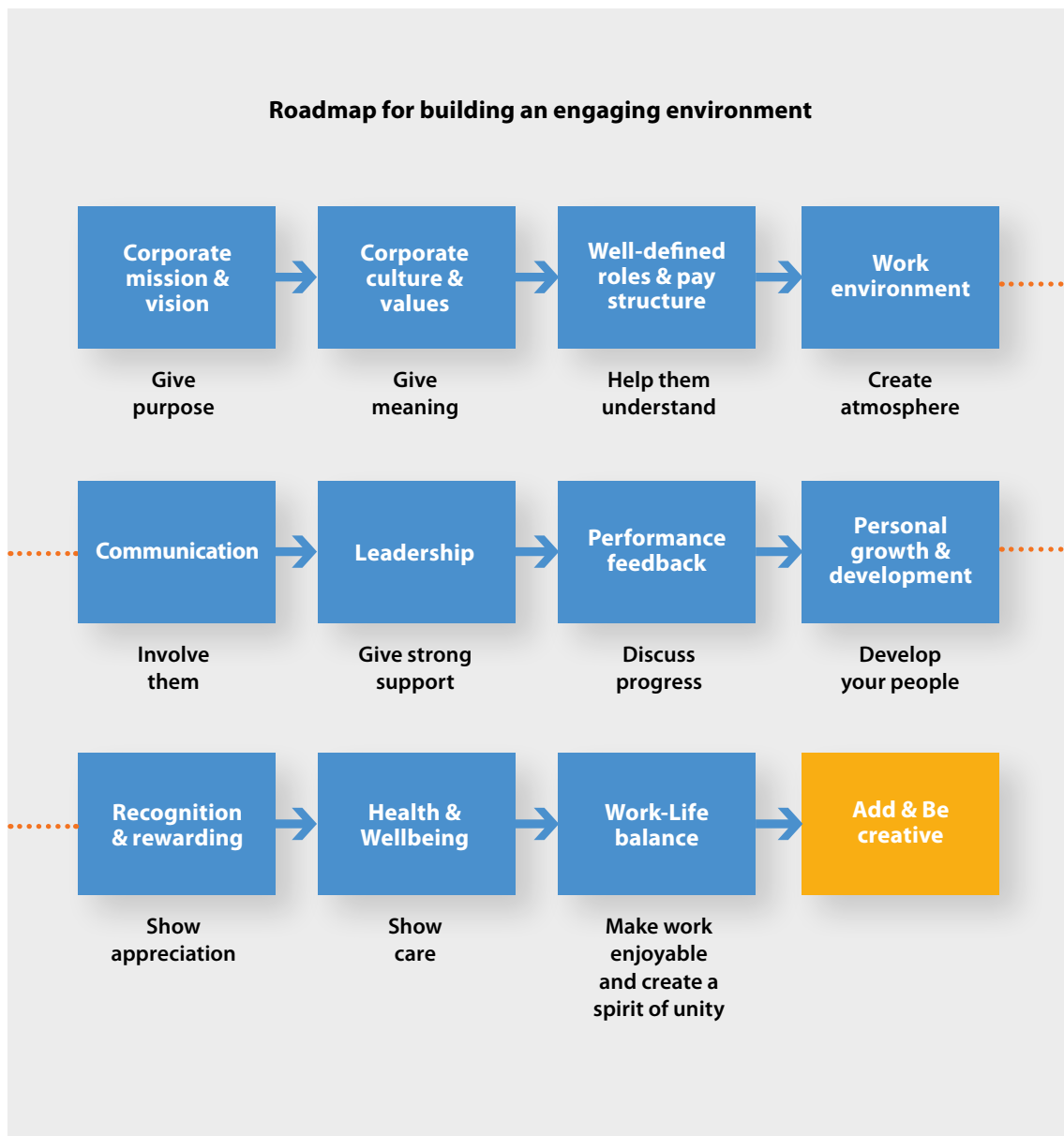
## **6.2 Roadmap for building an engaging environment**

Putting the four pillars of engagement into practice requires a more detailed roadmap in order to link the People Engagement programme in a more concrete way to business activities and results.

Each company can of course choose its own way to create its own roadmap with steps and activities which build the aspirational People Engagement environment.

The diagram below provides a general example of a roadmap for building a People Engagement environment, created by the ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum as a support to airport HR teams and management who are developing their own plans.

A Roadmap helps to accelerate the development of an engaging environment through the adoption of new and expansion of existing HR programmes – and linking these to the business strategy and achievement of business results. The model is based on the collective experience and know-how of the Forum members.



The leadership steps in this generic roadmap are as follows:

#### Give purpose

Human beings have a need to feel a part of something bigger than themselves. That is why it is essential that the company presents and explains to people its particular “Why,” and codifies this in a clear and concise vision, mission and values statement - something anyone in the organisation can understand and feel inspired by.

**TIP:** *Why does our business exist? Why do we do what we do? Create a shared sense of meaning.*

## Give meaning

Engagement requires people to make personal sense of the organisation purpose so that their work has real meaning. This requires building a strong corporate culture, with values which keep people together and show them the way they are expected to behave and perform in their day-to-day work. The stronger the company's culture is, the better employees will understand what is expected of them and what they are working toward.

**TIP:** *What would make people proud to be working in our company? What could get our people excited to get out of bed in the morning?*

## Help them understand

Mission, vision and values are important, but some companies fall into the trap of neglecting to connect the big picture with the individual's particular role within the company. In order to be engaged, people need to know that their work matters and to see how their individual goals fit with company objectives.

One of the most important factors for getting people engaged is explaining clearly their job role and their personal role in the company, what is expected of them in terms of performance and behaviour, what competencies they have to develop, where their job positions stand in the company structure and how their personal efforts contribute to the greater whole.

In many companies this step is neglected, but it forms a key part of the 'psychological contract' and plays an important role in the establishment of a sound relationship between company and the employee from the very beginning. Only relationships based on a clear transparent foundation are likely to be sustainable.

**TIP:** *Do we explain, and depict positive future horizons to our newcomers? Do we have meaningful job descriptions and job competency profiles?*

## Create atmosphere

The atmosphere, surroundings and ambience at work are key determinants of employee engagement. In particular, conditions in the workplace play an important role for employees whenever they consider whether they want to keep working in an organisation. A safe and positive work environment can also attract talented people to join the company. Supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships as well as supportive management promote psychological safety.

Creating a space that matches the company culture has a double value – reinforcing and communicating company values and culture at the same time as providing an environment which will stimulate collaboration, innovation and creativity.

**TIP:** *Do we create a comfortable work environment for our people? What do we do to encourage collaboration? Do we promote sufficiently the importance of positive, supportive and safe environments for our employees?*



## **Involve them**

The importance of proper communication cannot be overstated as all of the other pillars of engagement depend on it.

The functional element of communication is usually pretty clear. What sometimes is overlooked is the emotional element inherent in internal communications. When employees receive timely, constructive communication, they feel in the loop and included. This is critical for creating engaged teams.

Communication has to be a two-way street. Listening to the “voice of the people” is an important factor for open communication and transparency. Creating channels for employee feedback, like suggestion boxes (or including Q&A sessions in company briefings and staff meetings), will help win people’s trust, encouraging them to share their concerns and ideas.

**TIP:** *Do we have an efficient internal communication strategy? Is our two-way communication consistent across all levels of the organisation? Do we listen to our employees?*

## **Give strong support**

Employees feel psychologically safer in work environments characterised by openness and supportiveness. Supportive environments allow people to experiment, learn and to try out new things and even fail without fear of the consequences.

The quality of managers is a major factor in employee engagement and retention. Middle management is a critical link between senior leadership and the rest of the organisation. While the vision and the strategic goals are defined by the company’s senior management, middle managers have to carry out that vision on a daily basis.

Employees generally trust leaders who both lead and follow, who lead by example, who treat their teams fairly, equally, objectively, who create a positive, calm and trusting atmosphere, who provide opportunities for learning and growth, who inspire and motivate their people. Leadership lays down the foundation for employee trust.

**TIP:** *How are our employees treated by their managers? How do we as leaders treat our people? Do we have a strong leadership culture and standards?*

## **Discuss progress**

Sustainable high performance requires engaged and motivated employees. For an organisation to achieve its desired goals, every employee from the CEO to those at the most junior level needs to contribute. Performance, under-performance, and non-performance of each employee all have an impact on overall organisational performance.

Adopting agile and continuous performance management systems enables organisations to achieve these benefits on a consistent basis. Employees perform to the best of their ability when they are aware of what they are working towards and how their efforts are helping the organisation move forward. Performance feedback provides the perfect opportunity for managers and employees to review work progress and identify expected performance outcomes that align well with organisational goals.

The conversations and dialogue facilitated by a good performance management system provides employees with better clarity on their role in the organisation, the impact they are creating and the expected level of performance. When an employee sees this alignment in a transparent goals-based framework they become engaged and motivated within the larger organisation purpose and this leads to better performance.

**TIP:** *Have we established a culture for regular feedback to the people in the company? Do employees get the feedback they need and when they need it? Do our managers encourage sufficient two-directional open communication?*

## **Develop your people**

Organisations that focus on learning and development have taken important steps to supporting both higher employee engagement and company growth.

For too many organisations, learning and development are seen as costs rather than an investment, and are the first activities to be cut in difficult times. As has been evidenced in the pandemic, this can be short sighted and counterproductive. In the current climate, talented people are looking to join organisations where they have the opportunity to grow and develop rather than simply use existing skills.

Providing employees with learning and development opportunities builds capable and confident employees, willing and ready to lead the company to growth and success. Providing employees with learning experiences also helps them embrace changes in strategy or revised work processes. In addition, learning and development programmes give leaders the tools to prepare their team for change and help all employees approach change with confidence and a positive attitude.

Learning and development initiatives increase the likelihood of effective team functioning. These initiatives teach individuals how to communicate, resolve conflicts, and support each other, helping them contribute more effectively to organisational growth. Moreover, when team relationships are more positive, employees are also more engaged.

Finally and importantly, investing in employee learning and development shows employees they are valued. When people feel valued, they are more attached, motivated, engaged and are less likely to leave.

**TIP:** *Have we created an encouraging learning environment in the company? Do we provide enough opportunities for our people to learn, grow and develop?*

## **Show appreciation**

Recognition and reward are essential elements of employee engagement. Financial reward is important but appreciation – including verbal expressions of thanks, gratitude and non-monetary recognition – can also be tremendously important. Appreciation encourages people to attain more and focus both on work and individual growth. It not only motivates employees to perform well but also encourages them to give more attention to learning and career development.

The evidence from most reviews of employee engagement carried out by major HR consultancies suggest that it is very important that the employer encourages higher performance by providing

opportunities for enhancement and promotion. Where these opportunities are available to employees, there are incentives in place for employees to improve themselves, become more efficient, effective and engaged with the organisation and their job.

Employees feel better and more secure when they are recognised. Being appreciated at the workplace fosters a sense of gratitude and feelings of wellbeing. Happy employees perform better and care more for the company.

**TIP:** *Do we have a culture of recognition and reward in the company? Are our employees happy?*

### **Show care**

Employee health and wellness is a significant factor in productivity, wellbeing and performance. Healthy employees – both physically and mentally are happier, more productive and show higher rates of engagement in their job.

Creating dynamic company wellness programs for people that respond to their needs and incentivise positive behaviour and outcomes is one of the best strategies to ensure long-term engagement and success.

Some managers neglect health and wellness, but organisations who invest in it actually save money in the long run. When you pay attention to employee health, you curtail healthcare costs and reduce productivity loss due to absenteeism.

**TIP:** *Do we pay attention to the wellbeing of the employees in our company? How important is it for us? Do we provide a healthy environment and sustainable healthcare, both physical and mental, to our people?*

### **Make work enjoyable and create a spirit of unity**

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is not only important for health and relationships, but it can also improve an employee's productivity, and ultimately performance. If people don't view work as a chore, then they will make fewer mistakes and are more likely to become advocates of the organisation.

Nowadays, businesses that gain a reputation for encouraging work-life balance have become very attractive.

On the other hand, as employees spend a lot of their time at work, it is very important that they have a feeling of 'one team' and a spirit of unity. In engaged organisations, people get to know their colleagues as individuals and friends rather than workers simply filling a role. Generally, they enjoy spending time with their colleagues in and out of the office often joining with them on different initiatives, challenges and events and having fun together. This kind of spirit usually translates into the work context, creating a better work atmosphere, team spirit, relationships and support – leading to better performance and higher business results.

**TIP:** *Do we ensure a good work-life balance for our employees? Do we support enough measures to improve team spirit and the sense of unity in the company?*

The airport sector was deeply affected by the COVID pandemic. The unexpected and rapid downturn in demand meant that airport leaders around the world struggled to cope with the economic consequences and had to make difficult decisions. There was no way of knowing how long the downturn would last.

There were many challenges. What did airports need to do to survive financially? Was it possible to reduce costs quickly without damaging longer-term capabilities? Should people be made redundant or kept on the payroll hoping for an upturn? How could key people be retained? How should leaders communicate? How could they ensure people were safe? How could they keep people motivated? How could remote working best be introduced and managed? How should airport organisations and teams be restructured? How would airports cope with recovery?

While airport leaders were striving to come to terms with the economic crisis, employees found themselves facing many personal challenges - high job insecurity, fear, increased workload and stress, reduced income, priorities that seem to change by the day if not the hour, challenges posed by working in different rhythms and conditions, and a lack of longer term career prospects. As time went on, trust and faith in management was tested and team cohesion came under pressure.

People Engagement is an important goal in the best of times, but the importance of high-quality engagement is never more real and more pressing than in times of crisis. Engaging people in times when they feel uncertain in all areas of their lives is challenging but also crucial for the business. Trust in leadership is vital. Engagement is critical to the organisation's ability to deliver on its mission and strategic priorities, and to retain its key people. Employees rely on companies in times of crisis for help and to take care of them.

During the ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum meetings in 2020, employee engagement was recognised as one of the most critical challenges for European airports. As a result, the Forum's People Engagement working group initiated research into the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on People Engagement across airports in the 12 European countries represented in the Forum.

Airport HR managers assessed their level of employee engagement on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 was very poor and 10 outstanding. There were a range of responses, with the mean score around 7/10. Whilst motivation and morale had taken a big hit in some airports, at this relatively early stage of the pandemic the overall picture was one where people engagement was still holding up.

Airports which did well in this survey – which were also airports which had a good reputation for passenger experience – took a proactive approach to employee engagement. They understood people were feeling isolated and were worried about their safety, income, the skills they needed to work remotely and their career prospects. They were feeling anxious and uncertain about the future.

In these circumstances, they realised that it was important that people knew what was going on, trusted their leaders and were able to use any time they had available to the best effect.

Examples of the actions they took were:

- They did not rush into making people redundant, but generally did their best to keep people on payroll as long as possible
- They placed a strong emphasis on enhancing communication (virtual connectivity, newsletters, CEO messages, weekly blogs etc.)
- They provided support to employees including psychological support (in-house and external psychologists) employees' assistance programmes, company loan programmes
- They used the opportunity to catch up on training and help people develop capabilities for the future - including leadership, personal and technical skills
- They engaged people in challenging new projects and initiatives (particularly cross departmental and team activities)
- They continued to encourage team initiatives and challenges (including online celebrations, team challenges, different competitions)

The immediate concerns of the pandemic have now given way to a new set of concerns about how airports can deal with recovery. Attracting and retaining people to a sector which was so recently struggling to survive – and released many of its people – is proving to be a formidable challenge.

This means making People Engagement a leadership priority as well as looking anew at the basics – pay, conditions, and prospects – to make sure that the sector remains attractive. Now is an ideal opportunity for airport leaders to reflect on the way they treat their people and whether they provide the kind of people-centred environment which will attract and retain the best talent to the sector.

At a meeting of ACI EUROPE HR leaders in Cyprus in May 2022, participants agreed that it would be sensible to monitor people engagement through asking the following questions as part of regular employee surveys:

1. I get a sense of achievement from my work
2. In my organisation, we are willing to go 'the extra mile' where necessary
3. Overall, I am treated fairly by the organisation
4. I would recommend my airport as an employer
5. I am able to strike the right balance between my work and personal life
6. There is open and honest communication where I work
7. I am satisfied with my opportunities for training and personal development

Every journey starts with a first step. The ideas, tips and 'ready-to-adopt' proposals in this People Engagement Guide aim to encourage and support ACI EUROPE member airports in creating a more valuable, inspirational and engaging environment for their people. We encourage readers to get started – and build on your success!

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# APPENDIX

## HINTS AND TIPS

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### **'People Engagement Magic in a Nutshell'** **Notes from brainstorming of experienced HR managers**

- *Establish a clear vision for the future*
- *Create a strong and encouraging culture*
- *Include employees in company strategies*
- *Give employees a chance to contribute to the overall success of the company*
- *Encourage accountability*
- *Promote creativity and innovation*
- *Tailor communication styles to your employees' specificity*
- *Spend more time with your employees – listen and learn*
- *Make sure your leaders follow through the company's culture and values*
- *Respect your employees*
- *Provide ongoing support for learning and developing*
- *Invest in training*
- *Set constant challenges*
- *Measure outputs instead of inputs*
- *Make the small successes count*
- *Encourage a healthy lifestyle*
- *Provide more than just a job*
- *Don't focus on exit interviews, talk to people and encourage them to stay*
- *Lead by example*
- *Be proactive about engagement*
- *Identify the specific drivers of People Engagement at your company*



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Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Air transport supports 13.5 million jobs, generating €886 billion in European economic activity (4.4% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.

The present Guidance was elaborated by **Dr. Richard Plenty** (Managing Director of This IS) and **Dr. Pepina Miteva** (Aviation HR consultant) with contributions from the members of the ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum.

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