Basic recipe for an optimum Employee Experience

● Why it's better to not simply give a bonus?

1.

The Employee Experience: the icing in the cake

An extra shot of expresso in your latte. Recommendations for Scandi crime series after binge-watching The Bridge. A pop-up to tell you your train is late. The trend towards extensive **personalisation and flexibility** is starting to pervade all layers of society. This is also the case in the world of HR professionals, as illustrated by the growing importance of the 'Employee Experience'. (As we're writing this article this buzzword yields slightly over half a million hits on Google. We'll bet you anything that number has grown by the time you read this).

So why the hype? The **Employee Experience** is all about the sum of impressions, experiences and feelings of employees with regard to your company. That experience is obviously personal (and also personalisable) and as a business it is in your best interest that it is also positive. **Because talent is hard to find. Happy employees are not only more productive, they are also unlikely to move.**

In other words, a positive Employee Experience contributes to optimum 'employee engagement'. It is the touchstone of **an efficient HR policy** because it means that your employees are fully committed to your business success and act as true ambassadors, both inside and outside the company. In turn, this has a positive impact on the customer experience. And that brings everything full circle.

So more than the icing on the cake, the Employee Experience is the **essential ingredient**. Still, for many businesses an employee-centred approach means a fundamental change. Where to start? High time for a simple 'basic recipe'.

The Engaged Employee Recipe for a 360° HR approach

Until now - and in spite of the buzz - there was no **model that spells out how to gear your HR policy to Employee Experience and engagement**. You may find this surprising. After all, you are familiar with the Ulrich model, the godfather of HR. His theory laid the foundations of modern HR and it still holds sway. The model Partena Professional offers does not diverge from his approach but rather supplements it.

Whereas Ulrich places the HR manager at the centre, the main **focus** in our proposal is on the **employee**. Your HR policy is meant to foster your business results but engaged employees will help you realise your goals faster. That is the basic philosophy and of course we didn't conjure it out of thin air.
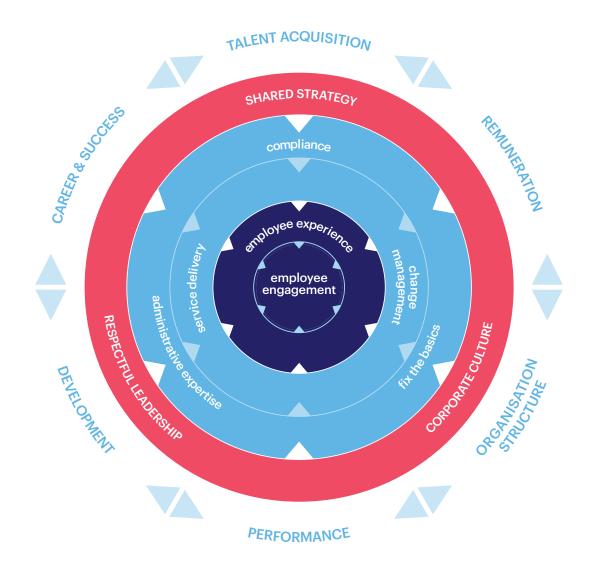
In developing this new model we drew heavily on our many years of **practical experience**.
In addition, the Engaged Employee Recipe is also **scientifically based**. Apart from Ulrich we also based our approach on the likes of Herzberg, who highlighted the importance of job satisfaction as early as the 1970s. You may also recognise elements from the Employee Life Cycle. To mould everything into a transparent whole we worked closely with Dirk Buyens, professor HR Management at the Vlerick Business School.

2.

Get to work with the Engaged Employee Recipe

The model below is a **practical guide on how to put employee engagement at the heart of all HR disciplines**. It's a recipe to help you steer the Employee Experience in the right direction on all levels of your company, whether it's recruitment, remuneration policy or leadership.
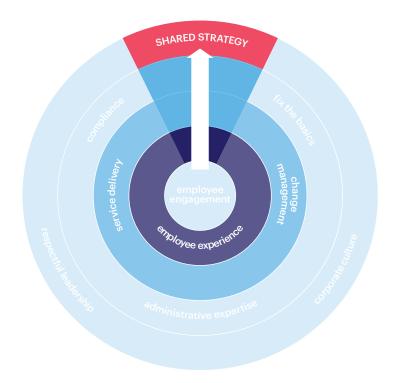
The important thing is that the model can be interpreted and used in different ways. Start from major principles or objectives (the 'core' of the model) to map out the impact on all components of your HR policy. Or start from one or more bottlenecks and work towards an integrated approach. **In short, work from the outside in or from the inside out.**
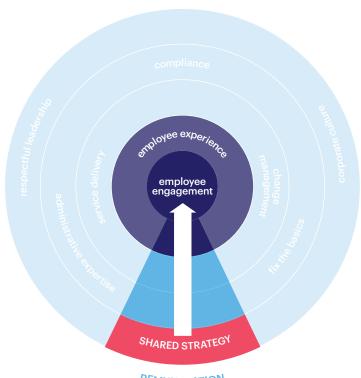
How to implement the Engaged Employee Recipe

Inside out

- Employees complain of a lack of motivation, a clear indication that the **Employee Experience** is not up to par.
- Examine the following circle: is there a problem in terms of your **service delivery** (for instance, do you need to upgrade your software)?
- Are my basic assumptions correct: did I choose the right motivators?
- Is this related to a lack of a **broader strategy**?

Outside in

- Suppose you want to reward an employee for his **performance**. You could simply give her a €1000 bonus.
- But does that fit in with your **broader strategy**? What is the effect you want to generate, also towards other employees?
- Do I have the tools to pay this bonus in the right way?
- Can the bonus be properly situated within the organisation and our remuneration policy e.g. by management?
- Does this bonus contribute to a positive **Employee Experience** and, ultimately, employee engagement (see also case study 1)?

The foundations of the model: shared strategy, corporate culture and respectful leadership

The Employee Experience reflects your HR policy, which is based on three fundamental pillars: **shared strategy, corporate culture and respectful leadership** (the outer ring in our model). Those pillars must be aligned and are also interdependent.

1. The *shared strategy* indicates the course: What does your company stand for and where are you going? Your mission, vision and values must be clear and shared by all employees.
2. Your *corporate culture* revolves around the way in which your employees interact with each other and with customers e.g. do you focus on performance ('work hard, play hard') or more on well-being and work-life balance?
3. *Respectful leadership* stands for the right brand of leadership: guiding when necessary but also open to employee initiatives and discussions on how to improve processes.

The sum of those three will **decide the basis of your approach**: what does your remuneration policy look like, how do you organise your administration, how do you evaluate your employees, ...

Are these three foundations shaky? Then the odds are overwhelming that the Employee Experience will remain suboptimal whatever else you may try. Let's take a simple example. Suppose your employee Ruben wants to take a course.

• Your **strategy** determines that the service you offer your customers always keeps abreast of the latest developments. Following training courses is part of that approach so things are looking good for Ruben.
• Within your corporate **culture** it is no secret that the company attaches a great deal of importance to the development of its employees. This is another reason why Ruben thinks he'll get the green light.
• However, things go wrong on a **leadership** level: Ruben's immediate superior does not allow him to take the training due to a heavy workload.

The result is a disappointment for Ruben: a negative Employee Experience. The Engaged Employee Recipe is your **instrument** to determine *where* things went wrong. So you start from a leadership level and work your way down the layers *(see case study 2)*.

3.

Case studies: implementing the model step by step

As we mentioned before you can start anywhere in the circle. The Employee Experience model helps you map out all the aspects and gives you a **helicopter perspective**. Start from a point of your choosing. Depending on your question or angle your priorities will be different. The case studies outline how you can implement the model on a step by step basis.

Case study 1: awarding a salary bonus

Suppose that, as in the case above, you are considering awarding (a number of) your employees a salary bonus. If so you can implement the Engaged Employee Recipe as follows:

1. Start with the outer layer: the level of **strategy, culture and leadership**. Consider the bonus as a function of the story you want to write with your organisation and how the bonus fits into that story. Ask yourself what the (desired) remuneration policy is:

    a. Do you want to reward unique performances or give employees a raise on multiple occasions?
    b. Do you want to reward excellence individually or collectively?

2. The decisions you take in this regard will impact the underlying concrete levels: **compliancy and administration** also play a role.

    a. Are you confident the rules are applied correctly?
    b. What conditions must employees meet?

3. The level of **service delivery and change management** determine how you award bonuses:

    a. Do you aim for an optimisation effect through a salary bonus (CLA 90) or do you go for another type of (para)fiscal optimisation?
    b. Can the employees themselves choose how they prefer to receive their bonus (e.g. rather a present than cash)?

4. All the above choices have an impact on the Employee Experience and the message that employee gets. A **positive Employee Experience** is guaranteed if he is rewarded for his performance and his employer trusts him to spend his bonus as he sees fit.

5. In turn, that positive Employee Experience has an effect on the employee's **engagement**.

6. His engagement determines how hard the employee applies himself. The more he applies himself, the bigger his contribution to the **business objectives**.

This example illustrates that HR can produce a **positive Employee Experience** through strategic decisions. This strengthens employee engagement, thereby making a substantial contribution to achieving the **business objectives**.

Case study 2: offering training programmes

Your employee Ruben has submitted a request to enrol in a training programme. That gets you thinking about the broader role of trainings and **development** within your organisation. The Engaged Employee Recipe also provides a guiding principle for cases like this:

1. Start by determining to what extent your training policy contributes to the **strategy** of your organisation.
    a. How do the strategic objectives translate into specific training courses?
    b. Is a training plan available for every employee or do they have to submit a request?
    c. Does your development strategy take the individual development needs of your employees into account?
2. What is your corporate **culture** in terms of development?
    a. Is the development programme a priority or not?
    b. Are all employees involved - do they have a say in the type of training courses that are offered or not at all?
3. What is the role of your managers and how do they take their responsibility (**respectful leadership**)?
    a. How does the immediate superior handle training requests? Is there room for discussion? Or are certain rules applied very strictly?
    b. How does the manager detect a training need during an evaluation or discussion?
4. To what extent does your training policy **comply with** legal stipulations?
    a. Do your employees hold the necessary certificates or diplomas?
    b. Does a certain percentage of your turnover go to trainings (as determined by your joint committee)?

  c. Within your organisation, to what extent does development dovetail with the other HR processes (**fix the basics**)?

  d. Have you given any thought to how trainings impact your employees' chances of advancement within your organisation?

  e. Is the fact whether or not an employee takes training courses considered in the performance reviews?

  f. Are trainings used as a reward or an incentive for high potentials?

  g. Do you organise training courses to remedy knowledge gaps or to acquire specific skills and knowledge that may be useful to your organisation at some point in the future? (This is also a strategic consideration).

5. With training courses **administration** and **service delivery** are also a factor. How do you cope with this?

  a. Can you automate part of your administrative processes?

  b. Do you offer a training catalogue and/or platform? How easy or difficult is it for people to enrol?

6. On a **change management** level: how does your company prepare its staff for impending changes through trainings?

  a. Does the training curriculum include a section on change? This is also a **strategic** decision and it is one of the elements that determines the atmosphere and **culture** in your company.

The above example shows that the development strategy within your organisation is closely related to all other HR domains (from strategy to administration). Here, too, the choices that you make will play a central role in the **Employee Experience** and the **commitment** of your employees.

4.

Conclusion

The Engaged Employee Recipe is your guiding principle for a 360° HR approach. It shows you every relevant HR domain in relation to the rest - and to your holy grail: employee engagement.

The model can be a useful instrument, **both to starting entrepreneurs and experienced companies**. In the first case to lay the groundwork and set an 'Olympic minimum'; in the second as an aid to streamline an existing HR policy.

We recommend that you take the recipe and apply it to your own specific situation!

> No time to get to work with the model yourself? Contact us and together we will determine how to apply the model to your specific problem(s).

Find out more and kick your HR into high gear: **www.partenaprofessional.be**

5.

Glossary

Concepts outside the circle

- **Talent acquisition:** The recruitment and selection procedures. How is the copy for vacancies drawn up? How are candidates interviewed?
- **Remuneration:** Your organisation's remuneration policy. How are the salary packages decided? Is the focus on hours worked (time registration) or on accomplishment?
- **Organisational structure:** The structure of your business. How is your organisation set up? Who takes up which role? And how does the structure contribute to your business objectives?
- **Performance:** The performance of your employees. Is it in line with the objectives? Does your company achieve the desired results? How do you measure, score and follow-up performance?
- **Development:** The development of your employees. What do you offer them in terms of training and support? How can they grow and become better at their job?
- **Career & success:** The right person in the right role. Do your employees have the proper competencies for their job? How can they advance to another position? Do they derive satisfaction from their job?

Concepts in the outer circle

- **Shared strategy:** The business strategy, which is shared by all. Is there a clear strategy that results in the necessary expertise and service? Are all noses pointed in the same direction?
- **Corporate culture:** The work culture in your organisation. What values and standards does your company subscribe to? How do your employees behave, both inside and outside the company? Which characteristics set your organisation apart from others? And does this apply to the organisation as a whole?
- **Respectful leadership:** Respectful leadership. How are the strategy and culture translated towards the employees? Mutual respect at all times is a core value: all employees must respect each other, regardless of their role. Do the team leads ensure that the strategy and culture are promoted and applied?

Concepts in the second circle

- **Compliance:** Defining policy and procedures. Which procedures ensure that your work practices comply with the applicable laws and regulations? How do you marry them with your business strategy and objectives?

- **Fix the basics:** The basis of your organisation. How do you put strategy into practice? What are the building blocks (procedures and systems) of your HR policy? What agreements are in place with regard to remuneration policy, diversity, roles, …?
- **Administrative expertise:** The administrative expertise of your business. Is your administration in order and kept to a minimum? To what extent do you outsource it and/or is it automated?

Concepts in the third circle

- **Change management:** Change in order to improve. Are there any processes that can be fine-tuned? Do we strive for continuous improvement? Are you able to incorporate certain new trends and knowledge? Is your company flexible enough to implement new legislation and regulations?

- **Service delivery:** The HR service. What is your HR policy and what services do you offer your employees? What can be changed or improved?

Concepts at the heart of the circle

- **Employee Experience:** The whole of impressions, experiences and feelings of employees with regard to your company. Do your employees like working for you? How is the atmosphere among colleagues? Are the proper tools available to do a good job?
- **Employee engagement:** Employee engagement ensures that your employees help you strive for your business goals. Is everyone working toward a common goal? Are your employees also ambassadors?