

CLARITY IS THE CATALYST: HOW HR LEADERS CAN DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE



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Private sector growth is expected to decline steadily over the next quarter, according to the CBI's latest Growth Indicator. With businesses facing growing pressure to maintain performance in a challenging economic climate, employee engagement isn't a "nice to have"; it's a strategic necessity. Gallup's research shows that engaged teams are 23% more profitable, 18% more productive and far less likely to be absent or leave.

But engagement doesn't happen by accident. It's built intentionally through four key drivers: Clarity, Conversation, Commitment and Culture. This article focuses on the first of those, clarity, exploring what it means, how it drives engagement, and how HR leaders can embed it into the day-to-day reality of work.

Clarity starts at the top

Organisational clarity begins with a clear, consistent purpose, one that defines why the organisation exists and what it stands for. This provides the foundation for a clear strategy, decision-making, and performance expectations. But while clarity starts at the top, Boards and C-Suite leaders often overestimate their collective clarity, assuming their individual understanding is shared. This creates confusion, misalignment, and conflict across the organisation. Investing in executive team coaching can build and sustain shared clarity by enabling honest conversations and developing the capability to have creative conflict in leadership teams.

Clarity is personal

It's important to remember that having clarity amongst the leadership team is not enough. Leaders, and particularly HR leaders, need to communicate purpose and values effectively and consistently across the business. However, if by 'clear communication' HR read this as 'telling people clearly,' then they are missing half the story.

Being 'told' is never enough. People need to make sense of it for themselves, which means understanding why the organisation exists, how it operates, and how their role contributes to its success. When individuals are clear about what's expected of them, including how their performance is measured, how it supports the team, and connects to the organisation's purpose, true clarity begins to form. But clarity isn't just organisational, it's also personal. If the organisation's goals don't align with an individual's own values, ambitions, or sense of purpose, sustained engagement is unlikely. This is particularly vital for an HR leader working to create clarity for others. How can a leader be inspiring if they are not personally inspired and committed to the company?

HR leaders must be able to answer and communicate:

- Why is the organisational purpose important to them?
- What in the strategy of the organisation, the HR strategy and individual or team goals, allows them to develop in line with their own goals?
- How does delivering success against their team and personal targets give them satisfaction?

Coaching for clarity

The world is never static, and 'perfect clarity' is an ideal, rarely attained and constantly being reinvented. Purpose should always be clear, but strategy can only ever be a current hypothesis to which teams are working. Clarity does not imply certainty or rigidity, which is why leaders at every level need to constantly attend to and focus on clarity of purpose and values, and ensure alignment with them.

Some leaders abdicate responsibility if they aren't 'given' clarity by their bosses. Those who lead must be responsible for creating clarity for their team and building wider clarity with others, even if they don't have it delivered to them by their own line manager. Leadership or executive coaching can be a tremendous catalyst to help senior leaders develop that clarity, providing reflective learning in a supportive and challenging thinking space.



HR leaders often recognise the value of personal leadership coaching as a space to examine and hone personal clarity and authenticity. They also recognise the value of insight into individual values, which enables teams to have honest and open conversations that foster work on team engagement and performance. That team element is particularly vital in today's diverse and virtual teams. HR leaders invest in it for others; however, they can be guilty of neglecting their own opportunities to develop more powerful clarity and to invest in HR teams. This is a missed opportunity to empower HR to support clarity throughout the organisation.

The role of HR in creating clarity

HR as a function can support leaders in creating and sustaining clarity. The key levers that they hold are in:

- Role design
- Performance evaluation,
- Feedback
- Development

Building clarity into role descriptions involves ensuring that the purpose of a role and its contribution to the team and wider purpose are stated clearly and coherently. HR professionals support leaders by coaching them on how to develop and communicate clear direction, particularly when setting goals and targets that align with and measure progress toward the organisation's purpose.

Evaluation and reward systems, both formal and informal, must be built and operated to be coherent with the organisation's purpose and values. It is important at an organisational level that people are rewarded and recognised when they meet these expectations. If reward and performance evaluation are inconsistent with purpose and values, then clarity is lost, and engagement, productivity and trust in leadership are undermined.

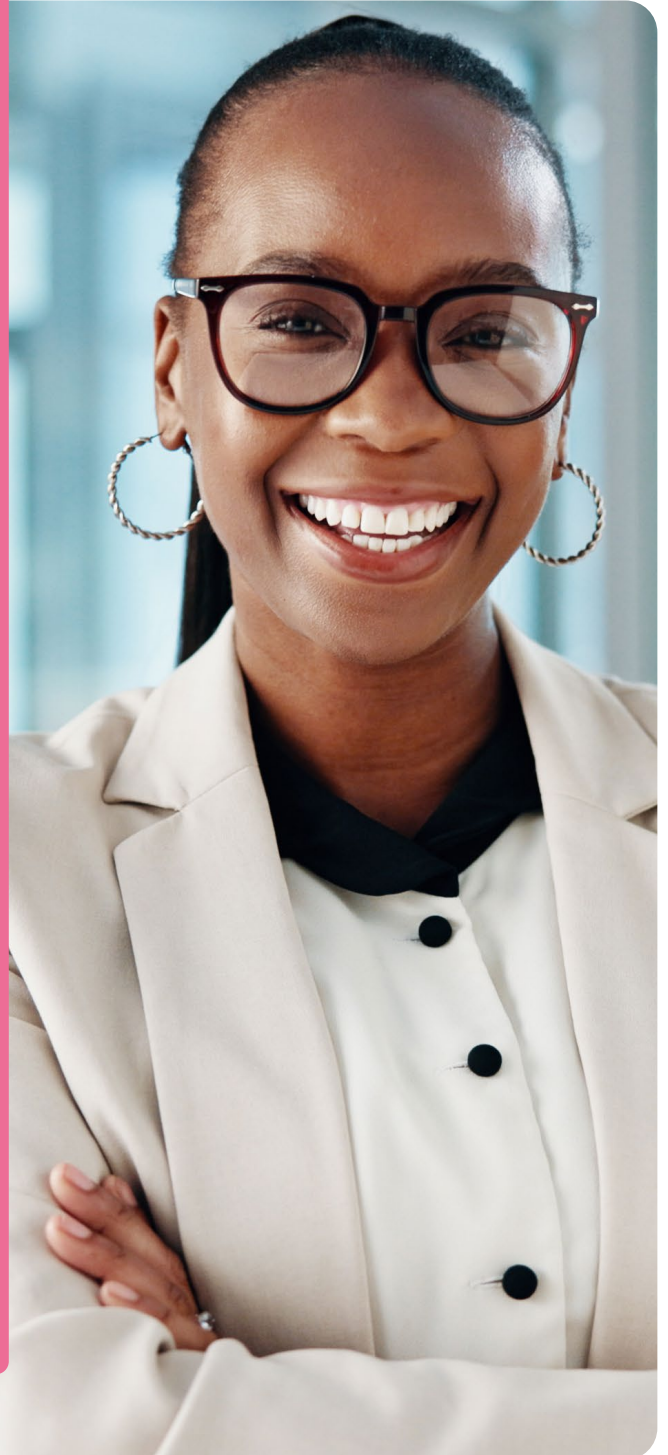
Feedback is a vital tool in sustaining clarity. The world is complex and changing; navigating to deliver on purpose requires constant adjustment. If leaders and managers fail to consistently and coherently provide and seek individual and team feedback, both positive and negative, clarity can't be sustained. Waiting for an end-of-year performance evaluation to find out that employees are significantly off course is not productive. Plus, just 'giving' feedback to others is insufficient if HR leaders can't coach for change. Unfortunately, the complex, changing nature of the world can make leaders feel like they lack the time to give constant feedback and coach their teams. Leaders may also avoid giving feedback because they lack confidence in their ability to give and receive feedback effectively.

They may resort to directive styles because they lack confidence in their ability to drive performance through coaching; however, avoiding difficult conversations can lead to lost clarity.

HR plays a crucial role in overcoming these barriers in companies by providing effective development through coaching skills training and supporting leaders and leadership teams with effective coaching, whether that is internally or externally provided. Building the skills of giving feedback and being an effective coach into the role requirements of leaders, plus ensuring reward systems and evaluations reflect a manager's performance, keeps these key facets of their role on leaders' priority lists, especially in challenging times.

Clarity isn't just a concept; it's a daily leadership discipline.

The time to invest in clarity is now. Without it, all the effort and energy spent on HR work in the organisation are diluted, and productivity is squandered. HR leaders should ask themselves how clear they really are on the organisation's purpose, strategy, and expectations, and, more importantly, how clear is their team. Exploring their own purpose and values, and how these values align with organisational goals, can help HR leaders gain greater clarity, which in turn will drive greater impact on engagement and performance.



If you'd like to discuss how we can support you and your teams with creating clarity, please get in touch with us at enquiry@theocm.co.uk.

¹<https://www.cbi.org.uk/media-centre/articles/private-sector-growth-expectations-remain-weak-cbi-growth-indicator-june-2025/>

²<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236927/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>