



Boosting
productivity
through
people



**#Productivity
ThroughPeople**

9 October 2025

Broadway House
London SW1

IES Annual Conference 2025

ies institute for
employment
studies

Agenda:

09.30 Coffee and registration

09.50 Welcome and opening remarks - *Naomi Clayton, Chief Executive, IES*

10.00 A whole new world: The things we see and the things we don't in the labour market of 2030 - *Neil Carberry, Chief Executive, REC*

10.45 Organisational case study: Making AI work for your people - *Matthew Ambrose, DEEP UK Project Lead, IEP*

11.15 Coffee

11.30 Engagement trends and their impact on UK productivity: Insights from the Engage for Success 2024 annual survey - *Dr Sarah Pass, Senior Lecturer, Nottingham Business School, Engage for Success*

12.00 The links between training, organisational climate, and digital innovation - *Professor Maura Sheehan, Edinburgh Napier University*

12.30 Lunch

13.15 Employee voice and productivity - *Lucy O'Melia, Head of Learning & Development, IPA*

13.45 Organisational case study: Wellbeing and productivity - *Dr Sally Wilson and Dr Alison Carter, Principal Research Fellows, IES*

14:15 Panel discussion: Where should organisations focus their efforts to improve productivity through people?

14.50 Closing remarks

The event will be chaired by *Dan Lucy, Director, HR Research and Consulting, IES*

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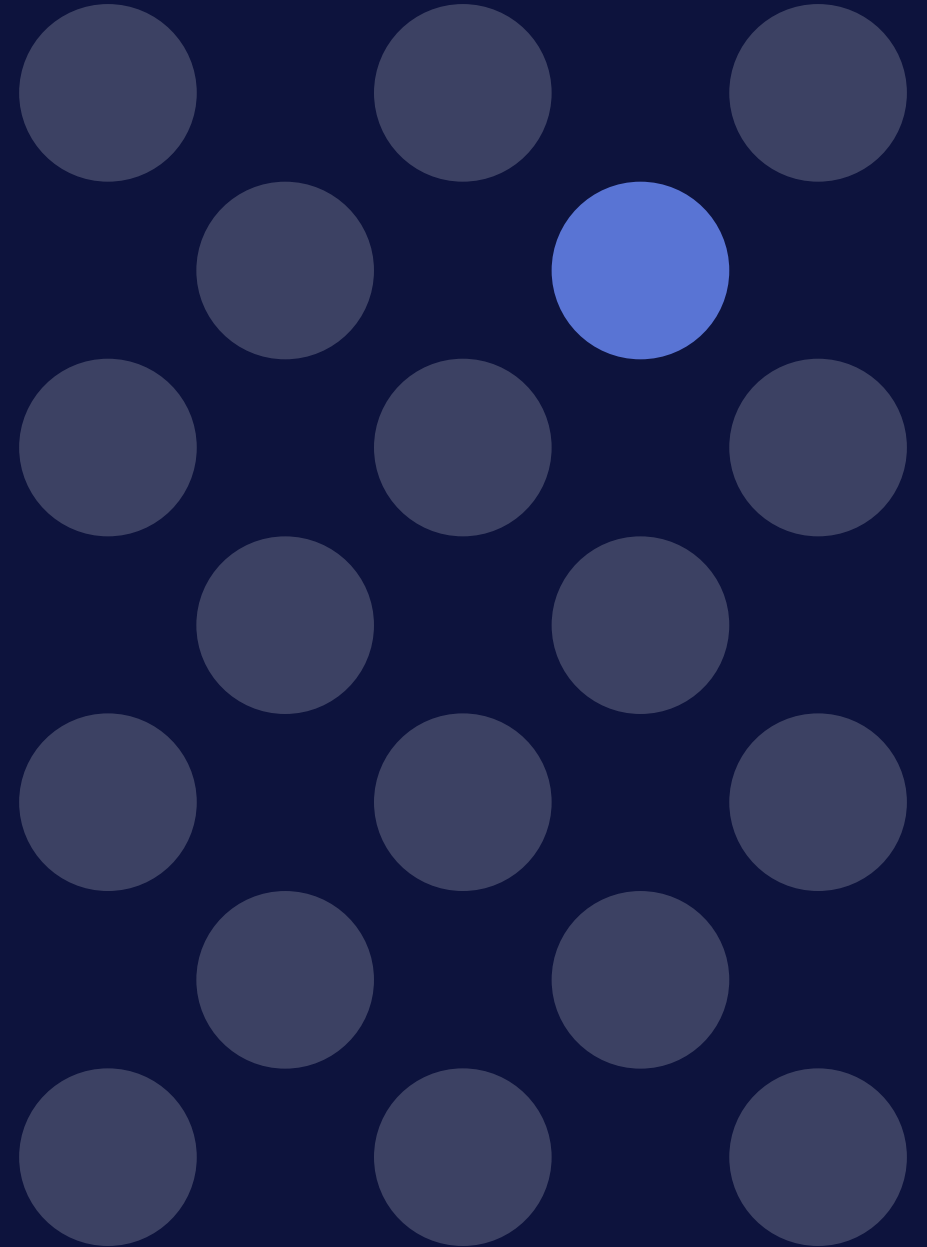


REC

Recruitment
& Employment
Confederation

A whole new world: the things we see and the things we don't of the labour market of 2030

Neil Carberry OBE, Chief Executive



Today

Chief Executive of the REC, the body for the UK's talent industry.

10 years on the Council of Acas.

7 Years on the Low Pay Commission.

14 years leading people work for the CBI.

RFU referee...

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RFU referee...



“We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten.”



Or...

“We tend to over-estimate change in the things we think will change, under-estimate change in the things that we think will stay the same, and over time, forget about the things we thought would change but didn’t.”

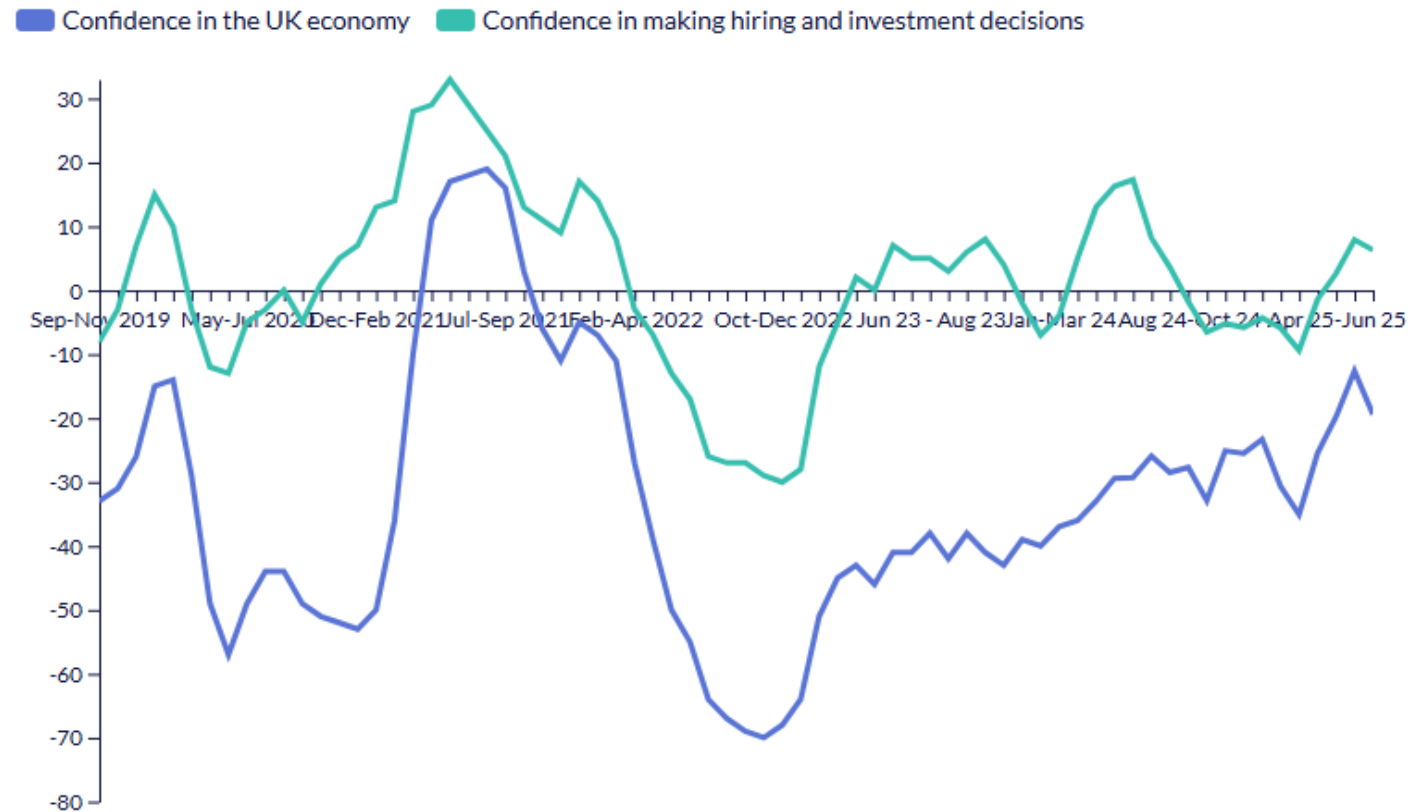
Simon Russell



Something is definitely changing...

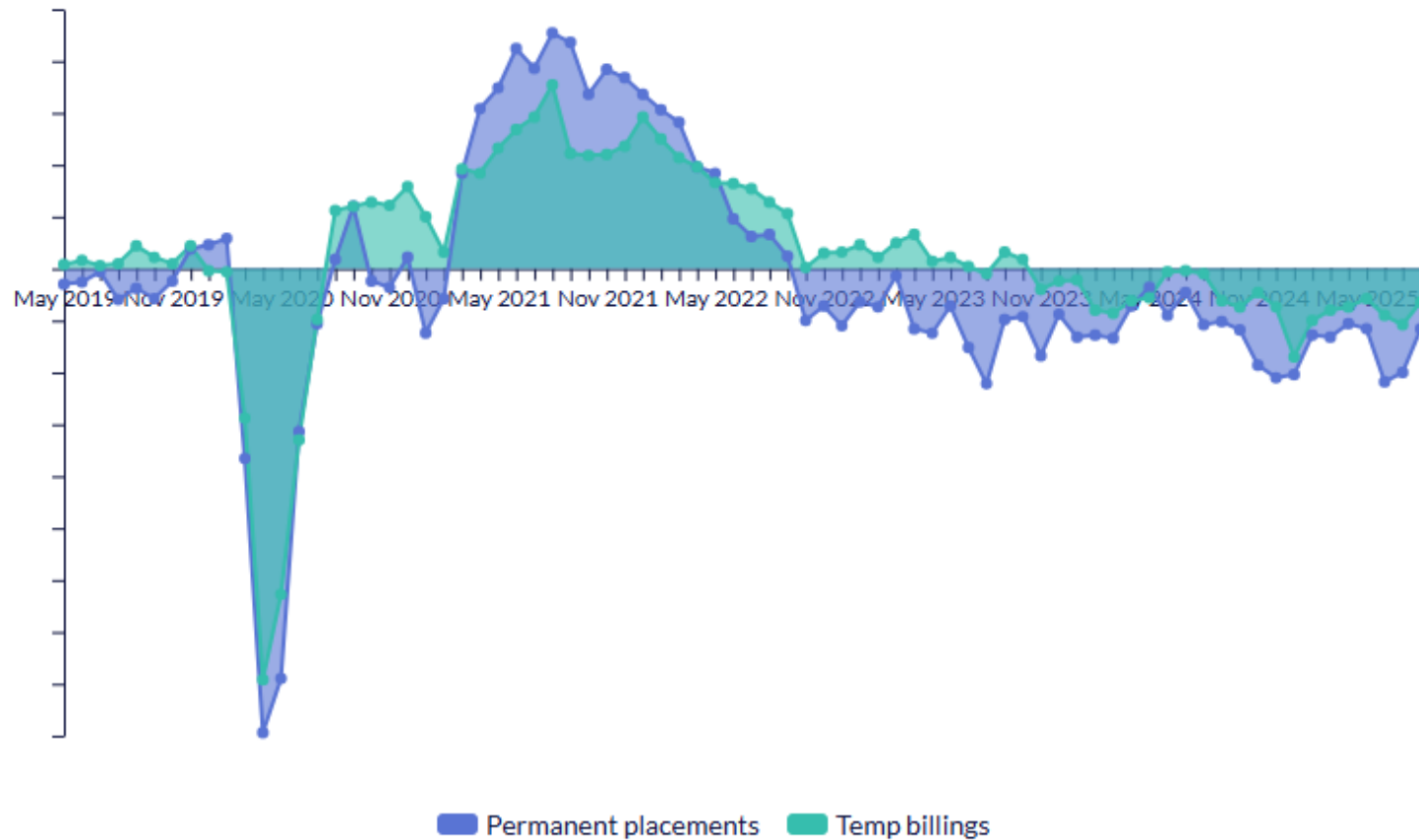
Jobs Outlook: Hiring intent strengthens

Employer confidence trends



Report on Jobs: Less negative picture emerges

Permanent placements and temporary billings indices









Warning!









"I understand past performance is no guarantee of future results, but I'm a little confused by your winking and air quotes."

| What might be different?

The world has changed

Rank	Name	Market Cap	F
☆ 1	 NVIDIA NVDA	\$4.269 T	
☆ 2	 Microsoft MSFT	\$3.800 T	
☆ 3	 Apple AAPL	\$3.500 T	
☆ 4	 Alphabet (Google) GOOG	\$3.032 T	
☆ 5	 Amazon AMZN	\$2.469 T	
☆ 6	 Meta Platforms (Facebook) META	\$1.906 T	

The world has changed

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How real is this?



- Money pouring in...
- Point solutions easier than systemic
- Impatient capital
- Poor institutional understanding
- Capital misallocation inevitable, BUT...
- The dot.com bust didn't kill the internet.

Who would have thought it?

AI is not killing jobs, US study finds

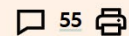
Research shows little evidence that cutting-edge tech such as chatbots is putting people out of work



© FT montage/Getty Images

Claire Jones in Washington and **Melissa Heikkilä** in London

Published OCT 1 2025



The mass adoption of ChatGPT is yet to have a big disruptive impact on US jobs, contradicting claims by chief executives and tech bosses that artificial intelligence is already upending labour markets.



Reasons to believe in HI as well as AI

Pushes for HI (1)

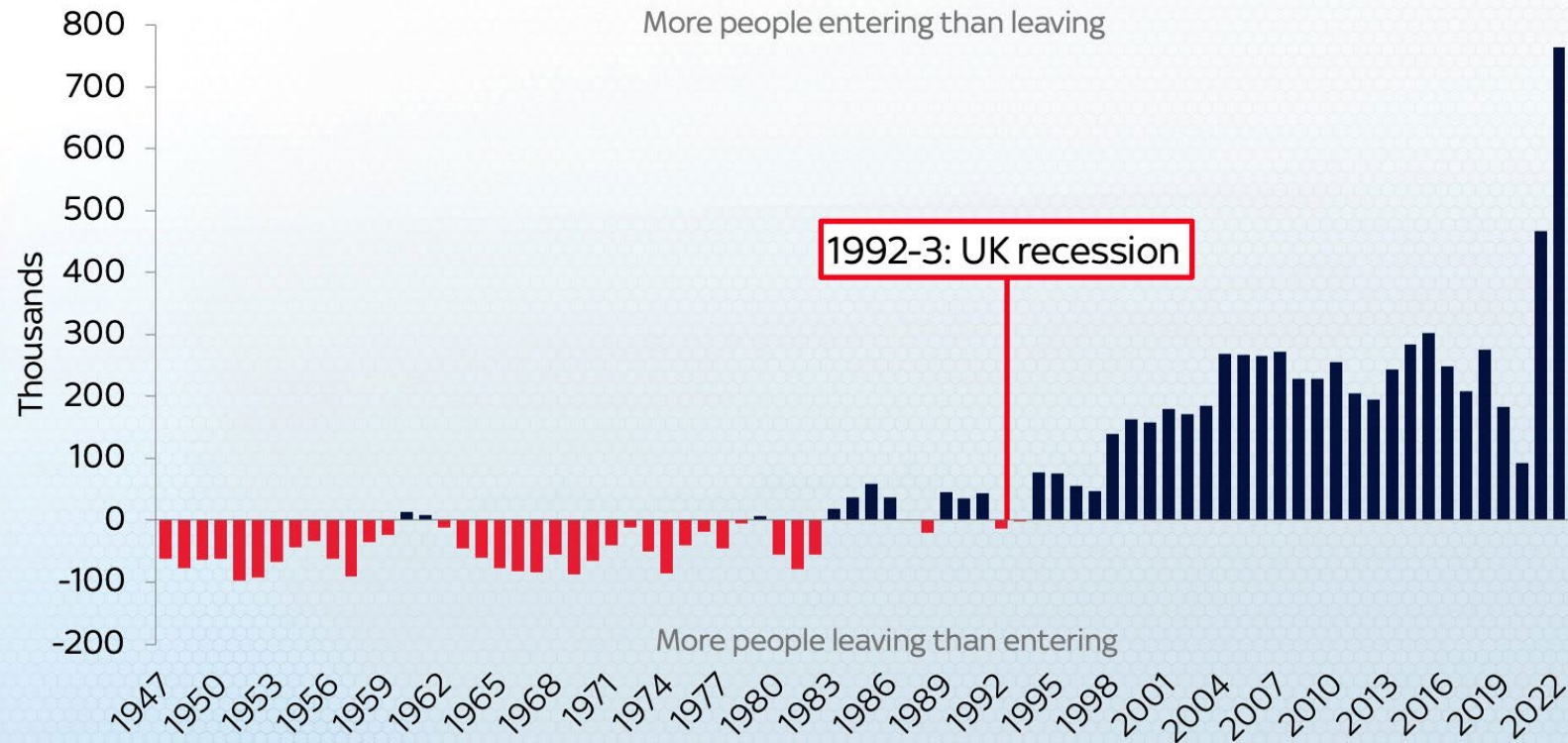


Pushes for HI (2)

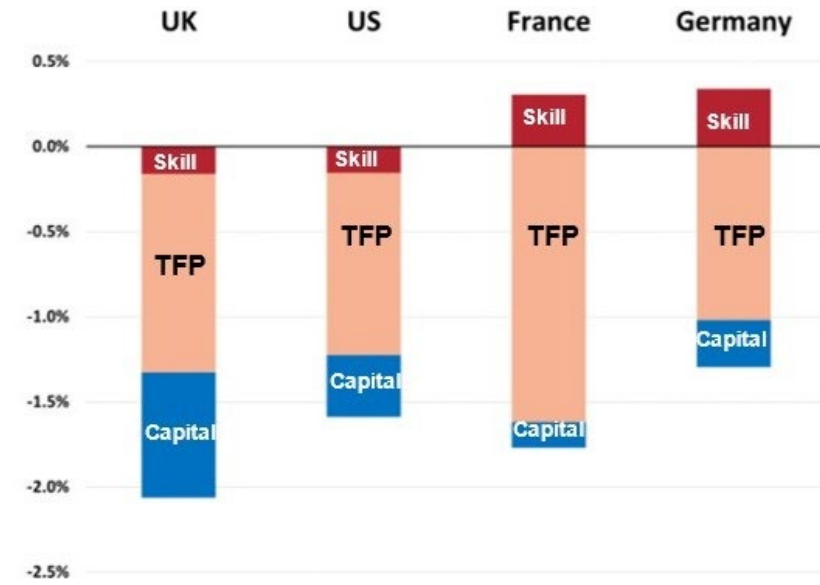
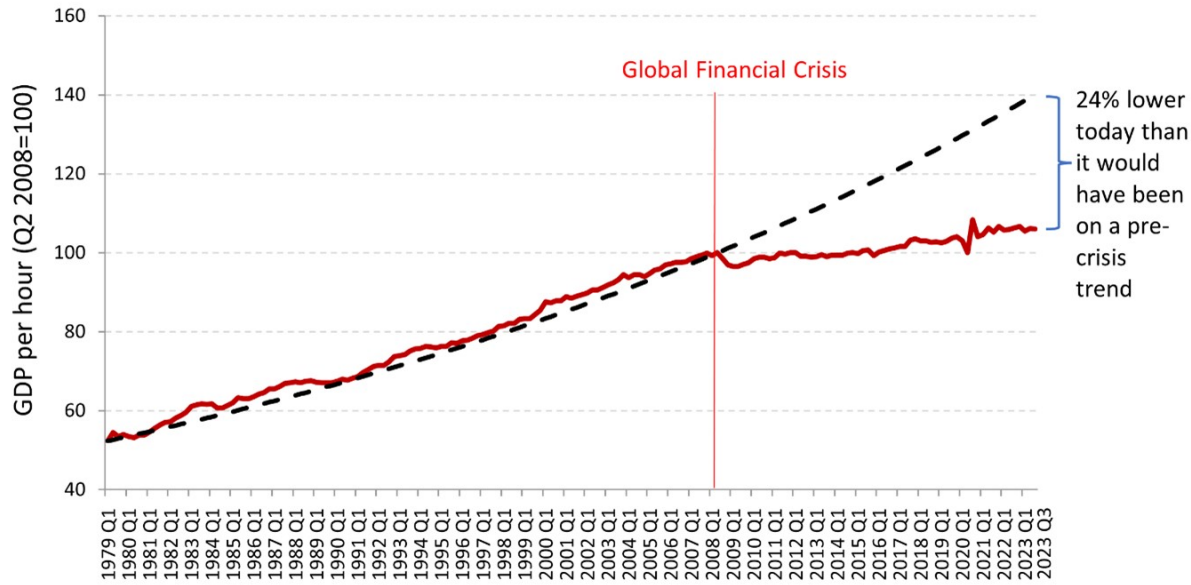
WHEN WAS NET MIGRATION LAST ZERO?

Source: ONS/Bank of England

Annual net migration since 1947

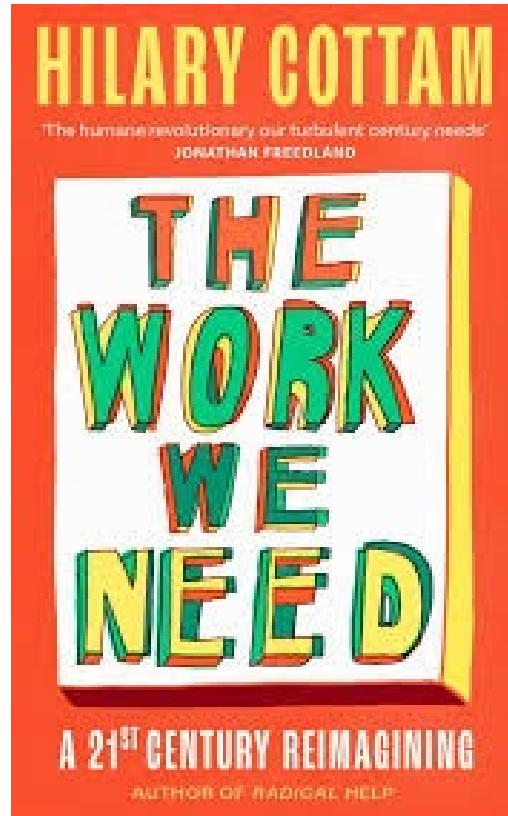


Pushes for HI (3)



Getting our recruitment right **alone** adds £7.7bn of productivity every year

Pushes for HI (4)



Where do the challenges to parties lie?

This is where we are...



Remembering Hayek

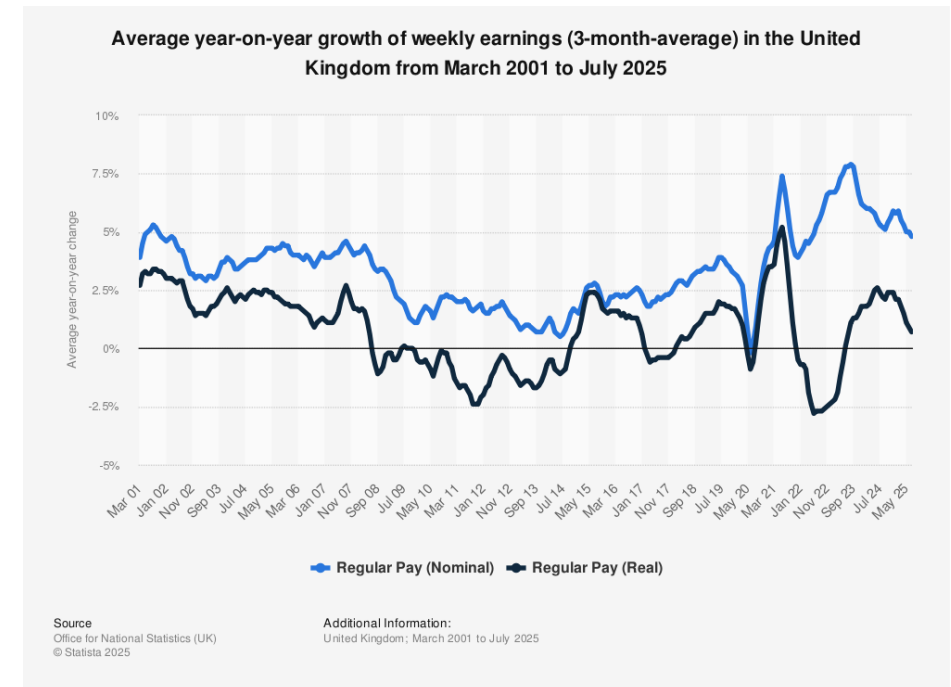
“The curious task of economics is to demonstrate to men how little they really know about what they imagine they can design. To the naive mind that can conceive of order only as the product of deliberate arrangement, it may seem absurd that in complex conditions order, and adaptation to the unknown, can be achieved more effectively by decentralizing decisions and that a division of authority will actually extend the possibility of overall order. Yet that decentralisation actually leads to more information being taken into account.”



Employers – it is genuinely tough

- High cost of capital, and high inflation – low market price elasticity.
- Market changing faster than ever, with high levels of international competition and lightning changes in tech and therefore skills. Further mixing of talent models inevitable.
- Tough trade-offs capital vs labour – loose markets have tightened in both. Skills deficits in addressing this.
- Short-term capital outlook amongst investors. And management shock?

- Long-run pay moderation made possible by tolerable low interest rates has dissipated – workers and employers face the same challenge. Pay pressure is back.
- High worker demand for flexibility not understood by unions and employers – too many employers fail the Declaration of Philadelphia principle. Especially in the public sector.
- ...Need for change undersold to workers.
- Protection challenges remain – or are amplified.
- Lack of collective vehicles and modernised voice. Skills deficits here too?





- Fiscal and Regulatory whirlwind risks self-defeat...
- ...ERB in particular undercooked and too little analysis of effect. Misses the real needs.
- Stewardship matters – as does managing the parties.
- Too little in growth plans on people.

What conclusions can we draw?

- Institutions matter. But they require moderation...
- Skills systems matter. But they require incentives to be aligned...
- Leadership amongst TUs and businesses needs to be challenged. Growth requires trade-offs. But change comes from below.
- Other policies need to align to support the labour market.

This is an opportunity

But...

Speed kills.





Discussion



Thank you!



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Project Deep: Artificial Intelligence in Employability Practice

Matthew Ambrose

DEEP UK Project Lead





“It’s not really enjoyable to make music now. It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of practice, you have to get really good at an instrument or really good at a piece of production software. I think the majority of people don’t enjoy the majority of time they spend making music.”

Mikey Shulman, CEO of Suno.

serco

Should we be suspicious of AI?



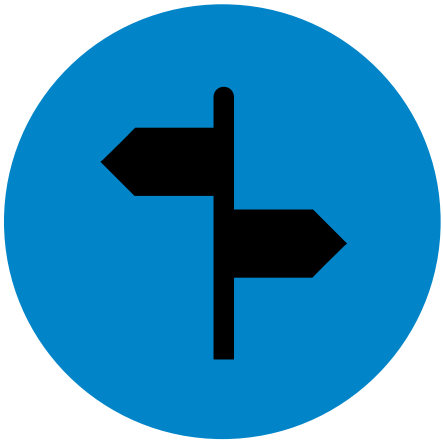
serco

Assessing AI opportunities



- Increased customer engagement and access **vs** control over customer interactions.
- Drive efficiency and labour cost savings **vs** loss of knowledgeable, experienced workforce if (or when) AI degradation occurs.
- Analysis of 'non-value adding' tasks (what is the true cost?)
- What are the appropriate controls?

Our way forward

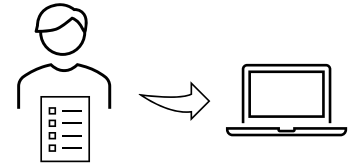
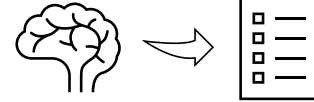
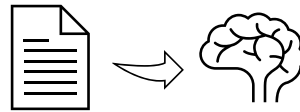
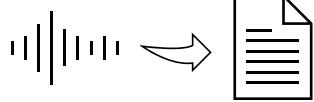
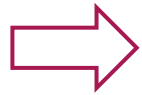
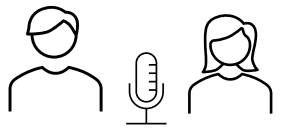


- Initially, AI is only being used to support practitioners, not to provide direct services to customers.
- Efficiency savings will be exploited to improve service delivery, not to cut labour costs.
- Practitioners will be involved in identifying candidates for AI support.
- AI will be trained only on Serco's previous Practitioner outputs, with additional controls to reduce / eliminate hallucinations and degradation.
- All AI outputs will be checked by the Practitioner before being added to the customer file.

The Serco model



- AI produces summarized outputs from full appointment transcripts
- Select output from a simple drop-down list
- Practitioners review outputs and can edit if required before uploading output to customer file



1. Conversation between Job Coach and Participant is recorded

2. Audio file is transcribed & converted to text file

3. AI engine ingests text file & Job Coach requests CV, Case Note or Actions

4. AI produces requested output

5. Job Coach checks requested output, edits if necessary and uploads to Case Management System

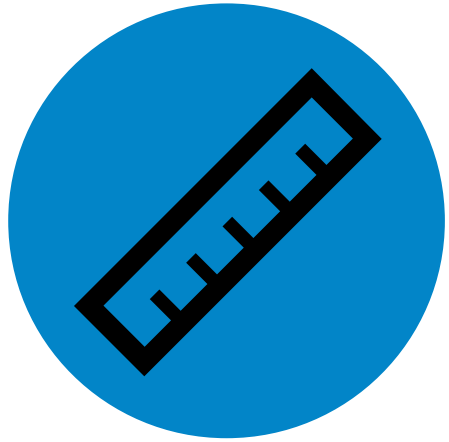
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Adoption



- Usage up from 1,290 interventions in month 1 to 10,197 in month 8 (against an increase in users of just 20%).
- AHT has dropped from 56 minutes in month 1 to 28 minutes in month 8 (using for shorter intervention types / ad-hoc calls).

Measurable benefits



- Action Plans:
 - 50% increase in volume of actions set per action plan
 - Significant broadening of actions set
- Case Notes:
 - 75% reduction in time spent typing notes
 - 20% increase in quality of case notes
- CV's:
 - No Participant leaves IM without at least a basic CV

What we learned



- AI initiatives are people projects, not technology projects. Start with the problem, not the solution.
- Invest in scalable solutions (to what extent can the basic concept be adapted to other use cases?).
- Be close to the outputs and correct in real time for rapid improvement and adoption.
- Ensure prompts remove non-relevant content, prevent the AI from using any other source material.
- Understand how people feel and work with the sceptics. If they buy in, then widespread adoption will follow.
- Ensure there is a benefit to the user beyond just efficiency.



Q&A

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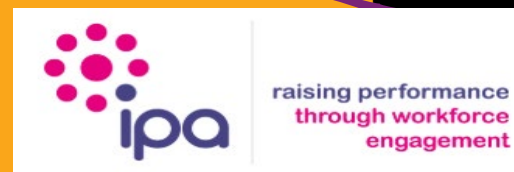


ENGAGE
FOR
SUCCESS

ENGAGEMENT TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON UK PRODUCTIVITY

Insights from the Engage for Success 2025 annual survey

Dr Sarah Pass



CONTEXT

Engage for Success UK annual engagement survey

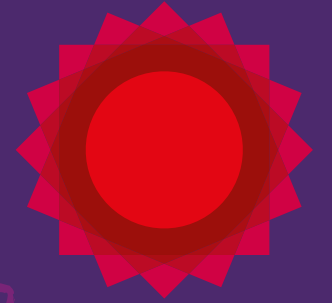
Data provides **actionable insights** to enable **evidence-based recommendations** for the government and organisations

Focus of presentation:

- Trends in engagement
- Engagement and productivity
- 5 key insights from the annual survey

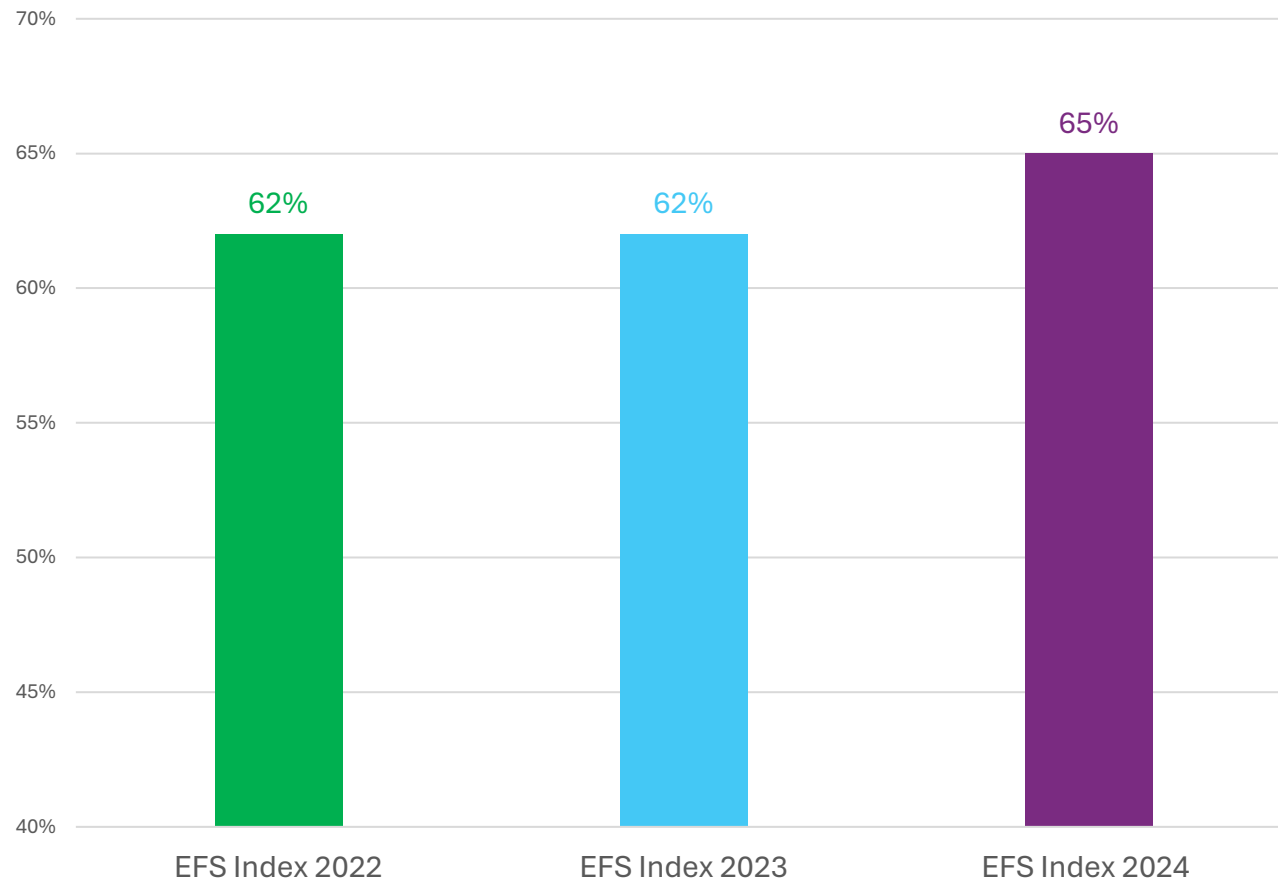


ENGAGEMENT TRENDS



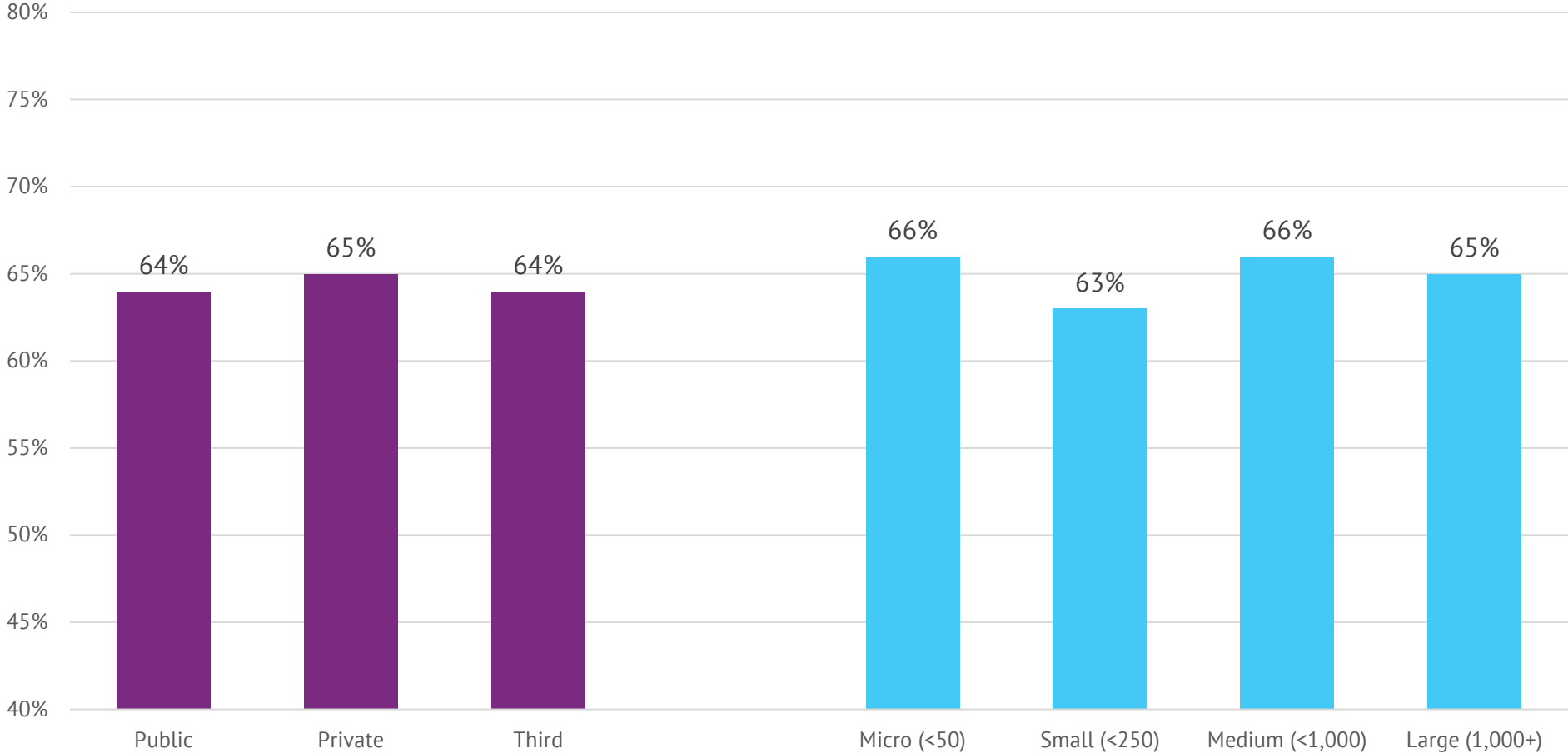
NATIONAL LEVEL

Significant drop in engagement during the pandemic
Starting to see improvements in stagnation



ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Minimal variations across regions



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

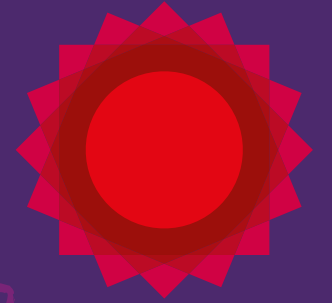
Variations in engagement levels at the individual level:

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Sexuality
- ▶ Caring commitments
- ▶ Position in organisation
- ▶ Socio-economic background
- ▶ Long-term health conditions
- ▶ Neurodivergence

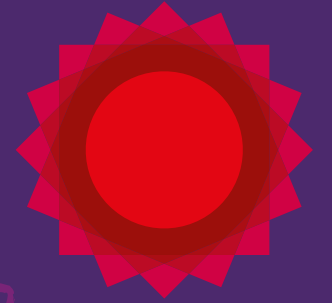
No variations in gender or ethnicity



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY
PRODUCTIVITY?



SURVEY INSIGHTS



KEY INSIGHT #1: PERFORMANCE

Highly engaged employees have **higher** ratings of **individual performance**

Highly engaged employees view their organisation as **outperforming competitors...**

...nearly 50% more likely to rate the **quality of their organisation's products, services,** and programs as better

...nearly 50% more likely to rate the **satisfaction of their customers** or clients as better



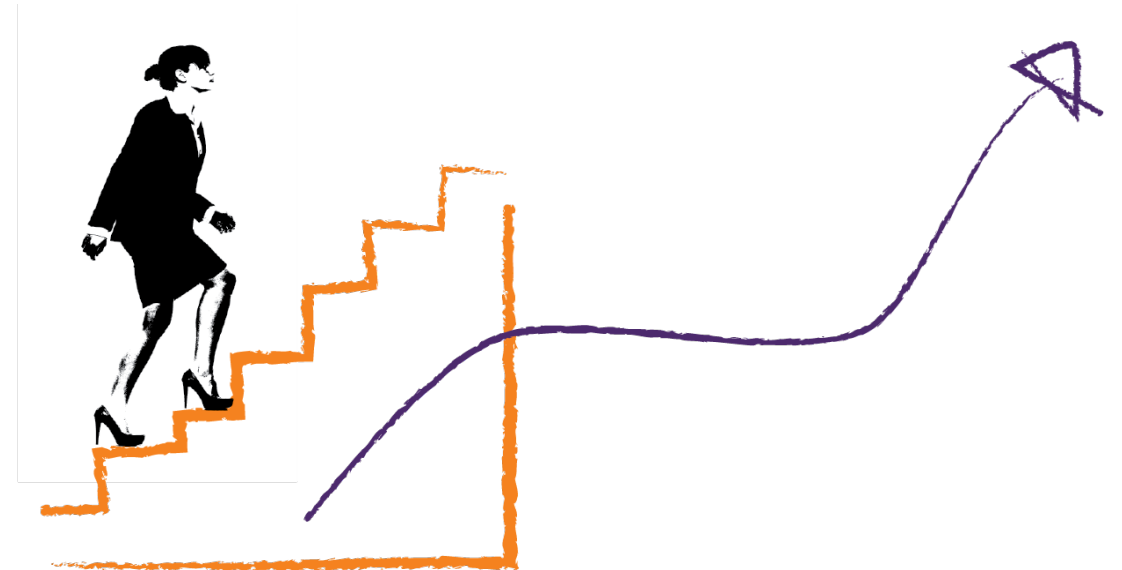
KEY INSIGHT#2: INNOVATION

Highly engaged employees...

...26% more likely to propose **innovations** to enhance team performance

...50% more likely to believe their organisation outperforms competitors in **developing new products and services**

...33% more likely to **initiate** better ways of doing core tasks



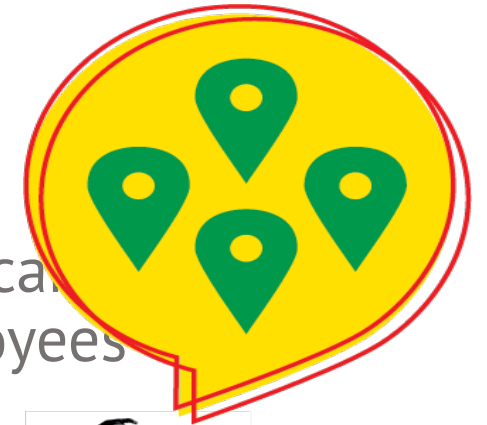
KEY INSIGHT #3: RETENTION AND ATTRACTION OF TALENT

Employees with **low engagement**....

...5 times more likely to think about **leaving** the organisation

...4 times more likely to be **planning their exit**

Employees with **high engagement** believe their organisation is significantly **better** than its competitors at **attracting and retaining** essential employees



KEY INSIGHT #4: RESILIENCE AND ATTITUDES TO WORK

Employees with low engagement levels are 3.5 times more likely to feel unwell due to work stress

...4 times more likely to feel depressed due to work

Employees with **higher engagement levels**...

...less likely to view work as purely a financial need

...more likely to offer **discretionary effort**

...more likely to **support** others during busy times

...more likely to see their work as **meaningful**

Engaged employees are 41% more likely to want to work



KEY INSIGHT #5: ENGAGEMENT DIVIDE

Variations across engagement connected to health and protected characteristics

Employees with **long-term health conditions** or **neurodivergence**...

...more likely to suffer from **unmanageable job stress**

...experience higher levels of **presenteeism**

...more likely to **consider leaving** the organisation

...significantly **lower engagement** levels

When reasonable adjustments **ARE in place**...

...**45% increase** in engagement

...engagement levels **match** employees without conditions



People Issues NOT Prioritised
2 in 5 UK employees

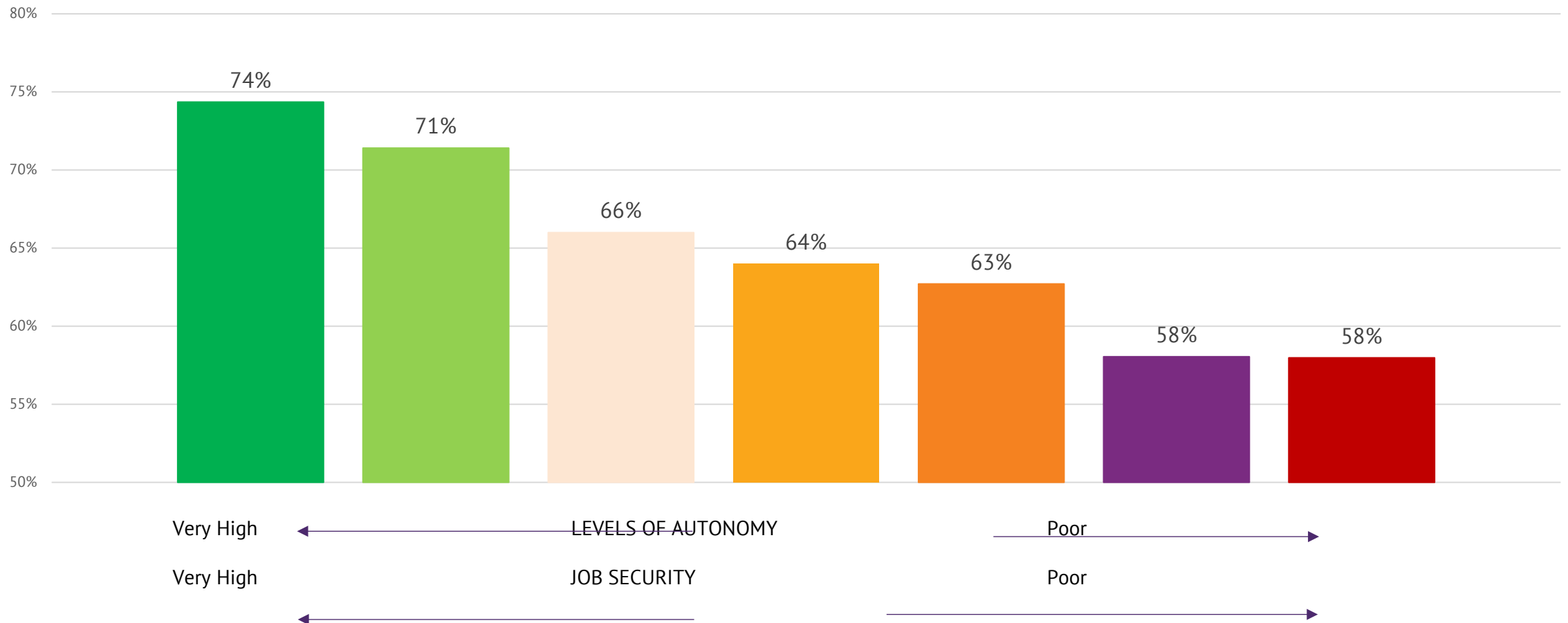
25% Unmanageable job stress
48% Engagement level

People Issues Prioritised
2 in 5 UK employees

4% Unmanageable job stress
79% Engagement level

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT DIVIDE

- Higher managerial and professional
- Small employers and own accounts
- Lower managerial and professional
- Intermediate Occupations
- Lower supervisory and technical
- Semi routine and technical
- Routine occupations



SUMMARY



Engagement is a strategic lever – driving productivity, innovation, retention, and employee wellbeing

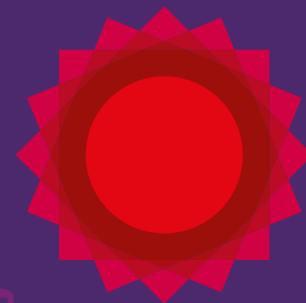
...but often seen as a 'nice to have' or 'soft issue'

Lack of knowledge and awareness around how to 'do' engagement

A **persistent engagement divide** exists across the UK economy

Disengagement signals risk – a leading indicator of potential workforce withdrawal and rising economic inactivity

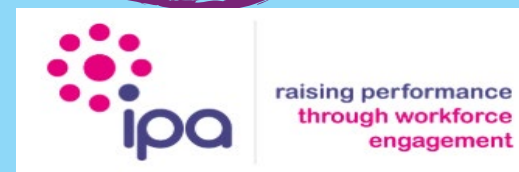
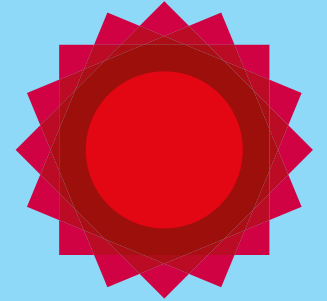
QUESTIONS?



RESEARCH TEAM

Dr Sarah Pass
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Dr Yu-Ling Lui-Smith
Serban Popescu

For more information, contact:
Sarah Pass at: Sarah.Pass@ntu.ac.uk



EFS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INDEX

Overall Satisfaction

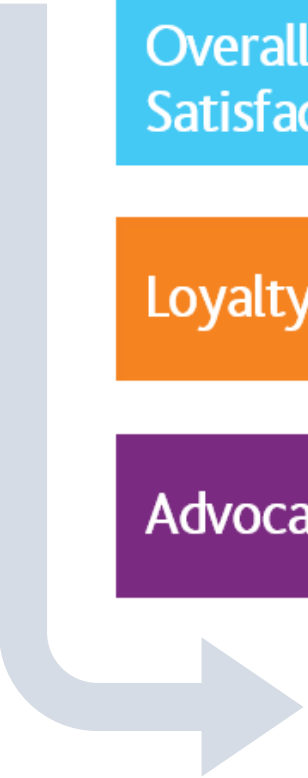
Overall, how satisfied are you with your organisation as a place to work?
5-point scale from Very Dissatisfied (1) to Very Satisfied (5)

Loyalty

I plan to be working for my organisation three years from now
5-point scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)

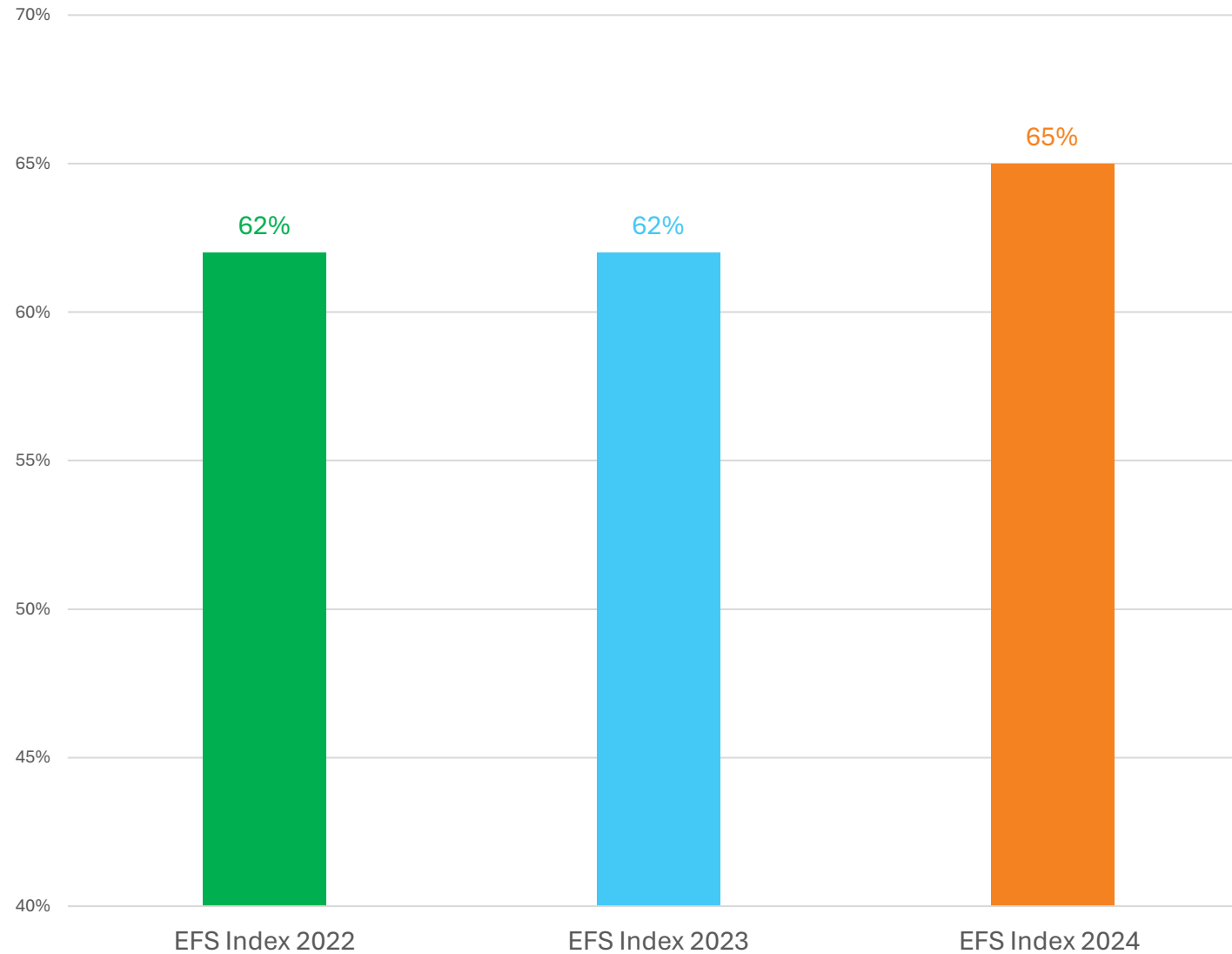
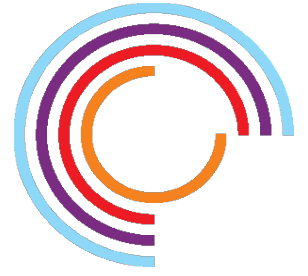
Advocacy

I would recommend my organisation as a great place to work
5-point scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)

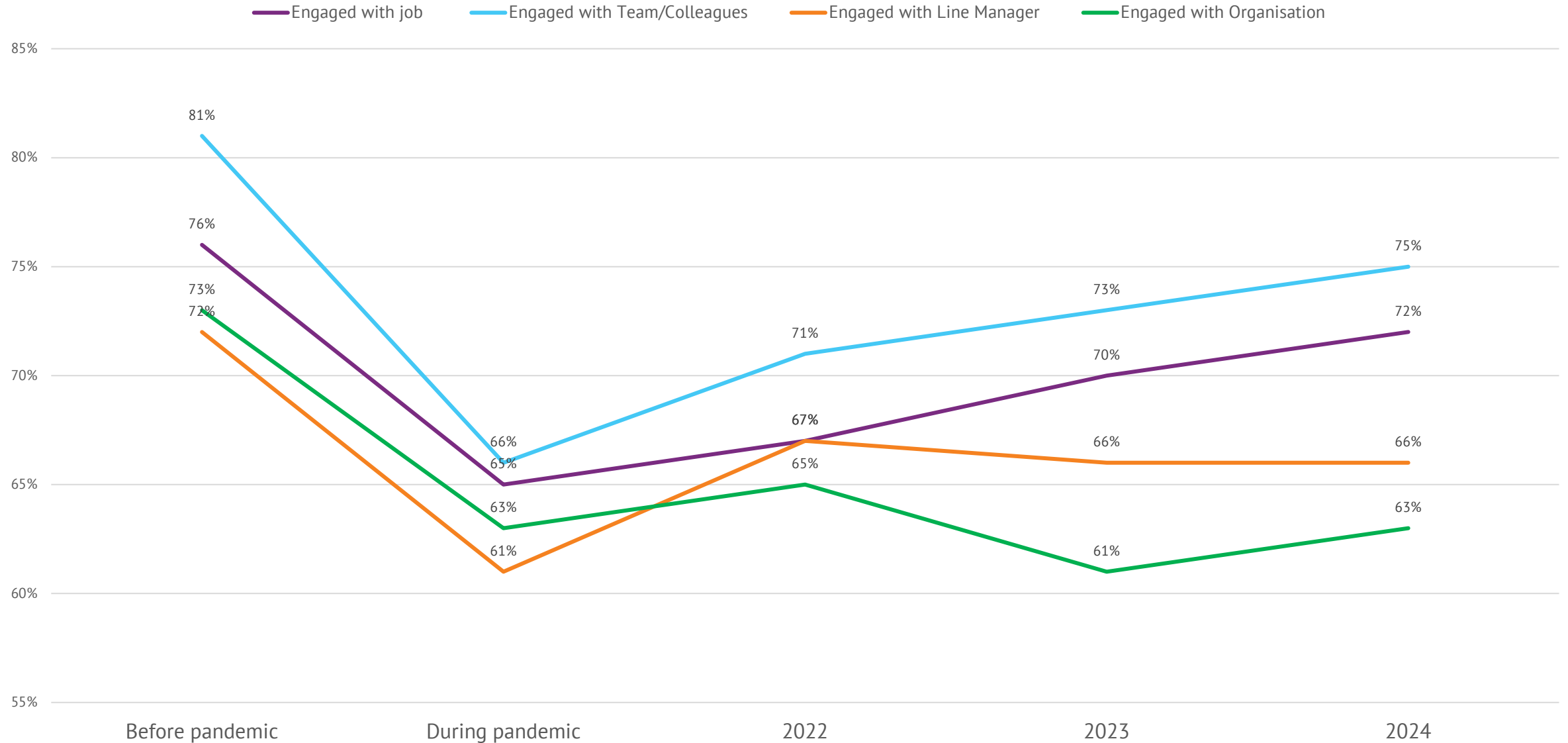


Simple average across the 3 questions
Converted to % to make it more intuitive
Used as a benchmark


EFS ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT INDEX



SELF-REPORTED FEELINGS OF ENGAGEMENT



REFLECTING BACK



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The links between training investments, organisational climate and innovation performance

Maura Sheehan
Professor of International Management
Edinburgh Napier University
M.Sheehan@napier.ac.uk



Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

The Business School

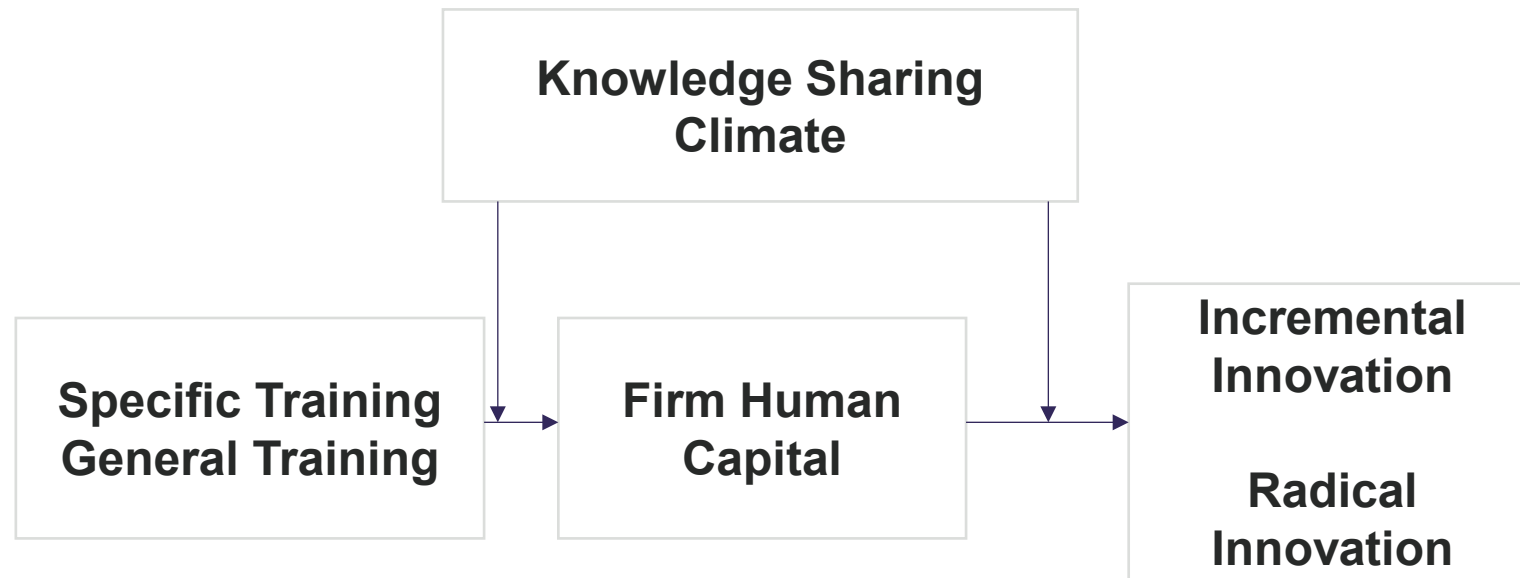
Overview

- Summary of key findings from a recent journal article, 'Training **Investments** and Innovation Gains in Knowledge Intensive Businesses: The Role of Firm Level Human Capital and Knowledge Sharing Climate', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 2024, Sheehan, Maura, Garavan, Thomas & Morley, Michael (<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12586>)
- Quick update on findings from a re-survey of companies that focus on AI, HRM practices and innovation performance.

Context

- Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS) - Scientific Research & Development; Advertising & Market Research; other Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities.
- Finland, France, Sweden and UK
- Survey data (n = 816), collected in two waves (2013 (T1) & 2016 (T2)), R&D managers & most senior HR manager

Conceptual Model



Key Study Variables

- **Firm Human Capital:** We measured firm level human capital at T1. HR managers provided data on firm level human capital utilizing all five of Subramaniam and Youndt's measures (2005: 463) on a seven- point Likert scale indicating the extent to which respondents strongly disagreed (1) or strongly agreed (7) with each measure. Sample items included: “**our employees are highly skilled**” and “**our employees are experts in their particular jobs and functions.**”
- **Specific Training (ST):** “In this study, we define specific training as training that is directly related to the operation of the firm and the roles that employees perform. Examples that are likely to be relevant to your firm would be your **quality control procedures; firm-specific software; training related to improving the satisfaction of your firm's supply chain stakeholders**”. Respondents provided data on the average number of days per annum allocated to specific training per employee

Key Study Variables

- **General Training (GT):** “In this study, we define general training as training that has application to multiple organizations and is therefore transferable to other organizations. Examples that are likely to be relevant to your firm would be the coverage of fees for employees' **post graduate studies** (e.g., MBAs, MScs; PhDs/DBAs); **language training; coaching; training in general software languages** (e.g., Java, Python).” **Note – data collected before AI – currently doing follow-up surveys.** Respondents provided data on the average number of days per annum allocated to general training per employee.
- **Knowledge Sharing Climate (KSC):** Following Foss et al., (2015: 966) (adapted from ideas developed by Husted and Michailova 2002) all four statements were formulated negatively as “discouraging knowledge sharing”. They were subsequently reverse coded in the statistical analysis. The four statements were: “**It is important to keep your own ideas secret until one is acknowledged as the source of the idea**”; “**Knowledge sharing reduces the incentive for others to create new knowledge**”; “**Time spent on knowledge sharing could be spent on more important activities**”; and “**Sharing knowledge is risky because others may misinterpret the shared knowledge**”.

Key Study Variables

- **Radical Innovation:** We provided respondents with the definition of radical innovation as follows: “Radical innovation is conceptualized as **substantial changes** in technology and assumes important changes in a firm's knowledge, offering new benefits to existent or new markets and customers.” Examples, the first i-Phone, the first Covid-19 vaccine.
- **Incremental Innovation:** We provided respondents with the definition of incremental innovation as follows: “Incremental innovation involves making **small and continuous improvements** to existing products, services, processes, or business models, based on customer feedback, market trends, or operational efficiency.” Examples, subsequent 16+ versions of the i-Phone.

Summary of Key Findings

Range of theoretically informed hypotheses derived and tests via statistical tests and econometric estimations, but **to spare our sanity**, in sum.....

- Higher levels of **firm human capital** are statistically significantly associated with both types of innovation, but most important for radical innovation.
- **Specific training** is statistically significantly associated with incremental innovation, but not radical innovation.
- **General training** is statistically significantly associated with both types of innovation, but most important for radical innovation.
- Firms with a strong culture of knowledge sharing (**knowledge sharing climate**), have higher returns to both types of training, firm human capital and both types of innovation.

Why do these findings matter?

- Given the significant resource constraints that most organisations are operating in, our results indicate the importance of linking training investments to your organisation's innovation strategy (ies)/priorities (eg radical or incremental & if a mix perhaps linking individuals to training investments and the type of innovation they are tasked with).
- Importance of having an innovation strategy (ies).
- AI appears to be influencing such strategies – shift toward a greater emphasis on radical innovation. Seeing a lot of investment in AI Bootcamps by firms, including SMEs.

Why do these findings matter?

- Creating a **culture of knowledge sharing** is critical to maximise returns on training investments & linking these investments to innovation performance. These are ‘resource efficient’.
1. **Build Trust and Supportive Environments, especially in cases of ‘failure’**
 - **Encourage openness:** Make it clear that sharing mistakes, questions, and lessons learned is safe — not punished.
 - **Lead by example:** Managers and leaders should share their own insights and uncertainties & examples of ‘failures’.
 - **Reflections:** success, but more importantly how to do things better.
 - **Recognise contributions:** Publicly appreciate people who share useful knowledge or help others.

Why do these findings matter?

2. Align Incentives and Values

- **Include knowledge sharing in KPIs/reviews:** Recognise and reward (non-monetary recognition works well) people for contributing to knowledge sharing.
- **Connect sharing to purpose:** Explain how sharing knowledge helps the team & organisation succeed and grow – and link to types of innovation performance.

3. Continuously Reinforce, Reflect and Evolve ('Innovate' your Knowledge Sharing Climate)

- **Gather feedback:** Ask what helps or hinders people from sharing knowledge.
- **Celebrate success stories:** Show tangible examples of how shared knowledge led to incremental/radical innovation.



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Thank you & Questions please!

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Employee Voice and Productivity

9 October 2025

Lucy O'Melia

Head of Learning and Development Services, IPA

- 
- A light blue, semi-transparent megaphone is positioned on the left side of the slide, pointing towards the right. It is partially overlaid by the text and decorative elements.
- **Current climate for employee voice**
 - **Voice as strategic insight**
 - **Voice and conflict**
 - **Harnessing and enabling voice**





Employee Voice and Productivity: the links

- **Boosts engagement**
- **Enhances innovation**
- **Improves job design**
- **Increases job satisfaction and wellbeing**
- **Strengthens management decision-making**
- **Fosters a positive workplace climate**

The current climate

- **The good, the bad, the indifferent!**
- **Mirrors the complex shifts in civic engagement**
 - Prevalence of individualised voice
 - Fragmentation of collective voice
 - Variable engagement with representatives
 - Pockets of ‘grievance culture’
- **BUT also a growing recognition of the value of voice in:**
 - Enhancing employer brand
 - Navigating complex change

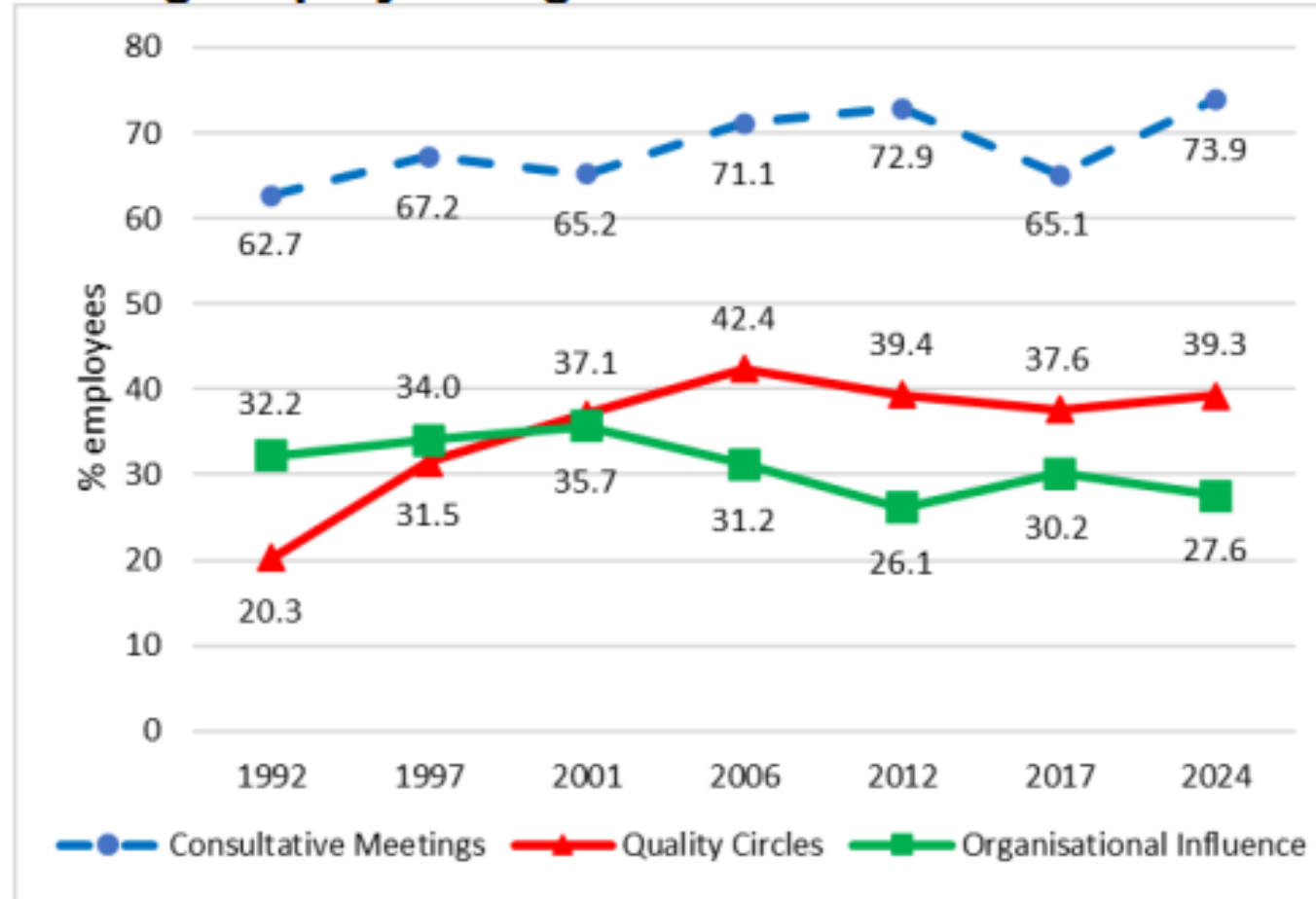


Employment Rights Bill

- Proposed new rights for trade union access and changes to the trade union recognition process
- New day one rights for employees
- Opportunity for employers to examine how colleagues are currently being heard
- Opportunity to bring workforce into the conversation about likely impacts of change

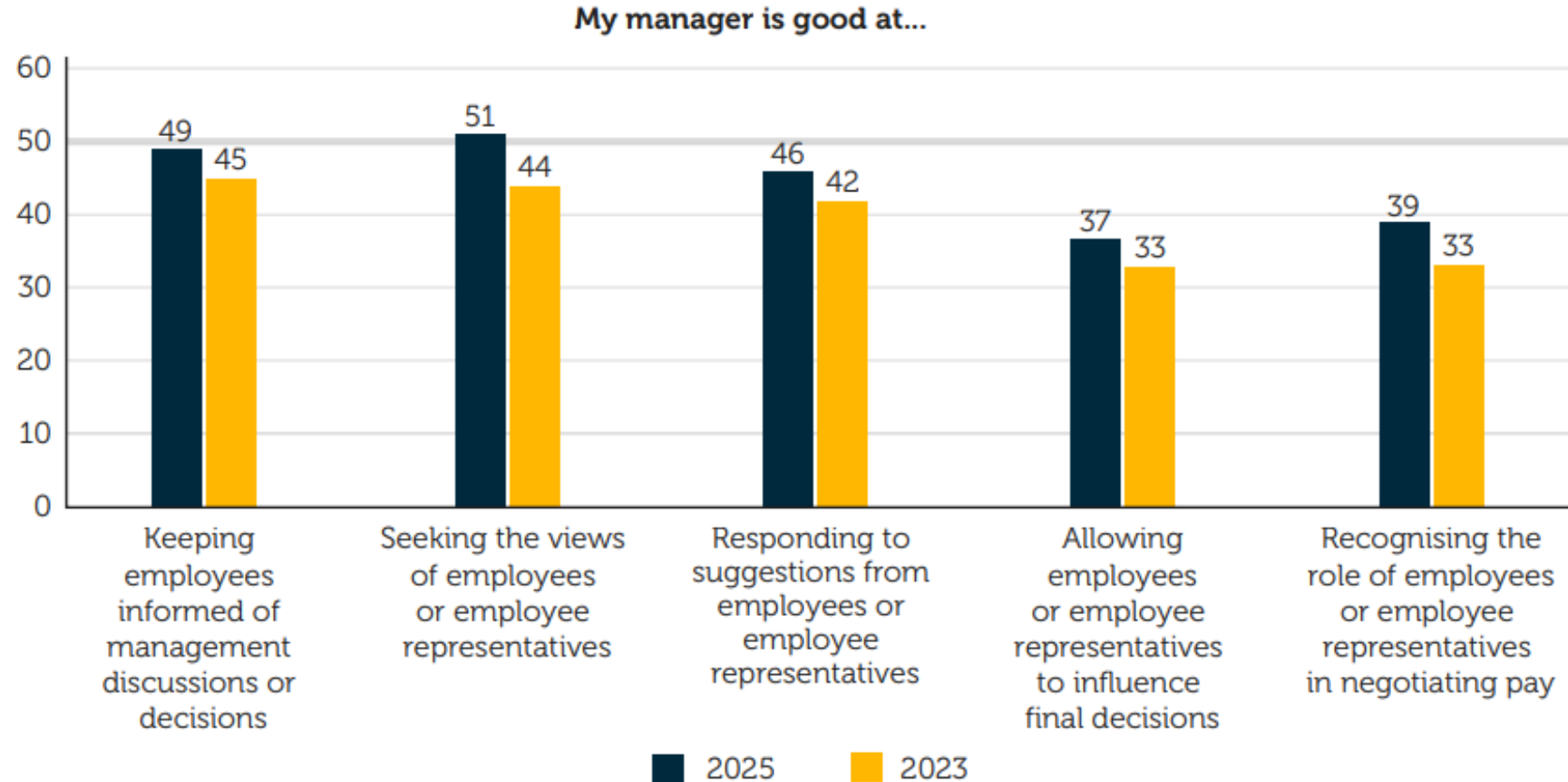
What the evidence says

Figure 2: Trends in Organisational Participation among Employees aged 20-60



What the evidence says

Figure 25: Employees who say their manager is good at enabling voice (%)



Source: CIPD Good Work Survey 2025



Voice as strategic insight

Is voice part of your communications strategy, or integrated into strategic planning?

Ensuring
people 'feel
heard'



Using voice to
make better
decisions



What can undermine the value of employee voice as insight?

- Employee Representatives who are not informed or consulted in a timely manner
- A workforce that is not plugged into the strategic narrative
- Tone and timing and communications
- Operational showstoppers identified too late
- Technocratic change management
- Lack of leadership knowledge and appetite

Employee Voice and Conflict

Risk factors

Benefits

Competing interests

Unclear remit/boundaries

Innovation

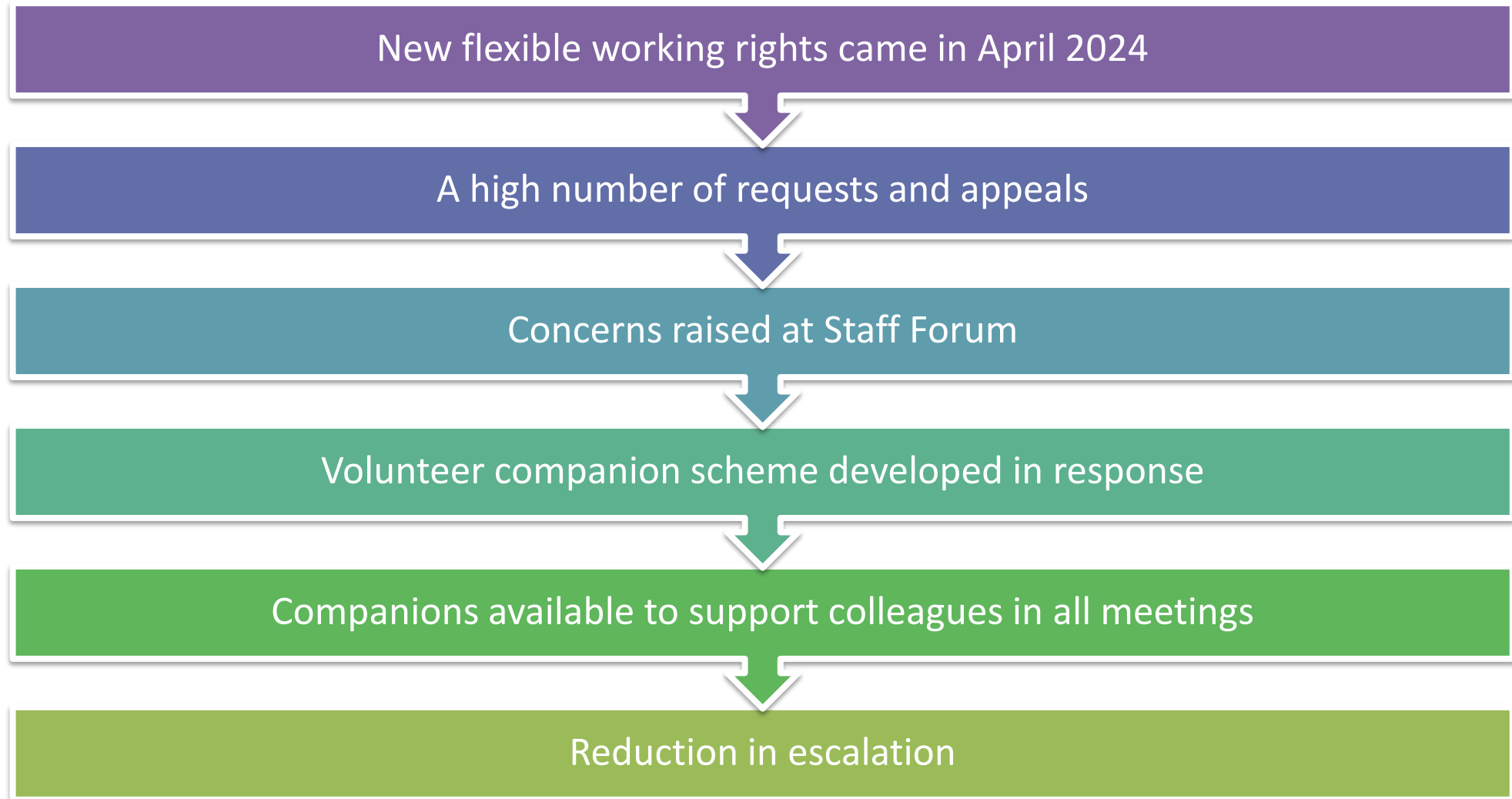
Representation

Damage limitation





Case study: voice as an enabler of informal resolution



Harnessing and enabling voice

Is voice embedded in or an adjunct to:

- Employer brand?
- Values?
- Your People Strategy?.....what is the role of voice in shaping:
 - Reward?
 - Recruitment and retention approaches?
 - People practices, including performance management?

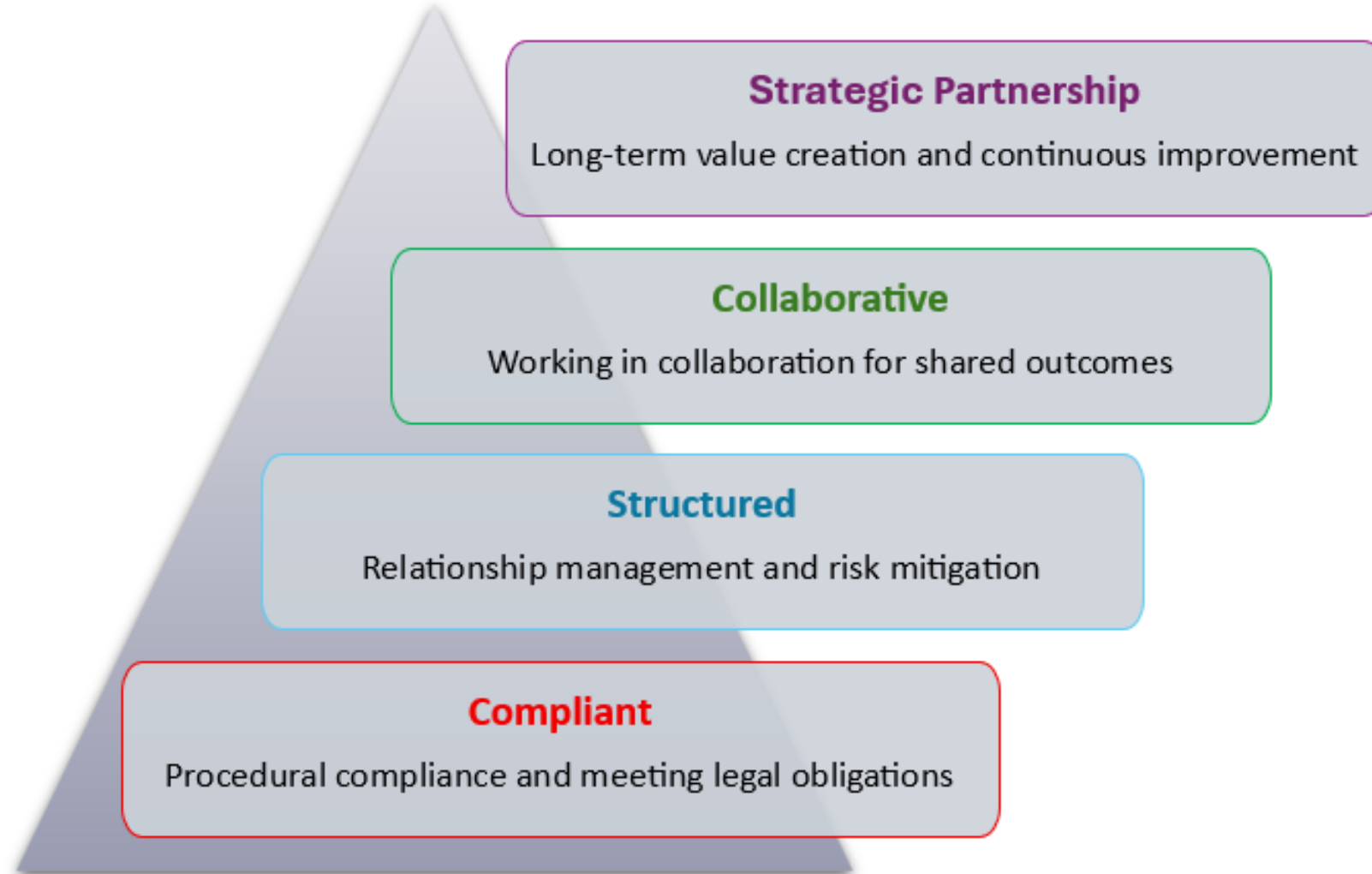




We know the path is not linear!

- People's needs and perspectives constantly shift.
- Trust builds — and breaks — over time.
- Context changes faster than policies adapt.
- Progress often follows rupture and repair.

Employment Relations Maturity Model





Thank you!

Any questions?


Please get in touch if you have any questions

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Wellbeing and productivity: A case study



IES Annual Conference

Alison Carter & Sally Wilson

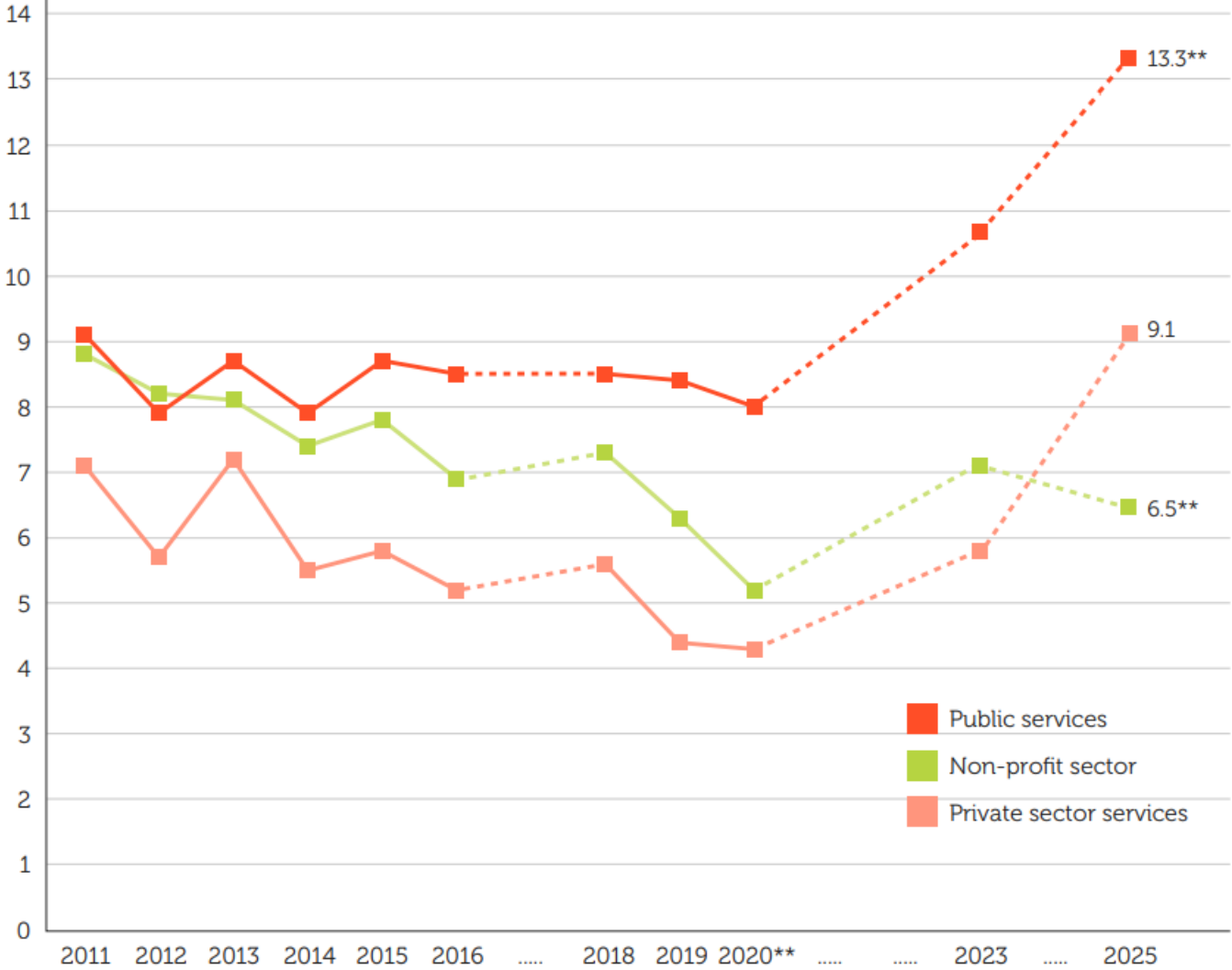
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Source: Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash

Key statistics & findings

- In 2022, an estimated 185.6 million working days were lost due to sickness or injury, a record high for the UK (ONS)
- The sickness absence rate (hours lost / hours worked) rose to 2.6%, its highest since 2004 (ONS)
- Much of the productivity cost is attributed not just to absence but to sub-optimal performance when ill. IPPR analysis shows that workers now lose
 - on average 44 days' worth of productivity due to working while unwell (presenteeism), up from 35 days in 2018
 - plus 6.7 days lost to actual sick leave (up from 3.7)
- In 2024, the overall sickness absence rate fell to 2.0% of working hours lost, down from 2.3% in 2023, but still slightly above the pre-pandemic level (ONS)
- The CIPD's 2024/2025 Health & Well-being at Work report cites that the average annual absence per employee is now 7.8 days — the highest in over a decade (this measure is more sensitive to trends)
- ONS shows the national sickness absence rate easing off slightly from its 2022 spike, whereas CIPD shows that employer-recorded absence remains elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Average number of days lost per employee per year, by sector



Source: CIPD 2025

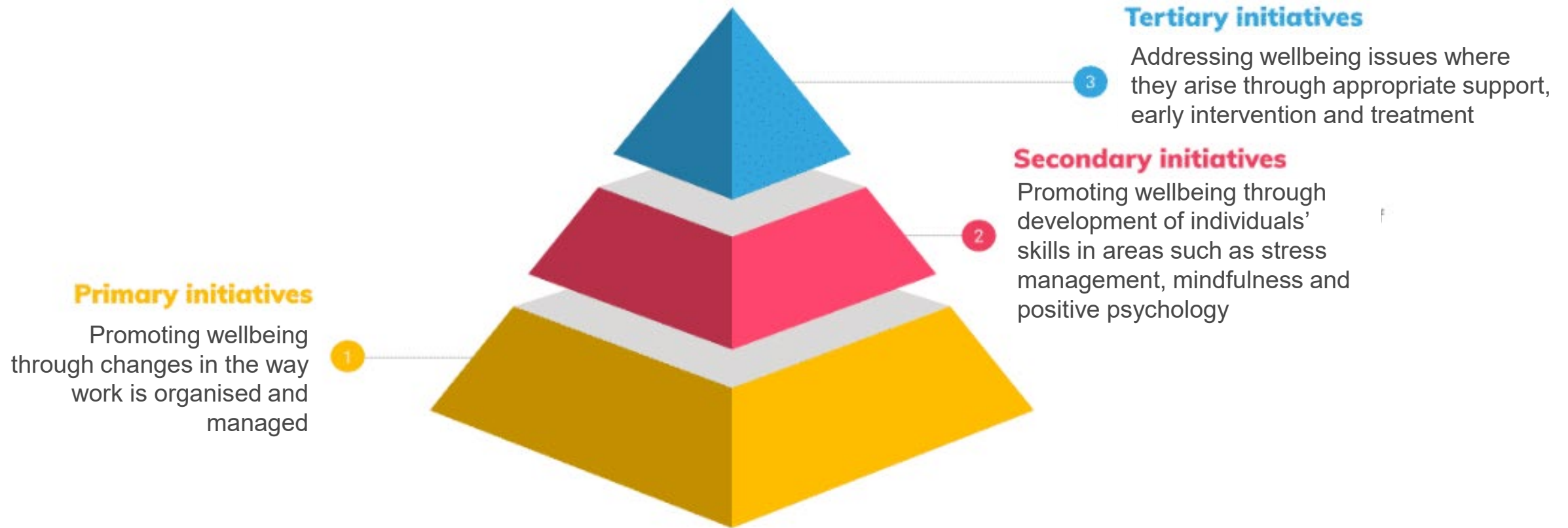
Research findings on wellbeing and productivity

- Both physical and mental health are key components: poor mental health (especially depression and anxiety) is consistently linked to lost productivity through:
 - absenteeism (missing work) and
 - presenteeism (reduced performance while at work)
- Meta-analyses of hundreds of studies and over a million employees confirm that higher employee wellbeing is strongly correlated with greater productivity, customer loyalty, and profitability, and is associated with lower staff turnover
- Experimental studies show that increasing happiness or positive affect can causally boost productivity (by around 10-12%), and that negative life events reduce productivity correspondingly
- Corporate wellness programs and interventions that improve health and wellbeing have been shown to increase productivity by about 10% in real-world organizational settings
- The relationship is not strictly one-way: while higher wellbeing tends to increase productivity, some evidence suggests that high job performance can also enhance wellbeing, indicating a reciprocal relationship

Some issues with interpreting academic findings: The case for applied, context-specific action research

- Some studies don't improve on 'common sense' conclusions, some may confound correlation with causation, and many are not prescriptive about remedial action
- Meaningfulness of productivity measures depends on sector, role, business priorities
 - Objective output measures: number of tasks completed, sales figures, or error rates
 - Self-reported productivity: employees rate their own productivity or creativity, often via validated survey instruments
 - Absenteeism and presenteeism: quantifying days missed due to illness or reduced effectiveness while present at work
 - Supervisor ratings: Performance appraisals or direct assessments by managers
- Weaknesses in many wellbeing interventions/research issues
 - Overreliance on individual-level interventions: many don't address organizational or systemic causes of workplace stress
 - Methodological and evidence gaps: evaluations and studies in diverse settings (e.g., SMEs, non-office workers) are especially lacking
 - One-size-fits-all approaches and contextual mismatch: Interventions are frequently implemented without sufficient adaptation to the specific workplace context, culture, or workforce needs

Types of wellbeing at work initiatives



Primary wellbeing at work initiatives

- Primary initiatives can be perceived as more difficult but are arguably much more impactful. They address problems with the way work is organised and managed, which means changing the structure and habits of an organisation.
- The goal of primary initiatives is to design wellbeing into the job. By doing so, these approaches stop stress, overwhelm and burnout at the source.
- Primary initiatives include:
 - Retraining managers
 - Re-thinking shift patterns
 - Automating repetitive job features
 - Sharing out work more evenly
 - Adjusting staffing levels
 - Introducing flexitime or home-working

Mechanisms Linking Job Design and Productivity

- **Core Job Characteristics:** Elements such as autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, and feedback are repeatedly shown to boost motivation and productivity by making work more meaningful and engaging
- **Job Enrichment and Goal Setting:** Enriching jobs (adding variety, responsibility, and opportunities for growth) and setting clear goals both increase satisfaction and productivity
- **Workplace Design:** Physical aspects of the work environment (e.g., office layout, ergonomics) also impact perceived productivity and job satisfaction
- **Job Crafting and Fit:** Allowing employees to shape their roles (job crafting) and ensuring a good fit between person and job further enhance productivity, especially when combined with personal initiative

Theory into practice: A case study

What comes next when we have a suite of wellbeing programmes but still have unhappy staff, high sickness absence and low productivity?

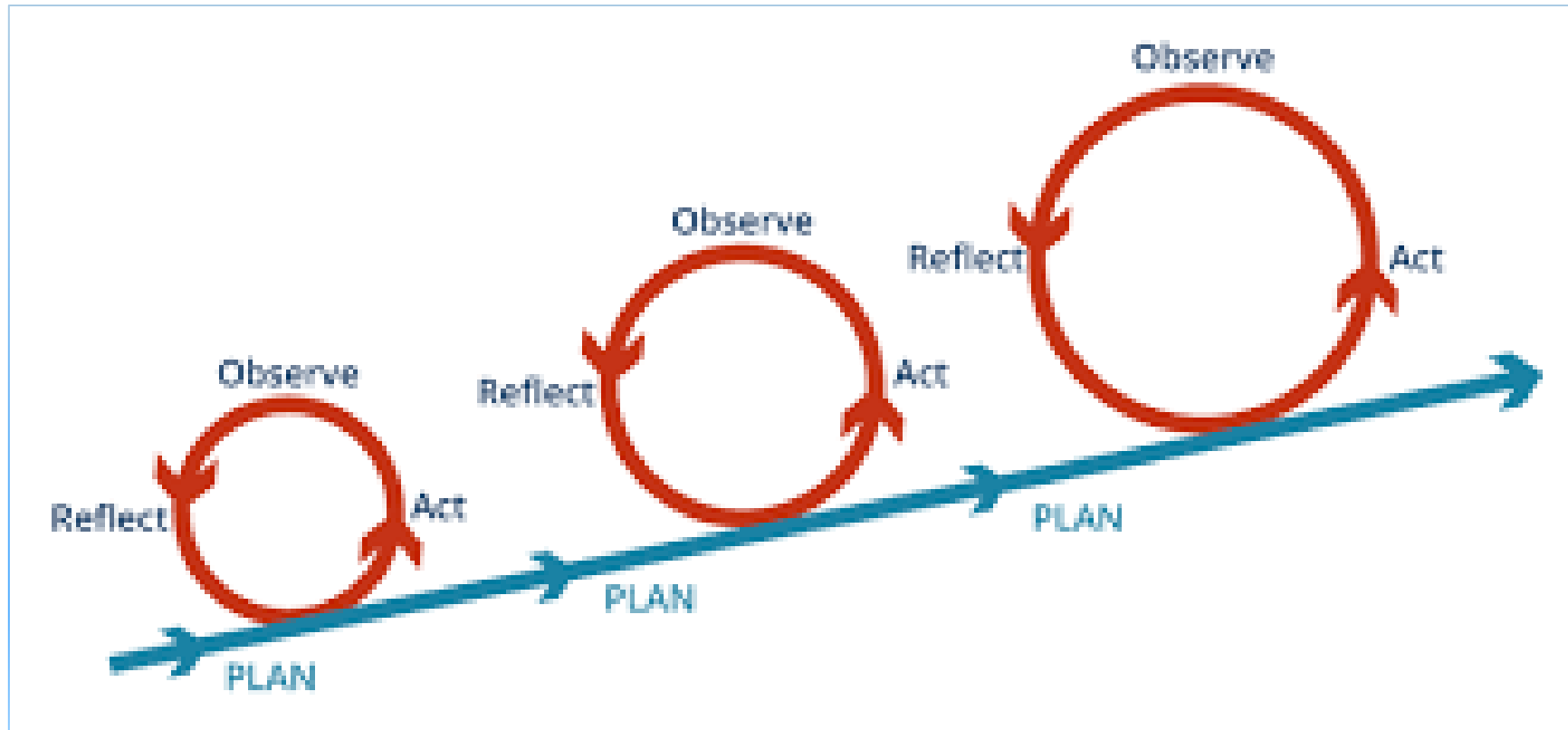
- Project co-designed an iterative action research approach to change systemic ways of working followed by changes to each person's job
- Pilot brought people together quarterly (managers, HR, team leaders, experts) to solve problems and enable honesty about what has and hasn't been working
- Outcomes were identified in real time 2018-2022
- Two service delivery teams (180 people in total) participated

Collaborative inquiry

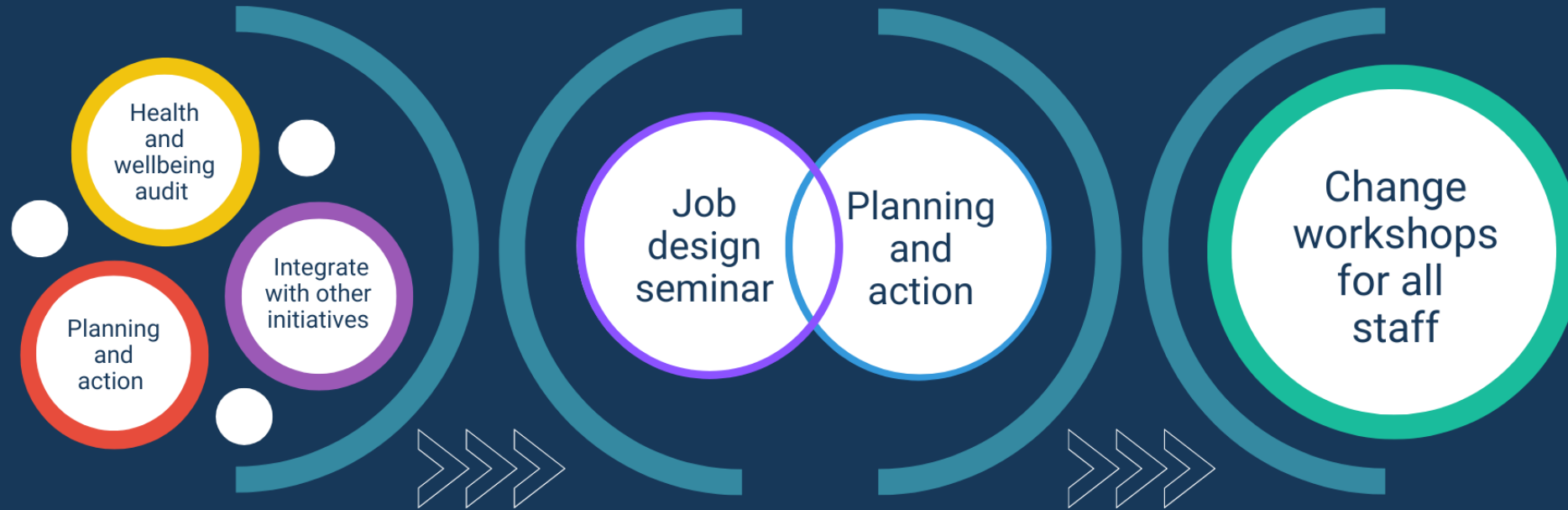
Research *with* people not *on* people

- A radically different way of doing research
- A systematic approach to help groups with a common interest come together to better understand a problem(s), generate their own ideas for change and make the change(s) work in practice
- People are treated as active agents (co-researchers), not as the passive subjects of research
- Usually involves groups engaging in 6-10 cycles of action and reflection
- Specialist knowledge/expertise is used in service of the group e.g. IES about wellbeing, job design and creating readiness for change
- Most useful in contexts of innovation, changing practice or implementation projects
- Lots of contracting and practical set up challenges!

How collaborative inquiry worked



Implementation phases and key activities



Leaders use data and provide energy behind wellbeing

Line managers focus on person-centred approaches

Teams focus on what they can do to help themselves

Phase 1: Messaging wellbeing matters

Team leaders and senior managers sought data and put energy behind wellbeing

- An evidence-based health and wellbeing audit and survey carried out by HR
- Separate action plans developed and implemented @6mths
 - A visual plan with upcoming milestones and key dates
 - A 'you said we did' board to show staff what managers had done with their feedback
 - Weekly 15 mins sessions on topics such as mindfulness, gratitude and stress relief
 - Development scheme to build first line manager capability
- Integration with other initiatives
 - Existing staff workshops used as idea-generating fora
 - Actions and processes integrated with Continuous Improvement (CI) programme
 - Mapping local requirements against corporate training programmes already on offer

Phase 2: Person-centred job design

Line managers focus on person-centred approaches to job design

- ‘Introduction to Job Design for Line Managers’ event
 - IES explained the principles and the evidence base behind job design options and the potential benefits
 - Team leads & senior managers led discussions and action planning
- Line managers took centre stage @4mths
 - Empowered to explore traditional options (e.g. job enrichment, enlargement and rotation) as well as job crafting (bottom-up job redesign)
 - Reviewed with direct reports what job redesign options might better support them
 - Actioned any changes indicated

Phase 3: Readiness for change

- ‘Wellbeing and Change’ interactive experiential-style workshops
 - Included all staff and managers from both teams
 - Staff voiced concerns around change overload/change fatigue
 - Discussion included what individuals can do to help themselves and each other
- A ‘People’s Group’ for staff and a ‘Leaders Group’ were formed
 - To take forward their own ideas and articulate their improvement suggestions
 - The way busy leave periods are managed (Christmas)
 - Opening development opportunities
 - Groups continued beyond the pilot to talk and share and identify would make a difference in supporting each other through current and future change

Sickness absence improved significantly

Average sickness days lost per year per FTE

	Prior to pilot	After pilot	Change number (& %)
Team 1	19.71	11.75	7.96 (40.4%)
Team 2	18.19	13.53	4.66 (25.6%)

Source: in-house HR and People Team metrics

Sickness absence improved significantly

Days lost per year due to stress/anxiety/depression/mental health

	Prior to pilot	After pilot	Change number (& %)
Team 1	250	121	129 (51.6%)
Team 2	562	230	331.5 (59%)

Source: in-house HR and People Team metrics

Key messages from the project

- Provide wellbeing support for whole teams during change
 - Wellbeing should be a collective not just an individual responsibility
- Don't shape job design decisions too early
 - Give people time to discuss and come up with their own suggestions
 - The options and possibilities are greater
- Leaders can create a climate where employee wellbeing matters
- Put a protective layer of change readiness around your teams
 - Reduces the fear of the unknown factor
 - Maintains positive psychological wellbeing



Any questions?

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Thank you

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Extra data - Staff engagement scores

Team 1

- Overall, remained slightly below the directorate average
- Substantial increase in wellbeing theme scores
- Items related to support from managers slightly higher than for benchmarks

Team 2

- Overall, scores remained slightly below the directorate average
- 8% increase in perceptions of how well change is managed
- 10% increase in feeling involved in decisions

Extra data - What the managers said...

The summer survey had some people in tears... it was tough on managers. They felt criticised for not being flexible: they said 'I'm always flexible'... but this is how people perceived it. It could be based on very personal grievances like 'they haven't sorted out my Christmas leave'.

There was a feeling that change was happening to them – an attitude of 'it's being done to us; we have no say.'

Staff weren't allowed to talk to each other. They couldn't ask colleagues what to do. Their mobile phones were face down...so I got rid of that. I got rid of the rules.



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