Great Ideas for Building Your Employer Brand

Contents

The problem with work

"The daily routine of most adults is so heavy and artificial that we are closed off to much of the world."
Ursula Le Guin, 1929 - 2018

Work – the thing we spend much of our time doing – is having a bad time of it these days. As research suggests a growing disillusionment with jobs as well as employers is emerging. But what's gone wrong? Why has the nature of work become such a contentious issue? And how can companies attract and retain talent amidst this backlash, or re-engage and re-energise employees, and make them love their jobs again? From Boreout to Burnout, in this paper, we look at some of the criticisms of working life and consider how companies are changing to meet the needs of the modern workforce.
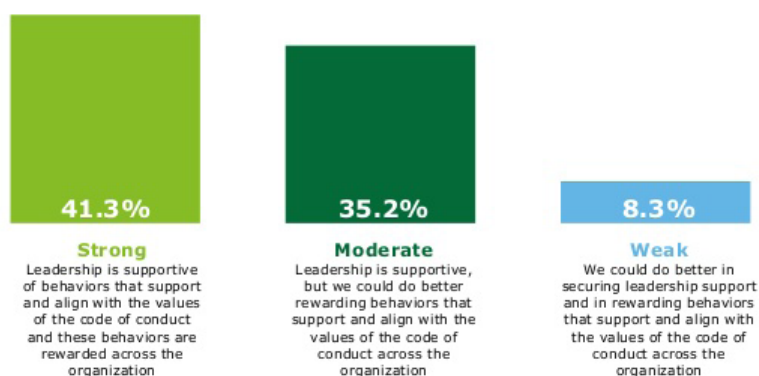
LOSING PURPOSE

With employment figures surging across Europe, you could argue we're living through a golden age of work. In the developed world there are more people than ever with jobs. Education is now wholly focused on training employability, regardless of the subject being studied. And being employed is widely considered a 'moral duty' as it means contributing to the expansion of the free market, the worthiest of causes since economists pronounced the 'End of History' some 26 years ago.

But in researching modern working life, it doesn't take long to stumble upon an ever-growing list of discrepancies between the promise of employment and the actual experience of it. For many, work lacks meaning and for some, the activities of employers appear ethically spurious. Its benefits are not distributed fairly either, and it's also bad for your health.

In 2015, a YouGov poll found 37% of British workers consider their job meaningless, with a further 13% saying they weren't sure if it was or not – that's basically half of the UK workforce with no sense of purpose in what they do for a living. Deloitte's 2017 'global ethics' survey revealed only 40% of North American executives believe their company is ethically 'strong', while the UK's Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) found 50% of British workers are unconvinced their employer is committed to ethical behaviours.

How would you describe your organization's global ethics culture?
Votes received: 1,482

41.3%	35.2%	8.3%
Strong	**Moderate**	**Weak**
Leadership is supportive of behaviors that support and align with the values of the code of conduct and these behaviors are rewarded across the organization	Leadership is supportive, but we could do better rewarding behaviors that support and align with the values of the code of conduct across the organization	We could do better in securing leadership support and in rewarding behaviors that support and align with the values of the code of conduct across the organization

15.2% Don't know/not applicable

PAY GAP

Regarding benefits, the gender pay gap is widely publicised and an increasing scourge for employers wanting to appear committed to fairness and equality. But perhaps the most outlandish inconsistencies reported today are the chasms that exist between executive and workers' pay. In the 2017 Bloomberg Global CEO Index, for example, CEOs in the USA were shown to earn 265 times more than the average American worker, while the UK (201), the Netherlands (171), Spain (143), and Germany (136) also featured in the top ten worst offending countries.

Global CEO Pay-to-Average Income Ratio

How well are bosses compensated? The ratio compares CEO pay with the per-capita gross domestic product adjusted for purchasing power parity, which shows how much income the average person generates

Rank	Economy	Pay Ratio	CEO Pay, $ Million	GDP p.c. PPP 2017/2016
1	United States	265	$14.25	$53,820
2	India	229	1.46	6,372
3	U.K.	201	7.95	39,545
4	South Africa	180	2.21	12,270
5	Netherlands	171	8.24	48,177
6	Switzerland	152	8.5	55,952
7	Canada	149	6.49	43,469
8	Spain	143	4.89	34,245
9	Germany	136	6.17	45,341
10	China	127	1.87	14,713

Source: Bloomberg, International Monetary Fund
Note: Reflects companies' most recent disclosures of pay as of December 2017.

Bloomberg

Furthermore, the rise of the gig economy and zero-hour contracts, comprising over five million people in Europe, while making overall employment statistics appear strong, isolates a large swath of the workforce from basic rights such as sick pay, minimum wage and unfair dismissal enjoyed by those with secure jobs and permanent contracts. And another discouraging statistic which undermines the role of work is that having a job no longer guarantees a life free from poverty. In the UK, for example, 67% of children living in poverty are from 'working homes.'

% of children in relative poverty BHC who live in working families
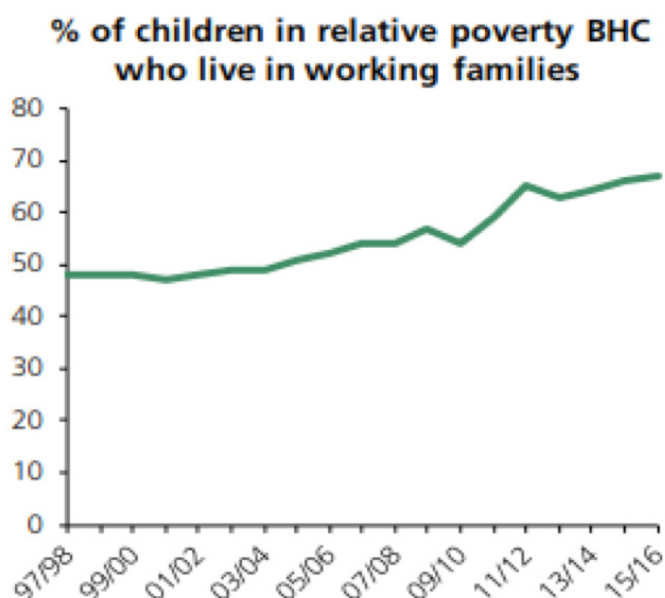
STATE OF MIND

The most prominent gripe against modern working life, though, is that work is bad for your health. Mental health, in particular, is a major concern for employers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says one in four people are affected by mental illness, and in the UK 15% of workers experience mental health issues at work, while 13% of all sick days are now attributed to mental health related problems.

While ongoing socio-economic, geopolitical, demographic, environmental and technological factors undoubtedly exasperate individual anxieties, the issues outlined above concerning pay, precarity, lack of meaning and distrust at work surely augment personal health problems.

It's easy to link low income and insecurity to poor mental health. The Royal College of Paediatrics recently confirmed higher rates of stress of those living in 'poor' working households. In recent years, though, researchers have made curious observations about how working life negatively impacts even educated and comparatively affluent workers who are secure in their jobs.

In their 2008 book Boreout! Peter Werder and Philippe Rothlin described a condition they say is found in most modern office environments, where employees perceive there is no meaning in their jobs, develop work-avoidance strategies that simultaneously give the impression they are busy and in demand. These include taking longer to complete tasks and faking enthusiasm and effort by staying late and skipping lunch. This is far from fun, though, as Boreout sufferers claim extreme anxiety and stress through fear of being found out.

Meaningless labour
% of British working adults

Is your job making a meaningful contribution to the world?

Is	50
Is not	37
Don't know	13
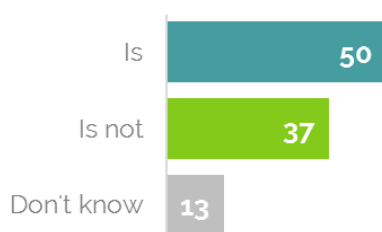
To what extent do you find your job personally fulfulling?

■ Very ■ Fairly ■ Not very ■ Not at all ■ DK
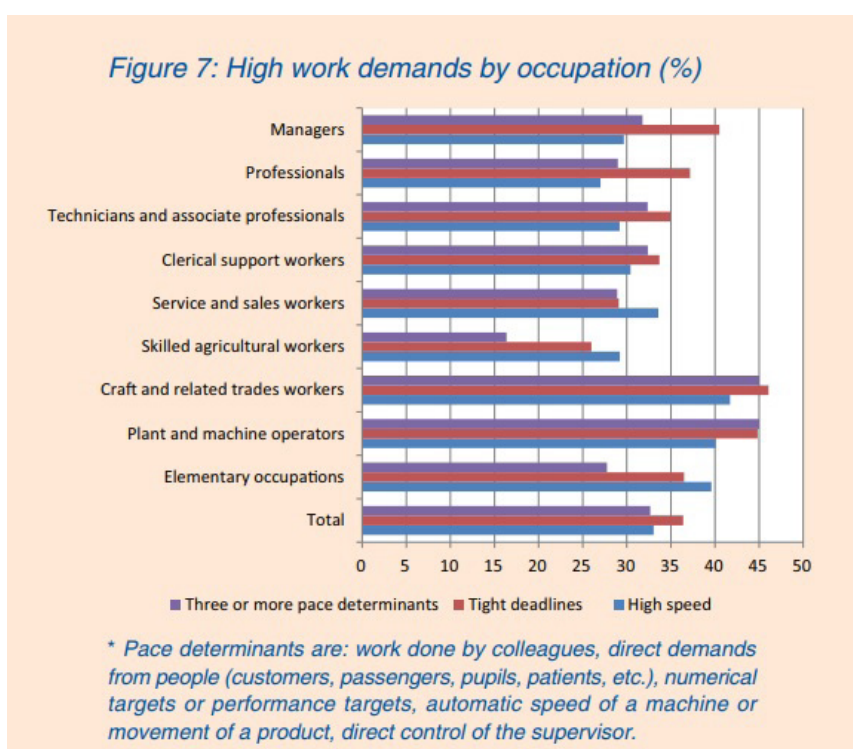
| 18 | 45 | 23 | 10 | |

YouGov | yougov.com   Aug. 10-11, 2015

Burnout is another stigma associated with working life today. In the European Working Conditions Survey, 33% of EU based workers say working at high speed to meet tight deadlines is normal. The same percentage also claim frequent interruptions prevent them from getting work done. The report confirms that intensive and disruptive working styles have negative consequences on mental health, with 14% saying work is a constant worry, while over 25% report psychological strain through trying to hide or supress the fact they're struggling to cope.

SWITCHED ON

Even for those that don't suffer (or don't believe they suffer) from health problems associated with modern working life – the European Working Conditions Survey confirms some people find intensive work rewarding or interesting – there is still a private cost to choosing or engaging in this 'always on' lifestyle.

Figure 7: High work demands by occupation (%)

Legend: ■ Three or more pace determinants ■ Tight deadlines ■ High speed

* Pace determinants are: work done by colleagues, direct demands from people (customers, passengers, pupils, patients, etc.), numerical targets or performance targets, automatic speed of a machine or movement of a product, direct control of the supervisor.

In the UK, for example, 75% of workers admit they can't help responding to work emails at home because technology enables them to, with 37% in another study claiming it makes them more productive. However, according to clinical psychologist Professor Vicki Culpin, this behaviour of staying connected to our technologies throughout the night causes people to sleep poorly because it limits the brain's ability to fully 'switch off.' High levels of sleeplessness and 'poor sleep 'she says exposes people to greater risks of catching colds, as well as suffering (in extreme cases) depression, dementia, strokes and heart attacks.

While social media, news and entertainment are part of the problem, Culpin, in her forthcoming book, The Business of Sleep, argues that presenteeism and long-hour working cultures are the biggest culprits. Unawareness of the health implications of poor sleep, she adds, is rife and Culpin labels our era the 'age of foolishness' where one-upmanship at work, despite its promise of short term financial gains, has no long-term benefits on individual wellbeing.
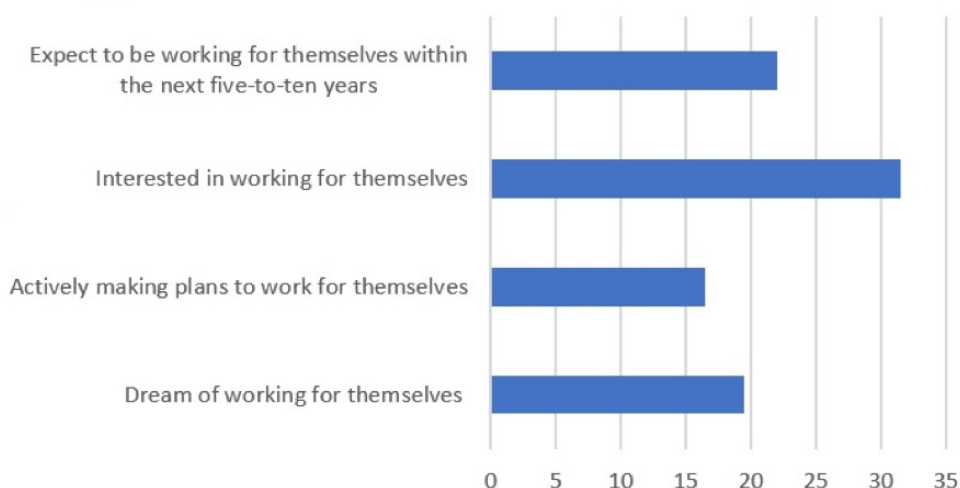
What else? The European Working Conditions Survey further reveals workers are usually too tired do household jobs (21%), can't commit enough time to their families or adequately look after children (11%), or undertake care responsibilities for sick or elderly relatives (3%). Commuting times are increasing across Europe and long commutes are a direct cause of unhappiness amongst workers. And, certainly, for younger generations, work is seemingly never-ending too, with average retirement ages slowing creeping up throughout the continent.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

So, yes, work is up against it. And mounting dissatisfaction caused by the reasons discussed above is taking its toll on employers. As referenced at the start of this article, talent is dropping out of the workforce at a high rate, as more people are lured away from the trappings of a traditional career and towards the perceived dignity of self-employment – better health and wellbeing, greater autonomy, the opportunity to do meaningful or ethical work, or where the fruits of their efforts are fairly rewarded.

Employment plans of 18-54-year-olds in UK (%)

|	
Expect to be working for themselves within the next five-to-ten years	22
Interested in working for themselves	31
Actively making plans to work for themselves	16
Dream of working for themselves	19

Perhaps more alarming, however, is the ongoing decline in productivity across the developed world. It seems despite efforts to normalise intensive working patterns, overall output per worker remains comparatively poor to what it has been in the past, with no indication it will recover.

Chart 1: Trend labor productivity growth has slowed markedly... (%)

Legend: US, Japan, Germany, UK
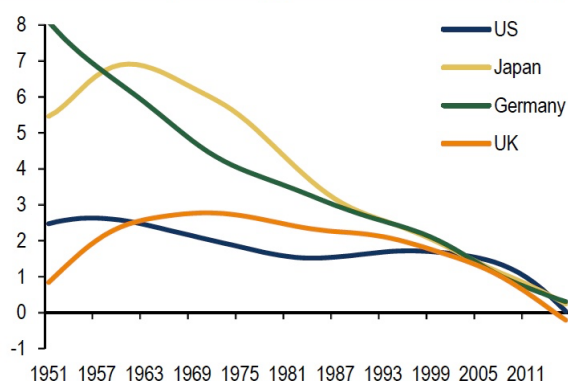
Source: BofA Merrill Lynch Global Research, Conference Board

Chart 2: ...throughout much of the developed world (%)

Legend: France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland
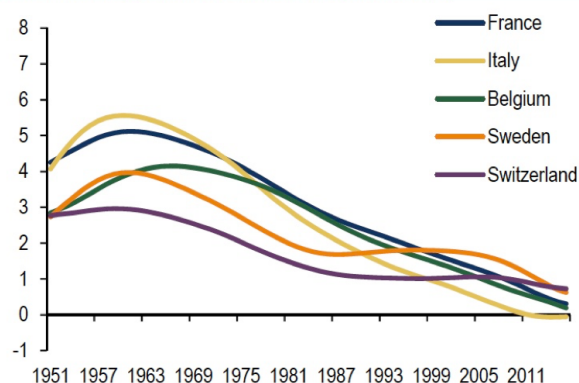
Source: BofA Merrill Lynch Global Research, Conference Board

To meet these challenges head on, things clearly need to change. And in some instances, they already are, with companies reporting favorable results for retention and productivity after acknowledging these issues and finding ways to make working life more meaningful, ethical, fair and heathier for their people. In the following section, we consider what the best practises are and look at what some of our clients have been doing to meet the needs of the modern workforce.

What good employer branding practices look like

Companies suffer if employees have little pride in their work, or where they believe their job lacks meaning or that it somehow makes them complicit in unethical behaviours. If the rewards are unfair or if it has a negative impact on their health – whether they realise it or not – their productivity and morale, too, will decline over time. Employers must, therefore, work hard to instil a sense of pride in their personnel through embedding a workplace culture that promotes purpose, personal growth, health and wellbeing.

The first stage in achieving this is to define exactly what the company stands for, as well as what it means to work there. Otherwise known as 'the brand' and 'employment brand,' these two factors should always match up through clear consistencies in how they're marketed and implemented.

Messages and initiatives play critical roles in engaging and uniting current employees behind the brand and its vision, as well as in attracting new people into the business through raising awareness of a company's employment brand in the market. The aim should always be to try to emphasise how your brand is different and encapsulate the type of people you want the business to be associated with – what does good look like? Which qualities from your current employees do you seek to emphasise above others?

Employee engagement surveys and conducting audits of the talent attraction, engagement and retention processes can help tease out what these things are. Cross functional involvement in establishing brand and employer brand messages is essential, as is appointing designated employee advocacy leaders to facilitate the process and embed cultural change.

Valuing everybody and giving direction and purpose through learning and development programmes is usually an easy win. Conceiving benefits and rewards that match the brand's ethos, linking brand building strategies with other processes – e.g. customer service – as well as aligning the organisation with perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as charitable or environmental activities, will also ensure success.

Being open to and creative around flexible working helps people meet personal obligations and responsibilities, avoid stressful commutes, provides empowerment by giving them greater control over their working lives, and ultimately, reduces stress.

In terms of the proactive elements involved in attracting talent, refining recruitment systems so that all candidates – whether successful in their job application or not – enjoy positive recruitment experiences, is a must. And many companies now participate in talent community building, utilising ongoing networking and other marketing touch points to ensure their brand remains 'top-of-mind' for prospective candidates So when the company is ready to launch a recruitment campaign, its already one step ahead of its competition, in a tight talent market.

Positive and in-depth onboarding processes, too, help retain the momentum of recruitment campaigns and ensure no inconsistencies between perception and reality emerge.

If employees are engaged, then they'll want to help and it's wise for companies to enlist the support of staff in brand and employer brand building activities. We've already mentioned using employee advocacy leaders to roll out internal initiatives and spread positive messages, but in the digital age, providing access to and training people to leverage digital channels is equally significant. Whether it's promoting products and services, raising brand awareness or highlighting how much they enjoy their jobs, giving employees the freedom and tools to participate in brand building online is a smart move.

Sending regular company updates and content sharing suggestions, utilising videos and infographics and testing employees' knowledge to ensure consistent and accurate messages, can maximise results. And the more channels collectively utilised, the greater exposure and impact gained.

We've been fortunate to work with companies in the UK and overseas that have demonstrated how to do all these things well. Below are some case studies highlighting how different businesses have approached the 'problem with work' and how successful their efforts have been.

DEFINE WHAT THE COMPANY STANDS FOR AND WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK THERE

ArmstrongWatson®
Accountants, Business & Financial Advisers

After identifying a lack of clarity of direction and joined-up focus across the business, UK accountancy firm Armstrong Watson decided to act. In 2008, the firm hired a consultancy to facilitate strategy workshops where employees came together to conceive a road map for where the business was, where it wanted to get to and what culture it needed to achieve its ambitions. The sessions led to the formation of a vision, a set of values and a competency framework which outlined what their 'ideal employee' looked like.

The competency framework now also forms parts of the firm's appraisal process and employees are rewarded, and progress through the salary bands, based on their effective demonstration of the four values and five behaviours. The firm uses external trainers as well as its management development academy to get the best results, and each year all Partners and Directors go through a three-sixty feedback process to ensure consistent alignment.

All decisions are integrity driven, even if it means losing out on monetary gains. Any people or commercial opportunity, for example, which is contrary to Armstrong Watson's values, is rejected. This includes preventing those hired from competitor firms to breach their restrictive covenants; and when recruiting, even if an individual shows technical prowess, if they don't demonstrate a fit with the Armstrong Watson culture, they won't get hired.

The firm also acknowledges how working life is no longer nine-to-five and if client demand means operating outside of 'normal' business hours, employees are given the required flexibility to meet these needs. Armstrong Watson's message is clear: 'we don't care when or where our people work, as long as they're delivering for our clients.' Offices still play a key role, though, providing venues for client meetings as well as encouraging collaboration and embedding the identity of the firm.

At all 16 of its sites, the firm has 'employee culture champions' tasked with collecting ideas and feeding them back to senior management. Communication is maintained throughout the year and feedback can influence anything from office refreshments, to which charitable endeavours the firm will support. An annual business conference, where all employees come together to talk about the future, further stimulates engagement and embeds values and behaviours.

All the leadership team are encouraged to regularly visit other offices and CEO Paul Dickson will always work part of his week at a different location, as well as undertake a 'CEO roadshow' once or twice a year delivering future strategy presentations at each location.

"It's all about looking after people, giving them a positive experience, and always reverting to our values to make the right choices. All the hard work we've put into our culture is coming to life in the experiences of our clients. That's incredibly rewarding." **Paul Dickson, Managing Partner and CEO at Armstrong Watson.**

Read the full article here

Other examples from the archive

Employee forums and site visits help get vision 'buy in' at Formica

By their second day at the firm, everyone's a leader at PwC

GIVE DIRECTION AND PURPOSE THROUGH ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Pernod Ricard recognised that digital competence would be a critical factor in sustaining its position as market leader in the Spanish spirits industry. A digital vision was established with a robust transform-action strategy and clear roadmap encompassing several areas including processes, consumers, data and culture.

Communication and engagement were key levers underpinning Pernod's digital 'transform-action' and it was HR's job to engage all employees in the change programme – demystifying digital, creating awareness of how it would play a central role in Pernod's future success, and providing the required digital training to make working lives easier and more efficient.

All employees completed an assessment which tested their digital skills and knowledge. Reports were generated which enabled HR to benchmark results internally, as well as externally with other businesses. These results together with workshops made it possible for HR to identify the main digital training and development opportunities that existed in each department.

HR then planned and delivered a 'digital fundamentals' training program to improve digital knowledge and skills, ensuring the right people gained appropriate knowledge to fulfill business and departmental digital needs.

Some people were already 'digital natives' who got to grips with new tools and ways of working quickly. Those individuals were selected as digital champions, whose tacit knowledge and skills were leveraged in further workshops and digital projects, therefore accelerating change across the business.

The amalgamation of Pernod's digital transform-action project was redesigning its work environment to reflect the 'homogenous' and 'barrier free' digital environment. The new Madrid headquarters includes an open and flexible layout, over 70 meeting rooms and shared spaces, high-tech facilities and a paper free philosophy which all incite interaction, cross-functional collaboration, efficient ways of working and better communication.

Once the office was complete, HR turned its focus to embedding a digital culture across the business. Ongoing digital training was part of this, as was establishing an Employer Value Proposition which defined the core ingredients of what it meant to work at Pernod.

Improving talent management and development practices, ensuring the business attracts and retains the best people, is another priority. All employees hired during the last four years, regardless of their level within the organisation, have attended a local development centre and the business has also released an award-winning gamification tool used for management and people development training, which has achieved excellent results.

"We're not just talking about technology and systems, we're talking about mindset, culture, new ways of working, moving from training to a self-learning philosophy and challenging everyone to adapt and embrace the digital opportunity in each department. In our latest employee engagement survey, 100% said they are proud to work at Pernod Ricard Spain." **Aitor Rueda, HR Director at Pernod Ricard Spain**

Read the full article here

Other examples from the archive

Instilling career direction and purpose at Newcastle University

Regardless of their job, everyone completes basic care home training at HC-One

POSITIVE IMPACT CAUSES SHOW IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT PROFIT

In 1989, <u>Northumbrian Water</u> was privatised as part of the UK Government's denationalisation programme for the water industry. Its culture gradually changed from a 'public enterprise' ethos to one more suited to the heavily scrutinised, competitive and profit driven market it now operated in.

Over the years, and through several ownership changes, the organisation suffered from behavioural, people engagement and trust issues. And with a workforce consisting of mainly scientists and engineers, technical and process driven approaches were favoured within the business. That was until Sarah Salter's appointment as HR Director in late 2010.

Recruited to support a change agenda, Sarah needed to get the organisation talking about cultural issues and for the business to see how a more inspirational people agenda could impact the bottom line. She conceived the 'Our Way' programme which outlines Northumbrian Water's values – to be customer focused and results driven, creative and ethical – and helps employees to understand how these values apply to their day to day role.

All employees participate in regular 'Our Way' training events, and every department's business plan has a section explaining how the team intends to embed values and behaviours. There's even an annual award for those people who bring the values to life through their efforts. 'Our Way – Your Direction' also repositioned career development at Northumbrian Water, by broadening employee experiences through allowing them to get involved in different areas of the business.

A key aspect of Our Way, however, was realigning and refocusing Northumbrian Water's employer brand with the ethical component of its work. Its water and waste water services are critical to life and to civil society, and Sarah wanted to further emphasise this by encouraging employees to get involved in voluntary community activities. 'Just an Hour' was one award-winning initiative aimed at doing just that, and now over 1,500 staff take part in community initiatives through this programme each year.

"Voluntary activities are now mainstreamed in our business. They give employees a sense of pride and help create a supportive, friendly and positive environment. Northumbrian Water is inextricably linked to the communities it serves, and in joining the business, you naturally take on the responsibly of being an active community member." **Sarah Salter, Group HR Director at Northumbrian Water.**

Read the full article here

Other examples from the archive

Time spent benefitting "nature, communities and society in general" at Beam Suntory

Five hundred free shares for all employees help level the playing field and boost productivity at Premier Foods

GET PEOPLE INVOLVED AND MAKE SURE YOU STAND OUT

Children fashion brand Petit Bateau combines high-quality craftsmanship with great marketing to win the hearts and minds of consumers. Though while the company enjoys commercial success around the world, the competitive talent market in France, together with a growing need to introduce new skills and mindsets into the business, meant action was needed to turn Petit Bateau into an employer, as well as brand, of choice.

After benchmarking its employer brand with competitors and brainstorming ideas of how to raise awareness of careers, the business highlighted one main issue: its reputation as an employer didn't match the great affection the public had for its brand. To change this perception, the HR team established an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and four core values – authentic, complicit, agile and intrepid – which help reinforce it.

They then came up with the concept of using real employees and their young relatives in a six-part online video campaign promoting the employer brand. Aimed at capturing the essence of the talented people behind the French children's clothing maker, the campaign would also shrewdly reinforce how the company is 'plugged into the childhood universe.'

In the unscripted and superbly shot clips, which combine real and animated sequences, employees of Petit Bateau, ranging from the Finance Director to the Supply Chain Manager, are joined by their young relatives (sons, daughters, nephews and cousins) who give their interpretations of what their adult companion does at the business, before the grown-ups' step in to clarify some of the finer details.

The messages are honest too. Finance Director Stéphanie Le Maoult, for example, tells how she often has a short lunch break and admits sometimes arriving home at 9 pm after her son reveals this aspect of his Mum's job. However, this reflects the reality of what it can sometimes be like working at Petit Bateau and shows how employees are intrepid and committed to the cause.

The message is actually very clear: Petit Bateau employees are just everyday people, and that together they're one big extended family."

The short films were all adapted for social media and were widely circulated via Petit Bateau's YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn and email marketing channels. Employees across all Groupe Rocher's (owner of Petit Bateau) subsidiaries worldwide were encouraged to share content, with some of the videos becoming the most watched on the company's YouTube channel, overtaking those which showcase its products.

"This was a perfect way to capture our values and give viewers and potential employees the chance to see if they identify with Petit Bateau's DNA. It increased the number of applications made to our business, and ensured Petit Bateau remains an iconic French brand and a company of the future." **Natalie Monjo, Recruitment and Development Manager at Petit Bateau**

[Read the full article here](#)

Other examples from the archive

['Together we are Arriva' video helps promote local connections and group identity.](#)