

EXPERIENCE AS A CULTURE CATALYST

POWERING
ORGANISATIONAL
CHANGE



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FOREWORD

In a time of perma-crisis, transformation and change are constants.

Against this backdrop - with employers seeking new solutions to address issues around productivity, cost, sustainability, hybrid working and AI/technology - how can organisations think smartly and creatively about the way they bring their people together to maximise impact on communication, engagement, culture and belonging? For HR leaders, the difference lies in how employees *experience* transformation.

This white paper reveals how purposeful and strategic employee experiences - brought to life through targeted event activations - can turn disruption into opportunity, right across the employee lifecycle.



At FourthWall, we define employee activations as high-impact, experiential moments that align with business objectives to drive positive outcomes on employee experience.

These are the unique, engaging, memorable, and immersive touchpoints that bring EVP, culture, and engagement strategies to life in tangible ways such as talent attraction events and onboarding programmes; employee recognition and development milestone events; team building and leadership activities; wellbeing, experiential L&D and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives; and purposeful manager-team interactions.

This white paper brings together perspectives and insights from HR thought leaders from leading organisations to share how purposeful employee experiences can transform attraction, retention, and engagement to deliver tangible business edge.

And how in this fast-evolving age of work, in-person colleague interaction and human connection should no longer be considered discretionary spend, but instead a core part of an organisation's internal engagement strategy.

We will explore how experiential interactions that create a deep emotional connection catalyse change to drive:

STRONGER EMPLOYER BRAND
to attract, retain, and engage talent
in uncertain times

UPSKILLING/RESKILLING
to meet new and evolving business
demands and strategies

**HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY
& ENGAGEMENT**
through clarity and connection

SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL CHANGE
that lasts beyond the transformation

For CPOs, HRDs, Heads of Talent, Employer Branding, Employee Experience and Culture Transformation, this is a blueprint for making experience a strategic lever.

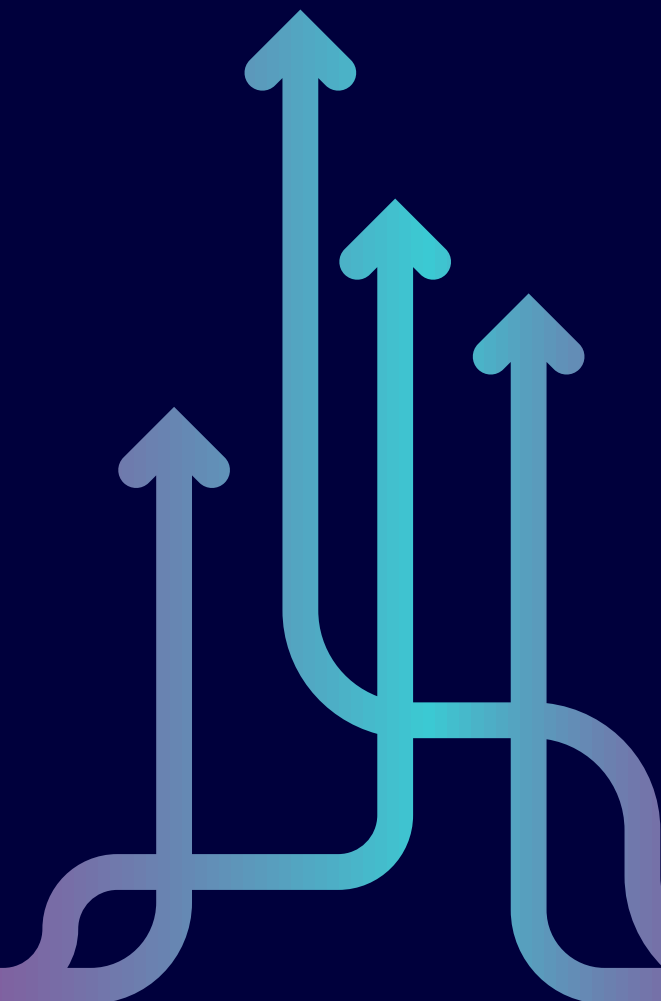
I'd like to thank each of our contributors for their powerful insights and perspectives into the essential role of employee experiences in supporting culture through organisational change. I hope this white paper encourages you to reflect on how you can implement these insights and create transformative experiences, to drive business performance and unlock the full potential of your workforce.

Mark Griffith
CEO & Founder, FourthWall



CHAPTER 1

THE TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGE



CHAPTER 1: THE TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGE



We start this white paper by understanding our contributors' worlds: the business and people challenges they face, the opportunities ahead, and where employee experiences and activations can drive impact.

The Context: Navigating uncertainty

A thread quickly emerged: people leaders today are managing more than organisational challenges. Rather, they're leading through global uncertainty and geopolitical shifts of a complexity never seen before and are navigating their people through these, at scale.

As Chris Pilling, Chairman, NED, Advisor, currently at Musgrave Group, observes: *"From a macro perspective, the world's not in the best place. There's a lot of psychological concern among employees. Senior leadership teams are aware of cost inflation, job security, AI and what that's going to do to society – it's a lot to get your head around."*

Josephina Smith, HR and Reward thought leader, adds: *"I see many employers grappling with political, market and financial uncertainty, as well as tech advancement. We've got a lot of leaders that are used to pre-Covid stability and find it hard to navigate how geopolitical uncertainty affects us in the workplace."*

Leading transformation at scale

Organisations are managing change at an unprecedented level of scale, velocity, and ambition. Each leader we spoke to is driving a significant business transformation that is shaping both strategic priorities and day-to-day employee experience.

Rick Jackson is EVP Engagement & Enablement at DHL Group ('DHL'). He explains: *"From a global perspective, we're looking at an evolving workforce of over 600,000 people with labour market challenges, multi-generational expectations and skills needs. All whilst understanding how AI and the future of digitisation will impact us."*



Globally every country has its own challenges, needs and requirements so we need to be mindful and respectful of all operational environments we are in. ”

Rick Jackson

Employer Brand Lead at Lloyds Banking Group, Daniel Savoury, speaks to his organisation's change programme: *"Lloyds is going through a huge period of transformational change so how we engage with our colleagues couldn't be more important. We are laser focused on the future, and we need to be in order to compete – of course AI is a huge part of this, but from a skills perspective this means building a workforce that is equipped to take us to the next level."*

We're quickly seeing the role of the AI revolution and how this has escalated workplace change, is shaping organisational structures, and is resetting corporate roadmaps.

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley, Strategic Business Leader, previously at Ocado Group shares: *"Looking at the tech industry, you have to look at the landscape with AI coming into the fold. Tech companies are focused on cost efficiencies, the socio-economic perspective and how this impacts the people within the organisation."*



As with many growing organisations, a core question is how to preserve the ‘special sauce’ that makes our culture distinct. It’s ultimately about striking the right balance between global scalability and local authenticity.”

Lauren Hoare



Growing while maintaining culture

For other organisations, the shifting forces within today’s world of work have set new culture challenges.

Lauren Hoare, Employee Experience & Engagement Leader at Lockton, explains: *“In my work, a key focus is delivering a consistent cultural experience for associates (our employees). One that is shaped and reinforced by our senior leaders. As with many growing organisations, a core question is how to preserve the ‘special sauce’ that makes our culture distinct. It’s ultimately about striking the right balance between global scalability and local authenticity.”*

For Chris Pilling, culture is also key to growth. As someone who’s worked for some of the largest companies in the world, he adds: *“At Walmart, for example, we set out to achieve a focused culture - hard working, professional, and a very fun place to be. People loved being there because the culture was focused on them – our mantra was “all colleagues, one team.”*

Talent mapping the future

While talent attraction and retention have always been a strategic priority, today’s leaders face a specific set of challenges from niche market requirements to preserving organisational culture.

Paul Szumilewicz is Chief Commercial Officer at Bank of London and The Middle East (BLME): *“BLME is UK based, but our customers are in the Middle East. When it comes to our people strategy, we’re trying to recruit individuals who have a connection to the region - speaking Arabic for example. It’s about the usual talent attraction and retention challenges for us specifically given we’re still a smaller organisation and lesser-known brand.”*

Lauren Hoare agrees that talent attraction is key: *“With such intense competition for talent, organisations must look beyond attraction and focus equally on retention. The most successful companies are those that stay deeply people-centred and preserve their cultural authenticity, even as they scale and evolve.”*

Resetting Return-to-Office

Post-pandemic, the role of hybrid working remains front of mind for people leaders, as organisations shift from optional office attendance to more robust return-to-office (‘RTO’) mandates.

Rick Jackson shares his personal view here: *“I believe that a lot of RTO strategies are a reaction to cultural shifts: organisations are seeing an impact on culture and are at risk of losing engagement and motivation in their people. Hybrid working absolutely has benefits, I truly believe that. Culture will really start to drift if people don’t have that human contact, the in-person connection that is so important. Companies can create a happy hybrid workplace, but leaders must keep building culture and not lose focus.”*

Paul Szumilewicz shares that communicating the “why” of leading an RTO strategy has supported employee buy-in at BLME:

“Our CEO is very clear that face-to-face is very important to us – we all benefit from being back in the office three days a week. We have no grey around our RTO mandate – the expectation is three days a week.

Because we’ve created a very clear narrative around the “why” of the strategy, our teams are all onboard with it.”

Driving organisational inclusion

Despite the challenges facing DEI initiatives at a global scale, speaking to UK-based people leaders, DEI programmes remain a commitment and focus in terms of fostering dynamic employee communities.

Kate Smith, Executive Director of Consulting at CBRE UK, tells us: *“We need to make sure our teams reflect the communities we work in. We see that building a collaborative community creates innovation and high performing teams. Diversity makes good business sense, and CBRE was just recognised in The Times Top 50 as one of the best places to work for gender equality. We enable our people and business partners to thrive by fostering a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment.”*

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley speaks to the challenges of competing priorities from a DEI perspective: *“Right now a lot of businesses are going through huge restructuring programmes and change which*

gives rise to a lack of psychological safety and trust among employees. With the implications of the DEI headwinds, we need to look at how we continue to create environments where all employees can thrive.”

Lauren Hoare speaks to the need to personalise inclusion: *“At Lockton, inclusion is not about uniformity. It’s about creating a shared cultural experience that still feels meaningful and authentic in every local context. Our aim is that wherever an associate is in the world, they feel connected to our core values while also seeing their own cultural nuances reflected in how we support, communicate and engage with them. Tailoring the experience to our people is central to how we build a truly inclusive and global culture.”*

It’s with these considerations in mind that we go on to explore how meaningful, innovative in-person activations are more important than ever to address the key challenges faced by our people leaders.

“

Right now a lot of businesses are going through huge restructuring programmes and change which gives rise to a lack of psychological safety and trust among employees.”

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley



CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE



CHAPTER 2: EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE



Against this complex backdrop of global uncertainty and organisational transformation, forward-thinking people leaders are reframing employee experience and specifically in-person events and activations from a 'nice-to-have' to a clear business imperative – showing that human connection is essential to performance, culture, and competitive advantage.

Making the business case

Lauren Hoare explains Lockton's approach here: *"We view associate experience as a true driver of organisational performance - not just a people metric, but a business one. By elevating the employee experience in this way, we're able to demonstrate how improvements in it translate directly into stronger business outcomes, including the experience we deliver to clients. It's a significant opportunity for us, and one I'm genuinely excited about."*

Kate Smith agrees: *"We serve our clients better when people collaborate better. We are more successful when we aggregate and bring more of CBRE's capabilities together through our culture of connectivity."*

She goes on to add: *"We're a business and ultimately everything has to be designed for performance and productivity - to have an ROI. We can show the benefit to the bottom line through a high performing, improving business, supported by a culture that balances in-person and flexibility."*

The non-negotiable of human connection

For the leaders we spoke with, human connection isn't a perk or a preference - it's foundational to how they build culture, drive engagement, and deliver on their purpose. We're now turning to the specifics of how in-person employee activations specifically support critical people strategies.



Everything should drive engagement around purpose - our in-person experiences are underpinned in our Employer of Choice bottom line - Being a Great Company to Work for All. What's important is that we ensure everyone 'Belongs'. We introduced this with a global campaign 'iBelong' which was activated from a group perspective internally and externally. Tens of thousands of people engaged on internal and external media showing how important connection is to DHL.

Rick Jackson

Daniel Savoury explains how in-person activations are cascaded across Lloyds in a strategic and meaningful way: *"In-person events are a great way of driving culture. How these happen varies across the organisation, with some divisions getting together once a quarter to focus solely on learning - something we do very well here. Other activations range from careers roadshows, charitable days, cultural days, and specific events aligned to calendar awareness. All our in-person events are supplemented by two big virtual all-in events where our CEO chats to the whole organisation about strategy and direction."*



We want our colleagues to have offices they are proud of and where they feel they can collaborate, and do their best work, so we've made a huge investment in getting this right and our spaces speak for themselves.”

Daniel Savoury

Lauren Hoare adds: *“Human connection is huge at Lockton. There's a lot of emphasis on digital experience – but it's all about human connection. You've got to put the heart and the mind of the person first – virtual touchpoints can't always replicate the connection.”*

For Josephina Smith, in-person strategies need to pay attention to the needs of multi-generational employee cohorts: *“Can you get the same human connection online? I don't think so, but my kids say they can, so it may be a generational thing. We need to consider this as leaders of multi-generational organisations.”*

She adds that it's about context and application: *“In-person has a role particularly when you're dealing with complex information. You need the environment where people feel comfortable asking questions - meetings, focus groups, for example. You get better anecdotal information and feedback this way.”*

Paul Szumilewicz is also clear on the impact of human connection, *“We're building back up to the magic of face-to-face – the things that happen when people come together. I read that in-person connection boosts levels of oxytocin which I think says it all. The power of connection is real and makes for innovation, creativity, problem solving – and trust. It sounds clichéd but it's true.”*



In-person driving culture and transformation

As organisations navigate return-to-office, in-person activations have evolved from an operational necessity to a strategic tool for rebuilding culture and accelerating transformation. It's clear from the insights our contributors shared that RTO remains very much front-of-mind and while picking up pace, it's still evolving.

Rick Jackson sets the scene for us: *“At DHL, we have a focus on in-person activations across the world. Our engagement and cultural programs including L&D have primarily been in-person but that transitioned during Covid - we quickly moved online. That is now evolving. We know that hybrid is important, and that in-person engagement drives a stronger culture.”*

Daniel Savoury shares: *“A big part of Lloyds' employee engagement strategy is in-person with key hubs right across the UK and internationally in India, the US and Europe. Over the past few years, we've made a shift towards hybrid working, so in the time that colleagues are in the office, we want them to feel that sense of purpose and community – in-person events do a great job of that.”*

Again, Daniel speaks candidly as to the lost sense of connection experienced post-pandemic *“Working virtually doesn't give you the same sense of connection, so it was important to get that magic back. We want our colleagues to have offices they are proud of and where they feel they can collaborate, and do their best work, so we've made a huge investment in getting this right and our spaces speak for themselves.”*

Paul Szumilewicz agrees, *“We’ve given in-person a lot of focus in last 6-12 months. We run regular all-in days with a big focus on getting people in the office and connecting face to face. We recently ran three days of face-to-face with a mix of town halls, break-out sessions and to celebrate the anniversary of BLME.”*



You can see colleagues collaborating, brainstorming ideas, bringing solutions to the bigger things we have going on in the business – we can’t afford not to do this. ”

Paul Szumilewicz

While many organisations are using well-designed in-person activations to support return-to-office strategies, balancing this with employee needs is also essential and a consideration our leaders are factoring into strategies.

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley shared her personal experience of this: *“When the pandemic started, I was a new mum and while I really enjoyed working from home, going back into the office makes the difference in terms of fostering connections, building networks, those ‘watercooler moments’ that come from standing in a queue waiting for a coffee. The informal stuff has a part to play.”*

She goes on to address the importance of choice for colleagues: *“In-person has to come from a place of choice and balance as a business. In my old role, we were two days a week. It’s when you feel like your balance is taken away from you – you’re removing choice – and it reverts to the parent-adult-child model which can have a negative impact.”*

Having established why in-person experience matters strategically, we now need to look at how organisations integrate human connection and meaningful activations to deliver on business objectives.



We’re building back up to the magic of face-to-face – the things that happen when people come together. I read that in-person connection boosts levels of oxytocin which I think says it all. The power of connection is real and makes for innovation, creativity, problem solving – and trust. ”

Paul Szumilewicz



CHAPTER 3

KEY OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYEE ACTIVATIONS



CHAPTER 3: KEY OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYEE ACTIVATIONS



Our findings so far have firmly established human connection as a core part of organisations’ people strategies and organisational roadmaps. In this chapter, our contributors break down the role of human connection in leading culture and change and identify six key business outcomes from employee activations.



KEY OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYEE ACTIVATIONS



We need to think about the impact of face-to-face in terms of leadership, visibility and authenticity. From an internal engagement strategy, we need to consider the key moments in an employee’s lifecycle – onboarding, talent recognition, career progression. It must be blended in a way that is inclusive and financially and environmentally pragmatic. ”

Lauren Hoare

“

In-person events for us are less about focusing on the day-to-day of our roles, and more about inclusivity, community, culture and belonging. ”

Daniel Savoury



1 DEEPEN CONNECTION TO PURPOSE

Strategic, intentional activations are foundational to deepening the connection for employees to organisational purpose.

Josephina Smith explains: *“In-person is vital when it comes to organisational purpose. Your people are seeing a leader sell a vision, the core of the business. If you think about it, often people talk about the way the person spoke – how they made them feel – rather than the message itself. People remember the passion and feeling rather than the message first. This is where the beauty of in-person is.”*

Chris Pilling speaks to the value of in-person: *“We’ve designed significant show-piece events – engineered in an engaging and creative way - so people understand where we are and where we’re going. These are led by the CEO and leadership team. It creates transparency and ensures every colleague is part of this.”*



2 FOSTER BELONGING & INCLUSION

The theme of belonging has emerged as a powerful thread throughout this white paper, woven into every element of employee activation strategy and design.

Daniel Savoury sees creating connection through events as an important part of Lloyds’ strategic vision: *“In terms of the events themselves, they do a great job of shining a light on our amazing culture. We want people to feel their hub is where they feel comfortable and truly part of something. Lloyds’ purpose of Helping Britain Prosper is central to absolutely everything we do and having a thriving culture is key to fulfilling that purpose.”*

He adds, *“In-person events for us are less about focusing on the day-to-day of our roles, and more about collective impact as well as inclusivity, community and culture.”*

Lauren Hoare also speaks to this through a global lens: *“As a global organisation, we have to ensure an inclusive and collaborative mindset across remote and distributed teams. It’s about intentionally creating the in-person moments that truly matter.”*

The moments that deepen human connection and reinforce belonging. People want to feel part of something. You can introduce that concept virtually, but you can't fully replicate the human experience through a screen. At Lockton, we focus on designing those meaningful touchpoints, so our associates feel connected wherever they are in the world."

Paul Szumilewicz explains that driving a sense of belonging can also strengthen the uniqueness of an organisation's culture: *"Our CPO does a lot to celebrate key religious events, as well as company and personal milestones. We have "majlis" throughout the year which is an Arabic tradition meaning "a place of sitting". It could be a council*

or a social gathering and it's a space for conversation and community. These root us back to BLME's purpose.

Chris Pilling shares how Musgrave invests in "wow" factor events to extend the brand into partnerships and suppliers: *"We run multi-day conferences with our SuperValu retail partners that are designed to be both highly informative, strategic and inspiring. There's a strong focus on the plan, new initiatives, and open Q&A, combined with external speakers. But it's also about celebration – we hold massive dinner dance and comedian evenings, and our 'Store of the Year' awards, which are hugely competitive and highly prized. All rooted in an atmosphere that reinforces belonging and shared success."*



A lot of what we do is just about spending time together – a lot about celebrating personal events and acknowledging success. ”

Paul Szumilewicz



3

ACCELERATE SKILLS & DEVELOPMENT

Learning & Development ('L&D') is the third area where employee activations drive meaningful impact through accelerating skills and development.

Rick Jackson explains how DHL approaches this: *"L&D is the premise of our cultural transformation. We've invested millions in driving engagement through development, and it's primarily done in person."*

Kate Smith shares CBRE's L&D model: *"We follow a 70/20/10 model for learning – 70% is on the job, through experience. 20% is learning from other people and 10% is traditional classroom or online. You can see why human connection is vital here. When you bring groups*

together, so much isn't about what you learn but the network you build while learning. Mentoring programmes are also led through in-person activations."

"We have cohorts going through leadership training and large graduate and apprenticeship programmes. Again, these rely on human-led assessment centres and bring an amazing injection of talent and energy to the business, delivered through a blend of in-person classrooms, drop-in surgeries, and workshops."

Daniel Savoury speaks to the success of Lloyds' divisional in-person learning: *"Our "Drop Everything and Learn Days" are brilliant – they're activated across all our hubs for certain divisions. There's a strong culture of learning here which is key for an organisation that's evolving."*

Like Kate, Daniel points to the value of in-person connection and cross-functional relationships within a learning environment: *"When you have in-person events you not only learn but you speak to people you normally wouldn't do -*

this builds breadth of understanding amongst colleagues and is great for career development."

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley adds that in-person is key for career development days: *"From a career architecture and framework perspective, in-person really supports how you equip senior leaders whether it's through board and exec days, retreats, or more 'inspirational' events where you bring in a speaker. It creates space to grow and develop."*



4 ATTRACT TOP TALENT

Without exception our contributors agreed that in-person experiences are essential for successful talent attraction strategies.

From the first interview through to onboarding and beyond, in-person experiences shape how individuals perceive, connect with, and commit to an organisation - making human connection critical to talent acquisition.

Lauren Hoare looks at the role it plays for Lockton's talent attraction strategies: *"Our candidates and associates feel our culture most powerfully when they experience it in person. Lockton's entrepreneurial spirit is a key differentiator. Our people are trusted and empowered to do what's right for clients. Being able to showcase that energy and authenticity face-to-face is incredibly impactful. Ultimately, we're a people business, and human connection is a core part of who we are."*

Lauren goes on to explain the longer-term employee cycle. *"When I look at onboarding, our priority is to create purposeful experiences that help new joiners feel welcomed, connected and part of something meaningful from Day One. Those early moments matter.*

We're intentional about designing onboarding in a way that feels personal and human, ensuring that managers have simple, thoughtful ways to make those first interactions genuinely warm and memorable."



It's about creating meaningful touchpoints that set the tone for an associate's entire experience with us. ”

Lauren Hoare

Daniel Savoury agrees, *"In-person interactions are essential for new joiners. We have Day One Buddies so our new colleagues are going through the process with someone who can support them. If people feel like they have that sense of belonging from the very start and they're comfortable in their surroundings and feel that sense of inclusivity, then they're more likely to do great work."*



5 RECOGNISE & CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENT

Several of our contributors spoke powerfully about the role of in-person recognition events: from large-scale flagship celebrations to local town halls, these celebrations create powerful moments where employees feel seen, valued, and connected to something bigger than themselves.

Josephina Smith starts us off: *“For me where it makes a difference most is recognition – every year we have a big event called “Thank You Fest.” We transform our HQ to a massive party to celebrate the colleagues we’re recognising, making sure that as an in-person gathering, it’s valuable. It’s a big positive event.”*

She adds that these events can also be scaled to meet more specific employee community needs. *“It can be difficult to accommodate everybody – we have to be responsible, cost and environmentally conscious. Locally, teams make recognition part of their townhalls.”*

Next to organisational purpose, recognition is a big part of belonging – being publicly seen and appreciated builds this culture of recognition.”

Lauren Hoare also highlights the role of Lockton’s flagship recognition event: *“Our Associate Awards are a highlight of the year. We bring colleagues together from across the region because recognising people meaningfully is simply the right thing to do. These moments allow us to celebrate individuals for who they are and reinforce their connection to each other and to our shared purpose and priorities.”*



6 STRENGTHEN EMPLOYER BRAND

The sixth outcome of employee activations is building stronger employer brands. What’s clear is that relevant, resonant, and impactful employer brands are forged and amplified through in-person experiences that turn candidates into employees and employees into ambassadors.

As Rick Jackson tells us: *“The whole reason you need a strong employer brand is to attract the best talent. Once inside, we want the emotional attachment from the experiences people have to become brand ambassadors – we want them to go home and tell their friends and family we are a great company to work for all.”*

Kate Smith agrees, highlighting that activations strengthen CBRE’s marketplace position as an employer brand – especially for talent attraction: *“We’re actively communicating our activations to the marketplace,*

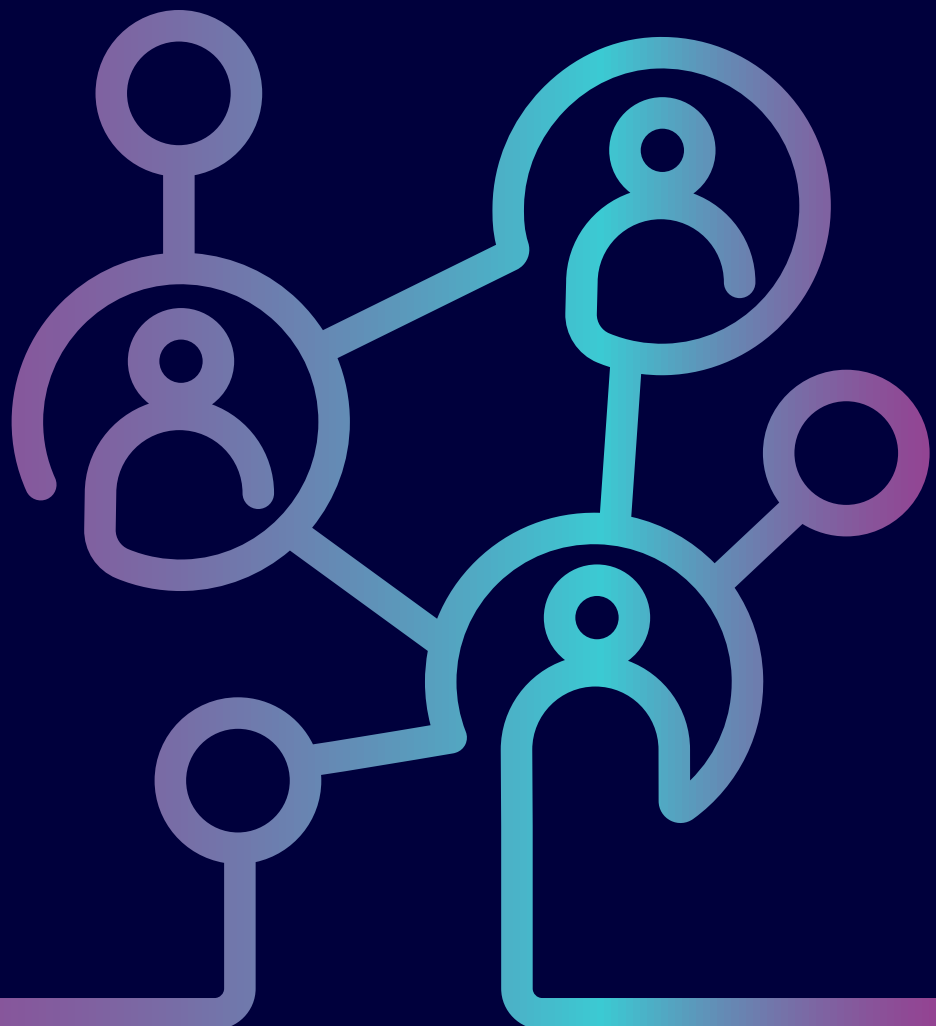
capturing what it’s like to work at CBRE. We do lots on video that we share on our social channels – it generates a strong interest in our graduate and apprentice schemes.”

Daniel Savoury also believes in the power of the shareable employer brand: *“Thinking of our graduate in-person events, the message is, “Lloyds is transforming. Look what you’re joining.” When people share what they’re doing, on LinkedIn or other social media, it creates excitement and strengthens our brand and engagement.”*



CHAPTER 4

THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONNECTION

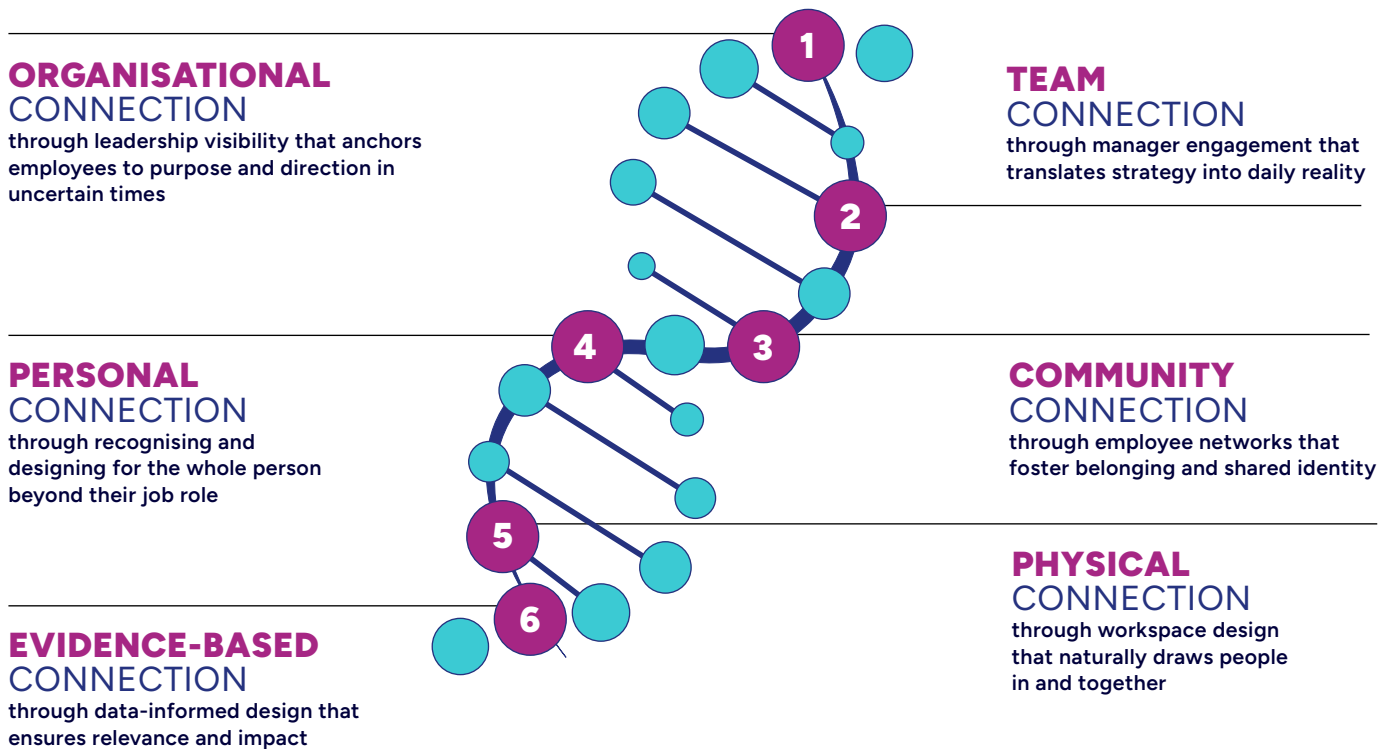


CHAPTER 4: THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONNECTION



Achieving these outcomes requires intentional design. Whilst human connection can take many forms – from large-scale global gatherings to smaller intimate workshops and one-to-ones, successful employee activations don't happen by accident.

They're built around multiple layers of connection, each designed to engage, inspire, and connect in different ways. When these layers work together, they create experiences that don't just engage employees in the moment – they build lasting relationships between people, purpose, and place.



1 LEADERSHIP VISIBILITY: ORGANISATIONAL CONNECTION

Josephina Smith is a passionate advocate for the role of leadership: *“For me culture is about leadership. Whether it’s in-office or virtual, ultimately if your culture’s not great, people can become disconnected or add to the dysfunction or just leave. When you look at culture in that way – leaders create the culture that employees live in.”*

“Culture is deep-rooted but we talk about it in a

flimsy way. There are fundamental things we – as people leaders – need to tackle at the organisational level. Helping our employees understand that leadership is an important part of how they connect with work and that the wider business is part of this.”

For Josephina, making sure leadership teams are visible is also key to culture-building when it comes

to human experiences. *“Visibility as a leader is critical: people need to see you. What’s more, as a leader, you get to know how people are feeling and thinking which can help to shape your own leadership. I sit near my team, and they pop in every day – it means I can keep that part of our engagement going. You can get a lot of clarity by grabbing someone for a few minutes.”*

Chris Pilling strongly agrees, *“At Musgrave, we put huge emphasis on bringing our leaders together in person. We have a commitment to building leadership events from conferences through to CEO visits. Every January we host an overall management conference that very deliberately*

sets the stall and tone for the year ahead. This is supported by Chairman and CEO visits - simply by visiting our stores, walking the floor and having coffee chats, leaders can communicate intent and commitment in powerful way.”

He adds, *“For us, leadership is practical. My most recent visit was to one of our newest openings, listening to the challenges, learning from the ideas on the ground, and celebrating with the team that are now running it. We’re telling our people: we’re here to check the temperature of the organisation and to make sure we’re doing everything for it to become a better version of itself. We want to make the workplace a lovely place to be.”*

2 THE MANAGER FACTOR: TEAM CONNECTION

While the role of leadership is clear in driving forward strategic direction, managers serve as the essential link between organisational vision and employee reality, critical carriers of culture and connection.

Lauren Hoare is clear on the essential role that managers play: *“Managers are one of the most powerful, and often underleveraged, drivers of the employee experience. People don’t leave organisations - they leave managers. It starts with simple human connection: Taking the time to have a conversation, to check in, to genuinely ask “How are you?” Those everyday moments build trust and help managers understand and support the whole person.”*

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley agrees. *“You don’t work for a business; you work for your manager. And that relationship is essential.”*



Line-managers are key when it comes to driving in-person attendance. Our line managers are well-equipped – from hiring through to day-to-day management. And it’s getting more complex and nuanced. Now you have 4-5 generations in the workplace – established leaders are leading people with different experiences they haven’t managed before and it’s important we create an equitable and positive culture across our business. Good managers can do this. ”

Kate Smith

3 EMPLOYEE NETWORKS: COMMUNITY CONNECTION

The organisations that are truly committed to exceptional in-person experiences as a core part of their employee engagement strategy have a strong infrastructure of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

ERGs are encouraged and supported to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organisations they serve and in turn develop a

rich programme of in-person events and experiences to support colleagues.

Rick Jackson shares DHL’s ambition here: *“We’re building Alliances at DHL which is the next level for our employee resource groups. We’re building a safe space for people including Allies to be themselves and create more of a sense of belonging.”*

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley agrees and believes that ERGs can provide support and safety during times of change: *“I’ve overseen several right-sizing programmes where the business has undergone a programme of redundancies and streamlining. This is where in-person activations around culture become key: you want your people to come on the journey of this, change, to understand what you’re trying to do, foster a sense of belonging and attachment to the brand. It’s about how you get people to trust that they will be ok. ERG groups are key here and you can do a lot through them.”*

CBRE UK Women’s Network was recently named Outstanding Women’s Network of the Year at the European Diversity Awards. Kate Smith explains:

“Our women’s network is one of our biggest drivers of activations as well as leading on how CBRE engages on gender equity. We host a Women’s Network Conference comprising panel events, networking, yoga and incredible guest speakers such as June Sarpong and Laura Bates. Other EBRG’s include family, disability, faith, race and ethnicity, social mobility, armed forces and LGBTQIA+.”

“Those groups will work with our experience team to host events around key topics, run regular café sessions on topics like pregnancy loss and fertility and menopause. We have men as allies groups as well.”

4 DESIGNING FOR THE WHOLE PERSON: PERSONAL CONNECTION

Employee experiences that take in-person activations beyond day-to-day work are also key, helping create a deeper sense of purpose, strengthen team connections, and build a more engaged, values-driven workplace culture.

Lauren Hoare explains: *“It’s essential to understand the person behind the job role and empower your leaders to be curious about the whole person. We need to be asking how we activate and leverage the relationship more.”*



At DHL, we design employee engagement with the whole person in mind. We look at the whole person holistically – what they think, how they feel, which drives what they say and what they do. Belonging and psychological safety are essential to our culture. We know that face to face creates empathy and builds trust. ”

Rick Jackson

Leading organisations are therefore designing activations that factor in the whole-person approach and include personal, relational, and emotional components.

Kate Smith shares how CBRE has developed this approach: *“CBRE votes for a charity partner every few years, with a lot of the support delivered in-person. Currently it’s Alzheimer’s Society, and our annual Row 50 event, for example, will fill an entire office floor here in London and happens in all our offices across the UK. We’ve raised £1m so far – that galvanises a sense of collective force, togetherness and purpose. We also deliver a lot of pro bono work with the organisation in addition to events like charity quizzes, book swaps, fundraisers. It builds community and is part of who we are as a culture.”*

Lauren Hoare agrees that charity and community initiatives expand connection: *“At Lockton, our Associate Dreams initiative is a powerful example of how we create meaningful connections with our people and our communities. Associates share a personal dream, and we bring a number of those dreams to life each year. It’s a truly unique initiative in our industry and a reflection of who we are. Beyond that, we invest in a wide range of community-focused activities that strengthen our ties with clients, colleagues, and the places we operate. It’s all part of building a culture that cares, contributes, and creates belonging.”*

Sport is another area of human connection for many contributors, either formally organised or more organic as Paul Szumilewicz explains: *“Once a month I book a local padel court and get a group together to play. It’s not revolutionary. But it’s about lighting lots of little fires around the organisation.”*

Chris Pilling explains: *“The best companies have got the resources to invest in the away days, the leadership programmes, the inspirational speakers, the town halls. And they have the appetite and desire to think of the whole person. I would never want to work for an organisation that didn’t want to make their people feel loved, cared for, or feel that their employer wasn’t a positive part of their career.”*

5 CREATING MAGNETIC SPACES: PHYSICAL CONNECTION

The link between physical workplace and in-person connection is clear – designing workplaces that attract colleagues to the office, creating healthy environments and compelling reasons to be there: these are magnetic workplaces. And these make the ideal locations for powerful on-site activations.

Kate Smith agrees: *“You can go back to the real estate itself. At Henrietta House we put a lot of thought into the design of the space – using the building as a magnet. Some is in the design, some in the amenities, some in the ad hoc activations we plan across the year, all underpinned by our fantastic team operating the building – so the daily experience is welcoming and frictionless.”*

Design elements - minimal barriers and a beautiful staircase that allows for serendipitous meetings - all bring people together. We are also WELL platinum certified which underpins our commitment to a happy and healthy workplace.”



We’ve invested in modern, agile and capable workspaces. If you create an environment that, by design, brings people together in a collaborative way, you can tell that the company has invested in you – it speaks volumes for the mindset of the leadership.”

Chris Pilling

6 DATA-INFORMED DESIGN: EVIDENCE-BASED CONNECTION

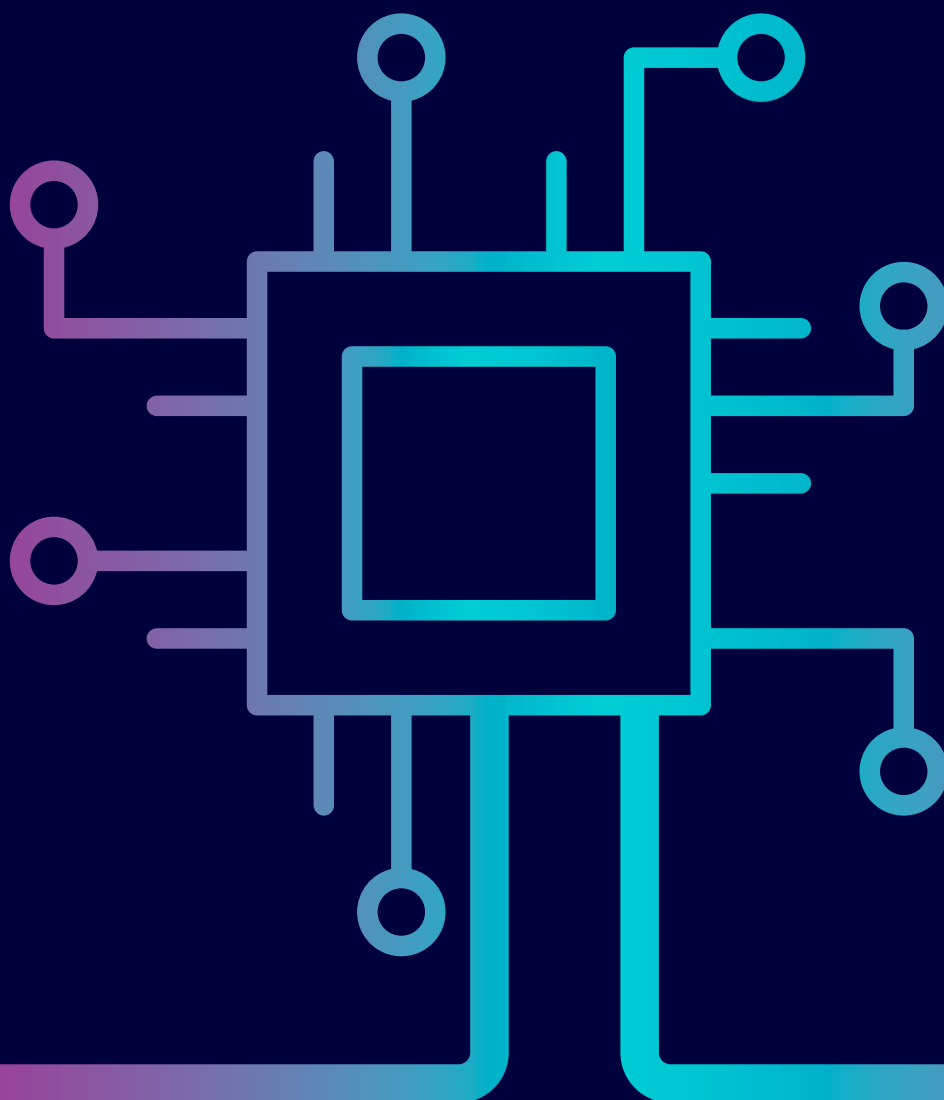
Whether strengthening connections across organisational silos or deepening understanding of specific employee experiences, leaders are taking increasingly strategic, data-informed approaches to building culture - and integrating this into in-person design.

Arti Kashyap-Aynsley has used engagement surveys to analyse specific needs for activations: *“In my last organisation, we had shifted our business goals to include employee experience as a metric, which we found was lower with women. Having this data, we wanted to look at the overall experience of women and how we could improve that. This included running focus groups and interviews to better understand the pulse of what was going on in the business and designing responses and events specifically through the lens of our female employees.”*

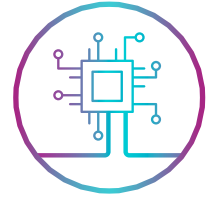


CHAPTER 5

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION & INNOVATION



CHAPTER 5: TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION & INNOVATION



Throughout this white paper, we've seen how technology and AI are transforming the workplace and employee experience at an unprecedented pace. In a world where technological change continues to accelerate, where does this leave human connection and experiences?

The technology and AI opportunity

What's clear is that AI has been a seismic catalyst of change – and with that, uncertainty and for many, fear.

As Arti Kashyap-Aynsley acknowledges, *"AI provides opportunities. There's the view that 'AI is going to take my job' without seeing the opportunity behind it. It's a huge opportunity for people to get involved and take away admin so that they can focus more on strategic things, have more impact, and do more of what they want to do. The question becomes how we can use it in business to provide more stretch opportunities. Businesses need to leverage AI to improve job satisfaction and provide more value to employees."*

Kate Smith explains CBRE's approach: *"CBRE's global AI strategy aims to improve client outcomes, boost operational efficiencies, and provide a knowledge advantage through our proprietary data and leading AI platform. Our UK business has adopted this technology from the beginning. Our employees frequently use our generative AI tool, and we are actively integrating applications to help our teams make better-informed decisions and work more efficiently."*

Paul Szumilewicz adds: *"We're looking at how we build tech with human advantage. Someone who understands tech will also understand connectivity, creativity and communication: we're recruiting grads who over-index on areas like critical thinking and problem solving."*

The reality is that some organisations want to take more time in terms of AI adoption.

Lauren Hoare tells us, *"As an industry we are cautious about AI. Right now, we're using it from a soft perspective for smaller scale projects. We're not being too radical and slowly looking at onboarding things like CoPilot. We're always being challenged to include AI from a candidate experience perspective, and of course data is where it really can support us, helping to build the link between design, participation, engagement."*

Balancing human and digital

When it comes to event activation, our contributors are clear that it isn't about digital or in-person, rather it's how businesses achieve the right balance between both so that technology enables and amplifies human connection rather than replaces it.

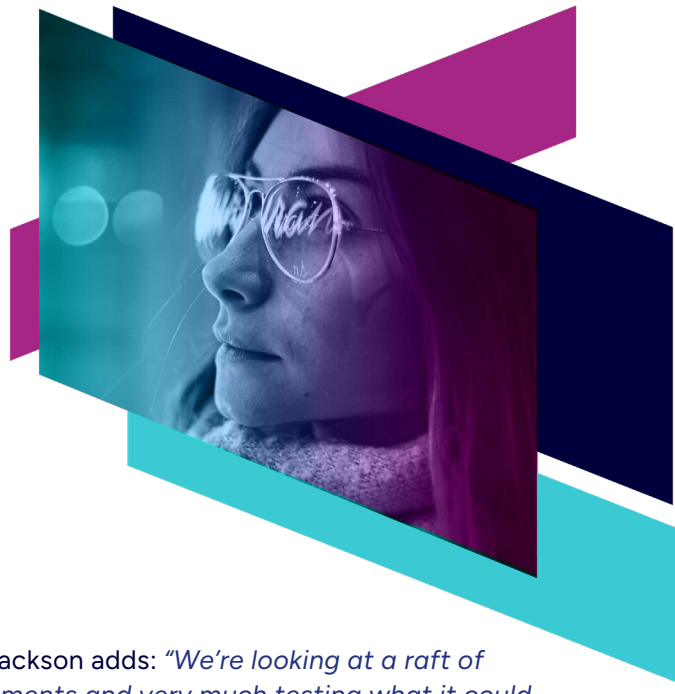
Leading organisations are strategically integrating AI and tech adoption with purposeful in-person connection to drive engagement and performance.

For Daniel Savoury, Lloyds has been successful at balancing the benefits of technology with in-person. *"I genuinely think that we have found our sweet spot. Our 'all-in' virtual events are a great way to hear from our CEO about strategy updates and insights, and our more localised in-person events bring more of a sense of local belonging and community. Together it feels like we're giving our colleagues the right engagement."*



Personalisation is a hugely untapped, and exciting area – features like real-time translation for our global business will have a real impact on engagement as it removes the communication barrier instantaneously. ”

Lauren Hoare



At CBRE, technology is about amplifying and supporting human experience. Kate Smith explains: *“We use digital to support what we do in-person. For example, we make sure its well-covered on social media so that we can share our thinking and experience with the marketplace. This way it delivers our brand to existing and potential talent and clients.”*

At DHL, blending technology with already powerful in-person activations is a way of expanding value and impact: *“A lot of work is going on around AI especially in terms of how it makes the employee experience more efficient, so our people have access to more experiences they wouldn’t get before.”*

Rick Jackson adds: *“We’re looking at a raft of experiments and very much testing what it could look like for us. But we always come back to the fundamental human piece too – and we always will.”*

Lauren Hoare agrees that balancing in-person with technology can help enhance experiences as well as underpin the impact on business outcomes: *“Personalisation is a hugely untapped, and exciting area – features like real-time translation for our global business will have a real impact on engagement as it removes the communication barrier instantaneously. It also helps us demonstrate value: tech can really help connect employee engagement with business performance and metrics.”*

As we move towards the conclusion of this report, it is clear that when technology and in-person experiences are thoughtfully integrated, they create employee experiences that are efficient yet deeply human, scalable yet personally meaningful, and innovative yet fundamentally grounded in what it means to be part of a thriving organisation.



CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE OF IN-PERSON EMPLOYEE ACTIVATIONS



CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF IN-PERSON EMPLOYEE ACTIVATIONS



As we look to the future, our contributors are clear: human connection and in-person experiences will only grow in importance.

Daniel Savoury brings it back to Lloyds' 2030 organisational strategic pathway: *"We have a very ambitious CEO and Leadership Team who are driving to take the business to the next level – to be the best we can be. So, the pace of change is evident as we develop the skills to take us there. As we continue to transform, bringing our colleagues on the journey is central to our success, so how we engage with them is key."*

Paul Szumilewicz agrees that a strong in-person culture will drive better performance: *"We need to be open-minded but all-in days will be of growing importance. In-person is a critical part of our DNA as a customer focused, small private bank that is people-led."*

Wellbeing

Further integrating wellbeing into employee experiences will become an increasing strategic imperative as – against a backdrop of social and economic uncertainty – it becomes a business risk.

As Arti Kashyap-Aynsley tells us, *"With so much change and anxiety around job security, employee wellbeing has to be at the heart of it. In-person means you can be honest and vulnerable – it puts a level of realness to it. This helps belonging and psychological safety, as well as commitment."*

Kate Smith agrees: *"Mental health is a leading cause of workplace absence so there's an increasing need for us to do more around this. Neurodiversity is also a big topic: 50% of Gen Z either have a diagnosis or believe they could be neurodivergent, so all workplaces need to consider how they help all colleagues feel they belong."*



We need resilience in organisations. You have to be able to change, to keep remodelling like clay. Resilience comes from togetherness and community. I really believe that community and connection will help people survive through rapid tech advancement and socioeconomic challenges. Strengthening resilience and helping support people will be a key role of the workplace. ”

Kate Smith



In-person experiences cannot exist in isolation but within a cultural strategy – there will always be that human factor. ”

Josephina Smith



AI in the future

Finally, as we look to the future, whilst AI is a key consideration for our people leaders, balancing this with human connection will be key.



In-person moments are never transactional. They remind people of who we are, why we exist and what makes Lockton different. Those human touchpoints will continue to play a central role in strengthening our culture, no matter how technology evolves. ”

Lauren Hoare

Josephina Smith adds, *“AI advancement has created real workplace uncertainty particularly regarding, skill relevance. Job security and pace of change. In-person can help to alleviate it, helping your people understand what it means for them. This will always be better face to face, to support your team and harness trust and collaboration.”*

She adds, *“In-person experiences cannot exist in isolation but within a cultural strategy – there will always be that human factor.”*

Rick Jackson says: *“We’re looking at how we create a hybrid position that allows digital to be more effective and we’re focusing on in-person where it is most important. We are returning to where we had the most impact pre-Covid because we understand the value of it.”*


Re-imagining human connection

Throughout this report, we’ve shared a diversity of experience and perspective drawing on the insights of our eight leaders – all operating across a range of sectors, markets and with unique people challenges. Despite these differences, the threads converge: human connection and in-person experiences are not ‘nice-to-have’. They are foundational to culture, essential to performance, and non-negotiable for building organisations with the resilience to navigate the complexity and velocity of change that is defining this era.

Our contributors have shown us that successful organisations integrate employee experience with business strategy. As we look toward the future, the question isn’t whether in-person connection matters, but *how* organisations will continue to evolve their approach and investment to meet the demands of tomorrow’s workplace.


INSIGHTS THAT POINT THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 HUMAN CONNECTION IS NON-NEGOTIABLE**




In an era of hybrid working and digital transformation, in-person experiences are essential now more than ever for building culture, driving engagement, and supporting organisational success and performance.

- 2 STRATEGIC INTEGRATION IS KEY**




Successful organisations integrate their in-person activations throughout the employee lifecycle from onboarding through learning, recognition, and beyond rather than treating them as standalone events.

- 3 LEADERSHIP BUY-IN MATTERS**



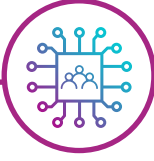
Leaders who are visible and invested in employee experience create cultures where employees feel seen, valued, and connected to organisational purpose.

- 4 PLACE AS STRATEGIC ASSET**




Physical workspace design that attracts colleagues, creates community, and supports wellbeing can bolster in-person experiences as part of a magnetic workplace strategy.

- 5 TECHNOLOGY ENABLES, NOT REPLACES**




AI and technology should enhance human connection and free people for more meaningful interaction, not replace the value of face-to-face engagement.

- 6 PURPOSE-DRIVEN EXPERIENCES WIN**



Employees respond to in-person activations that connect to organisational purpose, personal values, and meaningful moments.

- 7 BALANCE AND CHOICE CREATE BUY-IN**



Organisations that clearly articulate the “why” of in-person see higher engagement and greater impact.

Our contributors have told us: purposeful employee experiences aren't optional – they are a critical success factor for a thriving and successful organisation.

As AI redefines work, multi-generational workforces demand purposeful and personalised moments, and employee wellbeing becomes an even stronger business imperative, organisations are reinforcing their commitment to the human experiences and 'moments' that build resilience, foster belonging, and create the cultural foundation needed to navigate constant transformation and change.

To conclude, we know the future of work isn't about choosing between digital and physical, remote and in-office, efficiency and connection.

It's about intentionally designing experiences that **engage, inspire, and connect - experiences that bring out the best in people, build resilient cultures, and create environments where everyone can thrive.**



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS



LAUREN HOARE
Employee Experience
& Engagement Leader
Lockton

Lauren is the Employee Experience & Engagement Leader at Lockton, dedicated to shaping inclusive, high-performing cultures through neuroscience-led insight and intentional communication.

Lauren focuses on creating experiences that deepen belonging, boost engagement, and unlock organisational potential.



RICK JACKSON
Executive Vice President
Engagement & Enablement
DHL Group

Rick is the Executive Vice President Engagement & Enablement and is part of DHL's HR management team as an HR Board member.

Rick works closely with all divisions to engage, enable and empower DHL's 600,000 people across the globe, strengthening culture and employee experience.



ARTI KASHYAP-AYNSLEY
Strategy &
Transformation Leader

Arti is a strategic and commercially minded leader with over 15 years' experience across consulting and global organisations.

A former Chartered Accountant and management consultant, she has partnered with senior executives and clients to lead complex transformation and deliver measurable outcomes. Arti regularly contributes to conversations on transformation, performance, and the evolving realities of work.



CHRIS PILLING
Non-Executive Director
**Musgrave Group plc,
Barclays Bank UK, UK Sport**

Chris is an experienced Executive and Non-Executive Director with over 20 years' experience across high-profile public and private sector organisations.

As former CEO of two leading UK customer-focused businesses, Chris is known for delivering excellent commercial results, and leading significant strategic change and transformation in some of the best-known UK and US organisations.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS



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Employer Brand Lead
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Daniel is the Employer Brand Lead at Lloyds Banking Group, leading a team that is responsible for creating and activating the organisation's Employee Value Proposition.

A champion of inclusive storytelling and data-driven brand activation, Daniel's work connects the internal colleague experience to the outside world.



JOSEPHINA SMITH
Reward & Recognition Director
British Airways

Josephina is a People Director, HR and Reward thought leader, and speaker with over 20 years' experience across HR and reward management.

A business-first leader, she ensures people strategies are grounded in commercial reality and deliver measurable impact. Having held senior in-house roles across multiple industries, Josephina is known for connecting reward, performance, and inclusion to organisational success.



KATE SMITH
Executive Director
CBRE Consulting

Kate is an Executive Director in CBRE's Consulting team, partnering with the firm's most significant clients and prospects to tackle complex people, business and real estate challenges.

Kate is a frequent speaker on Workplace, inclusion and the future of work. She recently completed a five-year tenure as Co-Chair of the award-winning CBRE UK Women's Network and serves as Co-Chair of UK 50/50 Women on Boards.



PAUL SZUMILEWICZ
Chief Commercial Officer
BLME Bank

Paul joined BLME Bank in early 2024 as the Chief Commercial Officer, responsible for leading the Neo Bank, Nomo (the world's first digital Islamic bank), and the BLME Real Estate Finance and Private Banking businesses.

He has over 25 years' leadership experience in financial services including banking, wealth management and insurance.



METHODOLOGY

Experience as a Culture Catalyst: Powering Organisational Change draws on qualitative research conducted between October and December 2025. The research involved full interviews with our contributors to explore how organisations use in-person employee experiences to navigate transformation and drive cultural change.

ABOUT FOURTHWALL

FourthWall is an employee experience and employer branding agency.

Specialists in experience design and delivery, FourthWall partners with organisations to design and deliver innovative employee and future talent experiences that **engage, inspire, and connect**.

The London-based agency works with leading brands to bring employer value propositions, culture and engagement strategies to life – from strategic and creative development through to hands-on delivery and execution.

FIND OUT MORE

For questions or to discuss how these insights might apply to your organisation, contact us at hello@fourthwallagency.com.

www.fourthwallagency.com

This white paper is based on research, industry insights, and FourthWall's experience working with organisations on employee and future talent engagement and activation programs. The views and recommendations expressed are our own and those of the contributors, and should be adapted to fit your organisation's specific context, culture, and objectives.

While we've made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information presented, business environments and employee expectations continue to evolve. We recommend using this content as a starting point for discussion rather than a prescriptive solution. Results will vary based on implementation, organisational readiness, and local factors.

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