



Reward  
Gateway

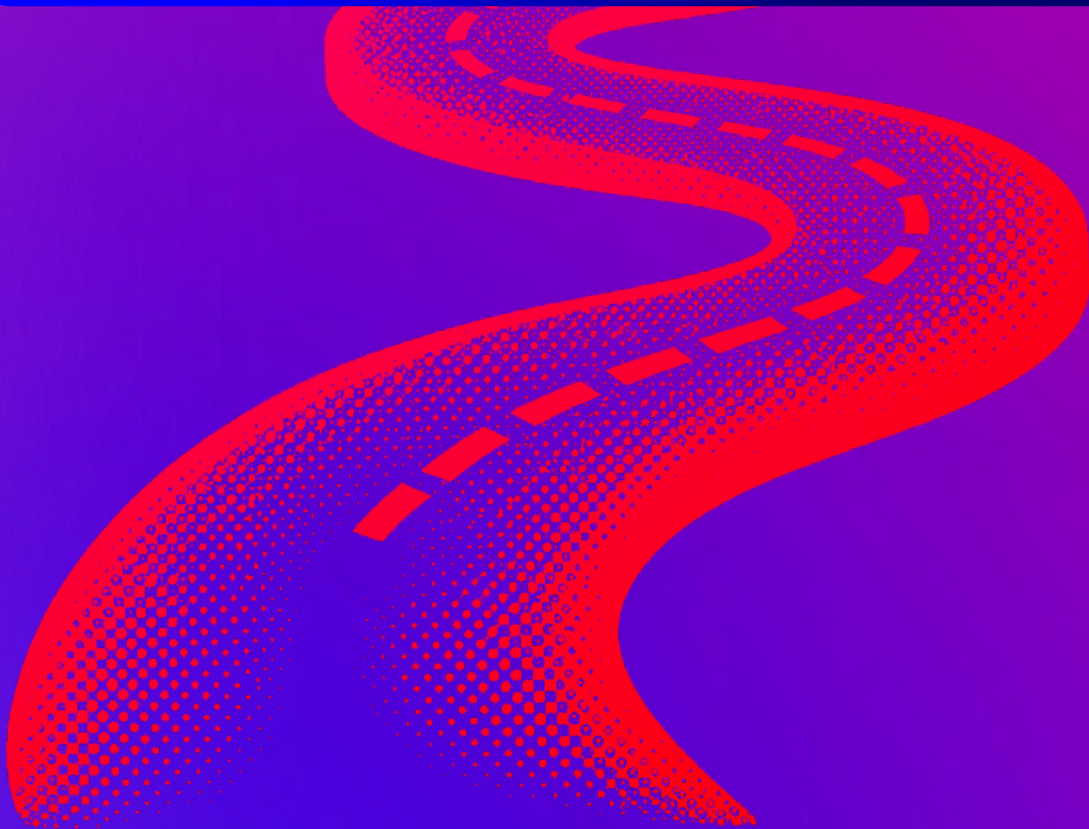


Edenred

# Powering Up

# Managers:

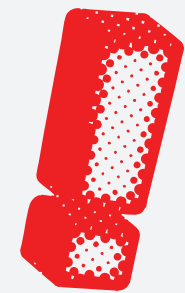
## Your 90-Day HR Roadmap.



A quick-win framework to drive  
engagement, lighten HR load and boost  
ROI through your people leaders



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# Introduction

HR teams are under intense pressure to prove clear, defensible ROI. With budgets shrinking and every initiative expected to justify its existence, HR leaders are being pushed to demonstrate what is genuinely moving the needle on business performance. In many organisations, funding is being pulled first from initiatives that lack measurable impact, making ROI not just a reporting challenge, but a necessity for survival.

At the same time, organisations are grappling with a deeper issue: employees are increasingly unhappy and traditional engagement tactics aren't fixing it. Despite years of investment in wellbeing, recognition and culture programmes, our 2025 research revealed that turnover continues to rise and only half of UK employees say they feel happy at work.

“  
**HR teams that struggle to prove ROI experience budget cuts of twice as much**  
”

“  
**90% of HR managers find it difficult to measure the impact or effectiveness of their programmes**  
”

Conducted in partnership with the London School of Economics (LSE), our latest report [The Happiness Dividend](#) explores the direct impact that employee happiness has on measurable business outcomes such as productivity, retention and firm value.



## Employee happiness leads to:

- 12%** increase in productivity
- 30%** improvement in retention
- 20%** growth in firm value

It's clear that investing in your people's happiness pays off – but this is only the case when employee engagement becomes a daily practice, embedded at every touchpoint and amplified across the organisation.

And one of the most influential factors in driving happiness, uncovered by our LSE-partnered research, is the relationship an employee has with their manager. Employees who feel supported by their manager are dramatically happier, more motivated, more engaged and more likely to stay. On the other hand, poor management can be hugely damaging to happiness and wellbeing, leading to a rise in turnover and disengagement. At the same time, even the best-designed employee engagement initiatives will be falling flat when delivered by managers who lack clarity, capability or confidence.

This is, in part, why more HR leaders are now looking to decentralise ownership of the employee experience, shifting day to day responsibility from central HR teams to people managers. Nearly all HR leaders agree that managers should take greater ownership of core people practices, from wellbeing conversations and personalised recognition to performance support and career progression mapping.

A decentralised model promises stronger employee support, higher utilisation of people programmes and the ability for HR to redirect scarce resources toward organisation wide priorities. This latter shift has become even more urgent as HR is increasingly asked to take on more strategic responsibilities while simultaneously operating with reduced budgets and smaller teams.



**Let's get started**

But decentralisation only works when managers are equipped and empowered to deliver it, and the reality is that many aren't. Our research has uncovered a clear and widening gap in line manager clarity, capability, capacity, and – perhaps unsurprisingly – a lack of desire to even become a people manager.

Closing this gap requires deliberate HR enablement: giving managers the training, tools, support and empowerment to own the employee experience in a meaningful way. Without this foundation, decentralisation risks becoming another strategic ambition that never translates into day to day behaviour.

This eBook aims to support you in your transition to a decentralised HR model that not only drives employee happiness through direct managerial support, but that delivers strategic value for your business and provides the ROI you need to demonstrate.

## Over the next three chapters, we'll outline:

- The crucial role managers play in driving employee happiness and strategic outcomes such as productivity, retention and business value
- The practical opportunities for HR to decentralise responsibilities to people managers and free up time and resource
- The current gap between employee needs and manager performance, as well as the mindset HR teams must take to elevate the organisational influence of people leaders
- Actionable tips to power-up managers with the clarity, capability and capacity to deliver improved support

**We'll also provide you with a comprehensive 90-Day Roadmap complete with short, medium and long-term steps to implement in empowering and enabling your managers.**

# Chapter 1

# The power of people managers

To help build an understanding of why the decentralised, manager-first approach can be so impactful and help deliver essential ROI, we need to consider the role and importance of people managers.

Our research with the London School of Economics reviewed some of the most recent academic research published in leading peer-reviewed journals, as well as recent large-scale survey evidence from the UK. This research crucially uncovered management quality as one of the top drivers of employee happiness in the UK, and twice as important to employees as pay. And this has a knock-on effect, with the evidence strongly associating effective management with employee productivity and overall firm performance.

“  
**People need to feel seen, heard and supported by their direct managers.**  
”

**Employees with managers who support and encourage them are:**

- 74% more productive at work
- 73% more likely to stay in their role
- 71% more motivated to go above and beyond their usual duties
- 68% more likely to get on with colleagues and maintain deeper relationships

Bridging the ROI Gap, Reward Gateway | Edenred, 2025/2026

Great managers play a crucial role in shaping how employees feel day to day, through consistent and **authentic care, support and recognition**. When managers show genuine care and take time to understand what motivates each person and what challenges they’re navigating, employees feel seen and valued. When they offer steady support, whether that’s removing blockers or simply checking in, they build trust and create a sense of stability. And when they recognise effort and progress in a timely, meaningful way, they reinforce that each person’s contribution matters. Together, these behaviours strengthen connection, boost happiness and create a team environment where people feel motivated to do their best work.

Their importance is underpinned by the fact that employees are most likely to go to their manager if they were having problems at work. At the same time, only 6% of employees said they would go to HR.

And on top of this care, support and recognition, people managers also play an important role in sharing important company information with their teams, tailoring and localising central messaging. They are often solely responsible for solidifying the link between the broader organisational strategy, and the part their team members play in helping to realise it. Internal communication professionals consistently rank ‘manager team meetings’ and ‘manager 1:1s’ as two of the most effective channels of communication, with many organisations being reliant on line managers to communicate key company benefits and drive utilisation.

But has this always been the case? There’s no doubt that the role of the people manager has evolved significantly over the last decade, as the weight of expectations from both employees and organisations continues to grow. While line managers used to be responsible for traditional resource and performance management, their responsibilities have expanded to include supporting, facilitating, guiding and connecting teams across increasingly complex and diverse working environments.



Committing to a decentralised approach by making manager empowerment a key priority is, ultimately, a win-win approach. On one side of the coin, people managers are already best placed to support their team members and promote people initiatives at a local level. On the other side, HR managers gain capacity to embrace a more strategic role that acknowledges the complex needs of the ever-evolving modern workforce, while meeting the increased demands for ROI.

Empowering and enabling managers is a must for organisations seeking to boost performance and connection across their workforces. The more effectively we enable and empower our people management populations, the more impact leaders will have in developing meaningful relationships with team members and ensuring everyone feels supported and appreciated.

“  
**Direct managers are already the frontline of HR, whether we acknowledge it or not.**  
”

# Chapter 2

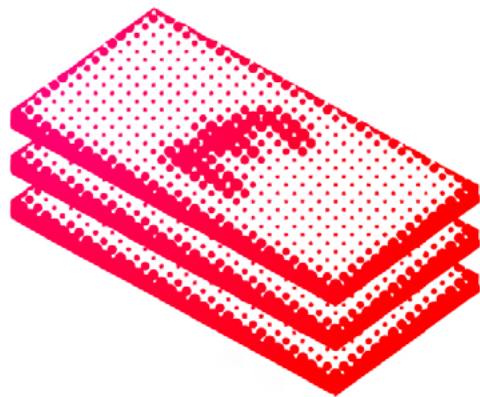
## The management gap

The unfortunate reality is that there is a significant disconnect between the responsibilities HR are expecting managers to take on, and the experiences of employees at the other end. With managerial relationships one of the biggest drivers of employee happiness, but one in every two employees currently unhappy at work, it's clear there is a substantial gap in manager capability and capacity that needs to be bridged.

To be in with a chance of progressing with a decentralised approach, HR leaders must assess and consider the current landscape within their workforces. And [our research](#) has uncovered some uncomfortable truths.

Despite an overwhelming **87% of HR managers** confident that they provide line managers in their organisation with “the necessary tools and information to effectively communicate employee benefits, initiatives and wellbeing resources to their teams”, **only 37% of employees** are actually aware of the benefits and initiatives available to them.

Concerningly, a third of managers are neglecting even the most basic of people management responsibilities – failing to set goals, monitor workloads or review progression with their team members. And while more than a quarter of employees now believe that their employer is responsible for their wellbeing, only 26% are comfortable talking about their mental health at work.



“Without effective lines of communication, trust and respect between people managers and their employees, central engagement initiatives all too often fail to translate to behavioural change. A lack of managerial engagement and follow-through is one of the most notable killers of impact and ROI, causing people initiatives and programmes to fall at the last hurdle.”



## The gap to bridge

### Areas HR want managers to take more ownership in

- Performance management and reviews **(43%)**
- Supporting employees through personal struggles **(39%)**  
Signposting wellbeing resources to employees in need **(29%)**
- Supporting employees through professional struggles **(39%)**
- Communicating relevant benefits and initiatives to employees **(33%)**

### The current employee experience

- 34%** say their manager doesn't regularly review their progression  
**38%** don't have have goals and targets regularly set by their manager
- 40%** say their manager doesn't regularly check in on their wellbeing
- 37%** say their manager doesn't regularly check on their workload and capacity  
**34%** say their manager doesn't listen to their problems and takes steps to manage them
- Only **37%** are fully aware of the benefits and initiatives available to them

Our research also revealed that only (57%) of managers feel supported and enabled to be a great manager, and 21% of say they were not offered sufficient training when they stepped into the role. At the same time, more than a quarter are frequently experiencing burnout. It's clear from the data that these line manager 'failings' are systemic, not personal, and so it doesn't come as too much of a shock to find that 44% of employees say they want to progress their careers without having to take on people management responsibilities.



HR teams need to take action to enable managers to support their people more effectively. Closing the gap will involve greater clarity around current and future people management responsibilities, provision of more deliverable engagement initiatives and more effective manager guidance and support.

# Chapter 3

## Practical Ways to Empower Managers

Now that we've considered the importance of people managers and the current gap that many organisations are experiencing, we can turn our attention to some of the practical ways HR teams can empower and enable managers.

We've designed this five-step plan to help foster and promote strong, supportive people management across any organisation – regardless of size, industry or geography.

1

### Co-design initiatives

From a manager's perspective, there's nothing more frustrating or limiting than being constantly sent people-related content or initiatives with a request to simply 'cascade' to their teams. People managers have the most direct line into the wants and needs of their team members, so it's a huge miss if we're building people and engagement-related initiatives in a HR vacuum without asking managers to input or provide feedback pre-launch.

Consider forming a 'Manager Advisory Board' to pressure-test initiatives, benefits and campaigns when they're in the development stage.

Aside from helping create an army of aligned and engaged advocates, this step will also help ensure that people programmes and initiatives are aligned with wider business priorities and feel operationally relevant.

2

### Establish a 'Management Framework'

Clarity is the antidote to resistance, reluctance and confusion, so it's incredibly important to set clear expectations for manager-led engagement. Use this step to define exactly what the partnership looks like, removing ambiguity and laying a foundation for psychologically safe conversations around performance.

This is your opportunity to provide the tools, data and coaching that will enable managers to deliver a consistent cadence of 1:1, transparent feedback and local action plans.

For the 'Management Framework' to be successfully embedded, it's important that senior leaders model and reinforce the desired behaviours. Deliver coaching and support to ensure leadership teams – including those at C-Suite level – understand their responsibilities and impact.

3

### Create a support ecosystem

Genuinely supporting your people managers does not mean delivering a one-off workshop or webinar and then expecting habits to change overnight. This step involves creating a self-sustaining support structure, including things like:

- Peer learning from 'manager champions' who share real-world wins
- Live 'manager resource centres' with quick and easy access to key documents and information
- Communities of practice, such as 'monthly manager forums' and 'management community check-ins'

4

### Provide manager KPIs

Provide people managers a clear set of 'leading indicators' (manager actions) and 'lagging indicators' (employee outcomes).

The aim with this step is to encourage managers to measure what matters by creating a consistent view of what good looks like across the people management community and encouraging a simple, credible ROI narrative.

Consider developing a central dashboard to track things like 1:1 frequency and manager recognition, connecting the dots with key outcomes such as retention and productivity data. This information should be used to identify where more support and training is required, rather than to flag if a manager needs 'punishment' or retribution.

5

### Normalise and model psychological safety

When you're people feel psychologically safe, they bring their best selves to work. It empowers employees to speak up, take smart risks and share ideas without fear, which directly fuels employee engagement and creativity.

But creating a psychologically safe working environment is impossible without empowering strong and supportive managers to lead the way and forge connections between employees and the organisation.

As an HR function, it's important to normalise and role-model psychological safety. You want to promote a genuine partnership with people managers, which begins with them feeling safe enough to reach out to their local HR Business Partner when they have a people-related question or challenge.

For this step, think about the ways that conversations and briefings with managers can shift from 'evaluation' to 'enablement'. Position HR as a true 'success coach', with aligned goals.

# 90-Day Roadmap to power up your managers

This 90-Day Roadmap supports HR teams to enable and empower managers right across their organisations, sharing different priorities and actions for each different period. We've shared quick wins that can be implemented immediately, along with medium-term capability-building initiatives and long-term cultural embedding.

We're aiming to shift focus from designing initiatives to designing manager capability, from programmes to people, and from HR-driven to manager-led. This roadmap will guide you through the steps you need to get there.

This 90 Day Roadmap gives HR teams a clear, practical path to activate and empower managers across the organisation. Each phase highlights the priorities that matter most, with immediate quick wins, mid term capability building, and long term cultural embedding to drive both fast and sustainable growth.

At its core, this roadmap shifts the focus from designing initiatives to building manager capability, from programmes to people and from HR driven to manager led. It shows the exact steps to make that shift real, achievable and lasting.

## By the end of the 90 days, you will have:

- ☐ Diagnosed the real barriers to engagement within your organisation
- ☐ Defined clear expectations for your people managers and a framework within which to measure tangible results
- ☐ Equipped managers with practical tools they need to drive employee happiness
- ☐ Powered up the capability and confidence of your managers
- ☐ Created early evidence of ROI, helping you to justify the impact of employee engagement
- ☐ Established a scalable model to deliver longer-term impact

## How we'll help:

As well as outlining the actions and strategies in your manager empowerment journey, we'll also be checking in with a friendly email reminder after each phase to keep you on track and provide some helpful and engaging resources along the way.

# Phase 1 | Days 1-30

## Diagnose & Align

This first phase is about building a strong foundation and setting a clear baseline. You'll uncover the real pain points and define what great people management should look like in your organisation. It's your moment to gain deep clarity, understand the current reality and set the direction before accelerating into action.

### HR Actions:

#### ☐ Conduct Capability Assessment

Identify skill gaps and barriers to engagement across your managers, paying particular attention to the areas where they feel least supported.

#### ☐ Review & Analyse Engagement Data

Work through existing engagement survey results, exit data, pulse survey feedback and employee sentiment to identify any positive or negative patterns linking to manager behaviour.

#### ☐ Define Management Framework

As detailed in the five-step plan in Chapter 3, create a simple framework that clarifies the behaviours and actions expected of all people managers in your organisation.

#### ☐ Secure Leadership Alignment

Present the findings and your proposed 'Management Framework' to senior leaders to finalise and agree on the role that people managers play, and confirm the organisation's authentic commitment to supporting them.

#### ☐ Audit HR Tools & Support

Consider if you are providing the tools and support that people managers actually need. Set out to identify what's working, what's unused and what's missing.

### Phase 1 Outcomes:

- HR gain greater focus on the most high-impact areas
- People managers feel heard and understood
- The organisation has a shared vision of 'good'
- Leaders are aligned on the vision

### Phase 1 Outputs:

- A people manager 'capability gap' analysis
- A finalised 'Management Framework' with senior leader buy-in
- A prioritised list of manager needs
- Baseline metrics for future ROI measurement

## The Happiness Dividend



Created in partnership with The London School of Economics, our research report reveals how employee happiness drives measurable productivity, retention and business performance, and explores the role that factors such as manager relationships play in influencing employee happiness.

[Download the Report](#)

## Manager surveys



Launch targeted surveys to gain clear insights into how prepared and confident your managers are feeling with survey tools. Identify blind spots and missed opportunities to shape your strategy and better empower your leaders.

[Learn more](#)

# Phase 2 | Days 31-60

## Equip & Enable

Throughout this phase, you'll equip managers with **practical, bite sized tools and simple habits** that build the skills and confidence they need to deliver engagement **consistently and with impact**. It's about giving them the everyday support that turns good intentions into reliable, repeatable behaviour.

### HR Actions:

#### ☐ Create a 'Manager Toolkit'

Using our Manager Toolkit Template, create and launch a helpful resource for people managers that includes conversation guides, action planning templates, recognition prompts and wellbeing check-in questions. Launch with a small pilot group of managers to allow for real-time, pre-launch feedback.

#### ☐ Launch Manager 'Micro-Learning'

Facilitate short, scenario-based trainings on things like coaching, recognition, feedback and communication. Again, consider launching first with a pilot group.

#### ☐ Introduce 'Engagement Rituals'

Help people managers to bring the 'Management Framework' to life by introducing a series of simple engagement rituals, such as scheduling monthly team 'pulse checks', a regular 1:1 cadence and weekly recognition moments.

#### ☐ Establish Support Channels

Clarify how, when and where managers can access HR support, such as coaching and guidance. Promote the support ecosystem with the 'communities of practice' referenced in the five-step plan in Chapter 3.

### Phase 2 Outcomes:

- Managers feel more confident, equipped and supported
- HR teams can begin the shift from 'programme owners' to 'enablement partners'
- Early behaviour changes begin to appear

### Phase 2 Outputs:

- A practical, easily-accessed 'Manager Toolkit'
- A set of engagement rituals for managers to embed immediately
- Clarification of the support available to people managers

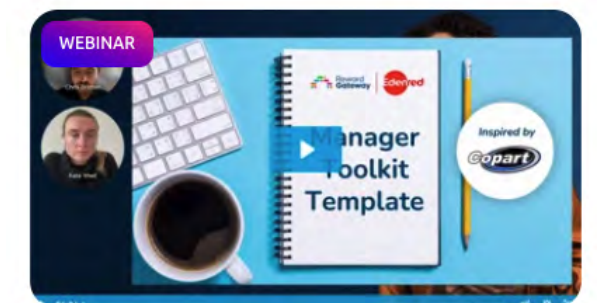
## Manager Rewards



Equip your managers with digital tools for recognising and rewarding their teams. With R&R one of the most powerful drivers of employee happiness, your leaders can boost morale, wellbeing and performance with Manager Rewards.

[Learn more](#)

## Webinar: How to Empower Managers to Drive HR Impact



Watch our practical webinar workshop as our hosts guide you through a step by step process to build a manager toolkit that covers onboarding, performance, recognition and wellbeing.

And build-along as you watch with your very own [Manager Toolkit Template](#)!

[Watch our Webinar](#)

# Phase 3 | Days 61-90

## Embed & Scale

The final phase involves scaling your enablement model across the entire organisation, embedding routines, and beginning to demonstrate the tangible ROI of improved manager capability.

### HR Actions:

#### ☐ Full-Scale Rollout

If you began trialling your Management Framework, Toolkit and training sessions with a pilot group, now is the time to finalise and launch the resources to the entire management population. Think about your launch communications, and consider offering optional drop-in clinics. Promote and amplify the additional support available by peer communities.

#### ☐ Track Leading Indicators

Monitor the frequency of 1:1s across the business, the adoption of engagement rituals and the delivery of monthly team pulse check-ins. Invite managers to 'self rate' to track changes in confidence levels.

#### ☐ Integrate Accountability

Embed engagement behaviours into formal performance and development conversations, using data and metrics to guide and encourage manager development. Ensure senior leaders are modelling and reinforcing desired behaviours.

#### ☐ Build ROI Narrative

Begin to identify and socialise early wins and team sentiment improvements with executive leadership. Share stories from the pilot group, and present leading indicators as predictors of future engagement improvements.

### Phase 3 Outcomes:

- Engagement and culture become a shared responsibility, not just a 'HR task'
- Managers feel more capable, confident, and consistent
- HR teams can demonstrate measurable progress and cultural embedding within 90 days

### Phase 3 Outputs:

- A sustainable, manager-led enablement ecosystem
- Early data-backed evidence of behavioural change
- A community of managers who feel supported and connected
- The early signs of a credible ROI narrative HR can share with senior leadership

## Measure and report on decentralisation



Track uptake of your employee engagement system and pinpoint movements related to your manager empowerment strategy such as recognition activity, wellbeing programme participation and more. These can be the bedrock of your ROI reporting, providing the metrics with which to link to your business outcomes such as retention and performance.

[Learn more](#)

## How to Build an HR Report Your CFO Can't Ignore



Discover how to build a high-impact report that demonstrates to leadership the tangible ROI of your employee engagement programme, and the crucial role that manager empowerment plays.

[Watch our Webinar](#)

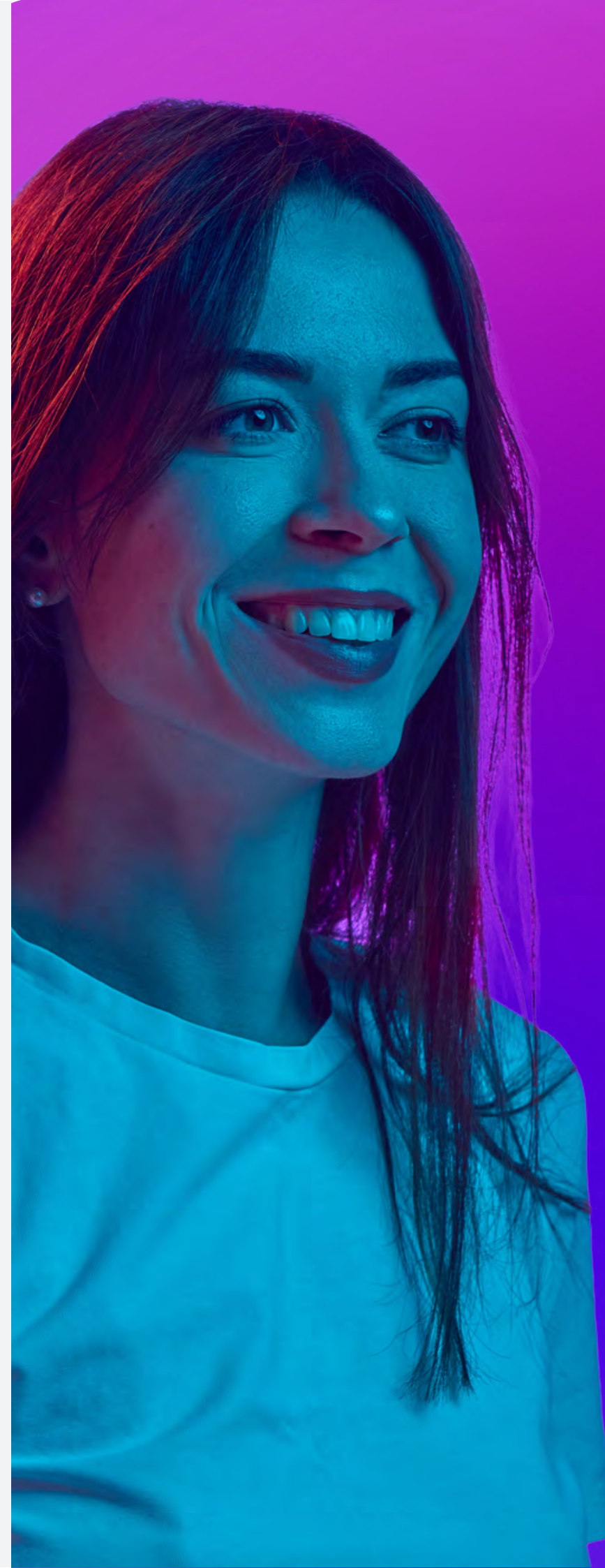
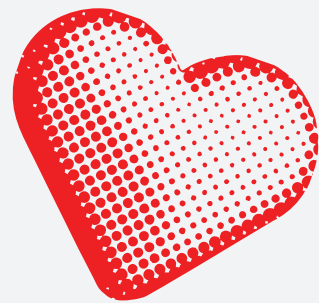
# Thank you

The business case for employee engagement has been proven, and it's clear that happiness is no longer a 'nice-to-have' but a strategic imperative. But technology alone won't create meaningful change, and platforms without practice are likely to fall short of your goals.

Turn engagement into an everyday practice and tap into the crucial role your managers play in driving employee happiness. Real progress happens when your leaders are empowered to bring your culture to life.

When paired with the five step plan outlined earlier in this eBook, the 90 Day Roadmap gives HR teams a practical way to activate a more decentralised approach — one that equips managers with the clarity, tools and confidence they need to support their people and lift performance across every corner of the organisation.

Thanks for taking the time to read - we hope it sparks ideas that make a real difference for your teams.



## EngagementOS

Mobile Experience

Communications & Surveys

Integrations

Total Reward Statement

Analytics

## Learn more about EngagementOS

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