The Power of Hidden Teams

The most-engaged employees work together in ways companies don't even realize.

By Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall

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Two nurses. Same job; different hospitals. One provides great care for patients, the other doesn't. Why?

Jordan has worked at Stanford Health Care as a clinical nurse in the orthopedic department for the past three years. In a recent interview with us, she described how thrilled she is to be in a role whose entire purpose is helping people get better one by one. In particular, she loves what she calls the interdisciplinary approach, in which the family, the case manager, the physical therapist, the physician, the occupational therapist, the social worker, and the nurse all come together to choose the best care for each patient.
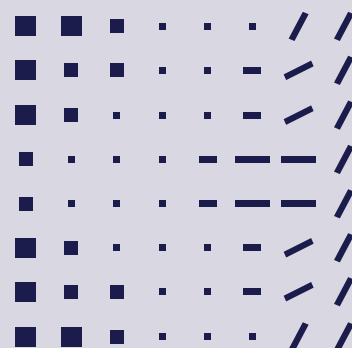
Fritz has been a clinical nurse for about the same amount of time, but he works for a different department in a different hospital. He works the same long hours Jordan does, but unlike her, he is not part of an interdisciplinary unit. He is merely one of 76 nurses, all of them assigned to rotating shifts whose members change from one week to the next, and all of them overseen by two administrators and one nurse supervisor. He is struggling. He embarked on his nursing career with as much passion to help people as Jordan did, but now he's tired, burned out, and thinking about quitting. (Jordan is a real person, whereas Fritz is a composite of several nurses we spoke with.)

Both Jordan and Fritz face incredible daily pressures at work. The job is inherently stressful, the system under strain, the paperwork endless, the emotional burden of caring for the ill weighty, the risk that errors may lead to lawsuits a

constant worry. For Fritz the stress lands heavily. His feeling, as he gets on the bus every morning to head to the hospital, is that he's going through the motions, surviving the experience at work, trying to keep it all at bay. He's just not engaged in his work. Something different is happening for Jordan. Something about her experience at work is lifting her up, not pulling her down. She is fully engaged — and her patients' health outcomes reflect that.

Jordan and Fritz happen to be nurses, but they could be any pair of workers anywhere in the world today, one thriving, the other just muddling through. A question that weighs on employers today is how to make Fritz more like Jordan — how, in other words, to create more highly engaged employees. Organizations' track record at doing this is mixed, to say the least. We wanted to understand what was going wrong.

The authors Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall

"I knew something was up from the beginning," **Marcus** says of his earliest days working at the Gallup Organization, where he studied the much-lauded cultures of some of the world's most prestigious companies. Observing the inconsistency (and often the shocking toxicity) of the cultures within these firms led him to conclude that "even the best companies to work for had to be doing something wrong — or else I was doing something wrong." Thus began a personal quest and a career dedicated to understanding what creates high performance and engagement in the world of work, and sharing that with the world.

Marcus has now authored nine books; his latest, with Ashley Goodall, is **Nine Lies About Work: A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World** (Harvard Business Review Press, 2019). He has been the subject of profiles in the New York Times, Fast Company, and the Wall Street Journal and has appeared on Larry King Live, Today, and The Oprah Winfrey Show. He now leads People + Performance research at the **ADP Research Institute**, where he spearheaded the most recent **Global Engagement Study**. Connect with him on his **website** and LinkedIn, Twitter (**@mwbuckingham**), Instagram (**@marcusbuckingham**), or on his YouTube **channel.**

Music has been a part of **Ashley's** life for as long as he can remember, and it was through music, as a student musician and conductor, that he first experienced teams and leadership. "I was particularly fascinated by the unspoken understanding between people playing together," he recalls. He carried this fascination into the corporate world, where, as an executive, a leadership expert, and an author, he has spent his career exploring large organizations from the inside. There he looks for lessons from the real world that help people and teams thrive. "I want to make work a more human place for all the humans in it," he says. "I love what makes people weird."

He's a coauthor, with Marcus Buckingham, of **Nine Lies About Work: A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World** (Harvard Business Review Press, 2019) and two cover stories in Harvard Business Review: **"The Feedback Fallacy"** (March–April 2019) and **"Reinventing Performance Management"** (April 2015). He currently serves as the senior vice president of leadership and team intelligence at Cisco, an organization focused entirely on serving teams and team leaders. Connect with him on LinkedIn, Twitter (**@littleplatoons**), or Instagram (**@ashley_goodall**) and join the **Freethinking Leader Coalition**.

Why we care about engagement, and how we've been getting it wrong

What, exactly, is engagement? At a gut level we know that it has something to do with how involved people are in their work and how enthusiastic they are about it. But by defining engagement more precisely as a set of attitudes, we have been able to measure it — and understand its impact on performance. From research beginning at the Gallup Organization in the 1980s and 1990s, and **continued** since then by many others (including both of us), we know that certain employee attitudes can help predict productive employee behaviors, and that companies and managers and individuals can take action to improve or change those attitudes. We also know that the attitudes seem to cluster around consistent themes, such as a clear sense of purpose, a commonly held notion of what's valuable or important, feelings of psychological safety,

and confidence about the future. We know that when we find these clusters expressed in one person, one team, or one company, we can label that expression "engagement." Finally, we know that engagement — when measured using a few precisely worded statements about the employee's own feelings and experiences — identifies a situation at work that leads to **productivity**, innovation, retention, and **much more.**

But when we look at aggregated levels of engagement across time and across countries, it quickly becomes clear that whatever organizations have been doing to improve these outcomes — from efforts around company culture to rigorous performance management — isn't working.

The sad state of employee engagement

The vast majority of employees globally aren't fully engaged with their work.

Employees who are fully engaged

16%

Employees who are "just coming to work"

84%

Source: ADP Research Institute, 2019

One of us (Marcus), building on his engagement **work** with the Gallup Organization, recently joined the ADP Research Institute (ADPRI) to lead its investigations into people and performance at work. He and his team have now completed the most extensive and methodologically consistent **global study of engagement** yet undertaken, in which a representative sample of working adults from 19 countries — 1,000 respondents in each country — were asked to respond to eight statements designed to measure engagement reliably. (Read more about the study in "The Ingredients of Engagement," on page 11.) This study reveals, among many other findings, that only about 16% of employees are fully engaged at work, like Jordan, while about 84% are just going through the motions, like Fritz.

These results are no happier than those revealed in earlier surveys conducted over the years by Gallup and others. And since we know that employee engagement drives employee productivity at the level of the **business unit**, it's hardly surprising that over the past 40 years the growth in per-person productivity in the United States has also been anemic, hovering barely above 1% a year, while other developed countries, such as the UK and Germany, seem to be doing even worse. Clearly we need to find another way.

The key is to understand what *actually* drives engagement. For years we've been getting this wrong. Most of us, when evaluating the difference between Jordan's and Fritz's experiences, tend to jump to one of two explanations. The first is that something about Jordan's hospital works for her, and something about Fritz's hospital doesn't work for him. So to improve his life and performance at work, the focus should be Fritz's hospital as a whole: It should offer more support to its nurses. Its commitment to work/life balance should be more explicit. It should talk up its "talent brand" and describe ever more clearly the sort of nurses it seeks to attract and how it wants them to behave so that all can better understand how they ought to perform. The common name for this idea is *culture* — and although companies that prioritize culture, and thereby the experience of their people, are taking an important first step, addressing the employee experience at the company level is an incomplete solution.

The second explanation goes to the other end of the spectrum. Rather than focusing on the broad notion of culture, it explains the differences in performance and engagement between Jordan and Fritz in terms of who they are as individuals: Something's right about Jordan, and something's less than right about Fritz. The prescription then becomes to help Fritz become more engaged

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by giving him **feedback** on how he's doing, developing him with more training, moving him around in hopes that a different role will bring different results, or, ultimately, replacing him with a nurse who will, with luck, be more like Jordan.

In essence, we have treated organizations like increasingly complex machines in which the humans are but component parts and in which the solutions to any ills involve tweaking the system from the top — by addressing culture broadly — or by upgrading the individual components, the humans, themselves.

But the ADPRI study that undergirds this article reveals a disarmingly simple, and hitherto largely neglected, way of increasing someone's health and productivity at work. It turns out that the most effective way to improve Fritz's lot, and that of his patients and his hospital, is to focus not on culture or on

individuals as though they work in isolation but, rather, on what makes Jordan's experience shine: her team.

The case for teams

To find the most-effective levers for creating engagement, we set about analyzing a number of variables for their power to explain why a particular employee might be fully engaged. Were older workers more disillusioned, and thus less likely than younger people to be fully engaged? Was high engagement best explained by a higher level of education? Did work status make a difference — meaning part-time workers were more engaged than full-time workers, or vice versa? The ADPRI study probed all these variables and more in an effort to discover which of them could best explain engagement and productivity. And as it turned out, the most

The power of teams

The share of employees who are fully engaged more than doubles if they are on teams.

Not on a team — 8%

On a team — 17%

are fully engaged

Source: ADP Research Institute, 2019
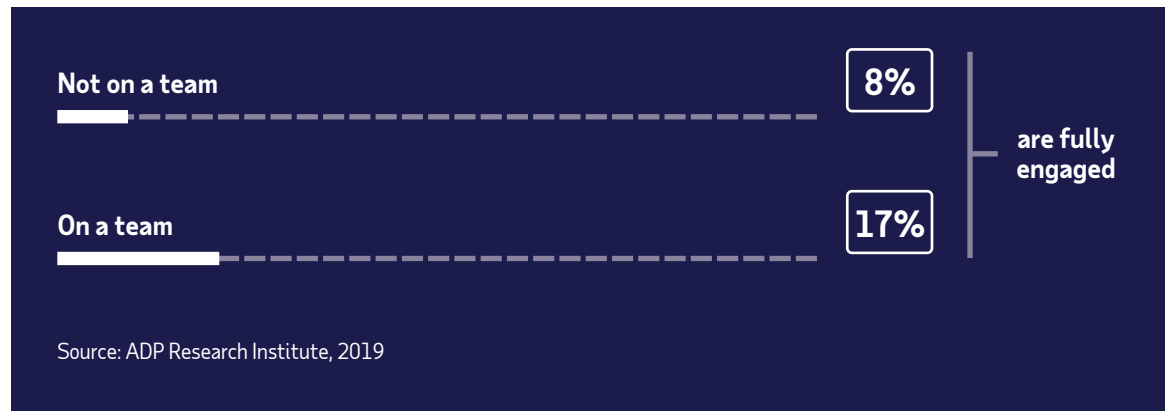
powerful factor was simply whether or not respondents reported doing most of their work on a team. Those who did were more than twice as likely to be fully engaged as those who said they did most of their work alone. The local, ground-level experience of work — the people they worked with and their interactions with them — trumped everything else.

That makes sense. According to the ADPRI study, most work — in every industry, in

every region of the world, and at every level in an organization — is actually teamwork; 83% of workers say they do most of their work in teams (although, as we'll see, some teams are far more engaging than others). The team is the reality of your experience at work. You have responsibilities that seem to be connected to other people's responsibilities; you have strengths that seem to be complemented by those of others; you have people over your left shoulder and your right, looking out for

you, keeping your confidences, offering their reactions to your work, sharing your idea of what "good" is, chipping in when you seem overwhelmed, and giving their input when you get stuck. The quality of this team experience is the quality of your work experience.

To feel like you're a part of a team doesn't require you to be oriented to the company culture; neither does it require a particular training course or development initiative. Instead, it depends on whether your team leader and your teammates show up every day, talk to you, lean in to you, and support you. Your experience of your team drives many things: how productive you are at work; how happy you are at work; how creative, innovative, and resilient you are; and how long you choose to stay with your company. In other words, when it comes to your work, great teams and teamwork aren't a nice-to-have; they're a must-have.

The best — indeed, according to our research, the only — way to help Fritz feel and perform more like Jordan is to start with the needs of his team. And if we want to increase engagement and productivity at work, we must first understand why it's difficult for organizations to see teams at work and how that's now changing. Then we must direct our investments and energies at improving those team experiences.

Seeing teams

Organizations can see boxes and lines on the org chart, but those fail to account for many actual teams. When the same ADPRI study asked respondents if they worked on more than one team — and how many of those teams could be found on the org chart — 64% said yes, and of those, three-quarters said their additional teams didn't show up in the directory. Most work is teamwork, but about half the teams where it happens are invisible to companies.

That blindness stems from our tools. "We shape our tools, and then our tools shape us," the saying goes. The tools that help us "see" our people — so-called human capital management tools that ensure that people are paid properly, are accounted for by the right departments, and are billed against the correct budgets — are all extensions of enterprise resource planning (ERP) tools, a significant part of whose function is organizing people into the right buckets. The source of truth regarding who lives in which bucket — marketing, say, or finance — and in which box in that bucket, is the human resources department. If a manager wants to formally add someone to his or her team, that manager has to call up HR and ask permission to move a "head count" (which basically means a paycheck) from one box to another. Approvals have to be applied for, budgets have to be consulted, permissions must be granted up and down the chain, until finally white smoke appears from the chimney and lo and behold, the new head count appears in a new box on the org chart.

What this hides, of course, is how work actually gets done. In the real world, team leaders are pulling team members onto new teams all the time. Some of those teams last three weeks, some three months — which is why the ADPRI study asked about differences between ground-level reality and org-chart theory. It found that the source of truth about what teams exist and who is on them is actually the team leader, not HR. Further, a team leader isn't a name in a box but, rather, *anyone* who has successfully recruited a group of people to work on something.

In other words, teams are not defined by who reports to whom in which department on an org chart. They *emerge* from a multitude of requests and acceptances, none of which HR sees, some of which are overlapping, many of which are ephemeral, and all of which are where people's actual experience of work truly resides. Our current tools are blind to this reality, and so, therefore, are we. We can't see our teams, so we can't see our work.

All this is changing, however. Our always-on mobile phones and the app-ification they have engendered mean that developers are now building tools that busy team leaders and members voluntarily use.

These are not the traditional goal-setting, performance-rating, form-filling tools — the kind that HR has to coerce people into engaging with. Instead they are tools such as Slack, Jira, and Cisco's Webex Teams, which meet team leaders and members in stride and help them get real work done through people. Although these are productivity tools, focused primarily on work rather than team building, organizations are starting to use their "**exhaust**" data to see who is reaching out to whom, who is inviting whom to join a project, who is relying on whom to meet a deadline. In other words, we are starting to actually see the dynamic, ephemeral, informal, contingent, and fluid teams of the real world of work. So now, finally, we can investigate what real teams — and in particular, the very best teams — look like in the wild.

Understanding how teams operate would mean an end to many of the initiatives that organizations currently rely on to address engagement and performance. For example, we wouldn't do a once-a-year engagement survey of the whole organization, break down the results according to the departments and divisions on the org chart, and pretend that we'd found anything useful. Instead we would simply analyze the data coming out of teams, in real time. We wouldn't design so much work around ex*trinsic* incentives (pay, promotion, titles, and so forth), as though *intrinsic* incentives (meaning, growth, relationships, and so forth) were impossible to measure; we would instead measure those things team by team, where they make the most difference. The organization's goals wouldn't cascade down to individuals through the who-reports-to-whom lines on the org chart, because those lines don't encompass anywhere near all the real teams in the company. And performance reviews wouldn't follow those same lines,

because most performance occurs outside the boxes. Instead, critical initiatives — around innovation, around diversity — and performance measurement would be deployed through the actual teams where work is being done.

On the team level, people wouldn't be invited to be team leaders simply because they were good at being team members; we can see and measure teams' performance, so we know what experiences the best leaders create. We would make informed decisions about how many people should be on a given team, because we would know how team performance is affected by the span of a team leader's control — the number of people the leader is responsible for. We would train specific teams together, according to their needs and to build their unique strengths, rather than chasing some generic "team-work" skill.

In other words, by finally being able to see dynamic, ephemeral, local teams, we would better fight the real war for talent: not just attracting the best people, but getting from them the best that they, uniquely, have to offer.

The best teams

Though feeling like you're on a team is fundamental to engagement, it's true that some teams are far more engaging than others. In the most engaged teams — the top quartile — 59% of members are fully engaged, whereas in the bottom quartile 0% are. The ADPRI study strongly suggests that a number of key factors separate the best teams from the rest. From those we can draw the following conclusions for leaders about how to improve their teams:

1. Focus on trust. Our data immediately pinpoints the biggest differentiator between high- and low- performing teams: trust in the team leader. Team members who *strongly agree* that they trust their team leader are *eight times* as likely to be fully engaged as those who don't.

This trust must be deep and without question. A team member who merely agrees that she trusts her team leader shows roughly the same level of engagement as does someone who actively distrusts his team leader. For trust to matter, it must be extreme.

We can go further, to identify the core components of that trust. That is, we know what activities a team leader must engage in to build extreme trust with her team members. In analyzing the ADPRI study to ascertain which concepts are most associated with trust, we discovered that strong agreement with two statements from our survey, "At work, I clearly understand what is expected of me" and "I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work," corresponds with a high level of trust in the team leader. This suggests that despite the fluidity of today's working world, the best team leaders can help each team member feel both understood and focused. *Know me for my best, and then focus my work around that*: These are the fundamental needs of every team member, and the foundation of any high-performing team.

As part of the qualitative analysis that accompanies any quantitative research, we interviewed a woman we'll call Kyona, a social media manager in a professional services firm, because the data revealed that she and her fellow team members were highly engaged. She described one small way in which a busy team leader can stop the flow of work to show a team member that her strengths are noticed and translated into ongoing expectations. "There was this one team meeting where everyone was spinning around and around, and I jumped in, simplified the issue, and solved it," she said. "My team leader paid attention to that. She called me the Calm in the Chaos, the pragmatic one who avoids getting wrapped up in debate. She named it, pointed it out to the rest of the team, and now in meetings, whenever we get stuck, everyone just naturally turns to me." Kyona and her team leader have taken this understanding beyond team meetings and into their weekly check-ins, during which Kyona shares her priorities and she and her team leader chat about course corrections and small shifts of focus. Over time each check-in serves as both a nudge toward the right outcomes and a reminder that Kyona's strengths are top-of-mind for her team leader. The high level of engagement that the members of Kyona's team feel comes in large part from the trust her team leader builds in this way.

Frequent attention to the work of each team member is the anchor ritual of team leadership.

2. Design teams for human attention.
The importance of trust leads us in turn to what we consider to be the most important insight from the ADPRI study about how to create engaged teams. Its outlines appear when we look more closely at our two nurses at work.

In Fritz's department, 76 nurses report to one nurse manager. No matter how brilliant that manager is, she simply cannot address the needs and priorities of every nurse every week — with the result that Fritz and his colleagues feel unseen, unheard, and alone as they face their daily challenges.

In contrast, Jordan's department actually has more nurses and nurse assistants — 97 — but that's just how things look on the org chart. Stanford Health Care is pioneering ways to make frequent, light-touch attention between team member and team leader the fundamental design principle of work. According to its CHRO, David Jones, the organization has not only deliberately put patients at the center of the dynamic teams that spring up every day (this is the "interdisciplinary approach" that so engages Jordan) but is also deploying an ADP team-creation, engagement measurement, and check-in tool called StandOut to every employee. It enables team members to get the attention they need from their team leaders, whether their team is visible on the org chart or just popped up yesterday to focus on a particular patient.

The data from Stanford Health Care — together with other research from Cisco, Deloitte, ADP, Mission Health, and Levi's — tells us that frequent attention to the work of each team member is what we might call the *anchor ritual* of team leadership. These organizations have all instituted a simple weekly conversation between team leaders and each of their team members and have been able to measure increases in engagement as a function of the frequency of these check-ins.

The check-ins address two simple questions — What are your priorities this week, and How can I help? — and serve to ensure that each team member receives the attention needed to do his or her best work. They are focused on the future and on what energizes each team member; they are strengths-based, not remedial.

The data makes an unambiguous case that the frequency of conversations is critical. An earlier ADPRI **study at Stanford Health Care** showed that team leaders who check in once a week see, on average, engagement levels 21 points higher than what those who check in only once a month see. A recent Cisco study yielded comparable data. And according to Jones, "We can see from our data that teams with more-frequent check-ins have dramatically higher levels of engagement; so, moving forward, we are going to keep experimenting with smaller, more patient-centered, more agile teams, and keep

The power of trust

As noted, the share of employees who are fully engaged more than doubles if they are on a team. It *more than* doubles *again* if they strongly trust the team leader.

Employees who are not on a team **8%**

Employees who are on a team **17%**

On a team, and have deep trust in their team leader **45%**

Source: ADP Research Institute, 2019

investigating the link between span of control and patient outcomes — and all because we can see the link between attention, teams, and patient care."

The most-engaged teams — and the most-effective team leaders — understand that the currency of engagement is real, human attention. This helps us answer a long-standing question about the optimal span of control in all organizations. Some **research** puts the number at eight to 10, whereas some work-places, such as call centers, push the limits with spans as great as 70 team members to one supervisor. Pinpointing the check in, and the frequent attention it provides, as the key driver of engagement shows that "span of control" is more accurately *span of attention*. The research reveals that for people to be engaged, the span of control must allow each team leader to check-in, one on one, with each team member every week of the year. Any relayering, delayering, or org redesign that prevents such frequent attention will ultimately lead to disengagement, **burnout**, and turnover.

3. Learn together. How can we help teams improve? One problem is that to teach employees to be better team members, organizations typically send them to a class on, say, empathy, active listening, or project management — alone.

They are taught these skills in a context completely separate from the teams where they will actually employ them. Then, when there still seems to be something wrong with how teammates interact, comes a second problematic intervention: They are sent to workshops and offsites featuring trust falls and other team-building activities that are unrelated to the actual teamwork — and so teach nothing about trusting one another in the context of work and nothing about making that work more transparent and predictable.

There's a different way. At Cisco, where one of us (Ashley) is a senior vice president, rather than teaching "teamwork skills" to employees and team leaders in isolation, the training is brought to the team through the Power of Teams program. Each session of the program begins with a discussion of engagement on *this* team, *right now*. Team members get to know their current teammates through the lens of their strengths.

From those ingredients, the team builds new habits and rituals to accelerate its members' growth together through their work together, on this particular team at this particular moment in time. Cisco has applied this specific, real-time, one-size-fits-one-team approach to team improvement more than 600 times in the past three years.

The company has learned that helping each team to understand how it's doing and to find new approaches rooted in the people on the team and the work in front of them is far more valuable than teaching abstract teaming skills to one person at a time. Such has been the impact of the program at Cisco that leaders have requested more than 400 sessions for the next 12 months alone.

4. Put team experience above team location.
Two recent labor trends have provoked much chatter in big companies thinking about engagement: remote work and gig work. The sense seems to be that remote work detracts from engagement and that gig work is a lonely, atomized experience. The past few years have seen a persistent pull to get workers back into the office. From Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's **2013 edict** that all workers must come to the office every day to more-recent rollbacks of work-from-home policies at **Aetna** and **IBM** along with our current fixation on open-plan workspaces and the location of the next new corporate headquarters — the prevailing wisdom appears

The ingredients of engagement

The **ADP Research Institute 2019 study** set out to measure the levels of engagement of more than 19,000 workers across the globe and to identify the factors most likely to attract and keep them. The study focused on aspects of engagement that an organization can influence rather than those that are usually beyond its control — such as political, economic, or individual concerns.

ADP sought to capture the essence of engagement by asking every team member about the extent to which he or she agreed with eight simple statements, on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These statements, the early formulations of which were first presented by researchers at Gallup and which have since been refined by researchers at Deloitte, Cisco, ADP, and several other companies, have proved to be the most reliable and powerful way we have discovered to explain the difference between the best work experiences and the rest.

The eight statements (taken verbatim from the ADPRI study) capture the emotional and attitudinal precursors to engagement and the productive employee behaviors that flow as a result.

1. I am really enthusiastic about the mission of my company.

2. At work, I clearly understand what is expected of me.

3. In my team, I am surrounded by people who share my values.

4. I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work.

5. My teammates have my back.

6. I know I will be recognized for excellent work.

7. I have great confidence in my company's future.

8. In my work, I am always challenged to grow.

Importantly, respondents are not directly rating their managers or their companies on anything — they are rating only their own feelings and experiences. That's because people are **horribly unreliable raters** of other people. When we ask someone to rate another person, or a company, on an abstract quality such as empathy or vision or strategic thinking or inclusiveness, the response tells us more about the person doing the rating than about the person or company being rated. To get good data we must ask people only about their own experiences.

The study included 19 countries and used exactly the same methodology in each one — 1,000 participants per country, stratified to match the workforce demographic. Every participant was presented with the same eight statements, and to ensure apples-to-apples comparisons, a correction was applied in the data analysis to take into account our finding that different nationalities have meaningfully different response patterns to rating scales. (Brazilians, for example, tend to skew toward the positive, and Japanese toward the negative, while Brits inevitably sit somewhere in the middle.)

By analyzing response patterns, we were able to place each person in one of two categories. We use the term *fully engaged* to describe people who answered virtually all the statements very positively. It turns out that they are also far more likely to be viewed by their managers as highly productive and far less likely to quit the organization in the following six months. And we use the term *coming to work* to describe those who respond neutrally or negatively to most of these statements. People in this category are not necessarily destructive or harmful to their organizations, but neither are they passionately committed. They are merely selling their time and talent to get by in the world. Clearly, Jordan is in the first of these categories, and Fritz is in the second.

to be that remote work is neither as productive nor as engaging as colocated work; that if we want people to collaborate and innovate with one another effectively on teams, they need to be bumping into one another in hallways and chatting with one another at coffee stations.

The ADPRI study has shown us something surprisingly different: First off, 23% of workers report that they work from home most of the time, and they turn out to be more engaged than colocated workers — 20% versus 15.8%. Furthermore, better than half of those remote workers (55%), far from feeling isolated, report that they feel part of a team. And of those who feel like part of a team, 27% are fully engaged at work. By contrast, only 17% of colocated team members who report they feel part of a team are fully engaged.

Having combined these initial findings and looked at them through the lens of team versus non-team rather than remote versus colocated, we can say for sure that to engage your people, you should avoid mandating that they show up at the office every day, and also that all the time you spend helping your remote workers join, get to know the other members of, and feel supported by their teams will pay off in the form of more-engaged workers. Engagement is about *who* you work with, not *where*.

5. Make all work more like gig work.
With the rise of the gig economy have come **concerns** that gig workers are socially isolated. But the ADPRI study revealed that gig work is more engaging than traditional work — 18% of gig-only workers (meaning both full- and part-time contract or contingent workers) are fully engaged, versus 15% of traditional workers

(those not participating in the gig economy). That's because of the top two reasons people reported loving their gig work: It gives them far more control over their working lives, and they feel more freedom to do work they love (both of which help explain why the ADPRI study shows that the most common title gig workers bestow on themselves is "president").

Consistent with this, when respondents were asked to describe their work status in detail — one full-time job, two part-time jobs for two companies, one full-time job and one part-time job with the same company, and so on — it turned out that by far the most engaging work status (25% fully engaged) was this: one full-time job and one part-time job for a different company. The full-time job brings stability and benefits, while the part-time role — like gig work — brings flexibility and the chance for the person to do something he or she truly enjoys (along with additional income).

These findings reveal not only that gig work can be very engaging but that it actually contains elements that can and should be transplanted into our traditional work. We should try to make all work more like gig work: Employees should have more control over their work and a greater chance to do work they love. They should have the best of both worlds: one predictable, stable role with a "home team" (more often than not, the static team depicted on the org chart) and one "side hustle" — a series of opportunities to join dynamic teams inside the same organization. Their greatest value to any of these teams may well be the particular, wonderful, and weird set of strengths they possess. This is not the usual way of designing either work or career paths, but it may be the most engaging.

If we want people to collaborate effectively on teams, they need to bump into one another in hallways and chat at coffee stations.

The weirdness orchestrators

What all this evidence tells us is that for the Fritzes of the world — which is to say all of us, from time to time and place to place — a focus on the ends of the seesaw, on reinforcing company culture on the one hand or trying to zero in on each individual in isolation on the other, won't deliver what companies want or, more important, what people at work need.

Organizations should pay less attention to the ends of the continuum and instead focus on the fulcrum of work: the team. When confronted with a performance problem or an innovation opportunity or anything else, we should ask, "How can we address this through our teams?"

First, the information architecture must be in place — we need to see the teams. We need to find and use technologies that will allow team leaders to tell those leading their organizations, in real time, who is on each team they lead. These technologies must be helpful to team leaders so that they will use them *voluntarily* to understand and better support their team members in the rhythms of daily work, because only from voluntary and ongoing use will we see in real time who is working with whom.

Second, we have to be more specific in how we think about leadership. Leadership roles within a large organization are many and varied, of course, but the weight of the evidence is that the most important of these, and thus the one that must be our highest priority, is the role of team leader. Of all the factors that create the experiences that distinguish the best teams, the most important is the actions of the team leader, and how he or she builds trust and gives attention. Thus we should select, train, reward, and promote leaders not on the basis of an abstract list of generic leadership competencies but, rather, on their appetite for team leadership and their demonstrable track record as team leaders.

Third, we need to break the shackles of the org chart. The fundamental lesson of the research is that work happens on teams, whether they are overlapping, dynamic, spontaneous or designed, long-lived or short-lived. The real world of work is messy. We must push into the richness of real teams doing real work, and we must ask new questions: Do large successful teams have the same habits and rhythms as small successful teams? In how many ways do teams start? Do the best ways for team members to share information vary according to the type of team they're on? Are some ways demonstrably better than others, in terms of their impact on team engagement? Do virtual teams adopt a cadence different from that of colocated teams?

Beyond that, should we reimagine our organizations as places where everyone has a home team plus one or more gig teams? Should we then push further, and consider careers not as a series of steps up the org ladder but as an accumulation of experiences across many dynamic teams? Can we use our teams, with their inherent flexibility, to rethink how we structure the "people stuff" in our companies — compensation, promotion, development, and succession? And if so, do we need the org chart at all?

For team leaders, the emphasis needs to shift from the generic to the specific. We need to be clear that the job of a team leader is simply, and challengingly, this: to create, day in and day out, an experience on the team that allows each person to offer his or her unique best, and then to meld those contributions into something no individual could do alone. We need to anchor this job in rituals and measures, all designed to help magnify what the best teams do: the weekly check-in; frequent discussion with each person and with the team as a whole about where people can employ their strengths; and use of the eight items in our methodology to gauge progress, not for the purpose of accountability but, rather, for illumination and course correction.

And here, finally, we see the core purpose of teams: They are the best method we humans have ever devised to make each person's uniqueness useful. We know that the frequent use of strengths leads to high performance, and we know that strengths vary from person to person. High-functioning teams are essential to a high-functioning organization because they create more opportunities for each person to use his or her strengths by enabling the tasks at hand to be divided according to the strengths on offer. Teams make weirdness useful. They are a mechanism for integrating the needs of the individual and the needs of the organization. If we can get them right, we solve a lot of problems. Ultimately, then, to help our people become fully engaged, we need to help our team leaders see that they are our weirdness orchestrators, our quirk capturers — that theirs is the most important job in our companies, and that only they can do it.