

# Employee engagement in **construction**

Building a culture that works for  
all your people



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# Introduction

Thanks for downloading this eBook from WorkBuzz on employee engagement in the construction industry. We know HR professionals in this sector have unique challenges – from how to engage a deskless workforce to maintaining health & safety standards – and we want to help.

We'll cover how to go about fixing these problems, how to effectively reach and engage your deskless employees, and a few ideas for how to improve employee engagement at your organisation.

We'll also hear from Stonbury, a specialist contractor to both the water industry and wider water environment, on how their partnership with WorkBuzz helped employees feel safer at work.

If you're interested in talking to us about how we can help make your employee engagement strategy better, don't hesitate to get in touch.

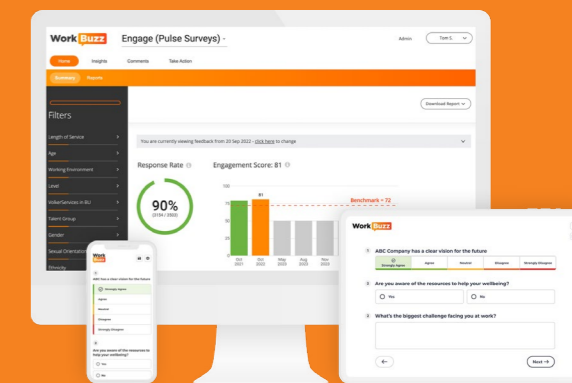


## About WorkBuzz

The simple, flexible, customisable way to reach your Everyday Heroes.

Our employee engagement surveys give you regular, real-time feedback from all your people – wherever they are, and whatever they do.

Listen to your unsung heroes. Understand their concerns. Act on areas of improvement. Build a culture all your people can thrive in.



# 6 key people challenges in the construction industry – and how to fix them



**The construction industry is facing unique workforce challenges. A perfect storm created by Covid, Brexit, IR35, an ageing workforce, and the cost-of-living crisis has seen the number of employees in the sector consistently fall over the past few years. This has resulted in a war for talent and a battle of retention.**

There are several distinct challenges likely to be high on your agenda right now:

## Attraction and retention

The attraction and retention challenge in construction has arisen from three key factors:

1. The talent pool has dramatically reduced. In 2021, the number of self-employed workers in construction hit its lowest level for 18 years. And this hasn't been matched by an increase in direct labour.
2. The grass is greener. With 'The Great Resignation' hitting hard, the existing workforce is more likely to move to competitor organisations for better perceived pay, culture or benefits.

3. A workforce nearing retirement. According to the CIOB, the number of employees above 60 is increasing more than any other age group in the sector. There's also a lack of younger talent attracted to the industry, with the number of construction apprentices falling consistently since 2018.

For people professionals in the construction industry, culture is your secret weapon. It provides you with a unique identity that will differentiate you from your competitors in a decreasing pool of talent, and should be high priority for your leadership teams.

## Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB)

From leadership to manual labour, the construction industry is not known for being a diverse or inclusive environment. This is backed up by data from the CIOB showing that women make up just 15% of the UK construction industry. This is whilst only 6% are from BAME backgrounds and just 6% are disabled.

When it comes to those identifying as LGBTQ+, the numbers are tricky, as more

than a third of LGBTQ+ admitted they hide or disguise their identity at work.

EDIB should be one of the top challenges you're looking to address. But there's a huge amount of work to be done. Improving your inclusivity to create a more diverse workforce will bring a wider pool of talent, different insights, new skills, and innovations into your business.

## Health & safety and wellbeing

Every construction project comes with hazards for both workers and members of the public. But with a stretched workforce and increasing costs, health & safety and wellbeing measures can slip – leading to a rise in accidents and their associated financial impact. This is when employee engagement inevitably takes a hit.

People are part of your health & safety and wellbeing solution. You need to offer all employees an easy and confidential mechanism for flagging near misses or areas of concern. And, with mental health becoming an increasingly important topic in what is typically seen to be a 'machoistic' working environment, you should listen to

your employees about what triggers are present in the workplace – with a view to avoiding or eradicating these causes in the long run.

Stonbury, for example, created an employee listening strategy with WorkBuzz that resulted in a 75% decrease in RIDDOR incidents and a wider consideration for mental health, psychological safety, and inclusivity. You can read Stonbury's story later in this eBook.

## Communication

The construction workplace is constantly changing, with workers moving to different sites dependent on the needs of projects. This makes engaging employees more challenging.

This is why conducting employee listening across your workforce – including all those self-employed or directly employed – is essential. It's the only way you can consistently identify departments, teams or groups that have issues. And for employees to feel engaged in their roles, it's vital that leadership teams communicate with all employees. This shows that they're aware of

issues, are addressing their needs, and are offering support.

Regular employee surveys are the best way to understand the consensus of your workforce – and to mark progression over time. Surveys can be digital or offline, and should be combined with other internal communications methods. For example, onsite meetings, newsletters or an employee intranet to create a seamless experience.

### Commercial impact

Disengaged employees mean lower productivity levels, higher absenteeism and increased employee turnover. And these will have a knock-on effect on projects. And, with many large construction projects running over months, if not years, any delay impacts the bottom line.

Having a leadership team that acknowledges the power of employee engagement – and the positive financial impact it has – is essential. Combine this with data insights and defined employee KPIs and you can make powerful people decisions tailored to your business.

To give you an example, HS2 improved employee retention by 9% and made commercial savings of £2-£3m through its employee engagement collaboration with WorkBuzz – a real impact on its bottom line.

### Why should you focus on employee engagement?

Employee engagement is a deep rational and emotional connection to your organisation and the work you do. It's the outcome of a great employee experience, and starts during the recruitment process – before you even turn up for your first day.

Engagement is important because it unlocks the potential of each individual, their motivation, and maximises their discretionary effort. If they're engaged enough to become advocates for your organisation, engagement can live on long after employees leave – which has a tangible impact on commercial outcomes for your business.



# How to reach and engage deskless employees in the construction industry



There are unique employee engagement challenges for the construction industry, not least due to the large number of difficult-to-reach, deskless employees. Organisations in this sector must use innovative strategies to ensure their workforce is engaged, motivated, and productive.

## The importance of listening to your employees

Employee surveys are a great way for organisations in the construction industry to understand employee sentiment and motivation, as well as to identify employee engagement issues.

Surveys can be used to gain feedback on policies, job satisfaction, employee recognition programs, and much more. They can also provide invaluable insights into employee morale and engagement levels.

Organisations should strive to regularly run employee surveys to ensure they're staying ahead of employee engagement issues and providing a positive work environment.

## Making employee engagement programmes more accessible to deskless workers







Having a great employee engagement programme is a waste of time if your employees can't take part. It's important to make employee surveys accessible for deskless employees in the construction industry.

Many of these workers are unable to access employee engagement tools due to them being inaccessible or difficult to use on a smartphone or tablet – and many won't have access to a corporate email address.

To ensure employee engagement is successful, organisations should provide mobile-friendly resources and leverage platforms like WorkBuzz, which offers a 'kiosk' mode and unique entry code so employees can access surveys from their own device.

This approach should extend to your wider communication strategy. How do you better connect head office, leadership and the deskless workforce? You should consider:

## What you need to know to better connect with a deskless workforce:

- 
**Who your deskless employees are**  
 Build a picture using demographics, role descriptions and the challenges they face.
- 
**Why you need to talk to them**  
 What information will you need to share?
- 
**When you'll communicate**  
 Take into consideration different shift patterns and time zones.
- 
**How you'll communicate**  
 Choosing the right channel is essential – specifically designed apps, internal communications tools (like Slack or SharePoint), kiosk stations, printed materials, bulletin boards, in-person conversations, texts and calls are all options.
- 
**What you'll say**  
 Tailor the content with clear impact and outcomes for your deskless audience.
- 
**Make it a two-way conversation**  
 Ensure your strategy includes methods for employee feedback, either through regular pulse surveys or on an ad-hoc basis.

Digital platforms like **WorkBuzz** can be powerful tools for improving employee engagement in the construction industry. Organisations should look to leverage these platforms to listen to their employees, understand their needs, and act on their feedback.

# 5 ways to improve employee engagement in the construction industry



**Employee engagement is essential for any successful organisation, and the construction industry is no different. It helps create a positive working environment and aligns employees' goals with those of the organisation.**

Fortunately, there are several practical strategies that can be implemented by employers in the construction industry to solve employee engagement challenges. From leveraging technology to introducing employee surveys, here are five ways to help increase employee motivation, satisfaction, and engagement.

## 1. Leverage technology to foster collaboration and communication

Leveraging technology is an important part of improving employee engagement in construction organisations. Technology can be used to foster collaboration and communication between employees, helping them stay connected and engaged with their work – while also reducing costs associated with manual processes.

For example, HR professionals can use online tools such as videoconferencing or instant

messaging to facilitate virtual meetings or discussions. Additionally, they can create digital workspaces where employees can share ideas and collaborate on projects in real-time. This will help strengthen relationships between team members and improve overall morale among workers.

Automated systems can also be used for tasks such as payroll processing or task tracking, so employees aren't burdened by tedious paperwork but instead have more time to focus on their jobs.

## 2. Create a positive working environment

Creating a positive working environment is essential for any successful organisation, especially in the construction industry. HR professionals have an important role to play in this regard as they are responsible for setting expectations and creating an atmosphere that empowers employees to be engaged with their work.

This can be done by providing clear guidelines on job roles and responsibilities, offering rewards or recognition when goals are met, and ensuring there is open communication between employees and

management.

Organisations should strive for a workplace culture that values collaboration, creativity, innovation, and feedback from all levels of the organisation. Fostering these qualities within the workforce through activities such as team building events or group discussions will help build trust among workers which leads to higher employee engagement overall.

## 3. Align employees' goals with those of the organisation

Aligning employees' goals with those of the organisation is key to improving employee engagement. HR professionals can ensure this alignment by clearly communicating organisational objectives and expectations to all levels of the workforce.

This includes providing a clear understanding of job roles and responsibilities as well as setting measurable performance targets that are achievable yet challenging. Additionally, they should strive to create an environment where everyone feels valued and respected, so that employees feel motivated to contribute their best efforts towards

achieving organisational goals.

It's also important to provide feedback on a regular basis so that employees know how they are performing relative to their peers and can adjust accordingly if needed.

## 4. Measure employee engagement

Measuring employee engagement is a critical aspect of any successful organisation, and HR professionals have an important role to play in this regard. One of the most effective tools available to them is using surveys to gauge the satisfaction and engagement levels of employees.

The best surveys allow for anonymous responses, allowing employees to be honest without fear of repercussions. Additionally, surveys can provide HR professionals with valuable insights into how employees feel about their job roles and responsibilities as well as any potential areas for improvement which can then be addressed accordingly.

Data can also be collected from other sources such as performance reviews or feedback from managers in order to get a comprehensive understanding of employee



# How Stonbury achieved a 68% decrease in minor injuries after introducing WorkBuzz



75% decrease in RIDDOR incidents



68% decrease in minor injuries



AFR (Accident Frequency Rate) has reduced from 0.64 to 0.25



EMEA Inspiring Workplaces Awards - Bronze Winner - Inspiring Culture Award

comprehensive understanding of employee engagement in the organisation.

## 5. Take action

Failing to act on feedback can have a negative impact on employee engagement, retention figures and overall customer experience. Employee surveys help deskless workers to be heard, but this should be more than just a box ticking exercise.

Surveys should be used as a means for gathering insights and data over time – and these insights should be aligned to your organisation’s KPIs, providing detail on key issues and highlighting opportunities for change and innovation.

Tailoring your surveys to your deskless workforce – as covered earlier in this eBook – means you’ll get better response rates and more actionable insights that can ensure fair and inclusive decisions for all your workforce, regardless of their schedules and locations.

Engaging your deskless workforce is essential if you want your construction organisation to provide the best customer experiences. To build better engagement, employee listening needs to be a constant activity within organisations, it helps leaders to identify what is – or isn’t – working, to respond to sources of disengagement, and to nurture a healthy culture.



Stonbury is an agile, direct delivery specialist contractor to both the water industry and wider water environment, with an emphasis on delivering innovative, low carbon and high-quality reliable solutions.



## The problem

Lorraine Thomas, Stonbury’s Director of People and Culture, recognised a need for the business to better support their people.

After completing research into employee engagement, Lorraine identified that a surveying platform, which could elicit employee feedback and communicate results to the wider business would be a key driver for providing this support. As part of the business case, it was imperative that the surveying platform could provide actionable insights and data-driven outcomes, which would be accepted by their

board. Stonbury didn’t want this to be a tick box exercise, but something that would be used to drive new initiatives and processes to provide a better employee experience for their team.

## The solution

Stonbury reached out to WorkBuzz to discuss the requirements and goals for their employee engagement strategy. After the initial consultation, they were impressed with our employee engagement platform and its ability to provide a more tailored, bespoke service, which aligned with their needs as a business. Flexibility was going to be critical for the project to be a success.

To get things started, we recommended running a baseline survey to gain an understanding of what was working well and where improvements could be made. This provided a variety of valuable insights and offered a benchmark for growth for Stonbury.

Since their initial baseline survey, Stonbury have developed the way they listen to employees over time, moving away from the traditional annual surveys to more regular, quarterly pulses. They work closely with WorkBuzz to develop the question sets linked to changes in the business and take away insight from each results call with WorkBuzz on where to focus their efforts to maximise engagement and tackle challenges in the areas that need support.

### The outcome

The initial survey results highlighted some concerns around employees feeling confident to speak up and implement safety standards. This didn't align with the company's ethos of 'Making safety our priority,' which focused on ensuring people feel safe at work and feeling empowered to challenge unsafe behaviour and stop a job.

In response to these findings, the following year Stonbury launched Empowerment Cards. One card authorises an individual to stop any work activity that they believe cannot be undertaken safely. The cards are signed and authorised by Chief Operating Officer, Ian Mellor, empowering all employees to challenge and ask questions and, if necessary, stop work if they feel that the task they are asked to do is unsafe.

As a result of the cards being introduced, Stonbury have seen a 31% increase in employees feeling empowered to stop any work activity that is unsafe, and a 12% increase in employees who feel safe to challenge the way things are done.

Stonbury also now think about safety in broader terms than just basic physical health and safety – they consider mental health,

psychological safety, and how they create a culture of inclusivity worthy of consideration/ just as important.

By using the surveys, Stonbury have reinforced terminology used internally to help them start conversations as their surveys close and have embedded their new ethos of "Be safe, be healthy and be kind".

Stonbury also make use of the WorkBuzz platform's ability to use logic to ask on-site employees different questions – very much focusing on their PPE offering where many valuable responses were returned. This has enabled them to set up a PPE and Workwear Taskforce – making a huge difference to ensure PPE is right for site workers and improving engagement.

More than these results, Stonbury feel differently about their safety culture now.

**"I was really excited by WorkBuzz's ability to provide a more tailored, bespoke service – they're hugely flexible and don't just shoehorn off-the-shelf solutions onto their clients. Their ability to build trust with our workforce to get them to share open feedback by having a clear and confidentiality promise has been critical.**

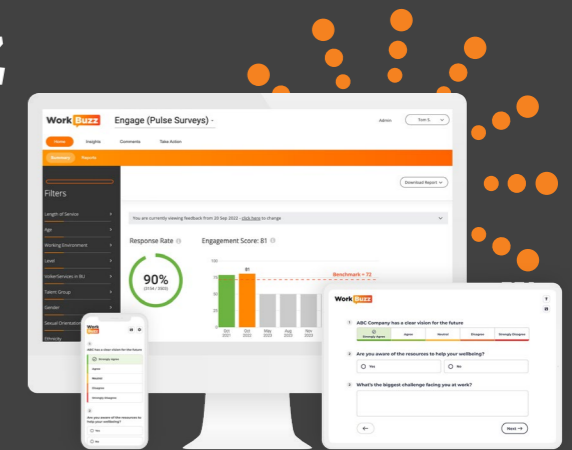
**"There's always work to do, but there is more of a willingness for employees to disclose errors of judgement – honest errors aren't punished, but there is more of a focus on how we learn from them and make improvements. It's shifted the responsibility of health safety from appointed officers with clipboards, to making everyone responsible for it."**

**Loraine Thomas**

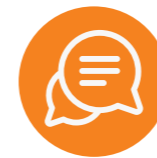
Director of People and Culture, Stonbury

# About WorkBuzz

Employee engagement surveys to reach everyday heroes in the construction industry.



WorkBuzz helps you gather real-time feedback from your people, improve employee engagement and build a culture your team are proud to be part of – wherever they are, and whatever they do.



**Listen** to your employees at a frequency to suit your business – with annual surveys, pulse surveys and on-demand polls available as standard.



**Understand** key staff challenges around employee wellbeing, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, and employee retention. Use our best-practice question libraries or work with our team to create your own.



**Act** on feedback and implement positive change. Work with our team to understand what your data is telling you, and which actions you need to take. Benefit from an engaged, more productive workforce, and see an improvement in employee wellbeing, performance, and retention.

*"Great service and easy to do business with. The WorkBuzz team are adaptive, attentive, professional and act as a true partner. Expertise within the team is also a big plus – providing useful insight into the wider world on what is/can impact on the employee experience."*

Ronnie Calderwood-Duncan, EDI Manager, Highways England

**Give your Everyday Heroes a voice -  
get started with a demo of the WorkBuzz platform**