

---

# AMPLIFYING COLLEAGUE VOICES

Part of the MRS Agency Leadership  
and Culture workstream



---

## Introduction

**There has never been a more vital time to listen to your team!**

### A practical toolkit to spark ideas

We want to arm you with a breadth of practical ideas for listening to and amplifying your team members' voices. Included here are best practice principles across a range of colleague engagement methods, offering possible starting points for positive conversations.

### Inclusion is an act – including all voices really matters

Ensuring all colleagues feel comfortable to have a voice at work is a cornerstone of inclusive workplaces. As a sector, we are on a journey to create more equitable team cultures. We must do all we can to encourage colleagues to share their views if they want to, and when they do, be ready to truly listen, understand and act.

### Builds a more engaged culture and aids talent retention

At its best, team culture is a cooperative – created and developed by all those within the team. By listening to our colleagues, and acting upon their feedback, we can give them a demonstrable stake in our businesses and foster a sense of ownership that can help retain talent in the longer term.

The [MRS Positive Retention Report](#) has also been published with insight and practical ideas on how to meet this challenge.

### Colleague feedback helps us navigate the future

Feedback can make us quake – what if team members have lots of criticism? We do indeed need to be ready to hear about areas for improvement, but there is also opportunity to get clearer about what is working well. Furthermore, colleague engagement can also help us navigate emerging challenges ahead and inspire talent-led, proactive innovation.

## Fostering openness between teams and senior management aids good dialogue

When our senior leaders actively engage in building relationships with team members and show they want to listen, candid feedback is more likely to happen. In addition to these approaches, we also recommend an ongoing attentiveness to nurturing good connection with the team. For example, leaders might include relationship building and listening exercises as part of their weekly tasks e.g., reaching out directly to colleagues, listening into workflow meetings, or regular leadership lunches to connect with people across the business.

## We might not always be able to implement feedback – but we should always address it in communication

The insight from listening to team members should always be considered carefully before making a decision on what to do next. The feedback might include initiatives, ideas or changes that we can't progress with – for commercial, ethical, structural or other reasons. When such feedback arises, it is important to be transparent about the decision-making process and to explain and educate around why it cannot be acted on (or prioritised right now). Many of those in our teams may not have experience of running a business, leading a team or balancing the needs of senior stakeholders. So, we should take time to explain the factors exerting an impact, and help our teams understand the genuine trade-offs at play.

## Of course, good communication is a priority for any efforts to amplify colleague voices

As we introduce new ways to hear our team members' views, we need to be clear and encouraging about the value and role their feedback can play. When we begin to embed such new initiatives, we need to communicate with participants and the broader team about the process. As we listen to people's views, we must be open to understanding what it is they need and want. When we decide about acting on the feedback or not, it is imperative to be transparent and upskill where necessary on the broader business context. If we include our colleagues in the process, we are able to demonstrate the value in feedback, build trust and maximise future engagement.

## A journey of learning, iterating and listening again

The quest to amplify colleague voices is an ongoing journey! This theme resounds in the case studies included in this document from Firefish, Opinium, DJS Research and Chime. We hope this guide provides you with some ideas to try, and more importantly we would love to hear how you evolve and adapt these for your team.

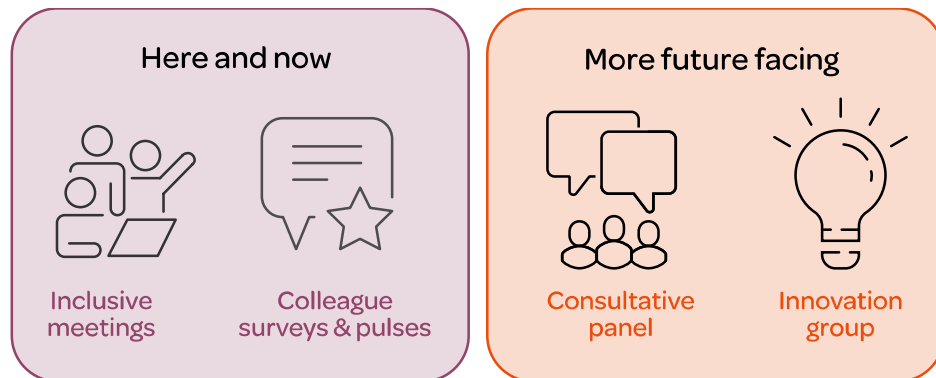
## Hearing from you

If you have successfully applied other solutions which we have not covered please let us know via [company.partners@mrs.org.uk](mailto:company.partners@mrs.org.uk). We will review the Briefing document and expand the guidance with your feedback to ensure it remains practical and relevant.

---

# Overview of Ideas for Amplifying Colleague Voices

We have four distinct ideas to share with you, which can help build a better culture of listening and engagement within your organisation. These can be adapted or evolved to best suit your team.



---

## Inclusive meetings

### Inclusive Meetings - the idea in a nutshell

Meetings matter – they are a daily / weekly touchpoint, where team culture grows. Particularly with hybrid working, everyday meetings act as a proof point to the inclusivity of the business, underpin a healthy culture of feedback and offer a way to build psychological safety.

It is important to check in and consider how we do meetings.

### The benefits of Inclusive Meetings

- Enable more inclusive culture day to day – laying the foundations for all voices to be heard and all ideas to be shared
- Remove unconscious bias from everyday meetings
- More intentional around deployment of and purpose of meetings
- Allow new team members to onboard more smoothly
- Build behaviours around feedback culture
- Embed psychological safety

## **Best practice principles for Inclusive Meetings**

1. Consider the benefits of online vs. in person when deciding on the channel for meetings e.g. Who will be able to attend? What role will they feel comfortable playing? What level of engagement do we need and for how long?
2. Clarity on meeting purpose – automatically adding an agenda to each new meeting, prompts hosts to share the aim for the session and helps people come prepared and better able to contribute meaningfully.
3. Rotate the hosting of meetings across the team – this can ensure the power balance is more democratised. Although, it is best to position this as optional as this role can feel terrifying for some.
4. Establish ground rules for your meetings: what are your 'do's and don'ts' for good conduct in meetings? Meeting chair to facilitate with this code of conduct front of mind e.g.
  - Frequent speakers and senior team members asked to cede space to less heard voices
  - Less heard voices encouraged to participate in a way that feels comfortable for them
5. Conduct meetings so that:
  - Every participant able to be visible if they choose to be (whether joining from the office or remotely)
  - Every person given space to participate (verbally / chat) in every meeting if they want to
  - People have time to process bigger questions or discussion. Offer the option to contribute after the meeting or 1 to 1, as well as within the meeting
6. Don't forget to leave time for building relationships! Personal interaction, mini group / paired exercises and bringing in moments for connection are as important as the 'work' discussion – they are the 'work' too!
7. Invite feedback – how can we make our meetings more inclusive?

“At Firefish, we are on a journey to build a more inclusive culture. We began by examining this as a series of smaller work cultures – so, how we come together in meetings, how we socialise, our project cultures and our line management and feedback culture. Meetings are a core area we want to reset to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and supported to contribute. With this in mind, we asked some of the team to consult and understand how inclusive our meetings are at the moment (or not). Our working group recommended some simple changes we can make to enact a powerful improvement. We have now agreed some simple, practical actions as a team. Firstly, that all meetings have an agenda that is clear and accessible before each meeting. Secondly, that the host of the meeting ‘moderates’ the session to manage dynamics – actively providing space for quieter voices and managing dominant contributors. These are just the first steps of course, but ones that we hope take us forward in our journey.”

Daniel Rose, MD Firefish UK

---

# Colleague Surveys and Pulses

## Colleague Surveys and Pulses - the idea in a nutshell

An invaluable way of collecting feedback from team members! Colleagues can feedback their true feelings anonymously, allowing leaders to get a real view on the current mood of the organisation. Colleague surveys, when implemented effectively, give everyone the opportunity to voice their opinion and can boost engagement.

A yearly colleague survey is a great way to track metrics over time and get more in-depth feedback. But quick pulse surveys (2-3 questions) can be super helpful to get a quick read on current events and enable agility!

As well as collecting feedback, it's just as important to communicate these findings back to your team. When feeding back make sure to include next steps and address any areas where it might not be possible to implement feedback. If it's not possible to implement feedback for whatever reason, that's totally ok, but it's important to communicate the reasons why it can't be implemented. Transparency in this scenario is key, and it can be a valuable opportunity to give your team insight into the running of a business and the constraints that come with that.

### **The benefits of Colleague Surveys and Pulses**

- Provides an opportunity for colleagues to feedback anonymously, allowing leadership to get a true read on how your organisation is doing and what might be needed
- Understand needs gaps before they become issues
- Quantify colleagues' needs and attitudes to drive future actions
- Track metrics over time, enabling progress tracking and organisational target setting

### **Best practice principles for Colleague Surveys and Pulses**

1. Participate in the research sector's engagement survey
  - a. MRS Leadership and Culture workstream is developing an Employee Experience survey which will form part of the Best Place to Work Award and can be used to benchmark yourself against the rest of the sector. It offers a great opportunity for identifying and understanding the drivers for employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and helps employers to improve their employee engagement
2. Clearly communicate why are you doing the survey and what will the outcome be



3. Have a separate small team who have access to the data and drive forward action (e.g., an internal culture team)
4. Ensure true anonymity and reassure colleagues of this throughout the process
  - a. If you are a small organisation, be wary of including classification questions which might make it possible to identify someone in the raw data (e.g., seniority and demographics)
5. Run a yearly/ twice-yearly core colleague survey, supplemented by pulse surveys (2-3 questions) throughout the year to get feedback on current topics (e.g., Covid-19, remote working, Cost of Living Crisis)
6. Design the core survey to be thorough but not take too long to complete
  - a. Some topic ideas for what you might want to cover are detailed in box 1.
7. Ensure results of the survey are reported back to the whole team in a timely fashion, including action points and explanation for any feedback that cannot be actioned at the moment
  - a. Consider setting up a meeting to review the results as a team, discuss openly and develop an action plan, giving ownership to each of the actions

### Template topics for Colleague Surveys and Pulses

There are many topics you can cover within a colleague survey, below are some example topics where you might want to measure **current satisfaction** and understand what **colleagues need**.

Ensure colleagues have the opportunity to feed back through **open end responses**.

- Overall satisfaction
- Leadership
- Work environment
  - Home and office environments
- Social / culture
  - Including hybrid working
- Learning and Development
  - Training
  - Interesting / challenging work / progression

- Health and wellbeing
  - Work-life balance, stress / burnout
- Diversity and Inclusion
  - Able to be authentic / bring whole selves to work
  - Belonging

"As part of our people team at Opinium, we have been tracking levels of engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing amongst our colleagues for quite some time now. For us it's all about the communication and process - the process in which we capture people's voices, making sure they are heard and acting upon these where we can.

We have annual and pulse surveys to track levels of engagement and wellbeing and what is driving these or areas hindering, then we deep dive into them further through our peer group forums, to discuss in more detail and get to the heart of it through what our employees in these cohorts are saying. Then it's all about getting together to see what we can potentially improve upon and getting our internal teams involved, for example our wellbeing team, diversity and inclusion team, operations team etc so our colleagues are also helping with the solutions.

The final and crucial step for us is about communication, communication and communication! Informing the outcomes and what we can look to improve on and where it is or isn't possible and the reasons why is fundamental. We have found it really helps improve trust and understanding and get buy in with future engagement!"

**James Endersby, CEO Opinium and MRS Chair Designate**

---

# Consultative Panel

## Consultative Panel - the idea in a nutshell

A cross-functional panel of employees who are open to coming together for ad-hoc consultation on emerging questions or around business initiatives.

The panel help develop, explore and stress-test new ideas from the leadership, or help analyse and prioritise action following employee surveys / pulses.

Consultation could take the form of discussion groups or asynchronous online work.

Subjects might include new ways of working, company culture, new propositions / product development etc.

### **The benefits of a Consultative Panel**

- Gets leaders out of their echo chamber - provides early reality check
- Strengthens new ideas before launch across the business
- Opportunity to socialise and build support for new ideas
- Offers understanding on how best to communicate new initiatives or results from colleague consultations
- Deepens understanding – a chance to sense check analyses following colleague surveys
- Ad-hoc arrangement reduces time commitment required

### **Best practice principles for a Consultative Panel**

1. Give clarity on expectations for participants and demonstrate their time is valued by providing information on the macro aims and an agenda for each session
2. The consultation must be meaningful i.e., feedback is actively considered, with transparency on outcomes and decision-making (particularly when feedback is not implemented)
3. Ensure inclusive and diverse recruitment to the Panel, across demographics, departments, different levels of tenure etc.
4. Make sure the Panel is recognised internally as work, not extra-curricular or an out of hours responsibility
5. Panel refreshed periodically e.g., annually to invite new voices to contribute

“Since becoming employee-owned DJS Research has become even more collaborative and inclusive. Our partners (employees) are at the heart of our strategy and indeed they themselves are helping us form the future direction of the company.

We are on a journey to help our partners think, feel and behave like owners. One of our key tools that we are utilising to help us achieve this is called 'EO Voice' which is an employee council made up of 11 representatives from every team at DJS Research. They meet quarterly and represent the 'company voice', sharing feedback, suggestions and constructive challenges to the Board. Many of the suggestions we have been able to implement, including expanding our Operational Board by utilising rotational Board members so more partners can gain experience and add value at a Board level.

Conversely, there have been some initiatives that we have not been able to act on. When this happens, we are very mindful to feedback in full transparent detail the reasoning behind these decisions. We feel it is important to educate honestly about the other side of the coin and the trade-offs that sometimes have to be made when running a business.

By listening, educating and acting where we can we are beginning to create a sense of empowerment for our partners where they feel comfortable to share their ideas and suggestions. Employee voice is a powerful tool that any business can utilise whether employee-owned or not.”

**Danny Sims, Chairman DJS Research Ltd**

---

# Innovation Group

## Innovation Group - the idea in a nutshell

A cross-functional employee group (or a number of small groups) works together on the development of new ideas over 12 months. The initiatives might be around culture, product, commercial or beyond.

The work is supported by the business by making time for the innovation work, plus mentoring and coaching from senior leaders / external experts.

At the end of the 12 months, developed ideas are pitched to leadership, or broader employee group, for a share in dedicated investment pot and green light to launch the initiatives.

## The benefits of an Innovation Group

- Gives broader range of employees the opportunity to enact meaningful change within and for the business
- Harnesses the divergent thinking of employees to drive greater innovation
- Mentoring – creates relationships across the business to offer guidance and experience to less seasoned colleagues
- Reverse mentoring – immerses current leadership in priorities, ideas and experiences of colleagues who are earlier in their career
- Nurtures future leaders of the business – fosters leadership, innovation, collaboration networking and negotiation skills

## Best practice principles for an Innovation Group

1. Start with a clear and meaningful brief for participants e.g., a challenge the business needs help to overcome
2. Communicate the value to participants, leaders and the business i.e., helping the business become more competitive around culture, product, commercials etc
3. Invite inclusive and diverse participants; consider if beneficial to invite e.g., just under 30s or specific cohort based on talent retention / acquisition needs or the nature of the business challenge
4. Ensure the Group is well supported to enable success (time, mentoring, money, resources, connections, upskilling etc), with the business committing to act upon the outcomes of the Group
5. A 12-month programme allows participants to progress on a learning

journey and develop the ideas, but requires time / resource commitment from the business too

“For 6 years, Chime ran a Youth Board to surface innovative ideas and fresh perspectives. Each year, we invited employees aged 30 or under to apply. Applicants were asked to put forward an idea that the business could benefit from (be it in terms of culture, product or ways of working). Successful applicants were organised into small working groups, including a mix of job roles, skills and location across the world. Each group was tasked with a different challenge brief, to work on across the next 12 months. During this time the groups were mentored by senior leaders across the business, and every month benefitted from external speakers providing inspiration. By being part of the Youth Board, participants grew their innovation, leadership and influencing skills, and senior leaders benefitted from reverse mentoring. After 12 months, the groups pitched their ideas to the board to win a share of investment to launch their initiative across the business. We found the Youth Board to be a rich initiative that helped us develop a new generation of talent, bring more diverse voices into our culture and decision-making and helped us innovate with more creativity.”

**Jo Parker, CEO and COO, Chime Group**

---

## Thank you to our contributors

Our sincere thanks for the contributions and input from Firefish, Good Sense Research, Opinium, DJS Research, Chime and Hall & Partners, as well as from the wider MRS Leadership & Culture team.

---

## A note on the authors

### **Lizzy Moroney, Head of Customer Strategy, Firefish**

With 20 years insight experience, Lizzy works with organisations to grow their audiences, amplify their brands and innovate well. A Squiggly Careers Advocate and a keen mentor, she is passionate about building strong team cultures that help everyone thrive. At Firefish, we have working groups to champion and innovate around e.g., Belonging and Green initiatives, we host Leadership Breakfasts and offer a monthly, anonymous opportunity for colleague feedback.

### **Sophie Holland, Senior Research Manager, Good Sense Research (FIS Group)**

Sophie manages the quant team at Good Sense Research, part of the FIS Group, integrating insights and innovation for Food & Beverage clients. As well as her day job researching the F&B industry, she also loves getting stuck into all things culture at FIS Group. FIS Group are passionate about people and undertake internal depth interviews and surveys to help shape the organisation around the needs of the team.