

The science of...
the candidate experience

How to deliver better preboarding and onboarding with technology and behavioural science



Introduction

The period between offer acceptance and Day One is often treated as an administrative waiting room. Increasingly, however, research and practical experience suggest it is something far more important: a critical phase in which candidates begin forming expectations, relationships, confidence, and emotional attachment to their future employer.

The six psychological principles outlined in this paper all point towards the same conclusion: candidate commitment is not secured at the point an offer is accepted. It is shaped by the experiences that follow.

The quality of the preboarding experience may influence:

- How prepared candidates feel for their role
- How confident they are about succeeding
- How connected they feel to the organisation
- How positively they perceive the employer brand
- How smoothly they transition into their new team
- Whether they remain engaged with the opportunity they have chosen

For organisations, this creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

In a market characterised by earlier offers, longer lead times, increasing candidate choice and AI-enabled mass applications, commitment can no longer be assumed. Successful organisations recognise that helping candidates feel informed, connected, confident and supported is not simply good candidate experience – it is a strategic investment in the strength of their talent pipeline.

Unseen provides a platform that supports these principles in a practical, scalable and evidence-informed way. By combining structured communication, authentic human connection, behavioural insight and engagement analytics, organisations can create experiences that feel personal to candidates while remaining manageable at scale.

Perhaps most importantly, the platform creates opportunities to understand and continuously improve the candidate journey over time.

Engagement data, feedback and behavioural patterns can help organisations move beyond assumptions and make more informed decisions about what genuinely helps candidates feel prepared, connected and ready to join.

Ben Williams

Chief Scientist at Unseen

Many organisations can strengthen candidate engagement, preparedness and commitment through small changes to communication, sequencing and preboarding design.

This document outlines six science-backed principles of psychologically informed preboarding journeys and offers science-backed tips to help organisations get the most from candidate engagement environments.



Principle one:

Early micro-commitments strengthen psychological momentum

Behavioural science research suggests that people are more likely to remain consistent with commitments they have already acted upon. Small actions can create psychological momentum, making decisions feel more real and personally meaningful over time.

In practical terms, this means that seemingly simple behaviours – such as registering for a preboarding platform or engaging with an early content release – may help strengthen a candidate's sense of commitment and connection to the organisation.

Principle two:

Reducing uncertainty helps candidates feel more prepared

Research in organisational psychology suggests that people entering unfamiliar situations actively seek information that reduces uncertainty and helps them understand what to expect. Increased clarity and preparedness are associated with greater confidence, lower anxiety and smoother adjustment into new environments.

Engagement data from Unseen's candidate experience and onboarding platform suggests that candidates engage particularly strongly with practical, role-relevant content that helps them mentally prepare for their future experience.

This aligns with research into uncertainty reduction and anticipatory socialisation.

Principle three:

Human connection and belonging increase organisational attachment

Research into social identity and belonging suggests that people are more likely to remain committed to groups and organisations where they can imagine themselves fitting in and succeeding. Early feelings of belonging may begin forming long before formal employment starts.

Candidate feedback from onboarding journeys frequently references feeling “included”, “connected” and “already part of the team” before joining. Research suggests that authentic human interaction and relatable peer content may be particularly effective in helping candidates build an emotional connection with an organisation.

Principle four:

Confidence and self-efficacy influence commitment and engagement

Self-efficacy research suggests that people are more likely to engage positively with situations where they believe they can succeed. Confidence influences motivation, persistence and emotional reactions, while uncertainty about capability can increase avoidance and anxiety.

Research suggests that candidates often seek reassurance and practical preparation before entering a new environment. Content that helps candidates feel more capable and prepared may strengthen confidence and reduce unnecessary apprehension.



Principle five:

Behavioural journey design shapes attention and re-engagement

Digital engagement research suggests that attention is limited and easily disrupted, particularly over long time periods. Small design choices within digital journeys – including timing and sequencing of content, reducing registration friction and improving platform access, and enhancing notifications with carefully selected and informative language – can meaningfully influence whether users continue to engage.

Behavioural patterns from onboarding journeys facilitated by Unseen suggest that early engagement is particularly important. Data also indicates that candidates who continue engaging beyond the first release often remain consistently engaged throughout the wider preboarding period.

Principle six:

Engagement data supports continuous journey improvement

Behavioural analytics can provide useful insight into how candidates interact with onboarding journeys over time.

While engagement metrics should not be interpreted too simplistically, they can help organisations identify patterns that may inform future refinement.

This allows organisations to review which types of content appear most useful or engaging for different audiences, while also identifying where engagement may weaken across the journey.

Our commitment to science

At Unseen, we're powering HR and TA teams globally to transform how they attract, assess, hire and develop people at scale.

We do this by combining specialist recruitment technology, recruitment expertise, assessment science and human storytelling. As part of this, we embed psychological principles into everything we do - from the tech we build to the assessment materials we design.

Unseen's candidate experience and onboarding platform, **Meet&Engage**, is not simply a communication tool - it is a psychologically informed preboarding environment designed to support candidate engagement, preparedness, confidence and commitment during one of the most uncertain phases of the talent journey: the period between offer acceptance and joining.



Meet&Engage

How would you rate your experience with the Preparing for Work Hub?



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Science-backed advantages of using Meet&Engage to strengthen your candidate experience



Human connection and belonging increase organisational attachment

Meet&Engage facilitates employee and cohort stories, peer testimonials and videos, live Q&A sessions and events, introductions to future colleagues or communities, authentic employee-generated content and opportunities for social interaction and shared experience.



Result: Candidates who begin to feel psychologically connected to the organisation before joining may be more likely to maintain engagement, develop trust and feel a stronger sense of belonging when they arrive.

Early micro-commitments strengthen psychological momentum

Meet&Engage enables candidate registration journeys, staged onboarding activities, prompts to engage with content, personalised welcome messages, polls, surveys and interaction opportunities, and structured release schedules that encourage ongoing participation.



Result: Candidates who actively engage early in the pre-start journey become more psychologically invested in joining, helping organisations maintain engagement during long and uncertain lead times.

Reducing uncertainty helps candidates feel more prepared

Meet&Engage allows you to host programme and business-line content, practical work-readiness resources, FAQs and onboarding guidance, tailored communication for different cohorts and locations, and opportunities to ask questions or access support.



Result: When candidates feel informed and prepared, they are more likely to remain engaged, feel confident about their decision and transition more smoothly into the organisation.

Behavioural journey design shapes attention and re-engagement

Meet&Engage facilitates staged content releases, reminder emails and notifications, mobile and desktop accessibility, reduced-friction onboarding journeys, structured content ordering and progressive engagement over time rather than information overload on Day One.



Result: Psychologically informed journey design can help organisations maintain candidate attention and engagement across long lead times, rather than relying on isolated moments of communication.

Engagement data supports continuous candidate journey improvement

Meet&Engage tracks and reports registration and re-engagement patterns, content open and completion rates, release-by-release engagement trends, candidate feedback and preparedness polls, notification and email interaction, and broader engagement behaviours across cohorts.



Result: Over time, these insights may help organisations create more engaging, psychologically informed and evidence-led preboarding experiences that better support candidate preparedness, connection and transition into role.

Confidence and self-efficacy influence commitment and engagement

Meet&Engage hosts content that provides opportunities for gradual familiarisation with the organisation and role. This includes work-readiness content, practical onboarding guidance, relatable employee stories and reassurance around Day One expectations

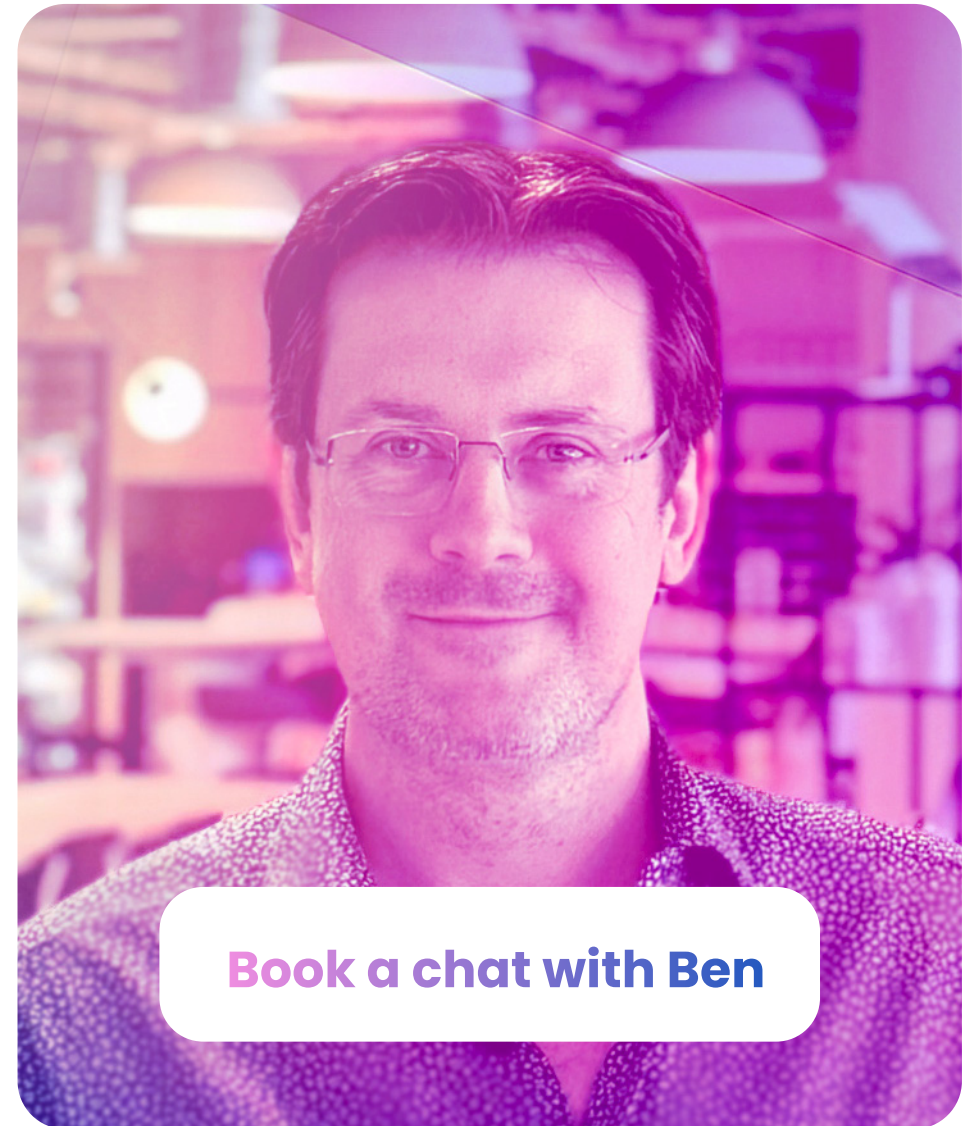


Result: Candidates who feel confident about what lies ahead are more likely to remain engaged, approach the transition positively and feel psychologically ready to succeed in role.

Thanks for reading

Now let's get scientific.

If you want to engage candidates with journeys that feel personal – no matter the scale – book a chat to explore how technology and behavioural science can support a more seamless, structured and evidence-based approach.



Book a chat with Ben

References

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