

# Starting a movement: A national initiative to build employee engagement in (lost) workplace pensions

## Authors

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## Abstract

<b>Purpose</b>	This paper explores the establishment of a National Pension Tracing Day in an attempt to address the national problem of employees not telling their pension provider when they change address, which has resulted in £19.4 billion in unclaimed pensions.
<b>Design / Approach</b>	This paper considers the approach taken by Punter Southall Aspire to build employee engagement to trace lost workplace pension through a summative content analysis. We then apply an ambidextrous leadership lens to develop greater meaning.
<b>Findings</b>	The combination of a simple narrative, a CSR approach allowing cooperation across the industry, and an engaging campaign allowed the first National Pension Tracing Day to build momentum and spread across the workplace.
<b>Originality / Value</b>	The first National Pension Tracing day was established 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2021 by a small team within an SME. This paper attempts to raise awareness of how the lost pension challenge can be addressed for the purpose of future research.
<b>Keywords</b>	Employee Engagement, Workplace Pensions, Ambidextrous Leadership
<b>Paper type</b>	Viewpoint

## Introduction

In 2020, nearly eight out of ten UK employees (78%) had a workplace pension compared with less than five out of ten in 2012 when Automatic Enrolment was introduced (ONS, 2021). However, only one in twenty five remember to tell their workplace pension provider when they change address (ABI, 2021). This has resulted in an estimated 1.6 million pension pots worth £19.4 billion (PPI, 2018) remaining unclaimed. The UK Government (DWP, 2014) predicts with the average person having 11 jobs in their lifetime this could lead to 50 million dormant and lost pension pots by 2050.

In response to this national issue of £19.4m unclaimed pensions, a small team in Punter Southall Aspire attempted to create a national movement to engage employees with their workplace pension and track down any lost pension pots. Punter Southall Aspire is an SME with 150 staff based in six offices across the UK. They provide consulting around workplace pensions, employee benefits, employee engagement and retirement solutions to 1000 UK Companies. This paper uses a summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) to consider the approach taken by the Punter Southall Aspire team to address these challenges.

Building on related discussions within a paper from the same authors within this journal (Smith and Butler, 2021), we will also consider the theoretical lens of ambidextrous leadership. This theory pertaining to paradox will contextualise the approach taken by Punter Southall Aspire and outline the importance of why it is both a different way of thinking but also a different way of engaging a workforce. The lens is applied in the hope of inspiring change in other companies and industries through embracing paradoxical elements (Smith, 2016).

### **The ambition**

In June 2021, the team agreed to establish a National Pension Tracing Day (NPTD, 2021) on the 31<sup>st</sup> October to allow employees to use the extra hour when the clocks went back to trace any lost pension they may have. The aim was to use their voice, network, and expertise, to contribute to the greater good of pensions, help people find lost pensions and improve retirement outcomes. The team acknowledge it would be a multiyear project, but set these year 1 goals:

1. Work collaboratively with the industry to 'make some noise' about pension tracing
2. Empower the public to trace, detailing steps, and sources, plus scam warnings
3. Collectively create a 'crescendo of noise' that triggers a 'tracing wave'
4. Allow the campaign to spread by word of mouth with people not only looking for their own pensions but nudging others
5. Secure the day in the pension calendar

### **Building momentum**

The team decided to take a 'campaign approach' towards this initiative and ensure that the communications approach was not only accessible (in terms of content and channels), but could 'cut through the noise', spark interest and had 'trending' potential. They came up with the concept of a 'Great Pension Treasure Hunt', an employee friendly concept and a nod to the much-loved Great British Bake Off. Appreciating that everyone learns differently, they developed a suite of multichannel communications using the concept and an eye-catching/memorable style. They launched a helpful step-by step website that 5,633 people visited and developed a full suite of helpful communications.

With 1.6 million lost pension pots, generating significant 'audience reach' was crucial and they decided that a collective industry voice would be far more powerful than just their own. Collaboration became their goal and they secured founding sponsorship from Aegon, Legal & General, Scottish Widows and Standard Life. These 'industry giants' meant that the National Pension Tracing Day initiative had the potential to reach millions. These pension providers all committed to raising awareness through their own media, marketing, and client communication channels.

In most cases tracing a pension is not hugely complex; the communication challenge is less about the message and more about pension apathy where pension savers leave tasks like pension tracing for another day, but then forget about it. So, from a timing perspective, they decided to have a dedicated tracing day, an annual 'moment in time', and purposefully chose the Sunday that the clocks go back so that the extra hour could be used to start tracing.

With a simple message to communicate '*Have you got a lost pension?*' they decided that 'kitchen table chats' were in fact a viable communication channel. Lost pensions is not a message that needs to be delivered by financial experts. Instead, they aimed to have 'lost pensions' as a topic of conversation where the public would nudge one another. To get the conversation going they

activated a virtual 'word of mouth' across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn and they saw their hashtags trend *#WheresMyPension #NationalPensionTracingDay #GreatPensionTreasureHunt*. For example, Twitter reached 544,000 views.

The team also decided that employers and Trustees were important communication channels, but appreciate they have lots of different priorities, so they worked to make this initiative easy for them to support. They created free-to-use communication toolkits and issued them to over 2,000 employers/Trustees. The founding sponsors also empowered their clients to communicate to their employees, which saw large pension schemes like BAE and British Transport Police bringing the campaign to their members.

In the lead up to National Pension Tracing Day, their goal was to create a 'crescendo of noise' from lots of different sources and they recognised the relevance for both industry and consumer media. They secured 56 consumer and industry media placements, including the Daily Express (Oldacres, 2021) and a slot on BBC radio. The media efforts gave the initiative a further audience reach of 2 million. As promised the founding sponsors also delivered their own media plans creating far greater reach, and by the end of the campaign, Google had nearly 8 million verbatim search results for National Pension Tracing day.

It was a deliberate approach to make National Pension Tracing Day inclusive, whereby providers, companies and competitors could freely join the campaign without the team holding centralised or restrictive control. This set the tone for other pension providers to get involved and Smart Pensions, Hargreaves Lansdowne, and Nutmeg communicated National Pension Tracing Day to their members. Industry influencers, such as Henry Tapper and ex-pension minister, Ros Altmann, also publicly backed the campaign. Scottish Widows produced videos with Guy Opperman, the Pensions Minister and Money Helper, who reported back that this led to over 130k impressions.

Since '1 in 30' could find a lost pension, the team used this angle to launch a 'Tracing wave' campaign where they asked our colleagues and industry networks to 'Tell 30 people' about lost pensions and ask those 30 people to 'Tell 30' more. This led to additional communication support from ShareSoc and the Transparency Task Force.

### **Achieving results**

The team recognised an important industry issue that was set to worsen, and they set out to work collaboratively with the industry to influence the trajectory of 50 million lost pensions by 2050. The direct success of the campaign is difficult to measure because of the word of mouth nature; however, the team received a number of success stories about employees who had taken the time to find historical pensions and found pension pots ranging in size from £700 to £27,000. Yet, it is fair to say the team's approach from a standing start over a four month period achieved significant results. They concluded the success was linked to:

1. The simple narrative – make people aware of forgotten money and help them claim it; this resonated at government, corporate and employee levels.
2. A CSR approach allowed the industry to put commercials to one side and work together.
3. Coupling the engaging campaign with a collaborative nature meant National Pension Tracing Day built momentum and spread across the workplace.

### **The need for Ambidextrous Leadership**

All can agree that picking up lost pensions is a good thing. It can promote further well-being of employees beyond retirement and add further financial security. However, what real onus is there on a company to want to help their workforce in this way? On the face of it, it perhaps does not have a significant return on investment for organisations. Thus, we could therefore argue that an ambidextrous leadership approach is needed.

Ambidextrous leadership relates to Organisational Ambidexterity and is a theory pertaining to paradox (Butler and Smith, 2021). Somewhat simplified, there are two polar opposites, namely *exploitation* and *exploration* (see Birkinshaw and Gupta (2013), O'Reilly and Tushman (2013), and Stokes et al. (2015) for greater understanding of Organisational Ambidexterity). In this discussion, *exploitation* can, for example, relate to organisations focusing on short-term goals like surviving and adapting to Covid-19, increasing efficiency and reducing costs within an incredibly competitive global market. *Exploration* can be considered to be more associated with innovation and flexibility, and could be linked here with long-term talent management, health and well-being of employees, and even a focus on developing responsible management practice.

Getting managers and organisations to do something that is arguably linked to being more 'responsible', i.e. help to find lost pensions, requires a change in thinking and approach. In this current global climate, such an approach cannot be to the detriment of the business. Organisations already have so much to manage and consider in this complex world (e.g. climate action, creating sustainable business practices and so on). Thus, ambidextrous leadership is potentially needed to embrace both sides of the paradox, i.e. *exploitative* versus *explorative* approaches (Smith, 2016). It is not easy to do, but investing in our workforce is arguably always the responsible approach and therefore it is worthwhile finding a way to do it. We could argue that Punter Southall Aspire is acting ambidextrously by building in this focus on lost pensions and we hope such a movement can act as a beacon of good practice to other businesses and industries.

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