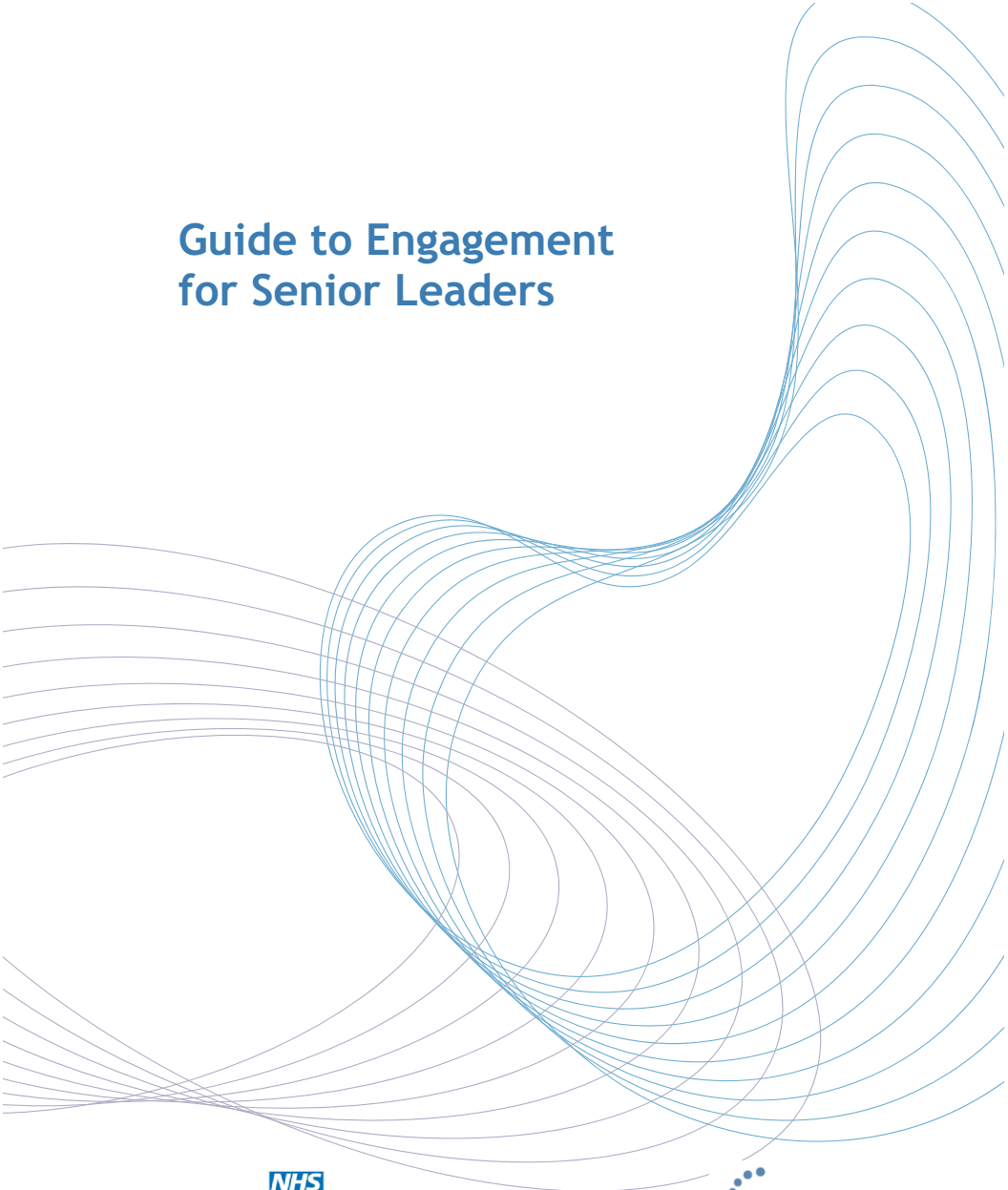


# Guide to Engagement for Senior Leaders



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# 1 Introduction

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Welcome to this guide on staff engagement in the NHS. The aim of the guide is to inform you about engagement: what it is, why it matters, what makes it happen, and above all what this means for you, in your role as a senior leader. It focuses on the actions you should take to foster and sustain engagement levels throughout your organisation.

The NHS is a complicated organisation, employing people in many different roles, staff types, and professional groups. It is under intense scrutiny – perhaps more so now than at any time in its history. Staff are looking to their senior leaders to steer the organisation in a people-centred, values-driven way.

There are many reports and ‘how to’ guides about staff engagement, so how does this one differ? Firstly, the evidence review on which this guide is based<sup>1</sup>, together with an associated review of practitioner research<sup>2</sup>, was commissioned with the NHS in mind, so the outputs from the review have a strong focus on what will work best in an NHS context. Secondly, the evidence review followed a systematic methodology, so you can be confident that the advice in this guide is based on robust, reliable, good-quality evidence.

There are four sections to the guide:

1. **What is Engagement?** This section describes engagement definitions, different perspectives on engagement, and how engagement is measured in the NHS.
2. **Why Does Engagement Matter?** This section presents the evidence showing that it is worthwhile investing in increasing staff engagement, because engagement makes a difference to morale and performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Truss, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., Fletcher, L., Robinson, D., Holmes, J., Buzzeo, J. and Currie, G. (2014). *Employee Engagement: An Evidence Synthesis*. National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, J., Fletcher, L., Buzzeo, J., Robinson, D., Truss, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K. and Currie, G. (2014). *NIHR Staff Engagement in the NHS: Review of Practitioner Studies of Engagement*. NIHR.

3. What Drives Engagement? To raise engagement levels, it is important to understand what causes engagement to happen (or not happen). This section presents the evidence about engagement drivers.
4. What Can Senior Leaders Do? This final section gives you some practical advice about actions you can take to raise and sustain engagement levels in your organisation.

## 2 What is Engagement?

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This section describes engagement definitions, different perspectives on engagement, and how engagement is measured in the NHS.

The question 'What is engagement' sounds straightforward, but in fact there are many different views about engagement and what it is, and there is no single, widely-accepted definition. A common factor, however, is that engagement is seen as a *positive psychological state*. This stems from Kahn (1990)<sup>3</sup>, the first academic to use the term 'engagement'. He viewed it as '*the individual's emotional and physical expression of the authentic and preferred self at work*'.

### 2.1.1 Engagement perspectives

There are two broad perspectives on engagement:

- The focus of **academic researchers** in the field of engagement tends to be the individual and the job, as the following two examples illustrate:
  - Schaufeli et al (2002)<sup>4</sup>, defined engagement as '*a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind*'.
  - Saks (2006)<sup>5</sup>, viewed engagement as being multi-dimensional: '*a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance*'.

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<sup>3</sup> Kahn, W. (1990). Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4).

<sup>4</sup> Schaufeli, W.B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V. and Bakker, A.B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1).

<sup>5</sup> Saks, A.M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(7).



## Research bite: the influence of Schaufeli

Schaufeli et al's definition of engagement<sup>6</sup>, together with his underpinning conceptual model and engagement measure, is very influential in academia. Numerous studies have been published in academic journals that test the definition, model and measure in different sectors, settings and countries.

The model is known as the 'Job demands-resources' model, JD-R for short. It proposes that there is a relationship between job demands (such as work pressure and emotional demands) and job resources (not only physical, but also personal, organisational and psychological such as resilience, career guidance and role autonomy). High job demands, combined with low resources, can lead to burnout - whereas high levels of job resources are associated with engagement, even if job demands are high.

Schaufeli's engagement measure is known as the 'Utrecht Work Engagement Scale', or UWES. It measures three aspects of engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption.

- Most **practitioners** (ie managers and HR/OD professionals who are working to engage the workforce) have a broader perspective, in that they would like individual employees to be engaged not only narrowly with their current job, but more widely with their team, their line manager, their business or functional area, and their organisation. This is particularly important for senior leaders, who need to take people with them in times of change. Examples of these definitions illustrate this different focus:
  - The Institute for Employment Studies (IES - 2004)<sup>7</sup> defines engagement as '*a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values*'. IES goes on to describe how the engaged employee behaves, and stresses the two-way nature of engagement: '*An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.*'
  - Kenexa's definition (2012)<sup>8</sup> is that engagement is '*the extent to which employees are motivated to contribute towards organizational success, and are willing to apply*

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<sup>6</sup> Schaufeli, W.B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V. and Bakker, A.B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1).

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, D., Perryman, S. and Hayday, S. (2004). *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*. Institute for Employment Studies (IES).

<sup>8</sup> Kenexa (2012). *The Many Contexts of Employee Engagement – A 2012/2013 Kenexa WorkTrends Report*. Kenexa.

*discretionary effort to accomplishing tasks important to the achievement of organizational goals'.*

- NHS Employers, in its online staff engagement resource<sup>9</sup>, focuses on the positive outcomes of engagement: *'Engaged staff think and act in a positive way about the work they do, the people they work with and the organisation that they work in.'*

### Research bite: How practitioners see engagement

Practitioner definitions of engagement typically encompass a range of positive attitudes towards the organisation, and sometimes also include engagement drivers (such as communication and involvement) and engagement outcomes (such as performance and desired behaviours).

Because of the different agendas and perspectives, academics and practitioners may not feel they share much common ground. Academics might feel that practitioners are insufficiently rigorous, while practitioners think that the narrower definitions and measures used by academics are not very useful, because they who want people to be engaged outside the boundaries of their jobs. Fortunately, some rigorous studies that use wider definitions and conceptual models of engagement have been published by reputable consultancies, survey houses and research institutes, and the broad findings are included in this guide.

## 2.1.2 How does the NHS measure engagement?

Engagement levels in the NHS are measured via the annual staff survey<sup>10</sup>. The **headline engagement indicator** is derived from nine questionnaire statements, to which respondents allocate a rating on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. This headline indicator is broken down into three sub-dimensions called 'key findings' (KFs), each of which is made up of three statements.

- KF22 is 'staff ability to contribute towards improvement at work', often given the shorter label of '**involvement**':
  - *'I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team/department.'*
  - *'There are frequent opportunities for me to show initiative in my role.'*
  - *'I am able to make improvements happen in my area of work.'*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/retain-and-improve/staff-experience/staff-engagement>

<sup>10</sup> [www.nhsstaffsurveys.com](http://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com)

- KF24 is described as ‘staff recommendation of the trust as a place to work or receive treatment’ or more simply ‘**advocacy**’:
  - *‘Care of patients/service users is my trust’s top priority.’*
  - *‘I would recommend my trust as a place to work.’*
  - *‘If a friend or relative needed treatment I would be happy with the standard of care provided by this organisation.’*
- Finally, KF25 is labelled ‘staff motivation at work’, usually abbreviated to ‘**motivation**’:
  - *‘I look forward to going to work.’*
  - *‘I am enthusiastic when I am working.’*
  - *‘Time passes quickly when I am working.’*

All three of these sub-dimensions are clearly very important, and the senior leaders will be influential in all of them. **Advocacy** is a behavioural outcome of engagement that every organisation would want to see. It is gaining in prominence within the NHS as it can be linked to the overall development of a ‘Friends and Family’ indicator within the patient satisfaction survey. However, you should try to guard against the very natural tendency to focus on this aspect of engagement alone, simply because it is attracting so much national attention. **Involvement** and **motivation** are also essential aspects of engagement.

### Research bite: different staff groups, different engagement

Work carried out by Jeremy Dawson and his colleagues<sup>11</sup> at the University of Sheffield, using the NHS staff survey engagement measure, shows that the headline staff engagement indicators can mask differences between staff groups in the way that they respond to the statements in the three sub-dimensions. The 2011 staff survey results, for example, showed that medical and dental staff had the highest motivation scores, general managers the highest involvement scores, and maintenance and ancillary staff the highest advocacy scores.

### 2.1.3 What does this mean for senior leaders?

As a leader of your organisation, you will want employees to be absorbed in their day-to-day work and motivated by their jobs, but you will also want them to take an

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<sup>11</sup> Presentation by Jeremy Dawson at ‘Staff Engagement in the NHS’ conference, University of Sussex, 25 February 2014

interest in the organisation, get involved in activities outside their immediate area of work, and speak positively about the organisation to outsiders. However, you do not have direct managerial influence over the employees in your organisation day-to-day, which means that you have to work through the line and HR. To do this successfully, you will need to ensure that HR not only has good policies, processes and development programmes in place, but that managers understand these and use them effectively. You will also need to act as a role model to line managers, to encourage them to adopt engaging behaviours and management styles.

## 3 Why Does Engagement Matter?

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This section presents the evidence showing that it is worthwhile investing in increasing staff engagement, because engagement makes a difference to morale and performance.

The reason why senior managers pay so much attention to employee engagement is that it makes a difference. When engagement first appeared on the business scene in the early 2000s, the links between engagement and positive outcomes were not proven, yet it seemed to make intuitive sense that people who were engaged with their jobs and the organisations would have higher morale, and perform better, than those who were disengaged or unengaged. As time has gone on, a body of evidence has built up to support this hypothesis. These studies have been included in the NIHR evidence review<sup>12</sup>.

### 3.1.1 Morale

35 high quality studies examined the link between engagement and morale, with 'morale' being defined here as positive perceptions of health and well-being, and positive work-related attitudes.

- Broadly, the results show that employees who are engaged:
  - report higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of ill health, depression and mental health problems
  - are less likely to experience symptoms of stress or burnout, such as emotional exhaustion and cynicism
  - are more satisfied with their jobs
  - report higher levels of self-efficacy (the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals)

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<sup>12</sup> Truss et al (2014) *Employee Engagement: An Evidence Synthesis*. NIHR.

- have higher levels of commitment to the organisation
  - are less likely to say they intend to leave.
- However, a word of caution: although engagement can be seen as generally good for morale, there is evidence that, if employees perceive that their organisation is pursuing engagement purely for *instrumental* purposes (eg to increase performance without any benefits for employees), their morale may be dented.

### 3.1.2 Performance

42 high quality studies explored the link between engagement and performance.

- 19 studies showed a consistent association between engagement and *individual* performance outcomes.
- The link between engagement and *organisational* performance is less clear, partly because the majority of academic research articles focus on the individual. This is because the engagement-performance link is easier to demonstrate at the level of the individual; it is notoriously difficult to identify conclusive links between people inputs and organisational outcomes. Eight studies, however, showed a link between engagement and performance at a higher level than the individual, ie the team, unit or organisation.
- 17 studies showed that there is a link between engagement and *extra-role performance*. This means that employees who are engaged are more likely to be prepared to give discretionary effort, for example by working extra hard when the pressure is on, and volunteering for things outside their normal role.

#### ‘Going beyond the job description’

Trades unions are sometimes suspicious of the concept of discretionary effort, because they understandably worry that the goodwill of employees might be exploited, and that ‘going beyond the job description’ might become the expected norm rather than the occasional exception. This should not be taken to mean that unions are opposed to engagement; on the contrary, they welcome the opportunities for greater staff involvement, particularly via partnership working, and want their members to be managed properly and have a positive experience of working life. In a highly unionised environment, a more collective approach to engagement (for example using recognised staff forums) is suggested.

- Three studies found a negative link between engagement and *counter-productive behaviour*. Put simply, engaged employees are less likely to indulge in behaviour that damages the organisation, from criticising organisational decisions and resisting change (at the mild end) to outright acts of sabotage such as theft.

# 4 What Drives Engagement?

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To raise engagement levels, it is important to understand what causes engagement to happen (or not happen). This section presents the evidence about engagement drivers.

If engagement is accepted as important, what should organisations do to engage their employees? How can organisations maintain or even increase engagement levels over time, in a sustainable manner?

## 4.1 The evidence from the review of academic literature

A very large number of academic studies included in the review (113 altogether) examined the factors associated with engagement. In some studies, these factors were identified as *drivers* or *antecedents* – meaning that they caused engagement to happen. In other studies, the factors were strongly linked to engagement, without the exact ‘direction of causality’ being proved. In addition, several reputable studies by research institutes have identified engagement drivers.

### 4.1.1 Positive psychological states

- 53 studies examined the association between *positive psychological states* and engagement. The term ‘positive psychological state’ encompasses a variety of things, which broadly relate to how employees feel about their jobs and how well they are able to cope with what the job demands of them:
  - Personal resources (strengths) such as resilience and self-efficacy
  - Wider aspects of the work, often manager-facilitated, such as empowerment
- Of particular interest are the 11 studies (of the 53 mentioned above) that were set in the healthcare context. These identified the following factors to be important in bringing about and sustaining engagement:
  - Self-care and self-tuning (often referred to as *mindfulness*, which is attracting considerable interest within the leadership community in the NHS)

- *Psychological detachment*, which is particularly important for clinical staff who often deal with very emotionally-demanding situations; it is very important to empathise with patients and relatives, but the individual employee must also be able to detach from situations to prevent excessive personal involvement leading to possible burn-out
- *Personal resources* that help to equip employees with strengths necessary to manage difficult and demanding jobs: resilience and coping mechanisms

#### 4.1.2 Management and leadership

- 36 studies, including eight in the healthcare context, demonstrated a link between *positive and supportive leadership* and engagement. A variety of factors were considered in these studies, notably *supervisory support* and *leadership style*.
- In most of these studies, ‘leadership’ refers less to senior organisational leaders, and more to line and middle managers, with whom employees might come into contact on a day-to-day basis. **There is clear evidence that the relationship between the individual employee and the manager is crucially important for engagement.**

#### Research bite: Management styles associated with engagement

##### Do you recognise your own leadership style here?

- **Authentic leadership:** “Authentic leaders are aware of their core end values and resist compromising them... (They) have optimal self-esteem and they objectively accept their strengths and weaknesses. They present their true selves to others in a trusting and open manner and encourage them to do the same”<sup>13</sup>.
- **Empowering leadership:** Empowering leaders are able to delegate authority and share information well; lead by example and set themselves as accountable for their actions; and encourage the personal development, decision-making and innovation of employees.<sup>14</sup>
- **Ethical leadership:** Ethical leaders demonstrate and encourage values, attitudes and behaviours that are socially acceptable and morally justifiable. They communicate and

<sup>13</sup> Alok, K. and Israel, D. (2012). Authentic Leadership and Work Engagement. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47(3).

<sup>14</sup> Eg Mendes, F. and Stander, M.W. (2011). Positive organisation: The role of leader behaviour in work engagement and retention. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 37(1).



reinforce these clearly and consistently, and they show responsibility and accountability for their own behaviours and decision-making.<sup>15</sup>

- **Transformational leadership:** Leadership behaviour that encourages and inspires employees to perform beyond their own expectations to meet the goals and values of the organisation (i.e. transform their own desires for the greater good of the organisation).<sup>16</sup>

### Research bite: Authentic leadership

A study of 280 nurses in acute care hospitals in Ontario in 2010<sup>17</sup> demonstrated that authentic leadership was associated with both trust in the manager and engagement - and these, in turn, predicted voice behaviour (willingness to express opinions, make suggestions etc) and perceptions of the quality of care in the unit to which the nurses belonged.

- Some of the evidence of the link between *senior leadership* and engagement is less clear. This is partly because academic researchers focus mainly on job engagement, where the line manager's influence far outstrips that of the senior leader's. However, a few good-quality studies have been carried out by academics, consultancies and research institutes, and these are described in the 'practitioner literature review findings' section below.

### 4.1.3 Organisational actions

- 65 studies focused on the link between *job design* and engagement. 'Job design' is widely defined here, in that it encompasses job resources, job demands and autonomy as well as the way in which the job is crafted and specified.
- 53 studies examined the relationship between *perceived organisational support* and engagement. This concept includes the psychological contract between the employer and the employee, and the extent to which the employee identifies with the organisation. If these are both positive, the employee is far more likely to be engaged. Some of these studies, including those conducted in the healthcare context, showed positive links between *communication* and *co-worker support* and *team-level engagement*. This is encouraging, in that good quality (and often inter-disciplinary) teamwork is essential in the NHS.

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<sup>15</sup> Eg Hartog, D.N. and Belschak, F.D. (2012). Work engagement and Machiavellianism in the ethical leadership process. *Journal of Business Ethics*, **107**(1).

<sup>16</sup> Eg Tims, M., Bakker, A.B. and Xanthopolou, D. (2011). Do transformational leaders enhance their followers' daily work engagement? *Leadership Quarterly*, **22**(1).

<sup>17</sup> Wong, C.A., Laschinger, H.K.S. and Cummings, G.C. (2010). Authentic Leadership and nurses' voice behaviour and perceptions of care quality. *Journal of Nursing Management*, **18**(8).

- A small number of studies showed a positive link between organisationally-sponsored *training and development interventions* and engagement. Effective interventions were those aimed at enhancing personal coping, resilience and job autonomy.

## 4.2 The evidence from the review of practitioner literature

In addition to the academic review, several reputable studies by non-academic consultancies and research institutes (such as IES, CIPD and Kenexa) have identified engagement drivers.

In broad terms, the drivers of engagement found in the practitioner literature can be grouped into seven themes.

### 4.2.1 Senior leadership

Studies consistently find that *positive perceptions of senior leaders* are linked with high levels of engagement. *Trust in senior leaders* is particularly important, as is a belief in their vision and a positive view of their communication style.

#### Research bite: Trust and effectiveness

Several studies have shown that employees who *trust* their senior leaders, and believe in their vision, are much more engaged than those who do not. Alfes et al (2010)<sup>18</sup>, for example, showed that positive perceptions of the communication style and vision of senior leaders were associated with high engagement. Kenexa (2012)<sup>19</sup> found that the engagement levels for employees who trusted their leader stood at 81 per cent, compared with just 29 per cent for employees who distrusted their leader.

However, the relationship is more equivocal when senior leaders' *effectiveness* is under consideration. The 2012 Kenexa study found a positive relationship between engagement and perceptions of effectiveness, whereas the 2010 Alfes et al study showed the opposite! Alfes et al speculate that the reason for this apparent anomaly might be that employees who are very involved with their organisations might trust their leadership overall, but disagree with certain actions.

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<sup>18</sup> Alfes, K., Truss, C., Soane, E.C., Rees, C. and Gatenby, M. (2010). *Creating an engaged workforce – Findings from the Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project*. CIPD.

<sup>19</sup> Kenexa (2012). *Engagement and Leadership in the Public Sector – A 2011/2012 Kenexa High Performance Institute Work Trends Report*.

## 4.2.2 Role of the line manager

In common with the academic studies, **the line manager's role in engaging employees is found to be very important.** Particularly important behaviours are:

- Reviewing and guiding
- Giving feedback, praise and recognition
- Encouraging autonomy and empowerment
- Communicating and making clear what is expected
- Listening
- Valuing and involving the team
- Being supportive.

### Research bite: An effective intervention

One study, in the Chesterfield office of the government department HMRC<sup>20</sup>, demonstrated that engagement levels (measured via the national civil service 'People Survey') rose after line managers had been on a programme of leadership development. This was linked to the introduction of a programme of behavioural change called the 'Chesterfield Way'.

## 4.2.3 Appraisals, performance management and training

Having a manager who manages performance well is associated with higher levels of engagement. The aspects of managing performance well are:

- Good quality appraisals
- Regular supervisory meetings that focus on good performance management principles
- Giving constructive feedback
- Building performance, via coaching, analysis of training needs, and providing training and development opportunities.

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<sup>20</sup> Government Social Research (2013). *Embedding Employee Engagement, Engagement Best Practice: Case Studies, How HMRC Chesterfield office improved engagement; 2013.* [www.civilservice.gov.uk](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk)

## Research bite: Importance of good quality appraisals

An analysis of 2009 and 2010 NHS staff survey data<sup>21</sup> showed that having an appraisal on its own was not associated with higher engagement; the key factor was whether the appraisal was of good quality or not. 'Good quality' was defined as being considered well structured (useful, clear and valuable) by the employee. The survey data showed that 71% of respondents had received an appraisal, but only 32% said it had been well structured. The research showed that a good quality appraisal was associated with high levels of engagement, whereas the engagement levels of those who had received a poor quality appraisal were even lower than those who had received no appraisal at all.

### 4.2.4 Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness – a belief that the work 'makes a difference' and is worthwhile and personally significant – is found to be an important driver in several research studies. Indeed, in two studies it was found to be *the most important* driver. In one of these studies, Alfes et al (2010)<sup>22</sup> describe meaningfulness as '*the extent to which employees find meaning in their work...where people can see the impact of their work on other people or society in general*'.

### 4.2.5 Employee voice

Employee voice, a term used rarely in academic studies but frequently in the practitioner world, refers to the opportunities employees have to input into decisions affecting their work, and to be properly consulted about workplace issues. Key factors here are:

- Having opportunities to feed views upwards
- Managers who welcome comments, ideas and suggestions for improvement
- Managers who actively involve the team in decision-making.

Research studies consistently find that having a voice is associated with higher levels of engagement.

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<sup>21</sup> West, M.A. and Dawson, J. (2012). *Employee Engagement and NHS Performance*. The King's Fund.

<sup>22</sup> Alfes, K., Truss, C., Soane, E.C., Rees, C. and Gatenby, M. (2010). *Creating an engaged workforce – Findings from the Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project*. CIPD.

## 4.2.6 Team working

Being part of an effective team is associated with higher levels of engagement in several studies. In Kenexa's 2012<sup>23</sup> research, it emerged (described as 'co-worker quality', which includes feeling part of a team) as one of the four key drivers of engagement. Important aspects of team working are:

- Believing that the team is well structured
- Having opportunities to contribute to organisational decisions via team discussions or team events
- Feeling a sense of belonging to the team
- Having good quality, mutually supportive relationships with colleagues.

### Research bite: the importance of well-structured teams

Research conducted in the NHS, using NHS staff survey data<sup>24</sup>, shows that feeling part of a well-structured team is associated with higher levels of engagement, yet being part of a poorly-constructed 'pseudo-team' is linked to lower engagement levels.

## 4.2.7 Support for work-life balance

Several studies demonstrate that employees who are satisfied with their work-life balance, and have some flexibility in their work, are more engaged than other employees. In Kenexa's 2012<sup>25</sup> research, having support for work-life balance emerged as one of the top three drivers of engagement; it is perceived as an important aspect of showing genuine concern for employees.

## 4.2.8 Other themes

In addition to the above, several themes emerged as important drivers in at least two studies:

- Job variety

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<sup>23</sup> Kenexa (2012). *The Many Contexts of Employee Engagement – A 2012/2013 Kenexa WorkTrends Report*. Kenexa.

<sup>24</sup> West, M.A. and Dawson, J. (2012). *Employee Engagement and NHS Performance*. The King's Fund.

<sup>25</sup> Kenexa (2012). *The Many Contexts of Employee Engagement – A 2012/2013 Kenexa WorkTrends Report*. Kenexa.

- Job autonomy
- Equal opportunities
- Health and safety.

In the latter two, the important aspect was not just the existence of policies and statements; it was rather the belief that the organisation was genuinely committed to equality of opportunity and health and safety in the workforce. Here, the actions of senior leaders are very important; if the top team seems to be paying lip-service to these aspects, employees are likely to become disillusioned and cynical.

### 4.3 Engagement drivers in the NHS

Research carried out by IES, published in 2004<sup>26</sup>, identified that the key driver of employee engagement in the NHS is a sense of *feeling valued by, and involved in, the organisation*. Feeling valued and involved is a particularly strong driver in the healthcare context; it is important in other sectors and settings, but less so than in the NHS. A variety of things were found to influence feeling valued and involved, as the diagram below shows. The actions of senior leaders are clearly important in all of these.

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<sup>26</sup> Robinson, D., Perryman, S. and Hayday, S. (2004). *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*. Institute for Employment Studies (IES).

# Engagement diagnostic tool: NHS



## 5 What Can Senior Leaders Do?

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This final section gives you some practical advice about actions you can take to raise and sustain engagement levels in your organisation.

The preceding sections demonstrate that engagement is important for morale, well-being and performance, and is associated with higher levels of advocacy. They also show that there is considerable agreement about the drivers of engagement. The key question for senior leaders is, what can I do to raise engagement levels in my organisation?

With such a wide-ranging list of things that can influence engagement levels, it can be difficult to know where to start, and what will have the most impact. It might help to think about what can be done at different levels within the organisation:

- To help **individuals and teams** become more engaged, resilient and effective
- To encourage **managers** to behave in an engaging way
- To ensure the **organisation** is giving the right messages.

### 5.1 Individuals and teams

Most Trusts in the NHS are large organisations, employing several thousand staff based in different locations. Senior leaders cannot possibly know everyone in the organisation. These action points, however, should help to ensure that individual employees, and the teams they are in, stand a better chance of being engaged with both their work and the wider organisation.

- **Bring the right people in.** The literature on job design and engagement indicates that a good job-person fit is essential. This suggests that job descriptions should be accurate and that person specifications should be really clear about the type of person who is being sought – not just skills and experience, but attitudes. Candidates should have a chance to ‘preview’ the job, via online tools such as virtual tours and recordings of existing staff describing the role, and/or discussions



with team members on the interview day. Psychometric testing and aptitude tests might be appropriate for some roles.

- **Give good quality inductions.** Research indicates that the first few weeks in the role are crucial. New joiners who are welcomed, are given a good induction, meet their line manager and new team members straight away, and are equipped with the right resources from day one, are far more likely to feel engaged and positive about their role. Both to demonstrate how important and valued the newcomers are, and to explain the organisation's commitment to its values, a senior leader should attend all induction sessions.
- **Be clear about expected behaviours.** Most Trusts have a set of values, and these should be clearly linked to expected behaviours. Some organisations are taking this a step further and introducing values-based recruitment. However, existing staff (often long-servers, who may have seen many 'initiatives' come and go) will need reminders about values-based behaviour, too. The strength of values-based behaviours is that staff have often had a huge amount of input to designing the Trust's values, which should encourage a greater sense of ownership.
- **Give all employees a voice.** The annual NHS staff survey is an excellent way of finding out staff opinions and experiences over a wide range of issues. However, many Trusts opt for the 'sample' approach, meaning that the majority of employees do not have a chance to express their views; and the survey is held only once a year. It is really important that individual employees and teams feel they have an opportunity to voice their views, offer opinions and suggestions, and input to decisions that affect them. The line manager plays a key role here, but senior leaders should work with HR to ensure that there are mechanisms to enable employees to have a voice: a few examples are staff forums (both physical and virtual/on-line), a comment board on the intranet, team briefings that request the line manager to gather opinions to feed back up the management chain. Some organisations are now using internal social media tools such as Yammer, which gives people a chance to air their views and pose questions, and which enable the organisation to see which issues are particularly important to staff at any one point in time.
- **Work with HR to really understand the NHS staff survey results.** This will help to pinpoint possible problem areas (locations or staff groups that are returning unusually low engagement scores) or conversely, areas where engagement is notably high. Both should be investigated, and good practice should be identified and shared.
- **Provide resources for resilience and mindfulness training.** Some relatively simple techniques, based on the principle of 'positive psychology', can help to boost

employees' resilience, coping mechanisms, and awareness of self and others. This is very important in the NHS, where jobs and situations can be extremely stressful and resources are constrained.

### Example: Mindfulness in Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust<sup>27</sup>

Derbyshire Healthcare uses the concept of 'mindfulness' to promote caring and positive behaviours, including self-care - 'compassion for self'. Mindfulness is a central plank in the Trust's efforts to engage better with staff, and is used together with values that have been organically-grown, and listening events involving hundreds of staff. The chief executive is a passionate advocate of the benefits of mindfulness.

- **Consider whether psychological supervision is needed for some roles.** This is appropriate for people working in extremely emotionally-demanding areas, where clinical/professional supervision alone may not be enough to maintain people's mental equilibrium. The required skills are likely to be beyond the scope of the line manager; they will need to be provided by professional psychologists, therapists and/or trained counsellors.

## 5.2 Line managers

It is worth repeating that the line manager's role in engagement is crucial. In smaller Trusts, it is possible that senior leaders/practitioners know every manager by name/sight, but this is unlikely in larger Trusts. Again, you are reliant on the line to implement policies and processes accurately and effectively, and to communicate messages and strategic decisions appropriately. To the team, the line manager is the single person who will impact most on morale and motivation, so his/her people management skills are extremely important.

- **Provide training for first-time supervisors and managers.** It is important that this training happens early on, maybe even before the individual takes up their new role. There will inevitably be some task-oriented things to learn, such as budget management, but the bulk of the training should be focused on people management. Consider 'buddying' new managers with more experienced managers who are known to be good at managing their teams.
- **Be clear about expected people management behaviours.** This clarity can be achieved via a guide, or blueprint, or list of behavioural competencies with

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<sup>27</sup> Presentation by Steve Trenchard at 'Staff Engagement in the NHS' conference, University of Sussex, 25 February 2014

descriptors. The important thing to ensure is that all line managers understand the behaviours they should adopt, and those they should avoid.

- **Ensure that the training and expected behaviours are reinforced at intervals.** Use every opportunity – meetings, workshops, training on other topics such as health and safety, diversity, performance management etc – to ensure that the messages about good people management behaviours are repeated. It can be very easy for managers to slip into ‘task’ mode when the pressure is on.
- **Provide training in coaching.** Engaging managers typically adopt a coaching style with their teams, including coaching poor performers to improve. This style comes naturally to some people, while others will need to learn the techniques. Managers who are known to be good coaches can act as mentors to others who are relatively new to coaching principles.
- **Encourage managers to self-assess and gather feedback.** Some Trusts use 360 or 180 degree feedback, enabling managers to gain a rounded picture of their performance. However, this can be expensive, especially if implemented at every managerial level. An alternative is to offer managers a self-assessment tool that they can use – either for self-reflection alone, or for sharing with their own manager and/or their team. IES’s research-based<sup>28</sup> self-assessment tool is attached to this guide as an appendix, for use within your organisation. It is aimed at line and middle managers, but you might want to try it yourself!
- **Ensure line managers know how to manage poor performance and poor behaviour.** This is always a difficult thing to do, particularly if the situation does not improve after the coaching stage and there is a need to invoke formal procedures. However, tackling poor performance and behaviour within the team is appreciated by the rest of the team, so is likely to raise engagement levels overall. Many managers will only have to take people through formal disciplinary processes and few times in their lives, so it is very important to not only provide training, but also support from HR about the policies and procedures to use.

## 5.3 Organisation

Senior leaders should support their HR practitioners in their attempts to ensure that people-management policies and processes are applied consistently and fairly across the whole organisation.

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<sup>28</sup> Robinson, D. and Hayday, S. (2009). *The Engaging Manager*. IES

- **Ensure that all people-related policies and processes are clear and accessible.**  
They need to be clearly signposted on the intranet, with explanatory notes and illustrative examples. Managers might need training in how to apply these policies and processes accurately and fairly. All staff will need to know who to contact in HR if they need help in understanding them.
- **Take every opportunity to promote good job design across the organisation.** This might be during a recruitment exercise, although there will also be opportunities when departments or functions are being restructured.
- **Ensure that the impact of engagement interventions is monitored and evaluated.**  
Examples might be a well-being programme for all staff, or a training intervention for all line managers or for a particular group of staff. The evidence will help you to demonstrate what works and what is less successful, which in turn will assist you to use scarce resources in the most cost-effective way.
- **Above all, act as a role model.** If line managers are told to behave in an engaging way, but observe the senior leadership team behaving differently, it will be hard for them to know which behaviours to follow.
  - Use the NHS staff survey results to find out how the senior team is viewed
  - Participate in 360 or 180 degree feedback, even if the results are uncomfortable
  - Read case studies of good practice, such as those on the NHS Employers website, to find out how engagement scores could be improved
  - Be as honest, open and accessible as possible to the line and to staff.

**GOOD LUCK IN YOUR ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS - WE HOPE THAT THIS  
GUIDE WILL HELP YOU TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR  
ORGANISATION!**

# 6 Appendix: The Engaging Manager Self-assessment Tool

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## Self-assessment questionnaire: behaviours

Please look at the following descriptions of behaviours that our research participants have identified as ‘engaging’. Rate yourself according to how frequently you demonstrate these behaviours, on the following scale:

- 0 Never
- 1 Rarely
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 Quite often
- 4 Usually
- 5 Always

**Be honest! Try to envisage how your team might experience you**

**Put your rating in the box**

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Welcome suggestions and act on them                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Delegate work on the basis of the strengths of my team | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Trust individuals to get on with their work            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Manage my time effectively                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Try to lead by example                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Listen, even when it’s not what I want to hear         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Know when to stretch people and when to hold back      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Try to protect my team from organisational pressure    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Talk up my team to the rest of the organisation        | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Stay positive, even when things get tough
11. Encourage my team to give their best
12. Share information about the organisation and the wider world
13. Give team members my undivided attention during one-to-ones
14. Own up to my mistakes
15. Praise and say thank you for a job well done
16. Ensure I am accessible to my team
17. Give clear instructions and direction
18. Understand what motivates the different members of my team
19. Say no and challenge organisational decisions on behalf of my team
20. Keep my door genuinely open
21. Strike a good balance between being friendly and professional
22. Stay calm when the heat is on
23. Try to be honest, truthful and open in all my dealings
24. Am pleased to see members of my team
25. Treat all my team members with consistency and fairness
26. Organise my work well
27. Ensure people know when I'm in
28. Am responsive when my team come to me with problems
29. Respect my colleagues in the team
30. Tackle problems, even if it makes me uncomfortable
31. Stand up for my team when they are under attack
32. Encourage team members to tell me about their lives outside work
33. Do what I say I'm going to do

- 34. Roll up my sleeves and pitch in if necessary
- 35. Ensure my team knows how we contribute to the organisation
- 36. Give my team public recognition for their achievements

# ENGAGING MANAGEMENT

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### Scoring sheet for behaviours

Enter the scores you have given to the individual behaviours in the boxes for each 'behaviour group' below, and then add them up to arrive at an overall score for each behaviour group.

#### Behaviour group A

Scores for individual behaviours 1, 12 and 17

Overall score

#### Behaviour group B

Scores for individual behaviours 16, 20 and 27

Overall score

#### Behaviour group C

Scores for individual behaviours 2, 18 and 21

Overall score

#### Behaviour group D

Scores for individual behaviours 7, 10 and 11

Overall score

#### Behaviour group E

Scores for individual behaviours 3, 13 and 29

Overall score

#### Behaviour group F

Scores for individual behaviours 8, 19 and 31

Overall score

#### Behaviour group G

Scores for individual behaviours 23, 25 and 33

Overall score

#### Behaviour group H

Scores for individual behaviours 9, 15 and 36

Overall score

#### Behaviour group I

Scores for individual behaviours 5, 22 and 34

Overall score



**Behaviour group J**

Scores for individual behaviours 6, 14 and 30

Overall score

**Behaviour group K**

Scores for individual behaviours 4, 26 and 35

Overall score

**Behaviour group L**

Scores for individual behaviours 24, 28 and 32

Overall score

# ENGAGING MANAGEMENT

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### Analysis sheet for behaviours

Now take your totals for each behaviour and shade in the appropriate number of squares on the bar graph below:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
A Two-way communication															
B Visibility and accessibility															
C Understanding the team															
D Motivating colleagues															
E Giving respect and trust															
F Protecting the team															
G Being trustworthy															
H Giving recognition															
I Being a role model															
J Tackling problems															
K Personal effectiveness															
L Empathy and approachability															

In which areas do you score highly? .....

.....

Where might you need to improve? .....

.....

Would your team agree with your assessment? .....

.....

Would your own manager agree with your assessment? .....

.....

Think about managers in different parts of your organisation, how would they score? .....

.....

Would this tool work effectively using a 360° approach: self-assessment, team assessment, manager assessment? .....

.....

## Self-assessment questionnaire: manager types

Now read the following descriptions of manager 'types'. Against each one, rate yourself according to how often you behave like this. Some of these descriptions are very positive, others may be uncomfortable to read, but all have been derived from our research. Sometimes, in the descriptions, the manager is described as 'he', while other times 'she' is used. There is nothing significant about this, in that these gender labels have been randomly allocated.

For this part of the assessment, please use the following scale:

- 0 This is **never** me
- 1 This is **hardly ever** me
- 2 This is **sometimes** me
- 3 This is **quite often** me
- 4 This is **usually** me
- 5 This is **always** me

### The High Performer

The High Performer is very focused on business outcomes, goals and targets. He monitors and reviews results on a regular basis with his team, and has frequent discussions about the best way to tackle any performance slippage. He wants to improve and looks for opportunities for his team to do even better. He is knowledgeable, well organised and methodical.

My score: .....

### The Communicator

The Communicator is particularly good at getting across messages across to her team. She is clear in her explanations and her team know exactly what is expected of them, whether this is related to standards of behaviour, objectives, or tasks. She is also a good listener and likes to involve her team in decision-making. She is adept at communicating bad news as well as good.

My score: .....

### The Micro Manager

The Micro Manager finds it difficult to delegate. He has lengthy task lists and fusses about minutiae. When he gives a task to a member of his team, he cannot let go, but bothers the team member at frequent intervals for progress reports. He interferes, is reluctant to allow the team to make any decisions, and stifles initiative.

My score: .....

## The Muddler

The Muddler is personally disorganised and inflicts this on her team. She gives confusing and sometimes contradictory instructions, and changes her mind frequently. She finds it difficult to communicate the organisation's vision and purpose, which means her team do not understand what their objectives are. Because she cannot allocate work and monitor progress effectively, her team often appears inefficient and fails to deliver.

My score: .....

## The Visionary

The Visionary is particularly good at communicating the big picture to his team, and selling new ways of working. He is an innovator who is not afraid to introduce change if it is in the wider interests of the organisation. The Visionary understands exactly where he and his team fit into the organisation, and what contribution they need to make. He is good at getting to the crux of the issue and seeing things with fresh eyes, untrammelled by convention.

My score: .....

## The Empathiser

The Empathiser can identify with her team, and individuals within it, and understand how they feel. Because of this, the Empathiser can break bad news, or tackle difficult conversations, with particular sensitivity and tact. She understands what motivates individuals within the team, and appreciates the contribution that different people make. She knows who needs help, whose confidence requires a boost, and who can be left to get on with it.

My score: .....

## The Blamer

The Blamer does not accept responsibility when things go wrong, instead pointing the finger at one or more members of his team. People in the team will be reluctant to make suggestions, even if they see that things are going wrong, because they know they will be held responsible. The Blamer does not defend his team's reputation to the rest of the organisation.

My score: .....

## The Bully

The Bully is aggressive, relying on heavy-handed tactics to get work done. She frequently shouts and belittles people in front of colleagues. She sometimes loses her temper and is intolerant of mistakes and weaknesses. Her team members are often afraid of her.

My score: .....

## The Developer

The Developer looks out for members of his team who have potential, and gives them opportunities and challenges to show what they can do. He coaches individuals who are experiencing difficulties, to help them improve. He looks at the work of his team to ensure that jobs are as interesting and rewarding as they can possibly be. He will facilitate access to opportunities such as secondments, special projects and entry onto development or talent programmes.

My score: .....

## The Enthusiast

The Enthusiast is able to galvanise and carry individuals, teams and even large groups of people due to her passion and powers of persuasion. She is energetic and encouraging, and has a strong sense of belief and identification with what the organisation stands for. She recognises and celebrates success.

My score: .....

## The Protector

The Protector looks out for his team, and shelters them from being buffeted by organisational politics and conflicts, or scorched by the heat from on high. He nurtures the team and encourages people to put forward their ideas and suggestions for improvement. He defends his team from attack by outsiders, but will readily tackle and resolve any disputes within the team that threaten to undermine the well-being and performance of the team as a whole.

My score: .....

## The Networker

The Networker is adept at identifying people within the organisation – and sometimes outside – whom she needs to cultivate. She has a wide circle of contacts and

understands the work of other departments, functions and locations. This in-depth knowledge of the organisation enables her to position the work of her team to benefit both the organisation and the individual.

My score: .....

## **The Egotist**

The Egotist believes that he, personally, is entirely responsible for his team's successes – but that failures are the fault of the team. He has an air of superiority, and is often aloof from his team, with whom he does not interact on a day-to-day basis. He uses inaccessible language and likes to score points. The Egotist rarely gives praise or recognition unless it reflects well on himself.

My score: .....

## **The Pessimist**

The Pessimist is draining of energy. She finds fault with everything and rarely smiles. She sees problems with any suggestion for improvement, which means that any ideas her team put forward are stifled in the early stages. She does not display enthusiasm and fails to motivate or encourage her team.

My score: .....

## **The Rock**

The Rock is steady, calm, dependable and reliable. He tackles problems in a straightforward way and never panics. His team and organisation can rely on him in a crisis. He is loyal to his team and is always considerate of their interests. He will roll up his sleeves to help and would not ask his team to do things he would not be prepared to do himself.

My score: .....

## **The Brave**

The Brave is not necessarily outgoing or people-focused, but knows how important it is to understand her team, herself and her organisation. She will overcome her natural reluctance and reserve to tackle difficult situations, stand up for the team in public, and act in accordance with her principles. She has integrity and courage, even when quaking inside.

My score: .....

## The Juggler

The Juggler is particularly good at managing resources and allocating work appropriately within the team. He is able to manage many different strands of activity, and keep all the balls in the air. He is a good delegator and has an excellent grasp of timescales, workload and project progress. Usually, he is a fast learner and a fast worker, but curbs any impatience he may feel with others, and accepts the value of different ways of working.

My score: .....

## The Maverick

The Maverick does not always toe the company line, and will sometimes bend the rules. However, she always has the best interests of her team and her organisation at heart. She will work with her team to devise new and innovatory ways of doing things, and she encourages imaginative solutions. She helps her team to achieve breakthroughs.

My score: .....

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**