

Conclusions and management implications

In our research, we have collected data from over 5,200 employees across eight different organisations. The picture that has emerged about engagement is rich and complex. Extent of engagement is higher in the public sector compared with the private, but private sector employees are more frequently engaged. Women are more engaged than men, whereas younger workers are less engaged than older workers, and those on flexible contracts are more engaged than others, reflecting the findings of our earlier report (Truss et al 2006). Those with managerial responsibilities emerge as being more engaged than other employees.

For all these different employee groups, we have run statistical tests to uncover what the key drivers of engagement are. It has emerged very strongly from this analysis that two factors are more important than any others in driving up levels of engagement for all groups: meaningfulness of work and employee voice. The way in which senior managers communicate with employees is the third most important driver. Other important factors are person–job fit, supportive work environment and management style.

DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT

- meaningfulness of work
- voice, being able to feed your views upwards
- senior management communication and vision
- supportive work environment
- person–job fit
- line management style

Taken together, these factors create a virtuous cycle of engagement processes that employers can reinterpret in ways that fit with their own organisational context and circumstances. We note in our study that around one-third of respondents, 34%, can be classified as the ‘vocal-involved’, working in jobs they find meaningful and able to express their views. Since these are the two key drivers of engagement, it is concerning that this figure is so low, and suggests that there is much that employers can do to create a more engaging work environment for their staff. Similarly, 32% can be described as ‘fit performers’, enjoying high levels of personal well-being and performing to a high standard. Employers would generally wish to raise this proportion of their workforce and putting in place a range of engagement initiatives would help to address this problem.

However, it is positive to note that the proportion of engaged employees overall is somewhat higher than has been found in previous surveys. In part, this may be due to the self-selected nature of our sample of organisations, which joined the Kingston Engagement Consortium project out of an interest in engagement and where it might reasonably be supposed that engagement strategies would be further advanced than in other organisational settings. Despite this, we did find quite wide variations in levels of engagement and in strategies and approaches to manage engagement, as emerges strongly from our case studies. These show that engagement can be managed effectively in different ways, and that although there are some general prescriptions of best practice relevant to everyone, the nuances and implementation will vary from setting to setting.

Our engagement journey has led to some fascinating insights into employee engagement over the past three years. We are about to embark upon a new phase, where we set about trying to answer some of the questions that have arisen out of the consortium project that we still feel remain unanswered, using different methodologies and different approaches to tap into engagement at an even deeper level.

Our management recommendations are:

- Understanding your workforce engagement profile is the first step to determining how to drive up engagement levels.
- Engagement is clearly associated, both in our report and in other studies, with high levels of performance, reduced intent to quit and raised levels of personal well-being. It is therefore legitimate from a corporate perspective to prioritise improving levels of employee engagement.
- There is a clear need to help create meaning for employees in their work; this can be achieved intellectually by articulating the links between individual jobs and the broader organisational aims, and emotionally through sharing an understanding of deeper levels of the purpose of the organisation.
- Employees need to be given opportunities to express their views and to know that their opinions will be taken seriously. This is an activity that needs to involve both senior and line managers. Our case studies provide some examples of how organisations in the consortium have achieved this.

- Senior managers have an important role to play in creating a vision for the organisation and sharing this with employees, and in being open, transparent and approachable.
- Engagement levels are affected by the working environment. Where employees can see that they have support from others to help them do their job, there is a sense of teamwork and they can safely express themselves, then engagement will be higher.
- Matching people to jobs is a critical driver of engagement. This is one area where HR professionals can play an important role helping line managers design jobs effectively, and develop selection processes that match individual skills to jobs.
- Line managers act as the interface between the organisation and the employee, and can do much to impact on engagement. Another key HR role is therefore to pay close attention to the selection, development and performance management of line managers to ensure they maximise their potential to be engaging leaders.

Figure 22: Employee engagement model

