



# Executive summary

This report is based on data collected by the Kingston Business School Engagement Consortium examining the question whether individuals can be engaged at different levels. The CIPD Shaping the Future work (CIPD 2011a) found evidence that people might be *emotionally engaged*, displaying an emotional attachment to one or more aspects of their work, or *transactionally engaged*, happy to exhibit the behaviour of engagement, do what is required or expected as long as promised rewards such as promotion or training are forthcoming, but not committed to the job or the organisation and willing to leave if a better offer appears elsewhere.

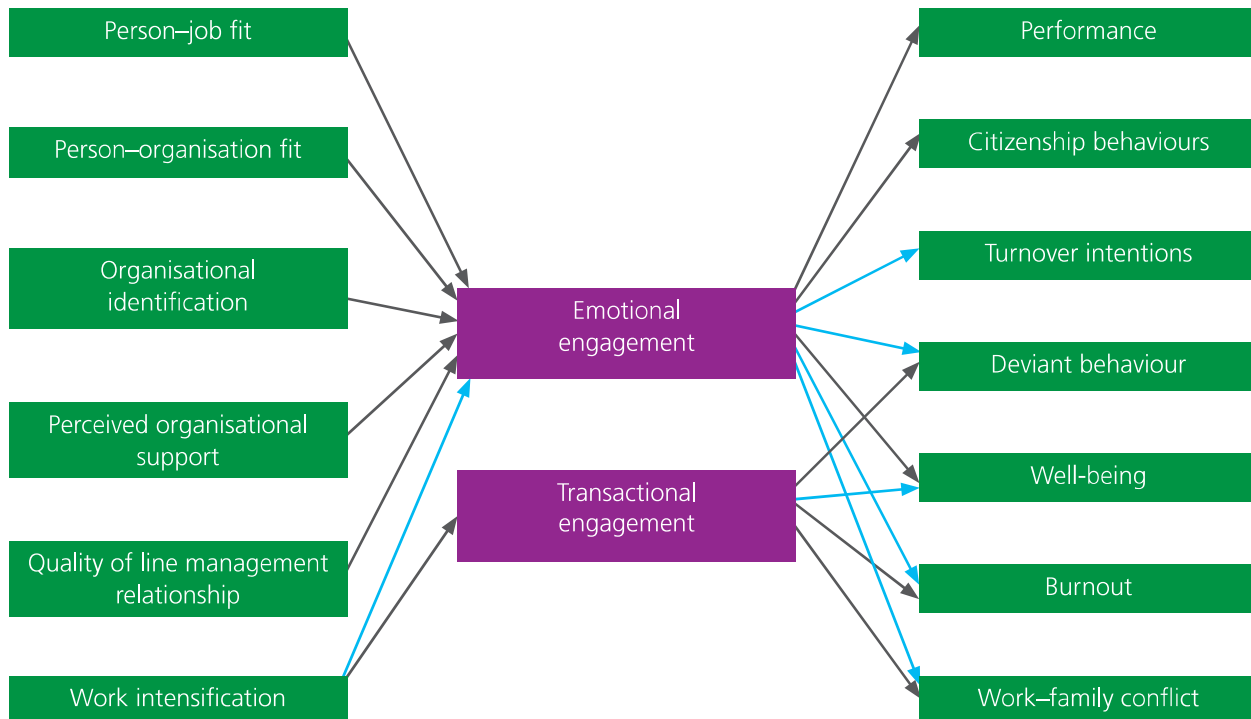
The evidence discussed in this report demonstrates that engagement is a complex issue which requires a greater depth of understanding than can be provided by engagement surveys alone. There are indeed different levels of engagement and the distinction between emotional and transactional engagement is an important one. The data shows a clear distinction between people doing the job because it's the one they have and people who express an emotional bond to their work, colleagues or the company they work for. Given that people can also be engaged with different aspects of their work and that this may vary over time, it becomes apparent that engagement is a multi-layered concept that requires real depth of understanding to be influenced successfully:

- Emotional engagement is driven by a desire on the part of employees to do more for (and to receive more – a greater psychological contract – from) the organisation than is normally expected.
- Transactional engagement is shaped by employees' concern to earn a living, to meet minimal expectations of the employer and their co-workers, and so on.
- Emotionally engaged employees are more likely than transactionally engaged individuals to have high levels of well-being and are less likely to experience burnout or work–family conflict. They are more likely to have high task performance and high levels of citizenship behaviour and less likely to indulge in deviant behaviour, defined as behaviour which might damage the organisation.
- Transactionally engaged employees score lower on all performance dimensions, are less likely to respond to a supportive environment and more likely to react negatively to the line manager relationship. They also display lower levels of organisational identification. They are more likely to leave the organisation and display deviant behaviours.
- There is evidence that work intensification may drive up transactional engagement at the expense of emotional engagement, causing emotionally engaged employees to flip into a transactional mode.
- Emotional and transactional engagement also have very different effects on individual performance, with emotionally engaged individuals tending to perform better. Although transactionally engaged individuals do not perform negatively, they perform rather less well than emotionally engaged individuals.
- Proven drivers of engagement, such as person–organisation fit, organisational identification, person–job fit, perceived organisational support and quality of the line manager relationship, are also significant drivers of emotional engagement. However, they are all negatively associated with transactional engagement.

## sustainable organisation performance



Figure 1: The drivers and outcomes of different types of engagement



These relationships describe a point-in-time measure – correlations. The results imply emotionally engaged employees perform better than transactionally engaged individuals and that emotional engagement correlates with practices designed to promote positive feelings about work. Clearly understanding at what level employees are engaged with different aspects of their job is important to the management of engagement and to developing strategies to get the best performance through people. This report provides evidence of why this is so and discusses the implications for HR practitioners.



## Implications for practice

- 1 Engagement is a complex condition. The evidence in this report makes it clear that it is no longer sufficient to talk simply of 'engagement', but we have to ask about: (a) what type of engagement; (b) what is the locus of engagement; (and perhaps) (c) how is it varying over time?
- 2 Current measures of engagement focus only on engagement as a general characteristic – that is, they measure the average engagement of an employee at a particular time. Someone highly emotionally engaged with a number of loci will score 'highly engaged', but someone highly emotionally engaged with only some loci may score 'low engagement' even though they might be highly engaged with key loci. So engagement measures need to be examined carefully to see (a) just what type and (b) what locus is being measured. It's not enough for organisations to focus on increasing their engagement scores without considering these questions, otherwise they risk misunderstanding the actual extent and nature of engagement. Understanding of engagement will come from a variety of sources, not least of which will be insight from line managers and HR practitioners with the ability to interpret the information available.
- 3 The report identifies a range of areas that managers/organisations can work on to improve levels of emotional engagement. Interestingly, there are other organisational drivers which are stronger than the quality of the line manager relationship (which is commonly cited in the engagement literature as the strongest driver of engagement), for example person–organisation fit and the level of organisational support. This should encourage organisations to think about, promote and communicate values, mission and vision to make sure that people can understand how they fit and identify more strongly with the organisation or self-select themselves out to an organisation they can more easily identify with. This suggests that HR professionals, line and senior managers should work together to foster a supportive climate in which emotional engagement can unfold, which is broader than the immediate line manager relationship (Alfes et al 2012a, 2012b).
- 4 Managers have to be aware to manage work intensification appropriately as it will prevent employees from being emotionally engaged and drives their levels of transactional engagement instead. People are reporting increasing pressures of work, with less time to carry out performance tasks in both private and public sector organisations. The evidence presented here indicates that people seem to switch from giving a lot to a transactional mode, where they are only engaged to the extent they need to be, if they perceive too many pressures at work.
- 5 The strong relationship between transactional engagement and burnout, work–family conflict and intention to leave should also prompt action from managers. While people may be able to cope with additional pressure at work in the short term, this work demonstrates the potential damage to sustainable success if such a situation is not challenged over time. Emotionally engaged employees will be able to cope with a degree of stress without significant damage to their well-being in the short term. However, over time it will reduce the level of emotional engagement in favour of transactional engagement. This link suggests that well-being initiatives alone will not have a great deal of impact on performance unless they are sufficiently linked to an understanding of the nature and depth of engagement.