

# Managing for sustainable employee engagement

## Developing a behavioural framework



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# Introduction

## What is engagement?

Although it is widely accepted by both academics and practitioners that employee engagement has a significant and positive impact on both the organisation and the individual (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010), there is no general consensus on the conceptualisation of employee engagement. A recent review of the literature (Lewis et al 2011) noted that HR professionals and management consultancies place a strong emphasis on engagement with the organisation, whereas academic definitions tend to place more of an emphasis on engagement with roles and tasks. The majority of HR professionals and management consultancies define employee engagement in terms of organisational commitment (a desire to stay with the organisation in the future) and employees' willingness to 'go the extra mile', which includes extra-role behaviour and discretionary effort that promotes the effective functioning of the organisation (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010).

In contrast, academics have defined engagement as a psychological state. Schaufeli and Bakker's (2003) is the most widely used definition in recent academic literature. They view employee engagement as the antithesis of burnout, characterised by vigour (high levels of energy and investing effort into one's work), dedication (work involvement and experiencing a sense of pride and enthusiasm about one's work) and absorption (fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work).

The CIPD definition (Alfes et al 2010) is based more on academic definitions of employee engagement, focusing more on the job role and tasks. They define employee engagement as:

- intellectual engagement: thinking hard about the job and how to do it better (thinking)
- affective engagement: feeling positive about doing a good job (feeling)

- social engagement: actively taking opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work (acting).

The current study aims to define employee engagement in such a way that it encompasses all the key definitions used in both academic research and practice. The definition was developed in the first phase of this research (Lewis et al 2011 – see below for the findings of the first phase):

*'Being focused in what you do (thinking), feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation (feeling), and acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the organisational values and objectives (acting).'*

## Why is employee engagement important?

Evidence suggests that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on organisations: for example, in Towers Watson's 2007–08 Global Workforce study, organisations with high employee engagement showed a 19% increase in operating income and 28% growth in earnings per share. A study by Hay Group (Werhane and Royal 2009) found that organisations with employee engagement levels in the top quartile had revenue growth of 2.5 times that of organisations with engagement levels in the lowest quartile. Employee engagement has also been found to impact positively on productivity, profitability and safety (Harter et al 2002).

From an individual perspective, evidence suggests that employees that are engaged are likely to be more satisfied in both their life and job and have better mental and physical health (Schaufeli and Salanova 2007). This translates into lower absence rates (Schaufeli et al 2009a), lower intention to leave the organisation (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) and higher organisational commitment (Schaufeli et al 2008) than non-engaged employees.

## Employee engagement in a changing world

Employee engagement may be becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Organisational change is perhaps the only constant in today's working life. In the last decade, global competition, harsh economic conditions, continuous innovation and new technology have resulted in organisational restructures, downsizing and changes in the nature and structure of work (Fairhurst and O'Connor 2010, Towers Watson 2012, Van Wijhe et al 2011). This has impacted on employees, with many having to cope with high demands and fewer resources. In addition, the boundaries between work and non-work life are increasingly blurred with Internet and mobile technology enabling employees to work around the clock and from any location (Van Wijhe et al 2011, Van Beek et al 2012). It seems likely that these recent changes both enable and impel employees to work harder and longer.

The Towers Watson 2012 *Global Workforce* study shows that the global workforce is feeling the impact of these pressures. Although there are local differences, overall, the study shows that employees are more anxious and more worried about their futures than in previous years. The suggestion is that this is already leading, or will lead, to lower productivity, greater absenteeism and a potential increase in turnover intentions within organisations. Of 32,000 workers surveyed worldwide, only one-third were engaged, with two-thirds feeling unsupported, detached or disengaged. Despite this, overall, employees were found to be working longer hours, taking less time off to recover and experiencing higher levels of stress. There is a clear implication that, during these challenging times, employee engagement is fragile and employee psychological well-being may be negatively impacted.

## Engagement vs well-being?

Robertson and Cooper (2010) argue that the way that engagement is often defined and conceptualised may actually be exacerbating this potential negative impact. They suggest that if engagement is perceived as and measured by organisational commitment and extra-role behaviours/discretionary effort (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010), this could create an unsustainable situation where engaged employees are expected to work ever longer and harder; and that those working this way are viewed as 'more engaged' and therefore

seen more positively. Over time, it is suggested that working in this way will negatively impact on an individual's well-being (Fairhurst and O'Connor 2010). For example, employees who are exposed to excessive pressure for prolonged periods are prone to stress and are more likely to suffer from conditions such as anxiety and depression (Melchior et al 2007). They are also likely to be at greater risk from heart disease (Kuper and Marmot 2003). In addition research also links stress to higher risk of accidents (Amati and Scaife 2003). Stress is the number one cause of long-term absence, according to CIPD's 2012 *Managing Absence* survey.

Consequently there is a need both to define engagement clearly and also to understand how to engage employees in a sustainable and healthy way. It also points to the fact that what an employee does may not actually reflect how they feel – and that, therefore, in studying employee engagement, an understanding of both behaviour and motivation is important.

## Transactional vs emotional engagement

A recent CIPD Research Insight (Gourlay et al 2012) distinguished between two different types of engagement, exploring not just the behaviours of engaged employees, but the motivations underlying those behaviours. The distinction was made between emotional engagement and transactional engagement. Both groups of employees may appear engaged behaviourally, but the motivations behind that engagement are different. Emotional engagement is said to occur when individuals are intrinsically motivated – they enjoy their work and identify with organisational values and objectives (measured by items such as 'because I enjoy this work very much'). In contrast, transactional engagement occurs when an employee's primary concern is for extrinsic reward or for fear of losing that reward/job and so, if they appear motivated, it is to satisfy organisational expectations or to earn their living (measured by items such as 'being engaged in my job is a matter of necessity rather than desire') rather than as a result of their intrinsic motivation.

The CIPD (Gourlay et al 2012) research found positive associations between emotional engagement and well-being and negative associations between emotional engagement and work–family conflict and burnout.

In contrast, those who were transactionally engaged experienced burnout and work–family conflict to a greater extent than those who were emotionally engaged. This suggests that employees who are emotionally engaged in their work are also likely to be happier and healthier.

In addition, this study suggested that people may switch from being emotionally engaged to transactionally engaged, particularly if high work pressures are perceived. The implication of this finding is that those who are emotionally engaged may be at risk of becoming transactionally engaged in the presence of high work demands and pressures. Once again, employee engagement is fragile, and therefore focus must be given to engaging employees – but in a sustainable and well-being-focused way.

**Well-being + engagement = sustainability**

There is preliminary evidence to suggest that engagement is more likely to be sustainable when employee psychological well-being is also high (Robertson and Cooper 2010). Research by Towers Watson (Fairhurst and O’Connor 2010) provides some initial evidence that employee engagement and psychological well-being interact with one another in predicting outcomes. They found that highly engaged individuals with high levels of well-being were the most productive and happiest employees. Highly engaged employees with low levels of well-being were more likely to leave their organisations; in

addition, although they tended towards high levels of productivity, they also were more likely to experience high levels of burnout. Employees with low levels of engagement, but high levels of well-being posed a problem for organisations: they were more likely to stay with the organisation, but they were less committed to the organisation’s goals. Employees who were both disengaged and had low levels of well-being contributed the least to the organisation: due to the current weak employment market, this group may also be reluctant to move organisations. See Figure 1 for a diagrammatic representation of these categories.

Robertson and Birch (2010) also found preliminary evidence of the importance of psychological well-being for sustaining employee engagement. Their study found that psychological well-being enhanced the relationship between employee engagement and productivity. They suggested that if organisations only focus on initiatives that target commitment and discretionary effort, without nurturing employee psychological well-being, these initiatives will be limited in the impact they can achieve.

Although research exploring the beneficial impact psychological well-being can have on employee engagement is limited, both factors have been shown to be of benefit to organisational outcomes. Robertson and Cooper (2010) therefore suggest it is feasible that the combined impact of engagement and well-being may be greater than each one alone.

Figure 1: The interaction between employee engagement and well-being



### Managing for employee engagement

In the CIPD’s final report for the Shaping the Future project, line managers were highlighted as one of the most important influences on engagement (Miller et al 2011). Although practitioner literature (such as the MacLeod Report (2009)) has long pointed to the relationship between effective management and employee engagement, academic literature has been slower to provide evidence. Nevertheless, a number of recent academic studies have suggested there is a link between employee engagement and various management behaviours, such as transformational leadership (Tims et al 2011), authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al 2010) and supportive leadership (Thomas and Xu 2011). Thus, evidence from both academic and practitioner literature points to the idea that line manager behaviour has a significant effect on the engagement of employees. The implication therefore is that one way to effectively increase or sustain engagement of employees would be to focus on improving line manager behaviour and the manager–employee relationship.

Until recently, there had been little research to identify the specific management behaviours relevant to enhancing and managing employee engagement. In 2011, a qualitative research study sponsored by the CIPD and conducted by the current authors (Lewis et al 2011) identified specific management behaviours important for employee engagement. We interviewed 48 call centre employees from a large global energy provider about their line manager’s behaviour that was important to their own engagement. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis. Both positive and negative behaviours were identified, and in the data analysis, 11 competencies emerged. For ease of comprehension, the 11 competencies were then grouped into the following three themes:

- supporting employee growth
- interpersonal style and integrity
- monitoring direction.

The competency framework from this work is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Management competencies for enhancing employee engagement

Theme	Management competency	Description
Supporting employee growth	Autonomy and empowerment	Has trust in employee capabilities, involving them in problem-solving and decision-making
	Development	Helps employees in their career development and progression
	Feedback, praise and recognition	Gives positive and constructive feedback, offers praise and rewards good work
Interpersonal style and integrity	Individual interest	Shows genuine care and concern for employees
	Availability	Holds regular one-to-one meetings with employees and is available when needed
	Personal manner	Demonstrates a positive approach to work, leading by example
	Ethics	Respects confidentiality and treats employees fairly
Monitoring direction	Reviewing and guiding	Offers help and advice to employees, responding effectively to employee requests for guidance
	Clarifying expectations	Sets clear goals and objectives, giving clear explanations of what is expected
	Managing time and resources	Is aware of the team’s workload, arranges for extra resources or redistributes workload when necessary
	Following processes and procedures	Effectively understands, explains and follows work processes and procedures

### Managing for employee well-being

In the employee well-being domain, too, management and leadership have emerged as pivotal factors. In 2008, Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population stated that *'good line management can lead to good health, well-being and improved performance'* (p59). Academic research on the links between management and employee well-being has grown dramatically in the last decade or two, and consistently shows that the way employees are managed is a key determinant of workplace well-being (for example, Skakon et al 2010).

Looking specifically at the link between management and employee well-being outcomes, a recent systematic review of three decades of research (Skakon et al 2010) concluded that *'leader behaviours, the relationship between leaders and their employees and specific leadership styles were all associated with employee stress and effective well-being'* (p107).

Given the vital role line managers play in managing employee well-being, it is important for them to be aware of the skills and behaviours that will enable them to manage their teams in a way that promotes their well-being. Funded by the CIPD, Health and Safety Executive, Investors in People and a consortium of organisations, a team of researchers, including two of the current authors, set out to generate the evidence base on which to raise managers' awareness and skills in this area.

Between 2005 and 2011, we conducted a four-phase research programme looking at the specific behaviours managers need to adopt to prevent and reduce stress in those they manage. Phases 1 and 2 of this programme used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to develop a framework of management behaviours, entitled 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' (MCPARS) (Yarker et al 2007, Yarker et al 2008). Phase 3 of the programme designed and evaluated a learning and development intervention to support managers to include the MCPARS behaviours in their management repertoire (Donaldson-Feilder et al 2009); and phase 4 developed a series of case studies showing how different organisations integrated the MCPARS findings into their organisational practices (Donaldson-Feilder and Lewis 2011). A summary of the MCPARS framework is provided in Table 2 on page 9.

### Managing for sustainable employee engagement: aims of the current research

In summary, research and practice clearly shows that managers impact both employee engagement and employee well-being. In addition, preliminary research suggests that, to sustain employee engagement over time, it is important for managers to understand how they impact on both employee engagement and employee well-being. To achieve sustainable employee engagement in their teams, so that people are engaged but not to the level where they overwork or become stressed, managers need to be competent in both these areas.

To support managers and organisations in achieving sustainable employee engagement, the purpose of the current research is to bring together two existing frameworks – enhancing employee engagement on the one hand and preventing and reducing stress at work on the other hand – to produce a combined 'managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework. Taking a questionnaire-based research approach, we aimed to identify the specific management behaviours important for enhancing and managing both employee well-being and employee engagement.



Table 2: Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Sub-competency</b>
Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity	<b>Integrity</b> Being respectful and honest to employees
	<b>Managing emotions</b> Behaving consistently and calmly around the team
	<b>Considerate approach</b> Being thoughtful in managing others and delegating
Managing and communicating existing and future work	<b>Proactive work management</b> Monitoring and reviewing existing work, allowing future prioritisation and planning
	<b>Problem-solving</b> Dealing with problems promptly, rationally and responsibly
	<b>Participative/empowering</b> Listening to, meeting and consulting with the team, providing direction, autonomy and development opportunities to individuals
Managing the individual within the team	<b>Personally accessible</b> Available to talk to personally
	<b>Sociable</b> Relaxing approach, such as socialising and using humour
	<b>Empathetic engagement</b> Seeking to understand each individual in the team in terms of their health and satisfaction, motivation, point of view and life outside work
Reasoning/managing difficult situations	<b>Managing conflict</b> Dealing with conflicts decisively, promptly and objectively
	<b>Use of organisational resources</b> Seeking advice when necessary from managers, HR and occupational health
	<b>Taking responsibility for resolving issues</b> Having a supportive and responsible approach to issues and incidents in the team

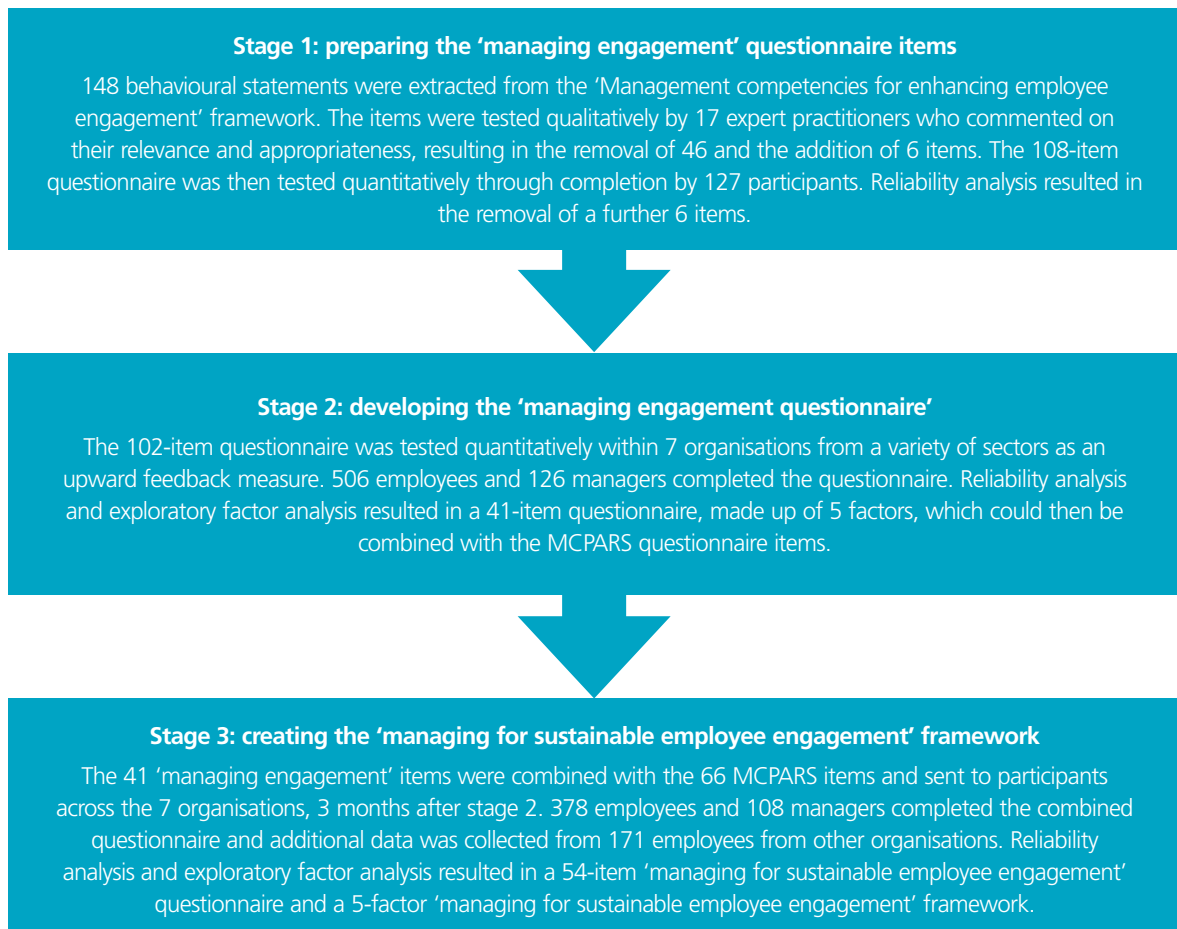
# Methodology

To develop the managing for sustainable employee engagement framework, a 'managing engagement' questionnaire was created from the management competencies for enhancing employee engagement framework (Lewis et al 2011 – see above) and tested both qualitatively (to ensure that all items were relevant in different organisational sectors and that no key areas of competence had been omitted) and quantitatively (initially with one sample to strengthen the reliability of the questionnaire and subsequently with a further sample to develop a refined, final version of the questionnaire).

The 'managing engagement' questionnaire was then combined with the MCPARS questionnaire (Yarker et al 2008) and tested quantitatively to examine the behaviours relevant to both engagement and stress prevention/well-being. The data gathered from the combined questionnaire was analysed using reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis to generate a framework of the management behaviours needed for 'managing for sustainable employee engagement'.

Details of the research design and process are included in the flow diagram in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Flow diagram summarising the processes involved in creating the managing for sustainable engagement framework



# Results: framework of competencies for ‘managing for sustainable employee engagement’

The purpose of this study was to develop a framework of the competencies needed for managing for sustainable employee engagement. This was achieved by combining two previously developed management competency frameworks, one for enhancing employee engagement and another for preventing and reducing stress at work (MCPARS).

The study results revealed a 54-item framework or questionnaire, with a five-factor structure. The factors, or behavioural themes/competencies, were named by researchers, taking care to distinguish the factor names from those used in the original enhancing employee engagement and MCPARS frameworks. All factor names were worded positively to reflect the aspiration of the ‘managing for sustainable employee engagement’ framework and questionnaire. A summary of the framework is shown in Table 3.

### Origins of the ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ items

Of the 54 items in the final ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ questionnaire, 29 items were from the ‘managing engagement’ questionnaire and 25 from the MCPARS questionnaire. Of the 54 items, 26 were positive indicators and 28 negatively worded. Despite the positively worded factor/competency names, the negatively worded items/indicators were left as such to maintain the integrity of the data. Table 4 on pages 12–13 shows the full set of ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ items, with colour-coding to denote from which questionnaire the item originated.

Table 3: Summary of the ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ framework

Competency	Brief description
Open, fair and consistent	Managing with integrity and consistency, managing emotions/personal issues and taking a positive approach in interpersonal interactions
Handling conflict and problems	Dealing with employee conflicts (including bullying and abuse) and using appropriate organisational resources
Knowledge, clarity and guidance	Clear communication, advice and guidance, demonstrating understanding of roles and responsible decision-making
Building and sustaining relationships	Personal interaction with employees involving empathy and consideration
Supporting development	Supporting and arranging employee career progression and development

Table 4: The full 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework/questionnaire showing the origins of the items

<b>Open, fair and consistent</b>	
1	Is overly critical of me and other team members
2	Blames me and other team members for decisions taken
3	Focuses on mistakes
4	Demonstrates a lack of faith in my capability
5	Tells me what to do rather than consulting me
6	Doesn't allow decisions to be challenged
7	Uses humour and sarcasm inappropriately
8	Shows favouritism
9	Talks about team members behind their backs
10	Criticises me and other team members in front of others
11	Treats me with respect
12	Is unpredictable in mood
13	Acts calmly in pressured situations
14	Passes on his/her stress to me
15	Is consistent in his/her approach to managing
16	Panics about deadlines
17	Seems to give more negative feedback than positive feedback
18	Imposes 'my way is the only way'
<b>Handling conflict and problems</b>	
19	Acts as a mediator in conflict situations
20	Deals with squabbles before they turn into arguments
21	Deals objectively with employee conflicts
22	Deals with employee conflicts head on
23	Uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems
24	Seeks help from occupational health when necessary
25	Follows up conflicts after resolution
26	Supports employees through incidents of abuse
27	Doesn't address bullying
28	Makes it clear he/she will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong
<b>Knowledge, clarity and guidance</b>	
29	Does not give advice when required
30	Deflects responsibility for problem-solving to senior management
31	Gives vague rather than specific advice
32	Does not clarify role requirements and expectations
33	Is not clear of their own role requirements
34	Demonstrates a lack of understanding of the role I do
35	Does not communicate whether I am on track or not
36	Does not give adequate time for planning
37	Demonstrates a lack of understanding of processes and procedures
38	Does not follow up on action points
39	Is too busy to give me time
40	Is indecisive at decision-making

Table 4: Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work (continued)

Building and sustaining relationships	
41	Shows interest in my personal life
42	Checks I am feeling okay
43	Shows understanding of the pressures I am under
44	Provides regular opportunities to speak one-to-one
45	Brings in treats
46	Socialises with the team
47	Is willing to have a laugh at work
48	Takes an interest in my life outside work
49	Regularly asks 'How are you?'
Supporting development	
50	Takes time to discuss my career development
51	Actively supports my career development
52	Offers opportunities for career progression
53	Plans/arranges time off from day-to-day tasks for development opportunities
54	Arranges development activities

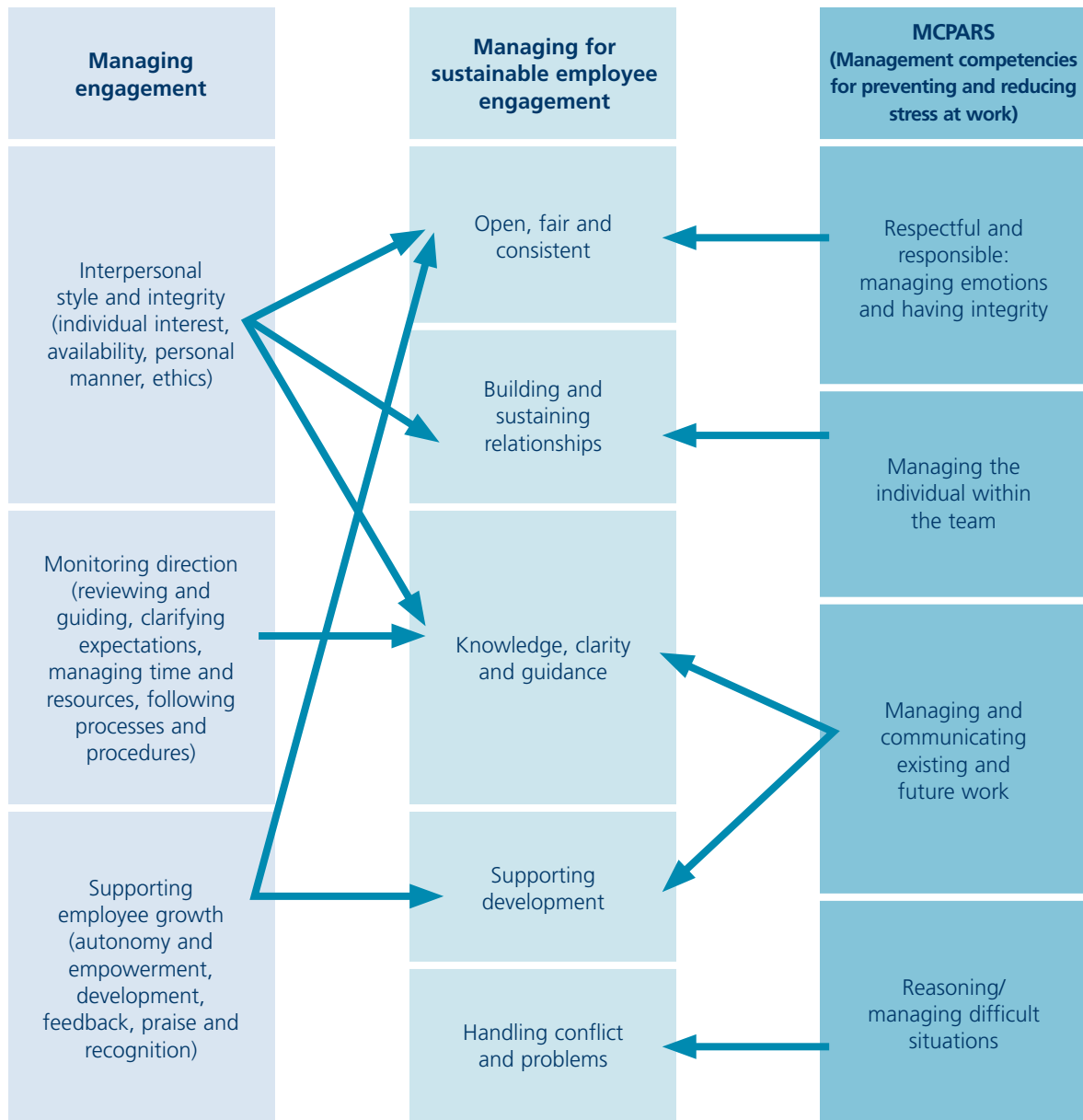
■ MCPARS questionnaire items      ■ 'Managing engagement' questionnaire items

As Table 4 and Figure 3 (on page 14) show, four of the five 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' competencies (open, fair and consistent; knowledge, clarity and guidance; building and sustaining relationships; and supporting development) have their origins in both the 'managing engagement' and the MCPARS questionnaires. (Note: while the competency 'supporting development' is made up of items drawn only from the 'managing engagement' framework, closer inspection of the MCPARS framework shows that there are MCPARS items that speak to the manager's developmental role but these have been removed in the analysis either as a result of repetition or reliability of the item.) Only the competency 'handling conflict and problems' contains items drawn solely from MCPARS that have no equivalents included in the 'managing engagement' questionnaire.

Although all the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' competencies (with the exception of 'handling conflict and problems') are included in some form in both of the original frameworks, there is a difference in emphasis between the

three frameworks. For instance, the 'Managing for sustainable engagement' framework has a greater emphasis on developing and progressing individuals and on role requirements than the MCPARS framework; and it has a greater emphasis on personal interaction and consideration and managing one's own emotions than the 'Managing engagement' framework. This suggests that although broad behavioural themes may be common across all three frameworks, particular manager behaviours may differ in importance depending on the employee outcome sought – engagement, well-being or sustainable engagement.

Figure 3: Relationship between 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement', MCPARS and 'Managing engagement' frameworks



# Discussion and conclusions

As outlined in the introduction, the literature on employee engagement suggests that engaging the workforce is important for organisational performance and productivity, but that it is hard to sustain employee engagement in highly pressurised workplaces, such as those becoming prevalent due to the current economic difficulties. Ever harder work and long working hours may be unsustainable; and may also come at the expense of employee well-being. Employers who want to create sustainable employee engagement need to consider employee well-being alongside employee engagement itself. They need to ensure that they are encouraging intrinsically engaged employees (or those that feel engaged), not just those that act in an engaged manner.

Line managers are pivotal to both employee engagement and workplace well-being. As described in the introduction, there is now evidence for links between management and leadership on the one hand and both employee engagement and a range of well-being outcomes on the other. This means that it is important for line managers to manage their teams in ways that both enhance employee engagement and support well-being/prevent stress. Our previous research has developed two separate frameworks of manager behaviour: one covering management behaviours needed to enhance employee engagement and the other detailing management behaviours for preventing and reducing stress at work. The purpose of the current research is to bring together these two frameworks to create a combined 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework.

Specifically, the research described here set out to identify the specific management behaviours important for enhancing and managing both employee well-being and employee engagement. The resulting 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework is made up of five behavioural themes or competencies,

each underpinned by a series of specific behavioural indicators. These are:

- open, fair and consistent
- handling conflict and problems
- knowledge, clarity and guidance
- building and sustaining relationships
- supporting development.

The 54 behavioural indicators underlying the framework provide details of what each behavioural theme/competency means. These include both positive and negative items to help managers understand what behaviours they need to continue doing, do more of, or add to their repertoire and also those behaviours they need to do less of or stop doing. The indicators also form a 54-item questionnaire that is a measure of the extent to which a particular manager is 'managing for sustainable employee engagement'.

Mapping the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework against both the MCPARS and the 'managing engagement' frameworks shows that four of the five competencies include items drawn from (or equivalent to) items included in both original frameworks. Only 'handling conflict and problems' was drawn solely from MCPARS and not included in the 'managing engagement' framework. The difference across the frameworks appears to be one of emphasis more than content.

At first sight, the similarity between the three behavioural frameworks under consideration here might seem to undermine the argument that engendering engagement is really distinct from engendering sustainable employee engagement and suggest that adding in the well-being/preventing stress element makes little difference. However, the distinction between emotional engagement and transactional engagement (Gourlay et al 2012, for the CIPD – see

introduction) may provide the key to understanding their overlap. The 'Managing engagement' framework was developed through research based on a definition of engagement that aligns with emotional engagement (thinking, feeling and acting in an engaged manner), which is a form of engagement that has positive associations with well-being. Thus the manager behaviours relevant to engendering this type of engagement are likely to have similarities to the manager behaviours designed to enhance well-being. What this means is that bringing 'managing engagement' together with well-being/preventing stress is less about combining two radically different management approaches and more about a few additional elements and shifts in emphasis.

The additional elements and shifts in emphasis provided by bringing the MCPARS framework together with the 'Managing engagement' framework (including adding a factor on 'handling conflict and problems' and providing more emphasis on personal interaction/consideration and managing one's own emotions) may be about helping to ensure managers create emotional engagement and sustain that engagement (in terms of both level and type – that is, preventing their employees' emotional engagement switching to either transactional engagement or workaholism). The CIPD research (Gourlay et al 2012) suggests that employees who are initially emotionally

engaged, but then exposed to high work pressures, may switch to transactional engagement: at this point, although they may appear from their behaviour to be engaged, their motivation has shifted from enjoyment of their work and identification with their employer organisation to 'performing' in an engaged manner out of necessity or fear of losing their job. In workaholism too it is the underlying motivations of the individual that are problematic: a workaholic individual works long and hard due to obsession/compulsion rather than enjoyment and energy. Both workaholism and transactional engagement are associated with negative well-being outcomes. We have not empirically examined what manager behaviours drive transactional engagement, though we could perhaps speculate about that (for example setting ever higher targets, talking about threats to job security, motivating only through reward); nor have we explored potential links between workaholism and transactional engagement. What we can say from the current research is that the manager behaviours for enhancing employee engagement are found to be broadly similar to those for preventing stress, with the latter bringing a few additional behaviours and shifts in emphasis that may prevent detrimental changes to employees' work motivations. This means that the two sets of behaviours can be combined relatively easily into a management approach designed to create sustainable employee engagement.



# The way forward

## Implications for employers

The evidence presented in this report gives a clear message to employers that employee engagement is important for performance, but is likely to be unsustainable unless it goes hand in hand with employee well-being. The literature review also suggests that employers need to beware of engendering an undesirable form of engagement where employees appear engaged, for example, by working longer hours and even responding as such in engagement surveys, but do not actually feel or think in an engaged way. This type of engagement (termed transactional engagement by some) can be seen as undesirable as it is associated with negative well-being outcomes. By contrast, when employees not only behave in an engaged way, but also think and feel engaged, this is associated with positive well-being outcomes.

A number of authors have suggested that organisations may unintentionally engender the less desirable form of engagement by defining engagement in purely behavioural terms (such as going the extra mile): in these cases, engagement is both conceptualised and measured in terms of how employees act and does not capture the ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’ elements of emotional engagement. For instance, an individual may act in an engaged way because that is the organisational expectation and they will be rewarded for doing so (and potentially punished for not doing so), but not in reality feel motivated by or committed to their role or their employer organisation. If this ‘façade’ of engagement is mistaken for ‘real’ engagement, it presents risks to employees’ well-being and to the sustainability of their engagement and performance.

A further key message from the evidence presented in this report is that manager behaviour is pivotal to both employee engagement and well-being. This means that an important way to ensure that real emotional

engagement is created and sustained is by focusing on the manager–employee relationship: managers who manage in ways that not only encourage employees to demonstrate engagement externally by their actions, but also engender emotional engagement, represent a vital mechanism for creating a workforce that is sustainably engaged and well (and productive). For instance, by being open, fair and consistent, supporting employees’ career progression and getting to know what motivates their team, managers can help ensure that employees are intrinsically committed to and motivated by their work.

For employers who want to create sustainable employee engagement in their workplaces, the ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ framework offers a great opportunity to support managers to make the relevant behaviours an integral part of their management approach. This support can be provided through a range of people management processes, for example:

- **Learning and development:** using the ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ framework to design or integrate into learning and development programmes could help managers adopt the behaviours it details. Our previous research (Donaldson-Feilder et al 2009) suggests that providing managers with upward feedback can help in the process of behaviour change, so it would be worth considering using the ‘Managing for sustainable employee engagement’ questionnaire in an upward or 360-degree feedback process as part of the learning and development programme.
- **Performance management and appraisal:** to reinforce the importance of showing the behaviours for ‘managing for sustainable employee engagement’ on an ongoing basis, they could be integrated into performance management or

appraisal systems, so that managers consider and are measured on the extent to which they integrate these behaviours into their management repertoire.

- **Selection, assessment and promotion:** to recruit and promote managers who either already show the behaviours set out in the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework or have the potential to develop these skills, the framework and questionnaire could be used as part of the selection or promotion process. For example, it could be integrated into structured interview questions or assessment centre exercises.

### Implications for managers

For managers, this report suggests that their behaviour is an important factor in achieving both employee engagement and well-being for those they manage. The 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework provides specific indications of what managers can do to create sustainable employee engagement in their team. The framework can help in:

- **Identifying which behaviours are already used and which ones could be changed:** there are likely to be behavioural indicators of things that managers already do (or avoid doing in the case of the negative behaviours) whereas others are not part of their current approach. It might be helpful to get feedback on whether others, particularly those who work directly for the manager, see these things or not. If the employer provides an opportunity for upward or 360-degree feedback, this is in an ideal way to find out others' views in a systematic and confidential way.
- **Changing behaviour where appropriate:** where there are elements of the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework that are not part of the manager's current management repertoire, the specific behavioural indicators underlying the framework can be used to help make behavioural changes. Coaching or other learning and development activities may be helpful in making and sustaining these changes.

Managers also need to focus on ensuring they engender real, emotional engagement in their employees. They must beware of rewarding or encouraging a 'façade' of engagement in which individuals are acting engaged, perhaps by working

long and hard, but not really thinking or feeling engaged, in terms of their underlying motivations. They need to bear in mind that it is emotional engagement that links to well-being and sustainability, whereas purely behavioural or transactional engagement is linked to poorer well-being and is unlikely to be sustained over time.

### Implications for public policy-makers

The 'Engaging for Success' movement, which is a follow-on to the MacLeod and Clarke (2009) report for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, is aiming to grow awareness of the importance of employee engagement in UK workplaces. It plans to provide information and access to tools that employers can use to enhance employee engagement. It is important that this activity includes clear messages about not just creating employee engagement, but also sustaining it – and how important workplace well-being is to sustainable employee engagement. Employers need to be warned of the potential risks of engendering (and measuring) a purely behaviour-based or transactional form of engagement that does not create genuine emotional engagement and could be detrimental to well-being. The 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework and questionnaire are potentially valuable tools that could be disseminated through this activity. The guidance leaflet based on this research could be provided as a download on the Engaging for Success website. Employers and managers could be encouraged to integrate the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework into their practices.

From the well-being angle, the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework provides an opportunity for those promoting workplace well-being and stress prevention to reinforce their messages about the benefits of well-being by adding sustaining employee engagement to the list. For example, the Health and Safety Executive and the Government's Health, Work and Well-being Unit could use sustainability of employee engagement as part of their 'business case' for well-being. They could promote the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework as a useful tool for employers looking at both well-being and engagement to use in their activities.

The 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework could also fit into public policy on skills. Reports by bodies such as UKCES and the CIPD point to the need for a greater focus on people management skills within the UK skills agenda. Management courses, MBAs and management development programmes could benefit from including more input on both engagement and well-being: the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework could form part of both knowledge and skills elements.

### **Future research**

Future research is needed to validate the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework, in terms of understanding whether, if managers demonstrate the positive and avoid demonstrating the negative behaviours, their team members are more likely to be intrinsically engaged, healthy and productive over time. The mapping process conducted for this research also demonstrates the need for further research to establish whether some behaviours are more important than others in terms of engagement, well-being and sustainable engagement in employees.

Once the 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement' framework has been validated and the relationships between different behaviours and employee outcomes have been elucidated, a further study could explore how best to support managers to behave in the ways set out in the framework. An intervention study could design and evaluate a learning and development intervention aimed at supporting managers' skill development in this area.

More generally, research in the area of employee engagement needs to focus on understanding the motivations or intentions behind demonstrations of employee engagement and the implications of these differing motivations. By understanding this, evidence will be gathered to support the recommendations that organisations need to move beyond the conceptualisation of engagement being about the demonstration of behaviour – such as 'going the extra mile' – and instead see engagement as something employees need to feel, think and act.

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