

# DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP AND THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE

### PART 1

#### Our engagement journey: what we learned along the way

1. Paying attention to things that matter to people works better than chasing a score
2. Local action works better than big corporate action plans BUT senior leaders have to be committed
3. You've got to treat people as adults – involve them in making change and improvements
4. Increasing our own employee engagement has helped create the conditions for better people focussed policy making.

#### Setting the scene

In 2013 DfT was one of only two government departments whose Engagement Index was both in the lower quartile and had dropped since 2012. A combination of internal and external events in 2012/13 contributed to low engagement across the department.

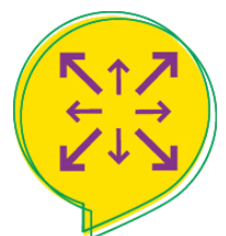
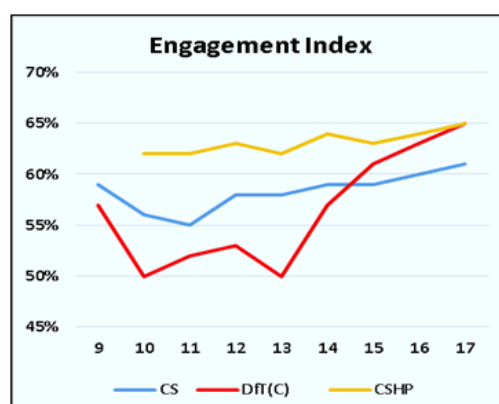
We made a decision not to simply chase after a higher engagement index score, but to tackle the root causes so that we could bring sustainable change to the organisation. This meant strengthening leadership and ownership across DfT, helping everyone share a vision of the future. We wanted change to be enabled from the top and led from within.

Fast forward to 2017. For the fourth consecutive year our engagement index has increased, bringing it to 65% - a fifteen percentage point increase since 2013 and making DfT one of the high performers on engagement across the Civil Service.

#### 2017: 65% Employee engagement index

We are the highest performing department for Learning and Development, joint second for Leading and Managing Change and second for Diversity and Inclusion (82% against an average of 74%).

Our Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment scores fell to 8% and 7% respectively, but worryingly, only 30% of people report a concern. We need to do more to make people feel safe to speak up.



## PART 2

### People build bridges – how we worked together to shift the culture

Our first priority was to understand the data – what were our people, all 2,000 of them, trying to tell us?

The 2013 results showed us there was a huge amount of unlocked potential within the organisation. People liked their work but they didn't feel a strong sense of leadership or change management from the top.

We went out across the organisation and listened to lots of people working at every level. These conversations helped us identify the areas we needed to focus on where people would be able to see a real difference.

#### What we found

People said they felt they were working in silos, discouraged from working towards a shared vision that was focused on transport users.

Our managers and leaders had lost some of their confidence and there was a strong perception that our communication was very top down; people felt that they were told what was going to happen rather than being consulted about the change.

### Engaging leaders & managers and giving people a voice

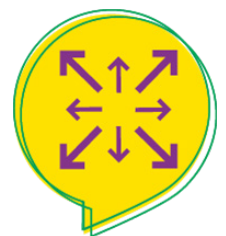
Based on this information we built a programme of both corporate and local activity, with a real focus on leadership and communication. The importance of storytelling ran through all of this.

#### The importance of leadership

It was vital that the leadership team were committed to a shared vision and felt they had the confidence and skills to make it happen.

We tackled this in two ways:

1. First by creating a regular rhythm of conversations with our top team (ExCo), initially fortnightly, then monthly, we helped them to:
  - build their collective leadership presence,
  - develop their core messages
  - focus strategically on key longer term people issues



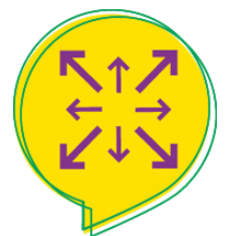
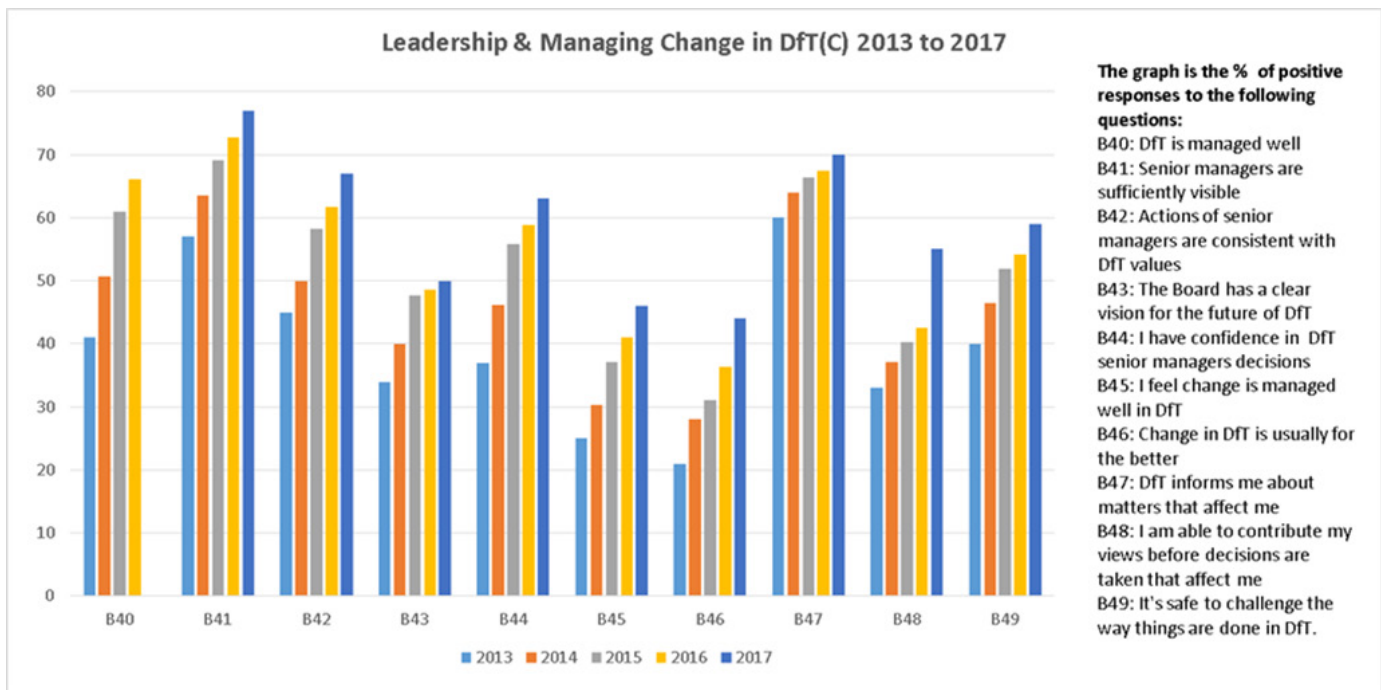
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2. Secondly, we re-engaged the wider SCS team through a structured programme of activity focussed on development and building a sense of community. This included a formal leadership development programme (Momentum) and regular Senior Management Group events for all SCS centrally managed opportunities to discuss, debate and own both policy and people issues.

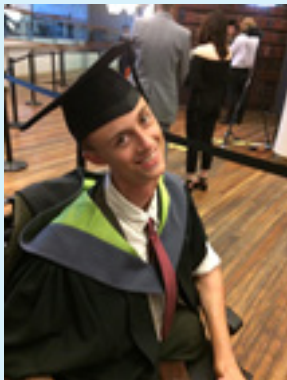
In 2015 we developed a similar programme of activity for our next tier of leaders and managers (Velocity) and in 2016, we developed and rolled out Ignite for the rest of the organisation.

While the content of each programme varied, they all contained a learning strand, an engagement strand and a self-sustaining community element and featured a strong focus on personal leadership and storytelling as a technique.



## How the work we do in here, matters out there

*Tracey Whitewood-Neal on sharing her story with colleagues*



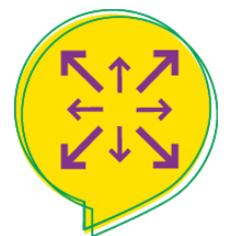
It was such a privilege for me to be asked to talk about my son at the first ever Ignite conference. I told the story of Jordan who was diagnosed at around two years old with a very rare and life threatening genetic disease called Proteus syndrome – the same condition that doctors now believe affected Joseph Merrick, the so-called Elephant Man. Jordan has undergone many operations since birth but the most life changing for him were the amputation of both legs above the knees and a spinal operation two years later that caused him to be paralysed from the waist down. I told my colleagues that from a young age Jordan wanted to become an architect and linked with that ambition was a desire to drive a car and be independent.

For most parents this would be a simple request (albeit for the costs involved!) but with Jordan becoming more disabled, this seemed like a bit of a pipe dream. How would he be able to drive a car? Not only was he an amputee but he also had very deformed hands and restrictions with his neck movements.

But then we heard about Mobility centres and discovered that they provided a driving assessment service. There are 13 Mobility centres around the country, funded by DfT. Jordan attended the assessment and drove around a test track and the report confirmed that with adaptations, he would be able to drive.



I was able to share with the audience some videos of Jordan talking about his trip to the mobility centre and how driving had made such a difference to his life, allowing him to drive back and forth from home to university in the holidays, to make site visits and even to drive his friends around. He explained that although public transport was much improved, having a car allowed him to be spontaneous. So I was able to tell my colleagues how Jordan realised his dream, driving his own car, thanks to the services of a DfT funded mobility centre. I also told them how Jordan was studying architecture and at the next Ignite conference I shared how proud I was that he had graduated with a first class honours degree in architecture. This news was met with a round of applause. It was great to tell them how following my initial presentation, the ignite Programme sponsor had put Jordan in touch with a contact in an architectural practice from which Jordan had secured a job in London. For me the best part was people coming up to me after my presentation saying firstly how inspirational the story was but also how it really brought home what the department did for people. What was also very special was that people actually started thinking about what they could do in their day jobs to make transport better for people in Jordan's situation. I received lots of lovely emails from people too, not just inspired to do more in their day jobs, but also in their private lives including someone who had been putting off doing a part time college course because they felt they didn't have the time.



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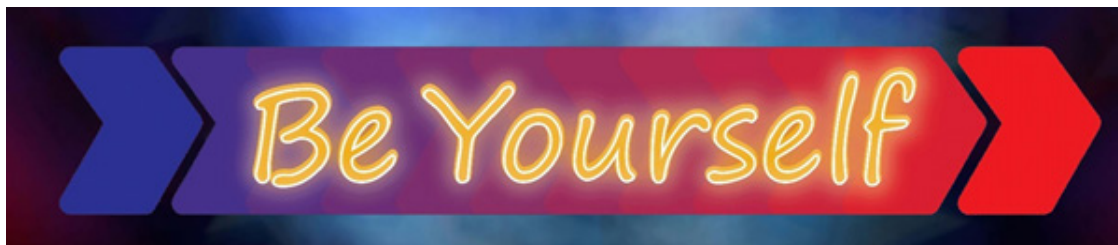
## Building communication

Complementing the work on leadership we developed a communication and engagement strategy to make it easier for our people to understand the connection between the work they do and the impact it has in “real life”.

We based our strategy round three key tenets:

1. What you do matters
2. Together we are brilliant
3. We care about our people

They sit at the heart of all our internal communication campaigns, including Be Yourself At Work which we developed in early 2016.



The Be Yourself Campaign was designed to foster an inclusive culture and encourage people to speak up and have their say about the things that mattered to them.

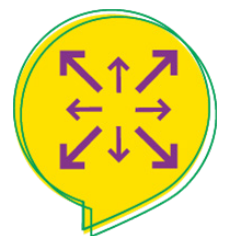
Through various activities including, events, blogs and poster campaigns we:

- Encourage all DfT’s people to feel able to bring their whole selves to work
- Celebrate individuality
- Share stories
- Make everyone feel welcome and valued for who they are and what they bring to the Department.

It’s had a great impact on line managers understanding the benefits of inclusion and made all our people aware that DfT strongly supports diversity and to feel valued for their differences.

### People said...

“It is a really positive, healthy initiative. It is a really good way of us all reminding ourselves that even though we are all working for a common cause, within that, we are individual people with varied strengths, weaknesses, personalities, skills, opinions and that all adds great value to our teams and how we achieve things as a collective.”





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This openness and clear drive for inclusion has extended to other areas of the way we do business, particularly the way we manage change.

We're currently developing a new performance management system. The project has been inclusive by design, involving wide-ranging staff consultation and giving everyone the opportunity to contribute their views and allow the project team to understand the impact in all our people.

## PART 3

### The difference engagement makes on the citizen

#### Where we are now: Think People

The work that has been done on employee engagement has moved the culture forward. And it is not just about the way we do things internally.

Our culture has matured as an organisation. We're much more open to thinking about the people element of the work we do – not just within the office, but

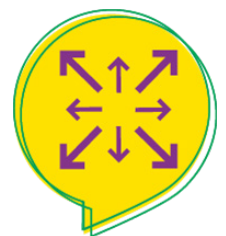
the citizens we serve every day. In October 2015, we launched the 'Think People' programme – to encourage colleagues to use more people-centred approaches for policy and delivery.



The 'Think People' programme comprises regular high profile events, capability building in Behavioural Insights, as well as intranet tools and resources about travel attitudes and behaviours. The Think People seminar series has brought high profile speakers from a range of institutions, including Harvard, Google, and the Behavioural Insights Team, into DfT to share insights on people-centred approaches. We provide training for policymakers to demonstrate how policies and processes can improve with people-centred approaches.

#### **Catherine Davie, Principal Research Officer explains:**

*"In our first year we delivered 15 behavioural insights workshops, finding solutions to live policy and delivery issues. Seminars and training workshops have been well received, with over 90% finding them useful. In years two and three we are seeking to further embed people centred approaches through developing a dashboard of key indicators to engage our executive committee and strengthen the user focus in business cases for investment."*



## PART 4

### What's next?

DfT is very much seeing the benefits of improving engagement - both internally and also the way we do our policy.

It's not something that ends but something that we continually invest in – seeking to improve the organisation and the way people feel about working in it. Having strong leadership and enabling managers who listen and give people a voice will sit at the heart of future change and improvements.

