



ENGAGE
FOR
SUCCESS



CLOSING THE SAY-DO GAP

INSIGHTS FOR BETTER
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Closing the 'Say-Do Gap' for Better Employee Engagement

In 2018, Engage for Success (EFS) began research into the connection between organisational integrity - the degree to which an organisation does what it says it will do – and employee engagement.

The purpose of the Organisational Integrity and Values Thought and Action Group is to help organisations across the United Kingdom achieve their own business, commercial and social goals.

Through our insight and tools we shall equip firms to close the gap between how they say they want to run and what happens in day-to-day practice. Reducing this 'say-do gap' is core to building organisational integrity, one of the four enablers of engagement identified by EFS.

Research Introduction

This initial research was conducted within the UK arm of a supplier of products and solutions to the energy and water sector. The company has a global workforce of around 16,000 employees. At the time of the study, 680 people were based at various locations across the UK.

The survey questions were developed by the EFS team together with representatives of the company. Members of the EFS team ran the survey, analysed the results and presented the findings.

In all, there were 312 valid responses across eight locations, reflecting a participation rate of approximately 46% (312 / 680). The employee engagement index in this study was a healthy, although not outstanding, 67%.

Employee Engagement and Overall Values Alignment

Our survey examined two key outcomes of how work is done: employee engagement and overall values alignment. Alignment is the extent to which the company matches up to its stated values, in the eyes of staff members.

Three Factors




We explored the relative impact of three core factors in these two outcomes:

1. Individual experiences – traditional engagement drivers such as opportunity to progress, having clear expectations, or support from a line manager.

2. Seniority cohorts – values alignment of three groups – colleagues, line managers and senior leaders; i.e. how far the behaviours and decisions of each group match up to the company’s stated values.
3. Organisational practices – such as how the company treats customers and suppliers, how people communicate internally, or which behaviours and results the company recognises and rewards.

What Influences Engagement

Analyses showed that individual experiences had the strongest impact on employee engagement. Whilst broader organisational practices and indeed overall values alignment also contributed uniquely to engagement, their impact was far weaker – as illustrated in the graph below.




	Impact on Engagement
Individual experiences	
Organisational practices	
Overall values alignment	

Improvements in organisational practices or in values alignment may yield a modest impact on engagement, but focusing on individual experiences is more effective

Seniority Cohorts

Perceptions of senior leaders drive overall values alignment

How far the behaviours and decisions of senior leaders are aligned with the company’s stated values emerged as the strongest driver of overall values alignment for the company. Colleagues living the values came a close second; the impact of line managers’ behaviours trailed both.

	Impact on overall values alignment
Senior leader behaviours and decisions	
Fellow team members behaviours and decisions	
Line manager behaviours and decisions	

Senior Leaders and fellow team members are more important to values than the line manager

Perceptions of the line manager drive engagement

In sharp contrast, when it comes to employee engagement and our seniority cohorts, the extent to which the behaviours and decisions of the line manager aligned with the company’s stated values emerged as the strongest driver. Senior leaders living the values had a much smaller impact.

	Impact on engagement
Line manager behaviours and decisions	
Senior leader behaviours and decisions	






Line managers living the values was far more important to employee engagement than senior leaders doing so

Organisational Practices

In examining organisational practices (nine were tested), how customers were treated emerged as the strongest driver of overall values alignment for the company.

However, it was the treatment of staff that mattered most to employee engagement.

And whilst there was some overlap with treatment of suppliers / partners, and what the company recognises / rewards emerging as secondary drivers of both engagement and values alignment, the primary drivers differed clearly. This is shown in the following charts.

	Impact on overall values alignment
How we treat our customers	
How we communicate internally	
How we treat non-employees (e.g. suppliers and partners)	
Our HR policies and practices	
Behaviours and results the company recognises and rewards	

Treatment of customers most important for values

	Impact on engagement
How we treat our staff	
Behaviours and results the company recognises and rewards	
How we treat non-employees (e.g. suppliers and partners)	

Treatment of staff was most important for engagement

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that:

- Individual experiences matter more to employee engagement than either organisational practices or overall values alignment;
- Line managers living the company's values is far more important to engagement than having senior leaders living the values;
- Different organisational practices are important to engagement on the one hand, and to values alignment on the other.

The outcomes of our first exploratory study show that there are three factors that influence how engaged an employee might be. In order of significance, these are: individual experiences, organisational practice and overall alignment.

Organisations need effective, desirable practices that apply to diverse teams. It is also important that businesses make efforts to ensure that the behaviours and decisions of influential (in this case, direct line) managers are aligned with agreed values.

However, the overriding significance of individual experiences suggests that broad-brush strategies may not secure the highest levels of employee engagement. Line managers must understand the experiences of individual employees and, where possible, ensure that these are positive and aligned with a person's work and growth needs.

With thanks to the following organisations for work on this project:

Glasgow Caledonian University
Marble Brook
Mo.work
Stillae