The Engaging Manager

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The Engaging Manager

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This report is the product of a study supported by the IES HR Network, through which members finance, and often participate in, applied research on employment issues. Full information on Network membership is available from IES on request, or at www.employment-studies.co.uk/network.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

Throughout our early research into employee engagement, we were struck by a finding that appeared to be consistent, regardless of organisation, sector or employee group: the line manager relationship is crucial. The strength and consistency of the influence of the line manager on engagement levels led us to this latest research, on 'The Engaging Manager'. Our aim was to understand how 'engaging managers' – people who inspire and engage their teams to perform well – behave in their dealings with people.

The research

Seven organisations – the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Centrica, Corus, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), London Borough of Merton, Rolls-Royce, and Sainsbury's – took part in the research. We asked each of them to identify a small number of engaging managers on the basis of the engagement scores of their teams in the most recent employee attitude survey. We then carried out interviews with both the engaging managers and their own managers, whom we have termed 'senior managers'. We also conducted focus groups with the 'engaged teams'. Focus groups members all completed a standard IES engagement questionnaire, in addition to participating in the discussion. The focus groups included a period of time for team members to consider their manager and describe him or her by means of descriptive words, a drawing, or a metaphor.

In total, 25 'engaging managers', 22 senior managers and 154 team members (in 25 teams) participated, and we would like to record our thanks for their co-operation, time and enthusiasm.

The engaging managers

It soon became apparent that our 25 managers had little in common aside from their ability to engage their teams via behaviours that were remarkably consistent.

Their jobs and roles were many and varied. They had, on average, been in their current positions for 3.3 years, but with their organisations for much longer (15.9 years on average). The size of their teams, in terms of direct reports, ranged from three to 15, and their wider spans of control varied even more – from four people, in a strategic, high level team, to over 5,000, in a huge operational environment. All were happy in their current posts, although the majority were still on the development curve and wanted to move upwards at some stage in the future. Although some had experienced a lot of formal development input – training courses, management development programmes, coaching and mentoring – others had received little or even nothing at all. The majority considered themselves to be good internal networkers, and had built up many contacts within their organisation, although external networking was less common.

Self-perception of management style

All of our managers said that an important way of learning about engaging management was to observe others and take the 'good bits' from some, and avoid the 'bad bits' of others: *I think my style is more looking at managers I've worked with and for, and stealing the bits that work for me and losing the bits that don't.'*

Most felt at ease when communicating with people and getting to know them; they also found it easy to encourage and develop people in the team, and were comfortable with managing performance. They all tried hard to keep their people focus, even when faced with high levels of day-to-day demands. A very strong theme was the belief that they should be clear about goals and expectations: *'I ensure that people understand what is expected of them. I try to encourage people to think of the wider objectives of [the organisation] and how they fit in.'*

Several managers referred to their need to meet often with their team members, on an individual basis, and to give feedback frequently; they also typically felt they had an encouraging, informal, coaching style, saw people as individuals and respected them.

The managers in our research were put forward by their organisations because their teams had high engagement scores. However, it soon became apparent that they were also high performing managers with high performing teams, and all were able to quote key performance indicators that had improved during the time they had managed their teams: *'We get fantastic results.'*

The difficult stuff

It was noticeable that, even if they did not like tackling poor performance, all of our managers were willing to do so, usually as soon as it occurred. Several referred to the need to be firm and clear about the standards they expected, and to take action

quickly but fairly – if necessary, to get tough and go to formal procedures: *'I tackle things straight away. I explain why things aren't right and work with people to make it better. I don't allow things to fester. I'll go to dismissal if necessary.'*

All the managers had, at some point in their careers, delivered bad news. The consensus was that honesty and openness was essential, along with empathy and a demonstration that the manager had an understanding of the possible impact on staff: *'I think honesty is the only way to do it.'* Giving time to people to absorb the news was cited several times, as was the need to be serious and calm. They also stressed the importance of doing one's homework and following proper procedures.

What did senior managers think?

As our engaging managers were mostly in middling or senior posts, their own line managers almost all occupied high level positions. The majority had seen changes in the engaging manager's style over time – an important finding, because it shows that managers can acquire new behaviours and become more engaging over time. Several senior managers described their engaging managers as gaining increased self-awareness, which often went hand-in-hand with a modification of behaviour. Other comments were that the engaging manager had gained confidence over time, had become more strategic and less task-focused, and had overcome an initial reluctance to tackle poor performance and difficult behaviour.

Senior managers valued their engaging managers' ability to communicate with people and to motivate and involve the team, thus enabling people to give their best. They also felt their engaging managers had a good general approach to managing performance, with a focus on clarity of expectations, objectives, explanations and feedback: *'Performance is at the forefront. He is driven through the line on performance … . He monitors objectives daily, weekly and monthly.'* Several spoke about their engaging managers using performance management to motivate the team to achieve highly: *'She has very high expectations.'*

They were appreciative of their engaging managers' methodical, consistent and phased approach to managing poor performance, and all felt that the managers were good at using their interpersonal skills – empathy, understanding, communication, persuasion – when dealing with difficult people: *'They face it and have difficult conversations, in a supportive way. They evidence failure, get people to face up to it, coach to improve, but will get them out if they have to.'* They also valued their engaging managers' straightforward and honest approach the engaging managers took when breaking bad news to staff, while still retaining business focus: *'He took a fairly direct approach … He explained why. He empathised, but made it clear that we still had to get on.'*

Other aspects cited by senior managers was their engaging managers' ability to recognise and develop high performers, give credit and thanks, take immediate action when things went wrong, and motivate their teams to perform well: *'I think a lot of it is about empowerment and confidence building … so they feel generally more enriched and satisfied with their jobs, because they're allowed to get on and do them.'*

The views of the teams

In the opinion of the team members the key reason that their teams scored highly for engagement was the strength of their team spirit. This was due to such factors as being able to 'get along well', 'working well together', 'sharing ups and downs', and 'helping each other out'. The line manager's role in creating and maintaining engagement was seen as vital, particularly around his or her approachability, awareness of what was happening in the organisation and the team, and high levels of skill in two-way communication.

When asked how their manager had improved their performance, the most frequently mentioned action was praising and giving positive feedback when the team had performed well. The engaging managers were also willing to assist their teams by helping out when necessary: *'He will also pull up his sleeves and get involved in the frontline and I've always felt that staff appreciate that.'* The managers were seen as encouraging their team's performance because there was mutual respect, and team members were treated as adults. Managers were also perceived as valuing the support of their teams and improving performance by encouraging the ideas and suggestions of their staff: *'He will challenge them on the logic of what they are doing and keep probing and pushing then to come up with a new answer or new method themselves rather than hand it to them.'*

Other factors that positively affected team performance were that the manager was focused on strategic initiatives, had high standards and was not afraid to change things. Individuals also valued the coaching and mentoring they had received from their managers, their effective use of appraisals and one to ones , and their willingness to pass on knowledge. Much appreciated was the time the managers took to help staff personally with tasks, support them, and get to know them. Team members also felt they understood the wider context better, because their manager was clear about the contribution of individuals and the team, and that the team's high reputation was at least in part due to the manager 'talking them up' to the rest of the organisation.

Teams felt that managers were willing to support their development, for example by arranging off-the job training and giving opportunities to do challenging and interesting work. The fact that managers allowed them to make their own mistakes and learn from them was referred to several times: *'We have moved away from a*

blame culture. He would say, look, this went wrong and you won't feel worried. You could easily say 'I've made a mistake'.

There was a feeling among engaged teams that they were happy and enjoyed their work, and that there was a good atmosphere in comparison to other teams: *'You can almost see a visual difference between the teams. I think we are one of the brighter or chirpier places.'* An important feature of the teams was how open they were and able to discuss a wide range of topics: *'There's an openness, there was a very open discussion about how people behave in teams …. it doesn't happen elsewhere.'*

The importance of team members having autonomy and being able to have an input into what they were doing was stressed. Alongside this, however, was the need to feel personally supported by the manager when necessary: *'You don't feel like someone is watching over you like a hawk and keeps going "What's going on?" but you don't feel quite abandoned. I think it's the right way.'*

The team's view: the best things about working for their engaging manager
My manager …

'Lets me get on with the job'

'Is honest and open'

'Is supportive and encouraging'

'Listens to me, values me, involves me and respects us'

'Takes genuine interest in my development'

'Is not judgemental'

'Is enthusiastic and inspiring'

'Helps me achieve good work/life balance'

'Is knowledgeable'

'Is approachable'

'Trusts me and delegates well'

'Keeps things interesting'

'Has strategic vision'

Source: IES, 2009

Engaging and disengaging behaviours

Our engaging managers, their managers, and their teams, were all asked to describe engaging and disengaging managerial behaviours. Interestingly (perhaps worryingly), most people were more able to give examples of negative than positive behaviours, which suggests that the former stick in the mind and perhaps have a long-lasting and damaging impact.

Table 1: Behaviours of engaging managers: top answers

Behaviour	No. of comments
Communicates, makes clear what's expected	36
Listens, values and involves team	32
Supportive, backs team/you up	26
Target focused	22
Shows empathy	20
Clear strategic vision	19
Shows active interest in others	19
Good leadership skills	15
Respected	15

Source: IES 2009

Table 2: Behaviours of disengaging managers: top answers

Behaviour	No. of comments
Lacks empathy/interest in people	39
Fails to listen and communicate	26
Self-centred	22
Doesn't motivate or inspire	21
Blames others, doesn't take responsibility	18
Aggressive	16
Lacks awareness	16
Doesn't deliver	15

Source: IES 2009

Images of engaging managers

At the end of the focus group discussion, participants were asked to draw a picture that represented how they saw their manager. Several themes emerged, around two-way communication, team focus, high performance, supporting and protecting the team, dependability, seeing the big picture, and versatility. Interestingly, several people drew (smiling) devils, indicating that not all engaging managers toe the company line. The most popular picture of all, however, and a positive image with which to end this summary, was of a sun or a smiling face.

My manager is … a smiling sun
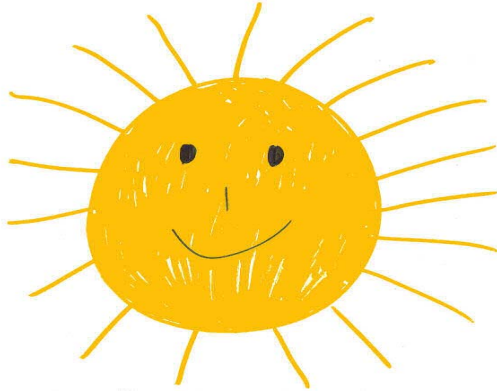
Source of funding

1 Introduction

Chapter Summary
■ IES embarked on this study of 'The Engaging Manager' because our previous research into employee engagement pointed to the importance of the employee-line manager relationship. ■ Our Engaging Manager research took place in seven organisations: ACCA, Centrica, Corus, HMRC, London Borough of Merton, Rolls-Royce and Sainsbury's. ■ We interviewed 25 engaging managers, their own managers, and their teams. ■ Our focus was on engaging *behaviours*, on the basis that these could be learnt (while disengaging behaviours could be un-learnt).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Previous research

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was an early entrant into the field of employee engagement research. We started our investigations in 2002, beginning by working with 46 organisations to define 'engagement', then moving on to develop an engagement measure for use within attitude surveys, and a diagnostic tool to identify engagement drivers. The results of the first phase of our research were published in 2004 (Robinson D, Perryman S, Hayday S, *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*, IES Report 408). In the second phase, we tested our engagement measure and diagnostic tool in a variety of sectors and settings, and identified the variations in engagement levels and drivers between different organisations and employee groups (in terms of job roles and biographical details). Our second phase report appeared in 2007 (Robinson D, Hooker H, Hayday S, *Engagement: The Continuing Story,* IES Report 447).

IES's engagement definition
'Engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to nurture, maintain and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.'

1.1.2 The line manager role

Throughout our early research, we were struck by a finding that appeared to be reasonably consistent, regardless of organisation, sector or employee group: the line manager relationship is crucial. The influence of the line manager on engagement levels is subtle and pervasive, in that it impacts on the extent to which employees feel valued, involved, interested in their jobs, communicated to, performance managed, developed and, when necessary, protected. Harassment from the line manager has a far more drastic and denting impact on engagement levels than harassment from clients, customers or colleagues.

The strength and consistency of the influence of the line manager on engagement levels led us to our latest research, which we have termed 'The Engaging Manager'. Our aim was to understand how 'engaging managers', that is people who inspire and engage their teams to perform well, behave in their dealings with people. We hope that the behaviours we have identified, even though they may come more naturally to some personality types than to others, can be learnt and incorporated into management training, development and assessment at all levels – from first time supervisors to senior leaders at Board level.

1.2 Methodology

We asked each participating organisation to identify a small number (we suggested four) of engaging managers on the basis of the engagement scores of their teams in the most recent employee attitude survey. In some cases, when the most recent survey had been run more than a year ago, the organisation used supplementary information (such as team performance and HR opinion) to identify managers for the research. All the managers identified were asked by their organisations if they were prepared to take part, and agreed to do so.

We then carried out interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide, with both the engaging managers and their own managers, whom we have termed 'senior managers' for the purpose of reporting our results. These interviews incorporated a repertory grid exercise, during which we asked interviewees to identify engaging and disengaging managers, and to describe and compare their behaviours. In

some cases, the senior manager interviews were conducted on the telephone due to problems with availability for face-to-face sessions; in these cases, a repertory grid exercise was not possible, so questions were asked instead about the nature of effective/engaging and ineffective/disengaging managerial behaviours.

Finally, we conducted focus groups, again using a semi-structured discussion guide, with as many members of the 'engaged teams' as possible, given normal absence and operational priorities. Focus groups participants all completed a standard IES engagement questionnaire, in addition to participating in the discussion. With one exception, the focus groups included a period of time for team members to consider their manager and describe him or her by means of descriptive words, a drawing, or a metaphor. In a minority of cases, the focus group contained a small number of individuals who did not report directly to the manager concerned, but knew him or her well due to frequent day-to-day contact. Two of the focus groups contained participants who were not physically present, but took part via a video link (two people in one group) or speaker telephone (one person).

Most of the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed; where this was not possible, detailed notes were taken and later written up. All interviewees and focus group participants were assured of confidentiality by IES researchers and were given the option not to take part, or to withdraw at any stage.

1.3 Terminology

When designing the questionnaire and discussion guides for this research, and later when planning the report structure, we considered whether to use the term 'manager' or 'leader'. The term 'leader' is now used in many contexts where 'manager' might have been used in the past, and there is a continuing debate about the difference between what a manager is and does, compared to the role of a leader. We decided, however, to opt for the terms 'manager' and 'senior manager' because we found that in the majority of our participating organisations, the term 'leader' was either not used at all, or was used only for very senior positions (such as the Chief Executive). In only one participating organisation was there routine reference to 'leaders', 'leadership skills', 'leadership training and development' *etc*.

1.4 Research participants

1.4.1 The organisations

Seven organisations took part in the research. They are described below, using information from their websites.

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

ACCA is the global body for professional accountants. It aims to offer business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to people of application, ability and ambition around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. ACCA's reputation is grounded in over 100 years of providing world-class accounting and finance qualifications.

ACCA supports its 131,500 members and 362,000 students in 170 countries, by providing services through a network of 80 offices and centres. Its global infrastructure means that exams and support are delivered at a local level, directly benefiting stakeholders wherever they are based. ACCA's global membership grew by around 9,000 last year, making 2008 the highest year of growth in the past five years. ACCA's focus is on professional values, ethics, and governance; it delivers services through 50 global accountancy partnerships, working closely with multinational and small entities to promote global standards and support. The organisation uses its expertise and experience to work with governments, donor agencies and professional bodies, to develop the global accountancy profession and to advance the public interest.

ACCA has around 830 employees, 600 of whom are based in the UK.

Centrica

Centrica is a top 30 FTSE100 company with growing energy businesses in the UK and North America. Centrica secures and supplies gas and electricity for millions of homes and businesses and offers a distinctive range of home energy solutions and low carbon products and services.

Centrica was demerged from the former British Gas plc in February 1997. Since then, the organisation has established and continued to invest in a successful energy and related home services business in the UK. Overseas it is building businesses in liberalising energy markets.

Centrica operates under the British Gas brand, supplying gas and electricity to residential and business customers. As well as energy, it offers millions of customers an increasing choice of home services. British Gas remains the largest residential supplier of gas and electricity in the UK as well as the largest domestic central heating installation and maintenance company. British Gas Business is the number one supplier of energy to the commercial sector in Britain.

Centrica employs 35,000 people.

Corus

Corus is Europe's second largest steel producer with annual revenues of around £12 billion and a crude steel production of over 20 million tonnes.

■ With innovation and continuous improvement at the heart of its business performance, Corus aims to create value by offering a differentiated product range supported by unrivalled customer service.

■ Corporate responsibility is integral to the way Corus does business and the objective is to be world class.

■ Corus is a subsidiary of Tata Steel.

■ Corus supplies a variety of innovative solutions to a broad range of markets. Its key market sectors are: aerospace, automotive, construction, consumer products, energy and power generation, engineering, packaging, rail, and security and defence.

Corus comprises three Divisions: Strip Products, Long Products, and Distribution and Building Systems. It has a global network of sales offices and service centres.

Corus employs around 40,000 people worldwide.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) was formed on the 18 April 2005, following the merger of Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise Departments.

■ HMRC collects and administers:

  □ **direct taxes:** Capital Gains Tax, Corporation Tax, Income Tax, Inheritance Tax, and National Insurance Contributions.

  □ **indirect taxes:** Excise Duties, Insurance Premium Tax, Petroleum Revenue Tax, Stamp Duty, Stamp Duty Land Tax, Stamp Duty Reserve Tax, and VAT.

■ HMRC pays and administers: Child Benefit, Child Trust Fund, and Tax Credits.

■ Finally, HMRC protects the public by enforcing and administering: border and frontier protection, environmental taxes, National Minimum Wage enforcement, and recovery of student loans.

HMRC is a very large government department, with 95,000 employees working in over 290 locations. Its annual revenue is £457 billion.

London Borough of Merton

Mitcham, Morden, Merton and Wimbledon merged to form the London Borough of Merton in 1965. The area of the borough is approximately 14.7 square miles. At the 2001 Census, the London Borough of Merton had a resident population of nearly 188,000, which represented an increase of almost 20,000 people over the 1991 Census. The population is growing, and is expected to reach 214,000 by 2020 according to government projections. A notable characteristic of the borough is the contrast between the more deprived wards in the east of the borough (Mitcham) and the more affluent wards in the west (Wimbledon, home of the Tennis Championships). Reducing these inequalities by bridging the gap between the east and west of the borough is the key priority. The council had a revenue budget of £240.4m in 2008/2009. Over 50 per cent of this was spent on education, and around another 30 per cent on social care.

Merton Council is made up of five departments: Chief Executive's Department; Corporate Services; Children, Schools and Families; Environment and Regeneration; and Community and Housing. Approximately 5,000 council employees provide a range of public services, from street cleaners and town planners to teachers and social workers.

Rolls-Royce

Rolls-Royce is a global business, providing integrated power systems for use on land, at sea and in the air. The Group has four businesses: civil aerospace, defence aerospace, marine, and energy. Rolls-Royce is one of the most well-known brands in the world, and its name is one of its most valuable assets. Rolls-Royce's strategy is to:

■ **address four global markets:** Rolls-Royce is a leading power systems company operating in the civil and defence aerospace, marine and energy markets.

■ **invest in technology, capability and infrastructure:** Over the past five years, Rolls-Royce has invested £3.5 billion in research and development. The company invests approximately £30 million annually on training and some £300 million a year on capital projects.

■ **develop a competitive portfolio of products and services:** Rolls-Royce has more than 50 current product programmes, and is are involved in many of the major future projects in the markets it serves.

■ **grow market share and installed product base:** Across the Group, the installed base of engines in service is expected throughout their long product lives to generate attractive returns over several decades.

■ **add value for our customers through the provision of product-related services:** Rolls-Royce seeks to add value for its customers with aftermarket services that will enhance the performance and reliability of its products.

At the end of 2008, Rolls-Royce employed 38,900 permanent staff in over 50 countries.

Sainsbury's

J Sainsbury plc consists of Sainsbury's – a chain of 504 supermarkets and 319 convenience stores – and Sainsbury's Bank.

Sainsbury's Supermarkets is the UK's longest-standing major food retailing chain, having opened its first store in 1869. The company is currently celebrating its 140th anniversary. The Sainsbury's brand is built upon a heritage of providing customers with healthy, safe, fresh and tasty food. Today it differentiates itself by offering a broad range of great quality products at fair prices with particular emphasis on fresh food, a strong ethical approach to business and continuous leadership and innovation.

Products are improved and developed to ensure the company leads in terms of the ingredients used and integrity of sourcing. A large Sainsbury's store offers around 30,000 products and an increasing number of stores also offer complementary non-food products and services. 147 stores also operate an internet-based home delivery shopping service.

The values of the Sainsbury's brand incorporate the five values that are at the core of the business:

■ the best for food and health

■ sourcing with integrity

■ respect for our environment

■ making a positive difference to our community

■ a great place to work.

These principles define and direct all the company's activities. Sainsbury's has 151,000 employees.

1.4.2 The managers, senior managers and teams

In total, 25 'engaging managers' participated in our research. They were distributed across the participating organisations as follows:

- Corus provided two managers

- ACCA and Centrica each provided three managers

- London Borough of Merton, Rolls-Royce and Sainsbury's all provided four managers

- HMRC provided five managers.

We interviewed 22 senior managers:

- One from ACCA (who managed all three of the 'engaging managers')

- Two from Corus

- Three from Centrica

- Four from each of London Borough of Merton, Rolls-Royce, Sainsbury's and HMRC (where one of the senior managers had two of the 'engaging managers' as direct reports).

We conducted 25 focus groups (one for each engaging manager), containing 154 people in total. The participants were distributed in the following way:

- ACCA: 25

- Centrica: 15

- Corus: 13

- HMRC: 27

- London Borough of Merton: 17

- Rolls-Royce: 29

- Sainsbury's: 28.

1.5 The report

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction

- Chapter 2: The Engaging Manager Viewpoint

- Chapter 3: A High-Level Perspective: Senior Managers' Views

- Chapter 4: The Engaged Teams

- Chapter 5: Perceptions of Engaging Managers

■ Chapter 6: A Classification of Engaging Managers

■ Chapter 7: Conclusions.

1.6 Research funding

2 The Engaging Manager Viewpoint

Chapter Summary
■ Our 25 engaging managers were very different in terms of their role, time in post, team size, span of control, experience, and career aspirations. They also had very varied experiences of formal management training and development. There is no 'typical' engaging manager. ■ The majority had been with their organisation for a considerable time, and were good internal networkers. ■ All our managers had learned a lot about engaging management by observing themselves and others and adopting the positive behaviours they saw, while dropping the negative. ■ Things that came particularly easily to our engaging managers were communicating with their teams and getting to know people. They all tended to adopt an informal coaching style of management. ■ They found managing conflict or poor performance harder, but did not shirk these difficult tasks, and tackled problems straight away. They were also adept at breaking bad news. ■ Although they all had demanding jobs, our managers tried hard not to let day-to-day demands get in the way of managing their people. ■ The engaging managers all had a strong performance focus, and it soon became apparent that they all led high-performing teams. ■ Most, but not all, felt they could be equally engaging in a different part of the organisation, or in another organisation.

2.1 Job roles

The jobs and roles of our 25 engaging managers were many and varied. Most were middle or senior managers with previous experience of managing people, although we had one first line, first time manager in the group. The types of jobs people had are described below in broad terms:

- ACCA: senior roles in business management, business development, and marketing.

- Centrica: different roles in customer service and management.

- Corus: supply chain and operations/logistics management.

- HMRC: a wide variety of roles in operations management, compliance management, tax return assessment, criminal investigation and debt recovery.

- London Borough of Merton: management of specific services (housing needs, transport, facilities), and the co-ordination of business and service planning.

- Rolls-Royce: the management of activities relating to operational purchasing, manufacturing engineering and production planning and control.

- Sainsbury's: store management.

2.2 Time in post and with organisation

Our managers had been in their current positions for a mean average time of 3.3 years, although this varied considerably; the range was from less than a year to 20 years. Only two managers, however, had been in their current posts for ten or more years. The majority had been with their organisations, however, for a considerable time: only three had less than five years service, with another eight having more than five, but less than ten, years service. The mean average length of service was 15.9 years, and the range was from two to 34 years.

2.3 Team sizes

The size of the teams managed by the engaging managers varied considerably. In terms of direct reports, the range was between three and 15, with a mean average of 7.5. When looking at overall responsibility for people, the scope varied even more. The range was between four people, in a strategic, high level team, to over 5,000, in a huge operational set-up. Approximately two-thirds of engaging managers had overall responsibility for up to 100 people, with the remaining third having responsibility for over 100 – in two cases, over 1,000.

2.4 Experience in managing people

The majority of engaging managers had managed people before taking up their existing roles, either in previous roles with the same organisation or in previous organisations. In some cases, their experience was extensive, covering several different teams, functions and organisations. However, for three people, their current job was their first experience of having to manage people fully (*ie* being

responsible for such aspects as performance management, not just day-to-day supervision).

2.5 Next career step

Although all of our engaging managers were happy in their current posts, and eight expressed a wish to stay where they were for the immediate future at least (in one case until retirement), the majority wanted to move upwards at some stage in the future. Ten were hoping for promotion within their current organisation, a further four would ideally like promotion but recognised they might have to move to another organisation to achieve this, and one knew that a move elsewhere would be necessary.

2.6 Training and development

Only two of our managers had received no formal training or development, *ie* had not been on courses or programmes, and had no mentor or coach. A further one had a mentor, but had not been on a formal training or development programme. The majority had experienced a variety of training and development inputs over the years: two had been on internal courses and a programme leading to an external qualification, eight had been on various training courses and/or development programmes, and 12 had been on various courses and/or programmes, and also had experience of a formal mentor or coach.

2.7 Networking

The majority of our engaging managers considered themselves to be good internal networkers, and had built up many contacts within their organisation over the years. These were both formal (for example, membership of a variety of multi-disciplinary or interest groups, often multi-locational) and informal. The external networking picture was very varied, however. Some of the managers belonged to professional organisations, such as the Institute of Operations Management and the Chartered Institute of Marketing; however, most of these did not play a particularly active role. A few mentioned community roles, such as being a school governor, running sporting teams or being involved with groups such as the Scouts, but again these were in a minority. Only a few were really busy external networkers, in the sense of participating actively in external, work- or profession-related groups: examples included the Economist Intelligence Unit Corporate Network, chairing a business club, and continuing to meet people from learning groups from past development programmes:

'I'm still part of just about every learning session we've been part of, so yes, I still see people and we sit down and talk about things … groups I've been part of for ages and ages and ages. We get quite a bit out of each other.'

2.8 Role models

Only one engaging manager did not have anyone in mind as a role model, while two described just one person on whom they had modelled themselves. By far the most frequent response was that more than one person had been a role model, in different ways and for different reasons. A few managers mentioned well-known people, such as Alex Ferguson; two said their mothers had been excellent role models, and another cited a spouse as a role model. The large majority, however, cited managers they had known, or knew now, in their existing and/or previous organisations. A very frequent response was that the managers had taken the 'good bits' from some, and tried to avoid the 'bad bits' of others, as the following examples illustrate:

'I don't think a particular role model; I have taken elements of what I consider to be good management style from other people.'

'I've definitely observed and taken what I think would be good practice.'

'… there were some examples of how it shouldn't be done….the bosses who cold be autocratic; who could be a bit of a bully…and secretive and introspective, and I certainly hope I've avoided those mistakes, because certainly it's not the best way to manage staff.'

'I wouldn't say anyone in particular … I remember just sitting back and just maybe taking aspects from different people's behaviour; I like how that person does this but I think how this person acts I wouldn't really. Just taking bits from other people, the negative bits, and putting them aside and trying to concentrate on what people do well.'

'I think my style is more looking at managers I've worked with and for, and stealing the bits that work for me and losing the bits that don't.'

2.9 Managing teams: easier and more difficult aspects

2.9.1 What's relatively easy

Only one manager felt that everything about managing people was fairly easy. By contrast, three thought that it was never, or rarely, easy:

'It's never easy … anybody who falls into that trap, I think they've made a mistake.'

'I'm not sure I find any of it relatively easy. I think it's one of the hardest jobs there is.'

'I have to say I don't particularly enjoy managing people.'

The most frequently cited aspect of ease with managing people was communicating with them and getting to know them, expressed in different ways: talking, chatting, engaging with people on a daily basis, interaction, talking informally, building relationships and rapport, being friendly, being visible, showing empathy, persuading, listening (to get underneath the issues and establish what the real problems are), and finding out what motivates people.

Another frequent theme was finding it relatively easy to encourage and develop people: instilling confidence and belief, encouraging people to learn and develop, coaching people and bringing out the best in them, bringing new people in and training them, unlocking people's ability, inspiring people and pulling ideas out of them, and creating/building a team.

Several managers mentioned feeling at ease with performance management in various guises: setting or talking about expectations, giving and receiving feedback, managing poor performance, and having difficult conversations.

Other aspects, each mentioned by just one manager, were problem solving, making connections ('joining the dots'), systematising and organising, being visionary, and sharing ideas and planning with others.

2.9.2 What's more difficult

There was less agreement about what was difficult about managing people. Managing conflict within the team was cited by some managers as difficult, particularly when there were extremes of personality. Some managers found managing poor performance, or lack of competency, difficult, especially when they had to resort to formal procedures.

Other difficulties, each mentioned only once or twice, were: selling the right way to do things to people; having to spend time dealing with certain types of people (prima donnas, or those who were draining of energy); unlocking or changing negative perceptions and attitudes, including those of people outside the team; having to persuade people to do things the manager did not necessarily believe in; having to withhold information from people, even when they knew this was necessary; coaching rather than telling, or equipping others to do things; letting things go, so that others could deal with them, or suppressing 'control freak' tendencies; managing the structure of the day and juggling work commitments; having to cope with a slower than ideal pace when trying to get things done; pure

administration; seeing things right through to conclusion; and delivering when not supported by one's own manager (without letting the team know this).

2.10 Barriers and distractions

A minority of our engaging managers felt that nothing in the organisation prevented them from being people-focused, and that there were no events occurring within the workplace to distract them:

> *'No, in fact, I think, as the years go by, we are more and more people-focused.'*

> *'I can't really think of anything. Because the main bulk is to spend with your team, so I think that's where I spend the majority of my time.'*

> *'Nothing.[This organisation] is very people-focused.'*

Most, however, cited things to do with the day-to-day demands of tasks, emails, requests for information, and peaks and troughs of activity:

> *'[My function] is very cyclical, it has peaks and troughs. I may have to manage my work and be less responsive to people sometimes.'*

> *'I think it's just the day-to-day stuff … it's the day-to-day admin that you can just get bogged down with, so I tend to just have a reality check every so often, and say, okay, I'm going to have some people time now.'*

> *'We're very task-oriented … and I would say that there is a disregard for recognising that we're a social machine ….'*

> *'Yes, targets, the constant pressure of meeting those targets, and the focus being so much on outcomes.'*

> *'Well, we are a delivery-focused manufacturing part of the organisation … delivery is king … so unfortunately that means that issues relating to output and … cost will always prioritise over … the softer side of the business, the people side.'*

Some mentioned specific events that took them away from their teams:

> *'Often events cause pressures, eg budget-setting, or if there's a crisis.'*

> *'We spend a lot of time … on new initiatives and relaunching and just coming up with new concepts and suchlike.'*

2.11 Approaches to managing performance

2.11.1 General approach

Our engaging managers, when asked about their general approach to managing performance, answered the question in very different ways. Some referred immediately to the formal system of performance management within their organisations, and said they were happy to use it. This was particularly noticeable in organisations that had a very detailed, day-to-day, performance focus, involving frequent measurement and internal publishing of results. Most thought their systems were sound, and were pleased to have a framework to fall back on if they found it necessary to tackle poor performers or difficult individuals. However, a small number felt that the formal systems cramped their personal style.

A very strong theme among our managers was the belief that they should be clear about goals and expectations:

> *'I ensure that people understand what is expected of them. I try to encourage people to think of the wider objectives of [the organisation] and how they fit in.'*

> *'If I want to achieve X, Y or Z they need to know what it is I want from them to start off with. I like to talk to them about what the goals are and how we are going to get there … '*

> *'… for me, it's important that from day one … they know exactly what's expected of them, so they know what they need to deliver.'*

Several managers spoke about the need to meet often with their team members, on an individual basis, and/or to give feedback frequently:

> *'… one of the things I do is, every week I have a one-to-one session with people who work for me. And it's half an hour, it's the opportunity to talk things over with people. I say to people it's your time with me. But, to be honest, it's not just that; it's me getting to talk to them.'*

> *'I think it's regular dialogue. I put in my diary every fortnight all the people that I manage individually. I speak to them at least … once a fortnight for an extended period of time, just one to one and just about them and the work they're doing and what's going on.'*

> *'Managing performance is a daily activity. I give praise if due. I tackle stuff immediately if it isn't right.'*

The importance of adopting an encouraging, informal, coaching style was referred to by several managers, as was the need to see and respect people as individuals:

'I take a supportive, coaching approach, with regular reviews to ensure that we all have integrity with the vision … I think about future development for the organisation and the individual.'

'I've developed, over the years … more of a coaching style to performance management... generally encouraging people to set their own targets and their own objectives.'

'I do it in a kind of light hearted way; I don't make it formal.'

'I treat people the way I want them to treat me.'

'… we try and build on successes rather than reflection on disasters.'

'… be focused, be realistic, explain, sell the benefits of performance and what it means to the individual as opposed to the organisation ….'

2.11.2 Managing high performers

All our engaging managers felt that, within their high performing teams, they had individuals who were particularly talented. There was no single, consistent approach to managing these individuals. Some managers did not treat them any differently from the rest of the team, apart from perhaps giving them additional recognition and praise; in a small number of cases, this was at least in part due to the fact that there were few career opportunities available for these individuals within the organisation. Others, however, saw it as their responsibility to give high performers additional opportunities, even if it meant they might move on:

'Well, for a start, I make sure they know it. I make sure that they are getting the right opportunities … I get them onto the [organisational] talent pool ….'

'Well, accept that they are not going to be around probably, and also that … we do not have the resources to offer them things that might keep them longer.'

'I give additional opportunities and exposure, such as new projects and trips abroad. Middling people wouldn't get the interesting projects.'

'I throw up opportunities for them to grab. I give them lots of rope. I push them if necessary – I push them hard and ensure they have high exposure …. There isn't much space for mistakes, however, so I have to be careful. I give them exposure in a safe environment first.'

2.11.3 Managing poor performers

It was noticeable that, even if they did not like tackling poor performance, all of our managers were willing to do so, usually as soon as it occurred. Several referred to

the need to be firm and clear about the standards they expected, and to take action quickly but fairly – if necessary, to get tough and/or go to formal procedures:

'Find out what the issue is, really. Is it something to do with the organisation? … Don't jump to the obvious conclusion that it's them that's causing the dip …. Don't panic, because if you do, it will just panic them.'

'We sit down and have a conversation of where they are at, where they need to be and what is stopping them from getting there, what they can do, what we can do or any barriers that are in the way of them achieving.'

'I don't tolerate people slacking off, not doing the job to the best of their ability. So, I'm always pushing and striving. And, because we are a strong team and I think the team knows that, it spurs them on. Because people don't really want to get left behind.'

'I deal with it; it's not an issue for me. I don't feel comfortable doing it and I wouldn't suggest for one moment that many managers would. I try and use a light touch initially and just point out to people that their performance isn't up to par, ask them if there are any issues or problems, give them the opportunity to improve, and also find out if there are any mitigating circumstances …. If there are not any improvements then obviously you just have to go through the usual HR procedures.'

'I tackle things straight away. I explain why things aren't right and work with people to make it better. I don't allow things to fester. I'll go to dismissal if necessary.'

'We tried cuddling, we tried showing them. And, in the end, I got them in the room and I gave both of them, for want of a better phrase, a bollocking.'

2.11.4 Managing difficult individuals

Many of our managers had individuals within the team who were not necessarily poor performers but whose behaviour and/or attitudes were, in some way, causing a problem. The general consensus was that it was important to try to understand these individuals, and get them 'on side' if at all possible, but that it was also essential to tackle any behaviour that was having a negative impact on the team. Again, our managers were prepared to tackle the situation immediately and have difficult conversations if necessary:

'Probably the most difficult group of individuals to manage; probably, high performing and, probably, not behaving in a way that we'd like them to behave … my view is … that we make the same early intervention and have an improvement

plan to get that person where we want to get them. I like mavericks …. But inappropriate behaviours can be very disruptive … and … demoralising.'

'… certain individuals like that, I try and use to lever the rest of the team … because I've found that normally the more difficult ones are also the more vocal ones … the ones who are more influential within the team, so if you can get them on your side, you can also then turn the performance of the team or the view of the team.'

'With some difficult people, it is about … letting them know when they're being difficult and sitting down and talking them through … and making sure that I've got all the evidence up my sleeve to be able to have that conversation in a very robust way.'

'I put huge store by the team. I try to get people to be part of the team. I reinforce good behaviour. Like poor performance, I tackle it immediately.'

'I have a lot of those – lots of strong characters – the job attracts those! It's about embracing diversity, understanding those individuals, giving them appropriate tasks.'

'I just try and find common ground with people. Once you build a rapport with them you can start to understand what makes them tick. It's very rare people come to work to do a bad job.'

'We have a lot of stroppy conversations with hunchback shoulders and arms crossed, because they do not believe it is really happening to them. But in order to move it forward one has to have that open and honest conversation to start off with to be able to then move it forward.'

2.11.5 Improving the team's performance

The managers in our sample were put forward by their organisations because their teams had high engagement scores. However, it soon became apparent that they were also high performing managers with high performing teams. Several of the managers were able to quote examples of how they had helped their teams to improve their performance. Some organisations had very detailed performance measures, with immediate feedback, due to the nature of their activity – manufacturing (Corus and Rolls-Royce), retail (Sainsbury's) and customer care/ service (Centrica). All of these were able to cite examples of the performance measures that had improved in recent years or months. Managers from the other organisations had less frequent feedback of performance statistics, but were all able to quote key indicators that had improved. Two of the teams from the London Borough of Merton had won the 'team of the year' award in recent years,

and two members of two teams had been recognised as 'employee of the year'. One of the HMRC managers had won a 'civil servant of the year' award.

Some examples of performance improvement are given below:

> '… we've had positive comments from outside the team, staff opinions in the survey have gone up, my own manager has remarked that individuals are doing better, and overall [the organisation] has more students and more members in the UK.'

> '… call handing performance … in May was something like 134 seconds was the wrap up time, and in December … it was down to 94 seconds … and that was really just talking to the managers every day about it. Find out why they weren't doing it and what we could do to improve performance, and to reduce it by 40 seconds is a significant impact on how many calls we handle.'

> 'I set a performance challenge: to improve productivity by between 20 and 30 per cent; to improve customer satisfaction with service to 90 per cent; to improve staff satisfaction to 60 per cent. At the end of the year, productivity had increased between 20 and 44 per cent in the different areas, customer service was 96 per cent in [X] Office, 85 per cent in [Y] Office, and staff satisfaction was in the low 40s per cent – ahead of the rest of [the organisation], but still work to be done.'

> 'The big things for me is homelessness and how many people we have in temporary accommodation. I am really passionate about that, that we have hit that level and we don't want to lose that. So therefore the message is really clear and the staff do actually understand that.'

> 'As a team we talk about performance. We have what we call 'scores on the doors', which means how much work is outstanding …. It is about having that conversation, having that awareness of where we are at, where we need to be and how we are going to get there that moves it on as a team. Then that motivates other people …. We have a bit of banter. We have a little bit of inter-team competition.'

> 'We get fantastic results, based on the number of organised crime groups that are dismantled or disrupted. The teams have the greatest success of any law enforcement agencies ….'

> 'I managed to increase yield by about 20 per cent, increase coverage by probably around 15 per cent maybe, reduced the amount of time that people were waiting by about a week.'

2.12 Delivering bad news

All of our managers had, at some point in their managerial careers, had to deliver bad news. Examples were many and varied, and included: telling people that their budgets were to be cut; breaking the news that a bonus or promotion would not

happen; visiting a location to tell all staff who worked there that their office was to be shut down, or transferred elsewhere; telling individuals or groups that they were to be dismissed or made redundant; and communicating the introduction of new, often initially unpopular, working practices.

The consensus among our managers was that honesty and as much openness as possible was essential, along with empathy and a demonstration that the manager had an understanding of the possible impact on staff. Giving time to people to absorb the news was cited several times, as was the need to be serious and calm when delivering bad news. The environment was also raised by some managers, *eg* breaking bad news to individuals on a one-to-one basis, in a quiet area away from the main workplace. Our managers also stressed the importance of doing one's homework and being armed with as much information and background as possible. Finally, the importance of following proper procedures (*eg* in a dismissal situation) was referred to by several managers.

> *'I tell it as it is … I try and articulate what it means to them as individuals.'*

> *'People would rather have bad news when there's bad news to give, rather than have managers string them along. But, clearly, there is a way, in terms of empathy, of delivering certain messages.'*

> *'… before you deliver the news, you have to try and think about what it might mean to that individual.'*

> *'As straightforwardly as I possibly can … I make absolutely certain that I know the full background of whatever news I'm delivering.'*

> *'I come straight out with it. There's no point trying to soften the blow, you need to be open and frank.'*

> *'I go in fully armed … I go in anticipating what they are going to say back to me so that I have got some answers. But at the same time, if I do not know, I will tell them I do not know what the answer is, and I will find out …. They will get an honest answer.'*

> *'I think honesty is the only way to do it. There's no point trying to sugar-coat things. Honesty, factual and let people understand the circumstances around any decision that's been made.'*

2.13 Context dependency of skills

The majority of our managers felt confident that they would be able to transfer their management/leadership skills effectively to a different position within their organisation, or to a different organisation, although it might take a bit of

familiarisation time. This was particularly marked among managers who had experienced several different changes of role and/or organisation in the past:

> *'If I'm honest, yeah. I'm quite a modest person, but I'm quite confident in what I've learnt. The two jobs I did in [my previous company], you could not have picked more diametrically opposed roles …. So, I'd like to think, with a bit of time, yes; because, for me, managing people isn't job function specific.'*

> *'I think leadership's behaviour drive, and therefore whether I was managing round things or square things, low volume or high volume, consumer or engineering goods, I think I would apply the same behaviours and styles that I do today.'*

> *'I think of people, yes. The difficulty would be around the visioning and purpose bit … but the overall mechanics of being a resource manager and a people leader, I can probably take anywhere, yeah, small teams or big teams.'*

> *'I think if you went somewhere you'd need to research or try and understand what it is that the staff are doing … you can transfer management skills. but obviously it is easier when you know the work, or the goal you are working to … it may take you slightly longer to achieve moving the team from being an average performance to a high performance team.'*

> *'I wouldn't mind moving in my final years into an HR role. I'd try anything.'*

> *'Yes, I think my career bears this out. I could go elsewhere [in this organisation] and would feel confident in any industry. Radical change is not as fearful as it would seem. The principles are the same, wherever you go.'*

> *'In a people environment, I could be just as effective. I could take on anything that needs trialling now, such a corporate social responsibility and health and safety – things that get people involved. Also things to do with ensuring people have the right behaviours and attitudes. I'm willing and able to take on another big challenge.'*

A few managers expressed caveats: it would have to be a similar type of job (*eg* operational rather than strategic/policy); the jobs that people did would need to be interesting to the manager; the manager would have to be comfortable with the culture and believe in what the organisation stood for. A small number, however, felt that their success in their current role depended a lot on knowledge built up over the years, so they would only feel comfortable transferring to a similar position within another organisation in the same sector:

> *'It would depend on the role and the organisation. A lot of technical expertise is needed, and it's hands-on delivery of projects, so I wouldn't want to go to another technical area as I'd have to learn from scratch. In another generic area, I'd be OK.'*

'I could emulate things if I had a similar kind of job, wherever it was. I might find it difficult if I had to manage people doing repetitive jobs, as I've never done this.'

'Yes, for example my previous role was very different. It would depend on the culture – I wouldn't thrive in a very aggressive culture. I would always try to champion the team's cause.'

'I've asked myself this and have wondered if I'm just a one-trick pony. A lot of attributes are general but I'd need development if I went to a different environment. There could be areas outside where I'd get frustrated, eg if I couldn't behave as I would wish …. Also I'd need to be passionate and interested in the job. So yes and no really.'

'Yes. But it would take quite a bit of time …. Obviously, if I totally hated the way they did things, I'd have to leave … because there is something very important to me about ethical leadership and doing what you think is right.'

3 A High-Level Perspective: Senior Managers' Views

Chapter Summary
■ The people who managed our engaging managers were mostly very senior, and had been with their organisations fro a considerable time.
■ These senior managers had seen their engaging managers develop over time, especially with regard to confidence, strategic thinking and readiness to tackle difficult problems.
■ They felt their engaging managers were particularly good at communicating with, and motivating, their teams.
■ They valued the performance focus of their engaging managers very highly, especially their clarity in setting expectations and giving feedback. The engaging managers' ability to manage high performers, poor performers and difficult individuals was appreciated.
■ Breaking bad news with openness and integrity, while still managing to communicate the big picture, was another aspect that senior managers valued highly.

3.1 Job roles

As our engaging managers were mostly in middling or senior posts, their own line managers, whom we have termed 'senior managers', were almost all in high level positions within their organisations. One was a Chief Executive, another a Vice President, and a third a very senior civil servant. They typically had responsibility for a function or business, or a clearly defined part of a function or business, and in some cases their span of control was very wide – from 50 people to well over 6,000. Three had responsibility for between 50 and 100, while at the other end of the scale, three had well over 500 staff and a further two had several thousand each. Some had operational roles and were very performance-driven, while others saw their primary role as being strategic.

On average (mean), the senior managers had 8.5 direct reports, and had been in their current roles for just over two years. Most were long servers within their organisation, however. Only two had fewer than five years service, and a further two between five and ten years. Six had been with their organisations for over 20 years, and four of those had 30 or more years service.

3.2 Development of the engaging manager over time

The engaging managers were mostly well known to the senior managers; some had known them well, or had even managed them, in previous roles. Only three had known the engaging manager for less than a year. The average (mean) length of time that the senior manager had known the engaging manager well was three years, although this masks a wide range of between one month and 11 years.

Most of the senior managers felt they were fairly involved in developing the engaging manager's skills. Typically, they recommended or facilitated entry onto courses or programmes, and reviewed training and development needs at one-to-ones and/or performance reviews. Many also said that they acted as the engaging manager's coach or mentor. Coaching and mentoring was mentioned on several occasions in terms of support with difficult areas, notably managing poor performance.

The majority of senior managers had seen changes in the engaging manager's style over time; the few who had not either had not known the engaging manager long enough, or felt that he/she was already mature and very competent when they took on the line management role. A frequent comment was that the engaging manager had gained confidence over time:

> *'Really taking the lead on certain things, is happy to challenge in certain areas, is happy to come up with possible solutions that she'll discuss with me; very confident individual. I've seen quite a significant difference in her ….'*

> *'… she's become much more assured and confident in terms of talking with large groups of people.'*

> *'I've seen his confidence grow in particular and, with that, his attitude to the job, his professionalism.'*

> *'As their confidence has increased, so has their capability.'*

> *'… he's more confident. He would ask a lot more questions early on than he does now.'*

> *'… he's grown much more into his role, and he understands his team better, he understands how to get the most out of his team, as his confidence in being a manager has grown, and we have had some really excellent moments along the way … '*

'Yes, he's becoming certainly more participative in my leadership team, which is obviously borne out of a level of confidence that he's getting from his own team.'

Another theme was increased self-awareness and a consequent modification of behaviour over time:

'[She] started off as very, very black and white, this is the right way to do it, and this is my way. She has come on in leaps and bounds … she's learnt to adapt her style to accommodate people's learning patterns and abilities, and then she can use that to see how she wants to spend time with regard to who needs more support than others.'

'I've seen [him] become more self aware, and by that I mean more able to land messages with a wider audience because he's more in tune with his own impact, both verbally and not verbally.'

'She has gone from being a manager who was, in the simplest terms, quite black and white with things …. She has not always been the most tolerant of managers …. I think we can all blow off when something is not going right, but it's the way you go back and deal with it. She is learning all the time with that, definitely.'

A few senior managers spoke of how the engaging manager's initial reluctance to tackle poor performance and difficult behaviour within the team had improved:

'[He] is very popular and approachable. He's learning very gradually to be a bit more hard-headed.'

'… previously [his team] saw him carrying and not facing into conflict, and carrying poor performers … his team have more respect for him because not only does he recognise success, and he's always had that ability, but he's also faced into some of the challenges he'd had … around poor performance.'

Another aspect, mentioned by a few senior managers, was the engaging manager's shift away from a task focus:

'[They] are developing into general management positions, away from a task/section focus.'

'He's changed in line with the roles he's had. In a small team, he was more focused on tasks. As his team grows, he's getting a balance, as he's reliant on people in the team; this gives him the opportunity to look further afield.'

'Initially, he wasn't a people manager; he was a computer systems person, working alone. He has become a people manager and is able to manage people. He is now proficient, experienced and relaxed.'

3.3 The engaging manager and teams: easier and more difficult aspects of management

3.3.1 What engaging managers find relatively easy

The aspect mentioned most frequently by senior managers, when considering what engaging managers found relatively easy when managing their teams, was communicating with people. This was expressed in various ways: talking to people; having open discussions; being open and honest; building rapport; interacting with people; getting across messages, to everyone, in an accessible way; and being easy with people, regardless of who they were.

Another aspect, cited by many, was around the theme of finding it easy to motivate and involve the team, thus enabling people to give their best. This was described as: being a natural leader; making time for people; enthusing the team; setting an example; involving people in decision-making; managing people well; making people feel valued; treating people like grown-ups or partners; motivating the team; getting the trust of the team; and absorbing pressures from above or from clients, to enable the team to get on with delivering.

Some senior managers felt that their engaging managers had a facility for directing and organising work: giving direction and setting objectives; structuring work; action planning; delegating appropriately; and being clear about priorities.

Sharing and passing on knowledge was mentioned by some as something their engaging managers found easy: imparting expertise; doing the job and showing others how to do it; demonstrating subject expertise; and having job knowledge.

A few senior managers cited things around development of the team: developing people; supporting development; and giving people job enrichment.

Two senior managers felt that performance management, even when it involved difficult conversations, was something their engaging manager found relatively easy: dealing with poor performance; and giving feedback, both positive and negative.

3.3.2 What is more difficult for engaging managers

Although some of our engaging managers believed themselves to be relatively good at tackling poor performers or tricky individuals, several senior managers believed this was an area of difficulty. They expressed it as: the disciplinary side; managing poor performance; addressing performance issues; managing awkward or difficult people; and managing conflict within the team.

Some engaging managers were perceived to have difficulties with the demands and slow pace of day-to-day administration: paperwork; writing reports and submitting returns; coping with bureaucracy.

Others, according to senior managers, had problems with complexity: strategic stuff; dealing with abstract, less concrete, issues; and dealing with the complexities of a large organisation.

Difficulties mentioned only once or twice by senior managers were: letting things go (*ie* being too hands-on); saying no to people (*ie* wanting to be liked); managing the clash between functional and organisational demands and priorities; failing to carry everyone due to over-enthusiasm; accepting that not everyone was equally hard working and motivated; making decisions about the best use of resources; being confident about strengths; and maintaining constantly high levels of performance.

3.4 The engaging manager's barriers to being people focused

Around half of the senior managers (*ie* considerably more than the engaging managers) did not think there were any barriers preventing their engaging managers from being people focused. Some expanded on their answers:

'[This company] has a very strong ethos around people management and communication. In the short term, there might be peaks of workload, but this won't prevent him from being people-focused.'

'No, [she] is a big believer in managing her managers, and they manage the team, and her role in that is to interact with the agents that work for her, but not to do the team managers' jobs for them ….'

'There are certainly pressures that come to bear at the end of the year … but … that's not an excuse to change, that's just an excuse to focus even more on the things that are correct to do.'

'No, quite the reverse, he has a huge amount of scope to be a people-focused person for the majority of his time.'

The other half gave various reasons why the engaging managers might sometimes be distracted from their people management roles. The most frequently-cited barrier was the number of tasks that managers had to do, which took up a lot of time: these were expressed as lack of headroom, everyday activity, workloads, administration, and volume of work. In some cases, senior managers felt that the engaging managers' workload pressures were being exacerbated by efficiency savings, budget cuts or lack of resources, which meant that the work had to be done with fewer people. Also cited were excessive amounts of energy going into

fire-fighting and problem-solving, confusion caused by inconsistent steers from senior management, too many goals, the cyclical nature of work, a degree of lack of confidence (meaning that time was taken up worrying or in checking decisions), and, in local government, politics leading to policy changes.

'Distractions of tasks and business admin ….'

'There's a lot of doing rather than managing.'

'I'd say every day. It is absolutely every day that things are thrown at you.'

'Probably the thing which is constraining all of us is headroom and time because people management … requires headroom and time. I think we should spend much more time with our people.'

'Constraints and boundaries, especially with budgets, eg he can't always send people on courses.'

'Yes – lack of resources (people and money). Also political dynamics: things can change a lot in local government, eg policy changes.'

'… annual efficiency savings, which lead to cuts in posts and budgets.'

'I would say it is inconsistent management steers … it could be one hour it's this, the next hour it could be that, he doesn't become so engaged, either with his team or the individuals, out of frustration I think.'

'… it's too many goals and too complex an organisation. [This] is a problem-fighting organisation in certain areas.'

'… it is probably a confidence issue … she'll get fazed … quite easily.'

3.5 The engaging manager's management of performance

3.5.1 General approach

All of the senior managers felt their engaging managers had a good general approach to managing performance. A major theme was clarity of expectations, objectives, explanations and feedback:

'He likes to have it quite clear, what needs to be done … He likes a very clear framework of expectations ….'

'Fairly rigorous, I think, quite insistent …. A very good focus on proper discussion with those who work through him, and proper explanation in a timely fashion about what's happening ….'

'He's very clear about targets and what's needed, and is focused on achieving these.'

'I think, generally, she will be very clear in terms of who's performing where, what they need to do in order to get there.'

'He has a very methodical and relaxed approach. He will set the parameters out to the individuals of what the minimums are that they are expected to achieve.'

'It's very good, very methodical and he's got his finger on the pulse, and if he says he's going to do something, he does it.'

'He is now much better at "telling it as it is".'

Fairness and consistency were specifically mentioned:

'She is quite a stickler for consistency.'

'… conscientious, equitable ….'

Several senior managers said that their engaging managers followed their organisation's performance management system, and appeared to approve of that approach. In general, this mirrors the responses of our engaging managers, many of whom found their formal system to be sound and reassuring:

'We've got this robust process in place … and she does follow that. She doesn't work any differently to how I would expect a manager to work, and it's not about her going above and beyond. She will follow the process to the letter, which is what it's there for.'

'I think he's following the [organisation's] system … to manage the individual.'

References to being performance-driven were fairly frequent:

'Performance is at the forefront. He is driven through the line on performance … [He] meets with his team every day … to review the previous day and discuss the rest of the week. He monitors objectives daily, weekly and monthly.'

'Very, very focused …. Because he sees the results of the business as being his main driver.'

Several senior managers also spoke about their engaging managers using performance management to motivate the team to achieve highly:

'She has very high expectations.'

'I think over the last six months I've seen quite a killer touch ….'

'[His] approach to managing performance is, he sets his objectives very, very high, often higher than the corporate objective or the defined objective ….'

'He's good at motivating the team so they're on his side.'

'Part of this daily meeting, I hear him saying you've done really well on the numbers, we've achieved a productivity of 24, you know that we need to get to 25, how do you think we can do this? …. So they're planning at 25 but he might expect them to achieve less than that but he doesn't give them a 21. He still says we want to reach 25, guys.'

3.5.2 Managing high performers

In general, the senior managers felt that their engaging managers were good at recognising high performers and giving them additional opportunities where appropriate – both to enhance their personal development, and for the good of the organisation.

'All of his staff are high performing … every 12 months he shifts the work of the team around, so people are doing new things … they're not people who are going to stay for ten years, anyway, they are people who will do two or three years tops ….'

'… he does give credit. He's very much a thank-you type manager. I don't think there's anybody that wouldn't appreciate that … But he thanks them realistically.'

'I think he's very encouraging of good behaviour, and excellence in performance. I think he's very good at recognising that openly, and in groups he will reward people publicly. He will sponsor people for things like director's commendation ….'

'He tries to inspire them. He's good at coaching informally, and works well with people to enable them to develop.'

'She'll give them additional responsibilities if that is what they are looking for, because then she can concentrate on those who are not such high performers, by delegating responsibilities to the high performers.'

'He doesn't manage them differently apart from giving them additional development requirement.'

'He's reliant on them and will push them to get things done. He'll give them small projects and will nominate them for reward and recognition.'

'They … find ways of giving good people stretch opportunities, such as projects. Sometimes, jobs are expanded for good people.'

3.5.3 Managing poor performers

Only one senior manager thought there was a reluctance to tackle poor performance as soon as it occurred:

'… an initial tendency to ignore it, then will go through the stages systematically, from counselling onwards. [They] have grown up and now tackle poor performance more systematically; they are prepared to recognise that people may not improve.'

By contrast, several others stressed how good their engaging managers were at taking immediate action (in one case, perhaps a touch too immediate!):

'They face it and have difficult conversations, in a supportive way. They evidence failure, get people to face up to it, coach to improve, but will get them out if they have to.'

'I think a lot of the problem about people management is when things fester and they're not addressed, and the one things he does that is different from a number of his peers, he'll get on with it. He'll spot a problem and be addressing it before he tells me about it …. There have been some niggles on cases lately, and some lack of performance, and he's right on the case there and he brings people to account pretty quickly.'

'… even when he was a very new manager, he still did all this …. Now, some managers longer in the tooth haven't done this and should do.'

'I would say he would initially bounce into tough performance management … there are subtle steps before you reach the more challenging end of the performance management system, but he won't necessarily stop at those first; he'll be going for, this must improve immediately – so I'm going to go in with the short, sharp shock.'

The majority of senior managers said that their engaging managers took a methodical, consistent and phased approach to managing poor performance, as the following examples show:

'He will work with that individual to try and sort it out and understand and go through a performance improvement plan and sit down and go it all methodically. He's very systematic in that and very organised. And he keeps excellent records …. And he's not tremendously quick to judge. He will assume that people are doing it wrong because they don't understand, first and foremost, rather than they're being malicious or awkward ….'

'First it is to recognise why it has happened, and secondly it is to see if there are any issues that we can address as a business … if there is, we will address them and if there is no improvement then it is a very firm line ….'

'… it is first by one to ones, identifying the gaps, jointly working out the causes of the gaps and re-phasing the next steps to go. And then wholly challenging the guys to go the steps, and then having continuous reviews ….'

'Well, he uses the systems that are made available to us, so he'll call people in, have a conversation about what the issue are, has a … counselling session, about how to put it right.'

Some examples were given of successful interventions by engaging managers:

'An example would be a deterioration in safety because of an individual …. [He] would conduct a small focus group to coach the individual – like a small surgery, to get at the reasons behind poor performance. This would set the way forward.'

'An example is one of her team managers …. She had a really tough conversation with the manager … but he came back and said thank you for that conversation, because it got him into shape.'

'He had to demote [an individual]. He has done this sensitively and has been able to keep the person in the [workplace] as a departmental head with the respect of staff. [The individual] was given the dignity to stay.'

A few senior managers mentioned that their senior managers took poor performance personally, to the extent that they felt they had failed if their intervention did not lead to improved performance:

'He is very unhappy when he has to explain to me that performance has dropped, which is a rare occasion, he takes it personally. He will have a plan invariably to put it right.'

'… he has been very disappointed on one or two occasions where he's taken [an informal] approach and, basically, the individual hasn't really understood where this could end. So he's taken a more formal approach ….'

3.5.4 Managing difficult individuals

Less than half of the senior managers felt that their engaged managers had difficult individuals in their teams (whereas most of the engaging managers felt they had at least one). They all felt that their engaging managers were good at using their interpersonal skills – empathy, understanding, communication, persuasion – when dealing with these individuals:

'… he's so nice to people, that they find it hard to be maverick.'

'I think probably with a sort of personal engagement … he does it with empathy, or using examples from his own experiences ….'

'He gets involved face to face, involves others, and assesses/measures people against objectives. He is open with individuals. He tries to win them over, by listening, comparing their behaviour with his own wishes, and developing a plan to move things forward. He also coaches – [he] is a good coach.'

'I think she tackles those things really well because she backs it up with a lot of comparisons and tries to put things into their language for them and simplify it, but being very clear on what her expectations are as a result of that, as well.'

Again, they were appreciative of the quick action their engaging managers took to identify difficult people and tackle them to prevent problems escalating:

'He is relatively robust so he has no fear to use the right language or the same language as his counterpart is using and be relatively direct. He is able to choose the right kind of buttons from friendly to angry.'

'[He] deals with the vociferous ones but realises that the real terrorists are those that are silent, need to get them on board.'

One senior manager felt that the engaging manager's lack of problematic people was down to her own actions:

'I wouldn't say she does, but that is down to the fact that she has instilled the right behaviours in them …. She has been given a team that has been the same as everyone, but due to her management style and her expectations, and what she expects as behaviours has meant that she doesn't have any awkward team members.'

3.5.5 Improving the team's performance

The majority of senior managers felt that their engaging manager had been instrumental in improving team performance. Some gave general descriptions of how the teams had improved, and the engaging manager's part in this:

'Yes, the team's performance is just significantly more professional … he started from quite a low base in many ways and I think he's now quite a well recognised and respected section.'

'Well, he challenges them … in different ways. So, he gets more out of individuals on an individual basis which the allows the team to be better ….'

'They have given talented individuals expanded portfolios, which means the organisation performs better. They are … performance-driven and say "we can do better". There is no distance between them and their teams, which leads to higher motivation and very high energy levels.'

'Since I've known him, his team's performance has been high and that's a lot down to [the manager] himself. He's very self-motivated, has a real need to achieve, is results-oriented, and very clear about what has to be achieved and how.'

'Well, I think a lot of it is about empowerment and confidence building … so they feel generally more enriched and satisfied with their jobs, because they're allowed to get on and do them.'

A small number made the point that the team were already high performing, or would be so under a different manager, although the engaging manager had certainly played a part:

'It isn't all down to [the manager] – the team would deliver results under others – but he plays a strong part.'

'Yes, it's improved. I think this is not only down to [the manager] because the whole plant improved but as I said today he has fewer people than he had before. One is long-term sick but there is no big trouble or emotion, the quality of the output is still the same and improved.'

Some senior managers gave specific examples of improved performance, using key performance indicators:

'This is visible because of service measures eg handling damage has improved …. Finances have improved. Safety is better here than at [location X]. Engagement with continuous improvement has gone up.'

'… basically as a target we have under three per cent … her team are 100 per cent dedicated to not letting any of those customers down … at the moment, year to date, we're at 2.14 per cent.'

'The percentage reduction in CO_2 measures, capital monitoring procedures, budgetary control, we've got things like building condition surveys, asbestos registers, a whole range of stuff.'

'Yes, we have delivery scores; we have what we call a scoreboard … in the past two years, as an example … levels are higher today than what they were two years ago.'

'Examples of indicators that are high scoring are government and internal PIs related to aspects such as the number of homeless people in temporary accommodation.'

'There's a whole raft of PIs, around 16 of them, reviewed monthly eg milestone achievements on key projects.'

3.6 The engaging manager and delivery of bad news

Just over half of the senior managers recalled their engaging manager having to break bad news to individuals, teams or larger groups of employees. This contrasts with the engaging managers themselves, who all felt they had been in this position. Several talked about the thorough preparation their engaging managers did beforehand:

'… she's very good at airing what she thinks her concerns will be for her team and putting those into place, putting some responses into place before she goes into a briefing of that nature.'

'They … did lots of planning and ensured they were fully briefed, included getting legal and HR advice.'

'My understanding of what he does is he goes and understands the issue at hand, so he knows it intimately, and then he communicates that to his team and explains the consequences of it, and how we're going to work our way through the issue. So, there are consequences, but this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it. So, he does explain it in very good detail.'

Another theme was the straightforward and honest approach the engaging managers took when breaking bad news to staff, while still retaining business focus:

'He took a fairly direct approach …. He explained why. He empathised, but made it clear that we still had to get on.'

'Even if it might be an unfavourable decision she is quite straight talking in terms of putting our position across.'

'… I don't think it matters what news he's delivering, he still delivers it with the same amount of … integrity.'

'[His] approach is straightforward; he communicates the facts clearly. He answers the questions he can, refers if he can't. He doesn't try to soften things or pander to people's questions.'

'I think he's very honest about it and he is always explaining the wider picture. If it is down to individuals in his team, he's never in the blaming mood … he takes accountability for his guys.'

'He's very straightforward. He doesn't hide anything.'

A few senior managers also stressed the sensitivity and empathy of their engaging managers, although in one case the engaging manager was perhaps too sensitive:

'When he delivers bad news, he will assume that it's his responsibility, and he feels very upset about that and basically I'll take that responsibility and put him out of the loop.'

'He is sensitive and talks direct to individuals.'

'The key thing is to be good at articulating why, at understanding how people will feel. [He] is adept at this. He will walk away for a while, then come back and tackle questions.'

4 The Engaged Teams

Chapter Summary
■ The engaged teams were positive about their jobs and the organisations they worked for, and could think of relatively few things they would like to improve.
■ They felt they had high levels of team spirit, and that the manager had contributed significantly to fostering a good team culture that set them apart from other parts of the organisation.
■ Teams were proud to be high performing, and valued their managers' role in giving positive feedback and being open in leading discussions about performance and how to improve it.
■ Individuals were appreciative of their managers' informal coaching style and development focus; they liked being challenged while also being supported.
■ Our engaged teams, when completing IES's attitude survey, scored highly not only for engagement, but about every aspect of working life.
■ The top three things that engaged teams valued about tier managers were their supportive and encouraging behaviour; their ability to listen and to make their teams feel valued and respected; and their approachability.
■ When asked to draw a picture to represent their manager, our engaged team members were most likely to draw a sun or a smiling face.

4.1 What was liked about the case study organisations

The beginning of each focus group discussion explored what the participants liked about working for their organisations. The topic that came up most often as the best feature was colleagues and the team. A friendly atmosphere in which people were prepared to help one another out was widely appreciated:

> *'It's like a big family and everybody knows everybody, everyone's problem is everybody's problem.'*

'If there's any support needed, I can always look at my colleagues for that support.'

'It's quite a supportive place to work. You feel if something was going wrong or even if you'd done something wrong, there would be people there to protect you and cushion you from those sorts of things.'

Flexible working was frequently one of the first things suggested in response to the question and work life balance was also referred to in relation to this. Development opportunities and the chance to move around between jobs was another aspect that the participants found important although actual formal training received little mention.

A key feature was the fact that jobs were varied, not boring, challenging and had 'lots of new things going on'. The ability to challenge, be listened to and change things was also valued. In contrast to this, a minority of people felt that a good aspect of their work was that they knew it well.

The image and reputation of their organisation was an attraction to some of the participants. They described their employers as 'prestigious', reputable', 'dynamic', 'exciting' and 'fantastic'. Others had a sense of pride in the wider purpose of their jobs in serving the community.

The more usual benefits of working for an organisation also received some recognition: pay, pensions and holidays were all commented on. Location was an aspect seen as important by some participants.

4.2 Improvements that would make staff feel more involved and valued

After discussing what they liked about their organisations, the respondents were asked to suggest improvements that would make them feel more valued and involved. The list of improvements was relatively much shorter than the good features which is unusual in focus groups and probably reflects the fact that the groups were highly engaged.

Better communication was most the widely raised issue. There was an sometimes unmet need to know what was going on in the teams, be given more information about the organisation and to understand more about other teams. 'Silo working' was mentioned and the need to share views and information across departments. One participant suggested social events to meet people from other parts of the organisation and learn more about them:

'When I first came here, I used to do at least a couple of things a year either the company paid for or even just going out and that has definitely tailed off. It was

good going on these things. I used to chat to people I didn't necessarily speak to all the time and got to understand what they were doing.'

There was a clear dislike of too much bureaucracy across most of the case study organisations. Reference was made to 'too much red tape', 'too many policies and procedures', and the 'length of time it took to get anything done'. The number of meetings was also commented upon in this context:

'There's a lot of duplication of meetings, of bureaucracy and the further that you go up the chain the more people are covering their own backs.'

Another problem common to many of the organisations was that of inadequate IT. This was in the form of poor systems, poor support for users and problems between different systems:

'Everybody is frustrated beyond belief by our abhorrent IT and how ridiculous the system is, to the point where it stops you from bring able to do your job.'

'You've got information, invoices and letters that have to go out that day and our IT just comes to a halt, so you can't deal with customers as you should, you can't give them the best service.'

Improvements in learning and development were also recommended with more meaningful one to ones, better use of personal development plans (PDPs) and more effective inductions:

'They (one to ones) were much more regular and now we're squeezing them in. And, really to get the best out of those sorts of activities they've got to be a bit more meaningful.'

'We need to ensure that we go back and look at them (PDPs) and think what we're trying to do.'

4.3 Why team has scored highly on engagement

In the opinion of the team members the key reason that their teams scored highly in their organisation's measurement of engagement was due to the strength of their team spirit. This was due to such factors as being able to 'get along well', 'working well together', 'sharing ups and downs', and 'helping each other out'. The actual features of the jobs were also important, the fact that the work was varied, interesting and had tangible results were all mentioned. Reference was made to the stability of the teams with long-serving experienced members and low turnover. It was also clear from the comments that engagement also arose from understanding the processes of the job and how it fitted into the overall business.

The vital role of the line manager in creating the engagement of the team was seen as being due to the manager's approachability and awareness of what was happening in the organisation and the team. A key component of the manager's engaging behaviour was two-way communication. The ability to share information and be open with their staff was valued, along with their willingness to listen and to seek feedback from the team. Encouraging personal development was also an important feature which helped to engage staff. Being able to give practical help and being 'hands on' was another component of engagement along with giving praise and encouragement to both individuals and the team:

> 'He's quite good at listening and giving encouragement and then he lets us get on with the job. He's there when you need him which is good. But on the other hand he's not standing over you all the time dictating what needs to happen. There is a presence. He's always in our office.'

> 'There is a lot of interaction between us. They are there to manage us, and we do respect them as managers, but we are all one big team and everybody is there to help everybody else. There is no division as in big manager and workers.'

4.4 Manager's impact on performance

4.4.1 Team performance

The teams taking part in the focus groups were asked how their manager had improved their performance. The most frequently mentioned action was praising and giving positive feedback when the team had performed well. In relation to this, the essential role of keeping the team informed about how it was performing was often commented on. Team talks and sharing information were seen as a key part of this and the ability to deliver a balanced message was mentioned:

> 'One the things he does stress is that these are the good things that are happening and then he will tell you what the not so good things are … so you're getting the message but you don't feel shot down.'

The managers of the engaged teams were willing to assist their teams by helping out when necessary:

> 'He will also pull up his sleeves and get involved in the frontline and I've always felt that staff appreciate that.'

The engaging managers were seen as improving their team's performance because there was mutual respect between them, and the team was treated as adults. The managers were seen as valuing the support of their teams and improving performance by encouraging the ideas and suggestions of their staff:

'He will challenge them on the logic of what they are doing and keep probing and pushing then to come up with a new answer or new method themselves rather than hand it to them.'

Other factors that positively affected team performance were that the manager was focused on strategic initiatives, had high standards and was not afraid to change things:

'He's very focused on everything that we do fits in with the higher strategic initiatives. So we all pretty much know what we're supposed to be doing, where it fits in and why.'

He does have his own quite high standards which we try to work to, he knows what he does and doesn't like in terms of us having to raise our performance in order to reach his standards.'

4.4.2 Individual performance

The participants in the focus groups discussed how their managers had helped them to improve their personal performances. This underlined the importance of managers seeing themselves as coaches and mentors to the individuals in their teams. The effective use of appraisals and one to ones received a number of mentions. Being willing to pass on knowledge was also a vital factor:

'He's passed on his knowledge; he doesn't keep it to himself and say 'you find out the hard way'. He helps you. He doesn't insist on you doing it his way but he does pass on his knowledge so it helps.'

The focus groups stressed the importance of managers spending time in various ways with their staff. The beneficial effects of managers taking time to help staff personally with tasks and supporting them were appreciated by their teams:

'I remember when I first started, I kept getting stuck sometimes, and she was always there to give advice.'

The impact of managers taking the time to get to know their staff was also recognised:

'He takes time out to talk to everybody; go round and take a bit of interest in what they're doing outside of here. Not to any great prying degree but if you put him in a corner he could probably tell you what most of the team's outside main interests are and their driving motivators, whether it be work-life balance, money. He's taken time out to understand that.'

Taking the time to talk about the team's wider context in the organisation also led to a clearer appreciation of the contribution of the individual:

'He's quite prepared to just stop what he's doing, not all the time, and just discuss bigger issues and things that are of interest to do with our work, which I think is important.'

Actions to support the development of staff were valued by the focus group participants. Willingness by the managers to arrange off-the job training and to promote the careers of their staff was seen as contributing to better personal performance. The fact that managers allowed them to make their own mistakes and learn from them was referred to several times:

'He won't step in prematurely and say 'This is important, I'm going to fix it for you'. He'll allow people to work their way through it, which is good.'

'We have moved away from a blame culture. He would say, look, this went wrong and you won't feel worried. You could easily say 'I've made a mistake', and I think generally he would work through why it went wrong and how to solve it.'

The need for managers to give their staff confidence and encouragement was another aspect of improving individual performance:

'She gives you the confidence to offer your opinions and views, you may not always get the answer you want from her, but I think it's just the way she approaches things, as if she has confidence in your ability.'

4.4.3 Differences from other teams in organisation

The engaged teams were asked if they thought they were different from other teams in the way they worked and what the role of their manager was in creating this. Their replies reflected their reasons for their high level of engagement, with the impact of team spirit being vital. The teams felt that they worked well together and could depend on one another for support. As one participant remarked:

'It's the business of the three musketeers, except we're nine musketeers, all for one and one for all.'

There was also a feeling that the engaged teams were happier, enjoyed their work and that there was a good atmosphere:

'You can almost see a visual difference between the teams. I think we are one of the brighter or chirpier places.'

Several groups mentioned the fact that the team's role and purpose made them different from other groups and their work potentially more interesting:

'We're supporting activities across the teams, so we're making a real contribution and not just bums on seats.'

The engaged teams saw themselves as more efficient and hard working than other teams in their organisations. They also had a desire to be the best and to improve their efficiency. There was an awareness that they were more informed and knew their objectives more clearly than other teams.

An important feature of the teams was how open they were and able to discuss a wide range of topics:

> *'There's an openness, there was a very open discussion about how people behave in teams. We were shocked because it doesn't happen elsewhere.'*

> *'If someone disagrees with something they can say they disagree. It doesn't mean they are going to get their way but it means that there's a bit more of an open forum on that and people aren't shut down and told to keep it to themselves.'*

4.4.4 Manager's role in creating a different team culture

The manager's role in creating the different culture in the engaged teams was explored. They were variously described as 'a breath of fresh air', 'open' and 'a bit like a tornado'. The managers were seen as particularly positive and not likely to say that something could not be done. A key skill was being able to select and recruit a good team and to keep them.

The manager's essential contribution was supporting and promoting the team. A good example of this was given in one focus group where team members were very enthusiastic about their manager:

> *'If we had a complaint lodged against us, other managers … would apologise even though you did everything right. X is completely the opposite. He will fight your corner and he will contact the people directly and defend you to the hilt.'*

The importance of team members having autonomy and being able to have an input into what they were doing was stressed. Alongside this, however, was the need to feel personally supported by the manager:

> *'You don't feel like someone is watching over you like a hawk and keeps going "What's going on?" but you don't feel quite abandoned. I think it's the right way.'*

> *'It's a case of "How can I help you help me?".'*

The ability of the manager to be organised and to give clear directions was emphasised. This was related to an appreciation of what was required to complete tasks:

> *'He's very aware of what's required and that's what drives him to drive us in order to complete tasks.'*

4.4.5 Survey headlines

Before the discussions started in the focus groups of the teams of the engaging managers the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. Its purpose was to understand more about the background of the participants and their levels of engagement. The subsequent analysis is based on 155 questionnaires.

It should be borne in mind that the analysis is describing engaged teams only; there is no more general group or disengaged group against which to compare and contrast from the case study organisations. To put the findings into context the results from the earlier IES work on engagement will be used.

Profile of respondents

The teams with high engagement scores that took part in the research were composed almost equally of men and women and 88 per cent were white. Their average age was 38 with a good spread throughout all ages.

Looking at their employment details, of those that were able to classify themselves in the pre-determined categories, just under half were managers or senior managers, 17 per cent were professionals, 23 per cent operational and 11 per cent were working in support roles. A third of participants had been with the organisation for over 12 years and the same proportion had been employed for less than four years. Their lengths of service varied between under a year and 40 years. Seventeen per cent of them worked on a part-time basis.

Most of the respondents, 88 per cent, had been appraised in the past 12 months and three quarters had a personal development plan (PDP). Forty per cent felt that their access to less formal training opportunities such as secondments, coaching, special projects and multi-disciplinary group working was good or excellent but 22 per cent felt it was poor or nonexistent.

Teams' engagement and views of other aspects of working life

The statements in the questionnaire were rated on a five-point scale by the respondents from one representing 'strongly disagree' to five for 'strongly agree' with three being 'neither agree or disagree'. The higher the score, the more positive respondents feel about the item. These statements can be formed into scales or factors (as shown in Table 4.1), which summarise the various aspects of working life. The statistical validity of these factors has been verified in IES's earlier work on engagement. The mean scores for the focus group respondents and the range of values found in the earlier IES research are also given in the table.

Table 4.1: Mean scores for engagement and other factors from current and past research

Factor	Range of mean values from other IES studies	Mean values from our engaged teams
Engagement	3.4 to 3.9	4.0
Immediate management	3.4 to 4.0	4.2
Feeling valued and involved	2.9 to 3.6	4.1
Job satisfaction	3.4 to 4.0	4.0
Team working	3.8 to 4.1	4.3
Performance and appraisal	2.9 to 3.8	4.0
Training and career development	3.1 to 3.7	3.9
Coping with stress and work pressure	2.1 to 3.0	3.3

Source: IES, 2009

The selection of the teams included in the research was based on their high engagement scores in the last organisational attitude survey; these engagement measures may not have been measuring the same aspects as the IES engagement scale. However, from the table it can be seen that their mean value for engagement, of 4.0, is outside the range of the mean values of 3.4 to 3.9 for the organisations in the earlier IES studies. The groups of staff involved in the study are therefore relatively highly engaged in terms of the IES engagement indicator.

When the scales for the other aspects of working life are considered, the engaged teams show much greater feelings of being valued and involved, with a mean 0.5 outside the standard range. They are also clearly better able to cope with stress and work pressure, shown by their mean being 0.3 higher than the organisations in the earlier IES work. The engaged teams also score more highly on all other aspects of working life such as satisfaction with immediate management, team working, their performance management and appraisals, and training and development. The one exception is job satisfaction where they are at the upper limit of the mean values from other organisations, but not actually above it.

The positive views held by our engaged teams about their working lives is even more apparent when the scores are presented in a diagram (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Engaged teams are positive teams
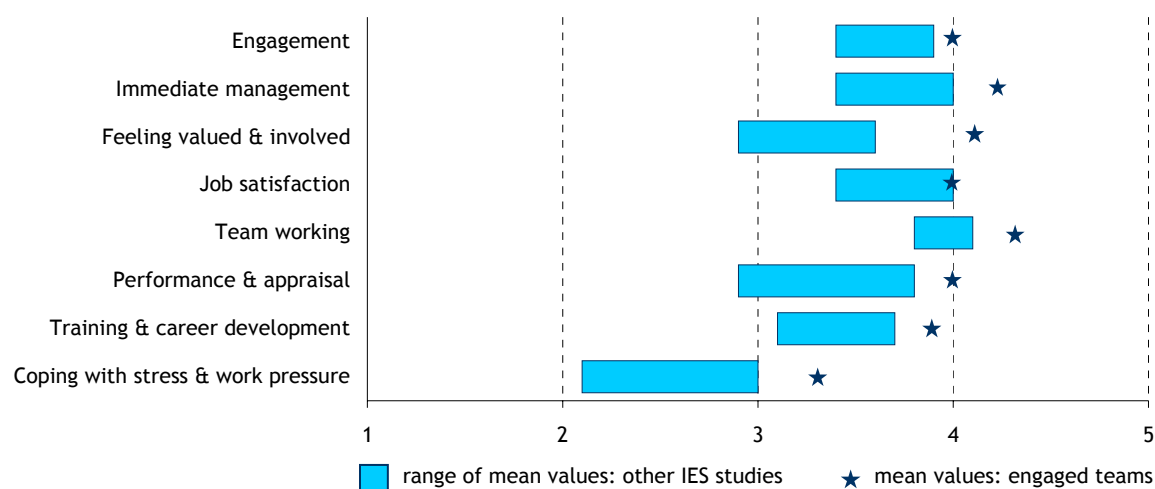
Source: IES, 2009

Best things about working for an engaging manager

The questionnaire asked the focus group participants to give the two best things about working for their manager. This produced the list shown in Table 4.2 of themes mentioned by more than two respondents. The most valued features of their managers, each mentioned in 16 per cent of the replies, were that they were supportive, encouraging and helpful; and that they listened to and involved their teams. This was closely followed by the view that the managers were approachable and available, as suggested by 13 per cent of respondents. Other characteristics that were important were taking a personal interest, being open and honest, and supporting work life balance. Figure 4.2 shows the relative strengths of the different aspects.

Table 4.2: Two best things about working for an engaging manager

	No. of comments	%
Supportive/backs me up/encouraging/helpful	44	16.4
Listens/values & involves me/the team; respects me/us	43	16.0
Approachable/available	35	13.0
Genuinely interested in my success/development	18	6.7
Honest/open	16	5.9
Provides a flexible working environment/good work-life balance	15	5.6
Gives me responsibility/trusts me; good at delegating	12	4.5
Keeps things interesting/keeps me going	9	3.3
Kind/non-judgemental	8	3.0
Enthusiastic/inspired to do the best possible	8	3.0

	No. of comments	%
Expert in their field/knowledgeable	8	3.0
Good communication/know what's expected of me/us	8	3.0
Strategic vision/direction	7	2.6
Laid back/lets me get on with the job	7	2.6
Balanced style of management in terms of formal vs informal	6	2.2
Freedom of action/autonomy	5	1.9
Hard working/hands-on	4	1.5
Reliable	3	1.1
Appreciative/praise	3	1.1
Total	**269**	**100.0**

Source: IES, 2009

Figure 4.2: The team's view: the best things about working for their engaging manager
My manager …

'Is honest and open'

'Lets me get on with the job'

'Is supportive and encouraging'

'Listens to me, values me, involves me and respects us'

'Takes genuine interest in my development'

'Is not judgemental'

'Is enthusiastic and inspiring'

'Helps me achieve good work/life balance'

'Is knowledgeable'

'Is approachable'

'Trusts me and delegates well'

'Keeps things interesting'

'Has strategic vision'

Source: IES, 2009

What would improve relationship with manager

Those taking part in the focus groups were given the opportunity to describe what would improve their relationship with their manager. Respondents found this difficult to answer and only 44 per cent gave any sort of reply. The answers given by over two people are shown in Table 4.3. Spending more time with the

respondent was requested by most respondents (15 per cent), followed by better communication and listening more (seven per cent). Five respondents wanted their manager to be less demanding and four each wanted more commitment to personal development, better feedback and the manager to be more organised.

Table 4.3: Is there anything that would improve your relationship with your manager?

	No. of comments	%
No/nothing	41	26.5
More time to spend with me/the team	23	14.8
Better communication/listen more	11	7.1
Less pushy/don't expect so much	5	3.2
More commitment to learning and development	4	2.6
Better feedback; direct either positive or negative	4	2.6
More organised/more notice of future meetings or events	4	2.6
Better understanding of impact of decisions/priorities	3	1.9
Not answered	46	29.7
Total	**155**	**100**

Source: IES, 2009

5 Perceptions of Engaging Managers

Chapter Summary
■ The engaging managers described themselves, above all else, as being open and honest.
■ Senior managers stressed different things: they valued the engaging managers' supportive behaviour towards their teams, the clarity of their communications, and their development focus.
■ Top engaging managerial behaviours were defined as good communication and clarity of expectation; listening, valuing and involving the team; being supportive; being target-focused; and displaying empathy.
■ Top disengagers were a lack of empathy, poor communication, being self-centred, failing to motivate or inspire, and blaming others.

This chapter will look at the words used to describe our engaging managers as given by themselves, the senior managers and their teams. In addition, the pictures drawn by members of the focus groups to represent their managers are presented.

5.1 Words

5.1.1 Managers' descriptions of their management style

The main words and phrases that the engaging managers used to describe themselves are shown in Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1. It can be seen that they considered themselves to be open and honest above every other description, with integrity also being seen as important. They recognised that they were enthusiastic about their jobs and cared about their teams. The managers saw themselves as approachable, energetic and not afraid of conflict. They described themselves as encouraging and positive to their teams but also had high expectations of team performance.

Table 5.1: Managers' descriptions of their management style

Manager's descriptions of themselves	No. of comments
Honest/open	20
Enthusiastic/passionate	6
Care about team	6
Approachable	6
Integrity	4
Energetic/active	4
Challenging/not afraid of conflict	4
High expectations of my team/demanding	4
Encouraging/positive	4
Delegates/empowers	4
Lead by example	3
Trustworthy	3
Communicator	3
Friendly	3
Hard working	2
Not afraid to roll sleeves up	2
Listening	2
Supportive	2
Upfront	2
Developing/coaching	2
Fun	2
Motivated	2
Questions management skills	2
Loyal	2
Flexible	2
Other (each mentioned once)	22

Source: IES 2009

Figure 5.1: How engaging managers see themselves

'I care about the team'

'I have high expectations
of my team'

'Encouraging and positive'

'Enthusiastic
and passionate'

'Honest
and open'

'Approachable'

'I have integrity'

'I'm not afraid of
conflict'

'Hard working – I'm not
afraid to roll-up my
sleeves'

'Delegating and
empowering'   'Challenging'

Source: IES, 2009

5.1.2 Senior managers' descriptions of engaging managers' management style

Senior managers were also asked to describe the management style of their team leaders. Compared to the managers, this produced a greater range of words with no single one dominating. The engaging managers were seen as predominantly supportive of their teams and able to communicate clearly and articulately. A desire to develop the team as individuals was perceived along with showing empathy towards them. Being results-driven was recognised in the managers as well as showing enthusiasm and being good at communicating. Figure 5.2 shows the relative strength of the various aspects and, when compared to Figure 5.1, demonstrates a difference in emphasis between how the managers describe themselves and how senior managers see them.

Table 5.2: Senior manager's descriptions of engaging managers management style

Senior manager's descriptions	No. of comments
Supportive	7
Clear/plain talker/articulate/direct	7
Wants team to develop	6
Empathetic	5
Communicative	4
Result-driven/demanding/high expectations	4
Enthusiastic/keen/passionate	4
Listening	3

Senior manager's descriptions	No. of comments
Detail/thorough	3
Good judgement	3
Good planner	2
Open	2
Confident	2
Thinker	2
Human	2
Competitive/desire to win	2
Recognises achievements of others	2
Humour	2
Consultative and inclusive	2
Relaxed/laid back	2
Organised	2
Pride in job	2
Other (each mentioned once)	48

Source: IES 2009

Figure 5.2: How senior managers see their engaging managers

'Good at communicating'

'Supportive'

'Attends to detail and is through'

'Has good judgement'

'Clear and direct'

'Wants the team to develop;

'A good listener'

'Empathetic'

'Driven by results, with high expectations'

'Enthusiastic and passionate'

Source: IES, 2009

5.1.3 Focus group descriptions of effective management

The focus groups discussed the behaviours of effective managers in general (rather than their own manager specifically). By far the most important activity was communication with the team and individuals about what was happening in the

organisation and team, including the recognition of good work. This was closely followed by listening to the team about their ideas and concerns:

> *'Listen and give you a voice. There's nothing more insulting than 'I hear what you're saying' and then they completely ignore it. It isn't just managing the worker it's managing the ideas they come up with.'*

The need to understand individuals to know their motivations and skills to obtain their best performance and engagement was widely recognised:

> *'Understand the ways in which you work, your preferences, your weaknesses, your strengths, all those kinds of things, and then make the team work as one by matching all those things up, by matching that up to the workload you're trying to achieve.'*

Having a good knowledge of the work done by their teams and the pressures they were under was seen as key to managers being effective along, with an understanding of the needs of the business. This supported the requirement for them to be clear in the directions they gave their teams, able to give the teams a clear focus and be consistent in their demands:

> *'Any manager that says who's doing it, why they're doing it, what they've got to do, when they've got to do it by and consistently adopts the same approach and behaviours, earns my respect – then they engage me.'*

It was also seen by the focus group participants as vital that managers empowered their staff to do their jobs in their own way, and enabled them to make decisions for themselves. However, there was also a call from the focus groups that managers should be there if needed, to support or help them resolve any problems:

> *'If something's not worked quite as well, not blaming you but exploring the reasons why and looking at different approaches you could have taken, how you might have been able to do something different; various kinds of things you can learn from the experience and improve your future performance.'*

Effective managers were seen as 'not minding getting their hands dirty' and prepared to help out when necessary. Being willing to pass on their knowledge to the team was also a key feature. Flexibility or allowing a 'bit of give and take' in working hours, where conditions permitted, was mentioned as a feature of effective managers.

The following characteristics of effective managers also emerged from the group discussions, but were not defined by behaviours. The top four items of approachable/accessible, respects team and individuals, leads by example and organised were the most frequently mentioned:

- approachable/accessible

- respects team and individuals

- leads by example

- organised/good time managers

- truthful

- fair and consistent

- calm and under control

- professional but friendly

- no favouritism

- encouraging

- trusting.

5.1.4 Focus group descriptions of less effective management

The focus of this research is the engaging behaviours of effective managers, but to understand this more fully the behaviours of less effective managers were also explored in the focus groups. To a large extent the comments made were the converse of the effective behaviours. Interestingly the participants were able to give more examples of ineffective rather than effective behaviours, which suggests that these behaviours can have long-lasting and damaging effects. The outcome of poor management was described in the following words by one focus group member:

> *'I would leave my own personality and sense of humour at the door every single day from 9 to 5. So, it just made a very, very unhappy place to work.'*

Many of the comments on less effective management centred on managers who had a controlling approach. They were described as 'dictatorial', 'just barking orders', 'talking to the team as if they were children', and 'taking a school-teacher role'. A member of one focus group gave the following illustration:

> *'I've had parental management. Everything was about control; she laid down on absolutely everything. Everyone was stifled and there was no decision anyone could make and it was all done that way.'*

A similar importance was given to the need to communicate clearly with individuals and teams so that they appreciate why they are doing tasks and how they fit into the bigger picture in the organisation. The approach of 'You're there, I'm up here; you do as you're told' led to employee disengagement. Part of the

significance of good communication was making objectives clear, so that everyone knew what was expected. An example of ineffective management was given as:

'Not being able to set specific objectives and having a vague idea of what they want but not really telling you when they want it or what the specific outcome is. And then giving you some fairly useless feedback at the end of it and saying it's not what they wanted.'

Again, the necessity of managers listening to their teams was highlighted by the failure of poor managers to do this. They were described as not 'making people feel that they are individuals and they can voice their own opinions and thought' and having the attitude of 'don't give me your problems, just give me solutions':

'Somebody is expressing an opinion and they say, we don't want to hear that, we just want to hear the positive side. A good manager will hear all sides.'

A failure to follow up on the concerns of team members, or to find out relevant information for them, were also given as examples of when people felt their views were not being listened to or taken seriously.

In order to hear the views of their teams and understand their points of view, managers need to be seen as approachable, but less effective managers were often portrayed as 'unapproachable' or 'not visible':

'If you have an issue, or if you feel uncomfortable, or if you feel that you can't approach them, it's not really going to have a good effect on your job because you're going to feel that you can't really do it as well as you could if you had the support.'

'Not being approachable, so having the feeling that you can't go to the person and say "Actually, I can't do this because of X,Y and Z" because they won't recognise that.'

Feedback was identified as an aspect of communication between managers and staff which was often handled badly by poor managers. This could be either a complete lack of feedback, too much negative feedback or positive feedback where it was not due:

'You don't really understand how you're performing, how the team is doing and I think you have a lack of respect for that manager, thinking, well, they don't actually know what's going on or they've got no interest in it.'

'If all you ever do is moan at staff and tell them that they're not doing anything, you're not going to motivate anyone like that … but if you always say how good they are when, in fact, they aren't good, that's just as bad in a way. People don't respect you when you're like that.'

Less effective managers were seen as not dealing with problems, leaving them unresolved and letting 'people get away with things'. They were also seen as inconsistent in their requests:

> 'With poor managers, it's inconsistency of approach, and saying, well, you need to do this now, before you've finished that, and it's, no, you need to move on this now.'

Standing up for the team and protecting individuals was something that less effective managers neglected but which was essential for the engagement of their staff. They were also described as 'yes men' who would not challenge upwards for the benefit of their teams. The issue of 'passing the buck' was also mentioned:

> 'Somebody who gives you one task and then when you're in a position being asked why you didn't do the first task they don't defend you and stand up and say "Well actually that's my fault, I told him to do something else." They leave you hanging out to dry and you end up with a bad mark on your copy book. They should stand up and protect you.'

Examples were also given of poor managers who were self-centred and promoted themselves rather than the team:

> 'Managers who are just completely focused on themselves, their career, their image, and whatever, as opposed to their role and what they should be doing. Focused on what they are going to do and how they will impart their authority on people, and all that is about what they're doing and not what other people are doing.'

The following adjectives were used to describe the less effective managers in the focus groups but did not have clear behaviours attached to them:

- self-centred

- disorganised

- dishonest

- unfair

- detached

- unfriendly

- disrespectful

- confrontational.

5.2 Repertory grid component of interviews

The interviews with managers and their line managers included a repertory grid component. The purpose of using the repertory grid component was to enable respondents to spontaneously articulate the behaviours of both engaging and disengaging managers with no direction from the interviewer. The comments from all the interviews have been analysed and classified and these findings will now be discussed.

5.2.1 Positive behaviours of engaging managers

The positive behaviours of engaging managers are shown in Table 5.3. The overriding importance of managers communicating with their staff and listening to them is again stressed in this different approach to collecting the views of interviewees. The need for teams and individuals to feel that their manager will support them is clearly very necessary along with being focused on achieving the team's targets.

Table 5.3: Behaviours of engaging managers

Behaviour	No. of comments
Communicates, makes clear what's expected	36
Listens, values and involves team	32
Supportive, backs team/you up	26
Target focused	22
Shows empathy	20
Clear strategic vision	19
Shows active interest in others	19
Good leadership skills	15
Respected	15
Enthusiastic, inspires others	14
Not afraid to confront or challenge	14
Interested in developing team	13
Approachable/available	12
Honest, open	10
Calm and relaxed	9
Hands on approach, gets involved	8
Shows appreciation and gives praise	8
Receptive to feedback about themselves	8
Gives responsibility/delegates	7
Team player	7

Behaviour	No. of comments
Perceptive, aware of business needs	7
Takes responsibility, doesn't blame	7
Flexible approach	6
Organised	6
Good at managing performance	6
Fair	6
Understands own role	6

Source: IES 2009

5.2.2 Behaviours of disengaging managers

The behaviours of disengaging managers as described in the manager and senior manager interviews are shown in Table 5.4. This list shows a different emphasis to that of the engaging behaviours above. The most frequently mentioned disengaging behaviour by far was a lack of empathy and interest in people. This was followed by the (not unrelated) failure to listen and communicate. Being perceived as self-centred is also seen as a very disengaging behaviour.

Table 5.4: Behaviours of disengaging managers

Behaviour	No. of comments
Lacks empathy, interest in people	39
Fails to listen and communicate	26
Self-centred	22
Doesn't motivate or inspire	21
Blames others, doesn't take responsibility	18
Aggressive	16
Lacks awareness	16
Doesn't deliver	15
Not approachable, visible	13
No integrity	12
Authoritarian	12
Controlling and micro managing	11
Acts unhelpfully	10
Inflexible attitude	9
No strategic vision	9
No mutual respect	9
Negative attitude	8
Ineffective	7

Behaviour	No. of comments
Avoids conflict	7
Poor teamwork	7
Seeks approval, agreement	7
Spends little time with team or individuals	6
Doesn't develop staff	6
Lacks understanding of impact of actions	6
Indecisive	6
Not interested in organisation	4
No praise or recognition of achievements	3
Doesn't support team	3
Calculating/political	3

Source: IES 2009

5.3 Themed behaviours

Figure 5.3 groups the engaging and disengaging behaviours, described above, into five main themes. Within each theme, the engaging behaviours are shown as positives and the disengaging behaviours as negatives. The length of the bars is indicative of the number of times the behaviour was mentioned.

Figure 5.3: What engages and what disengages? Themed behaviours (no. of comments)

disengaging ◀ ▶ engaging

The personal touch

disengaging	engaging
uninterested in people	empathetic
no visibility	interested in people
unhelpful	prepared to confront/challenge
inflexible	approachable
no mutual respect	flexible
avoids conflict	

Team focus

disengaging	engaging
poor listener/communicator	listens, values, involves
micro-managing	supportive
poor teamwork	develops the team
little time with/for team	hands-on
no development focus	delegates effectively
unsupportive	team player

Effective delivery

disengaging	engaging
fails to deliver	clarity of expectation
lacks strategic vision	target-focused
ineffective	strategic vision
fails to see impact	business-aware
indecisive	organised
no interest in organisation	manages performance
	understands me

Motivating

disengaging	engaging
uninspiring	good leader
negative	enthusiastic, inspirational
no praise or recognition	appreciative, gives praise

Personal integrity and self-awareness

| disengaging	engaging
self-centred	respected
blames others	honest, open
aggressive	calm, relaxed
no awareness	open to feedback
no integrity	accepts responsibility
authoritarian	fair
approval-seeking	
calculating	

5.4 Pictures

The focus groups with the teams of engaged managers concluded on a light-hearted note with the participants being asked to draw a representation of their manager, for example as an object or an animal. For those who did not want to do this, there was the alternative of creating a metaphor for their manager, or giving some words or phrases that described the manager. The groups then discussed the reasons behind their illustrations of engaging managers. Those taking part found this enjoyable and some very good pictures and descriptions were produced. A sample of the pictures which represent the main themes are now presented.

5.4.1 Pictures of engaging managers

The first five pictures are all about the relationship of the managers with their teams while the following four deal with the wider aspects of managing in an organisation.

A popular theme was that of smiling sunny faces, as shown in Figure 5.4. These represented the positive impact of engaging managers and their warm, motivating approach.

Figure 5.4: The engaging manager as warm, welcoming and motivating
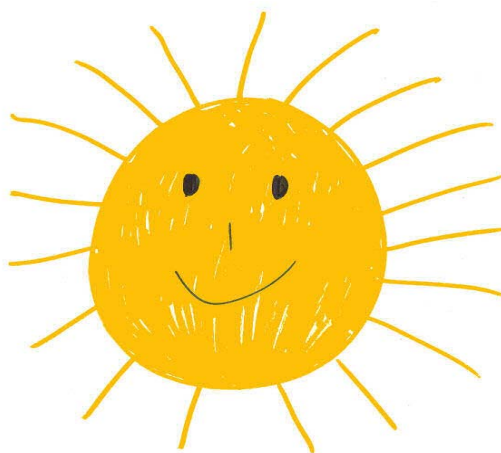
Source: IES 2009

Figure 5.5 is a good example of the importance of two way communication. This was recognised by a number of the drawings which stressed the need for managers to both communicate and listen and to be approachable. One drawing, for example, highlighted the importance of saying 'Good morning' and greeting staff.

Figure 5.5: The engaging manager as a good two-way communicator

2 way Communication

Source: IES 2009

A team-focused and supportive manager is shown in Figure 5.6. He was described as someone who would take the time to sit down and offer biscuits and coffee to solve problems with his staff. Another picture on this theme showed a house, which portrayed a secure supportive manager who encouraged a happy team.

Figure 5.6: The engaging manager as an excellent (and nurturing) team player

Source: IES 2009

The vital role of an engaging manager in protecting the team and individuals is illustrated in Figure 5.7. Here, the manager is the parasol protecting the team from heat from above. Other drawings showed the manager as a matriarchal elephant leading and looking after the team, and as a warm and caring cat, but one who could turn into a tiger to defend them.

Figure 5.7: The engaging manager as a protector
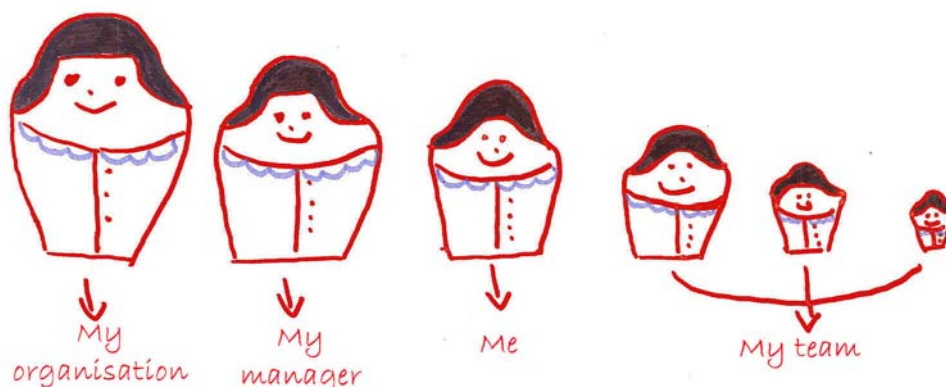

Source: IES 2009

Figure 5.8 shows the engaging manager as a sheepdog who is loyal, dependable and hard working. He is also wagging his tail to show he is friendly and approachable. Cows, horses and camels were also drawn to represent his theme.

Figure 5.8: The engaging manager as dependable and reliable

Source: IES 2009

The next picture, Figure 5.9, changes the emphasis to that of the engaging manager working with the whole organisation rather than just the team. It shows a series of Russian dolls which are about the manager understanding both her role in the organisation and her team's, showing that she is able to take a holistic view of the situation. Drawings of the world and networks also supported this idea.

Figure 5.9: The engaging manager as a strategic, big-picture thinker

Source: IES 2009

The importance of an engaging manager as a high performer who could lead the team onwards to greater achievements was presented in a number of pictures. They show the manager leading the team up mountains, either roped together or holding hands. Figure 5.10 presents this idea as the manager being the large star on the top of a Christmas tree with his team as smaller stars below him.

Figure 5.10: The engaging manager as a high performer, leading a high performing team

Source: IES 2009

The necessary skill of an engaging manager to be versatile and manage several things at once was shown by pictures of managers juggling, as in Figure 5.11, and also as a swan and duck looking serene but busy paddling underneath.

Figure 5.11 The engaging manager as a versatile juggler

Source: IES 2009

Figure 5.12 is a devil, which surprisingly was another popular image. These represented the maverick managers who did not follow the company line. They had their own highly personal styles, were highly engaging but were individuals who could not always be used as role models. However, they were nonetheless very effective.

Figure 5.12: The engaging manager as a maverick

Source: IES 2009

6 A Classification of Managers

Chapter Summary
■ We have constructed a classification of engaging and disengaging managers, based on the behaviours described by engaging managers, senior managers and teams in our research. ■ Most managers will be able to see themselves as a mixture of several different types of manager. ■ We have labelled engaging managers as: high performer, communicator, visionary, empathiser, developer, enthusiast, protector, networker, rock, brave, juggler and maverick. ■ Disengaging managers are: micro manager, muddler, blamer, bully, egotist and pessimist. ■ IES intends to develop an assessment tool based on these behavioural types.

6.1 Introduction

The research that we have carried out with engaging managers, senior managers and engaged teams has enabled us to get a very clear view about engaging and disengaging behaviours. We have used the behavioural descriptors gained via the material gathered from interviews, focus groups, completed engagement questionnaires, and repertory grid exercises, to construct the following classification of managerial behavioural types – both engaging and disengaging. We are using this classification to develop and test a 360° assessment tool which will enable managers to assess their own behaviour, and will also allow their managers and their teams to assess them.

It is, of course, unlikely that a manager's behaviours, when dealing with his or her team, will fit neatly into a single category. Most managers will be able to recognise aspects of themselves in several different types, or even all the types described here – and even the most engaging of managers may have a bad patch and slip into a disengaging category for a short while. However, we believe that most managers

will be able to identify several categories that most strongly exemplify their behaviours.

6.2 Engaging manager types

6.2.1 The High Performer

The High Performer is very focused on business outcomes, goals and targets. He monitors and reviews results on a regular basis with his team, and has frequent discussions about the best way to tackle any performance slippage. He wants to improve and looks for opportunities for his team to do even better. He is knowledgeable, well organised and methodical.

6.2.2 The Communicator

The Communicator is particularly good at getting across messages across to her team. She is clear in her explanations and her team know exactly what is expected of them, whether this is related to standards of behaviour, objectives, or tasks. She is also a good listener and likes to involve her team in decision-making. She is adept at communicating bad news as well as good.

6.2.3 The Visionary

The Visionary is particularly good at communicating the big picture to his team, and selling new ways of working. He is an innovator who is not afraid to introduce change if it is in the wider interests of the organisation. The Visionary understands exactly where he and his team fit into the organisation, and what contribution they need to make. He is good at getting to the crux of the issue and seeing things with fresh eyes, untrammelled by convention.

6.2.4 The Empathiser

The Empathiser can identify with her team, and individuals within it, and understand how they feel. Because of this, the Empathiser can break bad news, or tackle difficult conversations, with particular sensitivity and tact. She understands what motivates individuals within the team, and appreciates the contribution that different people make. She knows who needs help, whose confidence requires a boost, and who can be left to get on with it.

6.2.5 The Developer

The Developer looks out for members of his team who have potential, and gives them opportunities and challenges to show what they can do. He coaches

individuals who are experiencing difficulties, to help them improve. He looks at the work of his team to ensure that jobs are as interesting and rewarding as they can possibly be. He will facilitate access to opportunities such as secondments, special projects and entry onto development or talent programmes.

6.2.6 The Enthusiast

The Enthusiast is able to galvanise and carry individuals, teams and even large groups of people due to her passion and powers of persuasion. She is energetic and encouraging, and has a strong sense of belief and identification with what the organisation stands for. She recognises and celebrates success.

6.2.7 The Protector

The Protector looks out for his team, and shelters them from being buffeted by organisational politics and conflicts, or scorched by the heat from on high. He nurtures the team and encourages people to put forward their ideas and suggestions for improvement. He defends his team from attack by outsiders, but will readily tackle and resolve any disputes within the team that threaten to undermine the well-being and performance of the team as a whole.

6.2.8 The Networker

The Networker is adept at identifying people within the organisation – and sometimes outside – whom she needs to cultivate. She has a wide circle of contacts and understands the work of other departments, functions and locations. This in-depth knowledge of the organisation enables her to position the work of her team to benefit both the organisation and the individual.

6.2.9 The Rock

The Rock is steady, calm, dependable and reliable. He tackles problems in a straightforward way and never panics. His team and organisation can rely on him in a crisis. He is loyal to his team and is always considerate of their interests. He will roll up his sleeves to help and would not ask his team to do things he would not be prepared to do himself.

6.2.10 The Brave

The Brave is not necessarily outgoing or people-focused, but knows how important it is to understand her team, herself and her organisation. She will overcome her natural reluctance and reserve to tackle difficult situations, stand up for the team

in public, and act in accordance with her principles. She has integrity and courage, even when quaking inside.

6.2.11 The Juggler

The Juggler is particularly good at managing resources and allocating work appropriately within the team. He is able to manage many different strands of activity, and keep all the balls in the air. He is a good delegator and has an excellent grasp of timescales, workload and project progress. Usually, he is a fast learner and a fast worker, but curbs any impatience he may feel with others, and accepts the value of different ways of working.

6.2.12 The Maverick

The Maverick does not always toe the company line, and will sometimes bend the rules. However, she always has the best interests of her team and her organisation at heart. She will work with her team to devise new and innovatory ways of doing things, and she encourages imaginative solutions. She helps her team to achieve breakthroughs.

6.3 Disengaging manager types

6.3.1 The Micro Manager

The Micro Manager finds it difficult to delegate. He has lengthy task lists and fusses about minutiae. When he gives a task to a member of his team, he cannot let go, but bothers the team member at frequent intervals for progress reports. He interferes, is reluctant to allow the team to make any decisions, and stifles initiative.

6.3.2 The Muddler

The Muddler is personally disorganised and inflicts this on her team. She gives confusing and sometimes contradictory instructions, and changes her mind frequently. She finds it difficult to communicate the organisation's vision and purpose, which means her team do not understand what their objectives are. Because she cannot allocate work and monitor progress effectively, her team often appears inefficient and fails to deliver.

6.3.3 The Blamer

The Blamer does not accept responsibility when things go wrong, instead pointing the finger at one or more members of his team. People in the team will be reluctant to make suggestions, even if they see that things are going wrong, because they

know they will be held responsible. The Blamer does not defend his team's reputation to the rest of the organisation.

6.3.4 The Bully

The Bully is aggressive, relying on heavy-handed tactics to get work done. She frequently shouts and belittles people in front of colleagues. She sometimes loses her temper and is intolerant of mistakes and weaknesses. Her team members are often afraid of her.

6.3.5 The Egotist

The Egotist believes that he, personally, is entirely responsible for his team's successes – but that failures are the fault of the team. He has an air of superiority, and is often aloof from his team, with whom he does not interact on a day-to-day basis. He uses inaccessible language and likes to score points. The Egotist rarely gives praise or recognition unless it reflects well on himself.

6.3.6 The Pessimist

The Pessimist is draining of energy. She finds fault with everything and rarely smiles. She sees problems with any suggestion for improvement, which means that any ideas her team put forward are stifled in the early stages. She does not display enthusiasm and fails to motivate or encourage her team.

7 Conclusions

Chapter Summary

- Engaging managers have little in common apart from their engaging behaviours.

- Engaging managers are made, not born. They learn through observing others and through self-reflection. They have high levels of self-awareness.

- Two-way communication is an essential feature of engaging management.

- Interacting with others occupies a large part of engaging managers' time. In particular, they are empathetic and make a big effort to understand their teams as individuals.

- Our engaging managers had a performance focus, and were quick to tackle poor performance or difficult individuals. They were also good at the difficult things: managing poor performance and breaking bad news. This makes them very valuable in times of economic challenge.

- Engaging managers have an in-depth knowledge of their organisation and how their role fits into the bigger picture, and are good internal networkers.

- Senior managers and engaged teams both valued their engaging managers highly. Teams particularly appreciated being treated with respect, recognised and praised, and listened to; senior managers emphasised their engaging managers' performance focus.

- Engaged teams not only have high engagement scores, but also tend to be positive about all aspects of organisational life.

- Engaging managers are believed to have brought about sustained improvements in performance to benefit the organisation.

- Our engaging managers saw themselves as part of the team as well as its manager.

- Engaging managers, senior managers and teams all had very clear views about behaviours that were disengaging and therefore to be avoided.

7.1 What have we learnt about engaging management?

The engaging managers in our research had, on the surface, little in common. Their organisations, backgrounds, expertise, job roles, experiences of training and development, and career stages were very varied. The one attribute that all of them possessed was the ability to engage their teams. The research described in this report explored how they did this, focusing in particular on behaviours – both the engaging behaviours adopted by the engaging managers, and the disengaging behaviours that they did their best to avoid. There was a remarkable consistency about what constituted engaging management. The managers themselves, their managers, and their team members, all described (via words, metaphors, pictures and the repertory grid exercises) similar behaviours in a similar way, and themes kept recurring. The following bullet points summarise the key learning points from the research.

■ Engaging managers are made, not born. Although engaging behaviours come more naturally to some than others, we came across frequent examples of engaging managers learning from their mistakes, consciously adopting engaging behaviours, modifying how they did things, and becoming more aware of themselves and their impact on others. Some managers – for example, people who are naturally shy and reticent, or those who tend to be quick and impatient – do not find engaging behaviours very easy to adopt, but recognise the importance of people skills and work hard at acquiring them. In doing this, they exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence.

■ All our engaging managers had learned a lot about engaging and disengaging behaviours by observing others, typically other managers they knew, or managers they had encountered in the past. They adopted the things that worked well, and dropped the bad bits. They also learned by reflecting on their own behaviours and actions, and in general had high levels of self-awareness.

■ Communication – which means effective listening as well as explaining – is an essential feature of engaging management. Engaging managers seek the views of their teams, involve them in decision-making, do their homework and explain things in a straightforward, open and clear way.

■ Spending considerable amounts of time interacting with others is another key aspect of engaging management. This comes easily to some – but all the engaging managers in our research did it, whether or not they were naturally inclined to do so. They did not allow workload pressures to get in the way of day-to-day interaction.

■ Our engaging managers were empathetic, and understood their team members as individuals. This enabled them to allocate work, support the team, and

develop people, appropriately – which was perceived by senior managers as bringing organisational benefits as well as being good for the team and individuals. As well as being self-aware themselves, the engaging managers were good at helping their team members to become more self-aware.

■ Being an engaging manager certainly does not mean being pink and fluffy, however. Our engaging managers had a performance focus, managed high-achieving teams, and were quick to tackle poor performance or difficult individuals. They were clear about expected standards, behaviours and objectives, and monitored team achievement closely. The managers, senior managers and teams in our research believed that the teams' high performance was due, at least in part, to engaging managerial behaviours. This performance focus is key to understanding the difference between satisfaction and engagement; teams who are satisfied with their manager may still be underperforming, unchallenged and disconnected from organisational objectives.

■ When breaking bad news – to individuals or to teams – engaging managers set it into context and explain why it has to be done, for the good of the organisation. The team members we spoke to valued this honesty and integrity, and appeared better able to cope with, and understand, any changes that had happened, even those that were not to their advantage. This particular engaging behaviour makes engaging managers very valuable in times of economic challenge – especially when combined with their ability to motivate and encourage their teams to perform well.

■ Engaging managers have an in-depth knowledge of their organisation, and how their role fits into the bigger picture. In many cases, this has been acquired over several years, but it is also notable that, when we interviewed engaging managers with lower lengths of service, they told us they had worked extremely hard to familiarise themselves with their new organisation, and saw this is essential to success. Engaging managers also tend to be extensive internal networkers.

■ Senior managers and engaged teams both valued their engaging managers highly, although the emphasis was different. Teams appreciated being treated with respect, being recognised and praised, and being listened to; they also valued the clarity and openness of their managers, and the support and development they received. Senior managers acknowledged all of these aspects, although they tended to give more emphasis to their engaging managers' abilities to motivate their teams to perform highly, their performance focus, and their willingness to tackle underperformance.

■ Engaged teams not only have high engagement scores, but also tend to be positive about all aspects of organisational life.

■ Although this research did not set out to gather evidence of the link between engagement and performance, we encountered a widespread belief (often backed up with examples) that the engaging managers had, by motivating and enthusing their teams, brought about sustained improvements in performance which had benefited the organisation.

■ Engaging managers try to make jobs interesting and enjoyable, although they also expect their teams to buckle down and tackle unpopular tasks if necessary. Our engaging managers, however, were all willing to help if necessary; they saw themselves as part of the team as well as its manager.

■ Engaging managers, senior managers and teams all had very clear views about behaviours that were disengaging and therefore to be avoided. Disengaging managers are controlling, unapproachable, inconsistent, self-centred and blaming. They lack empathy and visibility, and are poor communicators: they give no or unhelpful feedback, and lack clarity when explaining tasks, goals and purpose. They do not listen or involve their teams, and are miserly with praise and recognition.

■ It was noticeable that senior managers did not always know about problems experienced by their engaging managers, or downplayed any difficulties they had encountered. This suggests firstly that senior managers trust their engaging managers to deal with problems, and secondly that engaging managers often take the initiative without bothering their senior manager; in effect they protect the senior manager as well as their own teams.

7.2 A small caveat

It was apparent that the majority of engaged teams in our research had interesting and challenging jobs that they enjoyed. It was pointed out to us by a small number of interviewees that being an engaging manager of a team doing boring, repetitive or otherwise unpleasant jobs would be a lot harder. This was borne out by one team, whose members had a high opinion of their engaging manager, but did not enjoy their repetitive jobs; this team had much lower scores, when their engagement questionnaires were analysed, than the other teams in the research.

7.3 The way forward

We hope that the engaging and disengaging behaviours we have identified will enable organisations to take a fresh look at their managers' behaviours, and perhaps incorporate engaging behaviours into their management training programmes at all levels – from first line supervision right up to Board level. We also have further work to do, to analyse and report in more depth on some of the research findings, and to develop our engaging manager assessment tool.