Maximising Staff Engagement

PLANNING FOR A 21ST CENTURY WORKFORCE
Staff engagement in an organisation has often been hard to measure, yet research has shown that an engaged workforce is more productive and show better recruitment and retention rates than unengaged staff. NHS National Workforce Projects (NWP) has been a partner in an innovative study in the United States looking at staff engagement across the workforce and the NWP project Maximising Staff Engagement has looked at staff engagement within the NHS and piloted a UK staff survey with three NHS organisations.

The NHS faces significant challenges over the next two years to deliver the challenging performance and financial targets that form part of the current health policy agenda. Initiatives such as the 18 week patient pathway, Working Time Directive 2009 and the shift of treatment from secondary care into a community setting will require a flexible affordable workforce to deliver these changes.

Organisations with staff that are engaged and enthusiastic about their work will find it easier to meet the challenges and sustain these changes in the longer term. This briefing paper outlines why staff engagement is important, gives details of the original US based staff engagement survey, shares the results of the NHS pilots and outlines simple actions to improve staff engagement in your organisation.

This paper is aimed at anyone that has responsibility for staff teams or recruitment and retention of staff including HR directors, planners and clinical staff. It will also be useful for directors and non-executive directors in NHS organisations. The paper can be used to prompt debate on staff engagement issues, highlight the complexity of staff engagement and share the simple steps that organisations can take to engage staff.

Engagement is a measure of how much people connect with their work and feel committed to their organisation and its goals. People who are highly engaged in an activity:

• Feel excited and enthused about their role
• Say time passes quickly at work
• Devote extra effort to the activity
• Identify with the task and describe themselves to others in the context of the task (doctor, nurse, NHS manager)
• Think about the questions or challenges posed by the activity during spare moments (for example, when travelling to and from work)
• Resist distractions and find it easy to stay focused
• Invite others into the activity or organisation (their enthusiasm is contagious).

Many organisations are not taking advantage of a positive engagement with staff to improve productivity and performance. Figure 1 shows the results of three surveys on staff engagement. The most positive results show that only 20 percent of the general workforce feel engaged with their organisation. A majority of staff express neutral feelings toward their employer whilst up to 19 percent of staff feel active bitterness towards their employer. There is clearly an opportunity for many organisations to look at the benefits of staff engagement and develop a strategy to take advantage of these studies.

1 The Concours Group, 2005: Excelling at Employee Engagement
Organisations that have demonstrated a high level of staff engagement in previous research are shown to be more productive and have better recruitment and retention rates than organisations that demonstrated little engagement. This engagement goes beyond the usual satisfaction that is highlighted in staff surveys. In the main these results are not simply an absence of negative issues or experiences, staff engagement goes beyond satisfaction to a positive interaction with the organisation.

There are many advantages to engaging the workforce at this time. The UK faces a significant demographic shift in the next 10 years that will result in a smaller population. Organisations that can recruit and keep valuable staff will have a considerable advantage during this time.

In addition the challenges facing organisations in the next two years will require many staff to work differently in both the role they undertake and the location of their work. In many cases more of the same will not work in the future staffing structures. Staff that are engaged with the organisation will respond better to these inevitable changes and adapt quickly to working differently. Organisations that can respond to changes quickly and effectively will have a distinct advantage in the new healthcare structures.

**Why do we need to engage with our staff?**

Organisations that have demonstrated a high level of engagement in previous research are shown to be more productive and have better recruitment and retention rates than organisations that demonstrated little engagement. This engagement goes beyond the usual satisfaction that is highlighted in staff surveys. In the main these results are not simply an absence of negative issues or experiences, staff engagement goes beyond satisfaction to a positive interaction with the organisation.

There are many advantages to engaging the workforce at this time. The UK faces a significant demographic shift in the next 10 years that will result in a smaller pool of available workforce. This is due to the significant number of baby boomers reaching retirement age not being replaced by an increase in the graduate and school leaver population. Organisations that can recruit and keep valuable staff will have a considerable advantage during this time.

In addition the challenges facing organisations in the next two years will require many staff to work differently in both the role they undertake and the location of their work. In many cases more of the same will not work in the future staffing structures. Staff that are engaged with the organisation will respond better to these inevitable changes and adapt quickly to working differently. Organisations that can respond to changes quickly and effectively will have a distinct advantage in the new healthcare structures.

**Figure 1**

Sources agree: Today, few employees are engaged in work

Random samples of the working population in the U.S. over 18 years of age

- **Gallup**: 28%, 62%, 16%
- **Towers Perrin**: 17%, 64%, 19%
- **Concours Group and Age Wave**: 20%, 62%, 18%

This paper outlines the work undertaken by NWP to look at staff engagement in healthcare in the UK. The top ten tips below are developed from lessons learned in this study and are outlined in detail in the following pages.

Engaging the workforce is not as difficult as it first appears. All NHS organisations have the basic building blocks in place to develop staff engagement. Initiatives such as agenda for change (AFC), improving working lives (IWL) and new ways of working have introduced flexibility and a work life balance into NHS careers. Organisations can build upon these initiatives in creating meaningful staff engagement.

10 top tips for improving engagement in your organisation

This paper outlines the work undertaken by NWP to look at staff engagement in healthcare in the UK. The top ten tips below are developed from lessons learned in this study and are outlined in detail in the following pages.

1. Do the simple things well – develop an enjoyable workplace that enables growth
2. Give feedback on abilities and involve clinical opinions in decision making
3. Treat all staff as individuals – no one size fits all
4. Share the big picture with all staff
5. Use the tools already in place in the NHS – IWL, AFC, IPR staff survey etc
6. Use performance review and PDP to make work more stimulating
7. Utilise the segmentation on page 17 to target particular groups of staff but avoid labelling groups or actions
8. Review your own baseline information – staff survey, recruitment and retention rates, complaints, feedback on AFC etc
9. Communication is key to informing staff of options and benefits, a steady stream of information is better than any one off communication
10. Organisations need to be consistent in their approach. Engagement is hard to build, easy to lose.
Background to maximising staff engagement

The background to this paper is an original study undertaken by the Concours Group in the United States to look at engagement in the US working population. The study results were based on nearly 8,000 responses to an online staff engagement survey.

The results of the US study have already given a significant insight into staff engagement. The analysis of the results showed no significant difference based on age, ethnicity or gender. In terms of the big issues of engagement at work we are all looking for similar rewards.

The survey was able to identify significant differences across six groupings or types of engagement. These six groups or segments show differences in their response to the survey and their engagement needs from an organisation. Figure 2 shows the six segments and the percentage of the workforce in the original US survey. This segmented workforce model is described in more detail on page 17 of this paper.

The original US study is now being taken forward across the partner organisations in the US to build up a more complete picture of the workforce and develop practical solutions to the engagement questions.
Staff engagement in the NHS

During 2006, NWP developed a UK version of the engagement survey and piloted it with three NHS organisations. The results demonstrate that the survey is transferable to the UK and gives an important insight into engagement in the NHS. The aim of this project was to use the survey to gain an insight into engagement within the NHS and outline for organisations the broad issues in staff engagement and give a set of top tips to improve staff engagement.

The UK NHS sample was smaller than the US study and the sample returned was too small to gain robust data on the engagement of professional groups. However, the results outlined in this briefing paper are robust and give a good indication of the issues that are concerning NHS staff at the current time. Many of the issues raised are similar to issues in the US and suggest that there may be a common set of solutions to improve staff engagement.

This briefing paper is based on the results of that survey and the lessons learnt from both the US and UK studies. The results do raise important points for discussion and further study, the workforce are the key resource in delivering healthcare and organisations will need to maximise staff engagement to ensure that high quality care can be maintained in the future.

What were some of the overall results for the NHS?

About working in the NHS
• Employees find the work itself worthwhile, and they tend to be passionate about it
• They are not similarly inspired by the organisation they work for or, in some cases, their roles
• Employees described themselves as sociable team players.

Attributes of NHS staff
• The survey does not show a close link between professional group and a particular engagement type
• Attitudes include being proud of their work, tolerant of diversity and eager for a vision but not all staff feel that they understand the big picture of what the organisation is doing.

What staff want
• Employees want a workplace that is enjoyable and a role that is personally stimulating
• Employees want more control over their employment, specifically in areas such as work schedule and work flexibility
• A desire for fair rewards and their abilities to be respected.
Figures 3 and 4 show the results of what staff value most in the UK and US studies. The list of options are taken from the engagement survey and are ranked by the respondents. The results for the UK and the US show that once the US need for a secure income and retirement are met, both sets of staff are looking for work that is enjoyable, enables them to grow and is personally stimulating. This is a key challenge for healthcare organisations to provide this work environment against a backdrop of significant change. It should be stressed as with all these results that they are based on staff perception and organisations will have to communicate the benefits of these and other initiatives to the staff.

The US results are biased towards benefits and pensions because in many cases staff negotiate their own benefits package of salary, holiday entitlement, health insurance and pension. The American private healthcare system means that this negotiation has much greater significance than in the UK where there is free access to healthcare and national negotiation on salary and pensions.

The result is low engagement, a failure to capitalise on the inherent engageability of the work itself, and lots of room for improvement in engagement levels terms of job satisfaction and engagement with managers.

**Figure 3**  
What the original USA population valued most: security

- Flexible workplace: 5.57
- Worthwhile work: 5.8
- 2 weeks vacation: 6.3
- 10% more in compensation: 7.2
- Flexible work schedule: 9
- Personally stimulating: 10
- Workplace that is enjoyable: 10.5
- Work that enables growth: 11
- Retirement: 14.4
- Benefits: 18.5

Numbers indicate relative preference. Total = 100

**Figure 4**  
What NHS employees value most: enjoyable, stimulating work

- Flexible workplace: 8
- Worthwhile work: 10
- 2 weeks vacation: 10
- 10% more in compensation: 10
- Flexible work schedule: 10
- Personally stimulating: 13
- Workplace that is enjoyable: 14
- Work that enables growth: 14
- Retirement: 16
- Benefits: 16

Numbers indicate relative preference. Total = 100

Source: The Concours Group
This study of UK healthcare workers has shown that there is scope for improvement in staff engagement in all staff groups and overall there are some simple, common themes emerging from the two studies. Figure 6 shows the common principles that can be applied to all staff groups. All staff wish to be treated fairly, be recognised for the contribution they make, use their skills to do the job well and to have a good relationship with those around them. Difficulties arise with staff engagement when staff perceive that these needs are not being met.

Often organisations do have policies and procedures in place that aim to achieve these goals but fail to communicate these positively to staff. It is staff perceptions that drive staff engagement rather than the individual initiatives put in place by the organisation.

As has been highlighted before, staff engagement cannot be assumed and is not simply an absence of staff dissatisfaction. Staff engagement is a positive interaction with the organisation. Figure 5 above shows the engagement scores by professional group in the UK study.

There is no one group that is markedly more engaged than another, although there are interesting differences between senior managers and the medical and dental training grades and the ancillary and maintenance staff. This may be due to the fact that the medical and dental training grades are still moving on rotation from hospital to hospital and therefore do not have an opportunity to engage with a particular organisation. The ancillary and maintenance staff are the group that are often outsourced to facilities management companies and may not feel engaged with the NHS if they are employed by a different organisation.

How to maximise staff engagement

This study of UK healthcare workers has shown that there is scope for improvement in staff engagement in all staff groups and overall there are some simple, common themes emerging from the two studies. Figure 6 shows the common principles that can be applied to all staff groups. All staff wish to be treated fairly, be recognised for the contribution they make, use their skills to do the job well and to have a good relationship with those around them. Difficulties arise with staff engagement when staff perceive that these needs are not being met.

Often organisations do have policies and procedures in place that aim to achieve these goals but fail to communicate these positively to staff. It is staff perceptions that drive staff engagement rather than the individual initiatives put in place by the organisation.

Yes, there are common principles...

- **Equity**
  - To be treated fairly in relation to the basic conditions of employment

- **Camaraderie**
  - To have cooperative relations with others in the workplace, particularly with your manager, and to have people you consider friends at work

- **Recognition**
  - To have one’s contributions acknowledged

- **Achievement**
  - To use your strengths on the job – to take pride in one’s accomplishments by doing things that matter and doing them well.

Source: The Concours Group
Employees also want more control over their employment, specifically in areas such as work schedule and work flexibility. The NHS has already put in place many of the building blocks to support this with the IWL initiative and family friendly policies. There is an opportunity to utilise these and other policies to maximise staff engagement.

There is an ideal opportunity for organisations to take advantage of the nature of healthcare work itself – most staff felt that they were doing work that was worthwhile and they did feel engaged with the concept of the NHS. The goal should be to capitalise on the inherent engageability of the work itself, and the room for improvement apparent in current engagement levels.

Key messages

• Staff engagement is complex, but there are some simple initial steps that can be undertaken by all healthcare organisations
• Organisations need to maximise their staff engagement in order to create the flexible productive workforce to meet the current challenges facing the NHS
• Engagement is not based on generational/gender/ethnic issues within the staff groups
• Broad themes have emerged from the US and UK studies that can used across all staff groups
• Engagement in the NHS is supported by the current best practice initiatives such as IWL and family friendly policies.

A significant finding is the absence of positive engagement factors, this appears to limit the engagement level of staff. It is not that NHS organisations are doing anything to actively disengage staff but more can be done to actively engage staff and follow through on the practical implementation of the current HR initiatives of IWL, AFc and the postgraduate training and development of established staff.

In addition there appears to be evidence that work needs doing to improve the culture and climate within NHS organisations in respect of actual and perceived staff recognition. There are many good supportive policies in place for staff but there is a danger that these are perceived as being only on paper. Staff will want to see any organisation follow through on the practical implementation of these initiatives.
Segmented workforce model

The UK study has identified the broad lessons that can be learned from engagement in the NHS and these have been outlined in the above sections. The US study has developed this analysis further and highlights six segments of the population that describes their engagement with work. This more detailed analysis can give an organisation an opportunity to tailor its HR policies to meet the needs of these staff groups. The US study identified six primary segments of staff engagement.

- **Accomplished contributors** focus on adding to the success of the enterprise. Work is an opportunity to be a valuable part of a winning team.
- **Demanding disconnects** find work to be an often unpleasant obligation. Work’s value is largely the short-term economic gain.
- **Fair and square traditionalists** want to follow a stable path to a secure future. Work is what we do – a steady, predictable path.
- **Maverick morphers** want to experience new things and find adventure in work. Work is one of multiple opportunities to live lives filled with change and excitement.
- **Self empowered innovators** want to create things and have long-term impact. Work is about building something with lasting value beyond themselves.
- **Stalled survivors** want to make a living and get their careers in gear. Work is a source of livelihood but not yet (or not currently) a satisfying priority in their lives.

**Accomplished contributors**

These employees are engaged by their work and by contributing to the organisation’s success. They take pride in what they do, are willing to put in extra effort, value teamwork, and seek an atmosphere that is cooperative and stimulating. To them, contribution is the name of the game, and they like to do work that is worthwhile to society. This group is loyal, hard working, reliable, capable, and typically very experienced.

They place less value than most others do on individualistic rewards such as more money or holidays and express less need for flexible work arrangements. Instead, they place strong emphasis on work that is personally stimulating and that enables them to learn and grow. They are among the most likely to say their employers offer them work environments that are congenial and fun, that employers provide stability and job security, and that people cooperate and teamwork is the rule.
Demanding disconnects
This group derives the least satisfaction from their work and returns the least commitment to their employers. They want stability, security, and greater recognition and reward. But at this point in their careers, they aren’t turned on by their jobs. Many are frustrated by the nature of their work, by a lack of opportunity, or by a perceived unfairness in their employment arrangements. Some are simply disgruntled. Many feel that they have got as much as possible out of their current positions and want to move on.
They tend to describe themselves as hard workers but not high achievers, as somewhat reliable but not leaders. Most feel that their organisations do not bring out the best in them. Some are struggling with low income, more focused on making ends meet than on deriving personal fulfillment from their work. They expect a lot in return for their labour and place high value on traditional compensation and benefits packages, while expressing less interest than other segments in work that is enjoyable, personally stimulating, or worthwhile to society.

Fair and square traditionalists
This group consists of highly reliable, loyal, traditional workers seeking traditional rewards. They got where they are by putting their noses to the grindstone, working hard, and being team players. In return, they want to be fairly rewarded for their efforts through concrete, traditional compensation like good benefits and a solid retirement package. They are pleased with their success, and often describe themselves as family men and women, high achievers, and leaders among their peers.
They have less interest in softer work benefits like stimulating work, enjoyable workplaces, work that is worthwhile to society, or even flexible work arrangements. They seek stable and secure environments, have the longest average tenure with their employers, and have the second highest engagement level among the six segments.
Maverick morphers

Often young, well educated, successful, and yet restless, these individuals thrive on exciting work and personal success. They’re not afraid to take chances, try new things, and shape the rules to fit their lifestyles. Frequently working for smaller organisations or self-employed, they are often senior level managers, despite their relative youth. Growth and opportunity and variety are what drive them, and they value organisations where they can work with other bright people and do work that is inherently worthwhile.

They are the most likely to want flexible workplaces and work schedules that enable them to work on their own terms and pursue their own interests. Confident in their abilities, they are the most likely to seek out bonus compensation and stock to reward their accomplishments. Organisations need to work hard to retain them, as they actively explore their career options and their tenures with employers can be brief.

Self empowered innovators

Entrepreneurial, hard working, creative and self empowered, this is an organisation’s most engaged group of employees. They consider themselves leaders and have frequently assumed the role of senior level manager, with many self employed or heading their own companies. Work is a source of great personal satisfaction. They are the most likely of all employees to say they are impassioned and energised by their work, and that time passes quickly on the job. Half say they will never retire.

They are less motivated by the traditional rewards, such as additional compensation, holiday entitlement, or even a better benefits package. Instead, they are looking for work that continues to empower and stimulate them, enables them to continue to learn and grow, and has a greater social purpose.
Healthcare organisations can use the personality types identified in the segmented workforce model to develop a more tailored approach to workforce planning. Organisations may well be able to identify the characteristics within specialty or professional staff groups and be able to tailor existing HR policies to meet the needs of the staff group.

For example maverick morphers often want new experiences and are likely to move on from organisations after a relatively short period of time, but organisations that keep in contact with this staff group are likely to attract them back at a later stage. The advantage is that the staff will return with more skills and experience of different organisations. Organisations are keeping in contact with previous members of staff, who may be travelling abroad, via email to advise them of news, updates on the organisation and new job opportunities. In this way organisations can make it easy for staff to return as new opportunities emerge, the organisation should not expect to keep the member of staff for a long time but can benefit from the staffs broad range of experience whilst they are there.

Similarly accomplished contributors will want to work as part of a team on projects that they see as worthwhile. They are most engaged when they have the ability to learn and grow, so for this group access to training and development opportunities is important. Many organisations are thinking more broadly than the traditional skills based development courses and are developing links to other organisations to enable
This study has given an insight into staff engagement and the advantages it offers to an organisation’s development. The challenges healthcare organisations face in the next five years requires a flexible productive workforce that can react to these changes. Research has shown that an engaged workforce is more productive and more responsive to change.

Healthcare organisations start with an advantage over other organisations in that staff are engaged with the work that they do. Staff enter careers within healthcare committed to patient care, organisations can take a range of simple steps to ensure that staff remain engaged. The building blocks for engagement are already in place to support better engagement with the implementation of improving working lives and family friendly policies.

Staff engagement is a dynamic process that needs continuous work, communication and dialogue are as important as the implementation of any action plan and policies. This paper outlines the broad findings of the survey and suggests a series of simple steps, there is no one universal solution for staff engagement. Organisations will have to develop individual plans based on their circumstances and dialogue with staff groups.

This briefing paper contains the findings of the survey and highlights actions that can be taken in the top ten tips and the details of engagement within the different staff segments on page 17. Organisations that take advantage of this opportunity to develop staff engagement will be best placed to cope with the workforce challenges in the next five years.

Conclusion

shadowing and benchmarking opportunities for teams of staff. In addition many organisations have mentoring or coaching sessions that can be useful to this group of staff.

The group that has been identified as stalled survivors feel pulled in many directions at once and will need support from the organisation at this point in their careers. In the segmented model this is a group of staff who can move out of this segment if their situation changes. Once engaged at work they may well show attributes of one of the other segment groups.

The NHS is very well placed to develop this staff group. Initiatives such as IWL, family friendly HR policies and flexible employment contracts are exactly what this staff group require to start to engage with the organisation. This staff group will form an important source of engaged staff that are loyal to the organisation that helped them develop.

The challenges facing healthcare organisations in the next two years will require a flexible engaged workforce to carry out significant change in how and where healthcare is delivered. New initiatives such as agenda for change have helped develop a new flexibility in staff contracts but organisations often struggle in how to engage staff. This segmented model offers some insight into staff groups and what engages staff in delivering high quality healthcare.

This study has given an insight into staff engagement and the advantages it offers to an organisation’s development. The challenges healthcare organisations face in the next five years requires a flexible productive workforce that can react to these changes. Research has shown that an engaged workforce is more productive and more responsive to change.

Healthcare organisations start with an advantage over other organisations in that staff are engaged with the work that they do. Staff enter careers within healthcare committed to patient care, organisations can take a range of simple steps to ensure that staff remain engaged. The building blocks for engagement are already in place to support better engagement with the implementation of improving working lives and family friendly policies.

Staff engagement is a dynamic process that needs continuous work, communication and dialogue are as important as the implementation of any action plan and policies. This paper outlines the broad findings of the survey and suggests a series of simple steps, there is no one universal solution for staff engagement. Organisations will have to develop individual plans based on their circumstances and dialogue with staff groups.

This briefing paper contains the findings of the survey and highlights actions that can be taken in the top ten tips and the details of engagement within the different staff segments on page 17. Organisations that take advantage of this opportunity to develop staff engagement will be best placed to cope with the workforce challenges in the next five years.
The National Workforce Projects team supports NHS organisations to achieve their workforce objectives through the development and implementation of a range of workforce skills, change management, information and planning tools.

Skills for Care is licensed by the government to represent the interests of around 60,000 employers and 2.5 million workers in adult and child social care in the UK. Its objectives are to deliver high quality social care and children’s services, and to make a significant contribution to the wider skills and learning agenda. Modernising the social care workforce – the first national training strategy for England can also be found on this website.

Skills for Health works with employers and other stakeholders to ensure that those working in the sector are equipped with the right skills to support the development and delivery of healthcare services. In addition to the case management competences framework, Skills for Health have developed a series of competence frameworks for the following long term conditions; diabetes type 2, renal, neurological care and coronary heart disease. They are in the process of developing frameworks for; respiratory, rheumatology and diabetes type 1.
Workforce Review Team (WRT)
The Workforce Review Team works at national level on behalf of the NHS in England. It coordinates and synthesises intelligence from local and national bodies on the supply of and demand for appropriately skilled staff to deliver care. Its analysis of the evidence informs decisions about investment in training to secure a workforce with the right skills, in the right places and in the right numbers to meet future staffing requirements.

www.healthcareworkforce.nhs.uk/wrt