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Management competencies for enhancing employee engagement

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

CIPD research over the last decade has repeatedly demonstrated the links between the way people are managed and business performance, the most recent being Shaping the Future, a longitudinal research programme investigating the drivers of sustainable organisation performance

In recent years government skills policy has also started to focus on the importance of leadership and management skills as it has become increasingly clear that steps to improve supply and raise the skills of the workforce are, while extremely important, not enough to drive productivity improvements on their own.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has conducted significant research exploring skills utilisation and its impact on productivity and performance since 2008. This research has identified high-performance working as one way to encourage better use of skills in the workplace. High-performance working practices can be defined as a set of complementary working practices within three areas:

- **high employee involvement practices:** for example self-directed teams, quality circles and sharing/access to company information
- **HR practices:** for example sophisticated recruitment processes, performance appraisals, work redesign and mentoring
- **reward and commitment practices:** for example various financial rewards, family-friendly policies, job rotation and flexible hours.

HPW emphasises the importance of the role of the line manager, as well as a range of issues that are directly affected by line management behaviour, including: employee learning and development; their treatment; autonomy; and the quality of communication and teamwork. All of these factors influence employee engagement and the extent to which employees are prepared to the go the extra mile for the organisation they work for.

In 2008, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned David MacLeod and Nita Clarke to take an in-depth look at employee engagement (one aspect of HPW) and to explore and report on its potential benefits for organisations and employees. The review identified four key enablers of employee engagement:

Leadership provides a strong strategic narrative which has widespread ownership and commitment from managers and employees at all levels.

Engaging managers are at the heart of this organisational culture – they facilitate and empower rather than control or restrict their staff; they treat their staff with appreciation and respect and show commitment to developing, increasing and rewarding the capabilities of those they manage.

Voice: An effective and empowered employee voice – employees' views are sought out; they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference.

Integrity: Behaviour throughout the organisation is consistent with stated values, leading to trust and a sense of integrity.

MacLeod's conclusions again highlight the importance of line managers in supporting employee engagement; however there is little research evidence that shines a light on the day-to-day management behaviours that underpin employee engagement. This Research Insight is designed to identify the specific management behaviours that line managers need to show in order to enhance

employee engagement in the workplace. The research will also lead to the creation of practical guidance to help organisations develop the core management skills that underpin enhanced employee engagement and sustainable organisation performance.

1.1.1 Defining employee engagement

A review was conducted to explore the definitions of employee engagement used in the literature. This suggested that there is no general consensus amongst academics and practitioners on the conceptualisation of employee engagement.

In the academic literature, employee engagement was conceptualised by Kahn in 1990 as 'the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances' (p694). Kahn suggested that engaged employees identified with their work and therefore put more effort into their work.

Other academics have taken a different approach from Kahn. Although still conceptualising employee engagement as a psychological state, they consider employee engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al 2001). Maslach and Leiter (1997) define employee engagement as the direct opposites of the burnout dimensions: engagement consists of energy, involvement and efficacy, which turn into exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness respectively during burnout. Shaufeli and Bakker (2003) also view employee engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout, they consider it to be a distinct construct which negatively relates to burnout; they define employee engagement as a state of mind, characterised by vigour (high levels of energy and investing effort into one's work), dedication (work involvement experiencing a sense of pride and enthusiasm about one's work) and absorption (fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work).

While academic conceptualisations tend to define employee engagement as a psychological state and focus on engagement with roles and tasks, business and practitioner definitions tend to add a strong focus on engagement with the organisation. Schaufeli and

Bakker's (2010) review states that the majority of HR professionals and management consultancies tend to define employee engagement in terms of the following:

- organisational commitment, including both an affective attachment to the organisation (emotional attachment or positive attitude) and a desire to stay with the organisation in the future
- employees' willingness to go the extra mile, which includes extra-role behaviour and discretionary effort that promotes the effective functioning of the organisation.

For example, Towers Perrin (now Towers Watson) defines employee engagement as the connections people have with their organisation, across three dimensions (that echo Kahn (1990)):

- **rational:** the extent employees understand their roles and responsibilities (thinking)
- **emotional:** the level of passion employees bring to their work and organisation (feeling)
- **motivational:** employee willingness to invest discretionary effort to perform their roles well (acting).

The CIPD felt it was important to differentiate employee engagement from similar constructs, such as organisational commitment. They argue that, although individuals who are highly engaged are generally more committed to the organisation and display more discretionary effort, these are distinct constructs to engagement. Therefore, the CIPD definition of engagement focuses more on the job role and tasks, rather than the organisation, and is based on the more state-based academic definitions such as that of Kahn (1990):

- **intellectual engagement:** thinking hard about the job and how to do it better (thinking)
- **affective engagement:** feeling positive about doing a good job (feeling)
- **social engagement:** actively taking opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work (acting).

The variety and range of definitions of employee engagement present a challenge when reviewing

employee engagement research. The current study therefore aims to define engagement in a way that encompasses all the key definitions used in both academic research and practice. To do this, all the key words and characteristics that had previously been used to define employee engagement were listed out and grouped into themes. The resulting framework shows similar themes to the Kahn, CIPD and Towers Watson definitions. For the purposes of this study, employee engagement has thus been defined as:

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

1.1.2 The case for employee engagement

Despite the variety of conceptualisations, it is now widely accepted by both practitioners and academics that employee engagement is not merely a fad (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010). Evidence demonstrates that high levels of employee engagement have a significant and positive impact at both organisational and individual levels.

The Towers Watson 2007–2008 Global Workforce study clearly demonstrates the links between employee engagement and performance. Observing 50 global organisations over a one-year period, this study found that organisations with high employee engagement benefited from a 19% increase in operating income, whereas organisations with low levels of engagement saw a 32% drop. It also found that organisations with highly engaged workforces experienced a 28% growth in earnings per share, compared with an 11% decline in earnings per share in organisations with low levels of engagement.

In other studies, high levels of employee engagement have been shown to impact positively on: organisational commitment (Saks 2006); customer satisfaction, loyalty, profitability, productivity and safety (Harter et al 2002). In addition, low levels of employee engagement have been linked to increased turnover intention (Saks 2006, Harter et al 2002, Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Research also shows that higher levels of engagement positively

impact individuals: those who feel engaged experience greater job satisfaction and greater well-being (Schaufeli et al 2008, Alfes et al 2010).

1.1.3 The drivers of employee engagement

Prior to 2000, much of the academic research focused on burnout rather than engagement, and the concept of employee engagement itself received little research attention. However, more recent academic research has begun to focus on employee engagement and to explore its antecedents. Maslach et al (2001) suggested six key areas of work that drive both burnout and engagement: workload, control, reward and recognition, support, fairness and shared values. Two of these areas have received the most research attention in relation to employee engagement:

- **Support:** supervisory support has been found to be positively related to employee engagement (Hakanen et al 2006).
- **Control:** input or involvement in decision-making as well as day-to-day control over tasks and schedules have been related both directly and indirectly to employee engagement (Hakanen et al 2006, Demerouti et al 2000, 2001, Bakker et al 2003).

Despite the limited academic research investigating the antecedents of employee engagement, the practitioner-based research and literature has largely focused on drivers of employee engagement. Practitioner papers (for example: CIPD (Alfes et al 2010); IES (Robinson et al 2004, Robinson and Hayday 2009); MacLeod and Clarke (2009); The Training Foundation (Mitchell et al 2010)) cite the following drivers as key to employee engagement:

- senior leadership communication and visibility
- good-quality line management
- clear vision/line of sight
- voice – opportunity to share ideas and opinions and input into decision-making
- development opportunities
- being ethical – treating individuals with respect, fairness and showing integrity
- organisation demonstrating care and concern for employee well-being.

1.1.4 The relationship between management behaviour and employee engagement

Academic research has not directly explored which leadership or management behaviours are drivers of employee engagement. However, it is plausible to suggest that both leadership and management would have significant roles in each of the six areas of work suggested by Maslach et al (2001). In addition, a conceptual paper by Macey and Schneider (2008) has suggested that transformational leadership would be a key driver of employee engagement, although no academic research has yet been published to lend support to this hypothesis.

Practitioner research and literature has placed a significant emphasis on the importance of leadership and management in employee engagement and has more recently distinguished between the different roles senior leadership and line management may have in fostering engagement. Research undertaken on behalf of the CIPD (Alfes et al 2010) highlighted the difference between perceptions of line management and senior leadership and their impact on employee engagement. Positive perceptions of line management are significantly related to employee engagement. Specifically, in order to foster employee engagement, it is important for line managers to ensure that: the right people are in the right jobs; goals and objectives are clearly communicated; effort is appropriately rewarded; and opportunities for development and promotion are provided. In contrast, negative perceptions of senior management are significantly related to employee engagement: specifically, it is important that senior management effectively communicates the organisation's vision and adopts an open, transparent and approachable style.

As mentioned earlier, the MacLeod and Clarke (2009) report, entitled *Engaging for Success*, also differentiated between leadership and line management. They suggest that in order to enhance employee engagement leaders need to: express the organisation's vision clearly; provide a clear line of sight; and develop an open and transparent culture. They propose that line management needs to: provide autonomy and empowerment to their employees; provide development opportunities; clarify

expectations; treat employees fairly and with respect; offer coaching, feedback and training; and ensure work is effectively and efficiently designed.

It is evident from these key papers that both leadership and management are considered by many practitioners as significant drivers of employee engagement.

1.1.5 Why this study is needed

The literature reviewed here suggests that both leadership and line management are potentially important determinants of employee engagement. However, there has been little research to identify the specific management behaviours relevant to enhancing and managing employee engagement.

One exception to this is research carried out by Robinson et al, whose 2004 study found that employee involvement in decision-making and the extent to which managers listen and value employee ideas and contributions are the strongest drivers of employee engagement. They suggested that effective line management, which offers two-way communication, would raise employee engagement levels and therefore conducted further research in order to identify and understand the behaviours of engaging managers. This further research (Robinson and Hayday 2009) identified 25 engaging managers across seven organisations and interviewed the engaging managers, their managers (senior managers) and their team members to identify the behaviours the engaging managers used to foster employee engagement amongst their teams. Although a number of behaviours were identified, many were broad (for example 'good leadership', 'supportive', 'team player') and the research did not distinguish between different levels of management

The current study aims to build on the existing research by: focusing on specific management behaviours important for enhancing and managing employee engagement, both positive behaviours to be adopted and negative behaviours to be avoided; and exploring these behaviours at two levels of management, first-level line managers and more senior managers (managers who manage other managers).

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- to identify the specific management behaviours line managers need to show in order to enhance employee engagement in the workplace, highlighting both effective and ineffective management behaviours in this context
- to identify whether there are significant differences between the management behaviours needed by first-level line managers and those needed by more senior managers (managers who manage other managers) in order to enhance the engagement of those who work directly for them
- to develop a management competency framework for enhancing employee engagement that can be used to give managers clear guidance on what they need to do in order to foster high levels of employee engagement in the workplace.

2 Research methodology

2.1 Sample

Forty-eight employees from the emergency team call centre of a large global energy provider participated in this research, of which 17 were male and 31 were female, with ages ranging from 20 to 60. The period of time participants had spent working with their current manager ranged from one month to six years. The participants were split into two groups as follows:

- Group 1 consisted of 23 individuals who had no management responsibilities.
- Group 2 consisted of 25 individuals who had line management responsibilities.

2.2 Interview proformas

The data was gathered through semi-structured, one-to-one telephone interviews, using the critical incident technique. The interview proforma was created based on the definition of employee engagement given in section 1.1.1. Two questions were developed for each part of the definition (thinking, feeling, acting), one asking participants to describe effective management behaviours and the second asking participants to describe ineffective management behaviours. The interview questions are given in Table 1. Additional prompt questions were designed to support interviewees in identifying specific incidents and particular manager behaviours.

The interview proforma was piloted on three individuals and, after reviewing the resultant transcripts, it was decided that no further revisions of the proforma were required. Within the interviews, participants were encouraged to focus on management behaviours and what their managers did or didn't do in the situations they were describing rather than focusing on thoughts and feelings. In all cases participants were asked to describe the behaviours of their line manager: individuals in group 1 were therefore describing behaviours shown by first-level line managers; and individuals in group 2 were describing behaviours shown by more senior managers (managers of managers).

Table 1: Interview questions developed based on this study's definition of employee engagement

Definition	Interview questions
'Being focused in what you do (thinking)'	1 Can you tell me about a time when your manager was effective in helping you focus in the work you were doing? 2 Can you tell me about a time when your manager was ineffective in helping you focus in the work you were doing?
'Feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation (feeling)'	3 Can you tell me about a time when your manager has made you feel positive about your role (eg excited, energised, inspired, proud, challenged)? 4 Can you tell me about a time when your manager has made you feel negative about your role?
'Acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the organisational values and objectives (acting)'	5 Can you tell me about a time when your manager has inspired you to go above and beyond what is expected of you (ie going the extra mile)? 6 Can you tell me about a time when your manager has put you off going above and beyond what is expected of you (ie not going the extra mile)?

2.3 Behaviour extraction and content analysis

The following steps were taken to extract the relevant behaviours and analyse the data:

- All interviews were recorded and transcribed. These were then uploaded into NVivo, a code and retrieve data management system.
- Content analysis was used to extract behavioural indicators from the transcripts. In order to ensure inter-rater agreement for consistent extraction of the behavioural indicators, three interview transcripts were chosen at random and two researchers independently highlighted behaviours relevant to employee engagement; the two sets of coded transcripts were compared, showing an acceptable inter-rater agreement of 72%.
- In order to develop the coding framework, the two researchers extracted behaviours from eight randomly chosen transcripts (four from group 1 participants and four from group 2 participants) and wrote these behaviours onto cards. To reduce subjectivity and bias a third researcher who had not been involved in conducting the interviews carried out a card sort and grouped the behaviours into themes. The three researchers then discussed these groupings and 16 themes emerged.
- The themes were input into NVivo and the remaining transcripts were coded. Early in this process, to ensure inter-rater agreement in terms of the coding framework, two researchers independently coded three transcripts and the inter-rater agreement was approximately 90%. During this process it was decided to merge two themes that were overlapping in content ('feedback' and 'praise and recognition'), resulting in a coding framework of 15 themes.

- Once all transcripts had been coded, frequency analysis was used to identify the percentage of the sample that referred to each competency and the percentage frequency of mentions. Although this demonstrated some differences in frequency of mentions between group 1 and group 2 (see section 3.2 for further details), both groups mentioned the same competencies and there were no competencies that were mentioned by only one group. As a result, a single behavioural competency framework has been developed, rather than separate frameworks for line managers and more senior managers.
- The researchers then met to discuss the content analysis and put together the competency framework. It was decided to merge the following themes:
  - 'Taking advice' was subsumed into 'autonomy and empowerment'.
  - 'Listening' was subsumed into 'individual interest'.
  - 'Keeping promises' was subsumed into 'following processes and procedures'.
  - 'Ideas and perspectives' was subsumed into 'reviewing and guiding'.
- The resulting framework therefore consisted of 11 competencies. For ease of comprehension, these competencies were then grouped into the following themes:
  - supporting employee growth
  - interpersonal style and integrity
  - monitoring direction.

3 Results

3.1 Employee engagement management competency framework

A total of 856 behavioural indicators were extracted from the 48 interview transcripts, with an average of 17.83 behaviours per transcript. These behaviours were grouped into 11 competencies using content analysis and the competencies grouped into themes as described in section 2. Table 2 provides a summary of the competencies and Table 3 gives examples of both positive and negative behavioural indicators relating to each competency.

Table 2: Management competency framework with brief descriptions

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

Table 3: Examples of positive and negative behavioural indicators relating to each management competency

Theme	Competency	Positive behavioural indicators	Negative behavioural indicators
Supporting employee growth	Autonomy and empowerment	Allows employees to do job the way they want Welcomes ideas and feedback from employees Encourages employees to step outside of their comfort zone Strikes the right balance between giving guidance and giving responsibility Enables visibility with senior management Makes an effort to support employees Backs up employee decisions Involves employees in problem-solving and decision-making Acts as a coach when needed Shows faith in employees' capability to do their job	Is overly critical of employees Micro-manages employees Blames employees for decisions taken Focuses on mistakes Ignores additional employee efforts Demonstrates lack of trust in employees' capabilities Tells employees what to do rather than being consultative Does not allow decisions to be challenged Does not give employees opportunity to solve their own problems Negatively compares employees to others
	Development	Gives team members extra-role responsibilities Offers opportunities for progression Sets challenging/stretching tasks and objectives Plans/arranges time off from day-to-day tasks for development opportunities Encourages people to go on training courses Helps/encourages employees to apply for promotions/new jobs Gives advice on career progression and development needs Arranges development activities for employees	Does not give employees direction in progression and career development Discourages employees from pursuing further job opportunities Does not provide opportunities for employees to use their skills Does not provide training opportunities for employees Gives inadequate time for development tasks
	Feedback, praise and recognition	Shares employees' achievements with the team and senior management Gives positive, constructive and specific feedback Thanks employees for their work Congratulates employees on their successes Gives clear reasons behind the feedback Nominates individuals for awards/rewards where relevant Recognises individuals' excellent work Shows understanding when giving feedback on things that haven't gone well Balances positive and negative feedback effectively Recognises both team and individual contribution and performance Gives timely feedback	Only gives negative feedback Does not give thanks and recognition Does not show appreciation for people's hard work and extra effort Gives limited or no feedback

Table 3: Examples of positive and negative behavioural indicators relating to each management competency (continued)

Theme	Competency	Positive behavioural indicators	Negative behavioural indicators
Interpersonal style and integrity	Individual interest	Cares about employee achievements Shows consideration and interest in employees' personal lives Checks employees are feeling okay Makes employees feel as if they're part of a team Remembers employee details such as birthdays Arranges social events Shows understanding of employee pressures Asks employees how they can improve their job enjoyment Listens to what employees have to say	Demonstrates lack of consideration of employees' personal circumstances Does not demonstrate interest in employee job satisfaction Does not demonstrate personal enjoyment of employees Inflexible with employees wanting time off Does not listen to what employees have to say Does not take employee concerns seriously Makes assumptions of what employees want
	Availability	Holds regular one-to-one meetings Is available for employees when needed Genuinely makes time to help and support the team Has regular team meetings Informs employees how to contact them when they are not in the office	Is too busy to give enough time to employees Cancels one-to-one meetings Does not have regular one-to-one meetings with employees Is unavailable when needed Is not visible on a regular basis Limited or no contact with individual
	Personal manner	Takes a positive approach to work Shows enthusiasm for work Is approachable Provides employees with reassurance that they are doing a good job Is willing to have a laugh at work Is willing to demonstrate their own weaknesses	Is aggressive towards employees Uses email rather than speaking personally to employees Is unapproachable Demonstrates a lack of care about one's own work Is not interested in work Uses humour and sarcasm inappropriately Does not lead by example
	Ethical	Respects employee confidentiality Communicates issues to employees honestly	Shows favouritism Treats employees differently Does not respect confidentiality Talks about employees behind their backs Criticises employees in front of others Does not respect employees' contributions

Theme	Competency	Positive behavioural indicators	Negative behavioural indicators
Monitoring direction	Reviewing and guiding	Gives guidance on how to meet targets	Does not give advice when required
		Makes suggestions of how to improve work	Criticises without providing solutions
		Highlights any barriers and gives guidance on how to overcome them	Not interested in finding out answers to employees' questions
		Monitors work to improve quality of work	Ignores employee requests for guidance
		Provides one-to-one support to undertake tasks	Deflects responsibility of problem-solving to senior management
		Asks if employees need help	Gives vague rather than specific advice
		Provides examples of previous work (eg reports) for employees to follow	
		Helps employees prioritise work	
		Is open to questions	
		Does not give advice unless it's the right advice	
		Helps employees to come up with new ideas and ways to do their work	
	Clarifying expectations	Sets clear goals and objectives	Does not clarify expectations and role requirements
		Takes time to explain what's needed in the role	Is not clear of their own role requirements
		Makes employees aware of how their role fits in with company objectives	Does not keep employees up to date of changes in job requirements
		Demonstrates understanding of the role that employees do	Demonstrates a lack of understanding of employees' job role
		Explains to employees how their work fits with expectations	Provides conflicting information to employees
			Fails to communicate if employees are on track or not
	Managing time and resources	Is keen to understand and resolve workload problems	Does not respond to the need for extra resources
		Is aware of their team's workload	Does not give adequate time for planning
		Arranges for employees to have time off phones when necessary	Interrupts employees when working to a deadline
		Allows employees to come into work early or leave late if required	Gives additional work to employees who are already struggling with their workloads
		Pitches in to help during busy periods	Does not recognise how much work they have already given to employees
		Gains extra or redistributes resources to manage high workload	Does not discuss workload with employees
		Provides time and space for employees to complete complex tasks	Gives extra tasks to employees late in the day
		Sets effective deadlines	Does not stay behind to support with extra workload
	Following process and procedures	Produces work plan for employees	Demonstrates lack of understanding of processes and procedures
		Sets regular performance reviews	Does not consistently follow process and procedures
		Demonstrates an understanding of work processes	Unduly focuses on one element of the process
		Sees the process through from beginning to end	Tells employees to follow process and procedures but does not follow themselves
		Clearly explains procedures	Does not follow up on action points
		Always does what they say they're going to do	Does not follow up on employee issues
		Follows up on issues on behalf of employees	

3.2 Frequency analysis

Two types of frequency analyses were carried out on the data:

1) Percentage of the sample that referred to each competency – this is calculated by the number of interviewees who mentioned each competency divided by the total number of interviewees.

2) Percentage frequency of mentions – this is calculated by the number of times each competency was mentioned divided by the total number of mentions for all competencies.

Table 4 provides a summary of this frequency data.

3.2.1 Overall frequency analysis

Overall, the competencies 'reviewing and guiding', 'feedback, praise and recognition', and 'autonomy and empowerment' received the highest percentage frequency of mentions and were also referred to by the highest percentages of the sample (79–92%). These three competencies were also the most frequently mentioned in both groups of participants (see Table 4).

Frequency analysis shows that for most of the competencies more positive behaviours were mentioned than negative ones. There were three exceptions where more negative behaviours were

Table 4: Management competency framework showing the percentage of the sample that referred to each competency, and percentage frequency of mentions for each competency

Management competency	% of sample who referred to competency	% frequency of mentions	% negative indicators	% positive indicators	% frequency of mentions for group 1 participants	% frequency of mentions for group 2 participants
Reviewing and guiding	90	17	29	71	14	21
Feedback, praise and recognition	92	16	25	75	18	14
Autonomy and empowerment	79	16	42	58	16	16
Individual interest	60	9	45	55	8	10
Availability	56	9	64	36	5	12
Personal manner	63	7	48	52	8	6
Development	50	6	20	80	9	4
Clarifying expectations	56	6	45	55	5	7
Following process and procedures	40	6	64	36	6	6
Ethical	35	4	85	15	7	1
Managing time and resources	29	3	41	59	4	3

mentioned: 'availability' and 'following processes and procedures' (both 36% positive and 64% negative); and 'ethical' (15% positive, 85% negative). See Table 4 for further details.

The following sections provide vignettes for the three competencies that were mentioned by the greatest number of interviewees and received the highest frequency of mentions to illustrate the types of behaviours reported.

Reviewing and guiding
'Reviewing and guiding' was the most frequently mentioned management competency (17% of total mentions). Seventy-one per cent of these were examples of positive management behaviours. These examples referred to giving employees appropriate advice and guidance on many aspects of their work, including meeting targets, overcoming barriers, improving the quality of one's work, prioritising workloads and offering different perspectives, helping employees come up with new ideas and ways to do their work.

The following are examples of managers who have offered effective 'reviewing and guiding' to their employees:

'In the one-to-ones he always offered his help, and on the calls he has always given me new ways of saying things on the phone which helps the customer get to the point more easily. He always gave good advice and never sounded rude with it.' (group 1 participant)

'I remember a particular time when it was very busy, a lot of work to do, lots of tasks, a lot of deadlines to meet and I brought that to the attention of my current line manager, and he helped me focus on what the priorities were. We decided which things I needed to work on first and allocate the other work to various other members of the team and so got together a more realistic timetable for how the work should be completed.' (group 2 participant)

'When I had an idea that was wrong or inappropriate he would point out why it wouldn't work rather than just give me a no and he was very effective in that he knew what I wanted to do and he effectively showed me how to do it.' (group 2 participant)

Negative examples included inappropriate or a lack of advice and guidance when needed:

'You never get any help though. You can say, "look I'm struggling" and you get told to "get on with it".' (group 1 participant)

'They [the manager] gave me no guidance as to where I could find that information out or how I could build my knowledge in those areas; they ignored anything I was asking them.' (group 2 participant)

Feedback, praise and recognition
Sixteen per cent of the total number of behaviours mentioned fell within 'feedback, praise and recognition'. The majority (75%) of behaviours mentioned within this competency were examples of positive management. For example:

'I went down for my performance review, my interim performance review so it was halfway between the proper one. He was basically saying all the positive things that I have done. He has all the individual collection of the customer thank yous. I know he is monitoring the good things as well. It is nice to know that you actually get told when you do something good. That made me feel good. I know he is paying attention and I know it's not just negative things that he takes down, its positive things as well. He listens to calls, listens back through it and sends me little notes of when it's an excellent example of customer service. It makes you feel like you are being recognised for your work and that he wants you to do well.' (group 1 participant)

Of the 25% of negative behaviours mentioned within this competency, the majority of examples mentioned receiving limited or no feedback, praise and recognition. For example, a group 1 participant stated they were *'getting no feedback about my stats, how I'm doing or anything and you just feel deserted'* and similarly a group 2 participant explained that there had *'not been one bit of praise'*.

Autonomy and empowerment
The competency 'autonomy and empowerment' included 16% of the total number of behaviours mentioned across all the competencies. A wide

variety of behaviours were mentioned, including: involvement in decision-making and problem-solving; feeling supported by their managers, who may provide coaching or back up employee decisions; being able to have some autonomy in the way they want to carry out their job role; and being believed in by their managers.

Fifty-eight per cent of the behaviours mentioned here were positive, for example:

'I had to report back and say where we were going, what we were doing about it and so every stage I can't say there was one instance that I didn't feel as though I was doing the job correctly or how he would do it and he gave me lots of encouragement to say "Don't be scared of going into those meetings and don't be scared to say what you think and how it will affect us. I'll always be there to back you up if it's needed" but I felt throughout the time I was given the grounding because I started at the beginning of it and I knew the process and all I did was keep it going. I always felt it was being positive and encouraged to do it and what I was doing was what was needed to be done.'

The individual went on to say that his manager was always there to back him up and provided *'plenty of support but I was given kind of a free rein to do what I needed to do, which made me feel more proactive and productive. It was giving me the guidance but being told not to be afraid to make my own decisions and he would back me up on them absolutely if they were wrong. He was "don't be afraid to make your own decisions because we're going in the right direction".'* (group 2 participant)

Forty-two per cent of responses within this competency were examples of negative management behaviours. Many of these referred to times where managers had been overly critical of employees, blaming, micro-managing, focusing on mistakes and not showing trust in employees' capabilities. A participant explained this, saying, *'We always felt like we were dictated to. We were very much micro-managed, you weren't able to have any input to decisions or question methods of working or what you were doing. You couldn't challenge anything it was kind of the "my way or the highway" approach to managing, disinterested in helping in any way whatsoever or coaching.'* (group 2 participant)

3.2.2 Frequency analysis comparing the two groups of participants

The two types of frequency analysis elicited different results when comparing the response patterns of the two participant groups.

Percentage of the sample that referred to each competency

This analysis shows that out of the total number of individuals who referred at least once to each competency, there was little difference between the two participant groups. There were three exceptions to this. Group 1 participants were more likely to refer to manager behaviours relating to 'development' and 'ethics', while group 2 participants were more likely to refer to manager behaviours relating to 'clarifying expectations'. Full details are provided in Table 5.

Percentage frequency of mentions

It follows that as more individuals in group 1 referred to manager behaviours relating to 'development' and 'ethics', individuals in group 1 also mentioned these two management behaviours more frequently than those in group 2. Interestingly, despite almost the same number of individuals in both groups referring to 'feedback, praise and recognition' and 'managing time and resources', group 1 participants mentioned behaviours relating to these two competencies more frequently than those in group 2. Similarly, group 2 participants mentioned 'reviewing and guiding' more frequently than group 1, despite a similar number of individuals within each group mentioning this competency. Full details are provided in Table 6.

Table 5: Management competency framework showing the percentage of sample that referred to each competency and according to participant group

Management sub-competency	% of sample who referred to competency	% of which were from group 1 participants	% of which were from group 2 participants
Reviewing and guiding	90	51	49
Feedback, praise and recognition	92	50	50
Autonomy and empowerment	79	53	47
Individual interest	60	52	48
Availability	56	41	59
Personal manner	63	57	43
Development	50	63	37
Clarifying expectations	56	37	63
Following process and procedures	40	53	47
Ethical	35	71	29
Managing time and resources	29	50	50

Table 6: Management competency framework showing the percentage frequency of mentions per competency and according to participant group

Management sub-competency	% frequency of mentions	% of which were from group 1 participants	% of which were from group 2 participants
Reviewing and guiding	17	43	57
Feedback, praise and recognition	16	57	43
Autonomy and empowerment	16	51	49
Individual interest	9	44	56
Availability	9	33	67
Personal manner	7	61	39
Development	6	69	31
Clarifying expectations	6	45	55
Following process and procedures	6	54	46
Ethical	4	85	15
Managing time and resources	3	59	41

4 Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to identify specific management behaviours important for enhancing employee engagement, explore the differences between first-level line management and more-senior-level management in this context, and develop a competency framework for use in giving guidance to managers. The main findings are summarised below:

- This qualitative research study, using critical incident technique interviews and content analysis, has revealed 11 engaging management competencies and identified both positive and negative behavioural indicators for each competency. The 11 competencies were grouped into three broader themes: supporting employee growth, interpersonal style and integrity, and monitoring direction.
- Despite expectations that first-line managers and more-senior managers might display different patterns of behaviours, the set of competencies was found to be consistent across descriptions of both first-line management and more-senior management (managers of managers). Both participant groups referred to all 11 competencies and therefore a single engaging management competency framework was developed to cover both levels of management.
- The three competencies that were mentioned by the greatest number of participants and received the highest percentage frequency of mentions were 'reviewing and guiding', 'feedback, praise and recognition', and 'autonomy and empowerment'. These three competencies were also the most frequently mentioned by both groups of participants.
- Frequency analysis highlighted that participants mentioned more positive behaviours than negative behaviours for most competencies. Three competencies received more negative mentions than positive: 'availability', 'following processes and procedures', and 'ethical'.

- The frequency analysis enabled exploration of the differences between the patterns of responses from the two participant groups. Overall, there was little difference between the number of individuals within each group who referred to each competency, although there were three exceptions. Group 1 participants, who were reporting on first-level line management behaviours, were more likely to refer to behaviours relating to the 'development' and 'ethical' competencies; whereas group 2 participants, who were reporting on more-senior management behaviours, were more likely to refer to behaviours relating to 'clarifying expectations'. Although this may suggest that behaviours relating to development opportunities and fairness/ethical practices are more relevant to employee engagement of non-managers and behaviours relating to clarifying expectations are more important to employee engagement of managers, it is dangerous to make assumptions that differences in frequencies indicates meaningful differences between these two groups. Further research is required to identify meaningful differences between which competencies may be more relevant for enhancing employee engagement at different organisational levels.
- Similarly, when examining the percentage frequency of mentions, a difference between the two groups emerged. Despite almost the same number of individuals in both groups referring to 'reviewing and guiding', this competency was mentioned more frequently by group 2 participants, while 'feedback, praise and recognition' and 'managing time and resources' were mentioned more frequently by group 1 participants. This may suggest that in order to enhance employee engagement it is more important for managers of managers to display behaviours relating to reviewing and guiding, and it is more important for first-line managers

to offer feedback, praise and recognition and effectively manage employee time and resources. Again, meaningful differences cannot be assumed from frequency analysis, but these differences may indicate that, although all competencies are important for both management levels, different competencies might become a priority for different levels of management. Future research should therefore aim to ascertain which competencies are more relevant for managing employee engagement at different levels of the organisation.

5 The way forward

5.1 Implications for policy-makers

Employee engagement has been a topic of interest for the UK Government for some years and the MacLeod and Clarke (2009) report, *Engaging for Success*, made it clear that both leadership and management should be a priority for organisations looking to improve performance through increased employee engagement. The current study has taken this a step further by conducting empirical research to identify the management behaviours that are important for enhancing employee engagement. The engaging management competency framework would also, once validated by further research, provide policy-makers with a mechanism for giving supportive guidance for employers on how to go about building employee engagement.

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) pointed out that the major task for policy-makers was to raise the profile of employee engagement with businesses in all sectors of the economy. In particular, their third recommendation was for increased support and mentioned both access to emerging evidence and easily actionable ideas for interventions. The findings of the current study can be a part of that profile-raising and support-provision process: it constitutes useful emerging evidence in this field and could form the basis of interventions to enhance engagement at work. For example, the engaging management competency framework could be part of awareness-raising and information-provision interventions; it could also be used to guide the design of learning and development or other human resources interventions. The findings could be promoted through websites, conferences and in conjunction with other relevant information and guidance.

Most, if not all, of the positive behaviours specified in the engaging management competency framework emerging from the current study could be regarded as part of good people management. The advantage of the framework provided is that it gives a clear specification of which parts of good people management are particularly important for employee engagement and which behaviours need to be avoided. Reports such as the Leitch Review of Skills (2006) and the Foresight report (2008) emphasise the need for the Government and other national bodies to promote good people management skills across the UK. This has implications not only for the relevant government departments, but also for, amongst others, the CIPD, UKCES, MBA providers and other management development and training providers. Emphasising the importance of manager behaviours that enhance employee engagement can be a part of this wider promotion of people management skills and part of the explanation of why good people management is important.

By specifying the role of managers in engaging employees, this provides an opportunity for those considering the productivity and engagement agendas to work in collaboration with those responsible for skills and management practice, for example on information and guidance provision.

5.2 Implications for future research

While this study is an important first step in exploring the role of managers in enhancing employee engagement, it is not without limitations and does point to a need for further research. As the study was conducted with participants drawn from a single organisation, further research is needed to test the applicability of the findings in other workplaces and sectors.

As it was a purely qualitative study, although the findings contribute to understanding what are perceived to be the important management behaviours for enhancing engagement at work, they cannot give empirical evidence of the impact of these behaviours. A quantitative study is needed in order

to explore the validity of the framework and to show an association between the behaviours of a manager and the levels of engagement of their employees: this would need both concurrent, cross-sectional validation and predictive, longitudinal validation. This kind of quantitative approach would require the development of a questionnaire measure, based on the behavioural framework, and would lead to its validation. Such a measure could be used in future research and practice to explore management behaviour in the context of employee engagement in more depth. The process of validating the framework and subsequent research would provide an opportunity to explore whether the different engaging management competencies differentially predict aspects of employee engagement.

Future research could usefully explore the similarities and distinctions between the engaging management competency framework and the authors' previous findings regarding management competencies for the prevention and reduction of stress at work. It has been suggested by some practitioners that levels of engagement may have a curvilinear relationship with well-being: that both very low levels, where an employee is disengaged from their work, and very high levels, where an employee is overengaged in their work, might be detrimental to the individual's well-being. In particular, high levels of engagement, while they might lead to short-term productivity and positive outcomes, might also bring the risk of burnout with prolonged overwork. There is a need for the balance between engagement and well-being to be understood in order to achieve sustainability in both dimensions.

In the long term, it would be ideal to design and evaluate an intervention to develop managers' competencies in enhancing employee engagement. Based on the framework emerging from the current study and further validation research, such an intervention would aim to support managers in understanding: which behaviours relevant to employee engagement they already include in their management approach; which ones they need to build; and how they can develop their behavioural repertoire in order to optimise the engagement of those who work for them.

5.3 Implications for employers

The aim of this research was to develop a behavioural competency framework in order to provide clear guidance on the behaviours managers need to show and avoid in order to enhance employee engagement. Thus the framework provided in this report, together with the specific positive and negative behavioural indicators given in the results section, can be used by employers to support managers. This support might be through simply providing the information to managers or might feed into specific people management interventions.

In terms of specific people management interventions, employers could consider integrating the engaging management competencies into a range of practices and processes which they use to define and develop management competence. First, learning and development interventions could be designed based on the framework to support managers in developing the skills and behaviours relevant to enhancing employee engagement; or the competencies/behaviours could be integrated into existing management development programmes. Second, the competencies could be assessed during manager selection processes to ensure that those recruited or promoted into management positions either currently show or have the potential to develop the relevant behaviours. Third, the framework could be integrated into performance management processes to ensure managers are rewarded or held accountable for demonstrating the relevant behaviours.

In addition to fitting into people management practices and process, the engaging management competencies could also be useful in following up employee engagement activities. For example, if an organisation has conducted an employee engagement survey and identified divisions or teams where engagement scores are low and management approaches are indicated as part of the reason for this, the competency framework could be used as a way of identifying solutions. The framework can be used to help managers in these areas understand the importance of their management approach and undertake management development as appropriate.

5.4 Implications for line managers

The key message for managers is that the research findings provide a clear indication of the behaviours required to enhance employee engagement, as well as the behaviours that may negatively impact employee engagement. While the resulting management approach could be regarded as general good people management, the framework specifies which elements of people management are the most important for engagement and which behaviours need to be avoided.

The research suggests that there is no single behaviour that is the 'magic solution' to engaging employees. Rather, there is a complementary set of behaviours that combine to enhance engagement. Which behaviours are most important is likely to vary according to the situation and the individual being managed.

Through exploring the range of behaviours identified in the framework, managers can get an insight into which behaviours are already part of their management repertoire and which ones they might need to develop. Asking for feedback, particularly from those they manage, can be helpful in this process. Where a manager identifies a particular skill gap, learning and development can be sought.

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