

Lead - Engage - Perform

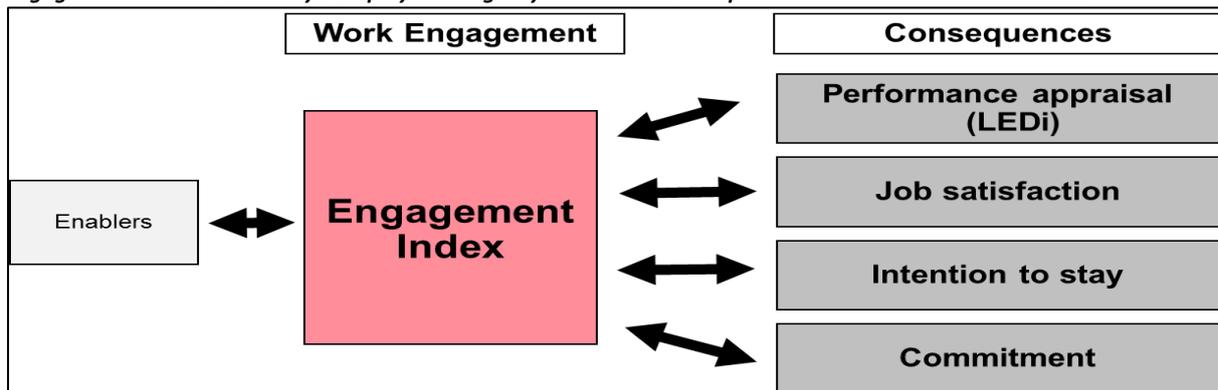
Expert Meeting on Leadership for Employee Engagement 21/22 January 2015

Employee engagement has been shown to be a necessary precondition for innovation, effective change management and overall performance in a wide range of organisations. Some OECD countries have begun to apply these insights to their civil services and public agencies in order to better understand the drivers for performance and the implications for human resource management and leadership. To discuss the role of leadership in supporting employee engagement, approximately 40 experts representing 21 member countries, 2 non-member countries (Latvia and Peru) and the European Commission met to share experience and consider steps forward for collective learning. [Click here for presentation and documents](#). Discussions touched on:

- Evidence that the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing budgetary constraints have had a negative impact on public employees' trust in leadership and organisational commitment
- The existing empirical measures and data for employee engagement, conceptual clarifications and critical appraisal
- In-depth case studies from Germany's Employment Agency, the European Commission, and the Governments of Australia, Belgium (Federal level and the Flanders Region), Estonia, the United Kingdom (central government and Scotland) and the United States.
- Cross-cutting themes including the roles and responsibilities of leadership, employer branding, the use of employee surveys for evidence-based policymaking in the field of HRM.

Work engagement is measured by testing the degree to which people devote energy and enthusiasm to their job and are absorbed by it. Empirical research identifies antecedents: congruence with organisational values, perceived organisational support, confidence in one's own abilities, and autonomy and challenge in the job. Extensive evidence associates work engagement with higher performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, pro-active innovative behaviour, lower labour turnover, lower absence, higher job satisfaction and personal well-being. More research is needed, however, on engagement at the organisational level. A strategy to promote engagement should include a holistic approach to leadership, HRM, organisational development and climate (e.g. working conditions), and measurement, often through the use of employee surveys.

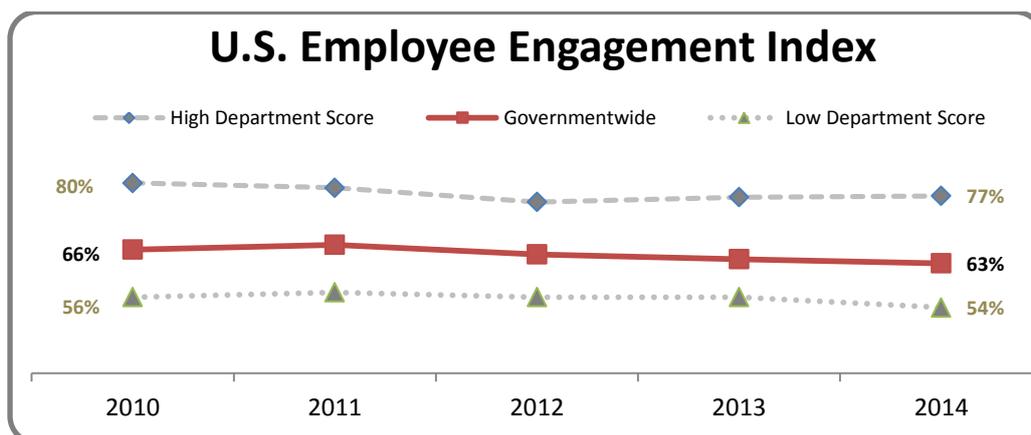
Engagement Index at Germany's Employment Agency: correlations with positive outcomes can be measured



Evidence collected by the OECD on HRM reforms between 2008 and 2013 indicates potential reductions in work engagement resulting from significant reforms in most OECD countries. The forthcoming OECD study suggests that in many OECD countries reforms have resulted in greater job intensity and work-related stress, and lower trust in leadership, job satisfaction, and workplace commitment. These concepts are intricately related to employee engagement.

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Country case studies highlight a range of data-driven, evidence-based approaches for identifying and addressing employee engagement and leadership strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the United States, engagement is a [core component of the President's management agenda](#) to “innovate by unlocking the full potential of the workforce we have today and build the workforce we need for tomorrow”. Germany’s employment agency uses a detailed engagement index to identify and invest in the most significant drivers of engagement: work organisation, support by supervisor, work environment and the psychological contract. Australia’s workforce survey correlates employee engagement with specific leadership behaviours, including being visible, and engaging with staff on how to respond to future challenges. The UK civil service survey suggests that specific challenges exist in employees’ perceptions of leadership and organisational change. The Scottish Government uses employee surveys to identify specific units and managers in need of support and designs tailor-made solutions. Estonia’s survey of top civil servants’ job commitment enables the government to direct specific interventions in areas that are highlighted as critical weaknesses, including developing a common understanding of the state’s strategic objectives across senior civil servants. Belgian research suggests that engagement is the result of team, supervisor and cultural factors; and the Flanders region’s modernised approach to HRM and leadership addresses this by providing coaching to improve leaders’ abilities to engage their employees. The European commission is in the process of stabilizing their engagement index and has developed an internal social media tool to improve engagement across DGs.



A nuanced understanding of the different roles played by top leadership and direct managers can help inform employee engagement policies and influence workplace culture and organisational climate. The country cases suggest that employee engagement also depends on a range of HRM-related enablers and organisational development policies and strategies. HRM policies that support well-being in the workplace, work-life balance and learning and development are equally important. Public organisations that improve their engagement become more attractive places to work when this is communicated outwards through employer branding. Effective employer branding can help public organisations to attract the skills and expertise they need to meet their objectives despite not always being financially competitive with the private sector.

The day and a half of stimulating discussions concluded with a consideration of the role engagement plays in meeting the priorities of the OECD: public sector innovation, trust in government and inclusive growth. Data on employee engagement strengthen countries’ understanding of an important dimension of the public sector workforce, and provide a new tool for monitoring and management in order to strengthen public sector performance as well as employee well-being. The OECD will continue to develop opportunities for countries to share experience and insights in these areas at upcoming events and through further data collection.