Employee Engagement in the UK Social Care Sector: Latest Research Findings

Roger Parry, Agenda Consulting

April 2015

Introduction

Social care is a major sector in the UK and employs over 1.5m people. Whilst the sector is set to grow, social care organisations face the challenge of operating within severe financial constraints in the coming years whilst ensuring excellent standards of care.

As people intensive organisations, it will therefore be critical for social care organisations to understand how to develop and maintain high levels of employee engagement.

Aims and Approach

The aims of our research were to understand:
- How best to measure employee engagement in social care; and
- Which factors have a strong impact on engagement.

To carry out the research, we created a database comprising the employee engagement survey results from 28 social care organisations that we have worked with between 2012 and 2015, and involving over 11,000 respondents in aggregate.

Getting a handle on Engagement

David McLeod and Nita Clarke, joint authors of *Engaging For Success - Enhancing Performance Through Employee Engagement*[1], contend that:
- Engagement goes to the heart of the relationship between the employee and their organisation
- That when employees are engaged there is a powerful win-win
    - Employees feel trusted and valued
    - There are a number of business benefits for organisations, including lower absence and turnover, higher levels of customer service and greater innovation.

There is no nationally agreed definition of employee engagement. At Agenda Consulting we commonly use 3 employee engagement questions in our survey work:
- **Extra Effort**: I would willingly put in extra effort in order to help the organisation
- **Proud**: I am proud to tell people that I work for this organisation
- **Good Place to Work**: I would wholeheartedly recommend this organisation to others as a good place to work.

---

[1] David McLeod and Nita Clarke, 2009, *Engage for Success – Enhancing Performance Through Employee Engagement,* A report to Government

We have used these questions with a 5 point Likert scale – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. In this note, by positivity we mean the percentage of employees who strongly agree or agree with each question.

Figure 1: Percentage of employees who are positive for each question (Lower Quartile, Median, Upper Quartile)
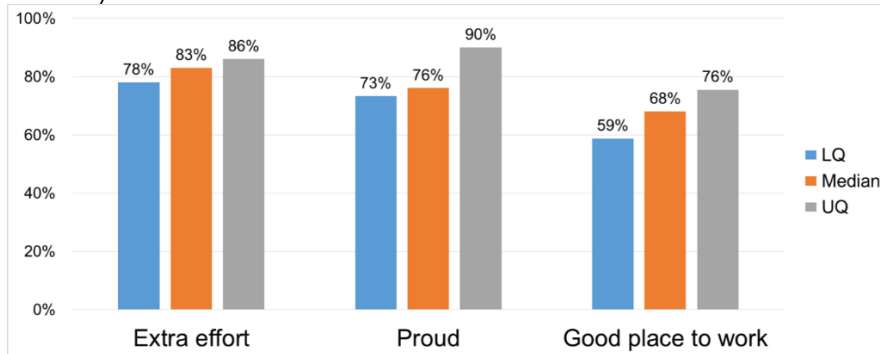

Figure 2: Percentage of employees who are positive on Good Place to Work and Extra Effort for each organisation
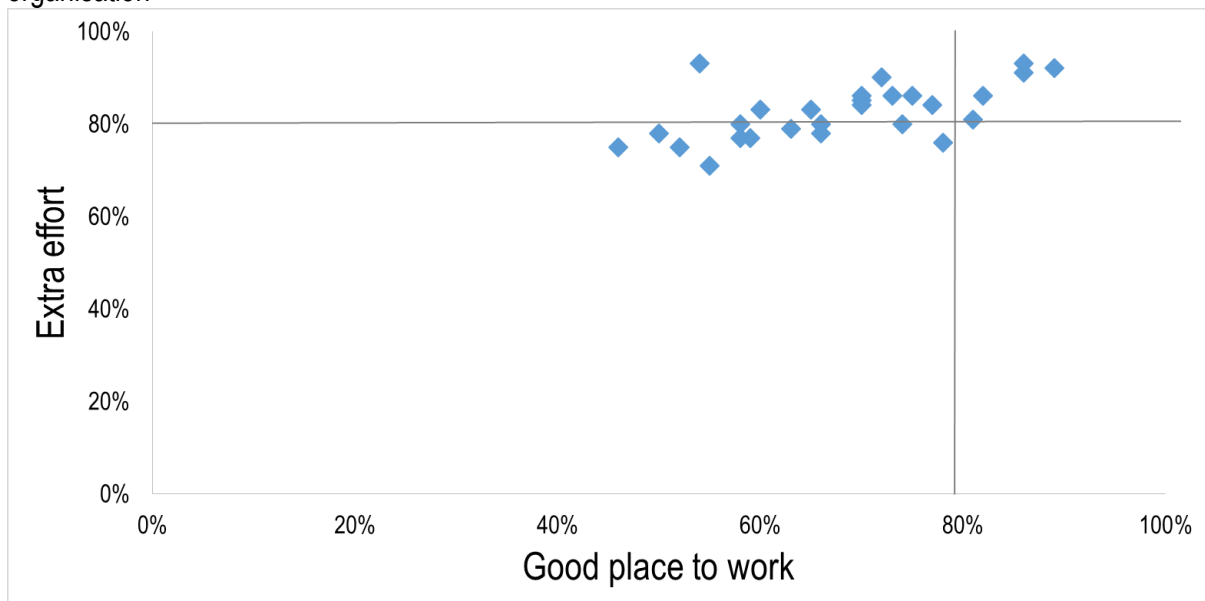

Figure 1 shows that levels of positivity vary by question. These are very high for Extra Effort (median 83%), high for Proud (median 76%) and more modest for Good Place To Work (median 68%).

Figure 2 shows that Extra Effort is generally high for all organisations – perhaps driven by the nature of the work undertaken and/or the organisation's mission – whilst the results for Good Place to Work are much more variable.

We then built 3 statistical models to explore the relationships between a number of aspects of the employee experience and each of the 3 engagement questions. A key finding was that the Good Place to Work question was more highly influenced by organisational factors than the other two.

2

Our conclusion from this analysis is that Good Place to Work is the best question to measure engagement in social care because it is the most discriminating of the 3 questions and is the most highly influenced by organisational factors – a key tenet of employee engagement.

What drives engagement in social care?

The second part of our research focussed on understanding the relationship between 10 key employee experience factors and engagement as measured by Good Place To Work. The factors were drawn from our research database and are set out in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Key Factors Explored

- **Colleagues**: I work with skilled, competent people who are good at their jobs
- **Communications**: This organisation practises open, honest communication and shares information
- **Leadership**: I trust and respect the leadership group in this organisation
- **Learning and Development**: This organisation helps me acquire skills and knowledge that will benefit my future career
- **Management**: I trust and respect my immediate manager
- **Reward**: I am rewarded fairly for the contribution I make in my particular job
- **Role**: The work that I do gives me a feeling of personal achievement
- **Service**: I believe that this organisation delivers a high quality service to its external customers
- **Values**: This organisation has strong values and operates to high ethical standards
- **Wellbeing**: I am badly treated or bullied at work.

We used regression modelling techniques applied to our research database to explore the relationships between these factors and engagement. The results were:

- All factors had a statistically significant impact on engagement with the exception of Colleagues. As a result, Colleagues was removed from the model
- Figure 4 sets out the percentage of impact on engagement due to each factor.

Figure 4: Percentage of impact on engagement due to each factor
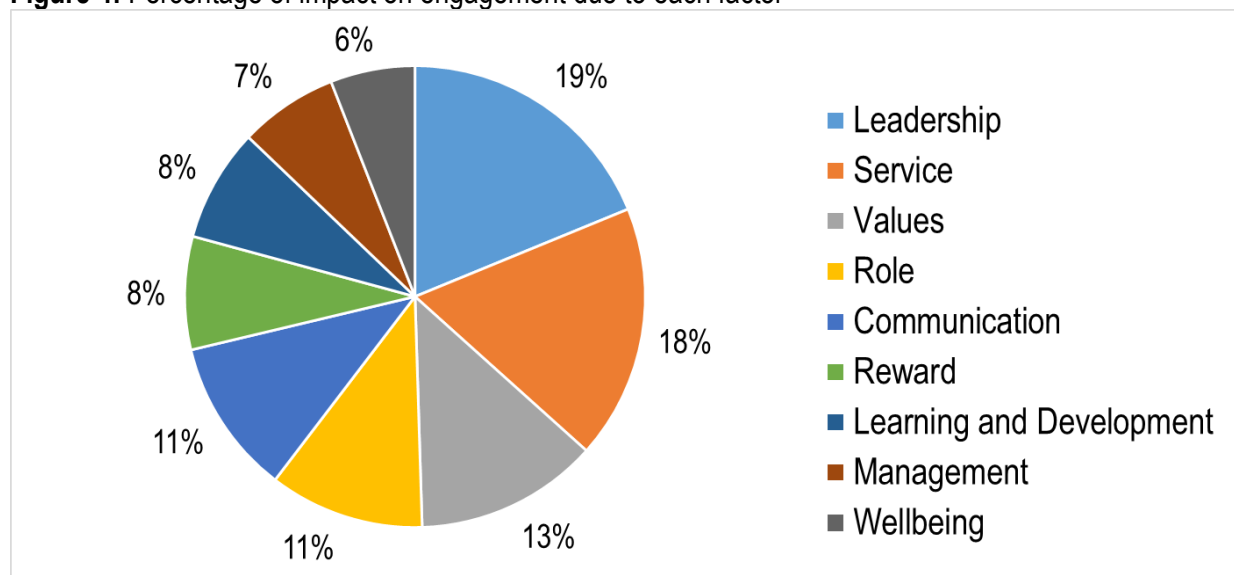
The findings are that **Leadership and Service** have the strongest impact on engagement and when combined with **Values** account for half the impact that can be explained by the model.

This implies that perceptions of the trustworthiness of the leadership group, of the quality of the service delivered to external customers, and of the strength of values and ethics in practice, strongly influence the engagement of social care employees.

Achieving high levels of positivity on Leadership, Service and Values will therefore be important for a social care organisation that wishes to increase levels of engagement.

Perceptions of **Role and Communication** appear to have a moderate impact on engagement and taken together account for 22% of the impact.

This suggests that the feelings of personal achievement as well as the extent to which employees perceive internal communications to be open and honest are important but less so than Leadership, Service and Values.

Reward, Learning and Development, Management and Wellbeing appear to have the weakest influence. These findings suggest that it is possible for employees to be happy about their reward, their learning, their manager and their wellbeing but not to be engaged. This might happen, for example, when employees identify with their local service, department or region rather than the organisation as a whole.

It should be noted that the results do not indicate that these factors are unimportant, simply that getting these factors right on their own is unlikely to improve engagement.

Recommendations

1 We recommend that social care organisations include Good Place to Work as one of their engagement questions. Responses to this question tend to be more varied and discriminating than other questions and provide the greatest insight.

2 Pay particular attention to Leadership, Service and Values. Any organisation wishing to improve engagement should consider making improvements on these factors.

3 We recommend that when social care organisations undertake employee engagement surveys, they explore the relative impact of the different factors in their own organisation and prioritise accordingly.

Roger Parry is Director of Agenda Consulting, a research consultancy which helps not-for-profit organisations achieve their mission through a deep understanding of their people. (www.agendaconsulting.co.uk)
Email: roger.parry@agendaconsulting.co.uk
Telephone: 01865 263720