

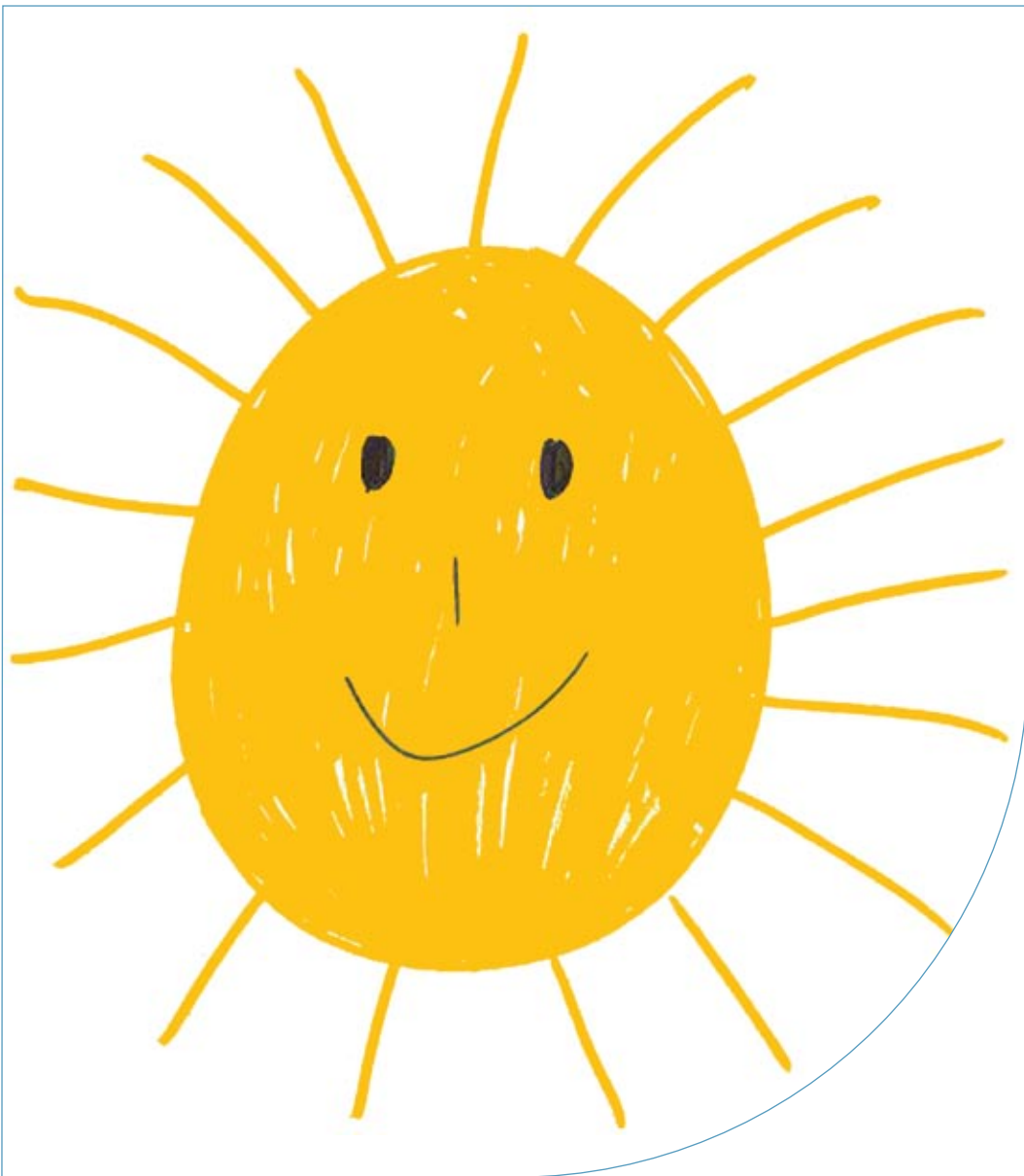
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# THE ENGAGING MANAGER SERIES

## **Images of engaging management**

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Gemma Robertson-Smith, Dilys Robinson





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# **THE ENGAGING MANAGER SERIES**

**IMAGES OF ENGAGING MANAGEMENT**

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Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009

*Exceeding Expectation: the principles of outstanding leadership*

Tamkin P, Pearson G, Hirsh W, Constable S

The Work Foundation, 2010

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# Images of engaging management

Gemma Robertson-Smith

Dilys Robinson

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) began exploring the concept of employee engagement in 2002, initially working with 46 organisations to define ‘engagement’ (see definition below), then moving on to develop an engagement measure for use within attitude surveys, and a diagnostic tool to identify engagement drivers.

### Engagement definition

*‘Engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to nurture, maintain and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee<sup>1</sup>.’*

Throughout our early research into employee engagement, we were consistently finding that the employee–line manager relationship is crucial, regardless of organisation, sector or employee group. The strength and consistency of the influence of the line manager on engagement levels led us to undertake our latest research, on ‘The Engaging Manager’. Our aim was to understand how ‘engaging managers’ – people who inspire and motivate their teams to perform well – behave in their dealings with people, especially their own teams.

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson D, Perryman S, Hayday S (2004), *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report number 408

## 1.2 The purpose of this report

The extensive material we collected during our Engaging Manager research is being used to create a series of short reports, exploring different aspects of the findings in more detail. This report explores perceptions of engaging managers, drawing on the findings from focus groups with the engaged teams. The focus groups concluded with an exercise whereby team members were asked to create a representation of their manager: this could be by drawing of their manager (for example as an object or an animal), creating a metaphor for their manager, or using descriptive words or phrases to represent their manager. Participants then discussed the reasons behind their representations of engaging managers. Those taking part found this enjoyable, and some insightful and thought-provoking pictures and descriptions were offered. This report presents a collection of the words, metaphors and pictures produced, analyses the main themes arising from them, and discusses how they guide our knowledge of the behaviours of engaging managers.

Figure 2.1 illustrates that the five most frequently used terms/descriptions used by team members to describe their manager's management style were: 'supportive' (used on 75 occasions), 'personable/empathetic' (46), 'positive/can-do attitude'

(37), 'listens/values/involves' (36) and 'good at delegating' (35). Table 2.1 shows the frequency of use of these and other descriptive terms. Noteworthy here is the frequency with which terms are used that reflect the way the manager relates to team members as individuals. For instance the top two most commonly cited descriptions relate to how supportive, empathetic and personable the manager is to their employees. This emphasises the importance of the personal employee–line manager relationship in characterising a manager as 'engaging'. This personal relationship seems to be more important to team members than their manager's expertise or strategic vision, although these 'bigger picture' behaviours also feature.

**Table 2.1: Words used by team members to describe their manager's management style, frequencies**

Term/description	Frequency of use
Supportive	75
Personable/Empathetic	46
Positive/Can-do attitude	37
Listens/Values/Involves	36
Good at delegating	35
Approachable/Available	33
Honest/Open	24
Hard working/Hands-on	21
Good sense of humour	20
Fair	16
Shows leadership	16
Expert in their field/Knowledgeable	15
Enthusiastic/Inspired to do the best possible	14
Organises and prioritises	13
Target-focused/Goal-focused/Determined	13
A team player/Promotes team	12
Shows active interest in others	11
Genuinely interested in my success and development	10
Strategic vision/Direction	9
Balances personal and professional	8
Calm/Relaxed	8
Not afraid to confront or challenge/Brave	8
Confidence/Charisma	7
Effective at managing performance	7
Interested in the future of the organisation	7

Term/description	Frequency of use
Provides a flexible working environment	7
Mutual respect/Trust	6
Committed/Dedicated	5
Effective	5
Takes responsibility	5
Collected/Level-headed	4
Adaptable/Versatile/Flexible	3
Breaks down barriers/Problem solving	3
Shares knowledge	3
Appreciative/Praises	2
Considerate	2
Perceptive/Business aware	2

Source: IES, 2009

## 2.2 Metaphors

In addition to descriptive words, a small number of engaged team members opted to describe their manager through metaphor. We offered team members the option to use metaphors as they can help us to better understand team members' perceptions of their engaging managers that cannot easily be expressed in single words. They can communicate a lot of meaning in a single phrase.

Team members used various metaphors. Some represented the engaging manager as a support mechanism to help them succeed or develop, or to see that there are no limits to what they can achieve. For instance:

*'[Manager's name] is an aeroplane – a "tool" to help you get where you want to be.'*

*'The sky is not the limit.'*

*'A good manager is a smart pair of well-fitting shoes – supportive, gives encouragement and allows you to go about your business with confidence.'*

The last metaphor indicates not only the supportive quality of the manager but also the encouragement that the manager gives to individuals to allow them to succeed and be confident in their work.

One person focused on the reliability and consistency of the manager's performance and a feeling that one can depend on the manager for consistent quality:

*'M&S food – you know you can depend on [manager's name], consistent quality.'*

Another team member made reference to the manager's ability to 'juggle' lots of tasks at once:

*'Keeping all the balls in the air.'*

Another team member used the example of the Queen to highlight the visibility of the manager and the respect and admiration of those around her:

*'[Manager's name] is a bit like the Queen, gets around a lot, is broadly recognised and generally liked by her people and her superiors alike, respected.'*

Finally, one person used the metaphor of a 'stick of rock' to emphasise that the manager internalises the company to the extent that it runs through his body. This illustrates the high level of commitment typically shown by engaging managers to their organisations:

*'If you cut his arm off he'd be like a stick of rock – [company name] through and through.'*

## 3 Pictures of Engaging Managers

This chapter presents an analysis of the pictures produced, during focus groups, by our engaged teams.

### 3.1 Picture themes

Of the 154 people who participated in the groups, 74 drew pictures to depict the behaviours of their engaging managers. Table 3.1 shows the proportion of team members who drew pictures reflecting specific topics. This chapter explores these themes in more depth with a collection of team member illustrations. The themes represented in the pictures can generally be split into two areas: the employee–line manager relationship and the wider aspects of managing within an organisation.

**Table 3.1: Picture themes**

	Frequency	Percentage
<i><b>Illustrating the employee-manager relationship</b></i>		
Positive motivators	15	17
Givers of direction	13	14
Caring protectors	8	9
Two-way communicators	7	8
People who are reliable, fair, trustworthy and hard working	6	7
<i><b>Illustrating the wider aspects of managing within an organisation</b></i>		
Versatile performers	12	13
Mavericks	8	9
People who understand their role/position	5	6
Team players	4	4
People with a performance focus	3	3
Other	9	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: IES, 2010*

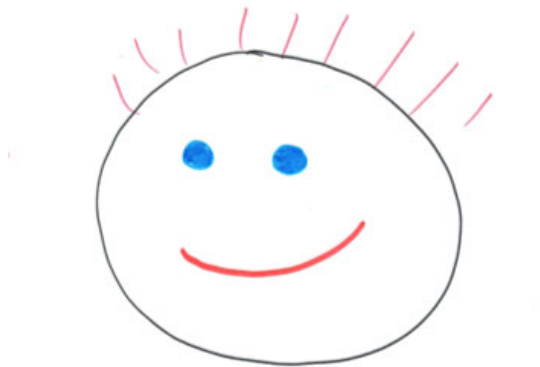
## 3.2 The employee-manager relationship

### 3.2.1 Positive motivators

A popular theme amongst the pictures drawn was that of smiling faces and suns, drawn by 17 per cent of participants. These represented the positive impact of engaging managers caused by their warm, bright, welcoming and motivating demeanour. They depict optimism, friendliness and making others feel happier. Figure 3.1 to Figure 3.4 show a selection of these drawings.

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**Figure 3.1: My manager... is friendly and welcoming**

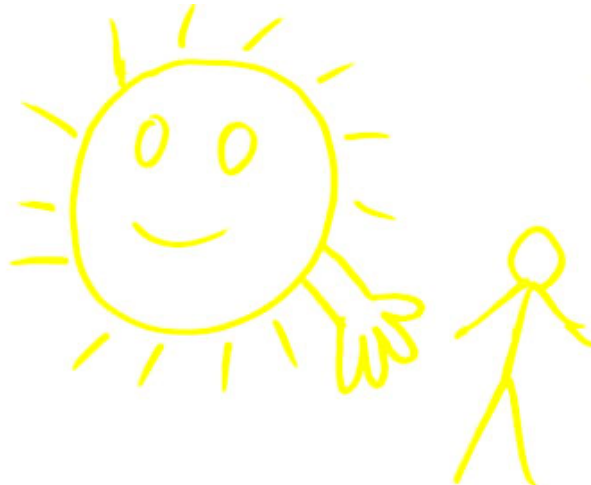


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*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.2: My manager... is bright, helpful and encouraging**



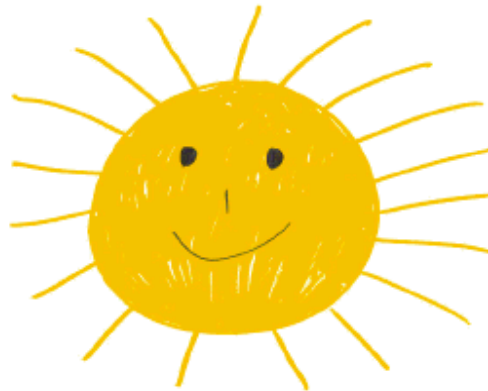
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*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*



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**Figure 3.3: My manager... is warm and smiling**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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---

**Figure 3.4: My manager... is positive and optimistic**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

---

### 3.2.2 Caring protectors

Nine per cent of participants drew pictures of their managers which depicted them as protectors, offering a helping hand, taking a 'matriarch' role or sheltering them from harm. These indicate the vital role of an engaging manager in protecting their team and individuals. Figure 3.5 to Figure 3.8 show a selection of these drawings.

Figure 3.5: My manager... helps me



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

---

Figure 3.6: My manager... protects us from the heat



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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**Figure 3.7: My manager... is like an elephant, a matriarch**

*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.8: My manager... offers a helping hand**

*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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### 3.2.3 Two-way communicators

The importance of open two-way communication and being a good listener was also emphasised in team members' drawings through pictures of open doors, enlarged ears, open arms and greeting people. The pictures stress the need for managers to communicate, listen and to be approachable. Such pictures were drawn by eight per cent of team members. One example highlighted the importance of small gestures such as saying 'good morning' and greeting staff, while another emphasised the importance of the manager encouraging communication at all levels within the team. Figure 3.9 to Figure 3.13 show a selection of these drawings.

Figure 3.9: My manager... is a good two-way communicator



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.10: My manager... is a good listener



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.11: My manager... always has an open-door policy



**Figure 3.12: My manager... is courteous and welcoming**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

**Figure 3.13: My manager... encourages communication at all levels**



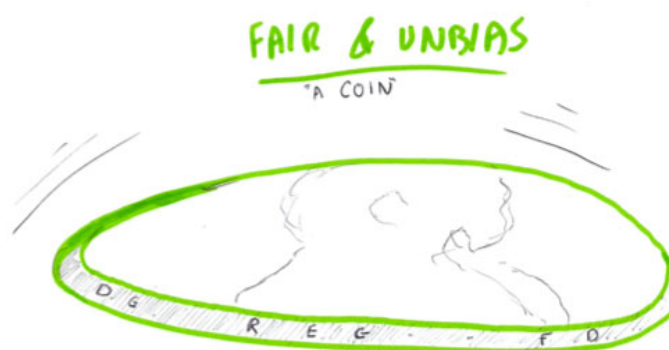
*Communication is encouraged at all levels within the team*

*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

### 3.2.4 Reliable, fair, trustworthy and hardworking

There was also an emphasis on depicting the engaging manager as reliable, trustworthy and fair in their dealings with people. Seven per cent of team members produced pictures reflecting this theme. Figure 3.14 to Figure 3.17 show examples of these illustrations. Figure 3.16 shows the engaging manager as a sheepdog who is loyal, dependable and hardworking. His wagging tail also shows he is friendly and approachable. Figure 3.15, Figure 3.17 and Figure 3.18 use a cow, a camel and a horse to emphasise the engaging manager as reliable, hard working and stable.

Figure 3.14: My manager... is fair



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.15: My manager... is reliable and trusts us



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.16: My manager... is loyal



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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**Figure 3.17: My manager... is hardworking and resilient**

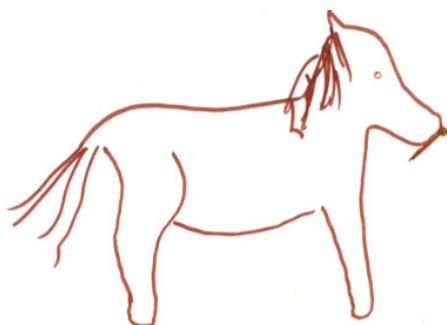


*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.18: My manager... is stable**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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### 3.2.5 Gives direction

Team member illustrations often reflected the ability of the manager to give good direction to their staff and lead them forward. Fourteen per cent of team members drew pictures representing this theme, using illustrations of climbing mountains, leading the 'troops' from a tank in front, being the pack leader as a wolf or a lion, or as a pilot of an aeroplane followed by others (Figures 3.19 to 3.23).

Figure 3.19: My manager... is forward looking and gives direction



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.20: My manager... leads the way



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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Figure 3.21: My manager... takes me upwards

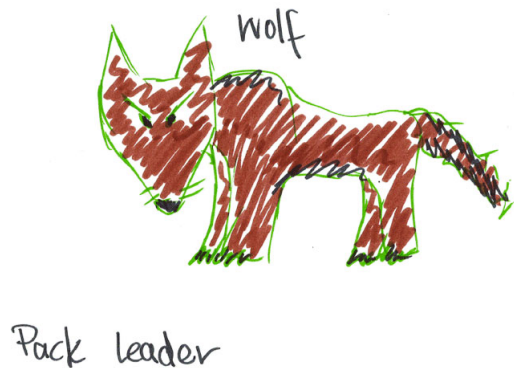


Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

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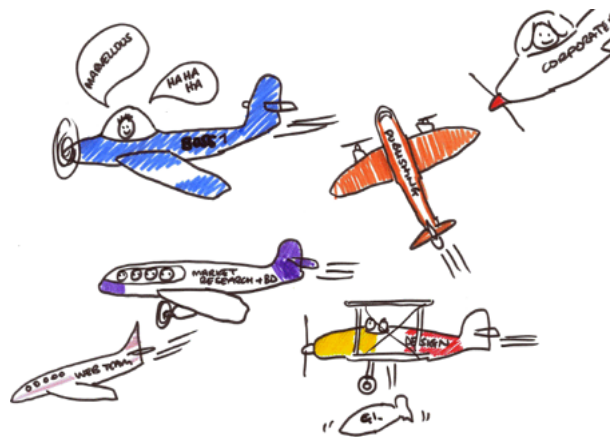


Figure 3.22: My manager... is the leader of the pack



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

Figure 3.23: My manager... leads from the front



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

### 3.3 Wider aspects of managing in an organisation

A number of themes represented in the pictures related to the wider aspects of managing in an organisation and the manager's style in the context of the wider organisation. These characterise the engaging manager as an individual who is versatile, a team player, performance focused, understands their position in the organisation but can also be somewhat of a maverick at times.

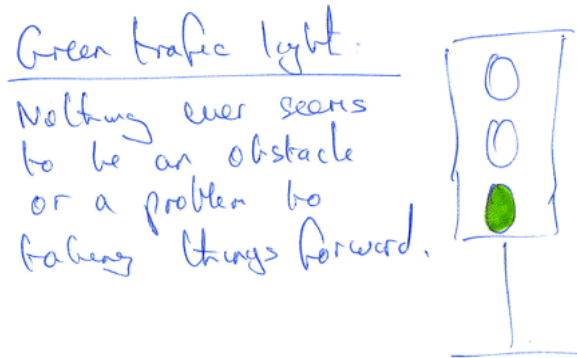
#### 3.3.1 Versatility

Thirteen per cent of team members drew pictures reflecting the versatility and competence of their manager. Drawings reflecting this theme showed images such as green traffic lights showing that nothing gets in the way, jugglers showing the

manager's ability to juggle tasks, putty emphasising the manager's flexibility, a big brain, and a leek reflecting the manager's many layers (Figures 3.24 to 3.29).

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**Figure 3.24: My manager... doesn't let obstacles get in the way**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.25: My manager... is good at multi-tasking**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

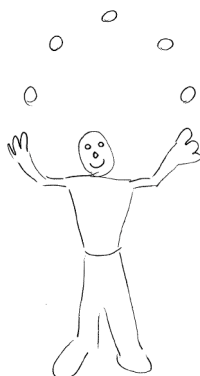
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Figure 3.26: My manager... is adaptable and flexible



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

Figure 3.27: My manager... can juggle competing priorities



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

Figure 3.28: My manager... is competent in many areas



Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009

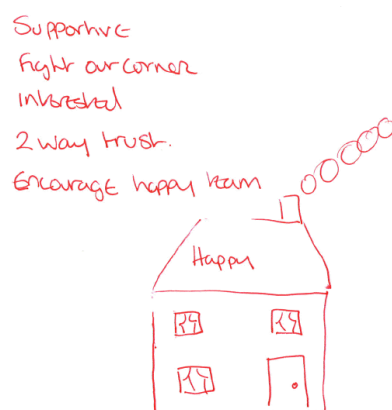
**Figure 3.29: My manager... is multi-layered and versatile**

*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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### 3.3.2 Team player

A proportion (four per cent) of team members produced illustrations representing their manager as a team player. Examples of these illustrations are shown in Figure 3.30 to Figure 3.32. Figure 3.31 and Figure 3.32 show the engaging manager to be someone who is team focused and supportive. The engaging manager shown in Figure 3.32 was described as someone who would take the time to sit down with the team to solve problems and offer biscuits and coffee. The image of a house in Figure 3.30 portrays the manager as secure and supportive.

**Figure 3.30: My manager... encourages us to be a supportive and happy team**

*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

---

**Figure 3.31: My manager... is team focused**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

**Figure 3.32: My manager... is an excellent (and nurturing) team player**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

### 3.3.3 Performance focused

A small number of team members (three per cent) illustrated the engaging manager's high performance and the ability of the manager to lead the team towards greater achievements (Figures 3.33 to 3.35). Figure 3.33 shows the manager as a large star on the top of a Christmas tree with the team as smaller stars below. Figure 3.35 illustrates that the manager 'is' the organisation through and through.

**Figure 3.33: My manager... is a high performer, leading a high performing team**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.34: My manager... meets all the targets**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.35: My manager... is a corporate performer through and through**



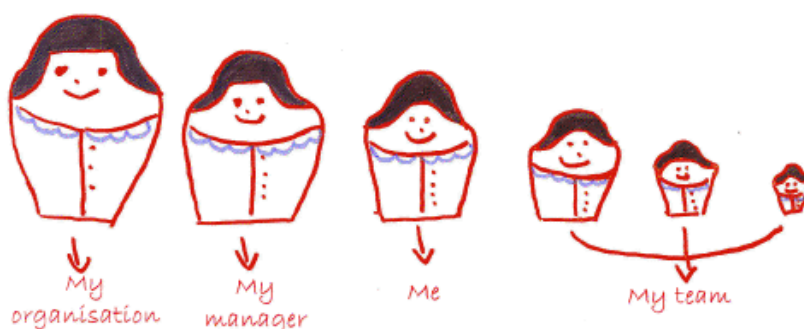
*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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### 3.3.4 Understanding their position

The pictures drawn by six per cent of team members reflected their managers' understanding of their own position within the company and how they work with the whole organisation collaboratively rather than just the team. Drawings depicted Russian dolls, a cell, networks and the world. Figure 3.36 portrays the manager as an individual who is able to take a holistic view of any situation and is a strategic, big-picture thinker.

**Figure 3.36: My manager... understands how we contribute to the wider organisation**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

### 3.3.5 Mavericks

Finally, a surprising theme that arose in the pictures was the portrayal of the engaging manager as a maverick – a rebellious and comic character often illustrated with images of the devil, clowns or popular mischievous characters such as Dennis the Menace or Billy Bunter. Figure 3.37 to Figure 3.40 show a selection of these images. The images reflected managers who do not follow the 'rule book'. They are unique personalities who have their own styles and do not necessarily follow the company line, although they and their teams deliver to the rest of the organisation. Despite them being highly engaging individuals, the extent to which they can be used as role models may be questionable due to their rebellious nature.

**Figure 3.37: My manager... is a joker**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

**Figure 3.38: My manager... is a maverick**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

---

**Figure 3.39: My manager... is cheeky**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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**Figure 3.40: My manager... is a (friendly) rebel**



*Source: IES Focus groups, 2008/2009*

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## 4 Key Messages

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This report has explored team members' perceptions of their engaging managers and has presented the main themes arising from a collection of the words, metaphors and pictures representing engaging managers. The data presented here helps to extend our knowledge and understanding of engaging managerial behaviours, and what managers can do to strengthen their relationships with their teams. Note that behaving in an engaging way does not mean being soft and fluffy: all the managers in our research had high performing teams with stretch targets, and all were good at managing poor performance.

The following advice is based on the material the teams provided – their words, metaphors and pictures.

### 4.1 Behaviours to adopt to engage your team

#### ■ Understand and empathise with your team members:

- Find out about them as individuals - their lives and their interests.
- Ask them what encourages and motivates them to perform, and conversely what they find demotivating.
- Observe what each person values by way of praise and recognition, and act accordingly.
- Ask yourself what the organisation looks like from the point of view of your team members: how do they experience communications, systems and processes, and what contribution do they think the team is making?

#### ■ Lead your team:

- Give clear direction, so the team knows what it is there to do.
- Set stretch targets, and be visible in helping the team to achieve these.

- Give clear, fair and timely feedback on performance.
- Tackle any weaknesses in the team – do not let anything fester.

■ **Support your team:**

- Absorb the flak – do not pass on the pressure you might be experiencing from above.
- Interpret organisational strategy and decisions for the team.
- Help team members in the way that is most appropriate (people need different things).
- Defend your team when it is under attack.
- Talk up your team's achievements and ensure it gets due recognition.
- Encourage team members to talk to you about problems at work, rather than letting things fester.
- Be clear about your expectations, and tackle performance and behaviour that does not match up.

■ **Be positive:**

- Smile at your team and show them you are pleased to see them.
- Your team won't be willing to try out new things if you're not.
- A 'can-do' attitude will show the team that you trust them to deliver.
- Ask the team for new ideas, and recognise people who show their initiative even when the results are not always ideal.

■ **Involve your team:**

- Listen to what they are saying.
- Involve the team in solving problems or tackling mistakes.
- Share your knowledge with the team, and encourage them to share with you and with each other
- Involve the team in setting targets.

■ **Be accessible:**

- Welcome team members who approach you.
- Keep your door open – better still, move in with your team.

- Be receptive to suggestions.
- If your team is dispersed, visit outlying workplaces, call on people to check how they are, and try to get people together sometimes.

■ **Delegate effectively:**

- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of different members of your team, and allocate work appropriately.
- Know who needs encouragement and who might be over-confident, and supervise their work accordingly.
- Trust your team to deliver – monitor but do not interfere.

■ **Work hard:**

- You can't expect your team to perform if you're not leading by example.
- Lend a hand when the team is under pressure and needs help – roll up your sleeves and get stuck in but...
- Stay calm, your team will need you to be a steady and reliable influence.

■ **Deal with people fairly and honestly:**

- Never show favouritism.
- Explain your decisions to the team.
- When tackling difficult behaviour or underperformance, always find out the facts before making a judgement – and, if you have to use formal procedures, do this properly and don't cut corners.
- Give everyone fair access to training and development opportunities.
- Share your knowledge, skills and information to help the team learn and perform better.
- In difficult situations, be as honest as you can.
- If you don't know the answer, be honest and admit it – then try to find out, on behalf of your team.

■ **Help your team keep a sense of perspective:**

- Encourage openness about mistakes, and help the team learn from these.
- A sense of humour establishes rapport and can make difficult targets seem achievable, but...

- Use humour appropriately – serious situations require calm and gravitas.
- If in doubt, chocolates, cakes, biscuits and flowers will probably cheer up your team!

## 4.2 A final word

Those of you who have read this far might be asking yourselves, 'So what's new? All this is obvious'. Of course, you are right; all the literature gives similar advice about how to be a good people manager. The problem is that many managers simply do not follow the advice, perhaps believing it to be 'management speak' based on consultancy products, or not relevant to their situation, or based on opinions alone. This report, however, is firmly based on sound evidence – the material the engaged teams produced when we asked them about their engaging managers. If you are a manager, perhaps you should ask your team to describe you, using words, metaphors or pictures, then have a discussion about what these mean in terms of behaviours to adopt or behaviours to avoid.

---

## Appendix: The research

---

### Participants in this research

Seven organisations took part in the research:

1. Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
2. Centrica
3. Corus
4. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
5. London Borough of Merton
6. Rolls-Royce
7. Sainsbury's.

In total 25 'engaging managers', 22 senior managers (those who managed the engaging managers) and 154 team members (in 25 teams) took part in the research. We would like to extend our thanks to them for their co-operation, time and enthusiasm.

### Methodology

We asked each organisation to identify a small number of engaging managers on the basis of the engagement scores of their teams in their most recent employee attitude survey. We then carried out interviews with both the engaging managers and their own managers, whom we have termed 'senior managers'. We also facilitated 25 focus groups with the 'engaged teams' (one for each engaging manager), containing 154 people in total. Focus group members completed the

standard IES engagement questionnaire<sup>2</sup> and participated in a discussion. The focus groups also included a period of time for team members to consider their manager and describe them by means of descriptive words, a drawing, or a metaphor.

Further details on the methodology adopted can be found in our first report on the research.<sup>3</sup>

## Terminology

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

## Research funding

All of our research into employee engagement, including the Engaging Manager research reported here, has been funded by IES's membership HR Network. For more details on IES's HR Network, please visit [www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk).

## The future of the research

The Engaging Manager research is being used to develop a 360° assessment tool focusing on engaging/disengaging managerial behaviours.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details on the IES Engagement Questionnaire contact Dilys Robinson at [dilys.robinson@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:dilys.robinson@employment-studies.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Robinson D, Hayday S (2009), *The Engaging Manager*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report number 470



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## THE ENGAGING MANAGER SERIES

# Images of engaging management

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Gemma Robertson-Smith, Dilys Robinson

This report is part of *The Engaging Manager Series*, which is a follow-up to IES report 470, *The Engaging Manager*. The other publications in this series include:

- **Teams and the Engaging Manager**
- **The Engaging Manager in Development Mode**
- **The Engaging Manager and Sticky Situations**

Each short report in the *Engaging Manager Series* explores different aspects of engaging management. This report explores perceptions of engaging managers, drawing on the contributions from their engaged teams. We asked team members to create a representation of their manager: this could be by drawing their manager (for example as an object or an animal), creating a metaphor, or using descriptive words or phrases to represent their manager. The teams discussed the reasons behind their representations of their engaging managers, which often led to new insights and observations.

This report presents a collection of the thought-provoking words, metaphors and pictures produced, analyses the main themes arising from them, and discusses how they guide our knowledge of the behaviours of engaging managers.

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