

IPA Case Study:

‘The WWL Way’ – Measuring the cause and effect of Engagement initiatives at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust

There is increasing recognition of the importance of employee engagement in the NHS. In April, the IPA launched ‘Meeting the Challenge – Successful Employee Engagement in the NHS’ which examined the approaches of high-performing NHS Trusts. In this case study, Nicole Ferguson of Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust explains how they developed an innovative approach to engagement – ‘The WWL Way’ – which has seen them substantially increase levels of engagement at the trust.

The “WWL Way” is a vision for understanding, implementing and embedding sustainable staff engagement in Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust (WWL). It has grown out of a long history of successful staff engagement initiatives, and has developed into an evidence-based measureable pathway model and robust strategy for staff engagement. The “WWL way” is further supported by both our Organisational Development strategy and Trust Values.



Our Early Foundations

Our staff engagement journey started over 15 years ago. Staff Involvement Delivers (SID) was a partnership initiative between Human Resources and Staff Side. We needed staff to be engaged with what was happening within the Trust. Our “Conversations with” Directors events allowed staff to raise issues important to them and “walkabouts” gave Directors the opportunity to integrate with staff at the front line. As a result we established a staff/management partnership of openness and transparency by getting staff on board with difficult decisions and change.

In 2011 we undertook the NHS national staff survey, resulting in scores below average on 55.3% staff engagement measures and only above average on 21% of measures. We decided to further energise staff engagement through the Listening into Action (LiA) programme. This included large-scale staff listening events, led by our Trust Board. Staff were asked three simple questions: what works well, what needs to improve, and what are the barriers to improvement? These events gave us the focus to make quick-win and bigger system changes, aligned to the needs of staff. LiA also initiated our “Pioneer Teams” programme, encouraging staff to run their own listening events and local level changes.

We further strengthened our staff engagement culture through our partnership with Unipart. We developed lean ways of working through team communication cells, visual management tools and a strong emphasis on metrics and devolved problem-solving. Teams discussed their priorities, gave updates, addressed issues and to celebrated successes and progress was recorded visually at a central point visible to the whole team. You can how we used these tools on this [video](#).

Our Initial Impact

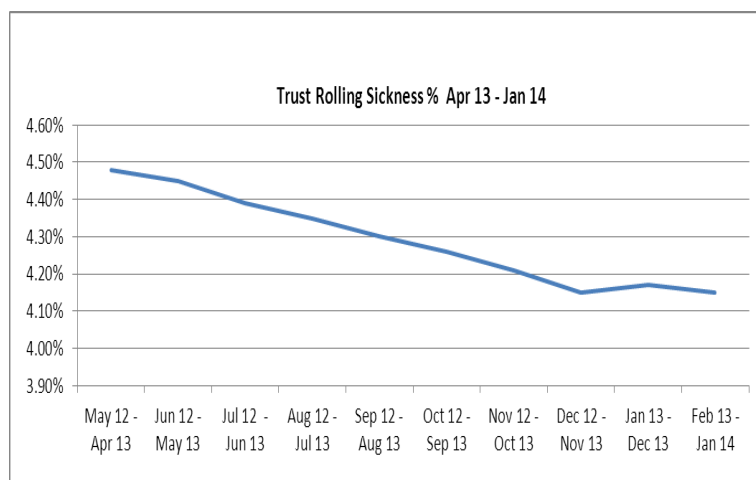
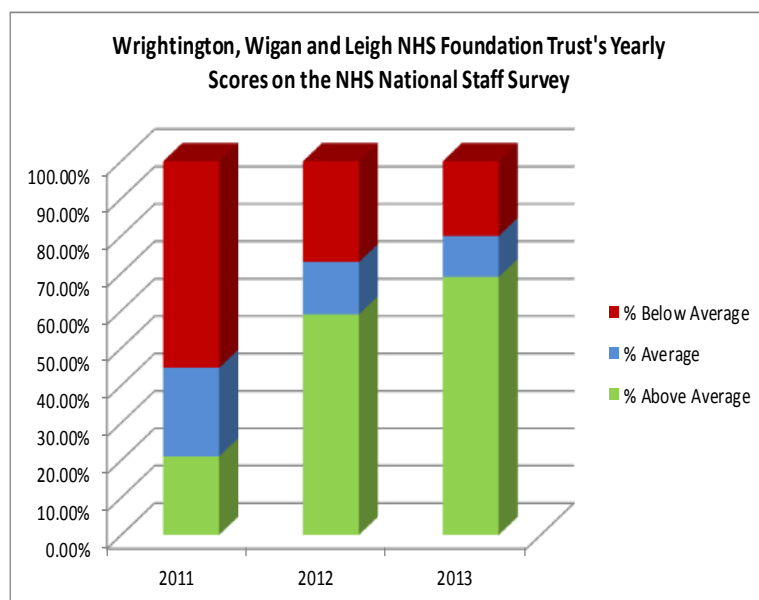
The cultural change and impact of the WWL Way is clear to see. In 2012 we saw major improvements in our national staff survey results. Above average scores increased from 21% in 2011 to 59% in 2012 and increased again to 69% in 2013.

In addition we have seen significant reductions in sickness absence (down from 4.62% in April 2012 to 4.17% in Dec 2013) and expenditure of temporary staffing (down from £15 million in 2011/2012 to £12 million in 2012/2013). These improvements have been sustained over time and we are confident they will continue.

Our Current Model

In mid-2013 we combined these approaches to create our own unique brand of staff engagement – “the WWL Way”. This led us to create a new “Staff Engagement Pathway” model - a framework for understanding staff engagement more deeply, by gauging levels of staff engagement, and identifying several factors that help us better understand what enables improved staff engagement. Our Staff Engagement Pathway Model is underpinned by research/theory such as the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti 2008), Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al, 2006) and West and Dawson (2012). The model focuses on the following 9 staff engagement enablers:

1. Working relationships – do staff feel supported?
2. Recognition – do staff feel valued?
3. Resources – do staff have the resources they need to work effectively?
4. Clarity – do staff understand what’s going on in their role/team/the Trust?
5. Perceived fairness – do staff feel processes and treatment is fair?



6. Personal Development – do staff have development opportunities?
7. Influence – do staff feel involved in change and decisions?
8. Mindset – do staff feel proud and optimistic about the future?
9. Trust – are staff empowered to do their job?

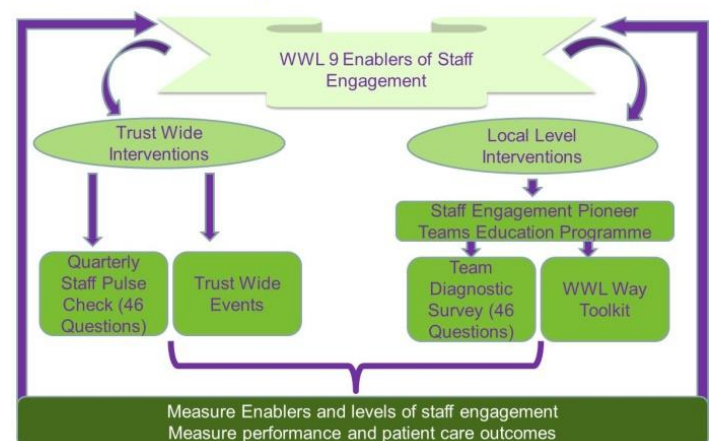
The model includes measures of staff engagement feelings (Energy, Focus, and Dedication) and behaviours (Persistence, Advocacy, Discretionary Effort and Adaptability). A video highlighting this model can be viewed [here](#).

Practical Application

Our validated 'WWL Way' quarterly diagnostic survey and extensive engagement toolkit are now used together both at Trust and Team level, to measure, track and continuously improve the enablers of staff engagement and ultimately our organisations performance.

Our new Staff Engagement Pioneer Team Programme is a 26 week initiative that helps individual Teams use this survey to identify their own specific needs, understanding the degree their levels of engagement differ to the Trust norm. Our new "WWL Way toolkit" uniquely utilises skills from our initial trio of partners, to create eight staff engagement tools. It offers a choice of solutions to apply locally, avoiding a "one size fits all" approach. The Programme creates a culture in which teams feel empowered to engage in, and offer up, service improvements through their own initiative.

The WWL Way Model



Nicole Ferguson is Staff Engagement Lead at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust.

The IPA recently published a report on employee engagement in the NHS, available [here](#).