



How Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service Achieves Upper Quartile Employee Engagement

April 2017

Richard McDonough

Account Executive and Quality Manager



OVERALL ENGAGEMENT SCORE

85%



↑↑ 8

POINTS ABOVE THE
EXTERNAL BENCHMARK

Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) have achieved an upper quartile score in their employee engagement survey of 85% - excellent for any organisation, but particularly significant given the context that DFRS were facing.

A long period of austerity in public services had created pressure on all fire authorities to deliver services on reduced budgets. The national dispute over pensions created a very difficult industrial relations environment for all parties. However, DFRS has been proactive through these challenges, and reviews budget on an ongoing basis, constantly challenging how to use resources across the whole organisation.

So how have DFRS managed to achieve strong employee engagement in such an environment?

Several months following their employee survey, People Insight carried out one-to-one staff interviews to probe deeper and understand exactly what led to their great score. We've been able to capture not only their key strengths, but areas where improvements have been made too.

We call this research PIPER (People Insight Peak Engagement Research) and we use it to share best practice that everyone can learn from.



PEARL™: The elements of employee engagement

To understand which aspects of employee engagement DFRS are particularly successful at, we use People Insight's model PEARL™ for analysis. PEARL™ represents five global factors that drive engagement:

- 1. Purpose** - what the organisation stands for and where it is going, made up of:
 - a. **Alignment** with organisational goals
 - b. **Integrity** and organisational values
- 2. Enablement** - conditions for the individual to do their job well:
 - a. **Community** - a supportive environment
 - b. **Resources** - equipment and training
- 3. Autonomy** - influence over work and health:
 - a. **Mastery** over work activities and employee voice
 - b. **Wellbeing** and health, work/life balance
- 4. Reward** - intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for workplace efforts:
 - a. **Growth** - personal fulfilment and development
 - b. **Recognition** - pay & benefits, feeling valued
- 5. Leadership** - leaders listen and enable positive change:
 - a. **Senior Leaders** provide vision, listen, act
 - b. **Line Managers** support and feed back

We found particular strengths in Purpose, Enablement and Autonomy – let's look next at what DFRS do to drive success.

PEARL™ Model of Engagement®

5 Global Factors

- ▶ Purpose
- ▶ Enablement
- ▶ Autonomy
- ▶ Reward
- ▶ Leadership

5 Engagement Indicators

- ▶ Pride in the organisation
- ▶ Commitment to long term career
- ▶ High levels of discretionary effort
- ▶ Willingness to recommend and advocate the organisation
- ▶ Care about the future of the organisation

Business Outcomes

- ▶ Better quality products and services
- ▶ Reduced waste and cost
- ▶ Increased productivity per employee
- ▶ Increased profitability
- ▶ High levels of customer satisfaction
- ▶ Organisation strategies and plans delivered



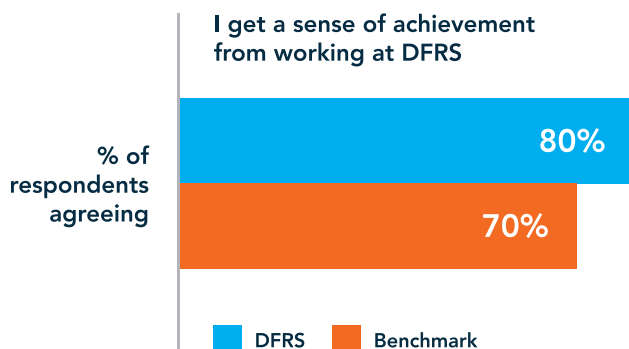
How DFRS create purpose and a sense of achievement

- ▶ Saving lives is of course extremely compelling
- ▶ DFRS have made 'Making Derbyshire Safer' explicit for ALL staff in ALL roles
- ▶ The purpose is positively reinforced at every level of the organisation

Whether employees work in support or are operational fire fighters, there is a sense that they are all contributing towards the purpose.

"Every day work is linked to our vision 'Making Derbyshire Safer' and this message comes from a lot of people."

"I feel linked to the purpose, I can see the impact my contribution can make, I can see a document I have created published on the website and I see my work out there being used."



The purpose and the link to the work done is continually measured, recognised and celebrated providing a source of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Regular communications from the Chief Fire Officer and the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) positively reinforce the purpose, but what makes a significant difference is that the message is consistently supported by staff at other levels.

Contributions to the purpose are recognised by peers not just leaders by email, and more impactfully by people going over to each other's desks and thanking them.

"I work in data management and the stats I put together are driving national and local campaigns and getting funding for projects. A few years ago we asked ourselves the question 'what are we here to do?' the answer was 'We are here to save lives' and definitely in my role and in our department we feel we are making a positive impact."

TAKEAWAYS

1. Purpose

- ▶ Create a compelling purpose, regularly re-communicate the purpose and show appreciation for contributions made by groups and individuals who specifically contribute to turning the purpose into a reality.

2. Culture

- ▶ Create a culture where authentic appreciation of contributions to the purpose is the norm, where everyone not just leaders and managers are encouraged to express thanks.

3. Job design

- ▶ Craft roles so that people can make a direct connection between the purpose and what they do. Ensure roles have feedback mechanisms that provide tangible evidence of a contribution to the purpose.



DFRS have been successful at establishing an enabling culture

- ▶ There is a strong sense of community and collaboration
- ▶ A 'golden thread' of communication keeps action swift
- ▶ Analytics and dashboards facilitate performance management
- ▶ Training and development is a priority for all

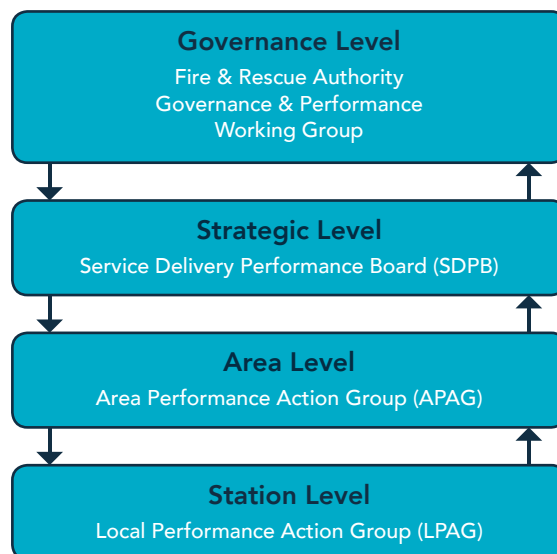
The enabling culture at DFRS is particularly impressive. Of course, facing life and death situations galvanises trusting relationships and co-operation, but there is more to learn here.

The term **"golden thread"** is often used by staff to describe how information is gathered and used at every level of the organisation to track, measure and improve organisational performance.

Information flows swiftly within the organisation, both vertically and horizontally, as lines of communication are clear and people are accountable for enabling performance.

What stands out is that DFRS have developed a culture where information is acted on and results of any decisions are fed back to the person or group who raised the issue in a timely manner.

"We had an issue with our Mobile Data Terminal's turnout system on the fire engine. We raised it at the meeting and the next day it was sorted."



Performance Management Structure

A key factor in enabling good decision making, is the key performance metrics dashboard. Established with input from front line and support staff, it is accessible and relevant to everyone, containing data ranging from when appraisals have been completed, to the type and severity of fires, to progress against the service improvement objectives. The targets, importantly, are not seen as performance failures, but used to understand the barriers preventing staff from achieving targets.

Having a main tool that everyone uses is transparent, and means goals are clear. It is part of 'business as usual', used in meetings, in helping e.g. fire prevention work targeting specific demographics, in helping SLT plan and deliver strategy and track progress against government targets.

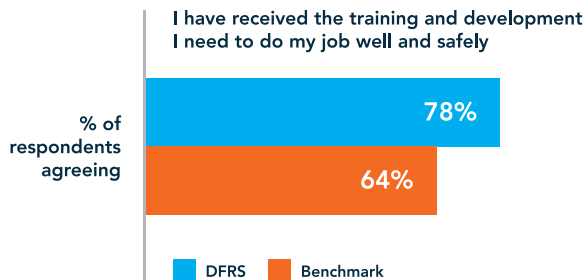
"The dashboard enables you to understand the reasons why a target hasn't been reached, you get the context and the why behind the performance."

Training and development is also an important enabler at DFRS, available for all, not just for staff seeking promotion. It is much more related to individual plans rather than just compulsory courses. The L&D department work hard to make development accessible for example by running training sessions on weekends to enable Retained Duty System (or 'on call') fire fighters to attend and extending and investing in qualifications.

"Years ago training was prescribed, now watch managers decide what training is required. It is no longer a box ticking exercise, allowing you to tailor training to the needs of your watch."

The far reaching changes over the last 20 years experienced by the fire service means skill requirements and roles are changing, requiring a long term training plan. There is a strategic approach at DFRS, future training needs of existing staff and knowledge and skills gaps in relation to delivering future strategic goals are identified. All of this has a positive effect, with DFRS scoring 14 points above benchmark for 'I have received the training and development I need to do my job well and safely'.

"Your skills and abilities are supported. When I first started, my job needed a different skill set to what it needs now. There is a lot of on the job training, line managers identify where you are going to have to develop."



TAKEAWAYS

1. Community

- ▶ Clear lines of communication and timely feedback to those that raise issues and ideas creates a culture of urgency and helps staff feel involved.

2. Resources

- ▶ Set targets and monitor progress in a visual way. Give staff access to performance data and empower them to act on it.

3. Training

- ▶ Make tailored development available to staff, and align it to strategy to ensure staff are equipped to deliver future strategic objectives.



'Autonomy' is frequently used by staff to describe their experience at DFRS

- ▶ Once autocratic policies are now enablers of staff autonomy
- ▶ Lower 'ranks' are empowered to make key decisions
- ▶ Trust underpins flexible working arrangements that staff really value
- ▶ Staff health and wellbeing has a high profile

Staff have a lot of autonomy at DFRS (outside incidents, where rank obviously has to be obeyed.) Leaders have created a culture of empowerment; staff are trusted and supported to take on more responsibility.

What makes a difference is positioning and setting expectations. Policies have been repositioned as guidelines rather than absolutes. Staff have a clear frame of reference, with flexibility to interpret the policies in the context of real world situations.

"If I operate outside the framework I know I'm not doing what SLT want. However, if I work within the framework I am empowered to do whatever I need to crack on."

There are many examples where decisions that traditionally would have been made at the top have been passed down the organisation, such as the recent appointment of fire station managers which was delegated to the heads of department group.

"We've just made quite a few moves of station managers, for the good of the organisation. There was no interference from the SLT, they trusted us to get on with it. There is no way that would have happened five years ago."

"I feel more trusted now, there was a feeling before that you were being watched for everything you did. Now as long as you can justify what you are doing, there is a lot more flexibility."

The example set by the SLT filters through to line managers who help their team to take on more responsibility. Importantly though, staff aren't just left to get on with things, support is available to help them adjust to the new empowered way of working.

"Responsibility is being pushed down to all levels, there is no micromanagement... give people wings and they will fly. The more responsibility you have, the more pride you have in what you do and the more appreciated you feel."

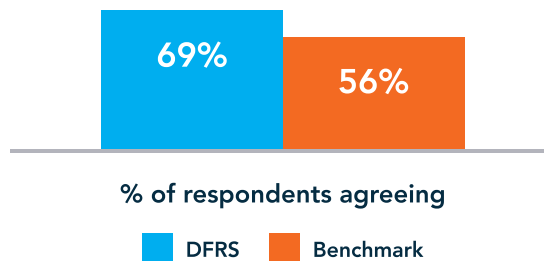
As well as 'mastery' outlined here, staff experience positive wellbeing, the second key component of Autonomy, with access to the very proactive Occupational Health Team (OHT). They run a health MOT programme at various locations so staff can get a free health check, and there is access to Employee Assistance for all. They help operational and support staff deal with the emotional aftermath of attending incidents. DFRS ensure staff are supported in the way that best suits them.

"Occupational Health is good, we get a free medical every three years, and they are looking after me as a person. Mental as well as physical health support is available, you can always make arrangements to go and see them."

Another way that both mastery and wellbeing are supported is through flexible working; in head office managers trust staff to get their work done so they can start later or finish earlier to suit other commitments.

"We have freedom, this isn't a 9-5 job, it is about delivering results and quality work. We have incredible flexibility and can book time off at short notice. I feel as if I am having fun, I don't feel under pressure I just get on with things."

I am comfortable to speak up and constructively challenge how things are done



TAKEAWAYS

1. Trust

- ▶ A culture of trust is the foundation for empowering individuals.

2. Empowerment

- ▶ Delegate decision making to the lowest appropriate level. Empower staff to take on extra responsibility.

3. Wellbeing

- ▶ Demonstrate that the organisation cares by providing staff health and welfare benefits and focusing on mental as well as physical health.

4. Mastery

- ▶ Allow staff the freedom to determine how to structure and approach their work. Support flexible working so that staff can find the right balance.



Reward means both personal growth and recognition at DFRS

- ▶ Career development opportunities are transparent
- ▶ Development is for everyone
- ▶ A variety of recognition styles are used

Reward is about finding the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to ensure individuals feel like their effort, growth and development is supported and valued.

"Progression is available to everyone who performs, the recruitment process is very open."

DFRS transparently provide opportunities for career development, and as a result scores 14 points above benchmark for 'I am clear on what I need to do in order to progress my career within DFRS.'

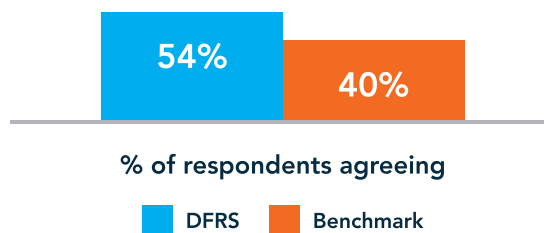
Vacancies are advertised internally via the weekly WIS (Weekly Information Sheet) newsletter, and the preference is to promote from within the organisation.

DFRS are effective at identifying talent early, a combined effort between HR, L&D and line managers. Once a talented individual has been identified they are prepared thoroughly to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, abilities and confidence to carry out their next role.

"If you have been recognised for development, you will have a bundle of courses to get you ready."

"There is a lot of support for development at all different levels. I have benefitted from specialist courses, it is nice that people invest in you."

I am clear on what I need to do in order to progress my career within DFRS



DRFS are also proactive in terms of recognising the efforts of staff.

They include:

- ▶ Annual excellence awards for those who have gone above and beyond
- ▶ Long service awards
- ▶ Letters of thanks sent in from members of the general public are published in the WIS newsletter
- ▶ Praise is regularly communicated by email and face to face from members of the SLT, principle officers, area managers and station managers
- ▶ Senior officers make regular visits to fire stations to show appreciation
- ▶ 'Thank you' messages between peers and from line managers are embedded in the culture

TAKEAWAYS

1. Growth

- ▶ Provide clear career paths and equitable promotion processes based on performance, and [make this] accessible to all.

2. Recognition

- ▶ Find varied ways to recognise staff formally, informally, and make it natural to do so in the organisation's culture.



Leadership steer the organisation through times of change

- ▶ Anticipating and managing strategic change wins respect
- ▶ Inclusiveness and openness make a big impact
- ▶ Facing difficult issues honestly is appreciated

Talking to staff one of the standout positive themes about working for DFRS is their experience of leadership. Whilst in last year's survey Leadership did not score as strongly as Enablement and Autonomy, clearly improvements have been made and the current view is very positive.

A particular strength of leaders has been that they anticipated the changes that government have imposed on the fire service nationally, which is perceived more positively than at some other services.

"We've been ahead of the curve, they have managed to cut back to where they need to gradually, not like other services that have seen mass redundancies and station closures. I've got a lot of confidence in the senior team as a result of that."

Inclusiveness and openness is another area of improvement, driven by the CFO (Chief Fire Officer) and mirrored by other leaders further down the hierarchy.

"When Terry (CFO) joined the service he spent most of the summer going out to meet people. He goes out of his way to say 'hi' to people."

Members of the SLT and principle officers make regular visits to fire stations, with biscuits and tea to “chew the fat”. Senior members of staff also make the effort to drop in to see HQ staff when they can.

“The leaders literally have their doors open. People are still getting used to this, asking ‘can we come up and see the SLT? Really?’ and I reply ‘Yes you can’, and people are going to say hello and have a chat.”

Staff feel that Terry McDermott (DFRS’s CFO) and the SLT are not afraid of having the hard conversations around subjects such as cuts, and the recent bullying survey is another example of the SLT facing difficult subject areas. The dashboard is also seen as a mechanism by which any poor performance can be addressed. Fundamentally leaders at DFRS lead by example, and understand what it is like to be on the front line.

“The way Terry puts things in plain speak makes people want to read it and they understand what he is saying. Terry uses social media and keeps praising people, he is very engaging.”

Improvements in leadership haven’t just been left to chance; there has been an ongoing programme of leadership courses.

“I’ve just finished an executive leadership programme. It taught me about valuing other people’s views and recognising that I don’t have all the answers. It is about being collaborative and saying to the team, ‘sometimes we will get things wrong, but we will learn and get better’. You have to allow people to get things wrong so they can be creative and innovative.”

TAKEAWAYS

1. Strategy

- ▶ Measure the success of the strategy and continue to update staff to build trust in the organisation’s leaders.

2. Accessibility

- ▶ Senior leaders build trust by being accessible to frontline staff and middle managers. Listen to concerns and develop collaborative working relationships with all staff, on a regular basis.

3. Trust

- ▶ Empower staff to make decisions. Ensure that mistakes are turned into learnings for staff.

4. Authentic leadership

- ▶ Integrity means being honest with staff and tackling the hard issues head on, with compassion and understanding.

Final thoughts

We have seen evidence of the five global factors of People Insight's engagement model at work within DFRS, particularly in relation to Purpose, Enablement and Autonomy.

In spite of the successes, DFRS are not complacent. They have created a culture of continuous improvement, where innovation and looking at things differently is the normal way of working. There is also a recognition that not everyone is on board with the new ways of working yet, but that helping people in that position in a supportive way is a top priority. The road to employee engagement is constantly under construction and DFRS are well aware of this.



Richard McDonough

Account Executive and Quality Manager

t: +44 (0) 203 142 6511

e: richard.mcdonough@peopleinsight.co.uk

Richard initially joined People Insight to lead further advances in quality management, and now manages complex client projects, focus groups and feedback whilst simultaneously studying for his MSc in Occupational Psychology. He also has a PGDIP (post graduate diploma) in Organisation Development.

With over 15 years of experience in the IT and Telecoms sectors, Richard has first-hand experience and appreciation of the strong link between highly engaged employees and optimum operational performance.

Richard was brought up on fish & chips in the North West of England. In his spare time he paddles and coaches for a local Dragon Boat team, having competed for and coached the GB Dragon Boat team.

Is your organisation in the top quartile of engaging organisations?

Talk to us:

e: enquiry@peopleinsight.co.uk

t: 0203 142 6511

twitter: @PeopleInsightUK

Find out how your engagement levels compare with your peers, and find out how you can improve.

We'd love to hear from you!
