# Engaging the Workforce for Disability

# **Executive Summary**

‘Employer of Choice’, and related terms such as ‘Sector of Choice’, have appeared with increasing frequency in the literature and discourse about workforce development in human services, including the workforce for disability[[1]](#footnote-1). Workforce development is critical to the success of reforms impacting on the disability sector. With the demand and competition to employ a skilled and responsive workforce within the disability services sector intensifying, many organisations are seeking to identify how they can be recognised as an ‘Employer of Choice’. Better definition and description of these terms would particularly assist thinking and planning by workforce development agents (government, employers and consumers/participants) about the priorities for workforce and sector development investment that properly supports employers to develop ‘employer/sector of choice’ attributes or capabilities.

This paper has two purposes. Firstly, by proposing that **developing and maintaining the strategic capability to engage employees** (‘employee engagement’) is central to becoming an employer of choice. That is, to stimulate discussion about which attributes or capabilities of organisations are more important in terms of an employer’s success or otherwise in becoming an employer of choice. To support this discussion, we provide a working definition of ‘employer of choice’ as successfully ‘*attracting, recruiting, selecting, retaining, engaging and developing a skilled and capable workforce for disability and efficiently matching diverse preferences for services and supports to diverse worker preferences’*. The second purpose of this paper is to bring focus to **employee engagement** by reporting the results of an employee engagement benchmarking exercise for disability service providers. The paper provides evidence that organisations fostering a high level of employee engagement; where their employees are committed to their work, and actively contribute to the organisation’s performance and mission; should be well positioned to achieve employer of choice attributes. The disability sector is expected to continue to face challenges in competing with adjacent sectors (aged care, mental health and children’s services) and other industries at an extrinsic (financial reward) level. Disability sector employers need to explore and invest in the intrinsic and non-wage related differentiators that underpin an individual’s decision to join and remain employed within the disability sector. To date, and despite the importance of these issues, ‘employee engagement’ has not been widely investigated in the disability support sector, particularly in the Australian context[[2]](#footnote-2).

This report fills a gap in the research by presenting the results of an industry led initiative involving employers working collaboratively to track engagement at an organisational and sector level[[3]](#footnote-3). The ‘NDS Employee Engagement Survey’ is specifically designed to ascertain employees’ levels of engagement, satisfaction and perceptions of their organisation’s success. It concurrently assesses an organisation’s employees’ awareness and commitment to improving the lives of people with a disability, particularly through the application of person-centred approaches. This paper details the process used, the sector level results and the key findings from the pilot of the NDS Employee Engagement Survey carried out in May/June 2013 (round 1) and May 2014 (round 2).

Twenty seven disability service providers (including small, medium, large, metropolitan and regional NSW organisations) participated in the first round of the pilot. Of the 2970 employees invited to participate, 1818 completed either an online or paper version of the survey. Nineteen of the original service providers also participated in round 2 of the pilot in May 2014. Of the 2448 employees invited to participate, 1489 completed either an online or paper version of the survey.

Participating organisations received comprehensive reports after both pilot rounds outlining recommendations. This enabled them to identify and prioritise strategies for increasing levels of staff engagement and retention as well as maximise their effectiveness in investments in workforce development that may significantly impact employee and organisational performance. Benchmark results of how both the sector and individual organisations rated against other disability service providers and an all-industry database, representing 2600 organisations results, are also provided.

**A Model of Employee Engagement for the Disability Sector**

**Development of the Standard Model**

Voice Project’s 7Ps model of employee engagement was created after extensive research with over 1000 organisations which has been peer-reviewed and published[[4]](#footnote-4). The original model has two broad purposes. Firstly, it aims to measure performance across a broad range of Human Resources (HR) and management practices in the areas of Purpose, Property, Participation, People and Peace. Secondly, the model measures the impact of these practices on two key organisational outcomes – Passion/Engagement and Progress.

The dual function of the model allows organisations to assess the key practices and identify the main drivers that will maximise staff engagement and organisational progress. In addition, the model has demonstrated links to independent measures of organisational performance such as turnover, productivity, absenteeism and managers’ reports of financial performance[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Refinement of the Model for Disability Services Organisations**

A number of refinements to the survey were developed so that it better suited the needs of disability service providers. In particular, a third outcome measure (‘Person-Centred Approach (PCA) Readiness’) was developed to enable organisations to assess the potential impact that various management practices may have on their overall readiness for a policy and regulatory environment where consumer preferences are more dynamic and choice and control are more prevalent.

In addition to this, the existing survey content was reviewed for its appropriateness and suitability to the sector.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Outcomes**

There are three key measures of organisational performance in the model. These are:

1. **Passion/Employee Engagement** – the extent to which staff are passionate about their day-to-day work, positive about belonging to the organisation and keen to stay there.
2. **Progress** – this measures staff perceptions about organisational performance: how successful is the organisation at achieving its objectives, how well is change and continuous improvement managed and is client service delivery of a high standard.
3. **Person-centred Approaches (PCA) Readiness** – the extent to which staff see themselves and their organisation as being aware of the various issues relating to Person-centred Approaches, committed and prepared for acting on these issues and embedding person-centred service into the organisation’s culture and processes, and whether they feel this has made a real difference in the lives of clients and customers.

**Outcome Drivers**

Driving the outcomes of engagement, progress and PCA readiness are a range of organisational practices. Current performance is measured in each of these practices and this helps to identify the key changes that can be made to achieve stronger engagement, progress and readiness for person-centred approaches. For example, if employees are unclear about the purpose of the organisation, this is likely to affect their emotional attachment to the organisation, their evaluation of its progress and how prepared they think it is for operating in an environment characterised by person-centred service and individualised funding. In this example, action could be taken around communication of strategy or perhaps clarifying organisational values.

Whilst research has supported the notion that these drivers cause changes in the outcome indicators of passion/engagement and progress (Langford et al., 2006), this has not been investigated in relation to PCA readiness as this was beyond the scope of the current project. That is (using the example above), it may be the case that PCA readiness causes awareness of organisational purpose rather than organisational purpose causing PCA readiness. For the aim of this report, however, we have assumed that the drivers listed below do actually impact on PCA Readiness as well as passion/engagement and progress:

1. **Purpose** – this is about the clarity which exists about organisational identity. Are staff aware of senior management's strategy and vision? Are staff committed to the values and mission of the organisation?
2. **Property** – the extent to which staff feel they have the infrastructure and resources they need to do their jobs.
3. **Participation** - this area relates to staff feeling about how they are managed, the extent to which they receive development opportunities, satisfaction with organisational communication – vertically and horizontally – and many traditional ‘HR’ practices.
4. **People** – this is mainly about staff relationships with immediate co-workers. Do they work well in a team? Are they motivated? Are they skilled and talented?
5. **Peace** – how well are staff able to maintain peace by managing stress, achieving work-life balance and working flexibly.

**Drivers and Outcomes**

**Drivers**

**Purpose:**

* Organisation direction
* Results focus
* Mission and values
* Ethics
* Role clarity
* Diversity

**People:**

* Motivation and initiative
* Teamwork
* Talent

**Peace:**

* Work-life balance
* Wellness
* Flexability

**Participation:**

* Leadership
* Recruitment and selection
* Cross-unit cooperation
* Learning and development
* Involvement
* Rewards and recognition
* Performance appraisal
* Supervision
* Career opportunities

**Property:**

* Resources
* Processes
* Technology
* Safety
* Facilties

**Outcomes**

**Passion/engagement:**

* Organisation commitment
* Job satisfation
* Intention to stay

**PCA readiness:**

* PCA awareness
* PCA commitment
* PCA effectiveness

**Progress:**

* Organisation objectives
* Change and innovation
* Customer satisfaction

**Application & Results:**

**Participation**

Round one of the NDS Employee Engagement Survey elicited a strong response from staff in participating organisations with 1818 people responding, or around 61% of the 2970 that were invited. This provided an estimated margin of error across the project of 1.3%, and 2.1% if inferring trends about the entire sector (assuming a total workforce of approximately 35000 FTE people)[[7]](#footnote-7). However, the typical response rate for an organisation was around 69%, as smaller organisations were typically able to achieve a higher response. A total of 27 organisations took part in the project, with 17 of these being reasonably small (10-100 staff), and including eight medium-sized (100–400 staff) and two larger organisations (400–700 staff), to be reasonably representative of the type of organisations operating in the sector.

Organisations were selected for the project on the basis of their readiness and commitment to act on the survey results which may have resulted in somewhat higher satisfaction levels being reported than had the selection been random. Organisations were supported throughout the process and provided with post-survey presentations and consultation sessions to assist them in understanding the results and developing strategies for improvement. Organisations were also advised that they would be able to participate in a second round of surveying to track their progress generally, and against specific areas that they may have targeted.

Of the 27 organisations that participated in the first round of the survey, 19 chose to remain in the project and participate in the second round. Some of the reasons for organisations deciding not to remain in the project included: insufficient time between round 1 and round 2, feeling that little had changed in their organisation since round 1, and that with their current workloads they had insufficient time or resourcing to participate in round 2. The response rate for round 2 was also 61%, based on 1489 completions from the 2448 people invited to participate. This gave a margin of error of 1.5% for the project and an estimated margin of error for the sector of 2.3%. Whilst the overall response rate was identical to that in round one, the average response rate per organisation was slightly higher at 71%, resulting from a relatively higher level of response from some of the smaller organisations compared with larger organisations. Of those people that paricipated in round 2, 59% had also taken part in round one.

**High Level Results**

Round one of the survey indicated staff satisfaction levels were generally quite high, being almost 14 percentage points above the all-industry benchmark (based on data from over 2600 organisations). Staff within the sector tend to be highly engaged and are particularly satisfied with their job and the nature of the work that they do. This finding is consistent with other research[[8]](#footnote-8). Respondents mostly felt that their organisation was successful in meeting its objectives and clients’ needs. For the most part, respondents felt that their organisation was aware of and committed to the various aspects of person-centred service and that this was effective in improving the lives of people with disability.

Particularly strong results were seen in terms of employees’ alignment towards the mission, values and purpose of their organisation, and their understanding of how their own role contributes to the organisation’s (and clients’) outcomes. Being focused on achieving results and high standards of performance were also scored highly, as well as having a workforce that is free of discrimination and harassment. Noticeably weaker results were seen for how well different parts of organisations share resources and work effectively together, satisfaction with income, use of technology and involvement of staff in decision making processes.

**Comparison and Changes between the two survey rounds**

We were not expecting to see significant changes between rounds 1 and 2. In the first instance, the relatively short time period between surveys would be unlikely to allow for significant changes to occur. Secondly, given the number of organisations involved and that different organisations were focussing on different areas for improvement, many changes would balance out across the sample. Similarly, whilst particular organisations may have sufficient focus and resources to achieve improvements in targeted areas, achieving significant sector-wide changes are likely to require more strategic and policy focussed initiatives that are beyond the scope of individual organisations.

At the sector level, this was indeed the case and satisfaction scores increased by only around one percentage point on average. The largest improvements were seen in terms of organisations’ awareness of person-centred approaches, satisfaction with facilities and rewards. No broad measures (i.e. scale-level results) showed a decrease beyond the margin of error and the only item-level results showing a decrease were in relation to how organisations handle change and learn from their mistakes and confidence in senior leadership.

Within organisations though, a greater level of change was apparent. For any given management practice, a shift of over five percentage points in satisfaction scores is often considered to be of practical significance. That is, regardless of the level of statistical significance (which can vary depending on an organisation’s size and response rate across different years), a shift in results of more than five percentage points is usually considered by managers to be worth paying attention to. Of the 39 scales included in the survey, 25 of these showed such an increase (>5%) by at least a quarter of the organisations. Comparatively, only 6 scales showed a substantial decrease by at least a quarter of the organisations. Areas that were most frequently improved upon in this sense included satisfaction with rewards, recognition, awareness of person-centred approaches, and recruitment and selection. Areas that most frequently decreased included cross-unit cooperation and satisfaction with senior leadership.

**Sector Differences**

Compared to results typically seen across other industries, staff working in disability services organisations particularly liked the type of work that they do and thought that it gave them a feeling of personal achievement. They believe strongly in the values and purpose of their organisation and feel emotionally attached to it and, for the most part, are planning to stay with their current employer. Moreso than in other industries, employees indicate that they have received training and development that has improved their performance.

None of the results were noticeably below those seen in other industries, but some weaker results were on par with those seen elsewhere. In particular, satisfaction with income was quite low (although it improved noticeably for round two) and there were concerns around the extent to which organisations make good use of technology or the skills that people have with technology.

**Demographic Trends**

Across both rounds of surveying, analysis of demographic data revealed more similarities than differences between most groups of people. Few noticeable differences were seen across employment status (full-time or part-time), gender or parental status. However, for volunteers, people in a primary care role (other than as a parent) or those people whose first language was not English, satisfaction was slightly higher. People with a disability also reported higher levels of satisfaction, but this difference disappeared if they also required a work related adjustment. Similar to other research[[9]](#footnote-9), we also found that engagement and general satisfaction was highest for people over 55 years of age and for those that had been employed with their organisation for more than 10 years. However, satisfaction was also quite high for those that were under 25 or that had been with their employer for less than two years.

**Drivers**

A key aspect of the project was understanding how each of the management practices covered by the survey impact on the outcome measures of passion/engagement, progress and PCA readiness. In general terms, the strongest predictors of these outcomes in round two were found to be **confidence in senior leadership**, **providing appropriate recognition for achievement** and **acknowledgement of efforts towards being more person centered**, and **involving staff in decision making processes that may affect them**. These drivers were very similar to those seen previously in round one of the survey, although the round one results showed a slightly stronger impact for **recruitment and selection**, and **learning and development**.

Engagement was driven mostly by whether people thought **the organisation was generally successful and meeting its objectives**, whilst perceptions of progress were largely determined by **confidence in senior leadership**. Readiness for person-centred approaches appeared to depend on whether staff felt their organisation had **managed change well in the past**, and whether it was successfully achieving its objectives and **providing quality services that were valued by clients.**

The relative impact of the various practices across the combined outcome measures in round two is shown in the gap analysis below alongside how well organisations were performing. Areas in the bottom right may be considered as potential priorities. Again, these results were very similar to those seen previously in round one, however, supporting people’s wellness emerged as a clearer priority in round two.

**Priorities & Discussion:**

**Organisation Priorities**

Participating organisations were presented with results specific to their organisation including a breakdown of responses and opinions across different demographics, listings of best and worst items in relation to benchmarks and previous results, listings of text comments, and separate reports and comparisons for different work areas.

For each organisation, the survey reports also outlined practices that are having a high impact on the outcome measures for their staff, but were being performed relatively poorly. Consequently, potential high priority areas were identified in each organisation for further consideration. Through consultation sessions and feedback presentations, organisations were assisted to narrow down these potential priorities to focus on items they could reasonably do something about at the local level as opposed to more systemic issues. Some of the more common issues that were identified by organisations are described below.

**Common Organisational Priorities**

**Short Term**

The most common and potentially addressable priority that emerged for participating organisations was that of recognition. That is, providing recognition for a job well done and acknowledging the achievements of staff, particularly in relation to efforts at being more person-centred in their work. The identification of this area as a low result was often surprising to managers, but on reflection made sense given the structure of many organisations. As staff are often operating in service setttings that are not direclty supervised (i.e. away from the main office or in clients’ homes), it can be difficult for managers to observe good practice achievements or special efforts.

Respondents identified communication from senior management as an area of concern: both generally and in relation to organisational direction or strategy. The dynamic nature of the policy and regulatory environment and providers’ varied exposure to self directed supports and/or individualised funding is a contributory factor here. In response to this, leaders in a number of the organisations undertook to implement greater communication with staff via activities such as staff newsletters and emails, blogs and on the ground personal interaction. This did result in some improvements by round two, but there remains a clear need for leaders to do more in this area. In particular, the round two results suggested that involving staff more in decision making processes that affect them would be likely to yield significant benefits.

**Longer Term**

Cross unit co-operation was identified by many organisations as an area they could address over the longer term. Whilst organisations varied in terms of how well different areas, teams or departments were able to communicate, share resources and work well together, this was commonly an area that had a large impact on overall staff engagement and satisfaction. A number of organisations are endeavouring to increase job rotation, cross functional acitivities and horizontal communication as a consequence of reviewing their engagement profile.

A further issue that seemed to be having a relatively strong impact on employee engagement was a lack of alignment or consistency between the current focus on person-centred approaches, and existing organisational processes such as performance appraisals, internal processes and procedures, and communications from management.

That is, although person-centred approaches were topical and being talked about within the organisation, existing processes and procedures did not reflect this or may have prevented staff from being more person-centred in their work. Whilst some organisations were doing quite well in this sense, many indicated that a person-centred approach had not really permeated their organisational culture as yet. In some cases this was linked to current uncertainty around the future operating environment, but most organisations saw this as an area that could be improved upon by directly addressing it.

**Sector Level Priorities**

In addition to organisation level strategies, the results also indicated high priority systemic issues.

**Short Term**

Good leadership (particularly around communication and consultation with staff) was identified by staff as generally being done very well and the area that had the strongest impact across all of the outcome measures. Maintenance of good leadership and improvements here are likely to lead to significant improvements across a broad range of indicators.

**Longer Term**

The limited availablity of career opportunities was also an area that had a large impact on staff. Organisations can undertake actions to address this by increasing awareness of existing opportunities, facilitated career planning, learning and development, professional supervision/practice leadership and greater role diversity, for example. However, resolving the core issue of limited positions for advancement is only likely to be succesful in the context of sector wide approaches that look at the structure of the industry and the nature of its workforce.

**Rewards**

Satisfaction with remuneration and financial rewards is particularly low throughout the industry. Indeed, this remained the lowest scoring area in the survey for round two despite showing one of the largest increases in satisfaction since round one. It is also an area that organisations typically have limited capacity to address. Whilst any further improvement in rewards would no doubt be appreciated by staff, the survey results indicated very little relationship between such rewards and the outcome measures. That is, increased levels of satisfaction with remuneration and financial benefits did not appear to impact greatly on whether people liked their job and their organisation, whether they intended to leave or their satisfaction with the organisation’s performance and its readiness for person-centred approaches. The finding that staff are attracted to the sector for other reasons is consistent with other research. Whilst there are clear equity and market related issues to consider in relation to remuneration, the survey results at least suggest that there are probably other factors that are higher immediate priorities given their relative impact on engagement.

**Wellness & Work/Life Balance**

Whilst general workload and work/life balance did not emerge as an area of priority, how well people are able to cope with and manage levels of job-related stress did have a strong impact on the outcome measures. Although satisfaction in this area was reasonable and consistent across rounds one and two, in cases where people were reporting high levels of stress, it was seen to have a high impact across the broad range of outcomes and this became even more apparent during round two. Staff were often operating in highly difficult situations, both physically and emotionally, given the nature of their work. As such, a number of organisations undertook to find ways to provide greater levels of support and supervision, and to make more counseling or debriefing sessions available for their staff.

**Conclusion:**

The findings from the pilot study of the NDS Employee Engagement Survey provided some consistency with earlier studies of the disability services workforce[[10]](#footnote-10) and the broader not-for-profit sector[[11]](#footnote-11). Overall, the results from round one of the survey pilot were 12 percentage points above all-industry benchmark results, 14 percentage points from round two, and showed a slight sector-wide improvement in general satisfaction levels between rounds one and two of the survey. Within organisations, the areas that showed the most improvement were awareness of issues relating to person-centred approaches, satisfaction with rewards and recognition, facilities and recruitment and selection procedures. Areas that tended to decrease the most were change management, confidence in senior leadership and cross-unit cooperation.

Disability services employees who participated in the survey tended to be highly engaged and satisfied with their job and the nature of the work they do. Employees also rated alignment to their employer’s mission, values and purpose and how their job role successfully contributes to organisational and client outcomes highly. However, they rated how organisations share resources and work effectively together, the use of technology and staff involvement in decision making less favourably.

Not surprisingly, the results confirmed the ongoing challenges the sector faces in relation to wages, despite a considerable improvement in this area for round two. However, while the results in this area were particularly low, the findings indicated that people join and stay in the sector for other reasons and that better terms and conditions will not necessarily significantly improve employee engagement.

One of the priority areas of focus identified through the pilot survey process, was the need for ongoing investment in leadership. Although leadership was identified as an area of relative strength, particularly in smaller organisations, it directly and significantly impacts on all levels of employee engagement. In particular, staff would like to receive more information about their organisation’s strategy and direction and would like to be consulted more in relation to decisions that affect them.

Other priority areas requiring focus include investment in informal and formal employee recognition, particularly in relation to direct service delivery; the implementation of effective communication strategies; cross unit cooperation; the availability of career opportunities and the alignment of organisational processes with person-centred practices.

Although workload and work life balance per se were not identified as priorities, how well people are able to cope with, and manage, levels of job-related stress did have a strong impact on the outcome measures. Little progress was made on this issue between round one and round two and, although general levels of stress have not increased, it did seem to be having a larger impact on staff during round two. As such, there is an increasing need for organisations to provide support for staff that may be experiencing difficult or stressful situations at work. The role of employee assistance programs is directly implicated here.

The findings from the pilot, therefore, reinforce the need for organisations to focus on, and invest in, the intrinsic and non-wage related differentiators to successfully attract, recruit and retain current and future employees, as an essential component of any strategy to be considered and recognised as an ‘employer of choice’.

**Appendix A: Psychometrics and validation of the standard model**

Voice Project’s standard staff engagement survey has undergone rigorous evaluation of its psychometric properties. The tool was initially tested across 13,729 employees representing approximately 1000 organisations. Exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses and internal reliability analyses support 31 lower-order work practices and outcomes that aggregate into seven higher-order work systems broadly covering practices and outcomes such as organisational direction, ethics, resources, involvement, wellness, change management, customer satisfaction, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and employees’ intention to stay. Average loadings across the lower order factors were .65 for the exploratory analyses and .78 for the confirmatory analyses. Average loadings across the higher order factors were .52 and .72 for exploratory and confirmatory analyses, respectively. The average scale alpha was .83 indicating strong reliability and internal consistency.

External validation of the tool has been demonstrated by linking scores from the employee survey with independent manager reports of turnover, absenteeism, productivity, health and safety, goal attainment, financial performance, change management, innovation and customer satisfaction. These external measures were aggregated to produce a composite performance measure. On average, the correlation between this composite measure and the lower order scales was .22, with all such correlations being signification at the .001 level. Correlations between the composite measure and the two outcome measures of passion and progress were similarly significant with values of .32 and .41 respectively.

Additionally, the direction of causality between the higher order factors has been estimated using structural equation modelling techniques which do generally support the notion of progress and passion as outcome measures. However, progress can be seen to have a strong influence on property, whilst people and peace are only weakly associated with the outcomes.

For further details on the tool’s psychometric properties and validation, please refer to the articles below:

Langford, P. H. (2009). Measuring organisational climate and employee engagement: Evidence for a “7 Ps” model of work practices and outcomes. Australian Journal of Psychology, 61, 185-198.

Langford, P. H., Parkes, L. P., & Metcalf, L. (2006). Developing a structural equation model of organisational performance and employee engagement. Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the Australian Psychological Society and the New Zealand Psychological Society, Auckland.

**Appendix B: Psychometrics of the refined model for disability services organisations**

The content of the standard survey was reviewed in order to increase its relevance to disability services organisations. This was undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders and subject matter experts within a framework of maintaining good measurement principles (e.g. short and simple items measuring unidimensional constructs, sufficient coverage of content area, preferring to remove items with known weaker item-scale correlations or weaker associations with the outcome measures, etc). Whilst many of the standard scales underwent revision as such, a key change was the inclusion of a third suggested outcome measure of PCA readiness. This consisted of scales looking at awareness of person-centred approaches, commitment to such approaches and the effectiveness of such approaches. Within these scales, initial items were designed to address the construct from the point of view of the individual as well as the organisational context. These items were similarly reviewed by key stakeholders and subject matter experts to determine their appropriateness for the final survey tool.

Whilst a detailed investigation of the psychometric properties of the final survey was beyond the scope of the current project, some basic measures were calculated. Item-scale correlations for each of the three PCA readiness measures were more than acceptable, ranging from .76 to .88. Similarly, scale alphas (internal consistency estimates) for the three PCA measures were quite high, ranging from .81 to .83, with the alpha for PCA readiness as a whole being exceptionally good at .96. Removal of any one question from each of the three measures did not increase the scale alphas, suggesting that each of the items was an appropriate inclusion within its scale. For the

existing survey scales that had been slightly modified (removal or addition of an item or slight wording changes), strong scale reliability was maintained with an average alpha of .89 (indeed, a slight improvement from the standard survey content). For new items or items that had been significantly altered, item-scale correlations averaged .85 indicating that the new items were consistently measuring the same construct as the standard content.

As such, given the survey development procedures followed and these initial estimates of the tool’s properties, we feel that the NDS Engagement Survey represents a valid and reliable instrument that is tailored to the specific needs of the disability services industry.

**Appendix C: Detailed Results**

The percentages of people responding favourably to each area are shown in the information below alongside the number of percentage points by which this differed from the round one results and from the all-industry benchmark:

**Scale**

**Round 2 percentage favourable:**

* High: more than and equal to 80%
* Medium: 50% and above but below 80%
* Low: below 50%

**Percentage difference from round 1:**

* High: more than and equal to 10%
* Medium: between minus 10% and plus 10%
* Low: fewer than or equal to 10%

**Benchmark difference to all-industries:**

* High: more than and equal to 10%
* Medium: between minus 10% and plus 10%
* Low: fewer than or equal to 10%

**Outcome Measures**

**Passion/engagement**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 84% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: + 21% (high)

**Organisational commitment**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 86% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: + 19% (high)

**Job satisfaction**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 92% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: -1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +21% (high)

**Intention to stay**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 75% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +22% (high)

**Progress**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 79% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +12% (high)

**Organisation objectives**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 83% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +10% (high)

**Change and innovation**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 71% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: + 13% (high)

**Client satisfaction**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 85% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: + 12% (high)

**PCA readiness**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 78% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +2% (medium)

**PCA awareness**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 77% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +4% (medium)

**PCA Commitment**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 74% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)

**PCA effectiveness**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 83% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)

**Scale Scores**

**Organisation direction**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 77% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +16% (high)

**Results focus**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 88% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +10% (high)

**Mission and values**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 92% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +19% (high)

**Ethics**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 85% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +2% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +12% (high)

**Role clarity**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 94% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +13% (high)

**Diversity**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 87% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +7% (medium)

**Resouces**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 76% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +2% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +11% (high)

**Processes**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 79% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +15% (high)

**Technology**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 62% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +2% (medium)

**Safety**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 87% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +3% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +18% (high)

**Facilities**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 69% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +4% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +8% (medium)

**Leadership**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 71% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +11% (high)

**Recruitment and selection**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 73% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +12% (high)

**Cross-unit cooperation**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 54% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +2% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +6% (medium)

**Learning and development**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 75% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +15% (high)

**Involvement**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 66% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +16% (high)

**Rewards**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 57% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +4% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +4% (medium)

**Recognition**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 69% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +2% (medium)

**Performance Appraisal**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 71% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: -1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +15% (high)

**Supervision**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 82% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +9% (medium

**Career opportunities**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 55% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +10% (high)

**Motivation and initiative**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 83% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +3% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +16% (high)

**Talent**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 86% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +3% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +12% (high)

**Teamwork**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 87% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +3% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +8% (medium)

**Wellness**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 73% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: +1% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +6% (medium)

**Work/life balance**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 82% (high)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +9% (medium)

**Flexibility**

* Round 2 percentage favourable: 77% (medium)
* Percentage difference from round 1: 0% (medium)
* Benchmark difference to all-industries: +10% (high)

**Appendix D: Note on recent and relevant research on employee engagement in the Australian disability sector**

Employee engagement has not been widely investigated in the disability support sector, particularly in the Australian context, as it has in other sectors. For example, studies investigating the nursing profession have been more common given the history of skill shortages and future growth in demand expected in the workforce as the population ages. With similar constraints now facing the disability support sector, developing the evidence base for what works in terms of maximising the engagement, loyalty and motivation among disability support workers in Australia remains a research priority.

A small number of recent studies have attempted to investigate employee engagement or satisfaction among disability support workers in Australia or adjacent sectors.

**The Nursing Profession**

One such study[[12]](#footnote-12) on the nursing profession sought to understand the role of individual characteristics, job features and satisfaction in the engagement of the nursing workforce.

The study found that, for the nursing professionals surveyed, increased levels of engagement were driven by higher job satisfaction, higher quality of working life, lower social dysfunction and lower stress associated with patient care. It also found that nursing professionals should be considered at high risk for developing mental disorders. As such, it was recommended that efforts be made to implement models of employee engagement to address staff shortages and high turnover in the profession rather than relying solely on more traditional retention strategies.

**The Not-For-Profit Sector**

The Maxxia Workplace Insights report (2013)[[13]](#footnote-13) is a recent study on employee sentiment in the Australian not-for-profit (NFP) sector. It provides useful insight into the factors of NFP employee engagementtogether with the reasons why staff were originally attracted to the NFP sector and their intentions to remain.

The survey findings revealed that making a positive impact in people’s lives was a substantial attractor for people working and wanting to work in the sector. The findings also highlighted the utilisation of skills and qualifications as another attraction.

In terms of rentention, the study revealed some disparity between HR managers’ perceptions of why employees chose to leave the sector and the reasons employees listed for wanting to leave. Although poor career progression and lower wages were seen as key drivers by both parties, poor management, low morale and high stress were more significant concerns for staff than HR managers had realised.

**The Disability Sector**

In 2010, the results of a survey were released that attempted to measure the satisfaction and motivation of the Victorian disability services workforce[[14]](#footnote-14). In total, more than 2,000 employees participated from 92 Victorian community services organisations that received funding from the Disability Services Division of the Department of Human Services. The results were framed as indicative of the wider disability services workforce across Victoria, but, due to methodological limitations, they were not representative of the workforce as a whole.

Overall, the survey revealed high levels of employee satisfaction with the intrinsic rewards of their job and flexible working arrangements provided by their employer. Complementing these findings, the survey revealed these areas as common reasons for attraction to the sector.

However, the survey also revealed areas for development within the sector. Employees were less likely to be satisfied with their career advancement as well as less likely to have received positive, regular feedback or any performance review. Not surprisingly, the lowest result of the survey overall related to employee satisfaction with salary.

Of high relevance, was a recent study by Vassos et al. (2013)[[15]](#footnote-15) that looked into factors associated with engagement and burnout amongst disability support workers nation-wide. As the first Australian study of its kind, no other research had looked into the relative importance of the workplace factors driving disability support worker engagement in Australia.

Overall, Vassos et al. found that the levels of engagement amongst disability support workers who participated were consistent with those in the general working population. In terms of the key drivers of this engagement, role clarity and job feedback were both found to be key contributors.

In order to address these two findings, Vassos et al. recommended that supervision of practices by managers was required to ensure job descriptors were adopted, and that position decriptions be changed over time in order to take into account new circumstances. Meanwhile, on-the-job feedback was suggested as a suitable feedback mechanism for the sector as it took into account the shift work nature of the role across many locations.

**About NDS**

National Disability Services is the Australian peak body for non-government disability services.

Through the provision of information, representation and policy advice, NDS promotes and advances services which support people with all forms of disability to participate in all domains of life.

**About Voice Project**

Voice Project are experts in designing and implementing employee, 360, and customer surveys that enable organisations to drive positive change. These surveys allow organisations to assess their performance on a range of Human Resource (HR) and management practices that are linked to successful people and financial outcomes. Voice Project is a privately owned management consultancy that has grown out of a research program at Macquarie University, and since 2002 has given a voice to over 1 million people across more than 3000 organisations.

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1. See for example Vassos, Nankervis, Skerry and Lante 2013, ‘Work Engagement and Job Burnout within the Disability Support Worker Population’, Research in Developmental Disabilities, Vol. 34, pp. 3884-3895. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Appendix C for a note on recent research related to worker satisfaction, engagement and related areas in the Australian disability sector context. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. NDS partnered with Voice Project (a leading organisational development research and consulting company) and representatives from the sector to develop a disability industry specific employee engagement survey. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Langford, P. H., Parkes, L. P., & Metcalf, L. (2006). Developing a structural equation model of organisational performance and employee engagement. Proceedings of the Joint Conference of the Australian Psychological Society and the New Zealand Psychological Society, Auckland. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Langford, P. H. (2009). Measuring organisational climate and employee engagement: Evidence for a “7 Ps” model of work practices and outcomes. Australian Journal of Psychology, 61, 185-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Focus groups were conducted with a number of people from organisations participating in a pilot project and with other key stakeholders. As a result of this process, the wording of some items was adjusted slightly to make it clearer or more relevant, some standard items were removed, and some additional items were built in. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Martin and Healy (2010) Who works in community services?. National Institute of Labour Studies [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, page133-134 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Eastment, B.L. (2012). Driven to stay: unwrapping engagement and retention in the public sector. CPA Congress 2012, Adelaide. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Parkes, L.P. (2009). Supporting employment for people with a disability. Paper presented at the 8th Industrial Psychology Conference, Sydney. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Parkes, L.P. & Langford, P. (2006). 'Money or the mission? comparing drivers of employee engagement in commercial and not-for-profit organisations', Proceedings of the 20th ANZAM (Australian New Zealand Academy of Management) Conference on "Management: Pragmatism, Philosophy, Priorities", 6-9 December 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jenaro, C, Flores, N, Orgaz, M. B. and Cruz, M, 2011, ‘Vigour and dedication in nursing professionals: towards a better understanding of work engagement’, Journal of Advanced Nursing, Vol. 67, pp. 865–875. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Maxxia Workplace Insights: 2013 Not-for-Profit Sentiment Study, June 2013, Key Insights and Summary Report, viewed 16 September 2013, http://www.maxxia.com.au/media/927322/maxmkg\_nfpreport\_web\_0613.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rimfire Resources 2010, National Disability Services Victoria: Disability Services Workforce Data Project, viewed 25 November 2013, http://www.nds.org.au/projects/article/79 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Vassos, Nankervis, Skerry and Lante 2013, ‘Work Engagement and Job Burnout within the Disability Support Worker Population’, Research in Developmental Disabilities, Vol. 34, pp. 3884-3895. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)