The Employee Engagement Index is an online survey in which employees assess their own engagement at work. The Federal Employment Agency considers employee engagement as one of the key prerequisites to improving PES performance. With this in mind, the survey focuses on factors that indicate good working relationships and strengthen leadership and collaboration at PES staff level, such as communication, identification or psychological contract. The initiative is more likely to affect PES performance if two main factors are involved: the national PES board supports the implementation of the initiative and understands its benefit; and results of the survey are integrated into the wider PES human resources policy.

### Name of the PES

Federal Employment Agency

### When was the practice implemented?

Between 2013 and 2015, the Employee Engagement Index has been conducted annually to ensure its effectiveness. From 2016 onwards, the survey will be performed every two years, allowing more time to implement improvement strategies. This also reduces the amount of feedback asked of employees, since they are also required to fill in other surveys, such as risk assessments.

### Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

The index was developed in cooperation with researchers at Jacobs University Bremen and VU Amsterdam. They also use the data for further analysis, such as the relationship between commitment and productivity. The HR policy team at the National Department of Staff and Organisational Development is responsible for the development and implementation of the survey. It is conducted by an internal centre for customer and staff surveys at head office.

### Which groups were targeted by the practice?

The results of the Employee Engagement Index are aggregated and reported to each management level, so that managers can start a follow-up process to improve results. All 156 local employment agencies, the regional directorates and special agencies (such as research institutes) have their own index. There is also an index for the entire organisation.

### What were the practice’s main objectives?

The aim of the Employee Engagement Index is to promote good working relationships and environments and to strengthen leadership and collaboration. Instead of measuring employee satisfaction, the index considers commitment as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioural pre-condition to performance.

### What activities were carried out?

To develop an empirically funded model, the Federal Employment Agency worked with Jacobs University Bremen. As a result, 90 questions were tested by the Federal Employment Agency in local agencies to identify factors that influence employee commitment. These agencies were recruited from all 10 regional directorates, also in order to gain wide support for the project. Finally 19 statements were identified that reflect the following factors:

- Willingness to make an effort: ambition to contribute to individual and team tasks.
- Identification with employer and company objectives.
- Psychological contract: this is a dialogue on the subjective expectations of the employer and the employee with the aim to understand what motivates employees and helps them develop.
- Work capacity: to be able to fulfil tasks and requirements that go with them.
- Communication: ability to communicate effectively.
Employees answer on a scale from one (‘I totally agree’) to six (‘I totally disagree’) to the 19 statements. All answers are anonymous. In addition, there are five statements referring to influential factors: work organisation, cooperation with colleagues, supervisors, qualification and appreciation. Finally, employees can also leave comments or positive feedback suggestions for improvements.

To successfully implement the tool, practitioners (local managers, HR representatives, employees from regional directorates) were involved in endorsing the index. In addition, ‘coordinators’ were nominated in each regional directorate to promote the index and help managers analyse the results.

There is a structured follow-up process with a focus on dialogue-based activities for all local employment agencies, regional directorates and the head office. In workshops managers and employees discuss how to improve low-scoring areas within the PDCA-cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act). Depending on individual results, managers can also consider certain sections of the index with other data (sick leave rates, risk assessment, work-life balance measures). Moreover, during the first three years, the index has been included in the target agreement of managers and therefore linked to performance related payments. Since 2016, the implementation of the follow-up process is also part of the target agreement.

The Employee Engagement Index was developed by external and internal staff and resources from all levels are used to implement it. The development of the index was supported by researchers at Jacobs University Bremen and VU Amsterdam. At national level, the results are analysed by employees of the department for HR policy at the head office. One member of the national HR department coordinates it, together with coordinators at regional level. At local level, managers and HR representatives are responsible for organising follow-up workshops.

The Employee Engagement Index is an empirically funded and tested model to identify areas relating to employee engagement that impact on personal performance. The results from 2013 show that higher scores in the Employee Engagement Index generate a significantly higher customer satisfaction. This underlines the importance of fostering engagement for organisational success. The analysis of the index in 2014 shows the same results.

In addition, the results of the Employee Engagement Index have been widely used. At local level, measures to improve results have already been successful. For example, the agency with the worst results one year, implemented measures which generated a 0.5 (on a scale from 1 to 6) improvement in results the next year. In total, there has been an overall improvement of 0.1 of the national index every year, a major achievement for a group of about 30,000 respondents in such a short time. At national level, the results are used to develop evidence-based HR policies and managers from individual business units use the results to plan improvement measures.

Participants:
In 2014, there were around 31,000 participants. Approximately 17,000 comments are included in the analysis every year.

Data analysis:
Results are available for managers in the management information system. The results are made transparent in internal communications to all employees.

Products:
▶ Guidance handbook for managers
▶ Managers are supported by specialist HR advisors
▶ Integration into general manager qualification
▶ Training material for coordinators at regional directorates
▶ Workshops to discuss the index with the head office
What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

- Combination of an empirically funded model and a transformational change management strategy for implementation that involves a wide range of employees, managers, work councils and employees representing certain interests (gender, disability). It is important that results are communicated transparently at any stage of the follow-up process.
- The national PES board supported the implementation of the initiative. The integration of the results of the Employee Engagement Index as a target into individual target agreements for managers showed that the results need to be taken seriously (turning soft factors into hard facts).
- The Employee Engagement Index is a newly developed tool and its implementation needs time. In addition, a continuous discussion at all levels is important to discuss questions, revisions or follow-up.
- The results should not be seen in isolation, they rather need to be integrated into wider HR policy so that results can support internal processes.
- The Employee Engagement Index is transferable to other organisations which would like to improve working conditions and relationships in a participative process by not only conducting a survey, but also develop and implement measures involving employees and supervisors at all stages.

Further development:

- It is planned to break down the results of the Employee Engagement Index to team level. For the first three years, it was easier to group the results by agencies, regional directorates and service units and put the higher local and regional management in charge. This was done in order to help with the introduction of the project.
- The brevity of the statements make it easy for employees to participate. However, comment functions and additional questions relating to leadership are a useful support to the PDCA cycle. Therefore, it is planned to extend them to give supervisors additional information regarding relevant levers of engagement.
- Until now, the target has been measured quantitatively, but to focus on the quality of the follow-up activities and organisational development, the target agreements for managers in 2016 focus on qualitative measures during the follow-up. Focus topics are value orientation and collaboration.