Images, Metaphors, Words

Examples from client projects & research studies

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the institute for employment studies

Programme for the session

- Client projects
- ‘Engaging Manager’ research
- Benefits of the approach

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Three client projects

- Engagement research for a government agency
  - questionnaires completed during focus groups with staff working in HQ and regional offices around the UK: 1. *'What are the best things about working here?' 2. 'If you had to describe [name of organisation] as an object, a place, a person, a non-human living thing, or anything else, what would it be? Why?'*
- Study of a group of healthcare professionals working with vulnerable teenagers
  - focus groups with staff and team supervisors: *'Draw a picture, or give me some words or phrases, to describe what it's like to work in your role'*
- Culture audit for a County Council
  - focus groups with employees at all levels: *'Draw a picture, or construct a metaphor, to represent the County Council'*

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Government Agency

Government Agency: word cloud

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Government Agency: metaphors

- *'**Spider**: useful and does important work, but not popular.'*
- *'**Battleship** in the age of agile air combat: feedback mechanisms are much too slow.'*
- *'The **neighbour** you'd call on for DIY but wouldn't necessarily invite to dinner: equipment/knowledge/ expertise when necessary, but not exciting.'*
- *'**Margaret Thatcher**: reputation for being firm and sticking to a course of action regardless of the consequences.'*
- *'**Spaghetti Junction**: lots of different work goals, strands and paths which occasionally intersect.'*

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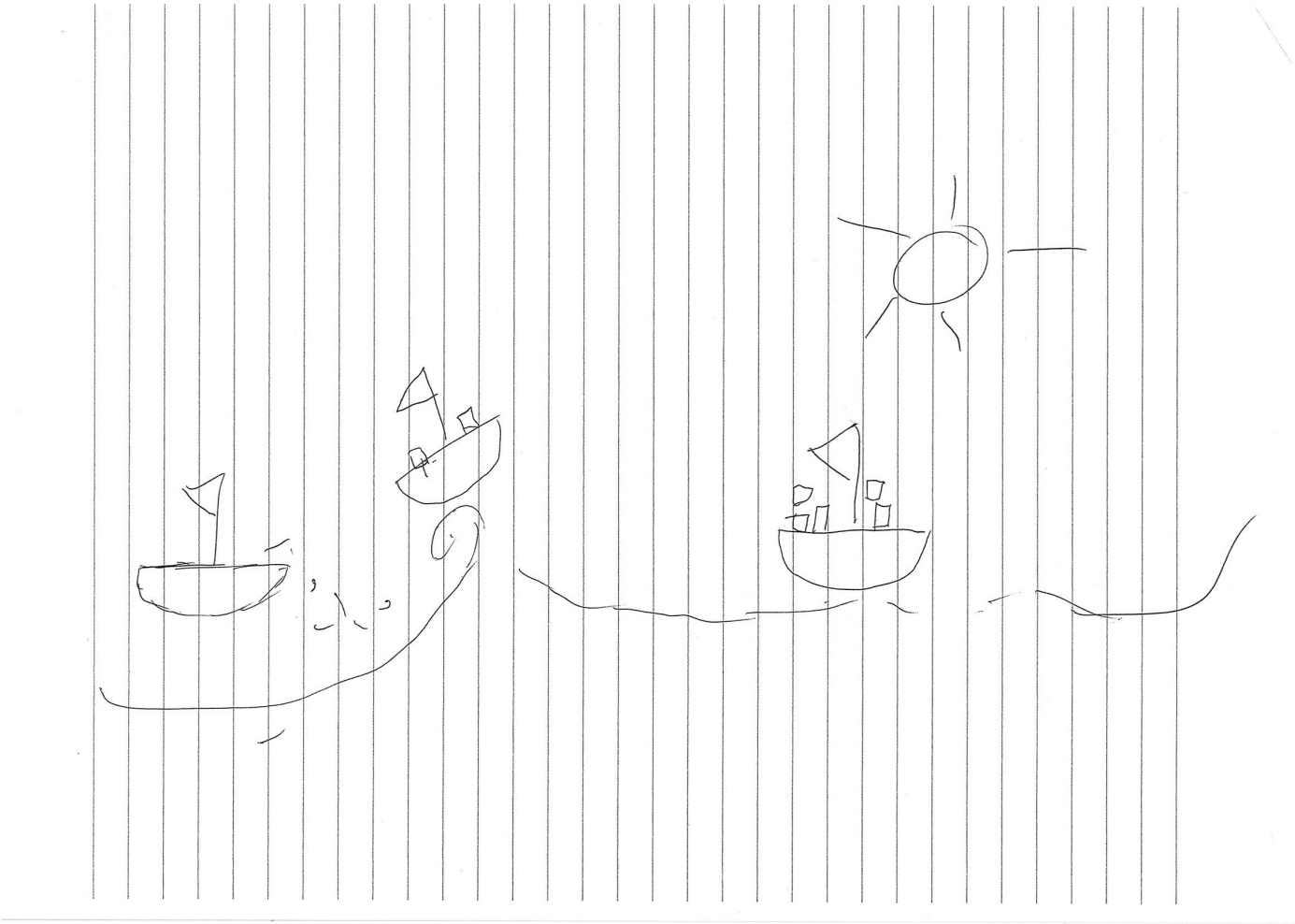
Healthcare Programme

Healthcare programme: the client journey



Healthcare programme: recurring heart imagery

Healthcare programme: word cloud

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County Council

County Council: metaphors

- *'An **octopus** — with no head, but lots of arms affecting people's lives, all operating independently, doing their own thing well but not talking to each other and not being joined up.'*
- *'A **brick wall** — which people can't get through and don't understand; managers need more training, staff don't have enough time and feel blocked all the time when trying to help clients.'*
- *'**Treacle** — runs slowly, would run faster if heated up'*
- *'A **threepenny bit** — with lots of different faces, trying to do lots of different things; rolls along but bumpily!'*

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County Council: paper as the end product

County Council: a sheep in wolf's clothing

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IES's 'Engaging Manager' Research

How do engaging managers behave?

Research participants

- Funded via IES's membership HR Network
- Seven participating organisations:
  - Centrica
  - Sainsbury's
  - Rolls-Royce
  - Corus
  - Association of Certified Chartered Accountants
  - HM Revenue and Customs
  - London Borough of Merton

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What we did

- Participating organisations nominated 2 to 5 managers whose teams had scored highly for organisational engagement in the latest employee survey
- We then:
  - interviewed these engaging managers (25)
  - interviewed their managers (22)
  - facilitated a focus group with their teams (154): *'Draw a picture to represent your manager'*
- Report published in 2009: *The Engaging Manager*
- Follow-up report published in 2012: *Images of Engaging Management*

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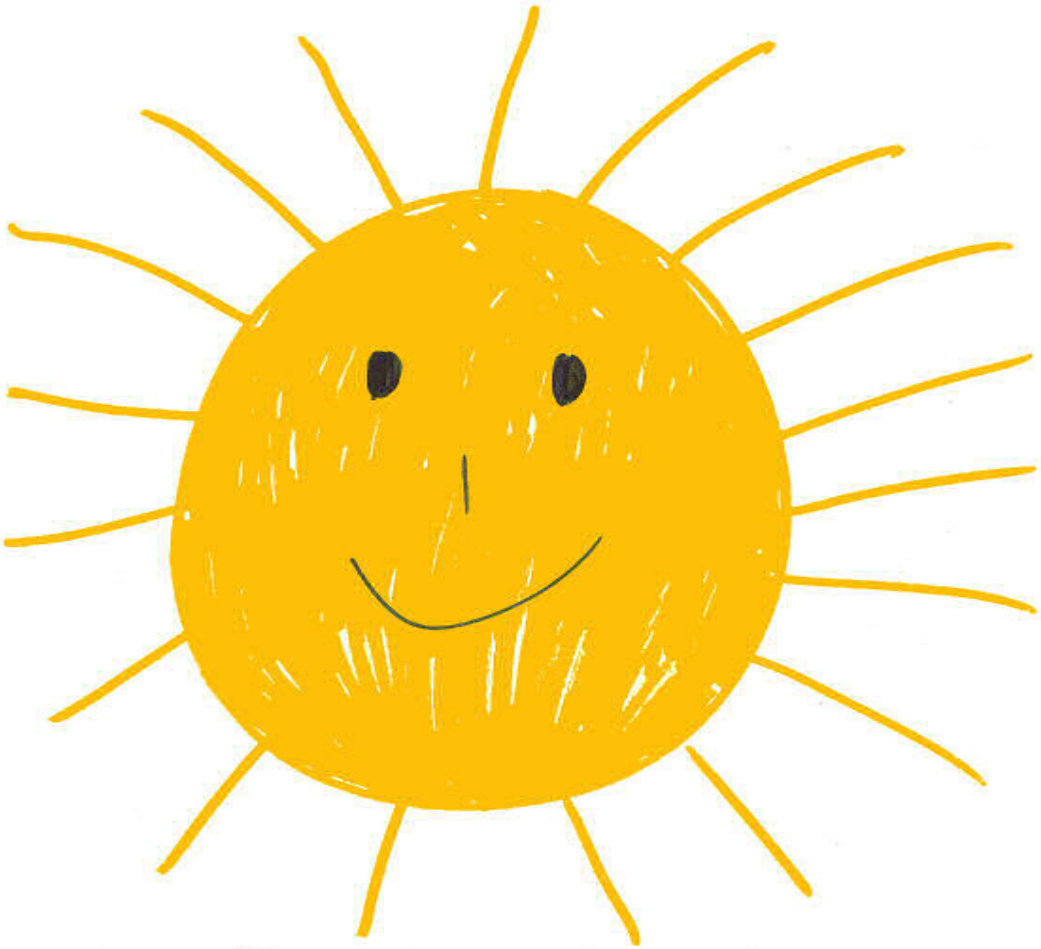
Positive, optimistic and warm



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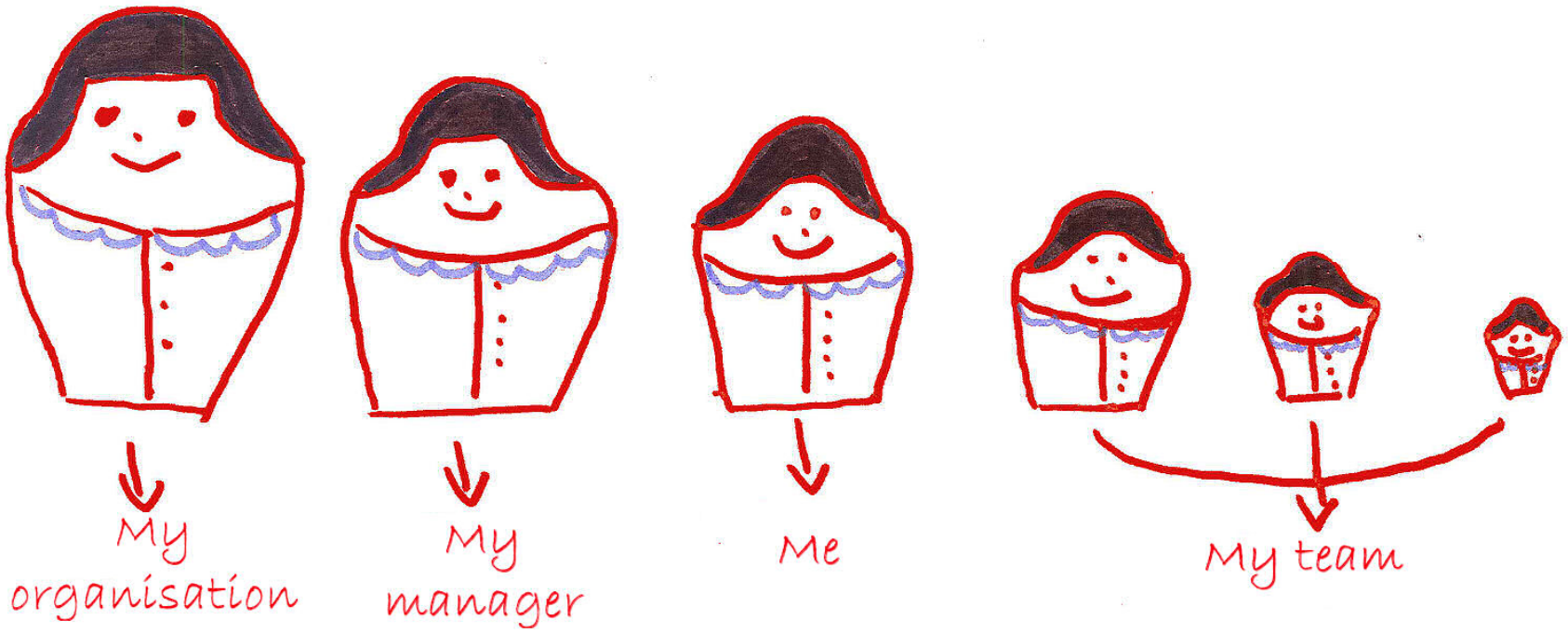
Communicating and listening

Team focused and supportive

Protecting team and individuals

Reliable, dependable and loyal

Understands organisation and contribution of self and team



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Manager as a high performer

Versatile, manages several things at once

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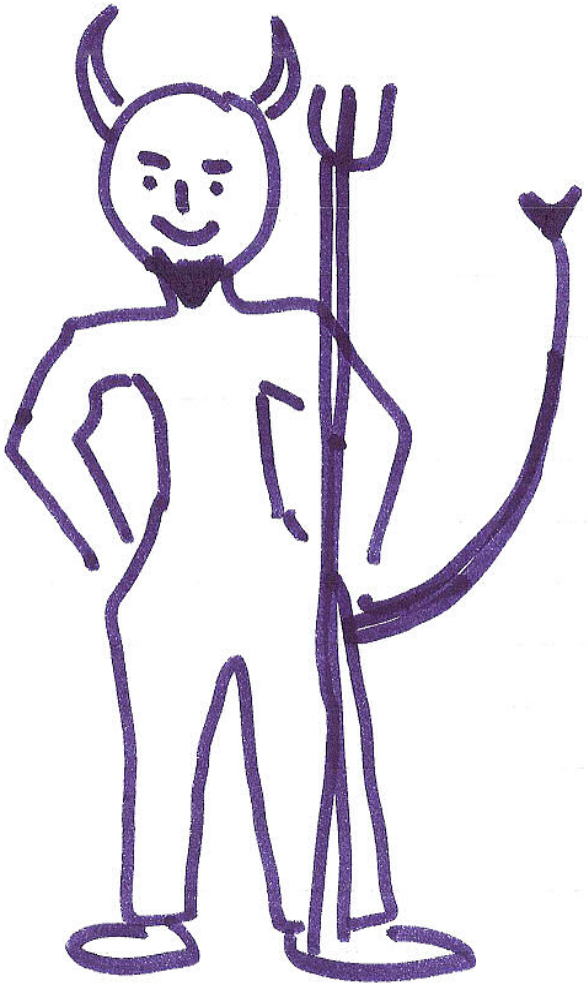
Maverick, not following company line



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Why use this approach?

- Liberates thinking
- Gives permission to be creative
- Allows people to get across what they mean
- Encourages discussion
- Makes a big impact
- Makes reports much more interesting to read

For the researcher and research participants…

- Enjoyable!

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… thank you