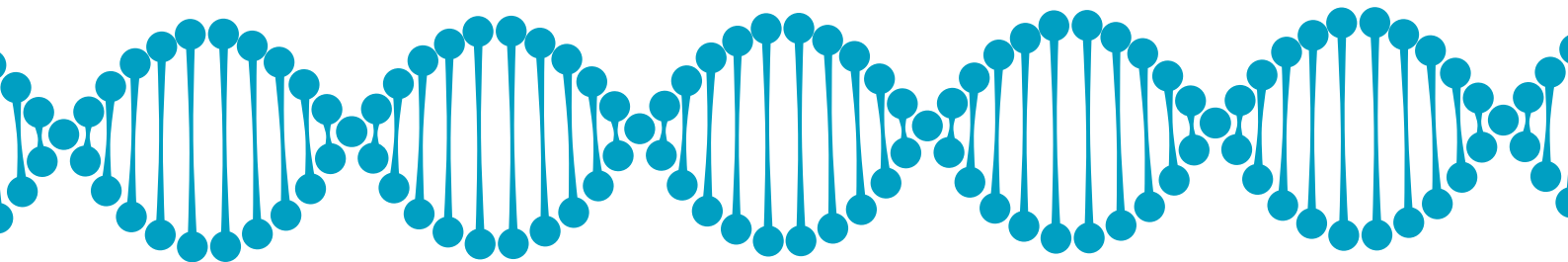


# Welcome to the strengths revolution

The benefits of strengths-based recruitment  
experienced by five top companies



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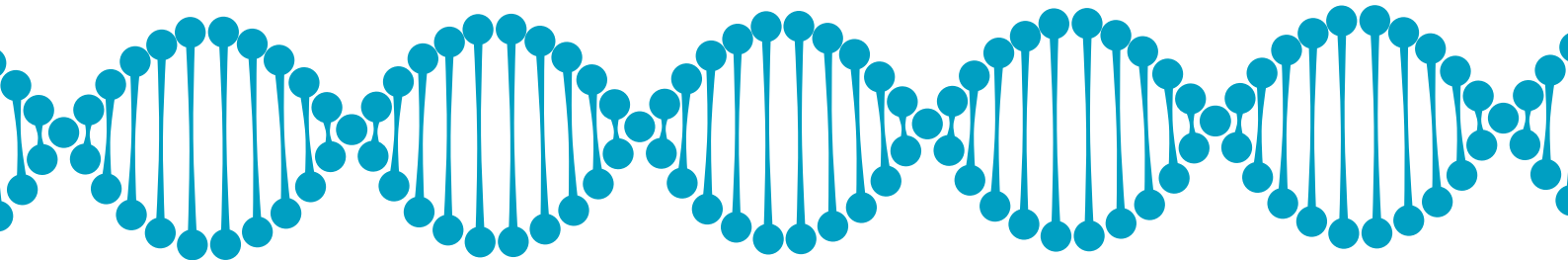
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# Section one:

## The study



## 1. Introduction

Since introducing strengths-based recruitment (SBR):

- A leading healthcare provider has seen staff turnover fall by 50%
- A major financial services business has reported a productivity rise of 20%
- A top travel company has seen customer satisfaction jump by 12%

Strengths-based recruitment may be relatively new but it's already having a tangible impact on market-leading businesses – as highlighted by the first in-depth study conducted into this new recruitment approach.

We'd like to share the key findings from that study with you here, so that you can see for yourself the difference that recruiting on strengths could make to your organisation.

“We have missed out so much by choosing the competency route in the past.”

## 2. What is strengths-based recruitment, and how and why is it different to the way you recruit now?

In simple terms, SBR is about profiling your great people. Then helping your organisation to find more of them. SBR helps you find out whether someone would be suited to a job, would love it and thrive in it.

Compare this with a competency-based recruitment (CBR) approach, where you simply discover whether someone *can* do the job. Now you start to see the difference that recruitment based on strengths could bring to your business.

As Steve Jobs, the late CEO of Apple, once said, “Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do”.

This is the essence of SBR. It's a way for you to seek out and hire people with the strengths needed to do great work for you. And it's why increasing numbers of companies are now starting to pay attention to it.

Until now, there has been no rigorous, in-depth study of the effects of this revolutionary new approach, which is why we commissioned this report. It shows very clearly that SBR reduces cost, increases efficiency and saves time. But it also reveals how SBR increases workers' engagement, happiness and performance. The power of SBR is usually unexpected and definitely undeniable. It presents a massive opportunity for organisations and those who work in them.

“Recruiters found CBR boring, over-scripted, and unreliable...the people we were recruiting just didn't seem the right types.”

**HR Director**

### 3. The research

As one of the UK's leading strengths consultancies, Engaging Minds has worked with a number of well-known organisations to introduce SBR for them.

This piece of research is the first of its kind. We wanted to gain an accurate picture of how SBR is working for five top organisations, the lessons they've learnt from introducing it, and most importantly, the difference it is making to their productivity, customer satisfaction and profits.

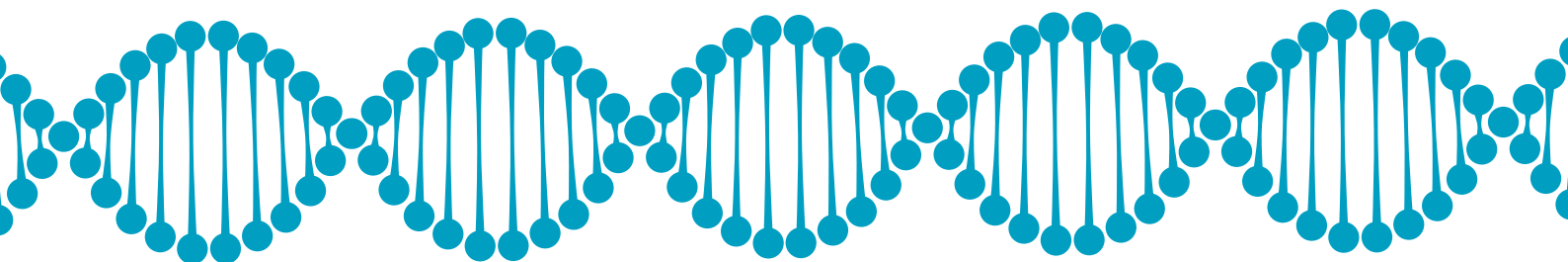
To begin with, take a look at the following five questions and see if any of them resonate with you:

1. Are high-quality people key to delivering your customer proposition and differentiating you from the competition?
2. Are you interested in attracting higher calibre job applicants?

3. With so many applicants for jobs, do you struggle to separate the best from the rest?
4. Is there value in identifying what makes your great performers great?
5. Do you want to reduce staff turnover and associated recruitment costs?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, SBR and the principles it is based on could be exactly what your organisation is looking for.

“SBR is such a simple process and it works.”



## 4. A summary of the findings

All five companies in the study have made the switch from CBR to SBR. They were all dissatisfied in some way with their recruitment process. Either it wasn't bringing them the quality of candidates they needed, or people simply weren't staying long enough with them. Both outcomes were costly, inefficient and bad for morale.

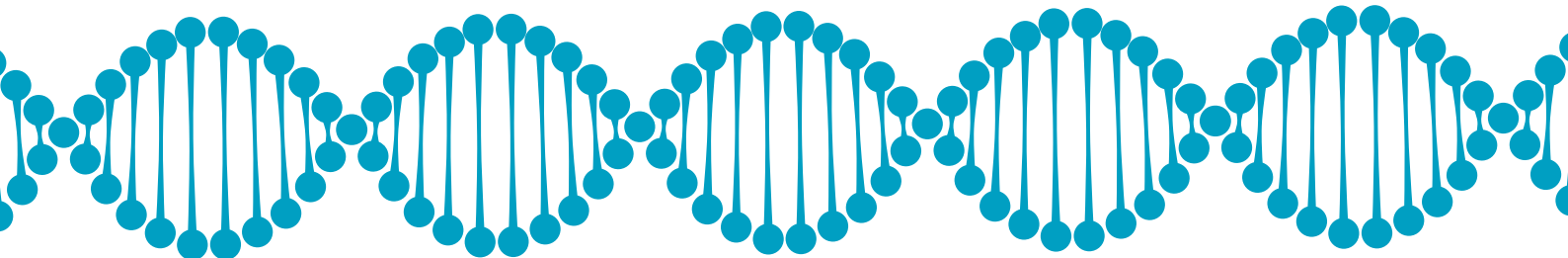
Having heard about the potential benefits of SBR, they had high hopes for what it could do for them. They were looking for one or more of the following:

- **A more cost-effective recruitment process**
- **Increased stability through reduced staff turnover**
- **Better results through having higher quality people**
- **More highly engaged employees**
- **Happier, more productive and stronger performing employees**

- **The right people in jobs, so less management time is spent dealing with the wrong people**
- **Higher calibre recruits who can deliver world-class service and generate brand loyalty from customers**
- **An improvement in the credibility of their HR function**

But some also worried that SBR might just be too good to be true. Could it really live up to its promise?

The short answer is that it has done in all five businesses we spoke to as part of this study. In every case, SBR is exceeding their expectations. It is saving them money, reducing staff turnover and improving customer service. Results are better and employees are more engaged and seem happier in their work.



## 5. The difference SBR has made

Since introducing SBR, the companies in this study have had the following results:

### Candidate attraction

**25%**

increase in applicants to a call centre position for which it has historically been hard to attract people.

### Interview experience

**85%**

of strengths-based (SB) candidates say, "the interviewer really got to know me."

**84%**

of SB starters rate their recruitment experience as "excellent."

### Strengths-based interviewers

**97%**

of trained interviewers say SBR will help them find the right people, improve performance and enhance their brand.

### Progress in training

**100%**

of trainers agree that SBR has had "a good impact on training."

**60%**

reduction in staff turnover during basic training.

### Performance

**20%**

increase in productivity after three months.

**2%**

increase in commission earnings after three months.

**6%**

reduction in sickness absence after three months.



### Staff turnover

**50%**

reduction in customer service agent turnover.

**66%**

reduction in sales agent turnover.

**37.5%**

reduction in first three months sales agent turnover.

### Brand advocacy/customer service

**12%**

increase in customer satisfaction.

**80%**

reduction in customer complaints.

### Job expectations

**94%**

of SB recruits said, "the expectations I developed about working for the company during the interview process have been fulfilled."

## 6. What people told us about strengths-based recruitment

We wanted to find out whether SBR was living up to the five organisations' expectations and delivering the improvements they were looking for.

These are just some of things they told us:

"People see a difference immediately... they say things like 'something has changed, what's happened?'"

**HR Director**

"The quality of the candidates is a definite improvement. The recruitment process enables the genuinely strong candidate to shine."

**Recruitment Manager**

"We have a different calibre of person now... when I walk in a store I [think] 'wow!'"

**Regional Manager**

"These people are smart, heads up and eyes forward, and start great conversations. They're confident, proud of who they are, and they're clearly engaged. Most important, they're living the brand values."

**Regional Manager**

"I'm confident that the people I am taking on with strengths-based recruitment are the right people for us."

**Recruiter**

"We have missed out on so much by choosing the competency route in the past."

**Branch Recruitment Manager**

"You gather so much more information than you do with competency interviews."

**HR Manager**

"The project has made a real difference to our business and our ability to recruit the right people."

**Recruitment Manager**

"Recruitment used to be a thorn in my side, but now I enjoy it."

**Line leader interviewer**

## 7. The impact of strength-based recruitment

We discovered that SBR is having an impressive and positive impact in all five organisations – and not just on the quality of new hires but also on staff turnover, engagement, job satisfaction and brand advocacy. And, importantly, on profit.

### SBR is working for these companies for the following reasons:

<b>They now know how to attract great candidates</b>	For the first time, these businesses understand what makes a great employee in a particular role, and their recruiters are better equipped to write job adverts that attract candidates with matching strengths.
<b>They can recruit from a wider pool</b>	Companies are able to attract people from a wider range of backgrounds, including individuals they'd never have considered before.
<b>Managers have become better at interviewing</b>	Managers who once dreaded interviewing now enjoy it. They're gathering more useful information, and feel they really get to know the person in front of them. They're also learning high-level observation and listening skills, which are equally valuable to them in performance conversations and team settings.
<b>Candidates get more from the process</b>	Candidates say interviews flow naturally and are unlike anything they've experienced before. Even rejected candidates are helped to understand the kind of job that would be a better fit for them.
<b>Recruitment has become more cost effective</b>	Cost-effectiveness increases as high-quality candidates are attracted to roles previously hard to interest people in, and a higher proportion of people are offered and accept jobs after interview or their on-job evaluation.
<b>New recruits perform better</b>	SBR hires are reported to be different, better, more engaged and positive, and more focused to succeed. They also show more initiative and are quicker to connect with customers than existing staff. One became the top performer in a well-established team at a leading financial services company within just six months of starting.
<b>The passion spreads</b>	New hires have a genuine passion for what they do, so they become great advocates for their brands. Their positive attitude also influences the working environment, challenging existing employees to perform better.
<b>People stay for longer</b>	Attrition rates have fallen – in some cases, dramatically. Significant reductions in staff turnover have disproved the belief, among some, that the only way to tackle a retention problem is to pay people more.

Confidence in the value and potential of SBR was so high in each of the companies we surveyed that all five are now either profiling more roles from a strengths perspective, or extending strengths-based approaches to other aspects of people management in their businesses.

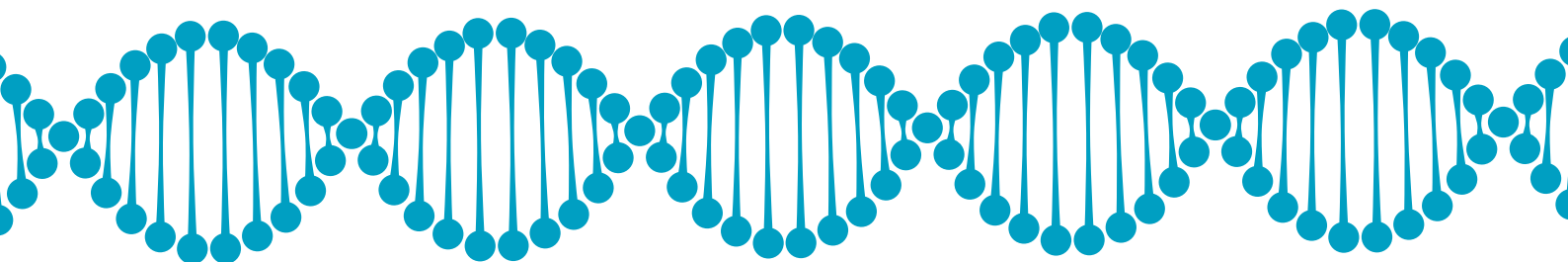
## 8. “Strengths are the true opportunities”

Almost 50 years ago, Peter Drucker, the world-renowned writer, educator and management consultant, argued that organisations built on strengths offer the greatest potential for performance, growth and individual fulfilment. In his words, “The effective executive makes strengths productive. He knows that one cannot build on weakness...strengths are the true opportunities”.

SBR leads the five well-known organisations in this study to the same conclusion, by delivering significant benefits to their performance, financials, efficiency, culture and reputation.

We found that recruiting on strengths makes sense to bosses, interviewers and candidates alike. They have seen for themselves the value that comes from fitting people to jobs they are naturally suited to. And introducing SBR is having a universally positive effect, in terms of both hard numbers and feel-good factor.

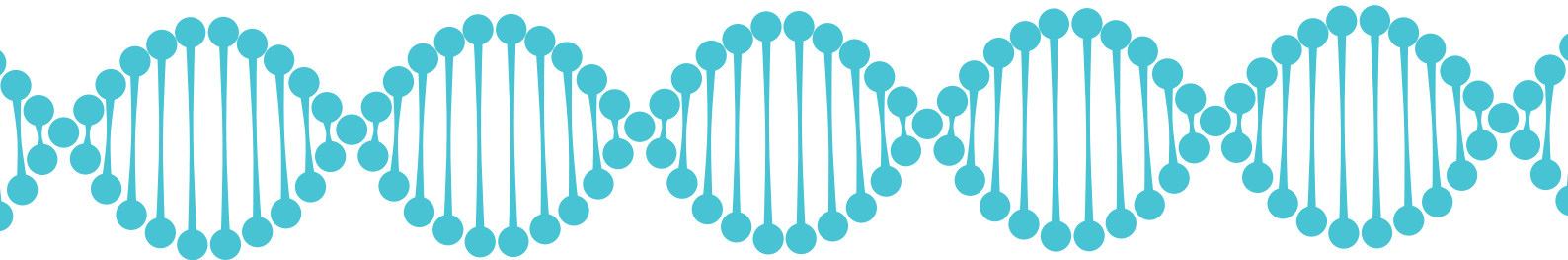
“It’s an approach that’s already making a powerful difference to the working lives of thousands of people, enabling them to do work they love and deliver outstanding results for their businesses.”



# Section two:

## Implementation guide

In this part of the white paper, we give you more detailed advice on the steps you need to take, and the questions you may have to answer, to implement SBR in your organisation.



## 9. Recommendations

The successes experienced and lessons learnt by the companies in this study have led us to the following recommendations:

### 9.1 Understand what problems SBR will help you solve

The organisations in this study had some specific, urgent problems that they wanted SBR to solve. If you have any or all of the following problems, SBR can help:

You don't know what it takes to be a great performer in one or more of the key jobs in your organisation.

You have high staff turnover that is costing you time and money.

You struggle to attract fantastic people in key roles.

Your people are not highly engaged and this is affecting customer service.

You're worried that your people can't deliver the performance and reputation that you want your organisation to have.

### 9.2 Secure buy-in from key stakeholders

The organisations in this study didn't find this difficult to do because senior executives were keen (sometimes desperate) to resolve the problems that led them to consider introducing SBR in the first place.

Evidence of results experienced by other organisations helped them to understand what was possible and how it could help them. The commitment and interest of senior people in the five organisations in this study made a huge difference to the speed with which SBR was implemented and benefits experienced.

### 9.3 Make a case for strengths-based recruitment

Here's the three-step process that the companies in this study went through to make the case for SBR:

- 1) Key sponsors/champions get together with a strengths consultancy, which come in and explain what SBR is and how it works, and give examples of how it has worked in other organisations.
- 2) Build a case for SBR by explaining to internal stakeholders how your problems or aspirations can be solved or achieved by introducing SBR.
- 3) Create a detailed plan, including a time-line, of what needs to be done to implement SBR, including setting goals and success criteria.

The appendix on page 15 outlines the questions we are most frequently asked about SBR. They cover the what, why and how of the strengths approach. You might find it useful to refer to them when building and articulating your case for SBR.

## 10. Appendix

These are some of the questions we're asked most often about strengths-based recruitment. You may find them useful to clarify your own understanding, if you need to explain the new approach to others, or if you're making a case for introducing SBR into your organisation.

### 10.1 Frequently-asked questions

#### **What is strengths profiling?**

It's a method of profiling excellent people already working in a specific role – people you would clone if you could. The profiling involves eliciting their strengths, drives and values, and understanding which are common among your excellent people.

#### **What is strengths-based recruitment?**

Essentially, it is about recruiting people based on their natural strengths, values and drives, in other words, what they are naturally good at, what they love to do and are energised by, and not just their competencies (what they can do). Relevant technical competencies are still important of course and it's important to continue to test for those as well.

#### **Why is strengths-based recruitment better than competency-based recruitment?**

Because the best performers are those who have the natural strengths, values and drives for the job. Someone may be competent at doing a job but dislike it, be de-motivated by it or be stressed by it.

People can learn to be competent at something that isn't a natural strength, but they will never be great at it. This is not a recipe for excellent performance and high employee engagement. Over time, if a person is a square peg in a round hole, their confidence will wane and their stress levels will rise as they struggle to perform well.

Competency job profiles are usually based on an ideal notion of what is wanted in the role and, as such, often aren't realistic for a real person. Strengths and motivator profiles, on the other hand, are based on profiling (or modelling) excellent performers in the role and are therefore much more realistic and useful.

Another thing to remember is that people can prepare the ideal answers to competency-based questions. They may also be tempted to make things up when asked 'tell me about a time when you have...' – they might not want to admit they haven't done the thing they are being asked about. So, in this way, competency-based interviewing encourages people to lie.

In contrast, strengths-based interviewing finds out what a person is really like because it is not based on set scenarios. The SBR interviewing training teaches interviewers to discern whether a person is giving genuine answers.

### **Where is the proof that it works?**

The improvements experienced by other organisations, such as those in this report, are testament to the effectiveness of the SBR model. Organisations that have introduced SBR report a positive impact on performance and their bottom line, as well as their culture, very quickly.

After three to six months of appointing people against their strengths and motivator profiles, organisations reported results such as a 50% drop in turnover, a 12% increase in customer satisfaction and a 25% increase in applications in a role that is notoriously hard to attract people to. We also know of one organisation that struggled with too high a volume of applications, who reported a 25% drop in applications which was actually a good result for them.

The early adopters of SBR are financial services, retail, professional services and the social care sector. All of these sectors measure performance rigorously and on a daily basis, and all report performance improvement as well as cost savings as a result of adopting this new approach.

### **Does SBR really work for volume recruiting?**

Yes, Engaging Minds has successfully introduced SBR to attract and select

great candidates as care workers and supermarket customer service assistants. Working with our clients in these high-volume recruitment environments, we've helped them overhaul their entire recruitment process to deliver cost-effective solutions.

### **Can SBR improve an organisation's reputation?**

Definitely. It does so in a number of ways:

Better people provide better service.

Even unsuccessful candidates are very positive about their experience. They say that they understand why the job isn't right for them, that they enjoyed the interview (often saying that they found out things they didn't know about themselves) and that they feel clearer about what kind of job they would be well suited to.

Many candidates are potential customers – so creating this kind of advocacy is very important.

### **Isn't it a bit of a leap in the dark, and far removed from what people are used to doing?**

Leading organisations are switching to SBR because the competency-based model isn't giving them the results they need. The evidence base that SBR works is strong and growing. In our experience, once companies experience the early benefits of SBR, any concerns or reluctance disappears.



### What does a typical SBR project involve?

Normally a project involves identifying the role or roles that the organisation wants to profile. Usually people start with the roles that have the most influence on their customer experience or the ones where they are having the most problems recruiting and keeping good people.

The profiling and review of the attraction and selection process happens simultaneously. Once the profiles are developed, recruiters are trained to undertake a strengths-based interview – in other words, how to identify whether the candidate has the strengths, drives and values in the profile.

For organisations that have a lot of recruiters, a train-the-trainer session can be organised.

Project kick-off to training completion can take as little as three months (as was the case with a leading financial services company, where 16 people in three locations were trained in strengths-based interviewing three months after the project started). For a large-scale project, it takes longer. For example, in a social care organisation, it took seven months to train 500+ people as strengths interviewers (using a train-the-trainer model) in 160 locations.

### How quickly might I expect to see positive results?

The short answer is very quickly. It varies though and depends on the problems that an organisation needs to solve. All clients see an immediate improvement in the

calibre of recruits and the attitude towards recruitment (by recruiters, managers and candidates). One organisation with high staff turnover saw it halve in three months.

## 10.2 Research aims and methods

### Our aim in carrying out this study was to:

- Capture the initial expectations of key stakeholders involved in introducing SBR.
- Understand the benefits of, and any issues or concerns arising from, this new style of recruitment.
- Recommend best practice approaches for implementing and managing SBR.
- Identify any opportunities for extending strengths-based approaches to other aspects of people management in an organisation.

### How we went about it

We used a number of different research approaches in this study:

- **Face-to-face and telephone interviews** with project sponsors, and business and HR leaders.
- **An online survey of 80 employees in one of the companies involved in the study**, comparing the experience of competency-based and strengths-based recruits.

- **Analysis of available client data** looking at job satisfaction and engagement scores, applicant numbers and quality, turnover and absenteeism rates, performance in training, reported cost savings, performance and productivity rates, and customer satisfaction levels.
- **Desk research:** we assessed other research studies, articles and news items, and gathered the perspectives of leading authors and consultants in the field.

### 10.3 The companies involved in this study

We spoke to five companies as part of this study; all have worked with Engaging Minds to implement SBR in their organisations. To preserve their confidentiality, we refer to them as companies A, B, C, D and E.

**Company A** is one of the UK's top four supermarket chains. This FTSE 100 business has an £18bn annual turnover and employs 132,000 people in over 400 stores across the country.

**Company B** is a leading international restaurant business, with 18,000 stores in 60 countries, and a global revenue in 2012 of more than £8bn. Almost 7,000 people are employed in their UK restaurants.

**Company C** is one of the UK's leading social care providers, and provides healthcare services in the home, community settings, hospitals and the workplace. They have a community-based network of over 140 branches nationwide.

**Company D** is a long-established business providing financial products and related customer services. They are the market leader in their field, with one of their businesses providing a service to 15 million members.

**Company E** is a financial services company providing a broad portfolio of insurance and travel products.

As part of the projects we've worked on with these clients, we've prepared strengths and motivator profiles for the following roles:

- Customer service advisors
- In-store team members
- In-bound sales agents
- Out-bound sales agents
- Customer service agents
- Carers

## 11. What to do next

If you're interested in finding out more about this transformational new approach, and what it can do for your organisation, contact us at **hello@engagingminds.co.uk** or call us at **+44 (0)20 7998 3120**

To purchase copies of the full 70 page report please [click here](#) or email **hello@engagingminds.co.uk**

### About Engaging Minds

Engaging Minds are strengths-based recruitment and development experts. We work with top companies, using our StrengthsMatch methodology, to identify the DNA of their best performers and recruit, develop and lead them.

Every year thousands of people are appointed to jobs where they thrive and do well, and their employers enjoy better performance and customer service as a result of our work. Organisations like the AA, Morrisons, NHS, Olympics 2012, SABMiller, Saga, Starbucks and Unilever have all benefited from our strengths-based approaches.

At Engaging Minds our work is our mission. Why? Because we see the massive difference strengths-based recruitment and development makes – to results, to how people feel about their work and to customer satisfaction.

We want to spread our work far and wide. We want to make a difference to business, to public services and to people of all ages and stages of their careers.

To find out more, visit [www.engagingminds.co.uk](http://www.engagingminds.co.uk)

“Engaging Minds and their strengths-based recruitment methodology are a powerful combination that has brought us results that exceeded expectation AND the results are in our numbers!”

**Lynda Greenshields, HR Director**

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