

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

AND

ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

An investigation based on qualitative research methodologies to examine the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals within the context of a medium sized financial organisation in Dublin

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1. Abstract

Recent years, significant attentions are increasingly paid on the field of employee engagement. Employee engagement is no longer been seen as a marketing tool but as a management priority distinctly useful to organisational business success.

After reviewing the current literatures, what happens to be missing is a deep research into HR professionals' perspectives regarding employee engagement. This research investigates employee engagement particularly from the perspective of HR professionals in a medium sized financial company in Dublin.

An inductive approach and interviews were adopted to examine the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement with associated literature. The research found that the importance of employee engagement and organisational communication are recognised among HR professionals. Organisational communication was recognised as the most vital driver of employee engagement using findings from interviews. Then organisational culture and senior management were identified as two crucial communication drivers of employee engagement.

These findings provide practical advises for HR professionals for enhancing the overall employee engagement level. This research also contributes to the general knowledge of employee engagement. But it still has its limitation due to the sampling and the data collection methods. Further research should pay more attention on these two aspects.

Key words: Employee engagement; Organisational communication; Organisational Culture; Senior Management; HR Professionals; Qualitative; Interview

2. Declaration

I hereby certify that this research which I am submitting for examination is wholly my own work and all materials consulted and ideas garnered in the process of researching the dissertation have been properly and accurately acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

3. Acknowledgements

It would not be possible to complete this dissertation without the help and support of my managers and colleagues in the HR team in Company X. Thanks for their generous assistance and valuable opinions.

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1 Chapter One

1.1 Contextualisation

Company X is a transnational corporation providing insurance, annuities and employee benefit programs. It has established a strong presence in over 50 countries. With over 140 years of experience, the company's brand is recognised and trusted by 90 million customers worldwide. Company X in Dublin is its Europe service centre which provides financial supports to the other subsidiaries throughout Europe. Company X is a medium sized company employed 265 employees.

During 2012, Company X went through a very difficult period, with increased financial loss and employee turnover. Towards the latter end of 2012, an internal employee survey was conducted as the first step to develop a solution. The 2012 survey illustrated that poor employee engagement level was the biggest factor results in such workplace phenomena. The consequences of such poor engagement level were felt in other measures of HR, including high level employee turnover which brings direct costs to the business.

So the company did a lot of efforts to improve the employee engagement level. They organised an employee committee which is a working group designed to make Company X a great place to work and a first choice employer. They use the committee to seek employee views to understand what employees think of the company and what they can continually improve.

The initiatives of engaging employees are expectations of employers in general, but especially in the financial sector. Because people working in the financial system having the expertise which is the key to organisational success. Losing talent, to financial company, is equal to lose money or more than that.

1.2 Title

An investigation based on qualitative research methodologies to examine the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals within a medium sized financial organisation in Dublin

1.3 Research aim

This research is conducted to investigate the significance of the relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement. This research will add to the general knowledge of the employee engagement and to the understanding of the employee engagement itself, specially the under-researched area of the perspective of HR professionals, in particular, in a medium sized financial organisation.

1.3.1 Specificity of research aim:

It will focus on defining employee engagement, discovering the benefits, exploring the drivers and determining the important communication drivers of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals.

1.3.2 Objectives:

- To gather information on employee engagement and organisational communication
- To enhance a theoretical framework of the employee engagement from a valuable and distinctive perspective
- To analyse and evaluate data to underpin this theoretical framework

1.4 Potentiality

This research ascertains organisational communication as the most vital driver of employee engagement. Potentially this research will aid all HR professionals who working in a medium sized financial organisation in relation to how to enhance employee engagement level by using organisational communication.

These outcomes may aid in the development of a theoretical concept about the employee engagement. It may add to the development of an understanding and critique of the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement.

1.5 Themes

- To identify how HR professionals define ‘employee engagement’
- To explore the benefits of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals
- To determine the most important driver of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals

The themes outlined were gleaned from the existing literature on the employee engagement and were applied as the basis for the interviews (See Research Methodology Chapter below).

1.6 Limitations

Research was limited to the gender of chosen interviewees and to one organisation in Dublin. Although the research conducted interviews with all the HR members within Company X, but all the HR members there are females. Compare to men, women are more relationship oriented rather than success oriented. Thus, the findings may have gender bias and can not be applied universally. On the other hand, the research is conducted in the context of a specific medium sized financial organisation and therefore the results may not suitable to other companies or the whole industry.

1.7 Paper structure

Chapter One: This chapter introduces areas for this research, questions posed by the researcher, which underpins the themes and concepts of the research. It also outlined the process of data collection method employed, and how the research was limited in its scope in addition to the potential of the research.

Chapter Two: This introduces the literature associated with and surrounding employee engagement and organisational communication separately. It outlines the definition of employee engagement, identifies the components of employee engagement and discusses the benefits of employee engagement. It also defines the concept of organisational communication in the context of this research, and discusses the communication context and explains how different elements of communication can drive employee engagement.

Chapter Three: It covers the research methodology employed. It also looks at the research philosophy, research strategy, sampling and data collection methods. It outlines the research questions and looks at the pilot study, ethical considerations and research limitations.

Chapter Four: This will combine the literature review with the findings for interpretation purposes. It will endeavour to show the relationship of the data to the research questions posted. It will attempt to show the implications for this research on the organisation in their context, and outline a number of further researches for consideration to add to and enhance an understanding of the employee engagement in addition to issuing recommendations for consideration by all.

2 Chapter Two

2.1 Overview

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of this study by discussing the two main concepts which are employee engagement and organisational communication, and then identifies the link between these two concepts. It explains employee engagement from its definition, components and benefits. Organisational communication is then introduced from its definition and context. At last, organisational communication is identified as the most vital driver of employee engagement. This will be established by discussing the relevant research and literature about how different factors of communication can enhance employee engagement.

2.2 The concept of employee engagement

2.2.1 The definition of employee engagement

The definitions of employee engagement are as varied as the researchers who have discussed them. But there still have some similarities.

Persistent ambiguity exists in the development of the concept of employee engagement. Most employers and commentators, however, recognise that employee engagement encompasses various dimensions. Definition from CIPD (2013) considers employee engagement as an umbrella concept which captures various means and can elicit extra effort from employees. Alfes, Truss, Soane and Gatenby (2010) divide employee engagement into three core facets which are intellectual engagement, affective engagement and social engagement. Thus, the concept of employee engagement is an “omnibus” term involves many aspects of employee relations.

The multi-factorial concept of employee engagement, originally derives from William Kahn’s (1990, p.694) description of personal engagement, as “the harnessing of

individuals' selves to their role performance on physical, cognitive and emotional levels". Rothbard (2011) and Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) all concur with Kahn (1990) that employee engagement is a form of psychological presence at work. However, Macey and Schneider (2008) point out that employee engagement is more than psychological states. It refers to psychological states, traits and behaviours at different times. They conclude as employee engagement is both attitudinal and behavioural form. But common belief does exist that "engagement is a desirable condition, has an organisational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy" (Macey and Schneider, 2008, p.4). For many organisations, employee engagement is regarded as a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organisation and its values. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) state that employee engagement is a fulfilling positive attitude featured with vigour, dedication and absorption. Thus, employee engagement is the result of the psychological contract which emotionally and attitudinally exists between employer and employee.

Employee engagement is a two-way process- it encompasses not only what organisations can do for employees but also how employees can go extra miles for their employers. This two-way nature has a strong theoretical rationale provided by social exchange theory (Saks, 2006). As Saks (2006, p.603) describes, "a basic tenet of social exchange theory is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain 'rules' of exchange...usually involve reciprocity or repayment rules such that the actions of one party lead to a response or actions by the other party". In other words, employees will respond to the resources they receive from employers and choose to engage themselves to varying degrees. This is also proved by Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) as they define employee engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee.

To sum up, employee engagement is a multidimensional concept. Although the

concept varies, there are still several commonalities. Typically, employee engagement is considered to be a two-way psychological process. It goes well beyond job involvement and organisational commitment and it is a voluntary offer from employees. An engaged employee is willing to go extra miles for the benefits of the organisation. As such, it has the potential to offer real business benefits. A better understanding of the concept provides an employer a better position to measure, monitor and ultimately increase employee engagement.

2.2.2 The components of employee engagement

Motivation and commitment are two overlapping components of employee engagement. These two concepts are frequently related to the concept of engagement. These two components of engagement are discussed below.

2.2.2.1 Engagement and motivation

Employee engagement is strongly related to the classical motivation theories (Frank, Finnegan and Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, employee engagement roots in the form of intrinsic motivation (Herzberg, 1966; McGregor, 1960; Maslow, 1943). According to Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1957), there are two motivation types described as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. These two types of motivation are specifically stated in Herzberg's two-factor model theory which is one of the most enduring motivational theories. Intrinsic motivation takes place when behaviour is performed for its own sake such as "achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and growth" (Armstrong, 2007, p.124). In contrast, extrinsic motivators refer to "rewards such as increased pay, promotion or praise and punishments such as disciplinary action, withholding pay, or criticism" (Armstrong, 2007, p.121). Extrinsic motivators are more immediate and powerful (Armstrong, 2007) while intrinsic motivation is assumed to have a deeper and longer impact on employee engagement. Macey and Schneider (2008) state that it is not money but the work itself that promotes positive feelings of engagement. Thus, the motivation element in

engagement is intrinsic.

2.2.2.2 Engagement and commitment

Sometimes, engagement is also mixed with the term of commitment. According to CIPD (2013), employee engagement can be seen as employee commitment. McBain (2006) points out that commitment is actually an outcome of engagement. Similar to McBain (2006), Macey and Schneider (2008) also recognise the connection between engagement and commitment. In contrast, Rama Devi (2009) presents an opposing view to McBain (2006) that engagement is an outcome of commitment. Additionally, the Corporate Executive Board (2008) argues that engagement involves both rational commitment and emotional commitment. However, Robinson et al (2004) argues that commitment does not reflect the two aspects of employee engagement - its two-way nature, and a committed worker does job within his work role while an engaged employee will go extra miles for the organisation. Thus, engagement and commitment are not the same concept.

In conclusion, the concept of engagement sometimes interchangeably with the concepts of motivation and commitment, however, they are not perfectly matched.

2.2.3 The benefits of employee engagement

In reality, the fact is that academic researchers look at the psychological constructs while the industry concerns the profitability. From this view of point, employee engagement seems to be a meaningless term. Little and Little (2006) points out that engagement might just a marketing tool. However, the ongoing researches and growing popularity in the field of employee engagement sufficiently demonstrate that employee engagement is not a management fad, it is a management necessity.

2.2.3.1 Benefits for employers

At the organisational level, employee engagement enhances a number of important bottom line outcomes (Gallup, 2006). The bottom line is the big picture. The benefits

are around higher productivity and profitability, lower turnover level, superior customer service, and stronger employer brand. Employee engagement promotes higher performance and longer tenure. Researchers have argued that engagement could lead to a high level of job performance (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011; Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Kahn, 1990). Employees who are highly engaged are not only physically focused on their jobs, but also emotionally connected to the organisation (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Kahn, 1990). And this in turn, promotes higher level of productivity and profitability, increased commitment and motivation as well as reduced absenteeism and operational cost (Cook, 2008). In contrast, employees who are not highly engaged in their jobs withhold their physical and emotional energies (Kahn, 1990). Low level engagement will cause poor business performance through higher absenteeism, higher turnover, lower productivity and a recruitment and training cost (Abukhalifeh and Mat Som, 2013). Researches conducted by Corporate Executive Board (2008 and 2007) has solidified this argument by showing that engaged employees are 57% productive and 9 times less likely to leave the organisation than unengaged employees. Similar findings also find in Murlis and Schubert's (2001) and Gallup's (2006) studies. Furthermore, the CEB researchers conclude that employee engagement stimulates business performance from the evidence which says employee engaged organisations have a 20% average three-year profit growth, compared with 9% in their counterparts. Engaged employees are proven to be more customer focused and more enthusiastic with meeting customer's needs (Devi, 2009; Cook, 2008). For example, customer satisfaction levels increased along with employee engagement levels in Visa Europe over a period of five years (CIPD, 2009). Thus, customer satisfied company gains a more satisfied employer brand.

2.2.3.2 Benefits for employees

Employee engagement promotes the efficient and affective functioning of the

organisation as well as employee achievement. CIPD (2009) research has shown that engaged employees experience more positive emotions towards their work, and are more likely to have a better career development. According to Macey and Schneider (2008), positive attitudes towards work such as enjoyment, passion and enthusiasm can be achieved by employee engagement. Similar to Macey and Schneider (2008), Cook (2008) also points out several positive attitudes can be motivated by high level engagement. At the same token, negative attitudes will arise when employees feel not engaged in their organisations. Thus, engaged employees are looking forward a longer term relationship and this in turn provides them much more career achievements.

In summary, an increasing body of research has persuasively proved that there is a causal link between employee engagement and organisational performance as well as individual achievements (Sun, Aryee and Law, 2007; Datta, Guthrie and Wright, 2005; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan and Allen, 2005; Batt, 2002). An engaged workforce is essential for organisations to achieve competitive advantages. Also, an engaged employee is passionate and enthusiastic about their work and is willing to donate additional time and energy to go extra mile and consequently is more likely to success. For this very reason, strategic human resource practitioner set an agenda for employee engagement in consistent with overall organisational strategy.

2.3 The concept of organisational communication

2.3.1 The definition of organisational communication

Before we investigate the significant relationship between employee engagement and organisational communication, we must understand what exactly organisational communication means in the context of this research. Organisational communication can be a very broad subject, covered by psychologists, sociologists, business experts, economists and politicians (Turner, 2003). So the key to success may be to choose those areas on which the HR professionals want to focus their efforts rather than having too broad a sweep of the subject (Turner, 2003).

Greenberg and Baron (2008) defines communication as the process by which a person, group or organisation (the sender) transmits some type of information (the message) to another person, group or organisation (the receiver). Meanwhile, Harvey (2010) defines communication as the process by which information is transmitted and understood between two or more people. Organisational communication, obviously, can be defined as a two-way information exchange process.

Organisational communication can be divided into internal communication and external communication. “Internal communications are seen as the purview of human resources while external communications are responsible for external communications” (Mishra, Boynton and Mishra, 2014, p.184). Internal communication occurs between managers and employees (Dolphin, 2005). For the purpose of this research, organisational communication refers to internal rather than external communication.

Thus, organisational communication in this context is defined as a two-way information exchange process between managers and employees (Dolphin, 2005; Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004). Communication has many different perspectives. It is not just about transmitting simple message from employer to employee or from employee to employer. When we communicate we invariably transmit something of ourselves (Turner, 2003). We say or do something which affects our listener or observer. A kind of cultural ripple is created which reflects our values (Perkins, 1999).

2.3.2 The context of organisational communication

From its two-way nature, organisational communication can be divided into downward and upward communications. Thus, the context can be divided into two parts as well.

In one direction, managers need to tell employees about the strategies, objectives, policies and performance of the company, about what they are expected to do, about

learning and development opportunities, and about any proposed employment changes (Armstrong, 2014; Turner, 2003). In each case they need to explain why the changes have been made and how they affect employees (Armstrong, 2014). Downward communication enables managements to inform employees on matters that concern them, to educate employees directly of organisational culture and to link them with organisational values (Leopold, 2002). Employees are more willing to stay and more motivated to do the job if they understand the bigger organisational picture.

In another direction, employees need the opportunity to communicate upwards with their managers about their feedbacks regarding salary, job security, terms of employment, working conditions, learning and development, work-life balance and equal opportunity (Armstrong, 2014). In the other words, upward communication allows employees to voice their real idea and contribute information for organisational benefits (Turner, 2003).

To sum up, this two-way flow of information develops a shared understanding of organisational goals.

2.4 Employee engagement and organisational communication

2.4.1 The relationship between employee engagement and organisational communication

Effective organisational communication is critical to enhance employee engagement. Organisational communication is a vital aspect of how relationships within the organisation are evaluated (Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 2000). In other words, open communication indicates a stronger relationship. Employee engagement is a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004) which means employee engagement largely depends on effective two-way communications (Rayner and Adam-Smith, 2009). Compare to companies with low communication effectiveness, companies with high communication effectiveness are more than 4.5 times more likely to have high engaged workforce

(Turner, 2003). Thus, the organisational communication and the degree of its effectiveness have an impact on the process of engaging employees.

2.4.2 Important Communication Drivers of Employee Engagement

We've seen the important role of organisational communication plays on employee engagement. One of the important things is to understand what drivers of communication are most likely to have an effect on the level of employee engagement.

More than 30 years ago, researches had been conducted and found that the most crucial elements of organisational communication which interact with employee engagement are communication climate and senior management. Since then, increasing researches suggest important factors of organisational communication which drive employee engagement are the relationship with managers, and how they express the organisational vision to employees (Welch, 2011; Attridge, 2009; Robinson, et al., 2004), receiving feedback and appraisals from managers (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009), and employees having their voice to be heard (Robinson, et al., 2004).

2.4.2.1 Organisational Culture

A key determinant of how and why organisation communicates is its corporate culture. "Understanding the context in which an organisation is operating is, in fact, an essential part of the communicator's art" (Turner, 2003, p.33). An engaged workforce look at the same direction and this direction is guided by shared cooperate culture. It is the culture of an organisation that effectively engages - or disengages - employees.

Culture is the set of beliefs, values, understandings, practices and ways of making sense of the world that are shared by a group of people (Harvey, 2010). Thus, organisational culture refers to the common mission, vision or values statement among employees. The most famous definition of the culture in organisation is stated

as ‘the way we do things around here’ (Turner, 2003, p.33). Organisational culture covers everything from the way the organisation delivers its business objectives to its whole approach to people management.

An engaged workforce is cultivated in a supportive, transparent and open working environment. Welch (2011) believes that the positive impact which communication affects on employee engagement occurs only when organisational vision and value is clearly understood by employees. Therefore, it is the organisational culture that actually engaging people. Furthermore, research results show that 32% of employees did not have a strong sense of engagement to the organisation and 39% of employees are dissatisfied with the organisation when management did not communicate the vision and future of the organisation clearly. When management communicated the organisational vision and culture clearly, the dissatisfied level and disengaged level between employees decreased (Attridge, 2009).

A culture of transparency between management and employees can be built through employee engagement (Mishra, Boynton and Mishra, 2014). Through effective communication, employees are engaged in the organisational priorities. Open and positive communication efforts can build trust between employees, as well as demonstrate respect for employees and acting with integrity in all employee relations (Mishra, Boynton and Mishra, 2014).

2.4.2.2 Senior Management

Senior management communication is another important communication driver of employee engagement. Senior management is far more important than line management in improving the level of employee engagement. Welch and Jackson (2007) point out that the role of senior management is overlooked.

Compare to line managers, senior managers have a much deeper and broader understanding of the organisational value and strategy. Saks (2006) emphasised the need to communicate with employees clearly and consistently about the

organisational roadmap to achieve employee engagement, suggesting that employees who are more engaged will have a broader picture of the organisation goal. As senior management having a clear vision of their organisation, they can convey this to their employees more accurately. When employees understand how their role contributes to achieving business outcomes, how their senior managers support them, they respond, according to Saks (2006), more engaged in their jobs. Thus, senior managers are critical in sharing reliable and open communications with their employees in order to promote a sense of belonging and commitment as well as helping employees to better understand the goals of the organisation (Welch and Jackson, 2007).

Senior managers also act as a more effective role model. An engaged manager inspires employees' enthusiasm to work. Robinson et al (2004) deduce that engaged employees are always supported by engaged and effective managers. Sak (2006) proves that leaders are critical to responding effectively to the emotional dimension of an employee's work experience. This responsibility comes through in how leaders enable employees to do their work, how they conduct themselves, and how they, as role models, convey messages through different channels (Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2014).

Further, Sak (2006) points out as the employees become more engaged in their work, the leader acquires confidence and belief in his ability to create and build an engaged team successfully. This provides evidence that senior managers need to be competent in effective communication with employees in order to become a trusted source of information. Thus, organisations need to focus on building a competent management team in order to carry out effective internal communication for the high level employee engagement.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter explained the definition of employee engagement. The definitions and explanations of employee engagement are as varied as the researchers who have

proposed them as are the drivers which enhance it. As evidenced in the literature, organisational communication has been proved as one vital driver of engagement. Definitely, there is a link between these two concepts which can be explored further. One of the key factors of communication which drivers employee engagement is organisational culture. And another one is the effective leadership which helps employees to realise their full potential and value. Next chapter will discuss the detail on how the research was conducted

3 Chapter Three

3.1 Overview

This chapter contains all the detail on how the research was conducted. It outlines the rationale for selecting an inductive, qualitative approach, the method for collecting the data, site and population and subsequent analysis of the data employed. It also looks at validity and reliability in the context of an inductive approach to research, as well as ethical considerations in the process, and for the individuals themselves.

3.2 Research philosophy

The methodology and the data collection methods adopted in the research project relate back to our philosophical perspective, in other words, relate to our understanding of the nature of the knowledge and the means of knowledge creation. Every research project is underpinned by a philosophical framework and the philosophical framework within each research project tells us something of the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher in relation to the research being undertaken (Quinlan, 2011).

“Ontology relates to the nature of reality, to the study and nature of being, and to our ways of being in the world” (Quinlan, 2011, p.96). Epistemology on the other hand, concerns what constitutes knowledge and the processes through which knowledge is created (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Positivism, interpretivism and social constructionism are three different epistemological understandings of ontology and ontological issues (Quinlan, 2011). Positivism holds that there is one objective reality and the reality is singular and separate from consciousness (Quinlan, 2011; Saunders et al, 2009). Interpretivism holds that social reality is a subjective construction based on interpretation and interaction. And social constructionism holds that social phenomena develop in social contexts and that individuals and groups create, in part,

their own realities (Quinlan, 2011). Quinlan (2011) develops a methodology pyramid, which can be seen in Figure 3-1, further to show that the fundamental philosophies support the research methodologies which in turn support the data collection methods. In other words, research methodologies emerge from the fundamental philosophies, and data collection methods emerge from research methodologies (Crotty, 2005). Thus, the methodology and data collection method one decides upon are framed by the theoretical perspective and philosophy adopted.

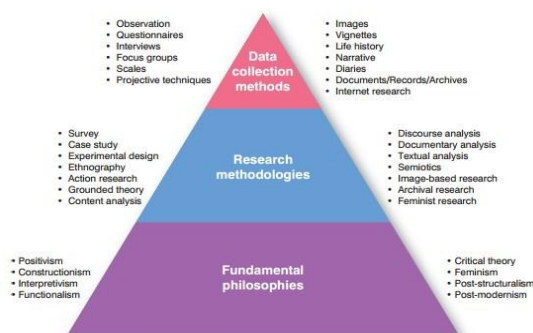


Figure 3-1 The Methodological Pyramid

Source: Quinlan, 2011

Methodologies and data collection methods are adopted in order to gather the kind of knowledge needed to adequately and properly respond to the research questions. Therefore, the best-fit methodology and data collection method develop from the research questions. Quinlan (2011) develops a four frameworks approach to demonstrate this point of view in which she states that the conceptual framework directs the development of the three subsequent frameworks, the theoretical framework, the methodological framework and the analytical framework. The conceptual framework contains all of the key concepts in the research project. The philosophical framework is the framework created by the researcher from theory relevant to the research project. Every theory is made up of concepts. Under this circumstance, it means that the philosophical framework within which the research project is suited emerges during the process of developing the conceptual framework

for the research project, using the four frameworks approach above (see Figure 3-2). And the conceptual framework, as we know, is contained in the research questions. Thus, Quinlan's (2011) words can be interpreted into the opinion that the most appropriate research methodology must be capable of supporting the research questions. Saunders et al (2009) also depict the important role in which research questions play in determining the research methodology.

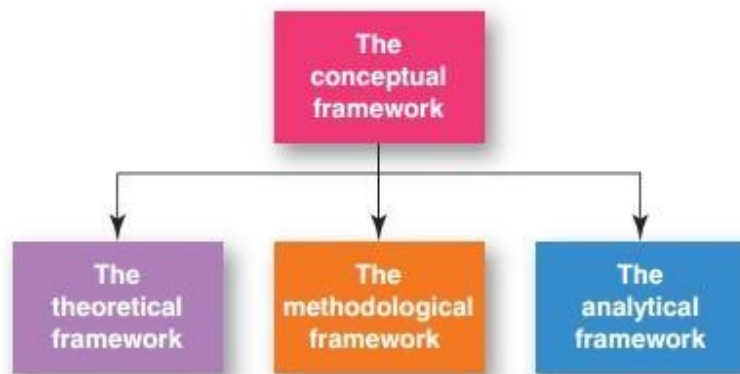


Figure 3-2 The Four Frameworks

Source: Quinlan, 2011

3.3 Research Questions

Overall objective:

·To investigate the significant relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement

Sub-objective 1:

·To define employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals

Sub-objective 2:

·To discover the benefits of having high levels of employee engagement

Sub-objective 3:

·To explore the drivers that impact on the employee engagement

Sub-objective 4:

·To determine the important communication drivers of employee engagement

3.4 Research Strategy

This research project adopts qualitative inductive approach based on researchers own epistemological assumptions. That is, the reality can not be singular and separate from consciousness, and the context, attitudes, environment and personal beliefs have an impact on how people perceive reality (Quinlan, 2011). The use of a phenomenological approach means the researcher is part of the research and cannot be divorced from it (Saunders, et al., 2009).

The inductive approach is qualitative in nature and generally uses interviews to collect the necessary data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). These data are a range of perspectives which are interviewees' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards a common research theme. This yields more accurate result and adds to the depth of this research.

The biggest factor to be considered when choosing the best-fit research strategy is the research purpose. In this research is to explore the relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement. The best-fit methodology develops from research questions. This relationship is believed to be complex and can not be simply measured with quantitative data. Thus, qualitative research methodologies are favoured as they are inductive, use contextualisation and the researcher is the instrument of data gathering and determines the 'how' of data to invoke meaning (Saunders, et al., 2009).

The rationale for not selecting quantitative research is that quantitative analysis cannot provide as deep an understanding of individuals' attitudes (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The scope of the data collected through a quantitative approach can be narrow and if the questions are not worded correctly of in a manner that cannot be

misinterpreted the study can be fatally flawed.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

A semi-structured interview method is adopted in this research. “The semi-structured interview refers to the context in which the researcher has a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interview has a great deal of leeway in how to reply” (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.474).

The advantage of semi-structured interview is it allows the researcher to explore and get a better understanding of the participant’s views (Quinlan, 2011). Besides, it also allows the respondent to raise cues in the interview. It gives room to ask the interviewee to further explain their answer. This flexible, loose structure allowed for rich and complex data to be collected (Cameron and Price, 2009).

Access to the resources is another biggest factor to be considered when deciding the data collection methods. As the researcher works as an intern in the Company X, face-to-face interview is preferred. The use of one-to-one interviews in this context allowed the individual to feel more comfortable and at ease (Horn, 2009). Each interview is between 20-30 minutes, and is carried out in an area which was most convenient for the participant. Note taken and that recording may take place, unless the interviewee requested it not be so. Transcription followed each interview and the interviewees subsequently give the note for their attention and adjustment or deletion, if required.

However, interviews also have limitations. The fact that the researcher will have a smaller sample size compare to a quantitative approach. They are also quite time consuming for both the interviewer and the interviewee and there is a chance that the interviewer could influence the answers unknowns to themselves with affects the credibility of the data collected. Interviews can also lead to misinterpretation of the data collected as the interviewer might hear what they want to hear. It is important that the researcher takes these negative aspects into account when conducting the

interviews. As they are quite time consuming it is necessary for the researcher to arrange the interviews in advance. It is also very important that the researcher remained focused throughout the interview. This was to ensure that the interview didn't go off track, and the questions asked were being answered. To avoid the misinterpretation of answers the researcher paraphrased what had been said just to ensure that data collected was completely understood.

It is recognised that the data collected through a survey may not be as wide-ranging as that collected by other research strategies due to the limitation on the number of questions considered practical. Interview can provide rich and deep data and deep understanding of individuals' attitudes.

3.6 Sample and Sampling

According to Saunders et al (2009, P.243), the choice of sampling techniques used depends on the "feasibility and sensibility of collecting data to answer your research questions and to address your objectives from the entire population".

For the purposes of this study the researcher undertook non-probability sampling. According to Kane (2005), there are two main categories of sampling which are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling everyone has a chance to be selected while in non-probability sampling some people have no opportunity to be included.

Company X has four people in its HR team. Thus, this research carried out interviews with all these four people. Research conducted on an entire population is known as a census (Quinlan, 2011). In social science research, it is often the case that the entire population of the research is too big. In this research, however, the total population of HR professionals in Company X is small. So this research is carried out using the entire populations.

After reviewing the current literatures, what happens to be missing is a deep research

into HR professionals' perspectives regarding employee engagement. HR professionals are acting as employees as well as employers. They working as employees but thinking from employers' perspectives. The HR function is at the heart of organisational communication. HR professionals serve as internal coaches in their own organisations to train front-line managers to listen and provide feedback.

Thus, this researcher chooses HR professionals in Company X as the sample to explore the relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement.

3.7 Pilot study

The interview was subsequently piloted as recommended by Saunders et al (2009) to test the schedule and gain some confidence in using it. To test its validity and reliability, the pilot test was undertaken with two employees in Company X.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

For our reputation within our own community and beyond, it is necessary to present ourselves as ethical practitioners and professionals and must consequently adopt in our research endeavour the highest ethical standards (Quinlan, 2011). In research, as in business, there are fundamental ethical principles (Quinlan, 2011). Ethical principles applied in this research study including no-harm to participants, informed consent, and privacy and whether deception was involved. Every respondent is voluntary to participate in the investigation. And the collected data is promised to be only used on academic research. Respondents have the authority to share these data.

Ethical principles and standards were applied in the conduct of this research study. It was conducted with transparency and integrity and the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The principles as described by Quinlan (2011) of non-harm to participants, informed consent, privacy and transparency were observed at all times.

Ethical approval was given by every participant. The data collected was used solely for the purpose of this academic research and assurances were given to participants to this effect.

3.9 Limitations

All research has limitations and any research whether qualitative or quantitative has areas of limitation.

Qualitative research and its associated methods, as Quinlan (2011) suggest, cannot provide as large amount of information in a timely manner from a reasonable sized sample as that which might be achieved from using quantitative methods.

This research is no different, in that it is limited to one small group of academics in one institution. This place limits on generalisability across the entire tertiary sector.

3.10 Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the research method preferred by this researcher; the chapter also covers details of how the researcher conducted the interviews, how information transcription, interpretation, and analysis achieved. Specific limitations noted and described for this research and how trust in the process achieved. In essence, this chapter has justified the chosen research methodology appropriate to this dissertation.

Next chapter will analyse the primary interview data and highlight key findings with associated literature.

4 Chapter Four

4.1 Overview

This chapter will develop themes in relation to the interviews in an attempt to analyse and interpret the data collected. Once the findings are outlined the research will expand on them further in the research findings.

4.2 Profile of Interviewees

Topic: Employee engagement

Time: 20-30 minutes

Number of interviews: 4

Interview period: 30th June – 8th August 2014

Appendix Four: interview transcript

Table 4-1 Interviewee Profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Position	Tenure
Interviewee A	Female	Head of HR	Ten years
Interviewee B	Female	HR Business Partner	Five years
Interviewee C	Female	HR Operations Manager	Four years
Interviewee D	Female	HR Operation & Payroll Administrator	One and half years

4.3 Primary Data Analysis

A thematic approach is adopted in order to analyse the interview data. First, the interviews are analysed for key themes. Second, the interviews are mapped for key terms based on frequency or intensity. Third, other terms such as those found near a key term or those that may connect to a key term are mapped as well. Finally, the analysis examines patterns of association or links to identify which terms are most interesting, most frequent, or of greatest importance. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78) explain that: “thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data”. They also explain that a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within that data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.83).

The interview findings and analysis are presented under the research objectives as headings and will be explained by the researcher separately. The re-occurring themes will be shown through a grid diagram. The researcher will also outline the percentage frequency in which the themes re-occurred.

4.3.1 Theme 1: To identify how HR professionals define ‘employee engagement’.

When the interviewees were asked how they would define employee engagement, opinions varies. But there do have several commonalities. Recurring themes including go extra miles, emotional link to the organisational culture, communicate well, mutual respect between employee and employer, motivated workforce, committed to the organisation. The re-occurring themes are illustrated in table 4-2 below

Table 4-2 Outlining recurring themes for defining employee engagement

Themes:	Interviewee A	Interviewee B	Interviewee C	Interviewee D
Committed		X	X	X
Emotional link	X	X	X	X
Linked to organisational value	X	X	X	
Motivated		X	X	X
Mutual relationship	X	X	X	X

All the interviewees outlined that employee engagement was a mutual relationship between employer and employee, for example, interviewee A stated, “there is a mutual respect between the employees and their employers. And it is a two-way relationship, you know, um, if the employer promises something, they will deliver on that, likewise, if the employee says he will do something, he will deliver on this as well”, interviewee D stated, “employee engagement is about the relationship between the organisation and the employees”.

Also, all the interviewees concurred that employee engagement was an emotional presence, as interviewee B stated, “my understanding of employee engagement is how an employee, um, emotionally linked to the company they work with”, and interviewee C also pointed out that “employee engagement is about that employee wants to go that extra mile, the psychological contract”.

Most interviewees mentioned an engaged employee was committed and motivated, examples such as interviewee C said “I would define employee engagement as when

employees are motivated, proud and committed, and one who exerts that extra effort to meet to organisational goals”, and interviewee D mentioned “my understanding is the relationship between the organisation and the employees, whereby the employees are satisfied by their jobs, that they are committed and motivated to go that extra miles”.

Figure 4-1 below shows the percentage frequency in which the themes re-occurred. 75% (3 out of 4) of the interviewees said employee engagement means that employees were committed to the organisation, 100% felt it was an emotional link between employer and employees, 75% (3 out of 4 interviewees) seen it happened when employees’ own values linked to organisational value, all the interviewees agreed that employee engagement was a mutual relationship between employees and employers and another 75% interviewees mentioned an engaged employee was a motivated employee.

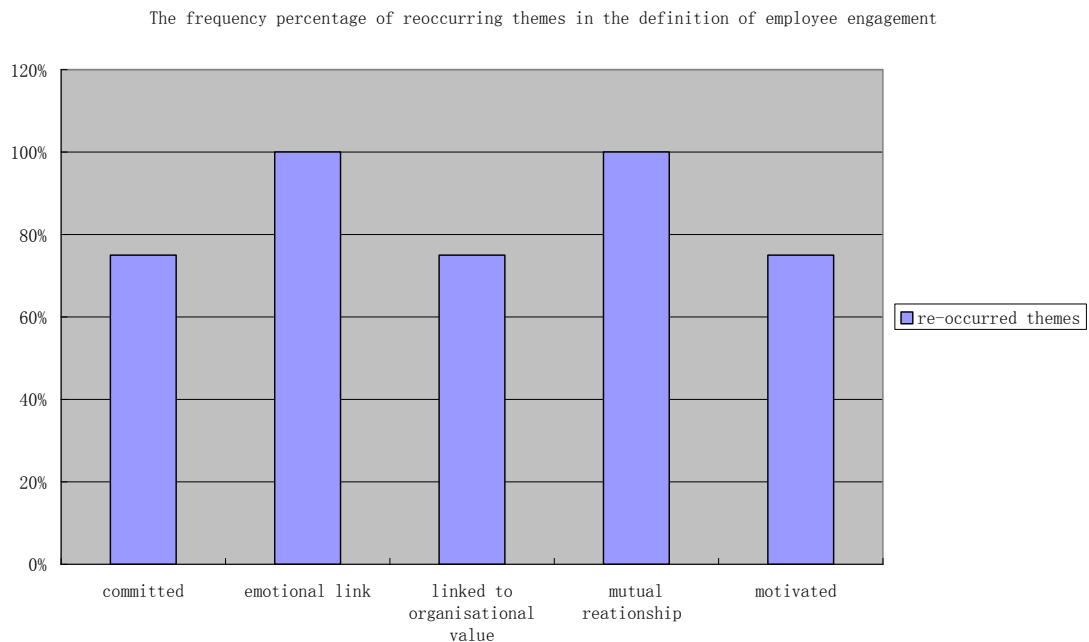


Figure 4-1 The Frequency Percentage of Reoccurring Themes in the Definitions of Employee Engagement

4.3.2 Theme 2: To explore the benefits of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives

When the interviewees were asked what they thought were the benefits of having a high level employee engagement, there were a number of re-occurring themes. These re-occurring themes including higher organisational productivity and profit, stronger employer brand, lower retention level, better customer service, and employee achievement. These re-occurring themes are outlined in table 4-3 below:

Table 4-3 Recurring Themes of the Benefits of High Level Employee Engagement

themes	Interview A	Interview B	Interview C	Interview D
Higher organisational productivity and profit	X	X	X	X
Stronger employer brand		X	X	X
Lower retention level	X	X		X
Better customer service	X	X		X
Employee achievement	X	X	X	X

Responses for this question were quit varied as well. There still, however, exist several commonalities. All the interviewees mentioned employee engagement can not only benefit employers but also individual employees. For instance, interviewee A stated, “from business point of view, you will get better solutions, you will get better customer services. And I think from the employees’ point of view, once they felt engaged, it is more than a job. It is kind of career, so they can seen what they do is useful and beneficial”. Others supported this, as all said that main benefits can be

divided into two big pieces, one was for employer and another one was for employees. For employers, the benefits were all about the bottom line. As interviewee B stated, “the bottom line is the big picture and the benefit about employee engagement is around retention, is around attract the right people to work in the organisation, is around employer brand, um, what you are marketing your company could offer to employees, then when they actually join the organisation, um, it happens to motivating them, um, it promotes a positive culture. So, recruitment, employee wellbeing, it all goes back to the bottom line, the business performance”. For employees, the biggest benefit of being engaged was for their own career development. As interviewee D said, “an engaged workforce will be a happy workforce, so it is easier to do business, um, people are more helpful, they are willing to do different tasks, more collaboration between different departments, um, they are proud of working for the company, and in turn, they will have better future within the organisation”.

Figure 4-2 below demonstrates the percentage frequencies in which the themes reoccurred, 75% (3 out of 4) of the interviewees said employee engagement can build lower retention level, superior customer service and stronger employer brand, all the interviewees (100%) agreed it promoted the efficient and effective functioning to the organisation as well as employee achievement.

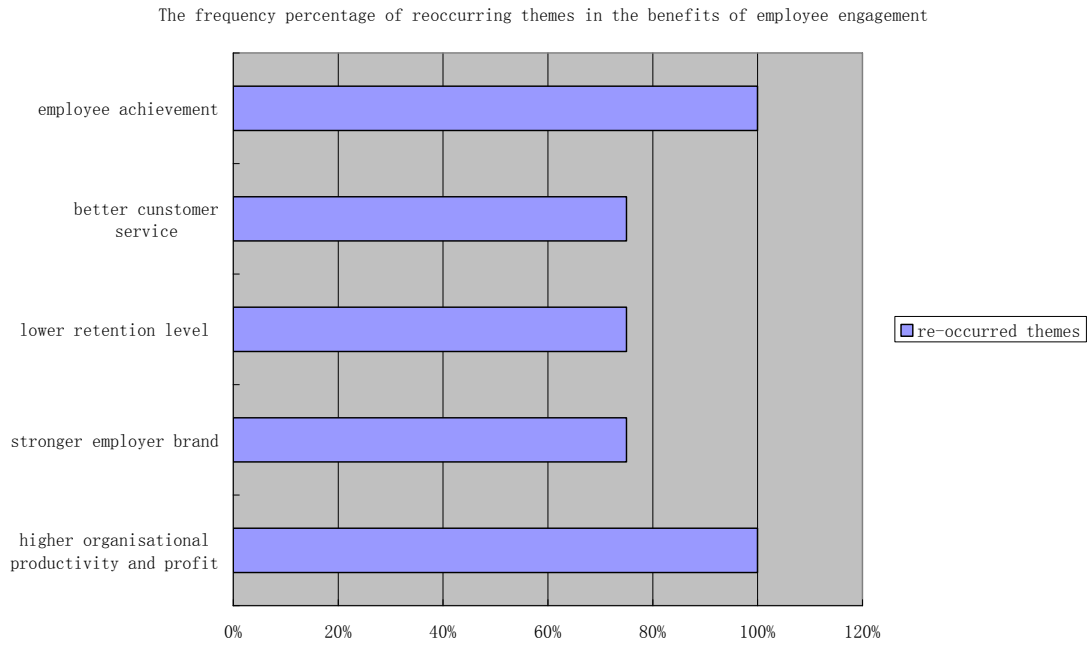


Figure 4-2 The Frequency Percentage of Reoccurring Themes in the Benefits of Employee Engagement

4.3.3 Theme 3: To determine the most important driver of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives

When the interviewees were asked what factor they thought was the most important driver of employee engagement, there were a number of re-occurring themes. These re-occurring themes including communication, organisational culture, line management, leadership support, recognition, employee voice, career development, support and trust. These are outlined in table 4-4 below:

Table 4-4 Recurring Themes of the Drivers of Employee Engagement

themes	Interviewee A	Interviewee B	Interviewee C	Interviewee D
Communication	X	X	X	X
Organisational culture	X	X		X
Senior management	X	X		X
Line management	X	X		
Recognition		X		X
Employee voice		X		X
Career development		X		X
Meaningful job		X		X
Trust		X		X
Support		X		X

All interviewees agreed communication was a vital driver of employee engagement. For example, interviewee A mentioned communication five times in the interview, “communication is a key”, “so I think communication, a role model and culture are vital”, “tell people what exactly to do is not a good way of communication. Communication should be a two-way process”. When asked about the drivers of employee engagement, interviewee B only mentioned communication as the driver of employee engagement, as she said “what drives me would be more communications”. Another two interviewees both echoed this opinion and said, “there needs to be clear, open and honest communication between senior leaders and managers and employees,

so everybody knows what their role in the company, and how it fits to the overall picture, how it fits into the organisation's core values and ideas", "communication is a very important driver of our employee engagement. One of the key things, for managers, is to have good conversation with employees. The other thing that is important, in terms of communication is giving employee voice".

Organisational culture and senior management were recognised as another two main drivers. As interviewee A said, "cultivating a culture that makes employees engaged and offering the opportunity for employees to directly talk to their senior manager are also very important". Interviewee B mentioned, "The drivers are all about the culture, so the mission of the organisation, the leadership team, how they promote values and expectations. Then I think senior managers are really important. Line managers, who are, um, competent, who have the ability to manage people to do their technical job". Interviewee C stated, "There needs to have clear understanding of organisational goals and values and how they can be used in everybody's everyday life and work. I, personally, I think I really have a good relationship with my manager. So I think definitely that makes me engaged".

Figure 4-3 below demonstrates the percentage frequencies in which the themes re-occurred, all the interviewees (100%) said effective organisational communication has a vital impact on the levels of engagement, 75% (3 out of 4 interviewees) said that organisational culture and senior management would be one of the most important factors in relation to employee engagement, 50% (2 out of 4 of the employees) said that line management , recognition, employee voice, career development, meaningful job, trust and support have a significant impact on employee engagement.

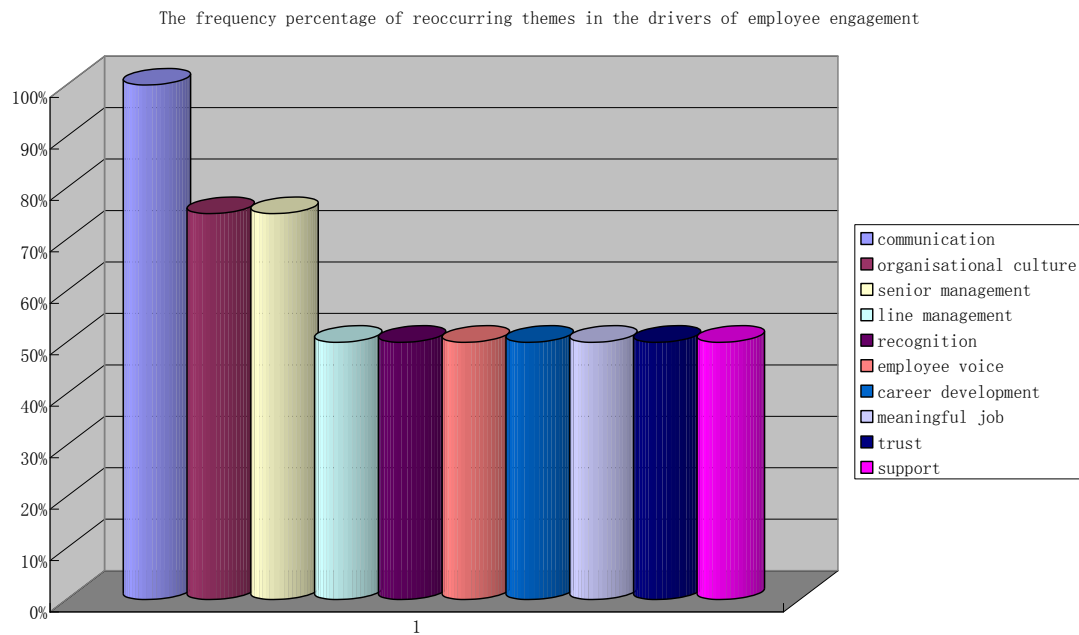


Figure 4-3 The Frequency Percentage of Reoccurring Themes in the Drivers of Employee Engagement

4.4 Research findings

The interviews were conducted in order to answer the original research aims:

- To define employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives
- To discover the benefits of having high levels of employee engagement
- To explore the most important driver that impacts on the employee engagement

4.4.1 Research aim 1: To define employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives

Through reviewing the analysed data, there was no one definition given by the interviewees. This proves the argument stated in the literature review that persistent ambiguity exists in the development of the concept of employee engagement. Similar characteristics, however, were acknowledged between interviewees.

As stated in the literature review, employee engagement is a multidimensional concept. When asked interviewees' understandings of employee engagement, different aspects of employee relations were mentioned, for instance, linking personal value with organisational value, communicating well, having mutual respect between employer and employee, feeling involved in the organisation, going extra mile for the organisation and themselves, coming to work early or taking on extra duties within the organisation, and also excited about the job.

All the interviewees concurred that employee engagement was an emotional presence which is supported in the literature review as saying employee engagement is a form of psychological presence at work (Kahn, 1990; Rothbard, 2011; Schaufeli et al, 2002). It is also supported by Schaufeli et al (2002), who explain that employee engagement is a fulfilling positive attitude featured with vigour, dedication and absorption.

Four interviewees also felt that employee engagement was a two-way process-it compasses not only what organisations can do for employees but also how employees can go extra miles for their employers. This is alike Robinson et al (2004) when they describe employee engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee. As proved in the literature review, this two-way nature has a strong theoretical rationale provided by social exchange theory (Saks, 2006). Employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organisation.

75% interviewees recognised that an engaged employee was highly motivated, this is compare to Frank, Finnegan and Taylor (2004), who notes that employee engagement is strongly linked to the classical theories of motivation. Furthermore, Hertzberg (1966), McGregor (1960) and Maslow (1943) point that employee engagement roots in the form of intrinsic motivation. Three out of four of the interviewees also felt it was when employees were committed to the organisation, which is comparable to

Rama Devi (2009), Macey and Schneider (2008) and McBain (2006), who recognise the connection between engagement and commitment. However, as Robinson et al (2004) states, commitment does not reflect sufficiently two aspects of engagement-its two-way nature, and a committed worker does job within his work role while an engaged employee will go extra miles for the organisation. Thus, while engagement contains many of the elements of commitment it is not a perfect match.

4.4.2 Research aim 2: To discover the benefits of having high levels of employee engagement

Moving on to discuss the researcher's second objective which was, to discover what were the benefits HR professionals seen from having high levels of engagement within the financial services company, it was clear in that there were a number of benefits that the interviewees associated with having employees engaged.

Opinions diverged into two main aspects that employee engagement can not only benefit organisation but also individual employees. This statement is highly consistent with what we argued in the literature review that there is a causal link between employee engagement and firm-level outcomes as well as individual benefits (Sun, Aryee and Law, 2007; Datta, Guthrie and Wright, 2005; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan and Allen, 2005; Batt, 2002).

For employers, all the interviewees said they could see an increase in productivity and profit from having high levels of engagement. This is supported by research conducted by Corporate Executive Board (2008 and 2007) that engaged employees are 57% productive than unengaged employees. Research also shows that engaged employees are 9 times less likely to leave the organisation. In addition to this, employees with high engagement levels are more customer focused and more enthusiastic with meeting customer's needs (Devi, 2009; Cook, 2008). Customer satisfied company, in turn, gains a more satisfied employer brand (Gronstedt, 2000). These arguments are corresponding with the three interviewees that said they could

see lower retention level, stronger employer brand and better customer service through having their employees engaged.

All these benefits, stated by interviewees, were discussed by a growing body of researches in the literature review. At the organisational level, employee engagement enhances a number of important bottom line outcomes (Gallup, 2006). The bottom line is the big picture. The benefits are around higher productivity, lower turnover level, superior customer service, and stronger employer brand. At individual employee level, it is around personal career achievements.

4.4.3 Research aim 3: To explore the most important driver that impacts on the employee engagement

Moving on to discuss the findings of the researcher's third objective which is to determine what factor is the most important driver of employee engagement.

All the interviewees said that communication would be considered as a vital factor of employee engagement. This is supported by Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000), when they say organisational communication is a critical aspect of how relationships within the organisation are evaluated, meaning that open communication indicates a stronger relationship. Employee engagement largely depends on effective two-way communication (Rayner and Adam-Smith, 2009).

Three out of four of the interviewees believed organisational culture was crucial in driving employee engagement. This is supported by Turner (2003), as he states that understanding the context in which an organisation is operating is, in fact, an essential part of the communicator's art. A key determinant of how and why organisation communicates its corporate culture. It is the culture of an organisation that effectively engages – or disengages – employees. Further, Welch (2011) points out that the positive impact which communication affect on employee engagement occurs only when employees understand the values and vision of an organisation, therefore they are engaged them with the organisation's culture.

Three out of four of the interviewee said senior management was also very important for enhancing employee engagement. As senior management having a clear vision of their organisation and conveying this to their employees so that they understand how their role contributes to achieving business outcomes, management providing employees with feedback and appraisals and management listening to employees concerns. Saks (2006) emphasised the need to communicate with employees clearly and consistently about the organisational roadmap to achieve employee engagement, suggesting that employees who are more engaged will have a broader picture of the organisation goal. Thus, senior managers are critical in sharing reliable and open communications with their employees in order to promote a sense of belonging and commitment as well as helping employees to better understand the goals of the organisation (Welch and Jackson, 2007).

All the above findings showed that the concept of employee engagement was clearly understood by HR professionals within Company X. This reflects that employee engagement is on the agenda of HR professionals in Company X. The positive impact of employee engagement were positively received by all interviewees and each participant agreed employee engagement could be used to impact business performance as well as employee performance in Company X. Communication was a key theme rising from these interviews. All the interviewees suggested that two-way organisational communication was vital to employee engagement and it should be put in place in Company X. Organisational culture and senior management were also been recognised between interviewees as important communication drivers of employee engagement.

4.5 Research implications

The research contributes, in some small way to awareness in relation to the relationship between employee engagement and organisational communication. The research should help in an appreciation by HR professionals of how to enhance

employee engagement using organisational communication tools.

It is hoped that this will add to a better outcome for all that are employed in the financial sector, that could lead to more effective organisational communications and in turn more engagement from employees, as espoused by these researched themes.

4.6 Research limitations

This research was conducted within one financial organisation due to the access to the individuals. The second limitation faced was the sample size which was used to collect the data. This was due to the fact that Company X has a small HR team. Another limitation the researcher became aware of was the reliability of the data collected as it was from HR professionals' perspective, if data was also collected from non-HR professionals it may have provided different results.

4.7 Further research options

This research was limited to one particular company. There is scope for research in a number of other companies. This would allow the research apply the finding to the whole industry and compare and contrast the findings among each financial institution. The researcher would also like to collect data from non-HR professionals' perspectives. This would allow the researcher get a better understanding of the research objectives.

In all this research, it must be borne in mind that economic situations change, and that this research for this dissertation was a snapshot in time, and perhaps a more rigorous and systematic approach, or a longitudinal study may get other outcomes.

4.8 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations that emanate from this research:

- The first concerns the sender, HR professionals need to train managers properly, make sure they know what exactly should be communicated. And managers need to

be trained in order to be competent to deliver communications. Because if they are not competent or they are not experienced, the communication they conducted will not be effective. And this will result in low level of engagement.

·The second concern is about the influence of the environment on the communication. Thus, HR professionals need to focus on building an open, transparent and positive communication environment to allow both downwards and upwards communications. In other words, there should have formal process whereby organisations values are communicated and employee voice is actually heard. This will help to promote conversations and enhance engagement.

·The last point is about leadership support. HR professionals need to gain support form the top level. Not all business leaders buy into the HR philosophy. So to get senior people aboard, HR professionals need to demonstrate why employee engagement is important and show the results that companies with high level staff engagement is better performed that those without.

4.9 Conclusion

Overall, employee engagement is a multidimensional concept. Typically, it is considered to be a two-way and psychological process. Employee engagement promotes the efficient and affective functioning of the organisations as well as employee engagement. As such, a better understanding of the drivers of the concept provides better solution to increase employee engagement.

Organisational communication is identified as the most vital factor to build employee engagement. Organisational communication, in the context of this research, refers to a two-way information exchange process between managers and employees. Organisational culture and senior management are recognised as two key communication drivers of employee engagement.

This dissertation has gone some way to help in a better understanding of the issues

around the relationship between employee engagement and organisational communication. As shown in the data, although employee engagement is seen as a management necessity, there still are a lot of things for HR professionals need to be done.

To promote organisational communications and enhance employee engagement, HR professionals need to train managers properly; focus on building an open, transparent and positive communication environment; and gain support from the top level.

This dissertation has given an insight to the thoughts and actions taken by HR professionals within a medium sized financial institution. It makes no claim to enable a generalisation of its findings to all employed at financial institution in Ireland or beyond.

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6 Learning Statement

This research makes great sense to me as it combined my knowledge and experience in HR field together. It highly concluded my deepest understanding of the HR job, especially the employee engagement part, and contributed to my continuous professional development.

Through doing this dissertation, I found that HR professionals are playing a more and more important role within the organisation. Employee relations are the biggest focus of HR professionals' job. Money or bonus is not regarded as the biggest element to engage talent. More and more employees are paying attention to the working environment and the relationship with other colleagues. Then, organisation communication becomes vital to the issue of engagement. Effective organisational communication can largely improve the engagement level.

I acknowledge there are limitations in this research due to the sample and data collection methods. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative research may have a deeper understanding of the objectives of research.

Finally, I extremely pleased to have achieved a personal goal to challenge myself intellectually on a issue if workplace significance and to add to the general body of knowledge in HR field.

Qionghui Cai

7 Appendix 1 – Interview request form

(Receipient)

Address 1,

Address 2,

Address 3,

Date:

Dear (name)

Ref: Dissertation Interview Invatation

Hi there,

I am currently doing my master dissertation. My dissertation is about employee engagement. I should be grateful if you would consider taking part in the research.

All answers provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and no reference will be made to you or your organisation in my dissertation, or on any supporting documentation.

The interview is totally based on the voluntary principle, so it is totally understood if you do not want to accept. Should you have any queries in respect of this interview, or the dissertation itself, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks,

Qionghui Cai

8 Appendix 2 - Acceptance form

The employee engagement and organisational communication

An investigation based on qualitative research methodologies to examine the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals within the context of a medium sized financial organisation in Dublin

I agree to take part in the research study named above.

I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.

The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.

I understand that the study involves an interview and that notes and recording may take place with my consent, the interview to be of approximately 30 minutes in duration

I understand that participation involves no foreseeable risks to me, and that the information given to me has been explained in detail

I understand that all research data will be securely stored under secure lock and key, at a secure location for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed unless I give permission for my data to be archived.

I agree to have my study data archived.

Yes No

Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the researcher(s) will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.

I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

If I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied be withdrawn from the research until project writing completion date.

Participant's _____ name:

Participant's _____ signature:

Date: _____

Statement by Qionghui Cai

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Researcher: _____ Qionghui Cai _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

9 Appendix 3 - Information sheet

The employee engagement and organisational communication

An investigation based on qualitative research methodologies to examine the influence of organisational communication on employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals within the context of a medium sized financial organisation in Dublin

Invitation

This study is designed to ascertain the perspective of HR professionals regarding the relationship between employee engagement and organisational communication.

The researcher is Qionghui Cai, an master student in National College of Ireland.

What is the purpose of this study?

This research is conducted to investigate the significance of the relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement. This research will add to the general knowledge of the employee engagement and to the understanding of the employee engagement itself, specially the under-researched area of the perspective of HR professionals, in particular, in a medium sized financial organisation.

Specificity of research aim:

It will focus on defining employee engagement, discovering the benefits, exploring the drivers and determining the important communication drivers of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals.

Objectives:

- To gather information on employee engagement and organisational communication
- To enhance a theoretical framework of the employee engagement from a valuable

and distinctive perspective

- To analyse and evaluate data to underpin this theoretical framework

Themes

- To identify how HR professionals define ‘employee engagement’

- To explore the benefits of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals

- To determine the most important driver of employee engagement from the perspective of HR professionals

All information will remain confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. The interview will be audio-recorded; the information gathered will be transcribed by the researcher. Only the researcher will have the access to the transcripts, and all of the transcripts will be coded. Your name will not appear on any transcript. All of the data gathered for the research will be adequately and properly disposed of on completion of the study.

Should you have any queries of this research or have any questions regarding any information contained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to contact me

Qionghui Cai

10 Appendix 4 - Transcript of interviews

Appendix 1- Transcript of interviews

The interviews all started with general discussion to form a bond and for ease of communication and to help all concerned feel at ease. Some personal information is shared but was removed prior to transcription as covered by the data protection and ethical considerations for those engaged in the process, as agreed with the interviewees in advance. As the interviews progressed other information for pertinent to the research given, this was also removed with the consent of those involved. The following is a succinct transcription of the relevant information so that no hint of identification possible.

Interview 1: 10 years' experience – Head of HR

Theme 1: Identify how HR professionals define 'employee engagement':	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What's your understanding of 'employee engagement'?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>My own way of understanding of 'employee engagement'. Um, I suppose, getting people totally engaged into the business, getting them to use all the skills, and knowledge. Engaged employees look at the same direction, commit to the organisational culture and value, and put extra energy on work, excited about the work. They are enjoyable, if they have ideas, they have ways of</p>	<p>Engaged into the business</p> <p>Commit to the organisational</p>

<p>contributing that, um, I think felt valued is part of that. The opposite of employee engagement is just come and been told just do AB and C, we don't want to know anything else. And that's turns people back. One area is some people called lean, we kind of list the waste of process, and the one of the waste we would list is people's asperities, wonderful people, and we ask them to do very Monday work, we are not tapping into their knowledge or skills, and I thinking buying employee engagement, one way is tapping into people's knowledge or skills.</p>	<p>culture</p> <p>Excited about the work</p> <p>Felt valued</p>
<p>Theme 2: Explore the benefits of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>So you think employee engagement is very important? Why you think it is important?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Um, I suppose it is important in several areas. Because engaged employees have much better understanding of what their managers and their CEOs, so in general, they will come back better solutions, um, also, if they come up an idea will be more sustainable, other than somebody come in and say this is the best way to do, but not really engaged. So from the business point of view, you will get better solutions, you will get better customer services. And I think from the employees' point of view, once they felt engaged, it is more than just a job. It is kind of career,</p>	<p>From business point of view, it offers better solutions and better customer services.</p> <p>For employees' point of view, it</p>

<p>so they can see what they do is useful and beneficial. Have ideas of contributions to make, that managers will listen to them, people will listen to them, and I think that's creates the healthy work organisation. Um, so things like staff turnover will reduce, and I think people will be more motivated and engaged, to kind of go extra mile. So I think it creates an organisation, um, people felt part of it, rather than been told what to do.</p>	<p>offers a career rather than a job.</p>
<p>Theme 3: Determine the most important driver of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What you think are the biggest drivers of employee engagement? In other words, what companies should do to get people engaged?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Um, I think, it has to come to several levels, one I think sponsorship. And, um, kind set role modelling from the top is very important, that um, I think senior management is what was told and what senior manager is doing. And I give quite good example, I was in Poland in couple of weeks ago, and A, quite senior guy in Finance, walk around the finance floor to talk with people, engaged with them, he was there for high level budget meetings, but, it was important that he walk around people and to see what people is doing and listen to them, um, he is also role modelling behaviour, what he want other local managers to do.</p>	<p>Sponsorship</p> <p>Senior management</p> <p>Role modeling from the top</p> <p>Sponsorship from senior</p>

<p>So I think sponsorship from senior people is critical. But I think, there also need to be resources to be committed to it. Communication is a key. There is a guy called John Carter, he is a Harvard business scholar, um, and he has, um, couple of books. One is called the 8 reasons make projects fail. Um, one of the things he has in the article is changing the culture within the organisation. Um, people underestimate what need to do. So if you think we should spend 1 hour a week, you should spend 10 hours a week. Because you want to change the culture of the organisation, you need to reinforce constantly. So I think communication, a role model and culture are vital.</p>	<p>people</p> <p>Communication is a key</p>
<p>And In 2012, we did an internal survey and found that our management is too directed. Tell people what exactly to do is not a good way of communication. Communication should be a two-way process. Involved the people in. We do not have many engaged talent. So we set up our strategies. We have morning tea 3 times a month; offer the opportunity to employees to directly talk to their line manager.</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>Organisational culture</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Line Management</p>
<p>Me:</p>	
<p>So you mean line management is the biggest driver?</p>	
<p>Interviewee:</p>	
<p>I won't say it is the biggest, but it is one of the most important. Cultivating a culture that makes employees engaged is also very important. Not like several decades ago, employees see</p>	<p>Cultivate a culture</p>

<p>organizations as own home, like a big family. Make a strong employer brand. Make sense, make people excited about work. Be proud of the workplace they are working.</p> <p>Me:</p> <p>What makes you engaged?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Um, well, big part of my job would be trying to get people engaged into the process, make the process, the customer services better. Um, I suppose, from my point of view, I think, a necessary I master other people to do these types of things, so I need to be role model of that behaviour. I suppose I try to engage everybody in the organisation, try to provide training to people, and try to engage everybody in the programs. Um, so I think role modelling, employee engagement would be my big driver. I think commitment would be easier just to pretend, you know what need to do with this, and would be easier to go away. But generally to be interested to people to work with, what I do is how I help these people. The skills, the capability, what they want at work, and how many I can help that and develop that, so the interest of the business.</p> <p>Me:</p> <p>Regarding the drivers, do you think the money is important?</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Help people</p> <p>Role modeling</p>
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<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>I think you get a certain band, other things will get more important. I phrases it different way. Somebody is 50,000 euro, but he working in a company he is very enjoyable, but you earning a little bit less, I think most people will go for a little bit less. So I think once we get the certain band, other things will come more important. Whether was work life balance, whether was communication, recognition. Recognition will not just be money, so money is important, but people are getting some stages replace work. Especially the types of people within this organisation, they can get a job any else. So if the job is not enjoyable, they will leave. There is an example, xxx, quite senior, left the job because there is too much hassle. And the company offered twice money want him come back, and he wouldn't. Because the job is horrible.</p>	<p>Enjoyable environment</p> <p>Interesting job</p>
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Interview 2: 5 years' experience – HR business partner

<p>Theme 1: Identify how HR professionals define 'employee engagement':</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What's your understanding of 'employee engagement'?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p>	

<p>My understanding of ‘employee engagement’ is how an employee, um, emotionally linked to the company they work with. So we all have contracts of employment, we all have contracts of employee to do particular job. But employee engagement is around how much the company’s values link to the employee’s values. So we all have different values based on our family, our up bring, our values and how does a company’s value link into an employee. So you believe in your value system. Ok? So, for example, to me, integrity is very important. Working with a company with integrity is very important to me and I believe that Company X does work, with integrity, conducts business very honestly, openly. It follows its rules, and it’s very, um, engaged, in terms of employees.</p>	<p>Emotionally linked to the company’s value</p> <p>Link company’s value with employees’ value</p>
<p>Me:</p> <p>So you define employee engagement is a psychological term?</p>	
<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Very much though. Yeah, it’s about that employee wants to go that extra mile to do, the psychological contract. So, employee wants to go beyond just doing a job that they get paid, they feel passionate about their company, they want to do more, so you don’t just work nine to half five, that you need to work hours, you need to do things, you want to do because you believe in the company, and you, you respect people who are.</p>	<p>Go extra mile</p> <p>The psychological contract</p>

<p>Theme 2: Explore the benefits of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>Why you think 'employee engagement' is important? And what are the benefits of having a high level employee engagement?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Because, I believe you have done this research in college, proven time and time again, employees, organisations with high employee engagement perform better. Where employees are not engaged, at the bottom line, it's about profits, performance in companies. Because you have engaged employees, who want to support your business and do everything. Make it successful and is going to affect the bottom line of what is business is about.</p> <p>Me:</p> <p>Anything else?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>The bottom line is the big picture. And the benefits about employee engagement is around retention, is around attract the right people to work in the organisation. Employer brand, in terms of recruitment, um, what you are marketing your company</p>	<p>Better business performance and profit</p> <p>Affect the bottom line</p> <p>Bottom line is the big picture</p>

<p>offer to employees, then when they actually join the organisation, um, it happens to motivating them, um, it promotes a positive culture, um, and, so recruitment, employee well-being, , it all goes back to the bottom line, the business performance. Engaged workforce, um, it about a culture that people would like to work, it's about giving a very positive culture.</p>	<p>Retention</p> <p>Attract talent</p> <p>Employer brand</p> <p>Recruitment</p> <p>Positive culture</p> <p>Employee well-being</p>
<p>Theme 3: Determine the most important driver of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What you think are the biggest drivers of employee engagement?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>So you mean what the company needs to provide? Well, the first thing the company needs to provide is the support from the top. Do you have your leadership at the very top, supporting, um, the engagement, um, philosophy. So you have your leaders have clear vision.</p> <p>(interview disrupted)</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>So the drivers are all about the culture, so the mission of the</p>	<p>Support from the top</p> <p>Leadership support</p> <p>Culture</p>

<p>organisation, the leadership team, how they promote, and values, the expectations. People and how they promote people. For example, here we go, Company X has recently refresh the values, so employees are able to link all of these values, and to say what organisation expect of me. Ok, so you can look at these and re-educate people and give the notebook to remind people the values. And the values cafe, so that's from the top down, you get your visions, your values, your leadership, so you have to have leadership supported, to this to work. I think line managers there are then really important. So line managers who are, um, competent, who are, have the ability to manage people to do their technical job. Spent about their 30% time managing people. I think all managers get that. Very important drivers for our employee engagement, because we are quit new organisation in Ireland, lot of new managers. And the biggest focus for us is to train managers properly, difficult conversations, how to motivate people, how to deal with employee relationship issues, things happen to your employee relationship. So we need our managers to more competent and more sufficient rather than coming to HR. Um, because, in the US, they have a model of self-service, so most things managers look for themselves, HR business partner focus more on the strategic initiatives. Here, in Ireland, at the moment, is more operate, is more day-to-day, is more supporting managers, and you see, managers come down to seek advices for dealing situations. I think the most part of our drivers is, once you have your leadership support, your line managers, and competency. Ok? Um, other drivers, then, are giving people meaning for work, so they doing a job they are enjoying. Very</p>	<p>The mission, value, expectations of the organisation</p> <p>Leadership support</p> <p>Line management</p> <p>Competent managers</p> <p>Train managers properly</p> <p>Leadership</p>
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<p>important, we managed last year. One of the key thing was, been able to stretch, you know, giving, objectives, and that they can have good conversations with employee , objectives, that check their quarterly, at least, focus on career conversation, their current role, what they could do going forward, that's all around giving people recognition, so people are happy stay their current role. So how you manage that, you need to be aware the managers, as an organisation, we give the manager the tooth, management conversations, make sure that people have meaningful work, so they want to stay with us. Key thing for retention. The other thing that is important, in terms of driving employee engagement is giving employee voice, so we have done the organisation health survey, the great place to work survey, we have very open policy ensure people will come to talk with us when they have an issue, they know we are approachable, we train our managers to, you know, to looking, you know, an employee is unhappy, or they see a high level of absenteeism, are able to have conversation with employees, to see everything is ok. Just be able to support them, ok. It's very important, so it's very important that we, we recognise people they have issues outside work, able to support them as a human, not just an employee. And also give them the voice I mention all around, employee surveys, been open and been receptive to any issues people have. The other thing is wellness, wellness is become a bigger and bigger issue because we are during the recession. Companies are asking people to work more for less money, or work longer. So I suppose, highlight some areas, we start walking club, um, we have people talk about, you know,</p>	<p>support</p> <p>Competent line managers</p> <p>Meaningful job</p> <p>Good conversation</p> <p>recognition</p> <p>employee voice</p> <p>support</p> <p>recognise</p>
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<p>healthy eating, blood test, talk about proper sleep, talk about eating properly and giving people, little, I suppose, tips. So making them well. That's very important. Because you got proper sleep, have good diet, being able to perform properly at work. Ok, that's another big piece. The other part is be able to trust people, give people job to do and not have that kind of micromanager check against them. So when employee did a nice job, say you do a good job, besides giving them interesting work to do, you trust them as well. Maybe, you know, involving them in special projects, or exposing them to senior people, ok? Um, the other part I mentioned, the recognition driver. Earlier, it's around to say someone does a good job, saying they did a good job, not necessary to give them money or give them present, is thank you, it is a great job, well done. And thank you means a lot to some people. The other part is monetary part, the compensation which based your salary, your benefits, the health insurance, the pension, and we have bonus, obviously, bonus, that's only a part of it. I think the compensation is only a part of the recognition. We also ask people to nominate people did a great job during the previous and we present awards to people, it is part of recognition. We also do a team award as well. And the other thing is career development, so how do we manager our talent.</p>	<p>Employee wellness</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>recognition</p> <p>recognition</p> <p>awards</p> <p>career development</p>
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Interview 3: 4 years' experience –HR Operations Manager

Theme 1: Identify how HR professionals define ‘employee engagement’:	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What’s your understanding of ‘employee engagement’?</p>	
<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>I would define employee engagement as when employees are motivated, proud and committed, and one who exerts that extra effort to meet to organizational goals. Well, most companies like to have engaged employees or teams. Em, I suppose it helps to create positive environment between the team building your values. I think it can be quite individual depend on what team or what company you are talking to. I suppose the core ideas are universal. So I think engaged team will work best together. So they have to link well together, communicate well together, work together. Um, and Similar to what we have here, the values, the four values. It is very much kind of focus around what does your company do. Well, most People have customers anyway. So basically the initiatives should be similar I presume. Um, but for me, personally work here, what I believe to be.</p>	<p>Committed</p> <p>Motivated</p> <p>Team value</p> <p>Work best together</p> <p>Link together</p> <p>Communicate well together</p> <p>Organisational value</p>
Theme 2: Explore the benefits of employee engagement from HR professionals’ perspectives:	
<p>Me:</p>	

<p>Do you think employee engagement is important?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Yes, I think so. It depends, again, on the background, what engagement. If it is something ongoing, team, event or meeting, have that engagement with your team or with your colleague. So it is, yeah, definitely very important.</p> <p>Me:</p> <p>What do you think is the benefit of having a high level engagement?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Um, for here, I know, what I know from working for Company X, um, I think , yeah , absolutely, generally it makes here a good feel good place to work. So I think again it depends much more on, you know, the company, the side you are working. Dublin does very small, but it is growing, our company a is a global organisation, and itself it's entity is very large, but in Dublin, specific I think, we are gaining that company a being like that. From that is already, you do say you work for Company X, people will already heard of it, or families themselves with its brand. So it does engagement there between, or someone doesn't heard of it, you can say, oh well, you might know, in the US, they sponsor the, you know, the golf. And automatically it will</p>	<p>Good place to work</p> <p>Company brand</p>
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<p>bring up an image, we are, the brand we are.</p> <p>The communication, I think, between the senior management, and the employees, in Dublin, again, and I suppose globally, again, as we do updates communication a lot from different, um offices, worldwide, organisational changes within your department, whatever. But in Dublin, the communication is very good. See that as kind of interaction. Senior manager, you gain encourage from them and you can be a manager as well.</p>	<p>Communication</p>
<p>Theme 3: Determine the most important driver of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:</p>	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What drives you to be engaged?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>What drives me would be.... So for me, I suppose more communication, organising, and the managing. I am a link between the manager and employees, pass on communication from managers, update filing, and also make sure that everything is up to date. The communication would be a big sector. I deal a lot with employees. Um, then it is really managing a lot the fourth floor, it will be a lot working on where the place to move, so there will be a lot communications between. For me, I am the only contact, for them come to me, then I come back to them.</p>	<p>Communication</p>

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Interview 4: 1.5 years' experience –HR Operation & Payroll Administrator

Theme 1: Identify how HR professionals define 'employee engagement':	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What's your understanding of 'employee engagement'?</p> <p>Interviewee:</p> <p>My understanding is the relationship between the organisation, and the employees, whereby the employees are satisfied by their jobs, that they are committed and motivated to go that extra miles for the company, um, well, go extra miles for themselves. Um, I think engaged employees are happy with their jobs, um, they are more willing to help out. They are more willing to improve the job, the company, um, and more productive, um, what else. They are more loyal, so retain staff more engaged, um, there is a mutual respect between, the employees and their employer. That will be my understanding.</p>	<p>Relationship between the origination and the employees</p> <p>Satisfied by their jobs</p> <p>Committed</p> <p>motivated</p> <p>go extra miles</p> <p>Loyal</p> <p>Mutual respect between employee and employer</p>
Theme 2: Explore the benefits of employee engagement from HR professionals'	

perspectives:	
<p>Me:</p> <p>Can I say you think employee engagement is very important? So, what's the benefit of employee engagement?</p>	Loyal
<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Benefits will be that employees are more loyal to the company. So they are likely to stay to for long period of time, and grow the company, so they, um, grow, um, you can retain the staff, you don't need to um, benefits, they can help with the increase productivity, which means that the profits of company can increase as well. And an engaged workforce will be a happy workforce, so it is easier to do business, um, people are more helpful, they are willing to do different tasks, more collaboration between different departments, um, they are proud of working for the company, um, they want to do more for their company, for their team and managers, um, I think there are main benefits.</p>	<p>Employees will stay longer</p> <p>Retain staff</p> <p>Increase productivity</p> <p>Happy workforce</p>
Theme 3: Determine the most important driver of employee engagement from HR professionals' perspectives:	
<p>Me:</p> <p>What you think are the biggest drivers of employee engagement? In other words, what companies should do to get people engaged?</p>	

<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>Ok, so I think there needs to be clear, open and honest communication between senior leaders and managers and employees, so everybody knows what their role in the company, and how it fits to the overall picture, how it fits into the organisation's core values, and um, core values, and ideas, and um, I think there needs to be respect between the managers and the employees, um, two-way open communication, again, understanding of their job roles, understanding why they are supposed to do, um, how they need to do that, there needs to be formal appraisal reward recognition process. If somebody did a good job, they recognised for it or they are rewarded for it. They think their opinion work and everything is valued. They needs to be formal employee voice program within company. So suggestion box where people can raise ideas and opinions, feel something and having that is just the answer that the suggestions, views and ideas, also need to be heard by the senior leaders and managers. Um, things need to be clear understanding of the organisational goals and values and how they can be used in everybody's everyday life and work.</p> <p>Me:</p> <p>What's your driver to make you engaged?</p>	<p>Clear, open and honest communication</p> <p>Two-way open communication</p> <p>Understanding of their job roles</p> <p>Formal appraisal reward recognition process</p> <p>Formal employee voice program</p> <p>Clear organisational goal and value</p>
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<p>Interviewee:</p> <p>I, personally, I think, I have a really good relationship with my manager. So I think definitely there is mutual respect there. So I know if I did a good job, I will be recognised. Likewise, if my manager asks me to do something, I am happy to do it. Um, sometime is busy, but I think that they have general interest in helping you and your career, and push you forward for different things, and help you grow with your own role. Um, I like the fact that there is a formal recognition program here, not necessary reward, but there is X stars, if you did a good job, somebody in the company can nominate you and you are recognized. You won't get anything major, it's nice to have your name there to be recognised. Somebody does a good job or has, kind of, showed the company values. Then, um, they will be my drivers. I think I am proud of working here, which helps. So if somebody ask where you working, I am happy to say where I work, so like to feel contribute to the overall success of the organisation.</p>	<p>Good relationship with manager</p> <p>Recognition</p> <p>Mutual respect</p> <p>Career help</p> <p>Formal recognition program</p> <p>Proud working here</p>
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