2024

Employee Engagement: Understanding the 'Personal' Dimension of Engagement

Newbury, Hannah

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

Copyright and Moral rights arising from original work in this thesis and (where relevant), any accompanying data, rests with the Author unless stated otherwise[1].

Re-use of the work is allowed under fair dealing exceptions outlined in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (amended)[2], and the terms of the copyright licence assigned to the thesis by the Author.

In practice, and unless the copyright licence assigned by the author allows for more permissive use, this means,

- that any content or accompanying data cannot be extensively quoted, reproduced or changed without the written permission of the author / rights holder; and

- that the work in whole or part may not be sold commercially in any format or medium without the written permission of the author/rights holder.

Any third-party copyright material in this thesis remains the property of the original owner. Such third party copyright work included in the thesis will be clearly marked and attributed, and the original licence under which it was released will be specified. This material is not covered by the licence or terms assigned to the wider thesis and must be used in accordance with the original licence; or separate permission must be sought from the copyright holder.

The author assigns certain rights to the University of Plymouth including the right to make the thesis accessible and discoverable via the British Library's Electronic Thesis Online Service (EThOS) and the University research repository, and to undertake activities to migrate, preserve and maintain the medium, format and integrity of the deposited file for future discovery and use.

---

[1] *E.g.* in the example of third party copyright materials reused in the thesis.
[2] In accordance with best practice principles such as, *Marking/Creators/Marking third party content* (2013). Available from:
https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/Marking/Creators/Marking_third_party_content
[accessed 28th February 2022]

Employee Engagement: Understanding the 'Personal' Dimension of Engagement

by

HANNAH NEWBURY

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Plymouth Business School

July 2024

******Intentionally left blank******

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my sincere thanks and gratitude to those who have formed my excellent supervisory team over the years, especially Dr Sue Kinsey and Dr Jasmine Kelland, who have constantly exceeded the duty of Director of Studies, guiding me throughout times of personal as well as academic challenge and inspiring me to keep going. The generosity and kindness of your support will not be forgotten.

It is important to thank the University of Plymouth and Plymouth Business School for supporting my PhD and helping me achieve my goals.

I'd also like to acknowledge the participants of this study who willingly gave up their time and offered their interesting and honest opinions. Without your help this would not have been possible.

Thank you to my wonderful family and friends. I am extremely grateful for your continual help, support and encouragement. Especially those I am most grateful to, my husband Will, and my parents, Kay and Les. I could not have achieved this without you. Your unwavering belief in my abilities, patience and love have been a constant source of strength. Thank you.

Author Declaration and Word Count

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

Word count of main body of thesis: 81,306

Signed

Date 26 July 2024

Abstract

Employee Engagement: Understanding the 'Personal' Dimension of Engagement

Hannah Newbury

Kahn's 'personal engagement' (PE) concept centres on the ways which 'people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (1990, p.694). However, engagement has been viewed through a predominantly positivistic, unitarist framework (Sambrook, 2021; Shuck, Kim & Fletcher, 2021) that has 'bent' engagement through its appropriation to managerialist agendas, and 'stretched' in its meaning away from being an individual state of mind (Truss *et al.*, 2013). This study explores Kahn's (1990) original framing of engagement as a deeply personal experience, considering what PE is and how it is understood and experienced by individual employees. This considers engagement as a deeply subjective experience and phenomenon (Shuck, Kim & Fletcher, 2021). It addresses the lack of research into the individual employee's unique, lived experience (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Sambrook, 2021; Truss *et al.*, 2013) of their engagement. Drawing on an extensive literature review and semi-structured interviews with employees from a range of organisations, this study applies an interpretivist analytical approach to explore employee understandings and experiences of engagement. It addresses the lack of qualitative and interpretivist studies of engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). Findings broadly indicate that existing understandings of engagement are divergent from Kahn's concept. Further, engagement experiences are nuanced according to individual perspectives and the contexts in which the experience takes place. This study's key contribution is that it extends Kahn's (1990) engagement framework through the development of a new conceptual model to consider two potential versions of being engaged as a person and engaged as an employee, represented by 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions. This develops knowledge relating to the active part the individual has in the processes that contribute towards expressions of engagement, identifying engagement as an active, conscious choice

and unique, subjective individual phenomenon. The model supports Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement as an individual's behaviours, feelings, values and psychological state of mind while at work, the extent to which they harness themselves to their work roles, and the ways in which they bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance. This study also develops understanding of engagement in relation to individual and personal dimensions, including employee perceptions and experiences of engagement, identifying some common understandings, experiences, and influences on engagement. It confirms the impact of the organisation on engagement, including consideration of the range of social, cultural, and structural factors that contribute to organisational context, power dynamics, managerial control and interventions and opportunities for individual agency and choice. Findings are developed to highlight practical implications and areas for future research.

Contents

List of Tables   **Page**

List of Figures   **Page**

List of abbreviations

ACAS Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

CIPD Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

CMI Chartered Management Institute

CPD continuing professional development

EE employee engagement

HRD human resource development

HRM human resource management

HR human resources

ILM Institute of Leadership & Management

PE personal engagement

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research by firstly providing an overview of the study, explaining the motivations of the author and gaps in existing literature. It will then outline how these have led to the development of the aim and research questions that are answered in the study. Finally, this chapter outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Overview of the Study

Sat in a lecture room at the beginning of a module entitled 'employee engagement (EE)', I recall the rising feelings of inadequacy as a manager as I realised the importance of the topic to which I had no awareness. Throughout my learning I gained understanding of the concept, practices, and approaches to EE. Through my working experience I observed and experienced engagement and disengagement in the workplace, with successes and failures at supporting organisational pursuits to improve engagement. I was left wondering why engagement is not more widely understood among employees. Why should understanding of EE be exclusively for HR professionals and managers? To whom does engagement belong? Does engagement always need to be 'improved'? It is with this introduction and plenty more questions that I explored the substantial topic of EE. I was surprised to learn that the alleged founder of EE, William Kahn, didn't even refer to EE. Explaining 'calibrations of self-in-role' through the terms 'personal engagement' and 'personal disengagement' (Kahn, 1990, p.694), I understood Kahn's concept to belong to and be enacted by the individual employee:

> *'I defined personal engagement as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.694).*

After several years of questioning family, friends, and colleagues about the ways they engaged at work, I began to consider that personal engagement (PE) is removed from the individual's lived experience of employment. People often described generic and collective organisational strategies to increase performance, or – more worryingly – asked what I meant by engagement. I heard few accounts of people understanding and enacting what engages them personally as an individual employee within an organisational context. My engagement awareness emerged alongside increasing personal disengagement in my role as HR Advisor at a large public sector organisation. Frustrated with the lack of impact I had in making a difference to engagement in the workplace, I seized the opportunity to research an area of my choosing. I was introduced to HRM research at a time of increasing Government attention on 'good' work and job quality following the Taylor (2017) review of modern working practices. There was increasing interest among scholars and practitioners on work as an opportunity to find meaning and purpose (Bailey *et al.*, 2019) to address calls for a renewed focus on 'good EE' (Taylor, 2017, p.50). The combination of these experiences pushed my drive to formally investigate the ways in which employees understand and make meaning of engagement. In addition to being a topic of present importance, I perceived a range of gaps in existing research; between Kahn's concept and engagement as it exists in organisations; exploration of employee understanding and experience of engagement; and the influence of organisational and managerial agendas on personal engagement at the individual level.

Engagement is inundated with conflicting understandings, complex contextual issues, and underlying power tensions, making it a difficult concept to research. The abundance of studies on EE involves a range of actors – including academic, consultants, professional bodies and government – with various priorities and intentions. These actors and the sources they have constructed have promoted and driven an engagement narrative to shape social subjectivities to reflect the interests of those constructing the text (Keenoy, 2014). Further, engagement has been viewed through a predominantly positivistic framework (Sambrook, 2021; Shuck, Kim & Fletcher, 2021) and much of this is in pursuit of a value-added, managerially-led engagement practice and agenda. It has been suggested that engagement conceptualised within existing research represents a notable divergence from Kahn's

(1990) original construct (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a; Sambrook, 2021) which is personal and focused on the individual employee. Employee understandings and experience of engagement need investigation to understand engagement as it exists within organisations, including how this relates to Kahn's concept. This includes acknowledgement that engagement exists within the organisational context, which is often contested through a plurality of groups with competing interests, and power dynamics that create tensions (Budd, 2004; Reed, 2011; Sambrook, 2021). Exploration of engagement that considers the impact of dominant positivist, unitarist perspectives in engagement (Sambrook, 2021) and engagement as about the deeply subjective experience and phenomenon (Shuck, Kim & Fletcher, 2021) is required. The importance of the employee in engagement, as well as how employees understand and experience engagement within their working environment, are at the centre of this research.

1.2 Research Questions

This study therefore aims to contribute towards an increased knowledge and understanding of employee engagement (EE) and personal engagement (PE), including employee understandings of these concepts and what it means to be engaged for the individual employee (referred to as the 'individual'). Addressing the lack of research into the individual employee's 'unique experience' (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011, p.302) and 'lived experience' (Sambrook, 2021; Truss *et al.*, 2013) of their engagement, this research explores participants' construction of their experience of engagement, seeking to collect and understand the individual's perception and experience of engagement concepts. Highlighting the predominance of scientific, psychology-based positivist engagement research, this study addresses the absence of interpretivist research into EE through exploration of the lived experience, perceptions and attitudes to engagement, alongside the meanings attributed to engagement. It argues that there is limited empirical evidence and qualitative research into the topic, aiming to address this through consideration of the role of the individual in engagement. The research explores the broader context in which engagement operates, acknowledging the complexities of businesses and the circumstances in which engagement is experienced. Asking employed individuals about their engagement, it utilises understandings and experiences of engagement in the

workplace. The study focuses on employed individuals with any contracted hours that are provided by an employer. It does not explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals that are self-employed, due to the importance of gaining insights into concepts such as organisational influence on engagement. Other than these classifications, all participants willing to take part were welcomed to the study to gain a broad and rich variety of responses.

Drawing on 30 interviews conducted with employees from a range of organisations, and employing an interpretivist analytical approach, the research focuses on the following research questions:

1. What is 'personal engagement', and how does it differ from existing understandings and research on engagement?
2. What is the experience of engagement at the individual level?
3. What are the obstacles to personal engagement and how might these be overcome?
4. How do organisations impact personal engagement at the individual level?

1.3 Thesis Structure

To understand what it means to be engaged for the individual, the study begins with two chapters of a literature review. Chapter 2 outlines existing literature and research on impact, power and influence on EE, including some of the wider underlying debates regarding power dynamics in employment relations and HRM in consideration of how these influence engagement. Power and influence in HRM are considered through topics such as sophisticated HRM and psychologisation and positivism in HRM. This chapter also explores approaches to engagement within managerial and organisational interests.

Chapter 3 is an exploration of existing literature on engagement which charts some of the tensions and debates in the way in which 'EE' has been defined. This focuses on four key models of engagement; personal engagement, work engagement, multidimensional engagement and engagement as management practice. The chapter concludes with a summary that justifies the theoretical framework for engagement for this research.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology. This considers the research philosophy and methodological choices underpinning this study, including consideration of the methodological options available and justification for the chosen approaches. Explaining my alignment with a constructionist and interpretivist theoretical perspective, it then presents reasoning for qualitative semi-structured interviews with questions informed by the literature review as the sole data collection method. The chapter then outlines the ways in which data was analysed through co-construction and interpretation between the researcher and participant.

The key findings from the interviews and analysis of these findings are presented in Chapters 5 – 8, which are structured to directly address the four research questions in this research. The data is presented in extracts of dialogue, primarily using a thematic coding strategy to analyse qualitative data and present the key themes within the overall aim of exploring employee perceptions and experiences of engagement. Chapter 5 explores data relevant to employee understandings of EE and PE both before and following the presentation of definitions. This includes content analysis according to the key models identified from the literature review. It also includes thematic data analysis which was framed through co-construction and interpretation, allowing themes which represented patterns across the data to emerge. This is of importance to understanding employee understandings of engagement in relation to the research question 1.

Chapter 6 presents data on employee experiences of engagement specifically addressing research question 2. Findings present themes identified in individuals telling their engagement story through a specific experience, focusing on how individuals understand their personal experience of engagement. Through similarities in participant experiences a coding strategy was utilised to analyse the data and from this, the data was divided into four main themes.

Exploration of employee experiences related to engagement continues in chapter 7, which presents data related to barriers and obstacles to engagement, specifically addressing research question 3. Continuing the analysis approach of the previous chapter, main themes emerged through identification of commonly cited barriers and obstacles described by participants.

Chapter 8 addresses research question 4 through a focus on organisational influences and impacts on engagement at the individual level. This chapter presents themes identified through commonly explored phenomena considered throughout all the interviews which relate to organisational factors that influence engagement.

Chapter 9 discusses the findings presented in chapters 5 – 8, drawing upon the academic literature to identify where this study extends and develops knowledge, particularly regarding employee understandings and experiences of engagement. The chapter begins with a preliminary discussion of employee's understandings of engagement, drawing upon key insights from this study's findings and the academic literature to address research question 1. The final three research questions are then addressed through the subsequent discussion, which introduces a conceptual model (figure 2) to support a conceptualisation of engagement according to this study's key findings relating to various dimensions of expressions engagement.

Chapter 10 concludes the study, summarising the key findings and reflecting on the practical implications and limitations of the study. The contribution the thesis makes to knowledge is summarised, and recommendations for areas of further research are made.

The Appendices presents relevant background documents used in the research and evidence from the analysis of data.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Contemporary issues in HRM

Impact, Power and Influence in Employee Engagement

2.0 Introduction

It is argued that engagement features as part of an assertive and contradictory management agenda of manufacturing employee cooperation and consent whilst at the same time exercising control and coercion (Farnham, 2015; Williams, 2020). As EE is an organisational phenomenon which operates within the context of a complex organisation and as part of the employment relationship, it is grounded within the asymmetrical relations of power (Valentin, 2014). And yet, existing work on engagement has largely ignored previous modes of thinking about HRM and employment relations (Purcell, 2014b), resulting in a 'power gap in engagement' with implications for the study and practice of engagement and HRM (Maddon and Bailey, 2017, p.114). The influence of power dynamics on engagement is of importance to this study in its understanding of employee perceptions and experiences of engagement. Power relations in the organisational context are associated with broader ideological and sociological debates surrounding the structures, processes, norms and values related to issues of power and control between the organisation and individual (Watson 2008; Farnham, 2015). It is not within the scope of this study to consider the multitude of ways in which power manifests in organisations or the range of perspectives on the balance of power; rather, this chapter explores some of the wider underlying debates regarding power dynamics in employment relations and HRM in consideration of how these influence engagement. This chapter argues that engagement is representative of the ways in which HRM phenomena attempt to address issues of power within the employment relationship. Organisational control, sophisticated HRM and psychologisation are now considered to address calls for more studies that examine engagement as a management strategy and issues of power and power relationships in engagement (Truss *et al.*, 2013).

2.1 Power and Influence in HRM

A brief exploration of Foucauldian perspectives on institutional power is important to understanding some of the wider debates regarding power and influence within HRM. Power exists and operates through social institutions, language and discourse, and is regulated through both formal mechanisms, such as knowledge and institutions, and hidden, subtle mechanisms such as discourse and surveillance (Foucault, 1974; Foucault, 1980). Foucault argued that power creates and shapes social relations, institutions and discourses, and thereby produces subjects who are both subjected to power and enabled by it. Individuals understand the world in terms of the social relations, institutions and discourses they experience. Describing the 'mechanisms of normalization' (Foucault, 1991, p.306), Foucault argues institutional processes are designed to regulate and control human behaviour, to make them conform to specific social, cultural, and behavioural norms. These norms, and the activities and actors within institutions that influence them, are manifestations of institutional power and control. Foucault highlights normalization is 'one of the great instruments of power' (1991, p.184), emphasising the influence institutions such as organisations have over the individuals who exist within it. Institutional power moulds behaviour according to a norm, subordinates individuals to institutional demands, and individualises precisely to better control (Leitch, 2001). The extent to which HRM activities, such as engagement, are representative of an institutional process designed to regulate and control human behaviour is now considered.

One perspective on organisational power is Alvesson and Willmott's study (2002) on identity regulation and organisational control. They explore the 'issue of managing employee identity and identification' (p621) and argue that 'organizational identification…(is) actively engendered or manufactured' (p623), suggesting employees are manipulated through identification as an employee within an organisation. Alvesson and Willmott identify the organisation's role in defining context as a significant power over employees; 'through explicating the scene and its preconditions for the people acting in it, a particular actor identity is implicitly invoked. By describing a particular version of the conditions in which an organization operates (e.g. the market situation) or the zeitgeist (the age of informational technology), identity is shaped or reinterpreted' (2002, p.631-632). This argument represents the view that

organisational power dominates the employment relationship, and individual 'identity is influenced, regulated and changed within work organisations' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.629). Application of Alvesson and Willmott's perspectives on identity regulation are of importance for this study in consideration of how engagement is regulated and controlled within organisations, including what impact this has at the individual level. Alvesson and Willmott argue 'discourses (also) depend upon the interpretation and inventive powers of employees. Employees are not passive receptacles or carriers of discourses but, instead more or less actively and critically interpret and enact them' (2002, p.628). This study will explore the ways and extent to which employees interpret, enact and 'consume' the engagement discourse through 'individual' inventive powers and influence.

A further area of significance in considering organisational power and its impact on engagement is the emergence of EE within HRM. Despite Kahn's placement of engagement in the workplace setting in 1990, it took many years for engagement research to emerge in HRM and later human resource development (HRD) (Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Shuck, 2011; Sambrook, 2021); early academic perspectives of EE are almost exclusively by psychologists (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014). The emergence of engagement into the HRM domain can be identified through questionings of engagement's unitarist and managerialist underpinnings (Truss *et al.*, 2013). HRM has evolved to include and differentiate from industrial relations, personnel management, organisational behaviour, work and organisational psychology and business strategy, alongside the development of suggestions that more progressive types of HRM systems can contribute to enhancing engagement (Peccei, 2013). Williams labels this as 'sophisticated HRM' which places 'greater emphasis on promoting employees' engagement, cooperation, and commitment to the organisation' (2020, p.156). Sophisticated HRM is a workforce approach based on a unitary concern with involving employees, securing their engagement and commitment to the organisation, and thus driving improvements in business performance (Williams, 2020; Harney, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018. Williams argues sophisticated HRM designed to raise organisational commitment and boost business performance is emblematic of a more assertive management agenda that is dominated by a concern to control employees and enhance managerial prerogative

(2020, p.167). Indeed, a focus on performance benefits of enhancing competitive and realising strategic advantage has led to a 'HRM-performance agenda' that is a relative of strategic management and has dictated much of the recent HRM research (Harney, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018, p.2).

It is argued that engagement fits comfortably within this pursuit of strategic HRM to leverage competitive advantage and human capital (Guest, 2014a). This implies that as an HRM activity, engagement is founded on the unitarist, managerial agenda, aims to achieve managerial goals and is part of the sophisticated HRM approach. Emmott suggests that 'for many employers, engagement has become the main focus on their efforts to manage the employment relationship…(and) represents an aspiration that employees should understand, identify with, and commit themselves to the objectives of the organisation they work for' (2015, p.663). Further, beliefs about the need for engagement are combined with the unitarist privileging of the managerialist prerogative and assumptions that both managers and non-managerial employees share goals and accept the need for engagement, and fail to consider managers' power and pivotal role in engagement (Sambrook, 2021). A preoccupation with identifying links between engagement and organisational performance (Rich *et al.*, 2010; Christian *et al.*, 2011) develops a value-added narrative which informs managerially-led engagement practice and agenda and assumes shared goals. As Valentine highlights in their critique of EE, 'engagement is supposed to be freely given, not commanded. But…if an element of performance is commandeered and manipulated through engagement initiatives, isn't EE just another way to try to make workers work harder for the organization?' (2014, p.486).

Alongside the emergence of HRM with a more assertive management agenda, engagement becomes one of the flagship tools through which managerial outcomes can be achieved. For example, the 'Engage for Success movement' (Engage-for-Success) – explored in more detail in chapter 3 – in a paper designed to 'highlight(s) the evidence for the effectiveness of EE strategies in improving performance, productivity…and profitability' (Rayton *et al.*, 2012, p.ii) stressed that engagement is a key element to the success of any organisation and 'a bottom line issue' (Rayton *et al.*, 2012, p.i). And yet, it has been suggested that unitarist and managerialist approaches have failed to engage with the complexities of the management

challenges inherent in the employment relationship (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013). Engagement under sophisticated HRM becomes yet another managerial control mechanism that overlooks individual experiences, as explored in the next chapter.

Studies that consider management and HRM approaches to doing engagement address 'longstanding debates within the field of HRM concerning unitarist and pluralist perspectives on the employment relationship' (Bailey *et al*., 2017a, p.35). In a narrative literature review on how engagement has progressed since Kahn's 1990 work, Sambrook argues there is 'a dominant positivist, unitarist perspective, assuming employees and managers share interests and engagement is in everyone's best interests' (2021, p.484). It finds that much literature 'adopts an unrealistic unitarist or psychologized position largely ignoring contextual complexity, where the plurality of stakeholder interests generates tensions and contradictions associated with conflict, power, and employee voice' (Sambrook, 2021, p.279). There have been others who have raised concerns with the unitarist foundations of the engagement construct (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Truss *et al*., 2013). Undoubtably, there are inherent problems with the way EE is being used to refer to managerial practices (Purcell, 2014) and organisational approaches to manage a workforce (Truss *et al*., 2014). It's important to consider that 'the hierarchic, co-ordinating power of management is at the centre' of the employment relationship (Farnham, 2015, p.325), and so management power influences all aspects of the employment relationship, including engagement. Farnham outlines the conflict this presents for managers in practice; 'by seeking both commitment and control of employees, the contradictory nature of these managerial practices results in managers trying to manufacture consent, while at the same time exercising coercion on the workforce' (2015, p.415). An employment relationship in which the employer or manager gives orders to workers inevitably provides them with the authority to regulate employment; to some extent the employee is obliged to comply. 'The employment relationship is thus a power relationship' (Farnham, 2015, p.220). There are arguments that the employment relationship is 'characterised by conflicting goals and interests and is fundamentally based on unequal power relations' (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013, p.2696). Yet, this reality is scarcely explored in

contemporary HRM; 'within a managerialist approach, issues of power and control, constraint and context are rarely considered' (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013, p.2672).

Engagement exists within the assertive management agenda of manufacturing consent and exercising coercion (Farnham, 2015) in the ways organisations and organisational members interpret and implement engagement. For example, a 2010 research report commissioned by the CIPD and written by the Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project – explored further in chapter 3 – claimed it is 'legitimate from a corporate perspective to prioritise improving levels of EE' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.3). The report promoted key 'drivers' of engagement such as senior management communication and vision, supporting work environment, and line management style, demonstrating processes organisations can implement to achieve an engaged workforce, with emphasis on the role of senior managers and line managers who 'can do much to impact on engagement' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.56). Important for this current study is the ways in which engagement as a control mechanism has influenced a shift away from Kahn's original engagement concept. The outcome and performance related perspective aligned with sophisticated HRM and the managerial agenda have overshadowed what it means to be engaged for the individual. As Shuck suggests, 'when EE is positioned as an outcome, the *employee* in *EE* becomes irrelevant and the construct anchored in an insatiable appetite for more… result(ing) in a disjointed understanding and the development of only one perspective on engagement, regularly valuing the outcome (e.g. performance) over the individual experience' (2019b, p.289-290). Harley highlights this is an inherent problem in HRM, in which too much interest is concerned with managerial objectives and how they can be realised, neglecting the implications for workers; 'the human experience of work has become incidental – a means to an end – rather than a matter of concern in its own right' (Harley, 2015, p.403). Certainly, a focus on the effectiveness of engagement in raising performance and productivity (e.g. Rayton, Dodge & D'Analeze, 2012) encourages a relentless privileging of the managerialist perspective associated with increasing performance, whilst failing to consider manager's power and pivotal role in engagement (Sambrook, 2021). More worryingly, Kahn and Fellows suggest employees are consequently waiting to be engaged; 'in truth, most workers are waiting…for leaders to create the conditions under which it is

more likely that they will choose to engage and feel as if they have made the right choice' (2013, p.111). As Truss *et al*. highlight, 'engagement has been 'bent' through its appropriation to managerialist agendas, and 'stretched' in its meaning away from being an individual state of mind to encompass workforce strategies and dialogic practice' (2013, p.2664). Arguably, through incorporation into the assertive management agenda of manufacturing consent and exercising coercion, engagement has been distorted from the individual focus of Kahn's concept.

It is important to acknowledge the development of sophisticated HRM as a workforce approach has been established in response to a range of external contextual influences (Williams, 2020). The decline in size and influence of trade unions, the rise of higher-skilled knowledge-based jobs, the tightening of labour markets and the increased competition from globalisation and technology have contributed to a dynamic and volatile context of work (Bennett, 2020). In addition to regulating the power dynamics inherent to the employment relationship, management and HR practitioners are obliged to deal with increasingly complex and multifaceted external issues (Vincent *et al.*, 2020). Arguments for employee relations skills and strategies in contributing towards tackling challenges with global economic and political climate of austerity, economic pressure and social problems have developed (Emmott, 2015; Francis *et al.*, 2013; Sambrook, 2021; Vincent *et al.*, 2020). This influences organisational approaches to engagement, and thereby employee perceptions and experiences.

Highlighting the 'myopic view that all employees in engagement studies give the impression of being in full-time secure jobs' (p.247), Purcell argues that engagement needs to reflect the realities and experiences of contemporary working arrangements; 'problems of job insecurity, zero hours contracts and real pay reductions for many do not get recognition, and studies of work engagement are, in the main, a-contextual' (2014b, p.244). Approaches to engagement that ignore the complexities of the workplace context and the diverse types of work and ways of working are inaccurate representations of employee experiences of engagement. As Purcell highlights, 'work engagement provides a distorted and misleading mirror on the world of work and the experience of workers in employment' (2014, p244). This is indicative of the wider HRM context in which the rising dominance of psychological theory in organisational

activities and research represents a shift in focus to what appears best for selected interests in society (Godard, 2014). There have long been calls for organisations to focus on the management of 'human capital' instead of 'traditional organisational structures that heavily rely on management control' (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Arrowsmith and Parker suggest effective EE includes identifying and acting upon issues of concern to employees, an approach which 'represents something different from both the classic 'pluralism' of personnel management (as arbitrator) and the conventional characterisation of HRM as essentially 'unitarist' (management agent)' (2013, p.2708). Sambrook (2021) highlights that pluralists recognise the collaborative potential of engagement as a route to generating mutual gains for employers and employees. EE therefore represents an opportunity for reconciliation of business needs and employee interests; 'a mutually beneficial employee-organisation relationship that sees the employee as a critical party' (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017, p.545) and prioritises the recognition and addressing of employee concerns (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). However, the extent to which such an approach to engagement can develop within a climate of managerial regulated control and power of needs further exploration.

A brief exploration of wider, contemporary debates on power within organisations has so far identified some of the ways in which organisational power influences the employment relationship, management strategy and workforce approaches to EE. The impact of these factors within HRM is now considered through the themes of psychologisation and positivism.

2.2 Psychologisation and Positivism in HRM

It has been suggested that contemporary organisations increasingly rely on the psychological knowledge and experience of their employees due to the '"psychologisation" of organisations and organisational activities (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008, p.380). Due to major changes related to what Schaufeli describes as 'the ongoing transition from traditional to modern organisations', such as changes from life-time employment and physical demands to precarious employment and mental and emotional demands, more than ever 'employees need psychological capabilities rather than just their bodies to thrive and make organisations survive' (Schaufeli, 2014,

p.16). Psychologisation is understood as the dominance of psychological theory within the study of HRM and in organisational activities and research, which is argued by Godard to represent a wider shift in ideology and culture that has narrowed and marginalised the study of employment relations, producing a focus on 'what appears best for selected interests in society' (2014, p.13). Psychological theory is often advanced through positivist approaches. These themes are now considered to explore the extent to which a psychologised and positivist HRM influences engagement.

The first concern with a psychologised HRM perspective of engagement is the influence of psychological theory on research and measurement. Research methods of work and organisational psychologists have been criticised for being overly positivist, quantitative, and narrow in focus on specific explanations for phenomena and how workplace features impact people's attitudes and behaviours (Harley, 2015). Whilst it is acknowledged that there is inductive, qualitative, and exploratory research undertaken by psychologists such as Kahn (1990) that enrich HRM research (Troth & Guest, 2020), the challenge is with the dominance of positivist approaches in HRM and 'the extent to which…this increasingly narrow approach appears to be regarded as the proper way to conduct HR-performance research' (Harley, 2015, p.401). Arguments that positivist, psychological research methods are inappropriate for HRM are convincing, especially when applied to complex concepts such as engagement. The methodology chapter provides justification for interpretive, qualitative methods of researching engagement; presently it is recognised that the dominance of positivist paradigmatic perspectives within HRM have restricted the field of engagement to psychological, positivist approaches. As Shuck, Kim & Fletcher summarise;

> *'engagement has…been viewed through a predominately positivistic framework, where scientific evidence and precision has driven what we think engagement is; quantifying engagement to better capture it – and bottle it up – has been the goal. Yet, research tells us that at times, engagement is about the deeply subjective experience and the phenomenon and much less about measurement precision.' (2021, p.465)*

A second challenge with the influence of psychological, positivist perspectives on HRM is the understanding of power and power dynamics within this domain. Psychologised HRM takes place through restricted and distorting theoretical approaches which are

likely to limit and regulate employees. Keenoy draws attention to the increasingly distortive framing analysis of 'positivist psychology' (2014, p.212). Vincent *et al*. explain that this operates at the organisational level; 'the study of HRM is often too narrowly constructed within a psychological, positivistic paradigm and at an organisation-level' (Vincent *et al.*, 2020, p.461). A narrow-minded, variable and correlational based theoretical approach is unable to explore the 'collective power imbalance that exists between employers and employees', indicating 'a unitarist bias that leads to uncritical and managerialist assumptions about significant workplace phenomena' (Harley, 2015, p.401). Harley outlines the psychologised HRM context as one that ignores power dynamics and assumes managerialist goals are the only points of importance (Harley, 2015). The dominance of psychology in HRM therefore prioritises organisational control and ignores power imbalance. This is problematic for engagement, which is significantly more than the managerial goals and optimal functioning that have dominated the concept to date but exists in an environment that is neither interested in nor has the ability to explore its additional components. Arguably, the selected interests of management in engagement have been increasingly prioritised, marginalising employee interests and experiences within the power imbalance in the employment relationship, enabling the organisation to exercise their power and have further control over the employee.

Organisational power and control of employees is suggested by Godard to be due to psychologised HRM, which is more interested in influencing workers to managerial ends and causes 'human beings (to) come to be viewed as objects to be manipulated, and…disciplined and controlled' (2014, p.11). This situates the employee as an object of control that is devoid of agency, dependent on the power of the organisation. And so, the psychologisation of employment relations has potential implications not only for how managers view their employees, but for how their employees view themselves; as employees themselves come to internalise the ontology that they are resources to be deployed in accordance with 'organisational' goals, they 'come to view themselves as objects or instruments' (Godard, 2014, p.11). This directs the third challenge with psychologicalised and positivist HRM research in that as discourse and practice consistently objectifies employees and enforces a rhetoric of manipulation and control, employees too believe their working experiences are dependent on the organisation.

This is of particular importance in the engagement concept; as Godard identifies, 'problems of motivation and control, and the dysfunctions to which they may give rise, tend to be attributed to individual or interpersonal phenomena' (2014, p.7). By outlining what an engaged employee 'should' "feel and look" (Macey *et al.*, 2009), organisations are controlling how an individual identifies as being engaged, arguably removing the individual's ability to engage on their own terms. Godard argues the general orientation underlying psychologisation of HRM is 'not just unitary, but also potentially totalitarian and repressive, essentially promising a Foucauldian world in which employees are disciplined and punished through often hidden mechanisms of power' (2014, p.7). The freedom and ability to explore individual or interpersonal phenomena within a psychologised HRM requires further exploration, as do 'the policy implications…to get better workers and indoctrinate them on organisational goals and their role in achieving them' (Purcell, 2014b, p.244). Godard suggests existing psychologised techniques 'may help foster a largely passive workforce and ultimately citizenry, one in which critical thought and resistance are less tolerated and ultimately less pervasive than Foucauldians typically wish to assume' (2014, p.7). The result of the growing psychologisation of employment relations, Godard argues, 'individualises and atomises workers' (2014, p11). Identifying that employees are treated as individual, isolated units rather than a collective group within psychologised HRM practices, engagement is positioned as a dehumanising and alienating management process for maximising efficiency and productivity. Clearly, there is 'a dominant positivist, unitarist perspective, assuming employees and managers share common interests and engagement is in everyone's best interests' (Sambrook, 2021, p.484). The dominance of positivist psychology in academic HRM research has contributed to a resource-based, output-focused view of organisations and engagement. The extent to which this organisational control influences individual level engagement will be considered in this study.

Troth and Guest denounce criticism of the psychologisation of HRM as a naïve generalisation that assumes psychologists' perceive 'employees as puppets to be controlled by 'management' through HRM practices' (2020, p.37-38). They highlight the individual is the primary and dominant level of analysis for work and organisational psychologists, through focus on outcomes for individuals of their experience of HRM

approaches such as engagement (Troth & Guest, 2020). Certainly, this individual-level focus is important, particularly in the aims of this research to understand employee perceptions and experiences of engagement. However, psychological, positivist perspectives on HRM are limited in understanding the individual's experience and participation in power, control and influence within organisations. As mentioned, rather than describing employees as inactive or passive carriers and recipients of organisational discourses, they actively and critically interpret and enact them (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), and resist conscription in complex and nuanced ways (Valentin, 2014). Foucault argued there is a 'productive aspect of power' (1980, p.119), identifying agency as produced and enacted through social practices, power relations and discursive contexts. Whilst it is widely agreed that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources (Macey & Schneider, 2008), the following chapter highlights the ways in which research has been disproportionately concerned with an organisational focus on engagement. This has led to an engagement bias towards the organisation, through which the concept of PE has been overlooked and marginalised. Research into the individual employee's unique experience of their engagement is required (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011), as is their participation in engagement, which this study addresses.

Despite the negative influence of a psychologised HRM, it can be acknowledged as encouraging the emergence of EE. It has been suggested that 'the positive psychology movement created the fertile soil that made engagement research blossom in academia' (Schaufeli, 2014, p.7) and advanced the 'reflexive process of 'fixing' engagement within a conceptual space' (Truss *et al*., 2013, p.2663). Engagement theory and research has developed out of the positive psychology movement's attempts to improve the workplace (Roof, 2015) and understanding of employee-centred outcomes, recognising employees as important stakeholders (Troth & Guest, 2020). The 'Engaging for Success' (2009) report allocated a section to 'engagement and the individual', which identifies that there is 'a measurable and significant win for the individual engaged employee' (p30). Despite disappointingly dichotomising engagement to a win or lose situation, which is problematic in that it simplifies and limits this complex phenomena to exist within a competitive notion of absolute outcomes, the report did at least attempt to highlight the possibilities of advantages for

the individual in engagement. Research has revealed that engaged employees are highly energetic, self-efficacious individuals who exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bakker, 2009; Schaufeli *et al*., 2001 in (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011). Evidently, there is an argument that individuals 'exercise influence' within engagement. However, dimensions of personal engagement such as decision-making and self-determined processes have been somewhat neglected by the dominant approaches that focus on job and organisational level influences on engagement (e.g. Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, 2014; Shuck *et al*., 2021). The extent to which employees are able to actively and critically interpret and enact engagement is explored in this study.

2.3 Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter has considered some of the underlying debates regarding power dynamics in employment relations and how these influence EE. It has argued that engagement is representative of the ways in which HRM phenomena attempt to address issues of power within the employment relationship. Identifying that HRM approaches focus on managerial goals and outcomes, this section highlights engagement has become another managerial control mechanism used to pursue managerial and organisational interests. It has considered the inherent power dynamics within the employment relationship alongside contextual factors which situate power and control of HRM practices such as engagement with the organisation. This chapter has argued that relentless interest in organisational outcomes and the influence of managerial and organisational power have distorted engagement from the individual focus of Kahn's concept. Applying debates about the psychologisation of HRM and positivist approaches to the study of engagement, this chapter highlighted the dominance of positivist paradigmatic perspectives within HRM which have restricted the field of engagement to psychological, positivist approaches, overlooked important nuances relating to power dynamics and organisational control, and contributed to a resource-based, output-focused view of organisations, employees and engagement. This section ends by arguing for greater exploration of the ways employees actively and critically interpret and enact engagement.

Chapter 3: Literature Review – Defining Engagement

3.0 Introduction

It is difficult to identify the first use of the phrase 'employee engagement'. Early adoption of the term by Harter defined 'workplace employee engagement' as 'a substantial predictor of business outcomes and satisfaction' (2000, p.215). There have since been many attempts to identify what EE is, and how its assumed benefits can be achieved, leading to numerous interpretations and the lack of a clear, consistent and widely agreed definition. It is misunderstood and, at times, misused (Shuck *et al*., 2017). Despite often used as a starting point for common understanding (Shuck *et al*., 2017), it is important to highlight the frequent misconception that EE in its entirety was first devised by Kahn. Kahn was the first to place engagement in workplace settings (Jeung, 2011), though he used the term 'personal engagement' not employee engagement (Kahn, 1990, p.694). These concepts have been interpreted and reinvented many times by a variety of sources since Kahn's study, resulting in a range of definitions for EE. Seemingly the only feature that can be agreed is that engagement is a broad ranging, multidimensional concept, encompassing a variety of elements (Torrington *et al*., 2008). As Shuck (2019) highlights, we are hard-pressed to find two authors who use the same definition, positionality, or meaning. In a recent review of engagement through the 'life-cycle of constructs', Sambrook argues that it is likely we are now in the 'agree to disagree over its definition' stage in which difference conceptualisations are accepted (2021, p.469).

Engagement and its associated benefits have generated much interest from a range of people, including academic researchers (e.g. Christian *et al*., 2011; Fletcher, 2017; Rich *et al*., 2010; Sambrook *et al*., 2015; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), industry practitioners (e.g. Alfes *et al*., 2010; Gifford & Young, 2021; Rayton, Dodge & D'Analeze, 2012) and the UK government (Macleod & Clarke, 2009). Researchers and practitioners broadly agree that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Kahn (1990) suggested that how

people present or absent themselves during work tasks is shaped by the psychological experiences of work and work contexts. The subsequent interest in the "promise of engagement" of a motivated happier, healthier, and more productive workforce (Meyer & Schneider, 2021, p.7) from various disciplines and stakeholder groups has resulted in a multiplicity of definitions, measures, conceptualisations, theories and research into engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bailey *et al*., 2017a). Once popular debates about engagement included the extent to which engagement is a 'muddy' concept (Saks, 2008, p.43), 'old wine in a new bottle' offering no new conceptual content (e.g. Macey & Schneider, 2008; Newman & Harrison, 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010) or associated to concepts that are antecedents and/or consequences of engagement (e.g. Anaza & Rutherford, 2012;Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) of EE. Whilst these discussions largely considered engagement as a trait-like construct which led to some confusion and conflation with other constructs, more recently engagement has been consolidated as a 'positive, active, work-related psychological state' (Shuck et al., 2017, p. 269) that can be differentiated from broader job attitudes. For example, Fletcher *et al.*'s (2016) study considered job satisfaction, EE, change-related anxiety, and emotional exhaustion as independent work attitudes, exploring how they interact with perceived training and development and its impact on employee retention. Such positioning broadens the application of engagement beyond an outcome or prediction, focusing on how employees make decisions about the maintenance, direction, intensity and use of their energy (Shuck *et al*., 2017). Sambrook refers to this as a 'shift to "construct collapse" where researchers agree to disagree over its definition and accept different conceptualisations' (2021, p. 475). Whilst the disentanglement of engagement from debates regarding conceptual muddling has not completely eradicated questions about the boundaries and value of engagement, it has enabled consideration of EE as 'a unique framework…not synonymous with anything else, nor…empirically redundant' (Shuck *et al*., 2017, p.283).

This chapter charts the tensions and debates in the way in which EE has been defined, including its relationships to associated concepts such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006; 2019), meaningfulness, safety and availability (May *et al*. 2004). It begins by exploring how

engagement has been considered within the academic literature as personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), a distinct and unique multidimensional constuct (Saks, 2006) and as management practice (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). The chapter then focuses on the influence of practitioners in constructing 'employee engagement', considering the conceptual muddling and ambiguity of engagement. The chapter explores some of these underlying arguments surrounding EE and the impact this has on understanding and the experience of EE.

It is important to acknowledge the limits in scope of this literature review; it cannot summarise and review all the known literature on engagement which – as Shuck et al. state – has 'swelled to enormous proportion' (2017, p.284). Further, it cannot explore separately the various perspectives and streams of engagement research that have emerged within different disciplines. Following Kahn's (1990) seminal work, engagement research emerged in work psychology, then HRM and later human resource development (HRD) (Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Sambrook, 2021). Literature within this review has therefore been drawn from a broad range of disciplines such as management, HRM, HRD, organisational behaviour, organisational psychology, and professional and practitioner sources. To address the research aims and objectives, which consider the individual's perception and experience of engagement and the organisational context and influence, this review focuses on literature primarily interested in considering these conceptual areas. As will be examined in the following chapters, key debates and themes within specific streams of engagement research of importance to this study will be considered, but it is not within the scope of this study to explore the contribution of each discipline separately. For example, the literature review acknowledges and explores several significant contributions from within the HRD field (e.g. Kwon & Park, 2019; Sambrook, 2021; Shuck & Rose, 2013; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Valentine, 2014). These are considered within broader conceptual understandings of engagement, such as how it has been defined. A specific, focused discussion of the multitudinous range of models, concepts and academic perspectives within HRD approaches to engagement would be too narrow for the purposes of this study. It is acknowledged that HRD has a close relationship with and is often interlinked with HRM and management approaches to

engagement, and so the contribution of HRD can be considered within wider mainstream engagement literature (Valentine, 2014).

Several literature reviews have attempted to identify how engagement has been defined (e.g. Bailey *et al*., 2017a, Kwon & Kim, 2020; Peccei, 2013; Shuck, 2011; Wittenberg *et al*., 2023). Shuck's (2011) integrative literature review identified four major approaches within the academic perspective of engagement; Kahn's (1990) needs-satisfying approach, Maslach *et al*.'s (2001) burnout-antithesis approach, Harter *et al*.'s (2002) satisfaction-engagement approach, and Sak's (2006) multidimensional approach. Bailey e*t al*.'s (2017a) narrative synthesis of engagement definitions and theories suggested there are six main headings under which engagement literature can be grouped; personal role engagement; work task or job engagement; multidimensional engagement; engagement as a composite attitudinal and behavioural construct; engagement as management practice; self engagement with performance. Literature reviews seeking clarification within engagement terminology have found references to dominant types of engagement in work engagement, job engagement and EE (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011), as well as personal, organisation, social and collective organisational engagement (Shuck *et al.*, 2017). Some have taken a more focused approach to the engagement literature, such as considering EE and the JD-R model and innovative behaviour (Kwon and Kim, 2020), or the relevance of context (Fletcher *et al*., 2020). Using the common conceptual areas of engagement research identified in the literature reviews of Shuck (2011) and Bailey *et al*., (2017a), the following chapter primarily explores the evolution, development and insights of four engagement research areas; personal engagement, work engagement, multidimensional engagement and engagement as management practice. An exploration of each approach follows.

3.1 Personal Engagement

The first use of the term 'engagement' to describe a worker featured in Kahn's (1990) article 'Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Shuck, 2011). Published in the Academy of Management Journal, Kahn's paper presented his grounded theoretical framework based on two in-depth qualitative studies. Kahn began conceptually by identifying that the work of Goffman (1961) on how 'people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances'

dealt only with 'fleeting face-to-face encounters' (1990, p.694). Kahn noted a different concept was needed to 'fit organisational life, which is ongoing, emotionally charged, and psychologically complex' (1990, p.694). Kahn considered the work of psychologists, sociologists and group theorists, combining perspectives on uncertainty in group memberships and the complexity of organisational behaviour, using this as a springboard for interest in an individual's self-regulation in work roles. Importantly, Kahn's interest was in the forces in an individual's 'internal ambivalence' and their external environment, and the relationship between them (1990, p.694). And so, Kahn's research premise was twofold; 'first, that the psychological experience of work drives people's attitudes and behaviours, and second, that individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational factors simultaneously influence these experiences' (1990, p.695).

Kahn's (1990) emerging research collected data across two studies through observation, document analysis, self-reflection, and in-depth interviewing. Kahn (1990) took different research stances across the two studies; one as participant and observer, the other as an outside researcher, which enabled unique insights. Kahn's framework focused on people's 'emotional reactions' and 'experiences of themselves and their contexts' (1990, p.717). Kahn's interest includes the individual's subjective experience and their conscious decision to employ and express this. PE is:

> *'the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.700).*

An important point to understanding Kahn's PE concept is that he proposed it in critique of existing organisational behaviour concepts of person-role relationships that make assumptions about individuals in the workplace and focus on organisational goals. Kahn (1992) considered existing theory to concentrate too intently on work constructs that propel the individual to productively perform tasks to meet organisational goals. Kahn (1990) critiqued the assumption that organisation members are inanimate subject matter that impersonate, assume, strike and hold organisationally led identities and stances. Kahn explained that these concepts exist at a distance from people's experiences and behaviours within work situations,

overlooking 'what enables the depths of workers' personal selves to come forth in the service of their own growth and development' (1992, p.1). Kahn's research argued such perspectives do not go 'to the core of what it means to be psychologically present in particular moments and situations. Doing so requires deeply probing people's experiences and situations during the discrete moments that make up their work lives' (1990, p.693). Through challenging and distancing himself from the static organisational behaviour perspective, Kahn's theory presented a dynamic concept deeply focused on personal selves and the individual's experience, psychology and behaviour. For example, Kahn considered authenticity at work through reference to a person's 'preferred self' and stating 'to express preferred dimensions is to display real identity, thoughts and feelings' (1990, p.700). Kahn explained that people who are able to bring more and less of their personal selves to their roles are 'authentic at work' (1992, p.2) in that they express their experienced feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Kahn's work therefore originated through his criticism of work constructs that assume individuals are impassive and ignore the importance of people's experiences and selves in their work lives.

Through this focus on personal selves and individual experience, Kahn developed the terms 'personal engagement' and 'personal disengagement' to describe 'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances' (1990, p 694). The distinction between these terms was clear for Kahn, and presented individual behaviour in an organisational context in a distinct, unambiguous way:

> *'I defined personal engagement as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. I defined personal disengagement as the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances.' (Kahn, 1990, p694)*

Kahn critiques the assumption that individuals are inanimate subject matter that assume organisationally led identities and stances. Particular significance is placed on the calibrations and degree of self, specifically the 'momentary rather than static circumstances of people's experiences that shape behaviours' (Kahn, 1990, p.703).

This indicates there is movement and application in which the employee chooses to 'employ' and 'express' their selves. Later, Kahn elaborated that 'the engagement concept captures the process of moving into and out of roles… Engagement is thus movement; it is the bringing of one's self into something outside the self' (Kahn & Fellows, 2013, p.106). Kahn identified the changing, dynamic aspect of PE; 'self and role exist in some dynamic, negotiable relation in which a person both drives personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression)' (1990, p.700).

Kahn also used personal disengagement to define what PE isn't, presenting them as opposites. Whilst this might be interpreted as a simple choice between engagement or disengagement, Kahn's PE concept is more complex, identifying the active decisions individuals have in engaging in their work. Kahn places emphasis on the 'preference' of dimensions of selves used within role performances, indicating PE is a decision. Although Kahn refers to 'choices', he positions these within the internal and external demands 'to absent parts of themselves that do not fit the unconscious roles in which they are cast' (1992, p.10). Kahn therefore describes levels of awareness and active decisions to employ, express, withdraw and defend, indicating engagement is a conscious decision by the individual. In his later work, Kahn expands:

> *'self and role thus exist in some dynamic, negotiable relation in which the person both drives personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression). Current conceptualizations of employee or work engagement emphasize self-employment at the expense of self-expression' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83).*

Kahn explored what it means to be psychologically present, outlining such presence as 'manifested as personally engaged behaviours' (1992, p.2). Kahn therefore indicated that psychological presence is demonstrated through behaviour. In addition to highlighting the active decision in harnessing personal selves in work role performances, Kahn emphasised the benefits this brings to individuals. As Truss *et al*., (2013) explain, Kahn argued that the authentic expression of self that occurs in experiencing engagement is psychologically beneficial for the individual. A second note of significance in understanding Kahn's concept is that PE is focused on personal selves and individual experience, the active decision individuals have in harnessing

personal selves in work role performances and behaviours, and the importance of psychological presence and benefits to the individual.

In addition to the psychological experience of work and individual attitudes and behaviours, Kahn outlines the influences that impact PE; Kahn suggested engagement is based on 'multiple levels of influence —individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational' (1990, p 718). These influencing factors indicate PE is an experience affected by internal and external forces; those that are shaped internally by the individual, and those which are externally located. People 'perform roles as external scripts indicate they should rather than internally interpret those roles; they act as custodians rather than innovators' (Kahn, 1990, p.702). As Kahn later articulated 'PE attends to self-expression – and to the relational contexts that shape how, when, and to what effect people disclose and express their selves in the course of role performances' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83). Kahn's outlook on engagement therefore placed particular emphasis on personal psychological presence in relation to a range of external factors, and understanding this through the way psychological presence is displayed within the workplace. As Kahn explained, 'moments of psychological presence may cycle with moments of psychological absence, as organization members calibrate how fully present they are in response to internal and external factors' (1992, p.12). And yet, the structures, processes and behaviours by which the authentic selves of workers are called forth into the work they perform are less understood than job design, rewards and motivation (Kahn & Fellows, 2013). It is important then to recognise PE as experienced and exhibited differently by different people, and influenced by a complex range of internal and external factors.

3.1.1 Psychological Conditions

From his findings, Kahn defined three psychological conditions which influence engagement and how people inhabit their roles - meaningfulness, safety, and availability:

> *'Psychological meaningfulness is the sense of return on investments of the self-in-role performances, psychological safety is the sense of being able to show and employ the self without fear of negative consequences, and psychological availability is the sense of possessing physical, emotional, and psychological resources for investing the self in role performances.' (Kahn, 1990, p.705)*

Kahn proposed that the combination of these three conditions drive the extent to which people are psychologically present and therefore personally engaged (1992). Kahn explained engagement varies according to individual's perceptions of 'the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations' and 'the resources they perceive themselves to have—their availability' (1990, p.703). Kahn's PE concept therefore places significant emphasis on an individual's perception of the psychological conditions for engagement. Consequently, equal levels of meaningfulness, safety and availability might be experienced between people, and yet the degree to which they are psychologically present and therefore engaged depends on their different, individual models of self-in-role (Kahn, 1992).

3.1.2 Personal Engagement as Performance

As previously mentioned, Goffman's (1971) work influenced Kahn's concept of performance in PE. Goffman's ideas are focused on a dramaturgical metaphor through which he understands all social activity as a 'performance'; 'the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer' (1971, p.83). Kahn drew upon Goffman's theatrical metaphor of people acting out 'momentary attachment and detachments in role performances' suggesting that attachment and detachment to work roles could be described in terms of the extent of 'separation between people and their roles' (Kahn, 1990, p.694). PE, then, is a behaviour by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances (Kahn, 1990). Utilising Goffman's suggestion that people's attachment or detachment to their roles varies, Kahn suggested a scale of engagement with work roles; 'people can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform' (1990, p.692). Kahn (1992) noted that engagement is observed through the behavioural investment of personal physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into work roles.

Goffman considered everyday life as a series of performances depending on 'the place where the performance is given' (1971, p.110), referring to the physical or social setting in which an individual presents themselves. As individuals interact with others within particular contexts, Goffman argued they adapt and present themselves in what they believe is the most favourable or appropriate way according to the situation. The

suggestion here is that individuals can – and do – shape behaviour and presentations of self to create a desired image according to the social context in which the social interaction takes place. When applied to engagement, Goffman's perspective suggests that the organisational context in which engagement takes place and the nature of the role influences the engagement (i.e. performance) of the individual. Goffman's concept described a social setting or place as the 'front region', outlining the instrumental requirements of this region through 'duties such as an employer might demand of his employees – care of property, maintenance of work levels' (1971, p.110). Such duties include conforming to the norms and expectations of the situation, such as by using particular language, behaviour, or 'ceremonial equipment such as…clothes' (Goffman, 1971, p.69). In comparison, the 'back region or backstage' referred to a setting in which the individual is not observed or on display, a place of privacy in which 'the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character' (Goffman, 1971, p.70). Overall, the front and back region concepts highlight the importance of the social context in which role performances take place in that it 'constitutes one way in which a performance is 'socialized', moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented…the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealized in several different ways.' (Goffman, 1971, p.44). In application to engagement in the workplace, this description of performance through the 'front region' suggests that engagement is "'socialized', moulded, and modified" to fit the social context of the organisation, and the organisationally idealised understandings and expectations of engagement. The influence of the workplace as the front region in which engagement performances take place clearly appropriates engagement performances, and yet this receives little attention in engagement research. Whilst Goffman's concept is limited in application to engagement in that it suggests engagement can be understood through observable behaviour only, it strengthens the argument that a more detailed understanding of the context in which engagement performances take place are needed.

A further important dimension to PE as a performance is its 'concern with people's emotional reactions to conscious and unconscious phenomena and the objective properties of jobs, roles, and work contexts' (Kahn, 1990, p.717). Kahn emphasises

the emotional reaction, rather than the emotion itself, aligning with Goffman's suggestion above that people manage their emotional reactions to create an idealised 'impression' for their observer (Goffman, 1971). Kahn (1990) suggests people employ role performances within the boundaries of organisational norms, which are shared expectations about the general behaviours of system members. Kahn places the focus on the way people's emotions are managed and expressed in the work context and in response to both their role and the organisational norms. Acknowledging the complex role emotion plays in organisational life, Rafaeil and Sutton argue that employees display feelings and emotions to fulfil role expectations, such as smiling and friendlessness (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). In application to engagement as an emotional reaction, this suggests engagement is 'driving personal energy into physical, cognitive and emotional labours' (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010, p.617). Reliance is on the observer interpreting these 'impressions' of the employee's labours in engagement displays, indicative of 'emotional transactions', which are the 'sequence of communication that occurs when an employee displays emotion, notes the reaction of a "target" person, and adjusts or maintains expressed feelings' (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, p.26). The performative dimensions of PE therefore emphasise that employees display emotions according to the organisational context in which the performance takes place, and the norms that context and audience have idealised.

3.2 Studies using Kahn's PE

Kahn's engagement concept is considered as one of the main theoretical approaches to engagement (Christian *et al.* 2011; Rich *et al.* 2010; Schaufeli and Bakker 2010; Shuck 2011), however, few studies use Kahn's PE concept as the foundation for their conceptual frameworks (Fletcher, 2017; Guest, 2014a), and only seven studies refer explicitly to Kahn's three psychological conditions (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). There are a small number of studies that provide empirical evidence for Kahn's conceptualisation that emphasise how it has been utilised and its evolution. Some have operationalised Kahn's (1990) definition of personal role engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). For example, May, Gilson and Harter (2004) were the first to empirically test engagement in a paper published in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. The quantitative survey study explored the determinants and mediating effects of Kahn's three psychological conditions (1990), finding that all three are important in

determining one's engagement at work, and that one's cognitive, emotional and physical resources has the strongest effect on psychological availability (May *et al.,* 2004). Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) also provided an empirical study drawing from Kahn's (1990) work. They investigated the relationship between engagement and positive behavioural outcomes, such as role performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). They suggested that engagement represents the simultaneous investment of cognitive, affective, and physical energies into role performance, identifying three antecedents of engagement: 'value congruence, perceived organizational support, and core self-evaluations' (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010, p.617). The authors developed these ideas to consider there to be several antecedents of job engagement that account for performance outcomes, and an emotional choice in engagement (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Through such studies, the idea that engagement relates to high quality job performance becomes inherent in the conceptualisation of personal role engagement (Fletcher, 2016). Whilst supporting Kahn's conceptual basis for research into engagement, these studies suggested that engagement needed further refinement and theory building (Shuck, 2011).

Interest in engagement began to evolve through the work of academics seeking to identify potential antecedents that could enhance and aid the development of an engagement workforce (Saks, 2006). Some studies pursued this ambition whilst continuing to draw upon Kahn's work. For example, Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz's (2011) conceptual framework bridged Kahn's (1990) work with Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs to examine engagement from a qualitative perspective. This research failed to consider the full range of depth of Kahn's (1990) three psychological processes (Fletcher, 2017). However, its case study approach enabled an in-depth qualitative exploration of the workplace environment and employee's experience of being engaged at work (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Endorsing Kahn's (1990) and Rich, Lepine & Crawford's (2010) findings that engagement is an individual choice, the study found that engagement is grounded in an employee's unique experience of work and represents the behavioural display of a cognitive and emotional interpretation of work-related environmental inputs and outcome (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Focus on the experience of work highlighted the influence of both the workplace

environment, and the interactions such as a supportive management style on engagement and disengagement (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). They identified meaningful work, supportive relationships with colleagues and managers, opportunities for learning, and a positive workplace culture are important in an engaged employee's interpretation of their work (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Further, that elements of the environment and the person interact and produce either engagement and/or disengagement (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Despite disappointingly using language of the positivist, organisational-focused landscape they existed in (e.g. 'producing' engagement), Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz's (2011) contribution is significant in that it highlights the experience of engagement. Notably, the study described engagement as 'a holistic experience perceived and then interpreted through the lens of each individual based on their own experience, rationales and views of their context' (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011, p.316). This study emphasised the importance of creating environmental conditions for engagement to development, suggesting that the organisation both sets the foundation for a culture of engagement, and provides the tools and resources to support engagement (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011).

Some academics have utilised Kahn's (1990) PE alongside other studies that have considered the concept, such as Fletcher's (2017) study which draws on Kahn's (1990) approach to engagement alongside the work of Rich, Lepine & Crawford (2010), and Shuck (2011). Fletcher's qualitative study explored the everyday experience of personal role engagement in work situations through semi-structured interviews that asked participants to describe how three features of engagement varied across their working days; '(a) feeling enthusiastic and positive about your job, (b) feeling attentive and focused on your job, and (c) feeling energized and wanting to put effort into your job' (Fletcher, 2017, p.458). Suggesting this is to incorporate Kahn's (1990) original theorising into the JD-R model to show how personal role engagement is heightened and reduced by certain resources and hindrances (Fletcher, 2017), this conflation of theory and model and focus on only three features of engagement is a restricted approach that does not fully explain or account for other contributions to engagement experiences, such as collective and organisational level influences and power dynamics between managers and employees. As Sambrook (2021) highlights,

it examines engagement within and between person, not extending beyond the individual realm of experience. Nonetheless, the study is instrumental in its consideration of the situational context of personal role engagement across various organizational settings. For example, it identified that task, relational, and organizational resources were the most relevant for heightened personal role engagement, whereas relational and organizational hindrances were the most prominent for reduced personal role engagement (Fletcher, 2017). Further, the study highlighted the link between supervisor and coworker behaviour and actions in heightening or hindering engagement (Fletcher, 2017).

Research into Kahn's PE concept has also evolved through studies that have explored it in relation to other engagement concepts. For example, Gupta and Shukla's (2017) study compared personal engagement, work engagement and job engagement concepts. Suggesting that that May *et al*.'s (2004) scale based on Kahn's conceptualisation is a stronger predictor of task performance than work engagement and job engagement concepts, the study advocated for the use of personal engagement to evaluate employee's engagement levels (Gupta & Shukla, 2017).

Clearly, PE has evolved from Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation through the work of researchers who are still largely inspired by Kahn's personal role concept. Bailey *et al*., highlight that 'the shift away from Kahn's (1990) original social-psychological construct of 'personal role engagement' is notable (2017a, p.35). Little research has explicitly focused on Kahn's original conceptualisation (Fletcher, 2017; Guest, 2014a) which suggests there are gaps in knowledge and understanding of personal role engagement. There remains a lack of understanding of Kahn's original personal role engagement concept and the experience of engagement at the personal level (Fletcher, 2017; Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014). Existing research has predominantly followed a different approach to Kahn's original ideas through psychological, positivist approaches. For example, Sambrook highlights that the dominant survey-based research provides 'uni-dimensional perspectives' and 'superficial, snapshots views (that) 'fail to capture the changing and challenging lived experience of engagement (2021, p.469). It is argued that engagement research needs to 'appreciate the more subtle, discretionary self-oriented aspects of EE which are...at the heart of Kahn's definition' (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014, p.175).

Kahn himself highlighted the need for 'research methods and instruments that get at the depth of the relation between the individual and the role' (1992, p.344). Further, the individual's 'changing and challenging lived experience of engagement' has been underrepresented (Sambrook, 2021, p.469). Many engagement scholars assume that the experience is a generally positive one (Shuck, 2019), or provide 'a distorted and misleading mirror on the world of work and the experience of workers in employment' (Purcell, 2014, p244). There is a need for more research that takes greater account of the organisational and political contexts within which engagement is enacted and experienced (Bailey *et al*., 2017a), and the individual employee's unique experience of their engagement (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Questions therefore remain regarding employee's understanding and lived experience of Kahn's original PE concept within the organisational context. This study aims to address some of these current gaps in the research.

3.3 Work Engagement

The second, and significantly more dominant stream of engagement research (Bailey *et al*., 2017a) that has emerged is known as 'work engagement'. Development of work engagement can be traced to Maslach *et al.'s* literature review of burnout, in which engagement was positioned as the 'positive antithesis' of burnout and 'characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy' (2001, p.416). This reimagining of burnout as a lack of engagement in one's work led to the development of a self-reporting measure of engagement as the reverse of burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) framework (Maslach *et al*.'s., 2001). This initiated an influx of interest in engagement from the field of psychology, with early attention from Schaufeli *et al.,* who expressed support for the positive antithesis of burnout conceptualisation of engagement (2002). Testing Maslach *et al*.'s (2001) MBI framework, Schaufeli *et al*., argued that burnout and engagement are 'opposite concepts that should be measured independently with different instruments', proposing a different definition of engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (2002, p.74).

Subsequent research into vigour, dedication and absorption continued to explore the relationship between burnout and engagement. For example, an empirical study by

Gonzalez-Roma *et al.* (2006) supported the conceptualisation of burnout and engagement as conceptual opposites. The study identified absorption as a unique concept to engagement with no corresponding opposite within burnout, whereas vigour and dedication corresponded with 'two underlying bipolar dimensions' of burnout defined 'energy and identification' (2006, p.172). Another study contributing to the burnout-antithesis narrative of engagement is Bakker *et al.,* who state that 'work engagement captures how workers experience their work: as stimulating and energetic and something to which they really want to devote time and effort (the vigour component); as a significant and meaningful pursuit (dedication); and as engrossing and something on which they are fully concentrated (absorption)' (2011, p.5). In addition to indicating a focus on vigour, dedication and absorption as key engagement dimensions, Bakker *et al.* (2008) supported the notion that work engagement was the opposite of burnout and argued that there is broad consensus that engagement includes energy and identification dimensions. Debates continue about the relationship between engagement and burnout. For example, Nimon and Shuck's empirical test of Bakker *et al.*'s (2008) conceptualisation found that the dimensions of work engagement and burnout did not align with previously positioned theoretical continuums (2020). Research by Taris *et al.*, (2017) found that it remains difficult to conclude whether burnout and engagement are different concepts. These studies highlight that the question whether engagement and burnout are different concepts is still open.

Schaufeli *et al.'s*, (2002) 'burnout-antithesis approach' contributed to the renaming of Kahn's state of engagement (1990) as 'work engagement' (Shuck, 2011; Nimon & Shuck, 2020), viewed now as the dominant definition (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). Schaufeli *et al.,* (2002) operationalised and measured engagement through development of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) as an alternative instrument to the MBI (Maslach *et al.,* 2001) and engagement only measurement (rather than engagement and burnout). The engagement scale was based on a three-factor structure of vigor, dedication and absorption, consisting of 17 statements such as 'at my job I feel strong and vigorous' and 'I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p.90). Later, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) extended the job demands– resources model (JD-R) to include engagement through use of the Utrecht Work

Engagement Scale. Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained effort and are associated with certain costs, and job resources are aspects of the job that reduce job demands, are functional in achieving work goals, and stimulate personal growth (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R model considers different 'resources'; job-related resources (e.g. social support from colleagues), personal resources (e.g. emotional stability) and job-demands (e.g. work overload). Bakker and Demerouti (2007; 2008), drawing on assumptions from the JD-R model, created a 'JD-R model of work engagement' which focused on the antecedents and consequences of work engagement, such as the impact of job and personal resources on predicting work engagement and thereby job performance This identified engaged employees has having 'high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work' and 'often fully immersed in their work so that time flies' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, p. 211) Notably, this established the JD-R model as a framework for antecedents and consequences of engagement, but not necessarily engagement itself. Further, work engagement developed through deductive, quantitative approaches that focused on positioning it as the positive antithesis of job burnout (Fletcher, 2016). Although similarities between May *et al*.'s (2004) three-dimensional physical, emotional and cognitive components of engagement have been suggested to correspond to Schaufeli *et al*.'s (2002) vigor, dedication and absorption as measured by the UWES (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), a recent narrative synthesis of engagement literature found the UWES to be the most widely adopted measure of engagement, validated in several languages (Bailey *et al.,* 2017a). Further, engagement is often explained within the context of the JD-R framework and using the UWES (Bailey *et al*., 2017a). These dimensions enabled tangible elements of engagement to be articulated and measured.

There are several critiques of the Maslach *et al*. (2001) and Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) conceptualisation of engagement relevant to the purposes of this study. Notably, the work engagement concept and measurement approach has been criticised for its lack of relation to Kahn's engagement concept. For example, Rich *et al*., (2010) suggest work engagement measures do not fully reflect Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation as the degree to which individuals invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their role performance (Rich *et al*., 2010). Further, Fletcher argues that 'personal

role engagement represents a fuller, deeper, and more immersive concept than work engagement…because it attempts to capture the authentic and complete expression of one's preferred self to one's work role performance rather than just the employment of energies into work activities' (2019, p. 6). Saks and Gruman (2014) acknowledge that whilst Kahn's (1990) and Schaufeli *et al*.'s (2002) engagement have some similarities and overlap in terms of being a motivational state, Kahn's conceptualisation is a much deeper, encompassing and more substantial definition. These critiques highlight that work engagement is both different to Kahn's engagement and fails to capture the complexity and depth of PE.

Although the definition of work engagement as a psychological state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption have remained consistent over the past decade (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Gonzalez-Roma *et al*., 2006; Macey & Schnieder, 2008; Schaufeli *et al*., 2002; Shuck *et al*., 2017), clarification regarding approaches to and relationships with work engagement continue (e.g. Bakker, 2017). Work engagement has been criticised for its similarities and relationship to other constructs such as job satisfaction (Christian *et al*., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2008; Saks & Gruman, 2014). For example, Christian *et al*. found engagement is 'unique although it shares conceptual space with job attitudes' (2011, p.120), and argued work engagement provides an effective method of assessing an employee's overall attitudes towards their job.

Criticisms of measurements of work engagement concern their validity and distinctiveness from other related constructs (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas & Saks, 2012). Saks and Gruman (2014) call into question the distinctiveness of Schaufeli *et al*.'s (2002) work engagement to burnout, and later (2020), the construct validity of the UWES due to its high correlations to job attitude measures. They highlight that measures that overlap with other measures are likely to produce results that are inflated, inaccurate and misleading (Saks and Gruman, 2020). The distinctiveness of the UWES scale from the MBI scale has also been questioned (Nimon & Shuck, 2020). As the most widely used engagement measure in academic research (Bailey *et al*., 2017a; Guest, 2014b), it is concerning that the UWES measure (Schaufeli *et al*., 2002) is based on an antithesis or positive opposite of burnout approach to engagement that positions these concepts as extreme ends of a scale.

For example, claims that burnout and engagement are 'scalable on two distinct underlying bipolar dimensions' (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008, p.384) limits and simplifies engagement in that it generalises the concepts, and focuses on them in assumed extremes. This may therefore miss important contextual and situational information about specific experiences that would provide a richer, more deeper understanding about engagement. Instead of broadening scope in understanding, positioning engagement and burnout as opposites arguably restricts knowledge and simplifies these complex phenomena.

Following Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) extension of the job demands–resources model (JD-R) to include engagement as the antithesis of burnout, some researchers developed the model further as a framework to increase work engagement (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008; Schaufeli, 2017; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). For example, Schaufeli (2014) suggests that the JD–R model proposes that engagement mediates the relationship between job and personal resources on the one hand and positive outcomes on the other hand. The suggestion is that job resources can contribute to positive employee outcomes, such as engagement. Development of the JD-R model as a framework to increase engagement is problematic in that it the model perceives engagement as a function of job demands and the resources provided by the organisation (Schaufeli, 2014), which fuels perceptions of engagement as a transactional relationship influenced by organisational provisions. This is a reductionist approach which overlooks the complexity and nuances of engagement experiences and fails to recognise the dynamic fluctuations and negotiations that take place in the employment relationship. Resources such as support, coaching, constructive feedback and recognition are often characterised as being important in raising engagement, and are attributed to managerial and organisational practices (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Fletcher, 2017; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007), without consideration as to variation in employee experiences of and access to particular resources. Further, this encourages focus on somewhat simplistic prescriptions for what organisations should do to 'increase engagement', without understanding the structural, cultural, and political dynamics within the organisation which may complicate these relationships. For example, Xanthopoulou *et al.*'s quantitative study showed that the supply of job resources

'activates' employees' personal resources (self-efficacy, organisational-based self-esteem and optimism), and makes them feel more capable of controlling of their work environment (2007, p.136). The study (Xanthopoulou, 2007) focused on the 'manageable' (p.126) qualities of job resources and environment that 'activate personal resources' (p. 125) which result in 'higher levels of work engagement' (p.126), without considering why employees might choose to activate personal resources independent of management involvement. Further, this outcome driven approach to engagement fuels the organisational focus of engagement. As Bailey *et al*. identify, 'under the JD-R model, engagement becomes a good bestowed by the individual in response to perceived and experienced benefits from the immediate environment' (2017a, p.44). The transactional approach is dependent on a balancing act between demands/resources through which engagement becomes externally controlled (Bargagliotti, 2012). Further, this linear model that assumes individuals are driven purely to optimise their situation and fails to account for contextual factors, interpersonal interactions and emotional or irrational responses (Bailey *et al*., 2017a). Whilst there is a wealth of evidence to support the JD-R model and work engagement theory, there remains significant concerns about its ability to access the more contextual and personally subjective factors that may be shaping the meaning and lived experience of engagement.

3.4 Multidimensional Engagement

Another approach to engagement, referred to as a multidimensional approach (Shuck, 2011) and multidimensional engagement (Bailey *et al*., 2017a), relates to Sak's (2006) hypothesis that engagement is based on a social exchange model. Saks defined engagement as 'a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance' (2006, p. 602). Shuck (2011) highlights that this definition is inclusive of previous literature suggesting EE develops from cognitive (Kahn, 1990; Maslach *et al*., 2001; Maslow, 1970), emotional (Harter *et al*., 2002; Kahn, 1990), and behavioural elements (Harter *et al*., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Maslach *et al*., 2001). Further, that Sak's (2006) approach 'touches on the multifaceted experience of being human: our thoughts, emotions, and ultimately our behaviours' (Shuck, 2011, p. 319). Sak's extended a three-component model of EE (cognitive-emotional-behavioural) and suggested

separate states of engagement: job engagement and organisational engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2011). These separate states are distinguished between performing the work role (job engagement) and performing the role as a member of an organisation (organisational engagement), a key aspect of the multidimensional approach (Schaufeli, 2014).

Saks (2006) conducted a survey measuring job engagement and organisation engagement and assessing participant's psychological presence in their job and organisation. Saks (2006) used a five-point likert-type scale to measure antecedents of engagement based on Hackman and Oldham's (1980) job characteristics, and a three-item scale to measure consequences of engagement based on jobs satisfaction measured by (Cammann *et al*., 1983). The study found that there is a meaningful distinction between job and organization engagements, and that a number of factors predict job and organisation engagement (Saks, 2006). Further, employees choose to engage themselves in their jobs based on the resources they receive from the organisation (2006). When employees receive resources from their organisation, such as reward and recognition, it creates a sense of obligation, and employees will repay their organisation with higher levels of engagement, or withdraw their engagement if resources are insufficient (Saks and Gruman, 2020). In addition to identifying reciprocity and choice in engagement, Saks (2006) developed two scales to measure two components of engagement: job engagement as related to an employee's specific role, and organisational engagement as related to an employee's role within an organisation. In a later study which reviewed Saks (2006) to assess the generalizability of the findings and models using the UWES measure of work engagement, Saks (2019) found that skills variety and perceived organizational support (POS) were the key drivers of job engagement, and POS important for organisational engagement. Further, 'job engagement seems to be particularly important for job satisfaction and intention to quit while organisation engagement seems to be more important for organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)' (Saks, 2019, p.34). These two distinct constructs (job and organisational engagement) are a unique feature of multidimensional engagement approaches.

Multidimensional approaches to engagement also consider a large number of different variables and their relationship to engagement. Saks' study found that engagement is

positively related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and inversely related to turnover intention (2006). Gruman and Saks later highlight that there is overlap among many constructs in the organisational sciences, and connections with associated concepts can still positively add to understanding of organisational phenomena such as EE (2011). Macey and Schneider (2008) extended Saks's (2006) model suggesting that each proceeding state of engagement (cognitive-emotional-behavioral) build on the next (Shuck, 2011). Defining EE as an individual trait, a psychological state, and behavioural tendency, Macey and Schneider identified 'trait' engagement as 'an inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point' (2008, p5), which 'comprises a number of interrelated personality attributes…(*which*) all suggest the inclination to experience work in positive, active, and energic ways and to behave adaptively in displaying effort at going beyond what is necessary and initiating change to facilitate organizationally relevant outcomes' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.24). It is argued that these individual traits are reflected in the psychological state of engagement (such as absorption, commitment and enthusiasm) and indicate an individual's propensity to engagement behaviours (such as extra-role behaviours and organisational citizenship behaviour) (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This has been used to suggest that there are 'individual differences in the propensity to become engaged' (Guest, 2014a, p.152) and therefore attributes and characteristics which predispose employees to be engaged that can be identified and selected (Meyer, Gagné & Parfyonova, 2010). The suggestion is that engagement adds value for the organisation, and traits and behaviours can be picked and selected by the organisation, indicating engagement as a commodity for organisational advantage.

Commodification of engagement is further exemplified in Macey and Schneider's 'behavioural' engagement, defined as 'adaptive behaviour intended to serve an organizational purpose' and 'strategically focused and bounded by purpose and organisational relevance' (2008, p.18). Much of Macey and Schneider's article focuses on 'establishing the conditions' for 'the goal of improving engagement levels' (2008, p.25-26), leading many to understand engagement as being fostered by both a dispositional orientation and facilitating climate (Meyer, Gagné & Parfyonova, 2010). This clearly aligns with the psychologised HRM context Harley (2015) identifies in

which significant workplace phenomena assume managerialist goals as the only points of importance. Behavioural understandings of EE focus on the visible manifestations and observational indicators of when EE is present, emphasising the perspective of and importance for the organisation (Masson *et al.*, 2008; Meyer, Gagné & Parfyonova, 2010; Shuck, 2019). This is additionally exemplified through Macey and Schneider's reference to state engagement being characterised by 'feelings of engagement' (2008, p.24). Later developed to describe 'the "feel and look" of engagement', Macey *et al.*, identify four components to feeling engaged as feelings of 'urgency, being focused, intensity and enthusiasm' (2009, p.23), and four key facets of engagement behaviour as 'performance that is persistent, adaptable, self-initiated and/or involves taking on new responsibilities' (2009, p.35). Such attention impacts understanding and introduces murkiness into the EE field, confusing traits, states and behaviours in one framework and one definition (Shuck, 2019).

Integrating EE with associated concepts such as those found in Sak's study is advantageous to consultants for two reasons. Firstly, it can be assumed there is an understanding of concepts such as satisfaction, commitment and citizenship behaviour, and that these are desirable states. Secondly, offering EE as something new and an integration of these desirable states offers a different yet familiar novelty fad to be marketed and consumed. Byrne (2015) highlights that the engagement story depicting everyone as seemingly focused on engagement indicates it must therefore be important, and evokes fear around what happens when you lack engagement. As Mackay *et al.* highlight, EE is identified as a 'higher-order construct' that is 'a more efficient and effective way to capture employee attitudes that predict indicators of employee effectiveness such as focal performance, contextual performance, turnover intention, and absenteeism' (2017, p.109). Debates focus not on the concepts, but the 'chicken and egg conundrum…expressing a scenario of infinite theoretical and practical regress' (Shuck, Kim & Chai, 2021, p.5). Rather than clarifying what EE means, the conflation of EE with well-established associated concepts means that it remains an ambiguous and contentious concept (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

Bailey *et al.*, (2017a) found that only six papers use Sak's (2006) specific measure. The multifaceted nature of EE has led some to consider its relationship to other related job attitudes, such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational commitment and

psychological empowerment (Saks, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Christian *et al*., 2011; Mackay, 2017). One study that extended Sak's model is Macey and Schneider (2008), who suggested that different variables such as job characteristics, leadership and personality were related to the development of engagement. Identifying engagement as encompassing psychological, state, train and behavioural elements, Macey and Schneider's (2008) multidimensional approach integrated different components of engagement. Particular aspects of their approach, such as the focus on behavioural manifestations of engagement, were later supported and developed (e.g. Christian *et al*., 2011). Shuck and Wollard's integrated literature review of engagement used multidimensional frameworks to define the concept as 'an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organizational outcomes' (2010, p. 103).

Guest suggests that organisational engagement is 'primarily concerned with improving organisational performance' (2014a, p. 143). Indeed, another angle to emerge from the multidimensional approach is that which focuses specifically on the organisational engagement concept, including its value contribution. Although it is acknowledged that research about organisational engagement is lacking (Saks, 2019), and that virtually all prior research on engagement has been conducted at the individual level of analysis (Barrick *et al*., 2015), there are some studies that consider the collective and organisational level of engagement. Barrick *et al*., (2015) developed a collective construct focused on shared perceptions of the level of engagement in an organisation. This suggested that organisation members collectively invest themselves in their work roles – physically, emotionally, and cognitively (Barrick, 2015). Notably, they considered the 'unique, value-creating organizational capability' of collective organisational engagement which is 'a more powerful predictor of firm performance than aggregated individual engagement' (Barrick *et al*., 2015, p.119). A later study by Eldor (2020) supported the focus on performance, finding that collective engagement improves service performance and creates a competitive advantage at the business level of analysis.

3.5 Engagement as Management Practice

Identified as a category of engagement literature by Bailey *et al.*, (2017a), engagement as management practice has emerged through studies interested in how management and the HR function develops and embeds engagement. Truss *et al.*, in highlighting that much engagement research has focused on 'being engaged', raised concerns with academic HRM studies that focus attention on 'doing engagement' and engagement as 'part of the managerialist project' (2013, p.2664). Such studies are interested in how management and the HR function perceives, addresses, develops and embeds EE through specific practices, strategies and programmes. These examine EE as a workforce management strategy (Bailey, 2022). Of concern is the extent to which these studies consider employee responses and experiences of engagement alongside the enactment of engagement practices and programmes, and the view that engagement can be a 'win-win' scenario for both employees and employers (Truss *et al.*, 2013).

Interest in the practice of engagement began with Harter *et al.*'s (2002) examination of the relationship between employee satisfaction–engagement and the business-unit outcomes such as customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover, and accidents. The study emphasised the importance of the manager and their influence over engagement and driving business outcomes (Harter *et al.*, 2002), and encouraged exploration of a satisfaction-engagement approach based on positive psychology frameworks (Shuck *et al.*, 2011). This study can be attributed to the depiction of EE as a 'driver' for business outcomes and influenced by management talents and practices, and an influence for future studies into the role of the line manager in EE (e.g. Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Arakawa and Greenberg, 2007). Further, its emphasis on the measurement of EE as achieved through focus on supervisor or manager processes and actions can also be linked to consultancy development of satisfaction-engagement ideas. Harter *et al.* used the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) as its instrument which 'measure processes and issues that are actionable at (i.e., under the influence of) the work group's supervisor or manager', and were identified as developed from studies of work satisfaction and motivation (2002, p. 269). Guest highlights such approaches align to the consultancy approach to exploring wider conditions of a concept (such as satisfaction) through

proprietary measures of engagement based on associations with higher organisational performance (2014a). Briner critiques 'potpourri measures' of engagement for failing to measure engagement as a clear, unique and distinct construct (2014). And yet, Harter *et al*.'s (2002) emphasis on 'actionable' facets that drive business outcomes encouraged a focus on practical actions associated with EE which fuelled the burgeoning practitioner and consultant interest in EE (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010; Shuck and Wollard 2010). It is noted that engagement as management practice developed from Harter *et al*.'s (2002) paper and its alignment to the consultancy approach to using surveys to measure working conditions, and association with other constructs.

One approach that considers engagement as management practice is Arrowsmith and Parker's (2013) study which aimed to understand how HR managers understand EE; how they develop and implement EE strategies; and what implications all of these might have for the HR function itself. With consideration of how EE may combine elements of 'hard' (performance-oriented) and 'soft' (employee-oriented) HRM, the study examined an HR initiative in a single case study organisation, finding that this was an 'engagement and performance initiative' as for HR these are inextricably linked (Arrowsmith and Parker, 2013, p.2707).

Another exploration of engagement as management practice is Jenkins and Delbridge's (2013) study which examined 'soft' and 'hard' approaches to EE in two workplaces, and their influence on management's ability to promote a supportive internal context. Highlighting that management practices are complex, contested, emergent, locally enacted and context specific, this study found that management practices operate as a continuum from softer to harder approaches to EE (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013). The authors also highlighted the role played by contextual contingencies and the importance of considering EE within the wider context of the perspectives of the employment relationship (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013).

Outside the specificity of studies within the HRM field that focus on 'doing engagement' (Truss *et al*., 2013), there are a significant number of academic studies that advocate for managerially led engagement interventions, including indirect managerial involvement such as organisational culture (Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007; Harter *et*

al., 2002; Macey *et al*., 2009; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Mackay, 2017 Saks, 2006), and an effective and empowered employee voice (ACAS, 2014; CIPD, 2010; Dromey 2014; MacLeod, 2009). Other recommended engagement approaches directly address managerial interventions, for example: the role of the line manager (ACAS, 2014; Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007; Harter *et al*., 2002; Lewis *et al*., 2014; Luthans & Peterson, 2002, Purcell *et al*., 2009); strong senior leadership ('strategic narrative') (Dromey 2014; MacLeod, 2009); job design (Bailey *et al*., 2015; Christian *et al*., 2011; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Macey and Schneider suggest organisations 'learn how to harness this potential will likely enjoy distinct competitive advantage' , 2008, p.15). Schneider *et al*., argue companies must 'engage their employees if they are to compete on customer satisfaction and differentiate themselves in financial and market performance' (2009, p.23). Gruman and Saks – referring to 'the engagement management process'– advocate for managers to receive training on what EE 'feels like and looks like, how to develop and facilitate it, and how to assess it and include it in the performance appraisal and feedback process (2011, p.133). Gruman and Saks presented the belief that organisations can achieve competitive advantage through incorporating EE in the performance management process (2011). And so, EE is widely claimed to have positive outcomes for both employer (Christian *et al*., 2011; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Byrne, 2015; Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017) and employee (Alfes *et al*., 2010; Macey *et al*., 2009), encouraging the 'win-win' perspective despite a lack of firm evidence of the link between EE and organisational performance (Bennett, 2020).

Whilst there is no overarching definition or conceptualisation of engagement as management practice (Bailey *et al.,* 2017a), similarities amongst the academic literature in this area include focus on the plurality of the employment relationship, consideration of management approaches to engagement, and concerns regarding the tensions and issues that may emerge through managers managing engagement. A noteworthy contradiction within this category of engagement literature is that engagement as management practice remains insufficiently understood within the academic literature, and yet there is a significant amount of practitioner discourse around the topic. Evolved from the engagement-satisfaction perspective, engagement as management practice now represents a dispersed network of relating themes. The

broader, more complicated, and muddled framework of HR initiatives, concepts and managerial practices explored within practitioner approaches to engagement are now considered to expand understanding of the broader framework of engagement as management practice.

3.5.1 Engagement as management practice: Practitioner approaches

Industry and practitioner related attention to EE have played a key part in interpreting engagement as management practice. Alongside interest in the outcomes and effects of engagement, there have been studies into the causes of engagement to identify ways in which organisations can drive engagement and build an engaged workforce (Rees *et al.*, 2013). As will be explored, this has been significantly influenced by initiatives related to the global economic and political climate of austerity and economic pressure (Emmott, 2015; Francis *et al.*, 2013; Sambrook, 2021; Vincent *et al.*, 2020). EE is 'big business' for consultancies (Valentin, 2014), and a wealth of practitioner published engagement literature labels EE as a technical fix and solution for management problems (Valentin, 2014). Welbourne goes as far as to suggest there is an 'engagement industry' (2011, p.98). Many have created engagement tools and strategies to produce opportunities and conditions deemed essential to enable engagement which will in turn produce organisational gain through improved 'performance, productivity…and profitability' (Rayton *et al.*, 2012). Some of the most influential and representative examples of the 'emerging excitement' (Sambrook, 2021, p.474) amongst practitioner approaches to engagement within the UK are the 'Engage for Success movement' (Engage-for-Success) and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

'Engage for Success movement'

The importance of engagement for UK businesses was recognised in 2008 when the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills commissioned the Engaging for Success report into the potential benefits of engagement for companies and UK competitiveness and performance. The resulting 'Engaging for Success' report supported the notion that EE can transform organisational performance and profitability (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). The report identified over 50 definitions of engagement from sources such as academics, consultants and practitioners,

reflecting the ambiguities surrounding the concept. Further, the report initiated a narrative that defining and understanding EE is less important setting out 'what it can do for organisations and individuals' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.5). This established a perspective that approaches to engagement need to identify the ways in which organisational stakeholders can implement and benefit from engagement.

MacLeod & Clarke defined EE as 'a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being' (2009, p.9). It summarised four 'enablers' of engagement: strategic narrative, engaging managers, employee voice and integrity (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). From the success of its widely cited report, an 'Engage for Success movement' (Engage-for-Success) established, involving more evidence and case studies to explain EE, including papers that claim to set out 'the evidence for the effectiveness of EE in raising performance and productivity across the UK economy', combining evidence from 'individual organisations, academics and research houses' (Rayton, Dodge & D'Analeze, 2012, p.i). The movement later acknowledged the 2009 definition as one 'it offers to organisations' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2014), part of the narrative through which organisational stakeholders can understand, implement and benefit from engagement.

Notably, this was a report to Government, promoting improvements in 'UK competitiveness and performance as part of the country's efforts to come through current economic difficulties…(and) meet the challenges of increased global competition' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.3). This is important because Government advocacy for the report's findings and acclamations of country-wide improvements add gravitas and authority to the report, including its narratives of engagement as an easily influenced concept that organisations can interpret, mould and redesign 'to achieve business objectives' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.42). There are arguments that 'prevailing economic factors have enabled management to reassert its power to push change through or relabel old concepts as something new, often with little or no concern for whether they are viewed favourably by employees' (Dundon & Rollinson, 2011, p.113). Indeed, engagement has captured the attention of managers because it 'raises the notion of cooperation to a higher level' (Masson *et al.*, 2008, p.56). The

report advocates that the government 'use its unique power to convene a nationwide discussion involving all stakeholders to sure the widest possible understanding of the case for engagement, and to encourage more organisations to adopt this approach' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.33). Yet, the report's definition of EE 'sets the goals of EE and provides criteria by which to determine whether employees express or display engagement…it does not outline 'the approach' that needs to be adopted to promote engagement' (Guest, 2014b, p.226). And so, a prioritisation for the business case and outcomes of engagement and adopting a non-defined business-orientated approach to engagement is arguably launched in the UK.

In his discourse analysis study of engagement literature, Keenoy considers the way in which a range of sources – including the Engaging for Success report – have constructed, promoted and driven the engagement narrative and conceptual object to shape social subjectivities to reflect the interests of those constructing the text (2014). Labelling EE a 'clearly "political object"', Keenoy criticises political endorsement for translating engagement into 'a malleable property of 'organization' and hence ostensibly subject to (re)direction through public policy and managerial fiat' (2014, p.199 - 200). Keenoy highlights the purpose of the 'Engaging for Success' report as to:

> *'shape and drive public policy and to embolden and inspire positive managerial action in difficult times. As such, its 'discursive value' lies precisely in this intrinsic ambiguity and all-embracing character, for it permits managers and others to embrace it as a 'discursive driver' of action without ever having to be over-concerned about what it might mean' (2014, p.203).*

Indeed, the combination of the 'difficult times' argument and Government backing permits the 'Engaging for Success' report to overlook what engagement means and focus on action and attainment. This permission permeates to the organisations and managers it advises, and so Government presents a biased perspective of engagement as aligned to and solely for business and managerial objectives. As Guest highlights, the 'Engaging for Success' report demonstrates Government interest and endorsement of engagement for organisational and senior management interests (2014a). The report's series of recommended initiatives and convincing arguments for managers has led the way for enthusiastic advocacy of the case for EE (Guest,

2014b), with little recognition of the report's intent. Keenoy critiques the 'Engaging for Success' report and its self-serving press-release style case studies for being designed only to represent themselves (2014). The case studies provide examples and encouragement to organisations to take self-serving ownership of engagement. With Government endorsement for organisational ownership of engagement, it is unsurprising that a considerable number of practitioner sources (e.g. Alfes *et al.*, 2010; CIPD, 2014; Harter, 2000; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Rayton *et al.*, 2012; Robinson et al., 2004) present engagement as a management approach through which organisations can – and should – manage and influence staff.

CIPD

Another example of practitioner advocacy for engagement as management practice is a 2010 research report commissioned by the CIPD and written by the Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project (Alfes *et al.*, 2010). The report promoted six key drivers of engagement: meaningfulness of work, voice, senior management communication and vision, supporting work environment, person-job fit, line management style (Alfes *et al.*, 2010). The CIPD report identifies the adaptability of these 'drivers'; 'these factors create a virtuous cycle of engagement processes that employers can reinterpret in ways that fit with their own organisational context and circumstances' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.55). This approach to engagement suggests it can be shaped by the organisation and should be incorporated as part of an overarching strategic approach to people management. The report outlines its objective to study 'the processes through which engagement levels can be raised or lowered through the actions taken by managers' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.4), positioning engagement as a managerial approach shaped by the organisation.

A concern with CIPD approaches to engagement relates to the 'use of EE as an umbrella term, collating different attributes into a holistic area of people strategy' (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.9). These broader perspectives around engagement encompass a wide range of organisational advantages – such as productivity, commitment, organisational citizenship, talent retention – which may conflate engagement with other concepts and cause issues with precision about interventions. For example, CIPD reports have suggested EE and health and well-being are

'mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked in organisations' (CIPD, 2016, p14), and that it is a combination of the two that enables performance outcomes to be sustainable over time (Lewis *et al*., 2014). This combining of concepts may result in a lack of clarity regarding specifically what actions are to be taken to achieve this outcome. This ambiguity continues into the CIPD's overall approach to engagement; the CIPD EE and motivation webpage recommends employers understand engagement as 'an umbrella term to describe a broad area of people strategy, and refer to narrower concepts – such as work engagement or organisational commitment…to be more specific when needed', and encourage employers to 'shape their view of engagement to suit their context or strategy' (CIPD, 2021). This approach presents engagement as 'good' and 'quality' people management, encouraging EE management practices to be 'viewed as discourses' and features of essential management interventions (Valentin, 2014, p.483). For example, a CIPD report on workplace 'megatrends' shaping work and working lives encourages 'the adoption of employee engagement as both an objective and a practical framework shaping many organisations' people management activities' (2014, p. 9). EE thereby becomes synonymous with good people management practice, viewed through core people management concepts which 'reflect a focus on "Narrow Engagement" – i.e. the factors that are of most direct interest to employers and organisations, since they describe positive employee behaviour that is likely to lead to more effective performance and confer direct benefits on the organisation' (Robertson & Cooper, 2010, p.326). This narrow view of the engagement concept values organisational outcomes over the experience.

In addition to issues regarding precision in engagement interventions, CIPD approaches to engagement as an umbrella term further exasperates the challenge of conceptual muddling. For example, a recent CIPD report presented the following 'model of EE as an umbrella term' (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.10):

Figure 1: A model of employee engagement as an umbrella term

Antecedents or drivers	Employee engagement: a state of being		Outcomes
Individual differences	Work engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption	Energy: the antihesis of burnout	Job satisfaction
Job design	Cognitive/intellectual engagement with the job	Meaningful work or shared purpose	Wellbeing
People management	Motivation	Social engagement: relationships	Task performance
Relationships	Emotional or affective engagement	Organisational identification	Organisational ciizenship behaviour
Organisational factors	Organisational engagement	Organisational commitment	Organisational performance

Figure 1: A model of EE as an umbrella term (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.10)

In considering a range of antecedents, states, and outcomes of engagement, the model attempts to 'describe a broad subject area or umbrella term that includes work engagement and other more specific terms, such as intellectual engagement, organisational engagement, motivation and organisational commitment' (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.9). Representative of the messy realism of engagement, this arguably adds greater confusion to what Gifford and Young refer to as this 'tiresome situation' (2021, p.5). As Briner highlights, 'when it comes to defining engagement it appears that almost anything goes…it is a confused, confusing and chaotic mess that is almost bound to lead to messy and desired outcomes… we literally do not know or understand what we're talking about or what we're doing' (2014, p.4). Sambrook suggests the 'umbrella construct' of engagement reveals 'the tensions between those seeking to validate engagement to absolute precision and those acknowledging its messy realism' (Sambrook, 2021, p.469). It represents the tensions between the academic community, who attempt to be precise and specific about engagement, and those 'in HR circles' who usually discuss EE as a broad umbrella term (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.3). Clearly a conceptual divide between both communities exists, which Guest suggests 'reflects differences in precision, theorization, level of analysis and empirical support' (2014b, p.224). This perpetuates the conflictual tensions that contribute to

ambiguities in the engagement concept and distracts from understanding of individual perceptions and experiences of engagement.

Notably, the CIPD references the psychological perspective of EE. For example, in a 2012 guide, the CIPD defined EE as 'being focused in what you do (thinking), feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation (feeling), and acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the organisational value and objectives (acting)' (2012, p.2). Arguably, these classifications focus more on the observable behaviours and emotions – such as observing an employee as being focused 'in' what they're doing – than the individual's experience of 'thinking' as contributing towards EE. As Kahn and Fellows state, 'we know engagement mostly by what people actually do – the actions that they take when presented with tasks. The most clearly observable behaviours that suggest engagement are people's efforts' (2013, p.108). Emphasis on observable behaviours and emotions is arguably an outcome-focused approach to understanding of engagement. A further example is the aforementioned Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project, which defines EE as 'being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others' (2010, p5). Identification of 'the performance of work' encourages attention on observable indicators of engagement. The report divided engagement into three core facets; 'emotional or affective engagement; intellectual or cognitive engagement and social engagement' (2010), which were later developed by the authors in their 2013 report to describe:

> *'(1) intellectual engagement – the extent to which individuals are absorbed in their work and think about ways role performance could be improved; (2) affective engagement – the extent to which employees feel positive emotional connections to their work experience; and (3) social engagement – the extent to which employees talk to colleagues about work-related improvements and change.' (Rees, Alfes & Gatenby, 2013, p.4)*

These three areas of focus are similar to the CIPD's understanding of EE as 'thinking', 'feeling' and 'acting' (CIPD, 2012). This conceptualisation is further explored by the CIPD's commissioned Taylor and Woodhams, who suggest that there are three dimensions of engagement; emotional engagement as being very emotionally

engaged with one's work, cognitive engagement as focusing very hard while at work, and physical engagement as being willing to go 'the extra mile' (2012).

These references to the emotional and intellectual components of engagement are very much of the MacLeod and Clarke report 'era' of focusing on the 'emotional, cognitive, behaviour' dimensions of EE (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). In addition to the CIPD, a range of authors in this time highlighted EE as 'driving personal energy into physical, cognitive and emotional labours' (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010, p.617) and 'an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behaviour state directed towards desired organisational outcomes' (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p.103). There is consistency in linking physical, cognitive and affective or emotional dimensions to an understanding of engagement at the level of the individual and driven towards organisational outcomes. All three perspectives indicate that EE has many levels and that each aspect - intellectual, emotional and behavioural - requires detailed understanding and attention to the individual that goes beyond simply acknowledging EE as another HR policy. Further, there are similarities between these views of engagement and Kahn's description of personal engagement as the ways in which 'people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (1990, p 694).

3.6 Selecting and Justifying the Theoretical Framework of Engagement for this research

The following section outlines features of Kahn's engagement concept that contribute to the overall framework of engagement for this research. The central features of Kahn's concept are aligned to the research questions (RQ) and summarises which parts of Kahn's perspective are focused on. This is summarised below in Table 1, and explored in the discussion which follows, justifying and explaining which parts of Kahn's perspective are considered. The second part of this section summarises some of the wider issues and problems identified within the literature review that will be addressed. These support justification as to the need for more research into Kahn's concept and the individual perception and experience of engagement. These are summarised below on Table 2.

The key research questions for this study are identified as:

1. What is 'personal engagement', and how does it differ from existing understandings and research on engagement?
2. What is the experience of engagement at the individual level?
3. What are the obstacles to personal engagement and how might these be overcome?
4. How do organisations impact personal engagement at the individual level?

Table 1: Summary of Kahn's concept and Framework of Engagement for this research

Key features of PE	Kahn's concept	RQ
Expression and performance	'the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances' (1990, p.700).	RQ1; RQ2
	people's 'emotional reactions' and 'experiences of themselves and their contexts' (1990, p.717).	RQ2
	'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance (1990, p694)	RQ2
Individual differences, decision, awareness and choice	three psychological conditions - meaningfulness, safety, and availability (1990).	RQ3; RQ4
	individual's perceptions of 'the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations' and 'the resources they perceive themselves to have—their availability' (1990, p.703).	RQ3; RQ4
	'to express preferred dimensions is to display real identity, thoughts, and feelings' (1990, p.700).	RQ1; RQ2
	'individual differences shape people's dispositions toward personally engaging or disengaging in all or some types of role performances' (1990, p.718)	RQ1; RQ2
	it is 'at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (1990, p.719).	RQ3; RQ4
Dynamic	'…the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.' (1990, p694)	RQ2
	'the momentary rather than static circumstances of people's experiences that shape behaviours' (1990, p.703).	RQ2
	'calibrations of self-in-role' (1990, p694); organization members calibrate how fully present they are in response to internal and external factors' (1992, p.12)	RQ2; RQ4
Experience	'deeply probing people's experiences and situations during the discrete moments that make up their work lives' (1990, p.693).	RQ2
	three psychological conditions as indicators of 'people's experiences of the rational and unconscious elements of their work contexts' (1992, p.12).	RQ2
Influenced by the organisation	'individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational factors simultaneously influence these experiences' (1990, p.695).	RQ3; RQ4
	People 'perform roles as external scripts indicate they should rather than internally interpret those roles; they act as custodians rather than innovators' (1990, p.702). People employ role performances within the boundaries of organisational norms, which are shared expectations about the general behaviours of system members (1990).	RQ3; RQ4
	'how psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances' (1990, p.694).	RQ2; RQ3; RQ4

This research aims to understand what PE is, and how engagement is perceived and experienced by employees. This emerged from the researcher's desire to better understand Kahn's (1990, 1992) original ideas and address his calls for future research that allow for production of 'a richer portrait of the processes by which personal engagements and disengagements are created' (Kahn, 1990, p.718) and the 'constant fluctuations of self-in-role' (p719). This developed through recognition that the way in which engagement has been conceptualised within existing research and literature demonstrates a notable divergence from Kahn's (1990) original construct (Bailey *et al*., 2017a; Sambrook, 2021). Engagement is 'a unique framework…not synonymous with anything else, nor…empirically redundant' (Shuck *et al*., 2017, p.283). Further, that little research has explicitly focused on Kahn's original conceptualisation and there remains a lack of understanding of his personal role engagement concept and the experience of engagement at the personal level (Fletcher, 2017; Guest 2014a; Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014). These factors influence research question 1.

Explaining 'calibrations of self-in-role' through the terms 'personal engagement' and personal disengagement' (Kahn, 1990, p.694), Kahn's concept is enacted by the individual employee:

> *'I defined personal engagement as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.694).*

As considered in section 3.1., Kahn's work questioned assumptions that employees are impassive, instead focusing on the ways which 'people employ and express themselves' (1990, p.694), which this research seeks to explore further. Kahn's concept suggests how people perceive themselves across the three domains (physically, cognitively, emotionally) impacts their engagement choices and performances. Further, it outlines that these decisions take place within multiple levels of influence – 'individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational', and it is 'at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.718 - 719). Although Kahn refers

to 'choices', he positions these within the internal and external demands 'to absent parts of themselves that do not fit the unconscious roles in which they are cast' (Kahn, 1992, p.10). Kahn therefore describes levels of awareness and active decisions to employ, express, withdraw and defend. In his later work, Kahn expands:

> *'self and role thus exist in some dynamic, negotiable relation in which the person both drives personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression). Current conceptualizations of employee or work engagement emphasize self-employment at the expense of self-expression' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83).*

Kahn's conceptualisation of 'displays' of the self within role and 'constant fluctuations of self-in-role' (p719) indicate the importance of individual differences in engagement. In later work, Kahn and Fellows acknowledge that 'variations in engagement may be explained partly by individual differences such as people's temperaments, life experiences, support systems, and aptitudes' (2013, p.111). Further investigation into Kahn's range of individual differences 'shaped by cultural, ethnic, and other group affiliations' (1992, p.10) and the influence on engagement is needed. These are considered through research question 1 and 2.

Kahn defined PE as 'the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles' (1990, p.694), critiquing the assumption that individuals are inanimate subject matter that assume organisationally led identities and stances. Significance was placed on the calibrations and degree of self, specifically the 'momentary rather than static circumstances of people's experiences that shape behaviours' (Kahn, 1990, p.703). This indicates there is movement and application in which the employee chooses to 'employ' and 'express' their selves. Kahn identified the changing, dynamic aspect of PE; 'self and role exist in some dynamic, negotiable relation in which a person both drives personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression)' (1990, p.700). Consideration as to why individuals will engage with various degrees needs greater exploration and will be addressed in this study research question 2.

Kahn's framework explores people's 'emotional reactions' and 'experiences of themselves and their contexts' (1990, p.717), which this research considers through research question 2, 3 and 4 through exploration of both the experience of

engagement and the contexts in which engagement takes place. Kahn's framework focused on three features that influence the experience of personal engagement; the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, availability and safety:

> *'Psychological meaningfulness is the sense of return on investments of the self-in-role performances, psychological safety is the sense of being able to show and employ the self without fear of negative consequences, and psychological availability is the sense of possessing physical, emotional, and psychological resources for investing the self in role performances.' (Kahn, 1990, p.705)*

Kahn proposed that the combination of these three conditions drive the extent to which people are psychologically present and therefore personally engaged (1992). Kahn explained engagement varies according to individual's perceptions of 'the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations' and 'the resources they perceive themselves to have—their availability' (Kahn, 1990, p.703). Kahn's PE concept therefore places significant emphasis on an individual's perception and experiences of the psychological conditions for engagement. This broad conceptual framework of psychological conditions and their influence on personal engagement provide limited examples as to how they are operationalised. Further, Kahn acknowledged that there are individual and contextual differences in experiences of engagement; in his aim to 'map across individuals the general conditions of experience that influence degrees of PE…to identify psychological conditions powerful enough to survive the gamut of individual differences' (1990, p.695). This current research does not explicitly focus on these three psychological conditions, rather, through 'deeply probing people's experiences and situations during the discrete moments that make up their work lives' (Kahn, 1990, p.693), it explores the broad and general ways in which employees perceive and experience engagement. As justified further in the methodology, this is in accordance with the perspective that individuals act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and the acts of others (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021).

Finally, external influences on engagement are explored through specific focus on the organisational context in which engagement takes place. PE is understood to describe the chosen 'calibrations of self-in-role' which take place within the organisational context, based on multiple levels of influence (Kahn, 1990, p694). The external context

in which PE exists is of importance to understanding Kahn's concept, which aimed to outline 'how psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances' (1990, p.694). The notion of presenting and absenting in PE derived from Goffman's (1961) suggestion that people's attachment to and detachment from their role is influenced by the social context. Goffman suggested that an individual offers their performance and 'puts on (his) show 'for the benefit of other people'' (Goffman, 1971, p.28). Within the workplace context this indicates engagement is performed for the benefit of organisational members, as well as the whole organisation. The multi-level aspect of PE indicates the organisation is one of the influences upon PE, however, the control the organisation has over an individual arguably overpowers other influences on PE. The suggestion that people can regulate their personal selves during work role performances suggests PE occurs within the individual, but is influenced by the external context – a concept which requires further exploration. Sambrook highlights that PE is 'an ongoing "negotiation" within a particular social context' (2021, p.473). This line of enquiry is a key driver of this research and is considered through research questions 3 and 4.

In addition to Kahn's own theoretical concept which supports the focus of this research, the literature review highlighted some of the wider issues and problems within engagement research which are also addressed in this research. These are summarised in Table 2 and subsequently discussed.

Table 2: Summary of issues relating to the need for more research into Kahn's concept and the individual perception and experience of engagement

Issues with existing approaches to engagement	Support for the need for further research	RQ
1. Little research has focused on Kahn's conceptualisation	Bailey *et al*., 2017; Fletcher, 2017; Guest, 2014a; Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014	RQ1
2. Limited research into individual employee's understanding and experience of engagement	Fletcher, 2017; Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011	RQ1 RQ2
3. Little research has considered how organisations and managerialist agendas impact personal engagement at the individual level	Truss *et al*., 2013; Bailey *et al*., 2017; Sambrook, 2021; Valentin, 2014; Maddon and Bailey, 2017	RQ2; RQ3; RQ4

The first issue addressed in this study is that little research has focused explicitly on Kahn's original conceptualisation (Fletcher, 2017; Guest, 2014a). Whilst there has been a recent increase in interest into Kahn's concept (e.g. Fletcher, 2017, 2019; Gupta & Shukla, 2017), work engagement remains as the significantly more dominant stream of engagement research (Bailey *et al*., 2017). This is problematic in that it suggests there are gaps in knowledge and understanding of personal role engagement, and that Kahn's concept is underrepresented within engagement research. As has been argued, existing engagement research has predominantly followed psychological, positivist approaches which are different to Kahn's original ideas. Further, 'the shift away from Kahn's (1990) original social-psychological construct of 'personal role engagement' is notable (Bailey *et al*., 2017, p.35). This study argues that to continue the development of our understanding of engagement, Kahn's original conceptualisation can not remain overlooked. Specifically, the employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours (Kahn, 1990, p.700) is lacking exploration. As Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert highlight, engagement research needs to 'appreciate the more subtle, discretionary self-oriented aspects of EE which are...at the heart of Kahn's definition' (2014, p.175). Kahn's original conceptualisation, in particular the individual and personal aspects of his ideas, deserve reconsideration, and these are explored in this study.

The second issue addressed by this study relates to gaps in knowledge regarding how individual employees both understand and experience engagement. It acknowledges concerns with existing approaches to engagement, such as that they provide a 'distorted and misleading mirror on the world of work and the experience of workers in employment' (Purcell, 2014, p244). Employee understanding and meaning of engagement, or the 'subjective understanding of being engaged from an employee's perspective' is identified by Shuck *et al*. as 'a perspective not often considered in the traditional EE literature' (2011, p.304). This links with the first issue regarding the marginalisation of Kahn's deeply personal engagement concept; specifically, that the subjective understanding and employee perspective of 'harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles' and how 'people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.694) is neglected in existing research. This study therefore aims to contribute towards an

increased knowledge of employee understandings of engagement and what it means to be engaged for the individual employee. This is addressed by asking employees how they understand engagement, and then exploring some engagement definitions with them.   Further, this study addresses the lack of research into the individual employee's 'unique experience' (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011, p.302) and 'lived experience' (Sambrook, 2021; Truss *et al.*, 2013) of engagement. There remains a lack of understanding of the experience of engagement at the personal level (Fletcher, 2017; Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014), and this research collects employee accounts of experiences of engagement and barriers to engagement to understand the individual's perception and experience of engagement. It addresses calls for further studies that investigate engagement at different levels – individual, work group/team and organizational, to 'shed additional light on the experience of engagement' (Bailey *et al.*, 2017, p.46).

The final issue relates to a lack of research that considers how organisations and managerialist agendas impact engagement at the individual level. Truss *et al.* highlight that 'engagement has been 'bent' through its appropriation to managerialist agendas, and 'stretched' in its meaning away from being an individual state of mind to encompass workforce strategies and dialogic practice', and there is a need to examine engagement as a management strategy and issues of power and power relationships in engagement (2013, p.2664). As has been argued in the literature review, research has been disproportionately concerned with an organisational focus and engagement as a management strategy; EE is manufactured as a 'desirable condition' that 'has an organizational purpose' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.4), is 'a good bestowed by the individual' (Bailey *et al.*, 2017, p.44) and 'one way for individuals to repay their organisation' (Saks, 2006, p.603). Further, engagement features as part of an assertive and contradictory management agenda of manufacturing employee cooperation and consent whilst at the same time exercising control and coercion (Farnham, 2015; Williams, 2017). The concern is that existing work on engagement has largely ignored previous modes of thinking about HRM and employment relations (Purcell, 2014b), resulting in a 'power gap in engagement' with implications for the study and practice of engagement and HRM (Maddon and Bailey, 2017, p.114). Further, there is 'a dominant positivist, unitarist perspective,

assuming employees and managers share interests and engagement is in everyone's best interests' (Sambrook, 2021, p.484). In consideration of individual employee's understandings and experiences of engagement, as well as obstacles and barriers to engagement, this study considers what impacts engagement at the individual level, including organisational and managerial influences.

3.7 Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter introduced engagement as lacking a clear, consistent and widely agreed definition. It outlined the range of stakeholders, disciplines and sources that have shown an interest in engagement, and identified that whilst there are still questions about the boundaries and values in engagement, engagement can be considered as a unique framework (Shuck *et al.*, 2017).

The chapter then charted the tensions and debates in the way in which engagement has been defined. This was structed by considering how engagement has been considered within the academic literature as personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), a distinct and unique multidimensional constuct (Saks, 2006) and as management practice (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). Section 3.1. included a detailed exploration of Kahn's (1990, 1992) engagement concept, including the psychological conditions which influence engagement and how people inhabit their roles (meaningfulness, safety, and availability). This section also outlined personal engagement as performance, exploring the influence of Goffman's (1971) work on Kahn's concept. Section 3.2 presented some of the studies that have used Kahn's PE conceptualisation, identifying how PE has evolved.

Section 3.3 identified work engagement and its development as the significantly more dominant stream of engagement research (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). This included consideration of the origin of work engagement in research that explored burnout, highlighting the development of the burnout-antithesis approach to engagement. This section included an overview of the development of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to measure engagement (Schaufeli *et al.,* 2002), and the JD-R model of work engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; 2008). It also outlined some of the critiques of the work engagement concept and measurement approach, including

concerns about its ability to access the more contextual and personally subjective factors that may be shaping the meaning and lived experience of engagement.

The multidimensional approach to engagement featured in section 3.4, which outlined conceptualisations of job engagement and organisation engagement (Saks, 2006) as well as a range of other variables and their relationship to engagement. This section introduced the argument that engagement is portrayed as a commodity for organisational advantage, as well as outlining other critiques of this approach such as its tendency to introduce murkiness into engagement (Shuck, 2019).

Section 3.5 focused on engagement as management practice, as introduced as a category of engagement literature by Bailey et al., (2017a). This considered how studies focus on doing engagement and feature as part of the managerialist project (Truss et al., 2013). This section then explored the influence of practitioner approaches in constructing engagement to consider some of the underlying arguments surrounding engagement, with particular focus on how this impacts understanding.

This chapter concluded with section 3.6 which outlined features of Kahn's engagement concept that contribute to the overall framework of engagement for this research. This served to justify the theoretical framework of engagement for this research. This section aligned the central features of Kahn's concept this study's research questions. Further, it summarised some of the wider issues and problems with existing approaches to engagement research which are also addressed in this research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the ways in which the primary research has been undertaken for this study. It will consider the philosophical approaches and methodological choices in preparing, analysing and reviewing this research. In support of the view that PE is personal, individual and non-typical, it should come as no surprise that I naturally recoil at the idea that social research 'should' be conducted in a certain way, and I confess that unpicking my own philosophical assumptions through the language and ideals of methodology initially felt rather restrictive. Nonetheless, in using established paradigms to delineate and illustrate my own (Crotty, 1998), I understand my approach to qualitative research is typical of those associated with an interpretivist philosophy, due to the need to make sense of the 'subjective and socially constructed meanings' expressed by those being studied (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023 p.185). With a natural wariness of the commodification of experiences I was apprehensive to read criticism of qualitative inquiry as looking 'more like an "industry"' (Schwandt, 2003, p.293), but I have been reassured by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2023) that interpretivist qualitative research has few prescriptions and I could make choices. I take further solace in the argument that inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018). Using the scaffold of Crotty's four elements approach to the research process (Crotty, 1998) the following outlines the research philosophy, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods to outline the approaches through which the research has been achieved.

As previously stated, this study aims to contribute towards an increased knowledge and understanding of PE and what it means to be engaged for the individual. It explores participants' construction of their lived experience of engagement, and intends to shift the focus of engagement to the individual and their experience. It

addresses the lack of qualitative research into the topic and aims to provide some much-needed empirical evidence on the role of the individual in their engagement.

4.1 Background to the Research Approach

In acknowledgement of the theoretical perspective and assumptions about reality I bring to this research (Crotty, 1998), I highlight that my research philosophy and theoretical perspective are influenced firstly by my working experience of HR management, secondly by my opinions on engagement, and finally by my knowledge as a researcher. As an HR professional, my working practice was driven by the traditional unitarist belief underlining most HRM approaches that aim to align the interests of employees and employers and remove conflicts of interest (Budd, 2004). However, as my understanding and experience of engagement developed, I began to question the established unitarist narrative and consider more complex and broader understandings of HRM. Further, I became disillusioned by the contradictions between organisationally-led EE strategies and the employee experience of engagement. This led me to seek answers and develop my understanding of these problems, ultimately encouraging a move towards research. Undoubtedly, a researcher's ontology determines the way they see the world of business and management, and their choice of study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). In my circumstance, lived and observed experience of business and management has influenced my research paradigm. When pursuing engagement as a topic for research, I was driven by my personal interest and views that engagement needs exploration in terms of how it is experienced within the workplace (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021), and so I inevitably have significant bias and assumptions on the importance of engagement and the employee (Bryman, 2012). These are some of my significant guiding beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

A further philosophical consideration is my interest in theories of organisational behaviour and the study of HRM, particularly understanding the extent to which individuals can and do make sense of their work and construct their reality within the workplace. This involves themes of power and influence and concepts from social psychology, such as the notion of self, social role, and interaction with others. I have

mentioned an interest in Goffman's (1971) dramaturgical approach to understandings of self in terms of performances within social establishments EE, and the application of this as important for the concept of PE influences my philosophical position. Goffman's (1971) work highlighted how the social context influences self, and that the structure of self can be observed in terms of how we arrange performances for society. This signifies an external influence on self in that the way we see the world shapes our thinking; people do not exist in an external reality, but rather within their perceptual understanding of that reality. Individuals interpret both their own and other's social roles in accordance with the meaning they give to those roles (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). This aligns with the phenomenological philosophy which emphasises the notion that individuals act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and the acts of others (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). This concern for how individuals make sense of the world and their position in that world generates awareness of individual understandings of self, experiences and perceptions. Clearly, this viewpoint aligns with an interpretivist epistemological approach to research and is a key influence on this research.

As previously highlighted in the literature review, epistemological attitudes may be used to distinguish varying opinions on EE. For those with a positivist approach to work and employment, EE may be viewed as external to the individual; for those with an interpretivist approach, EE is constructed and attributed meaning by the individual. Further, positivist and scientific approaches typically focus on generalisations and establishing general laws, whereas interpretivists seek to understand the unique and individual nature of engagement and engagement experiences. Given that this research seeks to access and understand the individual's perception and experience of engagement and argues that there are multiple variations of these experiences, positivist approaches to employment and research are inappropriate. This research understands EE as internal and belonging to the individual, and so interpretivist approaches that give attention to the production of meaning are needed. In an appreciation of the broader context in which EE operates, the complexities of business situations and the unique set of circumstances in which they take place makes the interpretivist perspective appropriate for business and management research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). Finally, as explored in the literature review,

'discourses (also) depend upon the interpretation and inventive powers of employees. Employees are not passive receptacles or carriers of discourses but, instead more or less actively and critically interpret and enact them' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.628). Therefore, more interpretivist, discussion-based studies of engagement are required.

As previously highlighted, engagement research has been viewed through a predominantly positivist framework concerned with establishing scientific evidence and facts and imitative rules for quantifying engagement (Shuck *et al.*, 2021). The increasing use of psychological research approaches in engagement studies seeks to emulate 'the pure science paradigm' (Godard, 2014, p.6) within HRM studies. This perspective indicates HR research is increasingly presented in the form of science, which is contrasted to 'stories – research that places more emphasis on qualitative data, narratives and interpretation' (Harley, 2015, p.402). Significantly, 'this shift in focus reflects an important paradigmatic transition that has occurred within the management discipline more generally; that of the 'psychologisation' of the employment relationship' (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a, p.35). As argued earlier in this study, the psychologisation of HRM and dominance of positive approaches have potential implications on the study of engagement in that psychological, positivist approaches may overlook important nuances relating to power dynamics and organisational control, and contribute to a resource-based, output-focused view of organisations, employees and engagement. Godard's criticism of 'scientistic' perspectives and positivist research that is 'directed at prediction and control rather than understanding' and tend to objectify the subjects of its research and the way they respond to external stimuli is of significant influence on the research approach in this current study (2014, p.10). Future studies, Godard (2014) argues, need to allow for the complexity and subjectivity of human beings, including a belief that they are capable and interested in independent thought and action, and focusing on what is best for society based on evidence, exposing the inconsistencies with what appears to be best for selected interests in society.

This study aims to address these calls for understanding and exploring complexity in engagement through an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism emerged in 'contradistinction to positivism attempts to understand and explain human and social reality', and seeks to understand by looking at individual cases to trace the

development of phenomena (Crotty, 1998, p.66-67). This approach is more appropriate for engagement research which needs to 'appreciate the more subtle, discretionary self-oriented aspects of EE which are...at the heart of Kahn's definition' (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014, p.175). More recently, Sambrook has argued that survey-based research provides superficial snapshots that 'fail to capture the changing and challenging lived experience of engagement as managers and employees attempt to co-operate in often conflictual work situations' (Sambrook, 2021, p.469). Indeed, Kahn himself argued for more innovative forms of research that 'get at the depth' (1992, p.344) of contemporary managerial and workplace issues in general and EE in particular. Certainly, there has been significantly less focus on the meaning and experience of engagement for employees. In seeking to explore the experience of engagement for employees, this research approach is informed by the argument that Kahn's (1990) PE concept, which has largely been overlooked and marginalised due to organisational and industrial focus on behavioural outcomes and advantages of engagement. It supports the phenomenological position that if we lay aside the prevailing understandings of phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge and an authentication and enhancement of former meaning (Crotty, 1998). This study aims to address the absence of interpretivist research into EE through exploration of the lived experience, perceptions and attitudes to engagement, alongside the meanings attributed to PE.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Theoretical Underpinning

The research focus on individual's experience and perceptions of EE and PE lends itself to the constructionism paradigm, perceiving 'social phenomena and their meanings as continually being accomplished by social actors' (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021, p.606). This perspective considers that there are many realities dependent on social actors, and reality and truth are created by experiences and meanings of how individuals perceive things, which inevitably evolve and change. As Crotty (1998) explains, meaning is not discovered, but constructed. The constructionism philosophy emphasises individual consciousness, experience and perception of the world, indicating that facts may not capture the whole picture and may be less important than local meaning and how people think about and experience their working lives. Further, 'different people may construct meaning in different ways,

even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Crotty, 1998, p.9). Of particular interest for this study is the way in which meaning is continually amended and changed; as Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill explain, 'as social interactions between actors are a continual process, social phenomena are in a constant state of revision' (2023, p.137).

Organisations are micro-societies that operate within a wider context that shape and influence the experience of employees. Therefore, there is interest in the context in which individual experience and meaning of EE and PE is constructed. What we see is external to us (not innate) and stresses the significance of the external world in shaping a sense of self. In this capacity, Crotty's third epistemological stance 'subjectivism' is insightful, in its view that 'meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject' (1998, p.9). Subjectivism is useful in that it emphasises the active role of human subjectivity and psychology; however, it examines experiences, thoughts and perceptions through the 'interiority of subjectivity', and thus as 'the product of ourselves' (Given, 2008). This view overlooks external influence and lacks sensitivity to construction of EE and PE by social institutions. Within qualitative research, subjectivism acknowledges only the subject's subjective accounts, and ignores external influences and comparisons to other sources of information or experiences (Given, 2008). And so, this research assumes a subjectivist ontology in its acknowledgment that participants construct and have an active role in meaning making. The subjectivist approach believes 'hard facts' may not capture the whole picture and may be less important than local 'meaning' and how people think about and experience their working lives. However, the view is that this takes place in relation to the external influence of social institutions, leaning towards the relativist theoretical understanding that our experiences can be understood only relative to something else, such as particular social and cultural practices (Given, 2008). Therefore, these concepts align to direct the constructivist approach of this research; as Denzin and Lincoln highlight, the constructivist/constructionist paradigm 'assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures' (2018, p.19).

The need to interact with individuals to gain deeper understanding is also essential to the epistemological approach. This research therefore assumes the interpretivist epistemological focus on 'the understanding of human behaviour…concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it' (Bryman, 2012, p28). The interpretivist perspective highlights the importance of understanding the social world as rich, complex, varied and variable, and situations are often unique; 'we interpret our everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning we give to these roles' (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p.137). Further, interpretivist approaches 'celebrate the permanence and priority of the real world of first-person, subjective experience' (Schwandt, 1998, p223). The interpretivist epistemology acknowledges that neither values nor meanings expressed by humans are universal, and so the same phenomenon can have different interpretations and explanations (Lee & Usman, 2018). The approach in this study allows for different experiences and perceptions of engagement.

In exploring what EE and PE mean for individuals, there are sensitivities towards an epistemological constructivism and phenomenology in that an individual's knowledge of their world is their own construction, but EE and PE are 'phenomenon' in that they are experiences of self. Constructivism describes the individual human subject engaging with objects and making sense of them (Crotty, 1998), referring to the ways individuals construct or make sense of experience through invented concepts, models and schemes that are continually tested (Schwandt, 1998). This clearly aligns to the research focus of sense-making and understanding what the concept of engagement means for individuals. However, constructivism views knowledge as contingent upon human practices and interactions within a social context, and so meaning comes into existence – and is constructed – in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world which we are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). This dependency on individual experience to make meaning renders a solely constructivist position unsuitable for this research. However, a consideration applied through the process of Max Weber's concept of 'verstehen' or 'understanding' (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021; Weber, 1978) aligns the interpretivist and constructivist approaches in a shared goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 1998). Interpretivism is the process of interpreting or

understanding (of achieving Verstehen) in a particular way what the actors are doing (Schwandt, 2003). Therefore, this research has constructivist theoretical underpinnings in that it explores the way individuals make meaning of their experience of EE and form views of this.

Phenomenology 'emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena…as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer' (Moran, 2000, p.4). Husserl developed an important facet of phenomenology in the 'life-world' concept, referring to the 'intersubjectivity' of the shared lived experience of the world and phenomena (1970). This focuses phenomenological analysis on understanding how the everyday, intersubjective world is constituted (Schwandt, 2003). To emphasise the 'life-world' is to focus on the foundational lived human experience as removed from the empiricist assumptions about human existence (Moran, 2000). This 'lived experience' of the life-world aligns with Goffman's 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983) in terms of the context of human experience and development of perception through social actions and interactions. Phenomenology then 'requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately…(it) refers to what we directly experience; that is, the objects of our experience before we start thinking about them, interpreting them or attributing meaning to them' (Crotty, 1998, p79). In the context of this research, this requires both acknowledgement of and detachment from the multi-layered organisational interpretations of EE and PE and opportunity to revisit it through the lens of the individual. As Merleau-Ponty (2002) explains, it is our experience that is the source of our knowledge in these things. This research approaches phenomenology in the view of a single-minded effort to identify, understand, describe and maintain the subjective experience of individuals (Crotty, 1998). It uses phenomenological design of inquiry through a focus on the lived experienced as described by participants that culminates in the essence of the experience of engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, it aligns with the notion that engagement is not a one-off occurrence, but an ebbing and flowing experience and awareness occurring at varying intensities throughout one's working life. Phenomenology is both a starting point and a touchstone in that it offers research both a beginning rooted in immediate social experience, but also a methodology requiring a return to that experience at many points along the way (Crotty, 1998).

4.3 Methodology and Methods

As outlined previously, this research seeks to address the lack of qualitative and interpretivist studies of engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a) by exploring the individual's perception and experience of engagement. The lack of qualitative research into engagement is representative of a wider issue with HRM research; mainstream research since the late 2000s has lacked methodological diversity and been exclusively quantitative and survey-based, with qualitative research appearing a less acceptable and legitimate approach than quantitative work (Harley, 2015). A broader management preference for quantitative, survey measurements is particularly problematic and limiting for diverse, multifaceted concepts such as engagement. Firstly, quantitative survey methods typically align with positivist approaches to research, which as previously highlighted may overlook complexities and nuances within the engagement concept. Secondly, such approaches contrast Kahn's qualitative, behaviour and transitory engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a) and fail to 'capture the essence of engagement as a dynamic, deeply personal state' (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014, p.173). Indeed, Kahn recommended that future engagement research needs to allow for production of 'a richer portrait of the processes by which personal engagements and disengagements are created' (1990, p.718) and the 'constant fluctuations of self-in-role' (p719). This means quantitative engagement research disregards both Kahn's engagement concept and his approach to future research. Finally, individuals may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, and so this requires a research process capable of and justified in fulfilling these purposes (Crotty, 1998). It is therefore suitable to have qualitative data collection and analysis methods which that seek to deeply understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024), and allow for multiple variations in both experience and meaning.

There are a range of data collection methods assoociated with qualitative research, and Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) identify the main methods as ethnography/participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, discourse/conversation analysis, and the collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents. These diverse research methods differ from each other considerably (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and it is important to explain why certain methods have

not been chosen for the purposes of this study, before justifing qualitative interviewing as the most appropriate method in section 4.3.1.

Ethnography and participant observation refer to similar approaches in which the researcher is immersed in a social setting to observe behaviour, listens to what is said in conversations, and ask questions with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This involves taking part in the activity being studied by participating as a member, and observing the social world of those in the organisation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). Researcher involvement in social settings is inappropriate to this study due to the focus on individual understanding and experiences of engagement, which may surface irregularly or only at certain points, require a retrospective reconstruction of events, and include understandings accomplished only by asking people directly about them (Bryman, 2012; Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). In addition to practical disadvantages such as time commitments required to undertake observation and participation, there are important ethical and legal issues to consider including the potential for bias and influence by the researcher's presence (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Participant observation is also deemed challenging regarding accessing social setting relevant to the research problems (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). The potentially intrusive nature of ethnography and participant observation in peoples work lives means it is important that there are good reasons for choosing this approach (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). When considering the advantages of qualitative interviewing in comparison to participant observation, such as investigation of issues that are resistant to observation, reconstruction of events, fewer ethical considerations, less intrusive in people's lives, avoiding potentially reactive effects of a participant observer, greater breadth of coverage and enabling a specific focus on research questions (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021), it was clear that the interview approach to collecting data was sufficient for the purposes of this study.

Focus groups were also considered an inappropriate data collection method for this study due to the need to gather individual and subjective understandings and experiences of engagement. The idea of the focus group is that people who are known to have had a certain experience can be interviewed in a relatively unstructured way

about that experience (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). This study does not assume that individuals have knowledge and experiences of engagement, but instead seeks to develop understanding of the varied perceptions and meanings individuals attribute to engagement. The focus group is essentially a focused group interview, in which several participants are asked questions on a defined topic and emphasis is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The researcher is interested in the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals, including how people respond to each other's views and the interactions that take place within the group (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), which is unsuitable for the individual focus of this research. Focus groups allow for the collection of the participant's own words and can take account of deeper meanings and interpretations, however, there may be influence on the participants from the facilitator and some of the other participants, that may affect the quality of the data (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). This study seeks to understand the deeply personal understanding and experience of engagement, which potentially involves privately held views that individuals may not want to share in front of colleagues or peers. The focus group also held the risk of supressing individual perspectives, and encouraging group effects such as agreement amongst participants in discussions (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). In combination, these restrictions rendered the focus group as an inadequate data collection method for this study.

Due to the nature of understanding individual's perceptions and experiences of engagement, the data collection methods for this study need to be individual. Kahn outlined that 'individual differences influence how people personally engage or disengage' (1990, p.718), and so the complexities in which people experience, comply, identify and internalise engagement need to be considered. Bailey *et al*. advocate for 'further studies that investigate engagement at different levels – individual, work group/team and organizational – would shed additional light on the experience of engagement' (2017a, p.46). It has been argued that few academic studies on engagement have focused on employees themselves (Lee & Ok, 2015). The research methods used for this research therefore focus on the individual level through in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

4.3.1 Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants employed at the time of interview were used to gather detailed descriptions of employee understandings and experiences of engagement. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the replies of the interviewees tend to be more personal in nature (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2021). Further, they allow for a conversational structure flexible enough for interviews to raise questions and concerns in the individual's own words and from their own perspectives (Brinkman, 2017). This approach allows for the subjective and flexible exploration of EE and PE.

This study focuses on individual's understandings and experiences, and the interviews were structured and designed to explore participants' understanding of the terms EE and PE and discuss the concepts. As previously identified, EE is a multifaceted concept with many definitions and understandings, and PE is underrepresented in relation to the employee experience. This study has also argued the importance of an interpretivist approach to exploring experienced based phenomena such as EE and PE. With these two approaches at the forefront of interview design, I considered it important to firstly ask participants what they understood by these terms, understanding it can mean different things and can be discussed without being imposed upon an individual (full questions Appendix E). These questions provided participants with the opportunity to describe their understanding of the phenomena through their voice. The interview is a 'human, intersubjective and responsive encounter' (Brinkman, 2018, p.578) which allows opportunities to interpret meanings of phenomena which can become part of the conversation itself, giving the interviewee a chance to object to a certain interpretation suggested by the interviewer (Brinkman, 2017). As 'the same term may not mean the same thing to all interviewees' (Willig, 2008, p.24), and PE is a lesser-known term, I recognised that to enable discussion of participants' experiences of EE and PE, there needed to be a shared understanding of the terms. Further, asking participants' their views on these in comparison to their understandings might provide interesting findings. Guest *et al*. (2013) highlight an advantage of the interview is that if respondents do not understand the phrasing or terminology in a question, the interviewer can record that information and provide a rephrasing of the question so that the interviewee might respond. Therefore, after

asking participants their understandings of EE and PE, two definitions of EE and two definitions of PE were made available in paper copy and offered to be verbally read to the participants (Appendix F). All participants asked to see and hear the definitions, a point explored further in the discussion and findings chapter.

Some criticise the interview for providing indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees and the likelihood that not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this research, these limitations were celebrated and encouraged to comprehend the vast range of experiences and understandings of the engagement concept, which were clarified through the detailed interpretations of the interviewees. These limitations also encouraged a sensitivity and awareness that the role of the interviewer is to involve and direct the other party (Lee & Usman, 2018). When the interview is perceived in the view of a performance (Denzin, 2001) with understanding of Goffman's dramaturgical sociology (Goffman, 1971), sensitivities to the extent to which the interview is the performance of a drama at the front of the stage or the backstage need to be considered (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). Some of the ways in which these power and performance tensions can be addressed are through being flexible over the interview schedule (i.e. allowing the interviewee to choose the time, setting and method of recording); the provision of information scripts for reading and commenting before; attention to the opening and closing of the interview; and generally being accessible after the interview (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick & Grace, 1996). These approaches were implemented as essential interview practice for this research.

The interview was designed with broad series of questions on EE and PE, including participant understanding and experiences of engagement concepts. Focus was on understanding the meaning that the participants hold about the concept, not the meaning that the researcher brings or that writers express in literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Importantly, this is with a sensitivity towards what Frosh (2007) describes as the tendency among qualitative researchers to present human experience in ways that set up coherent themes that constitute integrated wholes. Rather than categorise participant interpretation and experience, the interviews were open to multiple interpretations and understandings of engagement concepts. This was in attempt to free participant experience from 'the interview society', in particular

it's tendency to assume people have a private and public and authentic self, and the private self is the real self (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). This research acknowledges there is no real, deep or inner self that is accessed by the interview method, but instead different selves, different performances and different ways of being a person in a social situation and so different interpretive (and performative) versions of who the person is (Denzin, 2001). As outlined in the literature review, this aligns with particular interpretations of EE and PE, which allows sensitivities to the importance of providing opportunities for different selves to be presented. The research subject also enables awareness of the interview's contribution to a consumer culture in which the self and its experiences are commodified (Kvale, 1999). Whilst these ingrained aspects of interview culture cannot be fully avoided, the nature of the interview topic has sensitivities and understandings of these themes and deeper awareness of potential implications. It allows for greater awareness of the ethical and political dimensions of an interview, which can represent power relationships (Lee & Usman, 2018).

The semi-structured interview allowed for participants to discuss their interpretation and experience of engagement concepts. The questioning style aligned to that of narrative interviews, which encourage interviewees to tell stories about their experiences of organisational phenomena as a means to understanding how those interviewees make sense of their experiences (Lee & Usman, 2018). This approach places greater interest in the interviewee's perspective and point of view, giving insight into what they see as relevant and important (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). Importantly, it has the purpose of 'obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.6). It has been identified that 'engagement as a personal state is likely highly subjective (based on personal experience)' (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014), and that 'engagement is about the deeply subjective experience and the phenomenon and much less about measurement precision' (Shuck, Kim & Fletcher, 2021, p.465). Further, in semi-structured interviews 'the interviewer and interviewee are conversational, rather than rigid and controlled' allowing for participants to 'share information regarding their experience of engagement at work' (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011, p.307). In-depth interviews provide 'the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and to

secure vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience (Burgess, 1982, p.107). Additionally, semi-structured and in-depth interviews provide the opportunity to encourage the interviewee to explain, or build on, their responses and describe the meanings they ascribe to various phenomena; 'interviewees may use words or ideas in a particular way and probing their meanings will add significance and depth to the data' (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023, p.450).

The interviews utilised the critical incident technique, in which 'respondents are asked to describe in detail a critical incident or number of incidences that is key to the research question' (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023, p.817). This ensured that questions are grounded in real-life experiences of participants rather than being discussed as abstract concepts (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, p.390), as has been the approach with engagement research to date. This approach encouraged participants to recall a time of PE. Kahn (1990) outlines exploration of how moments of PE or disengagement are produced as a primary aim for future engagement research. Kahn's suggestion that 'people tacitly deal with multiple levels of influences – individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational' and that there are engagement thresholds needs further exploration (1990, p.718). A critical incident recollection of a moment of engagement helped to explore this in more detail.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, participants were given an option to choose where the interviews should take place, either at their place of work, a local café or a private room at the University. Enabling interviewees to choose the location helps to equalise relationships between interviewer and interviewee (Lee & Usman, 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic interviews had to take place through online formats through Zoom which significantly altered the interviewer and interviewee relationship and is explored later. Organisational access was not required, as the nature of the interview was to focus on individual understanding and experience. The interview functioned as a narrative opportunity for the participant to tell stories about themselves (Denzin, 2001), rather than the organisation in which they work. Therefore, the interview did not require information on organisational data. This strengthened the range of participants able to take part in the research, as negotiating organisational access in addition to participant interest can often cause stipulations, obstacles and contradictory requirements (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). Further, involving organisational decision making in

access requirements risks involvement of the complex and pluralistic power relationships that are often embedded in organisations and may not coincide with the interests of researchers (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016).

4.3.2 Research Participants

For this research, participant sampling had two areas of purpose; firstly, the practical and resource-based issues of accessing suitable participants, and secondly, the ability to focus on a specific phenomena or issue (Mason, 2018). Attention was also paid to the necessary sensitivities about what's going on around us as researchers, acknowledging the intricacies, challenges and political and ethical implications of negotiating access and building relationships with research participants which are necessary for qualitative research (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016).

In terms of practical issues, to address resource constraints, participants were primarily accessed through the researcher's personal, social, professional and institutional networks (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021; Gill & Johnson, 2010) as well as snowballing, asking people to nominate further interviewees. It is acknowledged that snowballing and social networks are considered less formal channels of access (Miller & Bell, 2012), however this approach is representative of qualitative researchers who 'usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth' (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020, p.27). Further, access through such methods supported single participant criteria for this study – that the participant was employed by an organisation at the time of the interview. Self-employed participants were excluded due to the importance of gaining insights into themes that emerged from the literature review, such as organisational influence on engagement. Unemployed individuals were discounted due to the ontological perspective that people's experiences are meaningful, and the research aim to explore participants' construction of their lived experience of engagement. It is important that participants in a study have all experienced the phenomenon in question so that the researcher can forge a common understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Other than these classifications, employed people willing to take part were invited to participate to gain a broad and rich variety of responses. Participants with any level of working experience were accepted, resulting in a diverse range of management level,

professions, sectors and working experiences involved in the sample. This approach enabled the research to interview a cross-section of people to give a diversity of opinions on the phenomenon (Lee & Usman, 2018).

I conducted 30 interviews; 27 face-to-face and 3 by Zoom, lasting between 30 – 70 minutes. As argued by Mason (2018), sample size is irrelevant in this research context since the logic of knowledge generation and explanation does not rest on enumerative principles. Rather than having a specific number of interviews in mind, the focus was on a sample 'large enough to make meaningful comparisons that relate to (the) research questions' (Mason, 2018, p.71). However, there is need to justify why data gathering ended at 30 interviews. The primary influence was the timing and scheduling of interviews. As a part-time researcher, the original research plan was for interviews to take place in two approximately equally divided tranches according to suitable periods of protected time from my employment. The first round of interviews began in May 2019, and due to an unexpected successful recruitment of participants through snowballing, it continued into August 2019 with 23 interviews being obtained. With a return to an intensive working schedule, there were significantly less opportunities to conduct interviews in a meaningful and constructive way, both due to time and mental capacity to devote myself to the interview process. I therefore stopped conducting interviews at the end of August 2019, and attention focused to transcribing when possible.

The second round of interviews were due to begin in March 2020; I managed one face-to-face interview before the Covid-19 pandemic forced remaining interviews to be referred to online formats through Zoom. This had significant impacts on interviews; firstly, participants that agreed to face-to-face interviews pulled out or failed to respond to attempts to rearrange to online. It is assumed this is because of the uncertainty and difficulties experienced during the turbulent times of Covid-19. It was harder to reach out to networks to gain access to participants. I was also sympathetic (and susceptible) to the emotional turmoil the uncertainty, bombardment of information and loss of social connection. My polite pestering for participants reduced significantly. Secondly, for those interviews that did agree to take place electronically, it significantly altered the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Undoubtedly, the medium of video-calling prevented meaningful connection between us; from technical glitches to quickly

learnt communication cues of waiting for each other to finish talking – the experience was noticeably different. The interaction and development of social relationships between the researcher and participant is key to the interview process (Kvale, 1999), and in electronic interviewing the relationship is 'disembodied' and 'decontextualized' (Morgan & Symon, 2004, p.28). I had concerns that this unplanned change was impacting the data and information gathered, especially when compared to the previous face-to-face interviews. As Lee and Usman (2018) highlight, the medium for the interview and social relationship between the researcher and the interviewee will be different when different media are used, and this may affect the quality of the information that is shared. And so, I halted the interview plan towards the end of March 2020 and resumed in August 2020 when government regulations allowed face-to-face communication.

The third influence on the decision to end data collection was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on participant responses taken at various times through the unfolding of the pandemic. The participants in interviews conducted in March 2020 had clear focus on fear around Covid-19 and uncertainty; interviews conducted in August 2020 continued these topics as well as referring to changes experienced, uncertainty about the future, inability to make plans and so on. There is a noticeable difference between responses in a time of sudden and unexpected lockdown (March) and eased restrictions (August), when participants have had more time to experience Covid-19 implications. This meant that Covid-19 interview relationships were not comparable, in addition to the face-to-face interviews. The focus of this research is the individual and their experience; it is very much internally focused. The 'Covid-19 interviews' were noticeably more focused on the external and generally struggled to move away from discussions of it to enable sufficient internal depth. Combining this with understanding that one of the strengths of qualitative research is that, as unexpected issues emerge in the course of the research, the researcher can be 'flexible and sensitive to the need to adapt the design of the content as issues are revealed by the interviewees' (Lee & Usman, 2018, p.106), the decision was made to end data collection.

A fourth and final influencing factor was that, as I progressed with interview transcription and reviewed annotations and notes on previous interviews, it became clear that many similarities were already emerging. The 'Covid-19 interviews' were not

shedding any new light on areas of importance for the research. Instead, there was a clear sense of reviewing topics covered in earlier interviews, and new discussion points focusing on Covid-19 and its implications. I felt that the essence of information, opinions and experiences needed to address the research questions had been gathered, and there were implications of possibly diluting that data by continuing to gather Covid-19 related information that is unrelated to this research. It became increasingly clear that I had reached 'saturation' and was at risk of data becoming 'repetitive' and 'superfluous' (Mason, 2010, p.2). I was further encouraged by Hennink and Kaiser's empirical study of sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research, which demonstrates that 'small' sample sizes (e.g., 9 – 17 interviews) are effective for qualitative research because they are able to reach saturation, and advocates sample sizes which are 'less about numbers and more about the ability of data to provide a rich and nuanced account of the phenomenon studied' (2022, p.9). Combined, these factors gave me confidence to end data collection.

The participant reference list (Appendix I) indicates how participants have been labelled by the numerical order in which they were interviewed, and includes a broad description of participant employer's industry to ensure that identification of participants is not possible. Information is also displayed visually (Appendix J) to demonstrate interview participant demographics. These factors are important to discussion of the data findings.

4.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process that requires sequential steps to be followed and involves multiple levels of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Creswell & Creswell's (2022) analytic process describes a systematic qualitative data analysis process which include organising and preparing the data, reading through all the data, coding, identifying themes, developing a story line interpretation, further analysing the data using an analytic framework, and interpreting the data. With a subjectivist epistemology and interest in meanings and understandings of EE and PE for individuals, data analysis was framed through beliefs in co-construction and interpretation between the researcher and participant. Analysis of qualitative data generally intends to make sense out of the text (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and so

there is then an element of 'sense-making', in that the data is revisited and explored for deeper layers of meaning. Further, it is influenced by the phenomenological position that by revisiting immediate experiences of phenomena possibilities for new meanings and enhancements of former meanings emerge (Crotty, 1998). This is fundamental to the research focus of understanding engagement for the individual.

Miles *et al*. (2020) strongly advocate for ongoing analysis that is concurrent with data collection. It could be argued that this data analysis approach is exploratory and inductive in nature in that it assessed emerging themes from the data as the research progressed, building up a theory that is grounded in the data and a result of the research process itself (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). However, a significant contributor to the research purpose and questions was to explore engagement concepts, including Kahn's PE concept, and so inevitably engagement theory such as Kahn's contributed to the research approach. In practice, research is likely to combine elements of both inductive and deductive approaches (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). Qualitative researchers typically work inductively, building categories and themes by organising data, working back and forth between the themes and database until a comprehensive set of themes are established, then deductively the researchers look back at their data from the themes, and so deductive thinking also plays an important role as the analysis moves forward (Creswell & Creswsell, 2023). It is therefore acknowledged that the data analysis approach is exploratory within the confines of engagement theory.

As Denscombe highlights, data in its raw format is difficult to analyse and needs to be organised (2017). Interviews were transcribed in their entirety (Appendix K), using an audio transcribing system and proof-read whilst listening to the audio file, making amendments, and anonymising the data whilst correcting errors. Transcripts enable a closeness to the data and opportunities to annotate and consider implied meanings whilst transcribing (Denscombe, 2017). The transcripts included notes such as changes to audibility (e.g. whispering), gestures, outside interferences, uncomfortable silences or other feelings that give a richer meaning to the words that were spoken (Denscombe, 2017).

When interview transcripts were complete, they were uploaded into computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to support organisation of the data and annotations, enable speed when sorting and searching through data and aiding the identifying of patterns and thematic analysis (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2021). However, much more additional thinking and analysis is required beyond the abilities of the software. The transcripts and annotations were coded individually and then examined again as a collective group of themes. Coding is 'deep reflection about and, thus, deep interpretation of the data's meanings' (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020, p.63). The process of coding involved reviewing each transcript in date order and assigning codes to sections of the data to identify recurring terms, references, or points of interest. Initially, an open coding approach was used in that the data was examined, conceptualised and then categorised into codes (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). This included descriptive coding, whereby I assigned a descriptive label that summarised the phrase, emotion, or concept that the data referred to. Codes referred to a topic broadly, including differences and contradictions to those topics; for example, some participants stated relationships with their colleagues positively influenced their engagement, whereas others stated a negative impact. Codes also included a description of the way in which participants responded, for example '*uncertainty*' when participants were asked how they understand EE or PE and responded with tones, laughter, comments or questions that sought reassurance and indicated uncertainty. These did not specifically answer the questions but provided important and illuminating data (Nowell *et al*., 2017). This process resulted in large chunks of data under each code in NVivo which I then examined again, attributing themes which represented patterns across the data. Codes and themes were also used as ways to manage data and identify potential indicators of concepts which are constantly compared and then generate theory (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). The resulting multitude of code labels were then compared and placed into broader, hierarchical related groupings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023) through more focused coding. This included broadly organising data into broader data-driven themes around categories relating to understandings and experiences of EE and PE to identify data relevant to the research questions. Once this data was categorised, analysis initially followed the interpretivist stance in that coding and themes emerged from the data rather than being pre-assigned.

After much refinement of codes and themes, three broad groups of themes emerged as forming the basic structure of analysis; understanding EE and PE (chapter 5), the experience of engagement (chapter 6) and barriers and enablers of PE (chapter 7). These themes related to each group were placed into thematically-labelled tables in a word document (Appendices M - S) to display multiple perspectives from individuals supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence (Crotty, 1998). This process is referred to as 'winnowing the data', through which some of the data is focused on and other parts are disregarded (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). For example, all codes related to colleague interaction and relationships were grouped as 'relationships with colleagues'. Focused coding involves reanalysis of data to consider initial codes that might be used to categorise larger units of data, allowing for constant comparison of codes to gain further insights and work towards an emergent explanation of the data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). This second round of focused coding analysis involved interrogating the data using the codes and groupings that had been developed, allowing themes to be identified. In this way, analysis is shaped by the researcher's interaction with and interpretation of these constant comparisons (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). Throughout the data analysis process codes and groupings were named by utilising terms that emerged from the data and actual terms used by the participants (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023; Strauss & Corbin, 2014). This resulted in data codes and groupings being data driven, derived from the data and applied by the researcher. Themes were therefore reviewed according to phenomena and arguments present in the data.

Following this analytic process of coding and identifying themes it was necessary to review the data according to the literature and wider understandings of engagement, to create detailed findings relevant to the research questions. After the basic structure of analysis had formed, I undertook an additional round of data analysis specifically on the data categorised in the first of the three broad groups of themes that initially emerged; understanding EE and PE; the experience of engagement; barriers to engagement. Creswell & Creswell's (2022) analytic process highlights that researchers can use the code-to-theme method and then further analyse their data using an interpretive analytic framework such as those available in the literature. To address research question 1 (what is PE, and how does it differ from existing

understandings and research on engagement?), this further analysis of data considered what type of engagement was described by participants according to the main models of engagement in the literature. This process included establishing a system or frame of categories according to the four main models of engagement that emerged in the literature review (Appendix L), and then classifying the data from the first theme group (understanding EE and PE) according to these predefined categories. This analysis of text within a system of categories can be understood as qualitative content analysis in that I had a clear concept of the categories derived from the literature review and theoretical background (Mayring, 2021). Qualitative content analysis requires some degree of interpretation in that it focuses on describing selected aspects of the material to help describe what interview participants have said (Schreier, 2012). Unlike the first approach to coding, through which codes were developed only from emerging information collected from participants, this approach involved using predetermined codes (four main models of engagement) and then fitting the data to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Predefined codes can help guide analysis when seeking to identify those themes which are most relevant to building an understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Content analysis through a process of thematic coding seeks to categorise phenomena of interest, and is achieved through an interpretative approach through which the researcher searches for manifest and latent content (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

The data analysis approach undertaken in this study involves multiple levels of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2022) and is interactive, flexible and aligns to a constructivist approach in that both the participant's and researcher's interpretations are being socially constructed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). Further, the multiple tiers of analysis demonstrates rigour in the analysis approach, including the process from raw data to sub-themes and overarching themes. This allowed me to identify significant concepts and themes whilst reading the data, leading on to focused coding and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be applied in relation to several different ways of analysing qualitative data (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). It understands a theme as a category identified through data, relating to the research focus, building on codes identified in transcripts and which provides the researcher

with the basis for a theoretical understanding of their data (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Research involving human subjects must consider the ethical implications of the involvement of those subjects in the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2021; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). This includes key principles such as informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, protection from harm, avoiding deception, declaring conflicts of interest, honesty, transparency and the right to withdraw (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2021; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; Shaw, 2003). This section outlines the ways in which these ethical considerations were adhered to in this research. The research was governed by the research ethics policy of University of Plymouth available in full [here](). Further, ethical approval was granted from the Faculty Research Ethics & Integrity Committee (Appendix H) before data was collected. As a professional member of the CIPD this research is also informed by the CIPD code of professional conduct and ethics, which states that members are required to adhere to specified standards and behaviours: Positive and active impact on working lives; Civic virtue and stewardship; Good character; Professional service and competence; and personal responsibility (CIPD, 2022).

Securing access to participants is an ongoing activity (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and consent to partake in the study was therefore achieved twice, both informally (by way of agreeing to take part in the study) and formally (signing the Consent Form). Firstly, participants responded to my email asking them to volunteer for the study (Appendix A) which provided them with information on the purpose and nature of the study and ensured no covert aspect to the research. Their response indicated they choose to participate, and I responded with a participant confirmation email (Appendix B), which included the Participant Interview Brief (Appendix C). This brief outlined their participation is voluntary and their right to withdraw at any time, without penalty, by informing the interviewer by a specific date. No request to withdraw were received from participants. The brief also outlined the purpose and nature of the study prior to and during their agreement to participate, and that I would not disclose names or identities of participants to any other participants, employees, management teams or

organisations, ensuring openness and honesty before and during the interview. When participants returned the participant confirmation form to me, they formally indicated their consent for current and future use of the data captures. Finally, the participants signed the Participant Interview Consent Form (Appendix D) at the beginning of the interview, providing a further formal indicator of their consent.

Due to the nature of the questions referring to personal experiences of engagement in the workplace, it was acknowledged that the interview may cover some potentially sensitive and personal issues which may be a small risk to the individuals involved. For example, discomfort when recalling experiences and/or emotions associated with colleagues or line managers, opportunities for promotion or development, previous engagement experiences or frustration at lack of feeling engaged. This was addressed by explaining to participants during the Participant Interview Brief that they do not have to answer any questions they don't want to. Further, it explained participants do not have to disclose any information they do not wish to. Finally, an Interview Debrief Form (Appendix G) outlined contact information for participants to access if they felt psychologically or emotionally distressed by participation in the study.

The control and use of data obtained is a particular ethical issue in organisational research, and the researcher must ensure ethical responsibility by not publicising or circulating any information that is likely to harm the interests of individual informants, particularly the less powerful ones (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2021). Further, the interviewee is reliant on the researcher to act with a proper duty of care with their information (Gatrell, 2009). To minimise reputational risk to individuals and ensure confidentiality the names of participants were replaced by a code in all written documents except for original interview notes. Participants were interviewed in a private room either at their place of work or away from their place of work, according to what the participant specifically requested. I am responsible for collecting, processing and storing all data, and have complied with the University of Plymouth Research Publications and OA Policy and Research Data Policy, which are in accordance with the data protection act. Audio recordings were transferred to and stored on my secure password protected University OneDrive account immediately after the interview. Interview notes were stored in a secure location either within the researchers home or in a locked drawer or cupboard at the university. Research notes

were always kept out of the direct sight of participants during the interview process. The transcribed data is securely stored on my University OneDrive account, which is password protected. It is managed in accordance with the University's Information Security Classification Policy.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis: Understanding Employee Engagement and Personal Engagement

Overview of Findings and Analysis

The following three chapters present key findings and analysis of the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. As explained in chapter 2, 'engagement' is referred to as the encompassing engagement concept. EE is an organisationally driven term describing a 'workplace approach' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009), and personal engagement (PE) is Kahn's (1990) definition (Appendix F). Each chapter is structured to address the research questions and begins by outlining which question it addresses. A range of relevant sub-themes are identified. Extracts of participant interviews are cited briefly in italics, with full versions of available in appendices as directed. Participants are identified numerically in the order in which they were interviewed, with 'P' signifying participant. E.g., 'P1' represents 'participant 1'. The participant reference list (Appendix I) indicates the labelling system. Personally identifiable information has been removed to ensure anonymity. However, references to participant employer's industry and length of service are accurate, and displayed visually (Appendix J). Efforts to use gender neutral pronouns have been made to avoid participant identification. Although data relating to participant's age and gender was collected, this is not presented as there were no findings significant to the research questions.

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews which allowed for participants to discuss their perception and experience of engagement concepts. The narrative interview and critical incident questioning style encouraged interviewees to tell stories about their experiences of organisational phenomena and understand how they make sense of their experiences. Data analysis was framed through beliefs in co-construction and interpretation between the researcher and participant. Analysing each interview for implied meanings, chunks of data were then re-examined, allocating collective themes representing patterns across the data. Themes referred a category

related to corresponding research questions, generic phrases to describe a theme, or actual terms used by the participants.

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 explores data relevant research question 1, 'what is PE, and how does it differ from existing understandings and research on engagement?'. Section 5.1 outlines the key themes that emerged from responses to interview questions 3 and 4 (Appendix E) regarding what the participant understands by the term EE. Section 5.2 considers this data again to identify the type of engagement described by participants when compared to the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review (personal engagement; work engagement; multidimensional engagement; engagement as management practice), summarised in table (Appendix L).

Section 5.3 summarises responses to interview question 7 (Appendix E) regarding what the participant understands by the term PE. Following both questions, participants were provided with definitions to continue discussions around their understanding (Appendix F).

Data explored in both sections refers only to participant's responses before presenting definitions. Themes are introduced that are considered more fully in the discussion chapter relating to existing perspectives on PE. The process of analysing data for these two questions included assigning preliminary codes to describe the data, reviewing these codes to identify themes, and renaming the codes to categorise findings to appropriate themes. These themes are presented in the corresponding sections, with reference to all the data collected for these themes in the appendices as directed.

Section 5.4 summarises data captured after definitions were provided. As outlined in the methodology, the distinction between 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrating pre-definition data and 5.4 considering post-definition data is purposeful in understanding participant's understandings in their words and from their perspectives. It also enabled participants to have a common understanding of EE and PE when provided with definitions to support the subsequent critical incident questions.

After sharing the definitions, participants continued to comment on their understandings of EE and PE, or adapt understandings to include aspects of the definitions. Some participants elaborated on their understandings and referred to additional concepts not previously mentioned in their original response. Section 5.4 therefore outlines identifiers of EE and PE discussed elsewhere in the interviews. This distinction between pre-definition themes and post-definition themes is of importance in understanding participant's understandings of the terms, and then how they have adapted them since being given definitions, in relation to the research questions.

5.1 Employee Understandings of Employee Engagement – Thematic Analysis

To address research question 1, participants were asked 'what do you understand by the term EE' (Appendix E). Responses were varied and multifaceted - as P3 notes: *'I think there's lots of little things that build up towards that ultimate full on engagement.'* To allow participant responses emerge from the data and directly address the research question, two rounds of data analysis were undertaken; thematic analysis and content analysis. Firstly, thematic analysis involved reviewing the responses and grouping them by themes which emerged from the data:

- Uncertainty
- Organisational initiative
- Two-way
- Relationships with others
- Individual feeling, behaviour and/or act

These themes summarise participant's understanding of EE as aligned to the organisation or individual, and an interaction between the two. Many participants described EE as more than one of these themes, and their answers have been split across these themes to distinguish between how EE is understood as organisationally led, individually experienced and as occurring at the interaction between organisation and individual.

5.1.1 Uncertainty (Appendix M, table 1)

One participant was entirely unsure what EE is:

> *P7: …don't know really...I wouldn't even know where to start…*

Significantly, 16 participants demonstrated uncertainty and hesitancy, seeking reassurance, using questions or guessing at what engagement is. Commonalities in participants positioning their answer as questions indicates uncertainty and need for confirmation in understanding engagement. For example:

> P17: "Is how it works here rather than assuming that they'll be happy with you? Do you know what I mean?"

This lack of understanding of EE indicates that for some, EE is unknown and unfamiliar; employees need reassurance and support in understanding EE. A universal awareness and knowledge of EE cannot be assumed.

5.1.2 Organisational Initiative (Appendix M, table 2)

17 participants perceived EE as an organisational initiative. Noteworthy is reference to how employees are made to feel by their organisation or management, for example:

> P10: …how you're made to feel about the job…systems that are in place…

> P15: …how they (management) make us feel and how that sort of reflects back on them as to how we feel about who we work for and our responsibility to them and our loyalty to them, so mutual respect…

> P17: … how they (management) engage us within the firm…

P20 shares a similar view that engagement is something that is 'done', but expands who is involved:

> P20: I suppose that depends on who is engaging the employee, whether it's the organisation as a whole, management, the employee's engagement with their work, although that is engaging I suppose.

Commonalities in references to management and organisational activities as a compelling force in how employees are '*made*' to feel are suggestive of power and control in engagement. Further, responses highlight being part of '*a bigger picture'* and responsibility and loyalty '*to them'*, indicating EE is understood to be for the organisation. These findings indicate some employees understand engagement as an experience initiated by management, and accessed through organisational/managerial activities, presenting EE as organisational intervention.

Another commonality in the data related to organisational or managerial influence are actions enabling an 'ability to engage'. For example:

> *P1: … being able to develop a relationship between…the higher authorities…where their staff feel you know engaged in their work looked after and…happy in their job roles.*

This indicates participants perceive engagement as accessed through organisational or managerial permission, understanding EE as organisational intervention, opportunities and the ability to engage. This aligns with definitions of engagement as a workplace approach (MacLeod, 2009) shaped and owned by the organisation.

It was striking that for some, engagement was understood as the HR function or communication. For example:

> *P12: …the job description…the contract…employer engagement was one of the HR names…our PDR (personal development reviews)…our personnel records…jobs adverts...a HR function.*

The importance is twofold. Firstly, for some EE is simplified to a function or activity such as an interview process, supporting the argument that there is a limited and confused understanding of EE. Secondly, EE is understood as an organisationally directed strategic initiative to people management. As one participant explains, it means employees understand engagement as the voice of organisations:

> *P13: … in corporate sort of speak which is what I'm used to is how well the employees of the business are engaged with the corporate objectives of that business*

P13 is responding to a question asking them to explain their understanding of EE, and yet they rely on *'corporate speak'* to articulate this, indicating employee understandings of EE are explained through organisational language, expression and discourse.

A further issue with understanding EE as an organisational initiative is that participants' attitudes on organisational initiatives are attached to EE. An example of this is P30 (full version Appendix M, table 2):

> *P30: … It's obviously about bringing everyone along…making employees feel like they've got a say…making people feel*

> *valued…Whether it's just a cynical exercise to tick a box is another question… our staff satisfaction survey actually every year, and that's just a waste of time…it is just lip service all this stuff I think…'*

P30 understands EE to be a way by which employees are *'made'* to feel for organisational gain. Notably, P30's response associates the 'ability to engage' to a distrustful and sceptical understanding of EE and, indeed, the organisation overall. This indicates that when EE is understood as an organisational initiative that provides the 'ability to engage', it can lead to negative attitudes towards engagement.

Findings in this section have demonstrated EE is understood as related to planned activities and systems taken by an organisation and/or management. This includes the ways organisations and managers provide opportunities for engagement and permission to engage, thereby influencing engagement. It also relates to organisational functions such as HR and communication, and as explained through organisational language, expression and discourse, positioning understanding of EE as an organisational initiative at the organisational level of influence.

5.1.3 Two-Way (Appendix M, table 3)

Participant understandings of EE as two-way include reference to multiple interests and a transactional exchange. Two participants described EE as two-way based on the dual interests of employee and organisation (Appendix X, table 3). For example:

> *P2: … it's a way by which the company get the best out their employees. And by which the employee can get the best of the company.*

This understanding assumes EE is an approach that achieves mutual gains for employees and organisations. Significantly, 7 participants explained EE as a transactional exchange of gains, or a *'two-way street'* (P18 and P26, Appendix M, table 3). For example:

> *P24: … how much a person is…willing to give – go above and beyond for their organisation so that their organisation is gaining, but you are getting what you want out of it as well?*

Reference to assumed equal effort and gains for both groups highlights similarities with SET and transactional views of engagement explored in the literature review. For example, P24's willingness resonates with 'employees will choose to engage

themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization' (Saks, 2006, p.603). P24's response to *'give'* and their understanding that the organisation will *'gain'* indicates they understand EE as based on equal effort and input which enables mutually desirable outcomes. Further, this is rooted in business language, supporting earlier findings that engagement is understood through organisational discourse. These findings indicate that EE is understood by employees as a transactional exchange initiated by management and/or the organisation, and the individual's response to this perceived exchange.

5.1.4 Relationships with Others (Appendix M, table 4)

The business-orientated language of the previous 7 participants who understood EE as a transactional exchange is contrasted with 6 participants who identified EE as relationships with other members of an organisation. These relationships can be with those you immediately work with, and people elsewhere in the organisation. For example:

> *P14: … engagement with the people you work with and also like slightly outside of that so like other teams…how do you like, engage all like, in your communication with other people.*

Participant perceptions of EE as relationships with others within an organisation include *'the people you work with (P14)'*, *'all of the staff members (P19)'* and *'the people around you (P3)'.* This suggests EE is understood as relationships with any organisational member and *'the company as a whole (P19)'.* Further, these are positive, supportive relationships. For example:

> *P16: It's about relationships…EE is actually about…understanding each other and - and actually looking after each other.*

Similarly, P15 states:

> *P15: … a good relationship with…the top level of management, they know who you are, and it just feels nice, it feels good to be in that position really.*

Contrasted to the business-orientated language of employee understandings of engagement as a transactional exchange, participants that referred to engagement as a relationship with others viewed this as positive, caring and supportive. This aligns to

the CIPD's 'meaningful connection to others' (CIPD, 2010, p5), but also implies a move beyond to describe relationships that are based on understanding and caring for one another. Trust, support and relationships with colleagues are themes explored in greater detail in chapters 7 and 8.

5.1.5 Individual Feeling, Behaviour and Act (Appendix M, table 5 and 6)

Data indicates employees understand EE as an affective phenomenon in that it refers to a range of emotions, feelings and experiences; 17 participants attributed EE to an individual's feeling (such as connection with the organisation), and 18 participants related EE to an individual's behaviour or acts (such as going *'above and beyond' (P15/P24)*). This section explores participant understandings of EE through an individual feeling (Appendix M, table 5) or behaviour and/or act (Appendix M, table 6). Whilst the data within these themes might be interpreted as a feeling, act or behaviour, they have been categorised according to participant descriptions, and how I interpreted them, in accordance with the research methodology. The concepts overlap significantly, with references to personal and observable feelings (such as enthusiasm), observable acts (such as smiling), and behaviour (such as working 'over and above' what is expected of them), outlining assumed shared common feelings or behaviours. These findings indicate that observable indicators related to feelings, acts and behaviours are important to employee understandings of EE.

The first theme relates to participant understandings of EE as an individual feeling, including their own and those they interpret others to feel. Some explained EE as an affective phenomenon that influences ambition and connection with the organisation (Appendix M, table 5). For example:

> *P13: … it's like what drives people…if an employee is engaged they're doing the stuff and they're being pushed in the direction, which is where they want to go…*

Responses indicate feelings of interest as internal affective enablers of engagement. Reference to '*being pushed in a direction'* to align with the organisation indicates an internal force aligned to external factors.

For some participants, engagement is understood by how people around them encourage feelings such as motivation (Appendix M, table 5). For example:

> *P19: … the people around you…encouraging you to be motivated…and highlighting that you're part of how it all works…if somebody higher up than you or somebody in your team recognises your part in it, then that also makes you feel more engaged…*

Highlighting the influence of both '*people around you*' and those '*higher up than you*', P19's reference to encouraging someone to feel engaged supports earlier findings that employees understand engagement to be a transactional exchange initiated by management involving feelings and emotions (section 5.1.3), and relationships with others (section 5.1.4). Further, P19 suggests that external recognition enables 'more' engagement, placing responsibility on people in their team or 'higher up'. This suggests the reaction of organisational members are important in understanding EE as an individual feeling, explored further in section 5.3.

Some participants outlined EE as reliant upon a connection to external meaning or meaningfulness. For example:

> *P10: … feel like I'm sort of part of something...that there's value in the work that I'm doing.*

This suggests opportunities to validate one's engagement within the wider context enable individual feelings for engagement.

Some participants outline personal responsibility for feelings related to EE (Appendix M, table 5). For example:

> *P15: you get out of it what you put in, a feeling that you're respected and that you're valued…"*

This suggests personal responsibility for enabling a feeling of respect and value. Similarly, P5 explained:

> *P5: … you've got to love what you're doing…it's really important to love the business that you're working for and to be in line with their values, their beliefs, their direction the goals of the business and about understanding how you personally can contribute to that…*

In this instance, onus is on the individual to feel the connection with the values and goals provided by the organisation and job. Findings therefore indicate views of both external and individual responsibility for feelings, behaviours and acts which enable and demonstrate engagement. Further, P5 emphasises the need to '*be in line with*' the organisation to enable feelings of connection, indicating an alignment of self with the organisation, explored further in section 5.5.1.

The most common sub-theme in understanding EE as an individual feeling, act or behaviour was happiness (Appendix M, table 5 and 6). Descriptions of engagement as happiness were often presented as an observable emotional state that signals positivity. For example:

> *P11: … it's about being happy at work…they'd be positive, definitely, in their day-to-day work, you know you get a hello and a smile in the morning*

Responses related to '*being*' happy and positive also present EE as an affective state experienced over time. Another example is P24, who describes how they would recognise an engaged person:

> *P24: … they would generally come off as a happy person um most of the time…they're more approachable, maybe a bit more friendly, they put themselves out there to be a person that would help other people, you know that wouldn't be their role.*

In addition to associating EE to an affective phenomenon, P24's term '*come off as*' suggests a performance of '*a happy person*', rather than experienced happiness. This suggests EE is understood as an affective phenomenon involving emotional labour to appear – in this instance – as '*a happy person*'. Emotional labour includes 'emotional efforts performed to fulfil perceived or explicit individual work-related motivations or expectations that serve organisational goals' (Barry, Olekalns & Rees, 2019, p.19). P24 describes efforts to present as '*happy…approachable…friendly*', suggesting there are idealised engagement displays which employees perform through emotional labour and can be observed and recognised by others. Further, P24 highlights that this '*wouldn't be their role*', indicating behaviours of going above the duties of their role explored in more depth later in this section.

P10 also suggested observable happiness an identifying factor:

> *P10: … quite enthusiastic about what they do…proactive to sort of get involved in maybe different aspects of not only their role…quite a happy positive person in their job, maybe quite a team player.*

P10 and P11 refer to happy or positive as describing an engaged person, indicating a shared understanding of identifying factors that can be used to define the idealised engagement display. P2 also explains:

> *P2: … they're keen, they show up…early…they are enthused…enjoying their work and they're keen to do more…you can tell if someone's not engaged from similar opposite reactions…someone who turns up late or someone who's not bothered about that job can show it physically…you can read it in them pretty clearly.*

These findings identify participants place importance on an observer's interpretation of employee's happiness and friendliness, emphasising observable indicators in understanding EE. For P22, observable emotional states include behaviours and the way someone speaks about their job:

> *P22: … people who speak positively about the place where they work...someone who…like actively excited to go to work and who maybe doesn't see work just as a chore…they feel like they're like actively contributing to something and that they get recognised for that…*

The suggestion is that verbal and observable emotional feelings of engagement need an external response such as recognition for validation. Descriptions of the presence and absence of verbal and observable emotional states suggests EE is understood through the way it is performed in relation to happiness. Further, the significance of the popularity of employees associating engagement to feelings of happiness is only surpassed by recognition that all except one of these findings describe the appearance of feeling happy; just one participant said they'd *'be…happy in their work (P23)'*. This indicates employees view the performative display of emotions as part of the act of engagement. Descriptions of a person who smiles and wants to work are put forward as observable acts of engagement by other participants (Appendix M, table 5). These align with understandings of EE as involving 'the appearance of engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486) which relates to a performative display.

Additional examples of EE as a performative display related to fulfilling job requirements, working *'above and beyond (P15/P24)'*, and behaving according to a

certain mood or attitude (Appendix M, table 6). Above, P2 suggests going to work early indicates engagement. For P29 EE is observable through timekeeping:

> *P29: … the standard things…turning up on the right times. Knowing your job hours and…what your responsibilities are, doing them to the best of your ability…you've got CPD constantly going…*

Reference to *'standard things'* suggests an assumed shared understanding of an idealised engagement display, such as timekeeping. Volunteering time and effort was a commonality among participants that identified working *'above and beyond (P15/P24)'* as behaviours of engagement (additional examples in Appendix L, table 6). Adding to previous findings of employees describing engaged employees as those who *'come off as (P24)'* affective phenomena such as happy and friendly, findings indicate employees understand engagement to be a performance of - rather than experiences of - affective phenomena. Another example:

> *P27: … it's kind of the discretionary effort…going the extra mile… the decision to do that bit of extra work…I don't think there's always a conscious necessarily conscious decision…something kind of within people that has either formed over time to make…good decisions subconsciously… I do think we have a choice in terms of how we react to different set of situations…*

P27's emphasis on not a *'conscious decision'* but a *'choice'* highlights they view discretionary effort and engagement as an opt-in response. P27 differentiates between the reaction to external factors in which engagement choices take place, and a *'conscious decision',* depending on the employee's level of awareness of a range of factors that influence in their engagement decision. For P27, engagement is not always a conscious decision, but engagement choices include subconscious processes. Similarities in responses relating EE to behaviours of going *'above and beyond (P15/P24)'* indicates EE is understood to include an active choice to opt-in and present observable behaviours and feelings.

As indicated in P22's response above, regarding the importance of '*recognition'* in engagement displays, a further common theme in participant responses relating EE to an individual behaviour and/or act relates to how the observer interprets observable behaviours of engagement (Appendix M, table 6). For example:

> *P4: I think friendly and smiley…*

> *P21:...people that look like they're having a nice time and are interacting with their colleagues...*

Emphasises is on the behaviour of being *'friendly'* and *'look(ing) like they're having a nice time'*, which are vague and ambiguous descriptors. Further, reliance is on the observer interpreting these acts, indicating there is more than the emotional labour of the employee's behaviour (such as smiling) involved in engagement displays. This study suggests this relates to 'emotional transactions', which are the 'sequence of communication that occurs when an employee displays emotion, notes the reaction of a "target" person, and adjusts or maintains expressed feelings' (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, p.26).

As discussed earlier in this section, participants outline engagement as a feeling of happiness, indicating understandings of the observable and audible indications of individual engagement behaviour. Participant responses relating this to describing engagement as additional behaviours support these findings. Another example:

> *P5: … if you look at someone and their eyes light up as soon as you start talking about the business they're working for and the job role, you can instantly see that, you can tell by the tone of their voice that the passion that they talk to you about it, the language that they use …*

Similarities with observable and audible indications of individual engagement behaviour as happiness, P5's description also goes beyond simply the act that an individual displays as indicated through reference to the way someone's 'eyes light up'. P13 refers to a similar intangible indication of engagement:

> *P13: … you can pick up when people are into something and then not just their general mood and their general body language and stuff which is associated with it?*

P13's description that *'you can pick up'* on engagement suggests an unspoken, unconscious level of individual engagement that can be understood through interpreting mood and body language. This suggests engagement is displayed through both observable individual behaviours and acts, but also intangible and ambiguous indicators, determined by an observer's interpretation of the indicator.

5.1.6 Summary: Employee Understandings of EE – Thematic Analysis

This section has demonstrated the range of ways in which employees understand EE. Section 5.1.1 demonstrated that for some employees EE is unknown and unfamiliar, and they need reassurance and support from others in understanding EE.

Findings presented in section 5.1.2 outline reference to understandings of EE as related to planned activities and systems initiated by an organisation and/or management. This includes data related to the ways organisations and managers provide opportunities for engagement and permission to engage, thereby influencing engagement. It also relates to views that EE is an organisational function such as HR and communication.

Section 5.1.3 presented findings related to employees understanding EE to be 'two-way' in interests and a transactional exchange initiated by management and/or the organisation and an individual response to this perceived exchange.

Section 5.1.4 demonstrated employees understand EE as the positive, supportive relationships employees have with members of an organisation. This section highlighted that existing definitions and understandings of EE do not account for individual understandings of EE as relationships with others, and that employees understand responsibility for the relationship with others lies with the individual, rather than the reciprocation of others.

Section 5.1.5 has presented findings that EE is understood as an individual feeling, behaviour or act experienced by the individual. Findings suggest these are enhanced by external recognition and validation from organisational members, as well as a sense of personal responsibility that influences engagement. Findings therefore indicate views of both external and individual responsibility for feelings, behaviours and acts which enable and demonstrate engagement. Further, this section presented findings indicating that EE is understood as related to behaviours that indicate EE is understood to have an active role in choosing to opt-in and present observable behaviours and feeling.

Section 5.1.5. also presented findings related to descriptions of engagement as an observable emotional state and an affective phenomenon that involves emotional labour to appear 'happy'. This presents EE as a performative display of happiness, indicating participants view the regulation of emotions as part of the act of engagement. These findings link with suggestions that verbal and observable indicators related to individual feelings, acts and behaviours are important to understandings of EE. Descriptions of the presence and absence of verbal and observable emotional states suggests EE is understood through the way it is performed in relation to happiness. Further, this section highlighted the importance of an observer's interpretation of engagement behaviours, acts or feelings in understanding EE, as well as references to intangible and ambiguous indicators of engagement.

5.2 Employee Understandings of Employee Engagement – Content Analysis (Appendix N)

To address research question 1, the following presents findings of participant responses to 'what do you understand by the term EE' (Appendix E) in comparison to the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review (Appendix L), to consider the type of engagement described by participants.

All four types of engagement were considered in participant responses (Appendix N). 14 participants referred to only one single type of engagement (8 of which referred to engagement as management practice) (Appendix N, figure 3), and 16 referred to a combination of two or three types of engagement (Appendix N, figure 2).

5.2.1 Engagement as management practice

The most common concept was engagement as management practice; 20 participants referred to features of this type of engagement in their responses (Appendix N, table 2). For example:

> *P4: … an interview panel and the process of that?...the communication between the two?...if it comes like from an organisation like (employer) I think ummm…*

> *P8: … it's about how motivated um the employees are, and how I suppose productive. I suppose the communication between the employer and employee and how they achieve that.*

> *P28: … how well your managers and everyone interacts with each other and how well they get a team to work together, how well you can communicate with them…the organisational goals filtering down into other members of the team*

Commonalities in responses that described engagement as management practice included describing *'process (P4)'*, strategies (e.g. *'communication (P4; P6; P8; P14; P18*)), culture, vision and leadership. This indicates employees perceive engagement as a workforce management strategy (Bailey, 2022). It supports findings in section 5.1.2 in which participants understand EE as an organisational initiative.

Notably, there were similarities in the responsibility of managers, such as in involving employees in decision making and creating a positive work environment, for example:

> *P10:…how you're made to feel about the job that you do and the people that are around you…So maybe systems that are in place or in the environment that's in place…*

> *P30:…about bringing everyone along…making employees feel like they've got a say in the direction of the company and how they're going to be treated I guess, making people feel valued…*

This aligns with interest in engagement as management practice which focuses on the importance of the manager and their influence over engagement and driving business outcomes (Harter *et al*., 2002). These findings support those discussed in section 5.1.2 which indicate participants understand engagement as an organisational initiative that is 'done' by management and organisational activities which influence how employees are *'made to feel (P10)'*.   This extends the concerns of Truss *et al*., who raised concerns with academic HRM studies that focus attention on 'doing engagement' and engagement as 'part of the managerialist project' (2013, p.2664) in that it suggests employees understand engagement to be 'doing engagement' through management practice.

Further commonalities in participant responses to how they understand engagement which aligned to engagement as management practice related to business outcomes including productivity and performance. For example:

P2:…it's a way by which the company and get the best out their employees. And by which the employee can get the best of the company."

P8:…how motivated um the employees are, and how I suppose productive

.

5.2.2 Multidimensional engagement

13 participants referred to features of multidimensional engagement described through a connection to either the job role, team, or organisation. For example:

P3: … a department level, on a team level or a general organisation level as well…

P19: …engagement with your particular role and then engagement with the company as a whole…

Saks's (2006) separate states of engagement – job engagement and organisational engagement – are distinguished between performing the work role and performing the role as a member of an organisation (Schaufeli, 2014). These findings suggest employees understand engagement to be at different 'levels' between role, team and organisation.

Multidimensional engagement is 'an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organizational outcomes' (Shuck and Wollard, 2010, p. 103). Emphasis by some authors is on engagement as an individual trait, a psychological state, and behavioural tendency that is 'intended to serve an organizational purpose' and 'strategically focused and bounded by purpose and organisational relevance' (Macey and Schneider, 2008, p.18). These featured in some participant descriptions, for example:

P23: … when a person is engaged with their work, but also with the organisation so they feel motivated to work but also have buy-in to the organisation and its culture and values and the willing to work as a team player.

Participants highlighted particular 'feelings' towards their role or organisation, such as motivation and willingness, which indicated alignment with multidimensional types of engagement.

5.2.3 Work engagement

As the significantly more dominant stream of engagement research (Bailey *et al*., 2017), it was surprising to find only 9 participants refer to features of work engagement. These included reference to passion and enjoyment for work, willingness, and alignment to and investment in organisational values and goals, for example:

> *P5: … you've got to love what you're doing…love the business that you're working for and to be in line with their values, their beliefs, their direction the goals of the business and about understanding how you personally can contribute to that…*

> *P10: … feeling part of something sort of how invested you are in your role, sort of how you're made to feel about the job that you do and the people that are around you…whether you've got a kind of a positive outlook going into work, whether you're sort of feeling part of a bigger picture…*

> *P27: … the discretionary effort…it's the going the extra mile…it's the decision to do that bit of extra work for the individual or the organisation that they're employed by.*

Participants who referred to features of work engagement in their understanding of engagement tended to align with engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli *et al*., 2002, p.74). References included job resources, such as a supportive work environment that encourages '*social activity (P3/P26)*' and '*opportunities to learn and grow (P10)*', and personal resources, such as '*how invested you are* (P10)' and '*being flexible (P11)*'.

5.2.4 Personal engagement

8 participants outlined features of PE in their understanding of engagement relating to 'the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p694). These were predominantly focused on supportive relationships with colleagues and managers, and the behavioural display of a cognitive and emotional interpretation of work-related environmental inputs and outcome (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). For example:

> *P1: … being able to develop a relationship between those kind of in the more…higher authorities…*

P14: … engagement with the people you work with and…other teams…in your communication with other people.

Responses also included displays of feeling '*happy (P1/P11)',* and the *'ability to speak freely (P6)'* indicating some alignment with Kahn's three psychological conditions which influence engagement and how people inhabit their roles - meaningfulness, safety, and availability (1990).

5.2.5 Combination of engagement types

16 participants were categorised as describing engagement as some combination of all four models (Appendix N, table 2 & figure 2). The most common combination was multidimensional engagement and engagement as management practice (4 participants) and work engagement and engagement as management practice (3 participants) (Appendix N). For example:

Extract from Table 1 Appendix N: Content analysis of participant understandings of employee engagement

Highlighting code:

- Personal engagement (Blue)
- Work engagement (Green)
- Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)
- Engagement as management practice (Pink)

P22:	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"I would say it's probably what the organisation is doing for the employees, and without a motive of, you know, better output necessarily, but just employee happiness...and wanting to stay engaged in the organisation and also understanding how the organisation works in departments that might not relate to you...I kind of equate it with happiness and wanting a high retention rate in your organisation and stuff."
P24	Work engagement (Green) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Um so my - is how much a person is, I guess, willing to give - go above and beyond for their organisation so that their organisation is gaining, but you are getting what you want out of it as well?"

5.2.6 Summary: Employee Understandings of EE – Content Analysis

This section has presented the ways in which employees understand EE in comparison to the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review. It has demonstrated that the dominant type of engagement in employee understandings is engagement as management practice. These findings were explored in section 5.2.1, which highlighted that employees understand engagement to be workplace management strategy such as communication. Findings also emphasised the role of the manager, their influence over engagement and the significance of business outcomes in employee understandings of engagement related to engagement as management practice.

5.3 Employee Understandings of PE

As previously argued, there is an absence of research into PE and how it is understood and experienced by employees. To better understand this and address the research questions, participants were asked 'what do you understand by the term PE?' (Appendix E). To assist analysis participant explanations of their understandings of PE were grouped by the following themes (Appendix O, table 1):

- Uncertainty
- Personal life
- Organisational approaches
- Personal responsibility
- Authenticity

These themes summarise participant understandings of PE as aligned to the organisation or individual. Each theme is now explored in greater detail.

5.3.1 Uncertainty (Appendix O, table 1)

Participants were asked, 'what do you understand by the term PE? (rather than EE)? (Appendix E). Notably, 6 participants responded with uncertainty regarding how they understand PE. For example:

> *P30: Uh. Um so I've got no idea what that is, um to hazard a guess…no, I couldn't even guess…*

These participants were unable to speculate what PE means and asked to be told what it meant. Further, 8 participants were hesitant, offering guesses and seeking reassurance through questions. For example:

> *P11: … I guess it is believing in what your company is setting out to do…you know, all the information about what, you know, the different products that we make…*

P11 guesses and seeks reassurance through frequently saying *'you know'* in a questioning tone, asking for non-verbal support. Many participants used tones and terms such as *'I guess'* positioning a question rather than a confident response, a similarity with findings related to understandings of EE (section 5.1.1). Interestingly, of the 11 participants that responded they didn't know or were guessing what PE is, 8 responded with both reassurance seeking and questions regarding their understanding of EE (section 5.1.1). This indicates some employees lack clarity and confidence in their understandings of PE, and require support and guidance from others in understanding the term.

Some participants referred to EE to develop an understanding of PE, for example:

> *P8: … what I'm getting out of it rather than – rather than with the kind of loose term of EE so what I would want out of it…what I would expect to gain from work…(EE) is about how the employer engages the employee. And personal would be more what - what I would do to engage.*

This indicates referring to understandings of EE can support employees in developing understanding and awareness of PE. However, this often led to participants describing PE in organisational terms, as exemplified in P8's response which focuses on *'gains'* and outcomes, and the perspective that it's the employees responsibility to *'do'* PE, explored in section 5.2.2.

At this stage in the interview, participants had been provided with a definition of EE, and likely expected a definition of PE to follow. Clearly, participants were influenced by the terminology used in the EE definitions. This suggests employee understandings of engagement are influenced by externally provided discourse. When this finding is applied to the observation of participants seeking reassurance and instruction to understand an engagement term, and making guesses, it is clear that employee understanding of engagement is externally influenced. Findings therefore imply that

127

employees who lack an understanding of PE seek reassurance and instruction in their understanding of PE, are externally influenced in their understandings and can use understandings of EE to develop awareness of PE.

5.3.2 Personal Life (Appendix O, table 1).

Following the finding that employees can use understandings of EE to develop understanding of PE, it is notable that some participants relied on other familiar terms to explain PE. For example:

> *P4: More to do with yourself? Well personal I guess?... to do with your life like your family your friends…things in your outside of work life, hobbies, interests, that kind of stuff?*

Unspecific reference to '*yourself*' and '*outside of work life*' asked as a question indicates lack of understanding of PE. Concepts such as '*hobbies*' refer to activities which the participant can assume have a shared understanding. P4 relies on the word '*personal*' and applies it to a different concept '*personal life*', which again has an assumed common understandings but contributes to misunderstanding and conceptual confusion of PE. Similarly, P9 refers to 'personal life':

> *P9: … getting involved in something in your personal life or in your working life as well…there's loads of things that we do personally in life that we're engaged in that we're not necessarily passionate about and want to be engaged in…there's just a variability of how excited you are to be engaged in things.*

P9 is suggesting PE is part of an individual's fluctuating enthusiasm for the activity or experience they are engaged in, either at work or outside of work. Findings in this theme are attached to the word 'personal' to describe something familiar, and indicate misunderstanding of PE. Participants understand PE as related to interests and experiences in their personal lives, and seek support in their understanding through use of the word 'personal'. Reliance upon familiar concepts indicates that for employees, PE is unfamiliar and misunderstood.

5.3.3 Organisational Approaches (Appendix O, table 1).

Continuing the finding of the use of familiar concepts to explain PE, some participants referred to organisational activities to explain their understanding of PE. For example:

> *P12: … it'd link me into my own personal development and CPD...and the support that the institution can give me to go where I need to go.*

These responses refer to the organisational support for the employee to engage through learning and development. It outlines understandings of PE in organisational terms, in this instance 'CPD'. These findings align with those in section 5.1.2 which demonstrated employees understand EE as planned activities initiated by an organisation and/or management, including organisational functions such as HR. Notably, these findings are organisational approaches to enable PE, which indicates some participants understand PE as an organisational approach. Further, it highlights employees do not understand PE or how it differs from EE.

Participant responses relating PE to organisational approaches also refer to the individual's involvement. In addition to P12 referring to *'link me into my own personal development'*, P23 highlights:

> *P23: PE is…about me personally. What attracts me to the job and encourages me to perform - or want to perform my best in the job…how that job enables me to achieve whatever might be my immediate and long-term goals, personally.*

Mention of the *'job enables me to achieve'* aligns this response to the responsibility of engagement as external to the individual, as discussed in 5.1.2. Further, multiple references to *'me'* outlines P23's responsibility for personal goals. This suggests PE is understood as involving internal responsibility, considered in 5.3.4.

5 participants understood PE as the way the organisation views employees as individuals. For example, P13 distinguished the difference between EE and PE as collective and individual engagement:

> *P13: … that's more my personal engagement as opposed to me as an employee…the EE is more of a collective group isn't it? Whereas personal's individual?...*

P13 indicates PE is understood as an opposite to EE. Further, P13 describes *'an employee'* as a collective group and *'personal'* as individual, suggesting EE is understood as an overall approach for all employees, whereas PE is understood as unique to the individual. As P20 explains, PE is:

> *P20: … to do with how the organisation and management interact with an individual on a personal level, so rather than; is everyone being treated as a sort of blanket treatment, it's; do they understand the needs professionally and personally of each individual employee.*

Reference to *'blanket treatment'* suggests EE is a panacea for all employees. Opposite to this, PE is understanding '*the needs professionally and personally of each individual employee*'. For P20, responsibility for achieving this is placed with the organisation and management and the way they interact on a personal level.

Another distinction between a collective panacea engagement approach and an individual level PE is made by P1's focus on the viewpoint of the organisation. P1 describes PE as:

> *P1: … looking at your employees as individuals rather than employees generally and knowing what it is that…those employees want as individuals rather than just like a group of people…*

Similar to P20's reference to the individual's needs, P1 draws attention to what individual employees want rather than employees in a broad and generic way. Further, understandings of engagement as how an organisation looks at their employees connotes themes of audience spectatorship and observation, explored in section 5.5. Commonalities indicate participant understandings of PE as an organisational approach to viewing employees as individuals rather than collective groups. As P24 highlights:

> *P24: … So, where the organisation might focus on employees as a whole, so everybody as the same, it's more direct to me… identifying what that individual needs potentially.*

P24 understands PE as the attention the organisation gives to an individual's needs and wants. Findings in this section have highlighted that for these participants, PE is related to individual needs and wants. It is opposite to EE which is a collective panacea to engagement, and distinguishes the individual employee from the collective group of employees.

5.3.4 Personal Responsibility (Appendix O table 1).

Personal responsibility in PE understandings has been previously mentioned; P8 (5.2.1) exploring '*what I would do to engage*' as important to defining PE, and P23's

reference (5.2.3) to what *'encourages me to perform…how that job enables me to achieve'*. In total, 11 participants referred to personal responsibility, making this the most common theme in participant understandings of PE. As previously considered, this could be influenced by the word 'personal' in PE. However, all responses in this theme referred to an understanding of PE as involving individual accountability, in either their actions, emotions or mindsets. For example:

> *P2: … what am I doing to fit into the company better?...what am I doing personally to engage myself with my company.*

This indicates that individuals have an obligation in PE, in this instance to '*fit*' with the organisation. Another example:

> *P10: … what steps you take yourself to sort of make sure those things sort of happen…not necessarily relying on the structures of the company but maybe asking the right questions of your line manager or using those sort of opportunities to feedback…*

Highlighting the steps the individual takes to personally align with their organisation or role, these findings indicate employees PE as something an individual actions. Personal responsibility for actively identifying emotions were also identified, for example understanding what is required for 'happiness':

> *P13: … what do I need to get out of it…to make myself happy…from a personal point of view you need to satisfy stuff…What are your own individual needs? What do you want to get out this? How much are you personally invested in it?*

PE is understood as something an individual must do (e.g., fit in with organisation) and experience (e.g. feelings of happiness) to enable engagement. This indicates participants viewed PE as both the organisation's activities and individual level of responsibility. These themes are explored further in the discussion. Participants also referred to actively involving particular mindsets, for example:

> *P19 :... in my mind it's kind of being switched on and open to new things…having your doors open to change…*

P19's response indicates openness as important to PE. This aligned with P26's understanding of PE as the 'work' they do on their mindset and resilience:

> *P26: … a range of things that I bring… why do I come to work?...what you get the most satisfaction from…which in turn encourages you to do more and get engaged… It's tough work to do…and so for me that personal engagement is how that work fits in to the rest of my life.*

For P26, PE the work they do to understand how their unique experiences and values enables them to align their work with the rest of their life. P26 also refers to understanding their authentic self and how this aligns to their role. P26's list of questions exploring what they bring to their role indicates PE is understood as exploration and application of self. This requires personal responsibility in mindset and application of self, which alludes to a psychological presence within work, aligning to Kahn's assumptions that there are both conscious and unconscious dynamics in the person-in-role relationship (1992, p13), explored further in the discussion chapter.

5.3.5 Authenticity (Appendix O, table 1).

A final theme that emerged in participant understandings of PE relates to authenticity, regarding references to *'me'* and application of self, or as P26 referenced, *'a range of things that I bring'*. For example:

> *P5: So me?...I have to love an organisation and I have to love what I'm doing in order to want to do it more… that's what I found with my personal engagement with my HR path…once you get that click, it makes you hungry…Thinking about what is it about a workplace that makes me want to work for them and it was the company's values and beliefs. They had to align with my own.*

Reference to the '*click'* they experienced in aligning their professional identity with the organisation's values and beliefs is suggestive of an adaptation of self to the organisation, explored further in section 5.5. P5 also outlines the things they *'have to'* do to *'love'* their organisation and role, aligning with the previous theme of personal responsibility. Further, they highlight the importance of aligning organisational values and beliefs with one's own, suggesting authentic connection with organisational purpose is important in PE. P5 describes professional identity and understanding of how this aligns with their values and beliefs as how they understand PE. P16 similarly outlines the importance of how they understand themselves to understanding PE:

> *P16: … we've all got a work personality and a home personality…the way you conduct yourself and the way you engage with people whether*

you're in work or whether you're outside of the organisation in your personal life are really the same aren't they?...the difference is that in work you'd have you've got some more formality against the way you engage with people. So, it's a little bit more structured and you have to think maybe about hierarchy or that type of thing…if you're in your personal life, then you're probably a bit more relaxed…it's a little bit like treat how you want to be treated. I think that's what engagement is about.

P16's statement that PE is '*a little bit like treat how you want to be treated*' indicates their understanding is synonymous with their moral principles and values. P16 distinguishes between a work and home personality; this is indicative of a multiplicity of selves within organisational contexts, explored further in section 5.5. Further, this is considered alongside the need to '*think...about hierarchy*' and '*formality*' within the workplace*,* which highlights the influence of the audience in engagement, explored in section 5.5. There is also consideration of an active choice in responding to formal hierarchy in the workplace. Actively choosing behaviours and performances is a theme considered in the literature review, and will be considered in the discussion. P16's understanding of PE has similarities with Kahn's description that 'people can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform' (1990, p.692). Further, they align PE with a principle described as of importance to them, suggesting PE is understood as alignment with personal beliefs, personalities and behaviours. P16's differentiation between a 'work' and 'home' personality suggests a splitting of self. P21 identifies a similar split between being a 'person' and an 'employee':

P21: I suppose with EE is that the focus is always on work really and what that means, whereas with PE is it's how you feel as a person not employee…I don't want to say emotional in a pejorative sense, that's not what I mean, but person is more emotional because it's more about how you feel and how it reflects on you as a person, whereas with EE I suppose it's more how it reflects on you as an employee.

This response adds to previous findings (5.2.2) that split the collective and individual employee groups. Further, P21 suggest PE reflects '*you as a person*', including how you feel and the emotions you experience. This reflection of self is position as opposite to EE, which reflects '*you as an employee*'. The performative dimensions of PE are considered in 5.5; presently highlighted is P21 distinguishing between an authentic version of self as aligned to PE, and an 'employee' version of self with EE.

5.3.6 Summary: Employee Understandings of PE – Thematic Analysis

To summarise, responses to the question 'how do you understand PE' indicate participants understand PE through comparisons to their understandings of EE and reference to familiar concepts and experiences. Section 5.3.1 demonstrated that for some employees PE is unknown and unfamiliar, and they need reassurance and support in understanding PE. Further, this section highlighted the use of understandings of EE to develop an understanding of PE, and the influence of externally provided discourse and intervention on employee understandings of engagement.

Section 5.3.2 highlighted employee use of familiar terms and generic concepts to develop understanding of PE, indicating unfamiliarity and lack of understanding of PE. This section also highlighted that some participants distinguishing between 'personal' and 'work' lives.

Findings in section 5.3.3 focused on findings related to employees understanding PE to be organisational approaches, reliant on the support approaches provide to enable PE. This includes the way the organisation views employees as individuals rather than a collective group of employees. This section presented findings that employees understand PE as distinguishable from the collective panacea of EE, in that PE is the attention the organisation gives to an individual's needs and wants.

Section 5.3.4 demonstrated employees understand PE as personal responsibility, which was the most common theme in this section. Findings relate PE to individual accountability in either their actions, emotions or mindsets.

Finally, section 5.3.5 outlined findings related to PE as authenticity, in application of self to role and what an individual brings to their role. Findings in this section also refer to a 'work' and 'home' personality and include references to active choices in PE.

5.4 Employee Understandings of Personal Engagement – Content Analysis (Appendix P)

To address research question 1, the following presents findings of participant responses to 'what do you understand by the term PE' (Appendix E) in comparison to

the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review (Appendix L), to consider the type of engagement described by participants. This section also compares participant responses to content analysis on their understanding of EE (Appendix P).

All four types of engagement were considered in participant responses, and a new category 'uncertain' was added for 6 participants who were unable to answer the question (Appendix P). 24 participants referred to only one single type of engagement or as uncertain (Appendix N, figure 3), and 6 referred to a combination of two types of engagement (Appendix N, figure 2).

5.4.1 Multidimensional engagement

11 participants PE understanding referred to features of the 'multifaceted experience of being human: our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours' (Shuck, 2011, p. 319) identified in multidimensional engagement concepts. This was often in relation to being part of the organisation and '*how an individual engages as part of a wider team* (P28)', and included descriptions 'characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli *et al*., 2002, p.74). For example:

> P2: … *what am I doing to fit into the company better? And what am I doing to – what am I doing personally to engage myself with my company.*

> P14: … *your input to the employee engagement? So like how you can play a part in that wider team I guess? So like everybody has their little role don't they? and like you'd want everybody to be to be doing their part for the whole engagement to then happen.*

Commonalities in the individual's '*input*' suggest these participants understand PE to represent behavioural dimensions. Macey and Schneider's multidimensional engagement concept identifies 'trait' engagement as 'the inclination to experience work in positive, active, and energic ways and to behave adaptively in displaying effort at going beyond what is necessary and initiating change to facilitate organizationally relevant outcomes' (2008, p.24). Participant responses aligned with features of this, for example:

> P19: … *being inquisitive and...in my mind it's kind of being switched on and open to new things or open to...yeah, in learning and understanding certain*

things...yeah to me it's like being switched on, being like having your doors open to change.

P19 describes resilience and adaptability that are indicative of a features of a person's 'inclination' to experience work, as well as their behaviour. These responses align participant understandings of PE to multidimensional engagement in that engagement is 'a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance' (Saks, 2006, p. 602).

5.4.2 Personal engagement

10 participants outlined features of PE in their understanding of PE, most often referring to aspects of individual awareness and expression of self. For some, this was differentiating between '*how you feel as a person not employee (P21)*'. For example:

> *P13: more my personal engagement as opposed to me as an employee. What do I need to get out of it in order to make myself happy because it is that sort of thing - you've got - the employee engagement is more of a collective group isn't it? Whereas personal's individual?... What are your own individual needs? What do you want to get out this? How much are you personally invested in it?*

PE is 'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance (Kahn, 1990, p694). These findings suggest some employees are aware of their 'personal selves' and understand there to be a difference between themselves at work and outside work. One participant described this as *'we've all got a work personality and a home personality (P13)'*.

Other responses indicating features of PE aligned with Kahn's three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (1990). For example:

> *P6: … a comfort of being able to discuss things…that you could speak about things and move things forward…*

> *P9: … getting personally involved with the relationships with different people at work as well. And developing those different relationship, being personally engaged in those different relationships.*

> *P29: … people's idiosyncratic values…it's something that means a lot to them.*

5.4.3 Conflation with EE

12 participants described a similar type of engagement to that which they had described as EE. For example, P12's identified features of engagement as management in their understanding of EE:

> *P12:… through the role that I've been given the job description that I've been given, the contract that I've been given and how I enact it within my team and the wider periphery, so we've gone through numerous different names and I think employer engagement was one of the HR names wasn't it a few years ago?…they manage all of our PDR and all of our personnel records and things like that and jobs and adverts and stuff like that…So, I presume from that perspective...a HR function.*

Similarly, their understanding of PE focused on the activities provided by the organisation to support the employee:

> *P12: … it'd link me into my own personal development and CPD... and the support that the institution can give me to go where I need to go…develop skills, experience different opportunities…*

These findings suggest that these participants do not understand there to be a different between EE and PE. Further, that the type of engagement they are familiar with is used as a way to describe all types of engagement.

5.4.4 Summary: Employee Understandings of Personal Engagement – Content Analysis

This section has presented the ways in which employees understand PE in comparison to the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review. All four types of engagement were considered in participant responses, and some participants were unable to answer or provided descriptions that were uncertain. There was no one dominant type of engagement identified, but rather features of multidimensional engagement and personal engagement were highlighted most frequently. Further, findings demonstrated conflation in engagement concepts in that 12 participants described a similar type of engagement to that which they had described as EE, suggesting that these participants do not understand there to be a difference between EE and PE.

5.5 Performative Dimensions of Engagement

This chapter has so far focused on findings related to understandings of engagement in direct response to interview questions on understandings of EE and PE. Section 5.5 outlines understandings of engagement discussed in the interviews after being provided with definitions (in response to any question including and following interview question 6, Appendix E). Large volumes of data were captured with a range of themes. When reviewing this data, a single overarching theme emerged which is considered significant for all four research questions; performative dimensions of engagement. As identified in the literature review, Kahn (1990) identified PE as behaviour by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances. This section solely explores participant references to such behaviours and performances in their exploration of engagement.

Sections 5.1 and 5.3 identified that participants referred to performative dimensions when explaining their understandings of EE and PE prior to receiving definitions. Section 5.1 identified understandings of EE as a performative display of emotions such as happiness, and section 5.3 considered actively choosing behaviours and performances, such as between how an individual acts at home and in the workplace. Additional presentations of performative dimensions to engagement appear elsewhere in the data. To explore this, related subthemes were created according to participant explanations, often using participant's language to title a subtheme. For example, 'adaptation' explains participant responses relating to how they adapt in scenarios or how they have observed others adapting. These subthemes relate to the way in which participants perform engagement, or the ways in which they view or understand engagement as having performative dimensions. Throughout this discussion, conscious decisions to perform in engagement are explored.

To assist analysis of participant views related to performative dimensions of engagement, responses are grouped by the following themes (Appendix Q, table 1):

- Adapting
- Role-play
- Costumes
- External response

5.5.1 Adapting (Appendix Q, table 1)

7 participants referred to a form of '*adapting yourself (P11)*' according to the people and situation in which engagement is experienced, and 4 participants' acknowledged this as a conscious decision. For example:

> *P19: … sometimes I will consciously think before I enter the door or when I walk into work, about how I'm going to act in that day…I would be personally engaged because of being aware of how I speak to different people...*

Similarly, P21 identifies elements of self they bring to work:

> *P21: … there are certain elements of yourself that you should be bringing to work…people generally put forward not an idealised version themselves…but I think that at least a version of yourself that you feel like should be being brought…you can say this version of myself is who I am at work whereas it's not who I am elsewhere…*

References to how they '*should*' perform suggests P21 experiences obligation and duty in engagement. P21 also indicates there are universally understood expectations of types of 'self' that '*should*' be presented in the workplace. P21 believes people '*put forward*' versions of themselves, suggesting a conscious decision in presentations of the self aligned to a universal idealised engaged employee. Further, P21 comments '*this version of myself is who I am at work whereas it's not who I am elsewhere*', indicating that in engagement performances, there is a multiplicity of self which compromises authenticity. Similarly, P28 is aware of different '*parts*' of themselves and their conscious decisions to act in particular circumstances:

> *P28: … I kind of use those different parts of myself, like of what I've experienced…different, different parts… it's very much like you take your emotion out of it, you kind of just deal with what you've got at hand…*

P28 suggests past experiences have influenced the separation of 'parts' of themselves which is experienced within engagement performances. P14 also acknowledges the influence of experiences on engagement, describing changes following a return to work after parental leave:

> *P14: … I don't feel as like into it anymore…I've kind of distanced myself a bit from it, it was almost like part of me before (daughter) now…it's just a job… have less like capacity in my head for it, so I think it's had to be not be part of me as much...*

P14 highlights their changes in their investment into their role, acknowledging the shift in their priorities and feelings about their role upon returning to work. Describing an inability for their role to be a '*part of me*' now, P14 signifies they have experienced a adaptation in engagement as they now experience restrictions in the mental energy and attention required for their role. Notably, P14's response suggests they are aware of their adaptation of self in engagement to their experience of being unable to conform to the ideal worker model upon return from parental leave (Acker, 1990).

In additional findings relating adaptations of self in engagement, participants highlighted contextual awareness in influencing engagement performances, such as hierarchical organisational structures:

> *P19: … I also recognise that within a workplace, you can still be performing different roles when you speak to a different person because you're going to speak to somebody who's on the same level as you very differently to how you're going to appear to your boss…*

P19 adapts how they '*appear*' as a response to their perceptions of hierarchy and assumed standards. That they '*recognise*' this suggests awareness of adaptation influenced by external influences such as hierarchy. Similarly, P24 outlines an awareness of their responsibilities to adapt and perform as a '*professional*':

> *P24: … I think people do have different them 'selves' like the person I am at work is very different to the person I am at home…I know my role at work is to be a professional…I know whilst I'm still myself, there are different levels of who I am and who I show at work and don't…it'd be nice if you can find that balance between being able to fully be kind of what you think is yourself and that person you are outside of work and being able to apply that in work…*

Adapting work performances according to the expectation of being '*professional*', P24 believes there are different levels of '*self*' and who they '*show*' at work and at home is influenced by their contextual awareness and understanding of the responsibilities of their role. P24 will knowingly '*show*' and '*hide*' their '*self*' in adaptations for the benefit of their organisational audience because their '*role at work is to be a professional*'. This suggests a calibration of self according to internal and external influences such as authenticity and conformity to professional expectations. P24 acknowledges there are a multiplicity of '*selves*' in different contexts, and that being able to '*find that balance*' is something they strive to achieve.

A multiplicity of selves, the influence of context and requirements to perform a particular way are also described by P16:

> *P16: … the person that I am when I come into that room depends on the people that I'm going to be meeting so you kind of have to figure that out before you get there…I struggle with being able to adapt – we talk about role-play, but actually there's a personal element which you don't put into the real play necessarily.*

References to *'role-play'* and *'real play'* indicates a recognition of the performative aspects of both engagement and roles in the organisational context, but P16 also notes that there is a *'personal element'* that isn't fully captured in these performance. P18 also suggests they display parts of themselves to certain groups of people, and only one group gets to see their *'full'* self:

> *P18: … every time I meet a new person I gauge off them what they're like and I will adapt to it…I would say I'm a bit of a chameleon…I normally adapt for the situation until I get back to my desk and then the five people that I share a room with know the full me…I'm normally one of two people, sometimes I mix it up a bit.*

An intentional decision to be *'the full me'* with selected colleagues demonstrates conscious adaptations of self in work performances. Acknowledging adaptations to behaviour according to the situation, P18's reference to being a *'chameleon'* in engagement indicates they adjust themselves to align to the people and circumstances their engagement performance takes place in, a commonality amongst all 7 participants who described adapting to the people and/or situation around them in engagement performances. These findings indicate a contextual awareness in engagement performances that adjust according to a range of influences. Further, these findings are indicative of impression management behaviour whereby employees use specific behaviours to shape how they are seen by others (Bozeman & Kacmar 1997; Rosenfeld *et al*. 1995; Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016). The ways in which employees consciously *'put forward (P21)'* versions of themselves is explored in more detail in the following sections.

In summary, the findings in this section demonstrate how employees adapt and perform different versions of themselves in the workplace, influenced by situational and social contexts over which employees have some degree of awareness. These

findings identify the existence of adaptation of self, acknowledgement of a multiplicity of selves, a balance of authenticity and external expectations such as professional expectations, and the influence of impression management whereby employees consciously shape how they are perceived by others in engagement performances.

5.4.2 Role-play (Appendix Q, table 1)

As mentioned, P16 refers to *'role-play'* and *'real play'* when considering how they adapt at work. They describe taking on the role of a character performing engagement according to who is in the room. Later, P16 referenced adaptations of self when describing play-acting excitement within their role to enable engagement from those around them:

> *P16: … PE isn't just about me, you know at the end of the day. And if they're excited about it, I must appear to be excited about it… Sort of overegging it because it's not really my bag. But they're – for them they need to make – they need me to be engaged. So, I must make sure that I am, that's the thing.*

P16 perceives PE as beyond their personal wants and includes a responsibility to others to support their engagement. P16's references to *'appear to be excited'* and *'overegging it'* acknowledges a pretence in their presentation, indicating emotional labour in engagement performances for the advantage of achieving engagement from others. This may be what Valentine terms as 'faux engagement', whereby employees 'manifest external signs of engagement as required, but their heart and soul is not in it' (2014, p.486).

Continuing previous findings of understandings of engagement as adaptations of self according to the people and context around you (5.3.1), P16 describes playing up to an audience to elicit a particular response, indicating engagement performances include responsibility for both presentations of self and the audience response. External responses to engagement performances including validation for engagement is a theme considered in greater detail (5.3.3).

Additional participants referred to observable role-play in engagement (Appendix Q, table 1). For example:

P8: It's about like kind of enthusiasm and…how you go about doing certain jobs and communication, and if I look enjoyed, if I well you know enjoy my work that kind of thing.

Reference to looking '*enjoyed*' as well as experiencing enjoyment suggests P8 understands engagement as about how they appear and how they feel, indicating part of engagement is about the show. These findings are similar to those in section 5.1.5 regarding understandings of EE as observable acts of engagement and how the observer interprets observable behaviours, explored further in the discussion.

5.5.3 Costumes (Appendix Q, table 1)

A further sub-theme related to performative displays of engagement relates to three participants' reference to clothes, categorised as costumes to represent the understanding of physical displays of engagement to an 'audience'. For P3, wearing different clothes at an away day experience was significant:

P3: … although we were talking about work…we were sort of in more casual dress…everything was a just a little bit more easy…it's nice to be able to get away… being able to let go of myself…

Casual dress served as physical signals of permission for P3 to '*let go of myself*'. Permission and clothing also appeared in P4's discussion of PE:

P4: … I think as an adult, you're worried about what you look like. You're worried about people's perceptions of you…if you're a child you don't care what you wear…how many times have people walked into a shop to go and buy clothes and…they've just bought what actually is already put together. Because that's what you think - that's the image you want…

P4 uses choosing clothes to explain their understanding of engagement as caring about '*people's perceptions of you*', indicating the importance of audience observation. P4 refers to choosing an outfit that is '*already put together*' because '*that's the image you want*', indicating displays 'put together' are more acceptable to the external viewer. Of particular interest is that P4 connects their understanding of engagement to choosing an outfit prepared by someone else, suggesting engagement is understood as donning externally prepared and validated performances. Later, P4 described a lack of knowledge about what clothes to wear as a barrier to engagement:

P4: I wasn't told what to wear…I was worried about do have the right clothes…like I've got to dress smart and I'm presenting myself…

These two references highlight for P4, physical appearance is significant in engagement, and the clothes they choose physically present their engagement and acceptance by their audience. P19 demonstrated their choice in clothing as representative of the different roles they perform in two different locations in their workplace – the office 'upstairs' and the entertainment venue 'downstairs' :

> *P19: … I perform a different role in the office…often physically with my clothing…this is my outfit for working downstairs and then I'll have a different outfit for being upstairs and that's more feminine as well, so I perform gender in the workplace…it does influence the way that I act or speak or work… I'm personally engaged because I reckon, I know that I do that…*

P19' identifies themselves as engaged because they understand clothing to influence other's perception of them. This is similar to P4's discussion on choosing what to wear. Findings in this sub-theme highlight understanding of costumes physically displaying an individual's engagement to their 'audience', and as influencing the audience's perception of them.

5.5.4 External Response (Appendix Q, table 1)

Presenting engagement to others appeared in 8 participant responses, with common references to external responses to engagement performances as influencing participant understandings of their engagement. For example, when asked how they knew if they were engaged or not, P7 responded:

> *P7: (Laughs) um…I guess contact with managers or directors and kind of gauging their feelings on – on you um so like progress reviews and stuff like that…Um…I mean it's showing engagement hopefully makes you look favourable for other opportunities.*

P7 indicates they require external validation to determine their engagement. Dependency on management interpretations to understand engagement means for P7 that they need to '*show*' engagement and be told they are doing so to be engaged. Continuing previous findings that performances of engagement are indicative of impression management behaviour to shape how employees are seen by others, findings emphasising the importance of the validation of others in engagement suggest engagement performances are focused on the observer or 'target' (Bozeman &

Kacmar 1997; Rosenfeld *et al*. 1995; Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016). Another example is P8's desire to be told if they are engaged:

> *P8: I suppose enjoyment…if I'm actually enjoying what I'm doing and learning in my case, but I feel like it would be easier for someone else to um – to say whether or not they think I am, that'd be interesting to know*

The suggestion that it is easier for engagement to be externally validated by the observer than gauged internally highlights that, for these participants, engagement is removed from self and belongs to others. It also makes assumptions about the abilities of others to assess engagement. 2 participants outlined fears about being incorrectly judged or perceived by others as impacting engagement. For example P4, when describing what impacts their engagement:

> *P4: Um…worry of I don't know, worry of what other people think I think that's something I've always found hard…I'm very shy so I guess I've slowly kind of opened up. But yeah, I think kind of like to scared that or – or worried that if I showed a bit of my personality would they make an assumption over me or kind of judge me and that kind of thing.*

P4 indicates that external judgement can influence the display of engagement and extent to which they reveal their '*self'*. Rather than identifying a specific observer they are concerned will judge them, P4 describes general '*other people'*. Similarly, P14 is vague in who they feel they need to '*prove'* themselves to:

> *P14: … I feel like I need to come in and prove myself...I always try and like get in and get straight on it…because…I feel like I'm being judged, and I probably am not, but...that's how I take it anyway.*

These responses indicate vulnerability in workplace performances and fear of negative reactions from a general organisational audience which impact engagement. Contrastingly, P13 described a previous role in which they were engaged because of how they felt about the observer:

> *P13: … I started doing stuff that wasn't my core job…you actually feel like somebody trusts you and somebody you respect trusts you. I think that's the key to it. Somebody thinks – rates you, who you respect and you think is clever…you know that that person knows their stuff and that somebody's taken a bit of a leap of faith with you…*

For P13, their engagement performance was influenced by a desire to shape how a previous supervisor they respected viewed them, representative of impression

management behaviour focused on a specific observer or 'target' (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016).

5.5.5 Summary: Performative Dimensions of Engagement

Findings in this section explored performative dimensions of engagement through a range of sub-themes. The first of these considered engagement as adaptability of self. For some, there is a clear distinction between a work and home self, and self-awareness of adaptation in engagement performance not only arrives from internal self-reflection but awareness of external influences. The second subtheme presented findings of engagement as role-play by performing particular emotions in engagement displays. The third subtheme demonstrated the importance of seeking the external (or 'audience') response and validation during engagement performances and highlights employees understand engagement as removed from self and belonging to others. A fourth subtheme demonstrated individuals can amend their engagement performance according to their audience, and therefore engagement is a conscious act with decisions to act in a particular way. The final subtheme considered understanding of costumes physically displaying an individual's engagement to their 'audience', and as influencing the audience's perception of them. Findings also demonstrated that the act of selecting an engagement costume requires external permission and individual conscious decisions about physical appearances.

All subthemes in this section explored self-awareness in engagement performances, emerging from internal self-reflection and understanding of role performances in and out of the workplace. All subthemes considered individual decision making in engagement performances. This links to section 5.3. which presented understandings of engagement as actively choosing behaviours and performances. Commonalities with physical and observable aspects of engagement performances also appeared, aligning with findings in section 5.1.5 regarding engagement as a show and display of emotions.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings of participant understandings of engagement which imply that there is some confusion, lack of understanding and awareness of

engagement amongst employees. For some, engagement is unknown and unfamiliar; for others, it is organisationally led, individually experienced and an interaction between organisation and individual.

Understandings of EE presented in section 5.1. included the responsibility of engagement as external to the individual, and an organisational initiative and approach. This included participant perspectives of the ways organisations and managers provide opportunities for engagement and permission to engage. This section presented findings of participant views that EE is an organisational construct, two-way interaction, relationships with others and feeling experienced by the individual, or a performed behaviour or attitude others observe and for which individuals have responsibility for. Findings of understandings of PE in section 5.2. emphasised that employees who lack awareness and understanding of PE seek explanations by exploring it alongside familiar concepts, seek reassurance and instruction, and are influenced by external intervention in understandings of PE. Some employees understand PE to refer to organisational approaches similar to EE, and some are unsure of the difference between PE and EE. Further findings in section 5.2. indicated employees understand there an individual active role and personal responsibility in PE, and PE to be aligned to understanding of 'me' and authenticity.

The final section in this chapter presented participant understandings of engagement discussed after being provided with definitions. This focused on the predominant theme of performative dimensions of engagement, and included exploration of engagement as adaptability of self, role-play, seeking external response for engagement, a conscious act, and a physical display to an 'audience'.

These findings indicate employee understandings of engagement are complex and multifaceted, and somewhat removed from Kahn's engagement concept. Engagement is understood as something an individual must do (such as fit in with organisation) and present (such as feelings of happiness). This research now explores findings related to the individual experience of engagement.

Chapter 6: Findings and Analysis - The Experience of Engagement

6.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 explores data relevant to research question 2; 'what is the experience of engagement at the individual level?'. This section presents findings of commonalities in participant descriptions of specific instances of engagement following discussions of definitions, and in answer to 'can you describe to me a time where you've experienced PE in any organisation or role?' Participants recalled a specific experience they interpret to be engagement following earlier discussions about what they understand engagement to be. The focus is on how individuals understand their experience of engagement and so the experiences they share are engagement, because that is what they say it is. This addresses the gaps in research of the employee's subjective understanding of perspective and their experience being engaged (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Notably, some participants gave specific examples, such as a work away-day (P3). Some were more general, such as describing how they felt at a previous job (P1, P5, P10). Interestingly, 2 participants couldn't think of any examples of engagement, suggesting it was a question they had not considered before:

> *P7: (Laughs) ummm…I don't know if that's something I can think of on the spot uhhh…*

> *P8: Um it's kind of weird because I've never thought about it like that.*

Markedly, P7 was the one participant unable to define EE (section 5.1.1), indicating they were unable to provide an example because they were new to the engagement concept. The range of detail of experiences of engagement indicates some employees can identify and recount engagement, whereas some have *'never thought about it (P8)'*. Some participants easily recalled engagement experiences in a lot of detail (e.g. P3), whereas others were more tentative, as indicated in P7's laughter and audible indications of uncertainty. This suggests there are differences in employees' ability to

148

recall, communicate and detail their engagement experiences. These findings support the argument that some employees need support in developing understanding of engagement.

Although participants described both similar and different experiences, as I analysed the data, I identified commonalities in what the participant was describing as engaging about the experience. For example, P9, P21 and P29 describe an occasion they helped a customer as an engagement experience. P21 focused on positive feedback they received, P29 centred on overcoming a challenge with the customer, and P9 described both of these attributes as engaging factors. The data in this section therefore presents participant's engagement experiences through the common themes I identified the participant as engaging with (e.g. positive feedback), rather than according to a description of the experience (e.g. helping a customer). Some participants lacked understanding of engagement or what an engagement experience is, and I tried to help them towards a construction of engagement through additional questions and emphasis on particular phrases used (for example P4). Full versions of participant's experiences are detailed in the appendices (Appendix R, table 1), with key findings noted in the following sections. Similarities in participant's experiences allowed data to be divided into four themes of experiences significant for the research questions, relating to overcoming challenges, positive feedback, socialisation and personal development.

6.1 Overcoming challenges (Appendix R, table 1)

This theme represents 13 participant's engagement experiences relating to challenges within workplace activities and overcoming these. That participants presented challenging situations as engagement experiences is interesting, and arguably contrary to much engagement literature. Examples include delivering a presentation to an audience that '*kicked off (P14)'* and dealing with a rude client (P9). These participants identify various aspects of the challenging situation as contributing to their experience of engagement, including emotional extremes, achievement in personal challenges, recognition, and collaboration with others.

Participants described positive and negative aspects of their experiences, often reflecting upon how these contributed to a memorable experience of engagement.

This study makes no judgements about what is positive and what is negative but presents the experience according to how the participant described it. For example, P4 identified aspects of their engagement experience as both positive and negative:

> *P4: … I was really lucky to go (abroad)… to do recruitment event. I was beaming…the best thing that ever happened to me. And that's where I thrive… It was really good. I loved it… was worried about do I have the right clothes to wear… no one's helped me… more stress because you're always worrying...*

P4 described their engagement experience as both the best thing that ever happened to them, and one of worry and stress, demonstrating P4 recounts this as an emotionally extreme experience beyond simply the experience of being engaged. Later, P4 aligned how they felt about the experience with their identity and what makes them happy:

> *P4: … the more I help people the more I feel good.…I think that's my nature. And I think that's what makes me work better as well…the more I get to do and the more I get to meet people the more I get to help the more I thrive*

P4 used the telling of their engagement experience to reflect and develop their self-awareness; language such as *'I think'* and *'self issue'* is reflectional. They recount emotional extremes and apply this to understanding of their engagement at work, describing '*what makes me work better'*. Arguably, these represent reflections from P4 on what engages them, and demonstrates recounting engagement experiences can be an opportunity for reflection on personal engagement. Further, the lack of help for P4 was challenging, and yet this is still a story of a time they were engaged. This supports the finding that employees can experience challenges, such as perceived lack of support, and still identify experiences as engaging.

Emotionally extreme experiences occurred in P14's engagement story which – similar to P4's experience – included both achievement and worry:

> *P14:...I was quite nervous…not long before that, I'd had like really bad panic-attacks and like struggled to leave the house so like to like for me I was nervous, like it wasn't just doing the presentation…I'd gone on the train on my own…it was the anxiety of just being...somewhere else… trying to not stutter...not up there muttering and sounding really shy, I was sort of like I don't want anyone to know I'm feeling like this… like*

luckily once it...I kind of felt like I had an ally…they're not all against me…I can carry on…it could have like gone really badly but… I did feel like it was like a little victory afterwards because I'd done lots of things I think like the getting there and the getting home as well...not just the actual presentation itself…

P14's language of *'victory'* and *'ally'* highlights the experience of conflict experienced in this situation, and P14's feeling of achievement in facing their fears. It is interesting that when asked to describe an experience of PE, both P4 and P14 referred to travelling outside of the workplace which included different examples of personal challenge. Further, both participants refer to luck but regarding different aspects of their experience, implying that employees experience different levels of influence, challenge and engagement in similar workplace experiences. These findings indicate engaging experiences involve emotional extremes and overcoming personal challenges, and highlight that participants engage with different aspects of similar situations.

A further example is P9's challenge to support a client:

P9: … I felt really passionate…rewarding…I'd say that's my best…example of personal engagement where I've really had to work harder throwing everything into it to try to create a better result…It was a frustrating process because…you are putting that much more effort in and you're not getting a lot back …it was incredibly incredibly frustrating…it was hard work…I put a lot of effort in it and my manager was really supportive in me taking that time to do it.

P9 also uses emotionally extreme language; *'really rewarding'* and *'really difficult'*. Further, P9 identifies overcoming a challenge that their colleagues had struggled with by adapting and being innovative with their solutions. P9 is proud of their aptitude in this challenge, and the acknowledgement of their manager and the changes it influenced. This indicates engagement for P9 relates to experiences of perseverance, learning, recognition and pride.

P9 explains the support they had from their organisation with their manager was significant in supporting their engagement within this challenge. Similarly, P11 highlights that their manager was supportive when they took on additional duties:

> *P11: … she (manager) felt that I would do a really good job…that made me feel very engaged… just because she believed I could do it, I thought no I'm going to throw myself into this and I got fantastic feedback…it made me feel very confident in myself actually…it also makes me now look back and think actually you can do things like that, you just remember how you handled that…*

P11's engagement experience focused on recounting recognition from their manager, positive feedback from colleagues, and the confidence the experience gave them. Recounting their engagement story also provided enabled them to '*look back and think'*. This demonstrates that recounting engagement experiences that involve overcoming challenges provides opportunities to reflect and identify key personal learning from engagement experiences.

A further theme that emerged from the data on engagement experiences relating to overcoming challenges is the experience from 4 participants of uniting together, working in collaboration with others. For example, P20's scenario in which a senior manager left unexpectedly:

> *P20: … everyone in the situation was personally engaged, right up to the top… the whole organisation responded to that problem… we're one team, doesn't matter how high or low you are in it, you know, it affects all of us if there's an issue so you've got to root it out, fix it…we're all going to try and solve it…in fact it probably made me better disposed to the company because of their positive response to the problem. So yeah, Blitz spirit I guess…I feel like very loyal to (employer) because I feel they were loyal to me.*

Another example of reflecting whilst recalling their engagement experience, P20 refers to a shared identity and connection to the organisational group, as well as a '*Blitz spirit'* of camaraderie to 'all' solve the challenge. There is a sense of solidarity in addressing the problem, combined with mutual support and cooperation to achieve a common goal. Further, P20 labels themselves and '*everyone in the situation (was) personally engaged*'. Regardless of if 'everyone' was engaged, P20's perception that they were contributed to their engagement experience. P20 therefore presents a shared engagement experience involving a sense of community and belonging, making them reciprocate loyalty that they perceived their employer demonstrated. The coming together of the whole organisation depicts shared identity, community and support in engagement experiences which appeared elsewhere in the data. For example:

> *P27: … challenged us to make a pound of profit the next year… the whole team bought into it…everybody else their part to play…we were able to work as a team…real family feel and everybody kind of looked after each other and kind of wanted to see each other's succeed…the team working together to achieve the result…being proud of the team.*

Commonalities in these examples include descriptions of solidarity and commitment to a goal, working as part of a group, being listened to and valued and feeling pride and loyalty in engagement experiences. These examples imply that engagement experiences include working with others to overcome challenges and achieve a group goal, which enable connection, shared identity and community.

P28 highlights similar themes of collaboration alongside the success of communication in a cohesive team as important in their engagement experience of overcoming challenges occurring within an emergency situation:

> *P28: … everyone gelled together…very clearly communicating…working with other people and therefore being able to give a positive outcome was what I think I was proud of the most. And then after that we got recognition for our work…although it was…a sad situation…I think having our managers…there supported us because they gave very clear communication.*

P28 also demonstrates pride at delivering a positive outcome, and the subsequent recognition, highlighting that a sense of achievement and recognition in overcoming challenging situations are important in engagement experiences.

P23's experience also identified the importance of recognition in their engagement experience, which relates to training they delivered to an audience that included their managers, which they were not expecting:

> *P23: … I arrived and I found that the whole of (department's) senior management team were there…I was a little bit apprehensive…I don't want to muck anything up… it went well the feedback was great….*

P23 presented the unexpected nature of their management being present, and the contributing pressure, as a challenge. However, the positive feedback P23 received supported their understanding of this as an engaging experience, a commonality explored in the next section.

153

6.2 Positive Feedback (Appendix R, table 2)

The previous section identified positive feedback when overcoming challenges is important in engagement experiences. Additional participants referred to positive feedback in their experiences, for example P17 describes the feedback they received for an event they organised:

> *P17: … everyone saying 'oh well done', like 'you've done really well to organise this' and obviously loads of people come in and making enquiries. It's like you feel that you've done a good job and it makes you feel happy …the partners who attended all sent like an email to all the volunteers saying 'thank you for your hard work'…*

P17 acknowledges the importance of feedback from her superiors. Similarly, P1 – who could not describe *'a specific time'* of engagement but could articulate feeling engaged when *'doing my training contract'* – identified the importance of support and feedback from their superiors:

> *P1: … you do get properly nurtured…you are aware that people are supporting you with those goals, you are going to be more engaged because you can be like, I'm not just doing this for me, I'm doing this for the wider picture…whenever I felt properly engaged, I would say it's generally been when I've had feedback from someone in a higher position than myself keep the written stuff, so if you got an email, print it off ….(giggles) have a little folder…*

Notably, support from superiors is described as getting '*properly nurtured'* and helping to place their work within the '*wider picture'*. Importance is placed on involvement from superiors in making meaning, which influences P1's engagement. Further, P1 highlights feedback from superiors as important in their understanding of experiencing engagement, and that they keep written feedback suggests they perceive it as an award for their engagement. P1 appeared embarrassed and giggled when describing keeping positive feedback souvenirs, indicating their discomfort in admitting how important positive feedback is for them.

Positive feedback from customers emerged as a theme in participant engagement stories, for example:

> *P2: … got really good feedback from the client…I was excited to go to work… I felt really good*

In total, 7 participants referred to positive feedback in their experiences of engagement, received from either colleagues, managers/superiors or customers, demonstrating its importance in engagement experiences. A further commonality is that participants recounted generally what the feedback was, or how it made them feel (e.g. '*everyone saying 'oh well done' (P17), 'I felt really good (P2)*'). This indicates the importance in conveying the emotional impact positive feedback has in engagement experiences, and that this is what employees remember. Rather than factual accounts of specifically what was said, participants portray a general sense that positive feedback was received, or that it had a positive emotional impact on them.

6.3 Socialisation (Appendix R, table 3)

5 participants referred to experiences of engagement as socialisation, including away days and team social events. Commonalities in these experiences indicate employees find the opportunity to do something different, be outside of the physical working environment, develop relationships and have shared experiences as engaging. For example:

> *P3: … it was just nice to spend that day bonding…to get away a bit…different from the everyday…being able to let go of myself…in more casual dress…in a different location, everything was a just a little bit more easy*

As discussed in section 5.5.3, casual dress served as physical signals of permission for P3. Further, they indicate being removed from the physical work environment breaks barriers usually experienced in a workplace setting, which contributes to their engagement. Similarly, P22's experience took place outside of work:

> *P22: … our manager…hosted us all at her house and cooked us a meal…it was just our team…it felt really, really positive because first of all we were removed from the place where we are every single day and it was like someone was like doing something very nice for us and cooking for us, and hosting this in her home*

For P22, the exclusivity of their team being hosted by their manager in their home indicates the removal of professional boundaries, which strengthened relationships within their team. Notably, physical and professional barriers were dropped through the instigation of management in either arranging the away day outside of the office in

casual dress, or hosting employees at their house. This develops earlier findings relating to engagement as a transactional exchange initiated by management, to suggest experiences can feature as part of an ongoing transactional relationship initiated by management.

P22's reference to *'it was just our team'* also indicates exclusivity in social experiences is important for their engagement. Exclusivity appeared in P30's engagement experience, in that their manager (partner) has taken time to note their individual preferences:

> *P30: … one of the partners in my office…knows that I'm into wine…he keeps suggesting to me that we go and get a wine together … It's one that he knows I'm into wine and the other thing is that he's actually offering to uh engage in with me, I suppose…*

For P30, exclusivity is represented in that they have been selected by the manager and that they know something personal. Interestingly, being invited to socialise in an event that their manager has taken the time to consider is itself engaging, rather than the actual act of socialising:

> *P30: … it is just a job that I just want to go in and earn my money…so, I don't want to be like after work, going for drinks with people…But being offered, it's like, you know, it is nice.*

For P30, the invitation to socialise is engaging, however they chose not to take up this offer:

> *P30: …it's just weird like I don't go for a drink on my own with a partner…it just strikes me as a bit weird, so I find an excuse not to go…I've just never known anyone else…to go and have a one on one with a partner… it's quite like, you know, hierarchical… if it were anyone more than just me and him…a group of us…I think I'd be a lot more receptive to it, it feels a lot more normal, um I think it's the one on one element of it that's a bit weird (laughs)…*

P30 explains they choose not to take part due to their personal values and beliefs around hierarchy and socialising; in this instance, that it is acceptable to socialise in a group with management, but not on a one-to-one basis. It is interesting to reiterate that P30 recounts this as an engaging experience; despite the invitation of socialising

156

individually with a manager violating their personal beliefs about what is acceptable socially with managers, P30 is engaged because they were invited.

Findings in this section imply employees find socialisation experiences that take place outside of the workplace, include the opportunity to develop relationships, and have a shared experience as engaging experiences. For some, socialisation experiences are engaging if they include exclusive treatment and permission to break barriers.

6.4 Personal Development (Appendix R, table 4)

A final theme emerged through 8 participants who recalled experiences of engagement involving personal development, such as learning and mentoring.

Findings related to engagement experiences as personal development opportunities for authenticity include roles that enabled the participant to identify what they want to do. For example, P15's training which provided them with the freedom to explore their interests:

> *P15: … they said…'your enthusiasm for the case management system means that you probably need to move from what you're doing into this role, so how would you feel about being trained and doing that'…which obviously I jumped at…they know you as a person, know what you want to try and do, give you that time to work through it and get there…a lot of freedom to just try it, see how it went, and work on things that I wanted to…*

P15 perceives their employers as knowing them as a person and thereby providing training and freedom to try something new. Freedom to experience authenticity indicates P15's engagement experience includes the opportunity to act according to their wants and pursue their goals and interests. This corresponds with P10's experience related to a role earlier in their career which they felt aligned with their sense of self:

> *P10: … kind of by fluke chance or whatever found this role…I kind of found something that felt really me which was quite nice…I felt like I was…giving sort of younger people opportunities to kind of step up a little bit, so I think that kind of helped me sort of be engaged and to feel like I was learning and doing something useful…*

Another example of reflecting on what engaged them whilst recalling their engagement experience, P10 refers to obtaining a role that *'felt really me'* and as *'by fluke chance'*, highlighting their belief that their attainment of a role that aligned to their authentic self was chance. Similarities with P4's *'really lucky'* experience which they felt represented their *'nature'*, and P15 being provided with *'freedom to just try…and work on things I wanted to'*, indicate these participants understand engagement experiences related to their authentic self as happening due to freedom, luck and coincidence. These imply varying degrees of influence and control in engagement experiences related to authenticity; from the freedom to act and shape one's role, to unpredictable external factors that shape opportunities. These findings highlight employees experience engagement related to authenticity through a complex interplay of individual agency and external factors that shape access to these experiences. Opportunities for authentic engagement experiences are understood by participants to be uncertain, restricted, and reliant on external factors.

The precarious and externally dependant nature of opportunities for engagement is further demonstrated through P12's request for development, presented as their engagement experience:

> *P12: … I've applied for a developmental program, so I've done my master's…and I was able to put a case forward and get that supported…an example of where an employer supported me…*

That their developmental program was supported by their employer is of importance to P12 and highlights that permission is required for an employee to access development opportunities to achieve their personal goals. Similarly, P25 recalls their development as dependent on their employer:

> *P25: … I kind of worked away hard and did everything right and start moving further up the till lines…I'm getting somewhere because they're asking me to do more responsibilities…so getting to do that responsibility and work for those is quite good…*

Describing themselves as doing *'everything right'* highlights P25 perceives external rules regarding progression. Additionally, that their employer needed to ask them to do more, identifies their perception that permission and instruction were needed to achieve their progression, explored in section 8.1. It is presently noted that participant

experiences of engagement related to opportunities for personal development highlight that employees understand there to be a requirement for organisational permission to access to these opportunities.

Experiences of engagement as personal development included recollections of learning from others. For example:

> P5: … my boss at the time was a fantastic mentor. I felt like she really took me under her wing and gave me that development which just made me hungry and more engaged for more… that just led to me knowing that this was a career path I needed to be on I wanted to be on…

Another example of reflecting on what engaged them whilst recalling their engagement experiences, P5 perceived their manager as a mentor, and someone who '*gave*' development opportunities. Interestingly, this suggests that P5's mentor permitted the freedom to access development opportunities which led to P5's career path which they perceive as aligning with their values and passions and therefore their authentic self. Notably, this was not described as a formal mentoring relationship, but rather that P5 perceives their manager as a mentor. Similarly, P13 describes an informal mentoring relationship in their engagement experience:

> P13: … I was sort of earmarked just inadvertently by my old boss. He was like probably one of the cleverest people which I've ever come across and he sort of put me under his wing… he did really open up a lot of doors for me…you actually feel like somebody trusts you and somebody you respect trusts you… rates you….

Reference to '*inadvertently*' indicates P13's mentoring relationship was unplanned and informal, and '*put me under his wing*' is indicative of protection and nurturing from their mentor. Similarly, P19 could '*count on*' their mentor:

> P19: … my last boss ...as a mentor for my time here has just been incredible…I didn't feel like I was facing anything alone…I could count on him to give me advice...

All three participants describe managers that were dependable, protecting, nurturing and supportive in their endeavours to learn, which formed engaging experiences. Notably, all three participants referred to a previous '*boss*', which denotes an informal reference to a position of authority and a familiar relationship. Further, reference to a previous boss indicates a passing of time in which the employee has had the

opportunity to reflect on and identify the learning they received from their relationship with that manager. It is interesting that none of the experiences of engagement as personal development refer to participant's current manager, explored further in section 8.1.

This section has presented findings of engagement experiences as personal development opportunities. It has explored commonalities in participant references to personal development opportunities for authenticity, gaining permission to access development opportunities, and learning from others.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented findings related to participant recollections of a specific experience they interpret to be engagement. It began by considering experiences of overcoming work-based challenges relating to engagement, indicating that this provides opportunities for employees to reflect and recognise personal, meaningful achievements and developments. Findings highlighted that engagement experiences can be emotionally extreme. Further themes included the importance of perseverance and achievement with challenges, pride in the outcomes of their success that influence organisational processes, exploring organisational and managerial support in overcoming challenges, and working with others to overcome challenges. This indicated the need to discuss these in relation to the impact support and working with others to overcome challenges has on engagement experiences.

The chapter then considered participant experiences of engagement involving positive feedback and socialisation with work colleagues and managers. Findings highlighted that positive feedback is important in employee understandings of experienced engagement, and the emotional impact positive feedback has on engagement. Further, commonalities in participant experiences of socialisation as engagement indicate employees find the opportunity to do something different, be outside of the physical working environment, develop relationships and have shared experiences as engaging. Finally, this chapter explored participant references to personal development as engagement experiences. This included opportunities for authenticity, development, gaining permission to access development opportunities, and learning from others.

This chapter has identified that there are a range of experiences of engagement at the individual level. Commonalities within these findings indicate individuals experience engagement when workplace activities include factors such as: relationships with others; achievement in personal challenges; recognition; positive feedback; socialisation; personal development. Further, that these encounters frequently include permission from either the organisation or manager, and that this influences the experience of engagement at the individual level.

Chapter 7: Findings and Analysis - Barriers to engagement

7.0 Introduction

Chapter 7 explores data relevant to research question 3; 'what are the obstacles to personal engagement and how might these be overcome?'. This section explores participant experiences of barriers to engagement in direct answer to the question 'can you describe anything that prevents or is a barrier to personal engagement, a time where something's stopped or blocked or prevented you from being personally engaged at work, at any organisation or in any role?' Despite asking for specific instances of barriers to engagement, 7 participants (P2, P6, P7, P8, P12, P20 and P29) did not give a specific example in response to this question, but answered generally, for example:

> *P2: … sometimes you get gripes with your particular employer. Whether it be pay, particular job tasks…*
>
> *P8: Um I suppose I can't think of anything but in general um…more than or too much responsibility…*

This supports the findings outlined in section 6.0 that there are differences in employees' ability to recall, communicate and detail engagement experiences.

The findings in this chapter present common themes of the manager, inadequate communication, breaches of trust, workload, and personal resources, which were identified in individuals recalling a specific experience of what they perceive to be barriers to engagement. These are participant interpretations of their experiences of barriers to engagement following earlier discussions about what they understand engagement to be. I identified commonalities in what the participant was describing as a barrier and therefore the data in this section presents participant's engagement experiences through the common barriers I identified (e.g. managers), rather than categorising them according to what happened in the experience. Extracts of

participant interviews are cited briefly in italics, with full versions of available in appendices as directed.

7.1 Manager (Appendix S, table 1)

Managers featured significantly in data related to experiences of barriers to engagement, most notably in terms of a lack of support from participant's immediate manager. For example, P11 refers to a recent project:

> *P11: … I had no support from my manager, his manager…they just had no real understanding of what was involved in the project but chose not to as well…felt like I was on my own…they were asking a lot of me…there was a lot of pressure on me to get all the information…I just got no support…*

P11's experience of isolation and pressure is exacerbated by their perceived lack of understanding and interest from their manager. Similarly, P26 describes feeling alone due to their manager's lack of support:

> *P26: … my current line manager… is very different than me…there are times where, I wouldn't say at loggerheads, but we have very different opinions about how things should be done. The nature of our work and our personalities…I don't get that support encouragement at all. I've gotta go it alone. So not only do I not have a team to bounce it off I don't have a team leader… a manger who has any sympathy with the work that I do…*

Similarly to P11's repetition of '*no support*', P26 emphasises their perceived absence of support in absolutes – '*at all*' and '*any sympathy*'. It is important for these participants to portray their perception that for them, managerial support does not exist at all. P11 and P26 have clear beliefs about the support they should receive from a manager, and that the absence of this is a barrier to engagement. P26 believes differences in personalities and the nature of work influence the lack of support they receive, indicating they have a poor relationship with their manager. Noteworthy is P26's reluctance to suggest they are at '*loggerheads*' with their manager, seemingly to avoid the suggestion of serious or irreconcilable conflict, and yet P26 emphasises through extremes their perceived lack of support from their manager. This reluctance to negatively label an experience with their manager also appeared in P15's experience of a lack of support:

> *P15: … My former boss…knew that I was very much interested in the computer system, so she would…not actively, I don't want to say actively prevent, but she would sort of try and limit how much the other people knew that I was keen on it…so that she wouldn't lose me…which is why the transition from that department was very slow because it couldn't be just like that (clicks fingers) because she'd go crazy.*

P15 is attempting to protect their former manager's reputation whilst hinting at how being withheld from accessing opportunities to be involved in a project felt for them. Notably, P15's barrier to engagement is evidence of their manager's abuse of power to achieve their own interests, in this situation to prevent P15 leaving their team. P15's reference to '*actively prevent*' is similar to P26's avoidance of admitting they experience conflict with their manager, indicating similarities in experiences of conflict with their manager and attempts to portray the conflict as non-serious. The vague and non-direct ways in which P15 and P26 share these experiences of barriers to engagement indicates self-regulation and underplaying the reality of their experience as a conflict. P15's experience is one in which their manager sabotaged progression opportunities, and yet even in recounting the experience P15 didn't want to label the experience as this ('*I don't want to say actively prevent…').* This is interesting because it indicates managerial lack of permission and support are barriers to engagement, and experiences of managerial sabotage continue to manipulate employees after the experience. Commonalities in these findings relate to perceptions of complete lack of support, being alone and hesitancy in admitting experiences of conflict with managers in experiences of barriers to engagement.

Additional examples of managers related to barriers to engagement were found in participant's accounts of having a poor opinion of their manager. For example:

> *P21: … I had a supervisor who did not particularly like me...I couldn't be bothered…when they were there, I just thought; I don't like you, I don't want to make your life easier…I also do think that personal stuff is…very important to me...*

Clearly, P21 had a poor relationship with their manager resulting in P21 being openly disruptive to make their manager's life harder at work. P23 also had a poor opinion of their manager, resulting in them stepping away from their involvement with the manager:

P23: … I had a new line manager who I didn't feel fully understood the needs of my team…I lasted a year and then I stepped down… I just couldn't deal with it… she wasn't she wasn't very good people manager…I had to report in, I wasn't allowed to have any autonomy to give my own ideas…I felt like I was knocking my head against a brick wall and you can only take so much of that.

P23 perceived their manager to be inadequate, which caused them frustration in the limits this placed on their role. Interestingly, P23 alludes to their manager being an obstacle and point of resistance, referencing '*brick wall*' as a vivid depiction of their manager as a barrier to engagement. P23 suggested they were helpless in overcoming the barrier, and so had to step away. Contrastingly, P21 acknowledges their resistance to their barrier-manager, in the way they approached working with them by resolving not to make their life easy. Unlike earlier findings, P21 and P23 were open in acknowledging they experienced conflict with a manager which was a barrier to engagement.

7.2 Inadequate Communication (Appendix S, table 2)

P23 alludes to the manager in their engagement barrier experience having inadequate communication skills, which contributed to the prevention of their engagement. Experiences of inadequate communication featured in a further 10 participant stories of barriers to engagement, making it the highest cited theme. Some referred to this in a general way, such as:

P1: … There's really, really poor communication. So, you know, they'll tell someone one thing and then won't tell any manager that…

Others referenced aspects of inadequate communication, such as failure to be heard. For example, P30 described a consultation period for their organisation's response to Covid-19:

P30: … (EE) was all of a sudden a big buzzword for us…I just felt like everyone was bringing up all these ideas and we were getting shepherded towards what everybody knew was going to happen anyway…our rep was very open to what I was saying, but you could tell that she was getting stonewalled higher up. So it just felt like a futile effort really at the end. And so I just I disengaged from it and just signed the paperwork…we had all these ideas that were floated by all staff engaged and then we ended up all getting pay cuts…it just felt like a waste of time…

P30's disenchantment with the consultation period is due to their belief that it was a waste of time, in that the organisation gathered feedback but P30 perceived them to be '*stonewalled higher up*'. Notably, P30 isn't complaining about receiving a pay cut, but the experience of a perceived predetermined consultation and not being listened to. P30 perceived the consultation and feedback period to be pointless and ineffective, and it is this which contributed towards preventing engagement.

P10 also referred the failure to be heard as a barrier to engagement:

> *P10: … there was quite a lot of personalities to negotiate…quite a poisonous atmosphere…a lot of tears which kind of you know tried to keep them away from work…a lot of the feedback was falling on deaf ears…I had to either suck it up, which didn't feel always very comfortable, or then it would kind of come out in kind of tearful outbursts…the sense of just having to sort of smile and get on with it when you know, it wasn't, didn't feel entirely right…*

P10's barrier example identifies two aspects of interest; firstly, P10 perceived management to be inadequate and felt unable to feedback directly to the managers in question because they were the ones '*causing the problems*', indicative of issues with power and conflict in the workplace. A second point of interest is that the feedback P10 did provide was ignored, and this meant they had to '*smile and get on with it*'. P10 implies they had to be silent, putting their personal feelings aside despite this opposing their values. P10 acknowledges that by self-silencing, their unhappiness manifested emotionally, which they tried to hide from work. P10's example demonstrates an employee knowingly silencing their voice and emotions due to failure to be heard and poor management. Similarly, in P19's barrier to engagement experience, they recall being unable to display their true feelings regarding the ineffective way they received information about a project they were working on being shut down:

> *P19: …a new piece of information was given to us with no sort of like lead-up, it was kind of thrown at us...feel like you're the last one to know...one member of staff knows but the other one doesn't and then they might just forget to mention it...I also got called up on my negativity which I just was like, uggghhh (frustrated)...because they're not used to me being negative…my boss…that made me a bit disengaged because...that means that I have to perform all (emphasis) the time and I felt a bit like uhh (frustrated), sometimes I just want to be a bit grumpy, everybody else is….*

P19 acknowledges the importance of the way that information is presented to all employees. Further, they explain they were *'called up on my negativity'* by their manager, emphasising they felt this meant they had to *'perform all (emphasis) the time'*. Similar to P10 who felt they had to *'suck it up'* and *'smile and get on with it'*, P19 felt unable to display their true feelings and emotions, instead forced to *'perform'* in a way opposite to their feelings of *'negativity'*. These findings align with those identified in Chapter 5 regarding employees understanding EE as a performative display of happiness, involving the regulation of emotions through a conscious decision to adapt in performing engagement. P19's frustration at having to *'perform all the time'* is both with the inability to display their true feelings and that they 'have to' comply with their manager's request. This supports earlier findings that employees experience engagement as removed from self and belonging to others, and amend their engagement performance according to their audience.

Further commonalities in communication as a barrier to engagement included not being provided with complete information, or information in a timely manner. For example, P18 wasn't given information on their promotion and had to find out about a delay from *'somebody else'*:

> *P18: … was going to move up to being a (junior job title)…hanging on for about four or five months…that did make me disengaged…I think at one point I actually did cry because I think it was somebody else who told me… I'd heard from one person…and then the other person…I thought well someone just could have told me that and I would have known but I've been stringing on…*

P18's communication expectations were not met; both the way they received the news and the prolonged time to be *'hanging…(and) stringing on'* and receive a lack of information influenced P18's sense of control over the situation. Further, P18 was frustrated with the way they did eventually receive the information, which was from different sources to those they expected to hear an update from. P11 describes a similar experience in receiving information about redundancy:

> *P11: … I kind of found out by accident…So then they had to kind of tell us…found out that I was due to be made redundant…it was hard work, hard work…I again got some good feedback…how I'd remained positive through that time. I went home and screamed a few times…it was hard, really, really hard and I didn't feel engaged at all, I didn't…(sigh) I was*

> *just dreading going into work, dreading it, I'm like what am I going to have to deal with today…*

That P11 '*found out by accident*' and seemingly had to work the situation out for themselves had a negative impact on P11. Similar to P10's hidden emotional outbursts, P11 hid their feelings about the situation at work, displaying them only at home. Arguably, these participants withheld their voice and emotions because they experienced inadequate communication from their manager or organisation. This suggests that when communication is inadequate and restricted at work, employees withdraw from communicating and displaying their true thoughts and feelings, which prevents them from engaging.

Further, P11 explained the negative impact this experience had in that they felt dread, uncertainty, and apprehension about their work situation. Similarly, P3 describes the emotional impact of their organisation's downsizing as a barrier to engagement:

> *P3: … (organisation) as a whole is going through…downsizing…Our director has said on several occasions no one is at risk, however…teams of people are being put at risk…it's very unfair to say that…coming from someone who is 100% not at risk um it is entirely his decision whether he stays or go…the atmosphere has been pretty dreadful…there's so much uncertainty around…we were told different things I think almost weekly…can be very demoralising very demotivating…*

P3 also has frustrations with unclear information from their director, indicating that experiences of inadequate, restricted and unclear information regarding organisational restructures are a barrier to engagement. Further, P3 identifies that they think it's unfair of their director to give unclear messages, describing a shared identity with their team of not being engaged, and the resulting dreadful '*atmosphere*'. These findings imply that inadequate communication regarding redundancy and restructuring are barriers to engagement, both during and after the experiences, and to employees directly and indirectly involved.

Three participants described experiences of barriers to engagement as relating to the lack of involvement in decision-making and consequential lack of communication about decisions important to their role. For example, P14 experienced the repercussions of an external party making a significant change to their project:

> *P14: … we spent ages developing this new system…the whole thing's like scrapped and we've got to start again because…this central group…have decided that all (profession) need to do a completely different type of assessment…so I think I feel quite left out of that…I feel like I can't contribute to it because I've missed so much of it, that when I am involved I'm sat there like, I don't even know what you're on about…*

P14's frustration with having to '*start again*' and being left out of the decision making, explaining they don't understand why it's happened. This is similar to P24's barrier example related to a new policy:

> *P24: … I don't really understand the process of how it's going to work in practice…I get questions about it because my own understanding is very slim on it and I don't necessarily agree with the process, I find myself quite disengaged with it…I just can't get on board with it…I'm not clear on the reasons why we're doing it that way…I don't have a full understanding of it I don't enjoy it…*

These findings imply that failure to involve employees in and appropriately communicate decisions that are important to their roles can prevent engagement.

7.3 Breach of Trust (Appendix S, table 3)

Breaches of trust have appeared in engagement barrier examples in the previous section; P3's frustration with perceived unclear messages regarding redundancies, and P10's experience of being ignored and having to '*smile and get on with it*', which went against what they felt was '*right*'. P3 and P10 presented their opinions that these experiences were lacking fairness and violated personal standards and values, and in doing so indicated this formed a significant contributor to preventing engagement. A further 4 participants described their perceptions of immoral activities as contributing towards barriers to engagement. For example, P28's work in government services, having to carry out an activity that they perceived to be '*unjust*'. P28's role means justice and fairness are critical values and principles, in both their duties and attitude to their work. Barriers to engagement in this situation were their supported beliefs ('*everybody was in agreement*') that it was an unjust situation and not '*the right thing to do*' yet having to carry out the task regardless due to a lack of options and support from their superiors and other organisations. P28 felt restricted and powerless to act according to their own and their profession's morals, that these were compromised and not reflected in the decisions of their superiors and other organisations.

Another example of breaches of assumed standards of fairness also appeared in P27's engagement barrier story, which describes perceived deceitful activity and the way they were personally misled. In their role as manager at a retailer, P27 had to communicate messages to employees regarding changes to their terms and conditions regarding payment of breaks. P27 had been told *'(employees) will not be financially…disadvantaged'* by the changes, and asked to *'persuade as many people as possible'* to agree. Unfortunately, P27 felt employees were financially disadvantaged and that they were misled and made *'to lie to people'* (full version available in Appendix S, table 3). P27's example aligns with earlier findings regarding a lack of information in communication preventing engagement, in that P27 believes they were not provided with the full information on the situation. This impacted them personally, in that they were not compensated as they believed they would be, and it impacted the employees in their team because they had informed them they would be compensated, both contributing to the experience of barriers to engagement. P27 also believes their organisation got them to lie on their behalf, which undermined their values. It's interesting to recognise P27's reluctance to admit that they felt forced to do this, which is similar to findings in section 8.1 regarding hesitancy in admitting experiences of conflict with managers. P27 is reluctant to apportion complete blame to the organisation for this situation. A final note of interest is that P27 admits to being disruptive as a result of the situation, taking part in no overtime because they perceived the organisation to be unworthy.

7.4 Workload (Appendix S, table 4)

6 participants referenced a high workload as a barrier to engagement. P25 outlined increased stress due to a high workload as a barrier to engagement:

> *P25: … the stress stuff…dealing with agro customers…colleagues that aren't pulling their weight…people going sick all the time…someone can do a better job and they just don't want to…*

Reference to '*the stress stuff*' alludes to an emotional response to challenging situations, however the word '*stuff*' is purposefully indistinct. Indeed, the generic and non-descript way these 6 participants cited workload as something they had experienced as a barrier to engagement suggests avoidance of considering the question in detail and in relation to themselves. Arguably, workload is a familiar,

common complaint, and citing this as a barrier to engagement represents a reliance on pre-determined views on issues at work. This is similar to the general answers outlined in section 8.0 to the example of a barrier question. These findings suggest some employees are unclear on what prevents them personally from engaging at work, unable to recall experiences of this, or are hesitant to share specific examples and details.

However, some participants did provide more specific examples of a high workload as a barrier to their engagement. For example:

> P13: … effectively I was delivering two jobs at the same time…But I didn't get paid anything more for that…so I was delivering when everyone in my team…had less of a workload…getting paid more than me…it was never formalised by HR…

Emphasising the lack of appreciation for their extra efforts, rather than that delivering two jobs at the same time was unmanageable, P13 compares the perceived unfairness of their increased workload to their colleagues. The lack of pay, equal treatment and formal acknowledgement of their increased workload are barriers to engagement for P13.

Similarly, P1 perceives the lack of formal job title as their barrier to engagement:

> P1: … whilst my post is technically a supervisor, I do exactly the same as the two managers and I don't get the pay they get, and I don't get the recognition that they necessarily get…just having that status…if I need to pull rank because I'm in charge, it's very difficult for me to pull rank when I don't have the title of manager.

For these participants, their experience of a lack of formal recognition received for their increased workload, in both pay and job title, are barriers to engagement, rather than the high workload itself. P20 also believes recognition for good work is important, but they perceive this as unachievable due to workload demands:

> P20: … people's work being recognised quickly…the sheer workload…the sheer pace by which people work…it isn't possible to spend enough time highlighting and celebrating somebody's good work because you're already on to the next thing…

Similarities in these findings highlight employees experience a perceived lack of recognition and acknowledgement in response to high workloads as barriers to

171

engagement. This includes formal recognition, such as job title and pay, and the influence of perceived unfair treatment in comparison to colleagues.

This section has identified that in recounting experiences of barriers to engagement, employees refer to both the 'formal' impact of high workload (such as difficulty in acting with authority due to the absence of a managerial job title), the moral impact (such as unfair treatment), and the emotional impact (such as frustration).

7.5 Personal Resources - 'Me' (Appendix S, table 5)

4 participants demonstrated self-awareness and belief in personal responsibility in their experiences of barriers to engagement, most clearly summarised by P26's response '*me*':

> *P26: Um me I suppose (laughs)…I think the expression is you sometimes get in your own way?...I make assumptions about things, about particular situations…I'm fairly critical with myself. I'm not a perfectionist by any means, but I like to provide the best service that I can.*

This is the start of P26's answer to an example of barriers to engagement, which continues to describe their experience of feeling alone due to their manager's lack of support and encouragement (discussed in 8.1). Notably, P26 initially describes themselves to be a barrier to engagement, due to their tendency to make assumptions and be critical of themselves. P26 presents self-awareness and understanding of the way they interact at work, the responsibility they believe they hold for their engagement, and barriers to their engagement. P2 demonstrates similar self-awareness and personal responsibility:

> *P2: … sometimes you can be stressed at home can't you, and that can maybe affect you…your mind is elsewhere…if I want to really focus and I don't feel focused I do tend to put my headphones on and listen to music because I do get distracted very easily otherwise…We've got quite a banter-ish office and it's quite difficult not to get sucked into…if you've got like disruptive individuals who – I struggle with my attention at the best of times so having other stuff going on kind of me particularly I get very sucked into it.*

Identifying stresses at home, '*banter*' in the office and personal '*struggles*' with attention as barriers to engagement, P2 doesn't provide a specific example of

172

experiencing a barrier to engagement but describes general scenarios and outlines one of their coping mechanisms. P7 also avoids providing a specific example of a barrier to engagement, but describes in a general way their '*issues with anxiety*':

> *P7: … so I have issues with anxiety quite a lot…I spend a lot of time thinking about things and not quite being able to act on them…so that's probably one of the things that would stop me engaging with things because I don't physically do it because mentally I can't do it sometimes. I couldn't think of an example of when, but that's – that kind of…I guess kind of people's perception on that makes quite a big difference.*

P2 and P7 openly describe issues with their emotional wellbeing and present them as preventing them from engaging at work. Phrases such as '*maybe', 'that's probably', 'I guess'* and asking '*can't you?*' indicate these participants are exploring rather than directly answering the question in the interview. Unable or choosing not to recall a specific barrier to engagement experience, the in-interview reflections from these participants may indicate it is the first time they have considered what prevents them from being engaged. P2 and P7's examples suggest employees need opportunities to explore self-awareness and engagement.

P2 and P7 further identify the influence other people have on their engagement, such as office banter and how others perceive their issues. P2 highlights their awareness of their responsibility in responding to or ignoring these distractions. P16 also refers to social interactions as a barrier to their engagement, specifically their difficulty adapting to changes in their social resources:

> *P16: … it's a sort of work/personal situation…somebody that I've worked with here for a long time…had a stroke…a friend and a colleague…which is awful…when you've known somebody for many, many years…and then meet that person on the other side um that's difficult to engage because it's almost like meeting a stranger in the shell of the person that you know so well. So, for me, I think that is a struggle to - to be able to differentiate between those two…I struggle with being able to adapt…*

P16 refers to their lack of resilience and ability to adapt as a barrier to engagement, a further indicator of personal responsibility. Their honest reflection on a recent and upsetting experience they describe as '*work/personal*' highlights a final point of interest; the honesty and vulnerability of these participants in describing their personal 'struggles' in response to what prevents them from engaging at work. The question

173

did not provoke a personally reflective response from all participants, but that these 4 participants took the opportunity to introspect and examine their thoughts and feelings indicates conversations about barriers to engagement encourage them to be open to opportunities to better understand themselves and what prevents them from engaging at work.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored employee experiences and perceptions of barriers to engagement. It identifies perceptions of lack of support, being alone and experiences of conflict with managers as barriers to engagement. Inadequate and restricted communication and failure to involve employees in and appropriately communicate decisions that are important to their roles can prevent engagement. Redundancy and restructuring are also barriers to engagement, both during and after the experiences, and to directly and indirectly involved employees. Further, violations and breaches of trust are engagement barriers, with findings related to compensated morals and principles. A high workload is also understood as causing barriers to engagement. Finally, findings indicated some participants understand themselves as barriers to engagement, using the interview to explore personal resources and better understand themselves and what prevents them from engaging at work. This chapter has explored a range of barriers to engagement, with some discussion as to how these might be addressed, including both organisational and personal approaches.

Chapter 8: Findings and Analysis – Influences on Engagement at the Individual Level

8.0 Introduction

This chapter explores data relevant to research question 4; 'how do organisations impact personal engagement at the individual level?' The preceding chapters have focused only on participant responses to specific questions and sections of the interviews (e.g. chapter 8 focuses on participant experiences of barriers to engagement in direct answer to questions about barriers). This chapter presents common themes throughout all the interview, irrespective of which questions participants were answering. It develops some previous findings and includes new data to address the final research question. The following represents the most cited themes representing participant perceptions of factors that influence and impact engagement.

8.1. Manager (Appendix T, table 1)

Perceptions of a manager as influencing engagement were widely apparent in the data. As previously identified, participants often described experiences with their manager when referring to experiences and barriers to engagement. Additional discussions of manager behaviours and being managed throughout interview discussions indicate employees perceive managers to influence engagement through mutual respect, trust, micromanagement, support and visibility.

Three employees referred to the importance of *'mutual respect'* (P15) between manager and employee in influencing engagement, for example:

> P1: I think in order to have EE…there's got to be an element of respect between…those higher up and then those lower down the food chain…

Commonalities in references to an exchange of respect between employee and management aligns with earlier findings that employees understand engagement to

be an ongoing transactional relationship, in which respect '*works both ways*' *(P6)*. Further, similarities in references to the hierarchy in the exchange indicate employees understand mutual respect to be influenced by positions of authority and the hierarchy of power and influence. P6's elaboration that when management don't treat their people with respect '*it becomes confrontational*' suggests a lack of respect is perceived to lead to conflict, which is a barrier to engagement.

Trusting one's manager and having a trusting relationship with them emerged as an influencing factor for 7 participants. For example:

> *P12: … I think a good manager is somebody that wants to develop and enhance their staff but also empowers them and trust them to make decisions and I think if you're in that supportive environment you're going to give more and if you're not then you're not.*

Trust is understood here as something that enables the manager to support the employee to independently make decisions. Another participant explained their experience their manager trusting them, which led to them being able to work autonomously:

> *P13: … I got to that level of working with him that he trusted me…that's when I felt quite engaged and wanted to actually just push on and do the extra pieces of work.*

It is interesting that P13 reported achieving '*that level of working with (manager) that he trusted me*' as an enabler to engagement. '*Level*' indicates an assumed common understanding in the type of trusting relationship P13 experienced with their manager, and '*he trusted me*' suggests the manager's confidence in P13's ability to work autonomously was the engaging factor, rather than having a trusting relationship. P13 later contrasted their trusted position with their opinion about the lack of trust in a subsidiary location of their organisation:

> *P13: … especially down in (subsidiary location) where you still got to clock-in…they don't trust the people because it has got that sort of just culture…people want to have flexibility but they're not trusted or managers still don't trust them. Whereas with me, I get complete flexibility. I can work at home whenever I want.*

Clocking-in is symbolic of surveillance, and P13 perceives this to represent a wider culture in which managers don't trust their employees. This is contrasted to P13's

176

position, who has permission to work flexibly and therefore has the trust of their managers. P11 also contrasted the flexibility they experience with their new manager to others in their organisations, and how they used to feel regarding taking time out for a doctor's appointment:

> *P11: …you always had that slight anxiety about…if that fed up to the next level say they wouldn't be happy about it…you're sneaking around...because you don't want certain people to see that you're leaving early…(now) you don't have to sneak out the door because someone might see you, it just doesn't feel like that at all anymore…*

Sneaking and hiding from managers due to a lack of trust, surveillance and monitoring is identified as a barrier to engagement by P11. A further 7 participants refer to micromanagement as preventing engagement. For example:

> *P23: … I've changed jobs…because I've been disengaged with a particular manager or leader because I like to - I like autonomy…I like to be able to be given the head to do things on my own. I don't like being micromanaged.*

And similarly:

> *P24: … I don't like to be micromanaged, so to have that autonomy in to be delegated and be allowed to do something the way that you like to do makes me feel very engaged.*

Participants identified autonomy as an enabler to engagement, and micromanagement including managers that are '*constantly on your back (P28)'* as barriers to engagement.

In addition to respect and trust, manager support was identified as influencing engagement for 6 participants. This included being nurtured and provided with access to opportunities for learning and progression. For example:

> *P3: … it's important to me that the things I value…are if not shared at least supported by my employer…I've been very lucky, especially my line manager now he's incredibly supportive and allows me the time to be involved with things that I want to do….*

P3's identifies being able to pursue an area of importance to their beliefs indicates managerial support, which influences engagement. Notably, it is when managers

'*allow me the time*' for additional activities, which indicates management provide permission as well as support for activities that influence engagement.

Additional findings relating to perceptions of managerial support as influencing engagement are in reference to being nurtured by a manager. For example:

> *P1: I think it's always whenever I felt properly engaged, I would say it's generally been when I've had feedback from someone in a higher position than myself…someone who's been through it themselves and is giving you that guidance and that kind of they're trying to nurture you, I think immediately that's going to encourage engagement.*

And similarly:

> *P28: … when I got assaulted at work…the support and communication I got after the incident…was amazing…made me feel really valued…it wasn't my close superiors and supervisors fault…it was the organisation as a whole that failed. Not the people who were looking after me.*

These findings indicate employees perceive managers who are supportive and caring, invested in their well-being and success, as influencing engagement.

A final commonality in findings related to perceptions of managers as influencing engagement is management visibility. For example:

> *P22: … senior managers are never around and our Chief Executive is never around because we all now share an open plan office it's really obvious… there's no communication between anyone, so no one really knows what's going on at any point.*

And similarly:

> *P1: … the owners…aren't consistently there. There's really really poor communication.*

The physical absence of management indicates a lack of connection and communication between people in the workplace, which negatively influences engagement.

8.2 Organisational Approaches (Appendix T, table 2)

Participants referred to a range of different 'approaches' to organisational activities that they perceive to influence engagement, such as vision and culture that supports

support flexible working. This section begins by identifying some of the commonalities in participant references to organisational approaches that influence engagement (Appendix T, table 2), before exploring two specific examples – progression and fairness (Appendix T, table 3 and 4).

Organisational approaches that were frequently cited by participants as influencing engagement include vision and culture, benefits, pay, learning and development, length of service and change, and time for additional activities. A commonality in participant descriptions of organisational approaches as influencing engagement relates to perceptions of engagement as a response to organisational approaches. This is summarised by P12:

> *P12: … to achieve my own individual goals and aspirations and contribute to the organisation and have all the tools, resources and things available to me to be able to fulfil that role…as much as me giving everything, it's about the institution equipping me with the resources and the tools and the skills that I need and in terms of skills as well, it's that development…*

P12 highlights '*it's about the institution equipping me*', with resources, skills and opportunities for development to be able to engage. P12 perceives these as only provided by the organisation, and so understandings of the organisation's offering as influencing engagement indicates participants understand engagement as a response and thereby part of an exchange. Arguably, the employee's evaluation and experience of the organisation's provision is therefore as an important influence on engagement.

An example of this is participants who referred to an organisation's vision or culture as influencing engagement through a transactional relationship in which the employer provides vision or culture, and the employee makes meaning of and aligns to it. For example:

> *P30: … everyone's got to be receptive to haven't they, but it's at the end of the day it's…the office or the culture of the work environment that's going to form that's going to command how people feel. So yeah, everyone has to engage with it, but unless it's there from…the top that say as an ethos then people just aren't going to…*

This indicates understanding of engagement as an exchange influenced by the organisation's input. Participants explained their perception that onus is on the

organisation putting strategies in place to encourage their commitment to the organisation's missions, indicating the organisation's role in providing something to engage with. Another example:

> *P13: … setting that mission statement… decent enough people at the top of the pile…to actually bring people along with that journey...see some sort of vision…which you can get behind…then you need people within the business in order to be able to create that culture…*

P13 highlights they need management to present the vision and bring them along, at which point it is for the employee to *'get behind'* it. Another example is provided by P26, who concludes that engagement is *'a two way street'*:

> *P26: … its incumbent upon the organization to create an environment where people can get engaged…it's a whole range from working environments…the resources they are given to do that work…the salary side, the perks of the job…the benefits…for me that's – it's a two way street. And I think the more you give the more you get.*

P26 perceives the environment, resources, and benefits the organisation provides to initiate the engagement transaction. A range of organisational activities and approaches were mentioned by participants as part of this transaction, and additional examples are available in Appendix T, table 2. The commonalities in these findings indicate employees believe organisations need to present approaches (e.g., vision) and resources (e.g. pay) for them to individually engage with. They highlight a common view that the organisation provides the resources employees need to engage, perceiving this to be a transaction. Understanding engagement as a simplified exchange is of course problematic; similarly to viewing the employment relationship as an economic transaction of labour for pay, there are invisible tensions of power and bargaining at play. These tensions are now considered through two specific examples of organisational approaches that participants perceive to influence engagement – progression and fairness.

8.2.1 Progression (Appendix T, table 3)

Previous findings indicated participants experience engagement relating to progression opportunities, and an external permission as required to access these opportunities (section 6.4). There were many additional participant references to

organisational approaches to progression as influencing engagement. To address the research questions, this section considers progression as influencing engagement from three common participant perspectives; that displays of engagement lead to progression opportunities; the organisation provides access to progression; and that breaches in trust relating to progression influence engagement.

Some participants shared opinions that showing engagement leads to opportunities for progression. For example:

> P7: … showing engagement hopefully makes you look favourable for other opportunities.

In the context of earlier findings regarding the performative dimension of presenting engagement to others and conscious decisions to act in presentations of the self (section 5.3), it is interesting to consider that P7 perceives '*showing engagement*' to '*look favourable*' leads to opportunities. The suggestion is that opportunities such as progression are accessible by consciously performing and presenting engagement to others.

P25 supports this idea in their suggestion of a need to '*have*' engagement to make managers '*interested in you*' for progression opportunities:

> P25: … (engagement is) quite important to have…especially if you want to develop a career…got to have that interest in what you do and then you want your managers to be interested in you and get you further up the ladder sort of thing.

For P25, engagement is understood as a prerequisite to managers being interested in you and then career development. Similarly, in section 6.4, P15 described an occasion where they demonstrated engagement with the organisation and were provided with a progression opportunity as a result. These findings demonstrate understandings of displaying engagement as leading to progression opportunities.

Conversely, a second theme related to progression emerged amongst 7 participants who identified that progression opportunities are needed first to then enable engagement. This was often portrayed through participant examples of progression opportunities they have received and consequently felt engaged, for example:

> *P18: … I started off nine years ago on reception…it was really lucky that it got noticed that I had a bit of a flare for using the system…I feel very valued here and listen to… that to me was real engagement…I feel really, really committed to this because I've been given that opportunity to do that…*

P18's reference to being '*lucky*' in the opportunities they received undermines their contribution to their progression and suggests reliance on the organisation. This aligns with earlier findings relating to influence and control in engagement experiences, including the interplay of individual agency and external factors that shape access to these experiences (section 6.4). P18 identifies their opportunities for progression and the subsequent engagement they feel as happening due to luck, being '*noticed*', and being provided with the opportunity to progress into a different role. This implies employees perceive organisational permission as involved in progression opportunities related to engagement.

Additional perspectives that opportunities for progression lead to engagement emerged in participant examples related to expectations about progression, outlining assumed expectations for how progression 'should' develop. These findings identified assumed understandings and societal norms around progression structures and opportunities, such as routes to progression since graduating (P21), achieving qualifications (P3; P15; P16) and length of service (P3). For example, P3, who describes how they have progressed throughout 12 years of service, explains:

> *P3: … I started…admin support role…asked me to do a few hours a week on the support desk…I eventually got a permanent role on the team. So I started as an assistant analyst and then became an analyst and now a senior analyst. And so it's kind of a nice natural progression through the years although the team has changed a lot we've had several restructures it's been a nice gentle progression I think over the years.*

P3 draws attention to achieving a permanent role and their 12 years of service as '*a nice natural progression*' and '*a nice gentle progression*'. Repetition of '*nice*' and labelling their progression as *'natural'* and *'gentle'* indicates P3 perceives their progression to be comfortable and 'normal', suggesting it aligns with the expectations of the society in which it is presented (Goffman, 1971). Similar findings were observed in participant references to transitions from temporary to permanent roles as progression. For example:

182

P13: … it's quite a weird job which I've sort of fallen into by accident…on a temporary contract about 10 years ago…I applied for a permanent job…then kind of bounced my way up the organisation over a period of time…I've been with (employer) for 10…years now…I started off manning the switchboard and now it's like I'm probably a couple rungs away from the CEO…

P13's reference to '*rungs*' alludes to a hierarchical progression ladder, and that they '*bounced…up the organisation*' denotes fast and unexpected progression which influences P13's engagement. Additional references to acquiring permanent roles indicates participant perceptions that this influences engagement. For example:

P19: … it's a kind of funny role…they asked me to stay on a…little bit longer, and then I've got a full-time contract…this year was the official contract… did I even apply? No. (laughs) I didn't apply for anything…I sometimes think that in my personal engagement with the role, my personal life, because I don't have any dependents and I'm just out of Uni, financially this is a good...this is a normal stepping stone...for somebody in my position…

Reference to '*a normal stepping stone*' is similar to P13's '*rungs*', which hints at unwritten rules for societal expectations of progression, hierarchy and job security, which these participants view as influencing engagement. Further, P19 highlights the non-traditional way in which they secured an '*official contract*', describing it as a '*funny role*' similarly to P13's description that '*it's quite a weird job which I've sort of fallen into by accident*'. The non-traditional, seemingly unplanned way in which permanent or full-time positions are acquired are important parts to these participant's stories of their engagement experiences. Further, these findings suggest employees perceive engagement as aligned with and experienced through full-time, permanent roles. Engagement is influenced by employee understandings and experiences of progression according to assumed societal expectations. The extent to which these views appropriate and mould engagement to fit societal expectations requires further exploration.

A final theme emerged through 4 participant's descriptions of breaches in trust relating to organisational approaches to progression which influence engagement. For example, P5's perception that the organisation lied about progression opportunities they promised in their interview negatively influenced engagement:

P5: In the organisation once I was there it didn't happen, so that almost a false promise was incredibly disheartening and disengaging, um and especially at the point in my career that I am and was at that time where I just wanted to develop.

Another example is P14 who explained their current lack of engagement as influenced by being overlooked for a promotion that their colleague received:

P14: … I don't feel as like into it anymore as I used to, I've kind of distanced myself a bit from it…I feel like I'm being judged…when I went on maternity he then covered my 0.5, the role that I had...and then they then decided, you have to be a grade five to…train people…so they then regraded him…from moving to administrator to senior administrator...then when I came back he had done it for longer than I had, so it was more his role than it was mine…

P14 perceives that, following their return to work on part-time hours after maternity leave, they have been overlooked for a promotion which a full-time colleague has received. A point of frustration for P14 is that this has been justified by their colleague's ability to achieve a longer length of service working in the role whilst they were absent. This is representative of the 'gendered hierarchy', in which 'the ranking of women's jobs is often justified based on women's identification with childbearing and domestic life. They are devalued because women are assumed to be unable to conform to the demands of the abstract job' (Acker, 1990, p.152). P14 perceives that their absence from the workplace during maternity leave, and subsequent change in working hours, has resulted in them being overlooked for progression opportunities. Notably, P14 echoes explanations from other participants of a 'natural order' to their progression from administrator to senior administrator and temporary to permanent staff, but understands this natural order as being halted due to their period of maternity leave. These complex points of tension indicate unfair treatment regarding access to progression opportunities influences engagement, and that changeable work such as temporary, part-time, and parental absence influence progression and thereby engagement. Further, findings indicate that lack of fairness and clarity in progression opportunities influence engagement.

8.2.2 Fairness (Appendix T, table 4)

In addition to the previous section, findings on barriers to engagement identified participant perceptions of fairness to influence engagement such as through breaches

of trust, lack of impartiality and unequal workloads. There were many additional participant references to fairness within organisational approaches as influencing engagement, and this section considers perceptions of fairness in organisational approaches to benefits, pay and flexible working as influencing engagement.

6 participants viewed unequal treatment relating to benefits and pay as unfair, which is a barrier to engagement. Participants identified themselves as being underpaid, or presented their view that being underpaid influences engagement, for example:

> P4: … So I feel like I'm the lowest paid member of staff in my office and I do probably the most amount of work and make other people look good…

It is significant that 4 of these 6 participants use reference to other members of staff in their organisation or wider sector pay scales to present their sense of unfairness related to pay. For example:

> P13: … I had to trade away a load of my benefits…they reviewed everyone in my team's pay and I know that the person who's on the same level as me is getting £3k more…the other person…he's on old terms…he's probably on about £15k-£17k more than me…I think for me - that parity and that consistency with the way people are treated and the way people are rewarded for what they're doing…

P13's use of '*probably*' and '*about*' to describe how much their colleagues earn in comparison to them indicates they do not actually know the pay differentiation within their team, however, this is not the point of significance for their influence on engagement. P13 is influenced by their experience of perceived unfairness in pay, in that their sacrifice of their old contract's benefits has not been rewarded financially, when members of their team are receiving more pay than them. This indicates employee evaluate fairness in organisational approaches to pay and benefits in relation to perceptions of treatment of others, which influences engagement.

P20 and P22 outlined perceived inherent unfair restrictions on pay in their sector as influencing their engagement. P22 perceives '*morale is low in general and part of that comes from working in the (sector) and people not getting paid enough.*'. They evaluate this in comparison to other industries to advocate for improvements for themselves and all staff in their organisation. Both P20 and P22 refer to a lack of

funding as the reason for low pay, suggesting this is a commonly cited narrative of pay being low in their sector which influences engagement. Similarities within representations of pay as an influence on engagement indicates employees assess pay in comparison to their perception of what others receive, using this to determine if they are being treated fairly, which influences their engagement.

Perceptions of fairness as an influence on engagement appeared elsewhere in discussion related to organisational approaches to flexible working time. For example:

> *P12: … it has to be fair across the board…that's something that perhaps we aren't so good at as an institution is everyone's got personal arrangements and then that can cause a bit of tension because they're like "why does she get day off a week when so-and-so doesn't"…*

P12 perceives tension due to assumed unfair treatment in flexibility of working hours, which influences engagement. P23 also identifies perceived unfairness in the way their contract and working hours compares to colleagues in other departments:

> *P23: … the problem is…the contracts that were on…they are expected (work) hours are exactly the same…there's - it's the unfairness…It's not their fault that it's like that but it just seemed to be unfair…*

P23 explains they assess unfairness through observing when other members of staff '*seem to be…finished'* in comparison to them. Participants indicate their observations of perceived unfair activities influence their engagement, indicating employee experiences and perceptions of fairness influence engagement.

These findings indicate employees observe and perceive fairness in how they are treated in relation to colleagues and wider society, and their own principles related to fairness. This indicates employees evaluate their experiences according to their own principles, which influences their engagement.

8.3 Opportunities to Reflect on Engagement (Appendix T, table 5)

Preceding chapters have highlighted occasions in which participants reflected upon their engagement during the interview. This final section presents participant references to reflection which indicates this can influence engagement.

3 participants shared their opinions that reflection influences in engagement. For example:

> *P5: … for like your own self engagement, you have to understand what makes you tick and that comes from a lot of like reflection and working on yourself…it's not automatically there, and I've noticed that quite recently with myself that I need to actually pinpoint what is it about my job that makes me engage. What is it that doesn't make me engaged.*

P5 emphasises their personal responsibility in identifying what engages them through reflection. Similarly, P26 described their frequent reflective practice through which they develop understanding of their personal responsibility in their engagement:

> *P26: … Most of the time I am personally engaged…I reflect a lot on my performance…why I've done it and what I can learn from it…I kind of keep a check of myself as best as I can through that reflective process …to look at what I've done, is there anything I could have provided better than I did. And quite often the answer is yes, and so I would then go and do that…*

These findings identify some participants are aware of their role in their engagement, achieved through personal reflection which includes exploration of how to improve. This indicates employees that have an awareness of and actively take part in reflective practice can develop greater understanding PE.

Following the presentation of engagement definitions, 3 participants began reflecting on their engagement during the interview. For example:

> *P8: Um it's kind of weird because I've never thought about it like that… I suppose in thinking about it doesn't make you um kind of question what – what I'm getting out of it, or what I would like to get out of working and – and what I do.*

This indicates the interview provided P8 with a chance to learn about engagement and consider its importance for them and their work. Similarly, P30 contemplated how engagement relates to their responsibility and attitude at work:

> *P30: I dunno, it's um…I mean who's responsibility is it? Because I just see my job as a job. I just want to turn up and do it and leave again and get paid. So who's responsibility is it? (Laughs) Is it everyone's responsibility to be on board? Or is it – so um, probably like my own attitude really now towards my workplace and my colleagues and just*

yeah, it's just a job now to me that I can perform enough to get by and…gets money paid at the end of the month.

Exploring their thoughts on a range of questions initiated from finding out more about engagement, P30 demonstrates that providing employees with definitions and asking their thoughts in response prompts exploration of pe.

A final common finding related to opportunities to reflect on engagement emerged as 7 participants explored insights they had gained from discussions at the end of the interview. These findings indicate that discussions about engagement provides employees with the opportunity to explore their experiences and feelings about their work. For example, P19, who highlights the significance of talking to someone separate from their organisation:

> *P19: … I think speaking to you, because you're not part of the company, does influence that…if I was talking to somebody within, then we all know what the situation is and we all know that negativity constantly boiling, so yeah it's very different speaking to someone outside it…*

P19 identifies that discussing engagement with someone external to their organisation provided perspective and the opportunity to explore different ideas.

P11 started to reflect on how they currently feel related to their engagement:

> *P11: I realise how bad it was before actually, now I've just talked about you do forget don't you? it kind of blurs into one but yeah, no it's so refreshing to have that now, I feel totally engaged, I do feel engaged and it's such a nice feeling...*

For P11 the interview provided the opportunity to reflect on their experience and feel '*totally engaged*' again. Similarly, P24 explains the interview has helped them reflect on their feelings towards work:

> *P24: I think what we've spoken about being engaged with a profession rather than the organisation has definitely helped? I know that…it's completely normal to be like I do want to be in HR, but I don't want to be in this organisation and that's not a bad thing…I think that's something I'm really going to take away from it like I am I'm engaged, I might just not be as engaged with this organisation anymore. That might be a growth thing and I'm just ready to take that next step and try something new…*

It appeared the interview supported P24 to articulate that they want to try something different, and the opportunity to explore what engages them enabled them to develop awareness of their future goals. P26 also identified the interview discussions as enabling them to think about their role:

> P26: … your questions have been quite full and searching, they've made me think…about my role, so that's been quite useful…I've got a lot from this as well. I got a lot from this. It has made me think a lot about the work I do and how I do it, who I do it with, so that's been a useful – a useful step back and reflection…

Further, P27 started to reflect that their engagement is *'personal to me'*:

> P27: … now we've talked about it becomes apparent to me it's about kind of the right thing for everyone. Not just – in fact – regardless, I guess almost of me…So yeah, and I don't know kind of where that fits in terms of what you think of that, but I guess that's personal to me and I guess that starts to – starts to say OK yeah, this is even more complex than certainly I had realised um before kind of talking to you tonight. So it's thought provoking definitely…

Highlighting the thought-provoking nature of the interview, P27 notably asks what I think of their thoughts on engagement, suggesting employees appreciate sharing views to enhance understanding.

Commonalities in these responses indicate protected time to explore engagement encouraged participants to reflect on PE. Participants identified things they will take away from the conversation, suggesting that conversations about engagement and experiences of it can enable employees to reflect on their engagement.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented some of the most common employee perceptions of factors that influence engagement. Firstly, it identified perceptions of a manager as influencing engagement through mutual respect, trust, micromanagement, support and visibility. Excessive surveillance, monitoring and micromanagement indicate a lack of trust from managers, which is a barrier to engagement. Secondly, findings relating participant perceptions of to organisational approaches to activities such as vision and culture were considered as influencing engagement. Commonalities in transactional understandings of the employment relationship were presented,

indicating employees believe organisations need to present approaches (e.g. vision) and resources (e.g. pay) for them to individually engage with. Organisational approaches to progression and fairness were specifically considered which identified the complexities of individual agency and external organisational factors that shape access to engagement experiences. A range of opinions on how progression influences engagement were considered, including expectations about progression and the influence of assumed societal expectations for progression. Further, employees observe and perceive fairness in how they are treated in relation to colleagues and wider society, which influences engagement. The final section of this chapter identified findings relating to reflection and engagement, indicating a need for opportunities for employees to reflect on their engagement.

Chapter 9: Discussion

9.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the findings of previous chapters and the literature review to draw conclusions to address the following research questions:

1. What is 'personal engagement', and how does it differ from existing understandings and research on engagement?
2. What is the experience of engagement at the individual level?
3. What are the obstacles to personal engagement and how might these be overcome?
4. How do organisations impact personal engagement at the individual level?

This research produced a wealth of rich data which was analysed and presented to address the research questions. The following chapter discusses the findings, drawing upon the academic literature to identify where this study extends and develops knowledge, particularly regarding employee understandings and experiences of engagement. It considers some of the influences on engagement to contribute towards better understanding of the individual lived experiences of being engaged. The following discussion outlines the key findings considered to be most significant in both addressing each of the research questions and contributing new insights to knowledge on the understanding and experience of being engaged for the individual. Whilst a range of rich and insightful data has emerged from this study, the focus of this discussion is on significant themes that extend knowledge into employee experiences and perceptions of being engaged that emerged from this study, in line with my perception of their importance. The importance of these key insights will be explored and justified in relation to the academic literature.

This chapter begins with a preliminary discussion of employee's understandings of engagement, drawing upon key insights from this study's findings and the academic literature to address research question 1. This considers the predominant alignment

of findings with existing approaches to engagement considered within the literature review, alongside the dominant themes identified in employee understandings of engagement, to identify where this study adds new insights into employee understandings of what constitutes engagement.

The final three research questions are then addressed through the subsequent discussion, which introduces a conceptual model of engagement (figure 2) according to this study's key findings relating to various dimensions of individual's perceptions and experiences of engagement. Alongside exploration of key academic literature, this conceptual model is explored in depth through discussion on the key insights of this study regarding engagement as having 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions. Discussion in relation to where this study develops Kahn's personal engagement conceptualisation focuses on the 'multiple levels of influence' in engagement experiences (1990, p 718) and 'the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices' (1990, p.719).

9.1 Understandings and perceptions of engagement

As demonstrated in the literature review, engagement has been influenced by a dominant positivist, unitarist perspective (Sambrook, 2021) and the "psychologisation" of organisational activities (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008; Troth & Guest, 2020; Vincent *et al.*, 2020). The psychologised HRM context is concerned with managerial objectives (Harley, 2015) and causes 'human beings (to) come to be viewed as objects to be manipulated, and…disciplined and controlled' and 'individualises and atomises workers' (Godard, 2014, p.11). The dominance of positivist psychology in academic HRM research has contributed to a resource-based, output-focused view of engagement. Engagement theory and research has developed out of the positive psychology movement's attempts to improve the workplace (Roof, 2015), resulting in much of the engagement literature focusing on understanding engagement for the organisation as part of a wider 'engagement industry' (Welborne, 2011, p.98) that prioritises managerial outcomes and 'being engaged' and 'doing engagement' as 'part of the managerialist project' (Truss *et al.*, 2013, p.2664). Engagement has become a flagship tool through which organisational and managerial outcomes of 'performance, productivity…and profitability' (Rayton *et al.*, 2012) can be achieved. Beliefs about the

need for engagement are combined with the unitarist privileging of the managerialist prerogative and assumptions that both managers and non-managerial employees share goals and accept the need for engagement, and fail to consider managers' power and pivotal role in engagement (Sambrook, 2021).

These views have contributed towards the concern within existing engagement research at the centre of this research; that a unitarist, managerialist approach to engagement is potentially problematic as it seems to distort and diverge away from Kahn's (1990) original foci framing of engagement as a deeply personal and agentic experience. Kahn defined PE as 'the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles' and 'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance' (1990, p.694). PE refers to an individual's behaviours, feelings, and values, as well as their psychological state of mind while at work. Although situated in the organisational context, 'the core of engagement is the individual as a person rather than as a worker or employee' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83). Existing engagement approaches are disproportionately concerned with organisational consequences and outcomes of engagement. Arguably, 'engagement has been 'bent' through its appropriation to managerialist agendas, and 'stretched' in its meaning away from being an individual state of mind to encompass workforce strategies and dialogic practice' (Truss *et al.*, 2013, p.2664). This has influenced a shift away from Kahn's original engagement concept, removing it from the individual's expression of a 'preferred self' and it into an organisational commodity. Of particular concern is that this seems to be widely accepted and even encouraged by various actors (such as scholars and practitioners) that contribute to engagement literature and research. This has encouraged an engagement phenomenon that is divergent from Kahn's psychological conditions, self-in-role performances, dynamic active experiences, individual differences and conscious decisions.

The dominant positivist, unitarist perspectives in engagement (Sambrook, 2021) ignore the perspective of the individual, particularly in their understanding and experiences of engagement. Shuck, Kim & Fletcher highlight that 'quantifying engagement to better capture it – and bottle it up – has been the goal. Yet, research tells us that at times, engagement is about the deeply subjective experience and the

phenomenon and much less about measurement precision' (2021, p.465). Engagement outlooks focused on employee conformity to organisational norms and expectations result in 'employees' subjective feelings of engagement and commitment (being) either unaffected or radicalized – resistant to the perceived emotional "cloning" attempts by management' (Fineman, 2006, p.278). Kahn's work questioned assumptions that employees are impassive, instead focusing on the ways which 'people employ and express themselves' (1990, p.694), which this research seeks to explore further. This study has considered this alongside Alvesson and Willmott's argument that employees are not passive carriers of discourses but critically interpret and enact them (2002). This study has therefore positioned employees as active and critical in their interpretation and enactment of engagement discourses to gain insight into the individual understanding and experience of engagement. The following sections explore the three key findings relating to employee understanding of engagement as a conflated and ambiguous concept, management practice and an emotional state or behaviour.

9.1.1 Conflated and Ambiguous Concept Requiring Support in Understanding

The literature review identified that engagement is a contested concept, with numerous interpretations and the lack of a clear, consistent and widely agreed definition. It is misunderstood and, at times, misused (Shuck *et al*., 2017), having been interpreted and reinvented many times that now the only point of agreement across definitions of engagement is that there are a wide range of definitions (Bailey, 2022). The 'emerging excitement' in constructing various versions of engagement (Sambrook, 2021, p.474) has overlooked how and if engagement is understood by employees. The findings of this study have discerned that employee understandings of engagement are varied and multifaceted, including a lack of consistent understanding and conflation across the four main engagement models considered in the literature review (personal engagement, work engagement, multidimensional engagement and engagement as management practice). Alongside findings of uncertainty and misunderstandings of engagement, a range of concepts and terms were used by employees to define engagement, as indicated in the range of themes derived from analysis. This study therefore contributes to knowledge in identifying that employees understand engagement as a broad ranging, multidimensional

concept, encompassing a variety of elements (Torrington *et al.*, 2008) and representative of a complex range of existing engagement conceptualisations. The multiplicity of definitions, conceptualisations and theories found in engagement research (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2017) are also represented in employee understandings.

Further, some participants were hesitant and uncertain in their understandings of engagement, relying on familiar concepts (such as those related to interests and experiences in their 'personal' lives), and seeking support and reassurance from the researcher in understanding the concept. For others, engagement was attributed to a wide range of different feelings, behaviours and acts that can be identifiable (such as through observable behaviours like 'smiling') or vague (such as *people that look like they're having a nice time* (P21)'). This supports arguments that engagement is an ambiguous concept (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013) and 'we literally do not know or understand what we're talking about or what we're doing' (Briner, 2014, p.53). Further, it suggests that the 'engagement industry' (Welborne, 2011, p.98) has devised a distorted and enigmatic concept that is largely disconnected from the employee. Whilst some participants could speculate what EE is, using questions, reassurance seeking and guesses to develop an answer, some *'couldn't even guess (P30)'*.

The enigmatic nature of engagement for employees is particularly evident in findings related to understandings of PE. These demonstrated a higher number of participants who were either uncertain and unable to speculate what PE means, or hesitant, requesting reassurance in their understandings. Whilst previous attention has focused on the crossover between engagement and other constructs as resulting in engagement becoming a redundant concept (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014), the findings of this study imply that the marginalisation of Kahn's PE has resulted in its unfamiliarity to employees. Kahn's PE concept is contingent on an individual's choice in engaging in their work; if employees do not have the knowledge or understanding of engagement, how can they make active choices to 'express and employ their personal selves...or withdraw and defend their personal selves' at work (1990, p. 692)? As argued throughout this study, the engagement phenomenon that exists in organisations today is not related to Kahn's engagement concept. This has

implications for the main actors in Kahn's engagement concept – employees; arguably, lack of knowledge or understanding of engagement restricts the extent to which engagement can be experienced.

The unfamiliarity of PE to employees was further demonstrated by those who needed support to speculate, or related it to familiar and generic concepts such as personal life and communication, thus further highlighting the vague and diluted nature of the enigmatic engagement concept to employees. This aligns with arguments about engagement as an umbrella term for whatever one wants it to be (Saks, 2008), and fuelled by the desire for conceptual convergence (Sambrook, 2021). Arguably, it indicates employees are accustomed to relying on external intervention in addressing their uncertainty of organisational concepts. That some employees are hesitant and uncertain in considering engagement, seeking external support to consider engagement for themselves, indicates reliance on external intervention to understand workplace phenomenon. Commonalities in participants guessing, seeking reassurance, and asking questions demonstrates a desire for understanding and an expectation of external information and opinion to fill in the gaps. More participants offered guesses at what EE and PE are than those that didn't speculate; arguably, this represents employee's desire to know, or at least appear to know, what engagement is. It has been argued that engagement 'represents an aspiration that employees should understand, identify with, and commit themselves to the objectives of the organisation they work for' (Emmott, 2015, p.663). Participant attempts to produce an understanding of engagement indicates their desire to comply with this aspiration.

The findings in this study identified that whilst some individuals don't perceive there to be a difference between EE and PE, those that do separate the concepts do so by distinguishing between an authentic and employee version of self, including identifying who is responsible for each. Management and the organisation are understood as responsible for providing influence and permission for EE, and participants referred to personal responsibility (such as what they do or bring) in their understandings of PE. Further, some employees understand PE as alignment with personal beliefs, values and personalities, distinguishing between PE as an authentic version of self, and an 'employee' version of self with EE as initiated by management and accessed through organisational and managerial permission. This indicates that employees understand

EE as 'something which can be 'done to' or 'extracted from' employees through 'leadership'' (Keenoy, 2014, p.203). Employee perspectives that management and the organisation, and the activities they conduct, are the compelling force and influence of EE demonstrate that employees understand EE to be initiated and managed by management and the organisation. This is problematic in that it suggests employee's perceive EE as removed from the individual level of influence and it is therefore divergent from Kahn's (1990) PE, which focused on the individual's conscious decision to employ and express a 'preferred self' in active, full role performances. However, findings that some employees consider personal responsibility and an authentic version of self in PE are promising in that they suggest employee awareness of a conceptual difference in engagement constructs and some of the features of PE.

The range of interpretations and explanations of EE and PE in this study contribute to the argument that engagement lacks shared understanding and meaning amongst employees. That it can be familiar for some and unknown for others highlights understanding of engagement is as diverse and unique as the employees that experience it. Engagement is uniquely interpreted and enacted by individual employees. This implies that workplace approaches that honour the diversity of an individual's behaviours, feelings, values, and psychological state of mind while at work can encourage understanding and awareness of the presentation of their 'preferred self' in engagement performances. The suggestion is that supporting employees to interpret and apply engagement concepts to their unique circumstances may enable development of a personal, individual level of engagement.

9.1.2 Understanding engagement as management practice

Thematic analysis of the findings of this study identified that employees refer to familiar organisational functions (e.g. HR) to explain their understanding of engagement, and perceive engagement as accessed through organisational language and expression. Engagement is therefore understood by employees as an organisational initiative and discourse – language-based communicative actions, which are a 'carrier of shared understanding in the creation and maintenance of organisational structures' (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000, p.1252). Power and influence underpin engagement as an organisational discourse through the ways it is moulded and constructed for

managerial outcomes; an example is the CIPD's advertisement of a 'virtuous cycle of engagement processes that employers can reinterpret in ways that fit with their own organisational context and circumstances' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010). Findings that engagement is an organisational initiative accessed through organisational discourse therefore indicate that employees understand engagement as shaped and owned by the organisation.

This is supported by analysis comparing participant understandings of EE to the four main types of engagement considered in the literature review (personal engagement, work engagement, multidimensional engagement and engagement as management practice). These findings demonstrated that engagement is described as some combination of all four models. Further, features of the engagement as management practice category were most frequently aligned to participant understandings, indicating that employees perceive engagement as a workforce management strategy (Bailey, 2022), 'a holistic area of people strategy' (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.9)' 'designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.9). This is representative of 'narrow engagement' that focuses on 'positive employee behaviour that is likely to lead to more effective performance and confer direct benefits on the organisation' (Robertson & Cooper, 2010, p.326). This study therefore extends the concerns of Truss *et al.*, regarding the focused attention on 'doing engagement' and engagement as 'part of the managerialist project', and suggests that employees understand engagement through the 'bent' and 'stretched' appropriation to managerialist agendas as 'doing engagement' through management practice (2013, p.2664).

Separating participant definitions of EE and PE demonstrated that EE is understood as an organisational initiative and permission to engage, as well as an individual feeling, behaviour and/or act. Participants articulated less understanding of PE; those that could describe PE either aligned it with references to organisational approaches or outlined dimensions of personal responsibility and authenticity. Differentiating understandings of these two concepts indicates some employees do understand there to be a difference between EE and PE, but seek support in clarifying and exploring this further. All four of the major engagement types featured in descriptions of PE,

indicating that all four of the main models of engagement have infiltrated employee understandings of PE. That 11 participants aligned with features of PE suggests aspects of the PE conceptualisation are familiar to employees. However, some employees described a similar type of engagement when asked about PE as they did when describing EE. This indicates conflation in understandings of EE and PE as management practice.

Understandings of EE as an organisational initiative, articulated through organisational discourse and management practice contribute to arguments that engagement has been 'narrowly constructed within a psychological, positivistic paradigm and at an organisation-level' (Vincent *et al.*, 2020, p.461). Further, it indicates EE is directed and operated by and for the organisation, tied to a range of pre-existing desirable organisational functions aligned with managerialist goals. This suggests that employees understand engagement as belonging to the organisation and as part of the management agenda. Employee use of organisational terms to describe their understanding suggests that engagement is also representative of a 'mechanism of normalization' (Foucault, 1991, p.306), through which employees are regulated to conform to specific social, cultural, and behavioural norms.

9.1.3 An Emotional State or Behaviour

Thematic analysis identified that the most common shared understanding of EE in this study is attributed to an emotional state or behaviour, aligning to the CIPD definition of EE as 'being focused in what you do (thinking), feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation (feeling), and acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the organisational value and objectives (acting)' (2012, p.2). As suggested in the literature review, the CIPD's classification focuses on the observable behaviours and emotions of EE, which aligns with participant descriptions of observing how someone feels through their actions or state of 'being'. Employees therefore understand engagement according to the outward behaviours and 'what engagement looks like', focusing on 'the appearance of engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486). The observable emotional and behavioural descriptions focus on the visible manifestations of EE and emphasise the perspective of and importance for the organisation (Masson *et al.*, 2008; Meyer, Gagné & Parfyonova, 2010). Further, they are a simplification similar to

the psychologised HRM perspective that is narrow in focus on explanations for how workplace features impact people's attitudes and behaviours (Harley, 2015). The findings of this study support the argument that sources have constructed, promoted and driven the engagement narrative and conceptual object to shape social subjectivities to reflect the interests of those constructing the text (Keenoy, 2014), and adds to knowledge in highlighting that this has permeated employee understandings of engagement to represent an outward behaviour observed through visible manifestations. This study finds that there is a need to look more deeply into people to establish their level of engagement, rather than just looking at their outward behaviour (Macey *et al.*, 2009). Kahn emphasised the importance of people's 'emotional reactions' and 'experiences of themselves and their contexts' (1990, p.717), observed through the behavioural investment of personal physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into work roles (Kahn, 1992). This focus on emotions and behaviours in relation to experiences of self requires further exploration, specifically in relation to the experience rather than observation of emotions and manifestations.

It can be argued that observable states of emotion and behaviour are common descriptors of engagement used by both employees and organisations because they are universally understood; the frequency of 'happiness' and 'smiling' to describe how employees understand engagement in this study supports this argument. However, universal, catch-all indicators simplify the engagement concept into a vague, ambiguous concept understood through 'fuzzy warm feelings' (Kulesa, Paul & Young, 2021) and 'feeling good about yourself in your role and the organisation' (CIPD, 2012, p.2). Arguably such approaches contribute to 'emotional "cloning" attempts by management' (Fineman, 2006, p.278) to create the 'the appearance of engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486) and the 'appropriate individual' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This overlooks that emotions and behaviours are complex phenomena, perceived and understood differently by different people and useless in conveying a common meaning. This is demonstrated by findings that participants understand engagement through vague and ambiguous behavioural descriptors and indicators such as the way someone's *'eyes light up (P5)'*. One person's perception of someone looking like they're having a nice time will be different to the next person's. As Kahn and Fellows highlight, 'engagement is not simply about the vigor with which people work, their high

levels of involvement. It is about putting ourselves – our real selves – into the work' (2013, p.108). Arguably, understanding engagement as an observable emotional state or behaviour is a misrepresentation of Kahn's PE. This becomes more worrisome when considered alongside this study's finding that emotional states and behaviours are the most common shared understanding of EE amongst employees. This indicates employees have assimilated a narrative of engagement as simply movement, actions and efforts at work, rather than their psychological experience of 'the bringing of one's self into something outside the self' (Kahn & Fellows, 2013, p.106).

This study found that many employees associate engagement with happiness, often presented as an observable emotional state that signals positivity. EE is understood as an affective phenomenon involving emotional labour, understood as the emotional efforts performed to fulfil perceived or explicit individual work-related expectations that serve organisational goals, (Barry, Olekalns & Rees, 2019). It is a process by which employees manage their true feelings to express 'organisationally desired emotional displays' that are consistent with work role expectations (Mesmer-Magnus *et al*., 2012, p.6). The findings from this study suggest that employees perceive emotional labour within idealised engagement displays (such as to be '*happy…approachable…friendly (P24)'*) which can be observed and recognised by others. This is explored further in section 9.5.

9.1.4 Summary

This section has discussed insights regarding employee understandings and perceptions of engagement, drawing upon key findings from this study and the academic literature. This study highlights that engagement lacks shared understanding and meaning amongst employees and is a complex and ambiguous concept. It identifies the enigmatic nature of engagement for employees, arguing that engagement has been distorted from the individual focus of Kahn's (1990) concept through an 'engagement industry' (Welborne, 2011, p.98) that favours organisational outcomes and managerial goals. Employee understandings of engagement are divergent from Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions, self-in-role performances, dynamic active experiences, individual differences, and conscious decisions.

Commonalities in employee understandings do exist, often in reference to managerial and organisational approaches and practice and an emotional state or behaviour.

Contributions to understanding include that employees understand engagement as a broad ranging, multidimensional concept, encompassing a variety of elements (Torrington *et al.*, 2008) and representative of a complex range of existing engagement conceptualisations. Further, employees understand engagement as an organisational initiative accessed through organisational discourse, therefore shaped and owned by the organisation. This contributes to knowledge in highlighting that the narrow, psychologised HRM perspective that is concerned with managerial objectives (Harley, 2015) has permeated employee understandings and perceptions of engagement.

9.2 A conceptual model of engagement

Section 9.1 presented a preliminary discussion of employee's understandings and perceptions of engagement, identifying key themes and aligning findings with some of the common existing approaches to engagement considered within the literature review. This chapter now introduces a conceptual model (figure 2) to demonstrate the key insights into knowledge of understandings and experiences of engagement as identified in this study. This model extends Kahn's conceptualisation, specifically in relation to:

> *'the multiple levels of influences —individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational— that shape people's personal engagements and disengagements. It is at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.719)*

The proposed conceptual model suggests that there are two potential versions of being engaged through 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions. Contributing to these versions of engagement are two processes (interpretation of levels of influence, and the swirling intersection of conscious choice and calibrations) which support expressions of engagement as performance or authentic. The model suggests that the individual has an active part in each of these processes influenced by different internal and external dimensions. For example, an individual's interpretation of an

organisation's resources will influence the extent to which they choose to adapt and show or hide aspects of themselves, such as their values or alignment to a professional role. This may include a calibration of self according to internal influences such as self-awareness, and external influences such as expectations as to how a professional behaves. The exhibited expression may then represent an emotion or behaviour, such as being happy or enthusiastic, or an observable act, such as arriving at work early. These expressions may represent two forms of being engaged as a person and engaged as an employee, represented through performative and authentic expressions. It is important to note that the model does not propose that all of the factors within each process exist, or that there is a ranking or hierarchy of constructs. The model does not suggest that there are only two versions of being engaged through 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions; there may be additional expressions of engagement which future research might identify. As explored in the following discussion, engagement is different for different individuals depending on a range of internal and external factors, and varying degrees of awareness of the processes that influence expressions of engagement. This conceptual model is based on the key insights from this study, and acknowledges and encourages further conceptual advancements. Subsequent sections of this chapter are structured to discuss each of these elements of the conceptual model in detail. This includes exploration of the key findings from this study that support this model, drawing upon key insights from the academic literature and identifying how these findings extend Kahn's conceptualisation and existing engagement research.

Figure 2: A conceptual model of engagement, developed by Author

9.3 'Levels of influence' – Interpretation

Kahn suggested that there are 'multiple levels of influences – individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational – that shape people's personal engagements and disengagements' (1990, p.719). These influencing factors indicate PE is an experience affected by internal and external forces; those that are shaped internally by the individual, and those which are externally located. As Kahn later articulated 'PE attends to self-expression – and to the relational contexts that shape how, when, and to what effect people disclose and express their selves in the course of role performances' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83). Kahn's outlook on engagement therefore placed particular emphasis on personal psychological presence in relation to a range of internal and external factors, and understanding this through the way psychological presence is displayed within the workplace. Although Shuck *et al.*'s (2011) qualitative engagement study highlighted that elements of the environment (such as community) and the person (such as confidence) interact to produce engagement, few studies have used Kahn's conceptualisation (Fletcher, 2017; Guest, 2014a), indicating there is a lack of understanding of these internal and external factors and the multiple levels of influence on employees engagement experiences.

This study's conceptual model develops Kahn's multiple levels of influence according to the key findings of this study, highlighted through four levels of influence; organisational, interpersonal, individual and perceptions of audience. Further, it considers that an employee's interpretation of these levels of influence is important in an employee's understanding and experience of engagement. This process of interpretation enhances Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz's suggestion that engagement is 'a holistic experience perceived and then interpreted through the lens of each individual based on their own experience, rationales and views of their context' (2011, p.316). Highlighting that no one single factor contributes to the creation of engagement at work, Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz (2011) suggest that elements of the environment and the person interact and produce either engagement and/or disengagement. This study's conceptual model (figure 2) develops these ideas in conceptualising the individual's interpretation of factors that exist within four levels of influence

(organisational, interpersonal, individual and audience) as significant in expressions of engagement. These are now each considered in further detail.

9.3.1 Organisational Level

Section 9.1 highlighted the findings from this study that employees understand engagement as an organisational initiative accessed through organisational discourse, shaped and managed by the organisation. Consideration of engagement as managerial practices and organisational approaches to managing a workforce and achieving managerial objectives position engagement at the 'organisational level' of influence. Organisational interventions including policies, vision and culture, benefits, pay, learning and development and opportunities for progression were identified by employees in this study as important to enabling engagement. Inadequate organisational activity such as communication and breaches of trust negatively influence engagement. Examples of some of the organisational influences on engagement identified in this study – progression opportunities, personal development and managers – and the way they shape engagement, are now considered.

Progression

Understandings of engagement as an organisational initiative and approach included consideration as to how engagement is enabled through specific organisational and managerial activities that provide access to progression. Two perspectives emerged; that employees who display engagement receive opportunities for progression, or that progression opportunities are needed for engagement. Throughout these findings, participants referred to the ways the organisation or manager influences progression, such as by noticing the employee's abilities and interests for progression. Engagement literature considers engagement and progression in relation to resources the organisation can provide, such as career resources (Lee, Rocco & Shuck, 2020), establishing routes for career advancement and progression or utilising personal development plans within the appraisal process (Shuck & Tonette, 2014). There have been suggestions that engagement can be integrated into career development and performance management programmes (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011), with emphasis on the role of the organisation and manager in providing resources and routes for progression and engagement. There is limited consideration of the influential

206

relationship progression and engagement have on each other, how this is experienced by employees, and how the organisation influences this, and findings in this study advance knowledge in this area.

Personal Development

Findings identify that participants perceive learning and personal development opportunities as organisational approaches which influence engagement, which aligns with Shuck *et al*.'s (2011) findings that that opportunities for learning are important in an engaged employee's interpretation of their work. Notably, participants were focused on the opportunities for learning and development, rather than the experience of learning and development itself. Findings highlight participants evaluate the ways organisational permission for learning and development is granted, such as financial support, time, roles, access to and opportunities for learning, and their interpretation of these factors influence engagement. The suggestion is that the organisation provides opportunities for engagement through various approaches and activities, and employee perceptions of this influence engagement. The advancement of knowledge relating to employee perceptions of access to engagement opportunities requires further exploration.

This study's findings implied that experiences related to opportunities for personal development are engaging. Few studies have considered experiences of personal development and engagement (Bailey *et al*., 2017a; Fletcher, 2019; Fletcher, Bailey & Gilman, 2018). A range of quantitative investigations into personal development have identified opportunities for development as important for enabling EE; some identified this through consideration of personal development as a job resource, as outlined by Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) JD-R framework, (e.g. Albrecht, Green & Marty, 2021; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010; Sarti, 2014). These studies consider personal development as an enabler of engagement, focusing on positive associations rather than experiences of the phenomenon. The findings in this study identify employees recount experiences of engagement as including positive personal development opportunities and occasions. Employees focus not on what the personal development opportunity was (e.g. mentoring), but rather that the opportunity allowed them to achieve or pursue something of importance to them. This aligns with

207

Kahn's psychological condition of meaningfulness, which he suggested is necessary for and influences engagement (Kahn, 1990; Kahn & Fellows, 2013). This implies that personal development opportunities that enable employees to experience meaningfulness through alignment to personal goals and interests influence engagement. Further, these opportunities shared understandings from employees of the requirement of the organisation to enable these opportunities, such as through financial support to do a master's degree. Employees therefore perceive positive development opportunities that are personally meaningful as engaging experiences, which are enabled through the organisational level of influence. This provides a new focus for organisations through which to align personal development approaches with meaningfulness.

Findings indicate employee experiences of personal development opportunities that allow for authenticity are perceived as engaging, supporting Kahn's (1990) suggestion that psychological safety influences engagement and how people inhabit their roles. Participants in this study described a sense of being able to show themselves through their role as accessed through organisational members in positions of authority, such as mentors and managers. This contrast's Kahn's (1990) suggestion that displaying dimensions of selves used within role performances is a 'preference'. Rather, the findings in this study imply employees require permission to access experiences that enable authenticity which influences engagement. Acknowledging the context in which role performances take place is of importance, Kahn (alongside Heaphy) later highlighted additional mechanisms important to the creation of psychological safety, such as relationships that enable individuals to feel affirmed and create the sense of safety necessary for people to engage themselves at work (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014; Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). This is supported through the findings in this study which indicate the important role of the manager as mentor in employee's pursuit of authentic career paths. Further, it identifies the need for greater opportunities to experience authenticity at work, such as through roles and training designed in alignment with employee's sense of self that encourage supportive relationships between employee and manager. This contributes to knowledge in identifying that employees require permission and freedom to access authenticity, and suggests some

of the ways in which managers can provide opportunities to align authenticity and engagement within work experiences.

Manager

Engagement literature is saturated with discussion on the role of the line manager (e.g. ACAS, 2014; Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007; Harter *et al.*, 2002; Lewis *et al.,* 2014; Luthans & Peterson, 2002, MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, Purcell *et al.*, 2009). Mangers, the actions they take, and management style are viewed as 'key drivers' and 'raise or lower' engagement (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.4). The findings of this study highlight commonalities in references to management as barriers to engagement, the most cited theme being a perceived lack of support from one's immediate manager. This contributes new knowledge of the impact of the manager in engagement, including understandings that employee perceptions of lack of support, understanding and interest from managers are barriers to engagement. Participants identify lack of support, feeling alone and undervalued as an absence of an 'engaging manager', highlighting that engagement is understood by employees as something done, or prevented, by managers. Further, these findings advance understanding that in engagement, employees are waiting for leaders to create the conditions under which they will choose to engage (Kahn & Fellows, 2013). This supports Fletcher's (2017) findings that relational hinderances between manager and employee involve managerial behaviours that indicate a lack of support, such as unclear expectations of performance and restrictive practices that limited the individual's autonomy, involvement or responsibility, which reduce personal role engagement. This study further contributes to knowledge that managerial support influences engagement, including support for flexible and autonomous working, access to opportunities for learning and progression, and support after a challenging experience. Participants emphasised the manager's behaviour within these examples of support, such as being nurturing and caring, further reinforcing the argument that perceived absence of managerial support is a barrier to engagement. This advances understanding of employee perceptions of managers and managerial behaviour as barriers to engagement.

The most cited theme within employee experiences of barriers to engagement was communication, including manager's inadequate communication skills, failure to be heard, incomplete or untimely information and lack of involvement in decision-making. Further, a lack of visibility and opportunities to communicate with managers are understood by employees as barriers to engagement. It is evident that employees perceive managerial ability and behaviours to influence engagement. This aligns with engagement as management practice approaches that place importance on 'soft skills' among managers to develop engagement (Alfes *et al.*, 2010; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009), such as 'communication skills, giving feedback, performance management, and giving recognition' (McBain, 2007, p.18). It adds to knowledge by identifying manager's inadequate communication skills, lack of visibility and opportunities to communicate with managers as barriers to engagement, identifying areas of focus for future practice.

Employees experience conflicting interests and opposition with managers as barriers to engagement. This contributes to knowledge, recognising that competing interests exist within and impact engagement. Since Kahn's work, engagement has been dominated by a positivist, unitarist perspective with consensus-focused management-centric assumptions that employees and managers share common interests and engagement is in everyone's best interests (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Sambrook, 2021; Truss *et al.*, 2013). Employees describe having conflicting interests with their manager that are consequently perceived as a lack of support which prevents them from engaging. Findings in this study indicate employees experience conflict with managers and managerial abuse of power as barriers to engagement, advancing knowledge regarding power dynamics in engagement. The power dynamics of the employment relationship as related to engagement has received little attention (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). Studies have focused on managerially led engagement interventions (e.g. Gruman & Saks, 2011), without considering the impact the managers' power has in engagement (Sambrook, 2021). Findings in this study that employees experience conflicting interests and opposition with managers highlight that the experience of power dynamics within engagement needs greater consideration. Participants that did describe an experience of conflict with their manager as a barrier to engagement were hesitant and reluctant to describe it as conflict. Whilst participants were comfortable

emphasising a perceived lack of support from their mangers, they attempted to conceal the experience of conflict and abuse of power with their manager, self-regulating and underplaying their story to avoid suggestion of serious or irreconcilable conflict. Arguably, this is representative of the institutionalisation of engagement according to the dominant positivist, unitarist perspectives that managers and employees share goals.

The literature review identified that engagement features as part of an assertive and contradictory management agenda of manufacturing employee cooperation and consent whilst at the same time exercising control and coercion (Farnham, 2015; Williams, 2017). It raised concerns with beliefs about the need for engagement with the unitarist privileging of the managerialist prerogative and assumptions that managers and non-managerial employees share common goals (Sambrook, 2021). Despite acknowledging experience of managerial abuse of power and conflict which prevented engagement, participants in this study portrayed this as having minimal influence on an otherwise harmonious employment relationship, which represents the influence of management power and the contradiction of cooperation and coercion. Arguably, harmony in engagement experiences that involve managers has been normalised, indicating engagement is a more subtle mechanisms of institutional power designed to regulate and control human behaviour (Foucault, 1991). Due to the underlying power dynamics within the employment relationship, employees are fearful to claim engagement as anything more than a positive, cooperative experience. This is further emphasised when explored alongside findings that employees who did acknowledge an experience of conflict without attempts to undermine it only did so if they were describing an experience with a previous manger, where the employment relationship has already ended. These findings are key to developing understanding of the influence of organisational power dynamics on experiences of engagement.

9.3.2 Levels of influence: Interpersonal

This study suggests employees understand engagement as the positive, supportive relationships employees have with other members in the organisation, such as those you immediately work with, people elsewhere in the organisation, and managers. Employees understand engagement as a relational concept involving meaningful

connections with organisational members. It is the interaction and development of meaningful connection within these relationships which are of significance to employee understandings of engagement. Findings included positive feedback from colleagues and managers, and the experience of socialisation and communication with others. Combined, these findings indicate that engagement is experienced through positive, supportive and meaningful relationships with members of their organisation, that include feedback, a sense of community, socialisation and trust.

This study therefore supports Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation, which highlighted that positive interpersonal relationships and meaningful interactions with others promoted psychological safety and contributed to psychological meaningfulness. This study develops existing knowledge relating to the importance of interpersonal relationships to engagement on two accounts; firstly, approaches to engagement do not typically refer to relationships with all organisational members, but rather focus on relationships with specific groups or people, such as the organisation (e.g. Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014; Shuck *et al.*, 2014), management (e.g. Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009), and team and social relationships (Macey *et al.*, 2009). The findings in this study contribute to knowledge through recognition that employees understand engagement as shaped by relationships and connections with organisational members at role, team, department, organisation, management and senior management level. Further, these are identified as positive, supportive relationships with all members of an organisation. Identification of these relationships as supportive is pivotal; behaviours such as communicating, understanding and caring for one another demonstrate it is the interaction and development of meaningful connection and relationships which are of significance to employee understandings of engagement. These findings support Kahn's (1990) psychological safety concept which highlights supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships with colleagues, the unconscious and conscious plays that characterise group and intergroup dynamics, and supportive management style and processes.

A second contribution to knowledge is that meaningful connection and relationships contribute towards the experience of engagement. Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz's (2011) qualitative study of engagement highlighted that relationships and connections developed in the workplace are critically important to an employee's overall experience

212

of work, including supportive relationships with an employee's manager and colleagues. Fletcher's (2017) study of the everyday experiences of personal role engagement found that 'relational' resources in the form of perceived supervisory and co-worker support reinforce a safe and secure environment and enhance employee's psychological resources needed for engagement. In particular, Fletcher's (2017) study found that engagement is heightened through three types of managerial behaviour; feedback and recognition, support and guidance, and coaching and developing. This study adds to knowledge, demonstrating that engagement is experienced at the individual level through positive and meaningful connection and relationships with members of their organisation, that include positive feedback, socialisation and a sense of community. These themes are now explored.

Feedback

Findings in this study related to engagement experiences suggest they involve positive feedback from a range of organisational actors, including managers and colleagues, which often supported the employee to learn and develop. According to the JD-R model perspective, feedback is a job-related resource considered to be important in raising engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Feedback as a resource typically refers to direct and clear information about an employee's performance, such as through performance appraisals and supervisory feedback (Lee, Rocco & Shuck, 2020). Whilst findings relating to feedback in this study did refer to some aspects of direct information, such as managers who provided advice or knowledge, more often the experience of the feedback that was engaging was that the employee felt they were learning from and being supported by someone they respected. Commonalities in describing a group of colleagues or manager as dependable, protective, nurturing and supportive in the employee's endeavours to learn contributed to an engaging experience, indicating the importance of feeling supported through relationships in engagement experiences.

Further, the positive feedback identified in this study as involved in engagement experiences included informal, casual conversations or emails from organisational members. Rather than engagement as a good bestowed by the individual in response to perceived and experienced benefits in the JD-R model (Bailey *et al*., 2017b, p.44),

these findings depict positive feedback as an indicator to employees that they were engaged. Specifically, participants recalled what the feedback was, or how it made them feel, highlighting the emotional impact positive feedback has in engagement experiences. Further, positive feedback alongside support from superiors supported individuals to understand their place within the '*wider picture (P1)'*. These factors are representative of constructs of 'meaningfulness' in terms of self-actualization and work that is of service to a wider cause or gives rise to a sense of belonging to a broader group (Rosso *et al*., 2010; Bailey *et al*., 2017b). This study adds to knowledge in identifying the role of informal and casual feedback in engagement experiences, and its contribution to meaningfulness in engagement experiences. Arguably, the influence of feedback in engagement in developing interpersonal relationships and meaning has not been considered to date. Certainly, feedback has been considered as a resource within the JD-R framework (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Fletcher, 2017; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). The practitioner literature is saturated with advice to managers on providing positive feedback (e.g. Alfes *et al*., 2010; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). It is undeniable feedback is acknowledged as an important part of engagement. However, this study argues positive feedback has not been explored as part of the rewarding interpersonal interactions Kahn (1990) argued influenced psychological meaningfulness and safety.

Community

Findings in this study demonstrate that engagement experiences involve a sense of community, specifically when working with others to overcome challenges and achieve a group goal. This includes shared responsibilities and identity (such as a 'family'), alongside being listened to, supported, valued and experiencing feelings of loyalty and connection to others which contributed towards being engaged. Kahn (1990) highlighted that supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships promoted psychological safety, which allowed people to try and fail and show and employ one's self without fearing the consequences. In addressing and eventually overcoming challenges with others, participants in this study acknowledged the importance of supportive relationships, indicating experiences of psychological safety in overcoming challenges. The common factors identified in experiences of a sense of community closely align with Kahn and Fellow's (2013) relational sources of meaning that

influence people's choices to engage at work; they highlight speaking and being heard, and important work relationships through which we feel connected to others as sources of meaning. Further, these findings correspond with Shuck *et al.*'s (2011) findings that the tangible elements of relationships with co-workers and managers, and intangible elements of trust, cooperation, community and attachment are representations of the environment which interacts with elements of the person to produce engagement. This study found that a sense of meaning in overcoming challenging situations is important in engagement experiences. Kahn and Fellows (2013) identified that meaning is likely to be sourced from a role that includes challenging work that makes a difference, feels good to do and complete, and is recognised and valued by others. Similarly, Fletcher (2017) identified heightened personal role engagement was achieved through tasks that were meaningful and had deeper significance to others, or a personal contribution such as visible benefit to self-development, co-workers, or organisation.

Findings in this study contribute to knowledge in that community and has limited exploration within engagement research to date outside of research related to burnout (e.g. Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Bakker *et al.*, 2011). The findings of this study provide new knowledge that shared engagement experiences contribute to a sense of community which includes experiences of shared identity, belonging, loyalty and support for one another. For example, experiences of a shared identity in addressing a challenge by working together included the perception that all involved in overcoming the challenge were engaged (e.g. '*Blitz spirit (P20)*'). This contributes to knowledge in that shared identity is important in making meaning in experiences, which contribute towards engagement. Research has shown that individuals' sense of identification with the groups of which they are a part have significant potential to impact the levels of meaningfulness they perceive in their work (e.g. Katz & Kahn, 1978; Pratt *et al.*, 2003). This study adds to understanding of the influence of shared identity on workplace experiences and engagement, highlighting the importance of group membership and identification. It identifies that a sense of community, positive, supportive and meaningful relationships with members of their organisation, and shared identity enhance engagement experiences. In an environment in which the growing psychologisation of employment relations 'individualises and atomises workers' (2014,

p11), these findings encourage workplace approaches that enhance community and relationships to oppose isolating employees and enable engagement.

Socialisation

A further contribution to knowledge regarding the interpersonal level of influence in engagement is the common finding that opportunities for socialisation are important contributors to engagement experiences. Socialisation indicated the removal of physical and professional barriers (such as location and casual dress) which are understood by employees to be significant in engagement experiences. It was noted that these examples were instigated by management (e.g., hosting employees at their home), suggesting that employees understand engagement opportunities to be enabled by management. This is further exemplified in findings related to exclusivity in engagement experiences, in that it is the manager who chooses to invite a team to their house or out for a drink, and the employee is obliged to respond. Most of the participants in this study who described socialisation experiences as examples of an engagement experience described these as positive experiences that provided opportunities to develop relationships with colleagues or managers and have shared experiences. However, findings relating to one participant who chose not to participate in socialisation raise interesting questions regarding the obligation to respond to management. These findings suggest that engagement is experienced as an individual response to organisational or managerial permission for socialisation opportunities, and that the experience of engagement is inextricably tied to managerial power and control. Therefore, issues of power and control permeate through individual engagement experiences which include relationships and meaningful connections.

Trust

A final theme of significance in findings relating to interpersonal relationships and meaningful interactions as influencing engagement relates to trust, in that trusting relationships with one's manager influence engagement. Studies have considered engagement in relation to trust (e.g. Schneider *et al.*, 2010), and empirical studies have confirmed positive relationships with supervisor support, employee voice, trust in management and supervisor relationships with EE (e.g. Holland, Cooper & Sheehan, 2017; Rees, Alfes & Gatenby, 2013). Whilst some participants did refer to

positive trusting relationships, more frequently findings highlighted a lack of trust (such as relating to redundancy or progression opportunities), in which perceptions of a lack of fairness and violating personal values contributed to preventing engagement. Participants also perceive excessive surveillance and micromanagement from their managers as indicators of an absence of trust, which is a barrier to engagement. Commonalities in references to surveillance of working hours (such as a clocking-in systems) and locations indicate employees understand management to use monitoring systems designed to regulate and control employees, which is a barrier to engagement and trust. Employees often used such examples to contrast desires for or experiences of autonomy and flexibility. This is perhaps indicative of work as a contested terrain and the fundamental contradictions found in management approaches that seek both control and consent of the workforce (Farnham, 2015; Reed, 2011). Trusting one's manager and experiencing a trusting relationship with them, including freedom to work autonomously and flexibly, were identified as enablers to engagement. These findings suggest employees perceive controlling management approaches such as excessive surveillance and micromanagement as barriers to engagement, and flexibility, autonomy and trusting relationships with managers as enablers of engagement. This adds to Shuck et al.'s findings that organisations can free employees to engage by 'behaving in was that lead to trust, such as communicating with transparency, demonstrating integrity and behaving consistently' (2011, p.319). Further, through highlighting the contrast between experiences perceived to involve trust and freedom, and controlling management approaches, this study argues the underlying contradictions of management approaches that seek both control and consent are experienced as barriers to engagement. This is an area for future research, alongside the influence of managerial power in experiences of trust that influence engagement.

9.3.3 Levels of influence: Individual

This study highlights that elements of the individual person, such as individual differences and self-awareness, influence engagement. Participants explored several individual differences, such as personal interests (e.g. hobbies), values, personal circumstances (e.g. parenthood) and identity (e.g. as a professional) as influencing their perception and experience of engagement. Further, findings relating to

participant's self-awareness, such as individual responsibility and accountability in their actions, emotions or mindsets, demonstrate employees understand engagement as influenced at the individual level. The findings of this study highlight that engagement is understood as something an individual must do (such as fit in with organisation) and experience (such as feelings of happiness) to enable engagement. This requires personal responsibility in application of self, which alludes to a psychological presence within work and Kahn's (1992) assumptions that there are both conscious and unconscious dynamics in the person-in-role relationship. These themes are now explored in further detail to consider the individual level influence on engagement.

Individual differences

This study identified that there are differences in employees' ability to recall, communicate and detail their engagement experiences. This ranged from being unable to recall an engagement experience, to easily providing rich detail and reflecting on the experience. Some participants outlined generic and common workplace demands such as workload and stress, often avoiding the specificity of the question in relation to themselves. The varied nature of participant abilities to identify and articulate engagement experiences highlight that there is variety in employee abilities to access and experience engagement. Reasons for this require further exploration; the findings of this study suggest this might be a result of the unfamiliarity of the engagement concept, suggesting prior knowledge and exposure to engagement is required to identify engagement experiences. Findings in which participants began to reflect on engagement in the interview, such as contemplating its importance for them and their personal responsibility in engagement, highlighted that some participants had not previously considered what prevents them from being engaged. Individual differences in approaches to new concepts and skills to explore and communicate experiences may influence engagement. The findings of this study demonstrate individual differences in abilities, perspectives and experiences of engagement, and identify the influence of individual differences on engagement as an area for future research.

Employee interpretation of experiences is complex and unique, including positive and negative encounters and emotional extremes. Findings that employees recount situations in which they overcame challenges within work as engaging experiences highlight similar situations have different experiences of engagement for different participants. For example, experiences including travelling outside of work were identified as engaging for P4 and a challenge for P14. Depending on their individual perspective, interests and circumstances, employees find different situations engaging for different reasons, and have a range of different emotional and behavioural responses. This aligns to Kahn and Fellow's acknowledgement that 'variations in engagement may be explained partly by individual differences such as people's temperaments, life experiences, support systems, and aptitudes' (2013, p.111). This is further demonstrated through the range of subthemes identified as related to engagement experiences of overcoming challenges; a sense of achievement, overcoming personal challenges, positive feedback, personal reflection, learning, pride, collaboration, relationships and community. This range indicates the complexity of engagement experiences and the individual differences in their interpretation of an engaging experience.

Self-Awareness

Emotional intelligence is 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189). The popularisation of this concept within organisational settings is largely assigned to Goleman's (2004) mixed model based on skills and competencies, which identified self-awareness as knowing one's emotions, being aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood. Discussions about the importance of personal competence and ability to stay aware of one's emotions and manage behaviours in the workplace have since prevailed, with emphasis on developing self-awareness and self-management skills. Themes related to these ideas appeared in the findings of this study, whereby employees related aspects of themselves to experiences of barriers to engagement and reflected on their responsibility in influencing engagement. Commonalities in describing a personal responsibility in avoiding barriers to engagement, such as to ignore office distractions or be resilient in the face of a challenging work situation, highlight that some

employees are aware of their influence on engagement. Employees also experience limitations in their abilities and skills, such as lack of adaptability, as barriers to engagement. Some participants introspected and examined their thoughts and feelings related to barriers to engagement, indicating that these conversations encourage employees to better understand themselves and what prevents them engaging at work.

There is limited consideration of the role of self-awareness and reflection in engagement literature; perhaps the closest associations are core self-evaluations (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010) and personal resources (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). Kahn's focus was on individuals possessing personal resources and applying them to 'meet the demands of PE' (1990, p.715). Personal resources are aspects of emotional well-being and personal agency that are linked to an individual's perception of their resilience, proactivity, and competence (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Fletcher, 2017; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Core evaluations, understood as individuals' appraisals of their worthiness, effectiveness and capability as people, are argued to be associated with higher levels of engagement (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). The findings of this current study suggest employees evaluate personal resources in relation to engagement barriers. This offers new perspectives on existing understandings of personal resources, which have focused on positive perceptions that individuals hold of their personal strength and ability as positively associated with engagement (Bailey *et al.*, 2017a). Employees have different levels of self-awareness, and there is value in considering practical ways organisations might support employee awareness and evaluations of personal resources in relation to engagement.

Participants explored ways to address what they perceived to be aspects of themselves as obstacles to engagement through reflection and development of self-awareness during the interviews in conversation with the researcher. This implies that employees may seek opportunities to reflect on engagement, and opening discussion about engagement experiences enables employees to reflect and consider future options. Findings relating to opportunities for reflection also appeared in discussions relating to overcoming challenges, such as opportunities that arise in overcoming challenges that contributed to personal achievement. A further example is in findings

relating to engagement experiences that involved socialisation, whereby participants reflected on what within that experience was engaging. In findings related to personal development as engagement, reflection was demonstrated such as with participants recalling a previous workplace relationship (e.g., with a previous manager) and identifying what they learnt, or considering their earlier career experiences and how they aligned to their sense of self or learning. These findings imply that recounting engagement experiences can provide opportunities to reflect and identify personal, meaningful achievements, which can inform future practice.

These findings support Kahn's later work which recognised the importance of reflection in discussion about 'calling forth the self in the context of work'; 'the more that people talk about how their identities are or might be expressed through their work, the more mindful they will be about engaging meaningfully in their work' (Kahn & Fellows, 2013, p.118). Findings also support Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz's (2011) advocation for authentically designed learning and development programmes that focus on self-awareness and nurturing the development of employee's growth in the organisation. Participants who shared their insights from the interview conversations identified that the chance to reflect has helped them feel engaged and clearer on their next steps. Some participants that told of engagement experiences in which they overcame challenges reflected on their progress and indicated that recounting engagement experiences provides opportunities to reflect and identify key personal learning. Arguably, discussing positive engagement experiences enables engagement just by talking about them again, supporting the argument for opportunities to reflect on engagement and support employees in developing self-awareness.

9.3.4 Levels of influence: Audience

A final level of influence on engagement identified through the findings of this study is the audience. This study has identified there to be performative dimensions of engagement, influenced by the reactions of "receivers" or "targets" which serve as feedback (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Some participants described a specific observer or 'target' they focused on in their engagement performances, such as a manager, whilst others described a generic organisational audience. Employees display external expressions of engagement according to the organisational context in which the

221

performance takes place, and the norms and expectations of the audience to which engagement performances are directed. For example, findings relating to engagement as an individual behaviour and act outlined common themes such as being happy, approachable and friendly as indicators of engagement, suggesting there are idealised engagement displays which can be observed and recognised by others. Another example in findings related to participant's consideration of the elements of self they bring to work, for example awareness of how they speak at work or being 'professional', indicates obligation in engagement in presenting versions of self aligned to a universal idealised engaged employee as identified by the audience. Reliance is on the observer interpreting the impressions of the employee's labours in engagement performances, and so the perceived audience in engagement thereby influences engagement.

The influence of the audience on engagement emerged through findings in which participants distinguished between a work and home 'self', descriptions of presenting emotions or behaviours (such as excitement) for those around them and people's perceptions of clothing at work. Themes such as acceptance and permission to engage from the perceived audience also emerged in reference to managers providing access to activities such as development opportunities and socialisation. Some participants referred to feelings of being judged and receiving negative reactions from a general organisational audience, others described desires to shape specific people such as managers view of the employee. These findings identified that employees amend engagement performances according to their perceived audience.

Consideration of audience expectations are interesting in relation to findings of participant perspectives that engagement is influenced by progression according to both organisational and societal norms and expectations, such as through taking on more responsibilities, achieving qualifications and attaining permanent roles. Engagement resulting from experiences that aligned with perceived expectations of progression referenced the normalisation of these routes (e.g. *'a normal stepping stone' (P19) and 'rungs (P13)'*), likened to Foucault's 'mechanisms of normalization' which regulate and control human behaviour to conform to specific social, cultural, and behavioural norms (1991, p.306). That participants explained their engagement experience as occurring through routes that are 'normal' suggests there are idealised

222

engagement performances determined by norms and expectations from the audience. This is similar to what Goffman termed as a 'socialized' performance involving 'the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealized in several different ways' (1971, p.44). The findings of this study include frequent reference to understanding and expectations of progression and hierarchy, highlighting that engagement is influenced by subtle mechanisms of normalisation and socialisation of workplace experiences according to organisational and societal expectations. This is further demonstrated through findings related to employee awareness of external expectations in workplace performances, such as requirements to conform to the ideal worker model (Acker, 1990), in which participants described ways in which they adapted according to the audience observing the engagement performance. Employees present an idealised performance of engagement for their workplace audience, according to organisational and societal expectations, and the normalisation and socialisation of workplace experiences.

Noteworthy in findings of employee understanding of engagement displays to be audience focused is reference to a fear of being judged by 'others'. Findings suggest that when the observer of the engagement performance is unknown, employees experience fear and vulnerability that influence the engagement experience. This was contrasted by findings that engagement is experienced in performances where the observer is identified, such as a manager who influenced feelings of trust and respect. This suggests an individual's assessment of their audience is influential in their engagement performance. Such assessments represent psychological safety – 'the sense of being able to show and employ the self without fear of negative consequences' (Kahn, 1990, p.705). External judgement influences the display of engagement and extent to which employees reveal their 'self', as demonstrated in findings that described the challenge in managing multiple selves at home and work, and compromising authenticity by engaging in false-self behaviour for the benefit of professional expectations. This is further exemplified in findings in which clothing represents physical signals of self, and requires permission and acceptance by the audience to indicate engagement. Employee understandings of engagement as involving costumes physically displaying an individual's engagement to their 'audience', and as influencing the audience's perception of them, connects to Kahn's

application of Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor in which the individual offers their performance and 'puts on (his) show 'for the benefit of other people'' (1971, p.28). This suggests employees use specific behaviours to create a performative display designed to shape how they are seen by their perceived audience, and elicit a specific audience reaction, as explored further in section 9.5.

9.3.5 Summary – Levels of influence

This section has identified where this study develops Kahn's concept of 'multiple levels of influences' (1990, p.719) that shape engagement. It has considered a range of internal and external factors at four levels of influence; organisational, interpersonal, individual and audience. Through discussion on employee perceptions of features within these four levels of influence, this section has presented the argument that an employee's interpretation of these levels of influence is important in an understandings and experiences of engagement.

The organisational level of influence was explored through managerial practices and organisational approaches to managing a workforce identified by employees in this study as influencing engagement. Commonalities in themes relating to engagement as aligned to progression, personal development and managers highlighted that engagement is understood by employees as something done, or prevented, by organisations and managers. Further, employees perceive managerial ability and behaviours to influence engagement, and organisational power dynamics influence experiences of engagement.

Employees understand engagement as the positive, supportive relationships employees have with other members in the organisation. These findings were explored through the interpersonal level of influence which indicate that engagement is experienced at the individual level through positive, supportive and meaningful relationships with members of their organisation, that include positive feedback, a sense of community, socialisation and trust.

Elements of the individual person, such as individual differences and self-awareness, influence engagement. Further, there are differences in employees awareness and

understanding of individual influence on engagement, and opportunities for reflection on the individual influence on engagement may support engagement experiences.

The audience level of influence was considered in terms of specific 'targets' employees consider in performances of engagement. Discussion considered idealised engagement displays which can be observed and recognised by others, and obligation in engagement in presenting versions of self aligned to a universal idealised engaged employee as identified by the audience. This suggests employees use specific behaviours to create a performative display designed to shape how they are seen by their perceived audience.

9.4 'Swirling intersection'

The second process in this study's conceptual model of engagement is the 'swirling intersection' at which an individual explores to the previous levels of influence through conscious choice, calibrations, transactional relationships and adaptation of self. This second process is a development of Kahn's concept, which explained 'it is at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (1990, p.719). Kahn suggested that 'organization members calibrate how fully present they are in response to internal and external factors' (1992, p.12). PE is therefore an active and conscious choice to invest oneself in a work role based on an individual's interpretation of internal and external influences. Individual levels of awareness of these factors inform employee's active decisions to employ, express, withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances. Kahn (1990, 1992) devised a purposely complex concept to recognise the dynamic fluctuations and negotiations that take place that impact the degree to which an individual will bring one's personal dimensions to the performance of the work role. This process is conceptualised in this study's model as a swirling intersection of different elements that is continuously evolving to shape individual engagement.

Importantly, Kahn emphasised that 'various factors shape rather than determine individual choices and behaviours' (1992, p.13), critiquing the assumption that individuals are inanimate subject matter that assume organisationally led identities and stances. Employees are not passive recipients or puppets to be controlled by management, but uniquely and actively interpret and enact engagement discourses and resist conscription in complex and nuanced ways (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Troth & Guest, 2020; Valentin, 2014). This study develops Kahn's conceptualisation of the active, conscious choices and calibrations individuals make to bring in or leave out their personal selves in work performances through two features considered in the findings of this study; transactional relationships and adaptation of self. These are now explored in further detail.

9.4.1 Transactional relationship

The findings of this study identify that employees consider EE to include a transactional exchange influenced by the organisation's input and involving mutual gains for employee and organisation. This aligns with practitioner definitions of engagement as 'two-way' (e.g. MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.9), and resembles social exchange theory (SET) perspectives of engagement in that employees' feel obliged to respond and repay the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). For example, Sak's (2006) hypothesis that engagement is based on a social exchange model proposed an exchange of resources, in that employees choose to respond to the economic and socioemotional resources they receive from their organisation by devoting greater amounts of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources. Arguably, such understandings reduce engagement to an exchange reminiscent of the buying and selling of a commodity. Further, it fuels perceptions of engagement as influenced by organisational provisions. This is a reductionist approach which overlooks the complexity and nuances of engagement experiences and fails to recognise the dynamic fluctuations that take place in engagement. Reductionist understandings of engagement as a workplace commodity are problematic in that they overlook the invisible tensions of power and bargaining at play in transactional exchanges. Findings in which engagement is understood as a transactional exchange often emphasised that engagement is a response to perceived resources received from the organisation, suggesting engagement is permitted by the organisation, and the employee offers their

226

appreciation by returning their engagement. This supports earlier findings that employees understanding engagement as management practice. Further, it aligns with presentations of EE as a 'desirable condition' that 'has an organizational purpose' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.4), is 'a good bestowed by the individual' (Bailey *et al*., 2017a, p.44) and 'one way for individuals to repay their organisation' (Saks, 2006, p.603).

This study also identified that some participants referred to an ongoing transactional relationship in which the employer provides an approach or resource (e.g. learning and development opportunities), and the employee responds with ongoing behaviours (e.g. going 'above and beyond'). Additional findings explored the way in which employees make meaning and align to an organisation's vision or culture. These findings often indicated the individual's choice to align with organisational approaches, indicative of Kahn's reference to 'choices…to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (1990, p.719). For example, findings identified that restrictions on organisational approaches, such as pay and benefits, are perceived by employees as barriers to engagement. This suggests that employees evaluate the organisation's provision and shape engagement accordingly. Emphasis is placed on evaluating what the organisation provides on an ongoing basis. Throughout these findings, the importance of the organisation in initiating and maintaining the transactional relationship is emphasised, placing the organisation and managers as responsible for engagement (e.g. *'how they (management) engage us (P17))*. This positions management and the organisation as the compelling force in individuals being 'made' to engage and maintaining an ongoing relationship for engagement.

Notably, participants described being underpaid or receiving fewer benefits in comparison to colleagues or wider society, which were perceived as unfair, and influencing engagement. Findings indicate employees evaluate fairness and meaningfulness between the work that they do and the reward that they get in relation to their perceptions of what others receive, suggesting employees shape engagement performances according to their perceptions of colleague experiences and wider society. Interested in Goffman's suggestion that individual performances are 'socialised' to fit the society in which it is presented (1971), Kahn aimed to outline 'how

psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances' (1990, p.694). Presenting, absenting and shaping self is a process of creation according to experience of work and work contexts - as Sambrook emphasises, PE is 'an ongoing "negotiation" within a particular social context' (2021, p.473). The findings of this study indicate that participants calibrate and negotiate engagement according to their perceptions of the activities that take place within organisational and societal contexts. The way in which employees live through work contexts and the influence of the context in which engagement takes place requires further exploration (Bailey, 2022; Purcell, 2014b; Sambrook, 2021).

A further example in which the process of choice and calibration in response to transactional relationships influence engagement relates to findings of the importance of mutual respect between management and employee. These findings highlight employees take account of the hierarchical organisational context in which encounters with their managers take place, acknowledging that management power influences engagement, and that to enable engagement, employees require reciprocated respect from their managers. This includes perceptions that a lack of respect leads to conflict and prevents engagement. There is little existing interest in the importance of respect within meaningful relationships at work, and greater consideration as to how this influences engagement is needed. Employee assessments of mutual respect might represent what Kahn referred to as the 'internal calculus' that employees consciously and unconsciously make when they offer up different degrees and dimensions of their selves (2010, p.20). Sambrook highlights that reference to calculus suggests some form of bargaining, although it isn't entirely clear what of (2021). In application to findings related to perceptions of mutual respect between management and employee as influencing engagement, perhaps employees evaluate their perceptions and experience of power dynamics with their manager, which influences their engagement. Engagement is thereby negotiated and calibrated according to employee evaluations of the influence of management power.

9.4.2 Adaptation of self

Findings relating to the ways in which participants describe adapting in engagement performances included the ways they 'show' or 'hide' aspects of 'self' in work performances. Consideration of the extent to which an employee decides to be *'the full me (P18)'* with selected colleagues demonstrates conscious adaptations of self in work performances which influence engagement. The findings in this study imply employees understand engagement as a conscious choice to adapt and respond in a particular way that emerges from self-awareness and authentic involvement in work performances, supporting Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation that individuals have varying levels of awareness of a 'preferred self' that they choose to invest in engagement performances. Findings in this study identified that employees actively choose versions of self within performative displays, such as between how an individual acts at home and in the workplace. Some participants explored the process by which they consider how they are going to act at work, presenting a version of themselves designed for the workplace context. Findings also identified common references to a multiplicity of 'selves' and different 'parts' of self which are consciously called upon to act in particular workplace circumstances which influence engagement. That employees understand engagement as an active, dynamic choice and adaptation of versions of self that are displayed through observable behaviours and feelings is a contribution to knowledge.

This study also contributes to knowledge through findings that employees understand and experience engagement as adaptations of self and role-play. Examples included adaptation to external expectations, such as requirements to conform to the ideal worker model (Acker, 1990), or adapting according to the audience observing the engagement performance. Findings relating to adaptations of self and role-play are of interest when considered alongside Bailey *et al.*'s concept of 'existential labour' or acting 'as if' work were meaningful, instead of authentically feeling meaningfulness (2017, p.421). 'Existential labour' involves employees adopting behaviours and attitudes to align with organisational expectations of meaningfulness, regardless of their true feelings. This can manifest as 'deep existential acting', where employees attempt to internalise organisational values, or 'surface existential acting', where employees only outwardly conform and act 'as if' what the organisation requires is

meaningful to them (Bailey *et al*., 2017, p.421-422). Impression management literature offers another interesting concept in 'facades of conformity', which are 'false representations created by employees to appear as if they embrace organisational values…a form of masking one's true self' (Hewlin, 2003, p.634). Facades are similar to surface acting regarding the pretence that is involved, however where surface acting is limited to emotional displays, facades of conformity also include behaviours, verbal expressions and nonverbal gestures, which can be products of overlearned habits or scripts, or consciously chosen and performed (Hewlin, 2003). Although these phenomena are considered in application to meaningfulness or embracing organisational values, they are useful to consider alongside the findings of this study relating to engagement as a behaviour, act and adaptation of self in contributing to knowledge that employees act 'as if' engaged according to a range of contextual information. Adaptations of self occur according to influences such as personal circumstances, audience, organisational factors and individual choice, signifying that engagement is 'an individual, psychological experience…wholly about the employee and the interpretation of information used to make decisions that influence action within that experience' (Shuck, 2019b, p.293).

Further, in engagement performances employees attempt 'deep existential acting' through adaptations of self – such as to align with professional values, 'surface existential acting' through role-play – such as performing enthusiasm, and facades of conforming such as presenting a version they feel should be brought to work. Bailey *et al*. highlight that 'individuals may choose to suppress their real opinions or to express fake views for personal reasons when faced with initiatives aimed at managing their levels of experienced meaningfulness' (2017, p.421). The adaptations and role-plays of engagement identified in this study may then be more aligned to 'faux engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486) and 'existential labour' (Bailey *et al*., 2017, p.421) than the 'harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles' (Kahn, 1990, p.694). For example, findings in which employees noted inadequate communication as a barrier to engagement described their active choices to put their personal emotions aside and *'smile and get on with it (P10)'*, which is more indicative of facades of conformity than an expression of authentic engagement. Employees can present a 'false front' at work through 'overtly adopted' actions and behaviours to act 'as if'

engaged (Bailey *et al*., 2017, p.421), or, as one participant phrased it, to be an engagement *'chameleon' (P18)*. Employees are aware of the people and circumstances in which engagement takes place, and adapt their behaviours, emotions, attitudes and appearance to act 'as if' they are engaged, calibrating performances according to various internal and external levels of influences. This is identified as a contribution to knowledge and an area for further research.

Findings that employees understand engagement to be a managerial and organisational approach and responsibility (discussed in section 9.1) indicate that employees perceive engagement as dependent on the organisation. This suggests that employee understandings of engagement have been influenced by the psychologicalised HRM discourse and practice that objectifies employees, commodifies experiences, and enforces a rhetoric through which employees believe their working experiences are dependent on management and the organisation. However, as explored in this section, employees also understand engagement as an active, conscious choice between versions of self and to present observable behaviours and feeling, such as to work 'above and beyond'. This is representative of the two processes outlined in this study's conceptual model; employees interpret the organisational level approaches that influence engagement, and at the swirling intersection actively choose and calibrate parts of themselves that are present in response to these (and other) factors. This aligns with Kahn's (1990) perception there is a movement and choice in the ways employees employ and express themselves during role performances.

9.4.3 Summary – 'Swirling intersection': Conscious choice and calibration

This section has identified where this study develops Kahn's (1990, 1992) consideration of the individual choices to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances, and ways in which employees calibrate how fully present they are in response to internal and external factors. This has focused on key findings of this study relating to transactional exchanges and relationships, and adaptations of self in engagement performances. These findings were explored to demonstrate the process by which individuals make active, conscious choices to bring in or leave out their personal selves in work performances.

Employees view engagement as a transactional exchange and relationship, including mutual gains and exchange of resources. Discussion considered the ways in which alignment to a transactional exchange is an oversimplification of engagement, and represents the commodification of engagement. The importance of the organisation in initiating and maintaining the transactional relationship was explored, suggesting employees negotiate and calibrate engagement according to their perceptions and evaluations of organisational resources. A final theme of mutual respect considered employee perceptions and experience of power dynamics with their manager, and the influence of this on engagement.

Adaptation of self in engagement performances considered findings in this study whereby employees understand engagement as a conscious choice to adapt and respond in a particular way. This section explored engagement as an active, dynamic choice and adaptation of versions of self that are displayed through observable behaviours and feelings and enacted through adaptations of self. This section discussed concepts of existential labour (Bailey *et al*., 2017) and impression management (Hewlin, 2003) contributing to knowledge that employees act 'as if' engaged and calibrate performances according to a range of contextual information.

9.5 Expressions of engagement

The previous sections have outlined the processes of an individual's interpretation of levels of influence, and the swirling intersection in which active and conscious choices are considered. This next section considers the final aspect of this study's conceptual model which represents expressions of engagement. Discussion focuses on key findings from this study that identify engagement as an expression, displayed through themes such as emotion, behaviour, observable acts, attitude, and appearance. Some of these findings have already been considered in relation to previous features of the conceptual model, and this section develops previous discussion through focus on the ways in which engagement is understood and experienced as expressions that are authentic and performative.

Kahn's theoretical framework is concerned with the moments in which people bring themselves into or remove themselves from task behaviours, to 'respond to the momentary ebbs and flows of those days and to express their selves at some times

and defend them at others' (1990, p.693). These constant fluctuations of engagement throughout the day are central to Kahn's dynamic concept that considers the degree to which an individual will bring one's personal dimensions to the performance of the work role. The findings from this study support the development of this conceptualisation to describe a duality in expressions of self, represented in this study as an authentic form of engagement and a performative form of engagement. Extending Kahn's (1990) focus on the everyday ebbs and flows of expressions of self, this study considers expressions of self that may be more performative and aligned with having to express engagement as an employee, and others that are more internalised, authentic, and express engagement as a person. This builds from Goffman's (1971) dramaturgical metaphor in which a performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed in what individuals believe is the most favourable or appropriate way according to the situation, rather than the characteristics of the performer. Goffman's (1971) suggestion is that individuals shape behaviour and presentations of self to create a desired image according to the social context in which the interaction takes place. The findings in this study suggest individuals shape behaviour and presentations of self to create an expression of engagement that is influenced by their preceding interpretation of levels of influence and conscious choices and calibrations, and the audience reaction to their engagement expression. This presents a potentially paradoxical relationship between the desired images of engagement individuals create and experience through expressions that are authentic and performative. The following section considers each of these themes in further detail.

9.5.1 Performative

A significant contribution to knowledge is this study's findings is that employees understand EE to be an individual feeling, behaviour and act, including observable feelings (such as enthusiasm), observable acts (such as smiling), and behaviour (such as being friendly). Further, participants explored their understandings of EE as an affective phenomenon involving emotional labour to fulfil perceived idealised engagement displays. Descriptions of EE as happiness were often presented as an observable emotional state that signals positivity, and represented idealised engagement displays that are performed through emotional labour to appear as a

233

'*happy person (P24)*'. Appearing 'happy' and 'positive' were frequent in participant descriptions of EE, which highlights that employees have a shared understanding of how an employee displays emotions as part of the act and 'appearance of engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486), indicative of 'the tendency for performers to offer their observers an impression that is idealised in several different ways' (Goffman, 1971, p.44). In his application of Goffman's (1971) theatrical metaphor of people acting out 'momentary attachment and detachments in role performances' through the 'front region', Kahn suggested that there is a 'separation between people and their roles' at work (1990, p.694). The findings of this study suggest employees understand there to be a separation between a person and their appearance of engagement as part of the 'employee' display of idealised feelings, behaviours and acts.

Kahn (1990; 1992) noted that engagement is observed through the behavioural investment of personal physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into work roles, and PE is a behaviour by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances. Kahn (1990) was interested in emotion as an ability and choice to react to workplace phenomena, however subsequent studies focused on positive feelings and emotions that are linked to engagement (e.g. Macey and Schneider, 2008; 2009; May *et al*., 2004; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2019). The findings in this study indicate that employees understand engagement as linked to behavioural displays of affective phenomenon, including playing a role that displays specific emotions and feelings representative of an employee form of engagement. EE is understood by employees as more representative of a 'performance' through the 'front region' (Goffman's, 1971). As Kahn surmised, people 'perform roles as external scripts indicate they should rather than internally interpret those roles; they act as custodians rather than innovators' (1990, p.702). The findings of this study suggest there are shared understandings of external scripts that outline specific behaviours, emotions and feelings that are portrayed as 'employee' forms of engagement.

For example, employees understand engagement as feelings such as ambition, motivation and happiness, as indicated in the findings of this study. These are desirable feelings synonymous with the popular work engagement narrative of being characterised by 'vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli *et al*., 2002, p.74),

multidimensional approaches to engagement such as 'passion, energy, enthusiasm and activation' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.24) and the "feel and look" of engagement' through 'urgency, being focused, intensity and enthusiasm' (Macey *et al.*, 2009, p.23). Notably, these definitions focus on the displays of feelings of engagement, or what Kahn terms 'people's emotional reactions', rather than the 'emotional ability to personally engage', including 'employing and expressing the self' (1990, p.717). The findings of this study indicate employees understand EE as focused on the 'feel and look' of engagement portrayed as idealised 'employee' forms of engagement that involve emotional labour to act 'as if' engaged.

The findings of this study suggest that organisational and societal expectations influence idealised engagement scripts, and employees regulate their engagement performances according to these expectations and the workplace context. This has been considered in findings of emotional labour in engagement performances, commonalities in adaptations of self that are calibrated according to various influences such as the ideal worker model (Acker, 1990) and 'normal' progression routes, and donning a costume to physically display engagement. Additional findings that described engagement as a behaviour or act included more generic references to how an employee 'should' perform and 'standard things' such as timekeeping in which employees understand engagement to be a performance of - rather than experiences of - affective phenomena. Further, engagement is shaped through the approaches the organisation provides, thereby regulating and influencing engagement through organisational norms, expectations and resources. As will be discussed in section 9.5.3, findings in this study also indicate that an external interpretation and response to engagement is fundamental to employee understandings and experiences. Participants often positioned organisational actors as the audience to observe and react to idealised engagement displays, identifying that employees understand management as responsible for engagement and rely upon their interpretation of and response to engagement performances. Together, these findings highlight that performative expressions of engagement are influenced by scripts of an idealised 'employee' form of engagement that are constructed both within the organisation and external expectations of workplace performances. Further, the findings of this study demonstrate employees consciously split, hide and show 'parts' of themselves in

engagement performances according to expectations within engagement 'scripts'. This study's findings contribute to knowledge that employees understand there to be performative dimensions to engagement involving displays of emotions and behaviours according to the organisational context in which the performance takes place, and the norms that context and audience have idealised. Engagement is an emotional response, performative display and conscious act in the presentation of self based on organisational scripts and reactions.

9.5.2 Authentic

As considered in section 9.1, this study suggests that employees understand PE as alignment with personal beliefs, values and personalities, distinguishing between PE as an authentic version of self, and an 'employee' version of self with EE. Further, personal responsibility was the most common theme in participant understandings of PE, involving reference to individual accountability in their actions, emotions or mindsets, such as understandings of authentic self and how this aligns to the work role. This suggests employees understand there to be a difference between a slightly more authentic version of engagement (personal) and a slightly more performative version of engagement (employee). This aligns to findings in which participants acknowledge adaptations of self in engagement (as explored in section 9.4.2); in particular, one participant's identification that '*there's a personal element which you don't put into the real play necessarily (P16)*'. This duality of engagement is also represented in findings indicating employees understand there to be a difference between the way an organisation approaches '*employees as a whole (P24)*' compared to the individual. This was further articulated by P21, who perceived PE as a reflection of '*you as a person*', including how you feel and the emotions you experience, rather than EE, which reflects '*you as an employee*'. This participant placed emphasis on '*how you feel as a person not employee (P21)*' in differentiating PE and EE which contributes towards an important development in understandings of engagement. Whilst Kahn's perspective is that 'the core of engagement is the individual as a person rather than as a worker or employee' (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014, p.83), this study suggests a duality of engagement exists that distinguishes between an authentic version of self as aligned to PE, and an 'employee' version of self with EE. This study therefore contributes to knowledge in suggesting that employees differentiate personal and

employee engagement between the individual and employee grouping whereby EE is perceived as an approach to managing employees as a collective, and PE is viewing employees as individual people. Further, employees differentiate between a slightly more authentic version of engagement (personal) and a slightly more performative version of engagement (employee).

As explored in section 9.4.2, this study identified the ways in which employees adapt versions or parts of themselves, such as in the way they 'show' or 'hide' aspects of 'self' in work performances. These hidden or upfront adaptations of self might represent a conscious choice between an authentic version of self as aligned to PE, and an 'employee' version of self with EE. The differentiation of 'selves' as a person or as an employee is an important conceptual development that builds on Goffman's (1971) suggestion that people manage their emotional reactions to create an idealised 'impression' for their observer. Findings in this study highlight employees understand varying degrees of influence over aspects of self that are displayed or hidden, identifying the complex interplay of individual agency and external factors that shape access to expressions of engagement. Recognising that agency is shaped by power relations within social practices and discursive contexts (Foucault, 1980), individual agency over engagement is both constrained and enabled by the power relations in the organisational context in which it exists. As previously discussed, employees perceive and experience organisational and managerial influence over engagement. The extent to which employees can and do employ agency through expressions of engagement requires further consideration, particularly in relation to the underlying power dynamics which exist within the assertive management agenda of manufacturing consent and exercising coercion (Farnham, 2015). For example, findings in this study that suggest employees perceive opportunities for authenticity such as personal development arise because the organisation knows and understands them indicates employees understand access to experiences that enable authentic engagement as provided by the organisation. This is arguably indicative of the ways in which identity is 'actively engendered or manufactured' through the roles and opportunities the organisation has created (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.623 - 632). In application to engagement, the suggestion is that expressions of engagement are shaped through organisational activities and permission. That participants perceive

organisational permission for activities that shape access to authentic expressions of self as engaging is concerning, in that it indicates employees understand and experience engagement as synonymous with organisational power and control. Further, that employees describe engagement experiences related to their authentic self as happening due to freedom, luck and coincidence suggests a lack of awareness of the extent to which the organisation is involved in their engagement experiences. There is a need for greater understanding of the complex interplay of individual agency and organisational involvement that influence authentic expressions of engagement.

These findings may suggest that an 'employee' version of self aligned with EE is representative of engagement as a 'rule' for the regulation of a 'collective sense of identity and purpose' whereby the 'appropriate individual' is produced into an engaged employee (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.631). Engagement may be viewed as a 'system(s) of management control that aim intentionally to "colonize" the identities of workers so that they become more the kind of person the company would like them to be…creating particular types of personhood' (Fleming & Spicer, 2003, p.158) and representative of 'emotional "cloning" attempts by management' (Fineman, 2006, p.278). These arguments are interesting to consider in relation to findings of the importance of the audience reactions to expressions and performances of engagement which may be a form of control and regulation, explored in the following section.

9.5.3 Audience Reaction

Audience spectatorship and observation feature throughout the findings of this study, such as in participant considerations as to how an organisation views their employees, adapting engagement according to those around them to elicit a particular response, and concerns about people's perceptions and judgements. Presenting engagement to others identified the importance participants place on external validation in determining engagement and suggest engagement performances are focused on the observer or 'target' (Bozeman & Kacmar 1997; Rosenfeld *et al*. 1995; Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016). References to those in the role of observer identified both a general organisational audience and those specifically identified as managers. Findings in this study indicate that audience reactions are a compelling force in individual engagement and employees understand, adjust, and regulate engagement according to audience

238

recognition, validation and feedback. Employees perceive and respond to audience reactions to performances, and so engagement depends upon the interpretation, inventive and enacting powers of employees (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Goffman's (1971) dramaturgical metaphor described the duties of the 'front region', which include conforming to norms and expectations such as by using particular language, behaviour, or clothes. Participants explain donning a costume in the workplace physically displays their 'self' and engagement to an audience, and their conscious decisions to speak and behave in particular ways and thereby perform externally prepared engagement scripts. The act of selecting an engagement costume and script requires individual conscious decisions which is similar to Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of people's attachment or detachment of varying degrees of their selves to their work roles. Further, these findings indicate the presence of impression management behaviour whereby employees are concerned about their image and use specific behaviours to shape how they are seen by others (Bozeman & Kacmar 1997; Rosenfeld *et al*. 1995; Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016).

As already discussed, this study highlighted that employees understand EE as attributed to an emotional state or behaviour, describing 'what engagement looks like' and focusing on 'the appearance of engagement' (Valentin, 2014, p.486), and perceive emotional labour within idealised engagement displays. It is important to note that these understandings of EE as attributed to an emotional state or behaviour often identified verbal and observable emotional states that need an external response such as recognition and validation. For example, EE is understood through the way it is performed in relation to happiness, with emphasis on the behaviour of speaking positively, being *'friendly (P4)'* and *'look(ing) like they're having a nice time (P21)'*. The reliance is on the observer interpreting engagement displays. The external interpretation of and response to engagement performances is fundamental to employee understandings; as one participant explained, *'I feel like it would be easier for someone else to…say whether or not they think I am (engaged) (P8)'*. Indeed, reference to influence of people around them in employee understandings of engagement permeate throughout the findings of this study, indicating employees understand engagement as involving other organisational members. Further, it denotes what Rafaeli and Sutton refer to as 'emotional transactions', 'when an

employee displays emotion, notes the reaction of a "target" person, and adjusts or maintains expressed feelings' (1987, p.26). According to Rafaeli and Sutton, emotional transactions are initiated by the organisational context, which has the strongest influence over feelings conveyed in that 'the reactions of "receivers" or "targets" serve as feedback that can influence and constrain subsequent sent emotions' (1987, p.28). Findings related to external validation in determining engagement, and concerns regarding the how others judge engagement indicate that the perceived audience influences engagement, which contributes to findings relating to issues of power and power relationships in engagement. Employees perceive engagement to be the content of a performative display based on existing engagement scripts and management and organisational reactions.

Consideration within existing engagement research of employees as having engagement traits, psychological states, and behavioural tendencies (Macey & Schneider, 2008) suggest that there might be attributes and characteristics which predispose employees to be engaged (Meyer, Gagné & Parfyonova, 2010). HRM practices that preconceive the 'psychological disposition' of an engaged employee (Purcell, 2014b) outline how an engaged employee 'should' "feel and look" (Macey *et al.*, 2009) as an engagement script which contributes to 'emotional "cloning" attempts by management' (Fineman, 2006, p.278) and controls the individual's engagement experience within the confines of management scripts. This is a limited view that assumes an 'expressive extension of the characteristics of the performer', but actually creates performances that 'serve mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed' (Goffman, 1971, p.83). Further, this positions management and organisational actors as the engagement 'target' to observe and react to idealised engagement displays, positioning the employee as 'objects or instruments' management are reading and measuring, with implications not only for how managers view their employees, but how their employees view themselves (Godard, 2014, p.11). This study highlights that employees understand management as responsible for engagement and rely upon their interpretation of and response to engagement performances. This is an important advancement of knowledge which acknowledges the power dynamics within engagement and encourages future research into idealised engagement displays and management responses.

The extent to which the organisation impacts engagement underpins findings relating to audience reactions to engagement throughout this research. Goffman proposed that an individual offers their performance and 'puts on (his) show 'for the benefit of other people'' (1971, p.28). Within the workplace context, this suggests engagement is performed for the benefit of the organisation and its members. Kahn (1990) suggested people can regulate their personal selves during work role performances indicating PE is individually led, but that there are a range of other influences. The influence of the organisational context requires further exploration, particularly in consideration of issues of power and engagement (Truss *et al.*, 2013). Acknowledging that the employment relationship is a power relationship with the hierarchic, co-ordinating power of management at the centre (Farnham, 2015), organisational and management power influences all aspects of the employment relationship, including engagement.

9.5.4 Performative and authentic expressions of engagement – a paradoxical relationship?

This study has suggested there may be two versions of being engaged as a person and engaged as an employee, represented through performative and authentic expressions. The proposed conceptual model has outlined two processes (interpretation of levels of influence, and the swirling intersection of conscious choice and calibrations) that contribute to differential yet parallel expressions of engagement as 'performative' or 'authentic'. The ways in which these forms of engagement exist, including the relationship between them, requires further consideration. For example, can employee and authentic forms of engagement co-exist, or are they conflicting expressions of engagement? Findings in this study relating to power and power relationships within organisational contexts suggest there may be more conflictual tensions than cooperation, however this requires further exploration. Another point of consideration is how dependent or autonomous each version of being engaged is on each other and the processes by which expressions of engagement emerge. The conceptual model highlights the active role of the individual in engagement, but there are complex and nuanced internal and external influencing factors that impact the extent to which individuals might access and navigate this active role. The duality in expressions of self as an authentic form of engagement and a performative form of

engagement requires further consideration into their potentially paradoxical relationship.

9.5.5 Summary

This section has explored the final aspect of this study's conceptual model which represents expressions of engagement. It presents findings from this study that indicate there is a duality in expressions of self, represented as an authentic form of engagement and a performative form of engagement. This extends Kahn's (1990) consideration of the ebbs and flows of expression of self to suggest that there are different forms of engagement as aligned to expressing engagement as an employee or as a person.

This section considered findings that indicate there are performative and authentic expressions of engagement. This included understandings of engagement as affective phenomenon involving emotional labour to fulfil perceived idealised engagement displays and external scripts that outline specific behaviours, emotions and feelings that are portrayed as 'employee' forms of engagement. Authentic expressions of self were presented through findings that referred to personal beliefs, values and personalities as influencing engagement. Discussion of the duality of engagement as represented in findings that distinguished between parts and elements of individuals that are 'personal' or 'employee' highlighted that employees differentiate between a slightly more authentic version of engagement (personal) and a slightly more performative version of engagement (employee). This section considered some perspectives of the complex interplay of individual agency and organisational involvement that influence authentic expressions of engagement.

Section 9.5.3 then considered how individuals shape behaviour and presentations of self according to audience reactions of their engagement expressions. This expanded discussion regarding targets of impression management behaviour and the importance placed on the observer interpreting engagement displays identified in the findings of this study.

Finally, section 9.5.4 highlighted that further consideration is required as to the relationship between performative and authentic expressions of engagement. It

outlined some of the areas for future research and advancement of knowledge, including if this is a cooperative of conflicting relationship, and if the different forms of engagement are dependent or autonomous of each other. The duality in expressions of self as an authentic form of engagement and a performative form of engagement requires further consideration into their potentially paradoxical relationship.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings and contributions of this study to towards an increased knowledge and understanding of engagement. It revisits the research objectives and identifies the overall conclusions from the study, outlining contributions towards both scholarship and practice. The chapter concludes with reflections on limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

10.1 Aims and Enactment of this Research

A significant amount of existing research has explored engagement, including many attempts to identify what engagement is and how its assumed benefits can be achieved, leading to multiple definitions and interpretations of EE from a range of sources. Through the intentions of various actors and the emergence of HRM with a more assertive management agenda, engagement becomes one of the flagship tools through which managerial outcomes can be achieved. A preoccupation with identifying links between engagement and organisational performance has developed a value-added narrative which informs managerially-led engagement practice and agenda.

Through exploration of Kahn's engagement concept (1990; 1992), this study identifies that PE is an individual's behaviours, feelings, values and psychological state of mind while at work, the extent to which they harness themselves to their work roles, and the ways in which they bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance (Kahn, 1990, p694). PE is therefore an active and conscious decision to invest oneself in a work role based on internal and external influences.

An in-depth review of existing engagement literature considered some of the underlying debates regarding power dynamics in employment relations and how these influence EE. This demonstrated that engagement has been influenced by a dominant positivist, unitarist perspective (Sambrook, 2021) and the "psychologisation" of organisational activities (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008; Troth & Guest, 2020; Vincent *et*

al., 2020). Engagement has become another managerial control mechanism used to pursue managerial and organisational interests which have distorted engagement from the individual focus of Kahn's concept.

The aim of this research was therefore to address these limitations by exploring what engagement is and how it is understood and experienced by individuals. Highlighting the predominance of scientific, psychology-based positivist engagement research which aims to quantify engagement to better capture it, the study aimed to explore the employee's deeply subjective, unique lived experiences of engagement at the individual level (Sambrook, 2021; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Truss *et al.,* 2013). This was pursued through the adoption of a constructionist and interpretivist position with concern for how individuals make sense of the world through understandings of self, experiences and perceptions. Critiquing the generalisation and simplification in positivist and scientific approaches to engagement, a focus developed on the ways in which engagement has been distorted to fulfil the objectives of scientific management and ignore the individual experience. The study sought to address the absence of interpretivist research into engagement, exploring employee's construction of their experience and meanings attributed to engagement to understand the individual's perception and experience of engagement. This included exploration of how engagement is constructed and attributed meaning by individuals within organisations. Data was collected through 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with employees from a range of organisations. A narrative interview and critical incident questioning style encouraged participants to tell stories about their experiences of engagement and understand how they make sense of their experiences. Data analysis was framed through beliefs in co-construction and interpretation between the researcher and participant.

The first research question sought to understand what PE is, and how it differs from existing understandings and research from engagement. A key finding of this study is that existing understandings and research on engagement have been distorted and are misaligned from Kahn's PE. The existing engagement phenomenon is divergent from Kahn's concept. Further, EE and PE are unknown and unfamiliar concepts and lack shared understanding and meaning amongst employees. Some commonalities exist in reference to managerial and organisational approaches, relationships and

exchanges, an emotional state or behaviour, internal and external forces, and a performative display for the audience. However, engagement is an ambiguous concept that employees require support in understanding.

This study has identified that employees understand PE as both part of the organisation's activities, something done, or prevented, by managers. Perspectives also include PE as alignment with personal beliefs and personalities, distinguishing between an authentic version of self as aligned to PE, and an 'employee' version of self with EE. Further, findings indicate employees understand there to be performative dimensions to engagement in that they display emotions according to the organisational context in which the performance takes place, and the norms that context and audience have idealised. Engagement is an emotional response, performative display and conscious act in the presentation of self based on self-awareness and organisational scripts and reactions.

Engagement is inundated with conflicting understandings, complex contextual issues and underlying power tensions. The engagement concept that exists in organisations and experienced by employees is divergent from Kahn's original concept. Supporting employees to interpret and apply engagement concepts to their unique circumstances will enable development of a personal, individual level of engagement.

The second research question considered the experience of engagement at the individual level. Significantly, this study found that employees' ability to recall, communicate and detail their engagement experiences differs. There is variety and diversity in employee abilities to access and experience engagement. Further, employee experiences of engagement include positive and negative encounters, emotional extremes, varying perspectives and a range of external influences. This demonstrates that engagement experiences are nuanced according to the perspective of those experiencing them and the context in which the experience takes place.

This study identified three common engagement experiences: firstly, overcoming challenges that provide meaning, a sense of community and a shared identity. Secondly, positive, supportive and meaningful relationships with members of their organisation, which include positive feedback, socialisation, communication and a sense of community. Finally, positive personal development experiences that include

opportunities for authenticity, learning and progression. Individual experiences of engagement clearly share some commonalities, and greater exploration of ways to enhance these experiences are needed.

Employees engage with opportunities to achieve or pursue something of importance to them, such as learning and developing, and experiencing relationships with people that they respected, who provided advice, knowledge, and support. Employees experience opportunities that allow for authenticity as engaging, although employees require permission and freedom to access authenticity and engagement. Further, recounting engagement experiences can provide opportunities to reflect and identify personal, meaningful achievements and developments from engagement experiences. These findings identify practical implications for organisations in opportunities for engagement.

Identifying that engagement is immersed in complex organisational issues and underlying power tensions, the third research question explored engagement as existing within momentary circumstances that shape behaviours, and based on multiple levels of influence (Kahn, 1990), considering what barriers and obstacles these present to engagement in the workplace, and how these might be overcome. Following the development of the argument that engagement has been manufactured into an organisational commodity, the final research question focused on the complex and dynamic circumstances and underlying power tensions which influence individual engagement to consider how the organisation impacts personal engagement at the individual level.

This study found that managers are experienced as barriers to engagement through poor relationships, unsupportive behaviour and conflicting interests. Employees expect to have an 'engaging manager' that is supportive of them and their work. The relationship between employee and manager is understood as transactional, but the meaningfulness of these relationships influence engagement. Engagement is negotiated according to the influence of management power on the relationship between manager and employee. Underlying contradictions of management approaches that seek both control and consent are experienced as barriers to

247

engagement. Further, employees experience inadequate communication, breaches of trust and fairness, and restricted organisational resources as barriers to engagement.

Perceptions of organisational approaches in comparison to others – colleagues or those outside of the organisation – influence engagement and highlight that employees assess engagement in relation to broader, external contexts. The organisation impacts engagement through the range of social, cultural and structural factors that contribute to organisational context, power dynamics, managerial control and interventions and opportunities for individual agency and choice. Further, employees perceive themselves as barriers to engagement and consider their self-awareness and personal responsibility in engagement. Engagement exists within the momentary circumstances that shape behaviours, and is based on multiple levels of influence (Kahn, 1990). This study identifies the organisational context, managers, power dynamics, managerial control and interventions and opportunities for individual agency and choice influence engagement. Engagement is therefore an 'ongoing "negotiation"' (Sambrook, 2021, p.473) between the employee's choice to integrate their sense of self in work performances and the power relations of the organisational context.

This study argues that to continue the development of our understanding of engagement, Kahn's (1990, 1992) original conceptualisation – specifically the individual and personal aspects of his ideas – cannot remain overlooked. It supports that research needs to consider the more subtle, self-oriented aspects of engagement at the heart of Kahn's definition (Sambrook, Jones & Doloriert, 2014). To support the development of knowledge about how engagement is understood and experienced by individuals, this study has extended Kahn's model through a proposed conceptual model (figure 2). The model identifies key insights of this study regarding engagement as having 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions and outlines opportunities for further development of knowledge of understandings and experiences of individual engagement. This conceptual model represents a key contribution of this study, and this and the practical recommendations from this study are now summarised.

10.2 Contribution

This study's key contribution is that it extends Kahn's (1990) engagement framework through the development of a conceptual model (figure 2) to consider two potential versions of being engaged as a person and engaged as an employee, represented by 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions. The model suggests that the individual has an active part in the processes that contribute towards these expressions, through their interpretation of various internal and external influences, and the conscious choices and calibrations individuals make to bring in or leave out their personal selves in work performances. This model develops Kahn's original foci framing of engagement as a deeply personal and agentic experience, and shows the potential for differential yet parallel expressions of engagement as 'performative' or 'authentic'. This contributes towards the theoretical development of our understanding of engagement in relation to the individual and personal dimensions. Further, it encourages approaches to engagement as an active, conscious choice and unique, subjective individual phenomenon.

This study also contributes to knowledge of employees' understandings of engagement. Based on empirical research, this study identified that employees are less familiar with individual, personal dimensions of engagement. Further, employees understand engagement as shaped and owned by the organisation. This study therefore extends the concerns of Truss *et al*. that employees understand engagement through the 'bent' and 'stretched' appropriation to managerialist agendas as 'doing engagement' through management practice (2013, p.2664). This adds to knowledge in highlighting that approaches to engagement as management practice have permeated employee understandings of engagement to represent an outward behaviour observed through visible manifestations. Employees understand there to be performative dimensions to engagement. This includes displays of emotions, role-play, adaptations of self, seeking external responses, and donning costumes and scripts according to idealised displays. Further, employees perceive managers to own engagement, including providing permission for and validating engagement. Engagement is therefore understood by employees as managerial practices and organisational approaches to managing a workforce and achieving managerial objectives, situating responsibility, power and control of engagement with the

organisation and management. This study further contributes to knowledge in that it highlights the subjective, individual experiences of being engaged at work, as represented through the conceptual model. Whilst employees may understand engagement as aligned to managerial and organisational ownership and approaches, engagement includes a range of dimensions and is complex, nuanced and individual by nature.

Further, this study has contributed to the debate on psychologised and positivist HRM approaches, arguing that scientific, psychology-based positivist engagement research is inadequate in understanding a uniquely individual, subjective phenomenon. This study has provided qualitative empirical exploration of the individual level of engagement through an interpretivist approach to research. This study has provided increased knowledge and understanding of the experience of engagement at the individual level. It has addressed the lack of research into the individual employee's unique, lived experience (Sambrook, 2021; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011; Truss *et al.*, 2013) of engagement. Exploration of the experience of engagement alongside employee perceptions of influences identified several significant commonalities within engagement at the individual level which contribute to knowledge. These are meaningful relationships, connection to community, managerial permission and relationships, organisational approaches, overcoming challenges, learning and development, authenticity. Understanding there to be a range of experiences of engagement contributes to knowledge and enables a deeper awareness of the complex, individual nature of engagement.

A final contribution relates to the exploration of employee perspectives and experiences of barriers to engagement. Collating employee perspectives and experiences of barriers to engagement identified commonalities related to perceptions of managers and managerial behaviour, specifically through a lack of support, feeling alone and experiences of conflict with managers. Experiences of challenges with organisational and managerial permission for opportunities advances knowledge regarding experiences of power dynamics in engagement. Further, inadequate communication, breaches of trust and fairness and restricted organisational resources are experienced and perceived as barriers to engagement. Specifically, employees evaluate fairness and meaningfulness between their own experiences in relation to

their perceptions of what others experience and receive, suggesting engagement is influenced by employee perceptions of colleague experiences and wider society. This study also indicated some employees understand themselves as barriers to engagement, using the interview to better understand themselves and what prevents them from engaging at work. These findings contribute to knowledge and require further exploration.

10.3 Practical Implications

The key practical implication arising from this study is that engagement can be reframed as a deeply personal, individual experience. Organisations, managers, and HRM practitioners can achieve this through approaches that feature the individual employee as the focus. Whilst this study has identified a range of ways in which engagement might be linked to organisational approaches (such as progression, personal development, communication etc.), the following section outlines some of the practical ways in which engagement might be reframed as a personal, individual experience.

A primary practical implication is increasing awareness of engagement as a deeply personal, individual experience. This might involve a reframing of engagement and the way it is perceived and communicated at all levels of an organisation. Organisations might provide support and encouragement for individually-focused engagement practices such as personal reflection and conversations about engagement experiences as a starting point for this reframing. Structured employee-manager conversations about engagement can enable an increased awareness and understanding of engagement. Open conversations should aim to expand awareness and understanding that is meaningful to the employee and can be applied within their work role and relationships. For example, employees have a range of preconceptions about what makes an 'engaging manager', and this study suggests conversations about this would clarify employee and management expectations of the role of the manager in individual engagement. These might be approached as learning experiences. Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz (2011) suggest utilising learning as a domain of engagement to reinforce the experience and value of work, strengthen perceptions of safety, broaden psychological and emotional resources and create conditions for

meaningful work to develop. Conversations about engagement as learning opportunities might enable manager and employee to make meaning of engagement together, and for the employee to develop awareness and understanding for themselves. Employees engage with opportunities to achieve or pursue something of importance to them, and have relationships with people that they respected, who provided advice, knowledge, and support. Managers can structure engagement conversations according to these areas.

Engagement conversations should take place with someone with understanding and awareness of the concept. The above recommendations are sensitive, requiring time and effort to ensure a safe environment and trusting relationship to enable meaningful conversations. Further, the findings of this study render managerial knowledge and understanding regarding their influence on individual level engagement essential. Organisations might consider managerial training to expand engagement understanding, including many of the themes that appear throughout this study such as power dynamics, authority, and performance. As the organisational representative perceived by employees to provide permission and validation for engagement, managers need guidance on how to fulfil this role, including leading engagement conversations as recommended previously. Further, employees experience lack of managerial support, fear of management conflict and opposition and lack of communication as barriers to engagement, and organisations might address these factors in managerial training and relationship development with the goal of understanding individual engagement.

Managers need to provide individuals with opportunities and encouragement to reflect on engagement, including what engagement means to them as individuals, and the ways in which they might interpret and experience different influences on and expressions of engagement. This may include engagement-focused discussions through coaching practices to include opportunities to discuss engagement individually. This study has highlighted that recounting engagement experiences can provide opportunities to reflect and identify personal, meaningful achievements and engagement within workplace experiences. Acknowledging the number of participants that used reflective discussions in the interviews to consider new insights, this study suggests reflection can be utilised as part of an ongoing engagement dialogue

between employee and manager, in which understanding is applied to and regularly reflected upon throughout working experiences.

Despite this being a unique and subjective concept, practitioners can utilise the common expectations and experiences of engagement and barriers identified in this study to structure engagement conversations. These include overcoming challenges, meaningful experiences, a sense of community, supportive and meaningful relationships, positive feedback and personal development. Participants cited experiences of being listened to, supported and valued, and feelings of loyalty and connection to others in overcoming challenges, which indicate areas of practical focus for organisations. These themes might serve as a starting point for engagement conversations and training.

10.4 Limitations

The first limitation of this study relates to methodological restrictions including the single use of interviews as a method, the sample size and composition, and interview timings. One interview offers only a snapshot of the employee's perspectives and experiences as they determine them at the time of the interview. I would have preferred to have two interviews with participants, to follow-up on their thoughts following the initial interviews and introductions to engagement. Further, the study is only representative of the perspectives and experiences of those who took part in it. Participants were recruited from my network and were self-selecting in that they showed interest in the study and topic. There is therefore a bias in those who are interest in the topic, and based within the locational context of the South West of England. This represents a very specific context and exploration of similar phenomena within wider locational contexts would be useful. The sample included some employees that identified as having line management responsibilities; responses therefore varied with some participants providing specific examples and opinions relating to their management responsibilities. However, there are significant commonalities within responses as identified in the discussion, which signifies both reliability and saturation of data. Finally, as discussed and justified in the methodology section, the final interviews for this study took place at a time of significant social turbulence and data gathering ended at 30 interviews. These unexpected adaptations limited the amount of data collected.

Secondly, this study was limited by the research questions, which were both broad and specific to understandings and experiences of EE and PE. Trying to consider both understanding and experiences has proven to be two significantly large topics that on reflection, might have been further narrowed in focus.

A further limitation relates to my own position as a researcher, former HR practitioner and lecturer in HRM. My view of the world – and Kahn's engagement concept – has undoubtedly influenced this research, in both the methodology and discussion focus. I prioritised impartiality in devising the interview questions and responses during the interviews, but inevitably my worldview has influenced this research. Finally, due to other commitments the analysis and write-up of this study has taken considerable time. However, the findings and arguments remain of importance to development of the engagement concept.

10.5 Future Research

A range of areas for future research have been identified throughout this study. Firstly, future research might apply and develop upon the conceptual model, such as by considering additional expressions of engagement and exploring the duality in expressions of self as an authentic form of engagement and a performative form of engagement as a potentially paradoxical relationship.

Secondly, consideration of the ways in which the organisational context influences individual level engagement. This study has identified common influences related to managerial behaviour and relationships, organisational approaches and permission to engage which might structure future areas of enquiry. This might include specific engagement approaches within a particular organisational context to gather detailed understandings of individuals experiences of engagement within an organisation.

A third area for future research includes collecting perspectives and experiences of engagement from employees with line management responsibilities, or those without any managerial responsibilities, or indeed a comparison of views might be considered. This study included some participants who were line managers who indicated they experience challenges in personal engagement and supporting the engagement of

employees in their teams. These areas were not relevant to the focus of this study, but might inform future areas of research.

A fourth area for future investigation relates to how employees make meaning, develop self-awareness and utilise self-reflection in engagement, including how skills and abilities influence engagement. Individual level experiences of engagement share commonalities such as overcoming challenges, meaningful experiences, a sense of community, supportive and meaningful relationships, positive feedback and personal development. Arguably, greater exploration of ways to enhance these experiences are needed.

Acknowledgement of the influence of external forces (such as managerial permission) and internal forces (such as self-awareness) identifies a fifth area for research in consideration of further examples, and the interplay between internal and external forces. Further, this study advances knowledge that contextual information such as perceptions of pay and benefits influence engagement, and greater consideration is needed in future research.

Finally, this study acknowledges the influence of power dynamics within engagement, including contradictions of management approaches that seek both control and consent, and encourages further research into this.

10.6 Summary of conclusions

To summarise the key findings and contributions of this study explored in this conclusion chapter, the following outlines new contributions and development and confirmation of existing knowledge and understanding relating to engagement.

The following new contributions have arisen from this study:

- A conceptual model that considers two potential versions of being engaged as a person and engaged as an employee, represented by 'performative' and 'authentic' expressions of engagement. This model highlights the influence of internal and external factors, and individual choice and awareness in engagement.

This study has developed the following from existing knowledge:

- Kahn's (1990) original foci framing of engagement as a deeply personal and agentic experience. This includes identifying that PE is an individual's behaviours, feelings, values and psychological state of mind while at work, the extent to which they harness themselves to their work roles, and the ways in which they bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance (Kahn, 1990).

- Consideration of the active part the individual has in the processes that contribute towards expressions of engagement, identifying engagement as an active, conscious choice and unique, subjective individual phenomenon.

- Understanding of engagement in relation to individual and personal dimensions, including employee perceptions and experiences of engagement, which are nuanced according to individual perspectives and the contexts in which the experience takes place.

- Common perceptions and experiences of influences on engagement at the individual level, including: meaningful relationships, connection to community, managerial permission and relationships, organisational approaches, overcoming challenges, learning and development, authenticity.

- Commonalities in understandings of engagement, such as in reference to managerial and organisational approaches, relationships and exchanges, an emotional state or behaviour, internal and external forces, and a performative display for the audience. For some, engagement concepts are unknown and unfamiliar, lacking a shared sense of meaning amongst employees.

- There are some common experiences of engagement, including:
  - overcoming challenges that provide meaning, a sense of community and a shared identity
  - positive, supportive and meaningful relationships with members of their organisation, which include positive feedback, socialisation, communication and a sense of community
  - positive personal development experiences that include opportunities for authenticity, learning and progression.

- The organisation impacts engagement through the range of social, cultural and structural factors that contribute to organisational context, power dynamics, managerial control and interventions and opportunities for individual agency and choice.

Appendices

Appendix A – Introductory e-mail

Subject: Invitation to participate in research on Employee Engagement

Dear Sir/Madam,

This email is to invite you to participate in my current research on employee engagement and to provide you with some more information on the study.

It has been identified that on an individual basis we engage with different aspects of our work and working life, and it is suggested that a more personalised approach to employee engagement might help to improve happiness, satisfaction and wellbeing at work. This research aims to explore this in more detail by discussing personal engagement with employees from a range of organisations. It is with hope that the outcome of this research may benefit you and the workforce in the future.

The research consists of two interviews conducted around 4 - 8 weeks apart with participants that are currently employed. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes (no longer than 60 minutes) and will cover your own understanding of engagement, as well as experiences of being engaged at work. I will conduct the interview and preferably would visit you at your place of work, or I can arrange for a private room at University of Plymouth campus. The second interview can take place either face to face, by email or telephone 4 – 8 weeks after the initial interview.

I'd be extremely grateful if you have some free time to help with this study. As the study is interested in you and your experiences as an employee, permission to interview is not required from your organisation, and personal and employment details will remain anonymous.

I have the following days free for the first interview at whatever time and location would suit you best. Please complete this table and return to me to indicate your availability:

Date	Preferred time	Preferred location
e.g. 31st May	*Anytime between 9 – 12.30*	*My workplace/ University campus*
3rd June		
5th June		
7th June		
10th June		
12th June		

If you feel you're unable to take part, but know of a colleague or friend that might be available, please feel free to forward this email to them.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this, and thank you in advance.

Best wishes,

Hannah

Hannah Newbury
Plymouth Business School
University of Plymouth
Room 504, Cookworthy
Plymouth PL4 8AA
hannah.newbury@plymouth.ac.uk

Appendix B – Agreement to participant email response

Dear NAME

Thank you for letting me know you're able to help with my study – it's greatly appreciated. I'd like to provide you with some more information on the research.

It has been identified that on an individual basis we engage with different aspects of our work and working life, and it is suggested that a more personalised approach to employee engagement might help to improve happiness, satisfaction and wellbeing at work. This research aims to explore this in more detail by discussing personal engagement with employees from a range of organisations. It is with hope that the outcome of this research may benefit you and the workforce in the future.

 The research consists of two interviews conducted around 4 - 8 weeks apart. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes (no longer than 60 minutes) and will cover your own understanding of engagement, as well as experiences of being engaged at work.

As the study is interested in you and your experiences, permission to interview is not required from your organisation, and personal and employment details will remain anonymous.

You have opted for the first interview to take place: INTERVIEW DETAILS

Please find attached a copy of the participation interview brief, which I will also show to you before the first interview.

To save time during our interview, please could you fill the following questions in and return this to me by email:

1) Your full name?
2) What is your age and gender?
3) What is your current job title?
4) Who is your current employer?
5) How long have you been employed at this organisation?

6) What sector is your company/employer?
   Private sector / Public sector / Charitable or voluntary organisation / Other (please specify)

7) How many people does your organisation employ (approx.)?

If you have any questions ahead of our interview, please let me know. Otherwise, I look forward to meeting with you on INTERVIEW DATE

Best wishes,

Hannah

Hannah Newbury

Plymouth Business School

University of Plymouth

Room 504, Cookworthy

Plymouth PL4 8AA

hannah.newbury@plymouth.ac.uk

Appendix C – Participant Interview Brief

Participant Interview Brief

Name: Hannah Newbury
Student Number: 10164314
Director of Studies: Dr Sue Kinsey
Course/Programme: 0410 - MPhil/PhD Business with Management

Employee Engagement; the 'personal' dimension of engagement

Researcher: Hannah Newbury, PhD student researcher, University of Plymouth
Contact: hannah.newbury@plymouth.ac.uk

You have been invited to take part in an interview as part of a study into employee engagement.

You will be asked some questions on your experiences of employee engagement and personal engagement at work. Some questions may relate to you personally, but you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to. The interview may cover some potentially sensitive and personal issues, but you do not have to disclose any information you do not wish to. You may withdraw from the study at any point before or during the interviews, without penalty, by informing the researcher.

This is the first of two interviews. This interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. The second interview will be either face to face, by email or telephone 4 – 8 weeks after the initial interview on a date and time convenient for you. The researcher will contact you after the interview today to arrange this.

The interview will be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and data analysis. The recording may be sent to a third party for transcription, but you do not have to provide any identifiable information.

By default, all information you provide will remain completely anonymous and it will not be possible for anyone to trace you from the data you provide. Any identifiable information you provide will be removed or replaced after transcription. All data is made anonymous immediately following transcription and so the right to withdraw will not be possible following the transcription process.

Data obtained from the information you provide may be made available, shared, archived or published but will remain anonymous. Data will be stored in compliance with GDPR regulations.

At the end of the study, a report of the findings may be created and provided for your organisation, including the Managing Director/CEO. You will be provided with an opportunity to opt in or out of this. Further, at the end of the study you will be provided with an opportunity to see a final copy of your interview transcript and any report outlining findings from your organisation. The researcher will contact you to provide this option.

If you have any questions, please ask the investigator now. Thank you for taking part.

Appendix D – Participant Interview Consent Form

Participant Interview Consent Form

Thank you for reading the Participant Interview Brief. If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete and sign the form below. Please make sure you have read the Participant Interview Brief in full and raised any questions with the investigator.

Please initial box

I have read and understood the information sheet. ☐

I have received satisfactory answers to my questions concerning the study. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw during both interviews without giving any reason and without penalty. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. ☐

I confirm that I understand that information shared during this interview must remain confidential. ☐

I consent for anonymised data obtained from the information I provide to be made available, shared, published, or archived for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the study.

☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

☐

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Date:

Name (print):

Signature:

Please return this sheet to the researcher

Appendix E – Interview Question Guide

Perception of Engagement Questions

1) Can you tell me about your current role?

2) How do you feel about your job currently?

3) Can you tell me what you understand by the term EE?

4) How would you recognise an engaged employee?

5) Some common definitions of engagement are that it is "…A workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organisation to give their best each day, committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, with an enhanced sense of their own well-being", and that it is "associated with individual role performance".

   Do you have any comments? Do you agree/disagree? Is that how you understand the terms?

6) What does employee engagement mean to you personally, on a personal level?

7) What do you understand by the term personal engagement? (rather than EE)?

8) For the purposes of this study, personal engagement is understood as:

   'Personal engagement is the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that

promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances.' (Kahn, 1990, p700)

'People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform, even as they maintain the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles they occupy.' (Kahn, 1990, p692)

Do you have any comments? Agree/disagree? Aware? Same as or different to EE?

9) Would you describe yourself as personally engaged? How can you tell if you're personally engaged? How would others tell if you're personally engaged?

10) Do you feel anything **influences** your personal engagement?

11) Do you think there are any **barriers** to your personal engagement?

Specific occasions, incidents of engagement questions

1) Can you describe to me time where you've experienced personal engagement in any organisation or role?
   a. What happened? When? Where? Who was involved?
   b. How did you feel? What did you make of the situation?
   c. What did you do?
   d. Did it impact your behaviour/thoughts/feelings?
2) Does anything prevent you from being personally engaged at work? Can you describe them? *(Remind of barriers/influences answers earlier if required)*
   a. Can you tell me about a specific personal example of this?
   b. What happened? When? Where? Who was involved? What did you do?
   c. How did you feel? What did you make of the situation?

     d. Did it impact your behaviour/thoughts/feelings?

3) Are there any other occasions or experiences that stand out for you in relation to your engagement?

4) What thoughts do you have now about your personal engagement?

5) Do you have anything to add?

Appendix F – Definitions sheet provided in interview

Definitions

<u>Employee Engagement</u>

"…A workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organisation to give their best each day, committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, with an enhanced sense of their own well-being."

(MacLeod and Clarke, Engaging for Success (http://engageforsuccess.org/))

"…A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance"

(Saks, 2006, p602)

<u>Personal Engagement</u>

'Personal engagement is the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances.'

(Kahn, 1990, p700)

'People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform, even as they maintain the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles they occupy.'

(Kahn, 1990, p692)

Appendix G – Interview Debrief Form

Interview Debrief Form

Employee Engagement; the 'personal' dimension of engagement

Researcher: Hannah Newbury, PhD student researcher, University of Plymouth

Contact: hannah.newbury@plymouth.ac.uk

Please take this form with you.

Thank you for taking part as an interview participant in this research study into employee engagement and personal engagement.

This study explores whether on an individual basis we engage with different aspects of our work and working life. If you know of any friends or acquaintances that are eligible and may be willing to participate in this study, we would be very grateful if you could pass their contact details to the researcher (email address detailed above).

Please may we request that you not discuss it with them until after they have had the opportunity to participate. Prior knowledge of questions asked during the study can invalidate the results. We greatly appreciate your cooperation and help with this.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to ask the researcher at this time, or contact them (details above).

In the event that you feel psychologically or emotionally distressed by participation in this study, we encourage you to contact:

- **Mind**
  https://www.mind.org.uk/
  0300   123   3393
  info@mind.org.uk
  Text: 86463

Samaritans
116 123 (24-hour helpline)
www.samaritans.org
jo@samaritans.org
If you're in Plymouth you can also drop into the Samaritans at 20 Oxford Place, Western Approach. Check for opening hours.

- **Medical centre** at University of Plymouth at +44 1752 222341

Thank you again for your participation.

Please take this form with you.

Appendix H – Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH
Faculty of Business

Date: 03 May 2019

Dear Hannah,

Ethical Approval Application No: FREIC1819.36
Title: Employee Engagement; the 'personal' dimension of engagement

Thank you for your application to the Faculty Research Ethics & Integrity Committee (FREIC) seeking ethical approval for your proposed research.

The committee has considered your application and is satisfied that the project complies with Plymouth University's ethical standards for research involving human participants.

However, the committee would like you to comment on the below concern before data collection begins.

> *Do you definitely intend to carry out the initial interview during the participant's working hours and in their places of work? If so, do you foresee that there may be any reluctance by participants to disclose sensitive information about their employers and that these circumstances may impact on the validity and reliability of any data you collect.*

Approval is for the duration of the project. However, please resubmit your application to the committee if the information provided in the form alters or is likely to alter significantly.

The FREIC members wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely
(Sent as email attachment)

Mr Derek Shepherd
Chair
Faculty Research Ethics & Integrity Committee
Faculty of Business

Appendix I – Participant Reference information

Participant reference	Employer industry	Number of employees (approx.)	Managerial responsibilities
1	Hospitality	18	Yes
2	Construction	16	No
3	Education	2900	Yes
4	Education	5,000	No
5	Food manufacturing	181	No
6	Construction	16	No
7	Construction	16	No
8	Construction	16	No
9	Healthcare	5408	No
10	Education	2900	No
11	Technology	70093	No
12	Education	2900	No
13	Aerospace / Defence	35,000	No
14	Education	2900	No
15	Legal Services	200	No
16	Legal Services	200	Yes
17	Legal Services	200	No
18	Legal Services	200	No
19	Entertainment	120	No
20	Entertainment	120	No
21	Entertainment	120	No
22	Entertainment	120	No
23	Education	1,000	No
24	Healthcare	600	No
25	Retail	20,000	No
26	Legal Services	600	No
27	Retail	20,000	Yes
28	Government services	160	No
29	Healthcare	80000	No
30	Construction	7,900	No

Appendix J – Participant Demographic

EMPLOYER SECTOR

- Charitable 13%
- Public 30%
- Private 57%

LENGTH OF SERVICE

- <1 years 10%
- 1 - 5 years 43%
- 6 - 10 years 27%
- 11 - 15 years 13%
- years 7%

GENDER

- Male 37%
- Female 63%

MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Yes
13%

No
87%

AGE

not provided
3%

60 - 69
7%

50 - 59
3%

40 - 49
10%

20 - 29
34%

30 - 39
43%

275
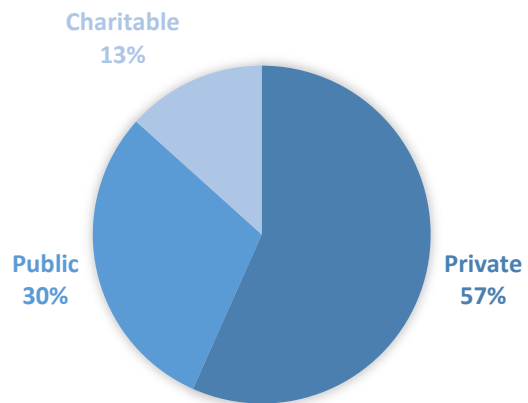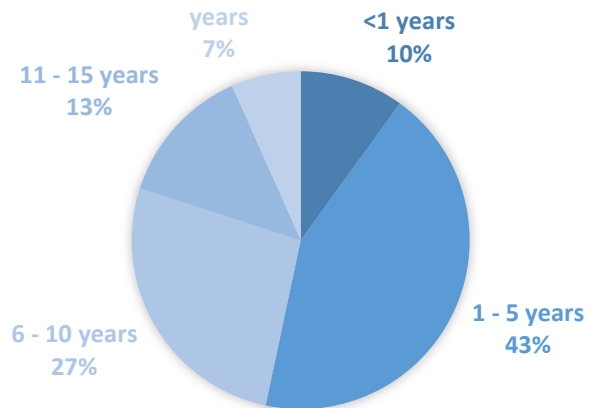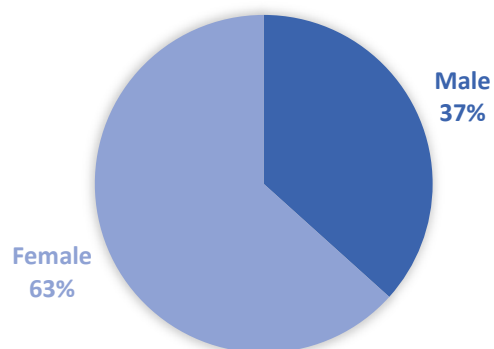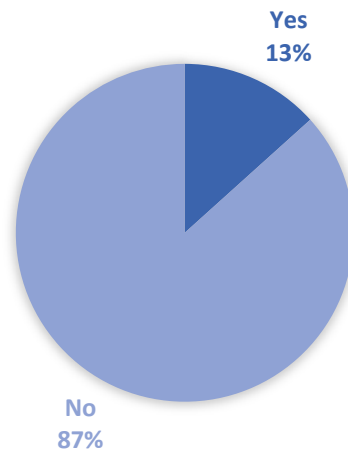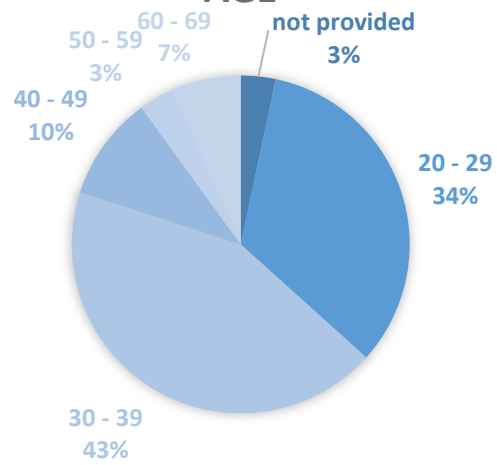
Appendix K – Example Interview Transcript

RESEARCHER: Okay. So, a really easy question, please could you tell me what your current role?

PARTICIPANT: I'm (*profession*) assistant at (*organisation)* which basically means I work in the (*industry*) department, there's only two of us...

RESEARCHER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT:...but we're part of the wider (*department)* team but just (*industry*) is just two of us...

RESEARCHER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT: and my...I basically oversee the (*industry*) activity for the organisation and for all the (*service*) that we do, so anything from arranging interviews…and just kind of liaising with journalists and reviewers and trying to find ways of spreading the word about our (*service)*, and I also do all of our social media.

RESEARCHER: Social media as well. Okay.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And how long have you been in this role for?

PARTICIPANT: A year, almost exactly a year.

RESEARCHER: Yeah. And how are you feeling about your role currently?

PARTICIPANT: Good, I think I...my aim was...because I graduated from school last year, and my aim was to have a job in a (*industry*) for the next year, and that...I've achieved that so that feels good, I really do enjoy it, I'm kind of on the verge of a promotion which is really nice ..

RESEARCHER: Oh wow!

PARTICIPANT:...because I do a lot that's out of my job description and so I've been pushing for that...and yeah, I do I do enjoy it, I think...I don't think a lot of people can

say that, you know, every day is different in their job, but I think if you work here you can say that and that's really nice, and that's quite a luxury that I don't think a lot of people have, so that's good.

RESEARCHER: Good, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: And over the last year have you seen that kind of improve? Have you increasingly felt better about your role? or has that kind of stayed the same?

PARTICIPANT: It fluctuates so much it here, it's really...it's really mad because you'll have a really awful week where everything goes wrong, and then the next Monday (*describes a positive experience unique to industry*) you're like, "oh this is why I do it". Yeah, it's kind of...and I...it feels quite extreme to go because I feel like I go through like quite extreme highs and lows, and it's been like that since I started...

RESEARCHER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT:...and I don't know if it's a good or a bad thing, but that's kind how I would explain it, I think every week I feel differently about it. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: Yeah. So I've mentioned the term employee engagement and with that caveat I said at the beginning there's no right or wrong answers, I'd like to know what's your understanding of the term employee engagement?

PARTICIPANT: I would say it's probably what the organisation is doing for the employees, and without a motive of, you know, better output necessarily, but just employee happiness...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...and wanting to stay engaged in the organisation and also understanding how the organisation works in departments that might not relate to you...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...but yeah, I would just...I kind of equate it with happiness and wanting a high retention rate in your organisation and stuff.

RESEARCHER: And how would you recognise an engaged employee? So, what they look like? What would they say? How would you know that someone is engaged rather than not engaged?

PARTICIPANT: That's a good question. I think people who speak positively about the place where they work and people who...someone who, you know, wakes up in the morning doesn't think "oh my God, I can't believe I have to do this again" but who's like actively excited to go to work and who maybe doesn't see work just as a chore, but also has like they feel like they're like actively contributing to something and that they get recognised for that, and yeah, and maybe also experiences perks of the job and that there's a sort of exchange happening between the employer and employee.

RESEARCHER: Yeah, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: That's how I would...that's what that person would look like or be like.

RESEARCHER: Fantastic, thank you. So for you, your understanding of engagement, employee engagement is what the organisation does for the employee, so in order to enable them to have a happy kind of existence whilst they're at work...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...so there's some element there about retention, retaining key staff as well, and someone who is engaged at work would be kind of quite excited and speak positively about their work, they'd contribute their work, perhaps maybe go above and beyond what's just in their job description, and there'd be like an exchange between the employee and what they put in and the recognition and the rewards that they get back from the organisation. Yeah?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: Good. OK. So, I will provide you with a kind of generic description, but employee engagement isn't just one thing, as you can hear there from what I've described to you, there's lots of different aspects of employee engagement, and it can

be a really wide-ranging term that could be interpreted in lots of different ways. So, I will provide a definition just so we've got kind of a mutual understanding of what we mean, but it's not the only one at all. So (*gives definition handout*) there's...written there if you want to read that but I will read it as well, so; *Employee Engagement is a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organisation, to give their best each day, be committed to the organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success with an enhanced sense of their own well-being*. So what are your thoughts on that? Any comments? Is that what you thought? Anything surprise you?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I think I would say for me well-being is probably the word that I...that describes it best for me...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...because that's like everyone's well-being, the organisations well-being, the employees well-being and just things working in harmony and everyone feeling, I don't know, pleased about what they're doing, and yeah.

RESEARCHER: Yeah. I'm quite interested to hear you say that it's not only the...an individual's well-being, the well-being of the organisational functionality as well, that's all that is, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Exactly because the happier people are at work, you know, the more productive the place is going to be, so yeah.

RESEARCHER: Okay. So (*participant*) you're an employee, you're employed within the organisation, I wonder what employee engagement means to you individually? You on a personal level as an employee of the organisation, what does that mean for you?

PARTICIPANT: It's quite funny because I have spoken to a lot of people about this, because I always compare what I'm doing now with a job I had previously...

RESEARCHER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT:...which was a start-up, and I feel like start-ups are very big on their - like it's all about equal work and play, yeah, work and play, and so I think I felt it a lot there, but it wasn't, you know, your traditional place of work, it was a very...it was a start-up and they didn't know what they were doing and they were still figuring it out but they knew that workplace well-being was a really important thing to them, and they worked as part of an incubator, where that was part of the ethos for all the companies that were part of this incubator so I felt it a lot better and so it's almost hard for me to be here now because I've had this drastic thing I can compare it to, but...that was kind of...that was mainly...I felt you know engagement or well-being because of the perks of the job...

RESEARCHER: Okay,

PARTICIPANT:...but I wasn't necessarily like happy in my job there, so that was like a good example of one strand of employee well-being or something I think, because you know on like on Fridays we would end the day early and go out for a team lunch and the...our CEO would pay for it and we go for like a karaoke night and we had a massive Christmas party and those sort of things where...it really boosts morale, and you have things to look forward to, and people's birthdays were a really big deal, and there were only 12 of us on the team, so it's like a really, really, small organisation, and it...a really cool place to work as well, it was like a co-working space, so those are the sort of things where I felt like, oh this is...it just felt cool, it was just like a cool place to work, but I don't...but long-term, I mean the company doesn't exist anymore, it went bust so, thing is long-term you can't actually chuck all of your money at the employees because you won't make it, but I think for me it's about knowing that you're heard in the place where you work and that even if you work at a lower level like me, if you're an assistant, that you know, your opinion still matters and also a sense of them like really valuing you and wanting to keep you around and to be able to negotiate with you to find ways of making, you know, your own experience better, but it can be anything from like, I mean it could be anything really it's so wide-ranging, I think I would want my place of work to be somewhere where, you know, I can...there's like good facilities around, and there's a lot of yeah, I would say a lot of dialogue and a lot of exchange about your actual well-being rather than just about your work or just about your place in the organisation. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: So even just having the conversations...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...is of importance...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...as well as what's provided to be able...

PARTICIPANT: Exactly, exactly.

RESEARCHER: So we've kind of spoken about the term employee engagement and you've shared there kind of what that means to you personally in terms of your work and your role, I'm going to introduce what might be a new term to you, or you might have heard of it before, which is personal engagement as opposed to employee engagement. What do you think might be meant by personal engagement? What would you understand why that term?

PARTICIPANT: I don't know would it be...I don't know like my own, you know, someone's individual feelings about their organisation and the place they work maybe?

RESEARCHER: Yeah, so, employee engagement is more kind of an organisation focus like a workplace approach...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...whereas personal engagement exactly is about us as individual, our ability to identify and understand, to be aware of our engagement or whether we're not engaged at work, and the recognition that we have a choice, although the organisation needs to do things, also that we can engage ourselves and find things that make us happy or, you know, don't, so...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...absolutely. So it's a fairly unknown term, and again, not really one-and-only definition, but (*provides definition handout*); *Personal engagement is the*

employment and expression of a person's preferred self in their task behaviours, that promote connection to work and to others, the personal presence, so there's a physical, cognitive and emotional element, with active full role performances, so it's understood that people can use varying degrees of themselves, physically, cognitively and emotionally, in the roles that they perform, even as they maintain the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles that they occupy. Take a couple of minutes because I've just given you those definitions and that term, any comments? Anything you find surprising or confusing? Anything that you agree or disagree with?

PARTICIPANT: I mean, I feel like I understand it, yeah I think everyone's different, there's a lot of people who want to be really engaged at work and a lot of people who literally just come in to get the job done and go home...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...and yeah you can see how from like an employer's perspective that can be tricky because everyone does have their own preferred style of being engaged and you can't please everyone all the time.

RESEARCHER: Yeah. So, would you describe yourself as personally engaged?

PARTICIPANT: At work currently? Yes, and no.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT: I feel like yes because I work in a field that I really enjoy.

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: And so it feels really good to be a part of something that I've grown up wanting to do, and I've now achieved that, and so I do wake up every morning and I'm like, oh like I'm really glad that you know, and so to an extent, you know, you feel engaged because you're engaged with the themes and the field in general, I think this place is a bit tricky, and I think...it's...you...I feel like I think a lot of people, here...actually for myself, I feel...I feel very like proud to be working here and it's a really...it's a big name to be behind and it's the sort of thing where you talk to, you know...my boyfriend's an accountant or like talk to like engineers, and you talk about

your job and it's so different from traditional jobs, and so that is really nice feeling, but...and I do think this place does a very good job at emphasising like the pride of being here and the like we're, you know, we're very lucky to be here, but I don't think that there's a lot of emphasis put on, I feel like every...we all work every day for the output but there's not a lot of input and there's...it's very outward looking it's not really inward looking, and you can tell by, you know, our staff retention and people come and go like nothing and that contributes to that as well because you're like well if they've got out maybe I should get out and so I think morale is low in general and part of that comes from working in (*industry)* and people not getting paid enough...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...and I think that's a huge part of it because that's how I feel like, I work full-time, you know, I was here till 11:00 last night because (*industry)* and you work quite late sometimes, and it's like I get paid literally the lowest salary and so it's kind of like, what...well why...what are you doing it for? Because you're not doing it for the money, and they know that and that's the issue as well because they know that there's 10 other people out there who would do it, because it's such a cool place to work, and so having that at the back of your mind is really...yeah, because I'm like trying to move into a new place now and it's like well I want to upgrade because every time you move you want to have a bit of an upgrade and I can't upgrade because like I just I can't afford it.

RESEARCHER: There's no physical way you can...yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, so it feels a bit, I don't know, I'm probably not very engaged at the moment, you've caught me at a time where it's a bit like frustrating, that's how I would describe it - frustrating.

RESEARCHER: Yeah, but the nature of it is that you'll be more engaged at different times, like different times in the day...

PARTICIPANT: Exactly.

RESEARCHER:...different times in the week and throughout your year according to what's going on in your personal life, exactly, you'll be more or less engaged.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

RESEARCHER:...but currently you would say you're frustrated?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, that's how I feel about it.

RESEARCHER: Okay, thank you. You actually covered a lot of this, but I'll ask you the question; Do you think anything influences your engagement? So, is there anything that encourages and supports and enables and helps your engagement? And is there anything that prevents it or puts a barrier up to being engaged?

PARTICIPANT: Like on a positive note, we had something recently where our manager, instead of having a meeting here, she actually hosted us all at her house and cooked us a meal and it was just our team, it was like a planning day, and that was like, for like two weeks after that, it felt really, really positive because we first of all we were removed from the place where we are every single day and it was like someone was like doing something very nice for us and cooking for us, and hosting this in her home, that was one thing that felt really positive, I think the fact that, you know, you can walk into the (*industry*) every day and you know, we're actively encouraged here to (*use service)* for free, that's a huge privilege as well…this is why I do it, that is why we all do it because we all love (*industry)*. I can't think of anything else. I think the things that don't make me feel engaged are, you know, I'm promised a lot of one-to-ones that don't happen, just because there's so much to do and if that's not a priority, and I feel like it should be a priority, but it's just not, because again, there's a lot of like other things that need to be done, and so it can always be pushed away because we're always in the organisation, but I feel like it is actually quite important to have that, because I'm meant to have a weekly one and I think in a year I've had about five, so that's quite annoying because then you also start feeling like you're bottling stuff up because you're saving something for your one-to-one and then that never happens and then another week goes by and it's like, oh there was that thing I was going to talk about three weeks ago...

RESEARCHER: But I haven't bought up because...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, and then when you do bring it up that much later, it feels like a much bigger deal ..

RESEARCHER: Yeah, exactly.

PARTICIPANT:...but it really wasn't a big deal that week when you wanted to talk about it ..

RESEARCHER: Yeah. If you'd dealt with that at the time.

PARTICIPANT:...so that's frustrating, stuff like, I don't know why I keep coming back to Christmas party, but...our Christmas party was on the 27th of January on a Sunday in our own bar, and we had to buy our own drinks...so that was like...I didn't even go and I love a Christmas party, but just that...that's just such a perfect example of this place because it's kind of put such an afterthought, and it's such...and it was like a board game theme night or something and it's like "come on"...

RESEARCHER: We deserve a bit more, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: We deserve so much more and we had obviously our huge reopening which was a really big deal last year, and...there was never really like a staff celebration of that, there was like the board organised something like last month, and everyone got a t-shirt as a thank you and it was like people worked the craziest as hours I've ever seen to reopen this building after two years of renovation and then everyone got a t-shirt that's like peeling off, it was awful, and it's just so obvious, it's funny...

RESEARCHER: Yeah. It sounds really ridiculous.

PARTICIPANT: It's funny to talk about it, but it's like this is a reality and this is where you work, and senior managers are never around and our Chief Executive is never around because we all now share an open plan office it's really obvious as well. Yeah, so it feels weird when desks are empty...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...and you want to have a chat with someone but you didn't know that they were going to be out the building. It's just a lot of...it's very like...I feel like it's very...everyone's very insular and everyone's just getting their own stuff done, but there's no communication between anyone, so no one really knows what's going on at any point.

RESEARCHER: So it's all like working really hard and pedalling really hard in your own style I suppose but there's not really much connectiveness across the different areas.

PARTICIPANT: Which doesn't feel great.

RESEARCHER: Yeah, of course.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I feel like I'm trash talking but...

RESEARCHER: No, absolutely not, it's important stuff isn't it, it's your job, and it's where you go every day.

PARTICIPANT: Exactly, it's like 80% of your entire life.

HM: So the final part of the interview, I'm interested in, and you've done this already, but I'll ask you again if you're able to do it again, that would be fantastic, to provide me with specific examples, so specific events or instances of engagement or, you know having a barrier to or a blocked engagement. So, the first question I'll ask, if you can be as specific as possible that's great; I'd like to know of a time where you've experienced personal engagement in any role or any organisation, so what happened? When was it? Where were you? Who was involved?

PARTICIPANT: It...does it have to be here?

RESEARCHER: No, any role or organisation.

PARTICIPANT: This wasn't a planned event, but I felt really like valued and heard as a team member so this is my...the start-up I worked for in 2016, and it was a very small team, there were only 12 of us and it was a Friday afternoon and it had been a really successful week and I think we'd signed with a bunch of new clients and it was a really

286

kind of exciting thing because we were brand new company and it's a Friday afternoon and it was around lunchtime and some people were saying, "ughh, I didn't bring lunch in today, where you going to go for lunch, where you going to go for lunch" and then our CEO who's sat in the office with us, he just said; well, why don't we go out for a team lunch? and so we went to like a gastropub and we each got to have a three-course meal and a bottle of wine each, and it was like...like it feels like quite a material thing to talk about but it was just so um, no one happened to be there and so we actually took ownership of like the stereo and we got to play our own music and it was a really, really, nice thing to do as a team, and then like the hours and hours went by and it was basically the end of the working day and instead of saying all this is go back to the office to finish off everything, one of the other managers said I've just booked us a karaoke booth, so let's just go to karaoke and I pre-ordered three bottles of prosecco for us to have, and we were like well we're having such a good time let's keep the party going, and it was just...it was such a...it was such a lovely thing to do, and we also, I don't know if I can give another example, but one thing I've just remembered that we did, was every month a different member of staff was in charge of organising a team day...

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT:...and every month is a lot really, but it was so great and every month people really came up with different things, so we went go-karting one afternoon, we had a...like a themed murder mystery party one afternoon, we did Breaking Bad cocktail making class ..

RESEARCHER: Oh cool!

PARTICIPANT:...and even we got a specific budget from the organisation to do this, and it was just like a monthly thing that you can look forward to and it was really fun because everyone had such different ideas, and it was just great and I really...that was a really, really, nice thing to do. So, yeah. Those are my positive examples. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: Good, thank you. And now, kind of flip that on its head, can you tell me about anything that's prevented you from being engaged? So any barriers, anything that's prevented you, what happened? Where were you? Who was involved?

PARTICIPANT: This isn't specific but it's specific to me because I...since the day that I started, I started taking on stuff that wasn't in my job description because there was a need for it and because I could do it and because, to be honest, I was getting through my actual stuff so quickly that I was like well might as well keep doing this, but then months and months went by and I still kept doing it and I wasn't being recognised for that, people just said "Ah, she's really great, she just gets it done" and it's kind of like well, yeah, I am happy to do it but, and I was happy to do it, you know, for no extra reward for a couple months because I was initiating myself in the company and I'm wanting to prove myself as being, you know, a valid employee, but then it started getting to a point where it really was almost like management level type of things because there's only two of us and because...so my manager she's got two young kids and so she leaves at 3:00 every day, and so I'm basically two and a half hours every day in charge of the department because she's not around, and so, which is great and I really enjoy that because it's you know, I like having responsibility and taking that on, but to then still have to sign off every email with 'Assistant' is like, I'm really not, I'm not assisting you, I am doing it, and so, I've had...I've tried to organise meetings to talk about it and I have had meetings talk about it, and every time I do bring it up, I'm told "Oh my god, of course, of course, it's going to change for you, of course you're not an assistant, of course you'll be promoted to officer" and then I'm like, oh great, well that's really encouraging, and then more months and months go by and then the next time bring it up is like "It's literally, we're literally signing the contract now, this is literally happening" and it's like, okay, so the last time that happened was so I've now been told that by the end of the month I'll be promoted before my next pay check, and it's the 17th or whatever today and it's like, it's kind of creeping up to our next pay check, and it's like where do you draw that line? When do you decide actually I'm being dicked around and I'm going to go. So yeah, that would be...I don't know if that's like a specific example. It's like false promises.

RESEARCHER: Yeah, no, that's a series of broken promises.

PARTICIPANT: Exactly.

RESEARCHER: Almost degrading to your pride because you continue to give them chances to do that...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah and you just feel like you're being lied to.

RESEARCHER:...and you just feel like you're being taken advantage of.

PARTICIPANT: Exactly, exactly because...but then it's like...because I did feel bad up to a certain point because I know that we basically...we've lost so much funding and there isn't a lot of money in *(industry),* but then we have our team quickies every Thursday, where we have a big team meeting and then we're told this is the most money we've made in a year, and it's like, where is it? Why is it not...Why aren't you putting that into your staff? Like all they do with it is they buy a bigger set to put on stage and it's like well, you should be putting in into your team. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: Yeah, thank you for sharing those, it's kind of really, quite clear examples of engagement and disengagement. So, we spoke about employee engagement, personal engagement, we kind of had a couple of examples from you and we've discussed you as an individual and kind of where your engagement is at the moment, I just wondered if you have any additional thoughts, any new thoughts now on anything we've discussed anything with regarding engagement?

PARTICIPANT: Gosh, I think people would feel more engaged in their place of work if there was...if everything didn't happen behind closed doors and if there was like transparency, and...I almost feel like places that really work are places that don't have tier systems, where it's like, you've got a top person and then a senior manager and a manager and an officer an assistant, it's like, because when you're at the bottom you have no idea what's going up on there because at some point that message just never gets passed down, and so...but I also don't think that...what are they called? When like ..

RESEARCHER: Like a hierarchal or hierarchy line?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah when there's like, but there's like organisations who would just don't do that, there's like a word for it, I forgot what it was, where everyone's like on the same level basically, I don't think that works either because I do think people need to be held responsible to things to get stuff done, but I just think if there was like honesty and transparency, I personally would feel a lot more engaged because I would

understand why certain decisions are being made and I would understand why this can and can't happen. Yeah, that's what I would add.

RESEARCHER: Thank you so much, it's has been really, really, interesting talking to you. That's the end of my interview. Do you have any questions for me?

PARTICIPANT: No, I don't think so.

[End of interview transcript.]

Appendix L – Summary of key features of engagement definitions considered in this study's literature review

Personal engagement	Expression and performance	'the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.700) 'the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance (Kahn, 1990, p694) - represents the behavioural display of a cognitive and emotional interpretation of work-related environmental inputs and outcome (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011)
	Individual differences, decision, awareness and choice	- three psychological conditions which influence engagement and how people inhabit their roles - meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990) - individual's perceptions of 'the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations' and 'the resources they perceive themselves to have—their availability' (Kahn, 1990, p.703) 'to express preferred dimensions is to display real identity, thoughts, and feelings' (Kahn, 1990, p.700) 'individual differences shape people's dispositions toward personally engaging or disengaging in all or some types of role performances…given their experiences of psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability in specific situations.' (Kahn, 1990, p.718) - it is 'at the swirling intersection of those influences that individuals make choices, at different levels of awareness, to employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performances' (Kahn, 1990, p.718 - 719) - the simultaneous investment of cognitive, affective, and physical energies into role performance, identifying three antecedents of engagement: 'value congruence, perceived organizational support, and core self-evaluations' (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010, p.617) 'a holistic experience perceived and then interpreted through the lens of each individual based on their own experience, rationales and views of their context' (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011, p.316)

	Dynamic	• '…the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.' (1990, p694) • 'the momentary rather than static circumstances of people's experiences that shape behaviours' (1990, p.703). • 'calibrations of self-in-role' (Kahn, 1990, p694); organization members calibrate how fully present they are in response to internal and external factors' (Kahn, 1992, p.12)
	Experience	• 'deeply probing people's experiences and situations during the discrete moments that make up their work lives' (Kahn, 1990, p.693) • three psychological conditions (meaningfulness, safety, and availability) as indicators of 'people's experiences of the rational and unconscious elements of their work contexts' (Kahn, 1992, p.12) • grounded in an employee's unique experience of work (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011) • meaningful work, supportive relationships with colleagues and managers, opportunities for learning, and a positive workplace culture are important in an engaged employee's interpretation of their work (Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011)
	Influenced by the organisation	• 'individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational factors simultaneously influence these experiences' (Kahn, 1990, p.695) • People 'perform roles as external scripts indicate they should rather than internally interpret those roles; they act as custodians rather than innovators' (1990, p.702). People employ role performances within the boundaries of organisational norms, which are shared expectations about the general behaviours of system members (Kahn, 1990). • 'how psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances' (Kahn,1990, p.694).
Work engagement	Burnout-antithesis characterised by	• 'positive antithesis' of burnout 'characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy' (Maslach et al., 2001, p.416). • engagement is 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). • 'work engagement captures how workers experience their work: as stimulating and energetic and something to which they really want to devote time and effort (the vigour component); as a

	vigour, dedication, and absorption	significant and meaningful pursuit (dedication); and as engrossing and something on which they are fully concentrated (absorption) (Bakker et al., 2011, p.5).
	Job demands/resources focused on antecedents and consequences of work engagement	- a 'JD-R model of work engagement' which focused on the antecedents and consequences of work engagement, such as the impact of job and personal resources on predicting work engagement and thereby job performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; 2008) - Engaged employees have 'high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work' and 'are often fully immersed in their work so that time flies' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, p. 211) - the model perceives engagement as a function of job demands and the resources provided by the organisation (Schaufeli, 2014)
Multidimensional engagement	Cognitive, emotional, and behavioural	- engagement as 'a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance' (Saks, 2006, p. 602) 'trait' engagement as 'an inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point' (2008, p5), which 'comprises a number of interrelated personality attributes…(*which*) all suggest the inclination to experience work in positive, active, and energic ways and to behave adaptively in displaying effort at going beyond what is necessary and initiating change to facilitate organizationally relevant outcomes' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.24). - four components to feeling engaged as feelings of 'urgency, being focused, intensity and enthusiasm' (Macey & Schneider, 2009, p.23) - four key facets of engagement behaviour as 'performance that is persistent, adaptable, self-initiated and/or involves taking on new responsibilities' (Macey & Schneider, 2009, p.35). - touches on the multifaceted experience of being human: our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Shuck, 2011, p. 319).

	States of engagement; job engagement and organisational engagement	- separate states of engagement: job engagement and organisational engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2011) - performing the work role (job engagement) and performing the role as a member of an organisation (organisational engagement) approach (Schaufeli, 2014) - a number of factors predict job and organisation engagement, such as resources employees receive from the organisation (Saks, 2006)
Engagement as management practice	EE as a workforce management strategy/approach	- the importance of the manager and their influence over engagement and driving business outcomes, and emphasis on 'actionable' facets that drive business outcomes (Harter et al., 2002) - exploration of a satisfaction-engagement approach based on positive psychology frameworks (Shuck et al., 2011) - EE as 'a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being' (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009, p.9) - six key drivers of engagement: meaningfulness of work, voice, senior management communication and vision, supporting work environment, person-job fit, line management style; 'these factors create a virtuous cycle of engagement processes that employers can reinterpret in ways that fit with their own organisational context and circumstances' (Alfes *et al.*, 2010, p.55) 'use of EE as an umbrella term, collating different attributes into a holistic area of people strategy' (Gifford & Young, 2021, p.9) - Focus on ways in which organisations can drive engagement and build an engaged workforce (Rees *et al.*, 2013) - three dimensions of engagement; emotional engagement as being very emotionally engaged with one's work, cognitive engagement as focusing very hard while at work, and physical engagement as being willing to go 'the extra mile' (Taylor and Woodhams, 2012).

		• engagement tools and strategies to produce opportunities and conditions deemed essential to enable engagement which will in turn produce organisational gain through improved 'performance, productivity…and profitability' (Rayton *et al.*, 2012).
	'Win-win' for employees and employers	• Engagement can be a 'win-win' scenario for both employees and employers (Truss et al., 2013), positive outcomes for both employer (Christian *et al.*, 2011; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Byrne, 2015; Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017) and employee (Alfes *et al.*, 2010; Macey *et al.*, 2009)
	HR engagement initiatives	• an 'engagement and performance initiative' as for HR these are inextricably linked (Arrowsmith and Parker, 2013, p.2707) • management practices operate as a continuum from softer to harder approaches to EE (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013) • HRM studies that focus attention on 'being engaged' and 'doing engagement' and engagement as 'part of the managerialist project' (Truss et al., 2013, p.2664)

Appendix M - Employee understandings of employee engagement – Thematic analysis

Table 1: Data evidencing employee's uncertainty in describing their understanding of EE.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Reassurance seeking	P13: *"those are the people who are up on the top and it's just a real want to push them through the business - gotta realise as well that some people don't want that. You know what I mean? It's like what drives people. You have to be mindful with employee engagement, I think."* P17: *"Is how it works here rather than assuming that they'll be happy with you? Do you know what I mean?"* P27: *"Do you know what I mean?"*
Using questions	P4: *"Does it mean that, when you…especially when it comes to interviews, an interview panel and the process of that? Is that part of the employability – well the kind of, the communication between the two? Is that right or is that wrong I don't know?"* P13:*"…are you bought into that vision and have you been bought into that end goal?... I think at the sort of like day-to-day the realistic sort of level the idea of employee engagement is what do they see - what the people in the business actually seeing in it for them? And how – and what engages somebody as well?"*
Guessing	P1: *"Employee engagement to me is basically… I guess the higher authorities"* P3: *"Yeah, so I guess to me it's how…I don't know if that's sort of the line that you're working towards or?"*

P8: *"Um (laughs) quite a difficult question there. So I suppose it's…I suppose productive. I suppose…"*

P10: *"So maybe… um…a kind of…maybe…Yeah, I guess to be engaged for me is to kind of feel like I'm sort of part of something, that I'm learning, that I'm sort of um..."*

P14: *"I think now I guess it could be lots of things...and also I guess…maybe…but I mean that's what I would just take it to mean like…"*

P15: *"To be honest I'm not sure but I think it will be sort of how they make us feel and how that sort of reflects back on them as to how we feel about who we work for and our responsibility to them and our loyalty to them…"*

P17: *"Urrr (laughs), I guess just how - so, like our partners are kind of in charge of us. So, how they engage us within the firm? Um to be honest, I think they're really good at it actually, which I was shocked about…."*

P18: *"Communication? I think…that's as far as I can go!"*

P19: *"I guess I would understand it as…so kind of …That's how I would see it….I guess like not complaining..."* (chuckles)

P20: *"I suppose…I suppose…I suppose…So like, you know…basically."*

P21: *"I sort of…I sort of, it feels to me like…so I suppose…"*

	P22: *"I would say it's probably…"*
	P24: *"Um so my…I guess…you are getting what you want out of it as well?"*

Table 2: Data evidencing employees understand EE as an organisational initiative.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Organisational or managerial influence and permission	P10: *"…it's kind of um feeling part of something sort of how invested you are in your role, sort of how you're made to feel about the job that you do and the people that are around you…So maybe systems that are in place or in the environment that's in place to kind of um…as to whether you've got a kind of a positive outlook going into work, whether you're sort of feeling part of a bigger picture, maybe whether you are given opportunities to learn or to grow or um…"*
	P15: *"…I think it will be sort of how they (management) make us feel and how that sort of reflects back on them as to how we feel about who we work for and our responsibility to them and our loyalty to them, so mutual respect…"*
	P17: *"…so, how they (management) engage us within the firm here… and obviously engaging with your staff is what - is how it works here rather than assuming that they'll be happy with you"*
	P1: *"…being able to develop a relationship between those kind of in the more I guess the higher authorities, being able to develop a relationship where their staff feel you know engaged in their work looked after and just generally are happy in their job roles."*
	P6: *"…a company that is switched on to people's – what they're going through perhaps um…People are people they have things go wrong in life and I think it's important to recognize that. We're not robots…"*

	P20: *"I suppose that depends on who is engaging the employee, whether it's the organisation as a whole, management, the employee's engagement with their work, although that is engaging I suppose."*
	P21: *"…it feels to me like the way that the company actually interacts with it's employees and…how they're able to define their own roles…making sure that the people that work in the company actually feel like they have a presence there, so that what we do does make a difference and that we're aware of that as well."*
	P22: *"probably what the organisation is doing for the employees, and without a motive of, you know, better output necessarily, but just employee happiness...and wanting to stay engaged in the organisation and also understanding how the organisation works in departments that might not relate to you...I kind of equate it with happiness and wanting a high retention rate in your organisation and stuff."*
	P25: *"…a manager maybe take an interest in everyone and what they want to develop and finding out what they need to get the best out of them."*
A HR function	P12: *"I suppose through the role that I've been given the job description that I've been given, the contract that I've been given and how I enact it within my team and the wider periphery… I think employer engagement was one of the HR names wasn't it a few years ago? ... and they were able to, obviously they manage all of our PDR (personal development reviews) and all of our personnel records and things like that and jobs and adverts and stuff like that…So I presume from that perspective...a HR function.*
	P4: *"Does it mean that, when you…especially when it comes to interviews, an interview panel and the process of that? Is that part of the employability – well the kind of, the communication between the two?"*
	P30: *"…our staff satisfaction survey actually every year, and that's just a waste of time, they spin – they spin the stats to make our office look great and everyone is really happy, but everyone you speak to, you know, didn't put what they kind of put as the headlines. So um it is just lip service all this stuff I think… It just becomes a waste of time, a bit of a joke – no one takes it seriously in the end, it's just something you have to do once a year…they probably get some really good feedback on how the firm can be run better but they're just not willing to – they get quite defensive. They see like this constructive feedback as an attack on their*

	professionalism or their competence…they seem to get very defensive over it all and they just wanna… (gestures with hand hitting away) …everything gets downplayed. Like there's always a motive around someone saying something.”
Communication	P6: *“I would say it's just good communication between the employee and employer…I think the ability to speak freely if there are any issues, yeah – both ways actually, not just from us from the employer's side as well.”* P8: *“…I suppose the communication between the employer and employee and how they achieve that… so they would actively communicate and talk through their job, maybe or...Maybe share their – share their knowledge or ask for help if they need it.”* P18: *“Communication?...Communication both ways.”* P14: *“...engagement with the people you work with and…other teams that you could maybe overlap with…how do you like, engage all like, in your communication with other people.”* P4: *“…well the kind of, the communication between the two?... it feels like everyone's on their tower and there's a lack of communication and engagement between each faculty and department.”* P28: *“…I'd guess it's to do with how well your managers and everyone interacts with each other and how well they get a team to work together, how well you can communicate with them, etc., etc. Things like that, those kind of lines that's what I would take it as…the organisational goals filtering down into other members of the team.”* P30: *“…so we've just had a round of it actually for um, our response to uh the coronavirus pandemic. (Sighs). It's obviously about bringing everyone along isn't it, um, kind of making employees feel like they've got a say in the direction of the company and how they're going to be treated I guess, making people feel valued…Whether it's just a cynical exercise to tick a box is another question, I suppose.”*

	P13: *"So, what I'd probably say around engagement in corporate sort of speak which is what I'm used to is how well the employees of the business are engaged with the corporate objectives of that business"*

Table 3: Data evidencing employees understand EE as two-way.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Two interests	P2: *"…it's a way by which the company get the best out their employees. And by which the employee can get the best of the company."*
	P25: *"…would be two different ways – the employee engagement of how you like the job and how you relate to it – if you want to do that job? And then there's the other where if it's like the management's engagement in you and interest in you to develop and stuff. So, I think there's two different ways of employee engagement from the employer and the employee's perspective."*
A transactional exchange	P13: *"…how well the employees of the business are engaged with the corporate objectives of that business…are you bought into that vision and have you been bought into that end goal?... you need to actually see some sort of vision and that which you can get behind and you can become involved with and then you need people within the business in order to be able to create that culture and see the carry-through."*
	P18: *"…working a way that makes your employees wanting to work for you, wanting to come to work in the morning, wanting to do the tasks, not being – well that's the thing, disengaged…So, management and the higher level have to be able to make you comfortable, happy, know what you're doing. But also happy with what you're doing and to make you want to work for the firm. It's like a two-way street."*
	P22: *"…there's a sort of exchange happening between the employer and employee."*
	P24: *"…how much a person is, I guess, willing to give – go above and beyond for*

	their organisation so that their organisation is gaining, but you are getting what you want out of it as well?"
	P26: *"I think for me…it's a two-way road…because I manage my own time um and I like a challenge sometimes I take on too much so I need to recognize that to maintain my interest, my engagements, but also its income upon the organization to create an environment where people can get engaged…it's a two-way street. And I think the more you give the more you get. You know, the more you get involved with stuff."*

Table 4: Data evidencing employees understand EE as relationships with others.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Relationships with others	P14: *"...engagement with the people you work with and also like slightly outside of that so like other teams…how do you like, engage all like, in your communication with other people."*
	P16: *"It's about relationships. We're all having a relationship with each other at the end of the day…employee engagement is actually about you know, understanding each other and - and actually looking after each other."*
	P16: *"…for me it's about engaging with people on a one-to-one basis…everyone is different and it's being able to sort of analyse almost someone's personality - their anxieties, if they have anxieties whether they don't care and, and being able to do that quite quickly."*
	P15: *"…so a good relationship with, you know, the top level of management, they know who you are, and it just feels nice, it feels good to be in that position really."*
	P3: *"…but I think to be wholly engaged you need to enjoy your role and perhaps get on with the people around you that kind of thing…"*

	P3: *"…it's the relationship between the organisation and the employee, which goes both way I think, how much they engage with each other. I think it can be sort of on a department level, on a team level or a general organisation level as well."*
	P19: *"…engagement with your particular role and then engagement with the company as a whole...all of the staff members that are within that organisation."*
	P21: *"…people that look like they're having a nice time and are interacting with their colleagues as well, but I think if you become somebody sort of...I don't want to say closed off, but if you become sort of isolated in the work that you're doing, it feels like you're not...well obviously not quite as engaged with it as you could be."*

Table 5: Data evidencing employees understand EE as an individual feeling.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Feeling – Ambition and drive	P2: *"My drive, my ambition within the company my – how I feel about my company."*
	P13: *"…it's like what drives people…if an employee is engaged they're doing the stuff and they're being pushed in the direction, which is where they want to go…"*
	P1: *"Enthusiasm, a desire to want to be better at their job, um an employee who basically just wants to do well and wants to make a business work and wants to progress and things like that."*
	P19: *"…not constantly thinking; oh, I could be somewhere else…you're engaged in your own sort of like – you're a bit more self-focused about your career…"*

	P23: *"…when a person is engaged with their work, but also with the organisation so they feel motivated to work but also have buy-in to the organisation and its culture and values and the willing to work as a team player."*
	P25: *"Someone who's passionate about their job and doing their job to the best as they can do."*
Feeling – Connection with organisation	P5: *"…a connection with the business…you've got to love what you're doing in terms of what you're doing every day, but I also think it's really important to love the business that you're working for and to be in line with their values, their beliefs, their direction the goals of the business and about understanding how you personally can contribute to that…"*
	P10: *"…to kind of feel like I'm sort of part of something, that I'm learning, that I'm sort of um... that there's value in the work that I'm doing."*
	P15: *"…you get out of it what you put in, a feeling that you're respected and that you're valued…"*
	P19: *"...quite confident about their role...which allows them to then be interested or sort of switched on and asking questions about other things within the company…like not complaining (chuckles)…the people around you explaining sort of, encouraging you to be motivated about what you're...what you're going to achieve…highlighting that you're part of how it all works, is quite important to make you engage because then if you feel like you have done your bit to make something happen or you...or if somebody higher up than you, or somebody in your team, recognises your part in it, then that also makes you feel more engaged because you've been recognised as doing your job."*
	P20: *"…an employee's engagement with the primary mission of the workplace potentially…how close does someone who work in a back office feel to the product basically."*
	P22: *"I think people who speak positively about the place where they work and people who...someone who, you know, wakes up in the morning doesn't think "oh my God, I can't believe I have to do this again" but who's like actively excited to go to work and who maybe doesn't see work just as a chore, but also has like*

	they feel like they're like actively contributing to something and that they get recognised for that, and yeah, and maybe also experiences perks of the job and that there's a sort of exchange happening between the employer and employee."
	P24: *"Um I do - I do feel quite strongly that you have to kind of have some kind of connection with your organisational values as well…I think you have to kind of have some kind of buy in so what it is your organisational does and have some kind of relationship with it."*
	P26: *"…what it is that engages employees at work…what is it – you know, what have you come to work for, what is it that brings you for work? why is it that you come to work? What is it that um…helps get out get out of bed come to work…It is about us having some purpose in the workplace…"*
Feeling – Happiness	P11: *"…it's about being happy at work…they'd be positive, definitely, in their day-to-day work, you know you get a hello and a smile in the morning."*
	P10: *"…would be quite enthusiastic about what they do…proactive to sort of get involved in maybe different aspects of not only their role but maybe supporting others. Yeah, I guess somebody who is really engaged I think would been quite a happy positive person in their job, maybe quite a team player."*
	P3: *"I think someone that is doing their best, someone that wants to work, wants to do their job, wants to be there. I think someone that's lost that engagement is maybe a little bit more reluctant to do everything they can their sort of doing the bare minimum to get by kind of thing. Just not happy in their role I guess…"*
	P5: *"Something you could visibly see is happiness…"*
	P8: *"…I suppose kind of enthusiastic about working um…enjoys their job probably."*
	P18: *"Happy, quite easy-going, quite happy to get on with work…happy to engage in the conversation and happy to just get on with their work as opposed to*

	someone that's not engaged. You generally would get the sullen faces a lot of talking behind the scenes that then feeds back and probably not as productive."
	P22: *"…probably what the organisation is doing for the employees, and without a motive of, you know, better output necessarily, but just employee happiness...and wanting to stay engaged in the organisation and also understanding how the organisation works in departments that might not relate to you...I kind of equate it with happiness and wanting a high retention rate in your organisation and stuff."*
	P23: *"They'd be um happy in their work."*
	P24: *"Um, so I think they would generally come off as a happy person um most of the time…they're more approachable, maybe a bit more friendly, they put themselves out there to be a person that would help other people, you know that wouldn't be their role."*

Table 6: Data evidencing employees understand EE as an individual behaviour and/or act.

Theme	Participant quote
Behaviour – Fulfilling the job requirements	P29: *"…it's about how one…engages I suppose at different levels with the actual job role…how they engage with their actual job title, um, rather than how they engage as a member of a team or they engage within the service…So I think (exasperated sigh) on the basics…I would probably say the standard things such as turning up on the right times. Knowing your job hours and knowing what your responsibilities are, doing them to the best of your ability. Um equally making sure that you – you've got CPD constantly going, those sorts of things. I think just trying to – to make sure you…I don't even know, it it's a really good question I suppose there's so many different things, but I wouldn't know for sure what employee engagement it just feels like how I would engage with – as a as a (job role) within the (organisation)."*

Behaviour – Above and beyond	P2: *"Well they're keen, they show up on – early they, they are enthused…if their enthusiastic and they're enjoying their work and their keen to do more and they ask lots of questions… Likewise you can tell if someone's not engaged from similar opposite reactions, you know, someone who turns up late or someone who's not bothered about that job can show it physically and by what they're saying, you know, you can read it in them pretty clearly."*
	P14: *"…rather than just coming in just doing the bare minimum and leaving, like seeing what you can do and how you can improve it..."*
	P9: *"…how happy are you to get involved with things that your employer has to offer?"*
	P15: *"A positive attitude, going above and beyond really if, you know, something is not necessarily your job, but you see something needs doing...you just do it because you're here and you'll do it because that's, you know, that's part of being a team isn't it?"*
	P16: *"…So people that are just set the desk doing their job have started to sort of come to me and say 'oh well, what about this digital project that you're doing?'…so, you don't shut the door on them…it's about how they engage with us as - how them coming to us."*
	P5: *"…that whole extra mile concept, if you can see that they're willing to stay back even 10 minutes after their shift is officially finished, that says a lot that they want to be there, they want to be doing more or they help out…"*
	P9: *"…someone who's happy to volunteer to do things, feels passionate about the things that doing you know, sometimes people do do things because they have to…there's some who are more enthusiastic than others…if you see someone really putting a lot of effort into things, coming up with really innovative ideas not just going through the processes…"*
	P7: *"…Someone that is always looking for that next thing to get on with. Rather than just complete something and wait for something else it but on their desk that kind of thing. Umm…someone that's punctual I guess you know actually turns up that little bit earlier…"*

307

P8: *"…it's about how motivated um the employees are, and how I suppose productive."*

P21: *"...they speak passionately about the company, and they also sort of, even in situations where they might be quite snowed under or they've got a lot of work, they still feel like they're valued so that even if you do think; oh my God, I have so much to do, you still feel like; ah but it's been...that people are acknowledging that I'm doing this hard work, and so it means...it again it's kind of the job satisfaction thing that comes from being recognised by your employer…"*

P23: *"…They would volunteer for things…they'd work over and above but not because they felt they had to but because they wanted to."*

P24: *"…how much a person is, I guess, willing to give – go above and beyond for their organisation so that their organisation is gaining, but you are getting what you want out of it as well?"*

P24: *"…as I said, go above and beyond; so, they don't just do their basic they do that little bit of extra. They would work a little bit later because they've got some task to do by a deadline."*

P26: *"…People are – their names always pop up when volunteers are asked for or they're there on the volunteer committee or, they're always involved in something that's extracurricular…and so they always contribute even if that's just in a small way…each year we sponsor a local charity…you see the same people pop up every now and then. And so for me that means they're not only engaged in the work they do…They get involved in the social stuff, and I think it has a benefit both ways, that if you are engaged during your work also become engaged and involved in some of the social side of work, also some of the fundraising and charity work too. And I think that works the other way as well…People who – people who get involved with charity work and give their time and extra generally they'll be satisfied in their job."*

P27: *"So for me it's kind of the discretionary effort I guess from people, so I think if somebody's really engaged, it's not just they come to work, they do what's expected of them kind of from a job description point of view and what I've directly asked them to do, it's the going the extra mile. It's the effort. It's that – yeah, it's the decision to do that bit of extra work for the individual or the organisation that*

	they're employed by.”
	P27: *“Probably overachieving? Um…contributing to kind of…yeah business ethos…living and breathing our values… staying past our time doing out there because you're going extra mile for people. Um offering great service…the extra on top of the day to day…”*
	P27: *“I don't think there's always a conscious necessarily conscious decision. But I think there is something kind of within people that has either formed over time to make that – those good decisions subconsciously or formed over time that has undermined that, that means people go actually do what you need to do I'm – I'm off home. You know, it's one minute past five next time I'm going to come in one minute, you know, later, to start my shift because actually we haven't got that relationship with one another whereas if you have got a good relationship and you engage with it you're like, oh, well, you know, we're quite busy I'll stay on an serve this customer that's fine, see you later. Do you know what I mean?... And I think that's the thing for me. As I said, I don't think it's always necessarily a conscious decision, but I do think we have a choice in terms of how we react to different set of situations and how engaged we are any given time any given day or any given minute to be honest (laughs)…”*
	P28: *“Um somebody who does their work off their own back. They'll stay on late. They'll help others. They will very rarely complain about it but they'll also question if they feel that something's not right and they feel that they can, like they can approach other members of staff definitely is a key one. And yeah, they don't need that motivation. They don't need to be told what to do and they're very positive about it. So I'd say that someone is very in tune with the organisation… they already know what the goals of the organisation's. They don't need somebody to constantly be on their back, like this is what it is do this, do this, they'll just do it.”*
Behaviour – Mood or attitude	P4: *“I think friendly and smiley…”*
	P5: *“…I think if you look at someone and their eyes light up as soon as you start talking about the business they're working for and the job role, you can instantly see that, you can tell by the tone of their voice that the passion that they talk to you about it, the language that they use if it's if it's negative, they're clearly not enjoying what they're doing…”*

P11: …they'd be positive, definitely, in their day-to-day work, you know you get a hello and a smile in the morning

P13: "…you can pick up when people are into something and then not just their general mood and their general body language and stuff which is associated with it?"

P14: "I think eye contact if you're talking to them and I think even if people don't know the answer at least people trying to help you find the answer I think would be like somebody who's engaged…"

P17: "…a positive attitude?"

P21: "...they speak passionately about the company, and they also sort of, even in situations where they might be quite snowed under or they've got a lot of work, they still feel like they're valued...that people are acknowledging that I'm doing this hard work…people that look like they're having a nice time and are interacting with their colleagues as well, but I think if you become somebody sort of...I don't want to say closed off, but if you become sort of isolated in the work that you're doing, it feels like you're not...well obviously not quite as engaged with it as you could be.

P24: "Um, so I think they would generally come off as a happy person um most of the time…they're more approachable, maybe a bit more friendly, they put themselves out there to be a person that would help other people, you know that wouldn't be their role."

Appendix N - Employee understandings of employee engagement – Content analysis

Table 1: Content analysis of participant understandings of employee engagement

Highlighting code:

- Personal engagement (Blue)
- Work engagement (Green)
- Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)
- Engagement as management practice (Pink)

Participant	Type of engagement described	Participant response coded
P1	Personal engagement (Blue)	"Employee engagement to me is basically being able to develop a relationship between those kind of in the more I guess the higher authorities, being able to develop a relationship where their staff feel you know engaged in their work looked after and just generally are happy in their job roles."
P2	Work engagement (Green) Personal engagement (Blue)	"My drive, my ambition within the company my – how I feel about my company. Um yeah…it means it's a way by which the company and get the best out their employees. And by which the employee can get the best of the company."

	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	
P3	Personal engagement (Blue) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow) Engagement as management practice (Pink) Work engagement (Green)	"Yeah, so I guess to me it's how – it's the relationship between the organisation and the employee, which goes both way I think, how much they engage with each other. I think it can be sort of on a department level, on a team level or a general organisation level as well…I like working for (*employer*) but I don't necessarily feel engaged with (*employer)* as a whole, however my team I do and I think that's partly because a lot of that engagement comes from me engaging with my team, and my department I do feel engaged with more on a professional level whereas with my team I'm sort of encourage a bit more social activity as well, obviously it's not mandatory for anyone if people don't want to go they don't go but it's always often opened up to the whole team, and often people who have moved on from our team but still work for the department often join us, so it's just nice we have family days out, sometimes we go to the cinema go out for dinner. There is always some shop talk but it's just nice to spend a bit of time with people completely separate from your role and there's no – obviously it can't get out of hand but you don't have to remain that completely professional that you would do in the workplace. I think that's nice to do."

P4	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Does it mean that, when you…especially when it comes to interviews, an interview panel and the process of that? Is that part of the employability – well the kind of, the communication between the two? Is that right or is that wrong I don't know…I think, I mean engagement is huge if you think on the grand scheme but if it comes like from an organisation like (*employer*) I think ummm…"
P5	Work engagement (Green) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"I understand that to be um, a connection with the business. Um…an employee, no matter what level of the business you're in from the bottom to the MD of the business, you've got to love what you're doing in terms of what you're doing every day, but I also think it's really important to love the business that you're working for and to be in line with their values, their beliefs, their direction the goals of the business and about understanding how you personally can contribute to that um, on a day-to-day and a monthly, yearly basis. I think that's so important. I've always stood by that no matter which workplace I've worked in, I've got to enjoy what I'm doing. Otherwise, it becomes such a chore and it becomes quite depressing having to get up every day to go to that place where you don't feel a connection, um and that's any advice I give to anyone now, you've got to love what you're doing because you spend so much time in work. You spend so much time with those people around you, 40 hours of your week at least. Um, and if you don't feel that connection, you don't feel engagement is my opinion"
P6	Personal engagement (Blue) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"I would say it's just good communication between the employee and employer. That'd probably the first thing good communication…I think the ability to speak freely if there are any issues, yeah – both ways actually, not just from us from the employer's side as well. I think sometimes that doesn't happen then issues get bigger and bigger and then one day one big explosion, sometimes it's too late."

P7	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"Yeah, see that's a – don't know really. So probably...yeah I wouldn't even know where to start. So…Hmmm…so we talking about how an employee engages with the work they do? Or engages within the company, with colleagues, who managers, just?"
P8	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Um (laughs) quite a difficult question there. So I suppose it's about how motivated um the employees are, and how I suppose productive. I suppose the communication between the employer and employee and how they achieve that."
P9	Work engagement (Green) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"So – so my first question would be is that in terms of um engaging in things that the employers put on or employee engagement in terms of like with your team and what you do, or all the above? Just whatever I think?...Okay. So when I – when you initially said employee engagement the kind of things I thought about were, you know, if (*employer*) wants you to help in any way how much you're willing to then help out so um, for example in (*employer*) they've often got a lot of cost saving stuff going on and they're always expecting you to help out there and so I would consider how much do you want to engage in that being engagement. But also like they put on continued professional development. And that's one thing I feel I do have time to dedicate to because it benefits me as well so it's always useful, especially if they put on a free lunch with it um as well. So my understanding would be in the workplace, how happy are you to get involved with things that your employer has to offer?"
P10	Work engagement (Green) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"As I'd understand it, it's kind of um feeling part of something sort of how invested you are in your role, sort of how you're made to feel about the job that you do and the people that are around you is kind of how I would interpret the term…So maybe systems that are in place or in the environment that's in place to kind of um…as to whether you've got a kind of a positive outlook going into work, whether you're sort of feeling part of a bigger picture, maybe whether you are given opportunities to learn or to grow or um…Yeah, I guess to be engaged for me

	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	is to kind of feel like I'm sort of part of something, that I'm learning, that I'm sort of um... that there's value in the work that I'm doing."
P11	Personal engagement (Blue) Work engagement (Green)	"So for me it's about being happy at work, I see even in a place this big, there's different departments probably work in different ways…um you know, and to me it's about being flexible, yes it's important that you get that work done and it's done to high standard but you know, there's ways that you can do that and make sure your staff are happy and there are certain teams that do that well and certain teams that don't here. Yeah…so perfect example's the team I've just gone into, they have a very good work-life balance so three of them are mums, um you know, there's...they all work extremely hard but two of them come in at quarter past nine and leave at quarter to six. You know, they're still getting their work done and you know and … even – you know, I've had to pick my nephew up last week from school because my sister couldn't get away from work, my mum was at work as well, they're absolutely fine about me coming and doing an early shift as long as you do your hours and you work hard and that just, that just gives you a nice comfortable feeling, you know, yeah…
P12	Personal engagement (Blue) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Okay, my engagement with the employer is, I suppose, through the role that I've been given the job description that I've been given, the contract that I've been given and how I enact it within my team and the wider periphery, so we've gone through numerous different names and I think employer engagement was one of the HR names wasn't it a few years ago?…employer engagement team... and they were able to, obviously they manage all of our PDR and all of our personnel records and things like that and jobs and adverts and stuff like that…So, I presume from that perspective...a HR function."
P13	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"So, what I'd probably say around engagement in corporate sort of speak which is what I'm used to is how well the employees of the business are engaged with the corporate objectives of that business. So, if the business wants to actually do x, y and z - are you bought into that

vision and have you been bought into that end goal? and I think the engagement piece - it comes down from that whole idea of setting that mission statement and then having decent enough people at the top of the pile in order to actually bring people along with that journey. And I think that's where a lot of things tend to fall down half the time. So, it's all different factors which come into it. It's like how do you actually give people the freedom and the flexibility to perform their job properly? But if people don't believe in what you're doing ultimately speaking, they're never going to be giving it 100%. So, the basic - I see at the basic you need to actually see some sort of vision and that which you can get behind and you can become involved with and then you need people within the business in order to be able to create that culture and see the carry-through. That's at the highest sort of level. I think at the sort of like day-to-day the realistic sort of level the idea of employee engagement is what do they see - what the people in the business actually seeing in it for them?...And how – and what engages somebody as well? It's like because – cause a big thing - some people are engaged and this is - this is the thing which I've looked at if you look at like talent-y sort of stuff, when you say people who have got high potential and high sort of performance and everything like that – those are the people who are up on the top and it's just a real want to push them through the business - gotta realise as well that some people don't want that. You know what I mean? It's like what drives people. You have to be mindful with employee engagement, I think. If an employee is engaged they're doing the stuff and they're being pushed in the direction, which is where they want to go; some people want to progress within a company, some people want a job for life, some people want to actually just turn up and just do what they need to do their job as well as they can do it. Get there one minute before they need a clock on, clock off at the end of the day. Sometimes those are the people who get the grief but without those people you can't have everybody who wants to progress because the whole thing is just going to fall apart."

| P14 | Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)

Personal engagement (Blue) | "I think now I guess it could be lots of things, like engaging with like, your role and like developing it, and like rather than just coming in just doing the bare minimum and leaving, like seeing what you can do and how you can improve it...and also I guess engagement with the people you work with and also like slightly outside of that so like other teams that you |

		could maybe overlap with and like working with them but I mean that's what I would just take it to mean like, how it ==how do you like, engage all like, in your communication with other people==."
P15	==Engagement as management practice (Pink)==	"To be honest I'm not sure but I think it will be sort of ==how they (management) make us feel and how that sort of reflects back on them as to how we feel about who we work for and our responsibility to them and our loyalty to them, so mutual respect== and...yeah, which brings loyalty with it."
P16	==Personal engagement (Blue)== ==Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)==	"Um for me it's about ==engaging with people on a one-to-one basis.== So, and like I just mentioned ==everyone is different and it's being able to sort of analyse almost someone's personality - their anxieties==, if they have anxieties whether they don't care and, and being able to do that quite quickly, especially with I would think like with new people when they holding a lot in because they're not understanding it necessarily or they don't really know me and they think 'oh my God she's up here' and you know, 'what is she going to be like? Is she going to be scary?' that type of thing. So, and all of those anxieties that people have yeah, so I think employee engagement is about that. ==It's about relationships. We're all having a relationship with each other at the end of the day== and just because I might be a IT Manager or whatever and there may be somebody in general office, like Frank in the post of ==those two roles are actually equally as important. We've all got somewhere to somewhere to play here but to be able to run as a business==, so I think employee engagement is actually about you know, ==understanding each other and - and actually looking after each other.==

P17	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Urrr (laughs), I guess just how - so, like our partners are kind of in charge of us. So, how they engage us within the firm? Um to be honest, I think they're really good at it actually, which I was shocked about. A lot of like - I've got friends who work at other law firms and it's quite like 'hierarchy'. So, not saying that this is the bottom role - but say like an admin girl was my friend, she was right at the bottom of the hierarchy and a partner wouldn't really talk to her and it's completely different here. Like (*name*) - one of our Senior Partners - will just chat to anyone like no matter what you do and obviously engaging with your staff is what - is how it works here rather than assuming that they'll be happy with you, do you know what I mean?"
P18	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Communication? I think…that's as far as I can go! Communication both ways. Employee engagement is acting – working a way that makes your employees wanting to work for you, wanting to come to work in the morning, wanting to do the tasks, not being – well that's the thing, disengaged. So, and that all stems from communication I think. So, management and the higher level have to be able to make you comfortable, happy, know what you're doing. But also happy with what you're doing and to make you want to work for the firm. It's like a two-way street. That's all I can kind of say on that."
P19	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"I guess I would understand it as being engagement with your particular role and then engagement with the company as a whole, and that being either what they're producing, what they're making, or the their people, so kind of two layers are being...if a company is yeah producing an actual item, then you're engaging with that process of making it or...and you're always doing that but you're also constantly engaging with every...all of the staff members that are within that organisation. That's how I would see it."

P20	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"I suppose that depends on who is engaging the employee, whether it's the organisation as a whole, management, the employee's engagement with their work, although that is engaging I suppose. Yeah, and I suppose an employee's engagement with the primary mission of the workplace potentially. So like, you know, how close does someone who work in a back office feel to the product basically."
P21	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"…what I'm thinking about what it meant, I sort of, it feels to me like the way that the company actually interacts with it's employees and the people that work there and how they're able to define their own roles, so I suppose respective of how the company does it as well, but also making sure that the people that work in the company actually feel like they have a presence there, so that what we do does make a difference and that we're aware of that as well."
P22:	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"I would say it's probably what the organisation is doing for the employees, and without a motive of, you know, better output necessarily, but just employee happiness...and wanting to stay engaged in the organisation and also understanding how the organisation works in departments that might not relate to you...I kind of equate it with happiness and wanting a high retention rate in your organisation and stuff."
P23	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"it's when somebody – when a person is engaged with their work, but also with the organisation so they feel motivated to work but also have buy-in to the organisation and its culture and values and the willing to work as a team player."

P24	Work engagement (Green) Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Um so my - is how much a person is, I guess, willing to give - go above and beyond for their organisation so that their organisation is gaining, but you are getting what you want out of it as well?"
P25	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"Um. I thought it's be two different ways the employee engagement of how you like the job and how you relate to it – if you want to do that job? And then there's the other where if it's like the management's engagement in you and interest in you to develop and stuff. So, I think there's two different ways of employee engagement from the employer and the employee's perspective."
P26:	Engagement as management practice (Pink) Work engagement (Green)	"I keep abreast of all developments in my professional area um…so I - I like so to think that I'm um to speed with things and employee engagement is one of those key areas, um that other organizations do a lot of research around. Um but for me it is about noting what um…what it is that engages employees at work. Um and my experience of working with teams, um I get a very…very good view – uh – steer of what that is close to their work. So it's – and it's only when I'm with them that I can actually gear them to sort of take a step back and actually think about, what is it – you know, what have you come to work for, what is it that brings you for work? Those things. So I've done a – a lot of work with the teams around that help them understand what it is that counts as work. They got loans, they got credit cards stuff, but you know putting all that aside, what is it - why is it that you come to work? What is it that um…helps get out get out of bed come to work, which of course is now changing (laughs). Um. It is about us having some purpose in the workplace. We've actually

		just re-branded re-launched our values, which is an interesting time so I've woven that in to the team development training. So, I'm getting a bit of a feel now about happy teams, which is one of our values, good work and a growth mindset. Um growth within the organization. Um so we've been teasing some of that out. What is it about people that I – and in any organisation there will be a set of people that are fully engaged, you know, they - they come to work they don't work to the clock they enjoy the work they do they do extra they get involved in um - um the social aspect of the work and we run a whole host of stuff throughout the year. Unfortunately we've just had to cancel our spring party, which is at the beginning of April or obvious reasons, which is down at the quay side and always a good event. So we're going to have to look at how we can replace some of that social activity. You know this – if this – is for an extended period of time we're going to lose that. And a lot of people – a lot of people firstly rely on it but also a whole lot of sponsorship events that we volunteer at. We run a summer party for families. So there's a whole lot of stuff to work and get involved in outside of day-to-day work…um…so that there's that's side of things, there's the work side of things. You get a sense of people who just come to work, just do what they need but not really – you know, that's fine – but you know, not for everybody. You know they may have – well they do have – a huge range of other stuff going on outside of work takes their time. That can fluctuate. Sometimes people are fully engaged, sometimes they have things going on in their private life that actually they have to – they have um…sit back on some of the involvement they've got with work so they withdraw some their engagement with that extracurricular stuff whilst they concentrate on that could be their own health. That could be a bereavement. A whole range of stuff everybody has going on in their lives."
P27	Work engagement (Green)	"So for me it's kind of the discretionary effort I guess from people, so I think if somebody's really engaged, it's not just they come to work, they do what's expected of them kind of from a job description point of view and what I've directly asked them to do, it's the going the extra mile. It's the effort. It's that – yeah, it's the decision to do that bit of extra work for the individual or the organisation that they're employed by."

P28	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Um I'd guess it's to do with how well your managers and everyone interacts with each other and how well they get a team to work together, how well you can communicate with them, etc., etc. Things like that, those kind of lines that's what I would take it as…and as well as the organisational goals filtering down into other members of the team."
P29	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	"Ohhh I would probably – if someone said that to me and I hadn't heard it before employee engagement, I would say it's about how one…engages I suppose at different levels with the actual job role, maybe with – I see it more as that, how they engage with their actual job title, um, rather than how they engage as a member of a team or they engage within the service, I would - it would feel like it was for me as a *(profession)* how do I engage as a *(profession)* within the service."
P30	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	"Um, so we've just had a round of it actually for um, our response to uh the coronavirus pandemic. (*Sighs*). It's obviously about bringing everyone along isn't it, um, kind of making employees feel like they've got a say in the direction of the company and how they're going to be treated I guess, making people feel valued… Whether it's just a cynical exercise to tick a box is another question, I suppose."

Table 2: Summary of categories of content analysis of participant understandings of employee engagement

Participant	Personal engagement	Work engagement	Multidimensional engagement	Engagement as management practice	Total
P1	X				1
P2	X	X		X	3
P3	X	X	X	X	4
P4				X	1
P5		X	X		2
P6	X			X	2
P7			X		1
P8				X	1
P9		X		X	2
P10		X	X	X	3
P11	X	X			2
P12	X			X	2
P13				X	1
P14	X		X		2
P15				X	1
P16	X		X		2
P17				X	1
P18				X	1
P19			X		1
P20			X	X	2
P21			X	X	2
P22			X	X	2
P23			X		1
P24		X		X	2
P25			X	X	2
P26		X		X	2
P27		X			1
P28				X	1
P29			X		1
P30				X	1
Total	**8**	**9**	**13**	**20**	

Figure 1: Chart of engagement type distribution based on all 30 participant understandings

ENGAGEMENT TYPE DISTRIBUTION BASED ON ALL 30 PARTICIPANT UNDERSTANDING

Personal engagement 16%

Work engagement 18%

Multidimensional engagement 26%

Engagement as management practice 40%

Figure 2: Chart of 16 participant understandings of employee engagement that used a combination of the four types of engagement

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT DESCRIBED IN COMBINATION UNDERSTANDINGS

Personal engagement 20%

Work engagement 22%
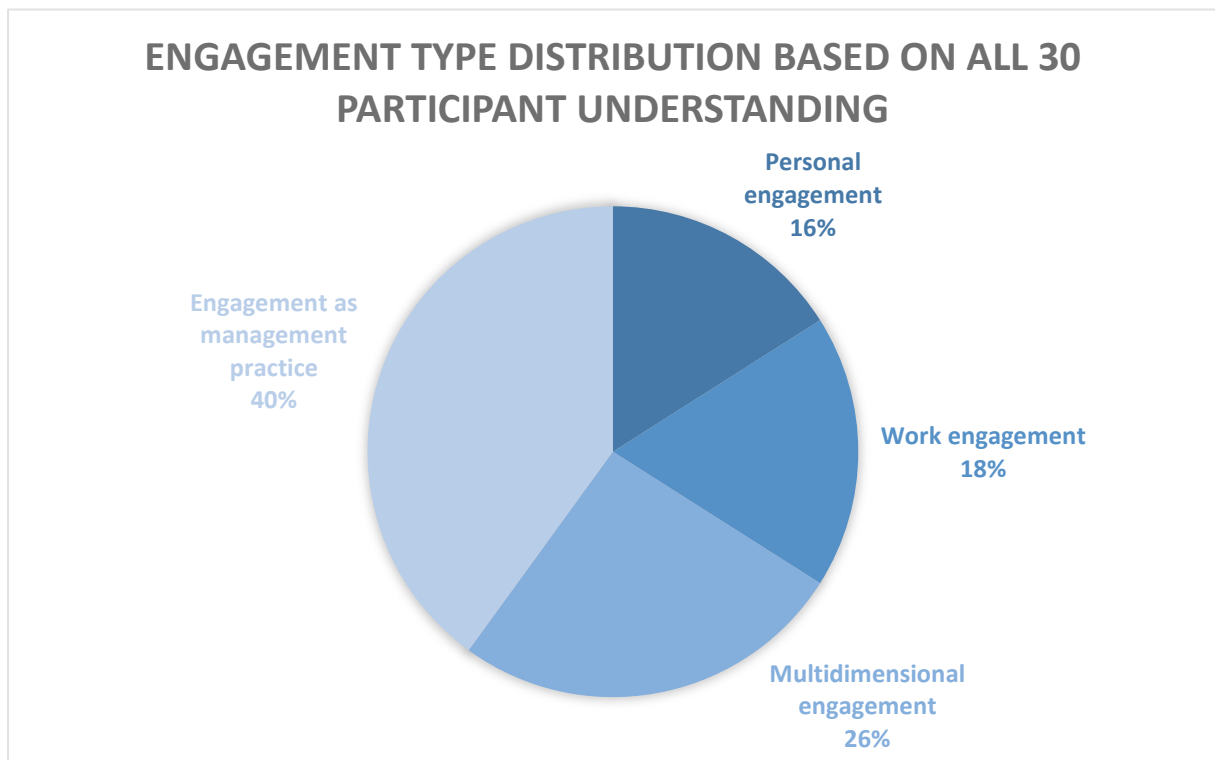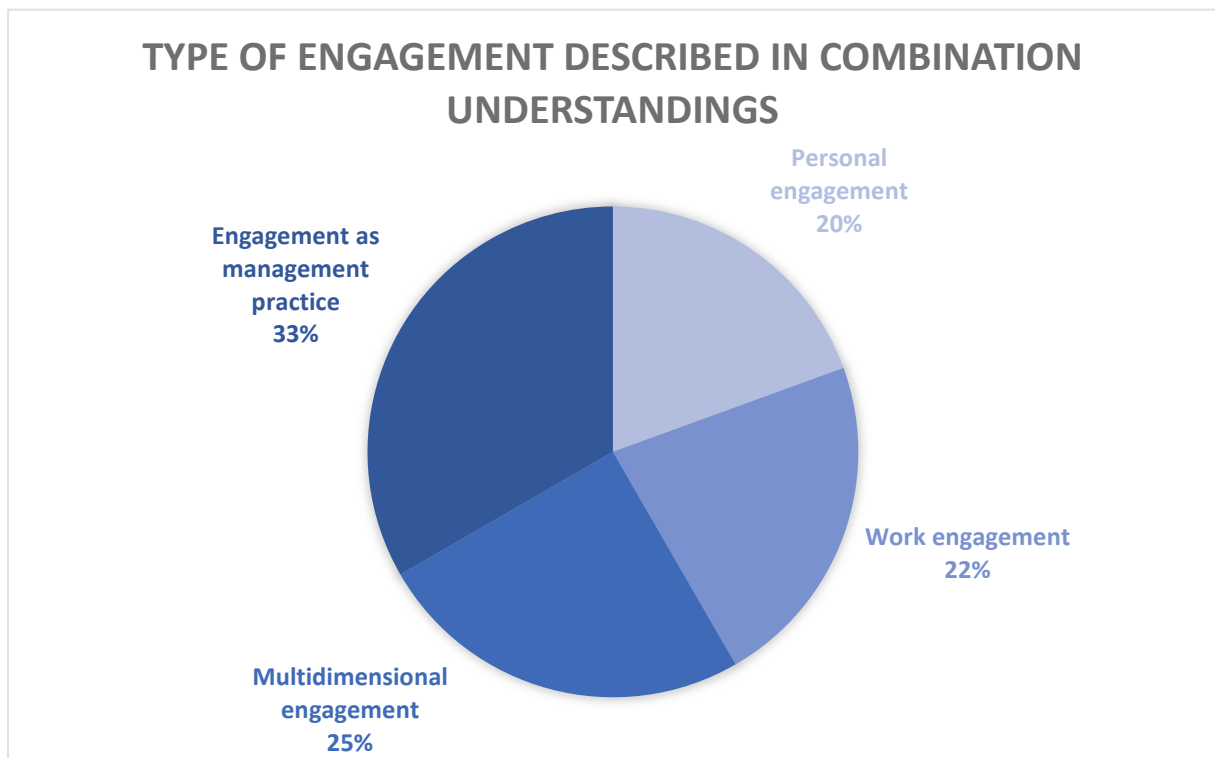
Multidimensional engagement 25%

Engagement as management practice 33%

Figure 3: Chart of 14 participant understandings of employee engagement that used one of the four types of engagement

ENGAGEMENT TYPE DISTRIBUTION BASED ON ONLY 14 PARTICIPANTS WITH SINGLE UNDERSTANDING

Personal engagement 7%

Work engagement 7%

Multidimensional engagement 29%

Engagement as management practice 57%

Appendix O - Employee understandings of personal engagement

Table 1: Data summarising themes from question ''what do you understand by the term personal engagement?'

Theme	Participant quotes
Uncertainty	P15: *"Not sure really…No, I don't know if it's all the same thing, so you're going to have to explain that one again."*
	P25: *"Um, I'm not sure really. I don't know (laughs). I don't know what to think of that."*
	P30: *"Uh. Um so I've got no idea what that is, um to hazard a guess…no, I couldn't even guess to be honest."*
	P22: *"I don't know would it be...I don't know…"*
Guessing	P1: *"I guess that's…"*
	P4: *"More to do with yourself? Well personal I guess?"*
	P11: *"…so I guess it is…*
	P14: *"...is that your input to the employee engagement? So like how you can play a part in that wider team I guess?*
	P17: *"…I guess if like…"*
	P20: *"I'm guessing that's…"*

	P22: *"I don't know would it be...I don't know like my own, you know, someone's individual feelings about their organisation and the place they work maybe?"* P28: *"Uh I'm only guessing…"*
Personal life	P4: *"More to do with yourself? Well personal I guess? would it be more to do with your life like your family your friends and general public and various things in your outside of work life, hobbies, interests, that kind of stuff?"* P9: *"…personal engagement is getting involved in something in your personal life or in your working life as well…there's loads of things that we do personally in life that we're engaged in that we're not necessarily passionate about and want to be engaged in as well. So I think in all aspects of your life you're engaged in things, and there's just a variability of how excited you are to be engaged in things."*
Communicatio n	P18: *"Talking to your friends or colleagues? So employee engagement is what from the top down and then personal engagement is with your colleagues and people that you see day-to-day and how you communicate with them."*
Organisational approach – HRM activities – Learning and development	P12: *"…it'd link me into my own personal development and CPD...and the support that the institution can give me to go where I need to go."* P17: *"…I guess if like - you have your own personal goals within your role? So, um…for example, I'm doing like a course on the side."* P24: *"…So potentially P24 wants to go into this area, how can we kind of help her to get to there while still making sure she does her day-to-day role and I think for everybody that will be different. People - some people are quite happy in their roles now. They don't want to progress, some people want to progress um and it's just kind of identifying what that individual needs potentially."*

Organisational approach – Viewing employees as individuals	P1: *"I guess that's looking at your employees as individuals rather than employees generally and knowing what it is that you're – what those employees want as individuals rather than just like a group of people…"*
	P13: *"…that's more my personal engagement as opposed to me as an employee…the employee engagement is more of a collective group isn't it? Whereas personal's individual?..."*
	P20: *"I'm guessing that's to do with how the organisation and management interact with an individual on a personal level, so rather than; is everyone being treated as a sort of blanket treatment, it's; do they understand the needs professionally and personally of each individual employee."*
	P23: *"Personal engagement is, is about me personally. What attracts me to the job and encourages me to perform - or want to perform my best in the job…how that job enables me to achieve whatever might be my immediate and long-term goals, personally."*
	P24: *"…So, where the organisation might focus on employees as a whole, so everybody as the same, it's more direct to me. So potentially P24 wants to go into this area, how can we kind of help her to get to there while still making sure she does her day-to-day role and I think for everybody that will be different."*
	P28: *"Uh I'm only guessing it would be how an individual engages as part of a wider team."*
	P29: *"I would probably break it down to people's idiosyncratic values and what is it that I do or could be done for me or for the people I manage to help them engage better…So it's important for the organisation but it's something that means a lot to them."*
Personal responsibility	P10: *"…what steps you take yourself to sort of make sure those things sort of happen…not necessarily relying on the structures of the company but maybe*

asking the right questions of your line manager or using those sort of opportunities to feedback…"

P8: *"…what I'm getting out of it rather than – rather than with the kind of loose term of employee engagement so what I would want out of it…what I would expect to gain from work…(EE) is about how the employer engages the employee. And personal would be more what - what I would do to engage."*

P13: *"…what do I need to get out of it in order to make myself happy…If you're thinking from a personal point of view you need to satisfy stuff in order to improve your existence to a certain extent. What are your own individual needs? What do you want to get out this? How much are you personally invested in it?"*

P14: *"...is that your input to the employee engagement? So like how you can play a part in that wider team I guess? So like everybody has their little role don't they? And like you'd want everybody to be to be doing their part for the whole engagement to then happen."*

P2: *"…what am I doing to fit into the company better? And what am I doing to – what am I doing personally to engage myself with my company."*

P19: *"...in my mind it's kind of being switched on and open to new things…having your doors open to change…"*

P22: *"I don't know like my own, you know, someone's individual feelings about their organisation and the place they work maybe?"*

P11: *"Yeah, so I guess it is believing in what your company is setting out to do…you know, all the information about what, you know, the different products that we make…then when you actually delve down into what you're doing, you know, you might only be a little cog in that huge - that wheel but it's making such a difference to so many people's lives and it makes you feel good."*

P6: *"…a comfort of being able to discuss things. To feel comfortable in your job but also to feel comfortable if you weren't comfortable that you could speak about*

	things and move things forward…I think just being comfortable with knowing that if you spoke something would get done or you know, again confidence in your employee and employer. They work both ways."
	P26: "…a range of things that I bring. So my personal engagement would be why do I come to work? Why do I work? Why do I do the work that I do? What is it that drives me to do that extra? To go above and beyond what's expected of me. I think that's – that's about…it goes back to your upbringing and any previous experience you've got, and also how that's been treated. So that personal engagement you know, we can all get knockbacks throughout our career our life making some wrong decisions. It is about bounce back from that and thinking, ok, despite what's happened or what somebody's said you've got to have that resilience…you've gotta – you've gotta pick your battles, um and pick what – what you get the most satisfaction from…which in turn encourages you to do more and get engaged…you you pick things that work for you. It's tough work to do…and so for me that personal engagement is how that work fits in to the rest of my life. Got a life outside of work."
	P28: "…I'm only guessing it would be how an individual engages as part of a wider team."
Authenticity	P5: "So me? It kind of goes back to what I think employee engagement is in general because I do feel like I have to love an organisation and I have to love what I'm doing in order to want to do it more… that's what I found with my personal engagement with my HR path…once you get that click, it makes you hungry…I couldn't get enough of it I wanted to pursue it more and more…Thinking about what is it about a workplace that makes me want to work for them and it was the company's values and beliefs. They had to align with my own.'
	P16: "…I think we've all got a work personality and a home personality…the way you conduct yourself and the way you engage with people whether you're in work or whether you're outside of the organisation in your personal life are really the same aren't they? I suppose the difference is that in work you'd have you've got some more formality against the way you engage with people. So, it's a little bit more structured and you have to think maybe about hierarchy or that type of thing but um - and then if if you're in your personal life, then you're probably a bit more relaxed or whatever but ultimately the principle is exactly the same thing, isn't it? You know, it's a little bit like treat how you want to be treated. I think that's what engagement is about."

	P21: *"I suppose with employee engagement is that the focus is always on work really and what that means, whereas with personal engagement is it's how you feel as a person not employee. So, that would be more to do with the more...I don't want to say emotional in a pejorative sense, that's not what I mean, but person is more emotional because it's more about how you feel and how it reflects on you as a person, whereas with employee engagement I suppose it's more how it reflects on you as an employee."*

Appendix P - Employee understandings of personal engagement – Content analysis

Table 1: Content analysis of participant understandings of personal engagement

Highlighting code:

Personal engagement (Blue)

Work engagement (Green)

Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)

Engagement as management practice (Pink)

Participant	Type of engagement described	Participant response coded
P1	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	Personal engagement? Um I guess that's looking at your employees as individuals rather than employees generally and knowing what it is that you're – what those employees want as individuals rather than just like a group of people, that'd probably be my view on it.
P2	Work engagement (Green) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	So I suppose that would be how I – what am I doing to fit into the company better? And what am I doing to – what am I doing personally to engage myself with my company.
P3	Uncertain	Um…I don't know really to be honest. Yeah, I'm not too sure.
P4	Personal engagement (Blue)	More to do with yourself? Well personal I guess?...Um…would it be more to do with your life like your family your friends and general public and various things in your outside of work life, hobbies, interests, that kind of stuff?
P5	Work engagement (Green) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	So me? It kind of goes back to what I think employee engagement is in general because I do feel like I have to love an organisation and I have to love what I'm doing in order to want to do it more.

P6	Personal engagement (Blue)	I think it's just that just like a comfort of being able to discuss things. To feel comfortable in your job but also to feel comfortable if you weren't comfortable that you could speak about things and move things forward and say that but there doesn't seem to be any reviews here, which is probably not a good thing. (*Manager*)'s doors always open so that's no issue but yeah. I think just being comfortable with knowing that if you spoke something would get done or you know, again confidence in your employee and employer. They work both ways.
P7	Uncertain	Hmmm…Yeah, I don't know if I could differentiate between the two.
P8	Personal engagement (Blue)	I suppose what I'm getting out of it rather than – rather than with the kind of loose term of employee engagement so what I would want out of it…(laughs) well what – yeah what I would expect to gain from work.
P9	Personal engagement (Blue)	Um so I'd say personal engagement is getting involved in something in your personal life. What for you and your work life as well that you want to be involved in…I guess it's those things that we do personally in life that we're engaged in that we're not necessarily passionate about and want to be engaged in as well. So I think in all aspects of your life your interested in things, and it's just your ability of how excited you are to be engaged and things. Like I don't particularly want to up at 2am in the morning, but we're engaged with it. Whereas, you know, I love going to the groups with her (referring to baby), because it's something I like to engage with and I guess that's the same at work getting personally involved with the relationships with different people at work as well. And developing those different relationship, being personally engaged in those different relationships.
P10	Work engagement (Green)	Personal engagement maybe what steps you take yourself to sort of make sure those things sort of happen sort of not necessarily relying on the structures of the company but maybe asking the right questions of your line manager or using those sort of opportunities to feedback

		and say oh I'd like to know more about this or I think I'd be good at that you know, maybe seeing areas where you could perhaps assist that maybe weren't in your role beforehand maybe.
P11	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	Yeah, so I guess it is believing in what your company is setting out to do, we have quite a lot of, sort of corporate videos and things that we have to watch or we can, you know, we can go to forums and I just find it all fascinating watching, you know, all the information about what, you know, the different products that we make, so we make vacutainer tubes here, so the blood collection tubes but some of the other places are making, you know, diabetic, you know, all sorts of things that all over the world we're making and I just find it all fascinating and then when you actually delve down into what you're doing, you know, you might only be a little cog in that huge - that wheel but it's making such a difference to so many people's lives and it makes you feel good.
P12	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	It'd be more … it'd link me into my own personal development and CPD... and the support that the institution can give me to go where I need to go…develop skills, experience different opportunities, I mentioned to you about working with different partners and it's the relationships that you have, understanding something is great but having exposure to do two things in a different ... two partners that do things in totally different ways is just fantastic because you just see so many different things that you can share, well actually they might be different but they still could do this and it's that kind of then sharing of knowledge from once you've got that oversight.
P13	Personal engagement (Blue)	That's more my personal engagement as opposed to me as an employee. What do I need to get out of it in order to make myself happy because it is that sort of thing - you've got - the employee engagement is more of a collective group isn't it? Whereas personal's individual?...If you're thinking from a personal point of view you need to satisfy stuff in order to improve your existence to a certain extent. What are your own individual needs? What do you want to get out this? How much are you personally invested in it? Because we've all have jobs where you

		just turn up and clock in and do what you need to do and there's a means to an end. But the personal side of things is how is what you're doing in work supporting what you're doing outside of work really.
P14	Work engagement (Green) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	I don't know, is that like your...is that your input to the employee engagement? So like how you can play a part in that wider team I guess? So like everybody has their little role don't they? and like you'd want everybody to be to be doing their part for the whole engagement to then happen.
P15	Uncertain	Not sure really…No, I don't know if it's all the same thing, so you're going to have to explain that one again.
P16	Personal engagement (Blue)	For me there one of the same. You know? It is very difficult to conduct yourself - I think we've all got a work personality and a home personality. That's probably right, but actually the way you conduct yourself and the way you engage with people whether you're in work or whether you're outside of the organisation in your personal life are really the same aren't they? I suppose the difference is that in work you'd have you've got some more formality against the way you engage with people. So, it's a little bit more structured and you have to think maybe about hierarchy or that type of thing but um - and then if if you're in your personal life, then you're probably a bit more relaxed or whatever but ultimately the principle is exactly the same thing, isn't it? You know, it's a little bit like treat how you want to be treated. I think that's what engagement is about.
P17	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	Uh I guess if like - you have your own personal goals within your role? So, um…for example, I'm doing like a course on the side… So, it's like improving your skills

P18	Personal engagement (Blue)	I don't know. Talking to your friends or colleagues? So employee engagement is what from the top down and then personal engagement is with your colleagues and people that you see day-to-day and how you communicate with them.
P19	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	Personal engagement. I guess still being inquisitive and...in my mind it's kind of being switched on and open to new things or open to...yeah, in learning and understanding certain things...yeah to me it's like being switched on, being like having your doors open to change.
P20	Engagement as management practice (Pink)	I'm guessing that's to do with how the organisation and management interact with an individual on a personal level, so rather than; is everyone being treated as a sort of blanket treatment, it's; do they understand the needs professionally and personally of each individual employee.
P21	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow) Personal engagement (Blue)	I suppose with employee engagement is that the focus is always on work really and what that means, whereas with personal engagement is it's how you feel as a person not employee. So, that would be more to do with the more...I don't want to say emotional in a pejorative sense, that's not what I mean, but person is more emotional because it's more about how you feel and how it reflects on you as a person, whereas with employee engagement I suppose it's more how it reflects on you as an employee.
P22:	Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	I don't know would it be...I don't know like my own, you know, someone's individual feelings about their organisation and the place they work maybe?
P23	Work engagement (Green) Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)	Personal engagement is, is about me personally. What attracts me to the job and encourages me to perform - or want to perform my best in the job…It's about personal engagement. It's

		also about how is <mark>how that job enables me to achieve whatever might be my immediate and long-term goals, personally.</mark>
P24	<mark>Engagement as management practice (Pink)</mark> <mark>Personal engagement (Blue)</mark>	Um maybe an adapted employee engagement? So, where the organisation might focus on employees as a whole, so everybody as the same, <mark>it's more direct to me</mark>. So potentially P24 wants to go into this area, <mark>how can we kind of help her to get to there while still making sure she does her day-to-day role,</mark> and I think for everybody that will be different. <mark>People - some people are quite happy in their roles now. They don't want to progress, some people want to progress um and it's just kind of identifying what that individual needs potentially</mark>.
P25	Uncertain	Um, I'm not sure really. I don't know (laughs). I don't know what to think of that.
P26	<mark>Work engagement (Green)</mark>	I think that for me that's um…a range of things that I bring. So my personal engagement would be <mark>why do I come to work? Why do I work? Why do I do the work that I do? What is it that drives me to do that extra?...To go above and beyond what's expected of me.</mark> I think that's – that's about…it goes back to your upbringing and any previous experience you've got, and also how that's been treated. So that personal engagement you know, we can all get knockbacks throughout our career our life making some wrong decisions. It is about <mark>bounce back</mark> from that and thinking, ok, despite what's happened or what somebody's said <mark>you've got to have that resilience</mark>….And I think first engagement is – is – is I mean it does help if you get nice feedback, if things are going well, you become more – more engaged because <mark>you'll get a reward with feedback</mark>. For all the times that you're you know, giving giving giving, you're really keen and enthusiastic you get knocked back time and time again, that can be detrimental to some people. You don't always bounce back. Um but for me, either you've gotta – you've gotta pick your battles, um and pick what – what you get the most satisfaction from…which in turn encourages you to do more and get engaged…And so, you know…you you pick things that work for you. It's tough work to do. And you know we hear a lot about <mark>work-life balance</mark>

		why people…why people are engaged at work um…and so for me that personal engagement is ==how that work fits in to the rest of my life.== Got a life outside of work…The boundary is there.
P27	Uncertain	Not too sure. I did skim the definition but yeah, I'm not too sure how it's different.
P28	==Multidimensional engagement (Yellow)==	Uh I'm only guessing it would be ==how an individual engages as part of a wider team.== That's – I could – yeah I would think it would be something to that.
P29	==Personal engagement (Blue)==	I would probably break it down to ==people's idiosyncratic values== and what is it that I do or could be done for me or for the people I manage to help them engage better rather than just a – is there something – so for example, if you had someone I manage is a homosexual and therefore they've taken on a role as the LGBTQ plus stuff because that's something that is quite passionate for them. So I see that as more personal engagement, Rather than – So it's important for the organisation but ==it's something that means a lot to them==.
P30	Uncertain	Uh. Um so I've got no idea what that is, um to hazard a guess…no, I couldn't even guess to be honest.

Table 2: Summary of categories of content analysis of participant understandings of personal engagement

Participant	Personal engagement	Work engagement	Multidimensional engagement	Engagement as management practice	Uncertain	Total
P1	X					1
P2		X	X			2
P3					X	1
P4	X					1
P5		X	X			2
P6	X					1
P7					X	1
P8	X					1
P9	X					1
P10		X				1
P11			X			1
P12				X		1
P13	X					1
P14		X	X			2
P15					X	1
P16	X					1
P17			X			1
P18	X					1
P19			X			1
P20				X		1
P21	X		X			2
P22			X			1
P23		X	X			2
P24	X			X		2
P25					X	1
P26			X			1
P27					X	1
P28			X			1
P29	X					1
P30					X	1
Total	**11**	**5**	**11**	**3**	**6**	

Table 3: Summary of categories of content analysis of participant understandings of employee engagement (EE) and personal engagement (PE)

Participant	Personal engagement	Work engagement	Multidimensional engagement	Engagement as management practice	Uncertain
P1	EE			PE	
P2	EE	EE / PE	PE	EE	
P3	EE	EE	EE	EE	PE
P4	PE			EE	
P5		EE / PE	EE / PE		
P6	EE / PE			EE	
P7			EE		PE
P8	PE			EE	
P9	PE	EE		EE	
P10		EE / PE	EE	EE	
P11	EE	EE	PE		
P12	EE			EE / PE	
P13	PE				
P14	EE	PE	EE / PE		
P15				EE	PE
P16	EE / PE		EE		
P17			PE	EE	
P18	PE			EE	
P19			EE / PE		
P20			EE	EE / PE	
P21	PE		EE / PE	EE	
P22			EE / PE	EE	
P23		PE	EE / PE		
P24	PE	EE		EE / PE	
P25			EE	EE	PE
P26		EE	PE	EE	
P27		EE			PE
P28			PE	EE	
P29	PE		EE		
P30				EE	PE
Total EE / PE 12	**2**	**3**	**6**	**3**	

Figure 1: Chart of engagement type distribution based on all 30 participant understandings
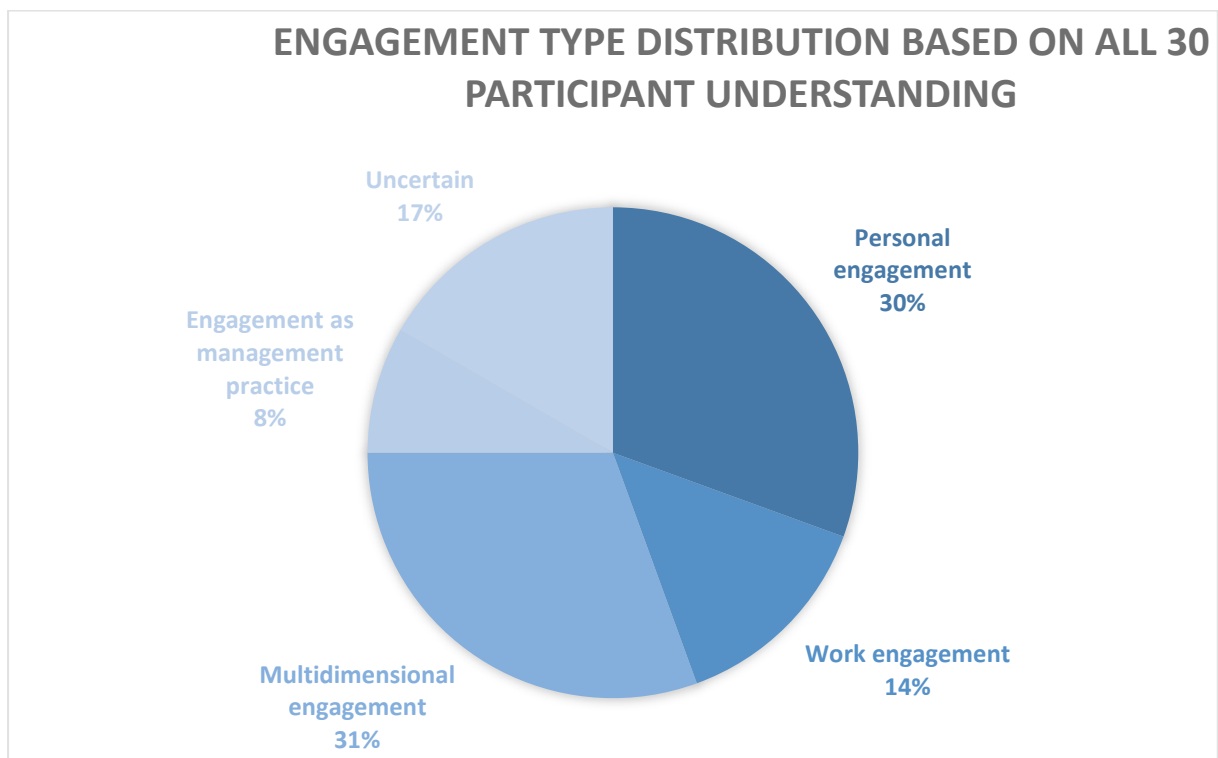

Figure 2: Chart of 16 participant understandings of employee engagement that used a combination of the four types of engagement
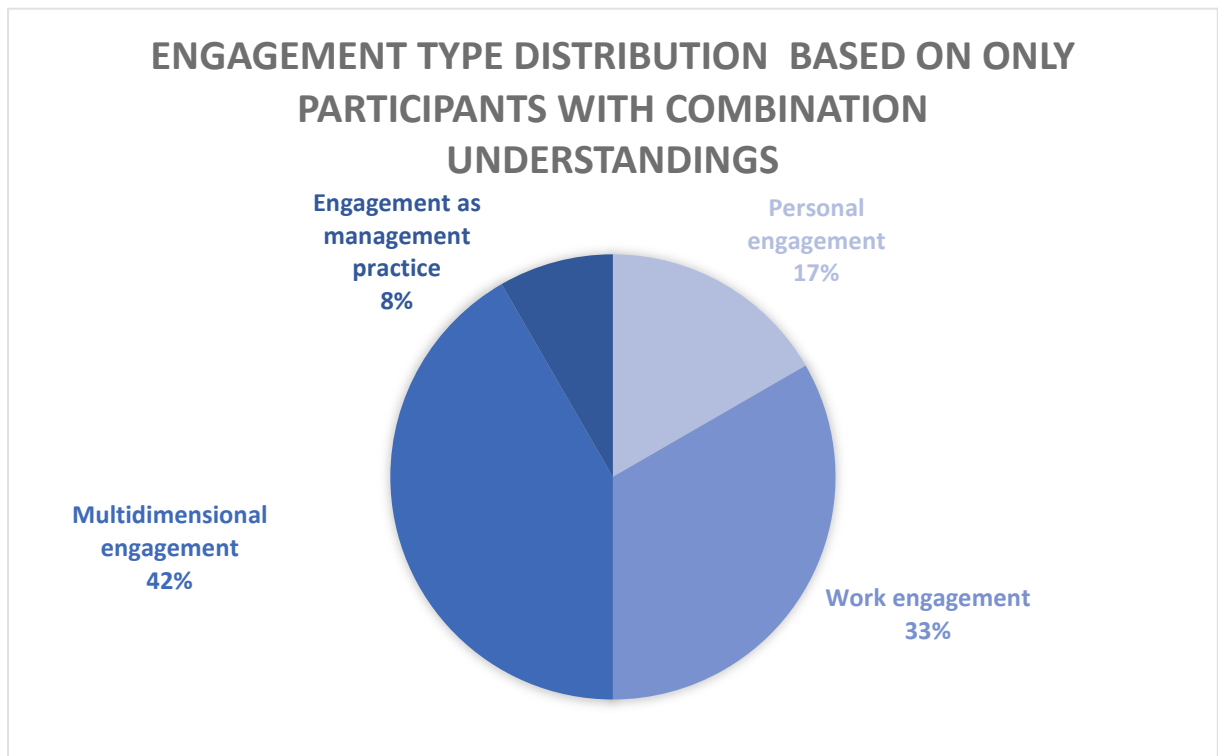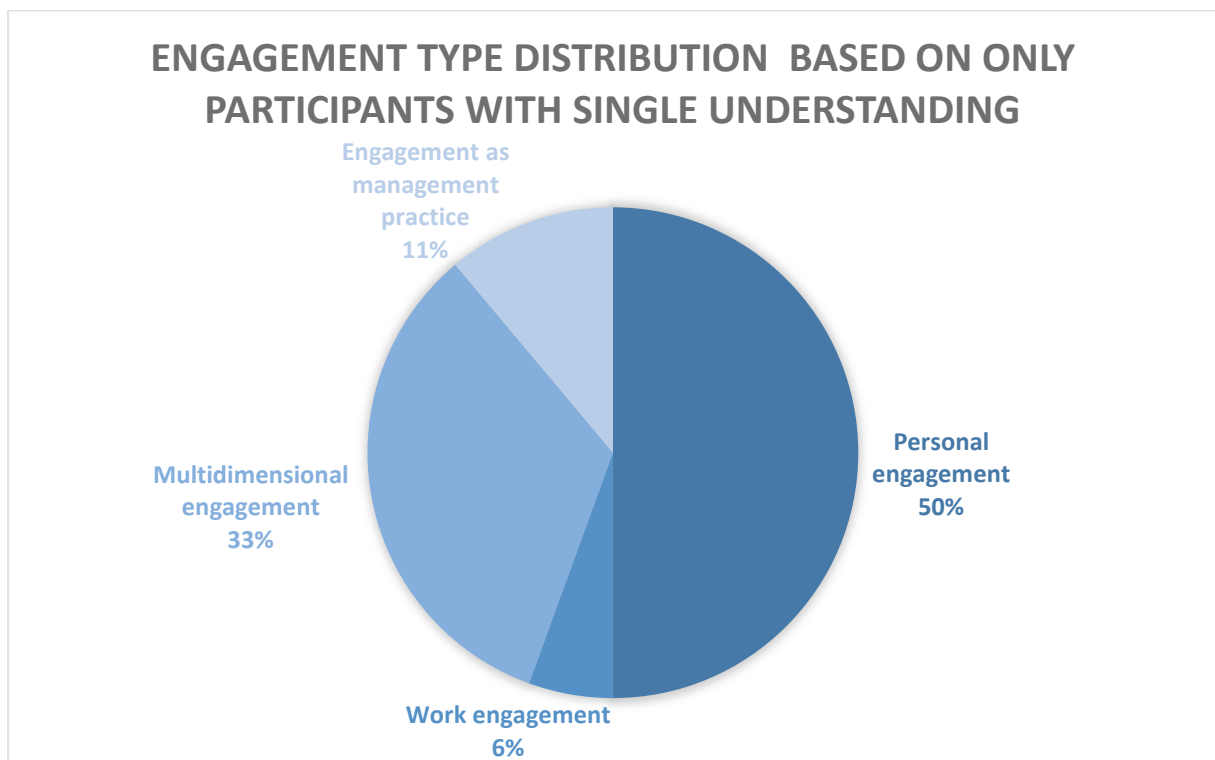
Figure 3: Chart of 14 participant understandings of employee engagement that used one of the four types of engagement

ENGAGEMENT TYPE DISTRIBUTION BASED ON ONLY PARTICIPANTS WITH SINGLE UNDERSTANDING

Engagement as management practice
11%

Multidimensional engagement
33%

Personal engagement
50%

Work engagement
6%

Appendix Q - Additional employee understandings of EE and PE

Table 1: Performative dimensions of EE and PE

Theme	Participant quotes
Adapting	P11: *"…I do tend to sit back and take in things so I can – I know how to handle people if I've – especially if I've known them for a long time, so, you know, it's about adapting yourself to who you talking to you as well… they all preferred the way I had led them and actually didn't like the way ... it'd been handled before…"*
	P14: *"…I don't feel as like into it anymore as I used to, I've kind of distanced myself a bit from it, it was almost like part of me before (daughter) now, it's just been like, oh it's just a job…I do like it but it's not what it used to be I guess…since having her it was like obviously that takes up so much of my brain-space…there's less space in my head for work now. So yeah, it's the spending less time here, but also have less like capacity in my head for it, so I think it's had to be not be part of me as much..."*
	P16: *"…person that I am when I come into that room depends on the people that I'm going to be meeting so you kind of have to figure that out before you get there. If you see what I mean?... I struggle with being able to adapt – we talk about role-play, but actually there's a personal element which you don't put into the real play necessarily."*
	P18: *"…every time I meet a new person I gauge off them what they're like and I will adapt to it. So I'm a very bubbly person but I can also be very serious and very solid and it - I can normally pick up or from someone very quickly how I need to act to get the best or to give them the best information… I would say I'm a bit of a chameleon because one - one day when you meet someone I can be really, really bubbly and then the next person I meet I'm straight there straight to the facts and just get on with it...But I normally adapt for the situation until I get back to my desk and then the five people that I share a room with know the full me… So, it's a really nice balance that we've got in our room and I can just be…telling people what they did last night, but trainings different. So I'm normally one of two people, sometimes I mix it up a bit."*

P9: *"…we did an away day recently…one of the things that a lot of them highlighted for me was my ability to adapt to different situations…in the office, I'm a confidant listen to what they've got to say, in groups and really active…"*

P19: *"But I also recognise that within a workplace, you can still be performing different roles when you speak to a different person because you're going to speak to somebody who's on the same level as you very differently to how you're going to appear to your boss or an even higher up member of staff."*

P24: *"I think people do have different them 'selves' like the person I am at work is very different to the person I am at home. However, the reason why I'm potentially I don't know maybe not a short tempered as I am at home is because I know my role at work is to be a professional….when I'm at home, I could potentially just slam something down and be like right that's it, I know I've got to keep it together and keep calm and cool. So, I know whilst I'm still myself, there are different levels of who I am and who I show at work and don't - don't show at work…So, I guess and – I guess it'd be nice if you can find that balance between being able to fully be kind of what you think is yourself and that person you are outside of work and being able to apply that in work and not I guess being tested and feeling like oh, I can't be that person because…"*

P19: *"…sometimes I will consciously think before I enter the door or when I walk into work, about how I'm going to act in that day and how sometimes it'll be small things like being more confident within the work downstairs and or just...sort of talking myself through what's ahead...you're coming up to a task, and if you consciously thought about the way that you're going to react to it, when you're hit...faced by it, then you're a bit more engaged in your response…I would be personally engaged because of being aware of how I speak to different people..."*

P21: *"…there are certain elements of yourself that you should be bringing to work, sort of a like, steadfastness an ability to...a resilience, all of that kind of stuff that's really important to bring to work and show to your colleagues and show to your employer…people generally put forward not an idealised version themselves, because I don't think that's particularly fair, but I think that at least a version of yourself that you feel like should be being brought work, so you don't...you don't have to include all the facets of your personality all the time, but it means that you can, but like I say, work and...work shouldn't be your life, it's because you can say this version of myself is who I am at work whereas it's not who I am elsewhere, if that makes sense."*

	P22: *"…there's a lot of people who want to be really engaged at work and a lot of people who literally just come in to get the job done and go home...and yeah you can see how from like an employer's perspective that can be tricky because everyone does have their own preferred style of being engaged and you can't please everyone all the time."* P28: *"…I notice that every single person works differently to me in the job and that I take my own experiences to the job. So, I kind of use those different parts of myself, like of what I've experienced…So it's – yeah, different, different parts… it's very much like you take your emotion out of it, you kind of just deal with what you've got at hand…*
Role-play	P16: *"…personal engagement isn't just about me, you know at the end of the day. And if they're excited about it, I must appear to be excited about it… Sort of overegging it because it's not really my bag. But they're – for them they need to make – they need me to be engaged. So, I must make sure that I am, that's the thing."* P8: *"…It's about like kind of enthusiasm and and a lot of that – yeah, and how – how you go about doing certain jobs and communication, and if I look enjoyed, if I well you know enjoy my work that kind of thing."*
Costumes	P3: *"And it was just really nice to – although we were talking about work, we weren't – we were sort of in more casual dress, we were in a different location, everything was a just a little bit more easy. Um there was no pressure on us to do anything in particular, it was just nice to spend that day bonding… I think sort of towards the second half of the day it was more sort of being able to let go of myself as well…we were a more informal casual day…"* P4: *"…okay so as a child you are – you don't have the worry you're not worried about anything. I think as an adult, you're always worried you're worried about what you look like. You're worried about people's perceptions of you…And I mean if you're a child you don't care what you wear…our you do but you pick your clothes and then probably the most randomest things like, you know, bright orange wellies with a little you know pastel dress or whatever, you know, you don't care because you love those items, whereas how many times have people walked into a shop to go and buy clothes and not actually known what to buy they've just bought what actually is already put together. Because that's what you think - that's the image you want…"*

	P4: *"I think I found it hard because I wasn't told what to wear that was something and I was worried and that's like the self issue was what I was worried about do have the right clothes to wear…like I've got to dress smart and I'm presenting myself at (employer) but no one's helped me…no one went through that…"*
	P19: *"…Often physically with my clothing as well because this is my outfit for working downstairs and then I'll have a different outfit for being upstairs and that's more feminine as well, so I perform gender in the workplace as well, I think, and not in a way that is saying I'm not feminine when I'm downstairs, it's just that it kind of... it does influence the way that I act or speak or work…I do things differently to different people or in different situations."*
External response	HN: *"Can you tell me how – how do you know if you're engaged or not engaged?"* P7: *(Laughs)* *"um…I guess contact with managers or directors and kind of gauging their feelings on – on you um so like progress reviews and stuff like that…Um…I mean it's showing engagement hopefully makes you look favourable for other opportunities."* P7: *"I guess kind of people's perception…makes quite a big difference"* P8: *"I suppose enjoyment. And um yeah, if I'm actually enjoying what I'm doing and learning in my case, but I feel like it would be easier for someone else to um – to say whether or not they think I am, that'd be interesting to know."* P2: *"It's the biggest job that I'd individually been put in charge of, and it was my opportunity to show what I can do."* P20: *"…it is whether they're positively or negatively engaged I guess…someone who…is getting productively through their work, but I suppose you could do that while being negatively engaged like, because people who are very anxious about their work, for example they do a lot of like turning up and trying to impress and that sort of thing so you could end up in the same place, but I would assume that someone who is properly engaged feels supported, is doing their work productively, and yeah, like I think that's what you would see, productive work."* P4: *"Um…worry of I don't know, worry of what other people think I think that's something I've always found hard…I'm very shy so I guess I've slowly kind of*

	opened up. But yeah, I think kind of like to scared that or – or worried that if I showed a bit of my personality would they make an assumption over me or kind of judge me and that kind of thing." P14: *"…I feel like I need to come in and prove myself as well...I always try and like get in and get straight on it and started bashing out emails and sorting stuff and like ticking things off because I think, I don't know, I feel like I'm being judged, and I probably am not, but that's my...that's how I take it anyway."* P5: *"don't shy away from who you are, don't judge a person on who they are and all those sorts of things and I completely agree. But then you still get people that are stereotypical and look at someone or look at their job title and think what they should be like that."*

Appendix R – Employee experiences of engagement

Table 1: Data evidencing employee's experiences of engagement related to times when they overcame a challenge.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
'The best thing that ever happened to me'.	P4: *"…I was really lucky to go (abroad) in October with the for (employer) to do recruitment event. I was beaming… gave me more passion for this (employer) and it – I was like a sponge – I just wanted to learn I want to learn more about (employer)… I loved it and that was the best thing that ever happened to me. And that's where I thrive so…I loved every moment of it. I had everything, I had the sickness, I had the heat stroke, I had everything you can think of but I just didn't care. I just didn't care at all and I loved it and I actually – that's something that I want to do more. Like I would love to go and do (activity) to meet (clients) and to do all that kind of stuff and that's where I think I do thrive because I am a people person…I think I found it hard because I wasn't told what to wear that was something and I was worried and that's like the self issue was what I was worried about do I have the right clothes to wear. I'm doing this for the (employer), it's not a holiday. So like I've got to dress smart and I'm presenting myself at the (employer), but no one's helped me…"*
Personal *'victory'*.	P14: *"…I had to do a presentation a few years ago in (location) in front of our...the like Heads…I was standing up there like doing my presentation and like showing people things and it was I think it was the first time I'd done something to that scale like that many people on that's like important people…they all kicked off and they were all like; "well what about this" and they was going, "yeah we have this and we have this" and they all started really like getting off...It threw me a little bit when it was happening because I was quite nervous, it's like going into way too much information but like I'd, not long before that, I'd had like really bad panic-attacks and like struggled to leave the house so like to like for me I was nervous, like it wasn't just doing the presentation, it was who I was doing it for and I was doing it for like someone I've worked for so like obviously the criticisms, I just feel a bit personally, but also getting to (location), I'd gone on the train on my own and that really like I was I barely slept the night before it was a real like, it was the anxiety of just being...somewhere else as well…your hearts going and "Oh, I don't want to do it" and like trying to not stutter and you want to be clear and loud and like, you know just...not up there muttering and sounding really shy, I was sort of like I don't want anyone to know I'm feeling like this and it…like luckily once it...I think I kind of felt like I had an ally then so then I was like, oh, they're not all against me and then it said I can carry on so, yeah, I don't know, I think yeah, it could have, it could have like gone really badly but I think that I did feel like it was like a little victory afterwards because I'd done lots of things I think like the getting there and the getting home as well rather than the actual...not just the actual presentation itself, so…"*

Adapting and innovating.	P9: *"…one young man who was particularly against wanting to listen to any information. He'd quite – quite want to do opposite to what you were talking about…And every single time he change a little tiny thing that he did, whereas if we went in the same approach every single time, he will have just heard absolutely nothing from it. But because I felt really passionate about helping him to change… So I felt it really rewarding to kind of build that kind of rapport with him, to be able to then make just tiny tiny changes that might help. So I'd say that's my best – my best example of personal engagement where I've really had to work harder throwing everything into it to try to create a better result than I would have done if I'd just stuck to all the stuff I've done before…It was a frustrating process because when – when you are putting that much more effort in and you're not getting a lot back, it's really difficult. So I you know, I just persisted with it. And so it was incredibly incredibly frustrating and it was you know, it was hard work…I put a lot of effort in it and my manager was really supportive in me taking that time to do it, you know by – by the time I was doing that I was quite um experienced in what I was doing so I wasn't having to put as much into the other aspects of my job. So I had some kind of spare time that I could throw into that – that in particular, but if I didn't have that spare time, obviously I wouldn't have been able to – to do it which is what I love about my job is that I can schedule in that time to really work on things that – that are important."* P24: *"…we've implemented a new…policy. And so, that was one that I was writing…I started from scratch and it was great, but I had like a basis to start from but I was able to write the policy, write a guidance document as to how to apply it…like I was able to trusted to do it to come up with something…I felt really, really good about it. Really had like – I went home after 'I read him a really good day at work today'. So, I really enjoyed that… you know when you've done some work and you know it's a really good piece of work and I'm going to be like really upset if it comes back and it's like 'no, it's completely missed the mark'. But luckily it wasn't and that made me reassured that yeah, I can appreciate a good piece of work and know when it's good…I'm quite an organised – and like routine. So, I like – I like process kind of and it makes sense…."* P26: *"…I get a much bigger satisfaction working with a team and the challenges that involves, you know enabling people to work better together is very satisfying…actually getting people working together is a challenge…"*
Acting up	P11: *"Okay, for the first one that comes to mind is at my previous job…team leader was going on maternity leave and the HR manager actually came straight to me and asked if I would cover her role…she believed I could do it, I thought no I'm going to throw myself into this and I got fantastic feedback…All the girls were really, you know, really happy we had to do – it was it was very structured review*

	process at the previous role, so we had monthly review than a half year review and then a full year review, so we're constantly having desk reviews with them…having to feedback good and bad which was ... it made me feel very confident in myself actually…it also makes me now look back and think actually you can do things like that…
Communication	P6: *"I had an instance once at (old employer) where, I was working very closely with one of the partners and he had – he had the habit of micromanaging you and I actually said to him can I have a word? Went to the boardroom had a word with him, explain how I was feeling, we shook hands and moved on and it worked… If I feel I can, if I feel like I can't and it's going to go on deaf ears that's a whole different ball game and I think a lot depends on the company. If a company is not really interested in that – in their employees."*

P28: *"…everyone gelled together. Everyone was very clearly communicating, like very strict, clear communication of what was going on, how it was going to be dealt with and it was like a time when I was like, yeah, this is like, this is what I joined for is to help someone in time of need. But second of all, working with other people and therefore being able to give a positive outcome was what I think I was proud of the most. And then after that we got recognition for our work…although it was a neg – you know, a sad situation…I think having our managers…there supported us because they gave very clear communication. So they were there telling us what to do. In a sense, we still could choose what we wanted to do, but they were clear what the outcomes were so we could achieve the best outcome."*

P29: *"…spent another four or so hours sorting out someone else when it's not really part of – it is part of my role, but it doesn't need to be…knowing that you then – someone else has got what it – what seems that's helpful for them…it was good to have to helped someone who was in a difficult situation."* |
| Uniting and collaboration | P20: *"… our interim manager didn't work out and the organisation responded really positively…brought in (colleague) who is a freelancer who helps us out two days a week on some of our big (tasks), and that really helped like, and I think, it was such a kind of positive response from everyone, you know, we positively responded to the…So I think everyone in the situation was personally engaged, right up to the top…the whole organisation responded to that problem…*

HN: And do you think it was the resolution of the issue that you were personally engaged with or do you think it is that so many people were involved?

P20:…I've worked in roles before where everything stops at a sort of middle manager, and whereas here they were like, you know, we're one team, doesn't matter how high or low you are in it, you know, it affects all of us if there's an issue |

so you've got to root it out, fix it…I think at the time, I mean I cannot stress this enough, like my experiences at previous employers means that sort of anything can happen here and it's fine...like I don't know whether I'm just weird with that but it's like, you know, the trauma of working at places which so undervalue you and so like grind you down...I don't know, like I found the whole thing sort of stressful in terms of the amount of day-to-day workload, but that's only because suddenly your to-do list is twice as long and you know, that's just pressure because you've got stuff to do, but in terms of everything else it was the same, you know, and in fact it probably made me better disposed to the company because of their positive response to the problem. So yeah, Blitz spirit I guess…I feel like very loyal to (employer) because I feel they were loyal to me."

P18: *"…feeling privileged enough to be asked to go on the group. And then for six months every sort of couple of weeks we had a training session and the (manager) was in on that, my boss was as well, and other people so I felt very, very engaged in that at the time because we were looking at things for the firm and moving forward and anything I said was listened to but the key point from it I suppose would be that we wrote - we all had work projects and reports for the board…I had to report it so that to me was real engagement. But the key thing for me then was actually when they said yes, P18, do it and my role changed as a result of it. They got someone new in and at that point or even now actually I feel really, really committed to this because I've been given that opportunity to do that. I told them I thought we should do this and they've said yes, it's come from nowhere, but me - this is my baby now and I work my butt off…that whole process actually to me would say that my engagement – I suppose…"*

P27: *"…challenged us to make a pound of profit the next year… the branch manager at the time kind of entrusted us with that kind of motivated us with this kind of pound target and we actually ended up with an old-fashioned one pound note framed on the wall at the end of the year, as kind of our we did it that year…everybody else their part to play, in our customer service team had a part to play the service team they had a part to play etc. etc. So we were able to work as a team…its real family feel and everybody kind of looked after each other and kind of wanted to see each other's succeed. And I think that was the thing. It was a group effort to go after that and do it…I don't remember what personal reward I got. I'm sure it would have impacted my rating that year, but that wasn't the driver for me. It was about the team working together to achieve the result…I that it was about being proud, but it was about mainly being proud of the team. I remember the area manager coming in being like you did a great job. I said I didn't really do much at all, it was those lot that did it. I think it was about being proud of my team which kind of again reinforced that engagement for me, rather than that kind of personal thank you."*

Representing the organisation	P23: *"I'd been asked to do a master class in (subject)…And then I arrived and I found that the whole of its senior management team were there as well…it went really well and a couple of people had that light bulb moment… it went well the feedback was great. You know, I had a couple of challenging questions which was good and everybody went away from there motivated. You could tell they left on a high…I was a little bit apprehensive because you know, you can't help it back of your mind thinking 'right, well, okay, this isn't about me. I'm representing (department). That manager is going to have contact with our manager so I don't want to muck anything up…I was on a real high..."*

Table 2: Data evidencing employees experiences of engagement are related to positive feedback.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Positive feedback	*P1: I think when I was doing my training…I would say there was a lot of personal engagement there because a lot of time and effort is put into you in order for you to reach your full potential and you do get properly nurtured…you are aware that people are supporting you with those goals, you are going to be more engaged because you can be like, I'm not just doing this for me, I'm doing this for the wider picture…whenever I felt properly engaged, I would say it's generally been when I've had feedback from someone in a higher position than myself…someone who's been through it themselves and is giving you that guidance and that kind of they're trying to nurture you, I think immediately that's going to encourage engagement…you know even just feedback on a singular piece of work would just make you more engaged because you think I nailed that, I can – I want to do this next or I want to do that next and yeah immediately you're encouraged to push yourself further and take on more…I always used to like to keep the written stuff, so if you got an email, print it off and you're like, okay, I did all right that time…(giggles) Have a little folder, have a little folder of like good – good reviews and also keep that work as a precedent as well."* P2: *"…I recently had a job where I was put in charge and the company put me in charge of job managing (task). It's the biggest job that I'd individually been put in charge of, and it was my opportunity to show what I can do….got really good feedback from the client. Did everything perfectly, was literally the perfect job…I was excited to go to work. And yeah, I felt really good…"*

	P9: *"…I think we've all started to try to adopt that kind of process…my manager when I told her about my idea was happy to help with the funding of it…it was nice to have people coming back from different angles and saying, yep that's a great idea go for it…"* P17: *"Okay. So, um…just had (event) last weekend… Just being there and sort of everyone saying 'oh well done', like 'you've done really well to organise this'…you feel that you've done a good job and it makes you feel happy…"* P21: *"...there was one customer where he came in and he had quite bad skin and I think it was like my second or third week in and I showed him a skin routine and we became friends outside of work because he worked with one of my friends and he was like "you saved...like you literally saved my skin", I was like "ooh that's really nice"…"*

Table 3: Data evidencing employees experiences of engagement are related to socialisation.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Away day	P3: *"Last year we had a team away day…it was just really nice to – although we were talking about work, we weren't – we were sort of in more casual dress, we were in a different location, everything was a just a little bit more easy. Um there was no pressure on us to do anything in particular, it was just nice to spend that day bonding… I think it's just it was so different for us um, so different from the every day…."*
Manager socialising	P22: *"…we had something recently where our manager, instead of having a meeting here, she actually hosted us all at her house and cooked us a meal and it was just our team, it was like a (task) planning day, and that was like, for like two weeks after that, it felt really, really positive because we first of all we were removed from the place where we are every single day and it was like someone was like doing something very nice for us and cooking for us, and hosting this in her home, that was one thing that felt really positive…"*

	P30: *"…one of the partners in my office…knows that I'm into wine and he's a bit into wine as well. So, he keeps suggesting to me that we go and get a wine together at the wine bar… I think he's just saying it just to be personal, he doesn't actually want to go for a wine…but it does feel like a bit of a nice touch sometimes. It's one that he knows I'm into wine and the other thing is that he's actually offering to uh engage in with me, I suppose…if it were anyone more than just me and him, if it was like, oh, a group of us, let's go down and get a bottle of wine, I think I'd be a lot more receptive to it, it feels a lot more normal, um I think it's the one on one element of it that's a bit weird (laughs)…it happens in groups so sometimes, you know, if you have a great week or, you know, they're just feeling generous…they'll get the whole office down for drinks and that's great. So, it does happen. It's just that one on one element and like the very particular – and like I said, it'd probably great for my career to get in and really bond with this guy. But yeah, it's not so much a hierarchy thing, it's just, I don't know, it just feels really weird… it is just a job that I just want to go in and earn my money, and then…so, I don't want to be like after work, going for drinks with people…But being offered, it's like, you know, it is nice."* P13: *"And the sort of ethos – the bloke who I work for, he's good, but he doesn't really do the whole get-together – it was more sociable before. People used to get together and you just shared on its success and everything like that."*

Table 4: Data evidencing employees experiences of engagement are related to personal development.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Opportunities for authenticity	P10: *"… I think kind of in terms of personal development I definitely feel I had kind of a lot of opportunity to learn and to kind of put myself out of my comfort zone maybe in that role… kind of by fluke chance or whatever found this role but yeah, it was kind of nice to know that I kind of found something that felt really me which was quite nice…I think kind of I definitely felt like in that role that I felt like I was I was around people that really cared about teaching and imparting knowledge and giving sort of younger people opportunities to kind of step up a little bit, so I think that kind of helped me sort of be engaged and to feel like I was learning and doing something useful."* P15: *"the (senior position) came up firm-wide… it was opened up to anyone so I thought right okay, I'm a very good (job), I'm head of my department, I reckon I could do that, so I actually applied…which came as a surprise for them because they*

355

	weren't actually expecting (profession) to apply…I had a proper interview with (managers)…they said 'well, you don't actually meet the criteria for what we need for (senior position), but within this we have read that your enthusiasm for the management system means that you probably need to move from what you're doing into this role, so how would you feel about being trained and doing that, as opposed to what you're doing now?' Which obviously I jumped at…just slowly working the way through and fitting around what I needed to do so that they could eventually put me in this role, which I wanted to do, so that was great…there were times when I was doing something and it wasn't really productive so I'd be doing the same thing over and over again couldn't work it out. So I'd spend the day doing something and think right still not getting it, but having that time to do it and the time to get it wrong but just carry on was like they're paying me to do this, this is weird and feeling a bit guilty but it's fantastic that they sort of because they know you as a person, know what you want to try and do, give you that time to work through it and get there…a lot of freedom to just try it, see how it went, and work on things that I wanted to work on…"
Opportunities for further education	P12: *"I suppose when I've applied for a developmental program, so I've done my master's, for example, while I was working here…and I was able to put a case forward and get that supported, so yeah, I think that's an example of where an employer supported me…"*
Opportunities for progression	P25: *"…when I first started at (employer). So, like that time you're kind of a new person you kind of get stuck on tills and stuff. Then I just gradually get – I kind of worked away hard and did everything right and start moving further up the till lines sort of thing…and you felt, yeah. I'm getting I'm getting somewhere because they're asking me to do more responsibilities…so getting to do that responsibility and work for those is quite good - and then obviously then moving on to duty management and do that. And then stepping up the ladder sort of thing…you're getting a bit further up the line and you get given more responsibility."*
Learning from others	P16: *"…we have an AGM every year…you're dealing with people then that are similar roles to me that have all the same sort of issues with staff or projects or whatever…we'd engage with each other and have a conversation…They feel like it's competitive. I just feel like it's sharing information. Yeah, so, um, yeah that - I do that every year and uh it is really interesting to see the people that sort of just stand in the corner with their coffee. So, even though that's the whole point of it they don't really talk to anyone, don't engage. I can't think there's no point going…For me it's about sharing knowledge - about gaining knowledge."*

P19: *"…I also had the freedom to be a…to be a creative within the team…they offered that to me with a mentor so (name) who was my last boss...he, as a mentor for my time here has just been incredible. He's yeah, very amazing, humble, motivator, he's very good. So he was my mentor, so I didn't feel like I was facing anything alone…The decisions I made about what kit to put in there, what to hire and how to do it were all linked to him and I could count on him to give me advice..."*

P5: *"I think the best example I can give of that was in my first job…I just soaked everything up like a sponge and I was excited to be given an opportunity in the subject area that I was passionate about. I'd done the theory I'd been at uni doing the theory for so long. I wanted the hands-on experience, and I was getting that and my boss at the time was a fantastic mentor. I felt like she really took me under her wing and gave me that development which just made me hungry and more engaged for more um…and that – that just led to me knowing that this was a career path I needed to be on I wanted to be on..."*

P13: *"…I was sort of earmarked just inadvertently by my old boss. He was like probably one of the cleverest people which I've ever come across and he sort of put me under his wing… he did really open up a lot of doors for me which is strange actually because I didn't - we didn't – he was very linear in a way which is very autistic in a certain way. He wasn't personable…I got to that level of working with him that he trusted me in order to go off and deliver independently, which he did with very few people and definitely very people - well nobody with my level of experience at that point in time… And so, in that sort of one that's when I felt quite engaged and wanted to actually just push on and do the extra pieces of work…he started pushing you in directions and doing bits and pieces…I started doing stuff that wasn't my core job which was more being- somebody sort of like held up to a certain extent but I did think - yeah at that point in time it's like right. Yeah, this is good now because it's just like you actually feel like somebody trusts you and somebody you respect trusts you. I think that's the key to it. Somebody thinks – rates you, who you respect and you think is clever. You might not get along with them personally, but you know that that person knows their stuff and that somebody's taken a bit of a leap of faith with you. I think, yeah, that was a time that I was quite engaged."*

Appendix S – Employee experiences of barriers to engagement

Table 1: Data evidencing employees experiences of barriers to engagement are related to managers.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Lack of support	P11: *"A total lack of support as well, I had no support from my manager, his manager here, and that wasn't necessarily their fault, they just had no real understanding of what was involved in the project but chose not to as well, so I kind of felt like I was on my own, I had, to be fair, I had great support from the team…I had more support from them actually from the people I have... you know, on-site here but that...I would say that was the main thing I felt totally unsupported for most of that project and they were asking a lot of me because I was the sort of main subject matter expert they call them here, there was a lot of pressure on me to get all the information and I…there were others that could have supported in certain ways but that I just got no support, so that didn't help."*
	P15: *"…My former boss…knew that I was very much interested in the computer system, so she would not act…not actively, I don't want to say actively prevent, but she would sort of try and limit how much the other people knew that I was keen on it…so that she wouldn't lose me…I mean she was emotionally attached because we work very well together…she knew where I was and what I could do and so the thought of having to start again with somebody else was quite unnerving for her. So yeah, so if she could stop that...and sort of impress upon me how much she needed me and how sort of how much she relied on me... which is why the transition from that department was very slow because it couldn't be just like that (clicks fingers) because she'd go crazy."*
	P22: *"…I'm promised a lot of one-to-ones that don't happen, just because there's so much to do and if that's not a priority, and I feel like it should be a priority, but it's just not…I'm meant to have a weekly one and I think in a year I've had about five, so that's quite annoying because then you also start feeling like you're bottling stuff up because you're saving something for your one-to-one and then that never happens and then another week goes by and it's like, oh there was that thing I was going to talk about three weeks ago... and then when you do bring it up that much later, it feels like a much bigger deal…"*
	P26: *"…I'll take my current job and my current line manager. Uh he is very different than me…He seems to handle a lot of information and he is very much risk adverse. Understandably. And…I call it he has to tick all the boxes to be satisfied. I'm very different to that…so there are times where, I wouldn't say at*

	logger heads but we have very different opinions about how things should be done. The nature of our work and our personalities…having been used to a line manager previously people or line managers who are fully supportive and encouraged me to take risks, innovate and experiment, I don't get that support encouragement at all. I've gotta go it alone. So not only do I not have a team to bounce it off I don't have a team leader, a manger who has any sympathy with the work that I do…"
Poor opinion of manager	P21: *"…I had a supervisor who did not particularly like me, that's fine, I really don't care…I don't want to sulk as a person, but they made it so that when I was working with them, I just didn't...I couldn't be bothered, and I didn't like that because that was one of my big strengths at work was that I was always present and I was always there, but when they were there, I just thought; I don't like you, I don't want to make your life easier, very petty but it sometimes does come across that way… and I think that makes a really big difference, but I also do think that personal stuff is quite...it's very important to me..."* P23: *"…I had a new line manager who I didn't feel fully understood the needs of my team. I was given - my team doubled in size. So, so, I had a much bigger team and a half of - half of the new part of the new team I didn't really know…I was told that my management - I need to be focusing on managing…I lasted a year and then I stepped down to be a (job) again because I just couldn't deal with it. So, um yeah her feedback wasn't - she wasn't she wasn't very good people manager…had enough…frustration…stress...upset. Lack of faith in (employer) as a whole. Lack of confidence in my - I felt like all my confidence have been taken away from me. There are still parts of the job that really motivated me. I still got on really well with my team and, you know, I will always strive to do - to achieve for them and for them to achieve. But if you feel like you've - yeah, I felt like I was knocking my head against a brick wall and you can only take so much of that."*

Table 2: Data evidencing employees experiences of barriers to engagement are related to inadequate communication.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Inadequate communication	P1: *"Yeah, I think in my current role there is a lot of barriers. The owners of where I work aren't consistently there. There's really really poor communication. So, you know, they'll tell someone one thing and then won't tell any manager that…"*

Failure to be heard	P6: *"I suppose a barrier would be if you know others have gone through something where nothing was done about it or you're speaking to deaf ears that is a big barrier. If – and then I think that comes down to confidence, if you don't have confidence in an organisation then what is the point? Then you move on basically."* P10: *"…I found I really had to battle with the job because (sighs) there was quite a lot of personalities to negotiate…sometimes it could feel like quite a poisonous atmosphere to be around…it kind of felt like quite a difficult time probably a job where I kind of had a lot of, a lot of tears which kind of you know tried to keep them away from work but like yeah, it felt quite a battle to get to through…I was engaged because of the aims of (organisation) but I was forced to have my engagement challenged by some of the personalities within the team and within the kind of general overall like structure of the place that I was working…I felt like sometimes a lot of the feedback was falling on deaf ears or the people that were perhaps causing the problems were the people that you would normally need to feed back to…I had to either suck it up, which didn't feel always very comfortable, or then it would kind of come out in kind of tearful outbursts…there was it was some of it that just didn't feel like it fully sat with my personality and the sense of just having to sort of smile and get on with it when you know, it wasn't, didn't feel entirely right…"* P30: *"…(EE) was all of a sudden a big buzz word for us…I just felt like everyone was bringing up all these ideas and we were getting shepherded towards what everybody knew was going to happen anyway… it just felt like a massive distraction really when I had better things to be getting on with….I did make a few suggestions, our rep was very open to what I was saying, but you could tell that she was getting stonewalled higher up. So it just felt like a futile effort really at the end. And so I just I disengaged from it and just signed the paperwork in the end…this was a consultation period for um…for getting the firm, the firm's reaction to coronavirus, it was to avoid redundancies it's like they wanted to test the water to see what the staff would be willing to accept and obviously everyone went oh it's going to be pay cuts…we had all these ideas that were floated by all staff engaged and then we ended up all getting pay cuts…it just felt like a waste of time…"*
Lack of information	P8: *"…ironically saying you have more than or too much responsibility, lack of knowledge and you can't actually – you can't engage because you don't know how to or something…I think people around me is the biggest influence. And I suppose like I said that the kind of work you're doing."* P11: *"…I was working on the project not knowing at the beginning what was going to happen, so no idea whether we had a job at the end of it or not…And I kind of found out by accident that someone said that the (profession) team from (location)*

will be at these seminars that we had to go to, and I was like, mmm okay…found out that I was due to the be made redundant…so it was hard work, hard work, but you know, I again got some good feedback to say that I, you know, how I'd remained positive through that time. I went home and screamed a few times ……but it was hard, really, really hard and I didn't feel engaged at all, I didn't…(sigh) I was just dreading going into work, dreading it, I'm like what am I going to have to deal with today and you've got, you know, people at you from all directions asking for stuff and yeah, it was um, it was tiring, really tiring … long, long hours as well."

P18: *"…was going to move up to being a (job title)…then it all went very quiet and I asked a couple of times…and it was getting back and back and back and I was like, 'no one's come to me and said, P18. This is what's happening…that did make me disengaged a bit, yeah…I was a bit disillusioned with it then. I did question whether I wanted to do it and whether this was the right company for me. Um and I think at one point I actually did cry because I think it was somebody else who told me it was like two months' time that all the work was happening. So I think I'd heard from one person, 'right, you can't move up to the work happens' and then the other person was like 'I don't know something to do with premises and facility so it's not happening until April', but I thought well someone just could have told me that and I would have known but I've been stringing on so I do remember being quite upset with that…"*

P19: *"…a new piece of information was given to us with no sort of like lead-up, it was kind of thrown at us…people hate not knowing what's going on, and or if you feel like you're the last one to know…I think that a lot of what happens in this company is done by speaking… instead of giving yeah, snippets here and snippets there…if you do have it by speaking, then one member of staff knows but the other one doesn't and then they might just forget to mention it... I also got called up on my negativity which I just was like, uggghhh (frustrated)...because they're not used to me being negative, so I'm normally the positive one or the one that is more engaged…and that made me a bit disengaged because it was like, if I...that means that I have to perform all (emphasis) the time and I felt a bit like uhh (frustrated), sometimes I just want to be a bit grumpy, everybody else is…."*

P3: *"…(organisation) as a whole is going through a very big…downsizing…Our director has said on several occasions no one is at risk, however…teams of people are being put at risk and I don't – it's very unfair to say that I think um coming from someone who is 100% not at risk um it is entirely his decision whether he stays or go…the atmosphere has been pretty dreadful um our director generally I think has been as open as he can be…he calls briefings quite regularly…but it's just been a very very difficult time…it can be very demoralising very demotivating, it's difficult to*

	sit and do your job when all this is going on around you and no one else is kind of particularly engaged either, everyone's just talking about – about this…"
Failure to involve in decision making/be informed about a decision	P17: *"…we basically hold like a (event) once a year for all of our clients…basically did all of this work and then I was told to like last-minute 'oh we're rescheduling it. We're doing it a different day.' So, I was a bit like 'right. Okay, so kind of wasted my time there'…Little things like that are a little bit frustrating…just cos obviously you've put a lot of work into it and then just a quick 'Oh we're not doing it now actually' is like…right…just told by my manager today…"*
	P14: *"…we spent ages developing this new system…the whole thing's like scrapped and we've got to start again…we'd worked really hard to get it all to fit the current way and then they're like, "oh, we're not doing it that way anymore, we're doing it this way"...so I think I feel quite left out of that…I feel like I can't contribute to it because I've missed so much of it, that when I am involved I'm sat there like, I don't even know what you're on about…"*
	P24: *"…We have a new policy…I guess I don't really understand the process of how it's going to work in practice…So, as soon as I get questions about it because my own understanding is very slim on it and I don't necessarily agree with the process, I find myself quite disengaged with it…"*

Table 3: Data evidencing employees experiences of barriers to engagement are related to a breach of trust

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Unjust	P28: *"…a (person) who had severe difficulties…I reiterated the point that this is not a (government services) matter, this is a (government services) matter, but (government services) unfortunately weren't engaging with us at all and not being very helpful at all…it wasn't, it wasn't the right place and everybody was in agreement it wasn't the right place…so I kind of disengaged a bit because I tried to really go through this with my superiors and say, this isn't right, you shouldn't be doing this…it just doesn't sit right at all. So yeah that was the – yeah I just felt a bit angry and a bit – it was a bit unjust really."*
Unfair	*P4: "…the stress of getting the train tickets…they can keep an eye on people not taking the piss. That's the truth, not booking the expensive host hotel right next to the airport, because it's convenient for them, but cost-wise it's not convenient…it's*

	because it's not your money…it's illegal…you're going to get flight points…and that's the thing that actually it's wrong…"
Deceit	*P5: "…it felt like they didn't want to help me as much as I wanted to be helped…I didn't get the support…and that had a massive impact on me wanting to be there…at interview I was promised exposure…maintain my practical knowledge. In the organisation once I was there it didn't happen, so that almost a false promise was incredibly disheartening and disengaging…especially at the point in my career that I am and was at that time where I just wanted to develop. Now that I knew what I wanted to do to not have the support to do that was horrible."* *P27: "…the message throughout the briefing was (employees) will not be financially…disadvantaged…I go up there and sell it to them and persuade as many people as possible to take it out because that's what the business wants us all to do…then it turns out people were financially disadvantaged…actually if you considered people who did overtime, it turned out they were financially disadvantaged…a really big knock for me personally because the business put me up there to sell this to people, kind of – not got me to force people to do it. But you know, they really strongly wanted us to do it…I did it and I was like you got me to lie to people that's one of my values you've completely undermined…I believed I was gonna get…compensation if I came out of these breaks related to...I came out of them because the business wanted me to and I wasn't financially worse off but I wasn't compensated – as well compensated as I should have been in my eyes…"*

Table 4: Data evidencing employees experiences of barriers to engagement are related to workload

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Workload	*P12: "I suppose it's just volume of workload isn't it? and time."* *P20: "I think the thing that might prevent (engagement) people's work being recognised quickly or as in as much detail, is the sheer workload that everyone has on and the sheer pace by which people work, in that it isn't possible to spend enough time highlighting and celebrating somebody's good work because you're already on to the next thing…"*

	P29: *"...too much work I would say...because you have lots of different roles...it can get quite busy...you aren't be able to do your, complete your client stuff on time...we don't get time to do it...spread a bit thin."*
	P25: *"...the stress stuff maybe in the dealing with agro customers...yelling at you or something or you do something wrong...maybe if there's other colleagues that aren't pulling their weight sort of thing. Like people going sick all the time or you know, you know someone can do a better job and they just don't want to and or...you're trying to get everyone working and everyone's working hard but there's just that one person that just doesn't pull their weight sort of thing."*
	P13: *"So, effectively I was delivering two jobs at the same time...But I didn't get paid anything more for that progression up to a group role - that only got finalised a couple of months ago...so I was delivering when everyone in my team who has - had less of a workload was basically getting paid more than me and the problem - well at that point in time it's because I wasn't specifically group and if they had something - I know this is all different structure stuff, but if the part of the business that was paying for me, there was always the risk that if they had work that needed to be done because it was never formalised by HR..."*
	P1: *"Um I would say again in the current role, I'm I, whilst my post is technically a supervisor, I do exactly the same as the two managers and I don't get the pay they get, and I don't get the recognition... just having I guess just having that status as well because I – not saying that I do it, but if I need to pull rank because I'm in charge, it's very difficult for me to pull rank when I don't have the title of manager."*

Table 5: Data evidencing employees experiences of barriers to engagement are related to personal resources

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
"me"	P26: *"Um me I suppose (laughs)...I think the expression is you sometimes get in your own way?...I make assumptions about things, about particular situations...I'm fairly critical with myself. I'm not a perfectionist by any means, but I like to provide the best service that I can.*

Stress and attention	P2: *"…sometimes you get gripes with your particular employer. Whether it be pay, particular job tasks…. sometimes you can be stressed at home can't you…I do tend to put my headphones on and listen to music because I do get distracted very easily otherwise…We've got quite a banter-ish office and it's quite difficult not to get sucked into I suppose, that can be difficult sometimes if you've got like disruptive individuals who – I struggle with my attention at the best of times so having other stuff going on kind of me particularly I get very sucked into it."*
Anxiety	P7: *"…so I have issues with anxiety quite a lot so things – I spend a lot of time thinking about things and not quite being able to act on them…so that's probably one of the things that would stop me engaging with things because I don't physically do it because mentally I can't do it sometimes…I guess kind of people's perception on that makes quite a big difference."*
Illness of friend and colleague	P16: *"…it's a sort of work/personal situation…somebody that I've worked with here for a long time…had a stroke. So, a friend and a colleague…which is awful…come out of it reasonably unscathed considering but cognitively has changed and so has sort of gone more insular and personality wise as well - has changed. So, when you've known somebody for many, many years and kind of inside out really, I suppose, and then meet that person on the other side um that's difficult to engage because it's almost like meeting a stranger in the shell of the person that you know so well. So, for me, I think that is a struggle to - to be able to differentiate between those two…I struggle with being able to adapt – we talk about role-play, but actually there's a personal element which you don't put into the real play necessarily."*

Appendix T – Employee perceptions of influences on engagement

Table 1: Data evidencing employees perceive managers as influencing engagement.

Sub-theme	Participant quote
Mutual respect	P1: *"I think in order to have employee engagement, you know, there's got to be an element of respect between you know, those higher up and then those lower down the food chain so to speak…"* P6: *"I think it's how people treat each other. I think if the powers that be or management treat their people with respect, that's always a good sign. If they don't well you're not going to get the best out of people are you, and it becomes confrontational… I think, he respected me I respected him. I think that it works both ways, the fact that you aren't a push over."* P15: *"…I think it will be sort of how they (management) make us feel and how that sort of reflects back on them as to how we feel about who we work for and our responsibility to them and our loyalty to them, so mutual respect…"*
Trust	P12: *"…I think a good manager is somebody that wants to develop and enhance their staff but also empowers them and trust them to make decisions and I think if you're in that supportive environment you're going to give more and if you're not then you're not."* P5: *"…I've managed to build up good trusting relationships with managers which has just made my job a lot easier…"* P13: *"But I got to that level of working with him that he trusted me in order to go off and deliver independently…And so, in that sort of one that's when I felt quite engaged and wanted to actually just push on and do the extra pieces of work."* P13: *"I reckon 95% of people who work for that company, especially down in (subsidiary location) where you still got to clock-in and everything like*

	that, that they want to be flexible but they don't trust the people because it has got that sort of just culture…so people want to have flexibility but they're not trusted or managers still don't trust them. Whereas with me, I get complete flexibility. I can work at home whenever I want." P11: *"…you know if you – there are policies in place for doctor's appointments…you always had that slight anxiety about asking the question, not necessarily with everyone in the team but you know if that fed up to the next level say they wouldn't be happy about it, so, and you almost like you're sneaking around a little bit...because you don't want certain people to see that you're leaving early…you don't have to sneak out the door because someone might see you, it just doesn't feel like that at all anymore… sort of man management, micromanaging…"* P22: *"…I'm promised a lot of one-to-ones that don't happen, just because there's so much to do and if that's not a priority, and I feel like it should be a priority, but it's just not…"* P12: *"…I know colleagues…that have got a day a week off and I also know other colleagues that say I wouldn't put in for that because if I do they're going to see I can do my job on four days a week and I'm vulnerable…when they're looking at maybe reshuffling and doing different things will say "Oh hang on a minute, she's only been doing that for four days a week, so actually that job's only four days a week we need, so we'll cut that job by a day"…"* P6: *"…if you know how people would react to a certain situation you can temperate it or you can go and like a bull out of control…you're not going to stick your neck over the parapet because if it's going to get shot off every time you're going to think well sorry, you know, not going to do it."*
Micromanagement	P23: *"…I've changed jobs within an organisational or out of an organisation because I've been disengaged with a particular manager or leader because I like to - I like autonomy. I like - I like to be able to be given the head to do things on my own. I don't like being micromanaged."* P5: *"…So, the sense I'm getting is that the people in the leadership team want me to be more like my boss…And I don't agree with that…that doesn't fulfil me."*

	P15: *"… this is this is more like er coming in and doing your hobby rather than a job, so yeah it's um it is different. I mean, it's sort of there's no sort of immediate person above you saying "this is what you're doing today, this is what's on your desk". So yeah, it's, it is different and it's yeah, it's great."* (chuckles)
	P1: *"…I think micromanagement is a big one…I think if you're working somewhere where you're being micromanaged, I think that's very difficult…micromanaging, trying to micromanage is just is not effective in the slightest."*
	P6: *"…I was working very closely with one of the partners and he had – he had the habit of micromanaging you and I actually said to him can I have a word? Went to the boardroom had a word with him, explain how I was feeling, we shook hands and moved on and it worked."*
	P24: *"…I don't like to be micromanaged, so to have that autonomy in to be delegated and be allowed to do something the way that you like to do makes me feel very engaged."*
	P28: *"I do get stressed sometimes because we're starting to look at a lot at statistics and your superiors are constantly on your back about your statistics…that kind of takes the love of the job a bit…So you just do what – what you're told to, I guess."*
Support	P1: *"I think it's always whenever I felt properly engaged, I would say it's generally been when I've had feedback from someone in a higher position than myself…someone who's been through it themselves and is giving you that guidance and that kind of they're trying to nurture you, I think immediately that's going to encourage engagement."*
	P12:*" Making sure that you know how to access opportunities and access the right opportunities and have supportive managers."*

	P9: *"So I'd say I put a lot of effort in it and my manager was really supportive in me taking that time to do it…"*
	P3: *"I think going back to the values I think that it's important to me that the things I value, the things that I feel really strongly about are if not shared at least supported by my employer, whether that be my direct line manager, my department head on the (employer) as a whole…I've been very lucky, especially my line manager now he's incredibly supportive and allows me the time to be involved with things that I want to do that aren't necessarily particularly related to my role, but just give me that bit more job satisfaction, general personal satisfaction. So I'm involved with one of the unions with the equality and diversity side of things…something I feel quite strongly about…."*
	P21: *"… I'm very lucky that I've got managers who are wanting me to actually think about where I want to go and what I'd like to do, rather than...I suppose it's not so much pigeonholing me into anything but giving you an opportunity, I think it's really...it's a very important thing for him dropping from a job, so yeah."*
	P28: *"…when I got assaulted at work…the support and communication I got after the incident and like just at the end of the incident was amazing…made me feel really valued… it wasn't their – it wasn't my close superiors and supervisors fault I was on my own, it was the whole organisation's…I'd say I was disengaging with the organisation, not my supervisors, because they said we would never, ever send you out like that if we didn't have to. So again it was the organisation as a whole that failed. Not the people who were looking after me."*
	P3: *"I think the engagement of the people above you is quite an influence as well, if you think that the people above you are disengaged and are not interested in what you're doing what your team is doing it can be quite disappointing, it just makes you feel that you're not appreciated that kind of thing."*
Visibility	P22: *"…senior managers are never around and our Chief Executive is never around because we all now share an open plan office it's really obvious…it feels weird when desks are empty...and you want to have a chat with someone but you didn't know that they were going to be out the*

	building...everyone's very insular and everyone's just getting their own stuff done, but there's no communication between anyone, so no one really knows what's going on at any point."
	P13: *"… but it's that sort of level of disengagement that the people who are the elders who sit up there. They're so out of touch with what actually happens – it's visibility of people as well in those positions. They need to really understand what is happening…"*
	P1: *"The owners of where I work aren't consistently there. There's really really poor communication."*
	P15: *"so a good relationship with, you know, the top level of management, they know who you are, and it just feels nice…"*

Table 2: Data evidencing employees perceive organisational approaches as influencing engagement.

Resource offered	Participant quote
It's about the institution equipping me	P12: *"…to achieve my own individual goals and aspirations and contribute to the organisation and have all the tools, resources and things available to me to be able to fulfil that role… so I think it's about having, as much as me giving everything, it's about the institution equipping me with the resources and the tools and the skills that I need…it's that development, isn't it?"*
Vision and culture	P13: *"…setting that mission statement and then having decent enough people at the top of the pile in order to actually bring people along with that journey... you need to actually see some sort of vision and that which you can get behind and you can become involved with and then you need people within the business in order to be able to create that culture and see the carry-through."* P1: *"…a lot of time and effort is put into you in order for you to reach your full potential and you do get properly nurtured…and I think if you've got*

	those goals and you are aware that people are supporting you with those goals, you are going to be more engaged because you can be like, I'm not just doing this for me, I'm doing this for the wider picture."
	P20: *"...I think it (employer) doesn't like actively try and get you to engage, it's a sort of environment where everyone just is committed to what it's doing, like that might be a bad thing in that it's not trying to actively kind of get people to sort of sign up to a set of values…I think people just do…"*
	P23: *"…the organisation can put strategies into place that can encourage employee engagement, but they can't force it. It's the individual themselves that are - there is engaged or not engaged and it's up to the organisation to identify what…what encourages engagement and put strategies into place to encourage that?..."*
	P27: *"…in terms of how I feel about my job now as I say, it is very different…the business model and the reasons I started I decided to join the business are starting to be compromised…I still hold true to those ideals and I think those ideals are as important today as they were, if not more important…that's frustrating for me at times because I don't feel like I can live and breathe them as much as I could..."*
	P29: *"…the organisation itself…culture…"*
	P30: *"…it's the culture of the you know, the office or the culture of the work environment that's going to form that's going to command how people feel. So yeah, everyone has to engage with it, but unless it's there from the kind of from the top that say as an ethos then people just aren't going to…"*
Vision and culture - flexibility	P10: *"Having the opportunity to have that flexibility, so to kind of have my role go from full-time to part-time but be given the time to make that decision and to work out what was right, at no point was I sort of forced into rushing that decision…"*
	P11: *"… it's about being flexible…a very good work-life balance… that just gives you a nice comfortable feeling, you know…"*
Vision and culture - Support for	P10: *"The team and the hierarchy around you like the support network… to kind of know that I'm valued and that somebody's – if something wasn't right, I feel that I would know that I have people that I could turn to or kind*

employee wellbeing	of support systems in place to sort of let people know if I was feeling like something wasn't right."
	P12: *"...but she's been struggling but the institution have been putting on those menopause workshops and I think that's really good that they've recognized that actually it might not even be the person that's going through that need support but it might be people around them that need to know why people are reacting the way they're reacting..."*
	P6: *"...a company that is switched on to people's – what they're going through perhaps um...People are people they have things go wrong in life and I think it's important to recognize that. We're not robots."*
	P1: *"...it's essential if you're going to run a good business, um if - if you don't look after your employees and you don't give them any support and communication anything like that, then your business is going to suffer, it's simple as that."*
	P19: *"...if you don't have an input there, a sense of well-being in yourself, in the company, then why would you, why would you be bothered, why would you be engaged?...If you're really stressed, really depressed or struggling, then it would be very hard to be engaged with the company's goals because it just, it just would be really difficult."*
	P20: *"...the one thing that I would say is that people are engaged at (employer) in some sense because they have to because of the workload... and that means if you're not getting on with it, you can just sink underneath it all..."*
Benefits	P17: *"...But you know, we always ask for the staff to volunteer if they want to come, they always get a massive 'thank you'. Sometimes they get like time in lieu and stuff like that."*
	P22: *"...on Fridays we would end the day early and go out for a team lunch and the...our CEO would pay for it and we go for like a karaoke night and we had a massive Christmas party and those sort of things where...it really boosts morale, and you have things to look forward to, and people's birthdays were a really big deal…"*
	P24: *"So, I always have the thoughts 'oh, I'm going to look for a new job'*

	but the perk – like the perks of this role definitely keep me here and it's not like – the grass isn't always greener…" P26: *"…its incumbent upon the organization to create an environment where people can get engaged…it's a whole range from working environments, physical work environment that people work, to have work that they are required to do, the resources they are given to do that work and then in addition to that, the other side, the salary side, the perks of the job I suppose, you know the benefits, everything that's provided by the organisation apart from salary…opportunities to socialize, to be involved with charities, volunteering, all those things. So for me that's – it's a two way street. And I think the more you give the more you get. You know, the more you get involved with stuff."*
Pay	P19: *"…pay does come into it as well, because I think that when you feel...there's different feelings of value within the workplace, and if you're feeling valued by your personal recognition from a company that they constantly are saying; you're really good job…if you're working really hard on the project and then you get a financial...like incentive, then that can, that is also value because it feels like the company are making a point of saying thank you, like or saying you've done that well, and particularly in this organisation pay is not particularly good..."* P24: *"…'m very engaged by a salary if I'm completely honest…I definitely am engaged by a salary."*
Learning and development	P1: *"…when I was a trainee…a lot of time and effort is put into you in order for you to reach your full potential and you do get properly nurtured."* P4: *"And I think training I think they should have like one week where they shadow someone…it gives you the confidence to ask the questions that you want to ask at the first or second week so that when you do start you don't feel like you're always trying to catch up."* P6: *"…had personal development plans…an informal chat and you could put things forward..."* P9: *"…that I do have a lot of opportunities to do things like continued professional development. I can go on courses. I can learn new things and*

	that helps me to be adaptable in different situations…we get to shadow each other so we get to watch each other."
	P10: "…opportunities to learn or to grow…feeling like I'm using my skills and using my brain a little…using my skill sets to kind of grow a role..."
	P11: "…the prospect of studying is just fantastic, really fantastic… they're going to pay for me to hopefully do the qualification which is just fantastic."
	P15: "… I think because we're in IT and none of us…started in IT...an attitude that we've come from...well I know that's doing that but why is it doing that? Why does that work and why does that not work? So it's um...building that knowledge and being able to sort of use that, it's very much for who we are… "
	P18: "…they sent me off on courses at like 'Train the Trainer' courses, everything. So, that whole process actually to me would say that my engagement – I suppose."
	P19: "…really learning on the job…I'm still learning a lot which is always really positive in the work environment, I think because if you're not learning anything then what are you doing there, you just kind of plateau…"
	P23: "…Personal development is really important for me because…as long as I'm still learning and I can do new things but without tipping it over the edge into too much stress, I feel that I'm engaged..."
Length of service and change	*P11: "…quite a new role, I've only been there sort of three weeks…Just to be able to use my brain again, I've really missed the sort of – um – the way my brain works…so to get back into that type of work is really exciting for me and the prospect of studying is just fantastic, really fantastic… they're going to pay for me to hopefully do the qualification which is just fantastic…I didn't want to leave this company, I like working here, so this has come at the perfect time…I believe in what they're doing they're doing as a full company..."*
	P15: "I've actually been here for 22 years but, for 19 of those years, I was a (profession)...so it's only when we started with this particular case management system, and I started sort of doing odd little bits, that we could do just to amend little things that I started getting into it more and seeing how it works and getting really interested in doing that, and slowly I

	moved over…I love my job… it's interesting, every day having to think about it and do something different…come up with solutions to problems…"
	P16: "…I'm not technical by education but I've been with the firm for 30 years, so I've learnt as I've gone along…the thing is about our firm, it's a good thing and a bad thing that we've got people - staff that worked here for a very long time. I've been here for 30 years, and I can name sort of maybe 10 of the people that have been here for 25 plus, um maybe more. So, they've - they've sort of been with us through the hard times and rough times and they sort of stick to their roles and just see it down one line…"
	P18: "…I'm quite lucky person especially in this firm. So, I've been quite privileged to effectively be able to do the roles I want…I love my job and I just, I feel very valued here and listened to…It means everything and it means that I've stayed here for 10 years. It means being happy to get up in the morning and go to work. It means enjoying my job.."
Time for additional activities	*P23: "The ability to do new things…it's nice to be able to do other things. So, things that might - like developing new courses…"* *P28: "…now with more people, we can do more training and have better investigations and things like that…so training and being proactive and rather than just doing the jobs that were sent to. So that's better."*

Table 3: Data evidencing employees perceive progression as influencing engagement.

Sub-theme	Participant quote
Showing engagement leads to progression opportunities	*P7: "I mean it's showing engagement hopefully makes you look favourable for other opportunities."* *P19: "…so at University… gave me an award for being engaged with the collection, so it's just literally outstanding engagement which just means being keen (chuckle)…that award was linked with (employer)...he just offered me a day of unpaid work...see how I would fit in…word of mouth or if you're working well and you have a good attitude… really learning on the job…"*

	P25: *"… it's quite important to have especially if you want - especially if you want to develop a career and you want to stay in that job role, got to have that interest in what you do and then you want your managers to be interested in you and get you further up the ladder sort of thing."*
Progression opportunities needed for engagement	P1: *"I've got to know that there's room for progress. I don't like – I've never been able to be in a job where I'm just stationary, I guess I think a really big part of it is knowing that there is room and potential room for improvement potential."* P4: *"I enjoy what I do, but I also think there should always be room for improvement and room for career steps… I think if you had a goal you knew that you could get like a career step. And that knowledge that it's possible. It gives you the confidence and almost extra energy to kind of see that."* P5: *"…my boss always knew that I wanted to grow so my role has developed…I got to a point and still am at that point where I'm feeling that possibly I have outgrown the business…my ambition is to potentially be a HR manager…"* P18: *"…I'm quite lucky person especially in this firm…it was really lucky that it got noticed that I had a bit of a flare for using the system at that time…and I said 'look we need to do this. I need to evolve my role into training' and they said 'okay'...."* P21: *"… as I've only been here for a short time really, but as I progressed through it I've definitely found myself enjoying it a lot, and I get quite a lot of job satisfaction which is...a nice position to be in as this is my second, sort of, second job out of Uni, so yeah… I've been given more responsibility it's given me a chance to actually see how far I've come..."* P22: *"…my aim was to have a job in a (industry) for the next year, and that...I've achieved that so that feels good, I really do enjoy it, I'm kind of on the verge of a promotion which is really nice…"* P25: *"Um, I'd say I'd be half-and-half really, I'm not – I put some of my personality out there, but not my full self probably it's - but it's probably because I'm not - it's not a job that I'd want to be doing for the rest of my life sort of thing… I just don't see the job as being my future career. If I think it was my future career I'd put more of myself into that role and then fixate and then stay…I feel like perhaps sometimes feel I'm quite overqualified for it…I think probably it's a – it's not a forever job."*

Fulfilment of a natural order for progression needed for engagement	P3: *"Yeah, so actually I've been working here for 12 years. I started in like an admin support role…asked me to do a few hours a week on the support desk as it was then, and then it all kind of went from there. A couple of years later I eventually got a permanent role on the team. So I started as an assistant analyst and then became an analyst and now a senior analyst. And so it's kind of a nice natural progression through the years although the team has changed a lot we've had several restructures it's been a nice gentle progression I think over the years."* P4: *"I was a temp for 18 months and so as a temp you have to basically work harder in the hope that they will keep you, because you never know from one week to the other…we will have maximum of 12 weeks because after 12 weeks you're seen as a proper employee and you have the same rights, and also as a temp you don't get paid until 6 weeks of your employment, so you work for 6 weeks with no money which is incredibly hard…it's frustrating. Incredibly frustrating."* P8: *"…it's kind of what I would expect after just graduating. But I think I'm learning a lot so good."* P9: *"Yep, and I think working with other people you often see people who are less engaged, and it can be very frustrating. Um so if you're really passionate about what you're doing and then there's someone who's just there because they have to be um and that was particularly difficult for me when I was doing covers for maternity and things um people who didn't necessarily want to be there they had that permanent full-time post, weren't really engaged…That was really frustrating for me because they weren't engaged in things. I was so excited to be part of the team. Wanted to be a permanent part of the team and it was just a little bit um…I don't know what the word I'm looking for is - demoralising probably, to sit with other people who didn't really care as well."* P13: *"So, it's quite a weird job which I've sort of fallen into by accident. So, I went in on a temporary contract about 10 years ago to do two weeks' worth of admin work which went to five weeks and then I got a job doing some sort of administration support for a month, month, month rolling stuff. And then I applied for a permanent job…Then I was an assistant (job title), and then learnt what it was all about, seemed to know a few bits. Then kind of bounced my way up the organisation over a period of time. This is – it's not too bad but it's a funny old job…It's not something which - I don't think anybody in this type of stuff I do grew up wanting to do it. You know what I mean? It just happens over circumstances and then you go, 'hang on a second, how did this happen?'…I've been with (employer) for 10 – well it's*

	about 10 years now. And as I said, I started off manning the switchboard and now it's like I'm probably a couple rungs away from the CEO…" P13: *"So, effectively I was delivering two jobs at the same time…While I'm seeing other people getting formative promotions and everything like that but because they couldn't budget for it and - they could have done and it makes you feel incredibly, incredibly undervalued and because at that point in time because I wasn't a formal member of that team, they couldn't put any specific projects which I was delivering in my name. Even though people knew I was delivering them. So, I was doing stuff which was delivering £250k worth of cost savings and that somebody else's name planted all over it. And you think when you're in the ascendancy of your career as well, you need to get recognition for the stuff that you're doing."* P19: *"…it's a kind of funny role and it didn't exist...I came in as maternity cover. So they asked me to stay on a little bit, little bit longer, little bit longer, and then I've got a full-time contract in April this year…so I've been here two years but April this year was the official contract… did I even apply? No. (laughs) I didn't apply for anything…I sometimes think that in my personal engagement with the role, my personal life, because I don't have any dependents and I'm just out of Uni, financially this is a good...this is a normal stepping stone...for somebody in my position, but because I'm surrounded by people constantly talking about pay, and being...and that being bad, I often will be like…I will then reflect what they're saying and…I absorb that, and sometimes I just don't need to."* P30: *"…one of the partners in my office…knows that I'm into wine and he's a bit into wine as well. So, he keeps suggesting to me that we go and get a wine together at the wine bar. But to me, it's just weird like I don't go for a drink on my own with a partner. I think that anyone else more career minded would be like go for it, but it just strikes me as a bit weird, so I find an excuse not to go… it'd probably great for my career to get in and really bond with this guy. But yeah, it's not so much a hierarchy thing, it's just, I don't know, it just feels really weird…"*
Qualifications	P3: *"Most of the people I work with are, they've done IT or something like that at University and I didn't – I didn't go to University and I'm a big believer that you don't have to go to University, there are - especially in things like IT - there are so many routes into IT and I think it's really important that people know that…"* P15: *"Yeah, I think because we're in IT and none of us…none of us started in IT…building that knowledge and being able to sort of use that, it's very much for who we are…"*

	P16: *"I'm not technical by education but I've been with the firm for 30 years, so I've learnt as I've gone along."*
Breaking trust about progression as impacting engagement	P5: *"In the organisation once I was there it didn't happen, so that almost a false promise was incredibly disheartening and disengaging, um and especially at the point in my career that I am and was at that time where I just wanted to develop. Now that I knew what I wanted to do to not have the support to do that was horrible."*
	P12: *"Opportunities (are) there but you've got to also manage your work and manage your time and I know colleagues, for example, that have got a day a week off and I also know other colleagues that say I wouldn't put in for that because if I do they're going to see I can do my job on four days a week and I'm vulnerable…So, you have to have that balance between what you think and your belief in the institution to support you through that development..."*
	P14: *"...I used to like it…I don't feel as like into it anymore as I used to, I've kind of distanced myself a bit from it, it was almost like part of me before (daughter) now…I feel like I need to come in and prove myself as well… I feel like I'm being judged, and I probably am not, but that's my...that's how I take it anyway…we both have the same job titles…he's full-time, I'm part-time but we're doing the same thing…from moving to administrator to senior administrator...like I'd only done it for maybe about four months before I went on maternity leave and then he then did it for like almost a year when... so then when I came back he had done it for longer than I had…they came about a bit funny about going back down again, when actually he's been doing more than I had, so I don't know…"*

Table 4: Data evidencing employees perceive fairness as influencing engagement.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Benefits	P14: *"…you don't get discount for theatre tickets anymore, or…I used to use the park-and-ride…just really bugged me… obviously saving money on the bus…I know it wasn't much but still, little bit off your theatre tickets, I liked that… it used to be that you have to work here for five years before you got an extra week of leave...I hit my five years, they then change it so everyone got five weeks…just as I got my fifth week, everybody starting had it, I was just like "that's so unfair, I've just got here and now I think that she's got it"…"*

	P12: *"…I'd like to go to loads more conferences, I'd like to go and present more but we're in a very different landscape now and we can't just do that…"*
Pay	P4: *"…So I feel like I'm the lowest paid member of staff in my office and I do probably the most amount of work and make other people look good…"*
	P13: *"…I'm not driven by money…I'm not driven by status or anything like that…I know that the person who's on the same level as me is getting £3k more a year than me…he's red ringed there; right person for doing that job but he's probably on about £15k-£17k more than me…It's like sometimes you find that people who are doing a significant amount of work, and they're really, really at the coalface having to do loads. They're getting paid the lowest grades of stuff and I can understand it permeates through companies like you won't believe and that's I think for me - that parity and that consistency with the way people are treated and the way people are rewarded for what they're doing. And if you don't get that right, then you're always going to have a disengaged work force."*
	P20: *"...I think that the real dampener on engagement is pay…and it's sort of the only thing they can kind of think about and they go "I'm doing all this hard work and what am I getting compensated for"..."*
	P22: *"…so I think morale is low in general and part of that comes from working in the (sector) and people not getting paid enough... I work full-time, you know…and it's like I get paid literally the lowest salary and so it's kind of like, what...well why...what are you doing it for?...we've lost so much funding and there isn't a lot of money in the (sector), but then…we're told this is the most money we've made in a year, and it's like, where is it? Why is it not...Why aren't you putting that into your staff?..."*
Flexible working time	P11: *"…a very good work-life balance...they all work extremely hard but two of them come in at quarter past nine and leave at quarter to six. You know, they're still getting their work done…I've had to pick my nephew up last week from school…they're absolutely fine about me coming and doing an early shift as long as you do your hours and you work hard and that just, that just gives you a nice comfortable feeling, you know, yeah?... that's really, I think it's really important and it's something that's quite new here, my previous job? It was almost standard..."*
	P12: *"…I think institutionally wise we've got to look at the structure so we're going through a VL process at the moment, so if I went and asked my boss could have two days a week off to do a CPD course at the moment, I think he'd say no but you have to be sensitive to the situation and you also have to be fair..."*

Working hours	P23: *"Well in a way it's expected of you…so for instance somebody's on the same contract as me to (task)…where they have no (task), but they're (work) hours - they are expected (work) hours are exactly the same…so, you know, there's - it's the unfairness. I don't, you know, don't blame them. It's not their fault that it's like that but it just seemed to be unfair…"*
Recognition	P1: *"I think a lack of consistency, you know, if one person's getting praised and the others not that's really really difficult and that's going to have an impact."* P5: *"…my job title doesn't reflect that which I feel is important…and as a result of that there are certain people in the business that I feel like don't see me at that level."*

Table 5: Data evidencing the need for opportunities to reflect on engagement.

Sub-theme	Participant quotes
Awareness of the importance of personal reflection for engagement	P5: *"…and individually, for like your own self engagement, you have to understand what makes you tick and that comes from a lot of like reflection and working on yourself because it's – it's not automatically there, and I've noticed that quite recently with myself that I need to actually pinpoint what is it about my job that makes me engage. What is it that doesn't make me engaged…it was only when there was just something that clicked and that's what I think engagement is is something that clicks with you, something that makes you think wow or I like that, I want more of it, give me more, I want to learn more…"* P10: *"…maybe I have had a bit of a shift of late…my personal sort of feelings towards the job…there's opportunities to kind of learn out there, so sort of trying to make the most of what I can kind of get out the role…I think kind of having a look at like my values and my role at the moment…why not go for, go for anything extra that's out there."* P26: *"… Most of the time I am personally engaged…I reflect a lot on my performance…I keep a reflective log about…why I've done it and what I can learn from it. So, I will ask myself questions…so I kind of keep a check of myself as best as I can through that reflective process..."*
Reflecting in the interview	P8: *"Um it's kind of weird because I've never thought about it like that… I suppose in thinking about it doesn't make you um kind of question what – what I'm getting out of*

in response to engagement definitions	*it, or what I would like to get out of working and – and what I do. Yeah. It kind of makes me think of productivity a lot and what the employee employer would kind of want."*
	P11: *"I think also, just having read…those terms, it's about enjoying your job as well actually, it's not just about the flexibility…so yeah, it is about enjoying the role and that makes you feel motivated straight away actually, I feel very motivated at the moment and I haven't done for the last 18 months, it's been sort of drag yourself in and psyche yourself up before you go in and do your training, that's quite tiring in itself actually…"*
	P30: *"I dunno, it's um…I mean who's responsibility is it? Because I just see my job as a job. I just want to turn up and do it and leave again and get paid. So, who's responsibility is it? (Laughs) Is it everyone's responsibility to be on board? Or is it – so um, probably like my own attitude really now towards my workplace and my colleagues and just yeah, it's just a job now to me that I can perform enough to get by and…gets money paid at the end of the month."*
Reflecting at the end of the interview, in response to question 'Do you have any other comments anything else you'd like to say about personal engagement?'	P9: *"…it's kind of made me start to think about others and how engaged other people are and it's something that you don't often think about – you're focused on yourself and the job that you're doing and then it will be interesting to know what other people that you're working with feel.."*
	P11: *"I realise how bad it was before actually, now I've just talked about you do forget don't you? It kind of blurs into one but yeah, no it's so refreshing to have that now, I feel totally engaged, I do feel engaged and it's such a nice feeling..."*
	P19: *"And I think speaking to you, because you're not part of the company…if I was talking to somebody within, then we all know what the situation is and we all know that negativity constantly boiling, so yeah it's very different speaking to someone outside it…"*
	P24: *"I think what we've spoken about being engaged with a profession rather than the organisation has definitely helped…I think that's something I'm really going to take away from it like I am I'm engaged; I might just not be as engaged with this organisation anymore…I recognise that I - where before the doubts about being in HR, I don't have those doubts like I do want to do this. I just want to try something new."*
	P26: *"…I think your questions have been quite full and searching, they've made me think – they've made me think about my role, so that's been quite useful thank you, because as I say I don't have anybody that challenges me, so, so this has been – I've got a lot from this as well. I got a lot from this. It has made me think a lot about*

the work I do and how I do it, who I do it with, so that's been a useful – a useful step back and reflection, so thank you for asking me those questions."

P27: *"…You know, now we've talked about it becomes apparent to me it's about kind of the right thing for everyone. Not just – in fact – regardless, I guess almost of me…I'd have felt even more out of it probably because it would have felt morally kind of wrong not just as wrong as it felt at the time…"*

P30: *"…it's interesting – this is probably not what the whole idea of what this is about…But then I was just thinking like, the people that are a couple of grades above me where I don't feel that personal engagement apart from this one partner, is that how I might be coming across to them yeah. I'm going to have to go away and have a little think about that now (laughs)…is important I can, you know, I can fully see how this is very, very important, but it's a very difficult thing to um…it's probably a difficult thing to establish isn't it, it's a culture thing?...I've got to go away and have a little think haven't I about it."*

References

ACAS (2014) The People Factor – engage your employees for business success, booklet [online], Available at http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/0/o/Advisory-booklet-The-People-Factor.pdf (Accessed: 08/09/2017)

Acker, J. (1990) 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations'. *Gender & society*, 4 (2), pp. 139-158.

Albrecht, S. L., Green, C. R. & Marty, A. (2021) 'Meaningful Work, Job Resources, and Employee Engagement'. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*, 13 (7), pp. 4045.

Alfes, K., Truss, C., Soane, E., Rees, C. & Gatenby, M. (2010) 'Creating an Engaged Workforce: Findings from the Kingston Employee Engagement Consortium Project'. *Chartered Institute of Personnel Development*, pp. 64.

Alfes, K., Shantz, A.D., Truss, C., and Soane, E.C. (2013), 'The Link Between Perceived Human Resource Management Practices, Engagement and Employee Behaviour: A Moderated Mediation Model,' *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24, 330–351.

Alvesson, M. & Karreman, D. (2000) 'Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse Analysis'. *Human relations (New York)*, 53 (9), pp. 1125-1149.

Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2002) 'Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39 (5), pp. 619-644.

Anderson, V. and Fontinha, R. (2024*) Research methods in human resource management : investigating a business issue*. Fifth edition. London: KoganPage.

Arakawa, D. & Greenberg, M. (2007), "Optimistic managers and the influence on productivity and employee engagement in a technology organization: implications for coaching psychologists", *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2 (1), pp. 78-89.

Arrowsmith, J. & Parker, J. (2013) 'The meaning of ' employee engagement' for the values and roles of the HRM function'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (14), pp. 2692-2712.

Atkinson, P. & Silverman, D. (1997) 'Kundera's Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (3), pp. 304-325.

Bailey, C. (2022) 'Employee engagement: Do practitioners care what academics have to say – And should they?'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 32 (1), pp. 100589.

Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K. & Fletcher, L. (2017a) 'The Meaning, Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement: A Narrative Synthesis'. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19 (1), pp. 31-53.

Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. & Soane, E. (2017b) 'The mismanaged soul: Existential labor and the erosion of meaningful work'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27 (1), pp. 416-430.

Bailey, C., Yeoman, R., Madden, A., Thompson, M. & Kerridge, G. (2019) 'A Review of the Empirical Literature on Meaningful Work: Progress and Research Agenda'. *Human Resource Development Review*, 18 (1), pp. 83-113.

Bakker, A. B. (2017). Strategic and proactive approaches to work engagement. *Organizational Dynamics*, 46(2), 67–75.

Bakker, A. B., Albrecht, S. L. & Leiter, M. P. (2011) 'Key questions regarding work engagement'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 20 (1), pp. 4-28.

Bakker, A. B. & Bal, M. P. (2010) 'Weekly work engagement and performance: A study among starting teachers'. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 83 (1), pp. 189-206.

Bakker, A.B. & Demerouti, E. (2007), "The job demands-resources model: state of the art", Journal of Managerial Psychology, Vol. 22, pp. 309-28.

Bakker, A. B. & Demerouti, E. (2008) 'Towards a model of work engagement'. *Career development international*, 13 (3), pp. 209-223.

Bakker, A. B. & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008) 'Positive organizational behavior: engaged employees in flourishing organizations'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29 (2), pp. 147-154.

Bargagliotti, L. A. (2012) 'Work engagement in nursing: a concept analysis'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 68 (6), pp. 1414-1428.

Barrick, M. R., Thurgood, G. R., Smith, T. A., & Courtright, S. H. (2015). Collective organizational engagement: Linking motivational antecedents, strategic implementation, and firm performance. *Academy of Management journal*, 58(1), 111-135.

Barry, B., Olekalns, M. & Rees, L. (2019) 'An Ethical Analysis of Emotional Labor' *Journal of Business Ethics,* 160 (1), pp. 17–34

Bell, E., Bryman, A. & Harley, B. (2019) *Business research methods.* Fifth edn.

Bennett, T. (2020) *Managing employment relations.* eds. Fisher, V., Saundry, R. and Gennard, J., 7th edn.

Bolino, M., Long, D. & Turnley W. (2016) 'Impression Management in Organizations: Critical Questions, Answers, and Areas for Future Research' *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 21 (3), pp. 377–406

Boxall, P. 2021. "Studying Mutuality and Perversity in the Impacts of Human Resource Management on Societal Well-being: Advancing a Pluralist Agenda." Human Resource Management Journal., 31, pp. 834-846

Bozeman D. & Kacmar K. (1997) 'A cybernetic model of impression management processes in organizations' *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 69 (1), pp. 9–30

Briner, R. B. (2014) 'What is employee engagement and does it matter? An evidence-based approach'. *The Future of Engagement Thought Piece Collection, Engage for Success Peer-Reviewed Thought Leadership Series*, 51

Brinkman, S. (2018) *The Interview.* eds. Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Fifth edn.

Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2015) *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods.* 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan, L. and Bryman, A. (2021) *Bryman's Social Research Methods*. 6th edition. Oxford University Press Academic UK.

Budd, J. W. (2004) *Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Burgess, R. (1982) *Field Research: A Source Book and Field Manual.* London: Routledge.

Byrne, Z. S. (2015) *Understanding employee engagement : theory, research, and practice.* Routledge.

Christian, M. S., Garza, A. S. & Slaughter, J. E. (2011) 'Work Engagement: A Quantiative Review and Test of its Relations with Task and Contextual Performance'. *Personnel Psychology*, 64 (1), pp. 89.

Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2008) 'Employee Engagement'. CIPD Factsheet.

CIPD (2012) 'Managing for sustainable employee engagement: Guidance for employers and managers'.[in London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-for-sustainable-employee-engagement-guidance-for-employers-and-managers_2012_tcm18-10753.pdf (Accessed: 08/09/2017).

CIPD (2014). Megatrends: Are UK Organizations Getting Better at Managing Their People? London: CIPD. Available at: https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/megatrends_2014-uk-organisations-managing-people_tcm18-11407.pdf (Accessed: 08/09/2017).

CIPD (2016) 'CIPD and Engage for Success announce a new collaboration'.[in cipd.co.uk. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/engage-for-success-300916#gref (Accessed: 08/09/2018).

CIPD (2021) 'Employee engagement and motivation'. [Online]. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/engagement/factsheet#gref (Accessed: 8/03/2022).

CIPD (2022) 'Code of Conduct and Ethics 2023'.[in London: Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/what-we-do/professional-standards/code#gref (Accessed: 05/09/2022).

Crawford, E. R., LePine, J. A. & Rich, B. L. (2010) 'Linking Job Demands and Resources to Employee Engagement and Burnout: A Theoretical Extension and Meta-Analytic Test'. *J Appl Psychol*, 95 (5), pp. 834-848.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C.N (2018) *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches.* Fourth edn. SAGE Publications

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2028) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edn. Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2022) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 6th edn. Sage Publications, Inc.

Cropanzano, R. & Mitchell, M. S. (2005) 'Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review'. *Journal of management*, 31 (6), pp. 874-900.

Crotty, M. (1998) *The foundations of social research:meaning and perspective in the research process.* London: Sage Publications.

Cunliffe, A. L. & Alcadipani, R. (2016) 'The Politics of Access in Fieldwork:Immersion, Backstage Dramas, and Deception'. *Organizational Research Methods*, 19 (4), pp. 535-561.

Delbridge, R. & Keenoy, T. (2010) 'Beyond managerialism?'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21 (6), pp. 799-817.

Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F. & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001) 'The Job Demands-Resources Model of Burnout'. *J Appl Psychol*, 86 (3), pp. 499-512.

Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2011). The Job Demands-Resources model: Challenges for future research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology,* 37(2).

Denscombe, M. (2017) *The good research guide : for small-scale social research projects.* Sixth edn. : Open University Press

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2013) *Strategy of Qualitative Inquiry.* SAGE Publications

Denzin, N. K. (2001) 'The reflexive interview and a performative social science'. *Qualitative Research*, 1 (1), pp. 23-46.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research.* Fifth edn.

Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health (2017) Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers (Accessed: 1/11/2017)

Dibben, P., Klerck, G. & Wood, G. (2011) *Employment relations : a critical and international approach.* London: London : Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Dromey, J. (2014). Meeting the Challenge: Successful Employee Engagement in the NHS, London: IPA.

Dundon, T. & Rollinson, D. (2011) *Understanding employment relations.* ed. Rollinson, D., 2nd edn. London: London : McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Easterby-Smith, M., Jaspersen, L. J., Thorpe, R. & Valizade, D. (2021) *Management and Business Research.* 7th edn. London : SAGE.

Eldor, L. (2020), How Collective Engagement Creates Competitive Advantage for Organizations: A Business-Level Model of Shared Vision, Competitive Intensity, and Service Performance. *Journal of management studies*, 57: 177-209

Eldor, L. & Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2017) 'The nature of employee engagement: rethinking the employee–organization relationship'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28 (3), pp. 1-27.

Emmott, M. (2015) 'Employment relations over the last 50 years: confrontation, consensus or neglect?'. *Employee relations*, 37 (6), pp. 658-669.

Engage-for-Success 'About the Movement '. [Online]. Available at: https://engageforsuccess.org/ (Accessed: 05/02/22).

Farnham, D. (2015) *The changing faces of employment relations : global, comparative and theoretical perspectives.* Management, work and organisations. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan Eduction.

Fineman, S. (2006) 'On Being Positive: Concerns and Counterpoints'. *The Academy of Management review*, 31 (2), pp. 270-291.

Fleming, P. & Spicer, A. (2003) 'Working at a Cynical Distance: Implications for Power, Subjectivity and Resistance'. *Organization (London, England)*, 10 (1), pp. 157-179.

Fletcher, L. (2016). Training perceptions, engagement, and performance: comparing work engagement and personal role engagement. *Human Resource Development International*, 19(1), 4-26.

Fletcher, L. (2017) 'The Everyday Experiences of Personal Role Engagement: What Matters Most?'. *Human resource development quarterly*, 28 (4), pp. 451-479.

Fletcher, L. (2019) 'How can personal development lead to increased engagement? The roles of meaningfulness and perceived line manager relations'. *International journal of human resource management*, 30 (7), pp. 1203-1226.

Fletcher, L., Bailey, C. & Gilman, M. W. (2018) 'Fluctuating levels of personal role engagement within the working day: A multilevel study'. *Human resource management journal*, 28 (1), pp. 128-147.

Fletcher, L., Alfes, K. and Robinson, D. (2016) 'The relationship between perceived training and development and employee retention: the mediating role of work

attitudes', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 29(18), pp. 2701–2728.

Fletcher, L., Bailey, C., Alfes, K., & Madden, A. (2020). Mind the context gap: A critical review of engagement within the public sector and an agenda for future research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *31*(1), 6-46.

Fletcher, L. & Robinson, D. (2014) 'Measuring and understanding employee engagement', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 273 - 290.

Foucault, M. (1974) *The archaeology of knowledge.* London: London : Social Science Paperback. Tavistock.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/knowledge : selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977.* ed. Gordon, C., 1st American ed. edn. New York: New York : Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison.* Penguin Books.

Francis, H. M., Ramdhony, A., Reddington, M. & Staines, H. (2013) 'Opening spaces for conversational practice: a conduit for effective engagement strategies and productive working arrangements'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (14), pp. 2713-2740.

Frosh, S. (2007) 'Disintegrating Qualitative Research'. *Theory & Psychology*, 17 (5), pp. 635-653.

Gallup (2010), The State of the Global Workplace: A worldwide study of employee engagement and wellbeing [online] Available at http://www.gallup.com/services/176300/state-global-workplace.aspx (Accessed: 7/09/2017)

Gallup (2018) 'Gallup employee engagement'. [Online]. Available at: https://www.gallup.com/workplace/229424/employee-engagement.aspx?g_source=link_wwwv9&g_campaign=item_237437&g_medium=copy (Accessed: 2/12/2018).

Gatrell, C. (2009) 'Safeguarding subjects? A reflexive appraisal of researcher accountability in qualitative interviews'. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 4 (2), pp. 110-122.

Ghorbannejad, P. & Esakhani, A. (2016) 'Capacity to engage: studying role of individual differences in work engagement – evidences from Iran'. *Journal of Management Development*, 35 (9), pp. 1174-1183.

Gifford, J. & Young, J. (2021) *Employee Engagement: Definitions, Measures and Outcomes.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/evidence-reviews/employee-engagement-discussion-report_tcm18-89598.pdf (Accessed: 25/03/2022).

Gill, J. & Johnson, P. (2010) *Research methods for managers.* 4th edition edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Given, L. M. (2008) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.

Godard, J. (2014) 'The psychologisation of employment relations?'. *Human resource management journal*, 24 (1), pp. 1-18.

Godard, J. (2020). 'Psychologisation Revisited.' *Human Resource Management Journal,* 30 (1), pp. 84-85.

Goffman, E. (1971) *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Goffman, E. (1983) 'The Presidential Address: The Interaction Order'. *American sociological review*, 48 (6), pp. 1.

Goleman, D. (2004) *Emotional intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ.* ed. Goleman, D., London: London : Bloomsbury.

Gonzalez-Roma, V., Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Lloret, S. (2006). Burnout and work engagement: Independent factors or opposite poles?, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour,* 68, pp. 165–174.

Grant, D., Keenoy, T. & Oswick, C. (2001) 'Organizational Discourse: Key Contributions and Challenges'. *International studies of management & organization*, 31 (3), pp. 5-24.

Gruman, J. A. & Saks, A. M. (2011) 'Performance management and employee engagement'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21 (2), pp. 123-136.

Gruman, J. A. & Saks, A. M. (2020) 'Employee and collective voice engagement: being psychologically present when speaking up at work', in Wilkinson, A., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T. and Freeman, R.B. (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Guest, D. (2014a) 'Employee engagement: a sceptical analysis'. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 1 (2), pp. 141-156.

Guest, D. (2014b) 'Employee Engagement: Fashionable fad or long-term fixture?', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York: NY: Routledge, pp. 221 - 235.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. & Namey, E. E. (2012) *Applied thematic analysis.* Los Angeles: Los Angeles : Sage Publications.

Guest, G., Namey, E. E. & Mitchell, M. L. (2013) *Collecting qualitative data: a field manual for applied research.* SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Gupta, M., & Shukla, K. (2017). An empirical clarification on the assessment of engagement at work. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 20(1)

Hakanen, J. J., Bakker, A. B. & Schaufeli, W. B. (2006) 'Burnout and work engagement among teachers'. *Journal of school psychology*, 43 (6), pp. 495-513.

Hammersley, M. & Traianou, A. (2012) 'Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity'*.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 99.

Harley, B. (2015) 'The one best way? 'Scientific' research on HRM and the threat to critical scholarship'. *Human resource management journal*, 25 (4), pp. 399-407.

Harney, B., Wilkinson, A. & Dundon, T., Donaghey, J. & Freeman, R. B. (2018) 'Employment Relations and Human Resource Management', in Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Donaghey, J., and Colvin, A. (eds.),*The Routledge Companion to Employment Relations.* Abingdon: Routledge, 108-24

Harter, J.K. (2000), 'Managerial talent, employee engagement, and business-unit performance', *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 215-224.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L. & Hayes, T. L. (2002) 'Business-Unit-Level Relationship Between Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, and Business Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87 (2), pp. 268-279.

Harter, S. (2002) 'Authenticity', *Handbook of positive psychology.* New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, pp. 382-394.

Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B. N. (2022) 'Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292 pp. 114523-114523.

Heracleous, L. & Hendry, J. (2000) 'Discourse and the study of organization: Toward a structurational perspective'. *Human relations (New York)*, 53 (10), pp. 1251-1286.

Hewlin, P. F. (2003) 'And the award for best actor goes to . . . : Facades of conformity in organizational settings'. *Academy of Management Review*, 28, pp. 633-642.

Hodgkinson, G. P. (2006) 'The role of JOOP (and other scientific journals) in bridging the practitioner-researcher divide in industrial, work and organizational (IWO) psychology'. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 79 (2), pp. 173-178.

Holland, P., Cooper, B. & Sheehan, C. (2017) 'Employee Voice, Supervisor Support, and Engagement: The Mediating Role of Trust'. *Human resource management*, 56 (6), pp. 915-929.

Husserl, E. (1970) *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology : an introduction to phenomenological philosophy.* Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Hyman, R. (1987) 'Strategy or Structure? Capital, Labour and Control'. *Work, employment and society*, 1 (1), pp. 25-55.

Jenkins, S. & Delbridge, R. (2013) 'Context matters: examining 'soft' and 'hard' approaches to employee engagement in two workplaces'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (14), pp. 2670-2691.

Jeung, C.-W. (2011) 'The Concept of Employee Engagement: A Comprehensive Review from a Positive Organizational Behavior Perspective'. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 24 (2), pp. 49-69.

Jones, N. I. (2012) *Full Circle: Employee Engagement in the Welsh Public Service*. Bangor University.

Kahn, W. A. (1990) 'Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work'. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 33 (4), pp. 692-724.

Kahn, W. A. (1992) 'To be fully there: psychological presence at work'. *Human Relations*, 45 (4), pp. 321.

Kahn, W. A. (2010) 'The Essence of Engagement: Lessons from the Field', in Albrecht, S.L. (ed.) *Handbook of Employee Engagement: Perspectives, Issues, Research and Practice.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kahn, W. A. & Fellows, S. (2013) 'Employee Engagement and Meaningful Work', in Dik, B.J., Byrne, Z.S. and Steger, M.F. (eds.) *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace.* American Psychological Association, pp. 105-126.

Kahn, W. A. & Heaphy, E. D. (2014) 'Relational contexts of personal engagement at work', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Routledge, pp. 96-110.

Katz, D. & Kahn, R. L. (1978) *The social psychology of organizations.* 2nd edn. Wiley.

Kaufman, B., Barry, M., Wilkinson, A., & Gomez, R. (2020) The future of employee engagement: the challenge of separating old wine from new bottles. In M. Wilkinson, A. and Barry (eds.), *The Future of Work and Employment*. Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 223-244.

Keenoy, T. (2014) 'Engagement: A murmuration of objects?', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 197-220.

Krishnaveni, R. & Monica, R. (2016) 'Identifying the drivers for developing and sustaining engagement among employees'. *IUP Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15 (3), pp. 7.

Kulesa, P., Paul, A. & Young, S. (2021) 'What is employee engagement?'. *EX Insights*, [Online]. Available at: https://www.wtwco.com/en-GB/Insights/2021/04/what-is-employee-engagement (Accessed: 25/03/2022).

Kvale, S. (1999) 'The Psychoanalytic Interview as Qualitative Research'. *Qualitative inquiry*, 5 (1), pp. 87-113.

Kwon, B., Farndale, E. & Park, J. G. (2016) 'Employee voice and work engagement: Macro, meso, and micro-level drivers of convergence?'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 26 (4), pp. 327-337.

Kwon, K., & Kim, T. (2020). An integrative literature review of employee engagement and innovative behavior: Revisiting the JD-R model. Human Resource Management Review, 30(2), 100704.

Kwon, K., & Park, J. (2019). The Life Cycle of Employee Engagement Theory in HRD Research. *Advances in Developing Human Resources,* 21(3), 352–370.

Latour, B. (2000) 'When things strike back: a possible contribution of 'science studies' to the social sciences'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1), pp. 107-123.

Lee, B. & Usman, A. (2018) 'Towards the Wholesome Interview: Technical, Social and Political Dimensions '.in Cassell, C., Cunliffe, A.L. and Grandy, G. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: Methods*

and Challenges. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. 102-116. Available at: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/the-sage-handbook-of-qualitative-business-and-management-research-methods-v2 (Accessed: 18/02/2022).

Lee, J. & Ok, C. M. (2015) 'Drivers of work engagement: An examination of core self-evaluations and psychological climate among hotel employees'. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 44 pp. 84-98.

Lee, J. Y., Rocco, T. S. & Shuck, B. (2020) 'What Is a Resource: Toward a Taxonomy of Resources for Employee Engagement'. *Human Resource Development Review*, 19 (1), pp. 5-38.

Leitch, V. B. (2001) *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism.* First Edition edn. New York: New York : W. W. Norton & Co.

Lewis, R., Donaldson-Feilder, E. & Godfree, K. (2014) Developing managers to manage sustainable employee engagement, health and well-being [online]. Research insight. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/developing-managers-report [Accessed: 25/09/2017]

Limerick, B., Burgess-Limerick, T. & Grace, M. (1996) 'The politics of interviewing: power relations and accepting the gift'. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 9 (4), pp. 449-460.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A. & Guba, E. G. (2018) *Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences, Revisited.* eds. Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., The SAGE handbook of qualitative research.

Luthans, F. & Peterson, S.J. (2002), "Employee engagement and manager self-efficacy: implications for managerial effectiveness and development", *Journal of Management Development*, 21 (5), pp. 376-87.

Macey, W. H. & Schneider, B. (2008) 'The Meaning of Employee Engagement'. *Industrial and organizational psychology*, 1 (1), pp. 3-30.

Macey, W. H., Schneider, B., Barbera, K. M. & Young, S. A. (2009) *Employee engagement : tools for analysis, practice, and competitive advantage.* Chichester: Chichester : Wiley-Blackwell.

Mackay, M. M. (2017) 'The link between employee attitudes and employee effectiveness: Data matrix of meta-analytic estimates based on 1161 unique correlations'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27, pp. 108 – 120

Mackay, M. M., Allen, J. A. & Landis, R. S. (2017) 'Investigating the incremental validity of employee engagement in the prediction of employee effectiveness: A meta-analytic path analysis'. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27 (1), pp. 108-120.

MacLeod, D. & Clarke, N. (2009) *Engaging for success: Enhancing performance through employee engagement.* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

MacLeod, D. & Clarke, N. (2014) *The Evidence: Wellbeing and Employee Engagement.* https://engageforsuccess.org/. 38 pp. Available at: https://engageforsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/wellbeing-and-engagement-04June2014-Final.pdf (Accessed: 25/09/2017).

Madden, A & Bailey, K 2017, 'Engagement: where has all the 'power' gone?', *Organisational Dynamics,* vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 113-119.

Maslach, C. H., Schaufeli, W. B. & Leiter, M. P. (2001) 'Job burnout'. *Annual Review of Psychology,,* 52 (1), pp. 397-422.

Mason, J. (2018) *Qualitative researching.* Third edition. edn. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Mason, M. (2010) 'Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews'. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11

Masson, R. C., Royal, M. A., Agnew, T. G. & Fine, S. (2008) 'Leveraging Employee Engagement: The Practical Implications'. *Ind. organ. psychol*, 1 (1), pp. 56-59.

May, D., Gilson, R. & Harter, L. (2004) 'The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work'. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 77 pp. 11-37.

Mayring, P. (2021) *Qualitative Content Analysis*. First edition. SAGE Publications Ltd.

McBain, R. (2007) 'The practice of engagement: Research into current employee engagement practice'. *Strategic HR Review*, 6 (6), pp. 16-19.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002) *Phenomenology of perception.* London: Routledge.

Mesmer-Magnus, J. R., DeChurch, L. A., & Wax, A. (2012) 'Moving emotional labor beyond surface and deep acting: A discordance-congruence perspective'. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2(1), pp. 6–53.

Meyer, J. P., Gagné, M. & Parfyonova, N. M. (2010) 'Toward an Evidence-based Model of Engagement: What We Can Learn from Motivation and Commitment

Research', in Albrecht, S.L. (ed.) *Handbook of Employee Engagement: Perspectives, Issues, Research and Practice.* Edward Elgar Publishing.

Meyer, J., & Schneider, B. (2021) 'The promise of engagement', in B. Meyer, J. and Schneider (ed.), *A Research Agenda for Employee Engagement in a Changing World of Work* (pp. 3–17). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldaña, J. (2020) *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook.* Fourth edition. edn.

Miller, T. & Bell, L. (2012) 'Consenting to What? Issues of Access, Gate-Keeping and 'Informed' Consent'.in Miller, T., Birch, M., Mauthner, M. and Jessop, J. (pages 61-75) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. 2 edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/ethics-in-qualitative-research-2e (Accessed: 01/10/2019).

Moran, D. (2000) *Introduction to Phenomenology.* London, New York: Routledge.

Morgan, S. J. & Symon, G. (2004) 'Electronic interviews in organisational research', in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (eds.) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research* London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 23 - 33.

Newman, D. A. & Harrison, D. A. (2008) 'Been There, Bottled That: Are State and Behavioral Work Engagement New and Useful Construct "Wines"?'. *Industrial and organizational psychology*, 1 (1), pp. 31-35.

Nimon, K. & Shuck, B. (2020) Work engagement and burnout: Testing the theoretical continuums of identification and energy. *Human resource development quarterly,* Vol.31 (3), p.301-318

Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16 (1), pp. 1–16.

Peccei, R. (2013), '*Engagement at work: an evidence-based review'*, in Bach, S. and Edwards, M. (eds), Managing Human Resources, 5th ed., Wiley, Chichester, pp. 336-363.

Phillips, N. & Hardy, C. (2002) *Discourse Analysis.* Thousand Oaks: Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pratt, M., Ashforth, B., Cameron, K., Dutton, J. & Quinn, R. (2003) 'Fostering meaningfulness in working and at work'. *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of A New Discipline*, pp. 309-327.

Purcell, J., N. Kinnie, J. Swart, B. Rayton & S. Hutchinson (2009). People management and performance, New York, Taylor & Francis.

Purcell, J. (2012) 'The limits and possibilities of employee engagement'. *Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations*, 9

Purcell, J. (2014a) 'Employee voice and engagement', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 236-249.

Purcell, J. (2014b) 'Disengaging from engagement'. *Human resource management journal*, 24 (3), pp. 241-254.

Rafaeli, A. & Sutton, R. I. (1987) 'Expression of Emotion as Part of the Work Role'. *The Academy of Management review*, 12 (1), pp. 23-37.

Rayton, B., Dodge, T. & D'Analeze, G. (2012) *The Evidence: Employee Engagement Task Force "Nailing the evidence" workgroup.* engageforsuccess.org. Available at: https://engageforsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/The-Evidence.pdf (Accessed: 08/01/2017).

Reed, M. (2011) 'Control in contemporary work organisations', in Blyton, P., Heery, E. and Turnbull, P. (eds.) *Reassessing the employment relationship.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 41 - 70.

Rees, C., Alfes, K. & Gatenby, M. (2013) 'Employee voice and engagement: connections and consequences'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (14), pp. 2780-2798.

Rich, B. L., Lepine, J. A. & Crawford, E. R. (2010) 'Job engagement: antecedents and effects on job performance.(Report)'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53 (3), pp. 617

Robertson-Smith, G. & Markwick, C. (2009) *Employee Engagement: A review of current thinking.* Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies. Available at: https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/469.pdf.

Robertson, I. T. & Cooper, C. L. (2010) 'Full engagement: the integration of employee engagement and psychological well-being'. *Leadership & organization development journal*, 31 (4), pp. 324-336.

Robinson, S., Perryman, D. and Hayday, S. (2004) The Drivers of Employee Engagement. IES Report 408, Institute for Employment Studies.

Rocco, T. S. and Plakhotnik, M. S. (2009) 'Literature reviews, conceptual frameworks and theoretical frameworks: Terms, function and distinctions', *Human Resources Development Review*, 8:1, 120-30.

Roof, R. (2015) 'The Association of Individual Spirituality on Employee Engagement: The Spirit at Work'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 130 (3), pp. 585-599.

Rosenfeld P., Giacalone R. & Riordan C. (1995) Impression Management in Organizations: Theory, Measurement, Practice. London: Routledge

Rosso, B. D., Dekas, K. H. & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010) 'On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review'. *Research in organizational behavior*, 30 pp. 91-127.

Saks, A. M. (2006) 'Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement'. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21 (7), pp. 600-619.

Saks, A. M. (2008) 'The Meaning and Bleeding of Employee Engagement: How Muddy Is the Water?'. *Industrial and organizational psychology*, 1 (1), pp. 40-43.

Saks, A. M. (2019). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement revisited. Journal of Organizational Effectiveness, 6(1), 19–38.

Saks, A. M. & Gruman, J. A. (2014) 'What Do We Really Know About Employee Engagement?'. *Human resource development quarterly*, 25 (2), pp. 155-182.

Saks, A. M. & Gruman, J. A (2020) Employee Engagement in Sessa, VI, & Bowling, NA (eds) 2020, *Essentials of Job Attitudes and Other Workplace Psychological Constructs*, Taylor & Francis Group, Oxford., pp. 242 - 271

Salanova, M., & Schaufeli, W.B. (2008), 'A Cross-National Study of Work Engagement as a Mediator Between Job Resources and Proactive Behaviour,' *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19, 116–131.

Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D. (1990) 'Emotional Intelligence'. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9 (3), pp. 185-211.

Sambrook, S. (2021) 'The life-cycle of engagement: towards a divergent critical HR/pluralist conceptualization'. *Human resource development international*, 24 (5), pp. 468-489.

Sambrook, S. A., Jones, N. & Doloriert, C. (2014) 'Employee engagement and autoethnography: being and studying self'. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 26 (3/4), pp. 172-187.

Sarti, D. (2014) 'Job Resources as Antecedents of Engagement at Work: Evidence From a Long-Term Care Setting'. *Human resource development quarterly*, 25 (2), pp. 213-237.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2016) *Research methods for business students.* Seventh edn. Pearson, Harlow.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2023) *Research methods for business students.* 9th edn. Pearson, Harlow.

Schaufeli, W. B. (2014) 'What is engagement?', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 15 - 35.

Schaufeli, W. B. (2017). Applying the Job Demands-Resources model: A 'how to' guide to measuring and tackling work engagement and burnout. *Organizational Dynamics,* 46(2),

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2003). UWES–Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: Test manual (Unpublished manuscript). Department of Psychology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Schaufeli, W. B. & Bakker, A. B. (2004) 'Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: a multi-sample study'. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 25 (3), pp. 293-315.

Schaufeli, W. B. & Bakker, A. B. (2010) 'Defining and measuring work engagement: Bringing clarity to the concept', in Bakker, A.B. and Leiter, M.P. (eds.) *Work engagement: a handbook of essential theory and research.* Hove [England], New York: Psychology Press, pp. 10 -24.

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B. & Salanova, M. (2006) 'The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study'. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 66 (4), pp. 701-716.

Schaufeli, W. B. & Salanova, M. (2008) 'Enhancing work engagement through the management of human resources', in Hellgren, J., Naswall, K. and Sverke, M. (eds.) *The Individual in the Changing Working Life.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 380-402.

Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V. & Bakker, A. B. (2002) 'The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach'. *Journal of Happiness studies*, 3 (1), pp. 71-92.

Schaufeli, W. & Salanova, M. (2011) 'Work engagement: On how to better catch a slippery concept'. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, 20 (1), pp. 39-46.

Schneider, B., Macey, W. H., Barbera, K. M. & Martin, N. (2009) 'Driving customer satisfaction and financial success through employee engagement'. *People & Strategy*, 32 (2), pp. 22.

Schneider, B., Macey, W. H., Barbera, K. M. & Young, S. A. (2010) 'The Role of Employee Trust in Understanding Employee Engagement', in Albrech, S.L. (ed.) *Handbook of Employee Engagement: Perspectives, Issues, Research and Practice.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Schreier M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice.* Sage.

Schwandt, T. A. (1998) *Constructivist, Interpretivist approaches to human inquiry.* eds. Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., The landscape of qualitative research : theories and issues / Volume 1. SAGE.

Schwandt, T. A. (2003) 'Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructionism' in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds), *The landscape of qualitative research: theories and issues.* 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.

Shaw, I. F. (2003) 'Ethics in Qualitative Research and Evaluation'. *Journal of Social Work*, 3 (1), pp. 9-29.

Shuck, B. (2011). Four emerging perspectives of employee engagement: an integrative literature review. Human Resource Development Review, 10, pp. 304–328.

Shuck, B. (2019) *Employee Engagement: A Research Overview.* Taylor & Francis.

Shuck, B. (2019b) 'Does My Engagement Matter? Exploring the Relationship Between Employee Engagement and Meaningful Work in Theory and Practice', in Ruth Yeoman, and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work*, Oxford Handbooks

Shuck, B., Kim, W. & Chai, D. S. (2021) 'The Chicken and Egg Conundrum: Job Satisfaction or Employee Engagement and Implications for Human Resources'. *New horizons in adult education & human resource development*, 33 (1), pp. 4-24.

Shuck, B., Kim, W. & Fletcher, L. (2021) 'Engagement at 30: a retrospective and look forward through an international cross-cultural context'. *Human resource development international*, 24 (5), pp. 465-467.

Shuck, B., Osam, K., Zigarmi, D. & Nimon, K. (2017) 'Definitional and Conceptual Muddling: Identifying the Positionality of Employee Engagement and Defining the Construct'. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16 (3), pp. 263-293.

Shuck, B. & Tonette, R. S. (2014) 'Human resource development and employee engagement', in Truss, C., Alfes, K., Delbridge, R., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice.* London: Routledge, pp. 336.

Shuck, B., Twyford, D., Reio Jr, T. G. & Shuck, A. (2014) 'Human Resource Development Practices and Employee Engagement: Examining the Connection With Employee Turnover Intentions'. *Human resource development quarterly*, 25 (2), pp. 239-270.

Shuck, B. & Wollard, K. (2010) 'Employee Engagement and HRD: A Seminal Review of the Foundations'. *Human Resource Development Review*, 9 (1), pp. 89-110.

Shuck, B., Osam, K., Zigarmi, D., & Nimon, K. (2017). Definitional and Conceptual Muddling: Identifying the Positionality of Employee Engagement and Defining the Construct. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(3), 263-293

Shuck, M. B., Rocco, T. S. & Albornoz, C. A. (2011) 'Exploring Employee Engagement from the Employee Perspective: Implications for HRD'. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 35 (4), pp. 300-325.

Shuck, B., & Rose, K. (2013). Reframing employee engagement within the context of meaning and purpose: Implications for HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 15, pp. 341-355.

Sparrow, P. (2014) 'Strategic HRM and employee engagement', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 99 - 115.

State of the global workplace. (2017) 1st edition. edn. New York, NY: Gallup Press.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. M. (2014) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques,* 4th ed. SAGE Publications Inc., London.

Taris, T., Ybema, J., & van Beek, I. (2017). Burnout and engagement: Identical twins or just close relatives? *Burnout Research*, 5, 3–11.

Taylor, M. (2017) *Good work: the Taylor review of modern working practices.* London: Royal Society of Arts.

Taylor, S. & Woodhams, C. (2012) *Managing people and organisations.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development,.

Torrington, D., Hall, L., Taylor, S. & Atkinson, C. (2008) Human Resource Management, 7th edition, Harlow: Pearson Education

Troth, A. C. & Guest, D. E. (2020) 'The case for psychology in human resource management research'. *Human resource management journal*, 30 (1), pp. 34-48.

Truss, K. (2014) 'The future of research in employee engagement', in D. Robinson and J. Gifford (Eds.), The Future of Engagement Thought Piece Collection, Engage for Success Peer-Reviewed Thought Leadership Series, London: Engaged for Success http://engageforsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Thought-piece-collection-post-review-070414.pdf (Accessed 1/08/2017)

Truss, C., Alfes, K., Delbridge, R., Shantz, A. & Soane, E.(eds) (2014). Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice. London: Routledge.

Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. & Soane, E. (2014) 'Introduction', in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (eds.) *Employee engagement in theory and practice.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 1 - 11.

Truss, C., Shantz, A., Soane, E., Alfes, K. & Delbridge, R. (2013) 'Employee engagement, organisational performance and individual well-being: exploring the evidence, developing the theory'. *International journal of human resource management*, 24 (14), pp. 2657-2669.

Valentin, C. (2014) 'The extra mile deconstructed: a critical and discourse perspective on employee engagement and HRD'. *Human Resource Development International*, 17 (4), pp. 475-490.

Viljevac, A., Cooper-Thomas, H. D. & Saks, A. M. (2012) 'An investigation into the validity of two measures of work engagement'. *International journal of human resource management*, 23 (17), pp. 3692-3709.

Vincent, S., Bamber, G. J., Delbridge, R., Doellgast, V., Grady, J. & Grugulis, I. (2020) 'Situating human resource management in the political economy: Multilevel theorising and opportunities for kaleidoscopic imagination'. *Human resource management journal*, 30 (4), pp. 461-477.

Watson, T. J. (2008) Sociology, work and industry (5th edn), Abingdon: Routledge

Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and society : an outline of interpretive sociology.* eds. Roth, G. and Wittich, C., Berkeley: University of California Press.

Welborne, T. M. (2011) 'Engaged in What? so What? A Role-Based Perspective for the Future of Employee Engagement', in Wilkinson, A. and Townsend, K. (eds.) *The Future of Employment Relations.* Basingstoke: Palgrame Macmillan, pp. 85 - 100.

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Donaghey, J. & Freeman, R. B. (2020) 'Employee voice: bridging new terrains and disciplinary boundaries', *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Williams, S. (2020) *Introducing Employment Relations: A Critical Approach.* Fifth edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology adventures in theory and method.* 2nd edn. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.

Willis-Towers-Watson (2022) 'About WTW: Overview'. [Online]. Available at: https://www.wtwco.com/en-US/About-Us/overview (Accessed: 25/03/2022).

Wittenberg, H., Eweje, G., Taskin, N., & Forsyth, D. (2023). Different perspectives on engagement, where to from here? A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

Wollard, K. K. (2011) 'Quiet Desperation: Another Perspective on Employee Engagement'. *Advances in developing human resources*, 13 (4), pp. 526-537.

Wollard, K. K. & Shuck, B. (2011) 'Antecedents to Employee Engagement:A Structured Review of the Literature'. *Advances in developing human resources*, 13 (4), pp. 429-446.

Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E. & Schaufeli, W. B. (2007) 'The Role of Personal Resources in the Job Demands-Resources Model'. *International journal of stress management*, 14 (2), pp. 121-141.

Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E. & Schaufeli, W.B (2009) Work engagement and financial returns: A diary study on the role of job and personal resources, Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology, Vol. 82, pp. 183-200