

**‘An investigation into employee engagement in the hotel sector in the West
of Ireland’.**

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Human
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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to identify and examine the current levels of employee engagement in the hotel sector in the West of Ireland, the differences in engagement levels between the different categories of employees and to recommend ways of improvement which would increase the levels of employee engagement in each organisation.

The research focused on assessing both managers and employees engagement levels. The research method employed was qualitative and data was collected through one-to-one interviews.

The research is an exploration of the experience of working life in a number of hotels in the West of Ireland. It aims to capture what peoples general feelings are about work, how well they think they perform, how satisfied they are at work and how they feel about interactions with their supervisors and their managers.

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of a Masters of Arts in Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

Date:

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 This chapter introduces the conceptual framework for this research including the background for this research and the reason for this research, the context for this research and the justifications for the research. This chapter also outlines the aims and the objectives and the appropriateness of the research questions.

1.2 Background and Context

The hotel sector is a major employer within the tourist industry. According to Grad Ireland in 2013 at the peak of a season between 150,000 and 250,000 workers were employed in the tourist industry in Ireland. The tourist industry earns six billion Euro for the Irish economy per annum. According to the IHF or the Irish Hotels Federation tourism is Irelands largest indigenous industry and is a key component of the export economy. It is 4 % of Gross National Product or GNP . According to O’Hagan (2011) “there are now more people employed in hotels and restaurants than in the total agricultural sector reflecting the increased importance of tourism to the Irish economy” (O’Hagan and Newman,2011,p.150).

The hotel industry is a labour intensive industry. Over 40% of the total costs of running hotels are made up of wages and salaries and hence the importance of an engaged workforce. The Gathering which took place in 2013 delivered at least 250,000 to 275,000 incremental tourists that would not have visited Ireland but for the Gathering(Varadkar,2013). The additional revenue generated by these tourists is estimated conservatively to be 170 million Euro(The Economic Impact Report,2014). According to a recent CSO report the number of tourists have surpassed the 2013 figures for the year up to August 2014.

Ireland is world renowned for its 'green image' and according to a recent article in the Irish Independent "the green image of Ireland has helped drive the successes of many businesses"(Hogan,2014,p.2).

This dissertation aims to explore in great detail employee engagement in the hotel sector in the west of Ireland. The hospitality sector here in Ireland does not just include hotels but also leisure, sports, tourism and annual events. Annual events include for example the Galway Races, the Rose of Tralee and many music festivals which bring great numbers of tourists and Irish citizens to the West of Ireland.

There is not a great amount of research into the hotel industry in the west of Ireland and employee engagement. There is a lacuna in particular on employee engagement in the hotel industry in Ireland.

1.3 Research Method

The research method chosen by the researcher will be qualitative research. The researcher use in depth interviews as the main method of research.

1.4 Research Aims

The aims of the research were to examine the topic of employee engagement from the perspective of managers and employees and examine how engaged they are in their jobs in the hotel sector.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research were:

- 1 To examine the concept of employee engagement and to gain an understanding of what is meant by the term "employee engagement"

2 To determine the factors which contribute to and drive engagement and its impact on the hotel sector

3 To explore the connections between employee engagement and leadership

4 To increase an understanding of the concept of disengagement

1.6 Research Questions

This research study is aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1 What is the level of employee engagement within the hotel sector?

2 Is there a difference in the level of engagement between managers and employees?

3 What improvements can be made in order to increase the present levels of employee engagement in the hotel sector?

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the reason for this research project, the background and context, the research method, the research aims and the research objectives.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this research project and is contained in the following review of the academic literature and the practitioner research. This supporting literature is relevant to this research project and was examined from a number of different perspectives:

- definitions of employee engagement
- drivers of engagement
- employee engagement and leadership
- disengagement
- measuring and understanding employee engagement
- employee engagement and retention
- employee voice and employee engagement

According to Holbeche and Matthews (2012) the term employee engagement was a term rarely heard of before the 1990's. However according to Hutchinson and Huntington (2013) the real principles of employee engagement are not new concepts at all and that in Ancient Greece and Rome employees were constantly encouraged by their employers. "Engagement is the morale or a groups willingness to accomplish organisational objectives" (Hutchinson, 2013, p.14). The concept of employee engagement has caught the imagination of practitioners and of academics however much debate continues in the academic community concerning the exact meaning of employee engagement and its consequences (Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz and Soane, 2014). "Engagement research has been plagued by inconsistent construct definitions and operationalisations" (Christian, 2011, p.89).

2.1 Definitions of employee engagement.

According to Macey and Schneider employee engagement has “been use to refer to a psychological state (involvement, commitment, attachment and mood, performance construct, disposition, or a combination of these” (Macey and Schneider, 2009,p. 5).

In defining employee engagement one must take into consideration that people first need to be engaged in their own individual personal lives. According to Millar (2012) employee engagement is made up of employee commitment and also employee motivation. There are many different definitions of employee engagement however there is no single definition of the term. Mac Leod and Clarke (2009) found as many as fifty different definitions of the term employee engagement. There exist many different versions of employee engagement and Mac Leod and Clarke suggest in their research that there may be many more. According to the Gallup Organisation “the term employee engagement refers to an individuals involvement and satisfaction with as well as their own enthusiasm for work” (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002, p. 269).

Sachs (2006) defined employee engagement as a “distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with the individuals role performance” (Sachs, 2006, p. 602). However, another definition of employee engagement is “employee engagement can be defined as a positive fulfilling work related state of mind which is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption and has been primarily articulated as a function of a job and also personal resources” (Ugwu, Onyishi and Sanchez, 2014, p.3). An engaged employee is an employee who is aware of business context and works with fellow colleagues on a daily basis to improve overall performance within the organisation for the benefit of everyone and the organisation as a whole (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004). Caplan (2013) suggests that engaged employees are those individuals within the organisation who feel that they are respected and treated fairly, they have plenty of opportunities for development, they know that they are listened to and they

understand how they contribute to organisational goals and overall success, they feel proud of their jobs, they know what they want for the future and they enjoy productive relationships with their work colleagues.

The United Kingdoms Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development or the CIPD defines employee engagement as “a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues. It goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation. Engagement is something that the employee has to offer the organisation: it cannot be required as part of the employment contract” (CIPD, 2006). In a later report the CIPD expanded its definition to read “we define employee engagement as being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others” The CIPD see engagement as having three core facets: intellectual engagement or thinking hard about the job and how to do it better, affective engagement or feeling positively about doing a good job and social engagement or actively taking opportunities to discuss work related improvements (CIPD, 2012).

The Work Foundation states that employee engagement describes “employees emotional and intellectual commitment to their organisation and to its success”. Engaged employees are those employees who experience a meaning and purpose in their work. They give of their own personal efforts to achieve the objectives of the organisation. Holbeche and Matthews (2012) argue that employee engagement is often viewed as an attitude of mind, a set or group of positive behaviours, attitudes and emotions which enable high job performance a kind which is in tune with the individual organisations vision and mission. Macey and Schneider (2008) outline that employee engagement has long been associated with an individuals personality traits and the closest connection is with conscientiousness. A comprehensive study was carried out by Kim, Shin and Swanger which included the so

called BIG 5 personality traits. It found that “only conscientiousness was significantly related to employee engagement where as neuroticism and extraversion were not. After controlling for job related factors “conscientiousness was still positively associated with engagement” but it was now “supplemented with neuroticism that was negatively associated with it” (Kin, Shin and Swanger, 2009,p.3). According to Kruse (2013) employee engagement is the actual emotional commitment that the employee has to the organisation and its goals and its objectives and the emotional commitment that the employee has which means that “employees who are engaged actually care about their work and when employees care they use discretionary effort and are willing to go the extra mile” (Kruse, 2013, p. 6).

Often the term employee engagement is used interchangeably with other terms including employee happiness, employee satisfaction, employee commitment, employee motivation, and internal communication. According to Hutchinson and Huntington (2013) “it is a combination of factors and a mix of things and one in isolation does not make for great employee engagement”(Hutchinson and Huntington, 2013,p.14). A further definition of employee engagement was put forward by Macey et al and it is “employee engagement is an individuals sense of purpose and focused energy, evident in others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort and persistence, directed towards organisational goals (Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young, 2009, p. 7).

Employee engagement has become something of a ‘vogue’ word which eclipses commitment and motivation in management literature (Woodruffe, 2006). The needs of the workforce have changed dramatically and in the year 2014 employees have many different wants and needs. The organisation of today must meet the wants and needs of there employees and there for employees will be more engaged.

The majority of what has been written about the subject of employee engagement can be found in academic articles, journals and books where its basis is in practice rather than

theory and experimental research. The European Motivation Index (2007) defines engaged employees as those individuals who are the “ambassadors of the organisation”. These individual employees go the extra mile. They are also those who learn more in less time and are often more creative.

Engaged employees are those employees who are concerned about the future of the organisation and they are willing to invest personal time, energy and effort to enable the organisation to excel.

2.2 Drivers of engagement

Researchers, academics and practitioners naturally wonder what key drivers can be leveraged to bring about increased results in employee engagement and many factors are explored to investigate this research.

Gibbons (2006) identifies after much research that the top drivers of employee engagement include the following “trust and integrity, the nature of the job, the connection between individual and company performance, career growth opportunities, pride about the company co workers, employee development and personal relationships with ones manager” (Gibbons, 2006, p.6). Yet, Hughes and Rog (2008) outline that employee engagement reflects a management philosophy and managers throughout the organisation at every level are required to behave and treat each and every individual employee with respect. Furthermore, Holbeche and Matthews (2012) argue that there are different drivers of engagement and these fall into four areas which are “connection, support, voice and scope”. According to Holbeche and Matthews (2012) the model explores the four drivers of engagement and what managers can do in response to these. “Connection is a sense of identification” and it is also “a sense of pride in the organisation” and “support is where employees feel valued and a sense of well being” and an employee without a voice can result in the employee feeling “excluded and

disregarded “ and finally “without scope as a driver of employee engagement, employees feel disempowered” (Holbeche and Matthews, 2012, p. 67).

Voltaire once said that work spares human beings from three evils which are boredom, vice and need. Work is very important to human beings and work provides human beings with a sense of achievement and satisfaction. One often asks the question what really drives engagement or creates the conditions for engagement? There are many arguments as to what drives employee engagement but what employees expect from their day to day work falls into a number of categories which were identified by Kahn. Firstly, Kahn outlines intellectual “am I able to grow, is my job stretching and interesting, so I have space; do I know what is happening and do my opinions count?”. Second is emotional or affective-“do I care about the organisation; do I care about its stakeholders, do I share its values; do I enjoy my work and am I cared for and am I valued?”. Third is social “is this an organisation where I feel I belong; am I part of a good team; is my organisation serving the community?” (Kahn, 1990, p.692).

There exists a number of factors which determine whether engagement is possible and one of these is fairness. According to the Institute for Employment Studies cited in Robinson (2004) a fair deal of fairness must exist at work because if people feel they are treated fairly in their workplace they are then ready to be engaged. Saks (2006) describes that challenging jobs are a good predictor of how engaged an individual was likely to be with their position of employment. Another moderating factor is that of trust and when this exists in a relationship there exists a lot more openness within a relationship between two individuals. It is clear that when an individual employee trusts their employer they then will feel more secure in their working relationship. When one examines fairness the most important principle of that is equity. Without a doubt equity is key to employee engagement and it is important to note that

rewards are a real test of the equity principle. Herzberg's research suggests that external rewards do not play a significant role in increasing engagement and can actually undermine it.

For Herzberg sufficient rewards are a hygiene factor rather than a motivator while insufficient rewards that are inherently unfair can become a source of active dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1987).

Debatably, Kahn (1990) argues that monetary rewards actually reduce peoples motivation to do work while Pink (2009) proposes that giving an individual excessive rewards does not raise commitment levels and sometimes actually undermines performance. There exists a strong connection between equity and employees having a voice. Employee voice is clearly addressed in the MacLeod Report (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009, p.33) as one of the "top four engagement drivers". The other three are "engaging leadership, engaging managers and organisations who live the values". According to the report it occurs when employees feel they are able to voice their ideas and be listened to both about their job role and making decisions in their own department as well as the sharing of problems and challenges along with a united or joint commitment to arrive at solutions. Kahn (1990) observed that peoples experiences of themselves and their work influence the conditions that drive their willingness to engage in their work roles and organisational members unconsciously ask themselves three questions which are: firstly, how meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance, second, how safe is it to do so and third, how available am I to do so? (Kahn, 1990).

The drivers of engagement fall into four areas of dynamic interconnectedness between individuals and organisations as follows: connection, support, voice and scope. The

employee engagement model is made up of these four elements and each plays an essential part of the model.

Connection is the first element and according to Robinson et al (2004) an engaged employee is aware of the business context and also that the organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires the existence of a two way relationship between the employer and also the employee. Leaders at all levels throughout the organisation including in hotels play a key role in building a culture and leaders are required to constantly connect and communicate. Daniel Goleman (2005) and the Hay group considered a group of six leadership styles which were widely used in client organisations and through this research they found that four of the six styles ; visionary, coaching, affiliative and democratic create a kind of resonance which boosts employee engagement and performance. Voice is the second quadrant of the model. In today's organisations it is essential to share and communicate information. According to Jan Carlzon the former CEO of Scandinavian Airlines "an individual without information can't take responsibility. An individual with information can't help but take responsibility". In a CIPD/Kingston Business School study it was found that the main drivers of employee engagement were having the opportunity to feed your views upwards and feeling well informed about what was happening in the organisation. A pre condition of voice is to accept differences of experience, outlook and approach and acceptance of different personal needs, values and beliefs is essential and this is what diversity is all about. The CIPD defines managing diversity as valuing everyone as an individual as employees, customers and clients (CIPD, 2011,b). Support is the third quadrant of the model and support includes words of encouragement or concern for needs. The Work Foundation (2010) found that for many employees their line manager is their employer. Support from all levels of management can make the difference between

employee engagement and employee burnout. Towers Watson (2010 b) defines well being as three elements of a persons work life which are connected to each other: “physical health-overall health, energy and stamina, psychological health-stress, anxiety, accomplishment, optimism, confidence and control, social health- work relationships, fairness, respect and social connectedness”(Watson, 2010,p.2).

The fourth and final quadrant of the model is scope. When individuals have scope they build new skills and capabilities and the importance of this is reflected in the Towers Watson (2012 b) global employee engagement survey and this survey found that “the top ten of seventy five engagement drivers: improved my skills over the last year, have excellent career advancement opportunities and enjoy challenging work assignments that broaden skills”.

2.3 Employee engagement and leadership

In recent years there has been a focus on employee engagement and its connection with effective leadership. There is much debate in relation to leadership and the process by which todays leaders achieve engagement.

According to Nahavandi (2009) “a leader is a person who influences individuals and groups within an organisation, helps them in establishing goals and guides them toward achievement of these goals thereby allowing them to be effective” (Nahavandi, 2009,p.4). this definition places emphasis on the dynamic nature of leadership and according to Beer (1994) leaders need to respond to the changing requirements of their role as “the old world was characterised by the need to manage things.....the new world is characterised by the need to manage complexity” (Beer,1994,p.15).

Above all else leaders are required to engage and motivate their employees/workforce because after all leadership is about “capturing attention and motivating people to follow

your way- your vision and your dreams” (Augier and Teece, 2005,p.116). Other academics have argued that leaders today can inspire and motivate employees through their guidance and leadership and these processes can influence the experience of engagement just as they can enhance performance” (Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz and Soane,2014).

Transformational leadership was a concept developed by Bass and Avolio and this model was derived through research and empirical data about the actual process of leadership. An important ingredient of transformational leadership is charisma and according to Conger and Kanungo (1988) it is the articulation of vision and the projection of strength and confidence that draws followers toward the mission of the organisational mission (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Charisma is a function which can increase meaningfulness of work. Furthermore, meaningfulness is an antecedent of employee engagement(May, Gilson and Harter, 2004). Meaningful work is a critical factor that seems to contribute to employee engagement and includes positive responses to an individuals work in the form of a general sense of positive well being as well as successful individual skill development and application (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990) . Today some employees are adept at finding meaning in their work (Cohen, 2008) and an important aspect of the leaders role is to assist employees who do not tend to see how their individual work fits the broader purpose of the organisation. The importance of motivation is acknowledged by the Plastic Co CEO “every manager who has got people working for them, its how effective they are at motivating people. You know I think if there is one thing I say to a lot of people in our business, it is we can invest in the best machinery and spend millions on it but at the end of the day its always going to come down to people because people are going to make the kit work and therefore the relationships we have with out subordinates. We like to motivate people and make them feel valued and rewarded and I think that’s a huge impact for leaders in our business something I personally spend a lot of time on” (Truss et al, 2014, p.151). Much research on transformational leadership by Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2011) has shown that

transformational leaders offer many opportunities to develop mastery and to increase the levels of employee engagement. One must examine the working environment and the interactions which take place between leaders and employees which represent a significant source of engagement.

Much research carried out by previous academics has identified several components of the working environment which are worthy of leaders attention. The Job Demands- Resources Model is a model which proposes that individual- level job resources direct and motivate effort towards performing work that leads to high levels of effort, absorption and attainment (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). This model contributes to an understanding of personal resources such as skills, abilities, resilience and self efficacy (Hobfoll, 2002). Leaders are required to approach employee engagement through ensuring that a fit between employees and their roles and a match between job demands and resources. Leaders are required to have a clear view of the entire organisation. As with other aspects of leadership developing engaging leadership requires reflective practice and attention to the engagement process. The actual definition of employee engagement is operationalized in the ISA Engagement Scale and this scale is a nine item measure that can assess overall engagement (Soane, Alfes, Truss, Rees and Gatenby, 2012) . The ISA Scale can be adapted to function as a measure of engaging leadership and can assess the extent to which leaders can assist and encourage employees to engage with their work. This scale is used as part of leadership development programmes and the data from the ISA Engaging Leadership Scale can provide a snapshot of an organisation such as a hotels current perspectives.

2.4 Disengagement

Disengagement or lack of engagement can result from differing conditions over which neither an employee nor the company has much control and too little focus on sustaining

an engagement culture can yield disengagement (Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young, 2009). Employee disengagement is a broad concept that is and has been studied in many different research areas. “Persons uncouple themselves from work roles when certain psychological conditions are insufficient” (Kahn, 1990, p. 692).

Niessen, Binnewies and Rank (2010) suggest that employee disengagement involves “a persons effort to release attention from thoughts and feelings related to both present work and previous work which they participated in” (Niessen, Binnewies and Rank, 2010,p.697). Hoffman and Tschida (2007) argue that engaged employees equal engaged customers and to improve customer service one must develop and nurture their employees and in addition the importance of employee engagement through on boarding, coaching, performance evaluation and career progression is essential. Some research suggests that there exists two types of disengagement and the first one exists due to the “lack of support for engagement” and the second is a function of “too much support for engagement” (Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young, 2009,p. 141). Employees often suffer from extreme psychological exhaustion and burnout. Matthews and Holbeche (2012) believe that when employees feel that the terms of their contract have been breached they then withdraw from their work and make less of an effort. Employees who suffer emotional exhaustion this in turn results in higher turnover levels in organisations. There is much debate around job satisfaction and disengagement. “Only forty five per cent of people are satisfied with their jobs and only twenty nine per cent are engaged at work” (Kruse, 2013,p.3). The actual symptoms of disengagement are distinguished by Gallup and Flade (2006) as employees who are ‘actively engaged’, ‘not engaged’ and ‘actively disengaged’.

According to Caplan (2013) the engagement index slots individuals into one of three categories. Firstly, engaged employees are those employees who work with passion and feel a profound connection to their organisation. Secondly, not engaged employees are

essentially 'checked out' and sleep walk through their work day and thirdly actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work but also act on their personal unhappiness. Much research shows that there are strong links between disengagement and burnout. Burnout is defined as "a negative psychological syndrome that comprises emotional exhaustion and reduced professional self-efficacy"

(Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001,p.3). Burnout was in the past measured by reversing scoring burnout questionnaire scales (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). However as research advanced some academics argued that burnout could not be measured in this way.

Disengaged employees is one problem which organisations must face however disengaged managers is a bigger issue faced by many organisations today.

A survey carried out in the United Kingdom by the Chartered Management Institute estimated that ineffective management is costing businesses in the United Kingdom more than £19 million annually in lost working hours (Pearson,2011). Research suggests further that many managers in organisations today are poor at developing relationships with their staff and the behaviours of disengaging managers are described by Robinson (2004) as follows "a lack of empathy and interest in people" along with "a failure to listen and communicate and do not motivate or inspire"

(Robinson, 2004,p.58). As Judith Bardwick (2007) points out if a person works for a manager who does not care about them as an individual and focuses on their weaknesses and not on their strengths and does not communicate with them the employees are not engaged or committed. It is clear that organisations who fail to create a culture of engagement for present employees fail also to attract new employees.

Many studies of work engagement have adopted the job demands resources model (JD-R) as an explanatory framework(Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). This model of burnout is used by academics because it separates burnout and engagement as two separate constructs. When job demands are high and additional effort is required to achieve work goals burnout

may lead to negative outcomes including depression or cardiovascular disease (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner and Shapira, 2006). Himelstein (2013) believes that there are a number of signs of employee disengagement and the warning signs are fairly obvious and they include an 'I don't care' attitude, an increase in absences, a decline in quality of work and mood swings.

Kahn (1990) p. 701 gave the following definition for personal disengagement: "personal disengagement is the simultaneous withdrawal and defence of a person's preferred self in behaviours that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive and emotional absence and passive incomplete role performance". Kahn furthermore discussed problems of disengagement which lead to the "uncoupling of selves from work roles".

According to Branham (2005) disengaged workers can negatively influence morale and the revenues of the organisation: they often make trouble and express negative feelings and this destroys achievements of engaged work mates. In essence employee disengagement is the opposite of employee engagement and can have a major damaging effect on any organisation. An organisations most valuable resource is its employees and often these employees do not perform to their full potential. Workers lack of commitment and lack of motivation results in disengagement (Simon, 2012) and the essential difference between an engaged and disengaged worker can more often than not mean the difference between success and failure (Maylett and Nielson, 2012).

2.5 Measuring and understanding engagement

There exists strong evidence that employee engagement leads to better overall organisational performance. It is clear that employee engagement has generated huge interest among many groups in the last decade in particular. Measurement is powerful because what gets measured gets more attention (Eccles, 1991). The interest in employee engagement has rapidly

increased as has the desire to measure, evaluate and benchmark levels of engagement in organisations today. Measures developed from the needs satisfying approach are drawn from the findings of Kahn's (1990) work on 'psychological engagement'. Kahn (1990) states that the construct captures the physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of one's preferred self which are expressed when one performs one's job role.

May, Gilson and Harter's (2004) psychological engagement measure was the first to operationalize Kahn's (1990) three factor conceptualisation of engagement. This study found that meaningfulness exhibited the strongest relationship with employee engagement followed by availability(May et al, 2004).

The multidimensional approach is one of the most recent developments in the employee engagement field and it stems from Sak's (2006) research. This approach focuses on the role performance and Sak's (2006) clarifies that employee engagement can be measured through job engagement and also through organisational engagement. The study by Sak's showed that although job and organisational engagement have some common antecedents they also have some different antecedents including job characteristics. The research also indicates that both job and organisational engagement correlate positively with the outcomes of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational behaviour.

The benefits of measuring and understanding employee engagement are highlighted by Alexandra Michael an employee engagement manager at Mace "it has given employees a voice and has provided figures to support our business case for engagement activity. It has helped us to understand the complexity of employee engagement. Some of our people are highly engaged despite having experienced less than adequate line management- why is that? Others are highly engaged with their projects but less so with the company itself- should we see this as a problem? Having an understanding of these complexities and anomalies has been most helpful in shaping our engagement strategy"(Cited from Truss et al. 2014). It is clear that when employees who are talented love what they do and

experience a good flow of emotions they will give of their best on a daily basis (Gardner et al, 2001). Employees who experience a good flow are the most productive employees and the most creative employees. There exists a strong connection between talent and employee engagement.

Talent management or the organisations ability to attract and retain talented workers and to engage them with the work of the firm distinguishes those organisations that survive and those that fail (Holbeche and Matthews, 2012). The implementation of talent management activities is essential to retain the most talented employees. A CIPD survey carried out in 2010 found that only fifty nine per cent of companies undertook talent management activities and only just over half of these thought they were effective (CIPD, 2010 b). According to a Towers Watson Survey carried out in (2010) attracting and retaining employees to create an engaged environment for future found five main drivers: competitive base pay, career advancement opportunities, challenging work, convenient work location and a flexible schedule.

Kruse (2013) outlines that how an individual feels about their work comes primarily from four things: communication- do you believe that there is frequent and consistent two way communication? Growth and development-do you believe that you are learning new things and developing yourself? Recognition and appreciation- do you feel appreciated? Trust and confidence-do you trust the leadership and have confidence in your organisations future? (Kruse, 2013).

2.6 Employee engagement and retention

It is paramount to retain talented employees. Taylor (2002) addresses the importance of employee retention as being: there are several new job opportunities in an organisation however there is a shortage of talented employees and there is an increasing demand getting skilled employees. It is critically important therefore to hold on to the talented employees because recruiting new employees is positive however they cannot replace the knowledge of the leaving employees. As a result of the recent economic recession employee retention has become a major challenge for organisations everywhere.

Many organisations seek to improve their profit by reducing overall costs however this results in difficulties in retaining a highly skilled and talented workforce. A number of factors influence employee retention and Mc Keown (2002) outlines his own opinion on employee retention which focuses mainly on retaining individuals who are the very best performers. Mc Keown believes there is no one definition of employee retention because individuals perception of employee retention varies. Browell (2013) suggests one definition of retention “ keeping those members of staff that one wants to retain and not losing them for whatever reason”(Browell, 2013, p. 5). Browell expands on this definition and goes on to say that the key employees who held important positions are vital for the overall success of the organisation. Furthermore, Ratna and Chawla (2012) suggest that employee retention is of more importance than hiring even though hiring knowledgeable individuals is essential for a manager or an employer. Employee retention includes taking the best measures to encourage people to remain in the organisation as long as they can. Retention is a process in itself. Retaining employees

can be a constant worry for many employers and it is important to stop the problem of losing talent before it begins. According to the Saks Network efforts should be made to retain highest value employees and these are the employees who create excellent results, contribute new ideas, require little supervision and possess unique skills(Saks,2014).

Taylor (2002) addresses the barriers for retention which include more job offers, which give current employees more alternatives, a shortage of skills in certain industries affects the development of some organisations so it is crucial to keep existing employees and finally the flexibility of work reduces the loyalty of employees. In the twenty-first century the needs of employees include the following: employability, communication capacity, job roles, cross functional work, meaningful work, short-term commitment, life long learning and enterprise(Baker, 2014). Employers in many organisations today are frustrated because employees do not stay long enough after being trained by the organisation.

This frustration questions employees values including loyalty and job focus. In retaining staff it is important that employees find their work meaningful. Jesper Isaksen carried out much research on employees performing highly repetitive and mundane work in a company using three criteria: meaning through attachment to the workplace, meaning through engagement with their work colleagues and meaning based on the concept of work being a necessary part of life. He found that meaningful work is not simply an outcome of some specific working conditions. The construction of meaning was the result of workers spontaneous and continuous effort and was shaped regardless of working conditions they had to endure. Despite many obstacles some employees experienced work as meaningful overall where as others did not (Isaksen, 2000).

2.7 Employee voice and engagement

What is employee voice and more importantly what do we define as employee voice?

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) identify in their comprehensive report the four pillars necessary to support employee engagement and include: employee voice along with leadership, engaging managers and integrity. The Mac Leod and Clarke report paid significant attention to ‘employee voice’ and “the opportunity for employees to have a voice in management decision making is fundamental in influencing attitudes and behaviour” Cited in Truss et al. 2014, p. 236).

Voice becomes a building block for engagement when employees views are sought out, they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference. There exists little recognition that employee voice is a two way process where employee have a chance to give their views and to engage in conversation with managers.

“The root of employee voice lies in influence being shared among individuals who are hierarchically unequal. In essence employee voice relates to employees ability to influence the outcome of organisational decisions by having the opportunity to advance their ideas” (Farndale, 2011,p.114). One way in which to examine employee voice is to profile the ‘engaged employee’. “Engaged individuals are described as being psychologically present, fully there, attentive, feeling, connected, integrated and focussed in their role performances. They are open to themselves and others, connected to work and focussed on their role performance”(Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010, p.619).

A good definition of voice through consultation is “a right to be informed of planned measures in advance and to have an opportunity to express an opinion prior to

implementation”(Budd and Zagelmeyer, 2010,p.492). Employee voice can be construed as somewhat of a vague term at times. The CIPD (2012) explain that employee voice culminates in the two way communication between employer and employee which involves both the employer communicating to the employee as well as the employee communicating to the employer. Communication is a concept which focuses on the opportunities for employees to be involved in the decision making collectively through trade unions or by other means(CIPD, 2012).

Employee voice can be considered as an expression of individuality and independent mindedness(Gorden and Graham, 1988,p.102). Today employee voice is more widely interpreted to mean a process of two way communication and the actual exchange of information between managers and employees. The employees also have a say in what goes on in their organisation.

Conclusion

There has been much research carried out by practitioners on employee engagement. The manager of the employees is the ultimate employee engagement driver and supervisors play a key role also.

Chapter Three Research Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore and explain the way in which the information that provides the basis of this research and its subsequent findings was sought. For this dissertation, the researcher had to decide on which methodology were going to be the most practical and yield the best results. The purpose of the research methodology chapter is to signal to the individual reader how the research was conducted and what philosophical assumptions underpin the argument being made (Quinlan, 2011). It is important that the research methodology used is capable of supporting the research and of enabling and facilitating its completion.

3.1 Research defined

Research is often thought of as a series of steps which make up a process and put simply research is “a set of activities unfolding over time which takes time and consideration” (Ghuri and Gronhaug,2005, p.29). The word research is originally from Latin and research has a number of characteristics: firstly data is collected systematically and then interpreted and there is always a clear purpose to finding things out (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill,2003).The research methodology chosen must be suitable for the research project and it “must be capable of supporting the research, capable of enabling and facilitating its completion”(Quinlan,2011,p.177). According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler,2008,p.15 “good research is research which generates dependable data which is derived through practices”. Good research is research which follows the standards of the scientific method and includes good policies and procedures for generating research.

The actions which generate good business research include: (a) the purpose of the business research is clearly defined, (b) the research procedures are described in enough detail to allow another researcher to repeat the research, (c) the research design is fully planned to yield results which are as objective as possible, (d) high ethical standards are applied, (e) the limitations are frankly revealed, (f) the analysis of the data is extensive enough to reveal its significance, (g) the findings are presented unambiguously, (h) conclusions should be limited to those for who the data provided on an adequate basis, (i) the researchers experience should be reflected and greater confidence in the researcher is experienced if he or she is a person of integrity (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

3.2 Qualitative research

The research methodology chosen for this dissertation is proposed to be a qualitative approach in the form of in depth interviews. The term qualitative is used to describe the “research and techniques which use and give rise to qualitative rather than quantitative information that is information in the form of words and images rather than numbers”(Veal, 2011,p.232). Qualitative research is research based on beliefs that the actual participants involved will reveal and explain their own personal experiences, feelings, views in their own work environment and in their own way or own words(Veal, 2011). Saunders (2003) explains or outlines that qualitative data is data based around words and the real results gathered which need to be then categorised or classified into groups and analysis needs to be carried out using concepts. Qualitative research is designed to tell the researcher how and why things happen as they do.

Furthermore, qualitative research is research which includes “an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and other wise come to terms

with the meaning and not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”(Cooper and Schindler,2014,p.114). Qualitative techniques are used at the data collection and data analysis stages of any research project and qualitative data is data which represents ideas, feelings, thoughts and understanding of non-numeric data(Quinlan, 2011). The emphasis in qualitative methods is on understanding and a key focus on understanding from the respondents point of view as well as “observations and measurements in natural setting” (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005,p.110). There are three main components of qualitative research and these are data, interpretative procedure and report(Backer,1970). There exists much support for the use of qualitative data. According to Miles (1979) qualitative data are attractive for many reasons including they are rich, full, earthly ,holistic and real and their value seems unimpeachable. Miles (1979) believes that qualitative data preserve chronological flow and in principle they offer a far more precise way to assess the affairs of the organisation. Qualitative research draws data from a variety of sources which include from people and organisations along with events and happenings.

3.3 Interviews

The interview is the primary data collection technique used to gather data or information in qualitative methodologies. Interviews are a popular technique used and they provide the researcher with richer data or information. Data are often collected through interviews and observations, interpretive procedure are those techniques to conceptualise the data to arrive at findings and reports are then written and in the case of the student the report is in the form of a thesis(Strauss and Corbin, 1990 and Miles and Huberman,1994).

Interviews need to be carefully planned and also carefully recorded by the researcher in order to create data. The data which is generated through interviewing needs

to be reliable and valid. According to the CIPD (2009) interviews offer many advantages including flexibility, informality and the ability to obtain various types of data. During a research project the interview questions need to be adaptable and also flexible. Open ended questions are most favoured during an interview. Jankowicz (1995) distinguishes some individual one-to-one interviews as key format interviews where questions might be common but there would be specific questions needed for each key informant. An advantage of using semi-structured is that the researcher can leave the interviewee free to express what is of importance to them. The CIPD (2009) state that the advantages of semi-structured interviews include: they are semi-flexible, semi-open, there is some comparability, some generalizability and relatively high face validity.

Most qualitative research relies on interviews and the semi-structured interview is distinct from the structured interview in a variety of ways including: “they rely on developing a dialogue, require more interviewer creativity, use the skill of the interviewer to extract more data and use the interviewers experience and skill to achieve greater clarity”(Cooper and Schindler, 2014,p.153). An advantage of the in depth interview is that the interviewer can gain a clearer and more accurate picture of the individual respondents position or behaviour (Ghauri and Gronhaug,2005). Kvale (1996) suggests nine different types of question and most interviews will contain a mix of all of them. These questions are as follows: introducing questions, follow up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct and indirect questions, structuring questions, silence and interpreting questions. As is suggested by this list one of the most important parts of interviewing is listening.

Qualitative research including interviews is generally based on the belief that the people personally involved in a particular situation are best placed to describe and

explain their own experiences(Veal,2011). The interviewees are given the opportunity to express their feelings and their own world view in their own words and to speak freely about their individual experiences.

3.4 Advantages and uses of qualitative research

According to Kelly (1980) qualitative research has a number of advantages over quantitative: the method corresponds better with the nature of the phenomenon being studied, the qualitative method is more personal, the results are better understood to individuals who are not statistically trained, qualitative method is better able to encompass an individuals change over time. However the debate continues as to whether qualitative research techniques are better at providing an understanding of peoples needs and overall aspirations. Peterson (1994) provides researchers with a useful list of the potential uses of qualitative research which includes as follows: to develop and identify all the issues, to suggest methods for understanding strategy and to learn about communications. Blumberg et al (2008) believe that in an interview the purpose is “learning the respondents view point regarding situations relevant to the broader research problem”(Blumberg,2008,p.386).

The researcher scheduled interviews by telephone in each individual hotel in this research project. Four hotels were selected and each hotel was contacted by telephone and the interviews were arranged at times which were suitable for the managers and the other members of staff. The interviews were held over the space of a week in the hotels in the West of Ireland. Summer time is a very busy period for all the hotels involved. Bryman and Bell, 2007,p.273 highlight the key reasons for piloting an interview schedule as “it may be possible to identify questions that make respondents feel

uncomfortable and detect any tendency for the respondents interest to be lost at junctures”. By identifying any potential problems in advance of the planned interviews any change could be made.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with whether or not the results of a study are repeatable. According to Bryman and Bell (2007) the term reliability is used in relation to the issue of whether or not the measures used are devised for concepts in management or business are consistent. Reliability is a common issue in connection to quantitative research more so than in qualitative research. In addition to this Veal (2011) p.46 defines reliability as “reliability is the extent to which research findings would be the same if the research were to be repeated at a later date or with a different sample of subjects”. Veal (2011) outlines that the actual use of reliability as a criteria for the assessing the quality of the research arose from the positivist tradition. Therefore they are not always fully appropriate for non-positivist research approaches. According to Bryman (2001) it is very worthwhile considering three aspects of reliability: is a measure stable over time? Is there internal consistency between items? Is the measure independent of the observer? In addition to this Cameron and Price define reliability as “reliable evidence is evidence that you can trust” and “reliability may be the more useful criterion for business research” (Cameron and Price, 2009,p.219). “Reliability is a necessary contributor to validity but is not a sufficient condition for validity” (Cooper and Schindler, 2014,p.260). Reliability is concerned with ensuring that measurement is free of errors. Reliable data or information can therefore be used with confidence.

3.6 Validity

Similarly, “when we measure something we want valid measures, that is measures capturing what they are supposed to do”(Ghauri and Gronhaug,2005,p.80). Often validity is a lot more difficult to ensure than reliability. “If a measure does not do what is ‘says on the tin’ conditions based upon that data may be similarly invalid and irrelevant and also misleading”(Cameron and Price,2009,p.216). Validity is primarily concerned with the actual integrity of the conclusions which are created from a piece of research and it is key to be fully aware of the main types of validity that exist(Bryman and Bell,2007). Certain aspects of validity can be checked however other aspects cannot. A researcher must ensure that the validity criterion being used is actually valid itself. For this reason “the criterion needs to be judged in terms of four qualities: relevance, freedom from bias, reliability and availability” (Cooper and Schindler,2014,p.258). Firstly, a criterion is relevant if it is defined in terms which we judge to be proper measures, second, freedom from bias is when criterion gives a person the chance to score well, third, a reliable criterion is stable and finally the data specified by the criterion must be readily available(Cooper and Schindler,2014). Validity is constantly talked about but validity must also be shown or demonstrated. Put simply “validity claims are responses to the question: How can I trust you?”(Ghauri and Grohaug 2005,p.218).

3.7 Ethical Issues

It was a key concern of the researcher that ethical issues were understood and addressed in advance throughout this research project. At each engagement with each hotel as the organisation the researcher endeavoured to outline that the purpose of any information sought was to support this study only. The key benefit of maintaining a duty of care to all respondents and the organisation can assist in the development of future research in the workplace.

“There are ethical issues in every aspect of the research process”(Quinlan,2011,p.69).

The researcher needs to be aware of the ethical issues faced by the participants in the research project. Out of all the questions that Quinlan (2011) suggests a researcher should consider the following are the questions the researcher has focused on:

1. How can I guarantee anonymity?
2. How can I guarantee confidentiality?
3. Have I provided participants with enough information about the research project?
4. Are the participants aware that they can withdraw from the research at any time?

The participants were made fully aware of the fact that their participation was on a voluntary basis and withdrawing from the process at any time was completely acceptable.

3.8 Themes and areas

The researcher used various themes in the interviews carried out for this research project. Six interviews were carried out in three different hotels in the west of Ireland. The themes included: the break down of full time and part time staff , turnover of staff at each hotel, the individual participants feelings about coming to work each morning and whether they felt proud to tell people where they work. Other themes included the opportunities they receive at work and whether or not any one encourages their development and do their

opinions seem to count?

Further themes explored included the mission and purpose of the organisation and finally opportunities to grow and learn in the last year. Each interview contained twelve questions and each participant was asked exactly the same questions. Each interview was approximately thirty minutes in duration.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide detailed analysis and exploration of the themes and issues that arose during the research. The data in this chapter is drawn from the main sources outlined in chapter three. While the quotations are from the participants in the research any responsibility for the opinions expressed, interpretations drawn and the analysis is the researcher's.

Findings

The research was carried out in three hotels in the West of Ireland. The research focused on managers and employees in each hotel. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds. The results of the analysis are presented in accordance with broad themes that emerged: full time and part time staff and turnover, going to work on a daily basis, pride and encouragement at work, the mission and purpose of the hotel and finally opportunities to learn and grow.

Full time and part time staff and turnover

The three hotels had a different breakdown in the number of full time and part time staff.

Hotel A which has forty three employees had a majority of full time staff “mostly depending “on how busy we are” and hotel B which has seventy four staff had a break down of “60:40 because the summer months are busier” and finally hotel C had one hundred and forty staff in total and sixty five full time staff and seventy five part time staff. During the summer months all three hotels required extra part time staff to meet demand. The researcher found that Hotel B had the minimum rate of staff turnover.” The majority of staff stay working here and some of the chefs are working here thirty and forty years”. On the contrary hotel A experienced staff leaving to “do courses in hospitality management, business, management and accountancy”.

The turnover of staff in hotel C “depended on the individual department” as this hotel has many different departments and one hundred and forty staff but “the turnover level at management and supervisor level is like zero” but on the other hand “ a few chefs have come and gone”. This is understandable because chefs need to broaden and increase their skills and for example if you want to acquire a good knowledge of French cuisine one has to go to France or Switzerland to up skill. According to the human resources manager of hotel C “I am working here since 2004 and overall there has been minimum movement”,

Going to work on a daily basis in a hotel

According to the general manager of hotel A coming to work on a daily basis “is not a problem because I love my job and every single day is different”. He went on to admit “I have a dynamic role” and according to the restaurant supervisor of hotel B “I build friendships at work” and “there is a good buzz in the hotel”. However, the leisure centre manager of hotel C admitted “I feel good and bad because I am working here for twelve years and customers always want more and they expect more”. Hotel C is the largest hotel of all three hotels with the most staff and more departments in comparison with hotels A and B. A receptionist in hotel A admitted that she “never feels bad coming into work and she is so busy each day that “I feel passionate about my job here”. On the opposite side

when a bar staff member in hotel B was asked the same question he said “I am up very early every morning because I live thirty miles from my place of work and therefore my commute is long”. The general manager of hotel A outlined in his interview “I enjoy a challenge” but a bar staff member in hotel B spoke honestly of how “when I wake up in the morning I don’t want to go to work” but he expanded on this and admitted “when I am here in the hotel half an hour I am content and have not a bother”.

In the researchers experience the majority of the hotel staff interviewed enjoy going to work each morning and they are glad to have a purpose to their day.

The human resources manager of hotel C explained how “I feel work gives me a purpose” and “I am kept going” and “I could not stay at home”. A receptionist at hotel A described how “there is great variety in my role and my rosters are fair and my managers are brilliant”. She admitted that even though she works long hours each day she has different tasks to look forward to.

Pride and encouragement

The majority of the hotel staff who were interviewed felt proud to tell people where they work. The general manager in hotel A told how “I have no problem at all with that because I am very satisfied in my job” and his colleague outlined how “I am proud to tell anyone where I work” and “this is a smaller hotel compared to the other hotels around the town with a fantastic reputation”. The restaurant supervisor in hotel B told the researcher that he felt “confident telling people where I work” and “there is a great bunch of staff in the hotel” and he felt a sense of pride to be working in such a hotel. A bar staff member in hotel B admitted that “my family are very impressed that I work here and the older generation of people who I speak to are also impressed”. The leisure club manager at hotel C felt very proud to tell people where he works and “I have built up a very good brand as regards the leisure club and I am always satisfied

with the reaction of people when I tell them that I work here”. The HR manager of hotel C told the researcher in her interview “I sure do feel very proud to tell people and individuals react and say “you work there? That is a fantastic hotel”. She further explained how the hotel is there in the city “over fifty years and my aunt was born in this area and sees this hotel as the hotel in the area”. She felt an enormous sense of pride to be the HR manager in such a reputable organisation.

The employees interviewed by the researcher felt overall that they had the tools to do their job effectively.

In hotel A both the general manager and the receptionist explained how “there exists a united feeling amongst the staff in this smaller hotel” and “we work together as a team to help each other on a daily basis”. The receptionist further explained how the managers in the hotel are always available and how “all staff receive very good training and development”. She also admitted that “the owners of the hotel visit regularly”.

The restaurant supervisor in hotel B spoke of how he had the use of a variety of resources to do his job effectively and “I also have a certain amount of authority and each staff member has resources available to them to solve problems which arise”. He went on to explain how “as a supervisor my role is to keep all staff in tow and in the morning in particular at breakfast time I have plenty of staff available to me to look after each customers individual needs”. A bar staff member explained how from his two years of working in the hotel he has everything available to him even down to small things “the proper utensils for the bar and the dining rooms are always there for me compared to in other places where I have worked”. He added that the managers and supervisors are very approachable and “I feel I can approach them at any time and ask them anything”.

The leisure club manager in hotel C admitted that “the majority of time I do have the tools I need however I really need someone available 27/7 to deal with the problems I

encounter in maintaining the facilities in the leisure club including the swimming pool”. On the other hand the HR manager in hotel C spoke openly about her experience. “I have a lot of responsibility here and if I ask another employee to do something I expect it to be done”. She also explained how it is not always up to her to solve other peoples problems.

All the hotel staff involved in this study felt that they had the tools available to them. Hotel C is the largest hotel of the three which also has additional facilities including a kids club, a leisure centre, a gym and a hairdressers. Therefore hotel C requires more tools, more facilities and additional resources for employees to do their job effectively. The individuals interviewed were asked if they felt valued for the work that they do. In hotel B both employees felt “trusted and valued” and felt that their “strengths and abilities are valued”. When they were asked to work over time they were happy to because they were aware that their efforts were appreciated. The general manager at hotel A explained how he regularly attends meetings with the owners of the hotel and “we have many discussions about for example if sales were up or down or if the hotel was a lot busier than usual”. He added how “I receive positive feedback and I am encouraged to continue to work away as I am”. The receptionist in hotel A expressed how “ I feel am I 100% appreciated for my efforts and yes I feel valued as an employee”. The leisure club manager in hotel C was asked if he felt valued for the work he does he said “yes my perks and my bonuses make me feel valued for the continuous effort I put in on a daily basis”.

Mission and purpose of the organisation

A further theme explored in this research project is the views of the hotel employees regarding the mission and the purpose of the hotel in which they work. The general manager in hotel A and the receptionist in hotel A both felt the mission of the hotel is to provide excellent customer service and a memorable experience for all customers and to “work together as a team and support each other”. The general manager also

outlined that “certain goals and targets are a great way to keep managers and other staff on their toes”. He also said that high quality staff training resulted in high hotel ratings. Both employees felt that their job was “very important and we cannot be done without”. The restaurant supervisor in hotel B clarified that he imagines “I fit well into the mission statement of this hotel “ and the bar man at the same hotel said “I personally feel that my job is important and here in this hotel there is a team effort to achieve the mission and purpose of the organisation”.

In the opinion expressed by the leisure club manager and the human resources manager at hotel C they both felt that they receive praise for the job that they do and the leisure club manager admitted honestly that “the hotel looks after us and has survived with no redundancies despite the recent economic recession”. The HR manager explained to the researcher that the mission statement of the hotel is “to be the best four star hotel in this city” and she added “this hotel has a reputation built up over the years”. All three hotels shared the similar focus on customer service and “the customer is king”. Also all three organisations agree that the reason that the customers return is because of the people. The staff are most often the reason why customers return again and again.

Opportunities to learn and grow

The final theme explored throughout the six interview was the opportunity for each employee to learn and grow particularly in the last year. In hotel C the HR manager spoke openly about the difficulties she encountered in dealing with “new personality types and leaning additional ways to deal with these people”. The leisure club manager how “I have had opportunities but really of my own bat” and he is currently taking part a course in strengthening and conditioning. The course is a part time course and

is spread out over a few years with a number of different modules. Similarly the general manager in hotel A is participating in a new course in social media. The supervisor and bar man in hotel b explained how they are both given more and more responsibilities on a monthly to quarterly basis. The young bar man admitted “I was very surprised to be promoted” .

The standard of education and training of the managers and staff in each hotel was very high. The manager in hotel B had a MSC in Marketing. The hotel manager in hotel C has a business degree and a degree in hotel management.

He studied and worked in Switzerland and France. He speaks French, German and Italian. The general manager in hotel A is furthering his studies. The HR manger in hotel C is a member of the CIPD. These three mangers had worked in these hotels at various staff levels before being appointed to management level. This more that likely explains their hands on approach to management and their empathy with staff.

There research findings will now be addressed under the research objective headings. Firstly, to examine the concept of employee engagement and to gain an understanding of what is meant by the term ‘employee engagement’ .

There is no single definition of employee engagement. There exists numerous definitions of employee engagement and this is illustrated by Holbeche and Matthews (2012), Huntington (2013), Millar (2012), Macey and Schneider (2009), MacLeod and Clarke (2009), Sacks(2006), Robinson (2004) and the CIPD(2006). All the definitions of employee engagement have common characteristics. They include commitment, motivation, enthusiasm for work, dedication and absorption. Employee engagement goes beyond job satisfaction and is something that the employee has to offer. It involves intellectual, affective and social engagement. Engaged employees are willing to go the extra mile. Engaged employees are those employees who display personal initiative

and a daily focus on achieving organisational goals.

Secondly, to establish if Irish hotel managers and employees are engaged . When the leisure club manager of hotel C was interviewed he stood out as an employee who was not engaged in his daily job role. He admitted that “my perks are limited and I have not received any pay rise lately and I do not see many incentives”. According to all six employees interviewed in this research they all feel loyal to the hotel and are very proud to tell people where they work. These employees are committed to their organisation and relatively engaged in their job roles on a daily basis. All six employees agreed that they do want to come to work on a daily basis.

Thirdly, exploring the connections between employee engagement and leadership . In all three hotels where the interviews took place there existed a clear connection between employee engagement and leadership. The general manager in hotel A spoke of “my dynamic role” and how he has “the responsibility to look after everyone”. A supervisor in hotel B spoke of “enjoying having a certain amount of authority” and also having the “opportunity to lead by example”.

The HR manager in hotel C felt it was her duty to “look after and look out for other members of staff. The three managers were all committed to their job role and all three were confident, capable and charismatic. These managers were motivated to do their job and they were honest and open throughout the interviews. They showed strong leadership personality characteristics and the ability to lead by example.

Finally, increasing an understanding of disengagement . It must be said that along with engaged employees in hotels in the West of Ireland there are many disengaged employees also. Employee disengagement is certainly a broad concept and has been studied in many

different research areas. “Persons uncouple themselves from work roles when certain psychological conditions are insufficient” (Kahn,1990,p.692). Furthermore, “only 45% of people are satisfied with their jobs and only 29% are engaged at work”(Kruse,2013,p.3). The concept of disengagement is a complicated subject matter and employees become disengaged for a variety of reasons which often depends on the individual. The leisure club manager in hotel C spoke honestly about the many challenges he faces on a daily basis and the great need to come up with many more ideas and initiatives for the growing demands of customers today.

Conclusion

In this chapter the results of the analysis were presented with five broad themes emerging. These included the break down of full time and part time staff, the turnover in each organisation, going to work on a daily basis, pride and encouragement at work, the mission or purpose of the organisation and finally opportunities to grow and learn. The overall themes were discussed and the personal opinions of the participants were outlined.

One of the most interesting aspects of the researchers journey was a casual meeting with the owner of hotel B while waiting in the reception of the hotel to interview an employee. The dialogue which took place was informal but most informative from the researchers point of view. It lasted for approximately twenty five minutes and is in the researchers notes. The owner was most interested in the researchers qualitative research method in the form of interviews. “I am running this place for forty one years and nobody ever in all these years ever asked me my views on hotel management or employee engagement”. He admitted he was “fed up filling out numerous questionnaires

from semi state bodies and hotel organisations”. The owner was very dissatisfied with the standard of recent graduates and trainees from hotel schools of management and also hospitality departments in the third level sector. He stated “out of the seventeen students who I employed this year only four students appear to have potential. The owner put this down to their lack of practical training and lack of engagement with customers and other staff. He blamed this on “poorly structured courses at third level”. He continued “if I had my own way to be honest I would have those students working two days a week on a placement from first year and this would help them to find out if they are suitable for this very demanding industry”. After a few moments he continued on and he stated that “the most disappointing of all are those who come out of third level courses who have no practical experience at all and their lack of empathy with customers and staff is unbelievable in many cases”.

The owner of hotel B also said “I know this also applies to other industries. Young nurses for example I will not go there!”. The conversation ended with a recommendation from him “you should think of a career in the hotel sector with your HR knowledge. This hotel is ranked number one out of ninety six hotels in this region which I am very proud of. Poor selection of employees at the very beginning will result in disengaged employees in the future”.

Chapter Five Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the researchers objectives, chapter one, chapter two, chapter three and chapter four. The limitations of this research project will be outlined and recommendations will be made. Finally, the researchers ideas for further research will be outlined and a conclusion will be reached.

5.2 Overview

The researchers aim was to investigate employee engagement levels in the hotel sector in the West of Ireland. The research objectives were: to examine the concept of employee engagement and to gain an understanding of what is meant by the term “employee engagement”, to determine the factors which contribute to and drive engagement and its impact on the hotel sector, to establish if Irish hotel managers are engaged, to explore the connections between employee engagement and leadership and finally to increase an understanding of the concept of disengagement. Chapter one of this study began with an introduction about employee engagement and many definitions of the term. In chapter two a review of the literature relating to employee engagement was described. In chapter three the research methodology was explained and the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach was explained. The mode used was interviewing. In chapter four the findings relating to employee engagement in the hotel sector in the West of Ireland which emerged from the analysis of the data were discussed.

5.3 Limitations

Whilst conducting this research project there were a number of limitations encountered by the researcher. Firstly, one hotel which the researcher had contacted indicated that they were willing to participate in a qualitative research. However, the researcher was denied access in the end. Secondly, the circumstances regarding access were very unusual. The hotel in question was recently sold by the National Asset Management Agency “NAMA “and the managers and employees were re employed on zero hour contracts. However, the researcher managed to find a substitute hotel at very short notice. This research project is based on three hotels in the West of Ireland and all three hotels are family owned hotels. The majority of hotels situated in the West of Ireland are family owned hotels. Another limitation encountered was that during the summer months hotels are at their business peak. The managers and staff are extremely busy. A further limitation was accessing managers and employees at a time which was most suitable to them. The researcher was required to be available at all times and at short notice to attend interview appointments.

5.5 Further research

In relation to this study when conducting future research the researcher would like to look at a number of different aspects. This study was a limited study involving only three hotels and the researcher would like to involve a much larger number of hotels. The limited number of hotels also had its benefits in that all three hotels were family run businesses. When conducting future research the researcher would use a mixed method to collect data. Rather than using just interviews questionnaires would be used and perhaps group interviews. On the other hand the researcher experienced the

kindness and the good will of those individuals who participated in the interviews carried out.

The dialogue with the owner of hotel B was fascinating. He was running a hotel for forty one years and his views and insights had never been sought. He was really pleased that the researcher valued his views. Qualitative research in particular is most appropriate to elicit the opinions of such experienced people who have a vast amount of social capital.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is a means of improving working lives and organisational performance. Employee engagement is a win-win initiative if done properly.

The result is better employee well being as well as the overall achievement of organisational goals. The three hotels in this research study had a non-hierarchical management structure. All employees and managers addressed each other by their first name and they treated each other with respect. Even during the recent Great Recession there were no redundancies in these three hotels. On occasion the workers had to work a shorter working week which then resulted in a reduction in their real wages. The necessity for this was understood by the employees and they were flexible in their work practices.

In each hotel the researcher observed managers working both behind the bar and in the restaurants supporting their fellow workers in the hotel. This was a demonstration of great team work.

A recent work by Sparrow, Scullion and Tarique (2014) have woven into their model three connected levels of engagement. Firstly, work engagement which involves the vigour that employees invest in doing the job, the level of attachment to their work. Work engagement leads to lower job turnover, higher levels of individual performance and positive evaluation of the organisation. Secondly, engagement with each other, positive relationships at a group or team level lead to effective organisational performance. Gittel, Seider and Wimbush (2010) have developed a theory of relational coordination which involves groups engaging in frequent and high quality communications, sharing goals and knowledge and

showing mutual respect for each other.

Thirdly, organisational engagement has sought to define organisational engagement in terms of emotions and attitudes and behaviour engagement. The idea of employee identification with the organisation has been developed by Edwards (2009) who refers to an employees sense of attachment and belonging to the organisation often relating to how long they have worked in it and the extent to which the employees share the goals and values of the organisation and incorporate them into their own goals, values and beliefs. High levels of organisational identification were shown to predict all categories of workers helping behaviours, retention levels and feelings of being involved in the organisation. The workers and managers in the three hotels identified very closely with their organisation.

The importance of employee engagement cannot be exaggerated cannot be in the twenty first century. Employees are looking for meaning from their work. Employees want more engagement from their working life because of a general decline in personal connectivity in their working communities.

“These days the work place takes centre stage as the primary source of community because for many people there has been a general decline in Western society of involvement in neighbourhood groups, churches, civic groups and extended families” (Baker, 2014, p. 186).

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Appendix 1

Qualitative Research. Interview Questions.

- Q1.** What is the breakdown within this hotel of full time and part time staff?
- Q2.** What is the turnover of staff within this hotel?
- Q3.** How do you feel about coming to work every morning?
- Q4.** Do the days that you do want to come to work out number the days that you don't want to come to work here?
- Q5.** Do you feel proud to tell people where you work?
- Q6.** Do you have the tools to enable you to do your job effectively?
- Q7.** Do you feel valued for the work that you do?
- Q8.** At work do you have the opportunity to do what you do best everyday?
- Q9.** Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
- Q10.** At work on a daily basis do your opinions seem to count?
- Q11** Does the mission of this organisation make you feel your job is important?
- Q12** In the last year have you had opportunities to learn and grow?