A Study of the Effectiveness and Challenges of Converging Employee Engagement Practices, Across an International Company

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to investigate how employee engagement practices are conceived by employees across an international company, with subsidiaries in Ireland, North America and Thailand. The study seeks to examine how well current HR engagement practices and initiatives are converged across sites and the socio-cultural limitations and challenges associated with this. The researcher carried out this study through the process of exploring the relationship between employee engagement and motivation, linking this to varying cultural views and thought patterns.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this research in order to get an in-depth analysis of current engagement practices and the learned beliefs around engagement within the Company, from employees in different geographical locations. Surveys were carried out on a large sample of 196 employees while interviews were conducted among a smaller sample of 6 employees.

The study shows the differences in motivating factors per site, as well as how this theory is supported by the analysis of the research findings through survey and interview responses. The awareness of changing mindsets and motivators over time is also noted in the limitations, emphasising the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of evolving perceptions and thought patterns.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are various elements to consider within the international aspect of HRM, and whether HR practices should be wholly streamlined and merged or adapted to suit each site of a company. This paper will primarily investigate employee engagement, how it is conducted across international subsidiaries of a company and identifying the main differences, if any, and the question posed here is whether these practices and procedures can and should be streamlined internationally. "Employee engagement is all about creating a positive feel among employees towards organisational goals…. employee engagement is one of the most effective tools for achieving long-term success and shared value." (Thamizhselvi, 2014). An interesting concept here that will be explored is the examination of the challenges associated with managing expectations, and motivators of groups of employees who differ socially and culturally.

The topic of International HRM and the movement of labour across subsidiaries is closely followed by the question of convergence versus divergence (Kaufman, 2016), (Pudelko and Harzing, 2007) which researchers have explored to ascertain the best method for applying a set of HR policies and practices. The question posed here is whether HR 'best-practice' should be applied globally across a business, as a proven method of success and sustainability in terms of effectively engaging and motivating the workforce, or HR 'best-fit', where the practices are adjusted to fit each country and cultured expectations (Marchington and Grugulis, 2001). There are arguments for and against these concepts of HR converging and unifying as a result of globalisation, as well as diverging and becoming increasingly dissimilar in order to accommodate cultural and social differences. The idea of international HRM being posed new challenges, as a result of an ever-increasing globally diverse workforce, will be explored and examined in this research study, tested through quantitative and qualitative methodological research approaches, and finally evaluated presenting the findings and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for improvement.

1.1 Research Questions & Objectives

The literature is divided into various sub-categories: 1. The strategic nature of HR, 2. The influence of American/Western culture and 3. Motivators affected by socio-cultural differences between Ireland, Thailand and North America. An examination of current employee engagement practices will be carried out to determine three things that will form the constructs of a gap analysis and allow for further discussion, on the implementation and evaluation of engagement within the organisation in question.

1. The effectiveness of current engagement practices

2. How well these practices are being converged across each subsidiary

3. Whether there are differences in engagement results/output per site.

To identify differences and variations in engagement within an international company, one must examine the changing role and duties of HR and Management within an international context and their role in championing engagement among a diverse workforce exhibiting varying degrees of motivation and job satisfaction. HR professionals and other people managers are directly responsible for the act of engaging their direct reports, in turn improving motivation and productivity. Motivating and engaging an individual can be difficult for many reasons, two of which will be discussed by the researcher: not understanding different socio-cultural values and thought patterns, and the distance that exists within a working relationship that is impacted by being in a different time and space, i.e. spread across different geographical sites in different time zones. This study will investigate how varying levels of engagement in the workplace can determine how content and motivated employees can be, including when an employee compares their site offerings against another within the same organisation, as well as the effect this can have on work relationships.

This research carries out an examination of the theoretical developments in international human resource management, due to globalization and the need for the effective management of a diverse global workforce. The convergence – divergence theory is explored by examining universal views and contextual based programs, to figure out why globalization and international HRM are leading to more converging HR policies,

practices and procedures, and how it is driving change among HRM practices and how this will contribute to the effectiveness of Company X's HR engagement strategy. This is examined by exploring the effects that globalization and technology have on a company's infrastructure and workforce, as well as the need to be mindful of cultural differences. HR and managers are becoming more and more of a married entity planning and implementing people practices together, and while it is important for managers to be involved in this process, it is the duty of the HR professional to identify any external contingencies that may adversely impact upon employee engagement, motivation and performance (Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006); such contingencies being the cultural and societal differences of the workplace both home and abroad. Advocates of HR Best Practice models believe that regardless of size, location and other environmental factors, the business operations should be carried out under best HRM practices (Swift, 2006; Sung and Ashton, 2002).

1.2 Justification for the Research

Employee engagement is a measurable concept and one that has a direct impact on an organisation's performance and productivity. Therefore, in order to effectively align talent management and strategy with the overall strategy and mission of Company X, it is important to firstly determine the current engagement levels and the implications for converging engagement practices across each subsidiary. HR and management are more involved and integrated in to the strategic planning of an organisation and its workforce and expected to align HR strategy with the business strategy; this is proving to be increasingly difficult across international business, employees and varied customers (Godard, 2004) (Kalleberg, Marsden, Reynolds, and Knoke, 2006). International HRM analyses the role of the HR professional, in terms of being able to identify and balance the technological, psychological and cultural differences, and the challenges associated with this process of harmonising, integrating and adapting to these differences in a business and managerial context.

As HR's main role is to align HR and business strategy, the question posed here is whether an increase in international business and globalisation is leading to HR practices converging and conforming to evaluate a set of best practices, or whether it is

highlighting the differences of countries, cultures and people, and calling more divergence and adaptability within the field of IHRM, allowing for companies to adapt to best fit practices. This concept of understanding the organisation and its workforce has now moved beyond the boundaries of the SWOT analysis that can be carried out on the organisation, and now encompasses the global market and the requirement of understanding the relationship between HR and a company (Matsuo, 2005). Employee performance must be at a level where output meets the organisation's needs (Matsuo, 2005) (Wilkinson and Kannan, 2013), and such performance is influenced by different elements and motivators; this is the paradoxical and challenging strategic role of HR in terms of Talent Management; HR professionals are challenged with the task of balancing the organisations' mission and values with individual employees' mission and values (Resick, 2011; Monks and Harney, 2014; Jackson, 2002; Ehnert, Harry and Zink, 2013).

1.3 Profile of Company X

The organisation at the heart of this study, shall be referred to throughout this research as Company X. Company X is an international BPO financial services organisation with 3 subsidiaries in Ireland, Asia and North America. Company X's subsidiaries are based on site with an international technology company, supporting their day-to-day operations within the areas of customer support, technical assistance, agreement management, contract planning, as well as quality, compliance and SOX controls. The researcher will investigate the engagement practices of each site and analyse this information to determine how well engagement is being converged across the organisation and provide suggestions on how this could be improved upon.

Employees of all levels across Ireland, North America and Thailand, will be invited to take part in a survey on employee engagement. The researcher will also select employees from different sites and in varied positions within Company X, from agent/entry level right up to VP level, in order to get a truthful depiction of the general consensus on employee engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher will review current literature on employee engagement. The topics within engagement that will be examined include the role that HR and other people managers play in advocating employee engagement, the impact of American and Western culture on MNCs and their international subsidiaries and how this can influence how an employee may view their organisation by comparison. The researcher will also explore how culture is seen in MNCs and the impact it can have on the decision making, and finally the concept of culture conflict and its challenges and implications for a company.

2.1 Strategic Management and HR

The lines between HR and management are becoming more blurred in terms of people management, as managers are expected to be more involved in the management of people issues within their teams, which allows for the HR business partners of the organisation to focus more on the strategic elements of managing and developing talent. Consequently, there needs to be a solid relationship existing between HR and other people managers to ensure effective communication and roll-out of HR policies and procedures; this becomes even more inclined to encounter difficulties when these HR practices are required to be implemented globally.

"A key feature of multinational companies (MNCs) as employers is their ability to transfer HR practices across borders. The extent and impact of such transfer has the potential to influence the performance of MNCs" (Edwards, Ferner and Colling, 2007). This quote identifies the importance of cross-border fluidity and consistency within international organisations. It is important to the operational efficiency and competitiveness of a company with international subsidiaries, that it has the knowledge and capacity to streamline HR practices (Edwards, Ferner and Colling, 2007; Pudelko and Harzing, 2007); this will create the necessary environments for an engaged, well-informed workforce, which in turn equals to greater productivity and competitive advantage. HR and Management are becoming more integrated, in order to achieve strategic advantage. Within the studies and research in the area of HRM and business strategy, one of the most popular topics to place emphasis on, is the importance of aligning a company's HR strategic vision with that of the business strategy (Robinson

and Robinson, 2008; Holbech, 2012; Wilkinson and Kannan, 2013); this is HR's most strategic role, to be mindful of the business strategy and possess the ability to compliment and work towards business goals and values. Here, the interdependent relationship is prominent between business goals and the need for hiring and retaining engaged talent (Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006). There is evidence evident to suggest that international HR practices highlight the paradoxical relationship between a clear, defined corporate mission displayed across the business, and taking into consideration the economic contingencies associated with personal motivation and desires for development.

These contingencies are an interesting element of HRM that is challenged throughout academic research, and one that will be examined in this paper - that employees of different countries will have different expectations and perceptions of the psychological contract, based on their cultured norms, the degrees of employee motivation and satisfaction will vary greatly (Rowe, 2008; Jackson, 2008). To examine this more accurately, this study will examine the HR practices of Company X and its subsidiaries in Ireland, Asia and North America. Through examining the relationship between reward and motivation among employees, one can assume that there are challenges posed to converging HR practices and processes internationally, yet when there is deviation from the best-practice model, the HR professionals tasked with managing this global workforce, are faced with a lack of transparency, miscommunication and disorder (Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006).

2.2 Globalisation & The Influence of American Culture

Globalisation and technology are heavily influencing the rate that all companies operate at, from small and domestic to large international companies, within a market that is faced with increased growth and competition as their operational capabilities expand and are met with a greater movement of talent and information (Monks and Harney, 2014; Edwards, Ferner and Colling, 2007). It can be demonstrated that Ireland, Thailand, and North America are exhibiting these variances in technological advancements and socio-cultural differences, which poses challenges to a company with subsidiaries in each of the above countries, in terms of streamlining processes and practices. Globalisation and the international movement of labour/talent has forced HR professionals to become more

globally conscious and aware of the implications associated with failing within an international market (Rowe, 2008). Growing integration of the world economy into one single huge marketplace is increasing the intensity of competition (Monks and Harney, 2014; Marchington and Grugulis, 2001); more globalization means more competition, leading to increasing pressure to improve through lower costs, high performing contributors and adopting innovative ways to do things more efficiently and be cost effective, which arguably can be seen as adopting HR Best Practice (Swift, 2006; Marchington and Grugulis, 2001).

Deregulation has reinforced the globalisation trends, as nations eliminate the legal barriers that protected companies from competition (Rowe, 2008) and globalisation has triggered the emergence of multi-national companies and organisations expanding beyond their native country, resulting in a variety of foreign and multi-national employees moving between business locations. Ireland has a growing population of multi-nationals coming to cities, such as Cork and Dublin, looking for work, as well as multi-national companies laying down roots in Ireland. Some of the key factors attracting foreign investment in Ireland are an English speaking and highly educated workforce, meaning competitive advantage for companies, the similarities between Irish and American work cultures also afford American multinational companies the opportunity to settle in with little disruption and form a solid base of operations for their European markets.

There are increasing similarities between the Irish and American workforce as the competitive environments lead to a certain level of Isomorphism (Pudelko and Harzing, 2007; Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2005). The idea of isomorphism examines how the competitiveness and efficiency of a company are mimicked to an extent where the competitiveness is at a standstill. The concept of Isomorphism can be supported by the micro-economic assumptions of Paauwe and Boselie's theory of mimetic behaviour (2004), whereby contrary to popular belief that best practice equals to high performance and thus competitive advantage, it is argues that an equilibrium will inevitably exist between companies operating under the same best practices (Paauwe and Boselie, 2004) (Dimaggio and Powell, 1991). Researchers and advocates of the Best Practice model,

conclude that applying these set of principles will yield the desired results, thus are seen as universally valid and can be applied regardless of economic or cultural difference (Pudelko and Harzing 2007). Evidence of this can be seen in the large US tech companies, who are setting the standard for other companies not only in the US, but worldwide by promoting these best-practice HR principles. These tech giants such as Google, Facebook and LinkedIn are attracting talented, sought-after millennials and post-millennials, being recognised as "great places to work".

Literature suggests there is an increasing shift towards Western management styles and "a strong central influence over management style at the international level, informed by the distinctive institutions of the American business system" (Edwards, Ferner and Colling, 2007).

The influence of these American based companies put pressure on other MNCs to follow suit in order to sustain competitiveness by adopting HR best practices; primarily best practices when it comes to their employee engagement, in the form of free food on site, relaxed atmospheres with flatter organisational structures, which allow for more formal regular communication and collaboration across the company, as well as regular on-site events and celebrations of companywide achievements. This American culture has influenced the global market and the perceptions of what employee engagement should look like. While it is clear in the market that there is a certain level of mimetic behaviours, the fact remains that the above-mentioned companies are "great places to work" and still attract top talent internationally and within their country of origin.

2.3 Cultural-based Perspectives in MNCs

As mentioned, globalisation has led to a spotlight on large American MNCs, specifically within their organisational culture. Organisational culture is a topic that is widely discussed among scholars, as individuals and companies are constantly becoming more and more aware of the impact a positive and engaging culture has on the working individual, and cross-cultural human resource management is an ever-evolving field examining the role of cultural and its implementation in to HRM policies and practices. The cultural-based perspectives have the same level of impact and position as the market-based perspectives of MNCs. Culture can be difficult to define, but Edgar J. Schein

(2010) easily conceptualises the culture of a group as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems".

Here it is important to ask the question of what will happen when people within the same group (such as the workforce) do not share the same beliefs and assumptions; when people see a problem or an opportunity and have very different reactions and expectations to these, thus leading to tensions if these expectations are not identified and managed by HR and managers in the organisation. This leads to the acknowledgement of organisational culture, which is described by Mats Alvesson (2013) as the process of "underscoring what is important and what is less so and framing how the corporate world should be understood…however, there is often a lack of a deeper understanding of how people and organisations function in terms of culture".

This misunderstanding and somewhat trivialising the importance of the management of organisational culture, can lead to misunderstanding and separation among a culturally diverse workforce. Previous research confirms that the climate or culture of an organisation relates significantly to employee engagement, as it can have a positive or negative effect on their psychological representations of the organisation (Chaudhary, Santosh and Barua, 2014; Gunnigle, Pulignano, Edwards, Belizon, Navrbjerg, Olsen and Susaeta, 2015). The culture of an organisation is based on communal consensus and therefore it can be argued that it is directly related to the wider socio-cultural aspects. For example, as previously discussed, what one geographical group of employees think compared to a different geographical group of employees within the same company. These groups vary in location, culture and social aspects of their every day life, so it is fair to say that they could have different opinions and feelings toward a certain work environment; here is where it can be difficult for an MNC to create a unified culture across locations where a perceptual agreement exists among employees (Glisson and James, 2002; Gunnigle, Pulignano, Edwards, Belizon, Navrbjerg, Olsen and Susaeta, 2015).

This idea of culture and the influence it can have within the culture of MNCs, gives rise to the topic of culture conflict. As previously discussed, with the wide-spread influence of American MNCs on the rise, HR professionals are becoming more and more challenged with culture conflict as globalisation has resulted in cross-border working relationships. It is firstly important to identify what type of cultural differences may exist within the subsidiaries of Company X, in order for the company to be prepared to manage them and integrate in to the HR and business strategy.

2.4 Culture Conflict – Ireland, Thailand and North America

When HR professionals and other people managers are faced with cultural conflicts or confusion, it is their responsibility to ensure and promote an environment of understanding, tolerance and respect (Hitt and Hoskisson, 2006). It is largely the HR practices in a company that have an impact on, and determine how, an employee will perceive that organisational culture (Kopelman, Brief, and Guzzo, 1990) This can be difficult when people's perceptions are the outcomes of their own experiences and culture, and the HR professional must influence an employee's perspective and approach to the current situation or culture/societal norms (Gupta et al., 2005) with the aim of enhancing clarity and communication between two cultures in a work environment. It is common to accept your own cultural values and systems as the norm (Resick, 2011), here the conflict and stress arise in different forms and is evident within studies of conflict, that it is in large part caused by negative emotions toward a person or indeed a collective society (Monks and Harney, 2014; Marchington and Grugulis, 2001). HR are expected to be equipped with the tools for providing adequate training to managers regarding these crucial differences and elements to be mindful of (Sims, 2002; Gupta et al., 2005), ensuring policies, procedures and expectations are clear and filtered down through the organisation (Sims, 2002) to allow for smooth cross-cultural employee experiences in a global company.

 Management is the key power resource in organisations (Hales, 2000); a good people manager expects respect and communication within the employment relationship, thus it is important to have well informed managers to avoid uncertainty and chaos, which can ultimately be of detriment to the business (Hitt and Hoskisson, 2006). Managers can

develop a concept of false consensus and teamwork, which results in managers wrongly choosing to believe there is effective engagement and communication within their team with everyone working towards a collective goal; however, due to lack of clarity, miscommunication and ignorance the opposite becomes reality. Within this context, it can be argued that best fit practices, or diverging practices, are more suitable, the cause being that managers will be more mindful of differences within the workforce. However, scholars argue that the HR professional must be mindful, possessing a global mindset (Monks and Harney, 2014; Jackson, 2002) and HR other people managers should be able to recognise the intrinsic and extrinsic needs and wants of employees nationally and internationally, including their motivation factors and learned cultural beliefs, training others to be aware of the same.

2.4.1 Individualism vs Collectivism

One aspect of international HR is engaging employees across various cultures and this involves understanding whether that society is collectively focused or more individualistic (Darwish and Huber, 2003). It is important to be able to identify individualistic and collectivist culture types, as both have very different needs, wants and desires; Darwish and Huber (2003) provide an excellent description of both cultures outlining the main differences:

"Individualistic cultures emphasize promoting the individual's and his/her immediate family's self-interest (underlining individual rights, not responsibilities), personal autonomy, self-realization, individual initiative, independence, individual decision making and less concern about the needs and interests of others. As examples of typical individualistic societies, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and the US"

"Collectivistic societies, on the other hand, emphasize loyalty to the group, emotional dependence on groups and organizations, the belief that group decisions are superior to individual decisions, interdependence, an understanding of personal identity as knowing one's place within the group, and concern about the needs and interests of others. As typical collectivistic societies China, Hong Kong, India and Japan" (Darwish and Huber, 2003).

The below diagrams confirm these concepts of individual and collective cultures, highlighting key differences between Ireland and Thailand. Ireland and Thailand have very visible differences within a socio-cultural context, as demonstrated in the below figure, with the most notable contrast between power distance, individualism and motivation. The demand for HR and business leaders to adopt a more global mindset and greater self-awareness (Levy, Taylor and Boyacigiller, 2007) is every increasing as the need to understand international markets and societies is becoming more and more important to an organisations survival (Javidan, Dorfman, Sully and House, 2006).
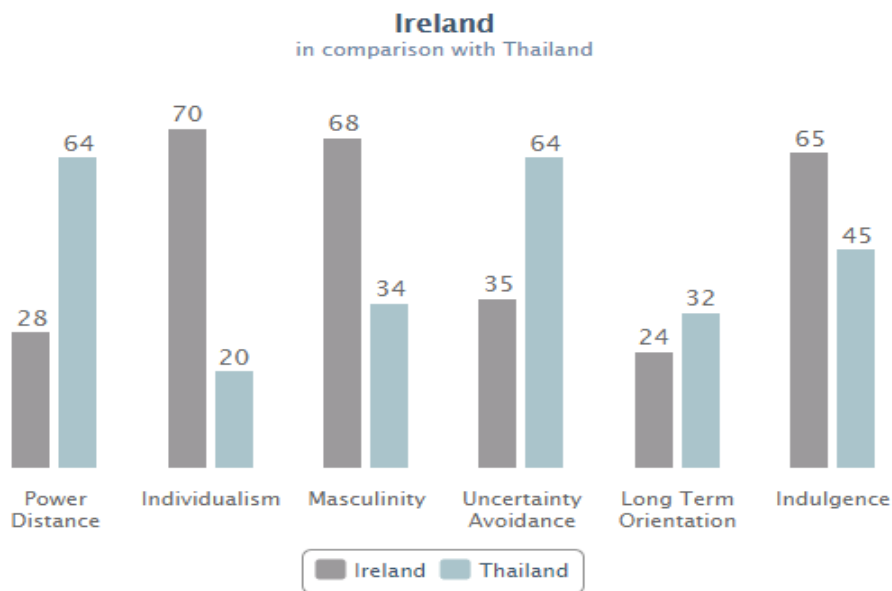
Figure 1. Ireland in comparison with Thailand (Hofstede Insights, 2018)

Ireland evidently has a much more individualistic culture and it can be seen from the below diagram, that Ireland the US are very similar in their way of thinking. Both countries scored very high in relation to Individualism and Masculinity and these are the notions lacking within Asian culture. There is an interesting correlation between individualism vs collectivism and masculine vs feminine societies, which will also be examined to determine key cultural differences.

Figure 2. America's Cultural Statistics (Hofstede Insights, 2018)

2.4.2 Increase in Individualism: A Shift from Universal to Individualistic Perspectives

As mentioned, in individualistic societies people are more concerned with their own particular needs and development, but in collectivist soc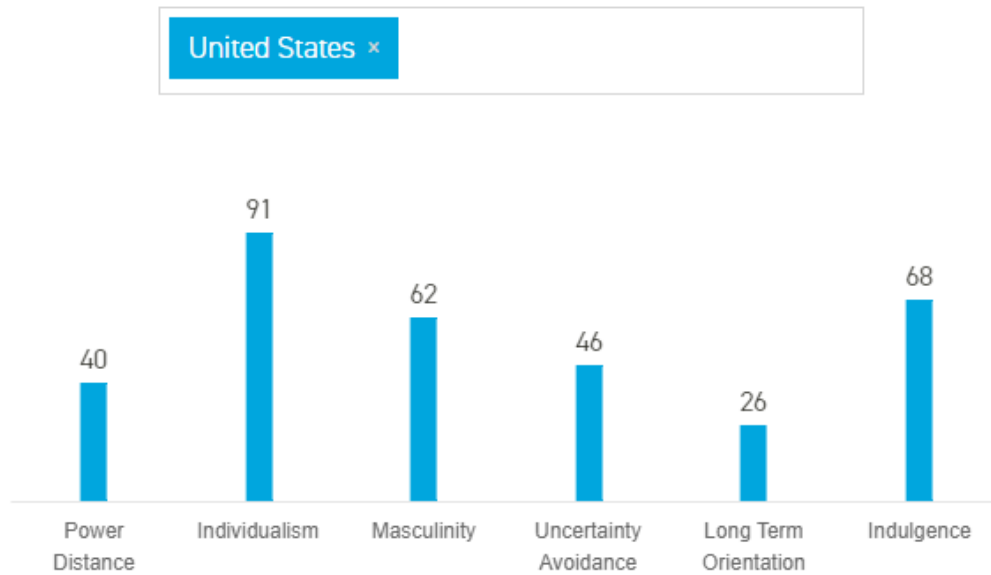ieties people are loyal to groups and are more concerned with what others think, what is best for the group and not losing face by appearing selfish and concerned with one's own requests (de Mooij, 2010). Also, In an Irish society there is a great deal of assertiveness and performance orientation (Resic, 2011; Javidan, Dorfman, Sully and House, 2006) and employees are goal driven, working towards self-actualisation, while in Thailand it can be argued that employees are too involved in each other's work and personal life, by displaying somewhat paternal behaviours and exhibiting family-like relationships in the workplace (Cheng, Chou and Farh, 2000). However, there is a shift in perspective among Eastern or Asian cultures as Western culture is saturating the consumer market, creating more interest in Western products, style and way of life.

As the above diagrams have established, Ireland and America are individualistic cultures. In organisations, employees are expected to be self-reliant, show initiative and be self-starters (Resick, 2011), with recruitment and development being based on merit or evidence of achievement; since Thailand is such a collectivist society, rather than

showing initiative and being seen as competitive or aggressive, they leave the decision-making and innovative thinking up to superiors and promotions are based on relationships and status in the workplace (de Mooij, 2010; Cheng, Chou and Farh, 2000). With more and more international companies setting up offices in Asia, there is an increase in the level of Western influence, accordingly it is important to remember that individuals and groups are motivated by different things and in different ways. The HR and management professionals with little or no understanding of human behavioural strategies and motivations within the workplace, can possibly do more harm than good to morale (de Mooij, 2010). It is important to understand this conception that certain societies will be more individualistic or collectivist, and the behaviour and needs of employees cannot be predicted or catered for at a mass level within an international context. Therefore, greater employee engagement initiatives should be used as the tools to bridge this cultural gap that exists among employees within international organisations, encouraging employees to become more engaged with one another and allowing for managers to effectively manage and motivate. Whether an employee is more concerned with their own achievements or the welfare of the group, will impact greatly on how they are motivated in the workplace and job satisfaction.

2.4.3 The Relationship Between Masculine Societies and Motivation

HR is centre stage when it comes to creating and sustaining the desired organisational structure and culture, aimed at retaining high performers and high potentials (MacRae and Furnham, 2014). One main element of retaining talent in the business is understanding motivation (de Mooij, M, 2010; Grobler, 2005) and whether the workforce is motivated by compensation, opportunities to develop, the organisational culture, etc. Motivation and competition impact on how the business operates internally (Matsuo, 2005), meaning the strength and transparency of the employment relationship, communication between departments and communication and collaboration across global locations, and externally in the form of customer relationships and reputation; people are motivated to do their best for customers and clients in order to succeed, winning business and receiving merit and approval from the business.

A high/masculine score reflects a competitive society driven by achievement and success, with individuals being seen as winners in their field; these values are ingrained on society from school years which continues throughout their working life (de Mooij, 2010). The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Masculine) or being content and at peace, enjoying what you do (Feminine) (Cheng, Chou and Farh, 2000; de Mooij, 2010). At 68 and 62, Ireland and America are Masculine societies, highly driven by competition, success and winning the game; Irish society is proud of their successes and achievements and evidently motivated by this competitive nature to win (Truss, 2012). Whereas Thai culture frowns upon being overly competitive; competition alludes to a sense if disrespect for others and "loosing face" as one is seen to be motivated by winning or being better than their colleague (de Mooij, 2010; Grobler, 2005).

Motivation and competition impact on how the business operates with customers, as employees are motivated to do their best for a customer in order to win business and receive praise from the organisation (Locke, 1990; Truss, 2012). This is one of the biggest concepts to be aware of for managing the international employment relationship, how different people are motivated by different things, how competition is driven by motivation, and if an employee is not motivated enough they will not exhibit that competitive edge and drive to enable them to be as efficient as possible to the organisation (Truss, 2012; Jackson, 2002). Herzberg's theory of motivation is complemented by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as demonstrated below. A person's intrinsic and extrinsic needs are placed in to a hierarchy of motivational influence. The dimensions at the bottom must be satisfied first and then the higher aspects of the pyramids must be satisfied for the individual to become driven and motivated. The motivational theories mentioned here, are all needs-based theories, and it is a manager's job to identify and satisfy these needs within the work environment (Rowe, 2008). What is classified as important in one culture may not be classified as such in another and vice versa (Resick, 2011; Javidan, Dorfman, Sully and House, 2006).
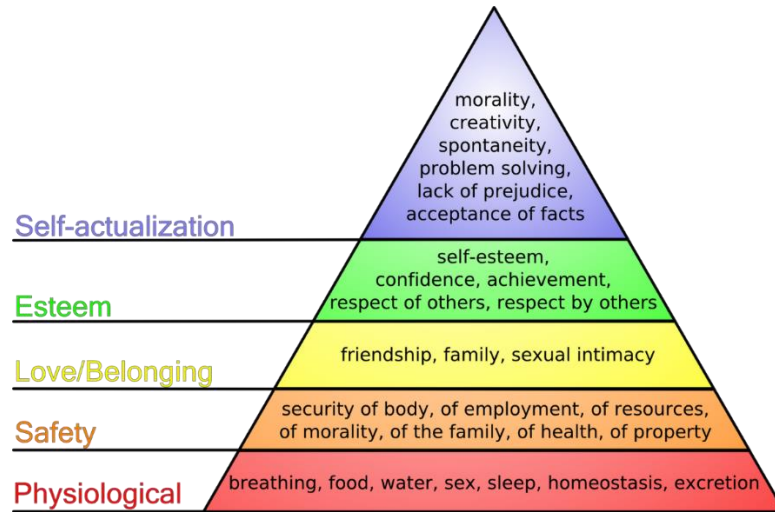
Fig.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (psychologyoflearningmotivation, 2011)
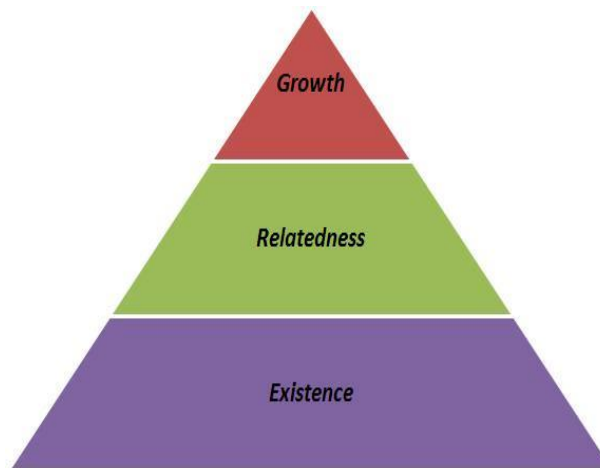
Fig.4 Alderfer's ERG Theory (psychologyoflearningmotivation, 2011)

Understanding an individual's motivators is vital to enhancing employee performance (Rowe, 2008), and it is evident through studies of motivation that the correlation between work and pay are not the only elements of the employment relationship, including all the expectations below the surface, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Jackson, 2002). These characteristics of the employment relationship that are under the surface, as demonstrated below in Figure 6, and can be difficult to see and measure in different societies. While contributors like progressive results, performance related pay incentives, flexibility and variety would have an impact on an Irish or American individual, other

aspects like a caring, supportive environment and the presence of status and respect would heavily influence upon a Thai individual's motivation to perform well at work. All this evidence of cultural, economic and political difference reinforces the idea that while it is important to remain loyal to the company brand and values, the cultural foreign values should not be compromised or infringed upon (Gupta et al., 2005; de Mooij, 2010; Jackson, 2002) and the HR professional should be mindful of these at all times to avoid confrontation and situations that may result in an employee relations concern.

Fig. 5 The Psychological Contract Iceberg Model (Crooks, 2015)

As discussed, an employee who grew up surrounded by Irish and American Western culture and societal norms, would have motivators such as pay, achievement and being the best in their field, as well as feeling valued and respected within the workplace. Conversely, a Thai employee would be more motivated by a sense of community in the workplace and a peaceful employment relationship. This also impacts upon compensation and benefits as what is valued in one country may not be valued in another; one size does not fit all, and this is what HR professionals need to take in to consideration when designing HR practices and policies across an international context (Gupta et al., 2005).

2.5 Literature Review Conclusions

The research shows evident differences in Irish and North American Vs Thai culture. In essence, this review of literature shows that HR engagement practices are most effective within an international company when streamlined across subsidiaries, as this eliminates further misunderstanding and misconceptions from international teams and work colleagues. While there will be culture conflict that needs to be identified and managed, converging of HR practices allows for greater transparency and control of the working environment. The researcher demonstrated in this examination of current literature, that it is important for organisations to comprehend the differences and aspects of individual and collective cultures, which will lead to effectively identifying work patterns, perceptions toward work and colleagues, and of course the differences in motivation and job satisfaction that exists among an international workforce.

Although previous research investigations provide some insight into converging HR practices and the effects of employee motivation on performance and job commitment, there is a need for continued research and application of the ever-changing and evolving employee mindset and expectations. The limitations to this research include the change management aspect of the HR professional's duty and how they must be "change-agents", a term coined by Dave Ulrich. The effectiveness of employee engagement within the evolution of cultures, will depend greatly on the ability of HR management to identify these changes and adapt, implement and monitor successfully. Thus, while the literature indicates a positive framework for Company X to rely on for the future of employee engagement practices and encourages convergence of HR practices, it is imperative that external forces are monitored, and the Company is flexible and adaptable to change; ongoing learning and development should constitute a large section of future HR strategy in order to remain competitive.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section will present a detailed description of the aim and scope of the research, types of research strategy applied and the reason for choosing these methods, and the overall findings. The reader will be provided with feedback focusing on the evaluation of this research process, including critical reflection and limitations of the study; both the strengths and weaknesses of the research study will be outlined. The sample selection will be discussed along with details of the demographic characteristics of the survey and interviews. In addition, this section will also outline recommendations for Company X to improve upon current roll-out and communication of engagement practices as well as detailing the ethical considerations of the researcher.

3.1 Research Defined

Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) define research as a process that is performed over time, and one that encompasses much planning, consideration and evaluation. There needs to be a systematic approach with clear steps in order to be a successful and logical study, as per the below diagram provided by Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue (2011).
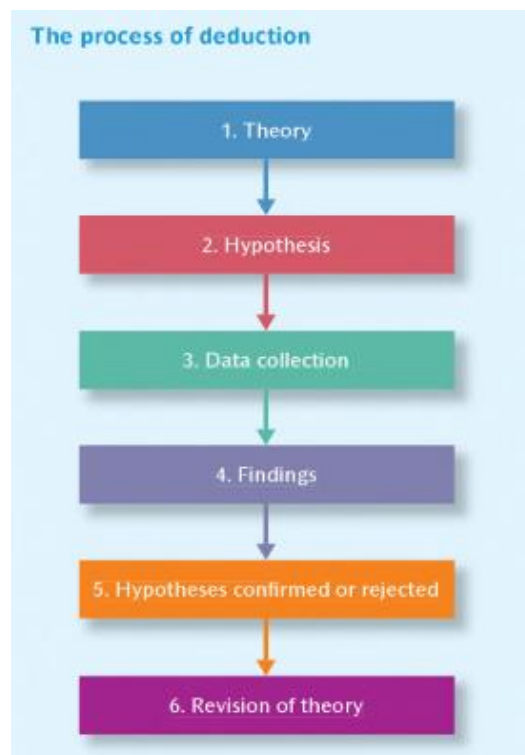

Fig. 6. The Process of Deduction in Research (Bell, Mills and Yue, 2011)

The first steps are to identify the relevant theory to be examined, from which the researcher will define the study's aim and hypothesis or research question(s). Once the aim of the study has been established and explored, the methods for data collection are chosen which are the construct for exhibiting the research findings, thus confirming or rejecting the literature review of the theory. Finally, an in-depth analysis is carried out involving the reflection and revision of the theory along with recommendations for further research.

The methodology for this study will be diagnostic and descriptive in nature – selecting the sample population, collecting data and carrying our further analysis on the findings. Surveys and interviews will be carried out with Company X's employees based in Ireland, Thailand and North America to identify the key differences, if any, within the HR practices across the company, as well as exploring the and the effectiveness of streamlining future engagement policies and processes

3.2 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is deductive by nature as the researcher is testing the theory that has already been drawn upon. This type of research entails collecting numerical data which exhibits the relationship between the research and the theory (Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue, 2011). The researcher felt that surveys were legitimate sources for carrying out quantitative research, as one could reach a larger audience and gather greater amounts of information, which in turn would provide more accurate data results for attempting to explain the relationship among the variables (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

3.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is inductive by nature and generates theory; this research strategy is mainly focused on emphasising words as opposed to the analysis and quantity of the data (Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue, 2011). This type of research method aims at analysing individual experiences and identifying a person's motives and beliefs as a result of these experiences. Interviews are a form of qualitative research and are a widely used form of primary data collecting as they can provide the researcher with the opportunity to study the individual and their surroundings in more a personal way, as the interviews can be tailored to each person if required. Thus, providing a more accurate representation of

how someone reacts towards other people and their environment (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). According to Dillon, Madden and Firtle (1984). the researcher should adhere to six rules in order to achieve the desired results of, during the interview process the interviewer must:

1. Avoid appearing superior or condescending and make use of only familiar words
2. Putting questions indirectly and informatively
3. Remain objective and detached from the participant and their experiences
4. Avoid questions and structure encouraging 'yes' or 'no' answers
5. Probe until all relevant details, emotions and attitudes are revealed
6. Provide an atmosphere that encourages the respondent to speak freely, while keeping the focus on the topic of discussion

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The researcher collected both primary and secondary date for the purpose of this study on the transfer of employee engagement practices across international subsidiaries of a company. Secondary data was gathered from the construction of the literature review, to gain a deeper understanding and collect relevant information and conclusions on the topic of engagement. Following on from this research in to current literature available on the cross-border element of employee engagement practices, primary data was collected in form of quantitative and qualitative research methods, which included surveys and interviews, which would serve to back this literature up as well identify gaps and limitations.

3.4.1 Surveys

The survey participants were selected at random across Ireland, North America and Thailand, from junior to management level, in order to get a fair representation of the opinions of the general workforce population. The total sample size of the survey responses amounted to 196, with 32 not being able to be included in the analysis due to incomplete responses. The demographics of the survey respondents are as follows:

- 44% of respondents from the Ireland site
- 37% of respondents from the North American site
- 19% of respondents from the Thailand site

- 16% aged between 18 – 24
- 41% aged between 25 – 34
- 32% aged between 35-44
- 11% aged 45 and above

- 53% in entry level - intermediate positions (level 1-4 non-management)
- 28% in management positions (level 1-3 management)
- 11% in senior management positions (level 4-6 management)
- 8% classified as director/vice president/owner

As can be seen from the above, the survey participants were chosen at random and across all levels of the organisation. By collecting data from a variety of ages, location and job roles, this provided the researcher with an in-depth analysis of the employees' opinions of current engagement levels, job satisfaction, motivation in the workplace, their perceptions of the validity of engagement practices in the other subsidiaries of the organisation compared to their own, and the overall census of opinion on Company X's current engagement practices. These surveys were conducted via Survey Monkey, with the data being returned to the researcher via quantitative analysis of the numbers and percentages of responses per question and per option provided. The data from the surveys was analysed via Microsoft excel. The researcher was able to download the results from the site to an excel file, which was then manipulated to include more formulas to group certain demographics and question sections together.

3.4.2 Interviews

Some participants were chosen specifically and others at random. The researcher conducted one on one interviews with a sample of six people from the organisation, the demographics shown below.

- 2 people from Ireland
- 2 people from the US
- 2 people from Thailand

- 2 in entry level to intermediate roles (US and Thailand)
- 2 in mid-level to manager roles (Ireland and Thailand)
- 2 at VP level (Ireland and the US)

The aim of selecting this sample location of participants was to ensure equal number of responses from each of our three subsidiaries. The researcher chose to interview two employees at each respective level within the organisation, i.e. at entry to intermediate level, mid to senior level and Director/VP level; this provides an accurate representation of responses from the bottom up, the views, beliefs and experiences at all levels within the company. Four of these interviewees were face to face interviews, as a VP from the US and a senior manager from Thailand were on site in Dublin for a global 'all-hands' meeting and agreed to participate in 20-minute interviews while on-site with the researcher. The other two face to face interviews were conducted with the two Ireland based participants, lasting 30 minutes. The final two interviews were Skype interviews, with participants based in the US and Thailand, also lasting 30 minutes.

The researcher chose to conduct one on one interviews, as well as surveys, because interviews provide more details and there is less room for error, in terms of uncertainty and answering questions at random. During face to face and Skype interviews, the participant is more inclined to give an honest answer. There were no preliminary unstructured interviews during this research study and the researcher provided the participants with standardised structured interviews, in order to follow a set of questions that would complement the quantitative research, the surveys. While participants answered similar questions to those carrying out the surveys, the interviewee relayed past experiences and current concerns; having the ability to prompt more in-depth responses during a one on one interview, the researcher has the advantage of more personal and sincere results. As this type of research is more qualitative and descriptive in nature, the researcher analysed the data by grouping similar answers together, and again this information was analysed via Microsoft excel. The researcher inputted responses in to an excel spreadsheet and manipulated to include formulas and various tabs to group certain demographics and question sections together.

3.5 Methodology Conclusions

As discussed, the researcher utilised both quantitative and qualitative research methods to get an in-depth analysis of current engagement practices and the learned beliefs around engagement within the Company. Surveys were carried out on a large sample of 196 employees while interviews were conducted among a smaller sample of 6 employees. The theory discussed in the literature review forms the construct for the methodology, as the research aims to confirm and/or refute current relevant literature against the findings. The next chapter will aim to show how the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative findings and ultimately how these relate to the literature review.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the survey and interview findings, proving clear examples of how both research methods complement one another. The researcher will evaluate and consider the findings keeping the research questions in focus. The findings chapter will seek to show how cultural differences do have an effect on employee engagement and motivation among Company X's workforce. It will be demonstrated how a lack of structure and consistency in HR policies and practices can lead to increased tensions and miscommunication between cross-border colleagues, thus influencing the dynamics of a team rendering business entities ineffective due to this lack of communal understanding and shared experiences within an organisation. The two main aspects that these research findings are categorized into are: 1. The role of culture in employee engagement and motivation, and 2. Job satisfaction and co-worker relationships. The researcher examined how there was an evident variance shown between each site location with reference to the over all engagement levels, how current engagement practices are perceived per site location, and how employees judged other site locations in comparison to their own. The research findings will then go on to confirm how an employee's perception of their working environment has a direct correlation to their perception of their job as well as their relationship with management other colleagues.

4.1 The Role of Culture in Employee Engagement & Motivation

One of very first questions in this survey was to determine what geographical location each participant was from, as this is crucial to this research. Each participant then answered general multiple-choice questions on engagement and the dynamics of their office or site, as per the above sample selection. The findings from this section on general engagement in the workplace, showed large variances between the South East Asian and Western sites. 87% of Thai employees answered 'Good' to almost all questions relating to engagement, whereas the American and Irish sites had very mixed views, 56% of American employees felt that current engagement practices were 'Good', while 49% of Irish employees viewing the company's engagement as 'Good'. During the interviews, the same responses were reflected in the below statement from an employee in an entry level position in the Irish site:

"We have fun in the office and we have the Summer and Christmas parties, but apart from that there isn't a whole lot going on. I guess we have regular All-Hands meetings across the company but I'm not sure that a lot of people find these informative or even interesting to be honest. I do think people are generally happy and there is a good atmosphere, on my own team anyway. I think it depends a lot on the way you manage people in here and the relationship you have with your team" (Team Manager, Ireland – Interviewee 2).

One must also remember that in definition terms, engagements is the level of commitment to one another that exists between employee and employer (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004) and even in certain terms it can relate to the emotional ties that an employee has with their manager (Torrington, Hall and Taylor, 2005), the level of social and informal interaction. As discussed in the literature review, Thai culture exhibits more personal relationships in the working environment, with employees often forming a family-like bond, hence this could explain the reasoning behind such a high engagement score among Thai employees. The interview responses for the Thailand based participants were similarly high when asked about their motivation in their current role, as well as when asked to compare against similar companies, as per the below employee's statement:

"We have quite a lot of events and parties that we organise here, most people are quite close. There are also some activities outside of work that I think some people feel obliged to go to, in order to be polite. But we do have a good working environment here overall and I always feel pushed and supported to excel in my role. I do think that having a good relationship with your manager will result in a happier employee, who has more motivation to do a good job and make their manager proud of them" (Intermediate/Level 3 employee, Thailand – Interviewee 5).

Contrarily, Ireland and America scored quite average when it came to questions about motivation. When asked about how they relate to engagement in their workplace and their level of motivation in their current role, the high volume of participants who felt

engagement practices did not relate to them at work (choosing the following two options: 'Poor' or 'OK but could be better') was almost identical to those who chose the same two options in the proceeding question relating to their motivation, which compliments the below statement by an Irish employee during the interview process:

> *"There isn't much of a 'culture' within the offices here and not a lot of interaction between teams. I feel that HR is too reactive and does not have enough time or resources to plan engagement activities or effectively partner with managers and business leaders. There isn't enough communication between the HR Business partners and the team managers, and this means that TMs do not have enough guidance and support on people issues and motivating their teams"* (Mid-level employee, Ireland – Interviewee 3).

 This confirms the link between engagement and motivation in the workplace; while there were some participants who seemed to be unhappy with the level of engagement but felt motivated in their job, the majority of answers demonstrated this relationship between the importance of employee engagement and an employee's motivation. The interview answers proceeded to follow the same pattern as the survey, with the Thai employees coming across very positive in their responses and the most negative in their responses and behaviours were the Irish employees; American employees while upbeat, also showed certain levels of yearning and wanting more from the company.

In terms of being asked about a comparison between the likes of Google and Facebook, the Thailand based participants were neutral on the matter with a lot choosing 'Good' and 'OK but could be better', the American based participants were slightly more optimistic in their response with the majority answering 'Good'. However, the Ireland based employees were somewhat more negative in their answer, with the majority choosing 'Poor'. Again, in the Thai culture we can see here the loyalty and commitment of employees, with Irish employees evidently feeling neglected in their work environment (in their opinion) compared to those working at Facebook and Google. Surprisingly, the American's felt their current practices and offerings were almost on-par with these tech giants, whereas in previous questions about engagement they had shown dissatisfaction with only 56% confirming that current engagement practices are

'Good'. This still leaves quite a high percentage of American based employees who chose 'Poor' and 'OK but could be better'. Thus, the research shows that while engagement practices in Company X's US site are relatively good, these employees yearn for more and for something better, and perhaps they always will expect more. Company X's Ireland site is evidently the most lacking in engagement and motivation and with the strong presence of American-influenced engagement practices in Ireland, this shows the researcher that improvement is required in the Irish site primarily, and possible the best way to achieve this is to ensure engagement policies and procedures are streamlined globally.

4.2 Job Satisfaction & Co-worker Relationships

In this section the researcher will aim at identifying the relationship between effective management and job satisfaction. When asked about employee engagement and their relationship with their managers, participants seem to view these as separate questions, when in reality one's manager is the first point of contact for communication and development within a company. Some participants felt they had good relationships with their managers, but after further probing in the interviews, there was an evident lack of engagement and communication between employees and their managers. Many of the Thai employees were satisfied with the level of communication and interaction with their managers, but Irish and American employees were more disgruntled about current management practices, as demonstrated in the below:

> *"There isn't much of a 'culture' within the offices here and not a lot of interaction between teams. I feel that HR is too reactive and does not have enough time or resources to plan engagement activities or effectively partner with managers and business leaders. There isn't enough communication between the HR Business partners and the team managers, and this means that TMs do not have enough guidance and support on motivating their teams"*
> *(Entry level employee, North America – Interviewee 1).*

There are socio-cultural dimensions within the organisation due to the fact that Company X is global, with employees spanning across the world meaning some employees have offsite managers based in other locations. If the engagement levels are unmatched

throughout the site locations, then it can be argued that this could lead to unmatched communication and coherent work practices between these employees and their offsite managers. As some employees are more engagement and motivated than others, this can lead to a divide within the organisation, not only due to cultural and social differences but it can be argued they will also be of a different mindset. Employee engagement is a means by which an organisation can effectively communicate and show its values and within early contemporary theories of management, Anthony Rucci (1997) examines the importance of informed and committed management, who must "steward the values" of the organisation. If management are not engaged then they cannot effectively engage and motivate their teams, which one can argue is the case in Company X. There seems to be an evident lack of structure within the company with little to no emphasis placed on the people managing aspect of a manager's job title,

4.3 Conclusion of Findings

Thus, it can be concluded that there are managers who are not actively engaged with the organisation and will evidently fail to act as a mouthpiece for the company's values and mission, resulting in a disengaged team; all of these disengaged employees will have a knock-on effect resulting in more serious problems of disengagement and attrition at a larger scale. A manager must be able to recognise their employees' motivations and values and match these with the company's values, so it is important that a manager is mindful, not only in a socio-cultural sense but also being aware that engagement practices are not effectively converged across locations and their teams may be disengaged as a result. The research in this study provided evidence that this is an ongoing concern in Company X. A massive 87% of participants accepted that their manager had a large role to play in their own engagement with the company and motivational levels at work, and again the majority believing that there are differences in engagement levels across the three subsidiaries. Therefore, the research supports the idea that different culture and varying engagement levels do have a large impact on international co-worker relationships and the overall commitment to Company X.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Research was carried out on this subject area with the aim of improving the management of talent in the Company, specifically the area of employee engagement within the context of the convergence versus divergence theory. Within the context of business research, evidence-based management is widely recognised as a guide to best practices and can be defined as the systematic use of the best available evidence to improve management practice" (Reay, et al 2009). However, it is argued that this type of business research is insufficiently guided by facts and lengthy theoretical findings (Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue, 2011), and it is clear from the literature review above, that there is little to no 'fact-finding' within the constructs of cultural and social beliefs in the work environment. The best practice approach is widely accepted as the best option for engaging a high-performance workforce (Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006), as is used in more Irish and American companies, including Company X, whereas in the Asian subsidiary of Thailand, the engagement practices may be better suited to a best-fit approach. The researcher will discuss the main differences found that, that relate to the literature review findings, as well as provide insights in to the limitation of this research and the recommendations, including costings, for application and further study.

The Thai culture is vastly different from that of the Irish and American culture, and these crucial differences and elements to society and culture are important workforce fundamentals to be mindful of (Sims, 2002; Gupta, 2005.) While this research is aimed at identifying and harmonising the differences within employee engagement and suggesting efforts to improve engagement at a global level, the research deals with individual opinions, emotions and beliefs, which can vary and change over time. Thus, there can be no 'fact-finding', but rather drawing on theories from observations and findings from quantitative research. Due to the evolving and speculative nature of this research, the researcher came to the conclusions that two types of research strategies should be used in order to get the most accurate responses: Surveys and interviews.

5.2 Main Findings

Review and evaluation of the research findings, show that the quantitative and qualitative methods used, do confirm the hypothesis that employee engagement levels vary across international subsidiaries of a company. It can also be determined that the reasons for these variances include the social and cultural beliefs that people are bounded by, as well the varying motivators that reflect these social and cultural differences.

5.2.1 The Effectiveness of Current Engagement Practices

The research shows that current engagement practices are lacking. This study highlights that certain sites within the company, who should be more engaged due to the influence of the Western culture and American society such as America and Ireland, are the least engaged; whereas the Thai perception of engagement practices is on much more positive levels the other 2 subsidiaries. The researcher concludes that those within the masculine societies have much higher expectations of their work environment and will possibly never be satisfied with what they have. Whereas in the South East Asia regions, employees are more accepting and content with what they have.

5.2.2 The Convergence of Engagement Practices Across Subsidiaries

It is evident that there is an enormous lack of convergence and application of best proactive within Company X and each of its three subsidiaries. The findings show that there is a lot of room for an effective engagement plan to be rolled out across Company X and one that can vastly improve upon the ineffective current policies and procedures. Engagement is not being converged across subsidiaries of the Company and as a result, there is an evident lack of communication between co-workers and this is also resulting in varying levels of output per site; as discussed, a lack of engagement among a workforce, will generally result in poor motivation and unproductive results.

5.2.3 The Effects of Varying Engagement Levels

As discussed, when a lack of structure and consistency in HR policies and practices exist, this can have a massive impact on relationships at work. It can lead to miscommunication between international teams and colleagues, influencing the dynamics of a team. Company X has many employees who are impacted by this and there is an evident lack of mutual understanding and shared experiences within an organisation. Some participants also felt jealous of their counterparts in other sites, who benefited from more

engaging work environments, it is important for Company X to understand that this can create a sense of discontent and hostility among colleagues, which will eventually lead to greater problems among international teams and international assignments. This aspect of the study confirmed that major differences exist psychologically among different individualistic and collectivist cultures.

5.3 Recommendations

The conclusion can be drawn that employee engagement practices are not operating at full capacity in terms of contributing to the effectiveness of communication, encouragement and motivation within the workplace, and should be streamlined across the international subsidiaries of Company X. As per best practice principles, HR policies and procedures should be streamlined and communicated across the company in order to ensure company-wide adhere to these policies and confirm a coherent and consistent message across the company; it is the researcher's opinion that employee engagement should be treated no differently to any other HR policy. HR Business Partners are champions of the organisation and it is their duty to support managers and all employees to have the resources to do their jobs effectively.

5.3.1 Annual Engagement Calendar

It is advisable that the global HR team have more regular meetings and discussions around employee engagement initiatives, for example creating an engagement calendar at the start of every year and each site sticking to this event planner. The HRBPs of Company X should be tasked with the planning and execution of monthly engagement events and encourage more cross-team engagement, both on-site and internationally. This will help to enhance communication within the organisation, which in turn will lead to more positive work relationships among the workforce.

The timelines for implementing an annual engagement calendar would not be significant and is something can start as soon as possible. This would be an ongoing project and the HR team could take one to two days to gather ideas and suggestions, then come together and decide on what events they will organise per month. This process for creating an annual engagement calendar could take up to a week, maximum, with ongoing monthly catch ups to ensure each site is on track to implement these around the same time every

month. HR should input monthly reminders to their calendars to have team calls over Skype or LoopUp to discuss how each site is preparing for the upcoming events and activities. As mentioned, an engagement calendar is something planning may for start within a week. The company may choose to implement immediately, with their first event in September/October, or start fresh in January 2019.

5.3.2 Quarterly Employee Engagement Surveys

Another recommendation would be to carry out quarterly employee engagement surveys. These will act as means to measure the effectiveness of ongoing engagement practices by, and the HR and management team can identify gaps, recognize what is and isn't working, and classify what areas and/or teams need more encouragement. Employee engagement surveys can help the organisation with evaluating engagement practices, thus providing ongoing feedback on which to improve upon. Engagement levels are subject to constant change due to both internal and external factors, therefore ongoing evaluation is necessary, and surveys are one of the most effective ways to achieve this.

Surveys are another recommended project that would be ongoing. In terms of 2018, if the company were to implement quarterly engagement surveys, the first survey should commence in September, or in the case of bi-annual surveys, then December would be the target timeline. With HR taking two to three weeks post survey deadline to analyse the results. The company could also ask for recommendations and suggestions on the monthly activities and events from the employees as part of the surveys.

5.3.3 Cost Implications

There will be cost implications for introducing an engagement calendar for the year and these would need to be discussed with other business partners to determine how much of an annual budget is available for engagement. An example of an engagement calendar could include a different activity each month, with some activities not requiring any financing. Activities such as competitions, health and wellbeing days, Easter egg giveaways and Christmas surprises are all examples of various activities that can happen throughout the year that wold have cost implications for the company. However, this is where the HR business partners needs to identify their budget and work within these restraints. Even smaller budgets can allow for engagement activities, for example CSR

events; the company could hold a pub quiz (or a lunch time quiz in the office to save money) with teams paying a set amount per table and all proceeds going to a charity. Cost effective prizes would include be a team lunch for the winning team, or a "duvet day" which is essentially an extra day annual leave.

With reference to employee engagement surveys, this is also a cost-effective means of gathering feedback. Creating surveys on Survey Monkey are free and you are provided with an analysis of your findings by means of graphs, showing the level of responses per question. For more detailed questionnaires and response findings, it could be an option down the line to invest some more in to the Survey Monkey account and pay for extra features, if HR feels there are getting value from these surveys.

5.4 Limitations

Of course, as with any research, there are certain limitations to this study. This research study has been based upon the social and cultural aspects of workforce groups in different geographical regions, these differences are the basis for the study as engagement is examined according to these differences. However, over time people, cultures, societies, may develop upon their opinions and their beliefs can evolve; thus, ongoing research and evaluation needs to be carried out by an organisation. While this study confirms the differences in opinion, motivation and co-worker relationships in different societies, all these elements can change as they are contingent on the external environment. An ontological position that reiterates the notion that certain social aspects are in constant change, is constructivism as detailed in Business Research Strategies: "Instead of culture being seen as an external reality that acts on and constraints people, it can be taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction" (Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue, 2011).

Due to the nature of the fast-paced and highly influenced world we live in, it is fair to say that one's cultural and social beliefs could be subject to change. While many ideals such as religious beliefs may be set in stone, others could be seen as more tentative in nature. Therefore, it is important that companies revise their practices regularly as engagement today could be vastly different to engagement next year, as motivators and

priorities change over time. A research study of this nature will always require ongoing evaluation and revision of practices and procedures.

Overall, when evaluating how well these research methods worked, the researcher can confirm that most of the findings concluded that, while socio-cultural differences can have an impact and should be considered, employee engagement should be converged across Company X's subsidiaries in Ireland, North America and Thailand. Better communication channels need to be created and promoted throughout the company, with regular site visits for international teams to stay physically connected and develop a greater understanding of the cultural differences existing within their team and the company as a whole.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations within research, refers to the topic(s) and design of the research including how this is created and formulated by the researcher, how the researcher has access to the participants, as well as the methods for data collection and storage (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). From the outset of the study, the researcher referred to the National College of Ireland's Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research involving Human Participants.

The issue of consent was an important factor of this research and data collection process. The confidentiality agreement included a consent section. Everyone was asked to consent to their survey and interview answers being used within this study, as well as being advised that all recordings of interviews would be deleted within an adequate amount of time, so as to ensure the anonymity of participants. During the research process, participants were advised that all information collected through surveys and interviews would remain anonymous and participant confidentiality was an earnest ethical duty of the researcher. Assurance was provided to participants in the confidentiality agreement, as can been seen in the appendix, regarding the anonymous nature of the study. The confidentiality agreement clearly stated the purpose of the research and it was also clearly noted in the agreement that no information would be collected, as such could be personally identifiable, including names, email/IP addresses, employee numbers and the team or department participants worked in.

The researcher was also accompanied by a note taker during the interview process, who took the minutes/notes during the interviews. The note taker also signed each interviewee's confidentiality agreement agreeing to the privileged nature of the interviews. The researcher also provided their email address, for participants to contact if any further information about the study was required and participants were advised that they were free to exit the survey and leave the interviews at any time if they did not wish to complete it.

5.6 Personal Learning Statement

This research study was both a challenging and rewarding process for me. I found the topics of employee engagement and international HRM to complement each other well and they are two topics that I have a keen interest in. I thoroughly enjoyed carrying out this research and I hope that this study will have an impact on other HRM students and act as a guide to their own thesis writing.

I also hope that the research will be recognised and form part of a new HR strategy for the company which this is based upon. I believe it is of the utmost importance that engagement be present within an organisation, even more so an international organisation. I discovered more and more about the relationship between engagement, motivation and an organisation's success while completing this study and I look forward to building on this knowledge and research in the future, being a witness to how engagement practices will evolve in Company X.

Reflecting on this entire process, I can admit that the most challenging section was to analyse the research findings and I think if I were to do it again, I would have added more questions to the survey to get more information, as well as probing into the interview responses a little more. But overall, I am happy with the end result.

One of my main objectives for undertaking the MA HRM course was to further enhance my knowledge and interest in the Human Resources field. This course and thesis provided me with invaluable motivation and encouragement to continue my learning and development within HR, and I look forward to where my HR career will lead me; I have no doubt that having completed the MA HRM with NCI will improve my chances in furthering my career.

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7. APPENDIX

7.1 Interview Questions

1. What is your current role?

2. What site/country do currently work in?

3. How would you rate the current level of employee engagement in the company?

4. How does current engagement initiatives relate to you and your role in the company?

5. How would you rate your level of motivation in your current role?

6. Do you think effective engagement practices have an impact on a person's performance at work? Please elaborate if possible.

7. Do you think motivation can be increased by effective engagement across a company's workforce? Please elaborate if possible.

8. Have you ever visited another site in the company?

9. If yes, where did you visit?

10. Were there any major differences that you noticed in relation to engagement and communication? Please elaborate if possible.

11. In your opinion, are there differences in engagement levels across the 3 sites?

12. How do you think engagement could be improved in your office/site?

13. Do you think it is practical to streamline engagement practices across the Irish, American and Thai sites? Please provide reasons for your answer.

14. Do you think American companies such as Google and Facebook, influence international HR practices such as engagement? Please elaborate if possible.

15. Would you like to see American culture have an influence on your company? Please provide reasons for your answer.

16. In your opinion, do you think the cultural and societal norms of a site/country, should be taken in to account? In other words, should engagement practices be streamlined across sites or should they be suited to fit each site?

7.2 Survey Questions

1. The level of employee engagement? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

2. How current engagement initiatives relate to you? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

3. How would you rate your level of motivation in your current role? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

4. How would you rate your company's current engagement practices? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

5. How would you rate your company's engagement practices against similar companies within the same industry? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

6. How would you rate your company's engagement practices against the larger tech companies such as Facebook and Google? (Options: Poor, Good, Great)

7. Does effective employee engagement increase your motivation levels at work? (Options: Yes, No)

8. Does a good relationship with your manager increase your motivation and productivity levels at work? (Options: Yes, No)

9. Have you ever visited another site within the company? (Options: Yes, No)

   If you answered Yes, please answer the below:

   8.1 What site did you visit? (Options: Ireland/Asia/North America)

   8.2 Did you observe any engagement initiatives while there? (Options: Yes, No)

   8.3 Were there differences in engagement and interaction among employees compared to your site? (Options: Yes, No)

   8.4 Do you think engagement practices are more effective in the site you visited? (Options: Yes, No)

10. Do you think employee engagement should be streamlined across the company internationally? (Options: Yes, No)

11. Do you think American culture has influenced engagement in your site? (Options: Yes, No)

12. Do you think American culture promotes better employee engagement compared to your site? (Options: Yes, No)

13. Do you think engagement should be catered to fit each office/site?

7.3 Confidentiality Agreement & Consent Form

Interview Confidentiality Agreement & Consent Form

This is a research study in to the engagement practices of a global company with subsidiaries in 3 countries: Ireland, the US and Thailand. The aim of this research is to explore current engagement levels and practices within your organisation.

You are invited to participate in this research and should you wish to accept, please mark the below boxes with an X and sign your initials below confirming the consent. Your participation in this research will involve a one-on-one interview with the researcher, and a note take will also be present. This interview will take no longer than 30 minutes and you will be asked 16 questions relating to engagement, motivation and your current role.

The identity of all participants will remain anonymous and information will be stored in a safe and confidential manner. General notes will be taken by the researcher as well as a note taker, who will type up the interviewees' responses in the interview. These notes will be typed up and stored in a locked password protected document on the researcher's personal laptop, and access will only be permitted to the researcher, as well as the note taker for review and confirmation of accuracy. The note taker is also obliged to sign this document, agreeing to the confidential nature of the research and the importance of the anonymity of all participants involved.

If at any time the participant wishes to stop the interview and leave, they are free to do so. If at any time the participant wishes not to answer a question(s), they are free to refuse. The researcher will also make these research findings available to all participants should they be interested.

Please take note of the below email address of the researcher, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this process feel free to address these to dani93elle@gmail.com

☐ I have read and understand the details of this study.

☐ I willingly provide my consent to participate in the study.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Initials of Participant: _____   Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____   Date: _____

Signature of Note Taker: _____   Date: _____