



AN EXAMINATION OF HOW LEADERSHIP
AFFECTS THE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
OF GRADUATES WITHIN THE IRISH
WORKFORCE

By

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Abstract

This research will focus on examining how leadership affects the employee engagement levels of Irish graduates. There is a clear gap with the body of literature surrounding employee engagement within the Irish setting and the employee engagement of graduates. This worried the researcher considering how important the topic of employee engagement is, a highly engaged workforce boasts a large amount of benefits such as a higher retention level and a more productive workforce. A qualitative method was used to obtain the data required, this method was chosen due to the sensitive nature that employee engagement and the fact that a qualitative method had rarely been used in past research. This method provided findings that were in line with previous research, the research found that the managerial relationship with graduates affected their employee engagement levels. One of the main findings was that the use of the transformational leadership leads to higher engagement levels within Irish graduates, although previous literature advised that this was true for the general workforce, this research outlined that it was true Irish graduates specifically. This means that Irish organisations need to be cognisant of their leadership styles when focusing on engaging the graduates that they have in their workforce.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The Research Area

The introduction of this dissertation will focus on a general overview of Employee Engagement. This concept is extremely broad and there are various academics who describe this far reaching concept in a few different ways, so the literature review will delve a bit deeper into explaining the concept. This introduction will also include a justification for the research conducted by this dissertation which will outline why the research is significant and a couple of aims and objectives which the dissertation hopes to achieve. The key purpose of this research is to examine to what extent leadership will affect the employee engagement within new graduates in Ireland. Employee engagement is a topic which is gaining a lot of traction among academics. For this reason, Employee Engagement in the last few years has been researched from a multitude of different aspects and for several different reasons. An engaged employee could be personified by the passion and energy given to an organisation to serve a particular purpose within the organisation, an engaged employee can be seen to willingly give discretionary effort to go that 'extra mile' (Cook, 2008). It is clear how beneficial this would be to any organisation, with an engaged workforce an organisation could reduce the turnover, become more profitable, increase employee and customer satisfaction and become more efficient (Madan, 2017). The benefits of having engaged employees seem to be endless, therefore it is vital that there is an abundance of research done around this area. The interest of this study is to examine the effects that leadership has on new graduate's employee engagement with Irish workforce.

1.2. Justification of Research

Although there has been a large amount of research done on the topic of employee engagement, the researcher felt as though there needed to be a more in-depth look at how graduate's employee engagement is affected. There has been little to none research done on the topic of graduates in Ireland in general, let alone the niche topic of employee engagement within graduates. With the war for talent coming back stronger than ever and the labour market tightening up, graduates are now an in-demand commodity within the workforce. Recruiting, developing and retaining graduate talent seems to be key element in the success of any organisation over the last few years (McCracken, Currie and Harrison, 2016). Seeing as engaged employees will tend to be more loyal to the organisation and be more likely to grow with the company than actively disengaged employees, it is key that organisations keep their graduates engaged (Cook, 2008). Graduates are different to 'regular employees' in a number of different ways, the main and most important difference is their relative inexperience in comparison to other employees (McCracken et al, 2016). With this inexperience, the manager or supervisor of the graduate will have to give a lot more attention and leadership to build the graduates skill up to an acceptable point within the organisation. The majority of these graduates coming into the workforce in the next few years will be dominated by Gen Y and Gen Z employees, research performed by Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) explains that these two generations will have a very different attitude towards work. It was found that these generations are expecting a large amount of training and development, they will also want a range of long term career prospects within an organisation and to work in an environment which is technological savvy (Luscombe et al, 2013).

From this, graduates coming into the workforce are very different than employees coming in with previous industry experience. They will require a large amount of training and development, leadership will be a key factor in the initial stages of any graduate's employment. The main aim of this study is to examine how leadership affects the employee engagement levels of new graduates within the Irish workforce. This is important as graduate's employee engagement levels seem to have been forgotten by academics but they are extremely heavily recruited by organisations, an Irish survey on graduate recruitment trends in 2017 illustrated that only 4% of organisations in Ireland weren't planning on hiring any graduates (<http://council.ie/graduate-recruitment-in-2017-trends-and-analysis/>). Therefore, it is important that organisations keep graduates engaged which in turn will make the graduates more productive and retain these graduates for a longer period. Leadership is the most important driver for these graduates as they won't have a large amount of industry experience and will be heavily reliant on the leadership skills of their direct manager or supervisor.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

The research question for this dissertation is to analyse the extent to which the leadership of the direct supervisors or managers affects the employee engagement of graduates within the Irish workforce. A brief overview of this academic area has been explored so far, from this it is clear that employee engagement is an area which definitely warrants a large amount of research as it offers such a large variety of benefits. Graduates have rarely been studied in an Irish setting also. There is a very large gap in the existing research which this research will hopefully rectify.

Research Objective One

The primary objective for this research question is to evaluate how exactly the relationship between the manager and employee affects the engagement of graduate employees within the Irish workforce.

Research Objective Two

Another objective of this research is to find and analyse how different styles of leadership affects the employee engagement of graduates. i.e. will transformational leadership lead to higher levels of employee engagement among graduates and conversely will transactional leadership lead to a lower level of employee engagement within graduates.

Research Objective Three

To examine the overall employee engagement levels of graduates within the Irish workforce.

Research Objective Four

From this research one of the aims is to formulate recommendations on how to increase or maintain employee engagement for graduates in the Irish workforce. This is for the benefit of both the employer and the employee.

1.4. Summary of Chapters

This study is divided up into five separate chapters. The first chapter introduces the overall arching concept that will be studied in this research and discuss the main aims and objectives of the research. The second chapter is an in-depth literature review, the literature in the area of employee engagement and how leadership affects employee engagement will be analysed and critiqued. The third chapter deals with the methodological approach of this study, the decision between quantitative and qualitative research is examined along with data collection methods used and how the participants were selected. Chapter four displays the findings of the research that was collected from the use of the aforementioned methodological approach, these findings will be presented in such a way to link back to the objectives of this study. The final chapter will discuss the findings in comparison to the literature already examined and note the implications this will have theoretically and practically. This chapter will also provide recommendations and conclude the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline and critique the topic of employee engagement, how leadership affects employee engagement and employee disengagement. It will focus on defining the term of employee engagement, explain why this area is important and try to highlight the main drivers that will result in a high level of employee engagement. The literature surrounding how leadership affects employee engagement will also be reviewed as this is the main focus of this research. Various models of employee engagement will also be analysed.

2.2 Definition of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement has been described and defined by the number of different academics through different aspects and there is confusion about the exact definition (Rich, LePine and Crawford, 2010; Macey and Schneider, 2008). It has been described from a psychological point of view from the work of Kahn, (1990) or alternatively from a point of view that would put all the responsibility of engaging their workforce on an organisation. One of the main reasons for confusion over the definition of employee engagement is that this concept overlaps with several similar concepts or constructs i.e. job satisfaction or organisational commitment (Saks, 2006). For this reason, for the first few years in which employee engagement was in academic circles, it didn't get proportionate attention as it was labelled 'old wine in a new bottle' (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is fundamentally different however, an employee may be satisfied in their work, but they may not be an engaged employee (Freeney and Tiernan, 2006). There was a change in how academics

viewed employee engagement in recent years however and it has received a lot of attention and relevant studies (Saks and Gruman, 2014). To make sense of all the definitions of employee engagement it is vital to analyse the work of Kahn (1990), he was the first academic to postulate what exactly employee engagement was.

Kahn conducted a study, he interviewed camp counsellors and employees in an architecture firm, notably two very different types of employment and then proceeded to examine moments of engagement and disengagement (Saks and Gruman, 2014). His theory is one that he termed 'personal engagement', he explained that an employee's engagement level is connected to the extent in which the employee will express their 'preferred self' in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). When employee's express their 'preferred self' in the performance of tasks in the workplace they will express themselves in a physical, cognitive and emotional fashion (Kahn, 1990). The employee will express their 'preferred self' if they feel that three conditions are met by the employer, these consist of psychological safety, psychological availability and psychological meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990). This means that an employee will only display their 'preferred self' if they feel psychologically safe to express this to others during role performances, if they have adequate resources to express their 'preferred self' and finally if the role performances are meaningful in nature (Kahn, 1990). Put simply employee engagement involves an employee investing their 'heads, hearts and hands' when performing a role in their job performance (Rich et al, 2010).

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as a psychological condition or a state of mind, but many other academics have defined it in a different manner. Such academics include Cook (2008), she has described employee engagement by the personification of the passion and energy

which the employees possess to help their organisation succeed. Another element within employee engagement which she defines, is the willingness of the employees to give discretionary efforts to help the organisation succeed (Cook, 2008). Although Cook (2008), has added her own elements to the definition, it seems to be rooted in the Kahn (1990) definition. She goes more in depth and explains that employee engagement is measured by examining how positive the employee thinks, feels and is proactive in relation to achieving organisational goals (Cook, 2008). It is clear that this definition is rooted in that of Kahn's definition of engaged employees acting in an emotional, cognitive and physical way. Another definition which is provided by Gallup researchers, they describe an organisation engaging their employees by capturing the 'heads, hearts and souls' to instil a passion for excellence among the workforce (Flemming and Asplund, 2007). Kahn's definition has once again influenced another academics work. At this point although there are a multitude of different definitions for employee engagement, they all have some very similar concepts and themes that run through most of these definitions.

2.3. Importance of Employee Engagement

There is a high emphasis placed on employee engagement within organisations of today, although the model of employee engagement is a relatively new area of interest for the HR profession it is extremely valuable as an engaged workforce boasts many benefits (Krishnaveni and Monica, 2016). The benefits of an engaged workforce are crucial to an organisation's success, engaged employees have an extremely positive work attitude i.e. they have high levels of job satisfaction and high levels of organisational commitment (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Employee engagement is responsible for a more customer focused

workforce, more efficient employees and increased creativity which will contribute to focusing on the overall business goals (Freeney and Tiernan, 2006).

One of the huge benefits to having an engaged workforce is that they will be far more committed to the organisation (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015). Now that the economy has begun to improve labour markets will begin to tighten up dramatically (Torrington, Hall and Taylor, 2008), unemployment has been seen to drop substantially over the last few years. Organisations will now find it increasingly more difficult to recruit staff with the appropriate skills and experience (Torrington et al, 2008). With a member of staff resigning, a number of significant costs tend to follow such as the recruitment and training of new staff and any down time the organisation would suffer due to the resignation (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015). There are multiple and different solutions for retaining staff in a wide variance of organisations but a key way for the majority of organisations to retain staff is to engage their employees in their work. Some of the reasons for turnover within an organisation that can be controlled is a decline in reputation of the organisation, lack of professional management practice and a decline in employee satisfaction (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015). This huge turnover risk to an organisation could be mitigated through the improvement of employee engagement within the organisation (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015).

The fact the turnover is reduced within an organisation and organisational commitment is increased is not the only benefit of an employee increasing employee engagement (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Engagement was found to positively affect work attitudes i.e. job satisfaction was increased. Employees in an organisation where engagement is seen to be fostered and nurtured are found to have better health and overall wellness (Rich et al, 2010).

2.4. The Drivers of Employee Engagement

As previously explained, employee engagement is very complex area indeed. A multitude of academics have given their own definitions to this very elusive topic, the same goes for the drivers of employee engagement. The Aon survey on global engagement trends illustrate that in 2018 the top drivers for employee engagement are rewards and recognition, senior leadership, career opportunities and an enabling infrastructure (Aon, 2018). These are just a few drivers which keep employees engaged in the workforce, the drivers can range from the culture of an organisation to the channels of communication (Mani, 2011). The drivers of employee engagement are categorised neatly by Saks and Gruman (2014), in general the drivers of employee engagement are the perceived working conditions of the employees. They can be divided into job resources and job demands. Job resources are seen as the following; work autonomy, co-worker relationships, leadership, and career progression (Saks and Gruman, 2014). In terms of job demands, there are two different aspects of this which relate to employee engagement. Challenging demands are those which keep the employees engaged in their work, these types of demand include the amount of workload within reason, the responsibility of the work done and the urgency of the work (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Hindrance demands however have a negative effect on employee engagement and would include such administrative work, role overload, work politics, policies and procedure which don't yield any positive results (Saks, 2018).

The nature of this study will focus in on one driver, this driver is how leadership, or the management relationship affects employee engagement, specifically within new graduates. Mercer (2007) performed

a study on employee engagement, they outlined the four main drivers of employee engagement which can be seen across all the culture and countries. These four global drivers for employee engagement are as follows; the opportunity to develop within the organisation, confidence and trust in the leadership, recognition and rewards and finally good organisational communication were the four global drivers for employee engagement (Mercer, 2007). It is clear to see from both the AON and the Mercer studies, the element of leadership continuously appears as a prominent driver for employee engagement. It is so prominent in fact that a study undertaken by Willis Towers Watson (2016) then proceeded to outline that leadership is the most important driver for employee engagement. A lot of the other drivers which were mentioned will also flow through the relationship a manager will have with employees which are new graduates. For example, management level will have a huge role in creating a culture within an organisation, they will also be able to influence such areas as workload, job responsibility, career progression etc. It is obvious how essential this driver is for employee engagement.

2.5. How Leadership Affects Employee Engagement

It is clear now from multiple different sources that effective leadership will increase employee engagement within the workforce, it is important however to now analyse what effective leadership means. The academic area of leadership is full of different models and theories in relation to how different leadership practices illicit responses from employees. There are such models as McGregor's theory of leadership, Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, Goleman's six leadership styles, LMX Theory or Transformational Leadership etc. (Torrington et al, 2008). In terms of the engaging a workforce, the transformational leadership model

best illustrates what a leader must do in terms engaging the workforce (Saks and Gruman, 2014).

Transformational leadership was first conceptualized in 1978 by Burns, at this time however, the seminal piece of work was based not on leadership within an organisation (Bass, 1999). Burns (1978) published his work at the end of the cold war and the leadership which was mentioned in this article was on a country wide basis. Transformational leadership is about lifting the follower's morale and motivation i.e. Burns (1978) explained that leaders within a country will focus on what a follower can do for the country. There is a converse type of leadership which is called Transactional leadership, this type of leadership will focus in on the self-interest of the follower i.e. what can your country do for you (Burns, 1978). This is the seminal piece of work on this type of leadership, Bernard Bass however in 1985 adopted this work into the modern work environment.

Bass (1999) explains that transformational leadership is about extending the follower beyond their own self-interests through a charismatic style of management which is also intellectually stimulating and focuses on the individual. This can be achieved when a leader can easily articulate a desirable future goal, how the follower can reach that goal and then sets an example to be followed which in terms of performance and determination (Bass, 1999). On the other side of that transactional leadership sets out an exchange relationship. Both the leader and the follower exchange something to meet their self-interests, the leader will explain that a reward is contingent on them taking a specific direction or performing to a specific degree (Bass, 1999). The concept of transformational leadership does have overlapping ideals with other leadership theories, transformational leadership is the most ideal concept or theory which increases employee engagement (Xu and Thomas, 2011). The leadership behaviours which make up the theory of

transformational leadership has multiple linkages to the constructs of employee engagement (Bass, 1985). Gaining trust of the followers as a leader is one of the key aspects within the concept of transformational leadership, this is also involved in the psychological safety first posed by Kahn (1990).

There are a multitude of different sources which display that there are certain correlations that the use of transformational leadership will cause higher employee engagement. Employees are usually motivated, have higher job satisfaction, committed to the organisation along with certain proactive behaviours when they are under a leader who implements a transformational leadership approach, this is also applicable when an employee has a high level of engagement (Xu and Thomas, 2011). Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou (2011) put forward in their study that transactional leaders lack the power to motivate and influence their followers i.e. followers with a leader that implements a transactional approach won't be engaged in their work. In this study it was found that transformational leadership will keep employees at a higher engagement level than transactional leadership (Tims et al, 2011). This is not to say that transactional leadership won't have any effect on the daily engagement of employees. It was found in a recent study that if a manager implements a transactional style of leadership i.e. offers a contingent reward daily, this will engage an employee to a certain extent, but the use of transformational leadership will offer a longer-term approach to engaging and keeping those employees engaged (Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen and Espevik, 2014).

Although transformational leadership is the theory which most correlates with the concept of employee engagement, I think it is important to see how other similar leadership theories will affect employee engagement within a workforce. Social exchange theory is one that fits quite well within

this area as it has many of the attributes similar to the transformational leadership (Jin and McDonald, 2017). Social exchange theory explains that if an employee perceives as though their supervisor supports and cares for them, they will feel obliged to 'return the favour' and engage themselves in their work (Jin and McDonald, 2017). This social exchange theory clearly can't be achieved using transactional leadership, instead it is clear that the manager will have to use a transformational model and connect with the employees on a deeper level to ensure that this social exchange is successful.

Graduates are an essential part of the economy and an essential for the survival of organisations, there is now a fight to hire the most capable graduates (Cesario and Chambel, 2017). The recruitment of these high-quality graduates to further the longevity of the organisation will be undermined if there is not a high level of employee engagement within the organisation (Cesario and Chambel, 2017). This dissertation will be focusing on the extent to which the leadership methods of their direct manager/supervisor will affect their engagement levels. There is a serious gap in academia with regards to how leadership affects these new graduates. For most new graduates after college, this will be the first time in a professional environment and their direct manager will need to be cognisant of this. As this is the first time in this type of environment, they should and more than likely will have a very high amount of interactions with their manager. Therefore, it is credible to think that the leadership within an organisation will affect a new graduates' engagements levels in a very serious fashion.

2.6. Model of Employee Engagement

As previously outlined, a multitude of academics have delved into the topic of employee engagement and brought forward a few theories which are quite useful. Cook (2008) was one of the first to bring forward a model to improve employee engagement within an organisation. This model is called the WIFI model, she explained that there were four key elements which drive employee engagement; Well Being, Information, Fairness and Involvement (Cook, 2008). With regards to the Well Being element of this model, this will include multiple different aspects both internal and external. The external aspect of this component will include the organisations corporate social responsibility and their employer branding i.e. if an organisation is known to be an employer of choice within an industry, this will contribute towards an improvement in their employee engagement (Cook, 2008). The internal side of this component will have a lot to do with HR policies, flexible working time arrangements etc. The job being sufficiently challenging for that specific individual and the level by which the employer genuinely cares for you is also a very large internal factor (Cook, 2008).

The next component of Cook's model for employee engagement is that of information. Information with regards to this model seems to be related to the way in which the organisational goals are translated down to the employees within the organisation. Giving employees a clear vision as to where the organisation is going and their future goals is key to improving employee engagement (Cook, 2008). This is on its own will not suffice however, the organisation will also have to explain to the employees in a concise manner how they are contributing towards the future goals of the organisation (Cook, 2008).

Fairness is the third component in the WIFI Model for employee engagement. The fairness aspects permeate through multiple areas of any organisation, fairness will begin with the recruitment and selection

process making sure that the entire process is totally transparent (Cook, 2008). Any performance management system or reward system will be needing to be fair, employees must be aware of what is expected of them and have access to a personal development plan with regards to their upskilling and training (Cook, 2008). It is essential that any reward or recognition are completely transparent and fair (Cook, 2008).

The final aspect of employee engagement within this model is the Involvement aspect. This component is mainly to do with how involved the employees are in having input into the direction of the company or organisation (Cook, 2008). Organisations with high levels of employee engagement will understand that communication is a two-way process, therefore these companies will understand that involving the employees and giving their opinions some weight will lead to innovative solutions and create a more engaged workforce (Cook, 2008).

The use of this WIFI model will illicit a situation where the employee will feel as though they are a trusted and respected as an employee who is empowered by their job. The employee will then proceed to be far more motivated within their position giving their best and going that 'extra mile' (Cook, 2008). The organisation will then proceed to benefit in a multitude of different ways by engaging their employees, the organisation will become far more efficient and productive. Turnover will be reduced, employee and customer satisfaction will increase see a notable increase, all of this in turn effect the bottom line which is the profitability of the organisation (Cook, 2008).

2.7. Disengagement of Employees

Disengagement is as the name implies, this is basically the converse of employee engagement. Again, the first academic to conceptualize this

was Kahn (1990), in this seminal piece of work he defined engagement, but he also defined disengagement within the workforce (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement is the withdrawal of a person's preferred self from their work, they therefore will not be physically, emotionally or cognitively connected to their work. Employees who are actively disengaged in their work, are said to be defensive and impersonal in their approach to their role performances, in turn they are said to be emotionally inexpressive (Kahn, 1990). Organisations where employees are actively disengaged will suffer consequences that could have the potential to significantly damage the performance of an organisation (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015). The multitude of benefits of an engaged workforce have already been examined thoroughly, a disengaged workforce offers basically a converse of the benefits of an engaged workforce. A disengaged workforce is one that is dissatisfied, fosters a culture of workplace deviance and fails to retain valuable members of the workforce (Hernandez and Kleiner, 2015).

2.8. Conclusion

It is clear from the review of this literature that there is a plethora of different definitions for the topic of employee engagement, all these definitions or models for employee engagement seem to stem from the seminal piece of work of Kahn (1990). For this reason, the researcher has given the majority of weight to the work of Kahn for the purpose of defining the actual area of employee engagement. With regards to the importance of employee engagement, it is clear that there are an abundance of benefits to having a high level of employee engagement within a workforce from higher levels of productivity to increase longevity in employee's lifecycle. We can also see that employee engagement has a variety of different factors which can affect it, leadership being one driver that consistently appears in the literature as a contributing factor to high

levels of employee engagement. Xu and Thomas (2014) advise that the use of transformational leadership directly links to higher levels of employee engagement, this is vital to this research as this study hope to prove the same applied to Irish graduates in the workplace.

Chapter 3: Methodology

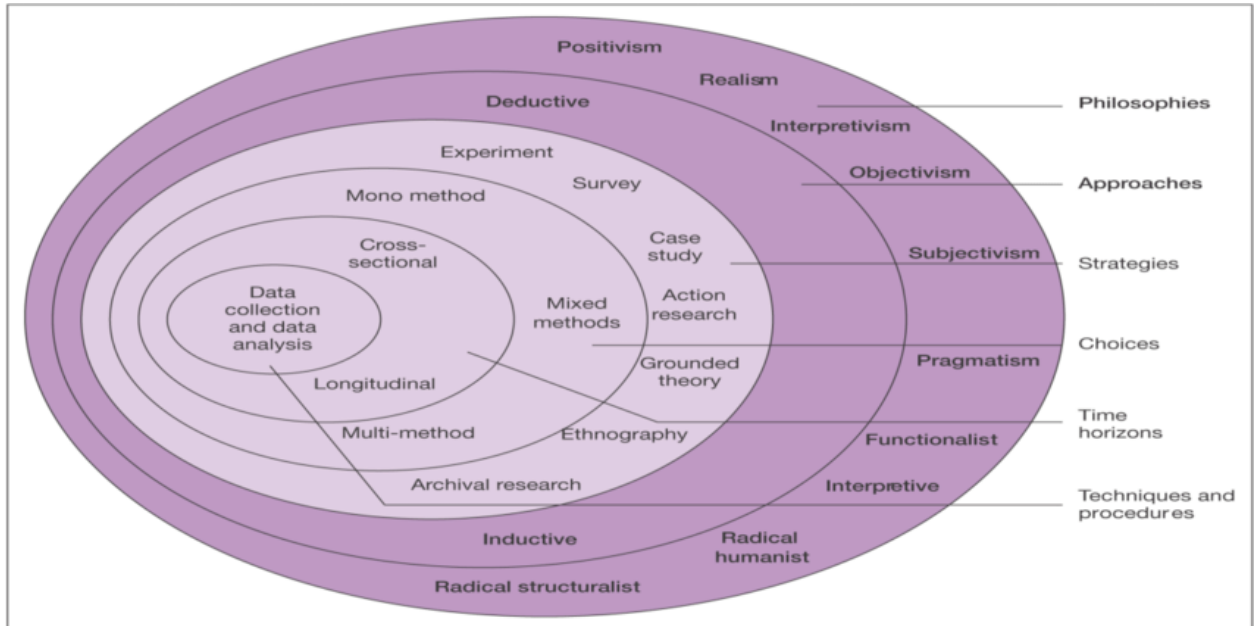
3.1. Introduction

This chapter goes through the research strategy and how this strategy was formulated to allow the researcher to gather credible results, the methodological structure will be outlined. Different research philosophies will be analysed in this section which influenced the decision of the research strategy. The research strategy will also be broken down into different sections i.e. how the participants were chosen, how the decision between a qualitative and a quantitative method was made. Keeping in mind the primary aim for this research question is to determine the extent to which leadership affects the employee engagement within graduates within the Irish workforce. The primary data which is required for this research question will be obtained through a qualitative approach. This chapter will go through different research methodology and why a qualitative approach was chosen and then outline the surrounding philosophies which influenced this decision.

3.2. Research Philosophies

The research philosophy which is adopted by a study is usually influenced by a question that the researcher is trying to answer (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). To best understand how the research philosophy influenced the research methodology, it is wise to look at the research onion (Saunders et al, 2009). The concept behind this diagram is simple enough, peeling back each layer of the onion will reveal a specific part of the research methodology which a researcher could follow. There is however no hard and fast rule which explains which research method is

the 'right' one, the research methodology will all depend on the question being asked by the researcher.



Saunders,

Lewis and Thornhill, 2009

Creswell (2009) explained that it is key for research to outline the philosophical worldview of that underpins and shaped the approach to the research. Therefore, it is important to look at the philosophies which had influenced the methodology behind this research. Starting on the very outer layer of this diagram, there is a number of different philosophies that can be chosen.

Positivism is an underpinning philosophy that is suitable if the research is attempting to establish the facts of a phenomenon (Quinlan, 2011). The framework is surrounded by a very simple understanding of the world, and that is there is only one objective reality and there is no ambiguity in the research (Quinlan, 2011). A major characteristic of the positivist approach is that the researcher can in no way alter the substance of the data collection process i.e. they are required to be totally objective when

collating and collecting the data. This was described by Saunders et al, 2009 as a value free approach. This type of approach would deal mainly with measurable observations and analysing any relations between the measurements (Saunders et al, 2009). Positivism is an epistemological position that applies methods of the natural sciences to study social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

What this study intends on doing is looking deeply into how leadership will affect a graduate's employee engagement in the workplace, as is clear from the literature, employee engagement is a very personalized topic and an employee's engagement level relies a lot on the employee's attitudes and perception of their workplace (Cook, 2008). It is important to note that the interpretivist and constructivist researcher hold a reality that is unique to each individual (Quinlan, 2011). The research question that posed will require answers from participants that are quite complex in their nature and therefore the researcher and the subjects must interpret what is being asked and answered respectively. It is clear from this that an interpretivism philosophy underpins this research as the topic is completely subjective this means that the participants will be able to respond and engage with the research in their own unique way free (Quinlan, 2011). As already mentioned, this research will focus on attitudes, perceptions, feelings etc. which are extremely subjective and such complexity can't be adequately represented by a positivist approach but instead the research will have to interpreted (Quinlan, 2011). Saunders et al, (2009) explained that topics intertwined the Human Resources sphere, the interpretivism is most useful. From there the research took an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach, a question was posed on how leadership would affect the employee engagement among graduates. For this question to be answered the researched needed to gain an understanding of the meanings the participants would attach to certain events like interactions with their direct

line managers (Saunders et al, 2009). A key aspect of inductive reasoning is the realisation that the researcher is a vital aspect of the research which is absolutely vital to this study (Saunders et al, 2009). As this study is adopting an interpretivist approach, the researcher thought an inductive approach would be best suited.

3.3. Research Methodologies

Before delving into the choice which was presented before the researcher, it is key to outline and explain the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods. A quantitative approach allows variables to be measured on a numerical basis (Creswell, 2009). A quantitative approach is gathering data in some form of numerical format which is then used to test a theory, the primary quantitative method which is used is that of the survey or questionnaire (Saunders et al, 2012). On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is qualitative research. This type of research advocates interpretivism as a philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It adopts this philosophy because the researcher will have to be subjective, this type of research studies the participants meanings and relationships to develop a conceptual framework (Saunders et al, 2012). The data collection for this type of method is not set, it usually has the ability to adapt and change during the research process. Unlike a quantitative method, a rapport will need to be built with the participants so the researcher can gain access to their cognitive data (Saunders et al, 2012).

When originally deciding on the strategy it was difficult as (Saunders et al, 2012) explained that it was important to emphasize that there is no superior research strategy. The majority of the studies done on the topic of employee engagement have all taken a quantitative method to collect

their data (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Harter, et al., 2002). One of the only studies on this area which took a qualitative approach was the seminal piece of work by (Kahn, 1990). The researcher found that this may have been an oversight with regards to the body of research done as the majority of the research was collected from a quantitative method by using surveys (Sambrook, Jones and Doloriert, 2014). It is clear that the research as a whole thus far has been solely focused on quantitative methods by using scales to measure engagement, this means that the research has tended to ignore the use of qualitative methods. This is concerning considering employee engagement is a personal state and is highly subjective and is based on personal experience (Sambrook et al, 2014). Kahn (1990) recommended that when researching this highly sensitive subject such as employee engagement, it was imperative to take a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach as this data collection method failed to sufficiently “get at the depth” required. This is one of the main reasons that the researcher chooses to take a qualitative approach, considering that there has been a clear lack of qualitative methods in the body of research. A qualitative approach should realistically be taken with regards to the topic of employee engagement as it is such a sensitive approach. A qualitative approach will allow the researcher to achieve a more in-depth analysis as to how leadership has affects employee engagement. Instead of focusing the analysis on sheer numerical data that would be taken from surveys, the use of a qualitative approach will allow the researcher to interact with the data subjects and pick up on small pieces of data that the data subjects might not even realise they are providing such as emotions and reactions to certain questions. This method will provide the researcher with the most relevant results. It is clear that the optimal research strategy was a qualitative approach considering the data which has to be collected and the way in which the data should be collected.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

When a qualitative approach was decided as the correct course of action, the next question which was posed to the researcher was to decide on the on the data collection tool. Researchers are often influenced heavily by the constraints of cost and time when deciding on the appropriate data collection tool, for this reason the main two tools that are usually considered are focus groups and interviews as they tend to be relatively quick and cheap (Walle, 2015). In this research study, the researcher was constrained on time and resources considering the research had to be completed in a matter of months and was only conducted by one person.

The first data collection tool which was considered was that of focus groups. Focus groups are a small group of people who have been brought together by the researcher to explore questions on a particular topic and is usually guided by the researcher (Walle, 2015). This provides the data subjects with a lot of freedom to generate ideas and insights about the topic of conversation without little to none influence from the researcher (Walle, 2015). A focus group would allow the subjects to compare and share their opinions on a particular topic (Acocella, 2012). Quinlan (2011) explains that the subjects of the focus groups have to be somewhat experts in the area that is being researched, this aspect would not be suitable for this research as it would be very difficult to find a number of people who are experts in a niche area of study such as employee engagement. Quinlan (2011) also explains that the researcher must be well versed in facilitating the focus group as it can be quite easy for the subjects to lose focus and veer off topic. This is also drawback for this data collection tool as the researcher has no prior experience conducting a focus group and would be concerned about usefulness of the data collected if the researcher was to facilitate such a focus group. One of the

biggest risks that the focus group would pose to this research is the lack of confidentiality that is associated with this data collection tool (Acocella, 2012). When graduates are speaking about how leadership in their workplace affects employee engagement, they might not feel comfortable disclosing that type of sensitive data to a group that they do not know for fear that this data might be leaked back by someone in the focus group. This means that they might not provide honest answers and in turn the data would not be reliable.

The alternative data collection tool considered was interviewing subjects, within interviewing there was a lot of different types of interviews which could be used (Quinlan, 2011). Options to consider are one to one interviews, group interviews, telephone interviews and online interviews. Although these types of interviews would all be collecting qualitative data, the data collected would all be very different. One to one interviews are an in-depth discussion between the researcher and the data subject where the topic of research is discussed in-depth with the data subject (Quinlan, 2011). Group interviews should not be confused with focus groups, group interviews are essentially when the researcher interviews a group of people at the same but is far more guided than a focus group (Acocella, 2012). The group interview would not be suitable however for the same reason why the focus group was not suitable, they are not confidential and this might limit the amount of reliable data that is produced. Telephone and online interviews are interviews conducted by the researcher over the phone or on the internet respectively (Quinlan, 2011). These interviews would not be suitable as data might be lost by not visualising the data subject's emotional responses throughout the interview. The only logical choice for collecting the data that the researcher wants to obtain are one to one interviews. This option offers the researcher an in-depth method of exploring how leadership affects the data subject's employee engagement levels, one to one interviews create

a personal element and the subject is then more likely to open up regarding sensitive topics such as employee engagement (Adams, 2007). This method is also totally confidential and will make the data subjects feel more comfortable when the interview is being conducted (Adams, 2007).

3.5. Interviewees and Selection

The selection of interview participants is the method that the researcher must undertake to determine the group of data subjects which will be a representation of the entire population (Adams, 2007). Obtaining some participants to collect data from is essential to any research conducted as it is nearly impossible to collect data from an entire population, the only way this is possible is by conducting a census (Quinlan, 2011). Adams et al, (2007) pointed out that it is imperative to take into consideration the time and the cost of the collection methods. The research that is being conducted by this study is of a very small scale and is done by an individual, for this reason the majority of the selection methods were ruled out by the researcher. The participants were chosen purposefully but at the convenience of the researcher as this was judged to be the most cost and time efficient way to choose a sample, this type of selection is when the researcher picks the participants from ease. Although this type of selection won't always allow for an accurate representation of the population, the researcher had no option due to time and resource constraints. Setia (2016) explains that convenience selection is often used in postgraduate research and dissertations. To gather the participants for this study I contacted my classmates many of whom would be employed in a HR department and asked if they could put me in contact with recent graduates who had joined their company in the last two years. The researcher received fifteen possible data subjects to

contact, ten of which replied to the researcher's initial contact and expressed an interest in being interviewed. Interviews were then set up and out of the initial ten, it was feasible to arrange and meet with eight of the proposed data subjects. Eight interviews were then conducted on a one to one basis.

3.6. Data Analysis

Eight one to one interviews were conducted, all interviews were recorded on the researcher's phone and placed in a password protected folder on the researcher's laptop to avoid any confidentiality breaches. All eight were transcribed for ease of analysing, although there wasn't a requirement to transcribe each of these interviews, the researcher found that it would be far easier to visually look at the data subject's responses. These transcribed interviews were also placed in a password protected file on the researcher's laptop to avoid a confidentiality breach. The interviews which were conducted were unstructured which allowed the researcher and the data subject to have the freedom to explore how leadership affected the data subject's employee engagement (Boyce and Neal, 2006). The main questions that the participants were asked in each of the interviews were realised from studying the literature. Once the researcher delved into the literature, the information which was required to answer the research objectives were realised and topics of conversation were placed on the interview schedule (Walle, 2015). This was found to be the most effective way of preparing for an interview and obtaining the correct data for research (Walle, 2015). The researcher does have substantive experience interviewing data subjects from experience in recruitment, asking open ending questions and letting the interview flow freely came naturally.

Saunders et al (2012) explains that when analysing qualitative data it is important first of all to summarise your data which is collected. The next step is to categorise the summarised data i.e. develop categories and then attach the summarised data to these categories (Saunders et al, 2012). When trying to identify these categories it is important to look at the research objectives and focus in on information that can answer a particular research objective (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Although the assistance of a computer programme was considered for analysing the collected data, the researcher found that this might take away from one of the biggest benefits of qualitative data which is collecting very rich data. A computer programme has the potential to dilute this rich data and take away certain aspects of the of the data collected, for this reason, the individual decided to analyse the data without the aid of a computer programme.

Chapter 4: Data Findings and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will present the findings of the eight interviews which were conducted. As discussed in the previous chapter, when analysing the data that is obtained from qualitative data collection tools, it is important to identify key themes that run through the data. The easiest way for the researcher to do this was to group data into how they answer the specific research objectives. For this chapter, the four research objectives will be mentioned and then the data will be displayed as to how each of the research objectives were answered. The participants were asked a total of thirteen questions surrounding their employment, direct line manager and employee engagement levels (See Appendix Two). The first three questions are designed to build rapport with the participants and make them relax into the interview, these questions got general knowledge about their educational background, where they work and why they initially joined their current organisation. At the beginning of every interview, the topic of employee engagement and the two different models of leadership i.e. transformational and transactional, were explained so that the participants could give informed answers to the questions asked by the researcher. The researcher also made a very strong comment that there was a big difference between employee engagement and employee satisfaction, advising that a high level of employee engagement doesn't necessarily equate to a high level of employee satisfaction and vice versa.

4.2. How the Managerial Relationship Affects Employee Engagement

The primary objective for this research question is to evaluate how exactly the relationship between the manager and employee affects the engagement of graduate employees within the Irish workforce.

When performing the interviews, all participants were asked if they believed if their manager affected their employee engagement levels. Of the eight participants, all eight outlined that their direct line manager affected their employee engagement levels in some way. The main themes of how their direct line manager affected their engagement levels are as follows; the general attitude and behaviour of the manager in relation to their own work, the environment that the manager creates within the team, how the manager distributes work to employees. Each of the findings in relation to these themes will now be discussed.

The general attitude and behaviour of the manager in relation to their own work was one of the most mentioned themes during all eight interviews but they were all mentioned in different ways and from different perspectives. Five of the participants talked about how their manager's attitude and general behaviour affected their employee engagement. It is first of all important to look at the responses from two participants that's have provided responses which are completely opposite. A participant who works as a newly qualified teacher remarked as follows:

There is a certain level of engagement that I take from my line manager by seeing how much time and effort they put into their daily tasks and how she gives me feedback when sitting in on my classes (Participant Six Interview).

It is clear here that the work and attitude of the manager sets an example for this participant, the employees then follow suit in their work and their engagement levels are increased. A participant who works as a Customer Service Agent in an Irish bank remarked as follows:

Yes. Of course. I don't believe they are the start and end but it's easy to not go above and beyond when you feel your manager is also taking it easy (Participant Three Interview).

The attitude of the manager here also sets an example for the participant but this time in a negative fashion. This has shown that the employees engagement levels are affected by the manager's constructive or destructive attitude towards their own work. Other participants explained that their engagement levels were influenced by how approachable their managers were and how open their managers were to new ideas. One participant who works as a Risk Officer in a large insurance company advised explained how their manager's behaviour influenced their engagement in the following way:

Yes, depending on how tasks are managed and how they are sold down the line can definitely affect engagement levels. Their attitude towards certain BAU tasks can also majorly affect the overall team's attitude towards it. I also feel it can affect in a positive way if my manger doesn't seem to engage with a particular team or task well, I see it as an opportunity to engage more to first of all, fill the gap and second of all, show support and ability (Participant Seven Interview).

This response is not one that the researcher was expecting. Participant seven explained how when their manager doesn't engage with a particular task, the participant would be more likely to engage with that task as they see a gap which can be filled. These findings demonstrate

that the manager's attitude and general behaviour to their own work clearly affects the engagement levels of the employee.

The environment that the managers created within the workplace also seemed to be an attributing factor to the participants engagement levels. Three of the participants outlined that a positive or negative environment created by the manager had in turn a positive or negative affect on their employee engagement levels. A participant that works as an Information Security Consultant in a small IT company advised as follows:

I did not think they did but they do by not being overly negative about performance. I feel that if I had a manager that was overly negative it would definitely negatively impact my engagement as I have seen happen in other teams. It gives off a sense that nothing is good enough anyway so it does not matter how well you do things (Participant Eight Interview).

Another participant also advised that their engagement levels were negatively affected by an environment created by the manager in a previous position. A Participant who works as a recruiter in the IT sector however talks about how their manager has created an open environment and advised as follows regarding how their manager affects their employee engagement:

To an extent, I think my manager has a good approach to her staff. She gives us the freedom we need to work without being micro managed. I have come from a micro-managing environment before and it was not a good atmosphere. I think the environment my manager creates on the team fuels my engagement, I feel a lot more comfortable with my current manager as her management style is very open, she lets myself and the team bounce ideas off her all day long and she is very approachable which makes my job easier and in turn more rewarding (Participant Four Interview).

The managers commitment to creating an environment that is focused on employees and their positive performance seems to have a substantial impact on employee's engagement levels.

Only two participants outlined how their manager's distributing tasks or work to employees affected their engagement levels but it was still important to mention in the findings of this research. A participant who works as a HR officer with a multinational aviation organisation outlined that their manager provides them with work that is meaningful:

I think she has a huge impact on my engagement levels as she provides me with really meaningful work that actually matters. She constantly is asking my advice and input on particular projects and how I think certain actions will affect the organisation and the employees. She also sets out really clear goals so I know what I am working towards. She makes me feel like a really valuable member of team and that I am needed for the entire team to work (Participant One Interview).

As we can see from participant four's response above, they aren't distributed work and are left to find work while not being micromanaged. Both participants as a result of this have recorded increased engagement levels. Although not a high number of participants found the distributing of work to be a contributing factor to increased employee engagement, it is important to recognise that this is still a common theme as to how managers affect the participants employee engagement

4.3. How Different Styles of Leadership Affect Employee Engagement

Another objective of this research is to find and analyse how different styles of leadership affects the employee engagement of graduates. i.e.

will transformational leadership lead to higher levels of employee engagement among graduates and conversely will transactional leadership lead to a lower level of employee engagement within graduates.

The bulk of the interviewing time and questions were focused around the participant's level of employee engagement and the leadership style of the participant's manager. Just as an overview, the majority of the participants seemed to be engaged in their position except one who seemed to be actively disengaged. The majority of the participants seemed to have managers who displayed a transformational style of leadership. After the initial questions regarding the participant's background and their organisation, the researcher then homed in on how engaged the employee was by asking probing questions regarding their passion for helping the company, their willingness to give discretionary efforts, their organisation's approach to providing adequate information on long term goals of the company and how challenging their job is. Finally, on this section, the participants were asked if they believed they were engaged in their work.

Seven of the participants outlined that they were passionate about helping the organisation succeed and that they were happy to give discretionary efforts to help the organisation. A common theme which tended to emerge when the participants were answering this line of questioning was that they didn't mind giving discretionary efforts to help the company succeed because they can see exactly how their work contributed to the company success or how their work affected others. Some participants linked this back to the small size of the organisation, as we can see from the below:

I am, there are two main reasons for this the first being due to the high level of visibility within the company due to it's size, you know that things you do will be seen and people will be grateful for these

efforts. Often times when you know no one will really notice these efforts you will be less likely to go above and beyond. The other reason is the yearly bonus given by the company which is reward for exactly these kinds of efforts (Participant Eight Interview).

Other participants linked how their work affected a smaller aspect of the organisation i.e. department goals, and advised that this was the reason why they were happy to provide discretionary efforts. As you can see from the above, participant eight explained that they were also happy to offer discretionary efforts in work due to the high level of visibility within the company that he would receive.

All participants explained that their companies provided adequate information regarding how the organisation was succeeding and the future plans of the organisation. Some of the organisations hosted specific days or events to let the staff know of companywide performance and long-term goals of the company while others distributed quarterly or monthly updates. The majority of the participants also confirmed that they are sufficiently challenged by their position, the common theme that ran through the participants answers when confirming that they were challenged, was that their position was always changing and that it was a fast-paced environment as we can see from the response of a Trainee HR manager in a well-known retail organisation:

Everyday is a new challenge dealing with different people, customers and employees. It means that I am constantly learning, once I am fully confident I will have the opportunity to move into a large store with a larger number of staff to manage and ultimately challenging myself more (Participant Five Interview).

Only one participant confirmed that their job was not sufficiently challenging by advising that:

No. It is repetitive and after 6 months it becomes boring. I challenge myself in getting better at it but it can be hard to keep focus when not feeling rewarded (Participant Three Interview).

The interviews then began to focus on the leadership styles of the participant's managers, the participants were asked if their manager set clear goals for them to help the organisation succeed, if their manager motivated them beyond their self-interests and if their manager only motivates you them by offering a contingent reward. These questions were asked to see if the participant's managers were motivating their employees by using transactional or transformational leadership. Seven of the participants explained that their manager does focus on what they can do as employees to help the organisation succeed. The majority of the participants advised that their managers will set goals on a monthly and yearly basis, 'one to one' meetings also seemed to be popular among the participants. Some of the participants also advised that their manager will motivate them beyond their own self-interests advising that their manager will lead by example as we have previously seen in participant six response. Another participant advised how their manager outlines the implications of the work as follows:

In my current role and when I am performing my job, I like to see my department and company succeed but I think what drives me the most is my self interest in the areas that I am working on but my manager often does get me to look past my self-interests as she often explains how my work will affect the employees in a positive way if we succeed and do good work which is always good to see (Participant One Interview).

We can see here that the manager's ability to outline how their work affects employees will motivate the participant beyond their self interests. Other participants however advised that their manager will usually not

motivate them past their own self-interests advising that their managers would usually try and motivate them in line with their own self-interests.

The final question regarding the leadership styles of the participant's managers was in relation to if the manager only motivates the participants by offering a contingent reward for performing specific way. The majority of the participants explained that a contingent reward was not the only way their manager motivated them, we can see this from the following:

Kind of yes. We do get a good monetary reward for reaching our goals but at the same time, I love doing what I do so I don't mind putting in the additional work just because I am passionate about what I do (Participant Two Interview).

Only offering contingent rewards out to employees is one of the biggest indicators of transactional leadership, it seems here that in this case the majority of the leadership are not implementing transactional leadership but instead are leaning more towards transformational leadership. The majority of the participants apart from participant three seem to very engaged in their work, this can be inferred as a whole because the majority of the participants are passionate about their work, willing to give discretionary efforts, are provided with adequate company information and are sufficiently challenged. The use of transformational leadership seems to be beneficial to engaging these particular participants. Only participant three could be seen as actively disengaged as this seems to be rooted in their manager's leadership style, this participant is not willing to help or offer discretionary effort as their manger is 'uninterested in general'. Seven of the participants seem to be engaged and their managers are employing transformational leadership while only one participant is disengaged and their manager is employing transactional leadership.

4.4. Overall Engagement Levels of Irish Graduates

To examine the overall employee engagement levels of graduates within the Irish workforce.

The qualitative data that has been collected by this research is not large enough to be representative of the Irish workforce as a whole but it certainly is good to look at the responses of to get a feel of the engagement levels of Irish graduates. All participants were asked if they felt like they were engaged at work and they were also asked why they felt they were engaged at work. This provided the researcher with information on the engagement levels of the employee and the main factor for their levels of engagement. As previously mentioned, seven of the participants explained that they are engaged in their work while one participant advised that they were actively disengaged. Four of these participants advised however that their manager or management in general contributed to their engagement levels. An example of this is the response of one participant that they felt that they were engaged in their work and this was a result of the constant support:

I do, without a doubt. A lot of it is down to the management and the support they give on an ongoing basis. Because it feels like they always have your back, I always feel obliged to go the extra mile because I know they would do the same for me (Participant Two Interview).

This participant advised that they don't mind going the 'extra mile' because of this ongoing support they receive from management. Another participant advised that their high level of engagement was in relation to their manager providing them with work that they could see the bigger impact of. The only disengaged employee explained that one of the

reasons for their advised that their low engagement levels was in relation to the below:

I have lost a lot of interest. I do it quite well because I have a large amount of experience but often have to remind myself to up the enthusiasm as it can be quite boring. There is also a lack of team morale, this is probably due to the management which is quite poor.

We can see from this that the only disengaged employee's level of engagement was directly affected by the management. In general, from this research, graduates are actually quite engaged with only one graduate being actively disengaged. Multiple participants also cited their management as a strong contributing factor to their engagement levels. The majority of the other participants noted the fast-paced environment and fluid state of their organisation was an engaging factor. As whole, the research has found that graduates are quite engaged regardless of the contributing factors associated with their engagement levels.

4.5. Recommendations to Improve Employee Engagement

From this research one of the aims is to formulate recommendations on how to increase or maintain employee engagement for graduates in the Irish workforce. This is for the benefit of both the employer and the employee.

The recommendations that will be formulated from this research will be addressed in a future chapter, these recommendations will be that of the researchers. During the interviews however, the participants were asked to give recommendations on how the employee engagement levels of graduates could be increased in the workplace. A few trends emerged

while the participants gave their recommendations. One of the most common trends was a desire for their managers to perform more frequent one to one assessment or performance review meetings with them. We can see an example of this from the following:

Long term Engagement levels can only be affected by 1to1 assessments of employee's attitudes and preferences, I think younger and re-gentrified companies with new office spaces and comprehensive benefits will always draw a crowd but retention and engagement will always come from appropriate management of the first line functions within a company. Manage them well and they'll stay (Participant Seven Interview).

Another participant advised that most graduates are only starting their career and they are constantly concerned about tasks working out perfectly, so these performance management reviews would instil confidence in the new employees. Another participant also advised that managers could show an interest in their professional development as seen below:

From a personal experience by showing an interest in their personal development. Most graduates get painted as lazy, unmotivated members of the workforce. It's not easy for graduates going into a big corporation and having to do all the worst of jobs in order to make a mark for themselves. By managers showing an interest in their development, the graduates will see the next step as an attainable one and consequently be more engaged in their current role (Participant Two Interview).

Other recommendations included team building days to get to know your colleagues and manager in a setting outside of work, they advised this would be beneficial as these employees were described as a major source of employee engagement.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on how the main themes identified in the findings of this research are linked back to the body of literature surrounding the areas of employee engagement and how leadership affects employee engagement. This chapter will look to see if there any similarities or differences in the findings from this research and that of research from the recognised literature. This chapter will also identify key limitations that the research faced while attempting to satisfy all the initial objectives. The researcher will then make recommendations and conclude this study.

5.2. How Managerial Actions Affects Employee Engagement

The first objective of this research was to discover how exactly the relationship between the manager and the graduate affect the graduate's employee engagement levels within the workplace. The findings indicated that some of the main ways that the manager's actions affected the participants engagement levels are linked to the general attitude and behaviour of the manager in relation to their own work, the environment that the manager creates within the team and how the manager distributes work to employees. These findings also outlined that the participant's engagement levels as a whole were affected by the relationship that they had with their manager. This is in line with the findings associated (Saad, Sudin and Shamsuddin, 2018), in this research it was found that leadership within the workplace had a drastic

effect of employee's engagement levels and that it was one of the biggest factors of employee engagement. It is clear that the findings in this research actually lines up with research that has gone before it. Another interesting similarity is how exactly the manager's actions affects the employee engagement also lines up with previous literature. The findings indicated the environment that the manager creates within the workplace also affects the engagement levels of the employees, we can also see this in the research of Breevaart et al, (2014). In this study, it was found that manager who used a leadership style to change the work environment and the way in which the employees perceive their work environment, will lead to employees with a higher engagement level (Breevaart et al, 2014). This research also affirms the same, as multiple participants explained that the environment which their manager creates has an effect on their employee engagement levels. This research also found that the managers ability to effectively distribute tasks to employees also had a major bearing on an employee's level of engagement, this finding was also reaffirmed by previous literature. Again, in Breevaart et al, (2014), it was found that leaders who know and identify their employee's abilities and passions in the workplace, and can then assign tasks to match their employee's preferred abilities and passions will lead to employee's who are deeply immersed in their job and are therefore engaged. The employees need to have what they view as meaningful work attached to their role on a daily basis to remain engaged, this can be seen from both this research and the past literature. The last theme that was identified as to how exactly the relationship between the manager and the employee affected the employee's engagement levels was the attitude the manager showed towards their own work. From what the researcher has found from the body of literature, this has never directly been identified in previous research as a specific driver of employee engagement. Although this might fall under the narrative of how the use of transformational leadership increases employee engagement

but from what the researcher has gathered from reviewing the literature, there has never been a specific mention to how the managers attitude to their own work affected employee engagement levels. This is really interesting and could definitely warrant further study, although it might seem obvious that the employee would be engaged in their work if they see their manager approaching their own work with a positive attitude rather than a negative approach, it could be studied to verify this. Overall, the researcher found it is clear that an employee's relationship with their manager is one of the main factors of employee engagement levels, this has been shown in previous literature and reaffirmed by this research.

5.3. How Different Styles of Leaderships Affects Employee Engagement

The second objective of this research was formulated to ascertain how the two different styles of leadership i.e. transformational and transactional leadership, would affect the employee engagement of graduates within in the Irish workforce. It is well documented from various different academics that the use of transformational leadership by managers will lead to a higher level of employee engagement for employees (Breevaart et al, 2014; Xu and Thomas, 2011; Zhu, Avolio and Walumba, 2009). The concept of transformational leadership is rooted in the idea that the leader can motivate their staff beyond their own self-interests towards a group interest, transactional leadership on the other hand is motivating employees by offering a contingent reward for performing a particular way (Bass, 1999). This concept of leadership also explains that all managers will use both transformational and transactional leadership but in general transformational leadership should be more prevalent for the best results (Bass, 1999). From this research we can see that the majority of the participants' managers were employing

a transformational leadership style, that is not to say that there were not elements of transactional leadership in the participants responses. All the participants who advised that their managers used a transformational leadership style, also had a very high level of employee engagement. The findings from this research are very clear, the use of a transformational leadership style leads to high levels of employee engagement within the graduate workforce in Ireland. As previously mentioned, multiple academics explain that the use of transformational leadership will increase employee engagement, the findings from this research outline that this conclusion can also be applied to graduates within the Irish workforce. This study also set out to see if the use of transactional leadership would result in a lower level of engagement. Unfortunately, during the collection of this data, only one participant advised that their manager used a transactional leadership style. Although this participant was heavily disengaged from their work, the researcher found that this was a limitation to the research as the sample of participants of who advised that their manager was employing a transactional approach was far too small. This one participant did advise however that their managers leadership style impacted their engagement levels. A larger sample size would have provided ample opportunity to collect data from participants that were exposed to transactional leadership styles.

5.4. The Employee Engagement Levels of Graduates in the Irish Workforce

The employee engagement levels of the sample of participants were generally quite high, seven out of the eight participants described themselves as being engaged while only one described themselves as being actively disengaged. This research does not determine that the employee engagement levels of graduates in the Irish workforce is high

as the sample size is too small and the methods for picking the sample were not optimal, this means that the sample is not representative of the entire population. This research does provide a deeper look at how exactly leadership affects the employee engagement levels of Irish graduates within the workplace. The use of follow up research would also be encouraged on this topic. To get a representative sample to examine how high the engagement level of Irish graduates was, it would be best to do follow on research but use quantitative methods rather than qualitative methods. Despite the small sample size, it is interesting to see the high level of employee engagement recorded within this research pertaining to graduates within the Irish workforce.

5.5. Recommendations to Increase Graduate's Employee Engagement Within the Irish Workforce

The findings of this research provided recommendations from the participants on how they thought graduate's employee engagement could be increased within their specific workplaces. The main theme which ran through these recommendations was an increase in the quality and frequency of the performance reviews that were conducted by management. In summary, the participants wanted more feedback on the quality of their work and how they could improve their performance going forward. These recommendations are actually grounded in some solid literature, providing ongoing feedback and appraisals coupled with setting performance goals and objectives is a very useful way of fostering employee engagement and lowering the number of employees that suffer burnout in their employment (Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price and Stine, 2011; Kirk, 2019). This would be a very wise and cheap avenue to increase employee engagement, an increase in the amount of performance assessments is simple. A simple memo could be published

internally to let the HR department and management know that a focus on performance management needs to be increased, if the headcount of the HR and management team can handle this additional workload, then this recommendation could cost an organisation effectively nothing. If an additional resource is required, the idea of promoting an employee to assistant manager with an additional salary of approx. €5,000 to €10,000 could be effective to handle to the additional performance review meetings. This costing is based on one individual and will vary depending on the size of the organisation. If an organisation identifies the quality of the performance review meetings as an issue in terms of improving employee engagement, that organisation could offer additional training to management. IBEC offers a one day course that focuses on improving the manager's performance appraising skills, this course costs €385 per person at a members rate and €425 per person at a non-member rate. This could be useful if the quality of performance review meetings are lacking.

Another recommendation that was taken from the findings was that management show an interest in the employees' professional development i.e. provide better opportunities to gain new knowledge. Mone et al, (2011) outlined that management need to be proactive in offering distinct career paths and opportunities for employees to continually gain knowledge in their role, to keep employee engagement levels high within an organisation. The recommendations are very useful which have been provided by the participants considering that they actually have some academic backing and support. When formulating the researchers own recommendations from this research, a large amount of weight was given to the recommendations that were collected from the participants. From the findings it is clear that the role of management has a large implication on the employee engagement levels of graduates within the workplace. Employers in Ireland need to cognisant of the

benefits that a highly engaged workforce could bring and also need to be equally as aware of the negative impacts that a disengaged workforce could bring. The main recommendation that this research has furnished is the need for appropriate leadership when approaching the management of graduates, the findings have reaffirmed a grounded theory that the use of transformational leadership will increase the employee engagement of graduates within the workplace. Therefore, management within organisations in the Irish workforce need to train their employees on the topic of leadership and how leadership can affect their employees. There are multiple courses and training options available in Ireland at the moment with some very cheap options, CMIT for example offers a QQI accredited Leadership course that is completed by eLearning. This course is costed at €295 which includes a twelve-week online course with tutor support. This costing is per individual, so every organisation will be different depending on how the number of managers that require this training.

5.6. Ethical Considerations

The researcher had to be particularly mindful of the ethical implications that collecting this type of data from subjects would impose. The data which this research obtained is extremely sensitive as the data subjects give information about their employment, specifically how their managers interact with them and how they feel about their managers and their level of engagement. To get credible data, the subjects needed to be reassured that the data which they provided would not be released to anyone apart from the researcher.

Each of the data subjects were informed that any personal data which would identify was hidden in the transcripts of the interviews i.e. names, company name etc. and that the original recordings of the interviews would be kept in a password protected file on the researcher's laptop and that these files would be deleted when a final mark was awarded for this research. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the topic of consent and got each of the participants to sign a consent form (See Appendix One) while also explaining the fact that the participants can withdraw their consent at any time.

5.7. Limitations

The biggest limitation which is associated with the majority of research conducted for dissertation is cost and time (Adams, 2007). Specifically, however for this research, it would have been beneficial to take a mixed methods approach when collecting the data rather than just focusing solely on a qualitative approach as it is very difficult which just qualitative data to create generalizable results (Zikmund, 2010). A mixed method approach would have provided the researcher with a large sample of data to see how leadership affects employee engagement in a very structured way which in turn would have made the process of performing interviews much easier as there is already general data there. A qualitative aspect could have been used then to dig that bit deeper into the results that the quantitative aspect had provided. This type of method however would have been far too draining on the time and resources of the researcher.

The sample size and the sampling method used for this research was also a limitation. The selection of the participants was a large limitation, the researcher used the selection methods that was convenient to save on cost and time, this method of sampling was the easiest way to find and

interview appropriate data subjects with the amount of resources at the researcher's disposal. However, the researcher does accept that the sample chosen from this method may not represent the entire population of graduates in Ireland and their engagement levels. The sample size is also a limitation, ideally the researcher would have preferred to interview close to twenty data subjects on this topic to get a good base of rich data. This was difficult in two ways, the first being the time it would have taken to collect and analyse that amount of data and secondly it was difficult to find willing candidates. Again, the researcher accepts that because of the small sample size, this research may not represent the population of graduates in Ireland and their engagement levels.

5.8. Final Conclusion

This research attempted to examine how leadership affects the employee engagement of graduates within the Irish workforce. The initial research question was formulated from the distinct lack of research that had been conducted on graduates within the Irish workforce, from what the researcher has observed, there has been no study within this specific niche area how leadership affects the employee engagement levels of Irish graduates. The importance of employee engagement has been confirmed by the previous literature as having many benefits such as improving organisational productivity and retaining employees which is especially important due to the tight labour market at the moment. This research then outlined the importance of leadership on engaging a workforce and labelled leadership as one of the main contributing factors of having high engagement levels. It is clear from this just how important this research is and why it was justified.

A qualitative methodological approach was then taken due to the lack of qualitative studies conducted on the topic of employee engagement, the researcher also felt that rich data would be more beneficial than the data collected by quantitative data for understanding exactly how leadership affected the graduate's employee engagement. The findings from this research reaffirmed some already grounded theories from the literature, specifically the use of transformational leadership will increase employee engagement, this research applied this theory to graduates within the Irish setting however. It was interesting to see that leadership also affected employee engagement in a similar fashion to the rest of the workforce. This research has outlined just how important the use of leadership is when engaging a workforce and has also outlined how serious organisations in Ireland must take their leadership approach when promoting employee engagement among graduates.

5.9. Personal Learning Statement - CIPD

The process of the completing a research dissertation of this size was probably one of the most challenging processes that I have ever have even been faced with, with saying that however I think it is important to note that it has also been very enjoyable. The topic of employee engagement really kept the research interesting for me, it was not a topic that I was in any way familiar before I began studying my masters. The amount of literature available on this topic made it quite accessible and easy to study.

The process of actually conducting research was an experience that I will never forget and I would like to continue in the future. The process of collecting data and analysing that data was very foreign to me initially, although I had completed other projects in earlier education, I had never actually collected data for a project. My earlier education was based solely

around reviewing literature. I am delighted to have actually conducted my own research. The benefits of studying this topic and conducting my own research will without a doubt stand to me in years to come as my career progresses. Employers are now asking prospective candidates if they have experience with employee engagement, organisations are now valuing this topic, the experience that I have gained studying this topic will always benefit me going forward in my career.

I think one of the biggest skills I have learned during the completion of this dissertation was the skill of time management and to always plan for the unexpected. In earlier education, I learned the concept and skill of planning your time effectively but nothing had ever gone wrong and I was always able to plan my time effectively. On this occasion, I had planned my time well and left myself with a period of grace to complete this dissertation. This however wasn't enough as there was a family emergency a month before the due date and I wasn't able to complete this dissertation meaning that I had to defer this research for a full year. This was really upsetting considering the rest of my class would be graduating a full year before me, this is something that I have taken from this research. In future projects, I will allow a much longer grace period to allow me an opportunity to recover from these types of unexpected events. Overall I would recommend performing this type of research at some stage as it offers experience that you won't obtain from a career.

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Appendices

Appendix One

Consent Form

An Examination Of How Leadership Affects The Employee Engagement Of Graduates Within The Irish Workforce

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves an examination at how leadership affects the employee engagement of graduates within the Irish workplace.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation which will be submitted to the National College of Ireland.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a password protected laptop, specifically in a password protected folder until the exam board issues the results of the researcher's dissertation, at which point they will be deleted.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained until the exam board issues the results of the researcher's dissertation, at which point they will be deleted.

- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Colm Kane, B.C.L, National College of Ireland,

Telephone Contact - 0851039297, Email – x16147731@student.ncirl.ie

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher Date

Appendix Two

List of Interview Questions

- Q.1. What did you study in college and when did you graduate?**
- Q.2. What is your current job role and explain what you do on a day to day basis?**
- Q.3. Why did you join your current organisation?**
- Q.4. Are you passionate about helping your organisation succeed? Why?**
- Q.5. Are you happy to give discretionary efforts to help your organisation succeed? Why?**
- Q.6. Has your organisation provided you with adequate information on how the company will succeed and future goals of the organisation?**
- Q.7. Does your job challenge you sufficiently?**
- Q.8. Do you believe that you are engaged in your work? Why?**
- Q.9. Does your direct line manager focus on what as an employee you can do for your organisation i.e. set clear goals for you to help the organisation succeed?**
- Q.10. Does your direct line manager focus on motivating you beyond your own self interests?**
- Q.11. Does your direct line manager motivate you by only offering a reward that is contingent on you performing a specific way?**

Q.12. Do you believe your manager affects your engagement levels?

Q.13. Do you have any recommendations on how employee engagement levels of graduates could be increased within your workplace?

Appendix Three

Sample Interview Transcript (Interview Participant One)

Q.1. What did you study in college and when did you graduate?

I did my undergraduate degree in Law and then moved on to complete a master in Human Resource Management. I graduated from my master one year ago and graduated from my law degree the year before that.

Q.2. What is your current job role and explain what you do on a day to day basis?

My current job role is a HR Officer in multinational aviation company. I deal with any HR related issues that arise from the employees under my remit, this could involve anything from as simple as providing reference letters or payroll queries to dealing with employee relations disputes. My role is quite varied and every day is different, that is why it is interesting.

Q.3. Why did you join your current organisation?

I joined my current organisation as I wanted a job straight out of college that would provide me with as much experience as humanly possible. I didn't want a job that I would be stuck doing dull admin duties before I worked my way up, I wanted to be put right in the deep end. I prefer it like that, I feel that experience would be most beneficial straight out of college considering I didn't have any practical HR experience before this. The organisation that I currently work for offered this exact experience from day one and only provides more responsibility as time goes on.

Q.4. Are you passionate about helping your organisation succeed? Why?

I really am passionate about helping my organisation succeed. Maybe not in the sense of helping them secure a healthy profit margin but I definitely want to see my department reach their goals over the coming years as it has many challenges ahead. I think I want the organisation to succeed because I can directly see how my efforts are helping the department reach its goals. I feel kind of proud when we reach a big milestone and I know that I have helped that in some way. There is also

a sense of accomplishment when you are trying to get something across the line for such a long period of time and you eventually make it work.

Q.5. Are you happy to give discretionary efforts to help your organisation succeed? Why?

I don't mind giving my discretionary time and effort to help the organisation succeed if the work in question is interesting. An aspect of my role is admin based, I wouldn't be happy to give my discretionary time and stay back after working hours just to help out on some form of admin function as it wouldn't interest me. If the work in question was interesting and it challenged me, I would be happy to stay back to help the company succeed.

Q.6. Has your organisation provided you with adequate information on how the company will succeed and future goals of the organisation?

The company provide us with quarterly updates on how the company is performing and where the company is planning on moving and expanding over the coming years. They really do keep us informed and it is an aspect of my job that I know the future plans of the company.

Q.7. Does your job challenge you sufficiently?

At the moment my job definitely does challenge me, as an organisation, we are going through major change and I am given a massive amount of responsibility. If I was in another organisation, I probably wouldn't get this type of responsibility for maybe five or ten years. Some aspects are quite tedious as there is a high volume of admin but the good definitely out ways the bad and I am usually challenged daily with something that I have never seen or heard of before. It always keeps me on my toes.

Q.8. Do you believe that you are you engaged in your work? Why?

I would say that I am definitely engaged in the work I do. I genuinely like doing my role, it is very rewarding as you see the impact that your work can make on the bigger scale, for example, my manager my ask to me to work on a particular industrial relations project and then you would see the media reporting on it. I like my role and I really don't mind putting in the extra effort once the work is engaging. The work definitely keeps me engaged and it is a reason to stay but the employment package just isn't great and we don't have much benefits.

Q.9. Does your direct line manger focus on what as an employee you can do for your organisation i.e. set clear goals for you to help the organisation succeed?

Yes, she will always let me know how my performance is affecting the overall HR function. She will often explain an individual or team goal and how this will affect the business if we succeed, which I find really beneficial as you know what you are working towards then.

Q.10. Does your direct line manager focus on motivating you beyond your own self interests?

In my current role and when I am performing my job, I like to see my department and company succeed but I think what drives me the most is my self interest in the areas that I am working on but my manager often does get me to look past my self-interests as she often explains how my work will affect the employees in a positive way if we succeed and do good work which is always good to see.

Q.11. Does your direct line manager motivate you by only offering a reward that is contingent on you performing a specific way?

My manager will never offer a specific reward that is contingent on good performance which I would like the odd time. I am motivated enough in the role that I will do good work regardless of what extra reward you offer me. It would be nice from time to time to receive some form of monetary or goodwill gesture for good work but it is really not that type of environment.

Q.12. Do you believe your manager affects your engagement levels?

I think she has a huge impact on my engagement levels as she provides me with really meaningful work that actually matters. She constantly is asking my advice and input on particular projects and how I think certain actions will affect the organisation and the employees. She also sets out really clear goals so I know what I am working towards. She makes me feel like a really valuable member of team and that I am needed for the entire team to work.

Q.13. Do you have any recommendations on how employee engagement levels of graduates could be increased within your workplace?

Although I do get feedback on my performance, I think it would be beneficial if we received the feedback in a slightly more formal setting. We don't actually have any formal performance management system where we are reviewed on a monthly basis etc. it is more informal like well done on a particular piece of work. I think that would definitely increase the engagement levels. Not personally for me but I think an increase in benefits would help a lot of the staff in the organisation to get engaged.

