

**The Effects of Inclusive Leadership on Employee  
Engagement in a Financial Services Organisation in  
Dublin**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Master of Arts in  
Human Resource Management

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to uncover the effect inclusive leadership (IL) has on employee engagement (EE), within a financial services public sector organisation in Dublin. The researcher followed a qualitative approach and the primary data was collected via nine semi-structured interviews from within the organisation. The study focused on the best practice IL traits and key drivers of EE to ascertain if leaders were inclusive and the impact it had on EE levels.

The results of the study indicated that the majority of leaders were inclusive, which had a positive impact on individuals EE. In particular, the concepts that leaders are fair, treat people as individuals and with respect, afford levels of autonomy and are cognisant of their own personal bias, came out as strong leadership traits. The study also found that some leaders do not embrace some key elements of IL, which encompasses being open to the views of others and being comfortable with airing their weaknesses and limitations. A unique finding which sets this study apart from other research on this topic, is the link the organisation has to being within the public sector. The study found that manager behaviour is not always the sole reason for employees being engaged and public duty is a big driver for some individuals, however leader behaviour should not be underestimated or ignored as it can untimely sway engagement levels.

The findings of this study add to existing literature on the impact of IL and EE as it was carried out in a qualitative form, as opposed to quantitative and in an Irish setting, with the findings reinforcing the importance of IL for engagement. Some inherent limitations were noted. Firstly, time constraints restricted the researcher from adopting a mixed methodology approach which would add to the reliability of the findings. Secondly, qualitative research by nature is not generalisable, making this study's findings relate solely to this organisation and not the wider financial services industry or public sector.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this study is to understand the effects of IL on EE, within a financial services public sector organisation in Dublin. The organisation which is being studied has been in operation for more than seventy years and has approximately 1,900 staff members. Currently, there is a strategic focus on Diversity and Inclusion (D & I) and in particular, a desire to create and imbed an inclusive culture where everyone is respected and valued, with corporate leaders being cited as the main driving force behind creating such an environment. This study will look to understand if leaders really do make individuals feel that sense of connection and value at work, by looking at current literature on IL and EE and investigating this within an Irish context.

Research tells us that leaders are people who heavily influence, exert power and bring their employees on a journey of developing career goals and aspirations (Hollander, 2009). The concept of IL has been highlighted significantly over the last few years, stemming heavily from the fact that D & I is becoming a key strategic priority for organisations (Hunt *et al.*, 2018). Diversity refers to the demographic makeup of an organisation be it gender, age or cultural background (Goswami and Goswami, 2017), other differences such as nationality, sexual orientation and religion are known as social diversity (Malik *et al.*, 2017). Bourke and Dillon (2016) note that the reason diversity has a direct correlation to performance, is due to organisations making a conscious effort to attract, mentor, develop and retain people from all corners of the world. By doing this, it naturally creates diversity of thought, moving away ‘groupthink’, which can create an environment with little or no challenging, resulting in poor quality decision making.

Inclusion is defined as the way people perceive their esteemed membership to workgroups that meets their need for belongingness and uniqueness (Shore *et al.*, 2011). Katz and Miller (2012) echo this definition and add to it, by describing inclusion as everybody having the opportunity to contribute as an individual and a collective while feeling respected and valued across all levels of the organisation.

Organisations today are heavily focused not only on creating a diverse workforce, but on creating an environment that fosters inclusion for all. The literature reveals, that for inclusion to flourish in the workplace, leaders are seen as key players, through creating a climate that allows every staff member to contribute to their own individual role and the performance of the organisation (Strategic HRM, 2018).

The literature has made a close link between IL and EE, according to a D & I industry survey (of over 150 c-suite leaders in Ireland) report by Ernst & Young (2018), 97% of their respondents indicated that a diverse and inclusive workplace, not only provides better business outcomes but is a driver of EE. Research tells us that EE is vital for organisation success, not only to attract but to retain staff in a changing global environment, where organisations need employees to be at their best for the organisation to thrive (Reilly, 2019). Managers and leaders are at the forefront of influencing if employees feel engaged or not (Beck and Harter, 2015). Studies carried out by Malik *et al.* (2017) and Choi, Tran and Park (2015) with a focus on Pakistan and Vietnam, reinforce this, as they positively state there is a link between leaders being inclusive and employees feeling engaged. The reason aspects of IL have a positive impact on employees is the focus IL has on the relationship individuals have with their leader, which is based on constructs such as valuing difference, openness, supportiveness and seeking perspective (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006), so that employees feel connected to one another and the organisation.

In the context of this study, the conversation on the importance D & I has already begun from a Human Resource and senior leader perspective with communication such as informing employees, educating staff on the importance of D & I and what it means for them and the organisation, is increasing across the company. If this organisation wishes to invest in cultivating an inclusive environment for the business benefits outlined by industry and academic reporters, this research is keen to explore what effect IL will have on EE, in an Irish context. By doing this, the research will address a current gap in the literature under this topic by looking at it, not only from an Irish perspective, but also seeking feedback from participants in a

qualitative form, as the majority of research in this area is dominated by quantitative findings. The ultimate aim of this research study is to firstly understand if leaders of this Irish financial services organisations portray any IL traits and secondly how this impacts employee engagement levels. The study hopes to unearth whether creating an inclusive climate, through IL has benefits for individuals, teams and overall improved business performance.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the literature surrounding IL, its evolution and its role in organisations today. Additionally, it will explore the importance of EE and what researchers are concluding on the link between IL and EE.

### **2.1 Evolution of inclusive leadership**

A study on IL by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006, p.947) refer to inclusive leaders as “leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others contributions”. They state the need for leaders to portray an invitation style approach, so followers feel safe to speak up. Following that, recognition creates a sense of value for the employee, meaning their voice was genuinely appreciated and heard (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006). Research that followed this study made a link between IL and another style of leadership know as relational leadership. Researchers cited that “inclusive leadership is at the core of relational leadership and focuses on whether followers feel that leaders are available to them, whether the leader listens and is paying attention to the followers needs” (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010, p.251). This concept of leadership sees the employee manager relationship from the employee’s perspective and draws attention to individual perceptions and behaviours (Carmeli *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, Akram, Lei and Haider (2016) studied the effect of relational leadership and its impact on employee innovative work behaviour, in the context of the Chinese IT industry. Their empirical study had a positive outcome for their various hypothesis. They examined the nature of the relationship leadership and its link to idea generation, promotion and realisation. They found that relational leadership is critical for employees to be creative and it generates innovative work behaviour of its followers (Akram *et al.*, 2016).

Researchers have also recorded how elements of transformational leadership are linked to IL. Transformational leadership traits are summarised by Judge and Piccolo (2004) as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration and these dimensions have links to EE (Xu and Thomas, 2011). The focus of transformational leadership is linked to trust (Gillespie and Mann, 2004), along with ensuring employees are committed to the organisations goals alone, which is not exactly the full essence of IL, but it plays a part in its development (Choi *et al.*, 2015). From these examples alone, it is clear that IL spawned from other concepts of leadership, but the expectation of the modern inclusive leader goes much more beyond these two concepts.

## **2.2 Inclusive leadership**

According to (Hollander, 2009, pg. 3), IL means “doing things with people, rather than to people”. Referring back to Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), IL is about leaders showing positive relationship with peers, along with being open and accessible, which in turn, can enhance EE levels. Carmeli *et al.* (2010) concur with this statement and found that IL who exhibit supportive traits must be open, accessible and available. Choi Tran and Kang (2017, p.1880) directly agree and note that “inclusive leaders are open, willing to listen to employees and discuss new ways for achieving the work goals, and paying attention to new opportunities”. They also found that adopting an inclusive style of leadership, was an effective way of engaging employees.

Inclusive leaders are also expected to overcome status difference and embrace diversity of thought, opinion and various ways of working (Malik et al., 2017). Dow (2017) explains that IL means leaders must embrace the different perspectives of its members, creating that environment of trust, confidence and overall giving employees a sense of empowerment and belonging. She also stressed how questioning your own personal bias is important by asking yourself, “do I let my experiences and biases limit how I make decisions or devalue the views of others?” (Dow, 2017, p. 21). A report by Deloitte (2012) agrees with this and explains that



in order for a leader to be truly inclusive, one must rid themselves of their conscious and unconscious biases, therefore, allowing the diversity of thought from their diverse teams and workgroups to flourish, for the greater good of the organisation. In direct correlation with this, Shore *et al.* (2011) notes that belongingness and uniqueness along with elements of management philosophy such as showing employees appreciation and fairness is key to being inclusive. Not only does the leader champion its team members, they also embrace the knowledge and wisdom people will bring, based on their varying life experiences. This links back to the basics of what inclusion is, the accepting of embracing of difference.

A key business case for IL is the fact that employees are heavily influenced by the leadership style they follow (Malik *et al.*, 2017). Bourke and Dillon (2016) state that when people feel included it can cause increased team performance, decision making and collaboration. An organisation that is known for its inclusiveness, will not only benefit its existing staff population, but it will become a magnet for attracting top talent, along with having diverse teams that can spark creativity, innovation and help individuals feel connected to their role in the organisation (Korn Ferry Institute, 2017). Bourke and Dillon (2016, p. 3) explained that IL is “understanding and being adept at inclusive leadership will help leaders thrive in their increasingly diverse environment”. In a world where leaders are seen as the enablers of creating inclusive teams and therefore an inclusive environment, inclusive leaders are expected to make their team members feel a sense of belonging and team cohesion, but people also want to feel valued and recognised for their unique differences (Bourke and Dillon (2016), and that is without doubt, a hard balancing act.

### **2.3 Inclusive leadership traits**

As the literature on IL evolves, traits of an inclusive leader are becoming more defined with theorist and industry experts expanding on what is meant by IL. Prime and Salib (2014) studied IL across six countries (Australia, China, Germany, India, Mexico, USA) and concluded that there were four common themes leaders should review to increase the levels of belongingness and uniqueness. These were; Empowerment, Humility, Courage and Accountability. Each of these themes reveal how a leaders sense of trust, honesty and genuine commitment to inclusion, are what truly have a positive impact on an individual's sense of feeling included.

Bourke and Dillon (2016) expanded on these and identified six traits of IL which they believe are tangible, achievable and required, if leaders are to thrive in an ever evolving world. Their study looked at this through the lens of the diversity of markets, ideas, customers, and talent. These six IL traits are indicators of the types of behaviours leaders should focus on in order to connect with their employees on an inclusive level (see figure 1). The six traits identified by Bourke and Dillon (2016) closely link to the four common themes identified by Prime and Salib (2014) above.

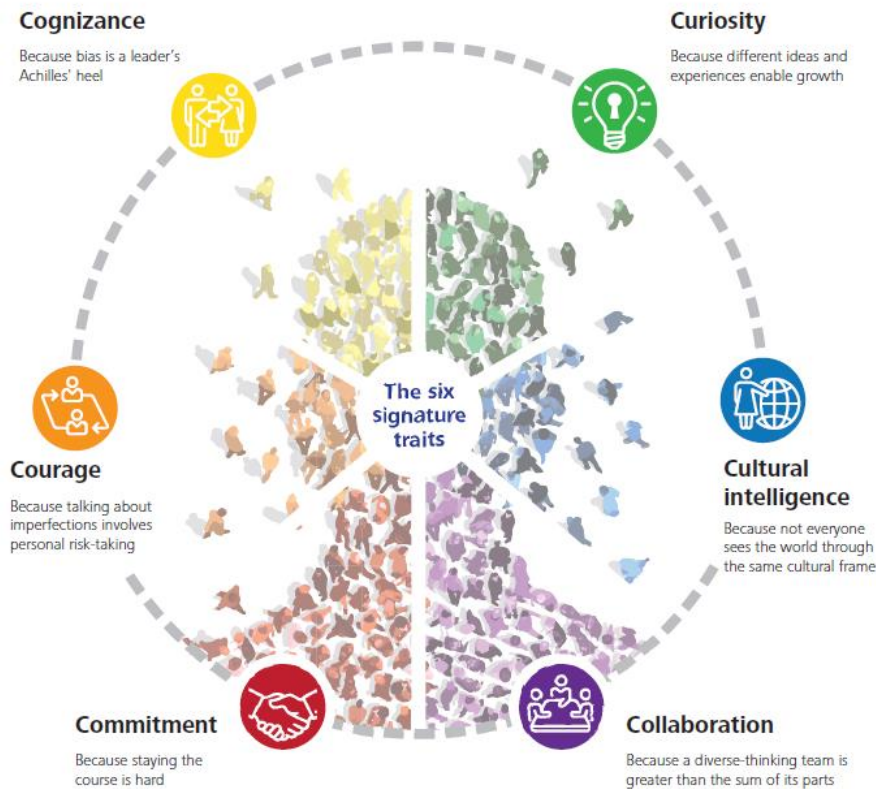


Figure 1- The six signature traits of an inclusive leader  
(Bourke and Dillon, 2016, p. 2)

**Curiosity** means leaders having an open mindset and being interested in hearing the views of others, without judgement, for the purpose of learning and embracing new ideas. From an employee's perspective, this can increase loyalty, if they genuinely feel listened to and valued. **Cultural intelligence** is about understanding, being aware of and accepting cultural differences, including recognising how a leaders own difference may impact their views. Understanding various cultures, fends off any judgment on other cultures being inferior to theirs and it enables leaders to adapt in situations that call for that cultural understanding and awareness. **Collaboration** is a powerful trait a leader can possess, by empowering others to do their jobs, being supportive and encouraging diversity of thought from teams, while creating cohesiveness. Leaders who embrace Collaboration will naturally create an environment where people feel comfortable to bring their diverse thoughts,

enabling autonomy (self-direction) and giving employees a sense of ownership. **Commitment**, lends itself to the ultimate objective of D & I, which is to imbed a diverse and inclusive way of thinking into “business as usual”, ensuring inclusion is not just an “add on” initiative. Inclusive leaders show their strengthened commitment to D & I through valuing uniqueness and embrace it as part of their core belief in the value and benefits of doing so. **Courage** is being unafraid to speak up, challenge the norm and admit to their weaknesses and limitations, knowing it is an opportunity for them to learn and for others to see how leaders don’t always know it all. **Cognizance of bias** is a trait leaders must become acquainted with in order to ensure fair play. Biases such as personal bias (stereotypes and attitudes) and process bias (groupthink, confirmation bias) need to be understood. Inclusive leaders must self-regulate on these, through knowing that success is driven through diversity and allowing it to flourish. It takes commitment from organisations and leaders to drive a comprehensive plan on aspiring to meet the criteria set out above, to ensure they create a more inclusive mindset and harness their diverse workforce (Korn Ferry Institute, 2017).

## **2.4 Employee engagement**

Organisations strive to increase employee’s discretionary effort by keeping them engaged within their roles and align them closely with the objectives of managerial goals and to boost organisation performance (Rees, Alfes and Gatenby, 2013). Leaders know that engaged employees will contribute to greater business outcomes, Sorenson (2013) solidifies this, by reporting that “companies with an average of 9.3 engaged employees for every actively disengaged employee in 2010-2011 experienced 147% higher EPS compared with their competition in 2011-2012”.

Over the years, EE has been given many definitions. Early researches developed the idea of worker engagement and defined it as “the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn 1990, p.694). He also suggested employees feeling psychologically safe

within their peers, role and ability, where they can be themselves, regardless of their status or image and without judgement, will influence EE. It is clear to see to link between EE and the traits inclusive leaders should display, as way in which to foster true EE.

More recently, Saks (2006, p. 602) focused on worker engagement, concluding that “employee engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles”. He also places an emphasis on the cognitive and emotional expressions during role performance. This outlook was inclusive of early work by Kahn (1990) and developed the meaning of EE. Following this, much work has been carried out trying to hone in on what EE is in essence. MacLeod and Clarke (2010, p. 27) defined EE as “a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation’s goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being”. On foot of this, it can be noted that an engaged employee is somebody who is motivated within their role, understands how their role fits within the organisation and shows loyalty towards the organisation. However, the literature on this topic is not without its cynics. Purcell (2014) challenged the thinking and emphasis being placed on EE by academics and HR practitioners, declaring that how EE has been defined over the years means that engaged employees are solely focused on their work and their work alone, with no interest for what is happening in their outside life, making it impossible to find a truly engaged employee as they are a “rare bread”. Despite this, the phenomena of EE has more champions than challengers and with increasing levels of research on the cost of employee disengagement, organisations are sitting up as they realise the benefits and reacting with tools and practices to engage their staff.

EE also has links to employee and manager relationships, similar to how IL operates. According to CIPD (2018), employees who have a supportive manager and have jobs of quality and substance, are happier and more fulfilled, driving productivity, and innovation. To engage an employee at this level, theorists say that a two-way mutual relationship is required for it to work. According to Saks (2006), this concept can be underpinned by what is known as Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET is a tool for understanding workplace behaviour. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), SET requires relationships that have evolved over time creating a sense of trust and loyalty where both parties abide by the 'rules'. In essence, EE works off mutual gains, the employer is good to the employee and vice versa.

## **2.5 Key drivers of employee engagement**

The literature has a wealth of information on the many factors that influence EE, and common themes emerge throughout the literature. Pink (2009) notes that one of the factors that increases EE, is when employees are given the right to autonomy in their role. Others cite leadership and the work environment Anitha (2014), while others build on this and believe that having your voice brings value to an employee's experience at work (Kumar and Swetha, 2011). These drivers all have strong links to IL traits and reinforce the connection between IL has with EE.

The role of management is evident among the EE literature, Xu and Thomas (2011) note that the relationship between the leader and follower is a positive one when a leader supports the team, their performance within their role and takes a genuine interest in their personal development. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) emphasise this point and cite that leaders engage employees when they are clear and transparent about role responsibilities, career development and allowing employees to see how their role contributes to the wider organisations goals. A study carried out by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) looked at the key drivers and enablers of engagement. On review of the data gathered, four broad themes emerged as being critical for EE. These were defined as the following; **Leadership-** being clear and transparent and

allows employees to see how their role contributes to the organisations goals, **Engaging managers-** that focus on the employee as an individual, commend them for their efforts and contributions and making them feel valued and supported in their job, **Employee voice-** giving employees a chance to be included in local decision making and problem solving, through listening and allowing the safe space for their voice to be heard and **Integrity-** ensuring employees feel that the organisation lives its values, creating that sense of trust and loyalty and that there is no “say-do” gap from senior leaders. HR professionals who are actively concerned about the success of their organisation can look at these factors as a means to positively engage their employees (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009).

In the context of this study, it is also important to specifically understand EE in the public sector. A document published by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) (2013) on public service motivation, likened EE drivers to those of motivation. The main conclusion of this report was that people feel motivated to work for the public service as “it affords them the opportunity of doing good for others and for society” (IPA, 2013, p. 30) along with the security of tenure that comes with it. Supporting this, The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) published a report on the findings of the Civil Service Employee Engagement. It detailed that the top five drivers of EE are leadership, meaningfulness, job skills match, organisational support and competence (DPER, 2017). In direct correlation with this and on the assessment of Human Capital Trends in the public sector, Deloitte (2017) reported that in the absence of the public sector providing high reward packages to individuals, aspects of culture such as providing meaningful work, having trust in the organisation and leadership and being able to develop a career, are all key drivers of engagement for those working within the public sector. This finding evidently shows that within the public sector there are similar EE drivers, but also calls out the value individuals place on public duty, which is a unique driver.

## 2.6 Employee disengagement

If engagement has positive outcomes for organisations, employee disengagement must come at a cost. Kahn (1990) believes disengagement is when people have no self-commitment or sense of belonging to the organisation and withdraw from interaction with others and the organisation. Crabtree (2005) notes that there are three types of employees; **engaged**, **not engaged** and **actively disengaged**. Engaged employees are passionate and feel a strong connection to the organisation. Through this, they have a drive for innovation and are willing the organisation to move forward with its success. The middle layer of this construct are employees who are not engaged. In general, they are checked out of the organisation, putting little energy and passion behind their work. Lastly, employees that are actively disengaged are visibly unhappy at work and will undermine what other engaged colleagues are doing and trying to achieve.

The cost of employee disengagement can come in the millions. Johansson (2016) reports that poor management can cause a number of things, one of them being employee disengagement, costing the U.S an average \$105 billion every year. This reinforces the need to actively engage employees and specifically through their closest link, their management. Therefore, engagement has to play an active role in the strategic priorities of any organisation.



## **2.7 Employee engagement and inclusive leadership**

Throughout the literature to date, researchers have found that particular leadership traits can impact on an individual's engagement. However, at this point in time, the literature does not currently provide a wealth of research studies that specifically focuses on IL and its impact to EE. It can be noted throughout the literature review that there is an obvious connection between what drives EE and the noted best practice traits of IL. There are some limited empirical studies that provide evidence of the positive impact of IL on EE. Malik *et al.* (2017) looked at the impact of IL on EE, concluding that that IL can be expected to increase EE through the culture they create, trust, fairness, and ownership. Similarly, the work of Choi *et al.* (2015) and their empirical study on IL and work engagement: mediating roles of affective organisational commitment and creativity, formed part of the foundation that IL is an effective way to engage employees through addressing employee needs. Not only can IL incorporate employee needs, but as Carmeli *et al.* (2010) concluded, if leaders provide emotional and intellectual support, this helps employees be more creative. All of these studies point positively to the fact that IL behaviours do have an impact on EE in some shape or form.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

It is evident that the main drivers of EE and the listed traits/behaviours of inclusive leaders are closely aligned. Management have been cited as the main enablers to true inclusion in the workplace which has been described as being very much an important part of making employees feel involved and considered at work. The literature reveals that leadership traits in general often impact EE and in the context of understanding IL, the literature has linked the traits of transformational leadership to relational leadership to the evolution of IL. Through various studies, IL has been positively connected to making employees feel more engaged at work, with several common themes emerging from the IL and EE literature including; the connection individuals feel to the organisation and sense of purpose, employee voice, employer support, acceptance of difference (be it physical or cognitive),

fairness, trust and empowerment. There are still gaps within the literature that need to be addressed and many researchers have called out for further work in general on IL and its outcomes. For example, Gillespie and Mann (2004) call for research to be conducted to define the relationship between leadership behaviour and trust of its follower's. Xu and Thomas (2011) conclude that there are a limited number of studies that look at the direct effects of leadership and engagement and future studies may look at the links between leader behaviours and EE in a single study. In response to this, there is evidently room in the literature to understand more about the concept of IL and its impact on EE. Most large organisations are heavily invested in ensuring their leaders are being inclusive in order to create and embed an open inclusive environment for all, for better EE and ultimately for better business outcomes. This research study is timely and appropriate to add to the literature on IL and EE and reinforce the efforts placed on making this a reality.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The aim of this study is to understand the effects of IL and EE in a financial services public sector organisation in Dublin. This chapter will detail the specific aims and objectives of this research study. It will also detail the research philosophy surrounding this piece of work, taking the reader through the preferred approach in which the data was collected and analysed.

### **3.1 Research aims**

At present, there are a limited number of studies on the topic of IL and EE, but the current literature cites a positive link between the two, meaning employees who experience inclusive leaders, generally are more engaged at work. This research study will look to prove this theory by carrying out a study within this chosen organisation. It will enlist the lived experiences of middle managers who report directly to senior leaders (who are classed as their direct managers) to ascertain their view on whether they believe their senior leader demonstrates inclusive behaviour and how this impacts their engagement. For the purpose of this study, leaders refer to senior leaders of this organisation and middle management refers to the employee participants of this study.

### 3.2 Research objectives

The researcher will aim to address the following research objectives:

1. Ascertain if leaders portray inclusive traits
2. Investigate the level of employee engagement
3. Examine whether leaders who portray IL traits, impact positively on EE
4. Explore if leaders can do anything further to increase EE

### 3.3 Research philosophies

There are many research philosophies for researchers to choose from, in order to undertake their study in the most meaningful and effective way. The best way to understand the different layers that must be considered is by looking at the Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007) as depicted in figure 2 below.

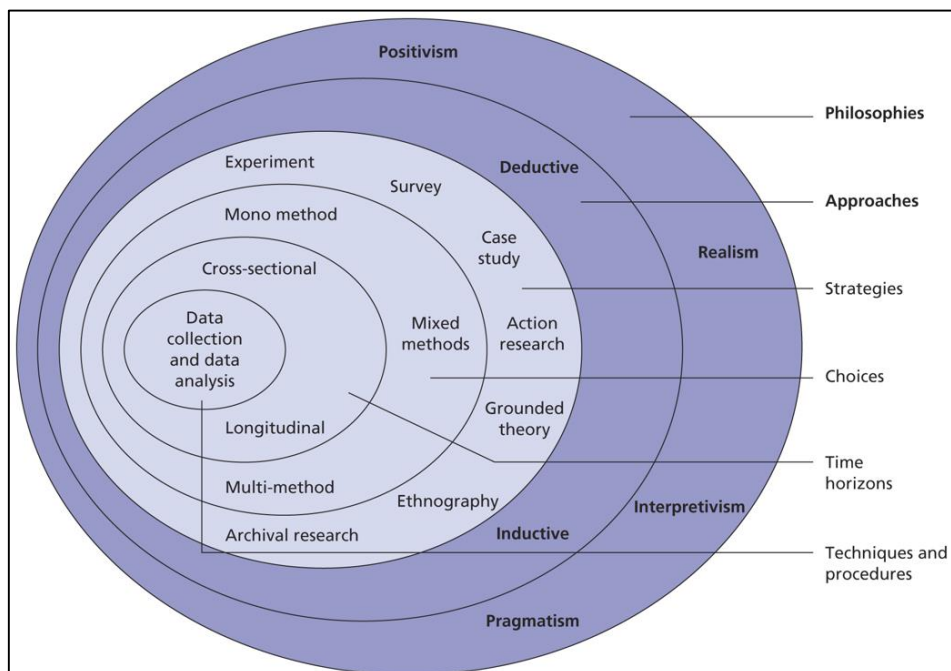


Figure 2- The Research Onion

The Research Onion explains that the very first step is identifying your philosophy construct, meaning the assumptions you make about the way you view the world. According to Saunders *et al.* (2007, p.101) “Research philosophy is an over-arching term relating to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge”. There are two aspects of research philosophies; Ontology and Epistemology. Ontology is concerned with “the nature of reality” whereas Epistemology looks at “assumptions based on knowledge” (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p.127). Epistemology is related to positivism and interpretivism (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2011), positivism implies observed facts are objective and that society has influence on its member’s. Whereas interpretivism, takes into account that the construct of the world is through the meaning placed on it by people, that being subjective (Blumberg *et al.*, 2011). This study requires a deep dive into the impact and emphasis people place on the traits of others, therefore it is a subjective study. In that vein, this study is best placed to take an epistemological interpretivism approach, which will allow the meaning behind what people say to emerge. Saunders *et al.* (2007) explain that this approach is most appropriate when exploring business management research and organisation behaviour.

### **3.4 Research approaches**

With the grounding philosophy defined, it is important to understand the various approaches from a methodology perspective. The two main approaches are inductive and deductive theory. An inductive approach is one in which the research moves from the theory to the data and draws a conclusion. Deductive is the opposite, it starts with the data and relates it to the theory. For this study, the researcher has decided that an inductive approach is the most appropriate as the researcher can analyse the data collected in line with the objectives of the study, allowing common themes to emerge (Thomas, 2006). This approach correlates with the qualitative research method (discussed in the next section) and it allows flexibility of changing the focus of the research as the study progresses, which the researcher believes is the more favoured way to address the aims and objectives of this subjective study.

### **3.5 Qualitative and quantitative methods**

The researcher must decide how they will collect primary data in order to meet the objectives of the research. When deciding this, the researcher noted that there are two main research methods types; qualitative and quantitative. A quantitative method of research is a deductive approach and empirical in nature. It measures and tests a specific research question, with structured responses, typically via a large sample size. A typical quantitative approach is in the form of surveys and results are measurable and generalisable (Zikmund, *et al.*, 2013).

Qualitative method of research is a process by which data is collected by images and words, rather than by numbers (Veal, 2011) and this can take many forms such as focus groups, interviews, action research, case studies etc. The nature of performing qualitative research is to discover ideas and interpret meaning from a person's responses. As the researcher is involved in this process, the results are very much subjective (Zikmund, *et al.*, 2013).

Neither qualitative nor quantitative research methods are more superior to the other (Blumberg *et al.*, 2011) but careful consideration is required at this point. Having reviewed the nature of each method available, the researcher has decided for this study, a qualitative method will be adopted as the primary data collection method, through the process of face to face interviews. This method has been chosen for various reasons that will benefit the research aims. The dominant research method on this topic in the past has been quantitative in nature. This method was initially considered for this study, as the researcher understands the benefits of replicating a quantitative study such as the work of Malik *et al.* (2017), as the data collected would be somewhat comparable. However, the researcher believes that a qualitative method is best placed in adding value to this topic, by giving the rich lived experience in the form of face to face interviews to get an in-depth understanding of feelings, emotions and opinions as well as assess non-verbal signs (change in eye contact, facial expressions etc.) Also, the time constraints associated with this study dictated that a qualitative approach was more practical and achievable. However, it is accepted that whilst a mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative)

would be optimal and give a more rounded view, more time would have been required to carry this out.

### **3.6 Conceptual framework**

Through reviewing the literature, one significant study that was identified as the underpinnings of this research study is the work of Malik *et al.* (2017). The authors reviewed the link between IL and EE via international Non-Government Organisations in Pakistan. This study was empirical based, conducted via surveys and concluded that there is a positive link between IL and EE. With this in mind, Malik *et al.* (2017) will form the basis of this research study and the researcher will react to call to action to further research this area using different variables in different countries/locations/industries. The researcher intends to take this approach in order to add value to the literature by bringing a more personal lens on this topic. IL will be measured by the six signature traits of IL, outlined in the literature by Bourke and Dillion (2016) as Curiosity, Cultural intelligence, Collaboration, Commitment, Courage and Cognizance of bias. This approach reflects the most recent thinking in IL literature.

For the purpose of this study, in order to measure the level of EE, the researcher will focus on the drivers of EE described by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) as Leadership, Engaging managers, Employee voice and Integrity. These four key drivers were deemed most appropriate to study, within the remit of focusing on leadership as a driver of engagement

### **3.7 Time horizons**

In the Research Onion, the researcher must consider the time allotted to complete a study. There are two types of approaches, a cross sectional approach, which is the study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time, also known as a “snap shot in time” (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) or a longitudinal study, which involves researching a topic over a long period of time (a year or more) and assessing changes (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). In the case of this research, there is limited time available and therefore a cross-sectional approach was deemed most appropriate.

### **3.8 Research sample**

In considering the research sample for this study, a number of factors were looked at before approaching participants. The researcher took into consideration the population targeted in the study carried out by Malik *et al.* (2017). This study was conducted via surveys to a large population of 300 employees (with a 57% response rate). The researcher noted that a sample size for a qualitative study varies dramatically to that of a quantitative form. The researcher was guided on the sample size for this qualitative study by Fusch and Ness (2015). Understanding the concept of saturation for validity and reliability of the qualitative studies is important. “Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible” (Fusch and Ness 2015, p. 1408). In the context of this study, the researcher also took guidance from Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 14) who spoke about the concept of grounded theory, noting that “it is rare that five or six one-hour interviews will provide sufficient data to lead to saturation”, therefore implying that in a small research study, greater than six interviews will justify for saturation.



As a key objective of this study is to understand if middle managers of this organisation experience IL. In order to ensure the correct participants were selected for this study, the researcher used a particular method called non-probabilistic purposive sampling. This is a method researchers can employ to allow them to pick their subjects, based on their own judgement, for the qualities the participant possess and the benefit of the study (Etikan *et al.*, 2015). The researcher is aware that this approach is in contrast to the methods used by Malik *et al.* (2017) and Carmeli *et al.* (2010), as they utilised random sampling to select their participants, via online questionnaires. The literature notes that a probabilistic approach is optimal, due its high validity rate, accuracy and it being more generalisable (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Nevertheless, the researcher believes the non-probabilistic purposive sampling method adopted for this study is appropriate, as it specifically targets participants from across the organisation that report directly to leaders, which will give a better insight into leader behaviour.

### **3.9 Participants**

Once the sample population was decided, participants were chosen based on the following four main criteria; interaction with leaders of the organisation, department, length of service and gender. In this regard, twelve people were contacted to participate, with nine accepting to part-take in the study. This group of participants are all part of the middle management cohort and are located in various departments across the organisation to ensure the findings could be reflective of leaders. It is also important to note that currently, the organisation is made up of 49% female, 51% male gender distribution and the researcher wanted to reflect this representation and ensure a balance where possible. The researcher is aware that gender is not a typical criteria used to select participants in similar studies on this topic, as they are quantitative based and generally do not target specific genders. However, the researcher feels a balanced representative from both genders is justified in this context. The researcher approached six females and six males, however five females and four males made the final participant list. Length of service was an important aspect of a participant's profile, as the organisation is more

than seventy years in operation and the researcher wanted to ensure a broad mix of tenure was included to ensure varying levels of experience within the organisation was captured through these responses.

The profile of the nine participants is listed below in table 1. For confidentiality purposes, participant's names and locations within the organisation have been anonymised, with each participant given a number between 1 and 9 for tracking purposes.

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>General area within the organisation</b>	<b>Length of service</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	Middle management	Regulation	10 years	Male
2	Middle management	Operations	7 years	Male
3	Middle management	Banking	19 years	Female
4	Middle management	Regulation	4 years	Female
5	Middle management	Operations	8 years	Male
6	Middle management	Banking	13 years	Male
7	Middle management	Operations	4 years	Female
8	Middle management	Projects	3 years	Female
9	Middle management	Operations	3 years	Female

Table 1- Summary of research participants profiles

### **3.10 Data collection**

When deciding on the type of interview to carry out, the researcher understands that one on one interviews take one of three forms, structured, semi structured or unstructured approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Structured interviews involve rigid pre-determined questioning, with no room to explore further any answers interviewees may provide. They are typically associated with a quantitative method of research and lack collecting in-depth understanding of the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In contrast, unstructured interviews take on a more informal conversation style. They do not set out a themed question format and generally the interviewee is in control of the conversation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The researcher has decided to adopt a semi-structured non-standardised approach with themed questions pre-set, but allowing for flexibility with each participant to uncover any additional themes and/or opinions that may emerge (Cameron and Price, 2009). This method will give the researcher an opportunity to probe and really unearth meaning and depth behind the data, which is important for the interpretivist epistemology approach. It will also allow for flexibility within the interview, following a different path for each participant depending on how they answer each question as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2007) again, allowing rich data to be captured.

### **3.11 Pilot study**

Before the participants for the study were engaged, the researcher carried out a small pilot study with known colleagues. According to Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) a pilot can automatically increase the likely hood of the main studies success and it is a way to test the data gathering instrument being used. The researcher wanted to test the validity and reliability of the interview questions Saunders *et al.* (2007) and ultimately determine if the semi structured approach and data collected would contribute to the research aims and objectives of this study. The pilot also enabled the researcher to observe the length of time the interviews would take and if any important elements may have been missing from the interview process.

Three pilot participants were selected due to their criteria being similar to the participants identified for research purposes, but they did not form part of the ten original research participants identified. Each pilot participant was furnished with an outline of the research objectives, aims, question themes and the interview schedule (timing, location etc.). Once the pilot participants agreed to take part, they were furnished with consent form (Appendix 3). The pilot interviews were held face to face and scheduled for 45 minutes to test the running time the interview required. Following the pilot study, improvements were made to the final questions as follows. Firstly, the wording of two questions were rearranged as it appeared the questions were too similar and would provide very similar answers. Secondly, the researcher understood the value of taking the time at the beginning to talk through the context of the study and allow time for the participant to understand what the researcher means by IL and EE. Lastly, the pilot provided an opportunity for the researcher to practice engaging in follow up questions, to delve deeper into the detail participants provided, which was helpful in conducting the study with the main participants.

### **3.12 Interview Schedule**

For the main study, the interview schedule was informed by the literature review and detailed a number of open ended questions on the topics of IL traits, based on the work of Bourke and Dillon (2016), EE drivers by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) and the impacts IL has on the participant's EE. The researcher provided each participant with information on the study and once the participants were confirmed to take part, the researcher furnished them with a consent form and arranged a time for the interview to take place. All interviews were held face to face in a small quiet office space away from each individual's usual working area. The participants were told the interview would take approximately 30-40 minutes. The researcher reiterated that the interview would be audio recorded and the interview could be terminated at any time. Context of the study was provided to start the conversation and the researcher then followed a semi-structured interview schedule, beginning

with some pre-set questions in relation to the IL qualities of their leaders and delving into the participant's answers where relevant, to reveal any further information. The same format was followed when talking about EE, again delving into how well the employees felt they were engaged. Any information provided that required further exploration was investigated by the researcher. The interview concluded with the researcher thanking the participant for the time in assisting with this study.

### **3.13 Data analysis**

In order to review the data gathered during the interview stage, each interview was transcribed. The rationale for this was to restrict bias from the data captured and increase the reliability of the data. The researcher reviewed the responses under the themes of IL and EE noting the common findings under each of these traits (sub themes). A final summary table was collated to showcase the level of responses by individuals under each theme and sub theme to detail the representation of the final conclusion reached.

### **3.14 Limitations**

The researcher acknowledges that there are some known limitations to this study. Firstly, qualitative research findings are not generalisable and cannot be extended to the wider financial services organisation or public sector in general. This is unlike quantitative research, where the research findings are tested to understand if they are statistically significant or not (Ateino, 2009). The researcher acknowledges these limitations and believes that a qualitative study on this topic is necessary and will add value to the current literature, by understanding the lived experiences of middle managers that report directly to leaders of the organisation and how they portray inclusive traits and behaviours. Secondly, the researcher also notes that while a probabilistic approach is optimal, maintains the non- probabilistic approach taken for this study, using a purposive sample to select the participants is the correct way to identify the most relevant people to address the research objectives of this study.

### **3.15 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations have been addressed, in line with the National College of Ireland's (NCI) Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants, September 2017. As part of this research, an ethics form has been completed (Appendix 1) which states the nature of this study and details the interaction with interview participants. The interviewees partaking in this study are classed as non-vulnerable, therefore no issues arise in the form of consent. The Ethics Board approved this research study, on foot of the research proposal submission process in January 2019. Permission was sought from the relevant head of department within the organisation to proceed with contacting participants on this particular study (Appendix 2).

In order to organise the interviews for this study, interviewees were contacted via email and informed on the purpose of this research study, with the option to participate being on a voluntary basis. Consent forms for participation were then furnished to participants (Appendix 3) to ensure full understanding and clear rules of engagement. The consent form was returned via email to the researcher if the participant was happy to take part.

The Data Protection Acts 1998- 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation 2018 were considered and adhered to throughout this study, in the context of addressing the importance of safeguarding personal data. To ensure the protection of each participant, their identities were redacted from written and recorded documentation. A general description of their management status, gender and length of service was detailed, to describe each individual. For record keeping purposes, all recordings and transcripts are electronically and password protected and in line with NCI's data retention policy. Only the researcher and assigned supervisor has permitted access to the data.

## Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter will reveal the findings of the primary research that was conducted within the financial services public sector organisation in Dublin. There were two main themes discussed during the interview process; 1) IL traits as described by Bourke and Dillon (2016) with six sub themes 2) the drivers of EE as outlined by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) with four sub themes. The researcher will present the findings under each sub theme, supporting the findings with relevant quotations from participants and analyse the findings.

### 4.1 Inclusive leadership traits

The first main theme of this study is IL traits, detailed below in figure 3 is a summary of the six sub themes of IL.



Figure 3: Summary of IL theme and sub themes

Findings of this study are presented below under the heading of each sub theme.

### 4.1.1 Curiosity

Participants were asked what their experience was like in relation to their leader canvassing for the opinions/views and how they felt about the level of respect afforded to them in respect of their views. The study found that participants experienced varying levels of this across the organisation. Four out of nine participants said they were included on decisions for discussion and expressed how the openness from their manager, allowed contrary views to be taken on board, questioned respectfully, listened to and heard. These participants were also aware that although their opinion may have been sought, they knew it would not always form part of the final outcome, as this was the leader's responsibility.

*“My manager does actively seek the opinion of others, at both my grade, her peer group and those above her, so she would be a great advocate of workshops particular at a more senior level. I never thought of that, I'm glad we had that conversation', her opinion is not set in stone” - (Participant 4)*

*“Decisions are to be made by my manager, the responsibility lies with them, they would be very aware of seeking the feedback from staff, where it's appropriate and if they were working on something they might ask you to review something or ask if you have any extra ideas”- (Participant 3)*

Contrary to this, three out of the nine participants expressed that their leader did not seek their view, with little consultation given on decisions that were being discussed at a more senior level that impacted them. This behaviour had a negative impact on how they felt valued within their role.

*“My manager could solicit more ideas from the teams at times and I have provided feedback within the 360 leadership management review- (Participant 1)*

*“Seeking the perspective of others would not happen whatsoever. There never would be a question of what do you think, people would have a voice and would have a thought but it wouldn't be actively sought”- (Participant 6)*



Participants eight and nine had a mixed response, they have witnessed their leader behave in an inclusive manner by seeking perspectives, but also doing the opposite in certain situations. One participant also relayed experiencing being asked for views and opinions from her manager's seniors, rather than the direct leader.

*“So I’ve seen my manager be a great listener, I’ve seen him allow another person to give their view. I’ve equally seen him dominating the conversation with what he wants out of it”- (Participant 8)*

The findings here uncover that this trait is experienced by less than half of participants. Participants who had a positive experience, linked this to feeling a sense of value and purpose and this was reinforced by the positive body language, the participants displayed in their response. Those that don't experience Curiosity regularly, showed their dissatisfaction and negativity associated with this behaviour. This reaction aligns with Choi *et al.* (2017) who believe that through IL, showing a willingness to listen and openness, will effectively engage employees and the findings above echo this. In the context of IL, it is apparent that some leaders do not believe in the benefits and impact of seeking the views of others. What's interesting is, some individuals are aware that while their view/opinion may not always have a place in the final outcome, having their voice heard is good enough. This correlates with Bourke and Dillon (2016) who believe that believe perspective seeking is important, regardless of the final outcome. It is important for this organisation to recognise what impact of not being inclusive in this manner is having on individuals.

### 4.1.2 Cultural intelligence

Participants were asked to reflect on their leader's behaviour, if and when there were different cultures to be considered. Three participants had direct experience working in culturally diverse teams, citing that manager's behaviours were consistent with the varying groups and treated everybody with the same level of respect, regardless of where they were from.

*“Two individuals on the team that come from quite different backgrounds (a conflict ensued between the two employees) my manager was very cognisant and spoke to me about the different backgrounds and if that was potentially something that was contributing to this situation. This would be an authentic and consistent trait on my managers behalf, whole sense of fairness and balance is important to them”- (Participant 1)*

*“The department I work in we have staff from three to four different countries and people who have different sexual preferences and I've never noticed anything, we are all the same and that's not just from the top down”- (Participant 3)*

However, the remaining six participants did not have direct experience with cultural diversity, but expressed how the difference they could relate to, in for example gender, age, religion and how their leaders are respectful in their treatment of others, regardless of that difference.

*“I've experienced it with different types of diversity through age and experience rather than through a cultural difference, I have influenced my manager in the skills sets people have regardless and I think she opened her mind a bit to the fact that not everybody has to be the same, now that she thinks about it, there is all of these different skill sets”- (Participant 4)*

The findings here were insightful, in an organisation with little global focus, the findings don't necessarily align to the IL trait of Cultural intelligence as described by (Bourke and Dillon, 2016). Based on participant's limited experience with vast cultural interaction, the question was interpreted to mean all types of diversity and on the basis of that it could be concluded that overall, Cultural intelligence in that

context is experienced positively by participants. The researcher acknowledges the limitation under this sub theme but is confident that in this context, this is positive and can be attributed to leaders portraying IL traits.

### **4.1.3 Collaboration**

Participants were asked to comment of the level of autonomy afforded to them on making decisions within the remit of their role. The main finding under this theme was that the majority of participants felt they had some level of autonomy, and understood that in this organisations context (public sector), they could only provide a certain level of input and decision making, due to the hierarchal constraints and the stakeholder engagement required, which interestingly, did not negatively affect their view on their autonomy levels.

*“We have a lot of autonomy in decision making and I think it’s due to the type of role we have in the department we work in, but exposure to senior people is normal and making decisions, makes me feel trusted”- (Participant 8)*

*“I have a large breath of autonomy, I would reach a decision and bring it to a point that it’s nearly a proposal, its more saying this is what the issue was and this is how I think we should fix it”- (Participant 9)*

Participant eight expressed a different reality, explaining how the lack of autonomy and decision making, had a very negative impact, comparing the autonomy levels experienced to a previous job in the private sector.

*“I felt like my wings were clipped and it had a really bad impact on me, as its counter to how I can operate and I went into survival mode”- (Participant 8)*

The literature is clear in saying that people need to feel some sense of empowerment Dow (2017) to feel they add value and the findings show that the majority of participants experienced this, by relaying that leaders who give autonomy, contribute to their sense of trustworthiness and faith in their ability to do their job. This is a positive finding and links to leaders having one of the six important traits of IL as described by (Bourke and Dillon, 2016).

#### 4.1.4 Commitment

Under the sub theme Commitment, a positive finding emerged with most participants revealing that in their experience, they have noted management recognising and dealing with people in unique ways. Particularly, with themselves personally, or with their surrounding team in the vein of adapting to an individual's skillset, making considered decisions based on individuality or circumstances and encouraging and commending them for their extra circular work activities.

*“My manager will look at the two of us and understand that we have unique personalities and unique strengths and I think people are prepared to work with that”- (Participant 2)*

However, the opposite experience applies to participants six and eight, recalling how their manager does not utilise the talent within their remit for greater outcomes, with a suggestion that they do not realise the benefit of different perspectives and uniqueness as being a key asset to the manager.

*“He has at his disposal, a group of people that have such a wealth of experience that he's not using”- (Participant 8)*

One participant was an outlier in this area and relayed how management will acknowledge uniqueness in scenarios where it suits and will call out behaviour that mirrors the norm, behaviour that differs from that is not welcomed.

*“It's been really recognised that somebody has a key talent/skill in a particular area and its highlighted but where somebody has been seen in terms of their manner, their way, their behaviour to be negative and difficult it is perceived as troublesome and that's not valuing uniqueness”- (Participant 9)*

Bourke and Dillon (2016) advocate for valuing uniqueness and this comes through leaders personally believing the values and benefits of D & I. The finding here alludes to management in the main, being considerate when it comes to using different skills sets and overall fairness for better business outcomes.

However, as some participants do not experience Commitment, it further adds to a common thread throughout the findings under IL, that some leaders do not value the benefits of D & I. It is vital for the organisation to address these omissions, in order ensure a consistent employee experience for everybody.

#### **4.1.5 Courage**

Inclusive leaders possess the Courage to be comfortable with and show their own weaknesses and limitations by being open about these with team members. The findings under this particular sub theme show that less than half of participants experienced this sense of vulnerability and sharing of weakness from their leader which for them, creates an openness, an environment of challenge and fosters good relations.

*“I would say yes, my manager is aware of her limitations, but I’d say she made efforts to check herself, she takes feedback from people reporting to her”- (Participant 5)*

*“Absolutely, they are comfortable with their weakness and the fact that don’t know everything, they are very open about it”- (Participant 3)*

The remaining participants explained that they did not experience this and in general, they stated that the reason may be due to a reluctance from leaders to display limitations to their staff and peers, as they feel it’s not accepted at their level.

*“I think the further up the food chain you go, there is a real reluctance to show any sort of weakness or to seek assistance with something”- (Participant 2)*

One participant was an outlier in this category, as they believe their manager is aware of their weakness but does not act upon it, rather makes decisions even when they are cognisant that further input could have been sought, with the rationale for this being down to the control the manager wants and needs.

*“There would be a certain amount of acknowledging weaknesses in their knowledge base but that wouldn’t transpire into actively managing that, there would be an acceptance of ‘oh I might not know a particular thing’ and then a day later he is making a decision based on that thing”- (Participant 6)*

Overall, the finding here was mainly fifty-fifty, which has a partial bearing on leaders of this organisation being inclusive, but it also adds to the narrative that a portion of leaders are not bought into the idea of inclusion, potentially due to their lack of understanding of the overall benefits of D & I. The finding in this sub theme is consistent with the lack of Curiosity shown by leaders, as discussed earlier. The correlation between Curiosity and Courage depend on being open and willing to canvas for others views, challenges and being confident in not having all of the answers. It is clear that some leaders of the organisation struggle with this key aspect of inclusion. The organisations actions to mitigate against this is vital, in bringing leaders on a journey of understanding and how to put such behaviour into practice.

#### **4.1.6 Cognizance of bias**

Participants were asked if they experienced their own leader’s personal bias play out and if they believed it influenced them making merit based decisions. In the majority of cases, participants were satisfied that their leader was aware of their own personal biases, acknowledging them openly and not making decisions based on those biases. This is a positive finding and an indication that leaders starting to be aware of the impact and importance of acknowledging reactions to stereotypes and groupthink risks.

*“I know that my manager would like to hire people that are exactly like they are, but they are aware of their bias and consciously work against it, for the benefit of having a mix”- (Participant 4)*

A minority group, three out of the nine participants, found that their manager acted in a way that it was clear they were satisfying their own bias, to the detriment of the staff around them. The consequences of acting in such a way, had a negative impact on morale and engagement in those particular teams.

*“I can work with that person would be the answer rather than, this person impressed me at interview or this person has a really good CV, it’s very much a bias being acted out and the result and impact on morale over the last year has been huge”- (Participant 6)*

*“Yes my manager has acted on bias and has had a really bad impact on people”- (Participant 8)*

However, overall, this finding does show that generally there is positive action by leaders being aware of their bias and having a sense of fairness. This positive result is another indicator that leaders of this organisation practice aspects of IL. This finding aligns with Dow (2017) who suggests that leaders should check their bias to ensure it does not impact their decision making or potentially devalue the views and opinions of others. The fact that some leaders are still not fully aware or act with bias in mind, contributes to the general overall finding that some leaders are not wholly embracing inclusion and need to be aligned with the business benefits and positive outcomes it will create for them and their teams.

#### **4.1.7 Summary of inclusive leadership traits**

To summarise the findings under IL, a number of findings were unearthed in answering one of the objectives of this study, do leaders of the organisation portray IL traits, as per the Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership literature published by (Bourke and Dillion, 2016). The findings reveal that overall participants experience IL, as the majority responded positively to four out of the six sub themes discussed; Cultural intelligence, Collaboration, Commitment and Cognizance of bias. Curiosity and Courage did not receive a general positive response and the researcher believes that elements of these traits are closely related, with the rationale for leaders not portraying these traits linked to their position within the

corporate hierarchy and an expectation they set on not requiring input, support or challenge where decisions or considerations are to be made. However, one common finding among all of the sub themes is a lack of IL behaviour among some leaders at varying degrees. On a positive note, the majority of leaders are adopting some elements of IL, but it is imperative that all leaders understand the need for inclusion and act in accordance, to truly imbed and create an inclusive culture.

Below is a summary of the number of responses per sub theme discussed, correlating participants experience with IL traits.

<b>Inclusive Leadership Traits</b>			
<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>No. of participants who experienced this trait</b>	<b>No. of participants do not experience this trait</b>	<b>Mixed response</b>
Curiosity	4	3	2
Cultural intelligence	6		3
Collaboration	7		2
Commitment	6	2	1
Courage	4	4	1
Cognizance of bias	6	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 2- Summary displaying the number of responses per IL sub themes



## 4.2 Employee engagement drivers

The second main theme discussed was EE, with the objective of the study to understand the participant's level of engagement as per the drivers of EE described by MacLeod and Clarke (2009). Figure 4 below is a summary of the four sub themes of EE.

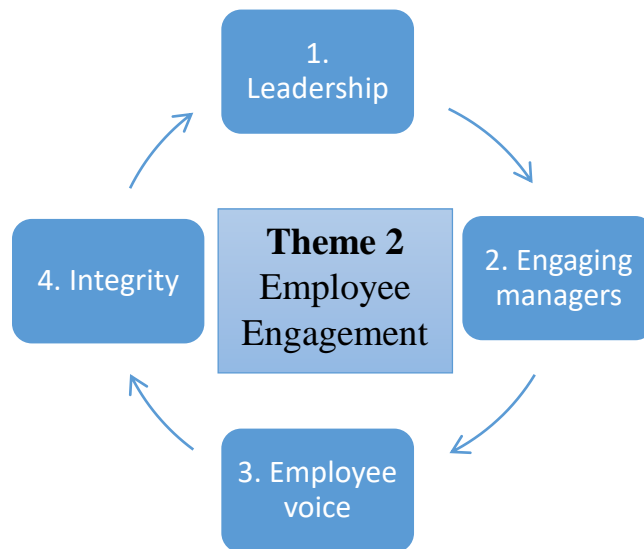


Figure 4- Summary of the EE theme and sub themes

### 4.2.1 Leadership as a driver of employee engagement

Participants were asked if they experienced guidance from their leaders on the strategic narrative of the organisation and if so, how they felt this contributed to their engagement levels. The predominant finding here was that over half of participant's were clear on where their role sits within the organisation and how they are making an impact on the organisations mandate. Participants based this on the organisations efforts to communicate the strategic plan and in particular, how their objectives linked to the overarching picture.

*“We saw the objectives cascaded down from management and it gave a clear picture on how it all feeds back up to the directorate and strategy which is a great idea, makes people more aware of how their role fits into the mandate of the organisation”- (Participant 4)*

However, participant two, six and eight explained how they did not experience this connection, they either felt their department as a whole was just a hard department to show where it fit within the organisation or that the department’s roles and responsibilities had not changed over the past few years, hence no clarity was required.

*“It would be limited from my manager, in terms of this is where you fit, that would be more so because the role of our section hasn’t changed in 10 years”- (Participant 6)*

*“I don’t understand what they (other departments within the organisation) do on a day to day basis and how my role links in any shape of form with any department, I think that’s one of the things we have to accept it’s the way it is”- Participant 2)*

For those participants that did not have this connection, it was evident that they did not show dissatisfaction or believe that it negatively impacted them, to the extent that it did not have a bearing on how they carried out their day to day duties or engage with the organisation.

In light of this, the overall finding is a positive one, as the organisation makes it a priority to ensure staff are aware of its strategic direction. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) suggest that leadership direction and knowing your place in the organisation is key for EE and this finding in one part agrees with the literature and links organisation connection to employees feeling they have a part to play in the overall performance of the organisation. In contrast to this, the finding also goes slightly against this theory, as those that didn’t necessarily feel they received that connection to the organisation, didn’t believe it impacted on their engagement or performance of their role. The researcher suggests that in one particular response, the participant has a longer length of service than the average participant and

potentially understands the organisation and their role context very well, regardless of having regular official communication.

#### **4.2.2 Engaging managers**

Participants were asked to give an account of their experience in terms of how they feel supported and valued in their role by their leader. The vast majority of participants relayed that they felt supported and received the level of validation they required. What came through heavily was the support individuals felt they received through work life balance flexibility and support in a personal and professional capacity. Participants linked this to EE and how they consider this a driver for them, making them feel a part of something bigger than just their small role.

*“I would say they have articulated that to me on a number of different occasions and I feel it and observe it, the support I got last year during a difficult time, I feel it helped my engagement as it showed that I was a valued member of their team and was worthy of support during a difficult time”- (Participant 1)*

*“I think I would have gone somewhere else before now, if that weren't the case, that's one of the things I would hold high on the list of factors that make me come into work in the morning”- (Participant 2)*

Overall, it is clear to see that the finding under this topic is very positive and shows that leaders are willing to show appreciation for the work carried out and commitment shown by the employee. This finding correlates directly to MacLeod and Clarke (2009) and Xu and Thomas (2011) who believe that managers who support individuals within their role will drive EE. This evidence is another signal that the organisation is taking steps to ensure engagement factors are being addressed. The researcher suggests that the culture of the organisation has a part to play in the support and flexibility afforded to individuals. As a public sector organisation with limited access to other benefits such as bonuses and benefits in kind, the organisation treats staff support and well-being as a high priority, therefore, generally getting that level of engagement back in return. This correlates

strongly to Deloitte (2017) who reference that in the absence of the public sector providing high reward packages to individuals, cultural norms such as supporting flexible working hours and career progression prevails.

### **4.2.3 Employee voice**

Participants were asked if they felt their voice was heard, opinion was valued and how this impacted on their engagement. The response to this was mainly in the vein of not having a very positive experience. Of those that felt their voice was heard and listened to, they acknowledged that not every idea would result in their favored outcome, but having the opportunity was important to them, making individuals feel their valued, contributing to their performance levels and their willingness to drive for success.

*“Absolutely, if there is any disagreement there is a discussion around it and when our work/opinion is being brought forward, we get the credit for it, it’s not taken and run with”- (Participant 3)*

An interesting finding was that some participants felt their opinion was canvased for but the substance of their opinions or views were not taken on board, feeling that they knew no matter what they said or suggested, they would not be listened to. Participants stressed their frustration with this behaviour and the researcher noticed a defensive and negative tone from participants when speaking about this subject.

*“Yes, listened to and given time to express thoughts and opinions....heard not always. It is frustrating, (Participant 9)*

The findings here reveal that less than half of participants perceive to having their voice heard. Employee voice is a driver for EE and has a strong correlation to the IL trait Curiosity, which is centered around leaders seeking the perspective of others. It’s interesting to note that the participants responded similarly in these two sub themes which reveals that the leaders in question are consistently not behaving

this way, which has a negative impact on employees feeling engaged and driven to perform their role to the best of their ability.

#### **4.2.4 Integrity**

It was clear that participants do trust the organisation, despite sometimes experiencing promises that are not necessarily followed through, but understanding the reality, that organisations cannot always achieve everything they set out to do. This acceptance was acknowledged by six out of the nine participants, with each of them expressing their loyalty to the organisation.

*“It think the organisation makes great efforts, things over the last few years have really ramped up, lots of good stuff going on, but sometimes actions don’t always match the words, but that will happen, you’re not ever going to get a perfect place”- (Participant 5)*

Three participants had mixed views on trusting the organisation. Their responses did not fall directly into the non-trust category, but there were some concerns around what the organisation says and connecting it back to their job, therefore clouding their trust judgement. Another interesting finding from participant four was the external influences they witness due to their interaction with other financial institutions. This participant was an outlier in that they referenced how they are influenced by what they see off site and believed this organisation does not necessarily hold itself to the same accountabilities it sets for others.

*“When an organisation says it’s going to do something, at a high level I think it’s hard to apply back to my job. I trust overall, I think we operate within a reasonable trust framework”- (Participant 2)*

*“I absolutely think we live our strategic priorities, we are doing everything we can however, I am definitely influenced by what I see out on site and what our expectation is of our firms, we don’t always meet that standard ourselves”- (Participant 4)*

Overall, the finding for integrity was positive. Trust and integrity can be hard to build but when employees feel that connection, it has an impact on the relationship the employee has, not only the organisation but their leader. This finding links to the work of Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) who believe that SET theory requires relationships that evolve overtime and mutual gains. Starting first with the connecting the employee has with the organisation and then how engaging their leaders are. Organisation integrity and engaging leaders play a vital role in overall EE, when done in the right way and experienced by employees.

#### **4.2.5 Engagement levels**

The researcher wanted to find out directly from participants if they felt they were engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged as depicted by Crabtree (2005) discussed in the literature review. All participants revealed that they would class themselves as “*engaged*” with their leader having an impact on their engagement levels. Six of the nine participants believe that their leader displays positive behaviours and this has a positive impact on their engagement levels.

However, participants six, eight and nine also responded yes to being engaged but would not class their leader as being inclusive. They believe their leader’s behaviour does have a negative impact on them, but not to the point that they would class themselves as disengaged or actively disengaged. This was a very interesting finding and the summary reason for this from respondents was due to their personal interest in the duty of the work they do for the public sector, overriding to a certain extent, their leaders behaviour. Another finding was the level of personal development and job satisfaction they received within their role which is key personal driver for them and keeps them engaged at work. This finding correlates strongly with research on public sector engagement which notes job meaningfulness and job skills match as a driver of those working within the public sector (Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, 2017).

As part of answering one of the objectives which was to explore if leaders can do anything further to increase EE, participants were asked what other key drivers of

engagement were important to them, if not already discussed under the sub themes of Leadership, Engaging managers, Employee voice and Integrity. Just over half of the participants believed that the drivers spoken about were their sole key drivers of engagement for them. Participants felt it important to understand the strategic direction and felt this driver was met by the organisation giving them a good sense of a connection to the organisation. Most participants felt that having a leader who were supportive in work and personal aspects of life, had a very high impact on their engagement, meaning they felt connected to the organisation, have a passion for doing their job well, for the benefit of their team and the organisation. This finding nicely ties in with CIPD (2018) which notes that when individuals feel supported by good management, they feel happier, which drives productivity. Employee voice came out strong as a driver for EE, but the findings reveal that generally, participants do not experience or perceive having a voice. The literature tells us that employee voice brings great employee experience in the workplace and is a key driver for engagement (Rees *et al.*, 2013). This is a clear call to action for the organisation to take an active role in rectifying this behaviour by leaders. When Integrity in the organisation was discussed, respondents felt that they had a high level of trust in the organisation, revealing that they believe the organisation will do what it says it's going to do, making individuals feel a positive connection to the organisation and a sense of pride in their work.

In terms of other key drivers for EE, participants gave varying examples, such as personal development/job satisfaction, public duty/being a voice for regulated firms and being given the opportunity to peruse personal passions within the organisation, outside of the day to day job, example: coaching/mentoring. This is a testament to the organisations efforts when it comes to engaging employees in various ways, to meet the needs of individual's expectations. This again could be attributed to the fact that the organisation operates within the public sector and engagement drivers are often outside the monetary reward framework.

#### 4.2.6 Summary of employee engagement drivers

To summarise the findings under EE, there were a number of findings in answering one of the objectives of this study, which was to investigate the level of employee engagement. The findings show that overall participants are engaged, as the majority responded positively to three out of the four sub themes discussed; Leadership, Engaging managers and Integrity. Employee voice was perceived by participants as a trait they did not experience from their leaders, which was not unusual finding, as participants had similar response to being asked if their leaders were active in seeking their perspective, within the IL traits. It is clear to see a common theme emerge under the umbrella of voice and being able to air your opinion and view. Leaders are not embracing the benefit of having diverse people around them, with different experiences, backgrounds and ways of thinking. It's important that leaders acknowledge and become aware of these benefits, not only for greater team performance and outcomes, but for better employee experience (Kumar and Swetha, 2011).

Below is a summary of the number of responses per sub theme discussed, correlating participant's exposure to the EE drivers.

<b>Employee Engagement Drivers</b>			
<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Experience this driver</b>	<b>Do not experience this driver</b>	<b>Mixed response</b>
Leadership	6	4	
Engaging managers	8	1	
Employee voice	4	2	3
Integrity	6	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 3- Summary displaying the number of responses per EE sub themes



#### **4.2.7 Conclusion**

Overall, the findings reveal that participants experience IL traits from their leaders and they are engaged. This is a positive result and shows that there is some good inclusive behaviour happening already, the organisation is not starting from the zero in trying to create an inclusive culture. It's evident that IL traits when put into practice, are appreciated by staff and in return, it results in a more positive experience for the individuals and teams. Public sector drivers also formed part of the reason participants felt engaged. The organisation can take a certain level of comfort in this, however it will not be the sole reason people will stay engaged and have the desire to perform to the best of their ability.

It is important to caveat these findings in stating that not all leaders were on board with all of the IL traits. The literature reveals that if IL is to be fully imbedded, organisations must ensure that all leaders can role model inclusive behaviour, so that it permeates throughout the rest of the organisation, for the culture to truly be inclusive (McEvoy 2017). It is evident from these findings that there is a lot done, however there is still more to do.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The objective of the study was to understand the effects of IL on EE, through exploring if leaders portray IL traits and if these ultimately has a positive impact on EE levels. The findings indicated that overall, leaders of the organisation portray IL traits which has a positive effect on EE. The researcher believes that organisations that focus on IL as a way of creating an inclusive environment, will positively engage employees for better individual, team and business performance. The findings in this study agree with the results of studies by Choi *et al.* (2015) and Malik *et al.* (2017) who conclude that there is a positive link between IL and EE and leader behaviour has a significant impact on engagement. However, further to the studies mentioned above, there were some unique findings within this research that particularly correlates to the organisation being within the public sector, which was not a factor in previous studies on this topic. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the overall findings against the studies defined objectives, discuss these in relation to how it links to the current literature and consider the practical implications of the study's findings.

### **5.1 Discussion**

The study strongly evidences that for this organisation, where individuals experience IL traits, also feel engaged at work and value particular aspects of IL, such as fairness and respect (Cultural intelligence), valuing uniqueness (Commitment), giving individuals autonomy (Collaboration) and being aware of their own personal biases (Cognizance of bias). In relation to the finding that there is a strong sense of Collaboration and autonomy, it was interesting to note that individuals understand the limitations associated with this, given public sector organisation constraints and this was not a demotivating factor for them, rather a matter of fact. The impact of being given a certain amount of autonomy, creates empowerment and allows individuals to carry on with their job grow professionally. This finding is very positive and is congruent with Lucan and McMahon (1998)

who believe that leaders affording employees empowerment, is a key trait if being inclusive. It also aligns with Pink (2009) who noted that EE increases when individuals are given the right to autonomy in their role.

The results also indicated that leaders are fair, respect individuals and acknowledge uniqueness of skills and individuals preferences. The researcher found that individuals felt valued as a person and managers are the core to instilling the environment of respect, which hugely contributes to a positive culture and a good starting point for an organisation if they are to build an inclusive environment. The findings of this study concurs with Choi *et al.* (2017) and Malik *et al.* (2017) who explain that inclusive leaders should treat people as individuals, valuing their differences, be it their skills or personalities and creating a sense of fairness for all.

To further prove the link between IL and EE, the study was clear in noting that when leaders did not exert some IL traits, such as perspective seeking (Curiosity), it ultimately has a negative knock on impact on individuals not feeling that their input is valued, specifically given their expertise and experience. This further adds to the importance of IL and is congruent with Kumar and Sweath (2011) and Bourke and Dillon (2016) who cite that employee voice and views are important to employee experience. The researcher notes that it is clear there is an underlying problem with this from an IL trait perspective and it is therefore having a direct negative impact on EE. This is an important watch point for the organisation and a potential focus if they are looking to create inclusive leaders.

The study also aligns with Bourke and Dillon (2016) and Shore *et al.* (2011) who believe leaders should show signs of weakness of limitations (Courage) to portray how they are open to seeking help and want collaboration for better team performance. Some participants noted strongly that not all leaders were open to showing weakness and limitations and this had a knock on impact on participants willing to express their thoughts or challenge their leader.

The study also agrees with engagement theory and reports that suggest employees need to feel a connection and trust the organisation MacLeod and Clarke (2009), along with having supportive management Xu and Thomas (2011), in order to be truly engaged. It is evident that the majority of participants experience EE drivers in a positive way and would class themselves as engaged. The EE drivers that were positively experienced by participants, were Leadership, in terms of how employees felt connected to the overall goals of the organisation, Engaging managers, trust and Integrity. These results also support findings by Saks (2006) and Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) who explain that when there is a positive link between the employee, the organisation and ultimately the leader, a SET theory is created. The researcher believes that the positive experiences from connecting individuals with the organisations strategy, having supportive and engaging managers and understanding their role in the organisations has attributed to the majority of participants having an overall positive sense of engagement.

It's important to discuss the findings of this study and the alignment it has with the literature on engagement in the public sector. Employees who did not experience inclusive behaviour from their leaders were still ultimately engaged, but for reasons such as connection to public duty and job satisfaction, not solely manager behaviour. This finding aligns with a report by DPER (2017) who links EE in the public sector to a sense of meaningfulness, in relation to a duty to the public. A report from Deloitte (2017) on EE within the public sector, references career development and job-skills-match as important aspects of EE. However, this study found that although engagement was experienced via public sector engagement driver's, leader behaviour is also still very much important and can still have an impact on engagement levels. This is a unique finding that sets itself apart from the findings of and Malik *et al.* (2017), as they could not emulate this finding as this research was not carried out within a public sector organisation.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The researcher believes that this study further reinforces organisations decisions to place a heavy focus on D & I and in particular, IL as a way in which to not only ensure everyone is treated equally, fairly and uniquely, but to engage employees in an environment where employee retention is key. As the global pace of change is rapid and employees need to feel their best in order to perform their best, the cost of disengaged employees, far out ways the cost of efforts to ensure the organisation is being inclusive, for better business outcomes. The organisation has a good grounding in which to continue its journey to better inclusion, as elements of IL traits are being portrayed by leaders and employees already feel engaged for various reasons such as, leader behaviour and certain public sector drivers.

## **5.3 Limitations**

The researcher is aware and acknowledges that there are some limitations to this research study. The study solely focused on one organisation via a qualitative method due to the time constraints involved, therefore the findings of this research are restricted to this organisation and cannot be extended to the wider financial services organisation or public sector.

The researcher also acknowledges that there is a preference for a mixed method approach however, this was not achievable, again due to the time constraints and hence a solely qualitative method was used. By undertaking a qualitative only study, the impact of developing a deeper understanding of the problem and displaying a micro and macro picture are somewhat limited.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

This study set out to find the link between IL and EE, in a public sector organisation within the financial services industry in Dublin. Throughout this study, the researcher investigated if the leaders of the organisation portrayed IL traits, the level of EE and if there was a direct correlation between the two. The researcher was also interested to find out if there were any further actions leaders of the organisation could take in relation to EE. The key findings of the study were that the majority of participants found that their leaders displayed the IL traits discussed, which ultimately had a positive impact on them personally and their engagement levels within the organisation. Positive attributes that contributed to this were managers giving employees autonomy to carry out their duties, creating a sense of team cohesion treating and respecting people as individuals, being cognisant of how bias can play a part in day to day considerations and decision and ensuring employees feel connected to the organisation.

The study also found that where people did not experience inclusive behaviour, it wasn't the overriding factor in making them feeling engaged. Although poor leader behaviour impacted them negatively, an unexpected outcome of this study was the insight of those that didn't class their leader as engaged. The drivers of engagement for them was their sense of duty to the Irish public and sense of job satisfaction, within their public sector role. However, this finding was not completely unknown, as noted within the literature review, employee's engagement within the public sector varied from some of the EE drivers within the private sector.

This overall result may be explained by the fact that this organisation is taking an active role in doing a number of things, such as ensuring employees feel connected to the organisation through clearly articulating the organisations strategy and how each individual plays a role in its success. Furthermore, leaders of the organisation are beginning to understand the importance of D & I through how they treat people as individuals, regardless of difference and are cognisant of their own personal bias.

The study also found that it is not necessary to have all of the listed best practice IL traits to fully engage employees, as other factors such as working within the public sector, holds value in engaging employees.

This research adds to the current literature by viewing IL through a personal lens, by having face to face interaction with participants. The study provides a practical rationale for organisations and HR practitioners, as it reinforces the need for organisations to continue to focus on IL and by doing so, they will be able to attract and retain key talent by ensuring individuals are engaged at work, ultimately for better team performance and organisational outcomes.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Within this study, diversity is about the mix of people you have within the organisation and inclusion is making the choice to integrate everybody to collaborate, innovate and problem solve using the various skills and backgrounds available. Organisations must be clear that in order to do this, no one programme, communication or signal will make this happen, it's a labour of consistent messaging, change in behaviour from the top and ultimately rewarding those who encompass it on a daily basis. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. Although this study found that the majority of participant's experienced IL traits overall and found themselves engaged, a minority of participants had the very opposite experience and did not see IL traits from their leader. Given the importance of D & I for the organisation, the researcher has two recommendations that will include all people managers within the workforce to fully embrace inclusion via behaviours and IL.

### **6.2.1 Inclusive leadership training**

As a first step, the researcher recommends that the organisation provides formal practical training for all leaders on IL, to help them understand the business case for D & I, the organisation benefits and provide practical tools for leaders on how to be an inclusive leader on a day to day basis. Leaders need to understand the why and then take away examples of how they might foster inclusion when it comes to decision making, challenging groupthink. The benefits of a formal IL training programme will address some of the findings within this study, such as, the importance of seeking perspective of those around them, leaders need to realise that if their teams are given this opportunity, not only will it impact positively on the individual, the team as a whole performs well and the leader benefits from an effectively thriving team. Another benefit, will be to teach leaders how to be self-aware, understanding how to acknowledge and understand that it's okay for them to have limitations and not be afraid to utilise the skills and experience around them in certain situations.

The study found that leaders of this organisation don't necessarily address or show their vulnerabilities or take stock in how people may view their actions when they make decisions without fully understanding the entire picture. Encompassed within the programme will be topics that discuss the importance of recognising unconscious bias such as similarity bias and stereotypes. Although the study found that leaders generally acted with bias in mind, reinforcing the various types of bias and how they play out in decision making inclusive, recruitment, performance management etc. is imperative to leaders fostering inclusion in every aspect of their role.

The training programme will have a heavy focus on practical tips and tricks on what being an inclusive leader means in action. To imbed such behaviour, the training will provide examples on best practice behaviours to ensure leaders know how to behave inclusively, so they can measure if they are creating an environment that is open, non-judgemental and fosters an inclusive environment for all.



### **6.2.2 Unconscious bias training**

The organisation must not ignore that including all people managers is critical to imbedding an inclusive culture. It is recommended that as a second phase approach, the organisation rolls out unconscious bias training for all current and newly recruited people managers, through a well-designed e-learning module, which can be completed as a desk top exercise. This module will help to create awareness and provoke thoughts and conversation on the impact of bias.

Below in table 4 you will see a breakdown of the two recommended training programmes, which the researcher advises is developed and implemented with a third party in terms of developing the content, delivering the training and providing any relevant materials required.

<b><u>Summary of recommendations</u></b>				
<b>Inclusive Leadership Training (first phase)</b>				
<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Summary of content</b>	<b>Durati on</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Leaders (120)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business case for D &amp; I</li> <li>• What it means to be inclusive</li> <li>• Unconscious bias</li> <li>• Practical tips on how to be an inclusive leader</li> </ul>	2 x half days	€280pp	<b>1.</b> Approach provider and develop content <b>(Jan 2020- May 2020)</b> <b>2.</b> Review and refine content and training material <b>(Jun 2020)</b> <b>3.</b> Roll out training <b>(Aug 2020-Nov 2020)</b>
<b>Cost</b>			<b>€33,600</b>	
<b>Unconscious Bias- e-learning module (second phase)</b>				
All people managers (600)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding bias</li> <li>• Where bias might appear</li> <li>• Testing understanding throughout Practical take-ways on how to be cognisant of bias</li> </ul>	Online e-learning module <i>20 minutes to complete</i>	€70pp	<b>1.</b> Approach provider and develop content <b>(Nov 2020- Feb 2020)</b> <b>2.</b> Review/ refine content & pilot <b>(Mar 2020)</b> <b>3.</b> Roll out training across all existing and recruited people mangers <b>(May 2020)</b>
<b>Cost</b>			<b>€42,000</b>	
<b><u>Total cost</u></b>			<b><u>€75,600</u></b>	

Table 4- Breakdown of training content, costs and indicative timelines

### **6.3 Further research**

Theorists have stressed the importance of further studies in this area to extend the understanding of how leadership impacts employee's interaction and engagement at work. This study reacted to that call to action and provided an insight on solely how IL has a direct impact on EE, collecting data in a qualitative form, within an Irish organisations. In light of this studies limitations, and to further the research on IL and EE, it is believed that research in the form of a mixed method approach could be applied within the organisation, wherein questionnaires are administered to staff and a sample population are interviewed, for more rich informative responses. This would be beneficial as it would create a more reliable picture and more accurate reflection of the organisations current landscape, further adding to this study's findings the existing IL and EE literature.

## **6.4 Personal learning statement**

The last two years completing my HR Masters part time has been a great learning curve, with many new skills and knowledge acquired along the way. In particular, completing this dissertation has opened my eyes to the world of research and an appreciation for the many research articles and studies I have read over my two years of study. I decided to focus on the topic of D & I as it heavily links to my current role and I believed that researching any topic within this area would have a dual benefit. Throughout the completion of the dissertation, there were some sacrifices to be made, firstly the time commitment involved with balancing full time work and evening studies was an adjustment, along with setting aside time for study and assignments in the evenings and weekends. However, this journey has thought me many things, including the level of personal commitment and dedication, I needed to give to my studies and the extent of the personal sacrifices I had to make. Overall, the wealth of experience I gained through research, writing each chapter with a defined purpose and having to learn how to present my primary research findings had been challenging, yet very rewarding from an educational point of view, which has increased my confidence undertaking studies at this level. Furthermore, I am more confident in my ability in my current role, in terms of researching and presenting my findings on other D & I topics.

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# Appendix 1 -Ethical Review Application Form

## National College of Ireland

### Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form

All parts of the below form must be completed. However in certain cases where sections are not relevant to the proposed study, clearly mark NA in the box provided.

#### Part A: Title of Project and Contact Information

**Name**

Sinead O'Brien

**Student Number (if applicable)**

17148189

**Email**

Sinead.obrien21@outlook.com

**Status:**

Undergraduate

**Postgraduate**

Staff

**Supervisor (if applicable)**

Supervisors will be assigned in March 2019

**Title of Research Project**

The effects of inclusive leadership traits on employee engagement, in a financial services organisation in Ireland

**Category into which the proposed research falls (see guidelines)**

**Research Category A**

Research Category B

Research Category C

**Have you read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants?**

Yes

No

**Please indicate any other ethical guidelines or codes of conduct you have consulted**

NA

**Has this research been submitted to any other research ethics committee?**

Yes

No

If yes please provide details, and the outcomes of this process, if applicable:

NA

**Is this research supported by any form of research funding?**

Yes

No

If yes please provide details, and indicate whether any restrictions exist on the freedom of the researcher to publish the results:

NA

## Part B: Research Proposal

Briefly outline the following information (not more than 200 words in any section).

### **Proposed starting date and duration of project**

A supervisor will be assigned to this research study in March 2019, with a due date of Aug 2019.

### **The rationale for the project**

Drawing on the literature of (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010) and (Choi, Tran and Park, 2015), inclusive leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement in some shape or form. With organisations investing heavily in diversity and inclusive, specifically inclusive leadership training, this study is proposing to add to the literature by way of further understand the link between inclusive leadership and employee engagement, in a Irish context and specifically in a financial service organisation, in the hope of ratifying the need for such time and investment into considering inclusive leadership as a key focus for organisations.

### **The research aims and objectives**

This research aims to find out what inclusive leadership traits directly affect how employees are engaged at work. This will advise on what traits and behaviours negatively and/or positively drive employee engagement levels.

### **The research design**

The research design will look firstly at literature on inclusive leadership and employee engagement, this will form the basis of the secondary research. Secondly, primary research will then be conducted via a qualitative method of research which will take the form of interviews in a particular organisation. As this topic is based on behavioural studies, there will be a need to take an interpretivist approach in order to gain insight information that will be based on emotion and lived experiences. A thematic analysis will then ensue to draw out themes from the interview answers.

### **The research sample and sample size**

**Please indicate the sample size and your justification of this sample size. Describe the age range of participants, and whether they belong to medical groups (those currently receiving medical treatment, those not in remission from previous medical treatment, those recruited because of a previous medical condition, healthy controls recruited for a medical study) or clinical groups (those undergoing non-medical treatment such as counselling, psychoanalysis, in treatment centres, rehabilitation centres, or similar, or those with a DSM disorder diagnosis).**

The research sample will include between 6-8 employees (age not applicable) from across the organisation, with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise. The employees will be line managers and non-line managers to get a sense of leadership traits at all levels across the business. The interviews will follow a semi-structured interview approach in order to collate perspectives from those and allow for flexibility within the interview which may bring out some richer themes.

**If the study involves a MEDICAL or CLINICAL group, the following details are required:**

- a) **Do you have approval from a hospital/medical/specialist ethics committee?**

**If YES, please append the letter of approval. Also required is a letter from a clinically responsible authority at the host institution, supporting the study, detailing the support mechanisms in place for individuals who may become distressed as a result of participating in the study, and the potential risk to participants.**

**If NO, please detail why this approval cannot or has not been sought.**

- b) Does the study impact on participant's medical condition, wellbeing, or health?**

**If YES, please append a letter of approval from a specialist ethics committee.**

**If NO, please give a detailed explanation about why you do not expect there to be an impact on medical condition, wellbeing, or health.**

**The nature of any proposed pilot study. Pilot studies are usually required if a) a new intervention is being used, b) a new questionnaire, scale or item is being used, or c) established interventions or questionnaires, scales or items are being used on a new population. If no such study is planned, explain why it is not necessary.**

NA

**The methods of data analysis. Give details here of the analytic process (e.g. the statistical procedures planned if quantitative, and the approach taken if qualitative. It is not sufficient to name the software to be used).**

Research method will take the form of a qualitative approach and the data analysis will be via thematic coding on the content within the interview responses.



### **Study Procedure**

**Please give as detailed an account as possible of a participant's likely experience in engaging with the study, from point of first learning about the study, to study completion. State how long project participation is likely to take, and whether participants will be offered breaks. Please attach all questionnaires, interview schedules, scales, surveys, and demographic questions, etc. in the Appendix.**

**NA- unknown at proposal stage**

### **Part C: Ethical Risk**

**Please identify any ethical issues or risks of harm or distress which may arise during the proposed research, and how you will address this risk. Here you need to consider the potential for physical risk, social risk (i.e. loss of social status, privacy, or reputation), outside of that expected in everyday life, and whether the participant is likely to feel distress as a result of taking part in the study. Debriefing sheets must be included in the appendix if required.** These should detail the participant's right to withdraw from the study, the statutory limits upon confidentiality, and the obligations of the researcher in relation to Freedom of Information legislation. Debriefing sheets should also include details of helplines and avenues for receiving support in the event that participants become distressed as a result of their involvement in this study.

There are no known ethical issues or risks of harm or distress which may arise during the proposed research.

**Do the participants belong to any of the following vulnerable groups?**

(Please tick all those involved).

- Children;
- The very elderly;
- People with an intellectual or learning disability
- Individuals or groups receiving help through the voluntary sector
- Those in a subordinate position to the researchers such as employees
- Other groups who might not understand the research and consent process
- Other vulnerable groups

**No**

**How will the research participants in this study be selected, approached and recruited? From where will participants be recruited? If recruiting via an institution or organisation other than NCI please attach a letter of agreement from the host institution agreeing to host the study and circulate recruitment advertisements/email etc.**

Participants will be selected based on their difference of departments locations across the organisation and if they are a line manager or not. Further details on how to approach and letters of agreement have not yet been considered at this proposal stage.

**What inclusion or exclusion criteria will be used?**

NA

**How will participants be informed of the nature of the study and participation?**

NA- unknown at proposal stage

**Does the study involve deception or the withholding of information? If so, provide justification for this decision.**

No

**What procedures will be used to document the participants' consent to participate?**

A consent form will be provided to all interviewees to ensure fully consented participation in this study- further information is not known at this proposal stage

**Can study participants withdraw at any time without penalty? If so, how will this be communicated to participants?**

Yes- further information is not known at this proposal stage

**If vulnerable groups are participating, what special arrangements will be made to deal with issues of informed consent/assent?**

NA

*Please include copies of any information letters, debriefing sheets, and consent forms with the application.*

#### Part D: Confidentiality and Data Protection

**Please indicate the form in which the data will be collected.**

Identified                       Potentially Identifiable                       **De-Identified**

**What arrangements are in place to ensure that the identity of participants is protected?**

NA- unknown at proposal stage

**Will any information about illegal behaviours be collected as part of the research process? If so, detail your consideration of how this information will be treated.**

No

**Please indicate any recording devices being used to collect data (e.g. audio/video).**

Audio device will be used to collect responses during interview.

**Please describe the procedures for securing specific permission for the use of these recording devices in advance.**

Permission will be sought to audio record interview- further information is not known at this proposal stage

**Please indicate the form in which the data will be stored.**

Identified                   Potentially Identifiable                   De-Identified

**Who will have responsibility for the data generated by the research?**

The research will assume responsibility for the data gathered during the study

Is there a possibility that the data will be archived for secondary data analysis? If so, has this been included in the informed consent process? Also include information on how and where the data will be stored for secondary analytic purposes.

If not to be stored for secondary data analysis, will the data be stored for 5 years and then destroyed, in accordance with NCI policy?

Yes     No NA

**Dissemination and Reporting**

**Please describe how the participants will be informed of dissemination and reporting (e.g. submission for examination, reporting, publications, presentations)?**

NA- unknown at proposal stage

**If any dissemination entails the use of audio, video and/or photographic records (including direct quotes), please describe how participants will be informed of this in advance.**

**NA- unknown at proposal stage**

**Part E: Signed Declaration**

I confirm that I have read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants, and agree to abide by them in conducting this research. I also confirm that the information provided on this form is correct.

**Signature of Applicant: Sinead O'Brien**

**Date 27 January 2019**

**Signature of Supervisor (where appropriate):**

**Date \_\_\_\_\_**

## Appendix 2 -Dissertation approval

Dear XXX

I wanted to reach out to you first my email and happy to have a chat whenever you are free next week. I am currently completing my MA in Human Resource Management with the National College of Ireland (NCI) and as part of my final year, I am tasked with doing a dissertation on a topic of my choice.

I wanted to keep the theme D&I related and through doing some research I started to delve into IL and then found myself reading research papers on IL and its link to EE which sparked my interest! In light of that, my topic of choice is IL and EE and what I want to uncover in my research is ‘inclusive leadership and its link to EE in a financial organisation in Dublin’. This topic has been approved by NCI Ethics committee and my supervisor is happy to support this piece of work.

I have completed a review of the literature in this area and landed on a decision that in order for me to research this topic further, I need to conduct qualitative face to face interviews, which I would like to undertake within the Bank. This research would be completely anonymous and I am proposing to conduct 10 anonymous in-depth interviews to explore this topic further. The participants I would like to interview are those at the middle management layer across the Bank who have regular access to leaders, to try and understand the level of IL they experience with their managers and how this impacts on their EE levels. All personal details such as names and departments etc. will be kept anonymous and I will not be asking individuals to disclose their manager’s name through the process. I would also be obtaining explicit consent from the individuals involved.

I am hoping to obtain your approval to progress with this research in this organisation. The findings will be used solely for the purpose of my dissertation but I’m hoping that it might provide me with further insights in this space which will be of benefit to me in my current role.

Thank you, Sinead O’Brien.

## Appendix 3 -Participant consent form

The Effects of Inclusive Leadership on Employee Engagement in a Financial Services Organisation in Dublin

For a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland

- 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 in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves partaking in an audio recorded face to face interview, lasting approx. 45 minutes within the premises of the organisation.
- 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 changing my name and 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 within the dissertation only.

- 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 folder on the researchers PC, with the researcher and assigned access only having access. The data will remain on file in line with [NCI's retention policy](#) and will be destroyed when the exam board confirms the results of this dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for in line with [NCI's retention policy](#), which is two years from the date of the exam board awarding this dissertation.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation 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.

**Signature and date of research participant**

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**Signature and date of researcher**

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

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## Appendix 4 -Pilot interview schedule

### **Inclusive leadership**

1. **Curiosity:** Can you describe your manager's approach when it comes to being open with you/your team to support you in your role?
2. **Curiosity:** Can you tell me if your manager is open to embracing what others have to say and respectful of what others can bring?
3. **Cultural:** Can you explain how your manager works with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?
4. **Collaboration:** Describe the level of autonomy your manager gives to you in order for you to make decisions within your own role and on issues that impact your work?
5. **Collaboration:** Describe how your manager manages the cohesion of your team and what environment that creates? E.g. is everybody given an opportunity to be heard?
6. **Commitment:** Does your manager promote the importance of diversity and inclusion and make decisions such as team compilation based on D & I?
7. **Courage:** How do you view your managers acknowledgment of their own strengths and weakness and how do they relay this you and the team?
8. **Cognizance of bias:** What is your perception of your manager's personal biases? Do they make fair decisions on things regardless of their own personal style/preference (researcher will provide an example)

## **Engagement**

9. **Leadership-** Does your manager make it clear to you on how your role fits within the organisation?
10. **Engaging managers-** Does your manager commend you for your efforts and contributions
11. **Engaging managers-** Do you feel valued and supported in your job
12. **Employee voice-** Are you enabled to be involved in decision making on things that effect your role/job?
13. **Integrity-** Do you feel the organisation lives its values giving you a sense of trust and loyalty?
14. How do you feel your level of engagement is impacted by your mangers behaviours? What could your manger do, if anything, to increase your level of engagement (if applicable)

## Appendix 5 -Final interview schedule

### Inclusive leadership

1. **Curiosity:** Can you describe your manager's approach when it comes to being open in relation to how they actively seek the perspective of others?
2. **Curiosity:** Can you tell me if your manager is respectful in their questioning of others as they try to better understand their viewpoint?
3. **Culturally intelligent:** Can you tell me a little bit about how your manager behaves when there are different cultures to consider, be it in your team, in a meeting room/project setting etc.?
4. **Collaboration: Managers are there to set the scene, give the overall high level goals of the role etc.,** can you describe the level of autonomy your manager gives to you in order for you to make decisions within your own role?
5. **Collaboration:** Can you tell me if your manager creates an environment that ensures team members respect each other and that there are no outgroups?
6. **Commitment:** D&I takes commitment from managers, can you explain if your managers shows their commitment to D&I, through how they treat others- respect and value their uniqueness?
7. **Courage:** How do you view your managers acknowledgment of their own strengths and weakness and how do they relay this you and the team?
8. **Cognizance of bias:** What is your perception of your manager's personal biases? Do they make merit based decisions

### **Employee engagement**

9. **Leadership-** How would you describe how management explain how your role fits within the organisation?
10. **Engaging managers-** What is your view on how you are made feel valued and supported in your job
11. **Engaging managers-** Can you tell me if generally you are commended for your efforts and contributions
12. **Employee voice-** Can you tell me if you feel your voice is heard and your opinion is valued?
13. **Integrity-** Do you feel the organisation lives its values giving you a sense of trust and loyalty?
14. Do you believe your level of engagement is impacted by your managers behaviours?
15. Is there anything else you think impacts employee engagement that hasn't already been mentioned?
16. Based on everything we spoke about and considering the leadership traits, do you think your leader is an inclusive leader
17. Based on everything we thing we spoke about around EE, would you say you are **Engaged, not engaged, disengaged** – Why?
18. Lastly, any final comments you would like to make?

**Thank you for your participation, it is greatly appreciated.**

(Transcripts can be made available on request)