# Assessing Employee Engagement, as a Result of Rewards and Benefits Across a Multi-Generational Workforce in Ireland.

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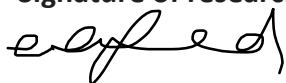
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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the rewards and benefits wanted across a multi-generational workforce in Ireland in respect of employee engagement. The aim of the research is to see whether rewards and benefits given to employees affect the engagement levels of same. These benefits come in the form of extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, flexible working options, and choice of benefits. This study uses a quantitative method in respect of distributing an anonymous survey to a sample of the population using the Work Value's Instrument devised by Lechner et al., (2018). and the Utrecht Employee Engagement Scale- 9 devised by Schaufeli et al., (2006) as inspiration in the formulation of said survey. The results are analysed using SPSS-27. The results received from this survey correspond with previous literature in most ways, and show that intrinsic/ extrinsic rewards, flexible working options and choice in benefits are wanted across all generations.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the effect rewards and benefits have on the engagement of employees, across a multi-generational workforce in Ireland.

An engaged workforce has been seen to have many benefits to an organisation such as: increased retention rates, loyalty, and productivity in one's role (Bussin, 2014).

It is essential in ensuring that the organisation can instil creativity, maintain/increase productivity and generate revenue for the business and should employee engagement be lacking within the organisation, these extremely important constructs may be hindered as a result (Brown et al, 2013).

It is seen that an engaged workforce show 22% higher productivity levels compared to that of a non-engaged workforce (Baldoni, 2013) and productivity is key. Productivity is the cog that keeps the organisation profitable.

Employee engagement has been a topic of research for many years. Research has been carried out on the effects that the generational differences may have on the needs and wants of employees from their organisation to ensure an engaged workforce. Reward and benefits has been seen to influence the engagement levels of employees in organisations, however many organisations  often look to match competitors strategies in regards to reward-engagement coalition rather than focusing on their own individual employees needs and desires from a reward perspective (Brown et al, 2013).  There are many different aspects which come in to play in aligning the right strategies for reward and benefits that organisations need to take in to account, one major aspect of this is age of their employees, and how this corresponds to their individual needs and wants (Brown et al, 2013). Research has been carried out relating to the silent generation, the baby boomers, generation X and generation Y (also known as millennials) in respect of the field of employee engagement

and reward management. The latest mass entry of a generation into a workforce was generation Y, however, the presence of the next generation, generation Z can be seen in organisations and they will be the next cohort to enter the workforce for the next number of years. Each generation is seen to have a different mindset to that of their predecessors (which will be discussed in the forthcoming literature review), and generation Z is no different, therefore an understanding of their fundamental needs and wants in an organisation, so that engagement can be fostered and nurtured from the beginning is essential (Mahmoud, et al. 2020).

As depicted by Schullery (2013) the age brackets for these generations would be the following:

- The silent generation: 1925-1945

- Baby Boomers: 1946- 1964

- Generation X: 1965-1981

- Generation Y (Millennials): 1982-1999

- Generation Z: 1999- 2012.

There has also been a lot of research done regarding whether these age brackets are accurate, or whether the start of a new generation could be sooner than the proposed dates above. This will be explored in more detail throughout the literature review.

## 1.2 Background of study

As depicted by Schullery (2013) there are many benefits to ensuring an engaged workforce such as: a higher level of revenue, reduced turnover, product quality, and improved customer service, therefore understanding the needs and wants for each generational cohort in respect of

rewards and benefits will greatly affect the quality of work that they do, and their loyalty to an organisation. According to Gupta & Sharma (2016)  the components that come together to create an engaged workforce are pay and benefits, autonomy, well-being, a right to an opinion, training and development opportunities, communication, health and safety, equal opportunities among others.

We can see the research beginning to take shape on generation Z, but this research is limited and there is more scope to see whether reward and benefits influence the baby boomers, generations X, Y and Z's engagement levels.  In the forthcoming literature review we will see the reasons this research is needed, due to the growing presence of multiple generations in the workforce in Ireland. Research regarding the older generations such as baby boomers generations X and Y flood the databases (Mencl et al, 2014). There are many studies regarding engagement in the workforce also, such as Saks, 2006; Yang et al. 2018, Maslach et al. 2001; Pilbeam et al. 2010 etc. but there is little research done on the engagement of different generations, especially generation Z. We can now see researchers such as Chilakuri (2020) and Mahmoud (2020) take on the perplexities of the generational differences, incorporating generation Z.

Today's market is a highly competitive one. There is such a war for key talent amongst organisations that retention of said talent is vital in order to remain advantageous. It is understood that an engaged and motivated team, is going to increase the retention rates in an organisation (Glen, 2006). In order to increase employee engagement within an organisation, employers must understand what it is their employees want and need. This cannot be a one size fits all approach as there are many different generations within the workforce, with the widest distribution of generations seen in the workforce to date (Burton et al, 2019).

As will be seen throughout the remainder of this research, each generation relies on different motivating factors in their employment in order to see increased engagement to one's role,

therefore it is imperative that organisations are aware of the differing requirements from each generational cohort (Mahmoud, et al. 2020).

There is scope for identifying how reward and benefits effect the engagement levels of the different cohorts across a multi-generational workforce.

## 1.3 Research objectives and questions

This research will look at the needs and wants of each generational cohort in respect of rewards and benefits, and attempt to establish a correlation between rewards and benefits and engagement levels amongst the Irish workforce.

We will look at the following generations Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z predominately. We will work through quantifiable analysis to establish which rewards and benefits (if any) produce an engaged and loyal workforce.

## 1.4 Rationale for this study

Employee engagement is seen to be one of the most influential aspects of creating and fostering a successful organisation and to have an engaged workforce, greatly increases the chances of the retention of said workforce, which is essential in remaining competitive in today's market (Eversole et al. 2012).

According to Baldoni (2013) organisations with a higher engagement have double the rate of success compared to that of their lesser engaged competitors. Majority of organisations know the benefits of employee engagement, but still very few have strategies in place to excel in this department, one must ask why? This particular field is so vast in nature, with many different facets of research that many organisations don't know what to incorporate in to their strategies. Generational differences are something that each organisation is going to have to incorporate

into their engagement strategies as different generations will always be coming in to the workforce, people are changing every day, month and year based off of their respective generation and their needs and their wants are constantly adapting to the changes in the world and this means that organisations need to be flexible in their approach of reward and benefits. This research will look at the rewards and benefits which could be given to employees in order to foster an engaged workforce across multiple generations (Eversole, et al. 2012), as it is seen that rewards and benefits can have a big impact on employee engagement within an organisation (Duncan & Reilly, 2013).

Generational differences are very quickly becoming a talked about subject. This topic of conversation can not only be found in the workplace, but throughout social media channels, news outlets and in general day to day conversation. The new generations coming up in the world tend to fascinate the other cohorts as they are seen as this group that has come to alter the ways we work, socialise and carry out our day to day living (McCall, 2019).

This research will look at these differences from an analytical point of view so that organisations will be able to identity what is needed going forward, to engage employees in their work, whilst also building on the existing literature around generation Z.

## 1.5 Methodology

A quantitative approach would see the best results for this study. Quantitative research is best used when you need to categorise, measure or rank and that is what is intended of this study: to measure the engagement levels of each generation through the ranking of different statements in order to assess their needs and wants regarding rewards and benefits (McCombes, 2020).

There are many different studies which have demonstrated the use of quantitative research in order to show the differences between engagement levels, rewards, retention, and the different

generations. This can be seen in the sense of an anonymous survey or questionnaire distributed to the sample of the population (Mahmoud, 2020; Yang et al. 2017; Mencl et al. 2014; Tang, 2020; Schaufeli et al. 2020; Saks, 2006). We will aim to have as large a sample size as possible so that a positive correlation or inverse correlation between rewards, benefits and engagement can be identified with a level of certainty. With this dissertation being heavily influenced by different ages and generations, it is important that this is taken into account when distributing the survey, as there will need to be a variation of ages present in the respondents. It is the aim of the researcher to distribute the aforementioned survey via social networking sites, such as LinkedIn so that as wide an audience as possible can be reached. The intended questionnaire will use a Likert scale so that participants can rank their reflection of the statements laid out in the questionnaire on a scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' up to and including 'Strongly Agree' (Saks, 2006). The surveys used as inspiration for this study are the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale- scale 9 devised by Schaufeli et al., (2006) and the Work Values Instrument questionnaire devised by Lechner et al., (2018).

We will then use SPSS statistical software to calculate the results (Omilion- Hodges et al., 2019).

**1.6 Dissertation structure.**

**Chapter One- Introduction:**

Chapter one will outline the dissertation topic at hand and provide an overview of the current literature to date. It will show the importance of employee engagement and why rewards and benefits are an important research topic in regards to improving or hindering employee engagement. It will address the background of this study, the rationale for this research, the proposed research questions and hypothesis and the intended methodology.

**Chapter Two- Literature Review:**

Chapter two will concentrate on the literature seen on employee engagement, rewards and benefits and generational cohorts and their differences to date. We will look at the research obtained regarding each generations varying requirement from a reward and benefits perspective, employee engagement and the reasonings it is necessary to have high engagement levels, the different types of rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic and the different theories already developed within this field of study.

**Chapter Three- Methodology:**

Chapter three will show the methods in which the research was carried out. It will demonstrate the different reasonings for carrying out quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire and the approach in which the study will be carried out. Details of sample size and distribution will be demonstrated here also.

**Chapter Four- Analysis:**

Chapter four will look at the results of said questionnaire and analytically draw a conclusion from the data presented from the responses to the questionnaire. The research questions and hypothesis within this chapter will be analysed and ascertained as to whether they are in standing with the results depicted.

**Chapter Five- Conclusion and Recommendations:**

In chapter five will draw the dissertation to a close by looking at the varying results from chapter four, corresponding with the literature review and recommendations will be made for organisations in regards to employee engagement across a multi-generational workforce and how reward and benefits play a part in this. Recommendations will then be made regarding

what reward and benefit strategies an organisation may wish to consider to foster a health

engagement level.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

Throughout this literature review the literature which is seen to date in regards to employee engagement, generational classification and rewards and benefits will be discussed. The initial conversation will first look at the definition of a generation, the different variations of generations and their corresponding needs and wants. This literature review will also look at the breakdown of age groups in the republic of Ireland, identifying the largest generational makeup and the number of students currently enrolled in Irish educational institutions; which will in turn show the need for this study due to the impact said people will have on an organisation. Employee engagement and it's various definitions, it's importance and it's theories regarding reward and benefits will then be discussed. Reward and benefits will then be looked at and the different types of rewards present in society to date. Definitions and different theories involving them will then be discussed along with why their importance in organisations should not be diminished. This literature review will be heavily based on the existing literature surrounding rewards, benefits and engagement so that a direct correlation in the importance of rewards and benefits and employee engagement can be established prior to the methodological chapter where they will be examined to assess their accuracy.

### 2.2 Generational cohorts

A generation can be defined as an: "identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages". Kupperschimdt (2000, pg.66). It is a corresponding effect of the significant events that occur in the world at a particular time. It has been argued by Mencl et al (2014) that a generations mindset is shaped based off of world

events, phenomenon and trends. These can stem from economic matters, political movements, advances in technology and medicine, and disasters of a natural and manmade making. It is argued that the silent generation (1925-1954) was greatly shaped by the two world wars. This cohort of people were either born and raised in a world war, and spent majority of their young lives in the midst of economic turmoil due to the corresponding effects of said wars- this would of corresponded with working long hours, shaping their children who went on to be the baby boomers (1946-1964). Generation X would be next who saw the beginning of the technological age and generation Y would have experienced a need for a more diverse and accepting environment (Mencl et al. 2014).

As with each generation there have been travesties and advancements associated with each cohort, it is inevitable that generations will hold a different stand point on some of their views (Chawala et al, 2017). As with the predecessors of generation Z there are many aspects which have shaped and continue to shape the newest cohort of workers, from the threat of terrorism in many parts of the world, the economic downturn of the 2007/2008 crash (Chalofsky et al 2009), the rise of social media and technological devises, which completely shaped many of their childhoods (Burton et al, 2019), climate change is more evident than ever, giving life to movements by people as young as primary school children marching the streets for change, equality movements such as equal pay for women and Black Lives Matter, along with the current global pandemic of Covid-19 (Napoli, 2020). All of these events and movements are shaping generation Z and their requirements for a stable and sustainable working environment, therefore it is quite clear that there is a need to understand their mindset so that engagement can be analysed based off of what is important for each generation from a reward perspective. It has been seen throughout the literature that the generational mindset does not simply shift overnight, but that it is a gradual crossover from one generation to the next, meaning that certain attributes that are associated with one particular generation may have snippets of the same

attributes in the corresponding generations, due to this gradual change (Brink et al. 2019). For example, Schullery (2013) states that the millennial generation did not begin in 1982 as often thought but may have begun as early as 1977, this could also be argued for generation Z: instead of this cohort commencing in 1999, it may have begun as early as 1994. This would henceforth increase the number of generation Z currently in the workforce with the oldest now being twenty six years old. This would broaden the scope of data significantly (Chillakuri, 2020). Generational cohorts are generally categorized into fifteen-year (or more) gaps; however, it is unrealistic to think that fifteen years does not have an impact on the outlook of a person. The world is accelerating and shifting at a much faster rate than ever before, therefore information, experiences and attitudes will be shifting much quicker as a result. Those at the oldest end of the generational makeup would have different life experiences and attitudes to those at the youngest end of the spectrum.  This bridges a gap for the concept of micro-generations, or cusp generations (Napoli, 2020). From a millennial and generation Z point of view, those at the end of the millennial era could be categorised as Zennial; incorporating attributes of both millennial and generation Z.

One hundred people were recently surveyed by WGSN (2020) and the results showed that 60% of these individuals aged between twenty-two and twenty-eight said that generations should be categorised in shorter periods of time, rather than the current fifteen years. (Napoli, 2020). From this we can see that it is important to take this change in perspective into account as, should a change in attitudes be present within generations, the change in reward and benefits required by said age groups can shift also.

 This approach will be used as part of this research to ensure that this potential crossover in generations is taken into account, it will also increase the availability of data of generation Z in the workforce, increasing the age demographic of generation Z to the oldest potentially being

26 years old. As part of the primary research these generational differences as seen above will be tested to explore how participants are impacted by reward and benefits.

**2.3 Breakdown of age groups in the Republic of Ireland**

During the 2016 census carried out by the Central Statistics Office, the largest cohort of people within the Republic of Ireland are ages 25-64 years old with 2,541,294 people within this cohort (generation X and Y), the next highest is 65+ at 637,567 people (silent generation and parts of baby boomers) and then 19-24 year olds populated the country in 2016 at 331,208 (generation Z) (CSO, 2017). This is a significant amount of people in the workforce to date who would be contributing to the engagement levels of the organisation, generation Z is growing in numbers each year with a vast amount of individuals in college or educational systems awaiting the end of courses in order to commence in the workplace. According to the student demographic statistics for the year 2018/2019 produced by the Higher Education Authority there are 227,677 students enrolled in third level education within those years. It shows that 121,175 female students, and 106,502 male students were enrolled, with 34% of said students over the age of twenty three, leaving 66% of students between the ages of 17-23 present in educational institutions. From this we can see that there is already a strong presence of generation Z in the workplace and it is continuing to grow yearly, therefore a study which incorporates generation Z is imperative so that a company can continue to establish effective reward and benefit strategies to fit their corresponding needs in order to ensure engagement levels remain high. Emerging from the above, a fundamental objective of the primary research is to carry out a study on the above age groups in respect of rewards and benefits and whether their engagement levels are influenced by the same.

## 2.4 Employee engagement

There are many different definitions of employee engagement used from different scholars but as put by Saks (2006) it is the extent of attention and absorption given by employees in their performance in any particular role.

Employee engagement is of great importance to not only the organisation, but the individual employee. It has been seen to enhance performance, mental and physical well-being and retention within the organisation (Yang et al. 2018). It is often thought that the employer-employee relationship is a one way system, meaning that employers want their employees to perform to standard, continue their professional development and remain loyal to the organisation, but it is a more co-dependent relationship that is needed.

Along with the employee performing their duties to the organisation it is also expected that employees receive professional development opportunities, and rewards and feedback on performance (Chilakuri, 2020). Four aspects of work were identified by Paul et al (2004) as having the most significant link to loyalty to one's organisation, these being: development opportunities, appraisal, training and friendly work environment.

Today's market is a highly competitive one. There is such a war for key talent amongst organisations that retention of said talent is vital in order to remain advantageous. It is understood that an engaged and motivated team, is going to increase the retention rates in an organisation (Glen, 2006). In order to increase employee engagement within an organisation, employers must understand what it is their employees want and need.

A high level of engagement and job satisfaction can stem from the reward and benefit schemes within an organisation (Vidal- Salazar, 2016). This cannot be a one size fits all approach as there are many different generations within the workforce, with the widest distribution of generations seen in the workforce to date (Burton et al, 2019). As will be seen throughout the

remainder of this research, each generation relies on different motivating factors in their employment in order to see increased engagement to one's role, therefore it is imperative that organisations are aware of the differing requirements from each generational cohort (Mahmoud, et al. 2020).

It is very clear that there is a lot of literature regarding the benefits of employee engagement, not only from an organisational point of view, but from an employee point of view also. A topic that is not as widely spoken about is the negative points of employee engagement. It can be seen that employees who are highly engaged can be at a greater risk of burnout and turnover (Seppala & Moellar, 2018). Burnout can often show itself in the form of physical and mental exhaustion, insomnia and depression; this is due to increase stress levels from being highly engaged and striving for goals within your job. This is something that needs to be considered when trying to promote high levels of engagement within the organisation, as should burnout be the result from your engaged employees there will be a much higher risk of staff turnover of some of your more dedicated employees, which in turn would have an overall negative impact on organisational success.

In a study carried out at Yale University (Moeller et al.2018) , researchers examined the optimally engaged vs the engaged- exhausted employees to show that those who were optimally- engaged reported large amounts of resources given to employees, such as supervisor support, self-efficiency, but more interestingly high levels of reward and recognition. It can be seen from this study that high levels of resources for employees can lead to employees being optimally engaged rather than engaged- exhausted, which inevitably leads to burnout and turnover (Seppala & Moellar, 2018). This is an interesting concept to take into the remainder of the research as we have seen the positive effects of employee engagement but now we must be aware of the negative aspects of it, and how these negativities can be diminished in the form of offering high resources for employees including reward and benefits.  This concept of

negative connotations arising from employee engagement is purely for informational purposes when considering the facts of employee engagement, so that organisations can be aware that robust measures are needed in establishing a balancing act between resources and workload. The benefits of employee engagement, when orchestrated correctly well outweigh the negatives. Since evidence points to many factors which have significant influence on employee engagement this is what will be studied as part of this research. The objective of this research is to distinguish the impact of reward and benefits on employee engagement across a multi-generational workforce.

## 2.5 Theories of employee engagement

There are many different theories which measure and analyse employee engagement, some of which will be discussed below. A select number of theories which will assist in this research objective will be outlined below, others will be discussed to build an understanding of the different variations of theories available to explore. Employee engagement itself, is in the very early stages of becoming a theory in its own right (Kwon & Park, 2019). One particular theory of employee engagement which is interesting to note is the idea of a trait-based (between-person process) and state-level (within-person process) as depicted by Kwon & Park (2019) as a means of understanding why certain employees are more engaged in their work compared to others, who may have the same job resources, benefits and cultural atmosphere encompassing them. In regards to the trait-based perspective, which would come down to their innate feelings and how that individual person feels, however the state-level perspective explains employee engagement as something that fluctuates in employees, rather than a constant state of engagement; which is interesting to note as within Human Resources one can be quick to

exclude the concept of the field in general; the human being. People's feelings change, and adapt, and their needs and wants can fluctuate depending on the different stages of life and that must be noted in employee engagement. What was wanted or needed by a group of employees five years ago, could have completely changed for them now; some could have decided to go back to education, start a family, take up a new hobby, get married, etc. and these different stages in one's life would alter what would be important for an individual from an organisation regarding rewards and benefits. This would fluctuate also due to the differing generational make up of employees also. Therefore, every organisation has a tough job in ensuring the needs of their employees are met, but they will also have to keep up with the necessary changes. An organisation is going to have to be flexible and adaptable in regard to rewards and benefits, so that this state-level concept, of employees fluctuating in and out of engagement can be minimised, so that engagement can be held all round (Kwon & Park, 2019).

Now looking at the organisation-public relationship paradigm as depicted by Jiang et al. (2020). This theory focuses on the shared goals of both the organisation and employee. This particular theory is very similar to that of the job demands- resources model which focuses on a more "give and take" from both organisation and employee (Jiang, et al. 2020). Similar to what was discussed earlier this theory would ensure that both employee and employer are receiving adequate return for their role in the dynamics of the employee- employer relationship and can be compared to the below Social Exchange Theory.

Saks (2006) propose the use of Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a model for employee engagement. SET looks at the co-dependence of the employer and employee as a means of "repaying" a benefit afforded to them. This could be seen with employees receiving a financial award or bonus, which would lead the employee to perform to the best of their ability as they attempt to return the benefit. Should the organisation limit the financial and non-financial

rewards, employees would begin to disengage from their work, eventually leading to decreased performance and a stronger chance of leaving (Saks, 2006).

It has also been argued by Maslach et al. (2001) that there are many different areas that lead to burnout and lack of engagement which are: rewards and recognition, social support, fairness, work place values, workload, control in one's role. For the purpose of this study rewards and benefits will be used as the main area of concentration. These theories will not be directly assessed within the survey detailed in the methodology chapter, they act as an informative piece so that awareness is gathered of the differing employee engagement theories that could be implemented within an organisation.

## 2.6 Rewards: Extrinsic and Intrinsic

As more and more companies set up bases in Ireland the war for talent increases significantly. The more organisations hiring, the more options candidates have in who they apply for, and whom they stay with. Rewards and benefits are not only seen to increase the attraction to an organisation but also the engagement in one's role, increasing the retention rate of an organisation (Vidal- Salazar et al, 2016). This war for talent is increasing the demands employees have as part of their benefit and reward package; therefore an understanding of what will engage a workforce is detrimental in the success of an organisation in today's climate. Reward and benefits are not purely based off of monetary benefits such as pay but incorporate non-monetary rewards also (Vidal- Salazar et al, 2016).

There are two main types of rewards: Extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic rewards are motivated purely from the feeling of completing a task, there is no external motivator involved where extrinsic rewards are linked to gaining something from having completed the task (Legault, 2017, Giancola, 2014). Extrinsic rewards involve the likes of pay, progression and

development opportunities, extra benefits such as health insurance, company car etc. These types of rewards can be across the board in an organisation or directly linked to an individual based on performance ( Wiersma, 1991).

 Intrinsic rewards are of a psychological nature, a reward gained from one's own view point: such as pride in your work, a feeling of progression, trust in the organisation, recognition from the organisation etc. (Thomas, et al.,2009).

When looking at intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, there is some debate as to whether HR departments focus too much on extrinsic rather than the exponentially cheaper alternative intrinsic rewards (Giancola, 2014, Wiersma, 1991).

A survey conducted by SHRM (2010) shows the importance different motivators played for employees. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators were measured and the results were interesting showing that the following rewards were seen to have the most standing in increasing job satisfaction: trust and openness, and  flexible working were seen as the two top aspects in regards to rewards attracting and retaining talent. Other rewards that were cited as important were the offering of a total reward package and career advancement opportunities (Giancola, 2014).

The roll out of reward systems would have to heavily depend on the size of the organisation, as a smaller organisation would not be able to compete with a large multi-national in regards to rewards, therefore should an organisation have significantly less funds available to use in reward strategies, more of an emphasis could be placed on increasing the intrinsic rewards within the organisation, which could be done by fostering an organisational culture which promotes intrinsic rewards and employee engagement through same with the added benefits of standard extrinsic rewards. Due to the fact that intrinsic rewards are not getting the same attention as extrinsic rewards, should an organisation place priority on the intrinsic rewards it may give them a competitive advantage (Giancola, 2014).

It is clear from the above research that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards go hand in hand in motivating employees, and fostering employee engagement, therefore this will be examined in the forthcoming methodology chapter in order to assess the potential differing importance placed on intrinsic and extrinsic rewards on each generational cohort. This brings us to our first research question.

**Research Questions 1:**

Do intrinsic rewards or extrinsic rewards have more influence on the engagement levels of employees?

**Research Question 2:**

Do all generations value the same type of reward (intrinsic/extrinsic) or does it vary across generations?

These will be fully examined in the primary research.

## 2.7 Reward and benefit theories

Having looked at the different variations of rewards we now must look at the relevant theories present in current research. There are many different theories present that may have a corresponding effect on the engagement levels of employees across multiple generations, however for the purpose of this research we will focus on key theories that may contribute to the overarching questions in the methodology chapter. Other theories may be presented here for information purposes but will be stated where necessary.

Throughout the research there is one theory which pops up over and over again and that is the theory of flexible rewards.

Flexible rewards are seen to be viable option for organisations in fostering employee engagement. Baeten et al. (2012) state that should an employee be given the freedom to choose their own benefits/rewards that there will be a positive effect in their perception of said benefits.

Also stated is that an organisation which adopts flexible rewards relates to employee satisfaction, employee attraction and retention. When an employee has choice, motivation and engagement is seen to increase (Romsey, 2021). There are three different types of benefit plans that organisations can use: 1. Fixed rewards/benefits- all or most benefits are across the board. 2. Flexible benefits- being able to select different benefit plans, and 3. Flex plans- the most flexible of all, where you get to choose what types of benefits you receive on an overall. If an organisation adopts a flexible benefit system, they could reduce costs without the reduction of reward as it will minimise the benefits being offered and being wasted on employees who do not wish to avail of certain benefits (Vidal- Salazar, et al. 2016). When formulating the strategy around flexible rewards there are many different elements which need to be considered, such as the external factors of the organisation but also the internal factors; these internal factors include: the culture, the business strategy and the HR environment (Baeten et al. 2012). Another aspect which needs to be taken into account is the type of organisation. It would be important to also look at where the organisation stands regarding Porter's generic strategies of cost-leadership, differentiation and innovation, as this will highly influence whether flexible rewards is a viable option (Porter, 2008). Baeten et al. (2012) argue that a cost-leadership strategy and a flexible rewards strategy would not work together. Cost-leadership organisations aim to keep costs as low as possible and aim for efficiency. A flexible rewards strategy however is seen to increase the time needed on developing, maintaining and analysing, therefore a flexible rewards strategy would not benefit these types of organisations. Differentiators and innovators on the other hand may see a positive effect from implementing a flexible reward strategy. Organisations that operate as differentiators, want to stand out from the competition and aim to engage and potentially retain their talent based off of this reward approach. Organisations that work as innovators, who need to attract the most highly skilled people will need an approach to draw key talent to their organisation (Baeten et al. 2012). From this we

can see that a flexible reward strategy may be effective in increasing employee engagement within an organisation. It can even go further to suggest that a choice in achievement rewards can increase engagement (Romsey, 2021). The strategy itself would have to be well thought out, incorporating factors such as the business objectives, internal and external factors and whether the team would be able to manage the extra workload in implementation and running. It will be interesting to bring a flexible rewards strategy into the research to see whether it is something that would engage employees and to see whether there is a difference in perception of said reward strategy amongst the different generations.

Similar to the above theory of flexible rewards Pilbeam et al. (2010) considers the use of a total reward system as a means of engaging the employee. Total reward encompasses the "needs of the whole person". Total rewards looks at both financial and non-financial based rewards. It can be seen in previous research (Mahmoud, et al. 2020) that both generation Y and Z value non-financial rewards as well as the usual extrinsic rewards. Total rewards may be a beneficial route to investigate in order to shape the way in ensuring all the generations' needs are met (Brown, 2013).

A project was carried out by Gemserv and Innecto (Lardner, 2015) wherein they looked at the reward and benefit strategies where they aimed to maximise the positive effects of said strategies. They wanted to look at what different aspects of reward and benefits were important to their employees. They conducted various different interviews with employees so that they could gauge what was important to them. They were very aware of the fact that generation Y, which were the newest generation in the organisation at the time were a "post-crash" generation and the typical monetary rewards were not the only things ensuring their engagement in the organisation- they wanted more, they wanted something different (Lardner, 2015).  Gemserv and Innecto looked to the theory of total reward for inspiration and wanted to ensure that the benefit package that they presented incorporated what their employees truly wanted. They

called their strategy the "Employee Deal" and they incorporated three different variations of reward available to their employees- 1. They brought in a profit share and bonus scheme for high performing employees. 2. Lifestyle choices for employees- remote working, annual leave exchanges etc. 3. Career development and support in same (Lardner, 2015). This new initiative saw excellent results for the organisation. They reported a 10% increase in revenue, 7% increase in profit, among others. Other than financial gain, the company also saw a much higher engagement rate from employees in their work and a keener interest in the rewards and benefit programme, as it had finally met their needs (Lardner, 2015).

This brings us to our second set of research questions:

**Research Question 3:**

Do each generational cohort want to pick their own benefits?

**Research Question 4:**

Does flexible working options increase engagement levels?


These questions will be directly researched as part of the primary research. The purpose of these research questions is to assess whether engagement levels increase with the allowance for employees to choose their benefits, rather than have assigned them.



**2.8 Reward and benefit preferences in each generational cohort seen to date.**


Now that we have identified the different areas which may increase the engagement amongst employees we must look at the differences in the generations seen to date.

It is noted that there is some literature on the different needs and wants of each generational cohort, (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016; Baeten et al., 2012; Crumpacker et al., 2007;

Kupperschmidt, 2000; Mahmoud, 2020; Khera, et al., 2014). The literature is beginning to build for generation Z, (Coogan et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2000; Lanier, 2017; O' Boyle et al., 2017) but there is still a lot of research to be done.

**Baby Boomers:**

The baby boomers are the oldest generational cohort in this study and they bring a set of characteristics very different from that of other generations, but also bring some similarities. The baby boomers would have seen the forefront of the civil rights movement, and women taking a stand. They would of witnessed the oil embargo and been present for the raises in inflation (Crumpacker et al.,2007). These movements would have corresponded to their behaviours in the workplace. Baby boomers are known to be micromanagers and very competitive in the workplace. Baby boomers prefer team work rather than autonomy and do not like to hierarchy in a company (Kupperschmidt, 2000). The baby boomers main requirement for reward would be compensation and salary, and praise (Khera, et al. 2014).

**Generation X:**

Families began a bit later in the life of the parents of generation X, who worked long hours, leading to highly independent kids in the generation X cohort (Crumpacker et al, 2007). Generation X would have come of age during the 1980s recession and in Ireland experienced the Celtic Tiger. Society started evolving quicker than ever before for the generation X youths. Divorce amongst parents became much more common than ever before, diversity and inclusion were extremely important and environmentalism started to make headlines (Kupperschmidt, 2000). In contrast to the baby boomers generation X prefer to work as individuals rather in a team but feel that a relationship with co-workers is also essential (Khera, et al. 2014). The main

reward and benefit constructs expected of generation X employees is that of work life balance, and the option to work off of a flexible schedule (Crumpacker et al. 2007 ). Generation X are very heavily influenced by social awards also such as recognition and respect (Mahmoud, 2020).

**Generation Y:**

Generation Y are also referred to as millennials. Generation Y came into the workforce when globalisation was at its highest rate of expansion, they have seen the rise of technology and companies outsourcing and setting up in foreign markets, global education and diversification (Mencl, 2014). Due to this we can see a high need for a diverse workforce for generation Y. Due to generation Y having instant access to information through means of technology they tend to look for training and development opportunities as a means of engagement but similar to that of generation X they require a need for flexible working options, and work life balance as well regular feedback on performance (Mencl, 2014). Generation Y are very vocal on their opinions, and express a high level of confidence in their abilities (Khera, et al. 2014). They expect themselves, their fellow employees and their employer to operate under an umbrella of social responsibility (O'Boyle, et al., 2017).

**Generation Z:**

Generation Z in Ireland would have experienced the recession as children, witnessing family members laid off or struggling for money. They would of seen the housing crash at it's worse and many different movements for equality (Coogan et al., 2020). Generation Z are quiet similar to generation Y in the sense that majority of whom are leaving college with a lot of debt on their shoulders (O'Boyle et al., 2017). This can lead to generation Z putting more of an emphasis on job security than the previous cohort (Chilakuri, 2020). They also seem to have

more of a commitment to the organisation than that of their predecessors who tend to jump from job to job (Mahmoud et al., 2000). This generation are seen to be the "always-on" generation as majority of whom don't remember a world without internet access. This can lead to employees having short attention spans in the workplace (Lanier, 2017). Generation Z prefer to work with a multi-disciplinary team and a global team. They prefer to have the option for mobility and like the previous generations, they too need flexible working options (O'Boyle, et al., 2017). Generation Z can see flexible options, with good paid time off and well-being initiatives as an "expectation" rather than a benefit in an organisation (O'Boyle, et al., 2017). From an Irish perspective, generation Z expect both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in equal measure. They want the opportunities for development, and training coupled with a good salary, and benefits such as work life balance, and security in a position (Coogan et al., 2020).

It is important to note that with each generational cohort they have "typical" characteristics, needs and wants from employers, that it is important not to categorise all employees from one generation under the same blanket, as with each person they have their own independent needs due to life circumstances, history and wants. Therefore, it is important to take the previous mentioned theories in to hand when assessing the needs and wants of each generational cohort, so that each employee can be engaged in their work (O'Boyle et al., 2017).

Arising from the above, the following research questions are formed:

**Research Question 5:**

Do each generational cohort prefer the option of flexible working options?

**Research Question 6:**

What reward and benefits do each generation place a higher value on?

**2.9 Conclusion of literature review**

As we can see from the above literature review, there are a lot of theories present in the field of employee engagement and reward and benefits. There are many different theories which can be analysed, however, for the purpose of this dissertation a focus will be placed on the theory of flexible rewards, and how this concept affects the engagement level across a multi-generational workforce. An analyse will be done on the effects intrinsic and extrinsic benefits and rewards have on employee engagement across the different generations and an examination of the different needs and wants of reward and benefits from each generation's point of view will be done in order to see a direct correlation in the engagement levels of employees.

In conclusion, the primary research aims to assess the employee engagement levels of a multi-generational workforce in Ireland based on the rewards and benefits in which they may receive or wish to receive. The generational differences will be assessed to see whether there is a correlation between generations or whether their needs and wants are very different, and what type of benefits and rewards are the most enticing for each generation so that organisations can formulate their strategies around this knowledge.

**2.10 Full list of Research Questions and hypothesis:**

**Research Questions 1:**

Do intrinsic rewards or extrinsic rewards have more influence on the engagement levels of employees?

**Research Question 2:**

Do all generations value the same type of reward (intrinsic/extrinsic) or does it vary across generations?

**Research Question 3:**

Do each generational cohort want to pick their own benefits?

**Research Question 4:**

Does flexible working options increase engagement levels?

**Research Question 5:**

Do each generational cohort prefer the option of flexible working options?

**Research Question 6:**

What reward and benefits do each generation place a higher value on?

From these research questions the following hypothesis can be brought forward:

**Hypothesis 1:**

The rewards and benefits differ across the multi-generational workforce with the generations requiring different reward and benefits.

**Hypothesis 2:**

Engagement levels will differ across all of the generations.

**Hypothesis 3:**

All generations report wanting flexible working options.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodological approaches which will be carried out as part of this research will be discussed. The objective of the research will be initially examined, linking back to the reasonings this research is essential for the future success of organisations and what the research aims to do. The research framework will then be explained. An overview of the research philosophy will then be discussed in relation to the adequate fit of said philosophies to this research, which will be followed by the methodological approach as to whether inductive or deductive will be used. An explanation of the data collection approaches, and data collection methods will be given and the sample selection needed to carry out this research. Once this has been discussed, the ways in which the data will be presented and analysed will then be presented, followed by any potential limitations for the research and ethical boundaries which will need to be considered.

### 3.2 Objective of the research

The aim of this research is to gather information pertaining to the different generational cohorts present in the Irish workforce today in respect of their demand of certain rewards and benefits so that their engagement levels can be affluent. The research will concentrate on four of the most prevalent generations in the Irish workforce: the baby boomers, generation X, generation Y and generation Z. The objective of this research is to assess whether certain predetermined reward and benefit structures such as flexible working conditions, high salary and compensation, health insurance, and job security will influence the engagement levels across this multi-generational workforce or whether it is the more intrinsic rewards which motivate these employees. This research aims to have as coherent an answer as possible to the research questions so that organisations will be able to see direct correlations or inverse correlations between the different generations and their requirements from a rewards perspective so that

effective strategies can be put in place to minimise lack of engagement in their corresponding workforces and to nurture employees so that loyalty and retention will remain in abundance. As outlined in the previous literature review chapter, there are seven research questions to be addressed during this research, they are as follows:

**Research Questions 1:**

Do intrinsic rewards or extrinsic rewards have more influence on the engagement levels of employees?

**Research Question 2:**

Do all generations value the same type of reward (intrinsic/extrinsic) or does it vary across generations?

**Research Question 3:**

Do each generational cohort want to pick their own benefits?

**Research Question 4:**

Does flexible working options increase engagement levels?

**Research Question 5:**

Do each generational cohort prefer the option of flexible working options?

**Research Question 6:**

What reward and benefits do each generation place a higher value on?

From these research questions the following hypothesis can be brought forward:

**Hypothesis 1:**

The rewards and benefits differ across the multi-generational workforce with the generations requiring different reward and benefits.

**Hypothesis 2:**

Engagement levels will differ across all of the generations.

**Hypothesis 3:**

Does flexible working options increase engagement across the different generations?

## 3.3 Research Framework

The research framework used to carry out this dissertation is the research onion developed by Saunders et al. (2019).
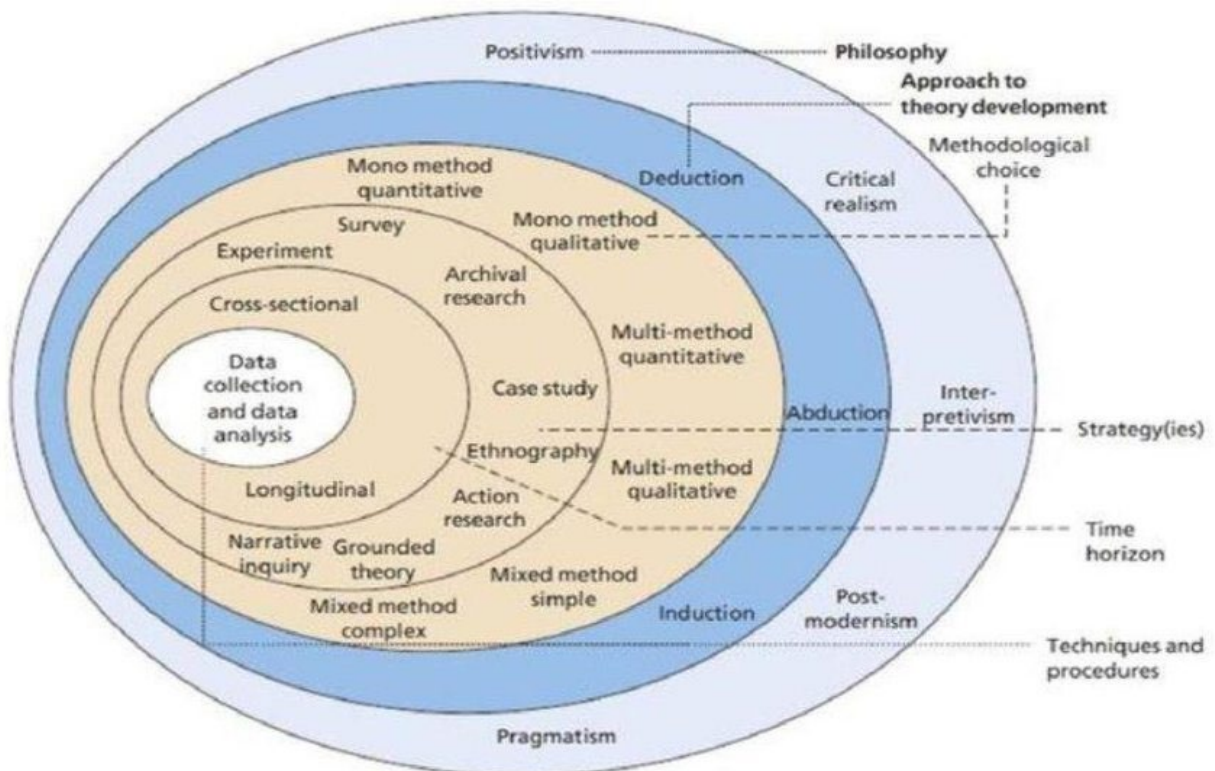


Figure 1.1 The Research Onion. Source:  Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, 2018.

The above research onion will be discussed in further detail in the remainder of this chapter.

**3.4 Research Philosophy**

The first step in Saunders et al., (2019) research onion is the adoption of a research philosophy. All the various research philosophies were considered when drafting this study, such as: critical realism, interpretivism, post-modernism, pragmatism and positivism.

Interpretivism was considered, as with an interpretivism approach one would believe that the operations of society are due to cultural and historical background of the sample, and this can be a heavily misconstrued idea of generations; expecting all generations to behave and interpret the world in a certain way, however individuals are varied, and culture and background are not the only influences on the perceptions of people and their individual needs. Interpretivism is also mainly associated with a qualitative approach, which would not see this research justice due to the potential implications of bias (Saunders, et al., 2019).

Critical realism was looked at for this research also, however it would not be a suitable match due to the dept in which the researcher would need to investigate the 'why' of the research questions. It comes across as a more long-term study to assess the research questions and hypothesis validity, which is not appropriate for this research (Saunders et al., 2019).

Post-modernism would not be a suitable research philosophy for this study as this approach tends to challenge the previous understandings of society and the structure of organisational and societal norms, and this is not what this study is trying to do (Saunders et al., 2019).

This research aims at addressing the research questions and hypothesis which were carefully drafted based off of previous literature and research to date. This study aims to add to the literature in a significant manner and not to completely shift the understanding on the generational norms from a rewards and benefits perspective in an organisation.

Pragmatism was also considered for this study as the fundamental goal of a pragmatist is to address the research questions at hand and to give practical solutions to the identified problem. This research will address recommendations following the forthcoming data analyse chapter

which would fit in with the pragmatism approach, however a pragmatism approach would generally incorporate mixed methods for the research, and again for this study, the researcher intends on being as unbiased as possible so that results are not fluctuated, therefore a mono-method quantitative approach would be more beneficial to the outcome of this research (Saunders, et al., 2019).

Taking all the above into consideration the philosophy of positivism is the most appropriate for this research as it purely a scientific method where data and figures are analysed to receive statistical results which can contribute to the overall understanding of societal norms (Saunders et al., 2019). It is the intention of the researcher to remain observant of the study and not contribute any bias or influence into the data received from the sample, which would be an important part of a positivism approach. The data received can then be used to explain the behaviour of certain entities and that is what is intended from this research: to establish whether the different generations present in the Irish workforce have a higher engagement based off certain rewards and benefits (Saunders et al., 2019). It is also seen in a positivism approach that previous research on similar topics can have an influence in shaping a hypothesis (Greener, 2008) and the previous literature stating in the previous literature review chapter shows that the hypothesis' presented for this research had an influence based off the reading of the findings of other research done to date (Mahmoud, 2020; Yang et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2020).

**3.5 Research Methodology**

For the purpose of this research, as will be detailed below in section 3.6 of this methodology chapter, a quantitative approach will be used. A mono-method quantitative approach with a single questionnaire will be formulated and distributed to a sample size for the purpose of analysing the data to determine the engagement levels of different generations based off of

their rewards and benefits requirements (Saunders et al., 2019). This study will take a deductive approach as, deductive is highly associated with a quantitative research method, and this will be the method used in this study (Greener, 2008). A deductive approach is also heavily influenced by the existing theories present in the literature to date, whereas inductive attempts to form a theoretical explanation whilst working through the data (Saunders et al., 2019). This study will look to the previous literature and theories seen in the field of employee engagement and reward management in order to assess the research questions and the data. Two main approaches were considered for this research. An evaluative study was considered as it is generally used to assess the strategies that are in place in an organisation and their effectiveness (Saunders et al., 2019). This study aims to assess the rewards and benefit requirements of different generations to foster employee engagement, through the use of (as posed in the research questions) flexible rewards, intrinsic/ extrinsic rewards systems etc., however we are not assessing a specific strategy or a specific organisation therefore an evaluative study is not best fitted to this research (QuestionPro.com). The best fit for this research would be an exploratory study. An exploratory study aims to analyse the relationship between different variables and uses a statistical method in evaluation of the data presented (Saunders et al., 2019). Exploratory research often forms from the understanding and investigation of previous research done on a particular topic and aims to address questions and develop a deeper understanding of a particular issues or topic. It is an excellent method in assessing data so that conclusions can be made and an opportunity for further research on the topic can be established. It also aims to improve the understanding of a topic so that changes can be implemented in order to see the best results from organisations (Consultores, 2020).  Hence this is the appropriate method for this research as it will assist in the understanding of the needs and wants of the different generations from a rewards and benefits perspective, so that these findings can be used in the formulation of potential strategies for organisations.

## 3.6 Data Collection Approach

When considering the best fit for this research both quantitative and qualitative approaches were considered for this project. They both offer merit in what they could bring to the research. When looking at the research questions, an understanding must be had on the results in which the research would like to see, and those results would form in a more numerical and statistical point of view rather than descriptive (Saunders, et al., 2019).

This dissertation will use a quantitative approach.

Quantitative research is best used when you need to categorise, measure or rank and that is what is intended of this study: to measure the engagement levels of each generation through the ranking of different statements in order to assess the needs and wants (McCombes, 2020). Qualitative research was also considered based off of previous research such as Chillakuri (2020) and Mishra et al. (2014) in the form of interviews but as with qualitative research a smaller sample size will be used due to the time-consuming nature of the research, and for this particular research a larger sample size would be of more benefit in order to be able to see an accurate correlation in the preferences of each generational cohort. There are many different studies which have demonstrated the use of quantitative research in order to show the differences between engagement levels, rewards, retention, and the different generations. This can be seen in the sense of an anonymous survey or questionnaire distributed to the sample of the population (Mahmoud, 2020; Yang et al. 2017; Mencl et al. 2014; Tang, 2020; Schaufeli et al. 2020; Saks, 2006). The distribution of said documents were done either through social networking sites, such as LinkedIn (Mahmoud, 2020) or by means of contacting organisations/ HR departments in order to distribute the documents (Mencl et al. 2014; Saks, 2006, etc).

## 3.7 Data Collection Methods

The data collection method for this research will take shape in the form of an anonymous survey. This survey will be produced via survey monkey and distributed to the relevant sample

size, discussed in the forthcoming section. This will be distributed via hyper-link to the sample size where they will be able to access via web and mobile services. This will ensure that a wider audience will have access to the survey with the capabilities to share further afield, increasing the response rate, which would in turn increase the effectiveness of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). A survey is the best data collection method for this research as it will keep an air of anonymity for the respondents ensuring that no unnecessary data or information is obtained during the collection. It will reduce the risk of a contamination of data, which would decrease the validity of the research. A questionnaire is also best paired with an exploratory study, which is the method this research intends on taking (Saunders et al., 2019, Bell et al., 2018).

The survey will be displayed in a series of questions. There will be three sections of the survey which will address different aspects of the research. Section one will be focused on demographics. Section two will address the rewards and benefit needs of the participants. Section three will address engagement levels.

Section one of the survey will comprise of questions based on the demographics of the participants (questions 1-3). This will identify the age group the participants fall into and their corresponding generational category. They will also be asked their gender, this is specifically to see whether there is a difference in the rewards and benefits required from different genders, for informational purposes.

The survey will then move into the analysis of the rewards and benefits expected from the participants. The following sections (sections one through four) are adapted for this survey based off the Work Values Instrument questionnaire devised by Lechner et al., (2018) with emphasis on extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, autonomy, and security. The questions will be phrased in a different way to that of the original survey in order to fit in with a Likert scale response format, as this will yield a more comprehensive result, due to the majority of the

questions posed, the answers will not be a simple yes or no question. This Likert scale will be displayed in the form of:

X Strongly Disagree

X Disagree

X Neutral

X Agree

X Strongly Agree

There will also be some questions added into these sections, formulated by the researcher in order to assess any gaps in the research and to ensure all of the research questions are addressed accurately.

Section 2.1 will detail extrinsic rewards (and will comprise of 8 statements) and aims to see the extent in which extrinsic rewards have on the engagement of staff members, with detailed questions based on financial rewards, salary, health, and dental benefits, and whether these correspond with one's satisfaction in their role and their commitment to their organization.

Section 2.2 will address flexibility as a benefit and to what extent flexibility affects the engagement to one's role along with the importance expressed by each generation in having this benefit. (This section will comprise of 7 statements).

Section 2.3 will focus on intrinsic rewards and the extent of importance these types of rewards have on the engagement levels of employees. Opportunities to learn, interesting work, feedback and recognition will be assessed as part of this section (this section will comprise of 8 statements).

Section 2.4 looks at autonomy and whether this effects engagement in one's role (this section has 3 questions).

The survey will then move on to address the engagement levels of participants in their role. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale- 9 devised by Schaufeli et al., (2006) will be adapted to assess same in the form of sentences that participants will have to rate from 0-6 on a Likert scale same as the above section (there are 6 statements as part of this section).

The cover letter attached to this survey detailing the purpose of the research, the intended outcome and the assurance of anonymity can be found in appendix 1. The detailed list of questions asked as part of this survey can be found in appendix 2.

### 3.8 Pilot study

A pilot study was also carried out prior to the distribution of the survey to the sample size to assess the accuracy in the questions in meeting the research objectives and to ensure that the questions have a flow and that they can be understood clearly. The pilot study was sent to three separate colleagues. A flaw in the survey was identified as part of the pilot study in which the demographic questions in respect of age excluded the age 27. There was also another flaw further on in the survey in section 3 where the Likert scale was not displaying properly. These flaws were rectified. Other than that pilot participants identified the survey as easy to understand and complete.

### 3.9 Sample Selection

When looking at the population for this research it must be noted that a very specific sample is required in order to meet the research objective. This research aims to answer whether employee engagement is impacted from rewards and benefits from the perspective of four different generations, therefore it is essential that the corresponding generations are accurately depicted as part of the sample size. It is also extremely important for the research purpose that individuals in the sample are working in Ireland, as this is the predominant interest of the study. Should an accurate sample be established the results will give the study a higher advantage, as accurate data can be drawn from the analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). Probability sampling will

be used for this research as there is a specific group of individuals targeted for participation in the research, this will be the most effective method for this research as the researcher aims to cover all of the different generations and distribute the survey to as many participants as possible (Saunders, et al. 2019). Probability sampling is generally associated with a quantitative study as it will allow a link to the general population as a whole rather than specific individuals in a population, and as this survey aims to gather data from multiple different generations; multiple different generations are needed in order to see accurate results, hence why probability sampling is best suited to this research (Bell et al., 2018). This survey will be distributed on LinkedIn and Facebook as a means of gathering participants, therefore anyone in the population has a chance to participate in the study, and this would be the most effective method in obtaining participants from different generations (Statisticssolutions.com). As was outlined in the literature review, there are varied amounts of each generation present in the Irish population (2,541,294 peoples aged 25-64, 331,208 peoples aged 19-24, and 227,677 currently attending third level education between the ages of 17-24 (CSO, 2017)). From these figures we can see that we have an extremely large population size, just over half of the population of Ireland, which is unrealistic, a sample of this population will have to made to see accurate representation of the subject age groups, and avoid the numbers skewing in favour of one particular age group (Saunders, et al., 2019). The means of communicating this research will be via platforms that will target working individuals or those seeking employment in Ireland, which will narrow down the sample size. LinkedIn will be used as a platform to spread the survey with the use of hashtags and connections. It is stated that the age demographics of users on LinkedIn fall heavily in the age groups of 21-45 years old, which would target a portion of generation Z, a large group of generation Y, and a portion of generation X. There are individuals that will be part of the later years of generation X and the baby boomers present on LinkedIn, but they simply do not take up the market majority on the social networking site (Leadgenera.com,

2021). Connections with a college careers counsellors have also been established, where said colleague will distribute the survey to a careers page targeted towards individuals currently enrolled in courses, which will have a mixture of the generations present, but it will be heavily based off of generation Z between the ages of 17-24. In order to build a foundation of the older generations the survey will be distributed on other social networking site such as Facebook and through work connections, which will target generation X and the baby boomers in a more affluent way than LinkedIn. Due to the nature of the research questions and the different age categories needed, a relevantly large sample size will be needed in order to statistically establish whether the hypotheses are supported or not (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher would be looking to get 200 respondents with 50 respondents from each generational cohort as an optimum. Analysis can still be done on a smaller sample size, should the response rate differ than the expected.

## 3.10 Data Presentation Analysis

The data received from the questionnaire will be presented in the analysis chapter. A detailed description will be given on the analysis of the data in the form of written word, and with the use of graphs to accurately depict the data. As with a quantitative approach analysis of the data received will initially be presented in excel form, which will then be transferred to the IBM SPSS software in order to code the data. SPSS software will be used to convert the data into readable results. SPSS is an excellent method in analysing complex data, presenting it in the forms of graphs or diagrams. It is one of the most widely used statistical analyse software in the world for quantifiable research, therefore this will be used to assess the data which is received as part of this research (Alchemer.com, 2021).

**3.11 Ethical Considerations**

Based off Bryman and Bell (2007) there are many different areas to consider in order to ensure that participants in this research are safe, that their information is secure and that they feel they have the right not to participate. This research will be carried out via an online survey, delivered through hyper-link, which will ensure that participants can choose whether they would like to complete the survey or not. There will be a cover sheet attached to the survey that will outline the purpose for the research (please see appendix 1), the intended outcome, and an explanation that the participants have free will and that completion of the survey is voluntary (Bryman & Bell, 2007). There will be no sensitive information gathered form the respondents; simply the age bracket they fall in to and their gender, should they wish to disclose, therefore there is no negative outcomes from a leak of data that can come from participating in the research, ensuring the anonymity of the respondents (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In conclusion, the formulation of the survey will be done so that no harm will come to respondents, condensing the ethical considerations applicable to this research.

**3.12 Limitations**

Having distributed the survey and received the results, the limitations fall in respect of sample size and time constraints. As mentioned above, the optimum participation rate for this survey would be 200 respondents, 50 from each generational category. Following distribution through the means mentioned above (LinkedIn, Facebook, college and work connections) there were a total of 118 participants of the survey with varied amounts in each generation. There was a total of 25 participants from the age cohort 18-26, 59 participants from the age category 27-39, 26 participants from the 40-56 year olds and 8 participants of the 57-78 year olds. The participation rate for generation Z (18-26) was half of the optimum levels, millennials (27-39) was above optimum, generation X (40-56) were half of the optimum level and the baby boomers participation rate was well below optimum. An analysis will be done on the above,

however a more equal distribution would be more effective in analysing the sample. Time constraints were also seen as a limitation as if this study was a more long term project, more time could have gone in to obtaining the participants, however due to time constraints with the dissertation this could not have been achieved.

# 4. Analysis and Results

## 4.1 Introduction

The following analysis chapter will outline the data received from the distribution of the survey and showcase the results through the means of descriptive text, graphs and tables. To start, a breakdown of the distribution statistics will be shown along with the rate of participation from each gender, age group and working status of the participants. Following this breakdown a reliability test will be done on the scales used in measurement of the data, laid out in the previous methodology chapter to assess the reliability and validity of the scale in the use of this data. Once this has been achieved, we will move on to the analysis of the hypothesis and corresponding research questions through the means of statistical tests within SPSS- 27 and the use of graphs and diagrams.

The data gathered was through an anonymous survey distributed via hyperlink through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook and a probability sampling method was used in the formation of said sample.

## 4.2 Participation rates

As mentioned in the previous methodology chapter there were 118 returned surveys as part of this research. The breakdown of such is as follows:

**Age**

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 18–26 | 25 | 20.7 | 21.2 | 21.2 |
| | 27–39 | 59 | 48.8 | 50.0 | 71.2 |
| | 40–56 | 26 | 21.5 | 22.0 | 93.2 |
| | 57–75 | 8 | 6.6 | 6.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 118 | 97.5 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 3 | 2.5 | | |
| Total | | 121 | 100.0 | | |

**Table 4.1 Age breakdown of respondents.**

As seen above there were a varied amount of respondents from each age group. The highest response rate being from the millennial (generation Y) with 59 respondents (50% of participants). As mentioned in the above methodology chapter, this could be due to the age demographics of LinkedIn, as LinkedIn is used mainly by the millennial cohort, with instances of other generations present on the social networking site, however not in the same abundance (Leadgenera.com, 2021). Generation X had the second highest respondents with 26 participants (22% of participants). Generation Z then falls in third highest with 25 respondents (21.2%). The baby boomers, however had a total of 8 respondents (6.8%) which was below what was anticipated.

### Gender * Age Crosstabulation

Count

| | | 18–26 | 27–39 | 40–56 | 57–75 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 5 | 31 | 11 | 3 | 50 |
| | Female | 19 | 28 | 15 | 5 | 67 |
| | Prefer not to disclose | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 25 | 59 | 26 | 8 | 118 |

**Table 4.2 Gender/Age Crosstabulation.**

The participation of individuals from both the male and female gender was relevantly equal with 50 participants of the male gender and 67 of the female gender, and one participant who preferred not to disclose their gender. The main differences in gender participation was in the age group of generation Z with a difference of 14 individuals, compared to that of the other generations where a balance between the both were present.

**Workingstatus**

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | In full-time employment | 94 | 77.7 | 79.7 | 79.7 |
| | In part-time employment | 14 | 11.6 | 11.9 | 91.5 |
| | Currently seeking opportunities | 6 | 5.0 | 5.1 | 96.6 |
| | other | 4 | 3.3 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 118 | 97.5 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 3 | 2.5 | | |
| Total | | 121 | 100.0 | | |

**Table 4.3 Working Status of Participants.**

As seen above the working status of participants were heavily skewed to that of those in full-time employment with 79.7% of participants indicating that they are in full-time employment, 11.9% in part-time employment, 5.1% seeking employment opportunities, and 3.4% indicated other.

**4.3 Reliability and Validity of the scales**

Reliability of the data is all about consistency within the data (Bryman et al., 2018). The internal reliability must be measured in this research as we have adapted a scale in order to assess the needs and wants from a rewards and benefits perspective from each generational cohort. The internal reliability assesses whether the multitude of questions posed in a survey or questionnaire are adequately measured and scored dependent on the answers (Bryman, et al. 2018).

The internal validity of the scales were assessed using Cronbach Alpha as a measurement.

As mentioned in chapter 3, to assess the engagement level of the participants the Utrecht Employee Engagement Scale- 9 devised by Schaufeli et al., (2006), was adapted to fit in with this research. When this scale was ran in SPSS 27 the following results were achieved:

**Reliability Statistics**

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| --- | --- |
| .925 | 6 |

The general acceptance of reliability is based on 0.7 (Bryman, et al. 2018) therefore the above Utrecht Engagement Scale- 9 adapted questions has been successful in achieving internal reliability.

For the Work Values Instrument scale adapted from the survey produced by Lechner et al., (2018) was also ran using Cronbach Alpha.

The statistic produced from this analysis of this scale however was .659, unfortunately not meeting the standardized accepted internal reliability of 0.7. Due to this, certain questions were removed in order to achieve internal reliability.

In section 2.1 of the survey, questions 1 and 2 were removed. In section 2.2 question 6 was removed, and in section 2.4 question 1 was removed. Following on from the manipulation of the questions the following internal reliability was achieved for the adapted version of Work Values Instrument (Lechner et al., 2018).

**Reliability Statistics**

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| --- | --- |
| .704 | 21 |

It is important to note that due to the manipulation of the questions in order to achieve internal reliability, the scale is no longer comparable. We are now working off of a subset scale for the Work Values Instrument, the remainder of the analysis of the data is now based on a subset scale, as the reliability is not as high as had intended.

**4.4 Hypothesis testing and addressing the research questions.**

Testing the hypothesis is an extremely important part of the research as it measures the relationship between the different variables present in the data (Saunders et al., 2019). There is always a null hypothesis (H0) and an alternative hypothesis (Ha). The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between the variables and the alternative suggests that there is a difference (Bryman et al., 2018).

Generally the null hypothesis is to be rejected should the statistical significance (p-value) be less than 0.05

This will now be tested using the Anova test in attempt to validate the hypothesis posed in this research.

**Hypothesis 1:**

There is no difference between the rewards and benefits wanted across the different generations (H0).

There is a difference between the rewards and benefits wanted across the different generations (Ha).

This hypothesis will be tested using an analysis of variance test in the form of the Anova test in SPSS 27.

The results indicate that there is no evidence to suggest that there is a difference wanted in regards to rewards and benefits across the different generations. Generation Z (M= 99.6,

SD=7.85) generation Y (M= 100.52, SD= 7.65) generation X (M=97.1, SD= 6.96) baby boomers (M= 94.30, SD= 8.34), F (3,113)= 2.238, p >.005.

## ANOVA

WVI_summation

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 386.378 | 3 | 128.793 | 2.238 | .088 |
| Within Groups | 6329.376 | 110 | 57.540 |  |  |
| Total | 6715.754 | 113 |  |  |  |

**Table 4.4 Adapted Work Value Instrument Scale hypothesis test.**

From the above results we can say that the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted and the alternative is rejected based on hypothesis 1, and this answers **research question 2** "Do all generations value the same type of reward (intrinsic/extrinsic) or does it vary across generations?".

To delve deeper into the research questions posed, we could look at the above and see whether individual types of rewards and benefits differ across the generations by analysing sub sections of the data.

In respect of **research question 2&6**: "Do all generations value the same type of rewards (intrinsic/extrinsic) or does it vary across generations?" and "What rewards and benefits do each generation place a higher value on?"

Extrinsic rewards in respect of the scale could score at the highest of 40, and at lowest of 8, based on the five point Likert Scale.

As seen on table 4.4 below, majority of respondents from each generational cohort sit in the median of the results.
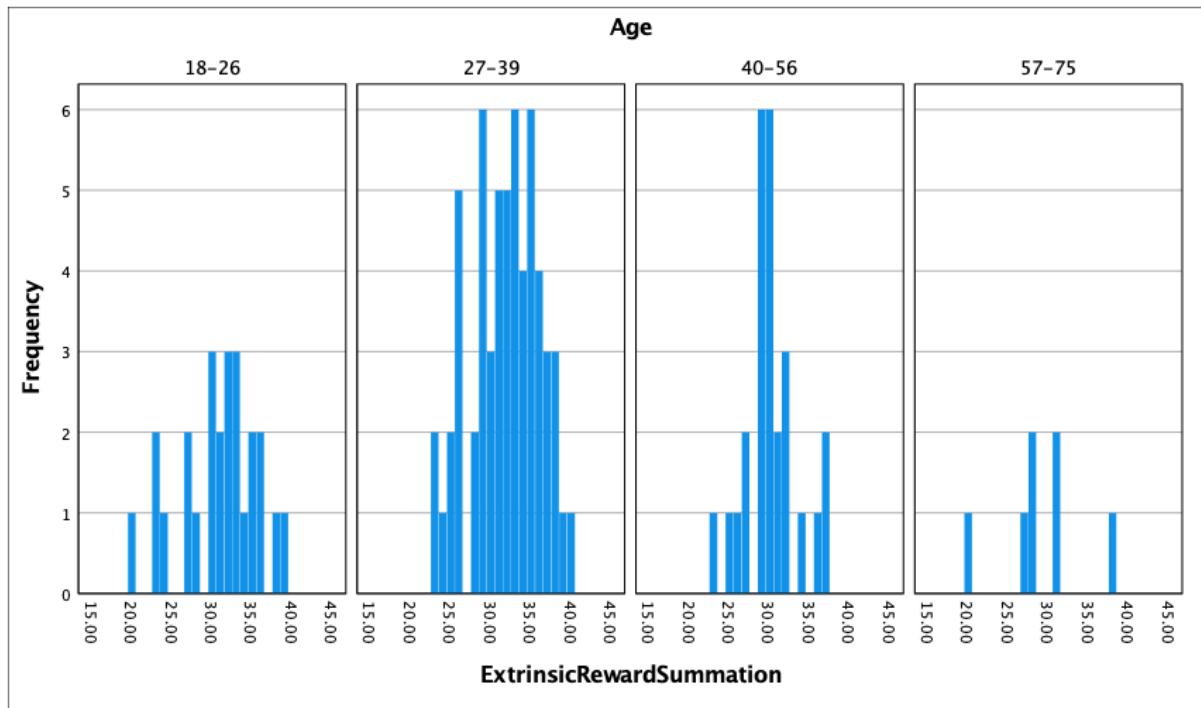
**Figure 4.1 Extrinsic rewards results in respect of age.**

Generation Z (M=30.88), generation Y (M=31.81), generation X (M=30.15) and baby boomers (M=29).

From these results we can see that majority of the respondents indicated with either 'Neutral' or 'Agree' in the survey in respect of extrinsic rewards, leaving the researcher to believe (coupled with the acceptance of the null hypothesis above) that expectations of extrinsic benefits fall evenly across the different generations, and one generation does not require them any more than the other.

To test this further, the following graph indicates the scores for the questions associated with the intrinsic benefits and rewards.
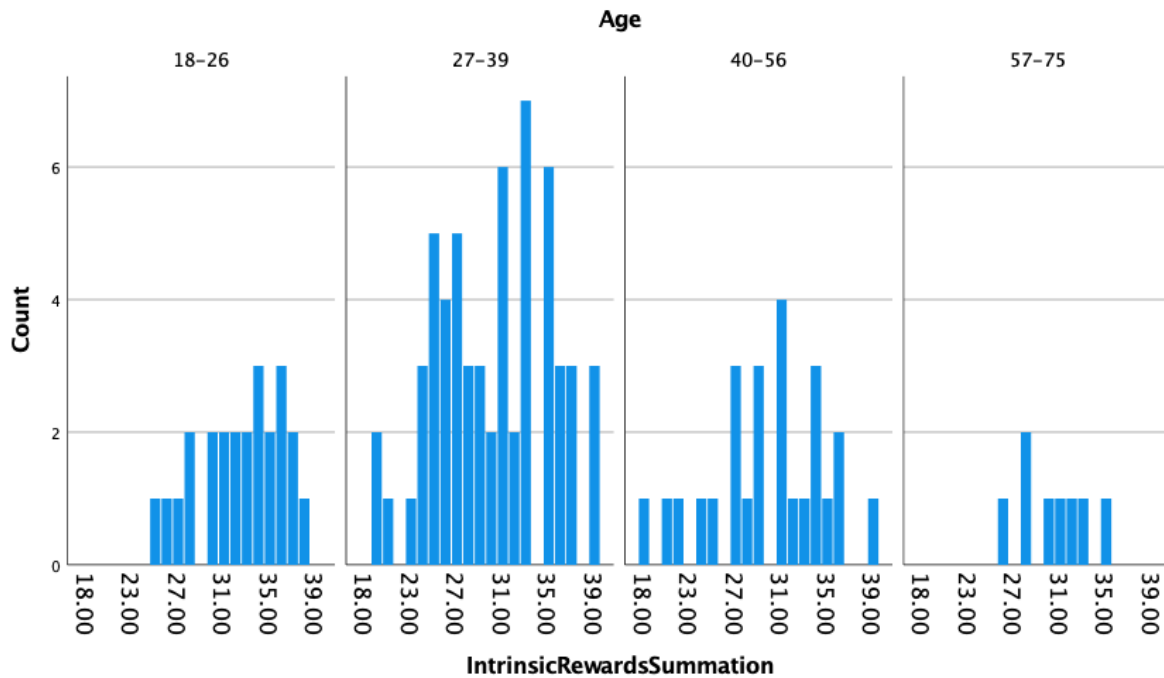
**Figure 4.2 Intrinsic rewards result in respect of age.**

The maximum score that could be achieved in the intrinsic reward questions section is: 40, and the minimum score is 8.

From the above we can see that generation Z scored (M= 32.41), generation Y (M= 30.10), generation X (M=29.72), baby boomers (M= 30.37).

From graph 4.4 and graph 4.5 we can see the average results computed show that each generation has a middle ground in respect of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and we can see that majority of respondents indicted 'Neutral' or 'Agree' to the intrinsic questions, similar to the extrinsic question.

 This is supported by the previous literature noted in chapter 2 ( Khera, et al., 2014.; Crumpacker et al., 2007,; Mahmoud, 2020,; Mahmoud, et al. 2020),  of this dissertation and answers **research question number 2/6:** in that all generations would require a mixture of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards.

From the above we can see that the null hypothesis (H0) for hypothesis 1 was accepted and that the findings from previous literature in support of question 2 and 6 are supported.

**Hypothesis 2:**

There is no difference in engagement levels across all of the generations. (H0).

There is a difference in engagement levels across all of the generations (Ha).

This hypothesis will be tested using SPSS- 27 with the Anova test, concurrent with hypothesis 1.

## ANOVA

Engagement_overall

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 306.118 | 3 | 102.039 | 4.113 | .008 |
| Within Groups | 2778.942 | 112 | 24.812 |  |  |
| Total | 3085.060 | 115 |  |  |  |

Table 4.5 Adapted Utrecht Engagement Scale- 9 hypothesis test.

The results show that there is no evidence to suggest that there is a difference in the engagement levels of participants across the different generations. Generation Z (M= 21.16, SD= 5.27), generation Y(M=20.06, SD= 5.29), generation X (M= 23.34, SD=4.31), and baby boomers (M= 25.00, 3.29), F (3, 115)= 4.113, p >.005.

From this we can say that the null hypothesis has been accepted, and that there are no differences present in the engagement levels of the different generations.

In addressing **research questions 1:** "Do intrinsic rewards or extrinsic rewards have more influence on the engagement levels of employees?" the average engagement level of participants across all generations were calculated: Generation Z (M= 21.16), generation Y (M= 20.06), generation X (M= 23.43), and baby boomers (M= 25.00).

Interestingly baby boomers scored the highest on the engagement scale, with generation X following in close proximity, generation Z were the third highest scored, leaving generation Y the lowest scoring on the adapted Utrecht Employee Engagement Scale- 9 (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

This data was then analysed in comparison to the previously presented averages for both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

Generation Z scored (M= 26.78) for intrinsic rewards/engagement, and (M= 26.02) for extrinsic rewards/engagement levels, showing that the average score for participants in generation Z was slightly higher for intrinsic rewards resulting in high engagement, however not high enough to say that that is their predominant need in rewards and benefits.

Generation Y scored (M= 25.08) for intrinsic/engagement, and (M= 25.93) for extrinsic/engagement, showing that their need and wants of rewards fell slightly higher in extrinsic reward in order to feel engaged; again similar to generation Z, the score wasn't high enough to establish dominance in one particular reward group.

Generation X scored (M= 26.57) for intrinsic/engagement, and (M= 26.79) for extrinsic/engagement showing very similar results in both, similar to the above generational cohorts.

Baby boomers scored (M= 27.68) for intrinsic/engagement and scored (M=27.00) for extrinsic/engagement levels, again similar to the above, a strong average was scored for both reward categories.

From the above data we can see that each generation require a mixture of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in order to feel engaged, addressing **research question number 1**. These finding lines up with the previous literature stating that there is a mixture needed (Coogan et al., 2020; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Khera et al., 2014;Crumpacker et al., 2007; Mahmoud, 2020; Mencl, 2014; Chilakuri, 2020).

**Hypothesis 3:**

Not all generations want flexible working options. (H0)

All generations do want flexible working options. (Ha)

This hypothesis was tested using SPSS- 27 with the use of the Anova test.

## ANOVA

FlexibleRewardsSummation

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 161.618 | 3 | 53.873 | 7.462 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 815.835 | 113 | 7.220 | | |
| Total | 977.453 | 116 | | | |

**4.5 Flexible working options hypothesis test.**

The results show that there is evidence to suggest that all generations want flexible working options.  Generation Z (M=26.92, SD= 2.99), generation Y (M=28.89, SD= 2.77), generation X (M=27.73, SD= 2.16), and baby boomers (M= 24.75, SD= 2.49),  $F(3,116)= 7.462$, $p<.005$. From this we can say that the null hypothesis has been rejected, and the alternative has been accepted, and that **research questions number 5** can be confirmed in assessing whether each generational cohort want for flexible working options.

In addressing **research question 4:** " Does flexible working options increase engagement levels?" the average engagement level was calculated in respect of responses for section two of the survey addressing flexible working options.
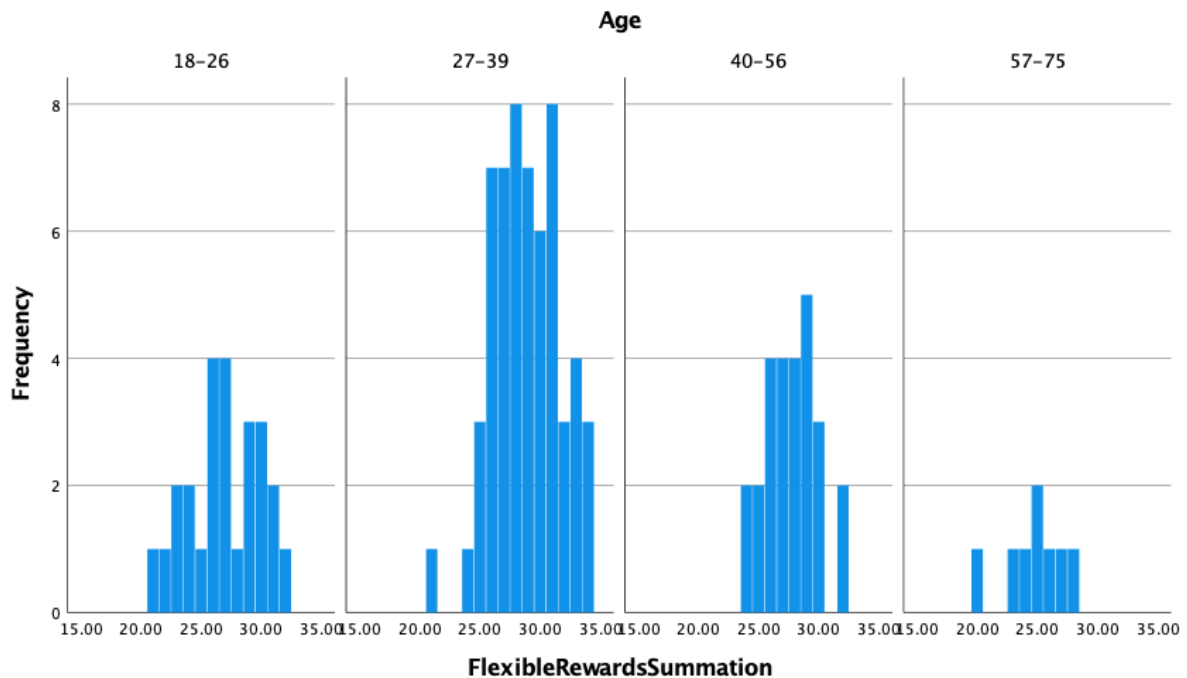


**Figure 4.3 Flexible working as a reward summation in respect of age.**

From the above graph we can see that the median score of flexible working options for generation Z is (M=26.92), generation Y is (M=26.03), generation X is (M= 27.73) and baby boomers is (M= 24.75). When you take into account the fact that the maximum score that can be attained from the flexible working questions is: 35 and minimum is 7, the results show that generation X,Y and Z scored quiet high with the majority of responses indicating 'Neutral', 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree', with baby boomers slightly under with the median response either 'Disagree' or 'Neutral'. When this is coupled with the median score for engagement levels of different age groups (Generation Z (M= 21.16), generation Y (M= 20.06), generation X (M= 23.34) and baby boomers (M=24.87)) the scores are as follows:

Generation Z (M= 24.04), generation Y (M= 26.03), generation X (M= 25.53) and baby boomers (M=24.87).

This data shows that generation X and Y are higher engaged when flexible working options are allowed, and generation Z and baby boomers are less concerned with flexible working options in respect of their engagement, however their score is still high, addressing **research question number 4**, this can also be seen across the various literature such as: Mencl, 2014; Crumpacker et al., 2007, Mencl, 2014, O'Boyle et al., 2017, and Coogan et al., 2020.

Finally, in addressing research question number 3: " Do each generational cohort want to pick their own benefits?" the following graph has been used in identifying same.
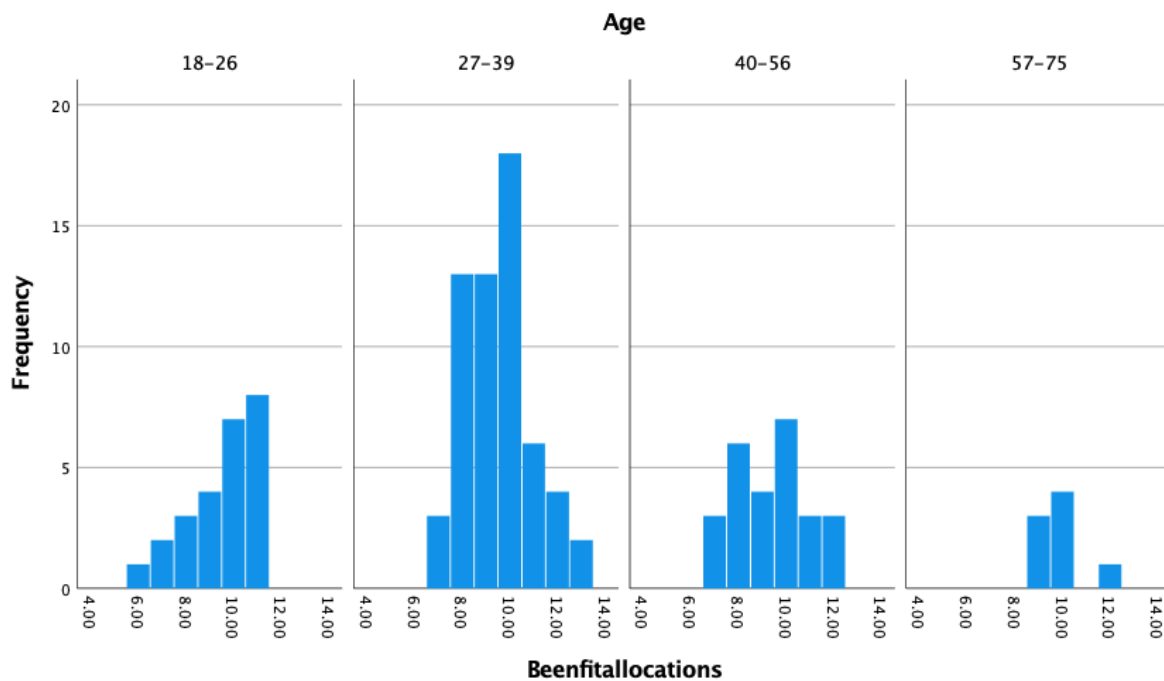


**Figure 4.4 Benefit allocations/ choice of benefits in respect of each generational cohort**.

In the above graph we can see that the results are skewed across the different generations.

In respect of the reward and benefit allocation questions in the survey the maximum score that could be attained is: 15 with the minimum of: 3.

Generation Z (M= 9.52), generation Y (M= 9.52), generation X(M=9.38) and baby boomers (M= 9.87).

The above shows that all generations indicated that they choose either 'Neural', 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' in respect of being able to choose their own benefits, addressing **research question 3.** This can be seen in the previous literature mentioned in chapter 2 of this dissertation (Baeten et al. 2012; Romsey; 2021; Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016; Brown, 2013).

**4.6 Limitations of the study**
As discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation the sample size was seen as the main area that could potentially limit the study. As seen throughout the results above there was a skewed representation of the different generations with a big portion of the participants falling under the generation Y category, and a very small number of participants falling under the baby boomers category. Should a more even participation rate be seen across all generations, the study may have benefitted more. The study was limited also by the number of participants; should a larger participation rate be present the results would have been more interesting as there would be more data to work from. It is recommended for future studies that a greater amount of time be given to the distribution of the survey in order to see a higher response rate, as was previously mentioned there were time constraints involved in receiving in the returned surveys.

Another limitation that presented itself in this study was the fact that the first scale used as inspiration for the survey (Work Value's Instrument Scale) did not achieve internal reliability, using the Cronbach's Alpha scale in SPSS-27. Should certain questions be limited from the survey internal reliability would have been achieved. This henceforth affected the results seen throughout the above chapter as we were no longer working off of the same scale, but a subset of the scale instead.

# 5. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 5 will see this research draw to a close with a detailed discussion of the findings outlined with careful consideration to the previous literature discussed in chapter 2. An analysis of said findings will occur followed by recommendations that could be employed in organisations in order to see an effective rewards and benefits strategy so that high engagement in employees can be fostered. This will take in to consideration the potential time strains and costings of the potential implementation of said strategies. This chapter will then conclude highlighting the potential for further research on this topic taking into account the limitations experienced as part of this research.

## 5.1 Discussion of findings:

One of the primary objectives of this research was to establish whether the multi-generational workforce in Ireland required different benefits and rewards in order to be engaged in their work. The outcome from the above analysis shows that there are no differences between the wants and needs in respect of rewards and benefits across the multi-generational workforce. This was established through testing of hypothesis 1. This is an interesting result to receive from the data as generally stated in the literature referring to the different generations, each generation values different rewards and benefits more than the other, with a stronger link in generation Z and Y and generation X and baby boomers (Coogan et al., 2020; O'Boyle et al., 2017; Khera et al., 2014; Mencl, 2014 etc) .

The data shows through figure's 4.1, and 4.2 that each generation values both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, rather than just one category of reward. This could go hand in hand with the theory of total reward proposed by Giancola (2014) and Pilbeam et al., (2010) discussed in

chapter 2 of this dissertation. Total reward intends on ensuring that the all the needs of the employee are met, rather than one specific need. Due to this Giancola proposes that a total reward system be in place in order to address both the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of the employees, and in correlation to the data received above, this would be a beneficial stance for employers to adopt so that the engagement levels of employees can remain high.

The engagement levels across the generational cohorts were then analysed and it came to be that the engagement levels across the generations were very similar, which can be seen in the testing of hypothesis 2. As stated in the previous literature review chapter engagement levels can fluctuate depending on the rewards and benefits present in the organisation (Vidal- Salazar, 2016) and high engagement levels are pertinent in the success of the organisation, as it increases revenue and profit, fosters creativity and reduces turnover (Lardner, 2015).

It is clear from the above that each generation requires a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, there are some fluctuations to that of the literature however;  it is stated that generation Y and Z value extrinsic rewards more as a benefit (Mahmoud, et al. 2020), that baby boomers main requirement would be extrinsic ( Khera, et al., 2014) and that according to Crumpacker et al., (2007) and Mahmoud (2020) the main reward required from generation X's perspective would be that of intrinsic rewards and benefits, however there is a higher score for generation Z in intrinsic, a higher score for generation Y for extrinsic, a higher score for generation X for extrinsic rewards and a higher score for baby boomers for extrinsic rewards. Albeit, the scores are mainly similar across the board, there are differences present, and this may be interesting to explore in further research, perhaps with a larger sample size.

In respect of hypothesis 3- where flexible working options as a requirement were analysed, this is concurrent with previous research, as Mencl (2014) and Crumpacker et al., (2007) states that generation X require flexible working options, and work life balance. Mencl (2014) also states that generation Y require flexible working options. O' Boyle et al., (2017) and Coogan et al., (2020) state that generation Z see flexible working options as a requirement rather than an option. It can also be seen in the above results that flexible working options are required across all generations in order to see a higher engagement level.

When assessing whether benefits should be allocated for employees or whether they should be allowed choose their benefits, figure 4.4 gives us great detail in to the requirements of such from each generational cohort. As stated by  Baeten et al., (2012) if an employee is given the opportunity to choose their benefits, rather than be allocated certain benefits, this will increase their engagement levels, this can be seen in the above data as majority of participants indicated 'Neutral', 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' in being given a choice in same. Vidal- Salazar et al., (2016) state that this would be an excellent method in reducing the costs of the reward and benefit strategies in an organisation as it would minimise the introduction of rewards and benefits that simply would not be used. The "employee deal"  implemented by Lardner (2015) was discussed in chapter 2, where employees would be given the choice in their benefits and given a choice between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and this concept saw increased engagement across the organisation, this would correspond nicely to the results above as it is indicated that employees would prefer a choice over their benefits.

**5.2 Recommendations**

Following on from chapter four of this dissertation and the discussion of said results above there are a number of recommendations that could be brought forward to organisations in Ireland.

As all organisations differ in size, income and number of employees it is important to note that some of the following recommendations would fit larger scaled organisations compared to that of smaller scaled organisations and vice versa, due to the differing operation methods that may be in place (Porter, 2008).

First and foremost as this research showed that the needs and wants of the different generations are very similar, however that is based off of a relevantly small participation rate, it would be in the best interest of organisations to communicate with their employees through means of an anonymous survey (such as what was used in this dissertation) in order to assess the needs and wants of their own employees, as there are many different organisations that invest heavily in the benefit schemes that employees have no use or want for (Giancola, 2014). Once the needs and wants of their employees have been established a strategic plan can be implemented.

This step would be a priority for organisations as it would give them an insight in to which direction they should be going with their rewards strategy. In respect of time strains, this would be a relevantly quick endeavour as the formation of a survey can be done using software such as SurveyMonkey which allows you to formulate your own questions and distribute via

hyperlink, which can be distributed to employees via email. This is a relevantly cost efficient manner in gathering insight from employees as a subscription for SurveyMonkey (which allows formation, distribution and analysis of results) starts at €39.00 but a basic account (which allows same, expect maximum of ten questions) is free. Due to the cost efficiency and time efficiency organisations should implement this straight away. The formulation of the survey would take approximately one week (once the organisation has an idea of what questions they would like addressed), a month to receive responses, and then two weeks to analyse the data, therefore a total of seven weeks would be needed.

From the research laid out in chapter four it is clear that employee engagement would benefit from allowing employees to choose their own benefits. This can also be confirmed through previous literature (Baeten et al.,2012., Romsey, 2021., Vidal- Salazar, et al. 2016., Pilbeam et al., 2010., Brown, 2013., Lardner, 2015).

As stated by Baeten et al., (2012) flexible rewards would only suit organisations that do not operate under a cost leadership strategy (Porter, 2008) as their main aim is to reduce costs, and the development and implication of a flexible reward strategy can be costly, timely and require infrastructure that may not be available to smaller organisations.

Due to this, the flexible reward strategy is recommended for larger organisations with the means to develop or acquire said infrastructure.

 The flexible reward strategy is seen to increase employee engagement, reduce costs, and productivity across the organisation, therefore employees should be allowed to choose their benefits or rewards in order to see results in same (Lardner, 2015).

This software could either be built accordingly by the organisation in question, however that could take a significant amount of time and resources so it is recommended that larger organisations adopt the services of a platform that specialise in moving all things

benefits/rewards/employee recognition on to an easy to use digital platform. The organisations which could be considered for same could be BambooHR, Core HR, Sage People etc. The different pricing of the platform for each organisation would heavily depend on how many services the organisation wants to move to said platform and the number of employees in the organisation. This would be a more time efficient method in implementing a flexible reward strategy as the systems are already in place, maintained and administrated.

Should the organisation use an alternative software (such as one mentioned above) the implementation of the flexible reward strategy would take approximately six months; which would include distribution of the anonymous survey/analysis of the data, contacting the relevant organisations to receive quotes, arranging internal meetings to discuss the potential benefits and rewards that would be brought over on to the new platform and then informing all employees of the new cross over and new system that would be put in place.

In respect of costings, as mentioned above the different pricing for each of the potential infrastructure organisations will differ based on the software itself, how many services will be brought to the new platform and the number of employees, however as an example for the use of BambooHR, the price per employee on the software starts at €5.28 per month (Pardo-Bunte, 2021) and for an organisation with 200 employees, costings for the software alone would amount to approximately €12,672 per annum, which may not be feasible for a lot of organisations, however when considering the cost of employing a team to build, maintain and administer said software on a yearly basis the costs of outsourcing another company to do same exponentially reduce the costs.

As seen in the discussion of findings there is a need for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards amongst all the different generations in Ireland, therefore it is recommended that organisations incorporate a mixture of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for employees. This again will

differ based on the funds available to the organisation, however should limited expenditure be available to organisations the general extrinsic rewards could be put in place such as annual leave, sick pay benefit, bonus (or vouchers) at the end of the year for a job well done and then heavily influence the intrinsic benefits such as: mentioning an employee in the company newsletter, opportunities for development and progression, a shout out through emails to the wider company about top performers etc. There are also many different software's available for organisations to use to foster employee recognition, such as: Assembly. This software allows employees to chat to one another, send badges of encouragements, messages of success and birthday celebrations. It is easy and quick to set up for employees, only needing an email address. It is also free of charge to use for organisations up to 50 employees (Bell, A, 2021). Should an organisation have more than 50 employees it would cost approximately €2.50 per team per month which is a low cost in respect of ensuring that the employees are connected and engaged. This could be implemented straight away in organisations to increase engagement through intrinsic reward methods, and should not take any longer than two months to implement, depending on the size of the organisation. This will ensure that both the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and benefits are met ensuring engagement levels would remain high.

For organisations that may have a higher budget for rewards and benefits higher extrinsic rewards and benefits could be implemented with the same intrinsic rewards mentioned above or a flexible reward strategy could be implemented in order to see results.

It is also clear from the above results that the different generations would like the opportunity for flexible working options in their workplace. This working method is very highly wanted across Ireland and across the world at present with a view for this to be even higher due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

From this it is recommended that organisations that are able to allow their employees to work from home, or hybrid working should do same as, from the results laid out in chapter four, engagement levels are higher for employees that are given flexible working options. This could also benefit the organisation as it would decrease cost of renting office space, utility bills amongst other potential expenditure involved with employees being in the office full-time. In respect of ensuring that employees have an ergonomic set up in their home office, the supplies that would be initially given to employees in the main office could simply be given to them for their home office reducing any additional expenditure. There are very little time strains on implementing this as majority of the world is currently working from home due to restrictions. Should majority of the workforce want to take up hybrid working, hot desking could be implemented in the office, a team calendar could be set up where employees book a day to be in the office avoiding overcrowding and lack of resources. This would not have any additional costs associated with the organisation and may in the long run reduce the overall costs of the organisation. This recommendation could be implemented straight away, as those already working from home who want to continue working from home will have the resources necessary having worked majority of the past year from home (due to the pandemic) and it will give the organisation time to arrange hot desking options in the office for when restrictions lift.

From the above recommendations the top priority of all organisations should be to conduct an anonymous survey to ensure that the organisation is aware of what it is their employees want, including their requirement for flexible working options. From this, for larger organisations a flexible reward strategy should be implemented, and for smaller organisations employee recognition tools (such as Assembly) should be used and the most prevalent extrinsic rewards required (from the survey results) should be implemented.

**5.3 Conclusion**

Throughout this research we examined employee engagement levels across the multi-generational workforce in Ireland in respect of rewards and benefits.

Rewards and benefits are always seen as a big reason why individual's choose to work for certain organisations, the level of commitment they will give to their role every day and their loyalty to the organisation  (Pilbeam et al.,2010), however an investigation had to be done on whether the different generations valued the same benefits and rewards and whether these rewards increased their engagement levels.

It was clear from the literature review that there are differences between the different generations' wants and needs, with some similarities present between the closer in age generations (Z and Y, X and baby boomers) (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016; Baeten et al., 2012; Crumpacker et al., 2007; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Mahmoud, 2020; Khera, et al., 2014), however the results of this research shows that there is a strong link between the wants and needs of each generation. The aforementioned studies were predominately done outside of Ireland, and this research focused on individual's currently working in Ireland. This could show that there is a difference in the rewards and benefits of the  working population of Ireland compared to that of other nations.

The research examined the effects the rewards and benefits had on the different generations in respect of employee engagement and showed that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic

rewards are important in fostering employee engagement across all generations, and that flexible working options along with a choice in benefits is important also.

These findings were then analysed and recommendations for organisations were laid out addressing the potential costing and time strains that could occur from the implementation of said recommendations.

## 5.4 Recommendations for future studies

As mentioned in the limitations section of chapter 4, the participation rate of the survey wasn't as high as required, therefore for future studies it is recommended that the researcher spend more time in accessing participants for the study. It is also recommended that a more widespread distribution of the survey be done in order to access said respondents. This could be done through means of contacting large organisations and asking whether they would distribute the survey, contacting colleges directly and asking same.

To note as mentioned in the conclusion that the results received from this dissertation showed a difference to that of the results seen in other similar literature (generations requiring different needs and wants) (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016; Baeten et al., 2012; Crumpacker et al., 2007; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Mahmoud, 2020; Khera, et al., 2014), a conclusion can be drawn to say that potentially the Irish workforce expect different rewards and benefits across the different generations to that of other nations, therefore it is recommended that a study be done on the comparison of the wants and needs of rewards and benefits from the Irish population to that of other nations.

**5.5 Personal learning reflection**

The past two years of completing the MA in Human Resource Management have been very challenging for me. Having gone back to education after a number of years working, getting back in to the swing of studying, writing essays and especially this year writing a dissertation was tough.

I continued to work full-time the whole way through the masters programme which was again a struggle. The Covid-19 pandemic also through my studies off as the library was closed, classes moved online and my job (working in a social care setting) was counted as essential and became busier than it ever was before.

All of these challenges made me work hard to achieve every essay mark, exam and now this dissertation, therefore I am happy with the outcome of my study.

I learned a lot about myself over the course of completing this dissertation. I learned that I am capable of performing well under stress, of hitting deadlines that are set for me, but also set by me. I learned that Human Resources is an absolute passion of mine and I am very excited to see where my career takes me after the end of this dissertation. I have learned so much about human resources, the policies, the laws, the requirements and the overall sense of comradery amongst HR professionals. I am delighted to have been able to finish my studies and continue in to the HR community as an accredited CIPD member.

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## Appendix 1

As part of the Master's Degree in Human Resource Management with National College of Ireland, we are asked to complete a piece of research.

My chosen topic is employee engagement and whether rewards and benefits play a role in same.

The following survey will ask you a series of questions, starting with demographic questions, then moving on to assess the rewards and benefits in which you find the most important and then finishing up with assessing your engagement levels.

The section assessing rewards and benefits is inspired by the Work Values Instrument developed by Lechner et al., (2018) and the section assessing employee engagement is adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale- 9 detailed by Schaufeli, et al., (2006).

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Some points to note before completing this survey:

1. By completing this survey you are consenting to participation in this study.

2. Participation is voluntary.

3. You can refuse to answer any question at any time throughout the survey.

4. The information gathered is purely for academic research.

5. The data obtained as part of this research will be held confidentially and used purely for this research.

6. No sensitive data will be obtained as part of this survey; no email address, phone numbers or names will be collected.

7. Your participation in this survey is anonymous and confidential.

Should you require any further information regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me on the below email address.

Thank you very much for your participation in this study.

Christina Comerford

x19185626@student.ncirl.ie

MA Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland.

# Appendix 2

Section 1:

1. Please indicate which age bracket you fall into.

57-75 years old.

40-56 years old.

27-39 years old.

18-26 years old.

Other (please specify)


2. Please indicate your current working status

In full-time employment

In part-time employment

Currently seeking opportunities

Other (please specify)


3. Please indicate which gender you fall into.

Male

Female

Transgender

Gender-fluid

Prefer not to disclose


Section 2.1:

In the following section, statements regarding extrinsic rewards and benefits will be shown.

Indicate your agreement level with the statement on the 5 point Likert Scale beginning with

'Strongly Disagree' ranging up to and including 'Strongly Agree'. Only one choice can be made per statement.

- A salary equal or above the market average is important to me.

- I would choose a higher salary over other benefits.

- I expect a lot of opportunities for progression.

- Health/ dental insurance as a benefit is important to me.

- Financial rewards for a job well done are important to me.

- Financial rewards alone would make me feel more engaged in my work.

- Financial rewards and benefits increase my satisfaction in my role.

- Financial rewards and benefits increase my commitment to my organization.

Section 2.2:

The following questions will contain statements regarding flexible working options and job security. Same as above please indicate your level of agreement across this 5 point Likert Scale.

- Flexible working hours are important to me.

- Flexible work location is important to me.

- I would choose job security over flexible working options.

- Having a permanent position is important to me.

- I would not leave my permanent position for a contract position.

- I would look for another position if my employment did not offer flexible working conditions.

- Work life balance is important to me.

Section 2.3:

The following statements are designed to assess Intrinsic rewards and benefits. As with the above statements, please indicate your agreeability with the below statements on the following 5 point Likert Scale.

- I require frequent opportunities to learn.

- Work that interests me is important.

- Making a difference in my role is important to me.

- Frequent feedback from managers is important to me.

- Recognition for a job well done is important to me.

- Knowing I am making a difference as part of my role is more important than financial reward.

- Non-financial rewards and benefits increase my satisfaction in my role.

- Non- financial rewards and benefits increase my commitment to my organization.

Section 2.4:

 Reward and benefit allocations

- I would prefer to pick what benefits I receive as part of my role.

- I think everyone in the organization should receive the same benefits.

- I would prefer to have my rewards and benefits picked for me.

Section 3:

The final section of this survey will assess the engagement levels you feel as part of your role.

Please see the following statements and select the value that most agrees with you for each one.

This should be done in the same format as the above 5 point Likert Scale.

- I enjoy my job.

- My work interests me.

- I am fulfilled by my work.

- I look forward to going to work.

- My work excites me.

- My work is a big part of my life.