

AN ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATIONAL THEORIES THAT COULD AID THE  
COLLEGE MANAGEMENT TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

By

YOKO ELVIRA VARGAS CASTELLANOS

BA (Hons) IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project asked: How can management encourage and enhance employee engagement in The College with the aid of motivational theories?

The aim was to help management identify the factors that enhance employee engagement at The College by analysing some of the most widely referenced motivational theories. The research question included focus topics to identify if any of them had an impact in the engagement of employees within the organisation, the topics were: financial rewards, job security, culture, autonomy, flexibility, communication, discretionary efforts, change within the organisation, development and growth, and challenge. The literature review provided the grounds for the creation of an interview protocol used to collect qualitative data from employees. The study findings confirmed that the culture of the organisation, flexibility and autonomy were the most important factors to keep employees engaged within The College.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is wholly the result of my own work. All materials consulted and ideas garnered in the process of researching for this dissertation have been properly and accurately acknowledged.

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## CHAPTER ONE: STUDY FOCUS AND FRAMING

### Introduction

As an agreement with the owner of this organisation the actual name of the company will remain anonymous and instead will be referred to as “The College”.

The focus of this research study is to analyse some of the most widely referenced motivational theories to identify what are the most common motivational factors. The specific purpose is to identify which of those elements have the most impact on the engagement of employees at The College, so that management can consider them for the future creation of activities and programs that could enhance and maintain the engagement of employees with the organisation.

The College is an Irish private institution currently based in Dublin city centre which started operating since 2004 as a partnership business venture with only two people, it has grown organically and to date it employs seventeen full-time staff; nine of them work in the academic department and the other eight work in administration and other areas; the college also employs approximately fifteen Part-time lecturers. In terms of the structure, although the organisational chart of the company is hierarchical in theory, in practice decision making is sometimes made in stream line depending on the nature of the issue.

The day to day operation of the college seems to run smoothly, however, from verbal interaction with colleagues it seems that although communication is constant, discontent exists with the content of information shared; also when it comes to pay and benefits, despite the fact that some employees believe they get just enough, they still remain in the same job and have done so for a number of years now. Digging further into the daily activities, The College operates under a multicultural environment which for some people is evidently enjoyable; however for some others it is not very clear what impact a multicultural environment has in their job or their work environment as a whole.



From a personal perspective it can be seen that the owner of The College takes every possible opportunity to remind staff that the culture of the company is to work as a family, where all members of the staff should help each other and where team-work and commitment is expected in order to maintain sustainability and achieve organisational goals. From a personal perspective it can also be seen that the director tries to maintain a flexible working environment and endeavours a friendly workplace where employees' wellbeing is considered important, and where staff development is promoted for the continuous growth of the organisation as well as the personal growth of workers.

### The Research Question

The research question is: how can management encourage and enhance employee engagement in The College with the aid of motivational theories?

An analysis of motivational theories will assist to identify what are generally the factors that motivate individuals in the workplace; once the general motivational factors and their causes have been identified a more focused approach to selected topics will be taken in order to identify which elements have the most impact on the engagement of employees at The College.

The selected focus topics are:

Financial Rewards- Although pay and other financial rewards are important for many people- Is it the main motivator for employees at The College to engage with the organisation?- It is expected that financial rewards will be highly mentioned in motivational theories related to the workplace because individuals need to work in order to survive, especially in modern days, however each individual is different and therefore the impact that financial rewards will differ among employees of The College, but to what extent?

Job security- During the recession businesses showed a massive decline in staffing and an increase in strict measures such as temporary lay-offs, temporary unpaid leave and in many cases redundancies, the very loose labour market derived from the

recession brought a considerable decrease in employee turnover (Gunnigle, et al, 2011). This flagged to my attention that recession had an impact not only in the people who lost their jobs but also in the individuals who were lucky to remain in employment. It is important therefore to identify how much impact recession has had in the engagement of employees at The College.

Culture- Since The College operates in a multicultural environment, from a colleague point of view as well as with the consumers to which the service is provided, in this case EU and overseas students, it is then relevant to find out how much of a positive or negative impact a multicultural environment has had on employees, and how much impact this has in their engagement with the company.

Flexibility- From a personal perspective the company generally offers great flexibility to all the staff, however since individuals differ in opinions it is important to identify what is the perception of individual employees in terms of flexibility and how much impact it has in their engagement with the organisation.

Communication- The process and content of communication should be based on important elements such as respect, trust, dignity and also shared authority, where the system will prove successful if it reinforces these values; to be effective, employees must perceive communication as being trustworthy and reliable, where the behaviours of management is consistent with the values of the organisation (Harshman and Harshman, 1999). This is why it is important to identify the perception of employees regarding communication and how much it impacts their work.

Autonomy- Which refers to the degree of discretion that employees have when it comes to make important decisions related to their work, for example the timing of their tasks, this is one of the reasons why autonomy can trigger employee satisfaction and motivation (Parker and Wall, 1998). It is important therefore to identify if the employees at The College consider to be given sufficient levels of autonomy and what impact this feature has on their engagement with the company.

Change- Daft and Lewin (as cited in Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999) state that due to the increase in customer expectations and demands, the rapid changes in technology and globalization, the traditional system of command-and-control doesn't seem to be the most effective approach when it comes to handle change. -Employees are often more capable of making decisions regarding changes related to their jobs because they have more specialized knowledge about their work compared to their superiors (Lawler, as cited in Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999). This statements highlight the importance of involving employees with the decision making process, for that reason it is important to identify how involved the employees of The College are in the decision making process, and if they consider it important to maintain their engagement with the organisation.

Development and growth- Innovation is the key to survive in the current rapidly changing market, many companies invest considerable resources to develop their intellectual capital in order to increase their innovative capabilities (Tushman & O'Reilly, as cited in Subramaniam, and Youndt, 2005). However the leaders of SMEs often encounter financial constrains to hire professionals like they do in large companies (MacLeod and Clarke, 2011). For this reasons it is important to identify if The College has provided the relevant opportunities for employee development, and how important it is for employees that the company offers such opportunities to increase their engagement with it.

### Aim and objectives

As the company grows, it becomes harder for management to evaluate the level of employee engagement at The College; the aim of this project is to help management identify which factors encourage and enhance employee engagement by analysing some of the most widely used motivational theories.

The research question states specific focus topics to be considered throughout this research, considering those focus topics which will assist to address the research question, the following objectives for this project have been established.

- a) To identify how strong financial reward is as a motivator to keep employees engaged with The College
- b) To identify how much impact recession has had in the engagement of employees with The College.
- c) To identify how much of a positive or negative impact a multicultural environment has had on employees and how much impact this has in their engagement with The College.
- d) To identify what is the perception of individual employees in terms of flexibility and how much impact it has in their engagement with The College.
- e) To identify the perception of employees regarding communication and how much it impacts their work.
- f) To identify if the employees at The College consider to be given sufficient levels of autonomy and what impact this feature has on their engagement with the organisation.
- g) To identify how involved the employees of The College are in the decision making process, and if they consider it important to maintain their engagement with the company.
- h) To identify how important it is for employees that The College offers opportunities for development and how much influence that has on their engagement with the company.

### Summary

This chapter provided the framework for this research as well as the relevant focus areas considered important for the identification of the level of employee engagement at The College, in order to provide management with the necessary information for the future development of activities and programs to enhance employee engagement. The next chapter reviews some of the most widely used motivational theories to identify the factors that influence motivation in the workplace.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The aim of this project is to analyse the most widely referred motivational theories in order to identify the factors that motivate employees to feel more engaged with The College and to provide the management with accurate data to assist in the creation and implementation of future activities and programs related to engagement. In order to make an informed decision a literature review is essential to examine key concepts and related research on the topics of motivation and employee engagement. The following topics have been identified: Overview of motivational theories, definition of employee engagement and its importance, importance of motivation to enhance employee engagement, motivation and engagement in SMEs and organisational culture.

#### *Overview of motivational theories*

Motivation is an incredibly broad and complex topic which is often studied in organisational sciences, and is often considered one of the most important areas of organisational behaviour. It is generally referred to as the external or internal force that is the source of interest, direction and persistence of goal-directed effort; it is then clear to see that Motivation theories are essential to understand the processes which explain when, why and how behaviour is triggered.

Although there is extensive evidence of motivation studies there is still no single theory of motivation that fits all purposes and is universally accepted, mainly because of the complexity of human psychology, therefore an analysis of the most popular theories will be used to find the most suitable one for The College.

In order to have a deeper understanding of Motivational theories the different types of motivation need to be identified beforehand.

## Motivation

“To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something” (Ryan, 2000, p.54). Ryan suggests that when an individual is not moved or inspired to do something then he can be referred as being unmotivated, contrastingly if the same individual is moved or activated towards achieving something then he will be categorised as being motivated. Individuals therefore can be motivated in two different ways, extrinsically or intrinsically.

### Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is the tendency from individuals to perform activities in order to obtain a separate outcome related to the activity, in other words, the individual is moved by the external reward or rewards related to the completion of such activity (Ryan, 2000). The rewards can be either tangible or psychological. Extrinsic tangible rewards often refer to monetary rewards, so in terms of business they are typically denoted as salary, bonus and fringe benefits (among the most common). On the other hand psychological rewards refer to the intangible element or elements that drive an individual to perform in a specific way, for example to seek approval or avoid fear (Brown, 2007). Managers could therefore use fear as an alternative when monetary rewards fail, by placing fear of “consequences” on employees if goals or targets are not achieved.

### Intrinsic Motivation

"Intrinsic motivation occurs when we act without any obvious external rewards. We simply enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn, and actualize our potentials."(Coon & Mitterer, 2010).

Individuals may choose to perform an activity just for the natural satisfaction it brings to them instead of doing it for a reward, pressure or to avoid a consequence. Humans are often active, curious and playful creatures who commonly develop a strong need to learn and explore during their first years of life without the promise of an instant reward, such natural motivation then is relevant in the development of

cognitive, psychological and social skills which will aid individuals in the development of knowledge and new skills (Ryan, 2000).

Even though intrinsic motivation can be an innate element within an individual, intrinsic motivation can also be found between individuals and the activities they perform. Hull (as cited in Ryan, 2000) stated with his learning theory that the behaviour of an individual can be motivated by activities that satisfy and fulfil their psychological needs, for example their need to feel productive, competent, autonomous, and the sense of belonging by being part of a team. Considering this, the factors that intrinsically motivate employees differ among each other depending on the type of activity they are given, so what may look like an appealing task or activity for one employee may not actually be for another.

Now that it has been recognised that individuals can be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, we can move on to have an overview of motivational theories to find out what factors they promote as important when it comes to motivating individuals generally as well as in the workplace.

### ***Theory 1- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory***

In 1943 American psychologist Abraham Maslow who was a major contributor to the humanistic approach in psychology developed a theory called "A theory of human motivation" which comprises five sets of needs to be fulfilled hierarchically by the individual in order to achieve self-actualization, such needs are prioritized from bottom to top as: Psychological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem and Self-Actualisation (see table 1).

The theory suggests that each set of needs has to be fulfilled before the individual moves on to the next one, and so on until the last and most important stage is achieved. With this theory Maslow intended to understand what it is that motivates people, focusing in the fact that an individual's performance is the outcome of a motivational system rather than a reward or an unconscious desire system. His theory proposes that the basic needs (psychological, safety, love/belonging) and

growth needs (Esteem) of individuals need to be covered first in order for the individual to achieve self-fulfilment and thus happiness (Maslow, 1943).

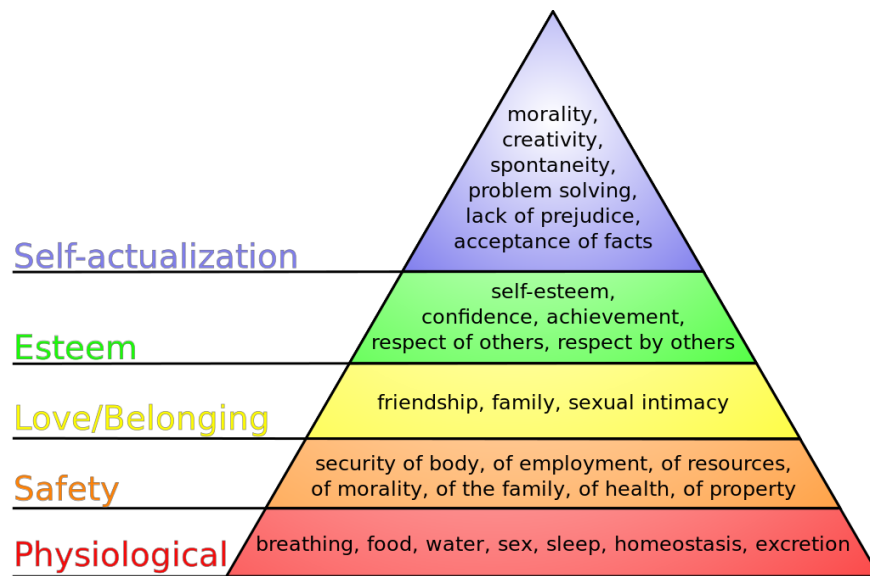


Table 1. - An interpretation of Maslow’s hierarchy of need, portrayed as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom.

### Maslow’s theory from the business perspective

#### Category 1 – Physiology

From the business perspective, the first stage which covers the basic needs of the individual, refers to the fact that employees would expect to receive at least a decent salary and acceptable working conditions that will allow them to pay for their most basic human needs such as food, clothing and shelter. It is important to consider however that employee engagement doesn’t play an important role at this stage, therefore business owners, managers and leaders should bear that in mind (Maslow and Stephens, 2000).

#### Category 2 – Safety

In the second stage, which relates to the safety needs of the individual, the person would develop the need for job security which in most cases means signing a long-term or permanent contract. Helminger (as cited in Kamery, 2004) suggests that after the physiological needs are met, the motivators can vary widely making it harder for



managers to decide what set of rewards will be the most adequate to fulfil the employees' needs that will lead to achieving corporate goals. Extrinsic motivators such as financial rewards or fear are more likely to be useful in the short term, and could end up being unfavourable for the company in the long run, thus it is important that managers identify and consider possible employees intrinsic motivators to help the company maintain sustainability (Voge, 2007).

Kamery (2004) states that some organisations provide educational assistance, saving plan benefits or stock options, with the aim of providing long-term security for employees to increase their commitment. He states that many companies encourage employees to continue with their education in order to increase their effectiveness at work, and prepare them if a better position becomes available within the company, the aim is to provide a sense of security in order to enhance the engagement from workers with the company.

The sense of motivation and safety can be highly influenced by good quality working conditions, clear short-term or long-term objectives, evidence of strong and effective leadership and a set of useful rewards available to employees among others (Kamery, 2004). Capozzoli (as cited in Kamery 2004) agrees with the previous statement suggesting that employees can't be expected to perform well and be motivated if the working conditions are poor, for example high levels of noise during a task that requires concentration or inadequate levels of temperature on site.

### Category 3– Social Belonging

In the third category, which relates to social needs, the employee is expected to have already fulfilled his physiological and safety needs and thus will start developing the need to build social relations. What was not important before suddenly becomes the top priority, since the physiological and safety needs are already satisfied belongingness becomes the top priority at this stage (Maslow, 1970). Considering this it can be expected that the the individual will search for social relatedness in the sense of positive social relations, good team work and a friendly atmosphere with colleagues and superiors in order to feel more engaged with the organisation.

*“In its highly regarded Q12, which is a measure of employee engagement, Gallup includes the following question: “Do you have a best friend at work?” Why does this question matter?... Because based on Gallup's research, employees who answer in the affirmative are more likely to be engaged than those who don't.”*

*Kelleher, 2014*

Organisations that consider social activities important have shown to enjoy a higher degree of employee engagement in comparison to companies that focus entirely on business related activities (Kelleher, 2014).

#### Category 4– Self Esteem

In the fourth stage Maslow (1970) argues that most people (except for some pathological exceptions) experience a need for self-respect or self-esteem, and simultaneously the respect and esteem of others. He divides the need for self-esteem into two sets: 1) a need or desire for achievement, mastery, competence, independence, and confidence in the face of the world; 2) Reputation or prestige, status, dominance, recognition, dignity, appreciation or importance. He argues that if an individual fulfils his self-esteem needs it will boost his self-confidence, if those same needs are not met however, then the individual will experience feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness. Maslow emphasises then that the encouragement or discouragement of these feelings will set the trend of the individual's behaviour. If employees feel that their contribution to the company is recognized, then they will experience a sense of achievement, if feel that their work is acknowledged by the organisation and that their efforts matter they will keep motivated.

*“Employee recognition is a key part of engagement. At its core, recognition builds esteem. Unfortunately, even though recognition has so much impact — and is often free — it remains low on most companies' list of priorities.”*

*Kelleher, 2014*

Kelleher states that when employees are confident and happy with the quality of their work, and they are recognized for the same reason, they will feel that others believe in them which in turn will increase their engagement and productivity.

## Category 5 – Self Actualization

This is the last stage of Maslow's hierarchy, where he argues that even if all the previously mentioned needs are met, the individual will still not be fully content if he/she is not doing what he/she is fitted for, for example, a musician must make music and a poet must write in order to feel truly happy with themselves (Maslow, 1970). He mentions that the term self-actualization was first stated in 1939 by American psychologist Kurt Goldstein, where he referred to self-actualization as an act from within the individual "self-made" and not as a result of external forces.

In terms of business, Kelleher (2014) argues that self-actualization relates employees performing at their full potential, therefore managers should help staff realise how they can achieve their full potential within the organisation, because it is only then when staff will feel trustworthy and will take full ownership of their job, this will make them feel empowered and thus will make them fully engaged to the organisation. Kelleher warns managers though, that workers will only be able to reach self-actualization if the tasks given to them are, although challenging, also within the limits of their capability.

Kelleher highlights that employee engagement can't be fully achieved if the needs of workers are not met; he gives the example of dropping levels of engagement in the case of a companywide layoff, explaining that even valuable workers who will remain in the company and have nothing to worry about still experience feelings of fear, because the company failed to meet the needs in level two which are related to safety; those valuable workers although "safe" at that particular moment in time, will doubt the future of the company and will possibly start to look for new opportunities in the market to recover that sense of security.

*"A healthy, fully engaged workforce is one that has collectively reached level five, or self-actualization. This occurs in organizations that have built a line of sight between where the company is going and each employee's job or role. Level five is where you win over employees' heads and hearts."*

*Kelleher, 2014*

## *Theory 2 – Alderfer’s Existence, Relatedness and Growth Theory*

When it comes to work motivation Maslow’s theory lacks the empirical evidence to prove that his proposed hierarchy is to be followed in that strict order within the workplace environment. Between 1967 and 1969 American psychologist Clayton Paul Alderfer tried to address the discrepancies in Maslow’s theory to make it more efficient by aligning the elements in the hierarchy with empirical research, his theory of needs as opposed to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is more focused in the impact that the need satisfaction of the individual has in his self-esteem and consequently what impact that has on his job performance (Robbins, as cited in Arnolds and Boshoff, 2002).

Alderfer (1969) further expanded on Maslow’s hierarchy suggesting that it is too rigid and that some of the levels overlap, he shortened the list of needs in the hierarchy from five to three categories (see table 2) which according to him are sufficient to understand motivational theory within the workplace; he emphasised that despite being in a hierarchy, the three categories have a different level of importance at any given time depending on the situation of the individual.

The three categories proposed by Alderfer’s ERG theory are:

### Existence-

This level covers the first two levels of Maslow’s hierarchy (Safety & Physiological needs). It refers to the need of an individual to stay alive and safe at present as well as in the future; it suggests that when a person satisfies his existence needs he feels physically comfortable to strive for the fulfilment of other needs.

### Relatedness-

This level covers the third and fourth levels of Maslow’s hierarchy (Social needs & Self-esteem). It suggests that when an individual feels physiologically safe and feels secure, the individual then starts looking into fulfilling the social needs, he/she suddenly becomes interested in maintaining important interpersonal relationships with other people such as friends, family, co-workers and employers. Relatedness gives the individual a sense of identity and acceptance, and thus, the individual experiences a sense of belonging within his/her immediate society.

## Growth-

Similar to Maslow's theory, this level covers the highest level of the hierarchy (Self-actualization). It suggests that when the individual feels safe, secure and has recognized his own identity then he can seek to grow by being creative and productive, by expressing and implementing his own ideas in the working environment making him feel that his input is an important element in the achievement of meaningful tasks within the organisation.

Alderfer's theory has also been criticized for not having extensive research that supports its suggested re-arrangements to Maslow's hierarchy (Ivancevich and Matteson 1999), however it is considered as a more valid version of the hierarchy and has received more support from contemporary researchers in relation to motivation in the workplace because it is more focused in job-related circumstances (Luthans, 1998). The theory highlights elements such as pay and fringe benefits, the importance of interpersonal relations with colleagues and management as well as the opportunity to grow within the workplace and the satisfaction it brings to the individual.

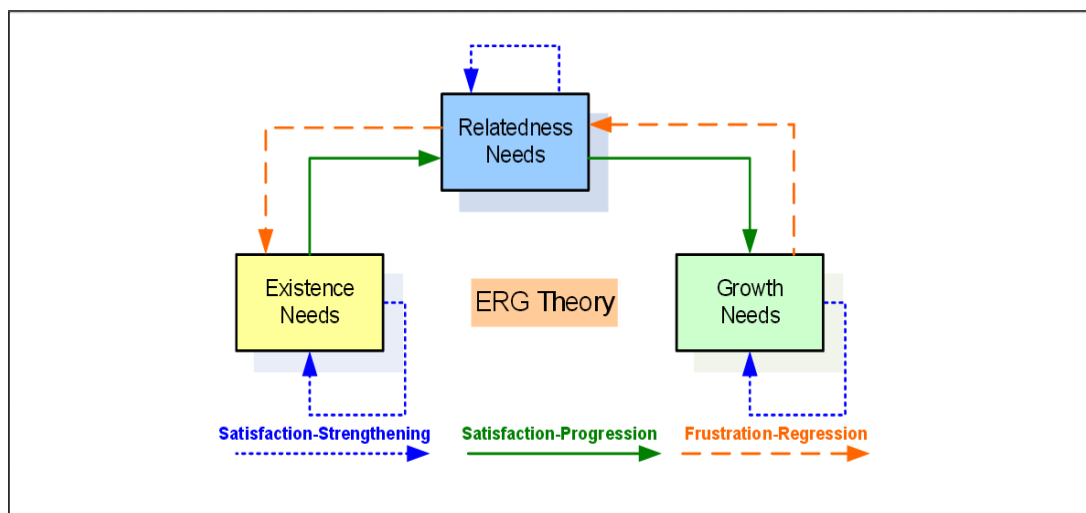


Table 2 – The concept of ERG theory  
(Data source: Alderfer 1969)

The ERG theory states that human needs are difficult to predict and therefore can't follow a strict five-level hierarchy as proposed by Maslow, also, considering that every human being is different, in the workplace employees will be different from each other and their needs could vary from one to another, or from the same

employee over time. The theory highlights the fact that the needs of an employee may need to be satisfied simultaneously, considering this managers should bear in mind not to focus in satisfying one single need in particular since this could result in employee demotivation which could lead to a decrease in performance, and in the long term a decrease in employee engagement (Arnolds and Boshoff, 2002).

#### *The Frustration- Regression Principle*

According to Alderfer (1969), if a need is satisfied on a specific level then the employee can progress to the next level, however if that same need is not satisfied then instead of moving on to a higher level the individual will regress to a lower need which he feels is easier to fulfil, for example if an employee is striving for self-actualization but the opportunities to grow within the company are limited or null, then he may regress to the relatedness need and socialise more with colleagues since it seems easier to fulfil that need at that particular moment, the employee will continue fulfilling the lower need until an opportunity to satisfy the higher need becomes available. This is an example of the frustration-regression principle, and is important to be recognised by managers at an early stage in order to implement the best procedures to minimize frustration as much as possible in order to maintain employee engagement.

### ***Theory 3 – Frederick Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory***

American psychologist Frederick Hertzberg became a big influence in the business management world with his two-factor theory, also referred as the dual-factor theory or motivation-hygiene theory. It is called the two-factor theory because it is composed of two independent set of factor named Motivation factors and Hygiene factors at work that cause either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but that are not linked to each other and in fact are completely unrelated (Herzberg, 1959).

In the 1950’s Herzberg performed a study on approximately 200 employees using a critical review method to identify the factors that affected their job attitudes. The employees who participated in the study were mainly engineers and accountants who were asked to highlight situation where they felt incredibly satisfied about their job

at the time and situations where they felt incredibly dissatisfied with their job at the time, and similarly with previous jobs they had. His findings were published in his book *The Motivation to work* in 1959, which showed that the analysis of the responses had a consistent pattern, where extrinsic factors which were items related to the job context or immediate work environment were the factors that triggered dissatisfaction, for example company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions, these factors were called the “hygiene factors”; On the other hand the motivating factors that seemed to increase job satisfaction were found to be related to the content of the job, for example responsibility, achievement, the work itself, recognition and advancement (Herzberg, 1959).

Factors that affect job satisfaction

Factors leading to dissatisfaction (Hygiene Factors)	Factors leading to satisfaction (Motivation factors)
Company policy and administration	Achievement
Supervision	Responsibility
Salary	The work itself
Interpersonal relations	Recognition
Working conditions	Advancement

Table 3. An interpretation of Herzberg’s two-factor theory as a table.

According to Herzberg et al. (1993), the motivator-hygiene factors are described as:

Hygiene Factors

- **Company policy and administration:** Factors emerging from the systems used in the company as a whole, they can include unclear channels of communication, poor authority to complete tasks successfully, disorganization and ineffective allocation of tasks.

- Supervision: The skills or lack of skills, fairness or unfairness of the supervisor or manager to delegate responsibility, and his or her interest or lack of interest in showing how a new task is done.
- Salary: Refers to all moves involved in compensating a job, for example a wage increase or the expectation of a salary increase that doesn't actually take place.
- Interpersonal relations: Is the interaction between employees and management, colleagues and other people related to the organisation with which direct contact takes place. The relationship can be either work related or simply social.
- Working conditions: Refers to the facilities where the job takes place, the workload and the tools made available to perform the job. It also refers to the overall environmental characteristics such as ventilation, lighting and space.

#### Motivation Factors

- Achievement: A job completed successfully, solving a problem, evidence of results of one's work. It includes the failure and absence of achievement.
- Responsibility: Includes responsibility for one's job, the job of others, or new responsibilities assigned.
- Work-itself: The good or bad feelings that the employee experience from doing the job. Jobs can be routinary or varied, they can be perceived as creative or useless, too easy or too difficult. These can impact job satisfaction positively or negatively.
- Recognition: Any sort of recognition from management, peers, clients or the general public. It may be an act of no-practice, praise or blame.
- Advancement: The opportunity for advancement, or the actual change of status or position of an employee within the organisation.

Hertzber's theory differs from the traditional view that job satisfaction is the opposite of job dissatisfaction which implies that increasing satisfaction automatically will reduce dissatisfaction; his theory argues that the factors causing job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are unrelated and thus provoke different feelings to the individual, he then argues that since the factors are opposite to each other they



should be treated as two separate set of factors that operate in parallel continuum.

Therefore:

“The opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction but, rather no job satisfaction; and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but no dissatisfaction”

(Herzberg 1968, 56).

The motivation-hygiene has been highly criticised because of the following reasons:

- a) The theory doesn't have a clear ability to generalize to other occupations (House and Wigdor, 1967; Schneider and Locke, 1971)
- b) The theory uses a simplification of the nature of job satisfaction (Dunnette, Campbell and Kazel, 1967)

Despite of the criticism, several studies have been conducted in order to interpret and test Herzberg's theory on occupational groups different to the ones originally used in his study. Harpaz (1983) obtained mixed results; Bass and Barrett (1981) support the theory, whereas Dunnette, et al. (1967) failed to support it.

According to Hackman and Oldham (1980) the two factor theory has encouraged a lot of research and inspired several successful projects that involve job design, because it is simple, persuasive, and it directly affects the design and evaluation of organizational changes that indeed take place, that's why over the years it is still used by managers in US organisations.

Even though there are motivational theories available to managers and organisational leaders, some with empirical support like Herzberg's two-factor theory, and others although relevant because of the content, with not so much empirical support like Maslow's theory; in order to find out the most suitable motivational theory for The College to enhance engagement, the concept of employee engagement now needs to be defined.

## *Employee engagement*

The term employee engagement has become a significant topic for researchers in the past few years (Albrecht, 2010), nonetheless it is difficult to find a generic definition of employee engagement that is suitable for all organisations. According to Gibbons (2007), executive managers are starting to realise that the definition of employee engagement has a different meaning for different people in different organisations. Gibbons came to this conclusion during his work with several employers in the search for the best definition of the concept of employee engagement, where the views of representatives differed notably among each other, where they rose topics such as identifying human needs, relationships with managers or supervisors and having close relationships with peers or even having a best friend in the workplace.

Since employee engagement is a topic that generally concerns management in most industries, researchers have tried to come up with the best definition. Empirical research has been made to explain what engagement in the workplace is really about, for example:

Saks (2006) conducted a survey of 102 employees of a wide range of occupations in Toronto, Canada; his definition of employee engagement was:

“A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance” (Saks, 2006, p. 602).

Czarnowsky (2008) conducted a survey of 776 of HR executives and learning executives around the world; his definition of employee engagement was:

“Employees who are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer’s success” (Czarnowsky, 2008, p. 6) are defined as engaged.

After performing a meta-analysis of 7,939 business units across multiple fields, Harter et al. concluded:

“Employee engagement refers to the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269).

After Khan (1990) performed an ethnographic research with the counsellors of 16 summer camps and 16 members of financial firms; he concluded:

“Personal engagement is the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

According to Schaufeli engagement is defined as the “persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001, p.417). Similarly and more related to the organisation, Gibbons (2006) maintains that engagement is “a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his or her organisation, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work” (Gibbons, 2006, p. 5).

Therefore, and based on the evidence of research just mentioned, it could be argued that the best definition of employee engagement will depend on the type of organisation, its culture and the stakeholders involved.

Macey and Schneider (2008) however propose that there is no specific definition for employee engagement; they argue that the meaning of employee engagement is ambiguous among researchers and practitioners because it is used in situations that denote psychological states, traits and behaviours taking into account their antecedents and outcomes. They propose therefore three different specific types of engagement:

1. Psychological state engagement
2. Behavioural engagement
3. Trait engagement

Psychological state engagement-

This sort of engagement is usually the most popular and referred to since it is central to the topic of engagement. From the operational point of view, psychological

engagement according to Macey and Schneider (2008) is subdivided in items that represent: job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and psychological empowerment.

*Engagement as satisfaction.* The terms engagement and satisfaction are often linked; according to Harter et al. (2002) the definition of engagement as previously mentioned is “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”, in their work *The Gallup Work Place Audit* the term satisfaction includes components such as: the availability of resources, opportunities for development and clear expectations.

The data collected from the Gallup survey was used to highlight the conditions that provide signs of engagement; however the term engagement was not directly assessed. Erickson (2005) states that engagement is much more than just satisfaction with the basics of the job, the relationship with management, and the work environment; but rather passion and commitment from the employee to give him/herself in full by expending discretionary effort to help the organisation and the employer succeed. According to Rothbard & Edwards (2003) satisfaction seems clearer when employees invest more time than usual in tasks they enjoy.

Even though satisfaction should be definitely considered within the sphere of engagement, satisfaction implies satiation whereas engagement on the other hand implies activation (Erickson, 2005). Therefore if satisfaction is measured as satiation, the result doesn’t necessarily fall into the same concept of engagement, alternatively though if satisfaction is assessed as feelings of enthusiasm, energy and related positive affective states, then satisfaction automatically becomes a facet of engagement (Macey & Schneider 2008).

*Engagement as commitment.* When it comes to organisational commitment, engagement can be referred to as the essential force that links the employee to the organisation (Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe, 2004), in the sense that the employee can develop affective commitment by growing a sense of belonging and personal meaning which results in making him/her feel as if he was “part of the family” (p.118), so in terms of commitment as a psychological state, these factors can affect organisational outcomes for example positive behaviour at work, or in the

case of such factors being absent the resignation of the employee (p.221). Affective commitment therefore should be interpreted as a facet of engagement.

Macey & Schneider (2008) suggest that organisational commitment is a facet of engagement in the sense that a positive attachment to the company can be created where the employee is willing to invest his/her energy to support the company, and experiences a sense of pride to be part of that company where he/she feels identified with the organisation.

*Engagement as job involvement.* It is commonly seen that job involvement comes hand in hand when describing the concept of engagement. Job involvement is the extent to which the employee relates to the job psychologically as well as the amount of work involved in the job, thus job involvement is directly associated with job commitment (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005).

In terms of task engagement and job commitment, Bass (1999) argues that the self-worth of the employee plays an important role because, when the employee is fully involved in the task, higher levels of commitment are expected to be seen; it doesn't necessarily mean however that the levels of commitment are directed to the organisation as a whole, but rather to the task specifically. He emphasises also that higher levels of task engagement are in line with the goals of the employer since performing the task well will lead to achieving the same outcome, which suggests that although not related, task involvement brings positive outcomes to the organisations as a whole.

*Engagement as psychological empowerment.* Rather than being inclusive in the definition of engagement, the term empowerment should be considered as an antecedent or a condition of engagement, according to Spreitzer (1995) there are four dimensions to define empowerment: meaning, which refers to the sense of purpose experienced by employees; competence, which refers to the feeling of self-efficacy; mental state of self-determination, which refers to the feelings of control; and impact, which relates to the belief that the efforts made are worth because they will make a difference. He continues explaining that a sense of empowerment will result in positive efforts from employees towards the organisation such as discretionary effort, persistence and initiative. Thus feelings of empowerment should be considered as a facet of psychological state engagement.

## Behavioural engagement-

According to Macey and Schneider (2008) the term engagement denotes something special, something extra, or in some cases something atypical; they explain that there is always a frame of reference for example other organisations, or within the same organisation employees that are more engaged become the frame of reference for the ones who are not.

When it comes to engagement behaviours, Campbell (1990) proposes that demonstrating effort is only a dimension of the classification of performance, where the dimension includes consistency of performance, applying discretionary effort when required and maintaining work levels even when conditions are not the best, this leads again to sustaining a line of persistence.

An important factor related to effort is what Rothbard and Edward (2003) called “role investment” which in terms of operations refer to the length of time spent in in specific tasks, where persistence comes into play once again. They established that employees are more likely to invest additional time to the activities that they enjoy and are important for them, because they feel identified with the task, even if the extrinsic reward remains constant.

Defining engagement only as extra effort from the individual would be considered limited, according to Kahn (1990) employees that are psychologically involved bring more of themselves to the task and thus go the extra mile, bringing something different and sometimes atypical to the work done rather than just something extra.

## Trait engagement-

In terms of engagement it is sometimes difficult to identify why some employees are more passionate and engaged with their job than others. Engagement can be referred to as a disposition from employees, where such disposition can be linked to personality characteristics or a tendency from individuals to experience state affect overtime, for example personal initiative (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Weiss (2002) states that Positive Affectivity as trait engagement is considered as an affective state from employees, where they feel satisfied and therefore have pleasant affect experiences while doing their job, for example they feel energetic and enthusiastic at work; he argues that if identified by management this could be used to frame organisational experiences to determine how employees will react in response to those experiences.

### ***Importance of employee engagement***

Saks (2006) argues that employees that are engaged tend to be more productive than those who are not, and that they are also more likely to stay with their current employer long term. Based on this statement it could be said that if employees are engaged, they will work hand in hand with managers to achieve strategic organisational goals.

Researchers suggest that engagement is also linked to job attitudes, for example, as stated by Rich, LePine, and Crawford (2010) employee engagement has a strong and direct relation with performance; their research suggests that employee engagement is likely to increase task performance, which is beneficial for the organisation. Additionally, other researchers have found that there is also a strong link between high levels of engagement to revenue generation for the organisation (Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, Killham, and Agrawal 2010).

Macey and Schneider (2008) suggest that employees that show engagement behaviour are most likely experiencing feelings of engagement; this in turn will increase the chances of them seeking environments which provide them with the opportunity to prolong those feelings of engagement despite such environments entailing extra efforts. They state that the discretionary effort from employees connote that those employees have that extra energy they can put into their work if they wish to do so, and that if companies learn how to enhance this positive behaviour they will increase their competitive advantage. Macey and Schneider continue explaining however that when referring to engagement, the term *extra* implies a challenge for managers because firstly it is difficult to actually define the term, and secondly, even if the employee is doing something extra it doesn't necessarily mean it is something different, they say that management should be

aiming to enhance innovative and proactive behaviour as well as providing employees with the opportunity to use their own initiative to go beyond the frames, and go beyond what is specifically required from them.

### ***Importance of Motivation to enhance employee engagement***

Many of the literature related to motivation suggest that there is a level of motivation beyond the boundaries stipulated by common types of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation; there is a more profound importance to intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness embodied in the concept of employee engagement (Chalofsky & Krishna 2009).

Traditional motivational theories and humanistic psychologists strongly argued that individuals have a natural need for a work life which is perceived by them as being meaningful (Alderfer, 1969; Herzberg 1959; Maslow, 1943). According to Maslow (1971) when it comes to the workplace, individuals need to recognise it as a place which is meaningful and purposeful, otherwise they will not perform up to their professional standards. If we consider Maslow's statement we can recognise the importance of giving meaningful tasks to employees in order to maintain high levels of performance that involve professionalism which is reflected in the service that companies provide to consumers.

Chalofsky & Krishna (2009) explain that despite the fact that motivation is an important individual and personal process, it can also be highly influenced by organisational factors and the context of situations; therefore it is important to motivate employees considering both individual factors as well as organisational factors that will reflect in their development. They argue that there is a more profound meaning of motivation highlighting the importance of meaningful work; they also strongly suggest that motivation, commitment and engagement are strongly linked to each other. Therefore it can be gathered that motivating employees will trigger their engagement and commitment within the organisation.

Finding the most adequate factors to motivate employees is not an easy task however; the results from the 2008 *job satisfaction survey report* made by the Society of Human Resource Management agrees in part with Herzberg's motivation-



hygiene theory in the sense that many of the factors that contribute to job satisfaction are indeed motivational factors, five out of the top ten motivational factors derived from the survey were:

- A) The opportunity that employees have to use their abilities and skills
- B) The task or work itself
- C) The relationship between workers and their immediate supervisor or manager
- D) The perception of employees that their job was meaningful
- E) The flexibility provided to workers to balance life and work issues

Although the above factors hit the top of the list, other important factors were also mentioned in the survey, for example, salary, benefit and compensation, but most importantly job security.

Considering that the global financial crisis had an enormous negative economic impact all over the world, these results could be perceived as the outcome of recessionary events which forced workers to change their mindset from a perspective where they tended to focus on high extrinsic rewards, to realising that having job security during recessionary times was indeed a luxury.

According to Chalofsky & Krishna (2009) motivation is commonly believed to be driven by the individual's beliefs, objectives or anticipated rewards, they suggest however that what can really motivate individuals more effectively is the idea of accomplishing the task and the satisfaction such achievement will bring to them. Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009) expands on this idea suggesting that individuals are not only motivated by the accomplishment of the task, but rather more the sense of mastery, enjoyment, challenge and potential for growth self that the job itself will bring to them; this is what he argued meaningful work was made up. He carries on explaining that a normal level of motivation could be achieved by factors such as pride, recognition from management and accomplishment of tasks among the most common, however, to achieve deeper levels of motivation in the workplace it is essential to focus in the individual's sense of self, the work itself and the sense of balance. With this approach he aims to bring the notion of intrinsic motivation to a more progressive level.

Considering Csikszentmihalyi's approach it can be gathered that in order to deeply motivate employees it is necessary to recognise what tasks bring their sense of self, if they are enjoying the work they were given or not, if the tasks are challenging enough or if they are beyond the individuals' abilities making them feel frustrated, and if the job is contributing to their self growth or not. According to Chalofsky & Krishna (2009) if all those factors are positive then employees will feel deeply motivated and thus engaged, they will become fulfilled and most likely loyal to the company, this in turn can provide management with the human resource instruments necessary to develop strategies that will increase productivity, sustainability and the opportunity to achieve organisational goals.

### ***Motivation and engagement in SMEs***

Lado and Wilson (1994) state that Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are different from large companies in size and nature, large companies are mostly governed by strategies, policies and procedures, however SMEs are not generally governed by the same because the owners of these companies, especially the small ones, have full responsibility for the day to day operations which reduces the time available to develop accurate policies and procedures, employee engagement therefore is more driven by the identification of employees' needs and how the owners of SMEs companies deal with them; they explain that for years it has been pointed out that employee engagement is a vital antecedent for the achievement of organisational objectives in SMEs.

MacLeod and Clarke (2011) claim however that in SMEs it is difficult to identify the correlation between engagement and performance, and that it is commonly assumed that individuals that work in those type of companies are more engaged than in larger companies, despite this assumption, when discussing the topic with employers and employees they found that in many cases that is not accurate, according to ACCOR (as cited in MacLeod and Clarke, 2011) it was identified that in companies that have less than 100 employees only 45 per cent showed high levels involvement from employees with the organisation, in the UK for example only one in four individuals felt involved with his organisation. Kishore, Majumdar and Kiran (2012) agreed with the previous statement arguing that SMEs seem to be deficient when it comes to

motivating employees, however they highlight that since SME's are not as financially stable as Multinational Companies (MNCs) commonly are, the leaders of SME's must make sure that employees are motivated and happy with their jobs, taking advantage that there is a more linear approach to employees that can be used to implement good personal relationships between employees and management, to create a harmonious working environment.

In large companies senior leaders are focused in developing strategies to position a product in the market, they analyse the geographical area, and place high importance in IT and human resources factors to achieve business strategies, although this doesn't guarantee employee engagement it certainly increases the chances of obtaining it; in the case of SMEs however, the barriers to achieve engagement increase potentially due to the limited financial resources they have available to hire HR professionals who can provide valuable advise that would help management develop and implement the right policies and procedures like they do in large companies (MacLeod and Clarke, 2011).

The motivation of managers in SMEs is also very important since effective leadership and management will reflect in the engagement of employees and the overall performance of the organisation, because engagement is often linked to performance, Metcalfe (as cited in MacLeod and Clarke, 2011) states that engaging leadership does predict productivity, and that satisfaction and commitment as well as motivation of employees is highly influenced by the style of leadership, she emphasises that leadership skills on their own are not sufficient for a transformational effect of the enterprise, she argues that to achieve such outcome, leadership skills need to be used together with an implementation of a positive workplace culture that helps increase the co-operation from workers, and reduces conflict and stress in the overall working environment.

It is important to clarify however that effective leadership doesn't mean that a manager makes absolutely all the decisions in the company, which is normally what happens in the case of start-up businesses because initially all the responsibility lies in the entrepreneur; according to studies of employment relations in SMEs the

management approach could be very autocratic at times because there isn't a specified set of formal procedures stating the rules of engagement between managers and employees, this could result in owners taking advantage of informal systems of affiliation, favouritism and patronage (Forth, Bewley, and Bryson 2006).

Owner-managers of SMEs take a discretionary approach when they manage their employees taking into consideration the skills of employees as well as their bargaining power in the company, product or service produced and the conditions of labour market; therefore how discrete managers can be and the limitations they face in implementing such discretion, including the management style, will be different from one manager to another across SMEs (Goss, 1988).

Forth, Bewley, and Bryson (2006) explain that in their *Workplace Employee Relations Survey*, managers of large businesses and SMEs were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with some statements related to employment relations issues, the outcome was that: SMEs agreed more to the statement "Those at the top are best placed to make decisions about this workplace"; on the other hand both SMEs and large firms disagreed in response to the statement "Most decisions at this workplace are made without consulting employees". As it could be expected the management of small companies agreed more than those from medium and large companies with the statement "We don't introduce any changes here without first discussing the implications with employees".

The responses to the above statements provide empiric evidence to show that in many cases managers of SMEs do take employees feedback into consideration when it comes to the decision-making process, which in turn and as previously mentioned increase the chances of obtaining employee engagement, most likely because the direct interaction with employees allows room for discussion related to changes and other issues, such interaction with employees becomes more difficult for the leaders of large firms since decision making regarding strategic changes usually takes place outside the workplace e.g. head quarter offices.

If it is assumed that workers do prefer to be involved in the decision-making process, mainly because many of those changes will have a direct impact their working environment, then it could also be assumed that the employees of SMEs will feel more satisfied with their jobs if they feel their employer seeks their views, respond to

their suggestions and allows them influence concluding decisions (Forth, Bewley, and Bryson, 2006). Cox (2005) argues however that within the range of SMEs workers could have different views regarding management in companies that employ less than 10 workers, compared to companies which employ 10 to 49 workers, especially because as small companies grow the nature of the company evolves too, so managers tend to lose direct informal contact with workers as the direct interaction between management and employees gradually fades away.

### *Organisational culture*

Since people have lived different experiences throughout their lives and can have different backgrounds, traditions, customs as well as personalities, when individuals get together in a work environment all this different elements can emerge in different ways creating conflict until a governing set of norms comes out, which becomes the regulator in the workplace that will lead workers to attain the goals set by the company, this phenomenon is what is referred to as organisational culture (Sadri and Lees, 2001).

The study of the concept of corporate culture began more than thirty years ago in the US with a big influence from the book called “Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life” (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) which originated more interest among companies that didn’t have an understanding of what the concept was but which were interested in developing and promoting a positive corporate culture in their organisations once the concept came out.

It can be difficult to find a definition of corporate culture that suits all organisations because of the nature of the concept, different elements need to be taken into account for example the type of industry in which the organisation operates, the geographical location of the company, the series of changes that the company has been through since its initiation, the personalities and cultural background of employees and how they interact among each other (Sadri and Lees, 2001).

There are however formal definitions put forward, for example “a cognitive framework consisting of attitudes, values, behavioural norms, and expectations” (Greenberg and Baron, 1997), from a more multicultural approach “the pattern of arrangement, material or behaviour which has been adopted by a society (corporation, group, or team) as the accepted way of solving problems” (Ahmed,

Loh, and Zairi, M. (1999). Sadri and Lees (2001) argue that top management has an enormous responsibility when it comes to corporate culture because it will act as the mediator when it comes to differing opinions among employees, and thus it should clearly communicate to employees what the mission and vision of the organisation is, so that everyone has a picture in their minds of what the collective goal is and thus everybody should be aiming for. Qubein (1999) states that the concept of corporate culture is sustained by corporate values that are in the same line as the purpose of the company and the personal values of the individuals employed by the organisation. According to Ahmed et al (1999) organisational culture can be adaptable and it can be adjusted rapidly if there is consistency in fair and equal treatment of all employees.

### Summary

Maslow's and Alderfer's theory agreed in the levels considered as important when it comes to motivate individuals, they both agree that the existence and safety levels are vital elements for individuals to move forward, however they state that those factors are not the most relevant when it comes to employee engagement, but rather a state of comfort that prepares individuals to develop needs which are more linked to engagement, those refer to the development and growth of the individual and involve more intrinsic elements. Herzberg's theory doesn't support a hierarchy, however he also highlights the importance of intrinsic motivators as being vital for employee engagement, his theory is also more focus in the need to the increase or decrease job satisfaction rather than existence related needs, resulting in more companies being interested in its use providing more empirical evidence.

The fact that SMEs operate at a different scale compared to large companies, narrows down the effective approaches that management could take to achieve employee engagement, for example approaches such as communicating directly with workers by taking advantage of the more linear approach to employees to establish a good relationship with them; also, focusing on effective leadership since the motivation and commitment of employees is highly influenced by the style of leadership which, if managed effectively, can create a positive workplace culture.

In the next chapter the research approach will be explained as well as the tools and the methodology used for this research.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This research project asked: How can management encourage and enhance employee engagement in The College with the aid of motivational theories?

This research was approached using Focus (Semi-structured) Interviews. I conducted this research using seven semi-structured interviews and one survey. All the interviews and the survey were recorded in digital format and software was used to assist organise the data. The length of time for each interview varied from thirty to forty five minutes. In total seven full-time staff participated in the interview and one was absent from the interview therefore sent the answers by e-mail. Ethical considerations were made throughout the research. This chapter provides details on the research approach, limitations of interview research, research participants, how the research was conducted and the ethical considerations.

### *Research Approach*

In social science research, interviewing is a method of data collection used to generate empirical data about the social world by inquiring individuals about their lives; the inquiry takes place as a distinctive form of conversation, where the conversation is structured and guided by the interviewer (Holstein, J., and Gubrium, J. 1997). According to Yin (2009) interview studies are studies entirely based on verbal reports that come from open-ended interviews, which assume a conversational manner.

Since the topic of this research is to analyse motivational theories to enhance engagement in the workplace, I consider that a humanistic approach is the best way to conduct this study, because it will allow me to collect more meaningful data by speaking face to face with the employees of the organisations to pick up important elements like body language and tone of voice, on top of the verbal statements. Besides, the number of participants was very small as to use questionnaires or surveys with them. For those reasons I decided to collect qualitative data instead of quantitative data.

Drever (1995) states that when it comes to small-scale research one of the most common methods used is interviewing. Semi-structured interviews are considered a flexible technique advised to be used in small-scale research; studies which involve a very large number of participants on the other hand are advised to use quantitative data because of the size to be sampled is large and thus requires other tools e.g. open-ended questionnaires or surveys.

Drever explains that semi-structured interviews entail that the facilitator sets up a general structure beforehand depending on the foundations of the topics that need to be covered, all the general topics to be discussed in the interview are selected in advance and the details of each topic are worked out during the interview; it is important however to give the interviewees a fair level of freedom to speak, and in terms of how much they want to say so that they express thoughts that would develop each topic further.

As the purpose of this research was to assist management identify which factors are the most influential to enhance employee engagement necessary for the continuous growth of The College, focused (semi-structured) interviews was the primary approach used to conduct this research project.

The objectivity of interview responses could be evaluated in terms of reliability e.g. which questions yield the same answers despite the place and time in which they were carried out, and the validity e.g. the extent to which questions produce the “correct” answers (Kirk and Miller, as cited in Holstein and Gubrium, 1997).

The focus is primarily in what the active interviewee, in collaboration with an equally active interviewer, produces and conveys about his/her experience under interpretative circumstances. The interviewer should expect a variation in responses since the experience of interviewees is produced from different circumstances, it is highly important to bear in mind that the validity of the interviewee’s answers will derived from their capability to convey real experiences in a way that can be easily understood (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997).



It is extremely important that the researchers who use interviews as the main method of collecting data know that the interaction with the interviewees needs to be structured, in order to maximize the validity and reliability of the answers, and also to reduce misinterpretation of the responses (Gorden, as cited in Holstein and Gubrium, 1997). The design of the interview questions is highly important; Yin (2009) explains that the questions in a focused interview must be worded carefully in order to appear naive about the topic in order to allow the interviewee express fresh statements about it.

### *Limitations of interview research*

Although interviews are a widely method used to collect empirical data, they could increase the possibility of misunderstandings, errors and bias in the following situations:

- a) If the interviewer doesn't ask the questions properly or says something that could spoil, contaminate or bias the data. (Fowler and Mangione, and Hyman et al., as cited in Holstein, and Gubrium, 1997).
- b) If the interview questions are misleading or pushing towards a "desired" answer (Holstein, and Gubrium, 1997).
- c) If the interviewee responds only what he/she believes the interviewer wants to hear. It is impossible to prove they are lying thus the reliability of the data can be questioned (King 1994).
- d) If the interviewer only "hears" the answers relying in the recording machine (it can be played later) instead of practicing active listening throughout the interview to pick up information useful for new enquiries (King 1994).

In order to minimize error and to reduce the risk of jeopardising the credibility and reliability of the data, it is imperative that the researcher maintains an active interviewing approach throughout the whole interview. Active interviewing is a kind of interpretative practice which involves the interviewer and the interviewee as they communicate with each other where interpretation is based in the structures and orientations with "practical reasoning" (Garfinkel, as cited in Holstein and Gubrium,1997).

## *Research Participants*

Since interviews are a method used to collect data about shared understandings of a particular group, the selection of participants is a vital element for the validity of the interview-based research, the selection of participants should be fairly homogenous and they should have critical similarities which are related to the research question; a purposeful sampling of interviewees will increase the usefulness of the data to address the research question. (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997).

This project included employees of The College who occupy a different level in the organisational chart from operational level to top-management level. All interviewees have previously worked in different companies and thus is assumed that they are able to compare factors such as organisational culture, autonomy levels and opportunities to grow among organisations. Interviewees were of both genres, two interviewees were female and six were men. Interviewees had different origins, four interviewees were Irish, three were Asian and one was South American. Interviewees ranged in age, from late twenties to early fifties. Participants ranged in educational background, two hold a master's degree, four an honours degree, one holds a diploma and one didn't continue studying after completing secondary school.

Research participant members were selected based on their willingness to participate in the focus interview. Each research participant signed a consent form before the interview (see Appendix A) which outlined the objectives of this research and their consent to participate in the focus (semi-structured) interview.

The focus of this research project was the full-time employees of The College; the research participants were involved directly through either focus interviews or a questionnaire. The participants needed to be employees of The College as these are the persons most affected by this research.

### *Conducting the Focused (Semi-structured) Interviews*

I predesigned an interview protocol based on the research question including the focus topics and the literature review. I also designed a consent form to maintain the required ethical standards. Both the interview protocol and the consent form were sent to my supervisor for revision, he advised to make amendments to the interview questions and verified that the consent suit the purpose of the project.

The employees of The College were verbally told the purpose of this research in advance and then were asked if they wanted to participate in the interviews. A mutual agreement on the date and time was made with the participants who agreed and were able to attend the interview. The interviews were carried out within the premises of The College since the interviewees were unable to find the time to be interviewed outside working hours. The interviews were carried out at different times on three different dates, Friday 11<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July. Before each interview, every participant was invited to read and sign the consent form for the interview; each interviewee read it, agreed to it and signed it; only after the consent form was signed I started recording each interview in my personal laptop.

Twelve questions, some with sub-questions were asked in the interview (see Appendix B) the first two questions of the interview protocol served two purposes; the first was to give interviewees a question with an easy answer to build confidence to speak and identify their level in the organisational hierarchy, the second was for me to get an average of the time the staff has worked for The College. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner to make the interviewees feel comfortable to express their experiences, opinions and ideas, and to avoid any kind of pressure that could lead to pushed answers. I took some notes during the interviews and asked other relevant questions according to the interviewees' responses. At the end of each interview I thanked every interviewee for their participation and contribution, I stopped recording and safely stored each file in my personal laptop to safely store the data.

I listened to all interviews individually and created a transcript for every interviewee (see Appendix C); each transcript contained the results of the questions asked during the interview.

Ethical considerations were kept throughout the whole process of this research, respecting every element prior and during the research as well as during the analysis period.

### Summary

Interviews are a common method to collect qualitative data to create empirical evidence, however, the researcher must bear in mind the limitations and drawbacks of interviews in order to minimise errors that could jeopardise the data.

This chapter provided details on the research approach, limitations of interview research, research participants, how the research was conducted and the ethical considerations. The next chapter will present the findings from the interviews made to employees of The College.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND RESULTS

### Introduction

Eight members of the staff participated in this research, seven of them were interviewed and one of them sent the answers by e-mail, the answers of this participant had to be taken into consideration because the participant plays an important role within the organisation. This chapter provides details on the findings from the qualitative data collected, content analysis as the chosen method to analyse the data extracted from the transcripts, and the primary categories identified using the content analysis method.

### *Findings from Interviews*

#### *In terms of financial rewards*

It was found that most Interviewees felt financial rewards are important and were comfortable with their current financial rewards to maintain a comfortable life style; Interviewee 1 mentioned that despite the fact that a full-time job provides financial stability, getting involved in extra jobs contributes even further to pursue future plans, but most importantly, it provides the intrinsic motivation that the full-time job lacks to provide. Interviewee 5 considered that the current financial reward is just sufficient to pay for the basic needs of the entire family. Three out of eight Interviewees didn't consider financial rewards as an important motivator to work, but rather doing something that they like and are passionate about; however they didn't raise any concerns about being discontent with their current financial rewards. This seems to be in line with the first two stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Safety and Physiological needs) and Alderfer's first stage "existence" which covers the first two stages of Maslow's hierarchy which argues that once individuals satisfy their existence needs, they will feel comfortable to strive for the fulfilment of more intrinsic needs.

Interviewee 4 mentioned that the previous job provided huge financial rewards, however felt that the culture in that organisation was not worth the money, "there

was a culture in the organisation that made me just wake up one day and say, no, the money is not worth this. So I came here, the money is not the same... but there is a much better work environment... I'm going home happier... I'm more active in my private life". This falls in line with Alderfer's frustration-regression principle, which suggests that if an individual strives for self-actualisation but the organisation doesn't offer the opportunity to do so, then the individual will seek to fulfil other needs to minimize frustration until new opportunities become available.

#### *In terms of job security*

And considering the aftermath of the recession, half of the Interviewees felt somehow concerned about their job security, Interviewee 3 said "I feel more worried because you can be easily replaced now, so it's easier to lose your job", some of those Interviewees were of the opinion that the job market is still very bad and are grateful to have a job. Interviewee 2 expressed confidence regarding the skills and capabilities possessed, however highlighted that the feelings of safety were jeopardised by the recession "back in 2009 I was made part-time, it was a worrying time... but I was doing loads of projects giving my 100%..." this Interviewee mentioned that management recognised the skills and thus felt somehow safe in the job. This falls in line with Alderfer's first stage "existence" which covers the first two stages of Maslow's hierarchy, in this case most importantly the second stage related to security.

The other half of the interviewees didn't express any worries or concerns about their job security, they felt satisfied with their jobs mainly because they enjoyed the work itself, and because they are confident that they possess the necessary skills, commitment, sense of responsibility to maintain their job despite adversities; Interviewee 4 expressed extreme confidence because of the work experience possessed "Being in education you always pick up freelance... the amount of skills that I've developed over the years are quite broad... it gives you much better confidence". This falls in line with Herzberg's two-factor theory in the sense that motivational factors such as responsibility, achievement and the work itself bring job satisfaction to individuals. It also relates to the proposition of Macey and Schneider

(2008) that job satisfaction, job involvement and psychological empowerment increase the psychological state engagement of individuals.

### *In terms of culture*

The College operates in a multicultural environment, and provided a service to students from different cultures and backgrounds. It was found that in terms of the culture of the workplace, most Interviewees found it enjoyable to work in a multicultural environment because it makes the work environment more interesting and exciting, it allows room for staff to express different opinions, ideas and perceptions from different backgrounds that widens the range of answers to a problem; it also allows lecturers to learn about different teaching styles and work environments in other countries. Some Interviewees highlighted that since they were foreigners themselves, the multicultural environment provided them with the chance to feel part of a “family”. This falls in line with Alderfer’s “relatedness” stage that covers the third and fourth level of Maslow’s hierarchy (social needs and self-esteem) which argues that relatedness provides individuals with a sense of identity and acceptance, and thus individuals experience a sense of belonging with their immediate society. Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe (2004) also support this idea by arguing that employees can develop affective commitment with the organisation if it allows them to grow a sense of belonging and personal meaning.

Interviewee 7 was the only one who found it hard to adapt to the multicultural environment at first, “you have to learn how to adapt yourself, I have had some problems towards the differences in culture...”, this Interviewee mentioned that achieving goals is the most important, thus adapting quickly is essential to get things done.

In terms of the interaction with students from different cultures and backgrounds, Interviewee 4, 6 and 7 expressed that dealing with international students makes their job much more difficult because they felt students from outside the EU are more high maintenance than local students, Interviewee 6 for example stated “working with international students is challenging, there is a different dynamic with local students i.e. Irish students or European students versus International students in

terms of how they deal with me”. In this case and for these particular members of the staff, the interaction between them and the students is a hygiene factor that according to Herzberg’s theory leads to job dissatisfaction.

#### *In terms of flexibility*

it was found that five out of seven Interviewees were happy with the flexibility their job provides to maintain what they consider an acceptable work-life balance; three of them mentioned that since they are not married and have no kids, and because two of them come from abroad and their families are not here, they don’t mind dedicating extra time at their discretion to complete certain tasks, for example Interviewee 2 said “I do work more than I’m supposed to because I don’t have my parents or family here. I decide to do that, that’s my choice”. When I asked the question regarding work-life balance the Interviewees generally showed confusion with the question, so much that most asked for the question to be rephrased. Interestingly Interviewee 4 was very familiar with the question and said “is there anything greater than 100%?, If you had asked me that question two years ago I would have said ‘I have no life’, but now I do... here the owner and everybody else believes in what you do, we’re all of the same mind”. This motivational factor leads to job satisfaction according to Herzberg’s theory, because the staff feels that management recognises their sense of responsibility and their ability to complete tasks successfully.

Interviewee 7 and Interviewee 8 highlighted that they find it difficult to keep an appropriate work life balance, mainly because of the amount of extra time they choose to dedicate to their work to complete tasks, however they are happy to do so, Interviewee 8 stated “Work-life balance is something I am constantly working on, but I would say I have a reasonable balance at the moment”. This factor is still in line with Hertzberg’s theory because for these individuals the motivational factors such as responsibility, achievement and advancement provide them with feelings of satisfaction.



### *In terms of communication*

Interviewee 4 who works at managerial level commented that if managers keep junior staff in isolation or don't communicate constantly with them, it leads to lack of confidence, insecurity and provokes destruction in the workflow; another comment from the same Interviewee was that when decisions are made without the knowledge or the input of the junior staff, it leads to mistrusts overtime which can affect the company in the long run; this Interviewee accepted however that many times it is difficult maintain good levels of communication because of the workload. In general it was found that all the Interviewees believed communication is essential in the workplace to be more organised and do their job more effectively, all the Interviewees said they are happy with the level of communication they give and receive from peers and management, however they mentioned there is always room for improvement to reduce mistakes.

Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 7 highlighted however that although the daily interaction is very good, the pre-planning and effective communication of future plans is not always delivered beforehand to the relevant members of the staff, which has resulted in disorganisation and lack of preparation for some projects, they highlighted this is a trend that has been going on for a while now. According to Herzberg the above mentioned factors could lead to employee dissatisfaction since hygiene factors such as company administration, which include unclear channels of communication, disorganisation and ineffective allocation of tasks, are factors that lead to job dissatisfaction.

### *In terms of autonomy*

It was found that all the Interviewees felt content to have total freedom to complete their tasks at their own pace and were happy to feel they were not constantly supervised, they believe such freedom comes down to the trust management has on them to do their job appropriately and effectively, Interviewee 6 stated "I think I have loads of freedom, that's good because I think my employer trusts me... I always get my job done", this Interviewee and Interviewee 7 mentioned nonetheless that if they needed the advice of a superior or a colleague to complete a task they felt

confident to seek for help. Interviewee 6 believed that only when it came to meeting strict deadlines high levels of supervision were considered acceptable. Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 7 expressed that their biggest motivator to work is that they have the responsibility of shaping the future of the students that they deal with, they noted that although it can become very hard to engage students with the class, having the power of materially help them to achieve something remarkable is their main motivator to keep working hard. This falls in line with some elements of the three theories because:

Maslow states that when staff feel trustworthy they take full ownership of their jobs, which in turn makes them feel empowered and thus make them fully engaged to the organisation.

Alderfer argues that allowing the staff to express and implement their own ideas in the working environment will make them feel that their input is important in the achievement of meaningful tasks within the organisation.

And Herzberg proposes that motivational factors including the successful completion of tasks, problem solving and the evidence of results of one's work are factors that lead to job satisfaction.

#### *In terms of extra discretionary efforts*

It was found that for Interviewee 7 the only motivation to help is professionalism, whereas all other Interviewees felt happy to make extra efforts for the benefit of assisting colleagues as well as for the benefit of the company, they all mentioned that helping others gives them personal satisfaction, it eases the workload, and helps the company to be more efficient, many recognised that if the company does well everybody in the organisation benefits from it, Interviewee 1 stated "I've no problem with doing something that is not within my job description, as long as it benefits the company... if the company is doing well it benefits every employee". This could be considered a sign that employees at The College are engaged with the organisation because Erickson (2005) states that engagement is the passion and commitment from employees to give themselves in full by expending discretionary effort to help the organisation and the employer succeed.

Some Interviewees mentioned that they like participating, contributing and getting involved in tasks because it provides room for learning and personal development, they highlighted however that one should be aware and accept his/her own limitations, Interviewee 6 stated “I like to get involved... but it obviously depends on whether I can be of help or not... If I can contribute to a certain extent and make somebody’s life easier it doesn’t bother me be part of the project”. This could be considered a sign of behavioural engagement because according to Rothbard and Edward (2003) employees invest additional time to the activities that are important for them even if the extrinsic reward remains constant.

#### *In terms of change in the workplace*

It was found that the staff had different opinions, some Interviewees were open to change because they considered they found it easy to adapt to change and other Interviewees saw change as a positive things and an opportunity to learn new things. In terms of being involved in decision making regarding change, Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 6 considered it important to contribute in the decision making because they believed their feedback is very useful since they are the ones doing the job and thus could aid management to make a more effective decision, Interviewee 2 commented “decision making is for management only, but, if they are trying to make a change regarding what I’m doing I would love to be involved in decision making so that I can give suggestions”. This may be the reason why the findings obtained from Forth, Bewley, and Bryson’s survey (2006) showed that many leaders of SMEs consider it important to consult employees when it comes to make decisions regarding the workplace.

On the other hand Interviewee 5 considered that decision making is a task for management only and thus believes there is no need to be involved, unless the change relates to losing the job then the Interviewee considers important to take part in decision making. Interviewee 1 highlighted that change itself is not an issue, as long as the change is communicated in advance and the necessary training for the effective handling of such change is provided- “I don’t mind challenge as long as I get training”. This according to Herzberg is a hygiene factor that leads to employee dissatisfaction, because it relates to the working conditions provided by the

organisation which states that the lack of provision of the necessary tools to perform is a factor that leads to job dissatisfaction.

*In terms of development and growth*

Interviewee 3 considered that it is too late to worry about development “I don’t think I’ll ever change what I’m doing, I am happy with what I do that’s why I have stuck to it for so many years” “I don’t like being tested, I freeze”. On the other hand the rest of the Interviewees however believed that it was important to up-skill , develop and grow, and considered it important that organisations offer such opportunities. Most Interviewees felt happy with the opportunities the company has provided them to develop, however three Interviewees believed the opportunities offered by the organisation are not relevant to their career and thus feel somehow disappointed, Interviewee 5 stated “I was offered to do a course before but it wasn’t relevant, besides I was doing a different course”. According to Maslow and Alderfer this is behaviour is experienced in the top level of the hierarchy of needs which relates to “growth” which states that once the other needs have been fulfilled, individuals will seek for the opportunity to grow within the organisation, or elsewhere if the workplace doesn’t offer such opportunity. According to Herzberg however this behaviour a sign of job satisfaction/no job satisfaction which can be triggered by motivational factors such as achievement and advancement.

*In terms of challenge*

It was found that Interviewee 5 wasn’t comfortable with the challenges he faces in the company because they are not related to career prospects. Nevertheless all other Interviewees perceive challenge as a positive thing, most of them feel that challenge keeps individuals moving, keeps the brain active, and makes the work more exiting, Interviewee 8 stated “challenge brings lateral thinking and creativity”. Some Interviewees however provided examples of times when they found their job very challenging, Interviewee 6 said “in terms of coordination, sometimes it can get a bit messy... you’re constantly dealing with human beings it becomes very psychological all of a sudden... you kind of have to push people to do things”. Overall however most Interviewees were happy to embrace challenge mainly

because of the intrinsic reward they experience from overcoming each challenge. Keller suggests that for employees to reach self-actualisation they need to be given tasks that although challenging, are also within the limits of their capability. Maslow suggests that individuals can fulfil their need for self-respect if they experience feelings of achievement, mastery, competence and confidence, which are feelings normally experienced when overcoming a challenge.

Although not relevant to any of the questions, the following comments which I consider important because of the linkage were made:

Interviewee 5 mentioned “I need some kind of recognition, sometimes I feel the recognition is not there”. Interviewee 7 stated “Sometimes it was hard to know if you were doing a good job because you don’t have any feedback or even a thank you, so you can only do what you think is right”, this Interviewee in particular seems to be very goal driven and expressed that the biggest motivator to work is recognition, personal achievement, and the joy that research brings. According to Herzberg lack of recognition is a motivational factor that leads to no job satisfaction. On the other hand Maslow suggests that if the need of recognition is not met, individuals will experience feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness, which in turn will set the trend of their behaviour. It is worth to mention though that none of the other Interviewees raised any concerns regarding the lack of recognition for their efforts.

### *Content Analysis*

According to Scott (2006) content analysis is a method used to analyse data using a quantitative approach, where the textual data is transformed into quantitative data by measuring the frequency of appearance of particular words, phrases or themes. The aim of this method is to identify clear and comprehensible categories that show noticeable aspects of the message transmitted, where the objectivity and reliance are kept by the methods used to calculate their relative significance in the final message. Such categories however will differ depending on the type of study, as well as the nature of the material analysed and the presumptions of the theories used in the same study. Most of the time the purpose is to devise categories that gather favourable or unfavourable attitudes or denotations of these. The specific words, phrases or themes

that connote such categories must be clearly stated; the purpose of the researcher is to find out which of those appear as prominent indicators of a specific category of meaning.

According to Holsti (as cited in Scott, 2006) the categories must be comprehensive, exclusive, and independent. The categories must be created in a way that all the relevant items can be classified into one category. The researcher must be careful to create unique categories that don't overlap so that items can only be placed into one single category, this will reduce the chances of classification ambiguity.

### Analysis of the Data

Before the analysis I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts to have a more comprehensive understanding of the data and to make sure that most of the information provided by the interviewees was taken into consideration.

After I made sure that the transcripts were complete I read them again to try to identify significant words, phrases or sentences that would help me create the most relevant categories. I wrote notes down to help me map the data and although difficult because my interpretation could not be completely accurate, I managed to come up with five primary categories. I realised that the majority of the items mentioned were related to intrinsic factors; therefore I subdivided the data even further to include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors

The identified five primary categories and their sub-themes are as follows:

1) *Financial Stability*

2) *Culture of the organisation*

- ✓ Friendly work environment
- ✓ I like helping. Helping is part of team effort.
- ✓ A multicultural environment makes the workplace interesting and exiting
- ✓ We communicate well, though there is always room for improvement
- ✓ This organisation provides room to learn from/about other cultures

3) *Development and growth*

- ✓ I like learning new skills

- ✓ It is important that the company offers opportunities to grow
- ✓ I love challenge, it brings lateral thinking and creativity
- ✓ Despite adversities, I always keep the same work ethic

#### 4) *Autonomy and Flexibility*

- ✓ I have a lot of freedom to do my tasks
- ✓ My employer trusts in me
- ✓ I currently have a good work-life balance

#### 5) *The work itself*

- ✓ The level and intensity of the workload has increased
- ✓ Projects need more pre-planning
- ✓ Dealing with international students makes work more challenging

Ethical considerations were kept throughout the whole process of this research, respecting every element prior and during the research as well as during the analysis period. I understand that transparency and subjectivity are vital elements to consider when conducting any research. I didn't allow my personal thoughts, views or opinions influence or manipulate the data in any way in order to keep the integrity of my research. I believe I did not use any bias approach when collecting, processing and analysing the data that could jeopardise the credibility of the findings for this study. I believe employee engagement in growing companies is achievable; my aim was to learn from the interviewees' experiences so that their interests and motives were considered in future activities and programs developed within The College.

### Summary

The findings from the interviews provided evidence of the motivational elements that according to the theories result in job satisfaction, as well as the factors that could cause demotivation among the employees of The College. The content analysis method assisted even further to identify the primary categories and subcategories which motivate employees to become engaged with the company. The categories are analysed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

This chapter provides the study findings from the interviews. The aim of this project was: to help management identify which factors encourage and enhance employee engagement by analysing some of the most widely used motivational theories. Four primary categories each with subcategories were found from the data analysis, each category is discussed separately. This chapter provides the study findings and the conclusions based on the findings as well as the limitations and recommendations to the management of The College.

### *Study Findings*

Seven members of the staff were interviewed separately for the purpose of this research. The findings from those interviews provided that for most participants economic stability is very important and thus consider that financial rewards as a strong motivator to keep their job, however nobody mentioned it as an important element to become more engaged with the company. Only one interviewee expressed that money has never been a motivator to work. Financial Reward was the only extrinsic motivator mentioned in the data collected from the interviewees.

Most of the factors highlighted throughout the interviews were intrinsic. The first three primary categories and their sub-themes provide positive intrinsic elements, whereas the last primary category and its sub-themes provide negative intrinsic elements. All the elements should be taken into account to improve effectiveness in the elaboration of future activities and programs aimed to develop employee engagement at The College.



## Primary categories and their sub-categories

### *Culture of the organisation*

- ✓ Friendly work environment (7 interviewees)
- ✓ I like helping, helping is part of team effort. (7 interviewees)
- ✓ A multicultural environment makes the workplace interesting and exciting, it provides room to learn from and about other cultures. (6 interviewees).
- ✓ We communicate well, though there is always room for improvement. (6 interviewees).

It was found that throughout different questions the interviewees would often highlight items related to the culture of the organisation, where *friendly work environment* and *I like helping, helping is part of team effort*, were the two items mentioned the most. Working in a multicultural environment seems to provide satisfaction to employees since most of the interviewees seemed content to work with people from other countries, nearly all the interviewees somehow agreed that *a multicultural environment makes the workplace interesting and exciting, it provides room to learn from and about other cultures*. Although the majority of the interviewees mentioned that the level of communication is good, some of them were concerned about the content of the information transmitted, most of the interviewees agreed that they *communicate well, though there is always room for improvement*.

The category of organisational culture therefore is the most important motivational factor that should be considered in the creation of future activities and programs to achieve employee engagement as the college grows.

### *Development and growth*

- ✓ I like learning new skills (6 interviewees).
- ✓ It is important that the company offers opportunities to grow (6 interviewees).
- ✓ I love challenge; it brings lateral thinking and creativity (6 interviewees).
- ✓ Despite adversities, I always keep the same work ethic. (5 interviewees).

The second primary category was development and growth. In this category the first three sub-categories were somehow mentioned by almost all the interviewees, where most of them somehow agreed that learning new skills is important as well as the opportunities that the company gives to grow. Although the third category was mentioned the equal amount of times than the first two, the *I love challenge, it brings lateral thinking and creativity*, was the only item what cause obvious excitement during the interviews and therefore should be particularly considered a strong motivator to engage employees within the company.

I found the last sub-category particularly interesting because if despite adversities, employees always keep the same work ethic, it means that there is high commitment to their work, which can be enormously beneficial for the company.

The category of development and grow also demonstrated high relevance to the interviewees, therefore it should also be considered as highly important motivational factor in the creation of future activities and programs to achieve employee engagement as the college grows.

#### *Autonomy and Flexibility*

- ✓ I have a lot of freedom to do my tasks (7 interviewees).
- ✓ My employer trusts in me (5 interviewees).
- ✓ I currently have a good work-life balance (5 interviewees).

The third primary category was autonomy and flexibility, the first subcategory, *I have a lot of freedom to do my tasks*, was mentioned by all the interviewees and they all seemed extremely happy about it. The second sub-questions however were not as strong but still were of importance for many interviewees, the fact that more than half of them considered that their employer trusts them and that their job allows them to maintain a good work-like balance, makes them feel satisfied with their jobs.

The category of autonomy and flexibility, although not as highly significant as the previous two, also demonstrated relevance to many of the interviewees, therefore it should also be considered as highly important motivational factor in the creation of future activities and programs to achieve employee engagement as the college grows.

### *The work itself*

- ✓ The level and intensity of the workload has increased (4 Interviewees)
- ✓ Projects need more pre-planning (4 Interviewees)

The fourth category was the work itself, where half of the interviewees somehow agreed that the level and intensity of the workload has increased; as the company grows it is very important to take this element into consideration, because work overload and burnout are demotivating factors that have the potential to reduce employee engagement. Therefore, it would be advisable that the management of The College give particular importance to the different alternatives available to tackle this issue.

Half of the interviewees also considered that *projects need more pre-planning*, and communication about those projects should be richer in content and should be delivered to the appropriate members of the staff, interviewees mentioned that at times some of the relevant information regarding projects is only disclosed at the last minute and thus mistakes are made due to lack of preparation.

This category should also be considered as highly important since the negative factors could create demotivation, which in turns will results in lack of, or complete absence of employee engagement if not addressed on time.

### ***Limitations***

It is important to remember that although interviews are considered an effective method to collect empirical data, interviews also have some important draw backs that should be taken into consideration. For example the fact that I have only entered the world of research and I am learning from it, means that I lack the required expertise to conduct professional interviews which could result in unintended misunderstanding of the message given by the interviewees. Another drawback to be considered is that, since the interviews where held in the workplace, it increases the chances of interviewees responding only what they believed was “right” to say and not the reality of their opinions and ideas. The last limitation to be considered is the applicability and relevance of the questions asked, the results are bound to the data that was captured at that time.

## *Recommendations*

Based on the study findings I would recommend the management of The College to take into consideration that although financial rewards are important to give employees stability, it won't necessarily enhance their engagement as the college grows. The study findings showed that intrinsic motivators such as training in their area and tasks that allow room creativity just to mention some, are more important for the employees of The College to gain their engagement with the organisation. Therefore, when it comes to the creation of future activities and programs, management are recommended to take into serious consideration that relevant opportunities to develop and grow are considered extremely important to employees, the opportunities however should match the needs of the staff, otherwise such opportunities will not serve the purpose of engaging employees since if their need to develop and grow will not be met.

Another recommendation is to maintain the autonomy and flexibility that the current employees perceive to have; changes in the level of supervision could have a negative impact in the engagement of employees since they expressed contentment about the freedom they are given to complete their tasks.

The last recommendation is to address the issues that employees seem to perceive as factors of job dissatisfaction. The first issue mentioned was the lack of pre-planning, so it would be advisable for the management to start discussions about new projects at early stages with the relevant staff, in order to give them room for preparation which will make them feel more confident about their work. The second issue was the level and intensity of the workload; this may be a sign that since the college is growing employees workload is becoming harder to manage, therefore it would be recommended to introduce a college wide training needs analysis program which identifies the skills shortages or gaps throughout all departments, this particular program is customised to the needs of individual staff members thus again reinforcing the motivational needs to enhance engagement, in addition to that, this particular training program will not decrease the current workload pressures that are under certain individuals within specific departments within the college, recruitment

may be the only resolution to those problems, and perhaps that could be something that could be embedded into the strategy for The College.

### Conclusions

The aim of this research project was to help management identify the factors that enhance employee engagement at The College by analysing some of the most widely referred motivational theories. In conclusion the study findings confirmed that the culture of the organisation, flexibility and autonomy were the most important factors to keep employees engaged within The College, whereas lack of pre-planning and the increase in workload appear to be important factors to be addressed by management in order to enhance the engagement of employees as the company grows.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

July 2014

My name is Yoko Vargas and I'm doing this project as part of the requirement for the BA (Hons) in Human Resources Management Degree from the National College of Ireland.

This document constitutes your agreement to participate in an interview carried out by myself. The objective of my research is to find out what factors motivate employees at The College to feel more engaged within the workplace. The interviews will contribute to find out what activities or programs could be developed and implemented to enhance employee engagement in The College.

I do not know of any risks or harm to you if you decide to participate in this research study and I aim to protect your responses within the discussion by writing up the results in an anonymous format.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes however it is not restricted to this time limit.

If you have any follow up questions or concerns after this interview you can contact me at [yoko@xxxx.ie](mailto:yoko@xxxx.ie) the results of the study will be available upon the completion of my program in August 2014.

Yours sincerely,  
Yoko Vargas

Researcher: Yoko Vargas

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing this letter, you give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Name (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is your job title and what responsibilities does it involve?
2. How long have you worked in the college to date?
3. Think about your lifestyle and life choices (the house you live in, if you own a car, your leisure activities: cinema, theatre, holidays abroad etc.) Do you consider them strong motivators to keep your current job? – Why?
4. Has your attitude towards your job changed because of the recession?
5. What is it like to work in a multicultural environment?
6. How would you define work-life balance?
  - How would you describe your own work-life balance?
7. Is communication with co-workers and management important for you?
  - Can you describe your level of communication with your co-workers and management?
8. Can you describe the level freedom you have to manage your own workload during a typical day? (autonomy)
9. Do you regularly participate in tasks that are not part of your daily activities?

YES- why? What would normally motivate you to do so?  
NO- why? What would you change to motivate you to do so?
10. Has there been any change to your job role since you started?

YES- What was that experience like for you?  
NO.
11. Have there been any opportunities to develop and grow within the company?

YES/NO

  - Is that relevant for you?
  - Is learning new skills through work relevant for you?
12. Do you like challenge?

YES- why? - Is there any specific aspects of your job that are challenging?  
NO- why?- Is there any specific aspects of your job that are challenging?

## **APPENDIX C: RESEARCH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

### **INTERVIEWEE 6**

#### **FOCUSED (SEMI-STRUCTURED) INTERVIEW**

**Date of interview: 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

**Audio length: 30 minutes**

#### **START OF TRANSCRIPT**

FACILITATOR: Ok. Question number one. What is your job title and what responsibilities does it involve?

INTERVIEWEE: My official role title is Faculty Coordinator for the ICT Department. What it involves is academic administration, what I do is I coordinate all the assessments for the IT department, so that means exams, time tables, results to students, etc.

FACILITATOR: Ok, question number two. How long have you worked in the college to date?

INTERVIEWEE: Good question, I actually forgot. I started in 2011, so approximately three years.

FACILITATOR: Approximately three years, OK. Question number three, think about your lifestyle and life choices (the house you live in, if you own a car, your leisure activities: cinema, theatre, holidays abroad etc.) Do you consider them strong motivators to keep your current job?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I suppose for the moment. It is paying the bills, I have a comfortable life, I suppose to certain extent I enjoy what I do, my working environment, my colleagues and my actual physical environment, it's all very comfortable.

FACILITATOR: OK, next question. Has your attitude towards your job changed because of the recession?

INTERVIEWEE: No. Touch wood it hasn't affected me really. I suppose nothing has changed since the recession in a negative way for me and if anything I think is actually more positive. I suppose I've been trying to improve myself.

FACILITATOR: But that improvement is despite the recession? Is it related at all?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I supposed I've not been affected by the recession, I still have my job, I wasn't discriminated based on the recession or used the recession as a reason to discriminate me, if that makes sense?

FACILITATOR: So mentally the recession didn't affect you?

INTERVIEWEE: I was constantly reminded of people losing jobs, people being affected in some way, but I felt I wasn't affected or threatened.

FACILITATOR: What gave you that confidence?

INTERVIEWEE: I don't know, I think I feel safe in this place, I actually never thought about it, never really felt in any way threatened.

FACILITATOR: Do you believe that is because of your skills - The time you've been working in the company -Or the company itself?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think all those points you mentioned, they all play a part in my confidence.

FACILITATOR: Ok very good. Question number five, what is it like to work in a multicultural environment?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose it's interesting. Because you get different ideas, different ways of thinking, whenever we have meeting or suggestions to improve, or ways to do things, there are always different views.

FACILITATOR: And you think that's because different human beings have different ideas, or actually because the person has a different background?

INTERVIEWEE: I think the background does play a role, it has an influence.

FACILITATOR: Does it impact your job in any way?

FACILITATOR: In terms of colleagues or in terms of working with the students?

INTERVIEWEE: Both.

INTERVIEWEE: From a colleague point of view, I suppose it makes it exiting and interesting, I feel comfortable in a multicultural environment. Whereas with students, working with international students is challenging, there is a different dynamic with local students i.e. Irish students or European students versus International students in terms of how they deal with me.

FACILITATOR: Ok so, your perception from working with other nationalities for example the lecturers is one thing and you find that exiting and enjoyable, but in terms of the students the multicultural topic is causing you a bit of a challenge?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah with the students there is a difference.

FACILITATOR: Ok so you perceive it differently with students and teachers?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

FACILITATOR: Perfect, next one, how would you define work-life balance?

INTERVIEWEE: How would I define it... give me an example.

FACILITATOR: According to your own perception, what would you consider that work-life balance is?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh ok, what's my definition like? my view?

FACILITATOR: Exactly.

INTERVIEWEE: Work life balance... I suppose it's having a career that you enjoy, but at the same time it doesn't take up the majority of your time where you neglect your social life such as holidaying, giving yourself a break.

FACILITATOR: So the balance is when your job doesn't take over your personal life.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly, i.e. you work 9-5 and then you go home and you still continue working, I think that's just, you don't know where to stop.

FACILITATOR: How do you describe your own work-life balance?

INTERVIEWEE: I think I'm very comfortable and I'm balancing it well. I suppose because I'm single, no married no kids.

FACILITATOR: Do you think your job affects your life balance?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I suppose to a certain extent of course, like if my role becomes more intense it may affect, but having said that if it gets more intense, like most people I don't have a family and that plays a part as well. I would always find time for my work and I would always view it as I can always balance it. I would say I would give myself time to take holidays and give myself a break.

FACILITATOR: Ok perfect. Question number seven, is communication with co-workers and management important for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I think it's all about team effort, it's a family, if a family can work together specially communicate then I think it's essential.

FACILITATOR: How would you describe the level of communication in the workplace?

INTERVIEWEE: I think we do communicate well, but of course there are so many things like timing is an issue, when you're dealing with people, personalities, and all sorts.

FACILITATOR: what do you mean by timing?

INTERVIEWEE: I mean when staff has the intention to communicate something, but due to time they couldn't get back to you, the communication becomes imbalanced.

FACILITATOR: In general do you considered that communication is fairly good? Does it need improvement?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose you can always say it can be improved. For me personally I think it's good, I often get my answers when I need them.

FACILITATOR: Ok so you rate your level of communication as good.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes good.

FACILITATOR: Is a good level, perfect. Question number eight Can you describe the level freedom you have to manage your own workload during a typical day?

INTERVIEWEE: Freedom? I think I have loads of freedom, that's good because I think my employer trusts me and I think I get my work done so I have the freedom I suppose.

FACILITATOR: Do you consider that as a motivator to engage more with the company?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, because of my personality, it works with my personality, with that flexibility I always get my job done. At the same time if I need to get it done later in the day, because I have so much flexibility I can do it later.

FACILITATOR: So you don't consider you have strong levels of supervision.

INTERVIEWEE: No I don't have that feeling. I don't know if I'm been constantly watched or not, but I don't feel like that.

FACILITATOR: Excellent. Question number nine, Do you regularly participate in tasks that are not part of your daily activities?

INTERVIEWEE: : I don't think so, unless I'm asked or invited, I won't purposely go and ask -can I take part?- But if I'm asked or if I'm part of a meeting or discussion I'll definitely participate because I like to get involved.



FACILITATOR: What motivates you to participate?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose I like to be part of the project that's happening in the college, it obviously depends if I'm related to, whether I can be of help, if it's a task that is completely alien to me like setting up a computer where I have to really learn every single steps and I don't really have the time, then I suppose I would sit back.

FACILITATOR: So if it is within your skills, your knowledge and your abilities you would be happy to participate?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I would be happy to participate. I like knowing what is going on.

FACILITATOR: Even if the reward doesn't benefit you directly?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I suppose is all part of team effort really, if I can contribute to certain extent and make somebody's life easier I suppose it doesn't really bother me to help.

FACILITATOR: Ok very good. Now question number ten, has there been any change to your job role since you started?

INTERVIEWEE: A very minor change I would say.

FACILITATOR: What was that change like for you?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose now is more focused, my role has become more focused into dealing with the IT Faculty itself.

FACILITATOR: How about the transition of that change?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose I kind of knew what I was going to get into because I was kind of in that role when I started, but now it has become more focused; I think the transitional change was positive.

FACILITATOR: If the change relates to your job, would you like to be involved in the decision making or you prefer to leave that in the hands of management?

INTERVIEWEE: I would love to be part of the decision making. Because I can give them my experience and my sort of journey, so that whether that influences them in a positive or negative way, at least I can give them my experience as to what they can improve or how they could expand, etc. It is not a big deal to me if they don't take my suggestion, I wouldn't feel affected, but it would be nice if they include me in the decision making process.

FACILITATOR: Perfect, Ok we are nearly there. Have there been any opportunities to develop and grow within the company?

INTERVIEWEE: Now as I see it, I can't see a gap yet.

FACILITATOR: Is that relevant to you at all?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose everybody wants to improve in their role, within the same company or even, whatever. I suppose any individual would like to improve, well I hope, I suppose some people are happy with what they are doing and just be like that, but I'm not like that kind of person, I like to improve myself. From a job point of view, I don't know if The College has any opportunity maybe there is and I can't see the gap; but from a personal point of view I suppose it's important.

FACILITATOR: Is learning new skills through work relevant to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I think so. I think it helps you improve your role, and sort of expand it. There may be somebody already above me, but that doesn't mean that, because there is somebody above me the staff just remains where they are and specialize in their area, it is good to improve the skills so that if they can be at the same level of that person even better, so that you have two people in the same line.

FACILITATOR: Ok very good. The last one, do you like challenge?

INTERVIEWEE: I love challenge. It keeps me active, I'd like to believe I'm a thinker; I like to be mentally alert and sort of active. If I'm not challenge I question my role, I question why am I here? What's my purpose? So when I'm challenge I think, OK!

FACILITATOR: Are there any particular aspects of your job that you find challenging?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I suppose in terms of coordination, sometimes it can get a bit messy trying to coordinate things, trying to coordinate them with people, with students, lecturers, so you're constantly dealing with human beings it becomes very psychological all of a sudden, when you think it's just a tasks the way you go: do this at x,y,z date. But no, then you kind of have to push people to do things. And I suppose it's also that there are so many students it keeps you busy.

FACILITATOR: Ok very good, the last one, overall what would be your main motivator to keep your job?

INTERVIEWEE: My main motivator?... That's a good question...

FACILITATOR: If you don't have one... but you have two or three...

INTERVIEWEE: I suppose I don't really have a specific one. From what I've seen from other people and their experience in their working career, they are not really happy, they got a job and they are happy with the job to a certain extent but they are

not happy with the environment and I think, for me the environment seems to be good, the job seems to be ok, the culture, all this little elements seem to work, they seem to be balance as we say. So that's kind of what motivates me, for some crazy reason, I know it sounds such like an ideal answer but really it is the truth, you know what I mean? like I don't know a day when I come to The College and I feel like I don't want to go to work.

FACILITATOR: Yeah that's what everybody tries to avoid.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly like when you talk to most friends and they say "I have to get up, I don't want to go to work", it hasn't happened to me.

FACILITATOR: Excellent. That was the very last one, thank you very much.

INTERVIEWEE: You're most welcome.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**