

**‘An Investigation into the Key Drivers of Employee Engagement in
An Garda Síochána’**

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Abstract

The research dissertation was undertaken to investigate and examine the key drivers of employee engagement in An Garda Síochána. The author was eager to interview Gardaí at various levels to determine whether there are any correlations between their drivers of engagement and those discussed in academic literature. The researcher interviewed and engaged with Gardaí of different rank and years' service to gain accurate data on the subject of employee engagement. The researcher found that, although a small sample was used, six out of six were engaged in the organisation, although they did recommend potential changes that are discussed within. Using a small sample presented limitations for the researcher and that too, is discussed in the dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will acquaint the reader to the theory of Employee Engagement, its background and context. The researcher will provide rationale for the research while highlighting aims, objectives, goals, questions, and importantly, the significance of the research.

The primary aim of this Master's Dissertation is to explore the key drivers of employee engagement in An Garda Síochána. While there has been much research conducted previously into the theory, there has been no concrete investigation into Ireland's police force. The researcher was eager to delve deeper into the facets of employee engagement in this sector and determine if Anitha's (2014) drivers "work environment, leadership, team and colleagues, career development, benefits and well-being" correlated to this public sector body.

As illustrated by the CIPD, employee engagement can be defined as "being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others" (www.cipd.co.uk, 2015).

According to the literature, there are three different types of employees, and they are; engaged, disengaged and actively disengaged. When organisations have a fully engaged workforce, employees are more likely to perform to a higher standard, thus allowing the company to become more competitive and successful (Gallup Business Journal, 2005).

From reading this dissertation, it will be visible that there is more than one interpretation of Employee Engagement and that there are many various opinions and definitions to be considered.

1.1 Background and Context

An Garda Síochána was chosen by the researcher for a number of reasons; a personal connection to the organisation, their presence in the media recently and also the lack of research on the subject within the Gardaí. In 2016, a survey distributed among senior Gardaí illustrated that 86% feel that morale is incredibly low and that there is an overwhelming demand for industrial action (Brady, 2016). This disengagement from their role is down to a number of contributing factors; poor work environment, lack of adequate tools, clear communication from management and a lack of career opportunities/training (Wall, 2015). As a result of media attention, the researcher was of the opinion that now would be the optimum time to investigate if employees believed there was any connection between their key drivers and the key drivers outlined in academic literature.

1.2 Rational for the Research

The research identified that there are various authors discussing the concept of employee engagement with many different ideas on the factors that drive it. Heintzman and Marson (2005) were of the opinion that employee engagement is a blend of commitment shown by an employee and their levels of satisfaction. An engaged employee is one who has an awareness of the business strategy and proactively works with colleagues to enhance performances (Robinson et al, 2004). Interestingly, Bedarkar and Pandita (2014), discussed the relevance of leadership and communication as driving forces behind employee engagement. The researcher was of the opinion that investigating the key drivers of employee engagement in An

Garda Síochána was worthwhile due to the lack of previous research within this state body.

1.3 Research Aim

The primary aim and objective of this study was to investigate the key drivers of employee engagement in An Garda Síochána and identify if there was any similarities with the drivers as specified by Anitha (2014). The researcher was eager to understand the value and purpose of employee engagement within An Garda Síochána while illustrating what motivates and encourages Gardaí. Importantly, the researcher was deeply motivated to discover what Gardaí thought of their work environment and what could be done to improve their role.

1.4 Research Objectives

The researcher set out to investigate this theory with the below objectives:

- To investigate the various definitions and theories of employee engagement.
- Develop a comprehension of the key drivers of employee engagement
- Review and consider whether there is a correlation between Anitha's (2014) drivers and those of serving members of An Garda Síochána.
- Probe what employee engagement means in An Garda Síochána.
- Comprehend if members of An Garda Síochána think the organisation could be making improvements in the area of employee engagement.

1.5 Significance of the research

The researcher had the ambition that this research would add value to knowledge of employee engagement within An Garda Síochána and that a gap in the literature would be met.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the researcher will acquaint the reader with the various literature on employee engagement and outline the theoretical framework for the research.

2.1 What is Employee Engagement?

In academic literature there are many different definitions and thoughts based on the idea of employee engagement. Through review, the most frequently used definition on employee engagement is by Anitha (2014), she states that employee engagement is “the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organisation and its values”. To add to this, Sundaray (2011) is of the opinion that employees who are engaged in their own work, in turn, motivate and engage their colleagues to perform better and achieve success. If an organisation has a high level of engaged employees, they will become more successful and competitive in the market place (Sundaray, 2011).

Employee engagement can also be explained as the way in which an employee becomes attached to their work and also to the organisation itself. These kinds of employees will share their beliefs in the workplace “physically, cognitively and emotionally” (Kahn, 1990). How an employee feels about themselves will have a direct impact on their performance and engagement in the organisation. An employee can determine how engaged they are in the workplace and also, how committed they are to their role both mentally and physically. A disengaged employee can have detrimental effects on an organisation as they are unable to associate themselves with their role and the work that must be completed (Kahn, 1990).

Organisations are now seeing the importance of having a fully engaged workforce as these employees will excel and perform to a higher standard than their counterparts, thus allowing the organisation to become more successful (IBEC, 2008). Star performers who are fully engaged are a valuable commodity to an organisation. Engaged staff cannot be replicated or recycled by other competitors (Anitha, 2014). According to Smith and Berg (1987), engaged employees can influence the work environment while also acting as a benchmark for other staff members. Other employees witness their successful counterpart's success and in turn, try to replicate it. It is important to note that there are many different levels of engagement and it can vary from person to person and organisation to organisation. These levels are defined as engaged, not-engaged, actively disengaged and by their names, they are easy to interpret and understand (Gallup Business Journal, 2005). Engaged employees are star performers, they are passionate about their role and the organisation they represent. As mentioned above, these workers create a positive environment and encourage colleagues to perform to a higher standard. They will go beyond the remit of their role for the benefit of the organisation. Non-engaged employees are covert in their dislike for their role, have no interest in their performance and the impact that has for the organisation (Gallup Business Journal, 2005). Finally, actively disengaged employees are vocal in their distain over their job and frequently endeavour to disengage their colleagues. These employees cannot see beyond their unhappiness or understand the bigger picture of the organisation (Gallup Business Journal, 2005).

As stated by IBEC (2008) is it important that employees have a wide understanding of the affects that employee engagement can have on an organisation. These include

but are not limited to; increasing performance levels, reducing absenteeism, promoting presenteeism, increasing revenue, and administering quality service to customers which in turn promotes the company brand. Employees who are engaged are also inclined to be flexible to organisational change as they feel committed to the organisation and trust in the changes (IBEC, 2008).

An article by Porath and Pearson in the Harvard Business Review (2013) looks at the concept of emotional intelligence and how vital is it for all employees to be more self-aware. Employees who are lacking in emotional intelligence may not have the ability to interpret how their actions affect those around them. The article indicates that managers should learn to appreciate employees and ask for feedback or if they need development on a specific area. The findings illustrated that one manager who asked for feedback was informed it troubled his staff when he kept looking at his phone in meetings. Once this feedback was received, he adjusted his behaviour in meetings and the employees were much happier as a result. The employees now feel that their manager is more focused and eager to have their opinions heard (Ponrath & Pearson, 2015).

2.2 Measuring Employee Engagement

According to an article available by the Harvard Business Review (2014), there are four ways in which organisations can promote employee engagement without relying on annual surveys:

- Management lead the change, not HR: Employee's cannot be engaged if they do not have trust in their line managers. This is critical for management and should be treated as a major priority (Harvard Business Review, 2014).
- Direct communication is key: Organisations rely too heavily on long annual surveys to gauge engagement. Foster an open environment by encouraging open communication, feedback and be open to different opinions (Harvard Business Review, 2014).
- Focus more on small changes: Holding regular mini meetings and short surveys can give management a snap shot of issues that could potentially be rectified easily (Harvard Business Review, 2014).
- There is no perfect workplace: organisations can become transfixed on trying to create the perfect work environment. Management should embrace change and different opinions and train staff to accept challenges. This can result in the workforce feeling a sense of empowerment and ownership over their own role (Harvard Business Review, 2014).

The global recession brought much unemployment and uncertainty that there was a shift in organisations perception of employee engagement (Harvard Business Review, 2013). There was a genuine focus on improving engagement and

refurbishing their businesses to become more competitive. When industry leaders were asked what their three main priorities are for the future, employee engagement was illustrated. Employee engagement has been described as giving employees the tools and competencies to succeed in their careers, and that it is not just a “warm, fuzzy thing” (Harvard Business Review, 2013). This has been further backed up by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) who expressed that it would have been difficult to get through the recession without an engaged workforce. Engagement brings with it higher levels of productivity, profits, innovation and lower turnover. This theory was also discussed as a business priority by Guest, Michie & Sheehan (2003) who discuss that employees can not be substituted and when they are engaged, contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organisation.

Employee engagement is a powerful retention strategy that has been adopted by many industries, most notably in the healthcare system (Sirisetti, 2012). In public sectors such as healthcare, police service and fire service, many employees are exposed to stressful situations and can feel lost in their role. Sirisetti (2012) illustrates that there are steps that organisation can adopt to create a positive environment of employee engagement. This is achieved by fostering positive relationships with colleagues – this can be achieved by promoting open communication between all levels of the organisation. An example, *an Inspector in the Gardaí maintaining communication with the team will build progressive and positive relationships that are based on trust. Ask colleagues for their opinion; individuals want to feel that opinions are wanted, especially when it comes to decisions that may directly affect them. Be approachable and take interest; simple things like asking employees what they need and where they want to go in their*

career will encourage them to speak up and assert what they hope to achieve. Encourage continuous development; encourage staff to develop themselves professionally, this will illustrate that their interest matters and in turn, they will become more engaged with the organisation (Sirisetti, 2012).

On the contrary, according to an article by Royal & Sorenson (2015), they state that the idea of employee engagement is not the sole responsibility of management and that it should be placed firmly with employees. They have the responsibility to ensure their own role is satisfying and engaging them with the business. This has been supported by Gallup Business Journal (2005) who discuss that employees have the power to become engaged themselves and should not totally rely on management. To do so, they must define their own level of engagement, use their strengths to harness engagement, build a plan to sustain their engagement levels and become responsible for their own success.

2.3 Benefits of Employee Engagement

As mentioned in previous sections, having engaged employees can have a number of benefits to an organisation. It can create positive work environments and that in turn results in employees having a positive can-do attitude towards their role (Sundaray, 2011). Having this demeanour can increase the organisations productivity levels, thus becoming more competitive in the market place (Sundaray, 2011). A lack of engaged employees can result in poor performance levels, absenteeism, high turnover and low morale (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). When an employee is fully

engaged and satisfied they will stay committed to the organisation and work hard to complete their tasks and objectives (Bakker, et al, 2012).

An employee is more likely to undertake new tasks or behaviours if they have a positive attitude towards the organisation. The outcome of this will be higher performance and a commitment to the success of the organisation (Ajzen, 1985).

From reading literature surrounding employee engagement, it can be said that there are three elements of employee engagement;

- Physical – an employee having a physical stake in the task, meaning they have to apply physical and mental energy into the role (Rothmann, et al, 2010).
- Cognitive – an employee being involved in the organisation, meaning employees need to be acutely aware of the organisation strategy and how to deliver on it (Rothmann, et al, 2010).
- Emotional – displaying support, dedication and diligence towards the task and the degree in which an employee feels trust and loyalty towards the organisation and colleagues (Rothmann, et al, 2010).

As illustrated by Rich et al (2010), fully engaged employees are passionate, eager, and diligent towards their work, and they will go beyond the remit of their job. This can include arriving into work early and staying in order to accomplish goals (Rich, et al, 2010).

According to the Hewitt Engagement Model (Hewitt, 2014); there are three major behaviours that define levels of employee engagement in an organisation;

- Say: This is when an employee is vocal in their passion for the company, their role and their colleagues. This behaviour illustrates satisfaction and can have a positive knock on effect for the organisation.
- Stay: When an employee is committed to the organisation, they will most likely stay and develop their careers long term. This will reduce the cost significantly for recruitment and selection processes.
- Strive: This is when an employee is working to their entire ability and capability so that they can add to the competitiveness and success of the organisation.

The Aon Hewitt Employee Engagement Model



Fig.1. Aon Hewitt Model (2014)

Cook (2008) further supports this engagement model by stating that if employees are engaged in work, they will be more productive, present and passionate, thus

supporting a positive environment. This can be seen when comparing and contrasting Hewitt’s model (2014) and Cook’s opinion (2008), there are direct correlations below:

Hewitt (2014)	Cook (2008)
Say	Passionate
Stay	Present
Strive	Productive

Say – be passionate about the company, the role and co-workers.

Stay – be present physically and emotionally in the organisation. Develop a long term career.

Strive – work to the maximum capacity to add to the organisations success and competitiveness.

Naturally, there are factors in which employee engagement can be difficult to control and promote. Engagement levels can decrease the longer an employee is in an organisation and also, when an employee gets older (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004).

2.4 Key Drivers of Employee Engagement

According to the literature available, there are many different drivers of employee engagement present within organisations. They can vary from sector to sector and many HR departments try to identify what is relevant to the organisation and incorporate them.

As identified by Bedarkar and Pandita (2004), leadership, communication and work life balance are the main drivers of employee engagement. When an organisation prioritises these three, they will have fully engaged staffs who are equipped to perform at higher standards. They state that employees are the heart of any organisation and therefore should be provided with a healthy work life balance. If not, employees will turn into disengaged workers and that will have a detrimental effect on the company's performance (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

In contrast, Mani (2011) discusses four drivers of engagement; employee welfare, empowerment, growth and interpersonal relationships. Mani came to this conclusion after conducting much research within an organisation (Mani, 2011).

Interestingly, in 2002 the ISR released an international report that discovered that nationally, there are ten main drivers of employee engagement within many organisations. These included; *“senior management sincerely interested in employee well-being, improved my skills and capabilities over the last year, organisation's reputation for social responsibility, input into decision-making in my department, organisation quickly resolves customer concerns, set high personal standards, have excellent career advancement opportunities, enjoy challenging work assignments that broaden skills, good relationship with supervisor, organisation encourages innovative thinking”* (IBEC, 2008). As a result of this research, it is possible to see

the links between this study and that of the drivers illustrated by other authors mentioned.

For the purpose of this research dissertation, the researcher has focused on five drivers of employee engagement as outlined by Anitha (2014). The rationale behind choosing five drivers as listed below, was because they are relevant to the industry that was chosen. They are as follows:

- Work Environment
- Leadership
- Team and Colleagues
- Training
- Career Development Opportunities
- Compensation

Employees within an organisation are more likely to be engaged in their tasks if the environment and atmosphere is safe and they know they have support from their colleagues and superiors (Deci and Ryan, 2014, cited in Anitha, 2014).

Research has shown that employees will be more engaged in their work and organisation strategy if there is a strong leader present. The leaders should recognise accomplishments as this will leave employees feeling capable and positive in their work (Wallace and Trinkka, cited in Anitha, 2014).

Collaboration and team work is a vital element of employee engagement. Employees are going to be highly engaged in their roles if they are given the opportunity to

advance and develop their careers (Woodruffe, 2006). Training and development is important as it gives employees the opportunity to learn and to perform at higher standards. Feedback from exited employees indicates that one of the reasons for their departure is a lack of training to better perform at their role. From day one in an organisation, employees should be trained effectively as this will kindle their passion for learning (Sundaray, 2011).

According to Anitha (2014), employees should be compensated accordingly and this can increase the levels of engagement. The reward does not necessarily need to be financial, giving extra annual leave days can be a massive incentive for employees (Anitha, 2014).

Work-life balance has been highlighted as an area in which engages employees and it is an important factor for potential employees. A study by the Health Safety Authority Ireland (2015) has shown that employees, who feel they have a balance of work and life, are more likely to be engaged in the workplace (Health and Safety Authority, 2015). Organisations that have strong work life policies in place illustrate that the needs of their employees are important to them. Employees will feel happier when their needs are accommodated accordingly (Devi, 2009). A policy in place can assist with reducing the level of absenteeism; employees will not need to take leave regularly and will be engaged fully while in the office (Devi, 2009).

According to Anitha (2014), the final element of employee engagement is wellbeing in the workplace. The well-being of an employee is a vital component to the success of an organisation. By highlighting the importance of workplace wellbeing, this will heighten the levels of employee engagement (Anitha, 2014).

According to IBEC (2008), there are many different organisations nationally that can identify with the five drivers of employee engagement as mentioned above. The organisations range from Vodafone to Kilkenny County Council, meaning there are similarities between the drivers of engagement in public and private sector organisations (IBEC, 2008).

2.5 Barriers and Challenges to Employee Engagement

When employees first join an organisation, they are fully engaged with their role and with the company's strategy. As times moves on, this engagement is likely to wear away as day to day pressures come to the forefront (Macy et al, 2009). New joiners can feel they have to be fully engaged, but over time this can result in them becoming disinterested in their role and also with the organisation itself (Macy et al, 2009). According to Gatenby et al (2008, p5), there are a number of possible barriers to employee engagement. The barriers described are as follows:

- Inconsistency in terms of management style and attitude which can result in unfairness.
- Lack of work life balance due to high demands and long working hours.
- Poor communication and lack of idea sharing.
- Lack of clarity in the communication that is shared and poor execution of the message.

- Poor job descriptions and responsibilities. Employees may have taken a role different to what they perceived and may have a higher/lower level of responsibilities.
- Unclear leadership styles through times of organisational change and bouts of low performance. It is vitally important that leadership styles are clearly defined to sustain levels of employee engagement.
- Junior Management should be harnessed and encouraged to share their opinions and ideas. This can promote positive communication through the ranks from higher management, down to floor staff.
- The lack of buy in from staff in terms of employee initiatives.

The barriers mentioned above have the capacity to be transformed by senior management into positive areas to work on. If the barriers are capitalised on, management can lay strong foundations for employee engagement by encouraging interaction among all staff.

As mentioned by Macey et al (2009), employee engagement can be interpreted in two different ways. The first one is when an employee is not given support to carry about their role such as, lack of clear communication, trust, and no meaning to their work. The second type of employee engagement is when individuals are given too much work. This is when an employee receives too much trust and their work proves to be overwhelming which results in exhaustion or burn out. An organisation must be careful in terms of sharing equal responsibilities to ensure no employee is struggling with their work load (Macey et al, 2009).

Interestingly, an article by Little and Little (2006) examined whether employee engagement is a logical concept and if it contributes to better management techniques or if it is fast becoming an out dated idea. The authors allude to

organisations using this concept to fix issues within the organisation and employees, but should assist high management to get to the root of engagement issues (Little & Little, 2006).

2.6 Disengagement

Disengagement can have detrimental effects on an organisation through a number of avenues such as increasing the levels of absenteeism and employee turnover (Pech and Slade, 2006). These factors cause the economy millions every year; in the U.S, absenteeism costs organisations over \$2,650 per employee, per year (The Workforce Institute, 2005). By reducing absenteeism, organisations can meet their production and service demands without having to hire new workers (Pech and Slade, 2006).

2.7 Components of Employee Engagement in the Public Service

According to a survey conducted by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2015), the main components of employee engagement in the Public Sector are;

- Competence – Civil Service workers need to feel that they have the ability to carry out the task at hand (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015).
- Well-being – They want to realise their own potential and cope with stress in a positive manner (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015).

- Support – Civil Servants want to build meaningful relationships with colleagues.
- Career Development & Mobility – Workers want to feel that there are genuine opportunities for career development, learning, sharing and promotion (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015).
- Pay – Civil Servants feel they need to be paid more to reflect the tasks they have to carry out. They want to be rewarded for their responsibilities (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015).

By comparing Anitha's (2014) key drivers of employee engagement, we can see a clear correlation between them and the components of employee engagement in the public sector:

- Competence can be linked to Anitha's (2014) driver of providing employees with adequate career development opportunities. Employees are motivated and engaged by knowing that their career is supported and that they will be provided with the tools necessary to complete their duties.
- Well-being can fall under Anita's (2014) driver of having a positive and supportive work environment. Work life balance and working with supportive management and colleagues can have an impact on how engaged an employee is.
- Support can be compared to Anitha's (2014) driver of having strong and positive leadership in the organisation. Anitha (2014) is of the opinion that by having positive leaders in work, employees will emulate their engagement and in turn, become fully engaged and motivated themselves.

- Pay can be directly backed up by Anita's (2014) driver of providing employees with excellent compensation and benefits to reward their work.

Having looked closely at the An Garda Síochána Human Resources Strategy for 2013 (An Garda Síochána, 2013), the Gardaí are working towards creating a positive and supportive work environment for all serving members. By focusing on a number of initiatives, they aspire to have an engaged, committed and high performing workforce (Devi, 2009):

- Occupational Health Strategy: This strategy will focus on areas such as recording and reporting on absence/attendance management while introducing initiatives to reduce absenteeism in the force. Gardaí on long term sickness will be monitored and supported closely by management to ensure a speedy return to duties. The strategy will work towards reducing sickness related absence by 20% and ensuring early intervention by senior management in these cases (An Garda Síochána, 2013).
- Employee Assistance Service: This initiative will focus on the areas of training, development, communications and increasing Garda resources. This initiative will better equip the Gardaí professionally and personally, thus allowing them to be fully engaged in the organisation strategy (An Garda Síochána, 2013).
- Work/Life Balance: A strategic HR goal is to continue to promote a healthy work life balance in An Garda Síochána. This will be achieved by introducing new and varied working hours and shift patterns, but is subject to budget constraints (An Garda Síochána, 2013)

- Employee Engagement: Through promotion of the initiatives, the hope will be that it will create a positive work environment in the Garda workforce. The HR department will also look at distributing employee engagement surveys on a more regular basis, while implementing a new ‘exit interview’ process. The goal will be to get a grasp of larger work related issues and adapt interventions to amend them (An Garda Síochána, 2013)
- Career Development: A defined career development process will be implemented allowing all Gardaí the opportunity to further enhance their career. The process will cover areas such as performance management, appraisal and mobility. The mobility policy will provide information on how Gardaí can apply for promotion, transfers, secondments and specialised placements in various units. Equal opportunities will ensure that Gardaí have access to different opportunities outside the remit of their everyday duties (An Garda Síochána, 2013). As mentioned by Devi (2009), access to new challenges and promotions will engage employees with the organisation and business strategy.

The initiatives and processes listed are similar to what Devi (2009) has discussed at length in literature. Regardless of the industry, the motivations and key engagement drivers are comparable and illustrates that employees are motivated by career advancement, work/life balance, clear communication and training/development opportunities. Following on from Devi (2009), the initiatives illustrated by An Garda Síochána are also comparable to Anitha (2014), and the key drivers illustrated in her literature:

An Garda Síochána Human Resources Strategy 2013	Anitha (2014)
Occupational Health Strategy	Work Environment
Employee Assistance Service	Career Development Opportunities
Work/Life Balance	Work Environment
Employee Engagement	Support System for Employees
Career Development	Career Development Opportunities

2.8 Conclusion

Through analysis of the literature surrounding employee engagement, the researcher has gained a deep understanding of the concept and opinions on what the key drivers of employee engagement are along with its benefits and barriers. As seen above, there are a number of definitions surrounding employee engagement and many authors are not buying into the concept. Through research, authors have conflicting opinions on the matter, as outlined by Little and Little (2006), is employee engagement even relevant? Many organisations too, have conflicting opinions on the matter; some have the belief that employees are responsible for their own engagement, while others believe that the company itself should be promoting it. The question then arises, should management be promoting engagement or should employees motivate themselves and become engaged in the process? Having reviewed the literature, the researcher is in a position to ask members of An Garda Síochána suitable questions that relates to employee engagement, such as key

drivers, barriers and whether management play a key role in engagement promotion. Taking the literature into account, the researcher wanted to focus the research on the key drivers of employee engagement and whether upper management has an impact on it. The themes the researcher will explore will include; work environment, career opportunities, training and development along with management and relationships with co-workers (Anitha, 2014).

Chapter 3: Research Methodologies

The aim of this chapter is to assess and examine the various research methodologies implemented within this dissertation. The aim is to inform the reader how the research was performed and what philosophical assumptions establish the argument being formed (Quinlan, 2011). It is crucial that the research methodology chosen is proficient in supporting the research and enforcing its completion.

3.1 What is Research?

Research can be described as a sequence of steps that becomes a process over time or easily put “a set of activities unfolding over time which takes time and consideration” (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005, p.29). Research has a number of facets such as: data collection, interpretation and results (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). Importantly, a research method chosen should be applicable and relevant to the study and it should be “capable of supporting the research, capable of enabling and facilitating its completion” (Quinlan, 2011, p.177). Another study has mentioned that reputable research is one that results in following clear procedures using scientific methods (Blumberg et al, 2008).

According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), a researcher must consider the following procedure to yield optimum results:

- Clearly define the purpose of the research.
- Describe the research procedure in high detail.
- Plan the research.
- Ensure that the research meets the ethical standards.

- Discuss the limitations that may be encountered.
- Clear analysis of the data.
- Illustrate the findings unambiguously.
- Conclude findings.
- Reflect on the experience.

(Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

Having looked at various literature surrounding the topic of research philosophies, there are many different approaches that one can adopt. The approach is based on what the researcher hopes to achieve and whether one is interested in understanding feeling/attitudes or data processes. There is no correct or incorrect research philosophy to adopt and it is solely based on the research and what results are desired (Hunt, 1993). It is possible to intertwine various approaches rather than rely on one philosophy. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2008), there are two fundamental research philosophies and they are “ontology and epistemology”. Ontology is to do with the nature of reality and there are two fundamental features which can be implemented by researchers; objectivism which is concerned with how social beings exist and subjectivism which is to do with understanding individuals (Saunders et al, 2008). The additional research philosophy is epistemology which can be described as gaining knowledge in a specific field of study (Saunders et al, 2008). Under the method of epistemology, there is positivism and interpretivism and they can be adopted by the researcher. If one was to adopt the positivism method, the research would be collected from an experience they have had and that would be

researched further. In terms of interpretivism, the researcher would have a vast understanding of human interaction and social standings. The interpretivist researcher is deeply concerned with surroundings and what is occurring in the environment. There are two facets to interpretivism; phenomenology, how individuals see and interpret the world and symbolic interactionism, the constant need to understand the world we live in. Importantly, researchers adopting interpretivism must have the ability to access the mind-sets of the individuals they are researching (Saunders et al, 2009).

In this instance, the researcher chose epistemology and by using interpretivism; they wanted to gain a deep understanding of employee engagement and key drivers of engagement in An Garda Siochana. The researcher was eager to understand and interpret the opinions of serving members on the concept of employee engagement.

There are two main research approaches that can be implemented by a researcher, and these are deductive and inductive. The deductive approach is concerned with the quantitative method of research and the inductive approach is related to the qualitative method research.

The researcher will discuss further the methods of quantitative and qualitative research and provide rationale for which method was adopted in this instance and why.

When contemplating which research approach to adopt, there are a number of elements to consider.

A “Research Onion” was established, and just like an onion, a researcher must peel and go through the various layers to reach the right research methodology for the

research (Saunders et al, 2008). This model was adopted by the researcher, and each layer was considered and analysed before moving onto the next stage. This approach is adopted when considering which research methodology to utilise, and once that has been decided, the researcher must also consider time frames and amount of time before a deadline (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2009).

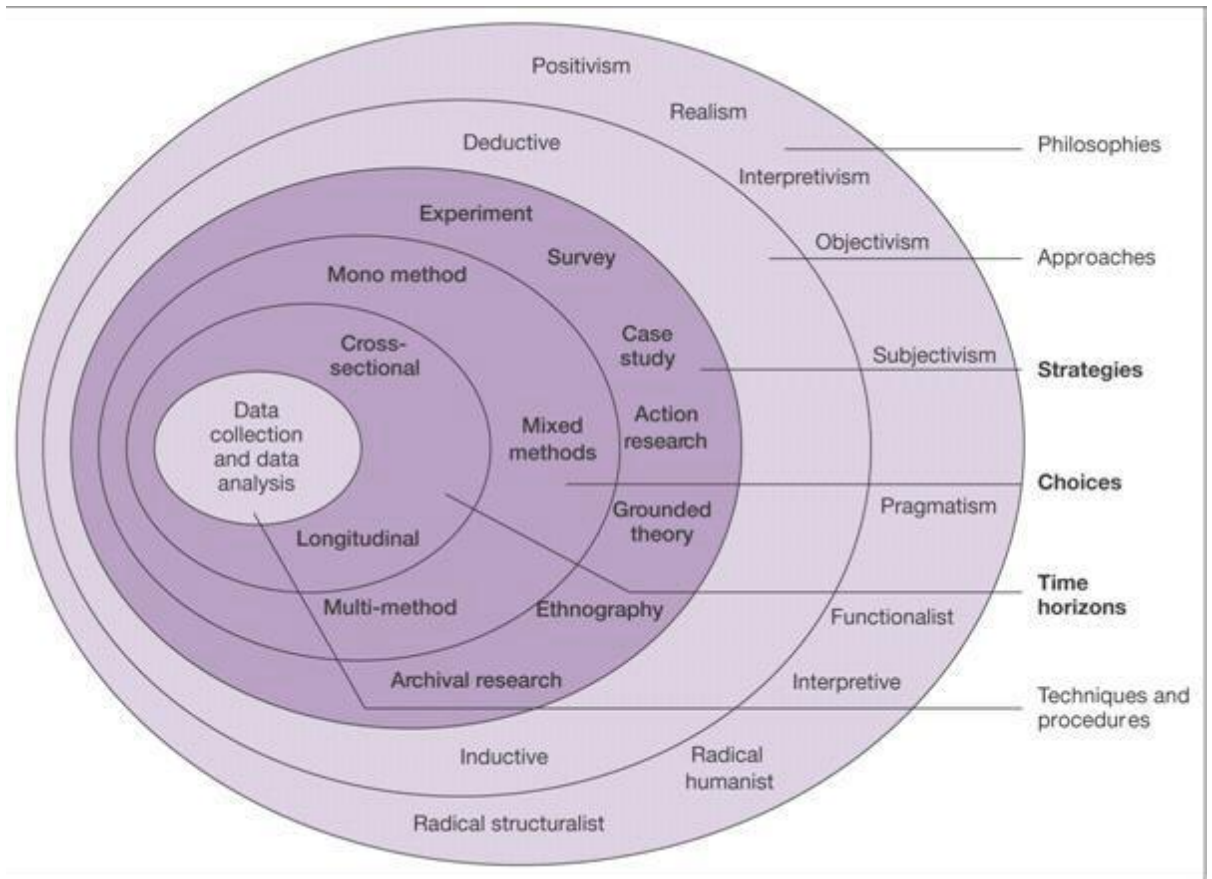


Fig.2. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill Research Onion (2009).

3.3 Research Objectives

To reiterate, the researcher hopes to address and comprehend the following objectives:

- To investigate the various definitions and theories of employee engagement.
- Develop a comprehension of the key drivers of employee engagement
- Review and consider whether there is a correlation between Anitha's (2014) drivers and those of serving members of An Garda Síochána.
- Probe what employee engagement means in An Garda Síochána.
- Comprehend if members of An Garda Síochána think the organisation could be making improvements in the area of employee engagement.

3.4 Qualitative Research Methods

The researcher chose to adopt qualitative research methodology in the form of comprehensive interviews. Qualitative research can be described as “research and techniques which use and give rise to qualitative rather than quantitative information that is information in the form of words and images rather than numbers” (Veal, 2011,p.232). This method in research is concerned with understanding and interpreting participants’ experiences, opinions, feelings and emotions in their own words (Veal, 2011). Saunders (2003) builds on this by explaining that qualitative data results need to be handled sensitively, and then assorted into groups and interpreted using theories and concepts. Interestingly, this form of research can give an insight into why individuals do what they do, and feel what they feel (Saunders, 2003).

In addition, qualitative research is one which depicts “an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, and translate and other wise come to terms with the meaning and not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Cooper and Schindler, 2014, p.114). An emphasis is placed on the researcher to understand and interpret participants’ opinions and experiences in a natural environment (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). Qualitative research is popular and attractive to researchers as it gives the opportunity to see the bigger picture which is holistic and genuine (Miles, 1979).

3.5 Qualitative Research Instruments

There are many different ways in which this research can be carried out and the main instruments include: individual observation, interviewing, focus groups, case studies and various analyses based on language and content. When considering which approach to choose, the researcher considered interviews and focus groups.

3.6 Focus Groups

Focus groups bring together individuals to discuss and debate issues or topics. This setting can encourage free conversation about topics that they have been asked to discuss (Anderson, 2010). There are a number of rules that should be adhered to when holding focus groups (Kruger, 2002):

- Confidentiality – the group should be reassured that their discussion is private and will stay in the group.

- Sharing – all individuals should be encouraged to participate and contribute to the discussion.
- Leadership – one individual should hold the group conversation and ensure it sticks to the point.
- Topical – the discussion needs to stay in line with the topic

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to holding focus groups. The main advantage would be the time saving it can incur; it allows the researcher to process findings from a large group of people in a short space of time. This is opposed to organising to meet a number of individuals separately with time pressures and peoples schedules, it can be difficult to coordinate. A disadvantage would be the fear that one individual may sway the opinions of others. By nature, some people are wary of sharing their opinions and beliefs, so they may find themselves agreeing because it is more convenient for them. There may also be a dominant participant in the group and this could discourage others from sharing as they may not get the same ‘air time’ (Anderson, 2010).

3.7 Interviews

The researcher chose to conduct comprehensive interviews to obtain information. As previously mentioned, interviews are a popular methodology to implement as they yield ample information of richer quality (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The data collected in interviews is done so by observing and actively listening to what the participant has to express. When completed, the researcher must conceptualise the information and come to findings and conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

As with the sensitive nature of conducting interviews, they need to be planned carefully and recorded in a manner that is easy for the researcher to interpret. There is a high emphasis on compiling reliable and unbiased information (Anderson, 2010).

As discussed by the CIPD (2009), there are a number of benefits to conducting interviews and these include: greater flexibility, informal environment and the capacity to gather different types of information. It is important to have questions prepared that are flexible and adaptable depending on the participant (Jankowicz, 1995). As a result, preparing and asking open ended questions are favourable as it can allow the participant to express themselves freely and discuss what is important to them (Jankowicz, 1995).

This has been further supported by the CIPD (2009) who discuss that open ended questions are more flexible, open to opinion and result in valid answers.

By holding semi structured interviews it will result in varied results than structured interviews as they depend on open dialogue, depend on creativity and rely on the interviewer's skills to obtain more detailed information (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). This is further appraised by Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) as they state that these interviews give the researcher a window into an individual's attitude, hopes, desires and opinions. As illustrated by Kvale (1996), open ended questions can be demonstrated in a number of ways: introducing the questions, further questions, probing for more detail, establishing questions, asking direct and indirect questions, asking structured questions and then listening to interpret the answers. As

demonstrated by Kvale (1996), actively listening is the main element for interviewing.

From investigating the information above, conducting interviews is beneficial as individuals in a specific environment are best to give their opinions and experiences (Veal, 2011).

3.8 Advantages of Qualitative Research

As discussed by Kelly (1980), qualitative research is far beneficial when compared to quantitative: the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at hand, it is far more personal and the results are better interpreted and understood.

There is an argument that qualitative research may not be necessarily better than quantitative when understanding needs and wants of individuals (Peterson, 1994).

Peterson (1994) also equips researchers with a breakdown of why to use qualitative research: establish and identify issues, create and suggest methods to understand and to develop a greater ability to communicate. It can also be said that by interviewing participants, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of situations, environments and issues (Blumberg, 2008).

The researcher coordinated interviews by telephone for each member of An Garda Síochána for the purpose of this research dissertation. The Gardaí selected are all stationed in the greater Dublin region but due to shift patterns and availability, interviews were carried out by telephone and arranged at times that were feasible for all involved. The interviews were conducted over a one week period to expedite the analysis stage.

3.9 Participants

The participants were approached and selected by the researcher as there was a connection already in place. The Gardaí selected are all stationed in the greater Dublin region and have a variety of years' experience. The researcher was mindful to gain as much varied responses as possible and ensured there was a career span of between 10 and 33 years' service. Interviewees were also selected on the basis of varying roles, and this resulted in gaining information from Gardaí, to Inspector, to Jailor, to Detective and a member of the Traffic Corp. This allowed the researcher to gain a variety of responses based on their own personal experiences in different divisions. It is also worth noting that the researcher interviewed 6 individuals in total, with a 50% split in gender and one serving member from a different cultural background.

3.10 Sample

The research sample composed of members of An Garda Síochána currently working in the greater Dublin region who were willing to participate in the study. Members were not compelled to participate if they did not want to or were not comfortable. This meant that not all individuals approached participated in the research. The region was selected by the researcher due to a personal connection and potential willing participants who expressed initial interest when discussed weeks in advance. As previously mentioned, 6 members identified themselves as interested in the interview out of 20 that were initially approached. There was a clear thought process of interviewing members from different departments, years' experience, gender and cultural background. Each interviewee was contacted via email and was given an

outline of the study and they were notified that the study was highly confidential. Given the nature of the subject and the organisations presence in the media, the researcher did not conduct a pilot study as there was concern for predetermined responses.

3.11 Data Collection

As mentioned throughout this chapter, the researcher chose to use interviews as the technique to compile information and data. This was chosen due to the nature of the study and as the approach is deemed adjustable and less structured (Robson, 2002).

The researcher first developed appropriate research questions that were suitable to the topic and could be asked at interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For this study, the researcher created 16 questions to ask participants that would yield optimum results and rich data.

Following this, the researcher approached a number of serving Gardaí with a range of experience, roles in the force and ensuring there is an equal gender split.

The researcher implemented a semi-structured approach as this adaptability affords the researcher to explore and probe to get a deeper understanding of the opinions and views of the interviewees (Quinlan, 2011). The interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes each and were carried out over the phone due to the long shifts worked by the members.

As illustrated by Cameron and Price (2009), there are a number of advantages and disadvantages to holding interviews: the researcher can restructure questions and

probe for conclusions, they are adaptable, informal, and encourage much social interaction. A distinct disadvantage when compared to quantitative research is the sample size. If a quantitative approach was implemented, this would allow for a greater amount of results, opinions and recommendations. Another downside would be the time taken to carry out an interview as it can be time consuming for both parties. Finally, and importantly, there can also be misinterpretation issues, meaning the interviewer might hear what they want to (Atieno, 2009).

As a result, it is paramount that a researcher understands the disadvantages of interviews. As they are time consuming, the interviewer must organise well in advance to agree specifics that are mutually suitable. Throughout an interview, the researcher must keep on track and stay within the questions so as to not deviate and potentially sway the participants.

As the interviews were held via telephone, the researcher had to write specifically what was said and to not embellish opinions, experiences and recommendations.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

It was vitally important that the researcher informed all participants that this study is strictly confidential as this research could be deemed as invading an employee's privacy. A major concern would also be that their views/opinions could be leaked and other members of An Garda Síochána could hear or see it. To reiterate the confidential nature of this research, letters were emailed to each participant – the letter can be found in appendix 1. Consent forms were also given to participants on

prior to the day of interview with the researcher. All the participants will be kept anonymous.

3.13 Limitations of Research Method

As the researcher has chosen to only use qualitative methods, it may hamper the results as there may have been further findings by using a mixed research approach. This type of research can be described as unstructured and unsystematic when compared to quantitative research (American Behavioural Scientist, 1986). By using a mixed approach, the researcher could have sent out surveys first with clear structures and guidelines, and when the results came in delve deeper into issues as specified in the survey.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Throughout this chapter, the researcher will consider and debate the findings of the interviews carried out with members of An Garda Síochána. When conducting the interviews via telephone, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the dissertation study and why the interviews were vital to understand the key drivers of employee engagement in An Garda Síochána. This information had already been relayed to the participants in the form of a letter, but the researcher was eager to gain trust and to further state the confidentiality of each interview. The researcher demonstrated the key drivers of employee engagement according to Anitha (2014) and explained that the research would be based on these. The researcher explained that the aim was to understand the drivers and also to analyze if there are any correlations between the two. The researcher demonstrated that the participants could remove themselves from the research at any point during the interview.

4.1 Employee Background

The researcher was eager to understand the participant's role, title, years' service and if they identified themselves as engaged, disengaged or actively disengaged. As a result, question 1, 2 and 3 was based on getting to know the participants and serve as an ice breaker. The roles were varied and ranged from: Garda, Inspector, Sergeant, Detective, and Jailor. Following this, participants were asked how long they have worked in the Gardaí, and the results ranged from 10 to 33 years of service. The third question inquired whether the employees deemed themselves to be engaged, disengaged or actively disengaged. Interestingly, the majority answered that they

were engaged but two participants stated they became “disillusioned” with their role in 2009, along the time of the recession in Ireland. The two participants who mentioned they became “disillusioned” are in management roles.

4.2 Work Environment

When asked if the work environment affected their levels of employee engagement, a majority said yes. Some members are out of the office in the traffic corps and another is based in multiple Garda Stations. Two mentioned that, when away from the office, they need to feel they have the “right tools” available in order to complete their duties. One mentioned that their work environment is “outdated” and needs to be updated. They had noticed colleagues in more modern stations with higher levels of engagement and motivation.

4.3 Relationship with Leaders

Directly after this, the researcher asked each participant if they felt having a strong relationship and trust with leadership has an impact on their levels of employee engagement. Each participant stated “yes”, that is is important to have leaders whom they can trust. They did state though that trust works both ways and that the leaders need to trust them too. One participant added “its important to know you have someone who will be there for you and will allow you to do your own job”.

4.4 Relationship with Colleagues

Following on from the above, the participants were then asked of they thought having a good relationship with colleagues affected their levels of engagement.

Every participant said that having a solid relationship affects them, and allows them to become more engaged. It was said by one that the nature of the Gardaí meant there is a sense of pride and comradeship and its “important to know we have people around us supporting us” and “it makes going to work that little bit easier”. As it is a team environment and each member works together collectively, they need to feel “supported”.

4.5 Training and Development

Next the researcher asked if having access to training and development would affect their employee engagement levels. Interestingly, one participant mentioned that because their role was on the motorbikes, they felt they had missed out on a lot of opportunities to complete training, “because of the nature of my role, I’ve missed out on a lot of training. I think it does affect engagement, I would like more equal opportunities to learn”. Another mentioned “Definitely, I’d like to see more opportunities that are relevant to our every day role. Many training schemes are not as grass root level”. The rest of the participants stated yes, they would like the organisation to invest in them.

4.6 Compensation and Benefits

This is a sensitive topic for some members of the Gardaí and there has been much discussion in the media surrounding pay and benefits (O’Conor and Ryan, 2016). It came as no surprise to the researcher that each participant felt there is an issues when it comes to pay and benefits. One participant stated “We’re not getting paid to reflect the work we have to do with the lack of resources”, another stated “Payment is a

reflection of how much you are worth; I don't feel the salaries reflect what we deal with". One participant said "I would hate to be starting off my career now with a family; it would make me feel undervalued". From listening to their responses, it was clear to the researcher that pay and compensation is a significant issue relating to employee engagement.

4.7 Work-Life Balance

When asked if having a healthy work life balance affects their employee engagement levels, again, each participant answered that it did. All were of the opinion that in order to stay engaged, one must strike a healthy balance between work and home life. Due to the hours and nature of their work, it can be difficult to strike this balance but most try to plan family orientated events for their day off. They said it's important to "switch off" and "spend time with the family outside of work". One respondent mentioned they they like to "book little breaks away every few months" as it gives them something to look forward to and keep them engaged in the meantime.

4.8 Culture of Engagement

The researcher was keen to understand if the organisation is doing enough to foster a culture of engagement within An Garda Síochána. When asked, participants had mixed responses. Some members felt that in the last few years, the organization had been trying to change the culture and to foster an engaged organization, "Yeah, I have seen some changes in the last while, I think they are trying their best". In contrast, one participant said "I think so, I don't think they are doing enough, not at

grass root level”. We can see that while strides have been made, not enough is being done to ensure each member is noticing changes.

4.9 Personal Engagement

Following on from this, the researcher asked if there are any factors which make them engaged in the Gardaí. Noticing common themes, the participant’s answers varied from: pride, duty, recognition and colleagues. It was clear to the researcher that the employees have an awareness of employee engagement and have a capacity to understand what exactly ensures they are motivated and engaged within the organisation.

4.10 Value at Work

After this, the researcher asked “Do you feel valued?”. This question resulted in mixed responses. “It depends, when it’s particularly busy I don’t feel valued but there is just no time for feedback I suppose. I’d like more feedback, it’s hard to know if I’m doing a good job sometimes”. Another answered “I’m lucky, I have a great manager, he is always giving feedback, even if its positive or constructive. I know where I stand”. This illustrates that some members need to hear more feedback and understand if they are doing a good job.

4.11 Motivation

The researcher was keen to understand if employees are motivated by their colleagues and if it affects their employee engagement levels. All participants

answered “yes” and said they are motivated by people around them. No participant gave further details other than agreeing; as a result, we can ascertain that members of An Garda Síochána are motivated by their counterparts.

4.12 Private Sector Engagement Levels

This question was only applicable to one participant but the researcher wanted to know if private sector organizations engage their employees in different ways. One participant who worked in a private organization prior to entering the Gardaí said that “Private sectors definitely invest more into employee engagement, probably because the industry is more competitive. It would be great to see the Gardaí adopting some methods and pushing engagement more”.

4.13 Management’s Levels of Employee Engagement

Following this, the researcher queried if employees are affected by their managements employee engagement levels. The answer was unanimously yes as they all felt their managers play a crucial role in keeping up morale, motivation and employee engagement. One said “My manager is an open book, I feel I can go to her when I have an issue”, another said “Yes, it’s important to see your management engaged as you will want to emulate that”.

4.14 Recommendations to Improve Employee Engagement

The researcher finally asked participants if they feel that more could be done to improve employee engagement within An Garda Síochána. All answered yes and had multiple suggestions:

- “Listen to the guys on the front line, we have lots to share and want to make contributions”.
- “There is still an air of nepotism in the Gardai, they should try and make promotion more equal”.
- “I think they should start delivering more training that is relevant to what we do on a day to day basis”.
- “I’d like to see more communication from top management down. Sometimes I feel we are felt out of the loop and don’t know what’s happening”.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the researcher will endeavour to discuss the findings as outlined in chapter 4 (transcribed transcripts available in appendix). Following this, the researcher will conclude this dissertation while considering the limitations of the research, potential opportunities to research the topic further and discuss possible recommendations An Garda Siochana could implement to develop employee engagement further. In terms of the recommendations, the researcher will illustrate estimated costings so as to better equip the reader. Finally, the chapter will adjourn with the researchers personal learning statement which will discuss the experience of conducting this research dissertation.

5.1 Discussion of Key Findings

5.1.1 Employee Background

As previously mentioned, the researcher asked all participants three initial questions to gauge their background in An Garda Siochana. These questions included role type, length of service and what they deemed their level of engagement is as per the levels outlined by the Gallup Business Journal (2005). Although these questions were not vital to the research, the researcher was of the opinion that these questions would serve as an ice breaker and allow the participants to become more comfortable.

5.1.2 Work Environment

The best part of the participants was of the opinion that the work environment did have a significant affect of their levels of employee engagement. This correlates Deci and Ryan (1985) and Anitha (2014) who were of the opinion that employees are more likely to be fully engaged in their role and the organisation if the environment/atmosphere is safe and they have on going support. From questioning the participants, it became clear to the researcher that the participants needed support from the environment surrounding them and should be provided with tools to help them with their role.

5.1.3 Relationship with Leaders

From the research, the researcher was able to establish that the participates felt having a strong and positive relationship with leaders/management made them feel more confident in their role. The participants felt that it is important to have someone on your side and someone who is trustworthy. This made them feel more engaged in the organisation and this is in agreement with Wallace and Trinkka (2009) and Anitha (2014) when they stated that employees will be more confident and engaged when they receive positive reinforcement and encouragement from leadership/management.

5.1.4 Relationship with Colleagues

The participants interviewed felt that having a strong relationship with co-workers was vital and a nature of the role. In the Gardaí there is a strong sense of comradeship, so members need to feel they can share their opinions and be encouraged by their counterparts. The results are in agreement with both Anitha (2014) and Kahn (1990) when they state that employees, regardless of the sector, need to feel “supported” by their colleagues.

5.1.5 Training and Development

Woodruffe (2006) and supported by Anitha (2014) state that employees need to be given the opportunity to develop themselves professionally, and once this is done, they will be more engaged in the organisation. The researcher uncovered that training and development was a priority and a key driver of employee engagement. Interestingly, as the researcher only interviewed six participants, it could be something that all employees are feeling and could have an impact on their engagement levels. The feedback was that the participants would like to see more training programmes as they want to feel their future is being invested in.

5.1.6 Compensation and Benefits

Agreeing with Anitha (2014), all participants were of the opinion that compensation and benefits is a driver of employee engagement. The rationale behind this driver is, the Gardaí feel the salaries they are offered is not reflective of what tasks they need

to perform. They have seen pay cuts slash their salaries and it can bring rise to a sense of them feeling undervalued and a gradual decrease in engagement over time. For the purpose of the research, participants were asked questions separate to employee engagement to gain a better understanding of the experiences and opinions relating to work, these included: work-balance, culture of employee engagement in the Gardai, whether they feel valued at work and if there are any recommendations to increase employee engagement.

5.1.7 Work-Life Balance

There was a unanimous yes when asked if work-life balance is a key driver of employee engagement in An Garda Síochána. This is in agreement with Bedarkar and Panita (2014) who stated that providing a healthy work-life balance is essential to increasing employee engagement. One participant stated that “I work to live, not live to work”, it is important to strike a healthy balance and make plans for family/friends. Another participant mentioned that is important to make plans and utilise annual leave as it’s important to have something to look forward to – it keeps them engaged in the organisation.

5.1.8 Culture of Engagement

As discussed by Sirisetti (2012), fostering an open, employee engagement focused culture in an organisation can have many benefits such as retaining staff and lowering turnover. From the interviews, the researcher heard that An Garda Síochána are trying to make improvements surrounding employee engagement. One participant stated the Gardaí are not doing enough at “grass root level”. By

continuing and pushing employee engagement with the organisation, they can build positive relationships and ensure each individual is supported (Sirisetti, 2012).

5.1.9 Management's Levels of Employee Engagement

As discussed in the literature review, Porath and Pearson (2015) coordinated research that discovered that employees feel frustrated when management do not pay attention to them and their issues when in meetings or in appraisals. When asked in interviews, the participants confirmed that they are motivated and more likely to be engaged when they are working with managers who are fully engaged also. This is also directly linked to Anitha's (2014) key driver of leadership being an engagement motivator.

5.1.10 Recommendations to Improve Employee Engagement

As a closing question, the researcher felt it was appropriate and important to understand what the employees felt the organisation could be doing to improve employee engagement. Although the participants felt that improvements had been made and that the organisation is trying, one participant said an organisation can "always improve". One similar theme is around communication, the participants illustrated a need for clearer and concise communication from top management down to front line Gardaí. Many felt that higher management is disengaged from the realities of the everyday role and they need to understand and start communicating with those lower down the power chain. Many academic authors have discussed the importance of communication within organisations. Cook (2008) highlights the value of clear communication in her WIFI Model. She illustrates that communication

is only truly effective when it is relayed from top to bottom. Employee's are more likely to be engaged when management are giving clear communication and direction (Cook, 2008).



Fig.3. Cooks WIFI Model (2008)

Another participant mentioned they like to see more relevant training that would be beneficial to their everyday roles. This same participant also mentioned that they missed out on a lot of training and subsequent promotions due to being on a motorbike every day. They did not have the same “face time” as counterparts. By allowing access to training days and opening them to all rank and file Gardaí, it will allow for equal opportunities when it comes to promotion etc. This correlates to Anitha's (2014) key driver of promotion and career development, employees need to feel they can build their career in an organisation and their presence is required (Anitha, 2014).

When asked if they feel valued in the organisation, the answer resulted in mixed responses. One participant felt that they should be receiving more constructive feedback to know where they stand. Interestingly, it was the front line workers that felt they need more recognition and praise as opposed to Gardaí higher up the ranks.

The Gardaí on the beat displayed a need for more appraisals and positive reinforcement. Drawing on a contrast to Anitha's (2014) driver of support, Gardaí need to feel valued and that management are supporting them in all capacities.

5.2 Conclusion

The researcher had a number of aims and objectives to be achieved through this study. The researcher was eager to investigate if there was any correlation between Anitha's (2014) key drivers of employee engagement and those discussed by Gardaí in the public sector.

Throughout this study, the researcher investigated employee engagement definitions, theories, barriers, and benefits to organisations. The researcher wanted to better understand the key drivers of employee engagement as illustrated by many academic authors and settled on focusing on Anitha's (2014). The researcher was aware of employee engagement having come from a private sector IT industry but was eager to identify the drivers in the public sector. Having a connection to An Garda Síochána, the researcher was keen to investigate within the organisation and compare that to Anitha (2014).

The researcher uncovered fascinating information from conducting this research and was given an insight into the organisation relatively closed off from the public. On the back of this, the researcher prepared a number of recommendations for the organisation to better improve employee engagement.

As illustrated by Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) communication is key when encouraging employee engagement and was a common theme identified by the participants. They felt that while the organisation is trying to make improvements, there is still a lack of communication coming from senior management. It is not filtering down clearly to front line staff and employees feel an improvement in this area would encourage engagement.

A participant mentioned they like to see more relevant training that would be beneficial to their everyday roles. This same participant also mentioned that they missed out on a lot of training and subsequent promotions due to being on a motorbike every day. They did not have the same “face time” as counterparts. By allowing access to training days and opening them to all rank and file Gardaí, it will allow for equal opportunities when it comes to promotion etc. This correlates to Anitha’s (2014) key driver of promotion and career development, employees need to feel they can build their career in an organisation and their presence is required (Anitha, 2014).

The researcher is aware that while only 6 Gardaí were interviewed, their roles varied from front line to management positions, there is a lack of value within the organisation. Many do not feel that they are supported in their roles both emotionally and professionally. It is in the interest of An Garda Síochána that they implement a new initiative to show that all employees are valued, especially considering the lack of resources available to them (O’Conor and Ryan, 2016).

5.3 Limitations of the Research

The researcher definitely encountered limitations in terms of the research. The researcher had anticipated interviewing on a larger scale but when it came to scheduling, many participants decided to withdraw from the process. This may have been down to the sensitive nature of the study given the media attention Gardaí encounter every day. The researcher also found that, although the questions were open ended and of a confidential nature, many participants only answered “yes” or “no” and were reluctant to divulge any further detail. As a result of this it is not feasible to ascertain that there are exact similarities between Anitha (2014) and those discussed at interview with the participants.

5.4 Opportunities for Further Research

As discussed previously, the researcher only had an opportunity to interview a small portion of employees within An Garda Síochána. Given the opportunity, they would be eager to complete further research on the topic of employee engagement within the Gardaí using a larger pool of participants. The researcher would use the opportunity to adopt a mixed method approach meaning a questionnaire would be sent to a large portion of the organisation initially and from that interview questions would be established. The interview questions would be of greater relevance to the participants and therefore more engaging. The researcher would endeavour to hold the interviews in person to gauge facial expressions and body language. In addition to including more participants in the study, the researcher would try to get a larger cross section in terms of role, duties, gender, years’ service and cultural background.

It would be interesting to understand if there were larger disparities when interviewing more employees.

5.5 Recommendations and Costings

As communication was highlighted as an area in which could be improved, the researcher was of the opinion this should be the main recommendation due to its importance for engagement (Deci, 2009). In order to improve communication within the organisation, management could consider sending out information and weekly updates to keep members engaged and aware of what is occurring. This information could include training and learning opportunities, events, and key dates in diaries. This implementation would not have a cost associated but manpower would be needed to ensure updates are being sent. An option would be to nominate one member on a rotation basis to keep the information up to date, and the information could feed from a previous week's meetings with management.

The second recommendation would be to distribute more employee engagement surveys. As discussed in their HR strategy (An Garda Síochána, 2013), the Gardaí send out annual engagement surveys but in order to pick up and remedy issues, the researcher is recommending more frequent surveys. This will allow senior management to gauge morale, levels of engagement, and reflect on any recommendations raised. By using tools such as Survey Monkey, this will allow for free questionnaires to be sent to all members and it has quick and easy data interpretation tools (Surveymonkey.com, 2016).

The third recommendation would be to provide Gardaí with positive and constructive feedback on a regular basis. Studies have shown that Gardaí are motivated and engaged when they receive recognition from their superiors (Gocke, 1945). As stated by Gocke (1945) in relation to engaging police “interest is stimulated when he realises his superior is watching him”. By recognising excellence in work, employees will be spurred on and engaged with the business strategy. Training and development opportunities are expensive to implement in the Gardaí and the public is limited in terms of knowing what opportunities are given (An Garda Síochána, 2013). With that in mind, senior members may endeavour to make improvements from inside the organisation and can be achieved through mentoring, buddy systems, shadowing and in service training days. This will allow all members to engage with senior Gardaí and learn from their experiences with no cost associated.

5.6 CIPD Personal Learning Statement

The researcher found this research dissertation both challenging and rewarding, as it was a major struggle to balance family life and academia. The author had little or no knowledge of An Garda Síochána in terms of employee engagement and issues affecting it. Having completed interviews and talked to Gardaí of different rank and years’ experience, the researcher now has a greater understanding of the organisation. Given a further opportunity, the researcher would mix qualitative research with quantitative research methods to gauge issues before compiling the questionnaire. In retrospect, the researcher is satisfied with the findings and is keen

to add to the research in the future. As a result of this course and dissertation the researcher has developed essential research skills, data collation and critical thinking.

Finally, through this dissertation process the researcher has enhanced attention to detail and confidence has grown through the completion of various projects.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter of consent to interviewees

August 2016

Dear participant,

I am a student at the National College of Ireland completing a Masters in Human Resource Management.

For my dissertation I am eager to engage with Gardaí to complete “*An Investigation into the Key Drivers of Employee Engagement in An Garda Síochána*”.

The goal of my research dissertation is to identify the key drivers of employee engagement and investigate if there are any similarities to those stated in academic literature.

This interview is totally anonymous and your identity will be kept out of the data.

The only individuals to view this information will be myself and my dissertation supervisor, Mr. Jonathan Brittain. As stated, this will be completely anonymous and your employer will not have a view of information.

I anticipate the interview to be 30 minutes in total and a location can be agreed that is suitable with you.

Should you have any questions surrounding this, please do not hesitate to contact me: noelleeiffe@gmail.com

Kindest regards,

Noelle Eiffe

Appendix 2 – Consent Form

Title of Dissertation:

“An Investigation into the Key Drivers of Employee Engagement in An Garda Síochána”.

Researcher Details:

Noelle Eiffe

Masters in Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland

- I affirm that I understand the questions that will be asked of me and that I have been given the opportunity to ask my own questions
- I confirm that this interview is voluntary and that I can withdraw myself from the process at any time should I feel so
- I approve of the researcher recording my words via audio or by note taking
- I understand that the researcher will use my quotes in a direct/indirect manner
- I acknowledge my participation in this dissertation project and know that my identity is private

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix 3 – Interview Questions

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?
2. How many years service have you completed?
3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?
4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?
5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?
6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?
7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?
8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?
9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?
10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?
11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?
12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?
13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?
14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organisations are doing different things to engage their staff?
15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

16. Have you have recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

Appendix 4 – Interview Transcripts

Participant 1

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Garda/Jailor

2. How many years service have you completed?

31 years and 10 months

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Fully engaged

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes, there are not enough hours in the day to do my job

5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes

6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?

Yes

7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?

The training is not relevant to everyday tasks but it didn't effect my levels personally. Because of the nature of my role, I've missed out on a lot of training. I think it does affect engagement, I would like to see more opportunities to learn

8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?

No

11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?

The love of the job makes me engaged. If you aren't happy you will smother

12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?

Yes

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes absolutely

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organisations are doing different things to engage their staff?

I don't know

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

No, I just get on with my own role

16. Have you have recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

Allow for more training opportunities for motorcyclist. Because I was away from the office I never had the same opportunities. There needs to be more

communication to the men on the ground and take on board our opinions.

Nepotism is still rife and needs to be abolished.

Participant 2

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Inspector

2. How many years' service have you completed?

33 years

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Engaged but since 2009/2010 I became very disillusioned

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes

5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?

Immediate management yes but the higher up the chain, the more removed they are from reality

6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?

Yes

7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?

Yes

8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes of course, we want to be rewarded. Payment is a reflection of how much you are worth. I don't feel the salaries reflect what we deal with.

9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?

No, upper management are removed from reality and decisions are made top down.

11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?

A deep sense of loyalty, dedication to public service and comradeship

12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?

No not in the last few years

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, absolutely

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organization are doing different things to engage their staff?

I've never worked in the private sector

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

16. Have you any recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

Listen to issues at grass root level and communicate with us effectively.

Have more meetings, one a month is not enough. Equip us with better tools that allow us to do our job better. We need support.

Participant 3

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Sergeant

2. How many years' service have you completed?

10 years

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Engaged but I have become disillusioned in recent years because we do not have the right tools

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes, but I would like more resources

5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes, but it has to work both ways. It's important to know you have someone who will be there for you and will allow you to do your job

6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?

Yes, we need to feel supported

7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?

Definitely, I'd like to see more opportunities that are relevant to our everyday role. Many training schemes are not at grass root level.

8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes of course, we're not getting paid to reflect the work we have to do with the lack of resources

9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?

Yeah I think they are trying their best. I have seen some changes

11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?

Duty and love of the job

12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?

It depends, when its particularly busy I don't feel valued but there is just no time for feedback I suppose. I'd like more feedback, its hard to know if I'm doing a good job sometimes.

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, absolutely

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organization are doing different things to engage their staff?

The private sector definitely invest more into employee engagement, probably because the industry is more competitive. It would be great to see the Gardaí adopting some methods and pushing engagement more.

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, my manager is an open book, I feel I can go to her when I have an issue

16. Have you any recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

More communication and more training

Participant 4

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Garda

2. How many years' service have you completed?

12 years

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Engaged

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes but some tools are outdated like other stations have more modern technology

5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes

6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?

Yes, it makes going to work that little bit easier

7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?

Yes

8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes of course, it's an issue that needs to be addressed. We're not enough

9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?

No really, it is not a priority

11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?

Things like recognition and pride

12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?

I'm lucky, I have a great manager, he always gives me feedback, even if it is positive or constructive, I know where I stand

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organization are doing different things to engage their staff?

Can't comment

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, its important to see your management engaged as you will want to emulate that

16. Have you any recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

Don't think they know how to communicate properly

More training, even mentoring

Participant 5

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Detective

2. How many years' service have you completed?

24 years

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Engaged

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes

- 5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?**

Yes

- 6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?**

Yes, I think so

- 7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?**

Yes

- 8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?**

Yes, it is an issue for me

- 9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?**

Yes

- 10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?**

I think so

- 11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?**

I guess pride and duty

- 12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?**

Yes

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organization are doing different things to engage their staff?

I don't know

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, definitely

16. Have you any recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

More open communication because news is slow to filter

I'd like to see varied training opportunities

Participant 6

1. What is your role in the Gardaí?

Garda

2. How many years' service have you completed?

13 years

3. Would you identify as: engaged, not engaged or disengaged?

Engaged but kind of frustrated too but not disengaged yet

4. Do you think the work environment has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes I think so

5. Would you say having a strong relationship with senior management/leadership has an effect on your engagement levels?

Yes

6. Is having a positive relationship with colleagues a driver of employee engagement?

Yes, it is a sense of comradeship. It gets me through bad days

7. Does further training and development effect your level of employee engagement?

Yes

8. Does pay and benefits have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, it is a major topic at the moment. We need salaries to reflect the industry

9. Do you think having a healthy work life balance has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, I try to make plans so I have something to look forward to

10. Do you think Garda Síochána is doing enough to develop and main a sense of engagement within the organization?

No, they could be doing more

11. What do you think makes you: engaged, not engaged or disengaged in work?

I like to do my job well

12. When you are in work, do you feel you are valued?

For the most part yes

13. Do you feel you are motivated by colleagues and does it have an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes

14. On the off chance you have ever worked in the private sector, do you think organization are doing different things to engage their staff?

Not sure

15. Do you think management has an effect on your levels of employee engagement?

Yes, they lead by example

16. Have you any recommendations for Garda Síochána to improve employee engagement levels?

I'd like to see more communication from top management down.

Sometimes I feel we are left out of the loop and don't know what's happening. Also, they should start to listen to the guys on the front line, we have lots to share and want to make contributions