

**The Relationship between Employee Development and
Line Manager Support/Interaction with Employee
Engagement. An investigation into employees in the Retail
Sector in Ireland.**

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Abstract

Employee engagement has become a large concern for employers. If employees are engaged there is less chance of problems arising within the workplace, it can increase organisational commitment, job satisfaction and retention. This study determines that development opportunities and line manager support/interaction has a positive impact on employee engagement in the Irish retail sector.

Quantitative research was undertaken for this study, a survey was distributed among employees in the retail industry. Three stores under the same retailer were chosen to take part in the study. 108 employees worked as associates in these stores and were invited to take part in the survey, the researcher received 83 complete responses. The survey that was used in this research was developed by Professor Alan Saks (2006) which was discovered through a previous dissertation that was submitted to the National College of Ireland (NCI). The data gathered from the survey was inputted into The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) where tests relevant to the hypothesis were ran.

The results gathered show both development opportunities and line manager support/interaction has a positive impact on employee engagement levels.

Key words: development, line manager support/interaction, engagement, retention, organisational commitment and job satisfaction.

1 . Introduction

Title

The title of this research is: The relationship between employee development and line manager support/interaction with employee engagement. An investigation into employees in the retail sector in Ireland.

Rationale

The rationale of this research is to identify whether employee development and line manager support have an effect on engagement levels from employees currently working in the retail sector in Ireland. Current literature that exists suggests that employee development and line manager support has an impact on employee engagement, this is highlighted in the literature review. However, a very small amount of research exists on the Irish retail sector.

Development has become such an important benefit for employees and it can have a very positive impact on the workforce if implemented, but if not it can have detrimental consequences for organisations (Baruch, 2006). Additionally, line manager support can also have an impact on engagement levels. When line manager support fails and development opportunities are not an option, it can lead to a breakdown in relationship between the employee and their organisation. If employees are dissatisfied in their jobs it can lead to numerous problems for an organisation such as, unproductive employees, lack of engagement and ultimately high employee turnover levels (Zimenoff, 2015). Therefore, it is important to explore if development and line manager support contribute to job satisfaction, organisational commitment and engagement levels.

The Justification for the Research

The retail sector plays a very important factor within every economy worldwide as consumers buy products and services daily. The retail industry in Ireland accounts for 14% of the overall total employment, making it the largest private sector company (Ibec, 2019). Employees working in the retail industry enjoy the fourth highest wage earnings in Europe, yet the retail sector accounts for one of the highest turnover rates (Ibec, 2019). As the turnover rate has remained incredibly high within the retail sector, the issue of how to engage and retain employees has become important to organisations. One way this issue can potentially be resolved is through offering employee development.

Employee development refers to the growth of an individual within a working environment (London, 1989). Employees are now in search more than ever for purpose and meaning in their jobs. According to Hall and Mirvis (1996) job satisfaction and engagement can be improved through both learning and development opportunities and manager support. Previous research has concluded where development opportunities are available to employees it can enhance organisational commitment, job satisfaction, engagement and retention levels (Gutteridge, Leibowitz and Shore, 1993). Not only are employees seeking development opportunities in the form of learning programmes provided by their organisations, but are looking for their line managers to aid in this development. Line managers typically work alongside employees on a daily basis, therefore they can have the ability to develop employees. According to Schneier, MacCoy and Burchman (1988) employers who devote their time doing this for workers within their organisation have the ability of increasing organisational commitment, job satisfaction, engagement and retention, the same as employee development programmes.

The author has developed a theoretical framework shown in Figure 1 below. In this theoretical framework the author outlines their approach in seeking to find if line manager

support/interaction has a positive or negative effect on the four variables highlighted and likewise with formal/informal employee development. The theoretical framework below will be discussed in the literature review section.

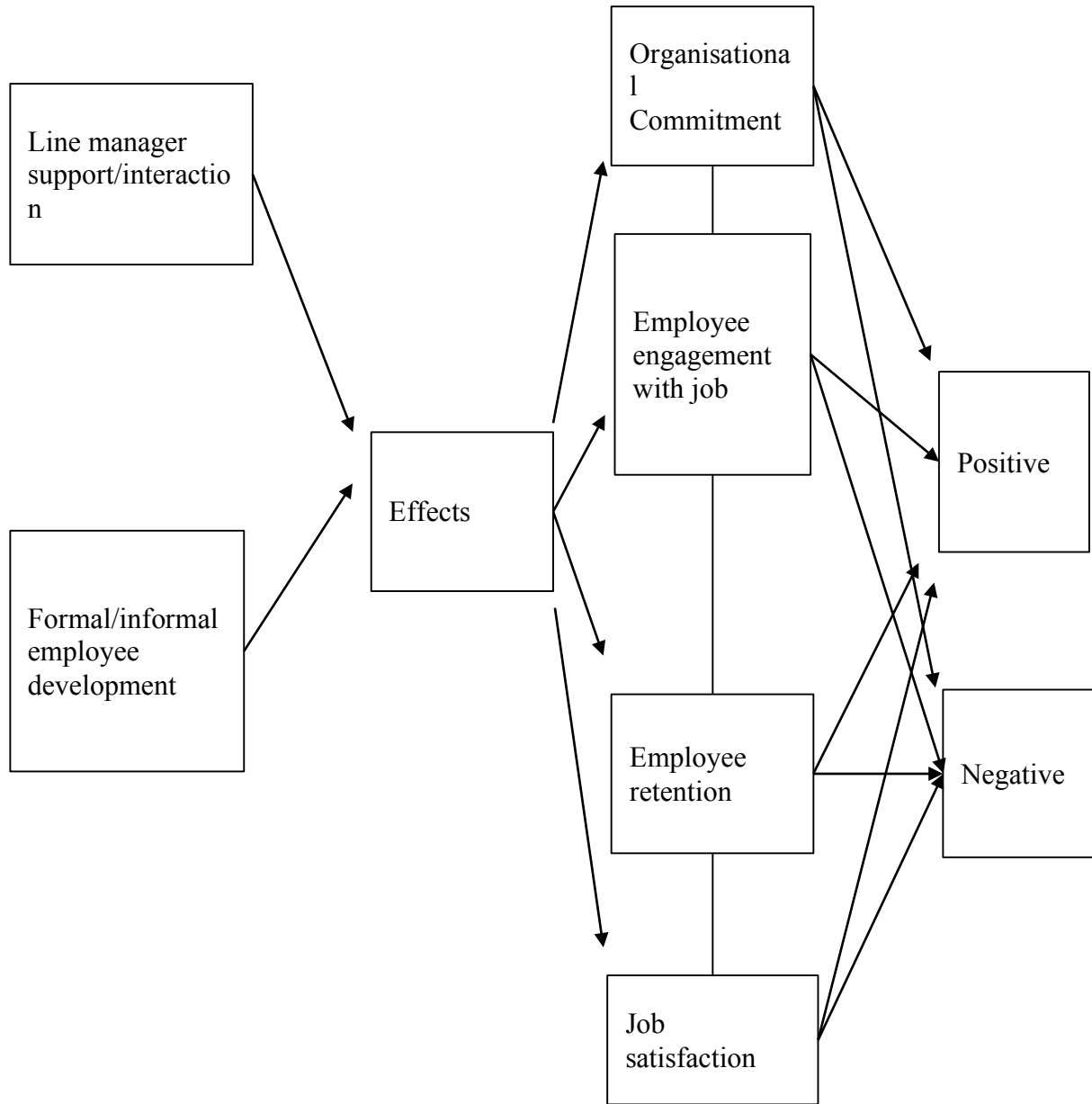


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

A survey developed by Professor Alan Saks (2006) titled “*Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement*” will be used for the purpose of this study. The researcher received permission from Professor Saks to use his employee engagement scale. The email confirming

the permission can be found in Appendix 3, while the contents of the survey can be found in Appendix 4.



Figure 2: A model of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks, 2006)

Employee engagement according to Saks (2006) can be measured in two different forms; job engagement and organisational engagement. Job engagement is the interaction the employee has with their role within an organisation, whereas organisational engagement is the relationship an employee has with their company (Saks, 2006). This survey will be suited to investigating employees who work in the retail sector in Ireland as the researcher can gather data from thirteen different scales in relation to the research topic.

2. Aims and Objectives

Research Aim

This researcher aims to examine individuals who are currently working in the clothing retail sector in Ireland. The researcher chose not to examine employees of different retail stores but to choose one large Irish retailer company, and survey three stores. Therefore, obtaining a more accurate result as the researcher will confidently know the participants who partake in their study will be working in the retail industry. The company that was chosen as the researcher's subject to survey was chosen as 90% of their employees are on associate contracts.

The reason sales associates were the target of this study is due to the fact sales associates are the face of the organisation. A large part of their role is to interact with customers on a daily basis, demonstrating a positive and motivated attitude towards the customer in order to encourage the consumer to return and buy the company's products. Also, in order to deliver excellent customer service employees must be fully engaged in their roles as being a sales associate can be a challenging job. Employees desire the same respect and dedication from their organisation as they input on a daily basis.

As the current literature that exists at this time suggests both development and line manager support has a positive impact on engagement levels. The researcher wanted to uncover if this would remain the same for employees in the Irish retail sector. Therefore, the two hypotheses outlined below were developed as the researcher had to predict their studies outcome. These hypotheses will be validated further in the findings section:

H₀: Employee progression will have a significant impact on employee engagement.

H_a: There will be a significant relationship between perceived line manager support/interaction and employee engagement.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to explore whether employee development and line manager support affects employee engagement.

The researcher is further going to explore the effect employee development and line manager support/interaction has on employee's commitment, intention to stay within an organisation and job satisfaction

The Significance of the Study

In conducting this research, the author aims to discover if development opportunities and line manager support enhance employee engagement in an organisation. This research is of importance to organisations operating within the retail industry as the results may show the impact development opportunities can have on an organisation. This study targets sales associates only as the investigation is concerned with employee developmental opportunities and line manager support, in which management are exempt from. The results will hopefully identify a clear conclusion to the research objectives the author has highlighted above.

3. Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to explore existing research and studies that consider employee development and line manager support as contributions of enhanced levels of employee engagement (and the intention to stay with an organisation).

Employee Development

The term employee development can be defined as an opportunity for an employee to develop his/her skills and knowledge in training programmes which are supported by the employer to ensure the employee has the competencies required to perform well (Jacobs and Washington, 2003). Over recent decades the term “employee development” has gained significant importance worldwide, the reason for this is due to global competition among organisations. Offering development opportunities has become an important benefit to entice employees to remain in their roles (Wait and Frazer, 2018). This theory of offering development opportunities to retain employees has been proven to be true by many authors as published literature suggests employee development opportunities has a positive impact on employees in organisations (Maurer, 2001; Weng et al. 2010 and Whitner, 2001). Benefits associated with employee development according to Lau and Ngo (2004) include creating an innovative

workforce as development investments can enable employees to continuously learn about the organisation. Sung and Choi (2013) also stated its positive impact on employees as their skills and knowledge bases are improved, therefore creating a competitive workforce.

A large percentage of organisations assume the most important aspect of an employee's job is their salary and financial benefits alone. Previous research suggests this is not a true statement to make, Jehanzeb and Bashir (2013) found that employees invested in their jobs looked for training and development programmes in which they reported leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment. As claimed by Garger (1999) employee's possess no loyalty to organisations who do not invest in them. According to Wagner (2000) development programmes can lead to great benefits for organisations, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and high retention levels. Torraco and Swanson (1995) agree with this stating that a positive relationship exists between employee development and organisational commitment. Research has been provided in relation to this. A study by Harrold (2000) showed when employee development investments of \$2 billion were made in the company Honeywell, productivity increased by 4.7 percent, thereby rising commitment levels. A similar study conducted by Shelton (2001) in relation to employee development and job satisfaction seen a positive correlation between the two variables, but also discovered if there is no support from management in these development programmes then it will leave employees feeling unengaged. Employees thrive from the feeling of adding value to a company as it gives them a purpose (Melymuka, 2000). The company Management Recruiter of Boston reported one of the main reasons employees leave their jobs is due to the lack of development opportunities (Rosenwald, 2000).

Employee Development in the Retail Industry

Ibec (2019) states the number of people employed in the retailing Industry in Ireland accounts for 14% of the population, making the retail industry the largest private sector company, and most profitable as it generates an annual estimate of €30 billion in capital. However, it also has the largest turnover rates (Ibec, 2019). Previous studies have emphasised these high turnover rates can be accounted to the lack of developmental opportunities available to employees. An investigation conducted by Nair et al. (2014) saw a similar situation in the Malaysian retail industry as to what Ireland experiences. The study found that similar to Ireland the retail industry dominates as one of the highest profitable sectors generating 60-70% Gross Domestic Product (GDP), yet employee turnover has remained a predominant problem with an annual turnover of 18%. The results of this study found that the main reason employees were leaving their positions was due to the lack of development opportunities (Nair et al. 2014). A similar situation was also recorded in the UK, survey conducted by Jashan (2016) found that 18% of employees surveyed had left previous retail roles as there was no opportunity for development. Employees respond in a more positive light to organisations that are investing in employee development, employees describe a feeling of being valued (Glazer et al. 2019). In accordance with this Twenge (2010) stated organisations can gain a greater competitive advantage through employees increasing their performance and productivity once employee development is invested in. Giant retailer Wal-Mart is a prime example of a company who successfully improved its ability to retain employees by changing their policy towards employee development. Peterson (2005) reported the retailer diminished their turnover by 65% all due to their decision to introduce development programmes which allows sales associates to advance to management positions within the company. Over 70% of those who hold management positions within Wal-mart today began their careers as sales associates (Peterson, 2005). Employees who are not seeing these development opportunities within their roles are beginning to leave their positions as the younger generation are in search of jobs that provide a purpose

(Jacobs et al. 2014). A study conducted by Reda (2008) on retail employees in the United States found that in the U.S alone the turnover rate accumulated to 60% for full-time employees and 115% for part-time workers in the year 2008. From this it was evident that organisational commitment and job satisfaction was at and all time low, and it is still continuing today. In the retail industry it is very important to have committed and satisfied employees as those are the ones who are representing the company brand and are the point of contact to customers.

Line Manager - Employee Relationship

A line manager has a very important role to play in both managing employees and reporting to upper management. The definition of a line manager comes from Currie and Procter (2001) who defined a line manager as a mediator, negotiator and the person who connects the organisation. These managers play a crucial role in motivating, engaging and retaining employees (Rathi and Lee, 217). The decision making process over the years has slowly changed now allowing line managers have more say in decision making, there has been a shift in power (Stoker, 2006). Line managers work alongside employees on a daily basis interacting and providing support. Arakawa and Greenberg (2007) identified that a line manager has a predominant amount of influence on their employees. In today's society the well-being of people not only in social life but working life has become so important. Therefore, looking after an employees well-being has become an essential part of a line manager's role within an organisation as studies have shown it links to job satisfaction and job engagement (Judge et al., 2001). According to Spector (1997) the more satisfied an employee is within their role the more committed and engaged they become.

Previous research from authors have shown that line manager support can have a positive impact on the employee, in terms of organisational commitment, job satisfaction, engagement

and retention. Authors Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2008) stated that employees who feel supported within their organisations possess a higher level of organisational commitment than those who are not provided with support. Organisational support is the key to organisational commitment (Colakoglu, Culha and Atay, 2010). When discussing the relationship between line managers and employees in relation to organisational commitment, the social exchange theory can be applied.

The Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory can be applied to any workplace. The social exchange theory essentially outlines when a person is treated in a fair and well received manner the person receiving that treatment is more likely to reciprocate that behaviour back to the other person (Blau, 1976). In more detail, the social exchange theory concludes that employee behaviour and overall workplace behaviour is due to the result of an exchange process that seeks to maximise benefits and minimise costs in a relationship (Emerson, 1981). When the negatives outweigh the positives then it can have a detrimental effect on the relationship between the employee and employer relationship. However, in contrast, if the positives outweigh the negatives the opposite applies. Holladay and Carroll (2010) stated organisational commitment can be increased as a result of the social exchange theory as employees have the ability to outweigh the positives over the negatives. This theory can be applied in any working environment no matter how large scale the organisation may be, according to Mearns et al. (2010) employees respond to their employer's behaviour towards them. The more investment employees see on their employers behalves, the more likely that investment will be reciprocated. This theory can be applied to the retail industry which can help towards the disengagement of employees. Thus, a line manager using this approach and investing time in the employee can contribute to organisational commitment.

Line Managers Impact on Employee Commitment and Job Satisfaction

Many aspects can have an influence on employee job satisfaction, such as pay, working environment, co-workers, but also line manager support (Malik, 2013). Research has shown that a positive line manager - employee relationship has resulted in increased commitment from employees, a higher feeling of satisfaction within their roles, performance has increased, while workplace conflicts have been brought down to a minimum (Newman et al. 2011; Sawang, 2010; Argarwala et al. 2014). Previous research that has been conducted on organisational commitment and employee job satisfaction has failed to identify exactly how supervisor support is linked to the two variables. However, a study undertaken by Rathi and Lee (2017) identified these gaps using Quality of Working Life as a mediating variable. Quality of Working Life is a relatively new concept in which organisations are becoming aware of. Instead of focusing on the level of work the employee is doing, attention is now being directed to the wellbeing of the employee. The results of their study showed line manager support has a positive and significant impact on Quality of Working Life which then leads to organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Rathi and Lee, 2017). Employees enjoy the feeling of support from line managers as it shows the level of commitment management have for them (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). However, line-managers can contribute and cause dissatisfaction to their employees from the amount of work and pressure that they put on them. A study operated by Eurofound (2015) reported of those participants surveyed 62% had to constantly chase targets and deadlines, as a result it had left employees overwhelmed and dissatisfied with their job. Therefore, organisational commitment and job satisfaction of an employee in a lot of circumstances rests on how line managers treat their employees.

Employee engagement

According to Macey and Schneider (2008) defining employee engagement has become ambiguous as many literatures hold different definitions of the term, leading it to be inconsistent at times. A variety of different ways the term employee engagement can be interpreted by authors are highlighted below. Studies conducted by authors Christian, Garza and Slaughter, (2011) and Rich, Lepine and Crawford, (2010) suggest employee engagement and organisational commitment come hand in hand. Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) determined employee engagement occurs when employees feel satisfied and contented with the organisation in which they work for. Whereas Attridge (2009) defines employee engagement as an employee's enthusiasm to work. What remains is the lack of a universal definition of the term. However, the first use of the term can be located to William A. Khan (1990).

The theory of employee engagement was first developed by William A. Khan (1990) in which the title of theoretical father has been bestowed upon him. Khan conducted research by studying and analysing a working environment. In his research Kahn's main aim was to identify how engagement occurs within a workplace, but also what can contribute to the disengagement of employees (Khan, 1990). His research was one of the first to focus on "how employees felt" rather than if the employee themselves were the "right fit" for the organisation. According to Kahn, employee engagement involves the harnessing of oneself to one's work roles (Khan, 1990). The employee then can become "physically, cognitively and emotionally" engaged with their work (Khan, 1990, p694).

Employee Development and Engagement

In order to retain, satisfy and increase productivity within a workplace employee engagement must be instilled into an organisations strategy according to Iqbal et al. (2017). One of the largest surveys that has been conducted on employee engagement investigating what is important to employees and why was orchestrated by Towers Perrin. The results of this study established that employees felt learning and development had become very important for them (O'Neal et al. 2006). Although people react well to money, enjoying pay increases and bonuses, a new desire for employees is now intrinsic rewards such as employee development according to Jacobs et al. (2014). Employees crave job autonomy and this can be given through developmental opportunities, employees have no desire to work within an environment in which they will be micromanaged, but want to know how to perform within their role, through this a more engaged workforce can be created (Kaur, 2016).

In the area of retail, an employee being engaged within their role is crucial to the successful running of that store. Employees who are disengaged fail to offer excellent customer service which can then have a damaging effect on the store as more often they will not become a loyal consumer (Ellis and Sorensen, 2007). Evenson (2007) reported for an employee to deliver excellent customer service they themselves must be fully engaged. For this reason alone organisations have been made aware of the importance in boosting organisational performance, this is through training and developing employees (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). Baumruk and Gorman (2006) expressed the value organisational performance can have on an organisation. Employees who are satisfied and committed to their roles become great advocates for their organisation (Bamruk and Gorman, 2006). The Blessing White (2006) study discovered 60% of individuals who were surveyed agreed that development opportunities have an impact on their job satisfaction and engagement levels.

Employee development is not the only aspect which can have an effect on engagement levels within an organisation, according to some authors line manager support/interaction has the same amount of impact on employee engagement levels.

Line Manager Support and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement can be driven by a number of factors within the working environment, one of these factors that can claim an important input is the relationship between employees and their line managers. Inevitably so, the more engaged an employee is within their organisation and work, the less likely there will be reduced productivity, sick rates and rising conflicts to occur (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009). Korsgaard et al. (1995) highlighted the importance of a healthy relationship between a line manager and employee. As the mantra says employees leave managers, not companies. As line managers have more interaction with employees on a daily basis than any other managers this mantra can be applied to them. Support and interaction are one of the main things employees seek from their management team, if these fail to exist it can create a disengaged workforce. MacLeod (2008, p34) stated, *“Common sense would suggest that management, both immediate and senior, hold the levers that can engage or disengage a workforce.”* According to Aktouf (1992) unsupportive line managers can result in disengagement for employees.

Managers have a choice to make within their position on how they manage their employees, they can take an authoritarian approach, or they have the opportunity to engage with and empower employees. In Khan's theory he discusses how three psychological conditions; psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability can have an impact on engagement and disengagement (Khan, 1990). Line managers who want to create or maintain an engaged workforce use these three areas to do so. First, they look to see how meaningful an employees work is to them, the more meaningful they feel towards their

role the more likely they are engaged with their jobs (May 2003). The second is safety, they must ensure their employees feel psychologically safe. An employee who feels psychologically safe is someone who is comfortable in being their full self without the risk of consequences (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Finally, the third of Khans psychological conditions is availability. Employees need to have confidence in themselves in order to do the work they undertake, the more confident the employee is within their role the more engaged they can become (Khan, 1990). These psychological conditions all play an important role in engaging employees, managers who support and involve their employees have the ability to increase engagement levels. By interpreting Khans psychological conditions this can be achieved.

Previous literature has shown employees seek these close relationships with their line manager. Chalofsky (2003) documented that employees desire a positive and well working relationship with their managers over any form of capital. Rai et al. (2017) also confirmed this statement, adding employees who work well with their manager show higher engagement levels than those employees who do not have this kind of relationship. As well as this employee want management to invest in organisational learning for them. The term organisational learning can be defined as *“the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning and continuous support”* (Bate and Khasawneh, 2005, p.99).

Management have become aware of the importance of organisational learning as it benefits both parties involved, it creates more enthusiastic and engaged employees, as well as a competitive advantage for the organisation (Mehrabani et al. 2013). Research undertaken by Rose, Kumar, & Pak, (2011) and Salarian, Baharmpour, & Habibi, (2015) discovered when management offer organisational learning it can have an impact on employee engagement. Moreover, Wang (2007) found organisational learning has a strong correlation with job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

From the literature found it has shown a positive correlation between line manager support and employee engagement.

Employee Retention

The term employee retention has no definitive definition; many authors have described it in different ways. Some examples of these definitions are as follows, Baharin and Hanafi (2018) defined employee retention as an organisations responsibility to take measures to ensure employees remain in the company for a long period of time. In accordance with this Iles at al. (2010) believes companies should make certain sacrifices for their employees which could improve the overall atmosphere within a working space. Whereas Aruna and Anitha (2015) defined employee retention as employees who have become talented within their specific job through training and development which results in employees becoming dedicated to their acquired roles. Over recent years there has been a major shift in the global economy due to the continuous rise in technology, resulting in competition among organisations becoming a significant challenge. The working organisations throughout the world is now facing a “war on talent” due to organisations inability to retain current employees (Cole, 2015). Organisations have now become more aware of the importance in investing in training and development programmes in order to retain staff (Coates, 2017). Along with this, managers within these organisations are seeing employees wanting to become more involved with the going-ons in the business and show interest in becoming more involved in decision making processes (Carmeli, 2005). By organisations and line managers investing in employees it has shown from the above literature that it can have an effect on engagement levels by creating satisfied and committed employees. Employees who are engaged with their work are less likely to leave their organisations. When an employee is satisfied and committed to their role there is a greater chance they will remain (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This is something that has become a major

challenge for employers in the retail sector as turnover is a continuous problem among retail employees (Daves, 2002). Lucas et al. (1990) and Shim et al. (2002) felt if organisations could stop focusing on the reason why employees were leaving organisations and focused more time on approving retention levels by increasing organisational commitment it would then lead to a higher chance of employees being engaged within their job and would eventually improve employee retention.

Organisational socialisation

Many researchers believe the employer and employee relationship has a significant impact on retention levels in an organisation. Whitcomb (2012) stated how it is crucial to attract, retain and most importantly engage with current employees as this will improve overall productivity rates creating a happier workforce. Walumbwa et al. (2005) identified that the support of a line manager to their employees has a positive impact on employee retention. This statement was also supported by Silbert (2005) who also noted line manager support has an impact on employee retention. In order to retain employees, it is important they are satisfied and committed to both their role and their organisation. Yet, organisational commitment sometimes fails to exist when there is a breakdown between employee and employer. The breakdown in these relationships can be solved through a process of organisational socialisation (Luca, 2016).

Tang et al. (2013) highlighted in his research the most effective way management can get employees to commit to the organisation is through organisational socialisation. The term is defined “*as a process by which newcomers acquire the attitudes, behaviours and knowledge needed to make the transition from being outsiders to becoming effective members of an organisation*” (Tang et al., 2013, p62). This is an approach that management can take which could solve many potential problems from arising. Simply by investing a large amount of time into developing new employees when they join the organisation will benefit the organisation

in the long term. Employees see the effort the managers are making and they will return that interaction in the form of commitment, engagement and inevitably retention (Ashford and Black, 1996). This may be a solution that could help line managers reduce large turnover rates in the retail sector and increase their ability to retain employees.

Employee Retention and Employee Development Opportunities

The ability to retain employees has become a skill for organisations as loyalty has slowly become a thing of the past. Linked in's Workforce Learning Report that was issued in 2018 discovered out of those surveyed 93% of employees stated that they would be willing to stay within organisations that are investing in development programmes for them. Forbes reported in a recent article that development opportunities should be mandatory in organisations to assist in retaining employees (Biro, 2018). According to Paré and Trembley (2007) development is vital in influencing job satisfaction which will then have an affect on the decision an employee makes when deciding to leave an organisation or not. Many authors it seems hold similar agreements in relation to employee development having a positive impact of retention, authors such as Lee and Bruvold (2003) and Ahmad, Bibi and Majid (2017).

Conclusion

For any research topic it is important to understand the area you are researching and see what other authors are discovering in this area. The objective of this section was to review literature on employee development and line manager support/interaction and its effect on employee engagement. Additionally, organisational commitment, job satisfaction and retention were recurring terms that continually arose when researching the main research title. This chapter highlighted the importance of employee development opportunities and line manager support/interaction on employee engagement and retention. Job satisfaction and organisational commitment also play a key role in employee engagement. Engagement as discussed has become very important for both employee and organisation. Although there is a vast amount of research around the topic of employee engagement, authors find it difficult to agree on an exact definition of the term. What this literature did discover was development and line manager support/interaction can have a positive effect when it comes to employee engagement.

4. Methodology

Introduction

In the previous section the literature identified that both employee development and line manager support have an effect on job engagement as well as organisational commitment, job satisfaction and retention.

This section of the paper outlines the different methods and approaches that will be used in this study. According to Scotland (2012, p9) a methodology section of a dissertation outlines the “*why, from where, when and how the data is collected and analysed*”. Therefore, the researcher will outline exactly that. Under the methodology section the following will be discussed; research philosophy, research framework, research approach, research design, research strategy, research procedure and research demographics. Furthermore, ethical considerations and research limitations will be outlined in this methodology section.

Research Philosophy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, p108) the term research philosophy refers to “*the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge.*” The type of research philosophy an author conducting a study undertakes has a lot to do with what questions they want to be answered. The two types of research philosophy that exist is ontology and epistemology. For the purpose of this study the researcher will be focusing on epistemology, adopting a philosophy of positivism.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge in general. Within the philosophy of epistemology there are two approaches the researcher can take, positivism and interpretivism. The term positivism “*holds that there is one objective reality*” (Quinlan, 2011, p99). Positivists believe that society shapes an individual. Whereas interpretivists believe the reality is multiple and

relative (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The author chose positivism as their research philosophy as a survey was being used. Also, the researcher was not involved with the participants who took part in the study, according to Carson et al. (2001) this is important to remain neutral and not have an impact on the way participants answer.

Research Framework

The research framework that is being used in this study is referred to as “the research onion” which was a model designed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). The research onion outlines each layer that is needed in a methodology for it to be effective. For Saunders et al. (2009) an effective methodology includes research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, time horizon and finally, data and collection methods. The purpose of a research onion is to guide the author through their methodology.

Research Approach

Two approaches that can be used when attempting to conduct research are inductive and deductive reasoning, both approaches are opposite to one another. An inductive approach involves the process of observation to theory, known as a bottom-up approach (Horn, 2012). Whereas, deductive reasoning moves from general to specific, known as a top-down approach (Horn, 2012).

For the purpose of this study deductive reasoning was chosen as a survey is associated with deductive reasoning according to Quinlan (2011). In more detail deductive reasoning involves moving from general to specific. The process includes developing a hypothesis that predicts an outcome, experiments are then further conducted to reach a conclusion on the hypothesis, the hypothesis can either be supported or rejected (Saunders et al. 2009).

Research Design

When conducting research two different approaches can be adapted, qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research involves the collection of information from word of mouth as a collection of data, for example semi structured and structured interviews fall under the category of qualitative research. Quantitative research on the other hand analyses the gathering of numeric data in ways such as questionnaire or survey distribution (Quinlan, 2011). The data collection for this study was within three stores in a large private retailing company in Ireland. Both of these methods could be used in this particular research. However, for the purpose of this study the researcher decided to use a quantitative survey in order to collect their data. The main reason quantitative research was selected as it allowed the researcher to gather a large sample of data within a short period as it allows for quick responses from participants.

Research Design Feasibility

The researcher has a very good connection with the company used in this study as they were a member of staff for a number of years employed as a part time sales associate. The survey was distributed to three stores as the researcher had a good relationship with the managers of these stores, they had been managed by them at some point during their time of employment. The survey was distributed by management in their employees Facebook Messenger group.

Research Strategy

The researcher chose to use a survey to gather their data. The choice to use a survey was due to the researcher wanting to gather a large amount of data in a short amount of time as they were under a time restriction. The researcher was gathering a large amount of data in relation to employee engagement.

A survey can ensure valid results as surveys are anonymous and participants will give their full and honest opinions to the statements made in the survey. A survey can ask a significantly large amount of questions without going into a large amount of detail so the participant can answer them at a fast pace. The survey was distributed to participants via SurveyMonkey.

Research Procedure

When the author was researching which survey they could use for their study they found a dissertation that was completed by Doreen Travers (2018) a student of the National College of Ireland (NCI) in which contained the contents of the survey created by Professor Alan Saks (2006). The researcher then sought permission from Professor Saks through email to use this survey in their study. The email showing this permission can be seen in Appendix 3. Secondly, the contents of this survey can be seen in Appendix 4. The survey was sent out through SurveyMonkey to the managers of retail stores, the managers of these stores then distributed the survey to their employees. The researcher only sent the survey to managers of retail stores as they were cautious of collecting valid and reliable results.

Research Demographics

For the purpose of this research Saks (2006) survey was used as it is an academic source which has been rigorously validated. The reason for choosing this survey over other academic surveys was due to the statements highlighted in Saks survey are consistent to the theme of the literature review. Participants who took part in this survey were asked to rate their answers to the questions on a Likert scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree. Some of the questions were reverse coded for negatively worded statements, this can be seen in Appendix 4 which shows the contents of the

survey. Following the questions to Saks survey additional five demographic questions were included at the end of the survey.

Employee engagement can be measured through job engagement and organisational engagement. The measurement of job engagement consists of five statements in which the participants have to answer on a Likert scale. Job engagement can also be measured through job satisfaction, organisational commitment, intention to quit and organisational citizen behaviour - individual and organisation. Organisational engagement consists of six scales, job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice and distributive justice.

Sampling

As stated previously, the author had a good relationship with three store managers that worked in this retailer. The researcher contacted the managers individually and explained to them what they wanted to do and ensured them the company's name would remain private and not be referred to by its name within their study. All three managers agreed to the researcher distributing the survey among the employees and then sent the managers the survey. These managers then shared the survey within a Facebook messenger group set up for each store. The sales associates in each store were invited to take part in the survey on a voluntary basis, those who did not want to participate in the research were not obliged to. In total one hundred and eight individuals are employed as sales associates within the three retail stores, therefore one hundred and eight was the sample size. This sample size included both male and females, with ages ranging from eighteen plus.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, it is essential the author adheres to ethical standards. Bowie and Schneider (2011, p10) defined ethics “*the code of moral standards.*” Ethical approval was previously sought and accepted for this research through a dissertation proposal. A research consent form had been submitted to each individual partaking in the survey, clearly highlighting the option to partake or refrain from being involved with the study. Individuals were fully aware that the survey was confidential and it was clearly expressed on the information sheet of the survey that the identification of any of the participants would not be disclosed or recorded. Contact information of the researcher was also available on the information section in case any participants sought further knowledge on the details of the survey. The researcher has complied with the ethical guidelines set out by the National College of Ireland.

Time Horizon

Given the small amount of time that was allocated to conducting this research, a time limit had to be set in relation to distributing and collecting the data. The amount of time that was allocated for this was two weeks for participants to partake in the survey.

Research Limitations

Although the survey the author distributed is a published journal by Professor Alan Saks some limitations in this research exist. The researcher chose to undertake quantitative research over qualitative research. When conducting this study, the researcher could have chosen quantitative or qualitative to collect their data but chose quantitative as it allows for a faster and larger response rate in a small amount of time. However, due to this decision a limitation has arisen. The problem with using a quantitative method is the responses lack in depth personal answers

which could have helped the researcher understand the participants feelings and opinions on the topic more.

As the researcher had a time limit of two weeks to send and collect the data before running it on SPSS, conducting research of longitudinal data was not an option in this circumstance. If the researcher had this time, then a longitudinal study could have been undertaken which would of allowed for the observation of the same variables over a longer amount of time. Further, if the researcher had a longer period of time to collect data a larger sample size could have been gathered as other stores in the retailer could of been contacted to take part. The researcher collected a small sample size (83 responses) due to time constraints.

5. Results and Findings

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will explore the results obtained from the survey that was distributed among retail employees. This chapter will first analyse the demographic questions the researcher asked participants, the reliability and validity of each of the thirteen scales that were used in this study will be tested where the results will be represented in the form of Cronbach's Alpha. Finally, the results from the statistical tests ran will be represented below.

The aim of the statistical tests ran were to address the research objectives:

- Employee progression will have a significant impact on employee engagement.
- There will be a significant relationship between perceived line manager support/interaction and employee engagement.

Demographics

This survey gathered 83 responses from participants in total, out of these responses there was 0 incomplete, the researcher achieved a 100% response rate. The researcher allocated two weeks to distribute and gather the data, after the two weeks were up the researcher closed the link to the survey and uploaded their data to SPSS.

In the first demographic question participants were asked to state their gender, the results showed females dominated these retail stores by over 30% 25(Male 30.1%) 58 Female (69.9%). It was confirmed by the management of these stores that the workforce was predominantly female. The second demographic question asked participants to choose a category which contained their age group 18-25 years (44.6%), 26-35 years (30.1%), 36-50 years (19.3%) and 50+ years (6.0%). This result showed a predominantly young workforce. The third asked employees to specify their length of time in retail, less than a year (21.7%), 1-

3 years (34.9%) and 4+ years (43.4%). The fourth question asked the participants the amount of time spent in the company, less than a year (48.2%), 1-3 years (31.3%) and 4+ years (20.5%). This shows how there is a large turnover rate within the retail sector. The final question asked employees their contract type, full time (55.4%), part time (37.3%) and flexible (7.2%).

Descriptive Statistics

The table that can be seen below represents the thirteenth different scales that were used to identify if employee development has an effect on engagement levels.

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
JobEngagement	83	5	18	11.31	3.602	-.466	.264	-.794	.523
OrganisationEngagement	82	4	23	12.15	4.486	.171	.266	-.775	.526
JobCharacteristic	83	0	11	4.72	2.481	-.013	.264	-.491	.523
RewardsRecognition	83	3	39	22.01	6.776	-.219	.264	.295	.523
DistributiveJustice	83	1	14	8.72	3.497	-.387	.264	1.277	.523
ProceduralJustice	83	3	26	15.28	4.722	-.333	.264	-.492	.523
PerceivedOrganisationalSupport	83	7	28	17.25	5.094	-.460	.264	-.721	.523

PerceivedSupervisorSupport	83	3	15	9.69	2.673	- .295	.264	- .397	.523
JobSatisfaction	83	0	12	7.42	2.897	- .599	.264	- .554	.523
OrganisationalCommitment	83	1	20	11.0 6	3.650	.106	.264	.146	.523
IntentToQuit	83	1	9	5.67	1.289	.180	.264	1.63 1	.523
OCBI	82	4	15	9.59	2.977	- .506	.266	- .870	.526
OCBO	82	0	12	6.40	2.643	- .211	.266	- .905	.526
Valid N (listwise)	81								

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Reliability and Validity

Before any researcher can determine which tests to run it is essential that they find out the reliability and validity of their scales as this allows the researcher to understand how consistent the results of their study are. For this study the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to determine the reliability of their scales. According to Cronbach's Alpha for the results to be reliable the coefficient would have to exceed .70. The results of Cronbach's Alpha is represented in the table below.

	Cronbach Alpha Results	Values
1	Job Engagement	0.819
2	Organisation Engagement	0.886
3	Job Characteristics	0.677
4	Rewards and Recognition	0.878

5	Distributive Justice	0.926
6	Procedural Justice	0.895
7	Perceived Organisational Support	0.787
8	Perceived Supervisor Support	0.833
9	Job Satisfaction	0.880
10	Organisational Commitment	0.563
11	Intent to Quit	-1.610
12	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Individual)	0.850
13	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Organisational)	0.762

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Results

The majority of the results show high reliability scales, however three of the scales failed to reach over .70 those were; Job Characteristics, Organisational Commitment and particularly Intent to Quit, this shows that these three scales are not reliable as they do not meet the required standard to be called a reliable scale. The researcher tried to resolve the issue with the scale Intent to Quit but continued to get this outcome.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis is: Employee progression will have a significant impact on employee engagement. In order to determine whether to use a parametric or non-parametric test, tests of normality were ran to see if the data was normally distributed. Due to a small sample size the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to access normality. A non-significant result which is a value of more than 5 shows normality. In this case the significant value of Rewards and Recognition was .933 which indicates a non-significant result as seen in table 3.

As the researcher wants to test the relationship between two variables the test that was most suited to this was Bivariate Pearson Correlation. The Pearson's Correlation will determine if a linear relationship exists.

Tests of Normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
RewardsRecognition	.993	83	.933

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3: Test of normality for Rewards and Recognition

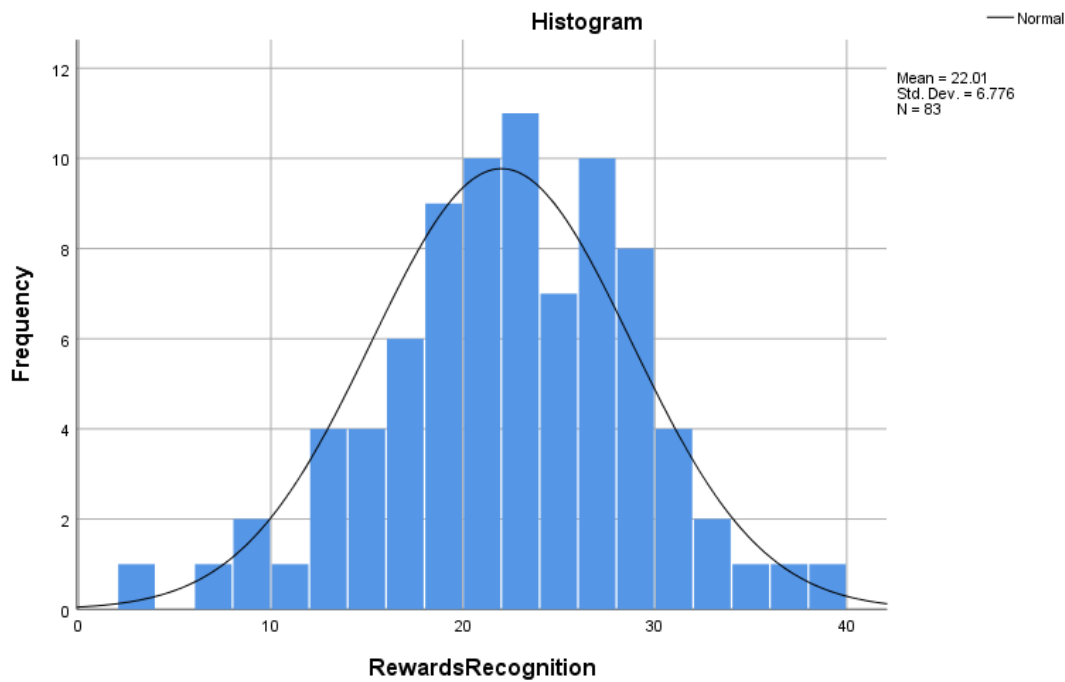


Figure 3: Data distribution for rewards and recognition

The relationship between Rewards and Recognition and Job Engagement was analysed through using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Prior to running this a test of normality was performed. There was a medium positive correlation between the two variables $r = .446$, $n = 83$, $p < .000$.

Correlations

		RewardsRecognition	JobEngagement
RewardsRecognition	Pearson Correlation	1	.446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	83	83
JobEngagement	Pearson Correlation	.446**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	83	83

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Bivariate Pearson Correlation

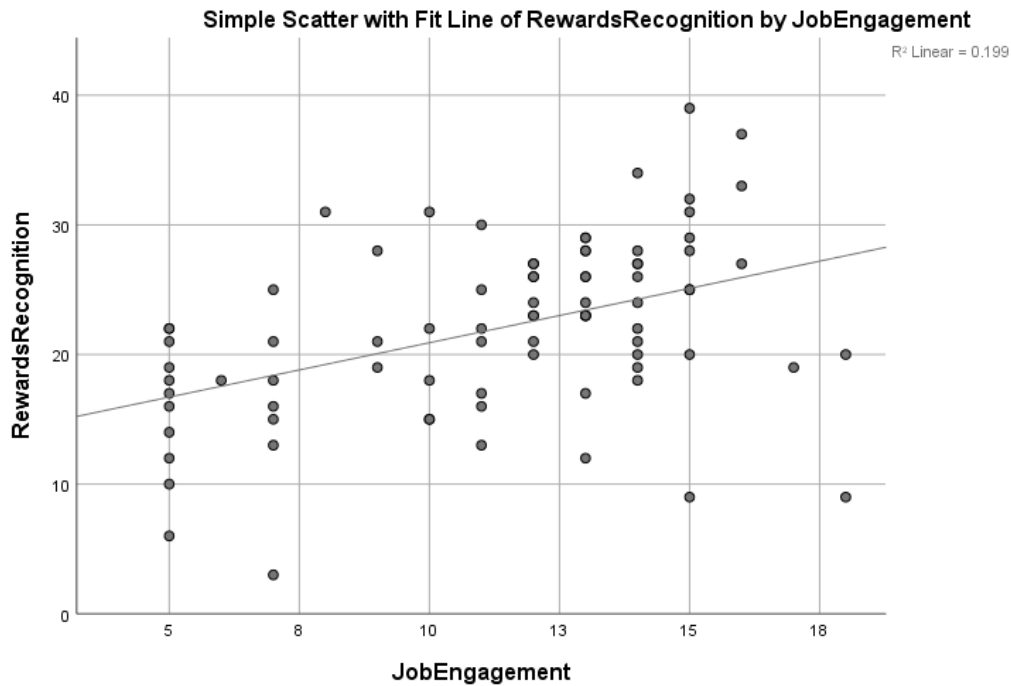


Figure 4: Scatter Plot of Rewards and Recognition ad Job Engagement

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis determined that there will be a significant relationship between perceived line manager support/ interaction and employee engagement. Again with hypothesis 2 as was done was hypothesis 1 a test of normality was ran to identify if the data was normally distributed or not which would help in determining if a parametric or non-parametric test was to be ran. Due to the non-normal distribution of data, a non-parametric test

The same as with hypothesis 1 Shapiro-Wilk test was used to access normality due to the small sample size. In this case the significant value was .966 which indicates a non-significant result as seen in Table 5.

Tests of Normality

	Statistic	Shapiro-Wilk	
		Statistic	Sig.
PerceivedSupervisorSupport	.966	83	.025

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 5: Test of normality for Perceived Supervisor Support

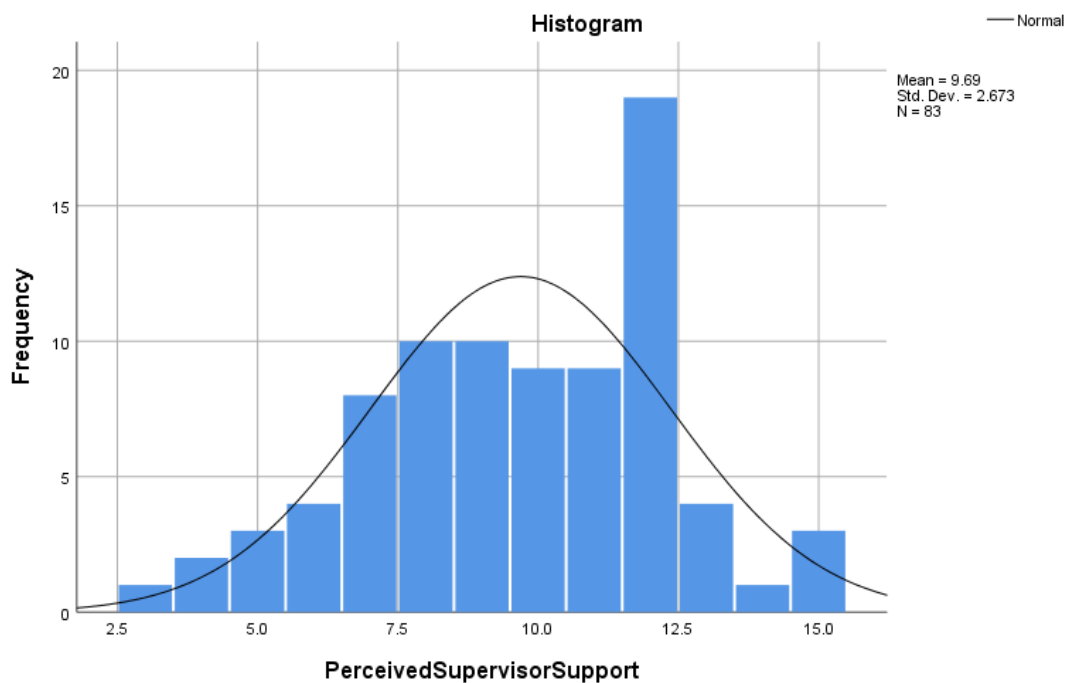


Figure 5: Data distribution for Perceived Supervisor Support and Job Engagement

The relationship between Perceived Supervisor Support and Job Engagement was analysed through using Spearman Rank Order Correlation (ρ). Prior to running this a test of normality was performed. There was a medium positive correlation between the two variables $r = .421$, $n = 83$, $p < .000$. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Correlations

			PerceivedSu pervisorSup port	JobEngagem ent
Spearman's rho	PerceivedSupervisorSup port	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.421**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	83	83
	JobEngagement	Correlation Coefficient	.421**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	83	83

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: Spearman Rank Order Correlation

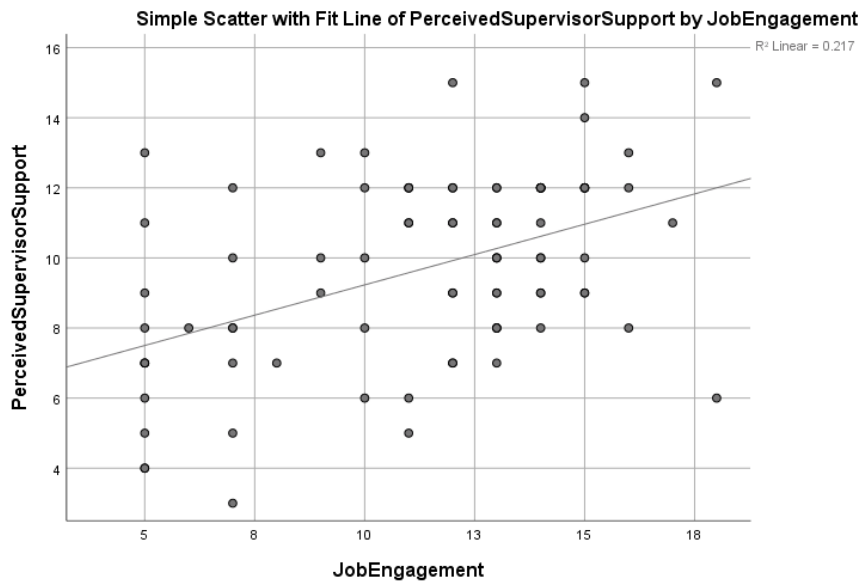


Figure 6: Scatter plot of Perceived Supervisor Support and Job Engagement

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the statistical tests that were ran to explore the hypothesis this researcher developed. The first hypothesis wanted to discover if there was a significant relationship between employee progression and employee engagement. The results that are presented in the above findings shows that there is a medium significance between both variables, indicating there is a positive relationship between employee progression and employee engagement.

The second hypothesis determined there would be a significant relationship between line manager support/interaction and employee engagement. Similar to the first hypothesis, the results showed that these two variables had a significant correlation between both. Both of these hypotheses will be explored further below in the chapter entitled Discussion.

6. Discussion

In the following chapter the researcher will discuss the results of their findings and compare it to the academic literature outlined in Chapter 3. The analysis of the data reveals that both employee progression and line manager support/interaction has a positive impact on employee engagement. The existing literature supports these results in which will be discussed below.

In this chapter the author will discuss the two hypotheses individually beginning with Hypothesis 1, followed by Hypothesis 2. The results of the tests that were ran will be highlighted below and the relevant literature already existing in the literature review will be discussed.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis sought to determine if there was a significant relationship between employee progression and employee engagement. The author when developing their hypotheses evidently seen from the current literature that development has an impact on employee engagement, from this the author determined that in analysing their data they would discover this significant relationship. As can be seen from the above chapter the author ran the statistical test Bivariate Pearson Correlation as this particular test determines if there is a significant relationship or not between two variables (Pallant, 2016). Prior to running this statistical test on SPSS the author tested the reliability of the scales that were relevant, the results showed a strong reliability for both scales in which they scored over .80. After this the author wanted to determine if the data was normally distributed, a test for normality was conducted and the results showed in this case the results were normally distributed scoring .933. The researcher then ran Bivariates Pearson's Correlation test in which the analysis confirmed a significant relationship between employee development and employee engagement.

In line with the hypothesis the literature in Chapter 2 highlighted the positive relationship between employee development and employee engagement. As turnover within the retail sector continues to rise each year retail companies are looking at how they can resolve this occurring problem. From the results of the data it is evidently clear investing in employees is the way to create a more engaged workforce and improve retention rates. This has been shown in previous research in companies who have invested in their employee's development. In Honeywell when employee development investments were inputted in the company employee commitment increased (Harrold, 2000). In a similar case Wal-Mart became aware of the importance to keep their employees engaged and made the change to develop current employees and promote them to managerial positions, over 60% of their employees began as associates (Peterson, 2005). Money has become less of a benefit for employees, whereas development opportunities has become their main priority (Jacobs et al. 2014), this is perhaps with development opportunities employees are gaining a substantial amount of knowledge, with this knowledge then they can climb the employment ladder.

If retailers want to stay on top of the market they must have motivated and committed employees, this can be achieved through development programmes. It is important for organisations that are currently facing difficulty retaining their employees to look to these organisations for inspiration on how to engage their employees. These results are very significant for the current problem in the retail sector.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis developed by the author believed there would be a significant relationship between perceived line manager support/interaction and employee engagement.

Before running the main statistical test was ran to determine if the hypothesis was significant or not, the author tested the reliability and validity of the scales that were being used in this test so see if they were reliable, the results showed both scales scored over .80 which proved valid and reliable results. Similar to hypothesis 1 the researcher wanted before running their test to see if the data was normally distributed. In hypothesis 1 the data was normally distributed so a parametric test was ran, in this case the data was not normally distributed as the value was .966 so a non parametric test was ran. The relationship between Perceived Supervisor Support and Job Engagement was tested through Spearman Rank Order Correlation which indicated a medium significant relationship.

The academic literature provided in Chapter 3 supports the results gathered by the author from the Spearman Rank Order Correlation test. According to the literature line managers can easily engage and disengage their employees (MacLeod, 2008). It is through building relationships with employees that management can contribute to the engagement of their employees. Researchers Chalofsky (2003) and Rai et al. (2017) discovered employees who have a good relationship with their line manager are more engaged with their work and organisation. In this test it has shown by simply communicating more and showing an interest in employees it can potentially solve a damaging problem that is occurring in an organisation. Through something as little as providing support to employees it can have a huge impact on the overall atmosphere within the organisation which can increase commitment and in the long term retention levels. Through implementing Khan's (1990) three psychological conditions; meaningfulness, safety and availability mentioned in the literature it can contribute to employee engagement, this is something that can be undertaken by all line managers.

Both results from the findings gathered and the literature review proved that a line manager can have an impact on employee engagement. In some cases where capital is not an option to

increase engagement this can be an excellent option for line managers within organisations to review to see how engaged their employees are with them. From both results it has shown that a simple change in attitude from management can have an outstanding impact on the whole organisation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to link the results from the data collected and the academic literature in chapter 3. From the above discussion it is clear to see that both hypotheses showed a significant relationship with job engagement. As the literature review revealed there is no definitive term to define engagement that has been agreed. As a result, this makes it hard to measure engagement as each individual has their own version of the term. Yet, the results obtained showed that those individuals that participated in the survey possibly have the same understanding of the term as the results gathered showed high engagement when development opportunities and line manager support/interaction is involved.

From the survey results and the academic literature, when development is offered it has shown an increase in engagement. When employees are engaged, it can not only have an affect on the employee themselves, but can bring a positive energy to the organisation. Employees who are more satisfied in their role and committed to their organisation are more likely to remain there. Development can not only help the employee but the organisation in the long term.

Line manager support/interaction also showed it had a significant impact on employee engagement which was supported by academic literature. Unlike offering development which would cost an organisation a substantial amount of investment, providing support to employees cost management nothing. Managers who are invested in their employees reap the rewards

that come with it, like the previous hypothesis it can increase job satisfaction and commitment and in the long term will increase retention levels.

Both hypotheses have shown if these actions were taken towards employees in the retail sector then it could potentially aid in resolving the issue of high turnover.

Recommendations

This research studied the relationship between employee development and line manager support/interaction and its effect on engagement among employees currently working in the retail sector in Ireland. The following recommendations the researcher will make are in relation to increasing employee engagement through development and line manager support.

When an employee becomes disengaged with their work it can have detrimental consequences on an organisation. Employees can become disengaged with both their work and organisation for a number of reasons but two of these reasons this author focused on was development opportunities and line manager support/interaction. As discussed in the above literature organisations have become aware of the importance of engaging and retaining their employees as employees are no longer loyal to one organisation. As the Irish retail industry has one of the largest turnover sectors it is clear there is something is causing this problem. From the findings in this study it was clear to see that both development opportunities and line manager support/interaction has an impact on employee engagement, as a result of this it is clear that by introducing both of these benefits it can impact on engagement and retention levels.

Development opportunities have become such an important factor for all organisations in all sectors. Organisations providing development opportunities can enhance employee commitment, job satisfaction, engagement and retention levels. The retail sector itself has a bad stigma associated with it in relation to career progression, people see no advancements in this role. While in some circumstances this may be true, but for the retail industry it is something than be resolved through developing employees who will be able to step into higher positions once trained. Development opportunities fail to exist in smaller retail stores as they may argue there is no career progression for every employee due to them being a small store. A recommendation that can be made in this situation is to look to the organisation itself and

not the individual stores to offer their employees development opportunities. Employees working in smaller retail stores should have the option to attend development programmes that could be provided for them on a monthly basis. Even if it is a small store managers and line managers can use their knowledge and expertise in helping individuals develop within their roles if they have shown an interest, or they can slowly provide them with more responsibility within their role as this can all help towards job satisfaction, commitment to the role and therefore, achieving better engagement and retention levels.

In larger retail stores development modules should be introduced to employees who want to partake in them. These modules should include development opportunities such as training an employee to progress in the company from associate to team leader. Even if these stores have no positions available, they could have the option to relocate or just wait for a position to come available. By introducing these development opportunities, it can assist in creating a more engaged workforce, employees will see they are trusted and encouraged to grow within the company and this can help boost their confidence and in turn retain employees.

Line managers have a crucial role to play in engaging employees. Line managers are the main point of contact for employees, therefore creating an effective communication strategy between employees and their line managers can potentially help problems that may arise. Line managers can be accounted for a large number of reasons as to why employees are disengaged, some of these reasons can include lack of respect and communication to their employees, not showing trust in employees and does not encourage or provide employees with feedback. If line managers were to invest more time interacting with employees, these situations could be resolved. Some recommendations that may help with employee engagement through line manager support/interaction is that if line managers set clear expectations and continuously communicate with their employees. Another recommendation that would be very important for

line managers to keep employees engaged is to provide them with regular feedback, recognition and rewards. This will make employees feel like their line managers notice the work they do and also provide them with recognition and reward when they do something good, for example having an employee of the month scheme can keep morale up and create friendly competition among employees for the award which can boost engagement levels.

From the recommendations outlined above some costs will be involved. In order for line managers to increase engagement levels among employees it would not cost organisations anything as communication would not be a cost to an organisation. Creating better relationships between both employee and line manager the problem of engagement may be resolved. However, in order to introduce employee development modules a substantial amount of capital investments would be required, costs the researcher could not even estimate. Yet, these costs can be justified as it would enhance employee engagement, loyalty and commitment to an organisation.

Future Research

For future research a more in depth analysis of a larger sample should be taken. Unfortunately, the researcher had limited time to gather their data so it was not possible in this case. If a larger sample study was targeted, it could gather more accurate results and more knowledge can be gained on the area. At present there is a very scarce amount of literature that exists on the retail sector in Ireland in general. Further research on employee development could be beneficial for the Irish retail sector.

7. Conclusion

In this study the researcher attempted to explore and understand the impact development and line manager support/interaction can have on an employee engagement levels and offer some recommendations that both organisations and line managers can do to help boost employee engagement. The literature review revealed that development and line managers have an impact on employee engagement, but it also can enhance job satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention. Employee engagement has become such an important topic for both employers and employees, however the literature review showed the lack of grounded evidence in which described what employee engagement actually is. Regardless of this the results collected, the survey showed development and line manager support/interaction in these particular retail stores would have an impact on engagement. Whether this result would remain the same for other retail stores if surveyed the author is unsure but it could be something that can be researched in the future.

To conclude, from this research is it crucial organisations and management focus on engaging employees in their work as it can have excellent benefits in the long term for the employee and employer relationship.

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9. Reflection (CIPD Requirement)

This year I have learnt more than I ever have in all my years in education. Having completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Sociology and Politics in National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) I decided to take a chance and apply for a Master of Arts degree in Human Resource Management and thankfully was accepted by the National College of Ireland (NCI) to study. I will be forever grateful to the college in taking a chance in me especially as I had no previous education in a business background. Although I was very nervous at the start of the year to begin this course I am glad to have pleasantly surprised myself and thoroughly enjoyed the course in learning all things HR that will definitely be of use to me when beginning a career in HR.

I was very much used to college life as I knew how to write academic essays, review literature, reference and I was aware of the pressure of exams as I had just finished my level 8 degree and went straight into the Masters. However, I had no idea what would be involved in writing a dissertation as I never had to do one before. Completing this dissertation has definitely been the most challenging thing I have done academic wise but I am proud of the results I have achieved. I began the dissertation after my exams had been completed on May 15th 2019.

Knowing a dissertation was imminent I had been thinking of different topics I could possibly research, however as I had worked many years part-time in the retail industry I knew I wanted to use it to my advantage. My proposal submitted in January 2019 was thankfully passed however the title had to be readjusted slightly, the proposal was entitled “ Does opportunities for employee development have an affect on employee engagement and employee retention? An investigation into the employees of the retail sector in Ireland” it was then changed to “The title of this research is: The relationship between employee

development and employee engagement. An investigation into employees in the retail sector in Ireland.”

For me the most difficult part of the dissertation was the starting point. The majority of people recommend to begin with the literature review but I felt I needed to set out a clear path before I began. Therefore, I developed a theoretical framework and tested the variables to see if they were connected and I then established my objectives which are as follows. My main objective of the research was to explore whether employee development and line manager support affects employee engagement. My sub-objectives was: The researcher is further going to explore the effect employee development and line manager support/interaction has on employees commitment, intention to stay within an organisation and job satisfaction

Completing the literature review took the longest amount of time for me and was the one section I continuously went back too as I was unsure I had everything covered that was needed. At times it was frustrating when reading large amounts of literature that then would not be material that was suited to my topic. However, I was delighted each time when I did find literature that was appropriate and I learnt a substantial amount more on my topic than I had known when starting the dissertation.

Finding my survey developed by Professor Alan Saks so early in my research reduced a lot of stress for me as the survey was perfect for what I wanted to measure. The use of a survey in my research proved to be the fastest and effective way I could gather data. I did not have to chase participants for interviews, instead all the participants had to do was click into a link which brought them to the survey on SurveyMonkey which made it easy for people to partake in the study. I enjoyed researching the methodology section and discovering the many different approaches that can be taken when conducting a study. The data analysis section

allowed me to learn all about SPSS and how to run my data. However, determining what tests to run was extremely difficult for me to determine and I spent a long time in this section.

I feel very proud of myself for completing this dissertation, definitely my biggest achievement to date academic wise. It was very challenging and at times but I feel like it has all been worth it and it is nice to say in life that you have completed a dissertation. I would highly recommend everyone in education to write one as it gives you self-achievement.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Survey Consent/Information Form

My name is Ciara Connaughton and I am Human Resource Management masters student in the National College of Ireland (NCI). As part of my dissertation project, I am inviting you to participate in this study if you are currently working in the retail sector.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to take part in the survey, exit or decline to answer a certain question you may not feel comfortable answering.

The survey asks you to answer multiple choice questions. It should take approximately 8-10 minutes to complete.

The information that will be gathered from this survey will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers.

The results of this survey will be used for academic purposes only.

If you have any further questions about my research, please contact me at ciaraconnaughton3@gmail.com.

Appendix 2 - Participant Consent

Clicking on the “agree” button below you have:

- Voluntarily consented to being a participant in this survey.
- Read the relevant information provided above by the researcher.
- Are 18 years of age or above.

Appendix 3 - Permission to use Survey



ciara connaughton <ciaraconnaughton3@gmail.com>
to saks ▾

Thu, 13 Jun, 18:55 ☆ ↩ ⋮

Dear Professor Saks,

My name is Ciara Connaughton and I am a student at the National College of Ireland (NCI). I am currently completing a Master's degree in Human Resource Management and I am undertaking a research dissertation on the relationship between employee development and employee engagement in the retail sector.

I am emailing you to seek your permission to use your survey please. I would very much appreciate it.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,



Alan Saks <saks@utsc.utoronto.ca>
to me ▾

Thu, 13 Jun, 19:22 ☆ ↩ ⋮

Yes you can use my engagement scale, items are in the appendix of my paper.

Alan Saks, PhD
Professor, HRM
University of Toronto



Appendix 4 - Survey Contents

1. Job Engagement

1. I really “throw” myself into my job.
2. Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time.
3. This job is all consuming, I am totally into it.
4. My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job (reverse coded).
5. I am highly engaged in this job.

2. Organisation Engagement

1. Being a member of this organisation is very captivating.
2. One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organisation.

3. I am really not into the “goings-on” in this organisation (reverse coded).
4. Being a member of this organisation makes me come “alive.”
5. Being a member of this organisation is exhilarating for me.
6. I am highly engaged in this organisation.

3. Job Characteristics

1. How much autonomy is there in your job? That is, to what extent does your job permit you to decide on your own how to go about doing the work?
2. To what extent does your job involve doing a “whole” and identifiable piece of work? That is, is the job a complete piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end? Or is it only a small part of the overall piece of work, which is finished by other people or by automatic machines?
3. How much variety is there in your job? That is, to what extent does the job require you to do many different things at work, using a variety of your skills and talents?
4. In general, how significant or important is your job? That is, are the results of your work likely to significantly affect the lives or well-being of other people?
5. To what extent do managers or co-workers let you know how well you are doing on your job?
6. To what extent does doing the job itself provide you with information about your work performance? That is, does the actual work itself provide clues about how well you are doing aside from any “feedback” co-workers or supervisors may provide?

4. Rewards and Recognition

Please indicate the extent to which you receive the following outcomes for performing your job well:

1. A pay raise.
2. Job security.
3. A promotion.
4. More freedom and opportunities.
5. Respect from the people you work with.
6. Praise from your supervisor.
7. Training and development opportunities.
8. More challenging work assignments.
9. Some form of public recognition (e.g. employee of the month).

10. A reward or token of appreciation (e.g. lunch).

5. Distributive Justice

1. Do the outcomes you receive reflect the effort you have put into your work?
2. Are the outcomes you receive appropriate for the work you have completed?
3. Do your outcomes reflect what you have contributed to the organisation?
4. Are your outcomes justified given your performance?

6. Procedural Justice

1. Have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?
2. Have you had influence over the outcomes arrived at by those procedures?
3. Have those procedures been applied consistently?
4. Have those procedures been free of bias?
5. Have those procedures been based on accurate information?
6. Have you been able to appeal the outcomes arrived at by those procedures?
7. Have those procedures upheld ethical and moral standards?

7. Perceived Organisational Support

1. My organisation really cares about my well-being.
2. My organisation strongly considers my goals and values.
3. My organisation shows little concern for me (reverse coded).
4. My organisation cares about my opinions.
5. My organisation is willing to help me if I need a special favour.
6. Help is available from my organisation when I have a problem.
7. My organisation would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
8. If given the opportunity, my organisation would take advantage of me (reverse coded).

8. Perceived Supervisor Support

1. My supervisor cares about my opinions.
2. My work supervisor really cares about my well-being.
3. My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.
4. My supervisor shows very little concern form me (reverse coded).

9. Job Satisfaction

1. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
2. In general, I do not like my job (reverse coded).

3. In general, I like working here.

10. Organisational Commitment

1. I would be happy to work at my organisation until I retire.
2. Working at my organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me.
3. I really feel that problems faced by my organisation are also my problems.
4. I feel personally attached to my work organisation.
5. I am proud to tell others I work at my organisation.
6. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation.

11. Intent to Quit

1. I frequently think of quitting my job.
2. I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months.
3. If I have my own way, I will be working for this organisation one year from now (reverse coded).

12. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Individual)

1. How often do you?
2. Willingly give your time to help others who have work-related problems.
3. Adjust your work schedule to accommodate other employees' requests for time off.
4. Give up time to help others who have work or non-work problems.
5. Assist others with their duties.

12. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Organisational)

How often do you?

1. Attend functions that are not required but that help the organisational image.
2. Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organisation.
3. Take action to protect the organisation from potential problems.
4. Defend the organisation when other employees criticize it.

Additional Demographic Questions

1. Please specify your gender?
2. Please specify your age?
3. How long have you worked in retail?
4. How long have you been with your current employer?

5. What is your current employment status?

Appendix 5 - Demographics

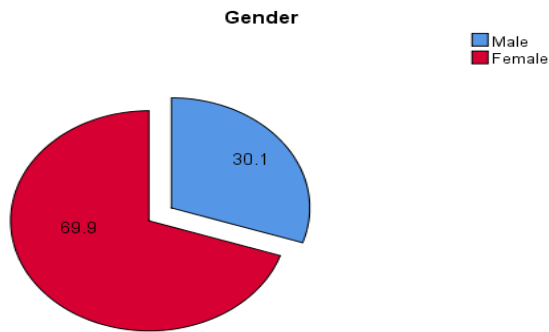


Table 7: Gender

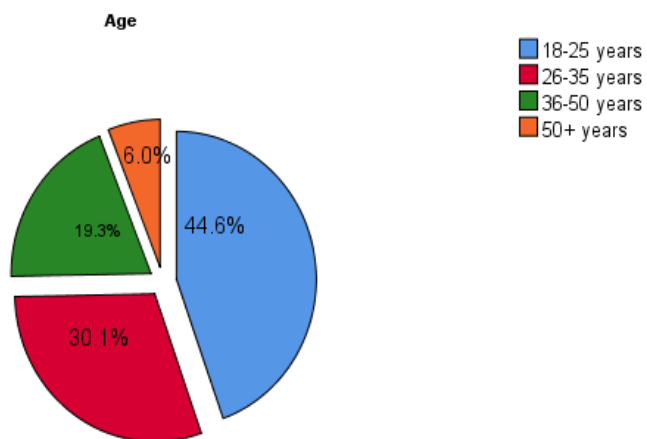


Table 8: Age

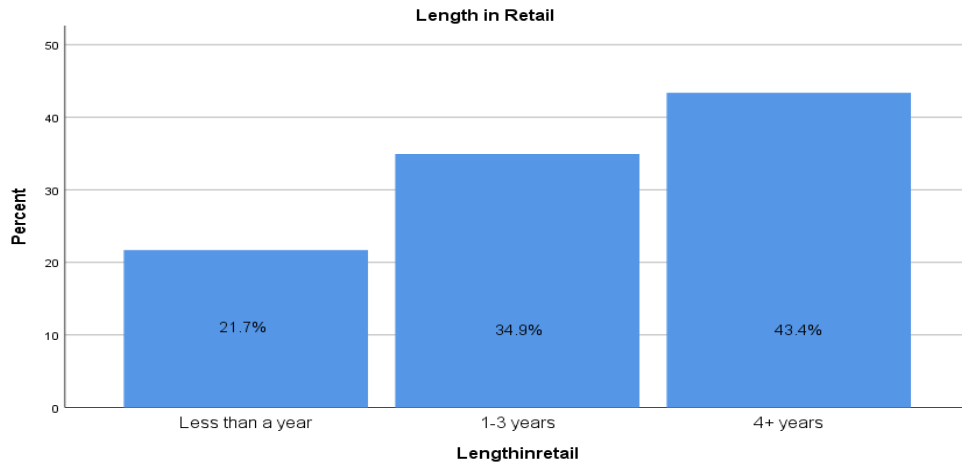


Table 9: Length in Retail

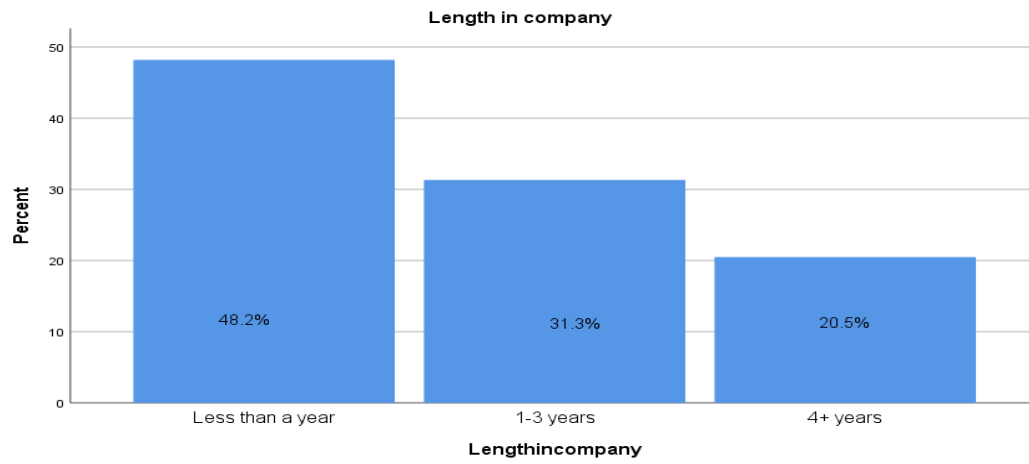


Table 10: Length in the company

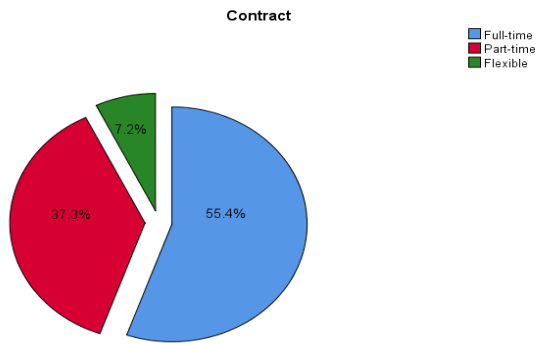


Table 11: Contract