

**What are the main employee engagement
challenges faced by a large multi-national
organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry
in Ireland?**

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What are the main employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland?

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Abstract

Employee engagement is a widely known concept in the fields of management and human resources. There is no one definition for employee engagement, the most common definitions however are; (i) that it is the commitment employees show to an organisation and its goals, both intellectually and emotionally or, (ii) the level of discretionary effort employees are willing to give to their jobs.

The concept was developed thirty years ago by William A. Kahn and has evolved since to align with the modern working world. Many studies have been carried out on employee engagement and have proven that there are clear links between employee engagement and increased employee productivity, commitment to the organisation, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and business profitability. Since these benefits have become widely understood, employee engagement has featured heavily on the agenda of Human Resources and Senior Leaders across the globe, with many introducing employee engagement strategies and applying employee engagement measurement tools.

This research aims to add to the existing literature by analysing the employee engagement challenges faced by the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland and by identifying whether the gender, age, length of service, job level or work function variables have an impact on employee engagement levels.

Through qualitative analysis in the form of an employee engagement survey, the research identified that the key employee engagement challenges faced were those around (i) talent management, (ii) reward and recognition and (iii) career development and opportunities. The research also found that gender does not have an impact on employee engagement, but age, length of service, job level and work function do.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study will focus on the concept of Employee Engagement, with the aim of identifying the key employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland.

Employee engagement is a widely known concept in the fields of management and human resources. It refers to the commitment, passion and levels of performance shown by an employee towards their organisation (Mercy & Choudhary, 2019). It was first discussed by William A. Kahn in 1990 and has been developed greatly, becoming increasingly important in recent years.

Organisations previously concerned themselves with customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in addition to profitability. With continued research into how engaged employees can increase customer satisfaction and have a significant impact on an organisation's bottom line, organisations have begun to shift their focus from customer satisfaction to employee satisfaction and now include employee engagement as one of their main focuses (Kumar and Pansari, 2015). This is due to the association between engaged employees and increased productivity (Pandita and Singhal, 2017), lower turnover (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and improved competitive advantage (Sundaray (2011). Higher engagement levels are also said to lead to organisational scale and growth (Xanthopoulou et al, 2009). These are just some of the benefits that are linked to employee engagement.

As studies have evolved the drivers of employee engagement have been clearly identified and copious research has been carried out to highlight the numerous ways in which organisations can encourage employee engagement and the tremendous benefits associated with high engagement levels, as outlined above. Studies have shown that engaged employees are happier and have higher levels of efficiency in their jobs than their counterparts (Schaufeli et al, 2009). The concept is also proven to enhance productivity, reduce turnover rates, increase profitability and competitive advantage (Masoor, 2016 and CIPD, 2020). Disengaged employees on the other hand can prove costly to a business in many ways as they are not only poor performers themselves, but they can have a negative influence on engaged employees (Anitha, 2014). An understanding for the importance of employee engagement really became apparent in the 2000's as the business case was widely discussed and the benefits of employee engagement were proven (Bridger, 2014). Today employee engagement is fully embedded within the HR and business leader communities, with Masoor (2016) citing it as a key business priority for business executives.

When discussing engagement, there are three main categories of engagement; engaged, passive and disengaged. These categories can vary to include a highly engaged category also. The most recent report issued by Effectory, Europe's leading provider of employee engagement surveys, highlighted that less than 30% of the workforce are currently deemed engaged. The current engagement rate in Ireland is 23% (Effectory, 2020).

1.2 Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify and analyse the employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation. The researcher focused the research in Ireland as there is a research gap on employee engagement in this country. The researcher then opted to focus on the Food and Beverage Industry as this is Ireland's largest industry.

The objective of the research is to begin to close the current research gap on employee engagement in Ireland. This will be achieved by analysing the employee engagement challenges that are faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland. The research sub-objectives aim to understand if engagement scores differ by gender, age, length of service, job level or function.

The research aims to understand if there are particular areas where employee engagement is poor across the organisation to identify the main employee engagement issues the organisation faces. The aim of the sub-objectives is to understand if the variables have an impact on employee engagement levels and to gather further insight into the engagement of various groups within the organisation which could facilitate a tailored and targeted approach to improving low employee engagement scores.

1.3 Research Approach

A quantitative methodology was selected for this research as this approach is most commonly utilised in employee engagement studies (Mansoor, 2016). The researcher utilised secondary data in the form of an employee engagement survey of a large multi-national organisation in the Food and

Beverage Industry in Ireland. This survey provided the researcher with data from a large population of circa 3,000 employees. The researcher will statistically analyse the data to determine the factors influencing the engagement scores.

1.4 Research overview

This research paper will begin by reviewing the current literature on employee engagement to provide a foundation for the research. It will then outline the methodology of the research and begin to analyse the results of the employee engagement survey and present the findings to the reader. The findings will be then be split into two categories; (i) key findings for the overall organisation and (ii) key findings by sub-objective. Both will be discussed in further detail. One key finding from the analysis of the results was that employees feel the organisation's need to satisfy the customer is greater than the need to satisfy their employees. This was apparent as customer focus was one of the highest scoring dimensions in the employee engagement survey, while talent management, career development and opportunities and reward and recognition were the three lowest scoring dimensions. Other key findings included a significant drop in employee engagement after the employee had reached 6 months service, and significantly lower engagement scores in middle management when compared to senior management. Following discussion of these key findings and more, the researcher will provide recommendations based on the information available. The recommendations if implemented should support the organisation in improving their employee engagement scores, which has many benefits to both the employee and the organisation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the theory of employee engagement through a review of relevant and up to date journal articles. A large volume of research has been carried out on employee engagement since the concept was introduced thirty years ago. Initially research focused on the engagement of individuals, however as time has progressed studies have proven there is a definite link between engaged employees and business success as engaged employees have been proven to work more effectively and efficiently, therefore achieving business goals and realising the business financial targets (Mercy & Choudhary, 2019, Shahidan et al, 2016 and Richman, 2008). As a result employee engagement levels are now measured for organisations rather than individuals. This gives organisations far greater insight as they can identify areas they are succeeding in, in addition to areas that would benefit from improvement across the organisation. In turn an organisation wide strategy can be implemented to continue to build upon current practices that are appreciated, and to improve areas where low engagement is found. This is by far an improved way of dealing with employee engagement as engagement levels by individual can be difficult to interpret and improve. As a result of this shift, research on the topic now focuses heavily on the business impact of having an engaged employee population.

This literature review will begin by defining the concept of employee engagement, reviewing the original concept as developed by Kahn in 1990 and its evolution since. To truly understand the concept, it is important to

know the drivers and benefits of employee engagement. There are seven drivers of employee engagement according to the latest research, these seven drivers will be presented to the reader and the literature review will then examine the benefits associated with employee engagement to highlight to the reader the significant business impact it can have. Having reviewed the benefits, the researcher will discuss the measurement of employee engagement and provide insight into one of several engagement models; the Aon Hewitt 'Say, Stay, Strive' engagement model. The researcher will then review the available literature on the impact of gender, age, length of service, job level and function on employee engagement and will outline the impact of employee disengagement to further prove the business importance of employee engagement. The literature review will conclude with an insight into the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland, as it is important to provide context of the industry the study relates to.

2.2 Defining Employee Engagement

Employee engagement can be a difficult concept to define and there are many different definitions provided by various researchers in the field (Soldati, 2007 and Bingham, 2016). William A. Kahn was the first to speak of personal engagement in 1990. From his studies of other theorists, sociologists and psychologists, he defined the concept which he described as the cognitive, physical and emotional investment individuals give to their work (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's concept has evolved over the past thirty years and is now labelled employee engagement. While it is largely recognised in the world of HR and management, there is no one definition

that is widely agreed upon (Saks, 2006). In the mid 2000's the most common definitions were around the commitment employees showed to the business and its goals, both intellectually and emotionally, or, the level of discretionary effort employees are willing to give to their jobs (Saks, 2006, Anitha, 2014 and Mercy and Choudhary, 2019). In short this means the commitment employees give to their work and their willingness to go beyond the organisation's expectations to achieve business goals. More recently definitions have included an indication to the link between the way the employee is treated by their employer and their commitment levels and willingness to go above and beyond. For example, CIPD (2019) takes the view that it is a mutual gain for employees and employers, where the employee is treated well by the organisation they show commitment and strong performance (CIPD, 2019 and Robertson-Smith and Markwick, 2009) Bingham (2016) further supports this by referring to engagement as the discretionary positive behaviours employees display as an outcome of the way they are treated by their organisation. While these more recent definitions include important reference to the employer's influence, it is evident the core elements of Kahn's original study continue to define the fundamentals of employee engagement as we know it today.

2.3 Drivers of Employee Engagement

Numerous studies including those of Macey et al (2009) and Mone and London (2010) have proven that employee engagement is a key factor in strong employee performance as engaged employees are known to be more effective and efficient in carrying out their job while also having a higher standard or quality of work. This inevitably leads to enhanced

business performance, whereby organisations achieve their business goals. In Kahn's 1990 concept of employee engagement, three conditions were identified as necessary for an employee to be engaged, they were; safety, availability and meaningful work (Kahn, 1990). While this was a great starting point, it may have been just a little too simple as it did not take into account factors such as management influence, teamwork or development opportunities. Anitha carried out further research on this in 2014 when the concept of employee engagement had evolved considerably. Anitha verified Kahn's drivers and identified a total of seven key factors that influenced employee engagement as shown in Figure 2.1 (Anitha, 2014). Anitha's drivers are more applicable and realistic than Kahn's as they take into consideration the impact other people can have on an employee's engagement levels and look at the overall workplace wellbeing. Each of these drivers will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.

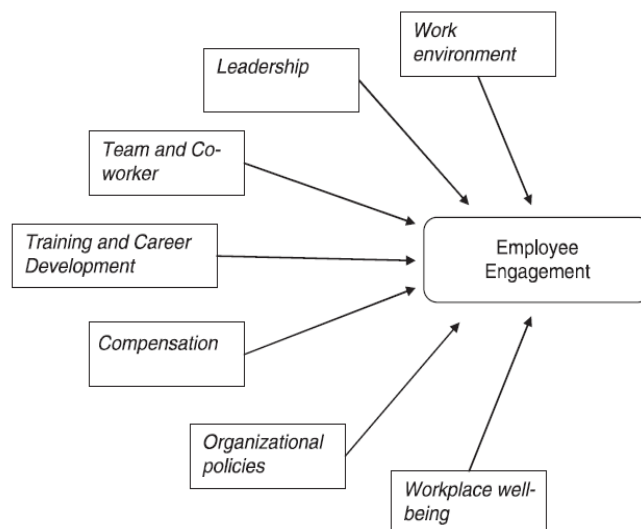


Figure 2.1 Factors that facilitate employee engagement. (Anitha, 2014)

2.3.1 The Work Environment

One of the key factors of employee engagement levels as identified by Anitha (2014) and supported by May et al (2004) and Rich et al (2010) is the work environment. A study by Deci and Ryan (1987) highlighted that a supportive approach from management, where care and concern is shown for employees encourages a positive work environment (Shahidan et al, 2016). Employees within a positive work environment benefit from being able to focus on their work and interpersonal development, as such this factor was deemed highly significant in influencing employee engagement (Anitha, 2014).

2.3.2 Leadership

Leadership was the next factor identified by Anitha, here the research links back to one of Kahn's original criteria of meaningful work. According to Anitha (2014), leaders are responsible for communicating to employees how their roles and duties impact the overall business, therefore helping the employee understand the importance and meaningfulness of their role. Lather and Jain (2015) and Breevaart et al (2014) are in agreement with this research and further build upon it. Lather and Jain (2015) suggest that through open communication, employees will have a greater understanding of the organisations goals for the future and therefore have a better understanding of where their roles fit and contribute. Breevaart et al (2014) also outline that transformational leadership has been proven to increase employee motivation and satisfaction in the work environment, therefore it is considered one of the most effective leadership styles for increased employee engagement (Breevaart et al, 2014).

2.3.3 Co-worker Relationships

The sense of feeling valued is said to be an intrinsic motivator which leads to higher engagement levels among employees (Lee, 2017). Once more linking back to Kahn's original work, Anitha (2014) cited team and co-worker relationships as the third influencing factor in employee engagement. Kahn suggested that a harmonious co-worker relationship meant that employees would support each other through difficult scenarios and encourage one another to explore new ideas (Kahn, 1990). Shahidan et al (2016) further support Kahn and Anitha's views citing that positive workplace relationships are proven to have an impact on the meaningfulness of the work and often the support employees show each other in exploring new ideas can result in innovation for the business (Shahidan et al, 2016). Positive workplace relationships are key for employee engagement as employees feel supported, trusted and inspired in the workplace when they exist.

2.3.4 Training and Career Development

Training and Career Development were also identified as key factors in employee engagement. Training can be viewed by employees as a reward and as acknowledgment that they are valued by the company (Anitha, 2014). Employees often view training and development as an investment in them by the company, this can lead to increased motivation, enhanced performance and an increase in overall employee engagement in many cases (Kumar & Pansari, 2015 and Sanneh and Taj, 2015). By nature, training strengthens the employee's knowledge and makes them more comfortable and capable in their roles. This can again have a positive

impact on employee engagement (Robertson-Smith and Markwick, 2009 and Anitha, 2014). In summary, training and development is highly beneficial for the employee and employer as the employee gains knowledge and feels valued, while the employer benefits from a more engaged employee whose performance has increased.

2.3.5 Compensation

Compensation was cited as an 'indispensable attribute to employee engagement' by Anitha (2014). It is said to motivate an employee to focus on their work and development leading to higher levels of engagement (Bratton and Gold, 2007). The overall compensation package is also said to have an impact on retaining employees; if the employee feels they are fairly compensated for their output, they may feel valued by the organisation and an increase in commitment towards the organisation thus staying with them longer term (Al Mamun and Hasan, 2017). When considering compensation, organisations should remember that compensation refers to the overall package offered to employees and can include non-monetary rewards (Anitha, 2014). Markos and Sridevi (2010) suggest that the monetary reward must at least meet market standards and satisfy the employee before organisations can begin to look at non-monetary rewards for engagement purposes. Alone neither monetary or non-monetary rewards will make an engaged employee, but if the monetary rewards are satisfactory, it provides a good base from which an organisation can then build (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). Non-monetary rewards can come in the form of annual leave, staff perks, etc. Company policies therefore play a huge role in employee engagement and were

identified as one of the key influencing factors in Anitha's 2014 study. This will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

2.3.6 Company Policies

Anitha (2014) suggests that company policies are particularly important for employee engagement and business success. Company policies and procedures around fair recruitment and selection, work-life balance and promotions are all proven to have a positive influence on employee engagement levels (Rudolph & Baltes, 2017 and Richman et al, 2008). Rudolph and Baltes (2017) suggest that policies should be flexible as different age groups have different requirements and expectations. As such a one-size-fits-all approach may not achieve the increased employee engagement one may expect. Upon design and implementation of policies, it is recommended that organisations consider the various groups they apply to and whether they suit both the business needs and employee needs. While organisations would historically have one policy to suit all employees, this is no longer the desired approach with flexible benefits becoming increasingly desirable.

2.3.7 Workplace Wellbeing

Workplace wellbeing was the final factor identified to have an influence on employee engagement. This relates to the employee's overall wellbeing in the workplace and the interest from management in same (Anitha, 2014). A positive workplace culture is said to support wellbeing and adaptability (Chatman et al, 2014). Work-life balance has become increasingly important in relation to workplace wellbeing in recent years. The 'always

on' world employees are subject to today means it is extremely difficult to switch off from work outside of working hours. Getting the right balance is beneficial for employees both at home and at work (Arif and Farooqi, 2014).

The above sections have provided the reader with an insight into the seven drivers of employee engagement as recognised by Anitha (2014) They are based on Kahn's original three drivers and include four additional drivers that have become apparent as the concept and time has progressed. These drivers are widely recognised and supported by many other researchers in the field of employee engagement. The identification of the drivers has been extremely useful in supporting organisations to understand how they can influence employee engagement and where they may be lacking if engagement scores are low. The next section will review the benefits of having an engaged employee population.

2.4 Benefits of Employee Engagement

Through employee engagement studies, strong links have been found between engaged employees and enhanced business performance and profitability. Saks (2006) confirms this benefit is widely recognised and highlights that engagement must begin at individual employee level for this benefit to materialise. Pandita and Singhal carried out further research over 10 years later and this was still found to be true. Pandita and Singhal's research suggests that engaged employees are more informed of business context and therefore perform better in their own job roles, which in turn benefits the overall organisation in terms of performance and profitability

(Pandita and Singhal, 2017). Higher engagement levels are also said to lead to organisational scale and growth (Xanthopoulou et al, 2009). Mansoor (2016) further contributes to this topic by outlining an organisations potential to surpass the industry standard revenue growth is proven to increase when the organisations employees are engaged. It is clear from years of research that employee engagement is directly linked to business performance and that engaged employees support business performance, Gallup's 2019 study outlined that business profitability is said to increase by 21% when the employee population are engaged (Gallup, 2019).

Organisations with high employee engagement have also been proven to have lower turnover rates (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004, Robinson et al, 2004 and CIPD, 2019). This relates back to the 'Stay' element of the AON Hewitt Say, Stay, Strive engagement model discussed in the previous section and to Kahn (1990) and Anitha's (2014) studies discussed earlier in this chapter, all of which suggest that when an employee feels valued by an organisation they are less likely to consider leaving. MacLeod and Clarke offer that this is an employee's way of displaying their loyalty to an organisation (MacLeod and Clarke, 2010). Lower turnover rates are hugely important for organisations as they avoid losing an experienced employee who understands how the organisation operates and is familiar with the customer (if customer facing). When an experienced employee leaves an organisation there is unavoidable disruption to productivity as other employees cover the workload while the organisation searches for a replacement. Even when a replacement is found the disruption continues as it will take the new hire months to reach the same productivity levels as the experienced employee who left. The customer will also face a

disruption as the new hire will have to build knowledge on their history, needs and ways of working. In essence, it is far more favorable for an organisation to retain its experienced employees than to try and recruit new hires.

Increased customer satisfaction has also been listed as a key benefit of an engaged workforce (Pandita and Singhal, 2017, Mansoor, 2016 & Mercy and Choudhary, 2019). This is due to the increased levels of commitment from engaged employees and the willingness to go above and beyond (Saks, 2006). Engaged employees are also said to place an emphasis on customer service (Little and Little, 2006). This literature is further supported by Gallup's 2019 study that shows an engaged employee population can increase customer satisfaction by 10% and increase customer sales by 20% (Gallup, 2019). These statistics outline the impact an engaged employee can have on the customer experience, proving that a positive customer relationship has an impact on the bottom line and that measuring and improving employee engagement levels will in turn improve customer satisfaction.

Another key benefit highlighted throughout the literature was the impact on competitive advantage. Pandita and Singhal (2017) suggest that an engaged workforce can improve an organisation's competitive advantage. Sundaray (2011) highlights that organisations are now competing in a global market and that competitive advantage is more important than ever. Engaged employees are proven to be enthusiastic about their work and have high energy levels (Macey and Schneider, 2008). As such they often want to be involved in the most innovative and exciting projects in

which they can prove their skills and abilities. Organisations with a high number of engaged employees will find themselves in a far better position than their competitors.

There are numerous other benefits to employee engagement, such as reduced absenteeism (Van Beek et al, 2011) and job satisfaction (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). However those discussed above are cited time and again as the key benefits resulting from increased employee engagement as they represent what organisations want and need; enhanced business performance and profitability. It is evident that employee engagement is no longer optional, but critical to business success (Bingham, 2016).

2.5 Measuring Employee Engagement

One misconception around employee engagement is that it has the same meaning as employee happiness. This is not the case as employees who are happy are not necessarily engaged (Pandita, 2017 and Forbes, 2012). In recent years organisations have come to realise that employees are their main source of innovation and that they are the touchpoint with the customer, thus have control over the customer satisfaction and in turn customer loyalty, as discussed in the previous section. Organisations have begun to understand that employees are the people who bring an organisations vision and values to life and act as the face of the organisation (Kumar and Pansari, 2015). Employees are the most valuable resource any organisation has. For these reasons alone it is vital that organisations measure employee engagement levels (Van Rooy et al, 2011).

In a 2019 survey conducted by PWC on HR Directors it was confirmed that 85% of businesses measure Employee Engagement (PWC, 2019). The science behind a simple employee engagement questionnaire can outline to a business the percentage of their workforce that are highly engaged, passive and disengaged. It can outline engagement levels by gender, age, job function, length of service and numerous other variables. This information is invaluable to employers as it outlines where their strengths and weaknesses lie. This allows organisations to develop employee engagement strategies to positively influencing employee engagement, but more importantly to address the issues that are causing low employee engagement. In order to reap the benefits of employee engagement, it is critical that it is measured and from there it can be evaluated and positively influenced (Van Rooey et al, 2011).

2.6 Employee Engagement and Individual Differences

2.6.1 Employee Engagement and Gender

On reflection of Khan's original concept of employee engagement, Britton (2000) suggested that there may have been a stronger link between males and employee engagement at the time the concept was developed. The rationale for this derived from the task characteristics Khan laid out in his research whereby challenging, creative and autonomous work was linked with employee engagement, as was role status. Where employees had influence and power they were also said to be more engaged (Kahn, 1990). These characteristics were linked with roles that males generally occupied in the early 1990's and less-so with females who were in less challenging,

lower positions (Britton, 2003). As the concept has developed and an importance has been placed on gender diversity in the workplace and improving the number of females in managerial and senior leadership positions, this perception has also changed and recent studies have shown that gender has little or no impact on employee engagement levels (Effectory, 2020 and Khodakarami and Dirani, 2020).

2.6.2 Employee Engagement and Age

When discussing the impact age can have on employee engagement, this is generally discussed in terms of generational cohorts. Today there are three different generations in the workplace, they are; Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Studies have shown that there are some commonalities between the three groups, for example that they can each be engaged by meaningful work. However, they vary in other ways such as their values and attitudes towards work. Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. As they are highly driven and loyal to their organisations, they are said to have a live-to-work mentality (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). It is certain that Generation X who were born between 1965 and 1978, do not live to work as they place huge value on work-life balance and display less loyalty to organisations. They are similar to Baby Boomers in certain aspects however as they still place value on career progression and being financially stable (Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). Millennials are the largest generational cohort in the workplace today, they were born between 1979 and 1994 and are tech savvy (Deloitte, 2016). They are very comfortable with and embrace technological changes which is a critical skill in today's global market. They are also optimistic and team

orientated (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). Research confirms that employee engagement rates increase with age / by generational cohort (Kim and Kang, 2017). In order to manage a team with diverse age ranges effectively, managers should take this into account, and tailor their approach accordingly to ensure they get the best out of each employee (Benson and Brown, 2011). Organisations should also consider age diversity when implementing policies and benefits to ensure they are equitable for all generational cohorts.

2.6.3 Employee Engagement and Length of Service

Research on the impact of length of service on employee engagement levels has shown that employee engagement levels are high when employees first join an organisation and then decline as their length of service increases (Effectory, 2015 and Gallup, 2013). Nancheria (2013) reports that employees who have less than one year's service generally have the highest engagement levels of all. The levels then consistently drop until the employee reaches 2-5 years' service and begin to increase slowly from when the employee has 6-10 years' service until they retire. While it is commonly accepted that length of service does have an impact on employee engagement (Ajibola et al, 2019), a report by Effectory on the 2020 global employee engagement insights contradicts Nancheria's research when it states that employees with less than one years' service are less engaged than their peers (Effectory, 2020). They claim this is due to employees feeling less certain and secure in their roles and concern over their organisational fit. This study will aim to test both points.

2.6.4 Employee Engagement and Job Level

Research shows that engagement comes from the top and that managers have a significant impact on employee engagement (Gallup, 2013). While there is no specific research to outline the difference in engagement by job level, it is understood from the research available that senior leaders should be the most engaged group of employees in an organisation. This is important as engagement cascades from senior leaders down to management and from management to non-management, therefore if senior leaders are not engaged, they can expect to see the same overall result for the organisation. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) discuss the Social Exchange Theory and how it has a major impact on employee engagement. The Social Exchange Theory is based on a party receiving favourable treatment and feeling obligated to return said favourable treatment (Huang et al, 2016). Robinson et al (2004) highlight that when favourable treatment is displayed from an employer to an employee, the repayment from the employee to the organisation comes in the form of engagement (Robinson et al, 2004). The researcher takes from this that engagement travels down the organisation and that if senior leaders are engaged it is hopeful that management and non-management populations will also be engaged and that it is critical that senior leaders and managers treat their direct reports well as they have a direct impact on engagement scores.

2.6.5 Employee Engagement and Function

Research around employee engagement by function, or department, is limited. The research that is available however states employee

engagement varies considerably by function (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter et al, 2010). Abraham (2012) suggests that the variances across functions is due to the fluctuation in engagement levels based on the nature of the job, with job characteristics and job resources having a major impact (Crawford et al, 2010 and Mauno et al, 2007). When analysing employee engagement by function it is important to consider not just the overall score, but where the differences in engagement sit between the functions. For example, safety is a dimension often measured on employee engagement surveys, if safety consistently scores well in back office functions such as HR or Finance, but scores poorly in hands-on functions such as Research, Development and Application, it becomes clear that there is a need to address this dimension in work functions that are more practical and hands-on. Noting the variances between work functions can be extremely beneficial for organisations as it can become apparent that a one-size-fits-all approach may not support employee engagement and the organisation can review and restructure their approach where necessary to positively influence employee engagement levels.

2.7 Disengagement

The above sections have highlighted the benefits, advantages and measurement of employee engagement. This section will now look at the opposite side of the coin; employee disengagement. Kahn recognised disengagement when the concept of employee engagement was first discussed in 1990, he defined employee disengagement, then called personal disengagement, as people 'uncoupling' themselves from their work on a cognitive, emotional or physical level, meaning they show little

interest in doing more than the basic level of work required from them (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees therefore have little drive or passion for their work, and little interest in exerting themselves. Research has shown that disengaged employees have higher absenteeism rates, lessened productivity and have a negative impact on profitability (Gallup, 2013). This is important to note as some may view employee engagement as a 'nice-to-have' in order to increase productivity and profitability and to benefit from other advantages associated with an engaged population. They may not however realise that disengaged employees aren't just poorer performers who aren't as committed, but that having a disengaged population could be the ruination of an organisation if not managed effectively. Research has shown that some of the key reasons for employees becoming disengaged are; poor relationships in the workplace, financial worries and poor career development opportunities (Schauefli et al, 2009). Disengaged employees are also a danger to organisations as they are not only poor performers themselves, but they can have a negative influence on engaged employees (Anitha, 2014). In addition to this the cost associated with disengaged employees is huge. While there is no definite figure available for the cost of employee disengagement in Ireland, Gallup have suggested that the cost of disengagement in the US is equivalent to 34% of the employee's salary (Forbes, 2019). Gallup released a report in 2017 that stated the cost of disengaged employees equated to a cost of \$483-\$605 billion for the US annually (Gallup, 2017). With businesses doing their utmost to improve agility and increase profitability in a time of globalisation, a disengaged employee is not a cost any businesses can afford.

As per the example above, there are clear gaps in the literature when it comes to employee engagement in Ireland, with most studies set in a Global, US or European setting. There are also gaps around the impact certain variables can have on employee engagement, for example the impact of job level on employee engagement. The purpose of this research is to close these gaps, the objectives of the research are set out in detail in section 2.10.

2.8 Say, Stay, Strive – The Aon Hewitt Engagement Model

Through focus groups and interviews with managers, Aon Hewitt developed the Say, Stay, Strive engagement model (Aon Hewitt, 2015). Aon Hewitt identified a mix of behaviors, emotions, rational thought and intentions are required for optimal performance and productivity. From this they developed six key components that assist in defining if an employee is engaged or not. The six key questions are grouped under three headings, labelled Say, Stay, Strive (Figure 2.2). Employees are then asked to rank the questions on a six-point likert scale, a standard measurement scale for employee engagement. Employees are considered engaged if they have all three of the Say, Stay, Strive attributes.




| Engagement | Content | Items in Aon Hewitt Operational Definition |
|---|--|---|
|  | Speak positively about the organization to coworkers, potential employees, and customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I would not hesitate to recommend this organization to a friend seeking employment ▪ Given the opportunity, I tell others great things about working here |
|  | Have an intense sense of belonging and desire to be part of the organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It would take a lot to get me to leave this organization ▪ I rarely think about leaving this organization to work somewhere else |
|  | Are motivated and exert effort toward success in their job and for the company | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This organization inspires me to do my best work every day ▪ This organization motivates me to contribute more than is normally required to complete my work |

Figure 2.2 – Aon Hewitt Say, Stay, Strive Engagement Model (AON, 2020)

The Say component of the model assists with the understanding of what the individual thinks and feels about the organisation. When discussing the organisation with a manager, employees are more likely to put a positive spin on the discussion than when discussing the same topic with co-workers or potential future employees. The Stay component is important and links back to Kahn and Anitha's studies from 1990 and 2014 respectively. Engaged employees will feel valued and as though the work they carry out has meaning and contributes toward the overall business goals, where a disengaged employee is less likely to feel this and more likely to consider leaving the organisation (Robinson et al, 2004). Aon Hewitt (2015) cite the Strive component as critical, referring to the discretionary effort employees give in their roles, which has been identified as a factor that links to business success.

2.9 The Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland

This research will focus on employee engagement within the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland. The research was positioned in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland as 1) there are gaps in employee engagement research in Ireland and 2) the Food and Beverage Industry is Ireland's largest industry. This section aims to provide an insight into the industry.

The Food and Beverage Industry comprises all areas of manufacturing; processing, packaging, transferring and distributing food and beverages from the source to the consumer. The industry is one of the world's largest for employment and revenue (Unicef, 2020). This is especially true for Ireland. The Food and Beverage Industry is Ireland's largest and some would say most important industry. The industry sustains 230,000 jobs and has a vast annual turnover of €25 billion, with €10 billion of this in exports (Deloitte, 2020). Ireland is considered to have one of the best setups for the food and beverage industry, with grassland accounting for 80% of Ireland's agricultural land and a 33% higher than European Average grass growth rate (Irish Food and Drink, 2020). The industry supplies Ireland's foodservice and domestic food sectors with most of its produce and Irish food and drink is also sold in over 180 markets globally (Food Drink Ireland, 2020). Ireland is the largest food and beverage supplier to the UK, the largest net exporter in Europe for beef, lamb and dairy ingredients and the largest exporter of infant formula in Europe (Irish Food and Drink, 2020).

With the world's population due to increase by 1 billion in the next 15 years there is huge opportunity for growth in the food and beverage industry, up to 50% according to a recent publication by Deloitte (Deloitte,

2020). With Ireland's position as one of the strongest Food and Beverage Industries, the opportunity for growth is immense. If organisations within the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland wish to capitalise on this opportunity, having an engaged workforce is key as this is proven to increase competitive advantage, productivity and overall performance of the organisation. These are factors which will place organisations in a much stronger position for growth versus their competitors who do not place value on employee engagement.

2.10 Research Question and Objectives

The research question for this paper is; What are the main employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland?

2.10.1 Research Objective

Upon review of the current literature on employee engagement, it appears the concept of employee engagement, its drivers and its benefits have been researched in depth. An area that is perhaps light on research is the employee engagement challenges faced by highly reputable organisations, where it could be assumed employee engagement would be at an optimum. The objective of this research is to begin to close that gap, by analysing the employee engagement challenges that are faced by a reputable multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland.

2.10.2 Research Sub-Objectives

The study is a quantitative based study that will delve into the employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland. The research aims to;

1. Identify and examine if engagement scores differ by gender
2. Identify and examine if engagement scores differ by age
3. Identify and examine if engagement scores differ by length of service
4. Identify and examine if engagement scores differ by job level
5. Identify and examine if engagement scores differ by function

The objective of this research is to understand if there are areas of the survey where engagement scores are poor across the organisation to understand the main employee engagement issues the organisation faces. Such analysis will outline if an overhaul or review is needed in a particular area of the business. For example, if there was a consistently low score against the 'quality' element of the survey, perhaps a review of quality processes, procedures, policies and ways of working may be beneficial.

The aim of the sub-objectives is to gather insight into the engagement of various groups of employees in the organisation. This information could facilitate a tailored and targeted approach to improving a low employee engagement score. For example, if a significant difference was found between the engagement score of males and females on a reward question, it may be beneficial for the organisation to review the reward structure to understand if it is appropriate and consistent for both gender groups. If the review were to show the reward structure was imbalanced,

the organisation could look to rectify this which could lead to more aligned scores between males and females in the future.

2.10.3 Hypothesis

The objective and sub-objectives of the study have now been explained in detail. The hypothesis for these objectives are set out below;

- Hypothesis 1: Gender does not have an impact on employee engagement levels.
- Hypothesis 2: Age has an impact on employee engagement levels.
- Hypothesis 3: Length of service has an impact on employee engagement levels.
- Hypothesis 4: Job Level has an impact on employee engagement levels.
- Hypothesis 5: Work function has an impact on employee engagement levels.

2.11 Chapter Summary

The concept of employee engagement has evolved considerably since it originated with Kahn in 1990. While the fundamentals remain the same, the concept was initially based solely on the commitment the employee was willing to give to the organisation and did not consider the role the organisation has to play in employee engagement in as much detail. In recent years, that focus has shifted towards drivers of employee engagement, how organisations can influence employee engagement

levels and critically, the benefits of employee engagement. Some of the key benefits associated with employee engagement are enhanced business performance and profitability (Saks, 2006), stronger employee commitment and a willingness to go above and beyond which in turn means lower turnover rates (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004 and CIPD, 2019) and increased competitive advantage (Sundaray, 2011). All of these benefits are proven to be crucial to business success. Measuring employee engagement has also proven to be invaluable, as businesses gain an insight into their problem areas which they then rectify. Having disengaged employees in the business can negatively impact productivity, profitability and engaged employees, while also having a tangible cost associated with it (Gallup, 2013). Simply put, businesses cannot afford to ignore employee engagement if they wish to survive and be successful in today's marketplace.

The following sections will provide further detail on the research question, aims and methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

According to Punch (2014), Research methods are a critical component of research studies and it is hugely important for researchers to evaluate the best approach to answer the research question at hand prior to beginning a research project. This chapter will therefore begin by outlining the aims and objectives of the research and identifying the relevant research philosophy for the research question, 'What are the main employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland?' This chapter will then discuss the research approach and data collection and analysis, while also reviewing the limitations and ethical considerations of the research project.

3.2 Research Philosophy

When undertaking a research project, it is important to understand the research philosophies that exist as the chosen philosophy will underpin the research, defining how the data that forms part of the research will be collected and analysed and ensures a holistic and meaningful approach to the research project (Saunders et al, 2009). Saunders et al (2009) developed a useful research framework called the 'Research Onion' (as shown in Figure 3.1). It is suggested that the research philosophy is the first layer of the 'onion' and that the researcher must understand the research philosophy before they can then begin to look at the next steps in the research process such as the research approach, strategies and procedures.

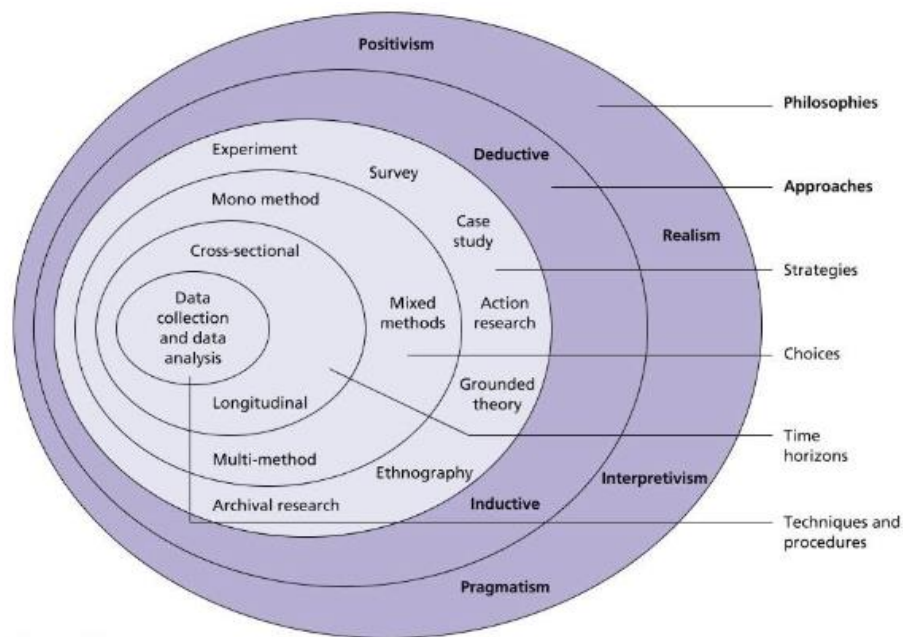


Figure 3.1: The Research Onion (Saunders et al, 2009)

Saunders et al (2009) states that research philosophy indicates how the researcher views the world and that the selected research philosophy will depend on how the researcher views knowledge and the knowledge development process. There are two key research philosophies; ontology and epistemology (Saunders et al, 2009). This research will employ epistemology, which looks at determining what knowledge is true and false from the data. There are numerous epistemology approaches including interpretivism, realism and pragmatism, however this research will adopt the positivism position, which places trust in knowledge that can be observed and verified from the data (Walle, 2015). This position is often adopted where the researcher prefers to work with facts rather than opinion. This approach has been selected as the aim of the research is to analyse the data and understand the impact of the variables.

3.3 Research Approach

Once a research philosophy has been selected, the researcher must next determine the research approach they will employ. There are two main research approaches; inductive and deductive. With the inductive approach, the researcher gathers and analyses data and then develops a theory based on their findings (Saunders et al., 2009). A deductive approach on the other hand is where the researcher develops a theory and a hypothesis which they then test to understand if the hypothesis is true or false (Saunders et al, 2009, Gill and Johnson, 2010). The deductive approach is the approach of choice for this research as studies have shown that this approach is most commonly linked to the positivism philosophy (Sneider and Lerner, 2009 and Saunders et al, 2009). This approach best fits the research question, where the aim is to test the relationship between numerous variables.

The next step in the research process is to understand if a qualitative or quantitative strategy is best suited to the research question. Quantitative research is most commonly linked to positivism and the deduction approach (Adams et al, 2014). The quantitative approach will often result in higher participation rates, which will give the researcher more data to work with and will allow the researcher to address the research sub-objectives. A qualitative approach would give the researcher further insight into the employee engagement levels than the likert scale, as with the likert scale the researcher will provide educated opinions on the results, whereas with qualitative data the researcher would be working with facts. It is highly unlikely however, that the researcher would gather enough data to be able to answer the research sub-objectives with a qualitative

approach. It is therefore advisable to review the strategies adopted in previous related research. When discussing past research on employee engagement Mansoor (2016) confirms that 'a significant number of research work appears to have applied the quantitative method using questionnaires designed in a five-point Likert scale' (Mansoor, 2016). A quantitative research methodology has therefore been identified as the most appropriate methodology for the research question. Upon reviewing the available literature on employee engagement for this research, it is evident that the quantitative method is the most commonly used method. Saks (2006), Anitha (2014) and even Kahn (1990) who founded the concept, all utilised quantitative research methods. An experimental design will be adopted in order to analyse the data and reach a conclusion.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1 Research Instrument - The Survey

The researcher was provided with access to the results of the most recent employee engagement survey carried out on behalf of a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry. The anonymous survey was sent via web link by a third-party company to the 3,824 employees of the organisation based in Ireland. 3,074 employees responded, 61% of respondents were male, while 39% were female. The employees ages ranged from under 25 to over 55, with the majority of employees in the 35-44 age group. The employee's length of service ranged from new joiners with less than six months service to long-standing employees with over 25 years' experience. The most common length of service was 2-5 years. The organisation asks employees to participate in

order to gain an insight into the areas the organisation is doing well in and the areas for focus moving forward. Participants are not rewarded financially or otherwise for participating but do benefit from having their voice heard as the organisation promises to act on the feedback from the survey. Access to the survey results was granted on the basis the respondents' data would remain unidentifiable. This secondary data will give the researcher access to the full population of the organisation's employees in Ireland, with 3,074 respondents. This is a far larger population than the researcher would have access to and provides for a more accurate response to the research question and sub-objective.

The employee engagement survey utilised for this study was carried out by Kincentric (formerly Aon) for the organisation in question. The survey is based on the 'Say, Stay, Strive' indicators discussed earlier in section 2.8 of the literature review. The survey has 56 unique questions, which can be found in Appendix 1. Respondents must utilise the six-point scale when answering each question. The six points are;

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

In the Research Approach section above, Mansoor (2016) refers to qualitative questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale, this questionnaire goes one step further with a six-point scale. The two mid points 'slightly agree' and 'slightly disagree' are hugely beneficial as they force the

respondent into providing a more accurate response than ‘neither agree nor disagree’ as seen on many other surveys.

The survey questions are outlined in Appendix 1 and an example is provided in Figure 3.2 below. The responses to the questions are utilised to understand employee engagement levels in six key categories; Employee Engagement, The Basics, The Work, Engaging Leadership, Agility and Talent Focus.

Employee Engagement Questionnaire

1. I would not hesitate to recommend this organisation to a friend seeking employment

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Slightly agree
- ☐ Slightly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Figure 3.2: An example of a survey question

3.4.2 Validity and Reliability

Questionnaires have been proven as a strong method for collecting large amounts of data that is both reliable and valid (Punch, 2014). Utilising the Kincentric data will ensure and reinforce this as they are experts in the field, supporting over 12,500 organisations with employee engagement

surveys and with almost 15 million responses to ensure strong benchmarking. There are a number of threats to the reliability of a survey, from a participant perspective, the two main ones are participant error and participant bias, where participants may provide the answer they think the organisation wants to hear rather than their true opinion (Saunders et al, 2009). With this survey, participants have a two-week window to complete the questions, which would reduce the risk of participant error as they can take the survey at a time that is convenient for them. Anonymity is also provided to the participants, which will support the accuracy and dependability of the information. There are also risks associated with error and bias from the researcher and the researcher needs to be mindful of this during the analysis of the data.

3.4.3 Population and Sample

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the researcher has been provided with access to the results of the most recent employee engagement survey carried out on behalf of a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry. In order to answer the research question, the researcher will utilise the survey responses from all employees based in Ireland, in total there were 3,074 responses. As the data is available for the full population, or at least those who completed the survey, the researcher will use the complete data set and will not use sampling methods.

3.4.4 Pilot Test

Pilot Tests are commonly used with quantitative surveys to ensure the respondents understand the questions being asked in the survey and to ensure the researcher receives the information required to answer the research question (Ruel et al, 2015). As this research is based on secondary data, a pilot test is not possible or required. Had the research been based on primary data, a pilot test would have been completed.

3.4.5 Data Analysis

To answer the research question, the researcher will statistically analyse the data in several ways. The first piece of data analysis will be on the scores of the six core areas of the survey; Engagement, The Basics, The Work, Engaging Leadership, Agility and Talent Focus to identify the high and low scoring areas and to begin to understand the challenges the organisation faces. The second stream of analysis will review the results by demographics, to understand if low engagement is consistent across the business, or if it exists only in certain demographic groups and not others. The research will look at gender, age, length of service, job level and function as key demographics. The researcher will use Microsoft Excel software as the main tool for analysis. While SPSS is often used as an analysis tool for research of this nature, it was not suitable for the data set the researcher had access to. The data will be presented statistically.

3.5 Limitations

There are limitations to all research methodologies. As this research utilises secondary data, the limitations associated with it are mainly around control. As the researcher did not have input into the questions asked on the survey, there may be variables that would be beneficial to the research that are not available. Qualitative research may have also given further insight into the topic and could have aided with recommendations, however with the volume of participants and time constraints for this study, this would have been difficult to obtain. Another limitation recognised regarding the use of secondary data is the quality of the data (Largan and Morris, 2019). As the survey utilised was carried out by an organisation that specialises in employee engagement these concerns are significantly reduced but must still be recognised.

3.6 Ethical considerations

It is crucial that ethical standards are upheld within research that involves human participants (Gravetter and Forzano, 2012). This research does not propose to include participants from vulnerable groups and upon review of the NCI Ethics Policy and completion of the NCI Ethics Form, the study is not deemed to have any risk to participants. Participants in the survey are guaranteed anonymity, with no request or option to share their names when completing the survey. In addition to this, survey results cannot be viewed for a group where there are less than five participants to avoid identification, e.g. if there are were less than five respondents in the 'under 25' age demographic, a report could not be pulled for that demographic.

3.7 Chapter Summary

Preparing a methodology is key to undertaking any research paper, regardless of the field. This research will adopt a positivist research philosophy which trusts that knowledge can be both observed and verified from the data. The research will follow a deductive approach whereby the relationship between numerous variables will be tested. Quantitative data is most commonly used in the field of employee engagement. As such this research will use qualitative data in the form of a survey to answer the research question. This will be an online survey and will use a six-point likert scale for responses. The data will come from a secondary source as this will allow the researcher access to a large population. The results will be analysed in Microsoft Excel, firstly for the organisation as a whole and secondly by sub-objective to determine if engagement scores vary depending on gender, age, length of service, job level or function. The next chapter will provide an insight into the results of the data.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a detailed description and analysis of the data available. The chapter will begin by looking at the descriptive results to give the reader an insight into the profile of the respondents. From there, further detail will be provided on how the engagement scores are calculated. The analysis and findings from the overall survey will be presented and will then be analysed further in accordance with the five key research sub-objectives, which are; to identify if engagement scores differ by gender, age, length of service, job level or function. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are six key indices in the employee engagement survey; Overall Engagement, The Basics, The Work, Engaging Leadership, Agility and Talent Focus. As the researcher analyses the results, each of these indices will be explored and findings will be shared. Prior to analysis of the data, a description will be provided for each index as well as an outline of the dimensions within each and types of questions asked.

4.2 Descriptive Results

The survey was sent to 3,824 employees across Ireland. With 3,074 respondents, the survey received a strong completion rate of just above 80%. The survey comprised of 56 unique questions (see appendix 1), which were used to determine engagement levels under six indices with twelve dimensions in total. These indices are outlined in Figure 4.1 and an overview of each is provided later in this chapter.

| Indices | Dimensions |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Engagement | - Engagement |
| 2. The Basics | - Quality & Safety |
| 3. The Work | - Empowerment |
| 4. Engaging Leadership | - Managers - Senior Leaders |
| 5. Agility | - Customer Focus - Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging - Teamwork |
| 6. Talent Focus | - The Organisation's Brand - Career Opportunities and Development - Reward and Recognition - Talent Management |

Figure 4.1: Survey Indices and Dimensions

4.2.1 Gender

Figure 4.2 shows the split of the survey respondents by gender. From the 3,074 respondents, 61% were male and 39% were female. This would suggest the organisation in question is slightly more male dominant, however with 20% of people not submitting a response to the survey, this cannot be verified.

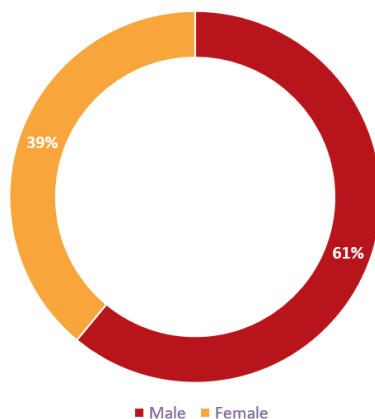


Figure 4.2: Survey Respondents by Gender

| GENDER | | |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
| Male | 1887 | 61 |
| Female | 1187 | 39 |
| Total | 3074 | 100 |

Table 4.1: Gender Frequencies

4.2.2 Age

Figure 4.3 below displays the age profile of the survey respondents. Respondents were required to select the age group appropriate to them before they began the survey. There were five age groups available to select from; under 25, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54 and over 55. The majority of the respondents sat in the 35 – 44 age group, with the 25 – 34 and 45 – 54 age groups not far behind. The under 25 and over 55 age groups were in the minority in comparison.

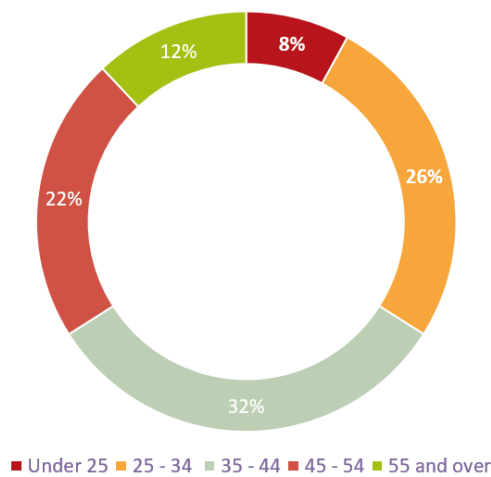


Figure 4.3: Survey Respondents by Age

| AGE | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Age | Frequency | Percent |
| Under 25 | 246 | 8 |
| 25 - 34 | 784 | 26 |
| 35 - 44 | 997 | 32 |
| 45 - 54 | 691 | 22 |
| 55 plus | 356 | 12 |
| Total | 3074 | 100 |

Table 4.2: Age Frequencies

4.2.3 Length of Service

Length of service was also recorded prior to participants taking the survey. Participants were given nine options to choose from, ranging from under six months to over twenty-five years. The vast majority of respondents had between two and five years' service with the organisation at the time of the survey as seen in Figure 4.4. There were almost double the number of

respondents in this group than there were in the second highest group, with 11 – 15 years of service. Aside from this one group, there was a good mix and spread across the other groups.

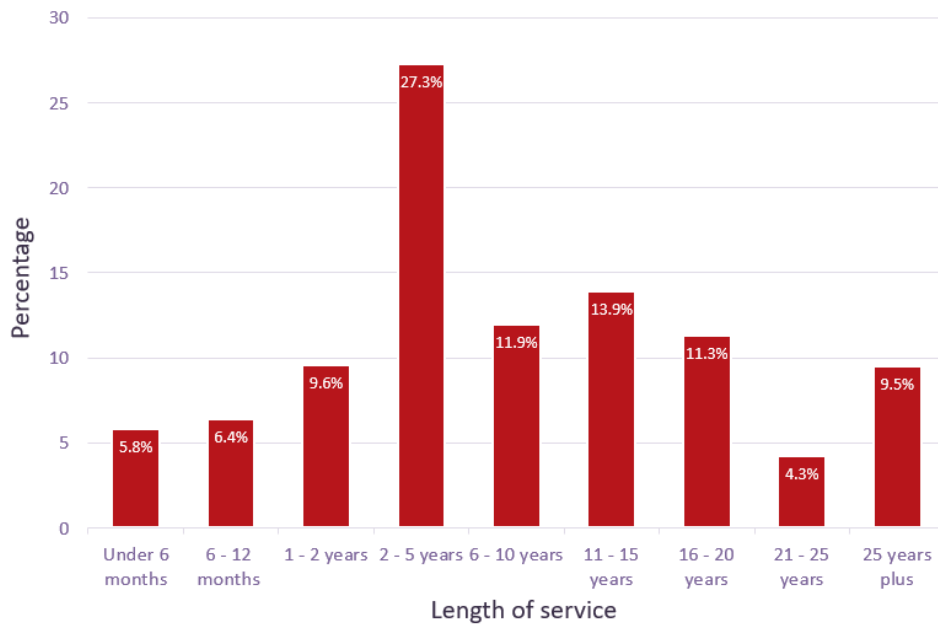


Figure 4.4: Survey Respondents by Length of Service

| LENGTH OF SERVICE | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Length of Service | Frequency | Percent |
| Under 6 months | 179 | 6 |
| 6 - 12 months | 196 | 6 |
| 1 - 2 years | 295 | 10 |
| 2 - 5 years | 838 | 27 |
| 6 - 10 years | 367 | 12 |
| 11 - 15 years | 427 | 14 |
| 16 - 20 years | 348 | 11 |
| 21 - 25 years | 131 | 4 |
| 25 years plus | 293 | 10 |
| Total | 3074 | 100 |

Table 4.3: Length of Service Frequencies

4.2.4 Job Level

Job Level is a great demographic to have when analysing survey results as it will support in defining whether management and non-management have similar views. Respondents job levels were categorised into three groups and recorded. Options provided were; Non-Management, Middle Management and Senior Management. Naturally, Figure 4.5 shows the non-management population represents most respondents.

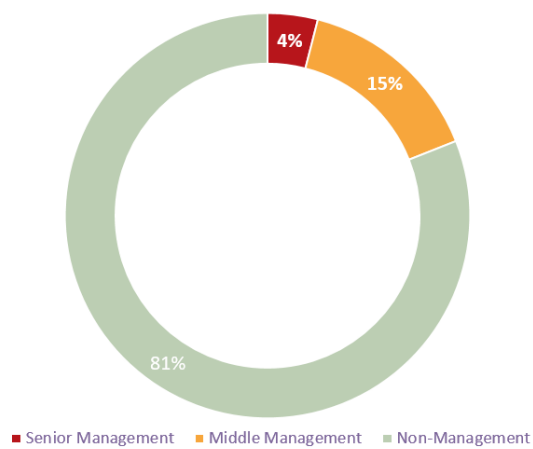


Figure 4.5: Survey Respondents by Job Level

| Job Level | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Job Level | Frequency | Percent |
| Senior Management | 109 | 4 |
| Middle Management | 469 | 15 |
| Non-management | 2496 | 81 |
| Total | 3074 | 100 |

Table 4.4: Job Level Frequencies

4.2.5 Work Function

Some twenty-three work functions, (also known as departments or divisions) are represented in the data set, with one function clearly much larger than others, accounting for almost 40% of respondents. The researcher does not propose to delve into too much detail on the functions, however it is useful to understand if there are pockets of the business where engagement scores are particularly high or low as this will facilitate the recommendations section of this paper.

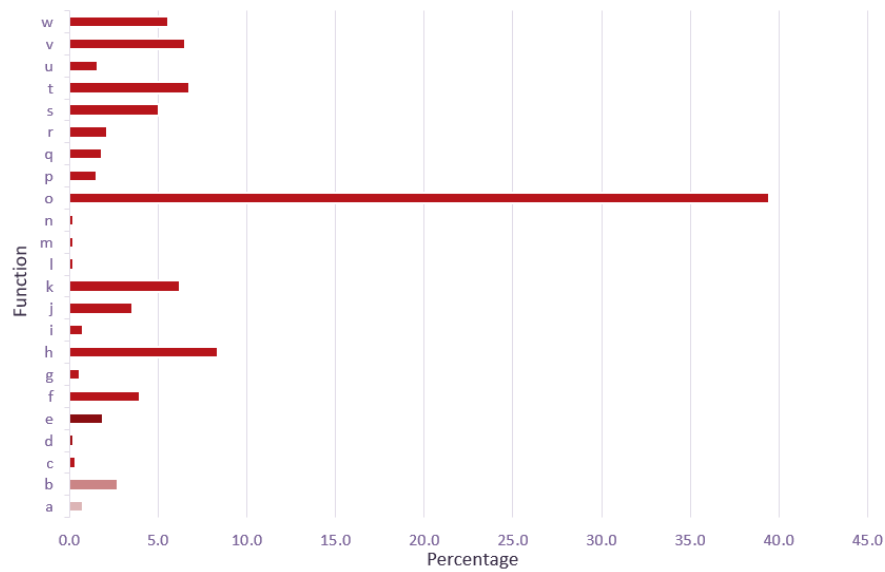


Figure 4.6: Survey Respondents by Function

| Function | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Function | Frequency | Percent |
| A | 23 | 1 |
| B | 83 | 3 |
| C | 10 | 0 |
| D | 6 | 0 |
| E | 58 | 2 |
| F | 121 | 4 |
| G | 17 | 1 |
| H | 256 | 8 |
| I | 22 | 1 |
| J | 109 | 4 |
| K | 191 | 6 |
| L | 6 | 0 |
| M | 6 | 0 |
| N | 7 | 0 |
| O | 1212 | 39 |
| P | 46 | 1 |
| Q | 55 | 2 |
| R | 65 | 2 |
| S | 154 | 5 |
| T | 207 | 7 |
| U | 49 | 2 |
| V | 200 | 7 |
| W | 171 | 6 |
| Total | 3074 | 100 |

Table 4.5: Function Frequencies

4.3 The Engagement Score Explained

As discussed in the previous chapter, survey respondents were asked to use a six-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, (shown in Figure 4.7 below) to answer the survey questions.



Figure 4.7: Survey Response Scale

The engagement score is calculated by taking the average of each employee's response score. Where an employee's average response score is under 3.5, they are considered actively disengaged. Where the average score of an employee is 3.5 to <4.5 they are considered passive. If the average response score is between 4.5 and <5.5 the employee is considered moderately engaged and employees with a score of 5.5 and above are considered highly engaged. The engagement score is the proportion of employees who are engaged (scored 4.5 or above) expressed as a percentage. A working example of this is shown in Figure 4.8 below.

| Teamwork Questions | Aine | Barry | Cathy | Daniel |
|--|------|-------|-------|--------|
| My colleagues are open and honest in communication | 6 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| My colleagues collaborate effectively to achieve our goals | 6 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| I feel that I a part of a team that cares about each other | 5 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Where I work, there is good teamwork and cooperation between departments | 6 | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Average Response Score for Teamwork | 5.75 | 3.5 | 6 | 4.5 |
| Engaged? (4.5 or above) | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |

3 out of 4 employees scored 4.5 or more, these three employees are classified as engaged. The engagement score is the proportion of employees who are engaged expressed as a percentage. In this example it is 75%.

Figure 4.8: Calculation of Engagement Score

4.4 Results by Index and Dimension

This section will review the results of the overall organisation by index and dimensions, beginning with Engagement. The Engagement index takes into consideration the overall engagement levels of employees in the organisation. The questions in this section are based on the 'Say, Stay, Strive' model mentioned in Chapter 2 and focus on whether or not the organisation inspires its employees, if employees would recommend the organisation to a friend and what it would take for employee to consider leaving the organisation. The organisation's overall engagement score is 43%. This was a positive result as Effectory (2020) report that global employee engagement levels sit below 30%, with Ireland's engagement percentage sitting at 23%.

The Basics index focuses on the quality of the products and services the organisation provide and the safety measures within the organisation. Another key question asked under 'The Basics' index is whether or not respondents feel the organisation will act on the results of the survey. Previous history will influence how participants respond to this question. This index was the second highest ranking index in the survey with an engagement score of 69%.

The Work index focuses on how empowered employees feel. Through eleven different questions, this index gathers an understanding on how connected employees feel to the organisation's goals, whether they feel their role is a good fit for their skills and experience, and if they have good work-life balance. In addition to this it looks at whether employees feel they have fair decision-making authority in their role and if they feel they

can try new things and challenge the status-quo. The engagement score for this index was 58%.

The Engaging Leadership index focuses on both management and senior leaders dimensions. The key focus of the management dimension is to establish whether employees feel management show them respect, recognise their efforts and provide support and feedback to aid their development. With the senior leaders dimension, the focus is on how employees perceive their efforts to run the business; do the organisation's leaders have a clear vision for the organisation and are they clear in their approach and communication of how to get there, ensuring the long-term success of the organisation. The organisation's overall score for 'management' was 61%, where the score for 'senior leaders' was significantly lower at 45%. This would lead the researcher to believe that the respondents were happier with their direct line management, but not so happy with the overall leadership in the organisation.

The Agility index focuses on three key areas, the first being the organisation's customer focus; the aim of this dimension is to understand if employees comprehend the needs of the organisation's customers and feel the organisation works hard to not only meet but exceed customer expectations. This is the highest scoring area of the survey with engagement score of 82%. The second dimension is diversity, inclusion and belonging, which aims to understand if employees perceive the work environment to be diverse and feel the organisation truly values diversity. This area of the survey also ranked in the organisation's top three areas with an engagement score of 65%. The third and final dimension under this index is teamwork which seeks to obtain employees views on

collaboration, open communication and camaraderie. The Teamwork score was just 1% behind the Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging score at 64%. The agility index was the strongest index in the survey, with good results across all three dimensions as outlined.

The Talent Focus index firstly gathers employees' views on the organisation's brand, aiming to understand if employees feel connected to the purpose, if the organisation is socially and environmentally responsible and if they consider the organisation one of the best places to work for someone with their skills and experience. This dimension of the survey scored a 54% engagement rate overall. The next area this index requests feedback on is career opportunities and development within the organisation, aiming to understand if employees feel the organisation supports their development and how their career opportunities with the organisation look. Reward and recognition is the third dimension and area of focus under this index which asks employees to provide their feedback on pay and benefits. Both career opportunities and development and reward and recognition dimensions scored 40% in the survey, these scores were just 3% above the lowest score of 37% which related to talent management, the final dimension under the talent focus index. Questions on talent management aim to understand employees' views on whether the organisation is attracting and retaining the right people and developing a workforce that adapts well to change. The Talent Focus index was the lowest scoring index in the survey with three out of four dimensions ranking in the bottom three results for the organisation.

4.5 Research Sub-objectives

This chapter has so far given an overview of the results for the overall organisation and shown that Agility is the strongest scoring index and Talent Focus is the lowest scoring index. This section will now analyse the results by sub-objective to gain further insight into the figures.

4.5.1 Engagement Levels by Gender

Analysis of the data found little or no variance between the engagement levels of male and female respondents. The maximum variance in scores between gender across the twelve dimensions was just 4% in line with the overall variance displayed in Figure 4.9.

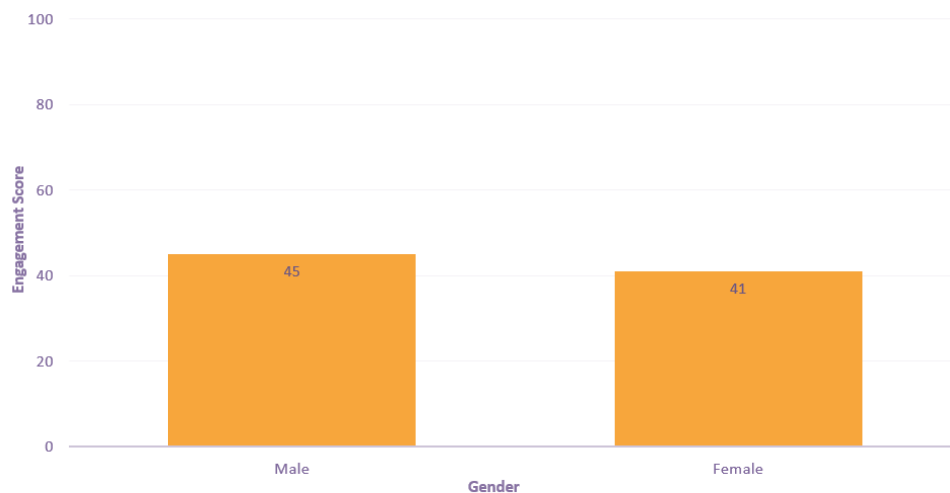


Figure 4.9: Engagement Score by Gender

The distribution of engagement is also quite similar for both groups with no major differences, as shown in Appendix 2.

4.5.2 Engagement Levels by Age

While gender does not appear to have an impact on employee engagement levels, there does appear to be a difference in engagement levels depending on age. The data confirms that those over 55 are more engaged than any other age group in the organisation with an overall engagement score of 55%. This age group had the highest engagement scores in 10 of the 12 dimensions when compared with the other age groups. The least engaged age groups are the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups, with a -16% difference between their engagement score of 39% and that of the over 55's score of 55.

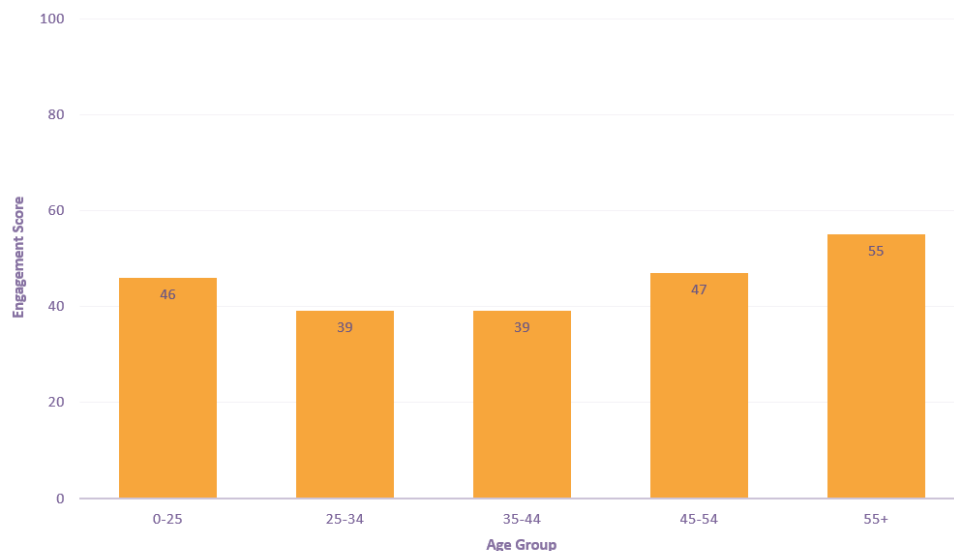


Figure 4.10: Engagement Score by Age

While it would appear from Figure 4.10 that the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups are equally engaged, this did not necessarily prove true when further analysis was completed. On analysis of age groups, a trend emerged whereby in 50% of the dimensions the engagement scores started strong in the Under 25 age group, decreased in the 25-34 age

group, *decreased further in the 35-44 age group* (which is not evident from the overall scores in Figure 4.10) and then gradually increased in the 45-54 age group and over 55 age group. While the graph above shows the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups have the same overall engagement score, the 35-44 age group scored below the organisation's average in all 12 dimensions, whereas the 25-34 age group score above the organisation's average in 4 dimensions. It would appear from this information that while both age groups have the same overall engagement score, the 35-44 age group are less engaged in general, while the 25-34 age group are engaged in some areas but want or need to see an improvement in other areas.

Interestingly this trend did not appear in one dimension; Customer Focus. In this dimension the engagement scores increased steadily with age, ranging from 77% - 86% from the youngest to oldest age groups.

To further support the finding that employee engagement varies based on age profile, the results found that there was a variance of 10% or more between the lowest and highest scoring age groups in 8 out of 12 dimensions. The largest variance was that between the 25-34 age group and over 55 age group, where Reward and Recognition scored 32% and 52% respectively, with a variance of 20%.

4.5.3 Engagement Levels by Length of Service

As displayed in Figure 4.11, the data displayed a clear trend in engagement scores when reviewed in terms of length of service. Those who have less than 6 months service are at peak engagement levels, however this drops significantly from 68% to 53% when the employee has between 6 months

and 12 months service and continues to drop consistently until the employee reaches 6-10 years of service where engagement is at its lowest at 35%. There is a steady incline from 11-15 years' service up to the maximum length of service of 25+ years, where engagement levels sit at 61%.

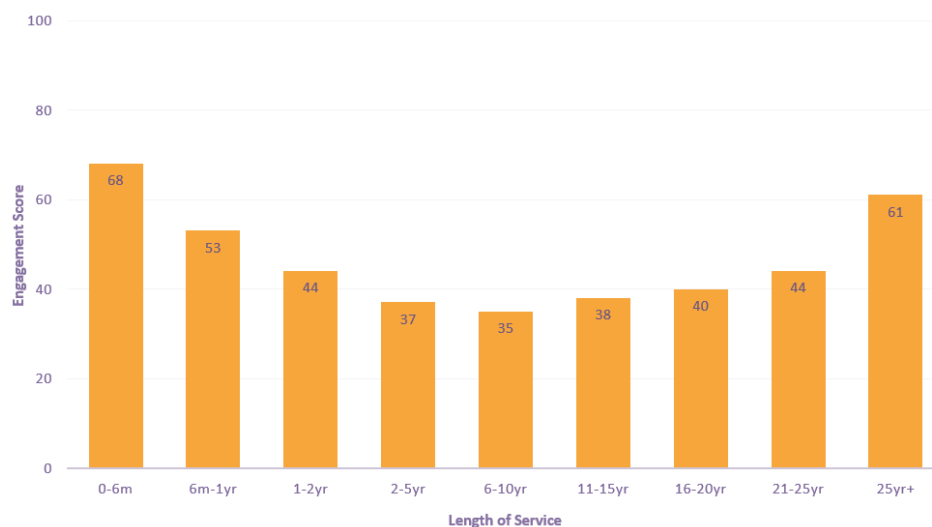


Figure 4.11: Engagement Score by Length of Service

One explanation for the decline could be that employees are freshly trained, engaged and highly vigilant when they first join, however they become more complacent in their roles as they gain experience. Employees who reach over 15 years' experience will often be promoted on merit and experience into either specialist or management roles, hence the incline in engagement scores from this point. Their long service also shows commitment to the organisation and this could be one potential reason for the incline in the score from over 15 years of service. The variance between the lowest and highest scoring groups across the dimensions was between 10% and 33%. The largest variance was between the 0-6 months category

and the 6-10 years category where Reward and Recognition scored 64% and 34% respectively, a variance of 30%.

As mentioned above there is a clear decline in engagement scores from 0-6 months to 6-12 months. Further analysis confirmed the scores declined across all 12 dimensions, which means the issue is across the board and not just with one or two dimensions of the engagement survey. In 75% of dimensions, the scores declined over 10%. The most significant decline noted was for Reward and Recognition with an 18% decline in the engagement score between 0-6 months and 6-12 months. This is a rather concerning statistic and leads the researcher to believe that the expectations of new joiners may not be aligned with those of the organisation.

Talent management was noted as an area for potential improvement as a significant decline was evident in the first year, with a 14% decline after 6 months and a further 10% decline after 1 year of service, this was the only occasion where two scores consecutively declined by over 10% when the data was analysed by length of service.

4.5.4 Engagement Levels by Job Level

Job Level also appears to have an impact on the employee engagement score, with senior management scoring 10% more than middle management and 12% more than non-management. This result is not surprising as the literature review confirmed that engagement filters down through organisations therefore senior leaders tend to be more engaged than middle management generally.



Figure 4.12: Engagement Score by Job Level

In line with the data displayed in Figure 4.12, a variance of over 10% was noted in 6 of the 12 dimensions when analysed by job level. The largest variance was 25% for Reward and Recognition where senior management scored 61% and middle management scored 36%.

Senior management scored more favourably on reward and recognition; 21% and 25% more favourably than non-management and middle management respectively to be exact. The group also scored more favourably on the senior leadership dimension of the survey, however the score for this group was significantly lower than middle management when it came to Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging with a variable of 12%.

While scores were generally higher across senior management and middle management, the talent management dimension received the highest score from non-management at 39%, with it declining to 27% and 28% respectively for middle management and senior management, which reflects the management populations views on whether the organisation

are attracting and retaining the right people and building an adaptable workforce.

4.5.5 Engagement Levels by Function

Analysis of the data by function showed there was a wide range of engagement scores from 18% in the lowest scoring function to 67% in the most engaged function. The five lowest scoring functions sat between 18% and 34%, while the five top scoring functions had engagement scores between 53% and 67%. The wide range of engagement scores here begs the question what is different across the functions to result in such variance.

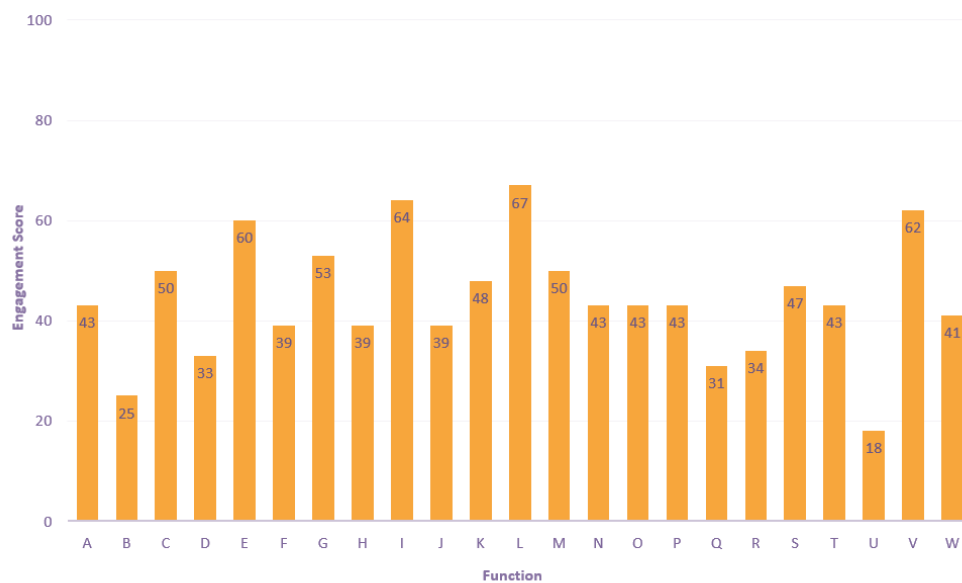


Figure 4.13: Engagement Score by Function

On analysis of the data it was evident that the functions were aligned on certain survey dimensions. The Basics and Agility indices were highly rated by all functions, with Customer Focus identified as the highest scoring

dimension for 21 of the 23 functions, this dimension was also the second highest scoring dimension for the two remaining functions. Quality and Safety which falls under The Basics index (see Figure 4.1) was given the second highest rating from 17 of 23 functions, it was also the highest scoring dimension for one function and ranked third highest for two additional functions. Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging ranked in the top three for 74% of functions.

Talent Focus was the lowest scoring index across the functions. The talent management dimension was in the bottom three ranking for all functions, with this dimension receiving the lowest engagement score from 52% of functions. Reward and recognition was the second lowest scoring dimension across all functions with career opportunities and development ranking third lowest across all functions.

These findings were consistent across the lowest scoring functions. The findings were also somewhat consistent across the highest scoring functions, however management featured on the top three dimensions for 40% of these functions and senior leaders featured in the bottom three dimensions for 60% of the highest scoring functions.

4.6 Chapter Summary

The objective of this research is to understand the employee engagement challenges faced by this organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland. The overall engagement score of the organisation was significantly higher than the global average, with a score of 43% vs the 2020 global average being below 30% and more specifically 23% for Ireland. The

researcher found that the organisation scored well in the Basics and Agility indices and that the key index for improvement for the overall organisation was Talent Focus, which includes Career Opportunities and Development, Talent Management and Reward and Recognition dimensions.

Upon further analysis of the data, it was found that engagement scores do not differ by gender, but do differ by age. The over 55 age group was the most engaged group, while the 35-44 age group was found to be the age group with the lowest engagement.

Engagement levels also differed depending on length of service, with a significant decline in engagement noted when employees reach 6 months service. Employees with 6-10 years' service were found to be the least engaged group in this category.

Job level was also found to have an impact on engagement scores. Similar engagement levels were noted for Non-Management and Middle Management groups, where Senior Management were found to be significantly more engaged.

The final difference noted was that between functions. Engagement scores ranged from 18% to 67% across the 23 functions surveyed. While the engagement scores varied considerably, consistency with the overall survey findings were noted, whereby the Agility and The Basics were the highest scoring indices and Talent Focus was the lowest scoring index.

These findings will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss in further detail the findings from the Results and Analysis chapter of this research paper. The chapter will begin by discussing the employee engagement challenges that are faced by the organisation as a whole. The results section identified these challenges as the dimensions within the talent focus index, namely; career opportunities and development, talent management and reward and recognition. Once the organisations overall challenges have been discussed, the research will begin to discuss the employee engagement challenges faced by the various groups as per the research sub-objectives.

5.2 Overall Employee Engagement Challenge – Talent Focus

The Talent Focus index was the lowest scoring index on the employee engagement survey for the organisation as a whole. This was in contrast with the customer focused areas of the survey; customer focus and safety and quality, which received extremely high scores. It would appear from the results that the organisation places the needs of the customer above the needs of the employee. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is considered an outdated approach as research has shown that the employee experience is critical in obtaining customer satisfaction in today's working world. Placing more value on employee experience will naturally lead to improved customer satisfaction (Cheema et al, 2015). This has proven to be the case as employees are the face of the business, they are also the touchpoint with the customer, and it is them who innovate and create competitive

advantage for the organisation. An engaged employee will have an increased desire to satisfy the customer over an employee who is not engaged (Kumar and Pansari, 2015). With the research proving these points to be true time and again, organisations are beginning to understand that it is more effective to focus on the employee experience, which leads to increased engagement and that this will in turn satisfy the customer. The organisation in this survey would benefit greatly from moving their focus from the customer to the employee for these reasons.

The career opportunities and development dimension under the talent focus index was one of the lowest scoring in the organisation. This low score would suggest to the researcher that the organisation is not promoting from within and is looking to external candidates to fill vacancies. In addition to competing with external candidates for opportunities, studies have shown that Baby Boomers are delaying retirement causing disruption to the talent pipeline (Deloitte, 2013). In a 2020 report by Mercer, 72% of baby boomers confirmed they intended to work beyond the normal retirement age (Mercer, 2020). Results from the same report showed that Generations X and Y felt they could not progress within their organisation due to this. In Chapter 2, subsection 2.6.2, when reviewing the literature on variances in employee engagement by age, it was highlighted that career progression is extremely important to all employees regardless of their age (Reisenwicks and Iyer, 2009). This confirms that a lack of career opportunities will result in huge employee engagement challenges, the organisation should therefore have a plan in

place as to how to deal with this, options will be discussed in the next chapter.

Reward and Recognition also sat under the Talent Focus Index and received the lowest engagement score of all dimensions. As discussed in Section 2.3.5, the research suggests that organisations should consider both monetary and non-monetary rewards as part of the overall compensation package. Monetary reward must at least meet market standards and satisfy the employee before organisations can begin to look at non-monetary rewards for engagement purposes (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). As the organisation has scored poorly here, it would be beneficial to benchmark employees' salaries against industry standard to understand if they are below, in line with, or above the standard. If they prove to be in line with or even above industry standard this could indicate that employees feel the compensation is not adequate for the output required. Non-monetary rewards for example annual leave, flexible working, staff perks etc. can also play a huge role in employee engagement and the organisation should ensure they have flexible benefits in place to address the needs of the full population. Research has shown that workplace flexibility helps employees to manage work and non-work responsibilities (Allen et al, 2013), and gives employees choices when it comes to when and how they complete their work (Hill et al, 2008).

Research shows that employees value flexible benefits as it meets their individual needs and that organisations benefit from this as it assists them in recruiting and retaining employees by meeting their economic and social needs (Herrbach et al, 2009 and Heshizer, 1994).

5.3 Key Employee Engagement Challenges by Demographic

5.3.1 Gender

Studies have shown that gender diversity has a positive impact on an organisations bottom line and supports the realisation of financial goals (Badal and Harter, 2014). Current research shows that there is little or no difference in engagement levels between males and females (Effectory, 2020 and Khodakarami and Dirani, 2020). The analysis of the survey results concurs with this as both genders were aligned in terms of engagement scores. Males had an overall engagement score of 45% and females had an overall engagement score of 41%, a minimal difference. The top and bottom three rankings were also the same for male and female groups and the largest score variance between the genders was 4%. Based on this, employee engagement challenges were not identified by gender.

5.3.2 Age Group

Literature shows that when discussing the impact of age on employee engagement, a generational approach is most commonly used. As section 2.6.2 discussed, research confirms that employee engagement levels increase with age / by generational cohort (Kim and Kang, 2017), however some studies suggest this is only true for certain dimensions on an employee engagement survey.

The employee engagement survey utilised for this research did not adopt the common generational approach, but rather asked employees to select one of five age groups; Under 25, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54 and 55 or over. The majority of the respondents sat in the 35 – 44 age group, representing

32% of the participants. This age group was also found to be the least engaged age group. While this group initially appeared to be equal with the 25-34 age group, as the overall engagement score for each group was 39%, further analysis showed the 35-44 age group was below the organisation's average engagement score in all twelve dimensions, where the 25-34 age group was sometimes above the organisation's average engagement score and sometimes below. This leads the researcher to believe that the 25-34 age group have more potential to be engaged as they view some dimensions positively. It is important for the organisation to act on this and attempt to improve the low scoring dimensions. In contrast the 35-44 age group have below average engagement levels across all dimensions, meaning it would be more of a challenge to increase engagement levels as improvement is required across the board rather than in some focus areas. One possible reason for the low engagement scores among this group is that they are at a point in their lives where they have the most responsibility e.g. mortgages, children, etc (Effectory, 2020).

The results in 4.5.2 show that employee engagement did not increase with age until after the employee had reached their mid-40's, with a decline in engagement evident in the 25-34 and 35-44 age categories. The results of this survey did align to the research that suggests the over 55 age group is the most engaged age group (Avery et al, 2007), but did not align to the literature that states employee engagement rises with age (Kim and Kang, 2017). The results do however satisfy sub-objective 2 of this research, that employee engagement varies by age.

5.3.3 Length of Service

The results when analysed by length of service aligned closely with previous literature whereby the length of service started strong and declined continuously until the employee reached 2-5 years' service after which point the engagement scores began to increase again (Nancheria, 2013). The key difference to note for this organisation was that employee engagement levels continued to decline until the employee reached 6-10 years' service, after which they began to increase again.

The research highlighted that engagement scores decrease after the employees first year of service (Effectory, 2015 and Gallup, 2013). This was a clear takeaway from the analysis of the data in this research as a significant decline of 15% in engagement after the first 6 months of employment with the organisation was noted. The engagement scores declined in all 12 dimensions at this juncture and the decline was over 10% in 75% of the dimensions. While the research shows it is natural for employee engagement scores to decline early in the employee's tenure, it is concerning that the decline was so significant across all 12 dimensions. The reward dimension showed the greatest decline of 18%. This further leads the researcher to believe that the expectations of new joiners have not been set appropriately prior to them joining the organisation. This point is supported by Effectory (2015) when they confirm that roles not living up to their expectations is one of the main causes for the decline in engagement so early on. Employees do not move for below average reward packages; therefore, the researcher believes the output requirement to be greater than expected for the employee's score to decline so much in 6 months.

Based on the results and analysis of the data, it is understood that length of service has an impact on employee engagement levels.

5.3.4 Job Level

The results section outlined that there was a clear variance in engagement levels of non-management and middle management when compared with senior leaders. The research has shown that engagement levels begin with the leaders of an organisation and cascade downwards throughout the organisation (Gallup, 2013). The literature also spoke about the social exchange theory and how employees who were treated favourably repaid the organisation in the form of higher engagement levels (Robinson et al, 2004). It is clear from this study that an improvement in the favourable treatment of middle management would be beneficial as there is potential for the engagement score of this group to increase.

In relation to this study, senior leaders scored more favourably on reward and recognition which is not surprising as their roles merit greater reward by nature. Senior leaders did however have a lower engagement score on the diversity, inclusion and belonging dimension when compared with other job levels. This indicates that diversity is not as evident at senior management level and should be considered by company executives. According to Mercer (2020), 63% of CEO's are being held accountable for diversity and inclusion, with clear metrics to be achieved in the coming years. It would be beneficial for this organisation to set diversity and inclusion targets at senior leadership level to address this low engagement score.

While scores were generally higher across senior management and middle management, the talent management dimension received the highest score from the non-management population. The researcher interprets this to mean the management population does not feel the organisation are attracting and retaining the right people to build an adaptable workforce. Management must understand it is their responsibility to improve upon this as they are responsible for hiring the right talent, and for developing and nurturing the employees in their teams (Harvard Business Review, 2020).

Based on the variance in results between job levels, job level does have an impact on employee engagement levels.

5.3.5 Functions

There is limited research on whether employee engagement levels differ by function, however the research that is available suggests there is considerable variance between work functions (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter et al, 2010). The results of this research displayed a vast variance between functions, with the lowest scoring function at 18% and the highest scoring function at 67% engagement. Upon further analysis of the results by function versus overall organisation it was found that some 3 functions had variances of 30% or more versus the organisations score on the same dimensions. Two of these scores related to Teamwork, with one 34% above organisation average and one 35% below organisation average. The researcher initially thought the variance may relate to team size, however on closer inspection, both were small functions with less than ten

employees in each. The researcher therefore concludes that it is down to the traits and characteristics of the employees with the relevant teams that the scores vary so largely. Teamwork is said to be a process of perceived organisational support which involves collaboration on decision making, idea generation and problem solving (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). It is likely that employees in one function perceive this support to be readily available to them, while the other function feel the opposite. The other score which varied more than 30% from the organisation's average was talent management. As the score was 31% lower than the organisation's average score on this dimension, the researcher believes the organisation is not attracting and retaining the right people in this particular function and should consider this further.

In addition to the above, five functions varied between 20 and 29% from the organisations average on nine occasions. Most of the variances related to reward and recognition, however some groups showed variance of this level on the diversity, inclusion and belonging dimension and the senior leaders dimension. Regarding reward and recognition, it is important for the organisation to split and review this separately. As discussed in section 2.3.5, literature has shown that compensation has an impact on employee engagement (Bratton and Gold, 2007), therefore an analysis exercise should be carried out to understand if the employees within these functions are receiving compensation in line with the market average. Recognition has also been found to have an impact on employee engagement (Henryhand, 2009), as such the organisation should review if the functions are recognised in the same way as other internal functions. It is important to recognise the efforts of all functions equally to ensure one function is not

deemed to be more valued and appreciated by the organisation than another as this could have a negative impact on employee engagement.

On further analysis of the variance in Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, it appeared the higher scores were within larger functions and lower engagement scores were noted in smaller functions of less than 10 employees. As a larger team is more likely to have increased diversity, this result is not surprising. It may be beneficial for the organisation to bear this in mind when recruiting / promoting within smaller functions going forward. Improving diversity within these smaller functions will not only positively impact the employee engagement score on this dimension, but will also benefit the function by promoting creativity and innovation which in turn increases the organisation's competitive advantage and puts them ahead of their competitors in the marketplace (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2004 and Myaskovsky, Unikel, & Dew, 2005).

Regarding Senior Leaders, the scores that varied 20-29% from organisation average held a positive variance. Upon further analysis, these were corporate functions which would be closer to senior leaders than other functions within the organisation. These functions could perhaps have a better insight into the strategic direction of the organisation and it is possible they could have work or personal relationships with senior leaders that employees in other functions in the organisation may not have. Research has proven there to be a link between strong engagement levels and understanding business goals (Lather and Jain, 2015 and Breevaart et al, 2014).

Overall, 78% of the functions had variances of +/- 10% from the organisations average, these were spread across the various dimensions and further proves that function has an impact on employee engagement.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study set out with the objective of identifying and analysing the employee engagement challenges a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland faced. The sub-objective of the research was to identify if gender, age, length of service, job level or function had an impact on employee engagement levels.

The research has many strengths and has achieved the main objective and the sub-objectives. The strong survey response rate and large data set the research was based on proved to be invaluable as the researcher had enough data to be comfortable that the findings were legitimate. Had the research been carried out on a small population, or had a poor response rate, the researcher would have concerns about the validity of the research results. Another positive is that the study used a standardised benchmark protocol and can therefore be used elsewhere for comparative purposes. Finally, the study was novel in that it looked at the breakdown of employee engagement through different dimensions and varying demographics. It has added greatly to previously limited research on whether variables such as age, gender, length of service, job level and function have an impact on employee engagement levels, which is important in the modern workforce that is extremely diverse.

The researcher also found there were limitations with the research. The main limitation was the lack of detail when working with quantitative data. The researcher feels additional verbatim comments on the survey could have given further insight into the scores and would have been beneficial. As a result, the researcher has recommended the organisation attempt to gather this detail via focus groups. The researcher also noted that having access to individual's scores would have been beneficial for further analysis. Finally, the researcher felt it would have been advantageous to have information on the organisation's current HR practices, strategies, challenges etc. to understand and further analyse if there is a link between them and the survey results.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed in more detail the findings of the survey from Chapter 4. The research question 'what are the main employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland?' was answered when talent management was very clearly identified as the lowest scoring index of the survey across the entire organisation. The researcher discussed in further detail why the organisation may face these challenges in relation to reward and recognition, career development and opportunities and talent management.

From there the chapter discussed the key engagement challenges faced by the various groups in the organisation. Gender did not appear to have an impact on employee engagement, therefore there was little to discuss in

terms of challenges specific to gender. Employees engagement levels did however vary depending on age, with the 35-44 age group identified as the least engaged age group. The discussion focused on the unique challenges this group faced as they are at a time in their lives where they have more responsibility than before, i.e. with mortgages and children. Length of service was also found to have an impact on employee engagement and the researcher discussed in detail the concerning decline in employee engagement levels after 6 months with the organisation. The researcher concluded that the employee and organisation's expectations were not aligned and this was having a huge impact on engagement scores. The researcher discussed job level and how it is critical for senior leaders to be engaged as this filters down through the organisation. Finally, the researcher discussed the challenges faced by functions which related to talent management and teamwork.

The next chapter will offer recommendations to the organisation on ways in which they can address some of these key challenges and try to improve upon the lower engagement scores.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters provided an insight into the key employee engagement challenges faced by a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland. This chapter will provide a conclusion to the research and recommendations on how the organisation may improve upon the key challenges identified in order to increase the organisation's employee engagement score. The recommendations will take into consideration all that has been discussed to this point and costings and timelines for implementation will be provided for each recommendation.

6.2 Conclusion

Employee engagement as a concept has been around for over 30 years (Kahn, 1990). It has evolved and developed over the years to fit today's working world and is now truly embedded in HR and Senior Leaders agenda's since the 2000's. This is due to research and studies on organisations proving the benefits associated with employee engagement and developing a strong business case. While organisations may have viewed the benefits associated with employee engagement such as increased productivity and profitability, increased customer satisfaction, lower turnover and increased competitive advantage as a nice-to-have, they cannot ignore the negative impact a disengaged employee can have on an organisation's bottom line. This has led to more organisations

measuring and attempting to increase employee engagement levels than ever before.

The aim of this research was to understand the main employee engagement challenges a large multi-national organisation in the Food and Beverage Industry in Ireland face. Overall, the organisation the study was conducted on had a good employee engagement score of 43% in comparison with the national average of 23%. The organisation did however, face employee engagement challenges, mainly around talent focus, whereby the organisation was deemed to put the needs of the customer ahead of the needs of their employees. This was addressed in the research as an outdated approach and studies which showed employee engagement and customer satisfaction go hand in hand were highlighted. It would therefore be more effective for the organisation to shift their focus from the customer to the employee to obtain the most positive business results. The research sub-objectives aimed to determine if gender, age, length of service, job level and function had an impact on employee engagement levels. This research proved that gender does not have an impact on employee engagement levels, but that age, length of service, job level and work function do, and that each category has their own unique challenges. The research highlighted the benefit of measuring the engagement scores by these demographics in order to develop a targeted approach for increasing employee engagement levels.

In conclusion, it is evident that employee engagement has a profound impact on an organisation's success and that it is critical now more than ever to track, measure and encourage employee engagement.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Talent Focus

In Chapter 5, the researcher outlined the need for the organisation to put employee experience and engagement ahead of customer focus. Engaged employees will naturally want to satisfy the customer and as such the focus on employees will result in a higher return on investment than customer focus alone (Kumar and Pansari, 2015). In addition to this, the researcher has further recommendations to improve employee engagement scores on the Talent Focus index.

The researcher suggests that a 'promote from within' strategy is implemented to improve employees' views and engagement scores on career development & opportunity. This will ensure employees within the organisation are afforded the opportunity to grow and develop instead of the organisation hiring outside talent immediately. The researcher proposes internal to external fill ratios are put in place and measured as a key performance indicator. It is not possible for an organisation to fill 100% of roles internally and external hires should be considered where skills gap are identified in the organisation, or to support diversity in the organisation. This strategy if implemented correctly would address not only the career opportunity and development dimension, but also the talent management dimension as the organisation would be focusing on upskilling employees and ensuring they have the right talent pipeline for the future. In addition, it could support with the reward and recognition dimension as promotions come hand-in-hand with pay increases. While this alone will not improve the reward and recognition dimension, it will

have a positive impact on it. Implementing this one recommendation could prove to be extremely impactful on employee engagement.

To further address the reward and recognition challenges, it is recommended that the organisation benchmark their salaries against the industry to identify and confirm they are aligned. If they are below industry standard, increasing salaries to meet the industry standard would be hugely beneficial to employee engagement levels (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). Costing information on benchmarking is provided in the next sections. Depending on the outcome of the benchmarking exercise this could prove costly to the organisation. In order to reduce the financial burden, any potential salary increases could be staged, as long as the staged plan is communicated with employees to achieve the objective of open communication and increased employee engagement.

On the recognition element of the reward and recognition dimension, the introduction of a meaningful recognition programme could also prove beneficial as studies have shown recognition programmes increase employee engagement (Henryhand, 2009). Often organisations have recognition awards where a small monetary voucher is gifted to the employee. This does not show thought or gratitude for the hard-work, commitment and dedication the employee has shown over months or even years to win the award. The organisation could instead have recognition awards with fewer winners or, on a less frequent basis and gift the winner a more thoughtful experience such as an overnight stay in a nice hotel with a partner or friend. This will have a more profound impact on employees, making them feel more valued and in turn increasing their engagement levels (Markos and Sridevi, 2010).

Timeline and Costings for a Promote from Within Strategy

A promote from within strategy can be implemented quickly once buy-in is sought from the organisation's leadership team. A key point for the organisation to analyse and discuss is whether the organisation has the talent pipeline ready for an internal promotion strategy. If the organisation has a strong talent pipeline, this strategy could be implemented within 6 months. If the talent pipeline is poor, the organisation should identify the roles they may need to backfill in the coming 1-3 years and those who are almost ready for promotion, they should then focus on training and developing that group to build the talent pipeline prior to implementation in order to ensure success when the strategy is implemented.

The financial implementation of the strategy depends on the status of the talent pipeline. If the organisation has a strong talent pipeline, a cost saving would occur on external recruitment. Research outlines that external hires are paid 18% more for the same role as internal hires (Silverman and Weber, 2012). If the organisation has a poor talent pipeline, there will be an increased learning and development cost to the organisation to upskill their employees. The researcher cannot put a cost against this as the skills gaps would need to be identified and a learning and development plan created before costings could be prepared.

Timeline and Costings for Benchmarking

For a population of 3,000 employees, a benchmarking exercise could be carried out in 6-8 weeks depending on the availability of a resource to execute it. Benchmarking can be carried out at no financial cost to the organisation as benchmarking reports and information is freely available (Brightwater, 2020).

Timeline and Costing for Implementing a Recognition Programme

Implementing a recognition programme can take time. For an organisation of this size, it could be implemented in 12 weeks. The organisation would need to form a recognition committee who would agree how best to run the programme and execute their plan. Time is also needed to communicate and promote the programme, for nominations to be sent to the recognition committee, for the committee to review said nominations and finally announce the winner and organise the gift. A budget of €500 would be required per award to allow for an overnight stay in a nice hotel with a meal for two.

6.3.2 Age Group

Sub-objective 2 of this research, that age has an impact on employee engagement was discussed in Chapter 5. The results in Chapter 4 showed that employees in the under 25, 45-54 and over 55 age groups had strong engagement levels and that the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups were the least engaged (See Figure 4.10 in Chapter 4). The discussion chapter identified that these less engaged employees may be at a time in their life where they have significant responsibility in their home lives, the examples given were children and mortgages (Effectory, 2020). In order to increase engagement levels, it would be beneficial to provide these employees with flexibility to support them with their work-life balance, which the literature acknowledged as a priority for these age groups (Reisenwitz and Iyer, 2009). The employee will still work the same hours, however productivity will increase as they will be more focused on the task as they are executing it at a time that is suitable to them. Flexible working has been proven to

improve employee job satisfaction and wellbeing and to reduce stress (CIPD, 2020 and Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2014). Flexible working will address the low engagement scores for this group but may also have a positive impact on other employees as according to Mercer (2020) two-thirds of employees feel flexible working is important to them.

It is also a time of financial burden for these age groups as mortgages and childcare are extremely expensive. In Mercer's Global Talent Trends Report in 2020, 71% of employees stated they wanted a 'midlife checkup' on their career, wealth and health. This links back to the recommendation in section 6.3.1 to become more transparent around career opportunities. Another way to improve engagement levels among this age group would be to provide health and wellbeing talks which can incorporate financial elements. Many organisations offer these supports through an employee assistance programme (EAP). These programmes offer dual-services whereby employees have access to a raft of information online, the option to discuss their health and financial wellbeing confidentially with specialists at no cost to them and EAP providers also offer services where they provide informational talks in the workplace on mental and physical health, financial wellbeing, etc..

Timeline and Costings for Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working hour arrangements are straightforward to implement. A timeframe of 12 weeks would allow the organisation time to prepare policies, get manager buy-in and communicate with the wider organisation. Flexible working is cost neutral for the organisation as the employee's hours and salary will remain the same.

Timeline and Costings for an Employee Assistance Programme

Employee Assistance Programmes are widely available and can be implemented in 4-6 weeks as the providers have the materials required readily available. Introducing an Employee Assistance Programme would cost in the region of €10 per employee for an organisation of this size. That equates to a €30,000 annual cost, plus an additional fee of €300 for any in-house talks. Should this prove too costly for the organisation, they could introduce the in-house talks only.

6.3.3 Length of Service

In section 5.3.3 the researcher discussed the concerning decline in engagement levels after the employee reached 6 months service. The decline in the engagement score on the reward and recognition index led the researcher to the conclusion that the expectations of the organisation and new employees were not aligned, particularly on the level of output required from the employee. In order to address this, the researcher recommends that management revisit how they position the roles when advertising and interviewing. It is especially important for the manager to be clear on expectations at interview stage as this is the perfect opportunity to discuss it further if the employee has concerns or questions.

Once the expectations are clear, the organisation can implement other initiatives to help the new employee settle in well and keep engagement levels up. A buddy system would be a positive initiative and can be implemented quickly at no financial cost. A buddy system involves the new joiner being partnered with a work colleague whom they can turn to if they have any questions and the role of the 'buddy' is to check in and

support the new employee to integrate and settle into their new role. This does not take away from management's responsibility to help the employee settle in and understand their role and the overall organisation, but it provides an extra layer of support to the employee.

The researcher would also recommend that the organisation begin to track exits from the organisation to understand if the company is losing people early in their employment journey, which can prove hugely expensive. In addition to tracking, introducing exit interviews would be beneficial as it supports the organisation in gaining an understanding into why employees are leaving the business, the organisation can then review this information to identify if trends appear and can deal with those trends accordingly.

Timeline and Costings on the buddy system and exit tracking

Both the buddy system and exit tracking can be implemented within 4 weeks. This timeframe allows the organisation time to develop these processes and agree who will manage them.

The implementation of a buddy system and exit tracking will not cost the organisation financially but may save them considerably in terms of recruitment and training costs and the cost of disengaged employees.

6.3.4 Functions

Section 5.3.5 of the previous chapter discussed the significant variances in engagement levels by function. Many of the key variances will be addressed by other recommendations in this chapter, for example reward and recognition scores varied by function, section 6.3.1 provides recommendations on how to improve these scores in poorly engaged

areas. In addition to the recommendations previously provided, the researcher would recommend that the organisation hold focus group discussions within the individual functions to enable employees to provide their feedback in light of the results. This would provide a more accurate view than if the organisation were to predict or assume they understand the issues in the lower scoring functions. This would hopefully address concerns such as poor teamwork highlighted by one function. Once managers understand the issue in more detail, they can implement a plan to improve upon it. Using the teamwork example above, the issue could be as simple as team members not being available to support one another due to conflicting schedules. A manager could quickly and easily address this by placing regular team meetings in the diary, during which employees have the opportunity to discuss their work challenges and request support.

Timeline and Costings for Focus Groups

The organisation should take 2-4 weeks to consider the results of the employee engagement survey and to allow them time to think of questions that would be beneficial to ask in the focus group discussions. Time will also be required to organise and hold the focus groups and importantly act upon the feedback provided. There is no cost associated with holding focus group discussions.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

When undertaking this study it was noted that there are very few longitudinal studies on employee engagement in Ireland. It would be beneficial to see longitudinal research on an organisation where the engagement was measured at a point in time and then measured again

after one or more years to understand the impact any improvement attempts may have had. Research was also light on the impact job level has on employee engagement and the researcher feels there is opportunity for further research here.

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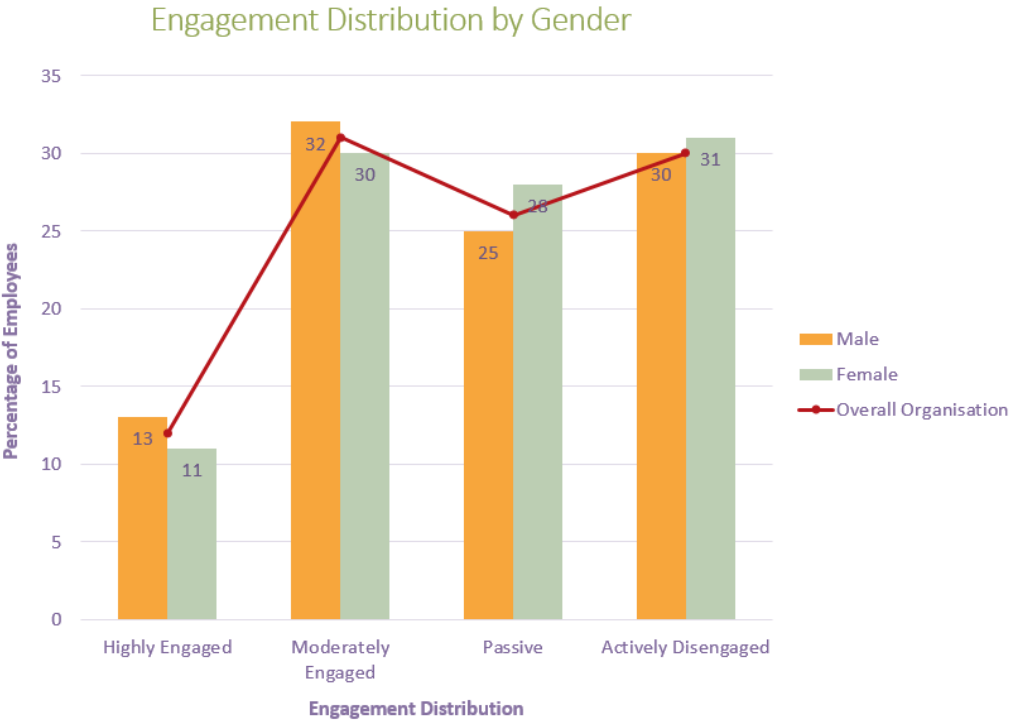
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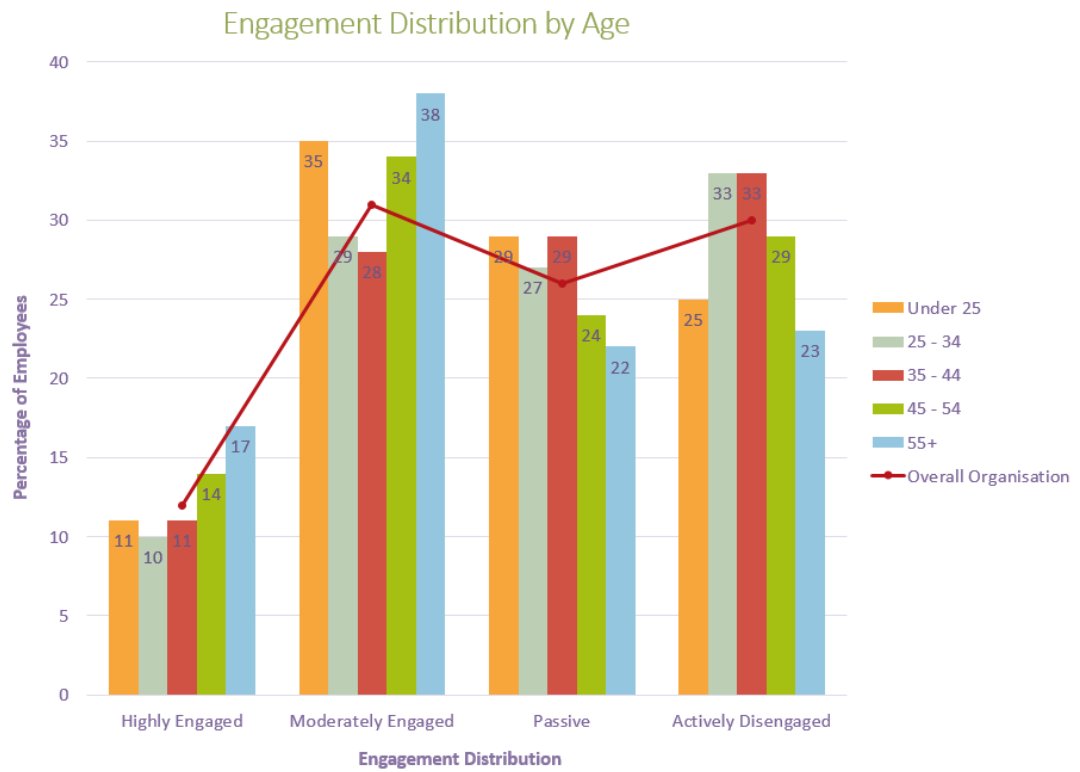
Appendix 1: Survey Questions

| Survey Questions | |
|------------------|---|
| 1 | I would not hesitate to recommend this organisation to a friend seeking employment |
| 2 | This organisation inspires me to do my best work every day |
| 3 | Given the opportunity, I tell others great things about working here |
| 4 | This organisation motivates me to contribute more than is normally required to complete my work |
| 5 | I rarely think about leaving this organisation to work somewhere else |
| 6 | It would take a lot to get me to leave this organisation |
| 7 | I understand the needs of our customers |
| 8 | We work hard to exceed the expectations of our customers |
| 9 | My colleagues are open and honest in communication |
| 10 | My colleagues collaborate effectively to achieve our goals |
| 11 | We have a work environment that is accepting of diverse backgrounds and ways of thinking |
| 12 | Where I work, there is good teamwork and cooperation between departments |
| 13 | I have the information I need to do my job well |
| 14 | We make high quality decisions at high speed |
| 15 | I am encouraged to respectfully challenge the way we do things |
| 16 | I have appropriate influence and decision-making authority in my job |
| 17 | The balance between my work and personal commitments is right for me |
| 18 | I can try new things even if they lead to occasional mistakes |
| 19 | Our work process allows me to be as productive as possible |
| 20 | Our organisational structure helps us achieve our goals |
| 21 | If I identify safety issues, I know my manager will act on it |
| 22 | My manager respects me |
| 23 | I have the training I need to ensure safety at work |
| 24 | Leadership demonstrates the high importance of Food Safety |
| 25 | My manager consistently prioritises customer focus |
| 26 | My manager supports my need to balance work and personal commitments |
| 27 | My manager recognises my efforts and results |
| 28 | I can report an instance of unethical conduct without fear of retribution |
| 29 | This organisation addresses safety issues quickly and effectively |
| 30 | My manager is open and transparent in communication |

| Survey Questions | |
|------------------|---|
| 31 | I feel that I a part of a team that cares about each other |
| 32 | This organisation is a socially and environmentally responsible organisation |
| 33 | The quality of our products / services is not compromised to meet deadlines |
| 34 | My manager provides valuable feedback throughout the year that allows me to improve my performance |
| 35 | There is a clear vision of what this organisation is trying to accomplish |
| 36 | Leadership is taking necessary actions now to position the company for long term success |
| 37 | I feel a personal connection to the organisation's purpose |
| 38 | My manager demonstrates a personal commitment to my continuous learning and development |
| 39 | My manager has helpful conversations with me which assist in developing and growing my career |
| 40 | Leadership is expert at running the business |
| 41 | I am treated like a valuable member of this organisation |
| 42 | Leadership is doing a good job of helping me understand the reasons for organisational change and the desired outcomes |
| 43 | Leadership makes me excited about the future of this organisation |
| 44 | Leadership treats employees as this organisation's most valued asset |
| 45 | I understand how my work relates to this organisation's goals |
| 46 | My job is a good fit for my abilities and experience |
| 47 | I feel that this organisation values diversity, inclusion (for example: age, gender, ethnicity, language, education qualifications, ideas and perspectives) |
| 48 | This organisation actively supports the learning and development of its employees |
| 49 | Compared with other places I might work, I feel I am fairly paid |
| 50 | This organisation is considered one of the best places to work for someone with my skills and experience |
| 51 | We are developing a workforce that adapts well to change |
| 52 | We are attracting the people we need to achieve our business goals |
| 53 | I am paid fairly for the contributions I make to this organisation's success |
| 54 | Overall, this organisation's benefits plans meets my (and my family's) needs well |
| 55 | My future career opportunities here look good |
| 56 | We are retraining the people we need to achieve our business goals |

Appendix 2: Engagement Distribution





Personal Learning Statement

Conducting this research has been the most challenging but rewarding experience of my education to date.

When initially faced with the task of selecting a research question, I spent much time considering the areas of HRM that most engage and interest me. I personally find employee engagement extremely interesting and now that the research is complete and I have had time to reflect on it, I am delighted to have selected this topic and gained in-depth knowledge on it.

I found the review of literature challenging during this research. As there is such a vast body of literature available on employee engagement, yet no concrete definition on the concept, it was important to find the most common and valued literature while also being confident I hadn't missed an interesting conflicting opinion.

On reflection of the research and looking at how it could have been improved, I noted that additional insight in the form of verbatim questions on the survey or through focus groups would have been beneficial as this would have provided further insights to work with, which could have further strengthened the recommendations.

I thoroughly enjoyed the analysis, discussion and recommendation sections of the research as I felt there was a real benefit to the organisation here, and that these sections were my opportunity to add to the body of amazing research on the topic of employee engagement. I found it rewarding to take the theory of what I have learned over the past two years of the Masters in Human Resource Management to discuss the

results of the research and to then couple that theory with my practical experience to offer suitable recommendations.