



**Engagement and retention of Generation Y employees
in the Irish fast-food chain**

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Abstract

Engagement and retention of Generation Y employees in the Irish fast-food chain

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the key drivers for engagement and retention of Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain. The author focused on six themes pointed by previous theories as enablers for engagement and retention: work-life balance, leadership, workplace culture, reward and recognition, career development opportunities, and learning and training. Qualitative research was chosen for this study, allowing the exploration of the research objectives with deeper detail through semi-structured interviews carried out with twelve individuals with work experience in the Irish fast-food chain. The aspects work-life balance, leadership, work environment and teamwork were unanimously classified as of great value to engage and retain the participants in the fast-food chain. The aspects career development opportunities, communication, learning and training and reward and recognition, despite having divided the participants' opinions, were rated by most of them as factors that impact their engagement and retention. The justification of the participants who disagreed with this was mostly that they do not consider it as influencing factors because they do not intend to work in fast food for a long time. Only the aspect diversity and inclusion was rated by almost all participants as having no influence on their engagement and retention, and the main justification was that they believe this aspect should be a basic principle of all companies. The findings of this research support a better understanding and knowledge of Generation Y employees' engagement and retention in the Irish context of fast-food restaurants, and it can be used as a tool for companies in this sector.

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List of Abbreviations

HR – Human Resources

HRM – Human Resources Management

Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Özçelik (2015), a generation comprises people who experienced historical and social events at the same stage in life. Naim and Lenka (2018) add to this defining generation as individuals who shared influential events and were born in the same life period. On the other hand, the CIPD (2015) classify the Generations that are present in the workforce into four groups:

- Baby Boomers, who are the people born between 1948 and 1963,
- Generation X, who were born between 1964 and 1978,
- Generation Y, who encompasses individuals born between 1979 and 1999, and
- Generation Z, who groups people born from 2000.

It is important to highlight that these divisions are not reflected in abrupt changes but as a gradual shift (Campbell, Twenge and Campbell 2017).

The constant expansion in the number of Generation Y employees in the workforce has always concerned employers and companies about motivating and retaining them worldwide (Mansor, Mun, Farhana and Tarmizi 2017). According to Maxwell, Ogden and Broadbridge (2010), Generation Y members are ambitious, self-focused, and have high initial career expectations. These employees grew up in a time of economic expansion but have been ageing during years of economic uncertainty and significant changes (Wong, Wan and Gao 2017).

Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to investigate and identify the critical facilitators of employee engagement and retention of Generation Y in the Irish fast-food chain. While some investigations were already conducted into the theory, there is no practical research in the Irish context. Moreover, the fast-food chain is an industry where employers need to stand out due to low wages and arduous work (Stewart and Rigg 2011).

According to the Central Statistics Office (2016), Generation Y corresponds to 70,2% of the Irish workforce in the Accommodation and food service activities and 59% of the total workforce in Ireland. Generation Y has been expanding their participation in the employment market since the retirement of Baby Boomers started coming on the way (Naim and Lenka 2018).

This research aims to deeply explore the practical elements that influence Generation Y employees' engagement and retention in the Irish fast-food chain through a qualitative study. The author investigated six main themes appointed by previous literature as enablers for employee engagement and retention. These themes include work-life balance (through flexible working hours), leadership, workplace culture (work environment, teamwork, diversity and inclusion, communication), reward and recognition, career development opportunities, and learning and training. The author aims to carry out this investigation through literature review and by conducting semi-structured interviews with Generation Y employees who work in fast-food restaurants in Ireland.

The structure of this research consists of a literature review, followed by the presentation of the research objectives, the research methodology, the data gathered from the interviews, the discussion of the topic, and the conclusion section, which encompasses the limitations of the research, the recommendations for future research, recommendations for business, and also the costs and timelines for applying these recommendations within companies. Lastly, the author terminates the conclusion section with a personal learning statement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Employee Engagement

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is about how individuals perform their workplace roles. Engaged people can express themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically in a positive way. Anitha (2014) defines employee engagement as the extent to which an employee is involved and committed to the company's goals and values. The meaning of employee engagement can be related to the concept of psychological contract, i.e., an existing reciprocal relationship between employee and employer, based on trust (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday 2004). This relationship can be easily broken, destroying years of collaboration. Therefore, companies should only try to increase the engagement levels if they are willing to invest adequate effort, time and money into it (Robinson et al. 2004).

Baron (2013) articulates that engagement is not a statement once it can vary between different companies or even generations, going beyond commitment and significantly impacting business outcomes. Employee engagement is also connected with the intention to remain in the company (Robinson et al. 2004).

Considering the engagement levels, Gallup (2017) affirms that there are three categories of employees:

- Engaged employees, who are high performers, and aim to execute their tasks with greatness. They are deeply interested and enthusiastic about their job,
- Not engaged employees, who only focus on the tasks that they were told to operate, not truly dedicating to work,
- Disengaged employees, who are discontented because their needs are not satisfied. Moreover, they perform poorly, and also can discouraging other staff to have a good performance.

Gallup (2017) also show that only 10% of employees are engaged in Western Europe. In Ireland, 13% of employees are classified as engaged, while 71% are not engaged and 16% are considered actively disengaged.

Aruna and Anitha (2015) explain that older generations (like Baby Boomers and Generation X) are usually more attracted by extrinsic benefits, such as reasonable

payments and compensations. However, engaging the Generation Y workforce is still challenging for many companies (Jha, Sareen and Potnuru 2018).

2.2 Drivers of employee engagement

According to Robinson *et al.* (2004), the basis for employee engagement is the sense of being valued and involved. Among the components that set up this feeling, the authors highlight the extent to which employees have a channel to expose their ideas to managers (including participation in decision-making), the opportunities for career development and how much the employer is concerned with the employees' welfare. Some components that play an important role in the promotion of employee engagement are detailed below.

2.2.1 Leadership

Managers' behaviours are associated with employee engagement outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation, proactivity and good performance (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014). A trustful relationship with a leader promotes psychological safety, leading to employee engagement (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014). Managers that aim to engage employees should support and empower their staff, respecting, appreciating and committing to their development (Macleod and Clarke 2009). An engaging leader maintains staff informed, motivating them to perform well and develop their careers, providing employees new opportunities (Robinson *et al.* 2004).

Leadership plays a critical duty in Generation Y engagement and retention. In this manner, management behaviours should be one of the first concerns of organisations to improve workers' performance (Mansor *et al.* 2017). Strategic leadership gives an awareness of direction and is focused on developing and retaining its employees (Naim and Lenka 2018). Studies reveal that employee engagement is a reasonable outcome when leaders are inspiring while micromanaging establishes disengagement and decreases productivity (Anitha 2014; Kilber, Barclay and Ohmer 2014).

2.2.2 Work-life balance

Work-life balance became an important enabler of employee engagement, especially for Generation Y employees. This concept is designated as an appropriate level of balance between various aspects of someone's life, balancing work and personal lives, which is essential for employee performance in the workplace (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014). Crumpacker and Crumpacker (2007) outline that Generation Y employees invest more energy in their personal lives and value having free time to hang out with friends and family and play their hobbies (Kilber et al., 2014). Furthermore, if they cannot get it, they are not afraid to leave their jobs, once their priority is to keep their private lives and relationships healthy.

Employers can help employees to reach a work-life balance by offering more flexible working time options, compresses working weeks, remote working, job sharing and leave programmes, for example (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014; Wilkinson, Redman and Dundon 2017). Companies that already fostered a culture of more flexible rosters have experienced a decrease in turnover rates (Kilber et al. 2014).

2.2.3 Reward and recognition

According to Gallup (2017), employees that have their job recognized and receive daily feedback or rewards from their bosses are three times more expected to be engaged than those who receive it once a year or do not receive it. Rewarding employees is a fundamental aspect of employee engagement once it motivates staff, making them more focused on their professional and personal development (Anitha 2014). Rewards encompass financial and non-financial compensation, including bonuses, holidays extension, vouchers, and discounts (Anitha 2014). Feedback or other types of recognition have the power to create a more trustful, integrated, and transparent employment relationship (Jha et al. 2018).

Mansor et al. (2017) suggest that reward and recognition is a powerful enabler of Generation Y levels of engagement. Millennials expect their bosses to be honest and provide meaningful and immediate feedback (Aruna and Anitha 2015; Cekada 2012).

Tulgan (2009) highlights that Generation Y grew up with parents that encouraged their confidence and who also used to reward them for their behaviour and performance. For this reason, adjustments and regular feedback work as a mechanism for improving Generation Y performance (Kilber et al. 2014). Cekada (2019) also complements that this generation provides immediate feedback, thus they also expect the same in return.

2.2.4 Workplace culture

All the companies have a culture, which defines how a company works. Workplace culture is a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that set up an organisation's foundation (Yahya, Yean, Johari and Saad 2015; Laker 2021). The organisational culture can impact staff performance, behaviours, productivity and commitment, defining a good work environment (Yahya et al., 2015; Indeed 2021).

According to Laker (2021), companies with a positive workplace culture have four times more increase in their revenue than others. To foster a good organisational culture, it is necessary having leaders that communicate the company values and provoke employee engagement. A strong workplace culture can be a multiplier when businesses are running well (Laker 2021).

A positive workplace culture develops teamwork, open a channel for diversity, increases productivity and efficiency, intensify employee retention, and create a beneficial work environment. I also reduce the levels of employee burnout (Agarwal 2018). Organisational culture is a process, not an end (Laker 2021). In this research, organisational culture encompasses the following aspects: Diversity and inclusion, Teamwork, Communication and Work environment.

– Diversity and Inclusion

Promoting and supporting diversity means recognising the importance of individuals' differences and creating an inclusive and positive work environment whereas all employees can work and fully develop their potential (IDS HR Studies 2010). Managing diversity in the workplace is a crucial people management

approach to foster an inclusive work environment, once it involves recognise, value, and respect every employee as an individual (CIPD 2021).

In today's employment market, establish diversity and inclusion should be no longer a differential because employers should promote equal opportunities for everyone in the workplace. The results of this would be the engagement and retention of employees and a deeper understanding of their needs so that it can help the organisation operates better (IDS HR Studies 2010).

In Ireland, there are nine aspects that aim to protect individuals from being unfairly treated - covered by the Irish discrimination law: Membership of traveller community, disability, race (colour, ethnic and nationality), age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, religion and family status (CIPD 2021). People want to be valued at the workplace and work for a company with good practices and a solid and inclusive organisational culture (CIPD 2021).

– *Teamwork*

Anitha (2014) outlines that teamwork and the relationships among staff indicate the social aspect of employee engagement. A helpful and trustful team develop employee engagement (Kahn 1990). Generation Y is familiar with working in a team because this generation seeks interpersonal connection (Balda and Mora 2011; Kilber et al. 2014). They prefer teamwork to independent work because they have a huge demand for sharing and being informed about the ideas of their co-workers (Kilber et al. 2014).

– *Communication*

Communication also plays a critical role in fostering employee engagement once they value and appreciate being listened to and considered (Macleod and Clarke 2009; Doherty 2010; Bedarkar and Pandita 2014). This opportunity to voice their decisions and ideas shapes a feeling of attachment (Jha et al. 2018). A two-way communication grants employees to voice their opinions and concerns while keeping them aware of aspects that are important to them (Robinson *et al.* 2004).

– *Work environment*

The work environment is another significant component that strongly affects Generation Y performance and engagement. Unlike past generations, they need a less formal environment, fewer work hours and a joyful atmosphere to perform better (Aruna and Anitha 2015). A workplace that helps employees focus on their roles and establishes interpersonal connections is crucial to employee engagement. A good work environment encompasses working with a helpful team, admirable leaders, quality work settings, job security and a more casual atmosphere (Anitha 2014).

2.2.5 Career development opportunities

Generation Y employees seek opportunities to acquire knowledge and fulfil their developmental demands (Naim and Lenka 2018; Marais, Barnard and Mensele 2017). Panda and Sahoo (2015) argue that when the company gives the employees the chance to develop their career, they show commitment to the company not only to help it reach its objectives but also to fulfil their own goals.

2.2.6 Learning and Training

Training is an important aspect for the engagement of Generation Y, as it helps them to focus more on their work-life (Anitha 2014). Kilber et al. (2014) explain that employers should adapt training techniques to meet Generation Y learning preferences once this generation is characterised as independent learners, who are happy to find out the information they need, with little guidance. Further, this is a generation that prefers multimedia and visual learning mechanisms

2.3 Consequences of employee engagement

Employee engagement leads to employee performance enhancement and commitment, as well as an increased productivity, leading to the improvement of organisational performance (Anitha 2014; Bedarkar and Pandita 2014). Employee engagement is related to reciprocal benefits, once employees receive personal and

professional fulfilment, well-being, job motivation and satisfaction; while employers gain high performing employees, commitment, business growth and increased productivity (Saks 2006; CIPD 2019). Moreover, engaged employees are more fulfilled, which usually leads to their retention. An engaged worker also offers a better service, increasing customer satisfaction and the company's profits (Arora and Dhole 2019; Marais et al.2017)

When employees are engaged, they deliver better business results, performing beyond expectations, and positively influencing co-workers (Gallup 2017). Therefore, employee engagement can support companies to get a competitive advantage, as people can be considered a strength if managed correctly (Anitha 2014). Companies with high levels of employee engagement perform by 202% better than others, having 41% less absenteeism and 17% more productivity (Lotardo 2019; Gallup 2017).

2.4 Employee retention

Employee retention refers to approaches that companies adopt in order to keep good workers within the organisation, reducing the turnover of high-performance professionals (Marais *et al.* 2017; Özçelik 2015; Balakrishnan, Masthan and Chandra 2013). Employees are considered organisational resources; therefore, employers should avoid losing high performer workers (Balakrishnan et al. 2013). When an employee decides to leave an organisation, it implies a high cost to the company for hiring a new person for the position (Carranza et al. 2019).

Mahmoud, Fuxman, Mohr, Reisel and Grigoriou (2010) enhance that employee retention is increased when managers can accommodate the workers' needs and meet their expectations. Randhawa (2007) explains that employees' intentions to quit are inversely proportional to job satisfaction, i.e., the intentions to stay within the company are bigger when employees feel attached, valued and motivated (Naim and Lenka 2015). Among the measures that stimulate employees to continue working within the organisation, some HRM (Human Resources Management) practices can be listed: reward and recognition, financial compensation, supportive leadership, career development prospects, desirable and positive work environment, open communication, teamwork, honest exchange between the

company and its staff (Balakrishnan et al., 2013; Carranza, Soria, Lemus and Hernández 2019).

2.5 Engagement versus Retention

Retaining the best employees within a company means that employers need to engage their staff in the long term, resulting in commitment and attachment, which can be consequently reflected in employee retention (Doherty 2010; Balakrishnan et al. 2013). There is a clear relationship between engagement and retention once engaged employees are 87% more likely to remain in their companies, reducing the general levels of turnover and the costs related to it (Lotardo 2019; Gallup 2017). However, despite this connection, both strategies are independent and can be individually impacted (Figure 1). Organisations must analyse whether their workforce is engaged or only feels very comfortable to leave (Lotardo 2019).

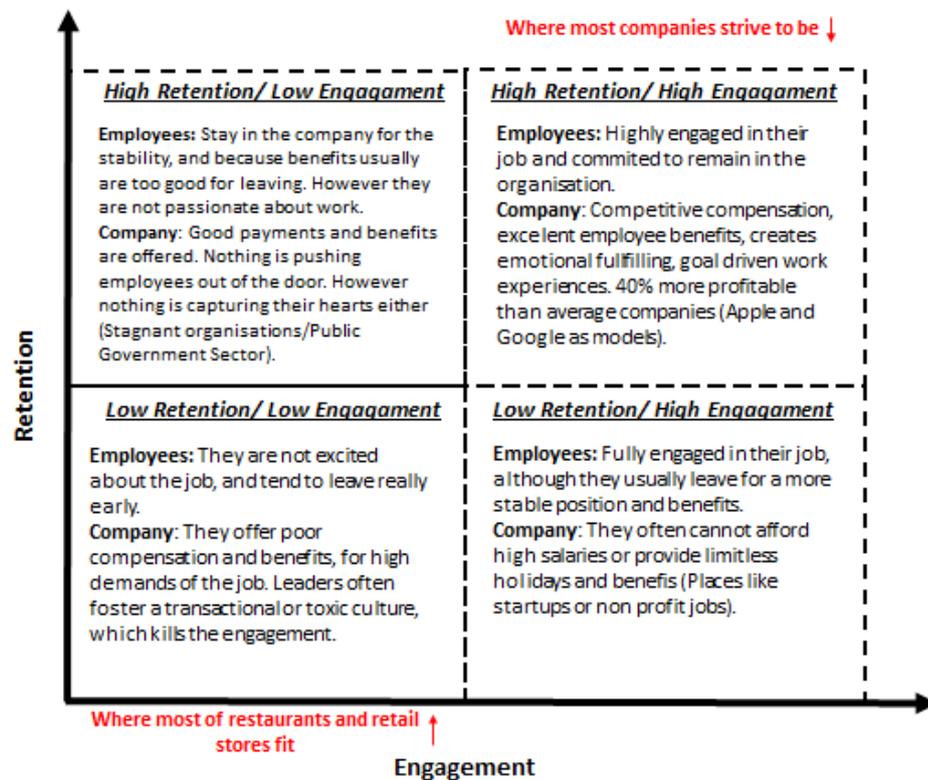


Figure 1 – Engagement versus Retention (Adapted from Lotardo, 2019).

2.6 Generation Y

According to Aruna and Anitha (2015), Generation Y is also called Millennials, Net Generation, Digital Natives and Sunshine Generation. Individuals from the Generation Y workforce have lived events such as the internet's evolution, social media's popularisation and environmental consciousness. Around 83% of Generation Y members keep their mobile phones close 24 hours per day and feel comfortable sharing their personal lives on the internet (Kilber et al. 2014). These experiences have a significant impact on their identity construction (Naim and Lenka 2018).

This generation is considered not afraid of taking risks and, in the majority, experienced a balanced financial life (Naim and Lenka 2018). Some of their primary values are commitment, loyalty, independence, and high education. Kilber et al. (2014) explain that Generation Y believes that education is crucial for work success and classify them as a cohort full of volunteerism, openness and tolerance. Aruna and Anitha (2015) complement describing them as open-minded, receptive, reliable, intelligent and social-concerned.

They are usually known for their self-confidence, demand, and high career prospects, admiring justice and fairness (Maxwell et al. 2010). They are also recognised for being good learners and multi-taskers (Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs 2013). Therefore, they expect that their employers match their expectations (Mansor et al. 2017).

2.7 Generation Y as employees

Generation Y employees are enthusiastic and like to set and reach their own goals. They also enjoy providing suggestions and solutions that can positively impact the company's achievements. This generation sees the world much different from previous cohorts. Therefore employers should adapt management approaches in order to engage and retain them (Kilber et al. 2014; Wong et al. 2017). This generation is specifically attracted to ethical companies with strong values and a more horizontal business model (Weyland 2011).

Aruna and Anitha (2015) outline that the previous generations working manners were more bureaucratic and concentrated more on following procedures. In contrast, Kilber *et al.* (2014) characterise Generation Y employees as:

- Multi-taskers – they can easily switch between tasks;
- Autonomy-seekers – they prefer being coached through their path than directed how to do it;
- Informal – they go for less formal meetings and more flexible, funny and relaxed working environments;
- Curious and visionary – they look for new and useful mechanisms and usually avoid more traditional approaches to complete tasks, and;
- Flexible - Marais *et al.* (2017) argue that work-life balance, relaxed atmosphere, training and development, immediate feedback, teamwork, transparent communication and being acknowledged for their job (Luscombe *et al.* 2013) are among the workplace preferences for Generation Y. Kilber *et al.* (2014), explain that Generation Y employees expect to interact with technology at the workplace. It grants them a more quickly information sharing and absorption.

Generation Y value their jobs; however, they do not allow them to drive their lives (Wong *et al.* 2017). They are keen on career development opportunities and enjoy having flexible working hours in an unconventional work environment. Besides it, these employees appreciate receiving honest and regular feedback, esteem trustful relationships (Kilber *et al.* 2014; Wong *et al.* 2017), and desire to be involved in the organisation's decision-making processes. (Luscombe *et al.* 2013).

It is challenging to engage the generation Y, and they can switch jobs more than five times in their work-life (Kilber *et al.* 2014; Maxwell *et al.* 2010). Wong *et al.* (2017) outline that Generation Y is more interested in performing a short, but meaningful job rather than achieving a lifelong job. Their intention to stay in an organisation ends when they feel that they do not have a worthwhile job (Aruna and Anitha 2015). Therefore, companies must incorporate strategies to value and motivate this new workforce.

Some authors see Generation Y through the other side of the spectrum, describing them as a lazy generation (Gani 2016). This cohort, however, defends themselves,

highlighting that this is not about laziness but about working in a smarter way (Gani 2016). Generation Y is also classified as “complainers”, as they do not like to handle poorly defined tasks, getting bored executing repetitive duties, and showing less commitment to organisations than past generations (Torsello 2019). Therefore, Generation Y is a challenging cohort to retain, and they can be unpredictable, with hard to handle behaviours (Torsello 2019).

2.8 Overview of the fast-food chain in Ireland

Currently, the fast-food chain is also referred to as Limited-Service Restaurants (LSR), i.e., restaurants that offer counter service, where customers usually order and pay for their food before eating (Bord Bia 2020). LSR encompasses several groups of restaurants:

- Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) - a subgroup which is characterised by offering counter service and sometimes drive-thru, often with a price guide;
- Fast-casual restaurants (FCR) – a subgroup in which menu items are generally prepared with better quality and fresh components, and their menu prices tend to be between QSR and Full-service restaurants (FSR) prices (€ 8 or more person), and;
- Food to go (FTG) – a subgroup that includes supermarkets, petrol stations and convenience stores (Bord Bia 2020).

This research, however, focuses only on the QSR and FCR.

The first appearance of fast-food restaurants in Ireland was in 1909 with the emergence of Fish and Chips shops – around 20 stores were opened in Dublin, led by Italian immigrants. In the 1950s, Chinese and Indian restaurants and take away were opened on the island. From the late 1970s, international franchising as the giant McDonald’s arrived in the country, and many companies started adopting the franchising business model in the 1980s. In the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of international fast-food restaurants such as Domino’s Pizza and Burger King (Beere 2017).

According to Bobek and Whickham (2015), there were approximately 2500 licensed and 1300 non-licensed restaurants in Ireland. Excluding only fast-food

chains, this sector is mainly owner-managed. The restaurant sector is the second large in the Irish Hospitality Industry, accounting for 30% of the industry turnover and 34% of employment in 2010 (Ernst and Young 2013). In this context, the Irish Central Statistics office (2016) shows that Generation Y employees correspond to 70,18% of the workforce (approximately 55 thousand of people) in the Accommodation and Food Service activities in Ireland. In a broader spectrum, this cohort corresponds to 59,06% of the general Irish workforce (approximately 1 million and 343 thousand of people).

Table 1 – Generation Y in the Irish workforce and Accommodation and Food Service Activities.

Age group	Accomodation and Food Service	Percentage	Total at work	Percentage
<i>15-19 years</i>	3.004	2,32%	26.710	1,18%
<i>20-24 years</i>	16.219	12,53%	143.917	6,33%
<i>25-34 years</i>	40.631	31,40%	561.501	24,71%
<i>35-44 years</i>	33.962	26,25%	636.834	28,02%
<i>45-54 years</i>	21.347	16,50%	509.395	22,41%
<i>55 years - over</i>	14.239	11,00%	394.246	17,35%

Adapted from Central Statistics Office, 2016.

People working in the hospitality industry are relatively high level educated. The high number of unqualified nature positions offered for this industry and the level of education reveal cases of employment below the competence level (Bobek and Whickham 2015).

Table 2 – Accommodation and Food Services Education Level

Education Level	Number of people	Percentage
<i>Primary (incl. no formal education)</i>	5.677	5,48%
<i>Lower secondary</i>	13.185	12,73%
<i>Upper secondary</i>	45.583	44,02%
<i>Third level non-degree</i>	6.255	6,04%
<i>Third level degree or higher</i>	17.642	17,04%
<i>Not stated</i>	2.607	2,52%
<i>Those whose full time education has not ceased</i>	12.600	12,17%

Adapted from Central Statistics Office, 2011.

According to the Central Statistics Office (2011), migrants correspond between 33% and 40% of employees in the Irish Hospitality industry. These significant education levels can be explained by the number of non-Irish working in this industry, once foreigners usually accept lower opportunities due to lack of the language, or because the first jobs will serve as a ladder for better ones. This industry also employs people who are still studying; therefore, these high educational levels might be justified for third-level students and part-time workers (Bobek and Whickham 2015).

Since the 1990s, some issues have been affecting fast-food restaurants: employee shortage, minimum wage making positions hard to be occupied, and unsuccessful in attracting a quality workforce (Bobek and Whickham 2015; Beere 2017). The jobs in this industry have a temporary character for the employees due to its bad conditions, like exorbitant working hours and little opportunities for career development (Deery and Jago 2015). Moreover, other facts strengthen staff turnover, including lack of quality training, relatively low wages, unpleasant working conditions, high level of physical demands, emotional demands related to customer service, and limited career development opportunities (Bobek and Whickham 2015; Deery and Jago 2015).

The accommodation and food services sector has been the most economically impacted sector after COVID-19 (Power 2020). The FCR had the worst performance of the three subgroups of the LSR because these restaurants are usually placed in good locations of the city, been directly affected by the lockdowns and by the shortage of tourists in the towns (Bord Bia 2020). The QSR, especially those with a strong focus on takeaways and deliveries, maintained a better financial situation than the other two subgroups during the lockdowns (Bord Bia 2020).

The numbers presented above showing that Generation Y is the most employed generation in the Accommodation and Food Services sector, the issues that fast-food restaurants in Ireland have been facing since 1990, and the fact that this chain was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic make this topic worthy of study. It is crucial to understand why this Generation Y is still a very present age group in this industry, even with all the problems highlighted above. While some investigations were already conducted into the theory, there is no practical research in the Irish context.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

Considering the importance of a deeper comprehension of aspects that can influence the engagement and retention of Generation Y, this research aims to identify the key drivers for engagement and retention of the Generation Y working in the Irish fast-food chain.

Besides explaining the concepts of engagement and retention, the research also throws light on six drivers specifically: work-life balance, leadership influence, workplace culture (diversity, teamwork, communication, work environment), reward and recognition, career development opportunities and learning and training. (Figure 2).

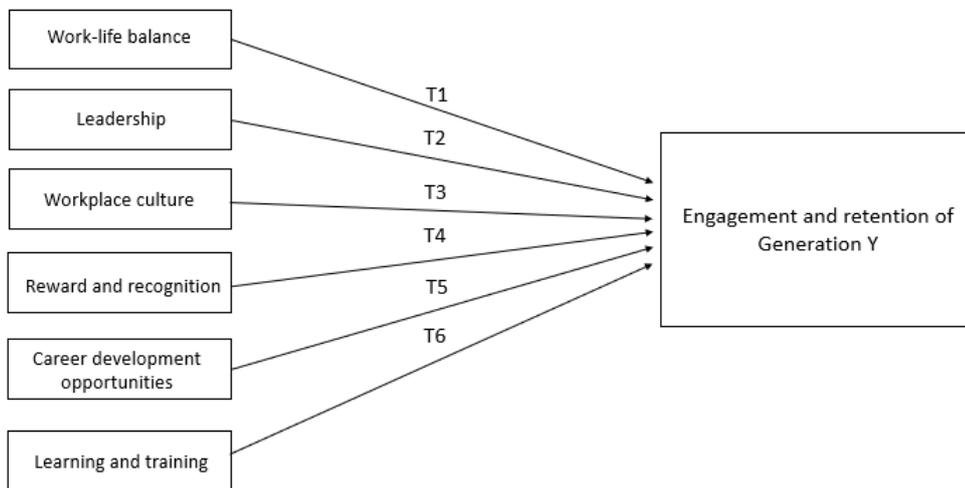


Figure 2 – Themes aborded on this research to assess the key drivers to engagement and retention of Generation Y in the Irish fast-food chain.

3.1 Research Objectives

- To explore a range of literature and develop an understanding of Generation Y, employee engagement and retention concepts and approaches.
- To understand what employee engagement and retention means to Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain.

- To examine if the engagement and retention enablers specified by previous researchers are equivalent to those identified by Generation Y employees from fast-food restaurants in Ireland.
- To investigate how fast-food restaurants from Ireland could improve their engagement and retention approaches, especially with Generation Y.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

According to Maylor and Blackmon (2005), research is the process of discovering new facts and exploring the unknown. However, it does not need to be a big discovery or a pretty new concept, but also a new or improving evidence, analysis, scenarios or contexts, methodologies and theories. A research can also bring small new knowledge to aspects that are already known.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) define business and management research as the process of exploring aspects of business and management, while Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) describe it as the academic study of subjects related to organisations and business. It encompasses the areas of Strategies, Human Resources Management (HRM), Marketing, Organisational performance and behaviours, Finance, Accounting, Economics, the Management process, Information Systems and International Business (Maylor and Blackmon 2005; Bell et al. 2019). The purpose of business research is to figure out the circumstances that individuals and organisations face on a daily basis (Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange 2020).

Saunders et al. (2019) call attention to the importance of having quality in the research methods applied in terms of planning, collecting and analysing data, reporting and gathering conclusions. Research methods are measures of analysis and interpretation of data and information, with the aim to come up with solutions (Ghauri et al. 2020). The methodology applied in this research was based on the Research Onion (Saunders et al. 2019). The diagram (Figure 3) was used to explain and clarify the proceeding used for data collection and analysis on this paper (Saunders et al. 2019).

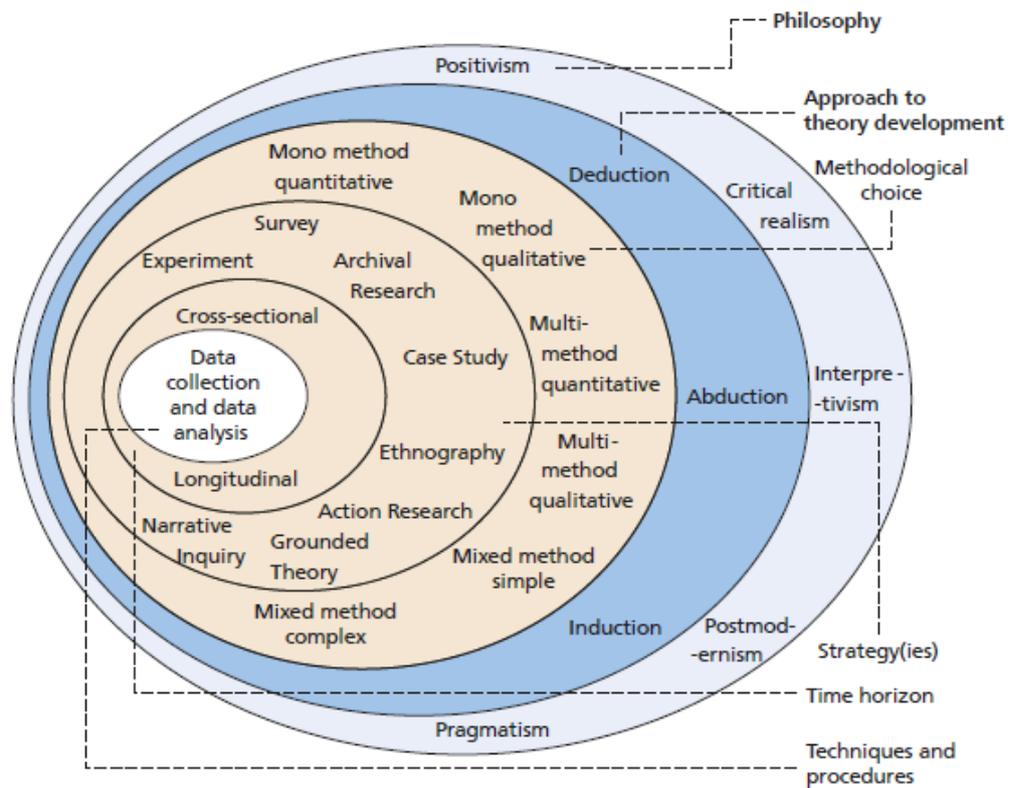


Figure 3 – The Research 'Onion' (Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

In order to acquire the information to achieve the research purpose, this chapter covers various aspects, including the research philosophy, approaches and strategies, the data collection and analysis methods chosen, population and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research Philosophy involves a set of principles and assumptions about knowledge expansion (Saunders et al. 2019). Maylor and Blackmon (2005) outline that research philosophies define the research beliefs in a specific field and disclose the hypotheses that regulate the research approaches. According to Bell et al. (2019), all the research are supported by philosophical assumptions, which frame the research itself. Research Philosophy refers to premises regarding the world view from which the research was managed.

All research philosophies make assumptions in three major scopes:

- **Ontology:** Refers to assumptions about the nature of the reality and the world (Saunders et al. 2019; Maylor and Blackmon 2005). It is about what is considered to exist, and thus, can be studied (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). Bell et al. (2019) define it as an understanding of the reality. It is about how the researchers see the world, your research objects, and what they accept to be real (Saunders et al. 2019; Maylor and Blackmon 2005).
- **Epistemology:** According to Saunders et al. (2019), Epistemology involves assumptions about knowledge. It is about what can and cannot be considered knowledge in a particular area (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). It is the understanding of how people can perceive the reality. It is about how people know what they know, what can be considered authentic knowledge, and how it can be transferred to other people (Saunders et al. 2019). Bell et al. (2019) explain that epistemology follows the logic from Ontology: a specific ontological position – a particular understanding of what reality is – will trigger an epistemological position – how we can acquire knowledge of that given reality.
- **Axiology:** It is about the values and ethics of the research process, considering how researchers can manage their own values and embrace the research components' values (Saunders et al. 2019).

The data in this research was analysed under the **Epistemology** position, which is about knowledge development in a particular research field. The author wanted to expand the knowledge about retaining and engaging Generation Y employees who work in the Irish fast-food chain. The interviewees' opinions were accepted as knowledge and were considered valuable inputs in this sphere of research.

It is also important to consider the main philosophical positions, which according to Saunders et al. (2019), are: Positivism, Critical Realism, Interpretivism, Post-modernism and Pragmatism. However, research philosophies used in academic studies are often divided into Positivism and Interpretivism. Interpretivism highlights that human beings are different from physical phenomena once they create meanings. The social field cannot be studied in the same way of physical aspects (Saunders et al. 2019). The main purpose of the Interpretivism philosophy

is to develop a deep understanding of social worlds and frameworks. People are different, have distinct backgrounds, values, experiences and opinions. Therefore, the Interpretivism goes against the Positivism philosophy, which, in turn, tries to find universal principles that can be applied to all the individuals (Saunders et al. 2019).

The philosophy used in this research was **Interpretivism**, which is involved in the comprehension of human social interactions (Saunders et al. 2019). The author wanted to explore organisations strategies for engagement and retention from the perspective of a specific group of people (Generation Y).

4.3 Research Approach

The choice of a Research Approach must be coherent with the question that the researcher aims to answer (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). If the research purpose is theory testing, the researcher should opt for a Deductive approach. If it is concerned with theory building, the researcher should go for an Inductive Approach (Saunders et al. 2019).

A Deductive approach establishes a process to test specific theories. From these theories, the researcher creates one or more hypotheses, and through data analysis is possible to check if they support the theory or not (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). A Deductive approach is when the research starts with a theory, and the strategy testes the theory. To test the theories, the research usually collects and analyses quantitative data and is supported by the Positivist philosophy (Saunders et al. 2019; Maylor and Blackmon 2005).

In an Inductive approach, the data leads to a theory (Saunders et al. 2019). Different from the Deductive approach, the Inductive will no generate hypotheses to test a particular theory. The researchers gather data from aspects they are studying and then develop a theory for it (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). The Inductive approach aims to better understand the essence of the issue and formulate a theory, usually expressed as a conceptual framework (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). This approach is concerned with the context where events happen. Therefore a study with a small

population sample is more pertinent. Under this approach, researchers are expected to work with qualitative data (Saunders et al. 2019).

An **Inductive approach** was adopted in this research. The researcher started with observations, followed by analysis, findings, and theory development, as these findings were integrated into existing theories, enhancing and enriching the knowledge in this field (Ghauri et al. 2020). Another reason for applying this approach was the aspiration to understand the context of fast-food restaurants in Ireland and consequently to work with qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with a small sample size of people.

Moreover, Saunders et al. (2019) refer to three different purposes of research design:

- Exploratory research: Through relatively non-structured interviews, the researcher aims to discover what is occurring and get new insights into the situation. The researchers usually ‘suspects’ of particular circumstances, observe, gather information and develop explanations (Ghauri et al. 2020).
- Descriptive research: It aims to get a detailed figure of people or situations. It can be considered an extension of part of an exploratory study and a precursor to a part of an explanatory study. The researcher must have a clear image of the object of the study before the data collection.
- Explanatory research: This type of study aims to assess a particular situation and then explain, correlate, and justify the relationship among variables.
- Evaluative research: Aims to form an idea of how well and why something happens or works. With this data, the researcher compares it to existing theory.

Exploratory research was applied for the purpose of this dissertation. An Exploratory design allowed the researcher to use open-ended questions on the interviews in order to get more insights on engagement and retention of Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain, to analyse and also to theorise de data gathered.

4.4 Research Strategy

A research strategy can be described as a project about how the researcher will answer the research question. The fundamental aspect for choosing the research strategy is to reach a practical level of consistency through the research design, which will enable the researcher to answer the research questions (Saunders et al. 2019). Qualitative studies are often associated with the following strategies: Action Research, Case Study Research, Ethnography, Grounded Theory and Narrative Inquiry (Saunders et al. 2019).

For the purpose of this dissertation, the author developed a **Grounded Theory** strategy in order to collect qualitative data to be used for Exploratory research purposes. According to Saunders et al. (2019), Grounded Theory was developed in order to analyse and understand social aspects and experiences, like in this case, where the strategy was used to explore business and management matters. This strategy presents a systematic approach to data collection and analysis by establishing analytical codes that come up from the interview data (Saunders et al. 2019). These codes are helpful to label groups of data with similar meanings. It summarises the content of the data from different interviews, for example, and group them, easing the data analysis process (Saunders et al. 2019).

4.5 Choice of Methods

Quantitative data often generates or use numeric data through data collection approaches such as questionnaires, which are usually analysed using statistics. Qualitative research, in turn, does not generate or use non-numerical data, and it collects and analyses data through interviews (for example) and data categorisation, respectively (Saunders et al. 2019). However, this explanation is relatively narrow and unsatisfactory for deciding between qualitative and quantitative research once methods can be combined in practice (Figure 4) (Saunders et al. 2019).

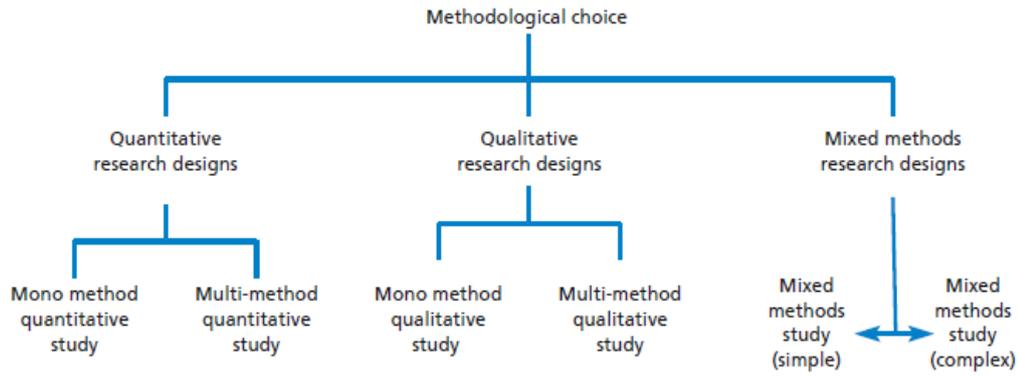


Figure 4 – Methodological choice (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

For the purpose of this research, **Qualitative methods** were used by conducting individual semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3) with Generation Y employees or former employees from the Irish fast-food chain in order to get more profound knowledge about the facts that make them engaged and influence them to remain in the company they work.

4.6 Time Horizons

To answer the research question, the researcher can choose between two time-horizons studies: Longitudinal and Cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies are conducted on the same population over a long period of time (Cooper and Schindler 2014). In the Cross-sectional study, all the data collected is from the same period of time (Ghauri et al. 2020). Considering that the total working time for the dissertation writing was of twelve weeks, which do not permit tracking changes over a long period of time., the time horizon applied in this research was **Cross-sectional research**, and the time frame for the data collection was four days.

4.7 Qualitative data primary collection and Population

Qualitative data collection techniques can be divided into indirect techniques (observation and projective) and direct techniques (focus groups, in-depth interviews, and semi-structured interviews) (Bell et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), in semi-structured interviews, the researcher comes up with

predetermined themes and crucial questions to head the conduct of the interviews. However, this is not a stuck process, and this ‘guide’ must be flexible in order to let the conversation flow. Researchers can possibly eliminate themes or change questions in some interviews, depending on the situation they face, which can require more creativity from the interviewer (Saunders et al. 2019; Cooper and Schindler 2014). Moreover, this kind of interview mainly uses open questions, which stimulate the participants to expand their answers (Saunders et al. 2019).

The researcher conducted online semi-structured interviews (via Zoom) with twelve Generation Y employees who are currently working or have already worked in fast-foods in Ireland for at least six months. The interviewees were selected using a non-probability sample based on a conventional approach, with some participants being part of the author’s working connections and the others randomly selected after a social media (Facebook) publication to recruit volunteers.

4.8 Data analysis

Qualitative data are expected to be rich in details and contribute to a deeper analysis, where aspects can be divided into themes that come up from the analysis (Saunders et al. 2019; Ghauri et al. 2020; Maylor and Blackmon 2005). Therefore, the interviews were **video-recorded** (via Zoom) and **transcribed** afterwards. Transcription is the process of accurately reproduce the interviewees' answers in a written form. As a matter of fact, not only what they have said, but also how they have said it (tone, expressions, reactions and gestures) (Saunders et al. 2019; Ghauri et al. 2020).

The analysis technique employed in this research was **Thematic Analysis**. This technique consists of coding qualitative data to determine themes and patterns to reach a broader and deeper analysis and subsequently to answer the research question (Saunders et al. 2019). This method often involves four phases: becoming familiar with the data, coding the data, searching for themes, and fostering relationships between them, and refining themes and testing prepositions (Saunders et al. 2019).

Table 3– Summary of research methodology

<i>Position</i>	Epistemology
<i>Philosophy</i>	Interpretivism
<i>Approach</i>	Inductive
<i>Design</i>	Exploratory research
<i>Strategy</i>	Grounded Theory
<i>Method</i>	Mono-method qualitative study
<i>Time Horizon</i>	Cross-sectional Research
<i>Population</i>	Generarion Y employees working in Irish fast-food chain
<i>Data collection</i>	Video-recorded semi-structured interviews
<i>Data Analysis</i>	Thematic Analysis

4.9 Ethical Considerations

According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), ethical considerations must be taken in every type of research, and everyone involved must exhibit ethical conduct and behaviours. Therefore, ethical considerations involve principles and values that lead the way the researcher manages the research processes to not cause any harm or discomfort to the people involved (Ghauri et al. 2020).

Regarding this research, the author took all the ethical measures to avoid any ethical issues along the different stages of the research. The author also emailed the participants a Consent form (Appendix 2) and an informative with all the details about the research (Appendix 1). All the information and data acquired by the online semi-structured interviews were only used for the purpose of this dissertation. The author presented integrity and responsibility in every stage of the research and respected the privacy of all parts involved. In addition to this, the participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and the interviewees could refuse to give particular information, besides the right to withdraw their information until two weeks after the interviews were done. The interviewee's anonymity was preserved.

Chapter 5: Analysis and findings

5.1 Introduction

After presenting the research objectives, and the methodology applied for data collection and analysis, this chapter presents the research outcomes. The results were classified in the six main themes previously commented on in this dissertation:

- Work-life balance;
- Leadership;
- Workplace culture (Diversity and Inclusion, Communication, Work environment, and Teamwork);
- Reward and Recognition;
- Career development opportunities, and;
- Learning and training.

At the end of this section, the author presents an overview of what engagement and retention mean to the interviewees.

5.2 Participants' profile

Twelve individuals were interviewed for the purpose of this research. All the participants are of Brazilian nationality, belong to Generation Y, and are currently working or have already worked in the Irish fast-food chain for at least six months. They are all current employees or former employees of the following restaurants based in Dublin County: Wow Burger, Five Guys, Wetherspoons, Supermacs, Wild and Green, Mc Donald's, Boojum, and Subway.

Eleven of the interviewees are female, and one of them is male, aged between twenty-six and thirty-four years old. The age, gender, length of work, role and employment situation (current employee/former employee) are described in the table below.

Table 4 – Participants’ profile.

Participant	Age	Restaurant	Gender	Lenght of work	Role	Employment Situation
P1	29	R1	Female	Six months	Floor staff	Former employee
P2	26	R2	Male	One and a half year	Staff Member	Former employee
P3	31	R3	Female	One year and three months	General staff	Former employee
P4	28	R2	Female	Nine months	Staff Member	Former employee
P5	27	R4	Female	Six months	General staff	Former employee
P6	27	R5	Female	One and a half year	Kitchen staff	Former employee
P7	31	R6	Female	Three years	Front of house staff	Current employee
P8	28	R7	Female	One year and eight months	General staff	Former employee
P9	27	R8	Female	Three years	Assistant Manager	Current employee
P10	34	R3	Female	Three years	Shift leader	Current employee
P11	28	R2	Female	Two and a half years	Team leader	Current employee
P12	31	R5	Female	Six months	General staff	Former employee

5.3 Work-life balance (Flexible working hours)

For all the participants, flexible working hours is one of the most important aspects related to retention, mainly because the work in a fast-food restaurant is very heavy. Eleven of them affirmed this is an aspect that also impacts their engagement, except for the participant number seven:

“I believe flexible working hours have a strong impact on my retention because it is an easy thing to get if I need. But it is not related to my engagement once I feel discouraged to go to work.” (Interviewee P7)

Flexible working hours in this research – considering the busy pace environment of a fast-food restaurant - refers to the possibility to ask for days off, swap shifts or book holidays. Most participants said they have easy access to these three aspects, which is also applied to their co-workers. The participant 8 (P8) declared she has easy access to ask for days off; however, swap shifts was quite difficult:

“I could easily request days off, but it had to be at least two weeks in advance. Changing shifts was pretty hard. (...) I could never refuse or ask not to work the night shifts; otherwise, they wouldn’t give me hours.” (Interviewee P8).

The participant P7, different from the others, highlighted that the benefit of flexible working hours does not apply to all the employees in the restaurant that she works for:

“I have access to flexible working hours. The fewer medical certificates you have, and the better you do your job, the more credibility you gain with management, which makes this aspect more viable. I don’t believe this is something all employees have easy access to.” (Interviewee P7)

The participant P5 believes that flexibility in working hours is something that is part of her daily routine because the store owner in the past was also an employee in the fast-food industry:

“The owner of the store where I worked – before having his own business – was an employee in the fast-food industry for many years. Therefore, I think he understands the need to provide time flexibility for his staff.” (Interviewee P7)

Some participants made it clear that flexible working hours is directly connected with work-life balance. Having flexibility in work helps them to balance it with other things they have, want or need to do:

“I was able to reconcile two jobs and the days off of both precisely because I had this flexibility. It was something I loved because I was able to plan my life outside of work too.” (Interviewee P3)

“The facility of requesting days off or swapping shifts was amazing. I could easily plan trips and resolve emergencies.” (Interviewee P4)

“It was very easy to swap shifts or work at specific times to be able to study or keep other jobs.” (Interviewee P6)

“Flexible working hours is a crucial aspect for me. Currently, I’m only working on weekends because I’m doing my masters. The general manager makes the schedule flexible according to the availability of employees.” (Interviewee P9)

In summary, flexible working hours is an important aspect that directly impacts employee engagement and retention, as it facilitates the management of the life outside of work. In other words, flexible working hours make it easier for employees to balance life and work.

5.4 Leadership

When asked if leadership is an aspect that influences their engagement and retention, all participants confirmed it. They explained that managers and supervisors have the power to influence employees either for a good performance or for a bad one, which consequently affects the restaurant operations:

“When managers don't get too close to employees, when they want to be very "bossy," it takes me a little bit away from the work itself, affects my motivation, and makes me want not to be there.” (Interviewee P1)

“What I think is cool about my job is that the hierarchy exists and is clear, but the relationship between manager, supervisors and employees, in general, is a very horizontal relationship.” (Interviewee P2)

“What I do not like here in Ireland is that managers and supervisors scream a lot. In all my experiences here, they had this habit. I don't think it is a good way to deal with employees because it is already a busy environment. So, if everybody takes out their stresses on others, it will not work.” (Interviewee P3)

“For me, the behaviour and posture of a leader has great power to influence employees and their performance (...) Managers need to know how to teach, organize and put everyone in their role.” (Interviewee P8)

“In my view, the behaviour of managers has a big impact on employees. My store manager is my mirror in the sense of how he works. He is very smart and deserves to be where he is right now (...) Despite this, he is very rude sometimes. He usually does not do it to me anymore, but he already gave me some painful reminders.” (Interviewee P9)

“The behaviour of my leaders does have an impact for me. If they treat me well and respect me, I will definitely work much more motivated.” (Interviewee P10)

Some participants also reported some unpleasant experiences they had with their superiors (managers and supervisors) in their jobs at fast-food restaurants. The worst case is the declaration from Interviewee P3 about physical violence. However, other declarations also show disrespectful situations:

“The manager slapped me in the face. And as far as I know, it wasn't the first episode. I heard reports of aggression and harassment from him towards other employees, but it seems like the girls always left their jobs because of him. In my case, I called the police.” (Interviewee P3)

“When I was transferred to another store, the manager there was very rude. She lacked the patience and tolerance to teach and deal with employees, and it was something that made me very stressed (...) She managed to destabilize employees emotionally.” (Interviewee P5)

“I had an episode with a manager about more controversial subjects once, subjects involving prejudice and religion, and simply because I disagreed with his opinion, he started calling me retarded. It created an uncomfortable situation (...) I told him it didn't make sense for him to attack me personally if I disagreed with his point of view.” (Interviewee P11)

Therefore, the answers from the interviewees highlight that the behaviour of a manager or supervisor and the way they deal with employees, in general, has a major influence on factors such as motivation, performance and satisfaction, and on the employee's willingness to remain working for the company.

5.5 Career development opportunities

Career development opportunities was an aspect that greatly divided the opinion of respondents. Some of them claimed to be an aspect that has a significant impact on their engagement and retention. Others, however, claimed to have no impact at all (because they see fast food as a temporary job), and some believed it would impact temporarily. Respondents also commented on the possibility of being promoted. Some argued that it is a reality within the restaurant where they work. Others, however, stated that they do not have easy access to it.

“I think career progression is important, but temporarily. Nobody wants to spend ten years working in a fast-food restaurant. It is important for employees to get motivated while they are working there. It would increase my engagement, but it wouldn't retain for long.” (Interviewee P1)

“It is an aspect that does not affect my engagement and retention since I know it is a temporary job only to pay my bills.” (Interviewee P2)

“In one of my experiences, there was a career plan. After six months, you could apply to become a “Team leader”, and if you performed well and wanted to reach a management position, they provided a one-year course in England, where you would live and work there. With everything paid by them. I think it’s a very important aspect. It impacts my engagement and willingness to continue working for the company.” (Interviewee P2)

“In the fast-food context, career development opportunities have zero impact on my engagement and retention. I prefer to remain as a general staff, rather than take on more responsibilities in an environment that I don’t intend to remain in the long term.” (Interviewee P4)

“In my experience, career development opportunities exist a lot in theory because sometimes employees took on greater responsibilities but were not actually promoted. It’s not something that impacts my engagement and retention because it’s not the area where I want to build a career.” (Interviewee P5)

“I don’t intend to develop a career in the fast-food industry. I believe that this opportunity is not offered to students either. For Europeans, this opportunity exists. If that opportunity existed, it would probably increase my engagement for a while, but I don’t think it would be something that would keep me working there for very long.” (Interviewee P6)

“I became a manager myself. This influenced me a lot to stay there (...) I don’t really want this job any longer, but I think it’s very important for my resume” (Interviewee P9)

“I believe career development opportunities impact my engagement and retention because I am a person who needs challenges (...) In my case, I was tired of doing the same thing, and I gave my notice to leave. So, they asked me to stay, and I got promoted.” (Interviewee P11)

The interviews showed that career development opportunities was not unanimously ranked as an aspect with a significant impact on engagement and retention.

Although most believe it influences both, others denied it or classified it as a provisional enabler, as they classify their job in fast-food as something temporary.

5.6 Workplace culture

Workplace culture in this research encompasses the following topics discussed further below: Diversity and inclusion, work environment, communication and teamwork.

5.6.1 Diversity and Inclusion

Most of the participants (seven of them) do not believe that having a more diverse team (different cultures, religions, sexual orientation, or gender, for example) alone has an impact on their engagement or retention. Some of them find it a very interesting aspect that generates rich exchange, and others believe that it is the least the company can do. All agreed that this is a very common feature in Ireland. Some interviewees believe that this is a factor that impacts engagement, but not on the possibility of remaining working in a company.

“For me, this is a very interesting aspect. I admire a company that takes this approach to diversity and inclusion, but that is a minimum. It is not something that makes me look at the company as exceptional.” (Interviewee P1)

“It is a very important aspect to have space for different types of people, because the diversification in a work environment is very rich, for exchanging experiences, talking and so on. And that makes you feel more welcomed. (...) If I feel that this is genuine on the part of the company, it does impact my engagement.” (Interviewee P4)

“The restaurant I worked at had a very diverse team. (...) And it's always been a place of great respect for everyone. I believe that if it were a company that only had men working, for example, and few women, I would feel unmotivated and would not stay long because I would see that it is a place that does not give women opportunities. But I think having a diverse team in itself is not such a heavy factor

that it would make me stay in the company and always engaged in that aspect alone.” (Interviewee P8)

“I think it is extremely important because, in the end, we spend about eight or nine hours a day in the workplace talking and interacting with people. So, I do not just want to interact with Irish, white and straight people, always talking about the same subjects and the same things. It is nice to have an exchange and to get out of the bubble. It increases my engagement. However, it does not make me want to stay there any longer.” (Interviewee P11)

In summary, this was an aspect that greatly divided opinions among the participants of this research. Only one person claimed to be a factor that influences both: engagement and retention. The other opinions were divided into people who believe that influence on engagement only and those who, despite finding it an interesting factor, have zero impact on both strategies. Interestingly, while not having a direct impact on retention and engagement, not having a diverse and inclusive team culture would make some of the participants feel uncomfortable and even rethink about staying with the company.

5.6.2 Work environment

Most of the participants agreed that despite being busy, a fast-food restaurant has a very relaxed atmosphere. Among the descriptions provided by them, the ideal work environment would be a space where employees feel respected and valued, maintaining a good relationship between managers, supervisors and team members:

“An ideal environment would be one where I feel welcomed and listened to by my superiors. That I'm no longer a 'robot' that just punches in, performs its tasks and leaves. An ideal environment needs supervisors/managers who understand you not only as a worker but as a human being.” (Interviewee P1)

“We used to play, put on loud music, make a mess and dance in the kitchen while we were working. Even on a busy day, it made me very calm.” (Interviewee P2)

“A clean environment, which reflects what customers want. This requires training, and it has to do with leadership too (...) It needs to be a genuinely happy

environment. This increases productivity and service quality. A good team counts a lot too.” (Interviewee P7)

In general, participants described an ideal fast-food environment as being clean, relaxed, collaborative, and where they feel respected. As a fast-food restaurant is usually very busy, and with long shifts, therefore employees need an environment that comforts them and motivates them to deliver good customer service.

5.6.3 Communication

For most participants, being able to share their ideas and concerns is a very important aspect. Eleven interviewees stated that communication (having a dialogue channel and feeling heard) directly affects engagement and retention. However, one of them claimed to impact engagement while she is working there, but it does not affect her retention. Two of the participants highlighted that it is not a practice performed by the restaurant where they work.

“Managers and supervisors who are not accessible and do not communicate properly make the working environment very bad. Managers opened to answering questions, and talking make the environment better.” (Interviewee P2)

“It's a very important aspect (...) I felt very comfortable talking to my manager. He opened up for us to suggest things for the store, promotions, new things, etc. It impacts my engagement while I work there, but it wouldn't hold me there.” (Interviewee P5)

“I had access to this communication channel. It's a very important aspect. Sometimes the manager cannot do much or cannot solve the problem. However, having someone to listen to it is very important.” (Interviewee P8)

“That does not happen a lot. I have ended up fighting a lot in the past for this reason. Even in the pandemic - when it started - we employees didn't know how things would turn out. I tried to talk to the managers, and they told me they didn't have any information other than what I had. And if we wanted to, I had to get in touch with the head office. This is not the attitude a manager should have (...)It is okay that sometimes they do not actually have the information, but they might say

they will go after it, or at least try to make an effort to help employees solve the issues they have.” (Interviewee P10)

These answers indicated that this was an aspect almost unanimously considered as a regulatory factor for employee engagement and retention. Having a communication channel with managers and supervisors makes employees feel more comfortable and listened to, showing that the employer cares about the opinion and well-being of the staff. Even participants who did not have this access to this in their work environment believe that if there was, it would increase their engagement and their willingness to stay working in the company for longer.

5.6.4 Teamwork

When asked about the importance of teamwork within a fast-food restaurant, participants generally described it as a key factor for the good functioning of the service. They claimed that if there is no teamwork, the restaurant simply does not work, as one workstation communicates and depends on the other. All employees stated that it is a factor that has a significant impact on engagement and retention. However, two of the participants stated that the dynamic of teamwork does not work very well in the restaurant where they work.

“As it is a busy and fast-paced environment, teamwork greatly influences the good performance of the service, and it also keeps me more motivated. If it is busy, but there is a good teamwork, everything flows well. In the long run, if teamwork at a fast-food restaurant does not work well, it could make me give up working there.” (Interviewee P1)

“In the environment where I worked, if there was no teamwork, everything stopped. If you do not have a minimum of communication and timing, it does not work because one station communicates with the other. It greatly affects the smooth running of the work and impacts on engagement and retention.” (Interviewee P2)

“Teamwork is the key to fast food. If someone on the team fails to do something, another employee is likely to be overwhelmed (...) This has a big impact on my engagement and retention because if I see that I am killing myself with work and

someone else is not doing anything or does not care, it is a stressor for me.”
(Interviewee P4)

“If one employee does not complement each other's demand, it will not work. Communication between the team is essential. This influences my engagement so much that I used to look at the schedule every day before working precisely to see if the team that day was a team that worked well together.” (Interviewee P7)

“As stressful as it is, if there is teamwork, no one is so overworked.” (Interviewee P8)

Even participants who work in restaurants that do not establish a culture of teamwork claimed that this aspect is a key factor not only for employee engagement and retention, but also for the functioning of the restaurant's dynamics. Without collaboration and communication, working in a fast-food restaurant becomes impractical and more exhausting.

5.7 Learning and training

On the subject of learning and training, opinions were widely divided. All the participants agreed that it is essential for the standardization of processes and the reduction of mistakes. However, only seven of them claimed to have an impact on both engagement and retention. Some believe it only impacts the engagement factor, while others do not believe it affects either of them, as they do not intend to work in fast food for the long term.

Most of the participants stated that the training provided by the restaurants they work for is carried out on a day-to-day basis, at the workstations with the accompaniment of a supervisor or manager. Some restaurants offer, in addition to face-to-face training, an online platform with explanatory videos. Other restaurants, however, do not provide formal training: employees simply learn from the daily demands. One employee claimed that overtraining can get in the way and is often unnecessary.

“I think it is very necessary. If you provide formal training for employees, the processes are standardized. Impacts on engagement, because without training employees are very lost.” (Interviewee P1)

“For me, the offer of training has two sides: the provision of basic training I think is very important—for example, techniques and functioning of each station, preparation time and so on. What I think is not so important: Knowing the temperature of things in your head, the name of each part of the stations. Some things I believe are irrelevant to running the service.” (Interviewee P4)

“I think it is an important aspect. However, it is pretty underrated in my experience. They do not train enough and do not encourage people to develop further. It impacts my engagement. If it had been a place that provided more training, I would certainly have stayed longer there.” (Interviewee P8)

“The restaurant I work for does not provide standardized training, which generates many errors in the processes. There is no time for someone to be on the employee's side, explaining, following up. But that does not put me off. And it did not even make me think about getting out of there. On a day-to-day basis, the person will end up learning. It will take time, there will be mistakes, but he ends up learning.” (Interviewee P9)

Most participants considered learning and training an important aspect, directly linked to engagement and retention, as it standardizes the processes and because they acquire new knowledge. Others think it is beneficial as it standardizes processes and decreases mistakes, but do not believe it impacts retention or engagement mainly because they classify fast food as a temporary job.

5.8 Reward and recognition

All interviewees rated job recognition as a positive aspect, declaring that receiving feedback directly impacts their performance. However, none of the restaurants that the respondents work in has a solid rewards policy. Three participants claimed that the restaurants they work for have an employee-of-the-month approach. One of them provides 50 euros for the featured employee of the month. The others just make this classification and give a voucher of 20 euros to spend within the restaurant itself, respectively. One participant stated that the only reward she was likely to win was through a competition between the chain's restaurants. The restaurant with the highest performance won a day of leisure for employees.

“For me, it's a very important aspect, because every day several times a day, simply by doing the job correctly, managers and supervisors used to praise the team's work. At the end of the shift, they also used to thank and congratulate us for the good work and also advised us when we were doing something wrong. This, after a tiring day, made all the difference. It motivated me and influenced me a lot to stay there longer.” (Interviewee P2)

“It makes all the difference in how you feel and how you perform. When you are praised or even received feedback on something that needs to be improved, it directly impacts engagement because it gives you a boost to do the job.” (Interviewee P2)

“In the restaurant where I work, they do not have the practice of providing feedback. And it does not have a reward policy either. (...) I have even been asking my store manager for feedback on my performance as an Assistant Manager, however, he says I am still in development. It does not affect my engagement and retention because if I want to have feedback, I will ask them.” (Interviewee P9)

“It is not something that is in my top criteria to make me stay in a company, but overall, maybe it improves the engagement of the team as a whole, and consequently mine too because the team's performance would be better.” (Interviewee P10)

Most participants claimed to be a factor that impacts engagement and retention. Others, however, despite classifying this as an important aspect, assume that it does not affect the fact in either of them. So much so that some of them do not experience this in practice, which is a factor that did not make them quit their jobs.

5.9 Overview of engagement and retention

This heading sought to explore why participants quit their jobs in fast-food restaurants (if they are former employees), the reasons that they like most (or liked most) working at a fast-food restaurant, and how they think their employers could improve employee engagement and retention strategies in the fast-food industry. Among the main reasons that made the interviewees quit their jobs in fast-food restaurants, the following stand out: the pandemic situation, abusive and

incompetent leadership, disorganization, having found a job in their areas, late hours shift, reduction of hours or time overload, due to many people have been quitting their jobs due to the pandemic.

About the main reasons why they enjoy working in a fast-food restaurant, they highlighted: having access to free food in the workplace, quality training, work environment, engaged team, teamwork, feedback policy, good managers, the relationship of superiors with general staff, accuracy in the payment of hours worked, opportunities for career development and salary higher than the minimum.

“Training there was excellent, the working environment itself, the vibe of team, the communication channel you had with supervisors and managers, and the constant feedback you received from them.” (Interviewee P2)

“Teamwork, the fact that they provide food in the workplace, organization and communication.” (Interviewee P3)

“Flexibility of working hours first. My general manager is also a factor that keeps me there, because she is fantastic (...), and the people that I work with.” (Interviewee P11)

When asked about aspects that employers could improve to retain and engage employees, the participants mentioned the most was: Standardized and quality training, a closer and open relationship between staff and managers, with a better communication channel between them, reinforcing the importance of teamwork, improving reward and recognition policies, training supervisors and managers, so they know how to deal with employees.

“I think that some supervisors and managers could be a little stricter because many times some employees ended up confusing this freedom and ended up not working properly, which directly impacted teamwork.” (Interviewee P2)

“Having standardized training, valuing old employees who know how to work, and taking the words of these employees into account. And managers also need to be trained to act as managers, so that they know well the logistics and operation of the restaurant, and how to manage employees.” (Interviewee P6)

“There is a lack of internal culture. (...) They could implement a discount ticket for employees (mostly young) to go to cinemas, concerts, travel – things that young people normally enjoy.” (Interviewee P7)

“Provide quality training, because this would facilitate the smooth running of the job (...)I think a good training at the beginning would solve most of the problems.” (Interviewee P8)

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Throughout this chapter, the author discusses the findings from the previous chapter, linking them back with previous literature. The main purpose of this research was to explore the key drivers to engage and retain the Generation Y working in the Irish fast-food chain. The results gathered from the interviews produced the six main categories previously presented by the researcher and an overview of engagement and retention in the participants' opinions. It addresses why participants quit their jobs in fast-food restaurants, the reasons why they like most working at a fast-food restaurant, and how they think their employers could improve employee engagement and retention strategies in the fast-food industry. These categories are discussed in this section in order to meet the following objectives:

- To understand what employee engagement and retention means to Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain.
- To examine if the engagement and retention enablers specified by previous researchers are equivalent to those identified by Generation Y employees from fast-food restaurants in Ireland.
- To investigate how fast-food restaurants from Ireland could improve their engagement and retention approaches, especially with Generation Y.

This research has identified employee engagement and retention as essential strategies for companies that intend to maintain good workers and reduce costs associated with turnover and also attempted to explore how to retain and engage Generation Y employees in the Irish fast-food context.

6.2 Work-life balance (flexible working hours)

Flexible working hours was an aspect unanimously classified as enhancing employee engagement and retention by the participants. All of them agreed that the possibility of swapping shifts, asking for days off, or getting holidays in the fast-food scenario promotes the achievement of a balance between life and work. These findings agree with Berdarkar and Pandita (2014), highlighting that a work-life

balance is a substantial facilitator of employee engagement, especially for younger cohorts.

Many interviewees highlighted that the easy access to more flexible working hours allows them to accommodate other jobs and studies. It also makes it easier to manage their personal lives outside of work. Generation Y value having time for their personal lives and are fearless of quitting their jobs if they do not feel a balance between personal and professional (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Kilber *et al.*, 2014). Companies that provide more flexible schedules to employees obtained a decrease in turnover levels (Kilber *et al.*, 2014).

All the participants were Brazilian. They came to Ireland mostly as students, which can be an aspect that carries more value for them since they need a job that is flexible with their timetable classes. However, as Bobek and Whickham (2015) highlighted, this industry also employs Irish third-level students. Therefore nationality might not be a factor that influences employees' opinions on this aspect.

6.3 Leadership

The participants also agree that the way managers and supervisors behave and deal with employees directly impacts their motivation, performance, and satisfaction with their job. Berdarkar and Pandita (2014) outline managers behaviours are directly associated with employee motivation, satisfaction, productivity, performance and commitment towards the company, and those are outcomes of employee engagement.

Some of the participants highlighted that when a superior is very bossy, it pushes them away from work, affects their motivation, and consequently, their engagement. On the other hand, when managers are respectful and treat employees with dignity, it makes them more committed to work. It happens even in workplaces where there is a clear hierarchy, as is the case of participant two (P2), who reported that although there is a hierarchy in the restaurant where he works, the relationship between managers and employees is very horizontal. As leadership plays a critical role in Generation Y engagement and retention, the managers' attitudes should be one of the first matters for companies (Mansor *et al.*, 2017).

Despite having considered leadership an important factor for engagement and retention and having classified her manager as inspiring, one of the participants was quite contradictory when she assumed that he is very rude to employees and that often, the way he treats employees hurts. Considering that handling people is of the primary duties of managers, they should support, respect, appreciate and empower their staff (Macleod and Clarke, 2009). Therefore, if they do not know how to handle individuals, they should not have a leading position.

When the participants were asked if they had ever experienced an unpleasant situation with managers or supervisors, many of the participants confirmed. Some mentioned episodes of impatience and intolerance, and others reported that managers had a habit of yelling at employees in most of their work experiences here in Ireland. One of the participants even stated that she had to call the police because of an episode of physical violence by her manager, who slapped her in the face. He still holds his position at the restaurant. There is no plausible reason why a manager should be right in humiliating or hitting an employee. Naim and Lenka (2018) and Robinson et al. (2004) stated that strategic leadership should care about staff, motivate them, and focus on their retention and development. Therefore these types of situations are completely unacceptable. Employers should pay more attention to the attitudes of managers and supervisors and promote to these positions people who are really qualified or adequately trained to do so.

6.4 Career development opportunities

According to Panda and Sahoo (2015), when a company gives employees the opportunity to develop their careers, they show commitment (one of employee engagement outcomes) not only to help the company to reach its objectives but also to fulfil their own goals. However, when looking at career development opportunities through a fast-food spectrum, a few things need to be considered. Although most participants classify this aspect as important and claim that it can impact their engagement and retention, it is a factor that needs to be analysed in more depth since almost all participants consider working fast -food as something temporary.

Three of the participants affirmed that career development opportunities are an aspect that does not impact their engagement and retention. Two of them aim to find a job in their area here in Ireland and therefore do not intend to stay long, and the third one will start her college in IT. Although she still has a long way to go, she prefers to continue as a general staff rather than take on more responsibilities for a less-than-attractive salary, as she has no intention of staying there for the long term.

Among the five people who rated career development opportunities as having an impact on engagement and retention, three of them no longer work in fast-food. Two of the five also stated that they do not have easy access to reach a management position, for example, mainly because they are immigrants and because they work part-time as they need to study. Four of the participants reported that it is an aspect that temporarily influences engagement, as they do not intend to work for years at a fast-food restaurant. Some believe that being promoted is something interesting to add to the curriculum and that it could open doors for them in other areas.

As fast food is an industry that also employs a high number of Generation Y Irish and European employees who are also third-level education students, nationality would not be an influencing factor to make employees classify fast food as a temporary job. The only fact that possibly influences international students to quit their jobs (but it is not particular to the fast-food sector) is that the routine of an exchange student is very unstable. Intercurrences for a foreigner living in a place that is not their country of origin are very common, and it can make them quit their jobs more often.

Naim and Lenka (2018) and Marais *et al.* (2017) outline that Generation Y employees are eager to acquire knowledge and find opportunities to develop themselves. Therefore, fast-food employers should provide career development opportunities to all employees without distinction. Although they need to know that even if they establish this, some employees will not remain working in a fast-food restaurant for long, as this industry is seen by many as a temporary job.

6.5 Workplace culture

According to Yahya *et al.* (2015) and Laker (2021), workplace culture is a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that build the organisation's foundation. Therefore, workplace culture in this research encompasses the following topics: Diversity and inclusion, work environment, communication, and teamwork.

6.5.1 Diversity and Inclusion

The finding of this research agrees with IDS HR studies (2010), which explain that nowadays, diversity and inclusion in the workplace is no longer a differential. Although all the participants claim that it impacts both strategies, only one of the participants affirmed that it influences her engagement and willingness to remain working in a company. Four participants stated that it is a factor that affects their engagement as it generates a rich exchange of views, experiences and cultures, making them rethink and understand thoughts and opinions that diverge from their own. However, the other seven participants rate this as a very interesting and rich aspect but claim that it is the least a company can do. They believe that it is unacceptable to have a scenario where companies do not yet have a culture of diversity and inclusion.

Although this is an aspect that for most of them, have no influence on their engagement and retention, some highlighted that if the company does not establish diversity and inclusion, it would make them feel uncomfortable and cornered. It possibly would make them consider leaving the job. The CIPD (2021) highlights that employees want to be valued in the workplace and work for companies with good practices and a strong culture of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, organisations should consider this aspect a critical element of their values and apply it in practice.

6.5.2 Working environment

Aruna and Anitha (2015) explain that the work environment is an aspect that strongly affects Generation employees' performance and engagement. For the participants, an ideal fast-food environment would be in general clean, organised,

relaxed, collaborative, where they feel respected and valued and can keep a good relationship with managers, supervisors, and co-workers. As a fast-food restaurant is usually very busy, with long shifts, they mentioned they need an enjoyable environment that comforts and motivates them to deliver quality customer service. These findings agree with Anitha (2014), who highlighted that a good work environment should encompass work with a helpful team, admirable leaders, quality work settings, job security and a more casual atmosphere.

6.5.3 Communication

Communication plays a critical role in fostering employee engagement (Bedarkar and Pandita, 2014). Doherty (2010) and Macleod and Clarke (2009) explain that employees value when they feel listened to, and their opinions are considered, which was corroborated by the interviewed participants. Eleven of the twelve considered communication with superiors a regulatory factor for employee engagement and retention. Having a communication channel with managers and supervisors makes them feel more comfortable and valued. Even participants who did not have this access to this in their work environment believe that if there was, it would increase their engagement and their willingness to stay working in the company.

Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) outline that a trustful relationship with a leader promotes psychological safety, leading to employee engagement. Therefore, in addition to capable and trained managers, the communication channel between them and employees should be one of the main priorities of employers. Employers should not only see employees as providers of labour, but instead, people who are there to work and offer their best, giving them a voice and understanding their needs, ideas, and opinions. The pandemic further accentuated this demand. As it was and still is a new situation for the whole world and has affected many people's employment, they should try to help staff with their issues and concerns.

6.5.4 Teamwork

In addition to having a significant impact on engagement and retention factors, teamwork was unanimously rated as essential by participants to provide quality products and services. According to Kahn (1990), a helpful and trustful team develop employee engagement. Participants endorse this information and add that this is a fact that makes them reflect on staying longer in the company since it is a place where they have a team that works well together.

The participants explained that a fast-food restaurant usually has a very busy and fast-paced environment and that the meals have a set time to be served and depend on several stations to get ready. Therefore, one station needs to communicate and follow the flow of the other so that the product is delivered with quality and on time for the customer. Furthermore, if there is no teamwork, some employees will feel overwhelmed, making them unmotivated to continue working in this place.

One of the participants highlighted that before all her shifts, she checks the schedule to see if the team on duty works well together. She also mentioned that this is a stress and motivation factor for her, depending on who she will work with. Balda and Mora (2011) explain that Generation Y likes working as a team, as they value interpersonal and useful connections. Therefore, as fast-food usually employ many individuals, they should foster this culture of teamwork, as it is an aspect that is also substantial for the smooth running of the restaurant operations.

6.6 Learning and training

Most participants consider learning and training to be a determining factor for retention and engagement, explaining that training standardizes processes and reduces the chance of making mistakes. The participants mentioned this is not an aspect that influences their retention and engagement and claimed that the reason is because they see fast-food as a temporary job.

Anitha (2014) explains that training is a crucial aspect for the engagement of Generation Y because it helps them understand the processes and focus and value more their work. Providing training is important so that employees can understand the functioning and dynamics of the restaurant and because it gives the basis for the

employee to perform well. One participant (P6) pointed out that without quality training, the whole process becomes chaos.

According to Ahmed and Arif (2021), learning and training is the most common factor for retention of employees in the fast-food industry. This factor is possibly more evident in Pakistan (where the researchers conducted this study), as it is an underdeveloped country where people are more likely to value knowledge acquisition. Through this research, however, just a little more than half of the participants responded that it is a factor that influences their retention.

The same participant who was contradictory regarding the 'Leadership' aspect also contradicted herself in this aspect. She works as an assistant manager of a fast-food restaurant and stated that the company does not provide standardized training, generating several mistakes in the processes. She said that the fact of not having adequate training does not affect their engagement and retention because the employees will learn from their errors. For occupying a management position, this should be an aspect that should be concerned, since these errors possibly generate costs and a burden for managers and supervisors, as they must work with employees who, due to lack of adequate training, perhaps do not have a good performance. Some other participants also claimed not to have quality training, even working in large fast-food chains.

Therefore, this research shows that fast-food employers should implement basic and necessary training for the proper functioning of the restaurant's processes and to deliver quality products and services to customers. Training and monitoring inside the kitchen during working hours would be enough. Even though many people see fast food as a temporary job, this type of training would reduce errors and costs and make employees feel more secure to carry out their duties.

6.7 Reward and recognition

As Gallup (2017) explained, employees that have their job recognized and receive feedback or rewards from their bosses are three times more expected to be engaged, which agrees with the results from the research interviews. Most participants appreciate employers' practice of providing feedback, and for most of them,

feedback can shape their performance, highlighting where they need to improve and what they should maintain. Feedback is also a strategy to make employees feel valued.

Regarding a rewards policy, none of the restaurants has a consolidated approach. Participants agreed that they would appreciate it because rewards would motivate them to keep a high-quality work. Three participants argued that the restaurants they work at have an “employee of the month” approach. However, only two provide small incentives for the outstanding employee. According to Anitha (2014), rewards encompasses both financial and non-financial as bonuses, extended holidays, vouchers or discounts. It agrees with the participants' opinions, who affirm that employers could offer rewards for outstanding employees such as discount vouchers for shows, cinema, travels, and discounts on marketplaces such as amazon.

6.8 Overview of engagement and retention

Under this theme, the author wanted to explore why some participants quit their jobs in restaurants fast-food and the aspects that they like most (or liked most) working there. Moreover, the author intended to assess how their employers could improve employee engagement and retention strategies in the fast-food industry. Through this section, the author sought to understand if those aspects are only related to the themes discussed in the previous headings or if there are other aspects that have a considerable impact on the retention or engagement of Generation Y employees working in the Irish-fast food chain.

Of the eight people who left their jobs, two claimed to have done it because of the pandemic, and one had its hours reduced due to restrictions and sales decrease. Another participant lived the opposite situation: many people resigned their contracts because of the pandemic, and there was a very large work overload for a very lean group of employees. Two other participants quit their jobs because of external reasons. The other four participants left their jobs because of internal issues. One of them classified the job in a restaurant as stressful, and the other left it because it is a job with late hours shift, which is challenging for a student like her. The last two participants who quit their jobs did it because of their managers.

Leadership is a theme that was addressed in this research and appointed as an influencer for the retention and engagement of Generation Y employees. One of them mentioned that her manager was very abusive in the way he treated employees. He always asked employees to perform tasks that were not their responsibility and often asked them to double the shift, which left them quite overwhelmed. The second one claimed a physical violence by her manager. She also mentioned this was not the first episode and that the other victims also left the job because nothing was done.

These situations involving leadership confirm the studies by Anitha (2014) and Barclay et al. (2014), which claim that when leaders are inspiring, it increases employees' engagement. When they don't know how to manage people, it fosters disengagement, decreases productivity and, depending on the situation, they may cause employees to quit their jobs.

When asked about the main reasons why the participants enjoy working in a fast-food restaurant, they highlighted:

- Flexible working hours;
- Having access to free food in the workplace;
- Quality training;
- The work environment;
- Engaged team – teamwork;
- Feedback policy;
- Good managers and supervisors and the relationship between them and the general staff;
- Accuracy in the payment of hours worked;
- Opportunities for career development, and;
- Salary higher than the minimum.

Among the reasons mentioned by the participants, only three of them are not included in the themes that this research pointed out as aspects that impact the engagement and retention of Generation Y employees. One of these reasons was getting free food in the workplace, mentioned by four of the participants. Without it, they would have to pay for their lunches or dinners. Another one, mentioned by only one participant, was a payment higher than the minimum established in

Ireland. The last reason was the accuracy in the payment of hours worked, mentioned by only one participant.

Although most of these reasons were previously discussed in this research, access to them was not unanimous. Because of this, the author decided to ask respondents how they thought their employer could improve approaches to engagement and retention. Among the answers, the following was mentioned:

- Standardized and quality training;
- A closer and open relationship between staff and managers - with a better communication channel between them;
- Reinforcing the importance of teamwork;
- Improving reward and recognition policies;
- Training supervisors and managers, so they know how to deal with employees.

Again, all the aspects mentioned by them were pointed out in this research as aspects that impact the engagement and retention of Generation Y employees.

6.9 Conclusion

From the qualitative data gathered through the interviews, it was possible to see that **work-life balance (through flexible working hours), leadership, work environment** and **teamwork** were themes that all the participants classified as having a significant impact on their retention and engagement within a fast-food restaurant. The topics **reward and recognition, learning and training, communication,** and **career development opportunities** divided opinions but were also rated by most participants as factors influencing their engagement and retention. Most of the participants who did not consider **learning and training** and **career development opportunities** factors that retain and keep them engaged justified it by seeing this industry as just an informal job, where they do not intend to work for a long time. It is possibly justified by the overall negative image and bad conditions offered in the hospitality sector. This industry is often described as providing long and irregular hours, heavy and repetitive work, lack of proper

training, non-meaningful work, and low pay and status (Pizam and Shani 2009; Bobek and Wickham 2015).

The **diversity and inclusion** theme was rated by only one participant as a factor that impacts her engagement and retention. Despite considering it a very interesting aspect, most participants expect this to be a basic principle of the companies. The themes **Having access to free food in the workplace, accuracy in the payment of hours worked and salary higher than the minimum** were also themes presented by some of the participants during the interviews as factors that make them feel engaged in the workplace. The results confirmed that the data collected from the interviews corroborate previous literature which identified the drivers for engagement and retention of Generation Y employees discarding only the theme **diversity and inclusion**

The interviews conducted in this research were, in general, of great value to this paper. Undoubtedly, it contributed to the researcher to gain better understanding and knowledge into Generation Y employees' opinions in relation to what engage and retain them in the Irish context of fast-food restaurants. The literature explored in this research also contributed to a deeper understanding of Generation Y, Employee engagement and retention, the fast-food industry in Ireland, and also the drivers to employee engagement and retention.

This qualitative research was also conducted in order to develop the author's people management skills within an organisation. Therefore, she would recommend that internal surveys are applied to Generation Y employees within a fast-food restaurant. The HR should analyse the results in order to verify the correlation between employee engagement and retention and the six themes presented in this research. It would benefit the organisation with a tailored feedback from staff, and it may promote the increase of employee engagement and retention, and consequently the company's profits.

Chapter 7: Conclusion of the thesis

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the conclusion to this research project and the limitations of this research. The researcher also considers the opportunities for future research, recommendations, and estimated costs for these recommendations. This chapter is closed with the researcher's personal learning statement. Throughout this research thesis, the main objective was to investigate the drivers for engagement and retention of Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain.

7.2 Limitations of the Research

Throughout this research, the author met a few limitations. The first limitation faced was about changing the scenario of the research, once her first objective was to conduct this research within the fast-food restaurant that she worked for two years. However, she was not allowed by the company to get access to further information. For this reason, the researcher expanded her focus and decided to research the fast-food chain in Ireland.

The second limitation was about the population. When recruiting individuals to the interviews, only Brazilian people volunteered to participate. Also, the author could only interview people who work or have worked in fast-food restaurants in Dublin. The author believes, however, that these factors did not impact the research results.

7.3 Recommendations

- **Recommendations for further research**

Although the author thinks that the population limitation did not impact the results of this research, it can be interesting that future studies try to consider people of other nationalities and who work in other counties within Ireland. Through this research, it was possible to verify that some aspects are considered key to retaining and engaging employees of Generation Y. The author believes that the nationality factor would not radically change the participants' opinion. Since they all belong to the same generation, they will present some patterns of thought and behaviour. However, the nationality factor carries a whole culture behind it, therefore, it may

influence the reasons why the participants justify their answers. Being a foreigner or a native person can possibly influence the order of importance or weight that each aspect mentioned in this research has on their engagement and retention.

- **Recommendations for business and Cost of recommendations**

The first recommendation is to obtain the necessary number of employees on the team. Some participants mentioned the fact that restaurants are always under staff. With the required number of employees, employees feel less overwhelmed. The fast-food environment is already busy, so it is necessary to have a complete workforce to provide a quality product in the stipulated time for the customers and for the employees to work without being overloaded.

Having a full staff also facilitates two of the aspects mentioned in this research: **flexible working hours** (in order to help employees to reach a **work-life balance**) and **learning and training**. If the employer has the necessary number of employees, it is easier to let employees swap shifts or ask for days off since they always have employees to cover the employee who will be absent. It also helps with employee training. As said by the participants themselves, training for good performance is enough to be carried out in the restaurant itself. Therefore, if the restaurant is not understaffed, managers and supervisors can train new employees within the store's opening hours, while employees already trained can continue to perform their duties. The cost of this would just be the cost of hiring new employees. It, however, would not generate an extra expense since the companies must employ a sufficient number of employees for the proper functioning of the restaurant and not overload the employees.

The second recommendation would be to give preference to promoting people who already work in the restaurant before externally recruiting for higher positions (**career development opportunities**) and to establish better criteria for promotion to managerial and supervisory positions. Employees who already work in the restaurant already have a certain knowledge of the dynamics of the establishment and already know the teams and processes, which would also facilitate strengthening a relationship between employees in general, supervisors and managers. The cost of this would be the cost of training for new supervisors and

managers and the cost of hiring new employees in order to fill the vacancies of those who have been promoted.

The third recommendation would be to improve the behaviours of managers and supervisors (**leadership**) and how they deal with employees. It would be necessary to provide capacity building training to those new and current employees occupying these positions. In addition to technical skills, these training should include soft skills lectures such as leadership, emotional intelligence, organization, teamwork, time management, decision-making, problem-solving, collaboration, stress management, customer care, and relationship building. The cost of this would be either the cost of hiring a company to provide such training or the cost of creating and implementing courses provided by the company's HR, for example, in person or even through a digital platform.

The fourth recommendation would be concerning aspects related to **workplace culture**. Teamwork, work environment, diversity and inclusion, and communication depend more on establishing a culture within the company. HR could create policies for these aspects, and then it would be a matter of passing on and reinforcing this from managers and supervisors to employees in general. Regarding **teamwork**, for example, managers should reinforce to employees the importance of teamwork and use themselves as a reference for this.

The work environment would be a matter of implementing a culture of a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Playing music in the restaurant during opening hours would be a manner to help establishing this. The **communication** factor would be significantly reinforced with better training of managers and supervisors. After that, it would also be an aspect that needs to be passed on and reinforced for employees. It would be necessary to emphasize that staff have free access to managers and that there is an open communication channel between them. The **diversity and inclusion** factor must be a basic premise of restaurants in order to give an opportunity to everyone, without distinction. The only cost would be in relation to the stereo, which would be placed in the restaurant to help make the environment more relaxed and informal. The other cultural aspects would be just a matter of time.

The fifth recommendation would be in relation to the **rewards and recognition** aspect. Regarding recognising employees' work, it would also be just a matter of time to provide a feedback culture within the restaurant. Negative feedback, however, needs a polite approach to teach and show where employees are going wrong. Regarding the reward policy, it would be interesting for restaurants to make partnerships or some type of contract with other establishments such as cinemas, other restaurants, event companies, travel agencies and online shopping in order to provide vouchers and discounts for outstanding employees. The cost of this would be the amount charged by other companies for partnerships or for the purchase of these vouchers.

Fast food employers need to understand that even though this is an industry seen by many Generation Y employees as temporary employment, they must implement strategies to make these employees feel engaged, motivated and consequently performing better during their employment period. These strategies can often extend this work period or cause employees not to leave their jobs to work in competing restaurants. It is important to try to reduce the number of employees who quit their jobs for internal reasons.

- **Timelines for implementation of recommendations**

The timelines involved in putting in action these recommendations would depend on the restaurants' budgets regarding hiring new staff, training managers and supervisors, purchasing stereo for the stores, and establishing partnerships or contracts with other companies. The other recommendations should not incur a long timeline, as those strategies could be immediately implemented. After that, it would just be a matter of establishing and maintaining the companies' culture and values, which could be ongoing within two or three months.

7.4 Personal learning statement

From completing this research, the author acquired great knowledge about the importance of engaging and retaining employees and the aspects that engage and retain Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain. The author also

gained considerable insights into individuals' opinions and feelings about work-life balance, learning and training, leadership, workplace culture, reward and recognition and career development opportunities. Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain want to feel involved and valued in the workplace and feel appreciated and recognized for their work.

The author also expanded her knowledge about qualitative research, gaining insights in collecting and analysing data, which will significantly benefit any future research that she considers conducting. Finally, this research has been beneficial in many ways, such as researching, time management, approaching and interviewing people, collecting and analysing data, and understanding and respecting people's opinions.

7.5 Final conclusion

The author analysed different theories and literature in order to reach the aims and objectives proposed by this research, identifying interesting themes. This research had a great interest in Generation Y, engagement and retention. Therefore, the author acquired great insights into the importance of engaging and retaining employees within organisations and the aspects that engage and retain Generation Y employees working in the Irish fast-food chain. This research also demonstrated that employee engagement is very important for both employees and companies' performance. Even though the author only interviewed a small number of Generation Y employees who work in fast-food restaurants in Ireland, it was evident from the findings the aspects that influence most their engagement and retention. The author believes that there could be more studies about Generation Y, engagement and retention in the Irish context. Also, it would be beneficial for further research considering different nationalities and counties in Ireland. Finally, the author has developed insights into qualitative research, which will significantly contribute to any future research that the author may carry out.

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Appendix 1 - Information Sheet

June 2021

Dear participant,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information.

I am a student at the National College of Ireland completing a Masters in Human Resource Management. I will conduct a qualitative research, which will be carried out through a semi-structured interview. For this research, I am eager to interact with Generation Y employees to complete the following topic: **“Engagement and retention of Generation Y employees on the Irish fast-food chain”**.

The primary purpose of my dissertation is to identify the key drivers for engagement and retention of Generation Y working in fast-food restaurants located in Ireland. I also aim to investigate any similarities to those drivers previously highlighted in academic literature and how employers could improve their approaches for engagement and retention of Generation Y.

This interview will be video-recorded (via Zoom) and will last around 30-40 minutes. It will be totally anonymous, and your identity will be kept out of the data. The only individuals who will access this information are my dissertation supervisor, Ms Silvija Delekovcan and I. As stated, this will be completely anonymous, and your employer will not have access to the information.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

If you have any questions surrounding this, please do not hesitate to contact me: regalomayara@gmail.com or through phone: +353 083 885 8990.

Kind regards,

Mayara Regalo

Appendix 2 – Consent form

June 2021

Researcher Details:

Mayara Regalo Alves de Brito

Masters of Arts in Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland

- 1.I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- 2.I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- 3.I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- 4.I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing.
- 5.I agree with my interview being video-recorded.
- 6.I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- 7.I acknowledge that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous.
- 8.I understand that the researcher will use my quotes in a direct/indirect manner.
- 9.I understand that under freedom of information legalisation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- 10.I understand that signed consent forms, original recordings and transcriptions of my interview will be retained by the researcher until she gets the dissertation's results.
- 12.I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of the participant:

Date:

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of the researcher:

Date:

Appendix 3 – Interview questions

- 1.Date of birth.
- 2.How long have you been working on fast-food in Ireland?
- 3.What is your role in the company?
- 4.If you do not work in a fast-food restaurant anymore, what made you leave this job
- 5.What is your opinion about flexible working hours (the possibility of swapping shifts or asking for days off, for example) within a fast-food restaurant?
- 6.How can your supervisors' and managers' behaviour influence you?
- 7.Can you tell me about some unpleasant experience that you had with a supervisor on a fast-food job?
- 8.What is your opinion about career development opportunities within a fast-food environment?
- 9.What do you think about a diverse team, with people from different cultures, gender or sexual orientation, for example, within a fast-food environment?
- 10.Can you define the ideal kind of environment for you in a fast-food restaurant?
- 11.Is the possibility of exposing your ideas and concerns an important aspect for you inside a fast-food restaurant?
- 12.How is teamwork important to you inside a fast-food restaurant?
- 13.What do you think about the offering of further training and development in a fast-food restaurant?
- 14.To what extent do you get rewarded or receive feedback from a superior manager?
- 15.Name the three main reasons that you like most about your job?
- 16.How could your employer improve its approaches for engagement and retention?