"SURVIVING THE CUT"

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY

By

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AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of a BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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ABSTRACT

This single case study explored how redundancy affects employee engagement for staff remaining with an organisation. The case chosen was the Irish subsidiary of a multi-national organisation recently merged with the UK subsidiary and following a significant change process throughout the group.

The study posed one main research question with two additional supporting questions as follows; 1) How does redundancy affect employee engagement? 2) Are remaining staff still engaged post redundancy? 3) What is the effect on employee retention?

Data for the study was collected through six interviews, consisting of five interviews with staff and one interview with Senior Management, on-site observation, review of company records, documentation and correspondence. Interviews were transcribed and analysed manually.

The results of the study suggest, in the case of this particular organisation, that redundancy has adversely affected the engagement levels of staff remaining with the company, although still engaged both with their jobs and the organisation,

The study also found that unless actively addressed, engagement levels could seriously affect employee retention in the future.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Paul and Maura Heaney.

Especially to the memory of my mother who passed away some years ago. She always had faith in my ability and has been with me in thought and spirit throughout this project.

Always missed, never forgotten

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

"We are all afraid of our confidence, for the future, for the world. That is the nature of the human imagination. Yet every man, every civilization, has gone forward because of its engagement with what it has set itself to do".

Jacob Bronowski (1908-1974) British Mathematician & Biologist

A key aspect of business is concerned with making the best use of all of its resources. It's about maximising a company's assets in order to gain competitive advantage in the market-place. Most Chief Executives when asked what their most important asset is, will usually say their people. However, in practice this rarely reflects the true situation. Most companies still regard and manage their employees as costs and fail to recognise that people are the only source of long-term competitive advantage. Utilizing a company's most important asset by ensuring staff want to, and actually do perform at the highest level of their capabilities should be a priority for every organisation. Managing this process by motivating and *engaging* staff is critical to achieving an organisation's objectives and the most competitive companies will be those that manage their employees like the assets they are. {{128 Bassi, Laurie. and McMurrer, Daniel. 2007;}}

Employee engagement is an emerging topic, and one which has stimulated much debate among human resource consulting practitioners in recent years. While there is a substantial amount of practitioner literature on engagement and the drivers of engagement, there are few academic studies on the concept, especially in the area of redundancy and it's effect on engagement.

1.1   Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to explore, using a case study method, how redundancy affects employee engagement for staff remaining with an organisation post redundancy.   Three questions were proposed, one main research question and two additional supporting questions. The following research questions were addressed in the dissertation, the main research question asked "how does redundancy affect employee engagement". Additional supporting questions asked;

1. Are remaining staff still engaged post redundancy?
2. What is the effect on employee retention?

In using a case study methodology to conduct research, it must be noted that the different types of case study are not well delineated and one type may be combined with another {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}}.   Due to the deficiency in relevant theories on employee engagement, the case study method used took the form of an exploratory/opportunist case study. As a consequence of this, a theoretical framework was not used as a foundation for the research. However, to ensure a sufficient breadth of knowledge around the topic and as a

framework for the interview guide, a thorough review of the available literature was first conducted before embarking on the research.

1.2   Background to the Study:

I work for the Irish subsidiary of a multi-national company which has undergone and continues to experience significant change.   This is due in part to the recent economic downturn and also the impact of global organisational change being implemented throughout the organisation.

These changes have had a significant impact on both staff and management. Over the past year, overhead costs have been cut significantly, payroll cuts have been implemented and headcount has been reduced by 20%. Further developments within the Group have meant that additional significant change has been implemented which has resulted in a re-organisation within the Irish entity.

Initially, the change process was an individual change initiative carried out by local Senior Management in response to the severe economic downturn in Ireland. However, as the economic downturn continued to bite, the Group responded by accelerating a scheduled reorganisation programme in order to cut costs and mitigate losses worldwide. This re-organisation resulted in the Irish entity becoming a branch of the UK Company, directly resulting in a significant loss of autonomy in Ireland. In retrospect, change for the Company was inevitable and the downturn in the world economic climate merely hastened the need for change to ensure the organisation's survival in the long term.

All management and staff in Ireland have been directly affected by the re-organisation. The second of two redundancy programmes was implemented in the second quarter of 2010 and has affected almost all areas of the business, in particular back office and support functions. It should be noted that the Irish entity has significantly out-performed its' European counterparts in recent years and remains the market leader in Ireland, with 65% market share. For staff who directly contributed to this success and enabled the company to turn a significant profit at the end of a very difficult year's trading, the shock of further cuts resulting in a significant reduction in headcount was devastating.

With all of this in mind, I initially explored the possibility of basing this research study on the effects of organisational change, but quickly realised from the initial reading on the topic that it is a very broad area and would require me to narrow the focus significantly to concentrate on one particular effect of the change process.

In the course of my reading and also with the changes that had been implemented to-date within the Company, I recognised that a significant issue is the need to balance the hard and soft issues as part of the change process as proposed by Bunker and Wakefield {{27 Bunker, K. A. and Wakefield, M. 2008;}}. As a matter of course, the hard issues such as time, staff and financial requirements would automatically be considered by the implementation team during the re-organisation, however the softer issues such as the culture, leadership and motivation might not be given the same priority.

In considering these softer issues, I found that the subject of employee engagement was a recurrent theme in much of the literature and was considered one of the "hot topics" in management and HR journals. This is very interesting topic and one which has been directly relevant to the organisation during the recent economic downturn. For the organisation, the

previous eighteen months have been turbulent and staff have been faced with much uncertainty regarding job security and the future of the organisation as a whole. Maintaining engagement through the change process has been a challenge for management when the relationship between employer and employees has been under severe pressure.

The purpose of this study therefore, was to explore the effects of redundancy on the engagement of employees that remain with the organisation post redundancy, using a case study method resulting in a phenomenological description of themes or patterns. In order to understand the whole area of employee engagement, what it is, how it can impact organisations and what the underlying theories are behind the concept, I conducted a review of the available literature on the topic.

1.3   Philosophical Framework

This section covers the main philosophical assumptions that influenced this study and how and why I approached the research in a particular way. As empirical research is influenced and impacted by the researcher's value system and biases, it was necessary to first identify the philosophical framework or research paradigm for the study in order to guide the research and determine how the research should be conducted. This process took quite some time and during the course of my reading before embarking on the study, I swayed between philosophies and approaches many times.

Epistemology concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}} There are two main approaches;

Positivism - this rests on the assumption that social reality is singular and objective and is not affected by the act of investigating it. Under this approach, the research involves using a deductive process in order to provide explanatory theories to understand social phenomena. This epistemology holds that the researcher is likely to conduct the research in a similar manner to that of a natural scientist treating the data collected in an objective fashion where it is less open to bias. {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}}.

Interpretivism - As an alternative to the above approach, Interpretivism is an epistemology that proposes that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors and therefore we interpret our everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning we give to these roles, and also we interpret the social roles of others in accordance with our own set of meanings. Therefore social reality is in our minds, and is subjective and multiple and is affected by the act of investigating it. Under this approach, the research involves using an inductive process to provide an understanding of social phenomena within a particular context. {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}}.

For the purposes of the study, I felt that investigating the topic using an interpretive paradigm would allow me to gain a better understanding of it and serve to explain the phenomenon being researched. I did have a number of queries in relation to the fit, however, on the three levels of philosophical, social and technical levels as suggested by Morgan 1979{{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} the interpretive approach better matched my orientation as the goal in using interpretivism is to "gain rich and detailed insights into the complexity of social phenomena" {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} which is the objective of the study. In

addition, crucial to this epistemology is that the researcher has to adopt an empathetic stance and enter the social world of the research participants and endeavour to understand their world from their unique position.

Having identified the research paradigm for the study, this to a large degree dictated the most appropriate methods and techniques which would be used to conduct the research in keeping with the philosophical framework. Choosing an appropriate methodology for the research reflected the philosophical framework which had been identified.

1.4   Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is in keeping with a standard format and is arranged in chapters. Each chapter is divided into separate sections which deal with relevant topics within the chapter. Chapter 2 is a review of the available literature on Employee Engagement. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5, the final chapter, presents an analysis and discussion of the findings. It identifies some limitations of the study and presents a number of recommendations for further research and possible implications of the findings for educators, for business and for the organisation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review provides an overview on employee engagement. It focuses on what employee engagement means, how it is defined, why it is important to business, the drivers and barriers of engagement and finally the theories underpinning it.

2.1   Employee Engagement: An Overview

Over the past 10 years the term employee engagement has become an emerging topic; it is one which is widely used among HR and Management professionals and features regularly in management journals and publications. In general terms, employee engagement has been identified as a key business driver for organizational success with high levels of engagement contributing to talent retention and improved organisational performance and stakeholder value.

However, in reviewing the literature on this topic it has been difficult to find consensus on the meaning of the term. There appears to be no universal definition or understanding among the among the literature available, and it is difficult to know if writers are using the term in the same way or even addressing the same issues. As a concept, employee engagement appears to be complex and varied and influenced by factors such as workplace culture, communication, managerial styles, trust, respect, leadership and company reputation to mention a few. Much

of the literature has been produced within the past ten years and has originated mainly within the practitioner rather than the academic field and in reviewing the available literature, I have found very little available of a purely academic nature.

Within the practitioner field, the most notable contributions have been from the Gallup Organisation{{61 Gallup.com ;}} who originally coined the term following many years of surveying and conducting research on behalf of client organisations. In fact, practitioners such as the Gallup Organisation, Towers Perrin, Blessing White, The Leadership Council and The Conference Board appear to have driven the research on employee engagement over the past ten years and have produced engagement studies which have contributed significantly to the available literature, thus highlighting it's importance for organisations and their performance. Engagement surveys are now widely used as a tool to take the pulse of an organisation and enable management to tap into what employees really feel about their connection to the organisation and their work.

Within the academic literature, employee engagement is continually referred to as a construct and has been acknowledged as one which is multi-faceted. Schmitt & Klimoski {{124 Schmitt, N. & Klimoski, R.J. 1991;}} define a construct as a concept that has been deliberately created or adopted for a scientific purpose. A construct cannot be observed; it must be inferred. For example, by observing a set of behaviours, it might be inferred that someone possesses a particular construct. By merely attaching a term this does not make it a construct. The term must be validated by comparing and contrasting it to similar and different constructs to show that it is related to them in theoretically predictable ways. Having labelled employee engagement as a construct, it is therefore important to determine if it is a valid construct and not merely something similar as in for example other constructs such as

commitment or organizational citizenship. In other words, is what is being observed actually employees being engaged in their work, or are they in fact working hard because they are anxious about their jobs due to the economic climate or is it perhaps something else entirely?

2.2   Defining Employee Engagement:

In order to review and critically examine the literature on the topic, I felt it necessary to first look in a broad sense at what the term actually means and how it has been defined.

Within the literature, the term employee engagement is at times used interchangeably with other constructs such as employee commitment, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship among others. Some writers even suggest that it is merely a relabeling of some of these terms, however, in my opinion; engagement appears to be more dynamic in its make up and a combination of several elements and therefore more complex.

I found that each piece of literature approaches the construct from a different angle making it difficult to get to the real meaning of the term. It is evident that a disparity exists as to whether the term refers to an **attitude** or a **behaviour** with many authors combining both in their definitions. For example, Croston{{59 Croston, David 2008;}} sees it as "a measure of what people are thinking and feeling when they turn up for work, which in turn determines how much discretionary effort they are prepared to invest in their work."   Robinson, Perryman & Hayday {{108 Robinson, D., Perryman, S.P., & Hayday, S. 2004}} define engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work", the "desire to work to make things better", "working longer hours, trying harder, accomplishing more and speaking positively about the organization".

The Best Company's definition that "engagement can be defined as an employee's drive to use all their ingenuity and resources for the benefit of the Company". The Work Foundation's definition describes it as "an employee's emotional and intellectual commitment to their organisation and its success. Engaged employees experience a sense of compelling purpose and meaning in their work and give of their discrete effort to advance the organisation's objectives".

Many of the authors using these types of definitions do not differentiate between attitudes and behaviours, making it difficult to gain a clear understanding of the term. Descriptors such as motivation, energy, drive, positivity all feature in the various definitions which only serves to confuse the issue further. The components of engagement such as enthusiasm, passion focus and energy all indicate a connection to job productivity and benefits for organisations.

Kahn{{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} defines employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves **physically, cognitively, and emotionally** during role performances". These three dimensions of employee engagement;

1. physical – being willing to go the extra mile.
2. cognitive- focusing very hard while at work and
3. emotional – being very involved emotionally with one's work

feature strongly in much of the literature and relates to how people are psychologically and physically present when they are performing a role. Truss, Soane, Edwards, Wisdom, Cross and Burnett {{129 Truss,C., Soane, E., Edwards, C., Wisdom, K., Cross, A. and Burnett, J.

2006;}} define it simply as "passion for work", a psychological state which may encompass the three facets of engagement described by Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} above.

Using similar threads or ideas to those of Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}}, Mastrangelo {{56 Mastrangelo,Paul M. 2009;}} finds common ground between a number of explanations for the concept and also notes that there are three components to engagement;

1. logical commitment
2. emotional commitment and
3. discretionary effort

This translates into the idea of head, hearts and hands which in turn translates into willingness of employees being connected to the company on all three levels and being fully engaged in achieving an organisations goals and objectives. The idea of discretionary effort and willingness to go the extra mile rather than merely showing up at work and being present and committed to the organisation are common themes.

Engagement correlates to individual, group and organisational performance in the areas of productivity, retention, turnover, customer service and loyalty. The link between employee engagement and productivity is a theme which predominates within the practitioner literature. Harter and James {{91 Harter,James K. 2002;}} study measured engagement in terms of business unit level and suggested the connection between engagement and profit which stimulated interest among the practitioner community.

The variety in these definitions gives some indication of the disparity that exists in relation to defining engagement and whether it is an attitude, a behaviour or perhaps an outcome, or a mixture of all three as suggested by Guest as cited by Macleod and Clarke {{35 MacLeod,

David., and Clarke, Nita. 2009;}} The practitioner literature produced by the various consultancy firms is diverse and not necessarily concerned with a common concept or definition for the engagement construct, it has however led to it being identified as an emerging topic and one which has merited academic recognition and further study and therefore warrants inclusion in this review. As a measure of it's importance to organisations, the term has found its way into more academic publications and writers now appear to accept that it is not just another fad term and accepted it as a valid indicator of how employees connect with their work environment.

Many of the terms and definitions used above are simple and uncomplicated and have been used mainly by practitioners. However, within the academic literature, the concept has been developed further and examined in more depth and an attempt has been made to define it in more precise terms in order to give it more academic credibility.

Kahn's {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}}definition is seen to be the original of the species and much of the academic literature use his study as a basis to develop and expand on. Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006}} defines engagement as a "distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance". Harter et al {{91 Harter,James K. 2002}} refers to the individuals involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work.

In summary, although there is a lack of consistency in how the term is defined there are a number of common themes or threads running through the various definitions to enable me to draw a working definition which combines these threads. My understanding is that engagement is above all personal, it is a choice made by individuals and involves being psychologically involved with their work, leading them to give of discretionary effort and

commitment and appears to be a mix of all or some of these constructs dependent on the individual and the circumstances in which they work.

2.3 What does Engagement Look Like?:

Definitions are all very well, but what exactly would a highly engaged workforce look like, be like, feel like? Among all of the writers on the topic, it is generally accepted that committed, engaged employees are more efficient, need less supervision and usually remain with a company longer. Having staff who are committed, enthusiastic, switched on and motivated and who are willing and capable of going the extra mile and delivering what is expected of them and more, is surely something all organisations should strive for. The case for business to take engagement seriously has been made strenuously over the past number of years by practitioner organisations such as CIPD, Gallup, Towers Perrin, Watson Wyatt to name but a few.

Research by Gallup {{61 Gallup.com ;}} has shown that "employee engagement is a force that drives performance outcomes". It shows that engaged employees are more productive, more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to withstand temptations to leave. Employee engagement looks different in every organisation and on occasion it may not be recognised as such, however, most companies understand the importance of employees who work hard, give of their best and pull out all the stops to get the job done.

Hewitt Associates{{85 Dewhurst,S. 2009}} simple model of say/stay/strive sets out the three things engaged people typically do differently;

> ➤ Say: they talk positively about the company to others, which means they help build and protect the corporate reputation

- Stay: they are more likely to stay with the organisation, reducing recruitment and training costs and preserving knowledge and experience

- Strive: they go the extra mile in their work, leading to a better company performance.

On the other hand, it has been found {{61 Gallup.com ;}} that in the US only approximately 29% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs, with a staggering 54% not engaged and another 17% actively disengaged. Disengaged employees can have a negative impact on a company's bottom line and actively discourage colleagues in the process.

2.4   Why is Engagement Important?:

In 2009 the UK Government commissioned a report by MacLeod and Clarke{{35 MacLeod, David., and Clarke, Nita. 2009;}} who reviewed the issue of employee engagement in the UK. This report highlights the fact that employers can create significant competitive advantage and success by paying more attention to creating an engaged workforce.

In the foreword to the study, the British Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, emphasised that although the UK was in the midst of recession, he saw that "Britain's economic recovery and its competitive strengths in a global economy will be built on strong, innovative companies and confident employees". He adds that "there has never been a more important time to think about employee engagement in Britain."

For the most part, there is a compelling case for companies to make themselves aware of how they could benefit from an engaged workforce to drive performance and success in their organisations. The cost of labour is a substantial fixed cost for companies, therefore it makes

sound economic sense to ensure that employees are not just clocking in, but are performing to their maximum capacity and making a difference within their organisations.

Towers Perrin {{65 Towers Perrin 2008;}}have conducted significant research in this area and the results of their Global Workforce Study conducted during 2007 and 2008 show the implications for organisations around employee engagement are significant. One of the key findings from the research is that companies who communicate effectively are four times as likely to report high levels of employee engagement as firms that communicate less effectively.

There is evidence of a clear link between the components of performance disciplines such as performance management processes and personal motivators such as leadership, recognition and collaboration. The advantage of having staff committed to improved performance and achieving organisational outcomes helps drive value in organisations and that is clearly desirable in the current economic climate. {{3 Boston Consulting Group 2008;}}.

Engagement can be hard to achieve and can only be maintained with hard work and effort and needs to be nurtured and helped along. By recognising the attributes and enablers that drive engagement and using them as a basis for implementing an engagement strategy, organisations can ensure they have a good framework for working toward a more engaged workforce who feel they have a voice within their workplace.

2.5   Drivers and Barriers to Engagement:

In much of the practitioner literature it has been highlighted that there can be as little as 30% of staff engaged in their work leaving a high level of untapped potential and scope for improvement in performance within organisations. Highlighted among the barriers toward

achieving high engagement are lack of awareness or understanding about the concept and lack of commitment or uncertainty about embarking on an engagement strategy{{35 MacLeod, David., and Clarke, Nita. 2009;}}. For organisations who recognise the potential for achieving competitive advantage and do decide to venture down the path toward improving engagement, Towers Perrin {{67 TowersPerrin 2003;}}have developed a set of workplace attributes or drivers which they see as critical to building engagement as;

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
1.	Senior management's interest in employee's well being
2.	Challenging work
3.	Decision making authority
4.	Evidence that the Company is focused on customers
5.	Career advancement opportunities
6.	Company's reputation as a good employer
7.	Collaborate work environment where people work well in teams
8.	Resources to get the job done
9.	Input on decision-making
10.	A clear vision from senior management about future success

TABLE 2.1 – DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT

It appears that true employee engagement takes time to develop and is built on mutual trust and a solid relationship between management and staff. Development of solid lines of communication that allow managers and staff to discuss difficult situations openly are crucial to promoting engagement.

Recognising that there are drivers to engagement, it has also been demonstrated that there are also factors or barriers which inhibit engagement. Key among these factors is poor leadership and ineffective management. Employees do not leave an organisation; they leave their manager, which highlights the importance of good management for organisations in the area of employee retention. Communication or lack of it also contributes to a negative work environment. Therefore, creating an environment where management treat employees with trust and respect and where existing talent is nurtured are contributing factors in encouraging employee engagement. The role that positive psychology takes in facilitating employee engagement is highlighted by Stairs {{123 Stairs, Martin 2005;}}.

2.6   Theoretical Background:

As discussed above, there is a distinct lack of clarity between theorists on whether employee engagement is a state, a trait, or a behaviour and many articles refer to it in more than one context or even a combination of all of these. In reviewing the available literature, it is important to recognise the wide array of theories and propositions which exist on the construct.

In an attempt to develop a framework for understanding the conceptual space of employee engagement Macey and Schneider {{62 Macey, William H, Schneider, Benjamin 2008}} propose a framework for understanding the elements of employee engagement, however, they preface this by commenting that their proposition should not be judged as "right" or "true" due to the need to develop the construct further.

They offer a series of propositions about three facets of engagement, namely

1. psychological state engagement;

2. behavioural engagement; and

3. trait engagement.

If we consider these facets of engagement put forward by Macey et al {{62 Macey, William H, Schneider, Benjamin 2008;}} they propose that the preceding state of engagement builds on the next, each developing a piece of the overall employee engagement construct.

Their conceptual framework is one of the first to present a working model based on research. The conceptual framework has evolved initially from literature originating with practitioners and more recently from academic research driven literature. Up to 2005 there is very little linkage between practitioner and academic literature. Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006}} appears to be the first academic to attempt to conceptualise and connect employee engagement theories. He proposed that employee engagement originated through a social exchange model and progressed the concept into two types of engagement,

1. job engagement and

2. organisational engagement.

His definition that engagement is "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components .... associated with individual role performance" ties in the three components previously proposed by other theorists.

Most of the literature emphasises the positive aspect of engagement, however, the opposite side of the coin i.e. disengagement is also addressed by a number of writers including Kahn{{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}}.

2.7 Models of Engagement:

It is evident from the literature that little academic research has been carried out on the theoretical basis for employee engagement. However, two models clearly emerge by academics in this field. In his 1990 study, Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} developed the first grounded theory of **personal engagement and personal disengagement**. Kahn's work conceptualised employee engagement and is therefore considered a seminal work on the topic and contributed significantly to developing the concept further.

Basing his study on the original motivation theories of Goffman, Maslow and Alderfer, as cited by Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}}, his research looked at how much of themselves people leave in or out during the course of their work day and tried to identify the variables which explained the ways in which people adjust their selves in the roles they performed. He defined disengagement as the decoupling of the self within the role, involving the individual withdrawing and defending themselves during role performances {{90 May,Douglas R. 2004;}}

This model of employee engagement suggested that there are three psychological conditions related with engagement or disengagement at work; meaningfulness, safety and availability. He proposed that individuals pose three fundamental questions in each role situation:

1. How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance?
2. How safe is it to do so?
3. How available am I to do so?

He found that workers were more engaged at work in situations that offer them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available.

He also looked at why the three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability are important to fully understand why a person becomes engaged. He defined meaningfulness as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" {{92 Kahn, William A. 1990, p 705}}, he defined safety as the ability to show one's self "without fear or negative consequences to self image, status, or career" and availability as the "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary" for the completion of the work. Overall, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relation to different employee outcomes in terms of engagement. Kahn's {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}}qualitative study integrated the idea that people need both self-expression and self-employment in their work lives and these key principles guided his study.

Both these models (engagement and disengagement) proposed the first models of employee engagement and show the psychological conditions necessary for engagement to take place. May, Gilson and Harter's {{90 May,Douglas R. 2004}} further study in this area confirms Kahn's{{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} work as foundational for the basis of the construct and found that all three psychological conditions showed positive connections with engagement. In testing his theory they found that their results suggest that psychological meaningfulness and safety were positively linked to employees' investment in their work roles. In addition, they also found that job enrichment and work role fit were positively linked to psychological meaningfulness. May et al's {{90 May,Douglas R. 2004;}} study also suggested that employee engagement is also related to emotional experiences and wellbeing.

An alternative to Kahn's{{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} model is that of the **"burnout"** model proposed by Maslach, Scahufeli and Leiter{{97 Maslach, Christina 2001}}. This model describes engagement as the "positive antithesis of burnout" and looks at the erosion of engagement and passion in an individual's job and working environment.

It is defined by three dimensions;

1. Exhaustion

2. cynicism and

3. reduced professional efficacy

Where an individual's work starts as being important, meaningful and challenging and subsequently becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling and meaningless. Burnout is particularly related to job demands such as work overload, emotional demands etc. Maslach et als {{97 Maslach, Christina 2001}} work in this area sees engagement as all that is positive in the work environment and on an individual's work itself where it is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy. This model looks at six areas of one's job or job environment which can lead to burnout or engagement, namely workload, control, reward, community, fairness, values.

Engagement focuses on the work itself and provides a more complex and thorough perspective on an individual's relationship with work and appears to be impacted particularly by job resources such as job control, availability of feedback, learning opportunities etc.

2.8   Theories:

From the models proposed by Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990}} and Maslasch et al {{97 Maslach, Christina 2001}} which served to put employee engagement on a sound footing, the construct was further developed by Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006}} who proposed a theoretical rationale linking it to **social exchange theory** otherwise referred to as SET.

The proposal of Social Exchange theory is that obligations are made through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of reciprocal interdependence. Put simply, relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain rules of exchange. It is the give and take of the relationship and the perceived fairness between the two parties which dictates how successful the relationship is. Within the work environment, the relationship between employer and employee develops over time and Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006}} argues that individuals repay their organisation in response to the resources they receive through the degree and levels of their engagement. For employees, becoming more involved in their role and devoting more of their personal resources is totally discretionary on their part and allows them to respond to the benefits or resources provided by their employer.

This theory provides a theoretical basis to explain in behavioural terms why employees choose to become more or less engaged in their work and their organisation. When they receive resources from for their employer, they feel they "owe" the company by becoming more engaged and bring themselves more into their roles to repay their organisation. When an organisation fails to provide these resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles. Therefore all of the resources, cognitive, emotional

and physical which an individual brings to their work are provisional on the resources received from the organisation.

Saks' {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006;}} study also suggested that there is a meaningful distinction between job engagement and organisation engagement and he was the first of the academic theorists to separate both types of engagement into related but distinct constructs.

While Social Exchange Theory serves to explain and put employee engagement into context, I do not feel it fully explains why, in an organisation which provides the same resources to all employees, some employees choose to engage and some do not, or why employees who have been fully engaged become disengaged? This leads to the question, what triggers individuals to disengage, withdraw discretionary effort and subsequently even leave an organisation? In the context of the current economic climate, it would be interesting to explore the effects that organisational change resulting in redundancy has on staff remaining with an organisation.

2.9 Research Question:

Maintaining employee engagement during an economic downturn is a challenge. Following redundancy, job security is an issue for employees where jobs are continually under threat; this can damage the psychological contract and affect the engagement of those remaining with an organisation.

Most of the literature deals with engagement, identifying it and trying to achieve it, but in the course of my review I found very little available dealing with how redundancy affects employees who survive the cut and remain with an organisation. How they feel about the organisation and whether or not they will continue to be engaged.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore, how redundancy affects employee engagement for staff remaining with an organisation. The fundamental question to be answered was "How does redundancy affect employee engagement"?

Additional supporting questions included;

- Are remaining staff still engaged post redundancy?
- What is the effect on employee retention?

These questions were answered by using the case study method to examine FIRMEX, the Irish entity of a multi-national organisation for which I work. Within this organisation, the change process was driven by both the downturn in the economy and the acceleration of a planned cost-cutting re-organisation programme throughout all European entities within the group. The context or environment in which this study was conducted was in the midst of a difficult transition period for the company and it's employees, which had resulted in significant redundancies.

2.10 Summary:

This chapter reviewed the available literature on employee engagement. Initially it gave a brief overview on engagement and looked at how it is defined. It further explored how what it looks like and why it is important, and the drivers and barriers to engagement. Finally it explored the theoretical background including existing theories and models which concluded in the research question for the study.

To summarise, there are a number of conclusions which can be drawn from the literature;

- There is no single agreed definition of engagement and for each study I have reviewed, each researcher has used a different protocol as a basis for their study.

- There is a distinct bias in the literature where engagement is mainly viewed from a positive aspect.

- The literature tends to emphasise that improvements to employee engagement are always positive.

- Employee engagement is deemed to be a valid construct, but the extent to which it can lead to a change in organisational performance requires further academic research.

- Some of the approaches aimed at improving employee engagement can have a measurable impact in areas such as productivity, absence and retention.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by detailing the approach I have taken in the research design, identification of the qualitative method used to conduct the study, including the methods used for data collection, analysis of the data, data analysis evaluation and finally the limitations of the research design for the study.

3.1   Research Approach

As indicated in Chapter 1, there are two main research approaches which are largely dictated by the research paradigm.

A deductive approach is developed based on a theoretical framework and a research strategy is designed to test the theory. This approach is used primarily within a positivist research paradigm. The inductive approach is where data is collected and analysed in order to develop and build theory and is primarily associated with an interpretivist paradigm.

The key differences in these approaches is that with an inductive approach, theory follows data rather than with a deductive approach where the opposite applies and data would follow theory. Inductive research describes a study in which theory is developed as a result of the observation of empirical data {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}}.

As I had established my research paradigm as interpretivist, it followed that by using an inductive approach to carry out the research, this would allow me to adopt a less structured approach and give me the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the research question and the context in which the research was being conducted. Also due to the fact that the topic is an emerging one and relatively new, there is little academic literature available and therefore it would be an opportunity to possibly develop further theories relating to this topic.

In the course of my research, I was aware that with an inductive approach the researcher is part of the research process and this also required a good understanding of the research context and for me the desire to have my research question answered. Data collected would be qualitative in nature and therefore it was important to understand and obtain the views of the interviewees and how they viewed what was happening in their environment.

It must be noted that neither research approach can be viewed as better than the other, however, the approach chosen should be appropriate to the philosophical framework established at the outset of the research and in keeping with the context of the paradigm or philosophical approach.

3.2   Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore how redundancy affects employee engagement for employees who remain with a company post redundancy.

There are a number of methodologies which can be used for a study such as this depending on the research paradigm. I was aware that no one particular approach is right or wrong,

however the approach chosen should be the most appropriate method to answer the research question and in turn achieve the objectives of the study.

The main methodologies associated with interpretivism are as follows a) Hermeneutics, b) Ethnography, c)Participative Enquiry, d) Action Research, e) Case Studies, f) Grounded Theory and g) Feminist, Gender and Ethnicity Studies. Due to of the nature of the study, a number of these methodologies were entirely unsuitable and were automatically discounted. Finding the best fit for the research design was an important decision and therefore I considered using Grounded Theory, Case Studies and Ethnography as possible methodologies.

With my research question in mind, I finally elected to use case study as the methodology for my research. Collis & Hussy {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} define case study as "a methodology that is used to explore a single phenomenon (the case) in a natural setting using a variety of methods to obtain in-depth knowledge". This method allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, it is also the preferred method to be used in a contemporary setting, but when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. Yin {{125 Yin, Robert. K. 2003;}}.

Using the case study method, the research aims not only to explore certain phenomena, but also to understand them within a particular context Yin as cited by {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}}. There are a number of types of case study, namely exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, however, they are not well defined and can combine with another. The research for this study was carried out as an exploratory case study but in some respects could be classified as an opportunist case study.

Yin {{125 Yin, Robert. K. 2003;}}defines the case study method into two parts, the first part defines the scope of a case study as "an empirical inquiry that

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"

In using the case study method for my study this ties in with Yin {{125 Yin, Robert. K. 2003;}} above as the phenomenon being investigated is within a real-life context and the boundaries between it and the context are blurred and unclear.

Part two of his definition deals with the technical elements such as data collection and analysis strategies. He proposes that the case study inquiry;

- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as on result
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

and therefore I considered it the best fit for the study.

In electing to use the case study method, the decision to use a single or multiple case is another critical factor. A single case is often used when it represents a critical case or an extreme or unique case. While I have opted to use a single case to explore and answer my research question, a case study strategy can incorporate more than one or multiple cases such as in the case study conducted on behalf of the British Government by Macleod and Clarke

{{35 MacLeod, David., and Clarke, Nita. 2009;}}. This was used to generalise the findings from one case to another. In addition, to ensure the data collected was as objective and unbiased as possible, I used triangulation by using multiple sources of data from both primary and secondary sources.

The theoretical background identified during the literature review shaped the research questions and influenced the methods used, the data analysis and the findings in the study.

3.2.1 The Case

In terms of selecting the case to study this phenomenon, the opportunity arose directly within my current employment which allowed direct access to the case. The research was carried out using my employer, the Irish subsidiary of a multi-national organisation, as the unit of analysis.

The company is non-unionised and has enjoyed excellent employee relations over the years. Although part of a multi-national group, the Irish entity falls into the SME category and therefore the population for the study included the entire workforce and from this population, an appropriate sample was drawn for interview purposes. Within an interpretivist study, a sample of one is deemed sufficient; however, I selected a random sample from across the organisation to give a better all round view of what was happening within the organisation.

The research was conducted over a short timeframe, following a period of major organisational change which resulted in downsizing and a significant number of redundancies. The redundancies were carried out in two exercises over a one year period and my research was carried out both during and immediately following the second and most recent exercise.

To fully answer my research question, it was imperative that the research was conducted during this period. Although data for case studies can usually be collected over a long time period, due to the nature of my research question, timing was important in capturing the relevant data to reveal the impact the changes which had occurred as a direct result of the re-organisation and redundancies.

The organisation agreed to my conducting the research following discussions with Senior Management and receiving written approval. One of the conditions agreed was that the organisation would remain anonymous for the purpose of the study and would not be referred to by name at any time. It was also agreed that any staff involved in the study during the course of my research would not be identified to the organisation and therefore all information would remain confidential and would not be disclosed to them.

While access to information was available during the course of my research, because of the difficulties the company was experiencing, gaining access was at times challenging. As an employee of the company, I was genuinely interested in understanding what was happening around me and found the research revealing in many aspects. The time period during which the research was conducted was a difficult one both for the company and employees.

I have used the existing theory to understand and explain what is happening within the organisation and endeavour to answer my research question.

3.2.2 Data Collection:

As this study was designed under an interpretive paradigm, the emphasis is on the quality and depth of the data collected about the phenomenon being researched. Within this approach, qualitative data collection methods provide just such information and this methodology

usually results in findings with a high degree of validity. This is an important factor, as it reflects the extent to which the research findings accurately reflect the phenomena being studied {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}}.

By it's very nature, qualitative data is highly influenced by the context of where it is collected and therefore background information is required to contextualise the data collected. Establishing a framework by looking at the overall "big picture" is extremely important in the research. Understanding the environment in which the study is conducted influences both the researcher and any participants in the study.

There are a number of data collection methods associated with qualitative analysis under an interpretive paradigm and deciding on the most appropriate method was again influenced by the nature of the study, the data required and the context in which the study was conducted. These methods include:

- Interviews
- Protocol Analysis
- Repertory Grid Technique
- Diary Methods
- Observation
- Focus Groups
- Grounded Theory

On further reading, I discounted using Protocol Analysis, Repertory Grid Technique and Diary Methods of data collection in the first instance, as I felt these methods would not provide me with the depth, quality and richness of data I was looking for in my research.

Focus Groups were also discounted due to the population available for the research, as numbers were small and due to the nature of the work, engineers and sales staff who were not office based, it would be difficult to bring sufficient numbers together to provide the depth and breadth of data needed for the study.

Data Collection Method:

In order to break down the data collection into a manageable workload, I divided the process into two distinct stages;

Stage one - Collection of secondary data to provide relevant background information on the company and provide context for the study.

Much of this information was collected from various sources within the company and was collected in the period prior to the redundancies taking place. This data is as follows;

- Historical company information
- Company literature and reports
- Observation of the re-organisation and change process
- Minutes of meetings
- HR records e.g. absence, disciplinary issues, compensation and benefits
- Changes in work patterns or practices
- Other relevant documentation such as notices and emails

Stage two - focused on obtaining empirical or primary data provided by employees within the company.

I had initially intended to collect data using the following qualitative methods; observation and interviews. However, this approach was poorly thought through on my part and following additional reading on various qualitative methods, I opted **not** to use observation methods to collect data as I realised it would not be feasible due to a) the time period involved and b) the context of the environment in which the research would be conducted. These considerations were key factors in my decision to use interviews as the main method to collect primary data for the study. I was also aware that with many staff in key areas leaving the company through redundancy, workload was heavy and remaining staff were anxious about their jobs.

I opted to use interviews as the main method for collection of primary data for the following reasons;

- It would be the least obtrusive method

- Would only involve a select number of participants

- Could be conducted outside of working hours (early morning, lunch breaks or after work)

- Would be the most conducive to obtaining the data required.

Yin {{125 Yin, Robert. K. 2003;}} highlights that "one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview". In electing to use interviews as part of my methodology, I was aware that they can provide subjective data, but that is the nature of interpretivism. Using an inductive approach would allow me to gain an understanding from what interviewees were telling me. I was also aware of quality issues due to interviewer bias, validity and generalisability derived from semi-structured, face to face interviews. However, I

was also aware of the opportunities available to the interviewer to probe an interviewee and obtain valuable data which might not be available through other methods.

I had intended to conduct initial interviews with senior management to provide an organizational context and a general overview of the re-organisation process, but also to probe how their own roles have been affected. However, due to the early departure of one of the senior managers due to redundancy and issues relating to his early departure (he was placed on garden leave) and the terms of his settlement, it was not feasible to include him in the interview schedule.

Interviews:

I initially met with interviewees and discussed the possibility of their participation in the study. Following this meeting, I wrote to each participant confirming our discussion and obtained the informed written consent of all the participants following, clarifications and guarantees of privacy and anonymity within the study. Most participants were slightly apprehensive about the process, however, on balance most were pleased to have been asked to be involved and this was evident in the course of the interviews.

Initial interviews were held with lower level staff to provide in-depth information on individual levels of engagement. In keeping with the interpretive paradigm, some of the interview questions were pre-prepared, however the main purpose of the interviews was to further explore any issues or information that might arise during the course of the interviews.

I opted to use one to one, face to face, semi-structured interviews for this study in order to ensure that specific areas were covered in each interview and to avoid the possibility of very lengthy interviews. This approach worked well and allowed me to direct the interviews

depending on the information being unearthed during the course of each interview and question interviewees in more depth where required. The themes used gave a general structure to the interview, allowing it to flow naturally from the general to the specific. Questions ranged from interviewees attitudes to the Company in general, their role and how they felt about the redundancy process.

Interviews were approximately of 45 minutes duration. Most interviewees were nervous to begin with and I was aware of their concern about the possible content of discussions. I had developed an interview protocol and took time to work through this with each interviewee at the start of the interview. I detailed the nature of my study, reassured them of complete confidentiality and the fact that none of the information would be disclosed to the company at any time. I also confirmed that their comments would be anonymous and they would not be identified by name at any time in the course of my research. I advised them that during the course of our discussions they were free at any time to refrain from answering any questions they did not feel completely comfortable with or to take a break if they so wished. I also ensured that they were comfortable to have the interview audio taped and asked permission to record the interview. All participants confirmed permission.

To ensure accuracy of all data collected during interviews, they were recorded using audio and fully transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews. The first interview was used as a pilot and as a result, I made the necessary adjustments to the questions for subsequent interviews. I had intended to take notes during the interviews, but quickly realised that this interrupted the flow and spontaneity of the interview. Therefore I relied on transcription and some notes recorded after the interviews. A full record of each interview was compiled as soon as possible after the event to ensure the required data was collected and to facilitate any

adjustment of the interview structure before commencing subsequent interviews. All data was referenced to ensure it was kept in good order and for ease of use during the analysis stage.

Initially, I proposed to interview a total of seven staff, comprising two senior managers and one member of staff from each functional area within the Company. Interviewees were of a mixed age group, mixed genders and also a mix of longer and shorter term employees to ensure a representative sample of the staff population and allow balanced feedback to further eliminate bias. Although this was not a strict requirement under the interpretivist paradigm, I felt it would allow me to gain a better overview of the phenomenon within the organisation and would give a more objective view. The final number interviewed was six, one senior manager and five staff from functional areas. This was due in part to a number of staff being unavailable due to holiday, illness, workload and reluctance on the part of one particular individual. I felt however, the numbers were sufficient to supply the data required for the research.

3.2.3 Data Analysis:

Data analysis is the process of systematically organizing and developing coherent themes out of a variety of information, it is about breaking down data to clarify the nature of the component parts and the relationship between them {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}}.

There is no standardised procedure for analysing data in an inductive research study such as this. I have used a qualitative approach to analyse the data collected. Collis & Hussey {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} list the main features of qualitative data analysis to include:

➤ Data reduction – finding a systematic way to select relevant data, often through the use of coding.

➤ Restructuring the data – using a pre-existing theoretical framework or one that emerges during the data collection stage to provide categories into which the data can be fitted.

➤ Detextualising the data – summarising the data in the form of a diagram.

When faced with the task of analysing masses of raw data what must be clear at the outset is the purpose of the analysis. The three key elements in the process suggested by Morse {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} are

• Comprehending – acquiring a full understanding of the setting, culture and study topic.

• Synthesizing – drawing together different themes and concepts from the research. Items of data reduced and sifted to give a general explanation of what is occurring.

• Theorizing – the constant development and manipulation of theoretical schemes until the best theoretical scheme is developed.

Primary data which was collected through the semi-structured, face to face interviews was transcribed and "cleaned" by tidying up the text and correcting transcription errors to ensure the transcript of each interview was accurate. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible after the event to allow interweaving of data collection and analysis.

As the data set became available, the next stage was reducing the substantial volume of data to a manageable level. This was done by sorting and organising it into categories in order to analyse the raw data. As part of the analysis, Miles and Huberman {{126 Miles, Matthew. B.,

& Huberman, A. Michael 1994;}} suggest the use of codes, otherwise known as labels or tags. These categories were dependent on the nature of the research questions and more or less emerged as the data was being sifted through. Ideally, while it would be useful to have data analysis software available to help with analysing raw data, however, this was not available during the course of my research; therefore, I used manual non-quantifying methods to analyse the data set provided.

Once this stage of the analysis was completed, a number of common themes emerged which started to paint a picture around the topic in the context of this particular organisation and allowed me to relate the information to the theories which have been previously presented by other researchers. The data was then collated in order to summarise key points.

3.2.4 Data Analysis Evaluation:

Evaluating the analysis of the data to ascertain the quality is the next step in the process. As with any work, establishing and testing the quality of the analysis is important so that the study can stand up to scrutiny. Lincoln and Guba as cited by Collis and Hussey {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}} propose using the following four criteria for evaluation purposes;

- credibility – whether research was conducted in a manner that the subject of the enquiry was correctly identified and described.
- Transferability – whether the findings of the study can be applied to another similar situation
- dependability – whether research processes are systematic, rigorous and well documented.

- Confirmability – whether research process has been fully described and if research findings flow from the data.

In evaluating the analysis, Collis & Hussey {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}}stress the need to be familiar with the qualitative data collected, to take a systematic and rigorous approach to the analysis and have a clear and comprehensive approach to the methodology and above all to keep the research question to the fore when conducting the analysis.

3.3 Methodology Limitations:

With all research, the findings must be credible and stand up to scrutiny. A well designed research study will need to consider all factors which could impact on the research, limit it in any way and introduce bias on the part of the researcher.

Reliability is one crucially important factor within the research and refers to the absence of differences in the results if the research were repeated {{43 Collis, J., & Hussey, R., 2009;}}. An interpretivist paradigm proposes that the researcher and their activities influence the research, therefore repeating the research would not necessarily yield the same results. However, reducing bias by establishing protocols and procedures should serve to eliminate threats to reliability in the research.

Validity is another important consideration for any research project as it is the extent to which the research findings accurately reflect the phenomena being researched. Under an interpretivist paradigm, the aim is to uncover and capture the essence of the phenomena and provide rich, detailed information. Validity can be measured in a number of ways, the most common of which is face validity, where the tests or measures used actually measure what they are meant to. In business research studies such as this one, construct validity is also a

consideration and particularly relevant for my study. This type of validity relates to phenomena which are not easily observed and are known as hypothetical constructs which are assumed to exist as factors that explain observable phenomena. In this situation, the researcher must be able to show that the observations and research findings can be explained by the construct. I was aware of to the generalizability or external validity factor also, however, given that my research was in the form of a case study, my task was not to try and produce a theory that is generalisable to all population, only to the particular research setting for the purpose of the study. Therefore I did not expect that my results would be generalisable.

In electing to carry out this research project in the form of a case study, I was aware of some practical limitations which might impact on the research. Firstly, as I would be conducting the research within the organisation in which I work, my role was that of practitioner/researcher and I was aware of the difficulties this might pose both practically and professionally.

As highlighted by Saunders et al {{66 Saunders, Mark., Lewis, Philip. and Thornhill, Adrian. 2009;}}, combining two roles did prove demanding and involved some data collection outside of normal hours. They also highlight the threat to the quality of the data by being "too close" to the research setting. Throughout the course of the data collection I was conscious at all times of this possibility and endeavoured through strict protocol when conducting the interviews to be as business like and detatched as possible.

Secondly, as I am known to the interviewees, I was aware that the quality of the data could be compromised by interviewer/interviewee bias, and briefed interviewees fully beforehand on the purpose and nature of the study when I invited them to participate and ensure them of confidentiality at all times. I was aware that this might be a barrier to interviewees answering

questions fully and frankly, however, I tried to ensure they received as much reassurance as possible before commencing interviews. By ensuring the interviews were conducted carefully, questions posed with clarity and without ambiguity, I tried to ensure high-validity of the data collected during the process.

Ideally with an interview schedule, it would be beneficial to get some feedback from an expert in the field for content and face validity, however, due to time constraints; this was unfortunately not possible in this instance. Also, again, time permitting, ideally a study should be peer-checked to establish the findings stand up to scrutiny, however, again in this instance, due to time constraints, I was unable to do this.

I was aware that the difficult environment in which the data would be collected might be cause some difficulties in terms of timescale and at times it was difficult to arrange interviews, however, I was able to overcome this by being flexible and scheduling interviews outside of normal working hours.

3.4 Summary:

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in this study. It identified the single case method as the most appropriate method to fit with the research questions posed. It detailed the rationale for the case selection and identified the sources of data used. Finally it described the method used to analyse the data and the limitations of the methodology such as they were.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter contains the findings of this study, including qualitative data obtained from interviews, details from company documentation and other information obtained from field research. It provides background to the research and details of how the various themes were determined. Due to the sensitivity of the information and the anonymity guaranteed both to the organisation and the participants in the study, the Company has been give the pseudonym FIRMEX and participants have been referred to as Interviewee 1, 2, etc.

4.1   Background:

The purpose of the research was to explore what effects if any, redundancy had on employee engagement for employees remaining with the company. The primary research question was "How does redundancy affect employee engagement"? Supporting research questions included;

- Are remaining staff still engaged post redundancy?
- What is the effect on employee retention?

Answers to these questions were found by using the case study method to explore FIRMEX, the Irish subsidiary of a multi-national organisation.

4.2   Method:

Interviews were held with six employees of FIRMEX, all of which were conducted at their place of work. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. All of the interviewees agreed to have the interviews audio-recorded. When conducting the interviews I used a number of broad questions to semi-structure the interviews, these questions were primarily about how people felt about 1) The Company, 2) their jobs and 3) the redundancy process.

I did not use a conceptual framework for the study as I wanted to see what was uncovered during the course of my research. I wanted to know overall how people felt about the company, their jobs and finally how they felt about the redundancy process and whether it had impacted on how they felt about the company and their place in it. Depending on the response to these questions, I probed each area to find out what people felt and how they viewed their current environment. As I had chosen an inductive approach for the study, I waited until analysing the data to decide on which codes to assign to the data.

All other documentation used as secondary data relating to FIRMEX was made available to me through the course of my work or alternatively supplied to me by a Senior Manager or other officers of the Company. Additional information was obtained through the internet and print media. All the recorded interviews were transcribed and documented.

The next step was to classify or categorize the data into meaningful categories. This method was used to group the data and label or code it to enable it to be used for further analysis. To do this I initially used open coding or labelling to work through each transcript. Codes are efficient data-labeling and data retrieval devices and serve to speed up analysis {{126 Miles, Matthew. B., & Huberman, A. Michael 1994;}}. Ideally one would use CAQDAS analysis

software such as NVivo to analyse the data, however, this was unavailable to me for this study. Therefore I analysed the information manually, initially using a spreadsheet to record the raw data and then transferred this data to a mind map to visually display the information for each interviewee. This allowed me to view the data and link labels from each interview to develop a "picture" of each interview.

From this process, 50 codes or labels emerged. Throughout the process of reviewing all of the responses, it was important to consider the context in which the interviews were conducted, which was during a period when redundancies had either taken place, or were about to take place and therefore most responses were impacted and related in some way to this process.

The next step was to reduce these labels and as expected a number of key themes and sub-themes emerged from the data. As mentioned above, I loosely structured the interviews into three distinct sections, 1) The Company, 2) The Job, 3) The Redundancy Process. The themes which emerged from this analysis are detailed in section 4.3.

4.3   Analysis:

The analysis underpinning the findings in section 4.2 are as follows;

Key Theme 1: "A great company to work for"

Finding :   The Company is viewed by employees as a very good employer and this was attributed to the ethos and nature of the Irish Senior Management team.

Through the course of each interview, the most overriding theme was how great the Company was to work for. Participants used descriptors such as *"Fair", "brilliant employer", "love*

working here", "can't speak highly enough of them", "proud to work for a global company", "one of the best companies I have ever worked for", "fun to work here".

This is confirmed in archive documentation in relation to former employees available from the HR Department and also in observations from third parties such as consultants working on-site on various projects. It is clear that this view is generally held about the organisation. All interviewees had a very positive attitude to the company, but in most instances made the point that this was a historical viewpoint and that things had changed somewhat in the period immediately prior the study.

Sub-Theme: People, Leadership/Management,

Finding : Good people are seen to be at the heart of the organisation.

Finding: A good relationship with an employee's Line Manager appears to be a key factor in maintaining employee engagement.

In almost all of the interviews, the theme of people was a predominant one. Each interviewee emphasised the quality and nature of company employees and especially the management and leaders within the organisation. All mentioned this in the context to the staff who had left or were leaving through redundancy and the loss this would be to the company. Interviewee 2 remarked;

"With the numbers and quality of the people that have left, I think it's definitely going to be harder for the company to come back. I know it wasn't the best decision to get rid of so many people, I think people are so stretched now".

"The Company was perfect before, compared to the way it is now".

Leadership and Management also featured significantly. The approachability of management and in turn their approach to staff in general, was remarked in several instances. Interviewee 3, an executive with thirteen years of service, remarked that

> *"The management structure was quite good, I also thought on a personal level they were very good to me, be it having babies, if there were issues going on in your life they were prepared to listen. I found one or two of the Senior Management brilliant and very approachable and that really helps and I found some of my old colleagues were very approachable, in particular my old manager and that made me really enjoy it".*

Most participants said they had a good or very good relationship with their line manager and felt a degree of safety or security in their role which allowed them to give of their best in their jobs. From my discussions with Senior Management and from company historical literature, it seems that the management style in Ireland is very different from other entities within the Group. The Irish entity has been autonomous until the recent organisational change and has not been unduly influenced by Japanese management as in many of the other larger entities within the Group.

Key Theme 2:   Culture & Environment

FIRMEX has a very distinctive open culture as compared with the culture within the UK and other European entities which are managed by Japanese General Managers and this was remarked on by a number of the participants who made a point of mentioning the culture of the organisation and how it has been until the recent changes. The company is friendly and progressive and is known to be innovative in its approach to business. It encourages employees to "think outside the box" and react quickly. Interviewee 3 specifically mentioned the Company mission statement,

"Because our mission statement asks us to remain focussed and put the customer first and react quickly. I do that every day and every week and that's what makes my role so important. That was always part of my job brief. I'm marketing and out on the road with customers. The Company needs to think as a whole and I think we do that. The priority is the customer in each department and I do think we think as a whole."

Being a small company with limited budgets, FIRMEX have had to think differently during the economic downturn to reduce its cost base, while at the same time offering the customer a better or even improved service. All of those interviewed were very customer focused and had a clear line of sight to the customer even where they were not in customer facing roles.

Key Theme 3: Communication

Finding :   Good two-way communication was considered an important element for employees with employee voice a crucial part of the process.

A third key theme highlighted within the study was Communication. Again this was raised by all participants as important. FIRMEX has made good communication a priority for the organisation. They have a good communication network with their customers and many staff know customers personally and have cultivated good working relationships over the years. It's the way they do business and the small close-knit organisation has made it a feature of their business model.

This is confirmed by emails from sales reps to all staff advising them when there has been a serious illness with a customer or even the death of a family member. This close relationship has been significant during the economic downtown where customers have been seriously affected and have been in financial difficulty. On more than one occasion where there has

been the possibility of a significant bad debt, the Finance Team and Sales Reps have been in a position to manage the account minimising the effect and arrange for the debt to be paid down thus enabling the customer to get back on track and continue trading rather than withhold stock and force closure. This has been noted and appreciated by the trade and has boosted company reputation and customer loyalty, evidence of this was found in company reports and minutes of management meetings.

In terms of communication with employees, FIRMEX has worked hard to ensure that channels of communication are kept open at all times. A Staff Committee was established some years ago and meetings are held with Management on a monthly basis to air the views of staff and receive a business update. During the recent change process, this committee has been used to relay information to staff and consult with them during the transfer of the company and during the redundancy process, however, meetings have been not been held with such regularity of late. Meetings are minuted for distribution to all staff and were made available as part of this study. This forum has provided a voice for employees during a very difficult period and allowed staff to air their views and raise issues of concern.

Interviewee 2 commented: "

> "... communication has been really good, all of the old management were great communicators and kept everyone up to date. Now no-one seems to know what's going on, its like, get us over these few months of transition and see what happens. The staff committee was a great idea, if someone had an issue they could bring it to their rep and raise it at the meeting,...."

With regard to giving employees a voice, she further commented ....

> *"Yea, I think it did, if they wanted to use it, I think it was good to be in a position for everyone to see where the company was at, how they were doing good or bad. Now that there is one, I have more understanding of what their aims and goals are".*

With the departure of the General Manager and the imminent departure of another Senior Manager, communication has dropped off the agenda and deteriorated significantly. This was mentioned by two interviewees. One declined to have her comments recorded, however, one commented as follows:

> *"Within the company itself, communication is the most important thing, if it goes its a disaster. As an individual, I don't like not knowing what's going on....... If you take this company as an example, our numbers have been halved, we were always a very tight company over the years, we all knew what was going on. I have never felt as alone in my life as I do now, we know nothing. All of the decisions are being made overseas and that's it. We have only one person who has any idea of what's going on and if he doesn't share what he knows then we are in the dark".*

Because communication has been so good in the past, employees now feel they are being abandoned and kept in the dark and have nowhere to go for information. During the course of the interviews, the discussions moved from being very <u>positive</u> when talking about the company to a more <u>negative</u> one when discussing the redundancy process and the relationship with the UK entity. Interviewee 5 remarked;

> *"It's like we are operating in a vacuum. No one really knows what's going on and people are coming and going from the UK and we don't have a clue who people are.*

People are not being told very much, so most people are waiting for the axe to fall again down the line".

Key Theme 4: Motivation/Engagement

Finding: Employees are highly motivated and actively engaged in their work.

It was evident during the course of the study that FIREMX staff are motivated and enthusiastic about their work and the Company. All of the primary data and a significant quantity of the secondary data demonstrates this.

Within this theme are a significant number of sub-themes:

Sub-Theme: Development/Knowledge:

Finding: Where the company had invested in developing employees through further education or training, staff felt they "owed" the company and influenced their levels of commitment.

Training and further education have been encouraged widely with all employees and this was widely acknowledged among the participants who feel it has served to further motivate staff within the company. Three of the interviewees had recently completed company sponsored further education courses and raised it as a factor during our discussions as a reason for motivating them. Interviewee 3 commented;

"I suppose it's partly down to the fact that they paid for my course, in other companies, that did not happen. I wasn't even directly working in the accounts area,

that's rare that that would happen. I think that would be something that would trigger me. Even recently when we were asked if we could do extra work to cover some of the jobs going, everyone is up to their eyes, but I know it's an area I would like to get into, but I will go that extra mile. Maybe if they hadn't allowed me to do the course my response would have been different. Now that they are looking for extra, I would not have been inclined to, but the fact that they have helped me I feel I owe them something".

Interviewee 3 noted;

"I've recently completed some studies and that was encouraged by others in the company and I found that hugely motivating. I always wondered if I should go back to study and I was encouraged to do it and the company paid for it so that was hugely motivating to go and do something like that. I found certain people were great for encouragement but they have now gone".

Sub-Theme: Workload

FIRMEX staff have always handled a significant workload. As a small company with few administration staff, most employees work in stand-alone positions and cover for each other during annual leave and over busy periods. The FIRMEX group tag line is "lean and strong", and this has certainly been true within the Irish entity. With staff numbers almost halved in the past fourteen months, the workload has increased significantly for all staff to the point where it is not possible to cover absence of any kind such as sickness or annual leave.

Sub-Theme: Commitment/Passion

Finding:　　There is an over-riding positivity among employees about their jobs and their commitment to their jobs.

Finding:　　Employees are emotionally committed to both the company and their jobs.

When participants were asked about their job, a number of them talked about commitment and passion as drivers in their work and their protectiveness of their work. Interviewee 3 commented;

> *"I would be hugely passionate about my work, and hugely proud about my work. I probably would be very protective over my work as well. I think passion drives me for what I do". .... it's very important. You need to have a bit of passion. If you have no passion, I don't think you're going to get the job done, you have to believe in what you're doing and why you are doing it".*

Interviewee 2 described her feelings about a particular element in her job;

> *....... "I've made suggestions on one particular job and its been improved tremendously and I've made it my own. I would hate to give that job up now".*

Sub-Theme: Enjoyment/Fun

Finding :　　Passion, enjoyment and fun were viewed as important for employees in their work.

The atmosphere and environment within the organisation is friendly and warm and for FIRMEX employees, enjoying what they do in their jobs is part of what defines the company. Senior Management are friendly and down to earth and make a point of socialising with staff regularly.

However, due to the downsizing, this has changed somewhat and opportunities to socialise and mix with other staff is now marked by leaving drinks held for employees leaving through redundancy. The fun factor for most staff is now largely missing.

Sub-Theme: Safety/Security/Confidence

Finding: Safety and security in carrying out their role is very important.

Early in each interview the theme of confidence, safety or security was raised. Each participant, in some form or another talked about the importance of having confidence, or feeling secure or safe in doing their jobs. I probed this further to understand how important a factor it actually was to them. Some related it to their knowledge of the role, length of service, experience and familiarity in the role, knowledge they had acquired through further education, knowing what was expected of them, job descriptions, familiarity with their Manager and a lot more. The safety factor appears to be crucially important in enabling them to do their best and be innovative in how they approach their work.

Many participants view this factor as being under threat in the current climate for a number of reasons. Interviewee 5 noted;

> *"I suppose because I've been here a while and have been doing the job for some time*
>
> *and I know if there is an issue I can have a go and if I make a mistake it's not the end*

of the world, although that rarely happens, it means you are not covering your ass all the time and watching your back like it has been in other jobs with me. There hasn't been a blame culture here, more of a learning one. Although that seems to be changing."

Interviewee 5 further commented;

"From very shortly after I started here, there has always been a feeling of safety and security, that if you worked hard and had the company's interests at heart you were looked after. There was very little office politics at play and the atmosphere was open and honest. You could go to your manager with an issue and feel confident he would try and resolve it or you could bring it up at the Staff Committee meeting and they would try and deal with it. The company was autonomous within the Group and the Senior Managers were in a position to make the best decisions for the Company. That is not the case now and I feel we are at the mercy of people who know and care very little about us and that is very sad. We don't seem to matter any more and I find that hard to take. "

Sub-Theme: Autonomy/Control

Finding: Autonomy and control in how work is carried out was viewed as important.

Control over the way work is performed is an important issue for the majority of participants. Within this theme some described being "micro-managed" and the frustration with a lack of autonomy. Being managed from a distance having being used to local management was seen as difficult to handle and to a large degree with control and autonomy being seen to be "lost" most felt that this impacted on how they do their work.

Sub-Theme: Trust and Respect

Finding: Trust and respect is a key requirement in the employer/employee relationship.

Trust and respect featured significantly with a number of the participants. Before the recent changes staff were treated with trust and respect, however, this does not seem to be the case with the new company. I asked participants if there was anything that would make them want to leave the Company. Participant 5 remarked;

> *"Yes, if I get to the point where I dread coming in to work, or if I feel it is just a situation of constantly watching my back and I have to cover off all avenues when I am doing my work, then I will certainly go as soon as I get a suitable role.*
>
> *Nothing is worth being unhappy. I have always been treated with respect and I would not stay if that were not the case. That's so important. In the job I do if the respect is gone then it would not be worth staying. I don't want to spend my time worrying about who I report to rather than trying to do my job to the best of my ability"* ....
>
> *There is a lack of respect for the individual and that comes through in their dealings with me and other colleagues".*

4.4 Additional Findings:

From my analysis there were some additional findings as follows:

Finding: Morale has been severely affected by the redundancy process.

Finding: There is a clear difference for employees whose work groups have been directly affected to those who have not.

Finding: There is a lack of direction and a sense of nervousness about the future of the Company.

Finding: Employees remaining with the company are in a "wait and see" mode to determine if they will choose to stay or move on.

4.5   Summary:

This chapter reviewed the key findings of the study. In reviewing the data, 4 key themes emerged and a number of sub-themes. The results of the study suggest that in the case of FIRMEX, while employee engagement has been high, it has been severely affected by downsizing and the redundancy process. The study also found that morale is low among staff remaining with the organisation and many are adopting a "wait and see approach" in terms of opting to stay with the Company in the short term.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

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The purpose of the research was to explore, using the case study method, how redundancy affects employee engagement for staff remaining with an organisation. The main research question posed was "How does redundancy affect employee engagement". Additional supporting questions included;

- Are remaining staff still engaged post redundancy?
- What is the effect on employee retention?

This chapter provides discussion on the findings and analysis of the study and relates these findings to the literature on employee engagement. It identifies the limitations of the study and presents the conclusions derived from the findings detailed in the previous chapter. It also provides recommendations for further research in this area.

5.1 Discussion:

This section focuses on the main research question and the additional questions posed at the commencement of the study. I have examined each question and provided an analysis of the findings in relation to each question and related it to the existing literature.

Main Research Question:

The main research question asked **"how does redundancy affect employee engagement"?** From the overall findings in this study, I have concluded that redundancy affects employee engagement in two very specific ways, namely through 1) breaking the psychological contract between employer and employee and 2) undermining employee confidence, security and trust.

Conclusion 1: Redundancy affects employee engagement by breaking the psychological contract between employer and employee.

At the outset it is clear from the research that there is a marked difference in feelings and attitudes about the Company prior to, and immediately following, the organisational changes which have resulted in the redundancy process. The notion of a psychological contract is one where the perceptions of the two parties, employer and employee of what their mutual obligations are towards each other are understood. Some of these obligations may be seen as expectations and are believed by the employee to be part of and reflect the reality of the relationship with the employer {{19 CIPD 2009;}}. Where this relationship changes such as in a redundancy situation, then the "contract" can be deemed to have been compromised or broken.

In general, the Company has been viewed by employees as a very good employer and this was largely attributed to the ethos and nature of the Irish Senior Management team. Good people are seen to be at the heart of the organisation and this is further echoed in the fact that all

participants had a good, if not very good, working relationship with their direct line manager and specifically highlighted this fact.

Communication: The findings suggest that communication within the company has also been very good and this is considered an important element for employees with employee voice a crucial part of the process.

Motivation & Commitment: There has been an over-riding positivity in the organisation with employees highly motivated and committed to their jobs. Where the company had invested in developing employees through further education or training, staff felt they "owed" the company and this significantly influenced their levels of commitment and loyalty. As suggested in the review of the literature, Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006;}} proposed link between engagement and Social Exchange Theory is reflected in the fact that the relationship which has existed for between staff and the company has evolved over time into a very successful one for both parties. The discretionary effort shown by employees has been acknowledged by the company in many ways both by monetary and other means, evidence of which has been confirmed in company documentation.

Both Kahn{{92 Kahn,William A. 1990;}} and Mastrangello's {{56 **Mastrangelo,Paul M. 2009;**}} explanation for the concept proposes three components, 1) logical commitment, 2)emotional commitment and 3) discretionary effort. All of the participants in the study highlighted their emotional commitment to the organisation and their work and gave clear examples of their discretionary effort in relation to the additional workload that almost everyone within the organisation has taken on over the past year as a direct consequence of the reduction in headcount. This is confirmed in company reports, minutes of meetings held with the Staff Representative Committee and in the Annual Appraisal documentation.

Attitude: It would appear that employees at the company have a very positive attitude to both the company and their work and see it as a great place to work. The data also indicated that the quality of people, leadership and management within the company are viewed by staff as significantly important to them and to the success of the company.

In much of the literature, engagement is referred to both attitudinally and behaviourally. If we consider the facets of engagement proposed by Macey et al {{62 Macey, William H, Schneider, Benjamin 2008;}} ie Trait, State and Behavioural Engagement, they propose that the preceding state of engagement builds on the next, each developing a piece of the overall employee engagement construct. These findings would suggest that FIRMEX employees have demonstrated high levels of engagement.

Conclusion 2: **Redundancy affects employee engagement by undermining employee confidence, security and trust.**

Trust and respect are key requirements in the employer/employee relationship with trust being recognized to be an integral part of the psychological contract, (Rousseau cited in Cartwright, and Holmes {{130 Cartwright, Susan and Holmes, Nicola 2006;}}) and it has been suggested that meaning in the workplace is also linked to trust.

From interviews, discussions and general observations, the research has shown that morale within the company has been severely affected by the redundancy process. All of the participants commented that passion, enjoyment and fun are important elements for them in their work. In a company which was noted for its upbeat and fun atmosphere, this has been replaced by one which is quiet, sombre and as noted by at least one interviewee "sad".

However, it should be noted that the extent of this feeling depended on whether or not a participant's work group had been directly affected.

The research also suggested that safety and security in carrying out their role has been very important to employees. This can be tied back to Kahn's model of engagement {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990;}} which suggests there are three psychological conditions related to engagement or disengagement at work and relates to 1) meaningfulness, 2) safety and 3) availability.

These findings suggest a real change has occurred in the organisation and the fact that participants used descriptors such as "survivor", "victim" and other similar terms to verbalise how they were feeling brought me back to the literature to further investigate this area and try and explain it.

I carried out a further search of the literature using "survivor" as a search term in addition to employee engagement and discovered a whole host of additional literature on this aspect of engagement. The term "survivor syndrome" or "survivor sickness" appears to have come into its own particularly during the economic downturn and is particularly relevant in this study. Ciancio {{120 Ciancio,Jack 2000;}} acknowledges that this state begins with the destruction of the psychological contract which is based on certain assumptions which include trust, job security, respect and appreciation among others. Downsizing and redundancy reintroduces unpredictability, loss of control and trust with employee morale and loyalty becoming unintended casualties {{117 Makawatsakul,Nantaporn 2003;}}. Low morale tends to affect employee motivation together with other side affects such as a sense of loss, chaos and uncertainty.

Additional Research Question 1: Are remaining employees still engaged post redundancy?

This question directly follows on from the main research question. When it comes to motivating and engaging staff, the findings suggest that staff have been highly motivated and engaged in both their work and the organisation, however, the findings also confirm that the redundancy process has had an adverse effect on both organisation and staff.

In all of the key themes which contribute to employee engagement, it suggests that employees were highly engaged prior to the redundancies. With the downturn in staff morale which has been severely affected by the redundancy process, engagement has been directly affected due to a deterioration in a number of key areas as detailed in the main research question. It would appear that this is due to issues such as job insecurity, perceptions of unfairness, loss of loyalty, increased workloads and an unwillingness to go beyond the required minimum for the new management regime.

A further key finding in the study is that where employees appear to be engaged, there is a sense that this in part could be attributed to fear and is a form of pseudo engagement rather than "the real deal". The most tangible measures of employee engagement are how hard an employee works and how long they stay as a result of that commitment {{123 Stairs, Martin 2005;}}.

Each interviewee spoke about their "sadness" and the "emptiness" that exists now and how they see this affecting the "organisational culture". The additional workload was also a factor mentioned by three of the participants and the difficulty in getting through the sheer volume

of work each day. Interviewee 4 specifically commented that the redundancies had "scared" everyone and "undermined" their confidence in the future of the company. He added that although he viewed himself as a "survivor of the process", the fear had not gone away and he did not feel "safe" any more about his job or the company. He felt this was due in part to the fact that two redundancy programmes only a year apart, had given the impression of a "drip, drip effect" and had resulted in him keeping a constant eye on information coming through from Head Office of any possible changes which could impact his job or the future of the organisation.

Additional Research Question 2: What is the effect on employee retention?

During the course of the interviews, there was a degree of reluctance to answer this question and of all the questions I posed, this was the one which gave least feedback.

Although morale is low, the economy is still underperforming and therefore many staff are conscious that there is little mobility in the job market. However, for staff remaining with the company there are mixed emotions with some feeling "lucky" to have a job. For others this is wearing thin and if the economy were more buoyant, might consider it time to move on to an organisation which is more stable, offers more opportunity and with a healthy future. A recent global survey conducted on behalf of Accenture {{131 Dillon, Frank 2010;}}on middle managers found that the majority were staying with their employer only because they had little choice.

It is evident that FIRMEX employees remaining with the company are in a "wait and see" mode to determine if they will choose to stay or move on. Retaining key staff will be critical

for the organisation especially as the economy climbs out of recession and tackling this 'survivor syndrome' will be a factor in handling retention.

5.2 Limitations:

In conducting this study there were a number of limitations to be considered. These were as follows:

- Holistic case study methodology: The methodology used for this study is a holistic single case – Yin {{125 Yin, Robert. K. 2003;}}argues that multiple case study methods are more preferable as they allow the researcher to establish whether the findings of the first case occur in subsequent cases and therefore that the findings are generalisable. One possible means of overcoming this problem perhaps would be to involve a number of work-groups and have more than one unit of analysis.

- For primary data purposes the number of interviewees was small, however, as a percentage of the overall population available, it should be sufficient to represent the views of the organisation, however, there is the possibility that they do not. To overcome this limitation, I used triangulation of other sources of secondary data to support the data derived from primary data thus ensuring the findings reflected reality.

- In relation to the interview questions, it is recommended that the interview guide should be peer checked with another researcher to ensure the questions are valid and relevant. Again, I was not in a position to do this.

- In relation to the primary data derived from interviews with participants, it is recommended that transcripts should be made available to participants to check they

are a true reflection of their views. Due to time constraints, I was not in a position to do this.

5.3 Conclusion:

Throughout the course of the research and in reviewing all of the literature, my most overriding thought has been that the topic is a complex multi-layered, multi-dimensional construct. By better understanding both the positive and negative elements associated with employee engagement can both HR practitioners and academics harness the benefits associated with it.

While employee engagement is certainly viewed as an emerging topic in terms of academic research, there is no doubt that for organisations who embark on a downsizing or redundancy programme, the engagement of employees remaining with the organisation should be as closely attended to as those leaving the organisation. As has been demonstrated in relation to FIRMEX, neglecting the softer side of change management may mean that the effect of redundancy on staff remaining with an organisation may have significant reprecussions well into the future.

5.4 Implications:

Very few organisations have escaped the need to downsize or layoff staff in the past couple of years due to the economic climate. The implications of this study for scholars, for business and for FIRMEX are many.

The research question asked "how does redundancy affect employee engagement". From the findings of the study it seems that the answer in one word is "significantly". As with any relationship, engagement is built on trust and confidence and is formed over time. It is a slow process and as with any relationship is delicate in its form and can be easily destroyed.

The implications for scholars - the findings of the study support a number of theories proposed by Kahn {{92 Kahn,William A. 1990;}}, Saks {{89 Saks,Alan M. 2006;}}, Macey and Schneider {{62 Macey, William H, Schneider, Benjamin 2008;}}In addition, the study has contributed to the literature on employee engagement by further adding to the evidence to support the literature on "survivor syndrome".

The implications for business - Marcus Buckingham cited by Labarre{{127 Labarre, Polly 2001;}} sees that the "major challenge for CEOs over the next 20 years will be the effective deployment of human assets. It's about getting one more individual to be more productive, more focused, more fulfilled than he was yesterday." Any advantage that's hard to replicate is an advantage that lasts and contributes to the bottom line for business. From the evidence available, it appears that employee engagement can be just such an advantage.

The implications for FIRMEX – it is clear from my findings that employees within FIREMX have enabled the company to excel in its field and be the market leader, however, in a very short timeframe, engagement has suffered and retention of key staff may be severely affected and affect their market position. This case study suggests that employee engagement should be treated with the respect it deserves.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM COMPANY

APPENDIX A:

87 St Declans Road
Marino
Dublin 3

20 January 2010

Dear Loretta

This letter confirms the Company's support for your research study as part of your BA (Hons) degree in Human Resource Management.

In offering support, the Company undertakes to provide the following:

- Permission to request interviews with staff
- Access to historical company information
- Permission to use miscellaneous company documentation (with prior approval)

In return we request that you conduct your research in an appropriate manner and respect each participant's right to confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, we would request that the company not be identified by name in the course of your research to preserve it's anonymity.

Good luck with your studies!

Yours sincerely

Kevin Donegan
Operations Controller (Snr Manager)

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX B

87 St Declans Road

Marino

Dublin 3

Tel: 087 2482505

Email: lorettaheaney@hotmail.com

June 2010

Dear Participant

Following our recent conversation, thank you for agreeing to participate in the research for my Dissertation in Human Resource Management. The topic for my Dissertation is Employee Engagement and I will be meeting people to discuss their views on their involvement with work.

Some of the themes I will be discussing with you are work in general and your job. Our discussions will be strictly confidential and anything we discuss will not be disclosed to anyone other than myself. Participants in the study will be totally anonymous and your name will not be used in any way during my study or associated with any comments made by you.

I anticipate my meeting with you will take about 45 minutes to an hour, so we will need to schedule a day and time to suit. I am happy to meet you on-site at the office or if you would prefer we can meet elsewhere, whichever would suit you best.

Finally, thank you for your support and I look forward to our meeting.

Yours sincerely

Loretta Heaney

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:
Employee Engagement

Name and position of Researcher:
Loretta Heaney
4th Year, BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management
National College of Ireland

Please initial
box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet
for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to
withdraw at any time without giving reason.

I give permission to audio-record and use direct or indirect quotes from
the interviews as part of this study.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: **Date:**   **Signature:**

Loretta Heaney (Researcher)   **Date:**   **Signature:**

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The Company:

1. How long you have been with the Company?
2. How do you feel about the company?
3. How do you view it as an employer?
   Probe: Why?

The Job:

1. Tell me about your job?
2. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
3. Do you have the materials and equipment to do the work right?
4. At work do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
5. In the past seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
6. Does your manager or someone at work seem to care about you as a person?
7. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
8. At work, do your opinions seem to count?
9. Does the mission or purpose of the company make you feel that your job is important?
10. Are your co-workers committed to doing quality work?
11. In the past 6 months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
12. In the past year, have you had opportunities in work to learn and grow?

THE REDUNDANCY PROCESS:

1. What are your thoughts about the recent redundancy process?
2. How did this compare with the last process in 2009?
3. How do you think it has affected staff staying with the company?
4. How do you feel about the future of the company?

5. Do you think the company has changed in any way?
   Probe: How?
6. Do you think your job will change in any way?

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW NO 5 – LH   **TRANSCRIPT**

Interview held: Wed 30th June – duration 45 mins

Interviewer: Loretta Heaney

Interviewee: No 5 - LP

Interview protocol covered at start of interview.

Interviewer then proceeded to conduct the interview.

Q: How long you have been with the Company?

A: 5 Years

Q: How do you feel about the company?

A: I love working here, it's been such a great company to work for from the day I started.

Q: How do you view it as an employer?

A: A great employer, I can't speak highly enough of them.

Q: Are there any specific reasons you would say that?

A: I work part-time and the flexibility that offers me in terms of work-life balance is great. I came back to work after a number of years at home looking after children and they made me feel my skills were useful and worthwhile. I was always encouraged to stretch myself and allowed to progress and develop at my own pace.

Q: In terms of your attitude towards the company, how would you say that is?

A: It would be extremely positive.

Q: Tell me about your job? How do you feel about it?

A: I love my job, it's varied and interesting and has grown over the period of time I've worked here. As I became more confident in the role I took on more responsibility

and was happy to do that. I love the area I work in and really enjoy coming to work every day.

Q: Do you know what is expected of you at work?

A: Yes – I have a job description but of course that's only the bare bones of what I do, but I sit down with my Manager at least once a week and we discuss what needs to be done and if there are any projects we are working on we catch up. Sometimes things slip and like any situation it goes off the boil but then when time is available we get back on track. He is very good a giving direction when its needed and I can ask for that if I feel I need some help.

Q: You say you have little direction, why do you think that is?

A: Well you know pretty much what you have to do and you just get on and do it. I know my Manager trusts me and knows what I'm capable of and he lets me get on with it. I have a fair degree of autonomy and I know I can go to him if I'm unsure of my ground and he will guide me. He doesn't micro manage me and the fact that he doesn't makes me feel confident and secure in what I do. That has changed now and although I'm not getting much direction its for a different reason. As you know my manager will be leaving soon and I will be reporting to other managers. In terms of direction now, well there's little or none now because everyone is too busy and we are being left in limbo to a degree.

Q: You mentioned the word secure, why do you think that?

A: I suppose because I've been here a while and have been doing the job for some time and I know if there is an issue I can have a go and if I make a mistake it's not the end of the world, although that rarely happens, it means you are not covering your ass all the time and watching your back like it has been in other jobs with me. There hasn't been a blame culture here, more of a learning one. Although that seems to be changing.

Q: Is that down to your experience or your knowledge base or would you attribute it to something else.

A: A bit of both I suppose. I have a fair degree of experience now but this year I returned to education to broaden my knowledge in my field and I feel that has given me a huge lift in terms of confidence in my ability. The company sponsored my course and I really am grateful for their investment in me and also the support of my manager. I had wanted to do this for a few years and I feel I both myself and the company have reaped the benefit of my further education.

Q: Do you have the materials and equipment to do the work right?

A: Yes, in some ways. Bigger budgets would be good, but in the current climate I understand the limitations and that is part of the challenge of the job.

Q: How important is the challenge?

A: Very important. I think when you've been doing a job for a while it can get stale and

A challenge is good to get a bit of oomph back into things!

Q: At work do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?

A: Not always. Because we have lost some many staff recently, we have all had to take on extra work which is probably not utilizing peoples skills in the best ways.

Q: In the past seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?

A: Yes.

Q: How important is that praise and feedback to you

A: Massively for me. It doesn't take much to say thank you or acknowledge when someone does a good job. It is a great motivator and makes you want to do that bit more.

Q: Has that stopped now?

A: No, that still has continued but people are almost too busy to take the time now.

Q: Does your manager or someone at work seem to care about you as a person?

A: Yes – but my manager and all of my team will be leaving through redundancy shortly and that will change.

Q: Is there someone at work who encourages your development?

A: Yes – again that will change.

Q: At work, do your opinions seem to count?

A: Yes and I get good feedback.

Q: Does the mission or purpose of the company make you feel that your job is important?

A: Yes, I have a clear view right to the customer and I can see the impact of what I do every day.

Q: Are your co-workers committed to doing quality work?

A: Very much so,.

Q: In the past 6 months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?

A: No only during the appraisal process.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: Because my working relationship with my boss is excellent, I know how things are so its not an issue.

Q: In the past year, have you had opportunities in work to learn and grow?

A: Yes – am just completing further education so that has been great.

Q: You brought up a number of issues up earlier that I'd like to talk about, in terms of watching your back and feeling secure, tell me about that?

A: From very shortly after I started here, there has always been a feeling of safety and security, that if you worked hard and had the company's interests at heart you were looked after. There was very little office politics at play and the atmosphere was open and honest. You could go to your manager with an issue and feel confident he would try and resolve it or you could bring it up at the Staff Committee meeting and they would try and deal with it. The company was autonomous within the Group and the Senior Managers were in a position to make the best decisions for the Company. That is not the case now and I feel we are at the mercy of people who know and care very little about us and that is very sad. We don't seem to matter any more and I find that hard to take.

Q: What are your thoughts about the recent redundancy process?

A: I'm devasted, I feel a huge loss, it really is the end of an era. Its a huge loss for the company and for those remaining with it. The essence of the place has gone and the great atmosphere has ebbed away over the past few months leaving a big gap in its place. I'm not looking forward to the next few months as I feel it will not be a great place to work.

Q: How did this compare with the last process in 2009?

A: Very drawn out and piecemeal compared to the last process. Most people could see why numbers were cut last year, but absolutely no one could or still can understand the current situation. The company was making money and we were making out budgets. No logic at all.

Q: How do you think it has affected staff staying with the company?

A: I think they are feeling very vulnerable, I certainly am. It's like we are operating in a vacuum. No one really knows what's going on and people are coming and going from the UK and we don't have a clue who people are. People are not being told very much, so most people are waiting for the axe to fall again down the line.

Q: Do you think the company has changed in any way?

A: Yes – with Senior Management gone, I don't think it will be the open, friendly, progressive place it has been in recent years and not such a great place to work. There is not sense of autonomy now, we were always masters of our own destiny, you could see your hard work making a difference, now decisions will come from faceless people who we won't ever get to meet, because that's not how they do it.

Q: How do you think it will affect people's motivation?

A: I think it will demotivate people. I think though because it's been such a great company people will wait to see what happens. I wouldn't be surprised if some will just hang on in there till the recession is over and the job market improves.

Q: Can you see any way around that and pulling it back?

A: Yes, I think management need to talk to staff and tell them what's going on, show them that there's still a good business and they are very important to making that work. Show them they are appreciated.

Q: Do you think your job will change in any way?

A: Yes, all my team will be going and I will be working very much on my own. That's not a great feeling. I will have to build a new working relationship and will be reporting also to the UK and I'm not hopeful from what I've seen so far. The UK manager tends to micro-manage and control everything and I am not used to that and I don't know if I can work like that. There is a real lack of respect from him, but I don't think that's just with me. I get the impression he treats all his team in that way. That's not part of our culture here.

Q: Is there anything that would make you want to leave?

A: Yes. If I get to the point where I dread coming in to work, or if I feel it is just a situation of constantly watching my back and I have to cover off all avenues when I doing my work, then I will certainly go as soon as I get a suitable role.

       Nothing is worth being unhappy. I have always been treated with respect and I would not stay if that were not the case. That's so important. In the job I do if the respect is gone then it would not be worth staying. I don't want to spend my time worrying about who I report to rather than trying to do my job to the best of my ability.

Q: In terms of job, role, the company, what are the most important things for you?

A: I want to work for a company where I can do the best job I can. I always put in maximum effort and I love what I do. This company has allowed me to do that always and have always appreciated the effort I put in and that has been acknowledged. It's important for me to feel I do a good job and give a good service. I don't want to feel that I am constantly being checked on and at the moment I feel that I am very much on my guard and that is unsettling. I have been treated poorly by the UK company and have not been impressed by their attitude, yet they are expecting maximum effort. There is a lack of respect for the individual and that comes through in their dealings with me and other colleagues.

Q: Culture and morale in the company, how do you see it at the moment?

A: Poor, It's very low, people are wondering when the next round of redundancies is going to be. Its a case of wait and see.

The interview terminated.