

**Examining Employee Engagement after the Covid-19 pandemic,
from a Human Resource perspective: An investigation into an
Irish Media and Communications Company**

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Abstract

Interest in employee engagement is being spurred on by the Covid-19 pandemic as employee's expectations of the workplace is changing. The central question in this piece of research is to examine employee engagement after the Covid-19 pandemic from a human resources perspective. The study sets out to achieve what are the drivers of engagement in this organisation and assess if this has changed since the pandemic.

The research sets out a research design that is qualitative in nature, conducting eight semi structured interviews in a large, Irish media and communications organisation. The research instrument will be designed as such to encourage employee to voice their views helping the researcher gather a more in-depth understanding on employee engagement.

The interviews will be recorded through Microsoft teams and to code the emerging four themes, thematic analysis will be applied. The limitations of the research will highlight that a snowballing method was chosen instead of a random sampling method. In addition, due to time constraints only eight participants were selected and as such a cross-sectional research method was chosen.

The research findings will indicate employees are somewhat engaged but their perception of the workplace has shifted since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Highlighted in this research will be that the shift of employee attitudes is a result of the changing nature of work. The literature on employee engagement shows in recent times that employees are disengaged in the workplace which is evident in the recent great employee resignation. The findings of this research are important as there is limited research at this point in time.

The recommendations from this research will highlight that employee voice should be encouraged through conducting quarterly focus groups. In addition, employee wellbeing should become a key area of focus in developing a wellbeing strategy.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Shauna Codd

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As the world continues to recover from the disasters of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations have been significantly impacted due to a high number of employee voluntary resigning. With recent economic uncertainty, employers are being faced with high costs that have resulted in organisations across the globe reducing employee headcount. The researcher intends to achieve a case study that provides recent findings on employee engagement at this point in time. This cross sectional, qualitative research will be conducted in a media and communications organisation of large size in Ireland on eight participants who are employees.

1.1 Outline of the research

This research will be sectioned into different chapters.

- Chapter 1: This chapter will provide the reader with an introduction to the aim of the research context and layout of the dissertation.
- Chapter 2: This chapter will provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the literature on employee engagement and identify gaps in the field. In addition this chapter will highlight the importance of this research.
- Chapter 3: This chapter will be clearly outline how the literature supports the research question and objectives.
- Chapter 4: This chapter will examine the different methodologies available for the researcher and highlight this research's philosophical positioning. In addition this will include the justification of chosen methodology.
- Chapter 5: This chapter will detail an analysis of the findings of the study and highlight the demographics of the eight participants who took part in the semi structured interviews.
- Chapter 6: This chapter will discuss and provide evidence of the study in terms of literature advancements and broader implications.
- Chapter 7: Lastly, this chapter will provide a fitting conclusion to the research at hand. In addition it will provide thoughtful considerations of the issues of implementation and outline of the cost association with recommendations.

1.2 Research Context

The history of work has significantly changed in the last century. Since the 1980s there has been a shift from manufacturing to a service economy industry which has derived from consumers consumption patterns (Beardwell and Beardwell, 2007). This large scale shift in the service economy was due to the move away from industrial production (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Within the last 20 years alone customers consumers patterns have changed due to global technology advancements (Hillyer, 2020). This has created a demand for gig economy work that matches a 24 hours, seven days a week service industry, most employers are in a battle of retaining top talent in a labour market shortage. This has created the demand for greater flexibility in the workplace.

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2020) the more flexible work environment has resulted in an increase in the number of employees choosing to work part time. The service industry has changed the terms of employment from permanent jobs to gig economy work and contracting work (Courtney, 2020). Interestingly, literature also suggests that employees have become less loyal as the number of employers an individual works for has increased (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020).

There have been major changes in the media and communications industry over the last century. Technological advancements in portal devices have allowed for consumers to access content easier allowing them to stream content almost anytime and anywhere. As a result many media and communications companies have had to change strategies to keep competitive and ahead in the market such as this organisation. This organisation has had to quickly adapt to keep ahead in the market by moving into a digital future.

In 2020 an infectious respiratory disease called the Covid-19 impacted the entire globe including Ireland (WHO, 2023). All organisations had to respond immediately to protect the health and safety of their staff and customers. During this time due the partial shutdown of many businesses in particular the service industry. The Covid-19 pandemic enforced a global lockdown that included Ireland which forced employees to adapt to remote working almost overnight (Pass and Ridgeway, 2022). In addition, there were employees layoffs and employees made furloughed during these times. These stay at home orders oversaw a national working

from home experiment (PWC, 2021). This added pressure on employers as they were required to make monumental rapid changes and rethink how to engage with their dispersed employees (Pass and Ridgeway, 2022). In addition to this communications companies saw the pressure as reliance on technology increased to a scale that was unparalleled (Pass and Ridgeway, 2022). During these times managers had a significant task on their hands in keeping employees highly motivated and engaged.

As we move into a new world of working post the pandemic, employers in 2021 and 2022 faced a talent retention crisis in what has been called the great resignation. Morgan (2022) outlines that the great resignation was triggered by the pandemic's chaos and uncertainty, millions left their work in search of roles that provided autonomy, a new meaning to their work, or more money as the labour market tightened. Additionally, Nachmias, McGuire and Ghosh (2022) suggest the great resignation showed there was a shift in employee expectations of the workplace. Klemp (2022) argues that there was a shift towards ensuring employees feel fulfilled in their roles and ensuring employees fully understand the purpose of the company. This is also supported by Gallup (2022) who suggest that employees desires have shifted towards seeking purpose and meaning from their work. Cable and Gratton (2022) highlights the reason for the great spike in resignations was that as many businesses opened back up and started hiring again, the rush of new jobs gave employees an abundant choice of jobs, strengthening the tight labour market further.

Since the great resignation of 2021 and 2022, there has been wide uncertainty due to an increase in energy prices. This is mainly due to the Russian-Ukraine war that has had a huge impact on energy and fuel prices since the conflict (World Economic Forum, 2023). As a result many employees are feeling the cost of living and likewise their employers. In the latter end of 2022 and early stages of 2023, many Irish and multinational companies have announced mass layoffs and redundancies cost cutting programmes.

There is a lot of uncertainty in the economy due to the rise cost of living and rising inflation rates. As a result many organisations are cutting headcount numbers in attempt to reduce costs. Worldwide there has been over 120,000 job losses in the technology industry across the main tech giants (McCallum, 2022). Media and communications giants Twitter and Meta announced recent job losses globally including in Ireland (Donovan, 2022a). In 2023 it was reported communications company Mediahuis would be opening a voluntary redundancy programme.

Interestingly, the company recognising in light of changing consumer behaviour as part of its digital transformation programme (Donovan, 2023). While, more recently it been reported Vice Media, ABC News are the latest to announce layoffs (Washburn and Roush, 2023) and US company Paper Magazine recently announced layoffs of the entire editorial team (Chen, 2023).

Moving forward to the future of work, unfortunately many parts of the worlds are coming to terms with extreme climate events, steep rise inflation and political uncertainly due to war. As we enter the third year of the pandemic, Ireland and many other countries emerge from its disasters, there are suggestions in literature the future of work entail a new way of working. PWC (2021, p.1) support this adding that the Covid-19 pandemic “has rewired the world of work” and as this continues to evolve, remote working has shifted employee’s behaviours. Nachmias et al. (2022) suggest remote working has become normalized and desired by most professionals since the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to remote working many employers had to become flexible. It’s evident the future of work will include flexible working arrangements and it doesn’t appear to be going anywhere anytime soon (Ponomareva, 2022).

With all the recent changes there too has been a change in the world of human resources. There has been a shift of human resources from personnel management towards to more strategic approach to human resource management. A viral component of strategic management is employee engagement. The Covid-19 pandemic brought a greater need of elevating and strengthening employee engagement levels (Kumar, 2021).

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study will be to gain insight into how employees view employee engagement in a large Irish media and communications organisation. This large enterprise consists of over 250 employees. Other research studies have provided mix results on employee engagement at this point in time however it appears to be suggested that employees are disengaged.

There appears to be a gap at this point in time in research assessing employee engagement in and Irish media and communications company. The findings from the eight semi structure interviews are expected to indicate that employees in this company perspectives have changed therefore, our understanding of employee engagement has changed.

It's expected the results will indicate that this is linked to employees changed expectation of their environment ultimately affecting the nature of work and what we expect from it. The findings will be important and worth examining as employers struggle with high costs, keeping employees happy and engaged across a five generational workforce will be a key challenge.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The chapter will provide a breadth of reviewed literature on employee engagement. In addition, the literature review will draw on conclusions as to what drives engagement in the workplace and the outcomes it has for the organisation and individual. Furthermore, this chapter will examine current research conducted in the area of employee engagement and identify gaps in the literature.

2.2 Employee Engagement

The term employee engagement is relatively new in the world of literature. Saks (2022) suggests the term has become a popular management topic among scholars and practitioners. The concept dates to 1990s where it was first referred to in an article by William Kahn (Bridger, 2022). In this article, Kahn (1990) conceptualized that personal engagement is defined as when employees are cognitively, emotionally and expressive during role performance.

Moving on from Khan's first conception of the term, there has been numerous updated definitions. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) define it as when employees are committed to their work and committed to their organisation. Employee engagement is often referenced by human resource professionals when employees are in a state of mind where they contribute full effort in their job role (Byrne, 2014). Most recently, Joshi (2022 p.23) defines this as a willingness to go above and beyond for their employer and completing tasks "to the best of one's ability".

Despite Kahn's article in the 1990s, Keenoy cited in Truss, Alfes, Delbridge, Shantz, and Soane (2013) argues that evaluating employee engagement is challenging. Many academics start when discussing employee engagement explaining that there is no agreed definition. This is supported by the CIPD (2021, p.1) who suggests, "there's no common understanding" of the concept. A recent statement also supports that when it comes to employee engagement "there is no single, universally accepted definition" (Bridger, 2022, p.8).

The concept of employee engagement combines and re-establishes older concepts, such as work motivation and organisational commitment (Marchington, Wilkinson, Donnelly and Kynighou, 2020). This is supported by Bridger (2022) who suggests the term includes numerous organisational behaviour concepts, which includes not only motivation and commitment but additionally, work effort and job satisfaction. After reviewing what employee engagement is, it appears there is no single universal accepted definition when explaining what employee engagement is (CIPD, 2021) but that it does appear to be gaining popularity amongst professionals.

2.3 Drivers of employee engagement

In order to change employee engagement levels it's necessary to understand the factors which affect employee engagement (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The following drivers of employee engagement will be discussed; management, job design, employee experience and communication.

2.3.1 Management

Bailey (2022) entails a driver of engagement is management. In particular, trust between an employee and their manager is a key driver for engagement (Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis and Sarigiannidis, 2022). In addition to trust managers who recognise when their employees have done a good job and acknowledge this has been found to drive engagement levels. A study conducted by Walia and Balani (2021) identified that there are a number of drivers of engagement. Their study identified that rewards and recognition were significant predictors of engagement. Joshi (2022) also highlights that management who recognize their staff drivers employees engagement in the workplace.

2.3.2 Job Design

Secondly, Kossyva et al. (2022) suggests an antecedents of engagement in an organisation is job design. This is backed by Bailey (2022) supporting that job design is a driver of engagement. The term job design entails the roles and responsibilities of the employee and how they carry out that job in terms of systems and procedures (CIPD, 2021). An objective of job

design and why it's important is it ensures employees are motivated in their role, have the opportunity to learn and develop and not subject to excessive workplaces or stress (CIPD, 2021). Interestingly, autonomy appears to be important in job design. In a recent study it was discovered that where employees have control and autonomy in their job roles impacted positively on engagement levels (Walia and Balani, 2021).

2.3.3 Employee Experience

Other authors such as Armstrong and Taylor (2020) entail that enhancing employee engagement is down to the employee experience. Employees that have a good employee experience will typically tend to have high engagement levels. Walia and Balani (2021) highlight that the quality of work life experiences is a predictor of engagement. This includes all aspect of the hiring process including how effective employee selection and recruitment policies (Joshi, 2022).

2.3.4 Communication

Another source Kossyva et al. (2022) lists a variety of different factors that drive engagement in the workplace. One example is channelling a direct communication line for employees to have a voice. Radley (2022) suggests where employees have the freedom to air their opinion it promotes a psychological safe feeling in the workplace. It's important to remember that this list of what drivers engagement in the workplace is an non exhaustive list. There are many other drivers of employee engagement however, literature appears to suggest these are the main drivers. While one driver as a standalone, maybe sufficient to drive engagement levels, combining all together creates the ideal formula in achieving high engagement levels.

2.4 Measuring employee engagement

As discussed in the literature review there is no universal agreed definition of the term, which makes measuring engagement problematic. Numerous scholars have offered their own view and unique lean on how to best measure the concept (Shuck, 2019). There has been numerous proposals to date on how to measure engagement including focus groups and interviews (Bailey, 2022). On the other hand, Kew and Stredwick (2016) suggests that the engagement

levels of employees can be measured by conducting employee surveys. While, another sources argues an alternative method is measuring levels of engagement is by using the Utrecht work engagement scale (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). The scale was developed by Wilmar Schaufeli and is a quantitative approach in measuring engagement levels in the workplace (Shuck, 2019). The scale is a validated tool that can be used as indicator that represent the extent to which what level of engaged employees are (Bailey, 2022) by measuring 24 items for example such as devotion in the workplace (Joshi, 2022).

2.5 Outcomes of engagement

There are positive outcomes for both the organisation and the individual where they have high engagement levels. This is supported by Saks (2022) who has the view that for the employee and organisation there is strong evidence of the positive effects. These outcomes will be discussed in section 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.

2.5.1 Organisational outcomes

There is strong correlation across academic literature that links employee engagement and generating profits (Joshi, 2022). There is an abundance of evidence on employee engagement that increased engagement levels can result in revenue growth, increase profit margins and overall shareholder return (Bridger, 2022). In addition, employee engagement reduces turnover and absenteeism rates. Cook (2008) supports this by adding there is a higher talent retention in organisations where there are high engagement levels. This is because an employee who is highly engaged go beyond their own interests and have better workplace performance (Kaur and Sharma, 2022).

In addition organisational growth and innovation are outcomes of engaged employees (Kaur and Sharma, 2022). This is supported by Bridger (2022) who highlights highly engaged employees behaviour is more innovative. While Kaur and Sharma (2022) suggest employees who are highly engaged feel more positive about their organisation and would strive to uplift the company's reputation and interests. This is supported by Bridger (2022) who state that organisations have a better reputation when employees are engaged.

2.5.2 Individual outcomes

Schuhfeli cited in Truss et al. (2013) suggests engagement is not just linked to the outcome of the organisation but can be linked to individual outcomes with employees tending to be less sick and absent from the workplace. This is supported by Bridger (2022) who adds employees wellbeing is improved because of increased levels of employee engagement. Where employees experience higher levels of engagement there are individual benefits that can impact employee's overall quality of life (Shuck, 2019).

As employees who are engaged increase profitability of the organisation, they are more productive in the workplace (Joshi, 2022). The productivity also stems from employees being happier and are found to display more innovation behaviour (Joshi, 2022).

It's important to note in literature that engagement creates positive outcomes equally for the organisation and the individual. On the other hand, if engagement is not achieved it has had devastating affects in what is called employee disengagement.

2.6 Employee disengagement

Employees who are not engaged in the workplace are referred to in literature as disengagement. Disengagement can be defined as employees who simultaneous withdraw themselves from work and “defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p.693). More recently disengagement can be defined as when an employee simply does not exceed beyond the minimum and employee's views works as an exchange of time for momentary value (Chaudhary, Mohanty, Malik, 2022).

2.6.1 Organisational outcomes

As engagement is closely linked with high levels of productivity and performance, disengagement has the opposite effect (Pass and Ridgeway, 2022). This is why one of the greatest concerns for organisations is how to constantly improve and enhance employee engagement (Saks, 2022). Where employees are disengaged they become less productive and do not perform to the same level as engaged employees. At organisational level financial losses

can be attributed to employees who are disengaged (Byrne, 2014). These financial losses can be due to the fact the employees are not as productive but also that disengagement can lead to absenteeism or leaving the organisation altogether (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). While organisations are expected to have a healthy level of staff turnover, there can be great costs associated with recruitment.

High attrition rates can be most recently seen in Ireland and across the world where employees are clearly disengaged and leaving their jobs. The drop in engagement levels can be seen in the number employees voluntarily resigning from their roles (Harter, 2022). According to Fuller and Keer (2022) the great resignation was associated with the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, with a record number of employees voluntary resigning in their roles. This is supported by, Advertising feature (2022) who explains organisations are struggling to retain employees in the wake of the great resignation in 2021. The great resignation is also impacting Ireland, a study on over 1000 Irish employees suggests employees feel disconnect from their team and organisation (Harnett and Kieran, 2020) this implies employees are feeling disengaged (Pass and Ridgway, 2022).

2.6.2 Individual outcomes

In cases where employees are met with excessive job demands and workplace stress this can lead to a term in literature described as burnout (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Where employees experience burnout in the workplace, they can often fail to meet these job demands. The two terms, disengagement and burnout are often used interchangeably in academic literature. It is also important to note that in literature its suggested that employees who are too engaged may also become burnout. Where employees become so engaged with their works and take home their home it can lead also lead to distress and burnout (Walia and Balani, 2021).

A new phenomenon in employee engagement literature, is a term referred to as quiet quitting. It's being suggested in recent literature the number of employees who are silently disengaged from the workplace are simply quiet quitting. The term has gained attraction in recent times with Klotz and Bolino (2022) suggesting it is less visible in organisations compared to the great resignation and can even be more damaging. Quiet quitting is an alternative for employees over resigning, instead of leaving employees refuse to go beyond their core tasks and do the bare

minimum at work. It's being suggested as the economy outlook becomes more uncertain quiet quitting is likely to gain more attention as outright resigning is less feasible for many employees (Koltz and Bolina, 2022).

The literature on employee disengagement has shown that it has devastating outcomes for organisation level and the individual. It's vital managers keep a pulse of employee engagement levels.

2.7 Research gap identified

The monumental changes spurred on by the pandemic has impacted employee engagement with initial findings indicating mixed results. While there is limited research in an Irish media and communications company, the researcher did find similar studies that will be discussed below.

Research conducted by Chaudhary et al., (2022) identified the factors affecting employee engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research was carried out on remote working employees in India. The study was designed to test what factors may increase and decrease employee engagement. Interestingly the study showed that males had less engagement scores than females.

A similar study by Onyeukwu and Elikwu (2021) in Nigeria on remote workers during the recent pandemic was conducted at a government agency. The study showed the factors affecting employee engagement during these turbulent times. The findings displayed that employees showed significant levels of commitment and employees with higher salary had higher engagement scores.

A further study conducted during the early stages of the pandemic in the United States during June 2020 revealed employee empowerment was the most significant variance in predicating employee engagement (Donovan, 2022b). The study found that enabling employees to have autonomy in their work and a part in the decision making process positively impacted employee engagement levels (Donovan, 2022b).

Another study explored employee engagement and nature of remote working. This was conducted mainly in the United Kingdom and with some respondents in the United States, this study discovered remote working did not decrease job engagement levels. The study suggests it cannot be assumed that full time physical presence in the office is key in maintaining engagement levels when levels of loneliness play a factor (Bojmel, Hai and Margalit, 2023).

The author did find a research study conducted in Ireland in a larger public sector organisation. The findings found that performance management had a positive correlation to emotional exhaustion that negatively related to employee engagement. However, this was conducted prior to the pandemic (Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes and Bailey, 2016).

It is evident from these identified studies that the pandemic has triggered a fundamental change in our understanding in what engages employees in the workplace. From reviewing the literature, is it clear that there is limited knowledge at this point in time on whether recent economic uncertainties post the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting employee engagement levels in the large, media and communication sector in Ireland. The time is right to question and examine if current understandings of employee engagement (Pass and Ridgeway, 2022). Thus, why the researcher will be conducting this piece of research.

2.8 Conclusion

From the literature review it is evident there is establish theories on what encompasses employee engagement. Across different academic literature there are main topics as to what it entails for example, the drivers, the outcomes including disengagement and how it is measured. It's important when discussing these to particularly focus on the current state of the market and how Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the workplace. While it's vital for organisations to keep the pulse on engagement levels during recent turbulent times (Klemp, 2022) it's even more important for this organisation to get an understanding of what employee engagement currently in its particular context. The next chapter will outline the research question and objectives and how this literature has influence the research instrument.

Chapter 3: Research Question

3.1 Research Question

The aim of this research is to gain insight into the how employees view employee engagement in an large Irish media and communications organisation. The following research question will set out to provide clarification as to how employees view engagement in their current working environment. In addition, what drives employee engagement in a new world of working where employees expectations of the workplace are changing.

Secondary research as seen in the literature review has indicated that there is limited research at the point in time on this topic. While much of the literature is suggesting that employees are disengaged as evident from the great resignation and economic uncertainties post the pandemic there are clear gaps identifying this in an large, Irish media and communication company. In exploring recent literature, it has informed the research question and objectives. The main research question is as follows:

“How do employees in a Media and Communications feel about employee engagement in a hybrid working environment post the Covid-19 pandemic?”

3.2 Research Objectives

To gain further insight into this topic of employee engagement, the research will address the following five research objectives:

1. To understand at this point in time whether employees within this media and communications organisation are engaged or disengaged.

This objective will help this organisation at this point in time understand assess what level of engagement employees have. Recent literature is suggesting that employees are clearly disengaged from work as the number of employees who have resigned in recent times. In addition, new terms are being added to literature on employee engagement such as quiet quitting. This literature is suggesting employees who are quiet quitting are clearly disengaged

from work but with economic uncertainties and cost of living many are unable to leave their jobs. Thus, this is why this objective has been chosen. The objective sets out to achieve if employees in this organisation feel they are engaged or disengagement in a qualitative research.

2. To understand what are the drivers in a hybrid working environment that have an impact on employee engagement.

This objective is to investigate what are the current drivers of employee engagement in a hybrid working environment. The literature is suggesting that there are a number of different factors that drive engagement in any organisation. As the world of work is changing the rationale for choosing this objective is to examine if the findings of this research indicate anything different in literature. This objective sets out to achieve what are the drivers of employee engagement in this organisation.

3. To understand if the recent economic turbulence is having an impact on employee engagement levels.

This objective is to investigate how recent economic turbulence is affecting engagement levels. The literature is suggesting at this point in time that many organisations are feeling the pressure to reduce costs resulting in massive layoffs across the globe and in different industries. On the other hand, employees are feeling the pressure of the cost of living and feel they are better to stay in an organisation than leave for uncertainty. This objective sets out to achieve if employees in this organisation feel their engagement levels are being impacted by the recent economic turbulence.

4. To understand the impact of hybrid working on employee engagement.

This objective will examine the impact of operating in a hybrid environment and if employees feel this has had an impact on their engagement levels. The literature is suggesting that the Covid-19 pandemic has rewired the world of work. There is now a power imbalance that has shifted from the employer to the employee. Hybrid working appears to be a permanent feature of the workplace that is going nowhere fast. The literature is suggesting that employees are clutching onto hybrid working and refusing to come back in office five days per week. This

objective sets out to achieve an understanding of the impact of hybrid working on employee engagement levels in this organisation.

5. To understand if employee attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic.

This objective of this research is to understand if employee's attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic and if this has impacted engagement levels. The literature is suggesting the nature of work has drastically change in the last decade. In more recent times, literature is suggesting that Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed the workplace and as a result employee attitudes towards work are changing for the better. This objective sets out to achieve an understanding if employee attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the research is to add to literature where there is an identified gap. The research is important as this organisation finds itself in a context where there are turbulent times and it is necessary to investigate and keep a pulse on employees engagement levels. The research question and objectives will inform the research design and instrument. As this research sets out to understand employees views on these objectives, the research design will take a cross-sectional, qualitative approach through the use of semi structured interviews. The eight interview participants will be employees in this company. The data from the interviews will be analysed using an approach called thematic analysis. The research design that will be discussed in the following chapter outlines this in greater detail.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research methodology chapter is to explain the researchers thinking in selecting the appropriate research methodology. There will be an overview of the various types of research methods and a discussion on the chosen research tool and instrument.

The aim of this research is to gain insight into the how employees view employee engagement in this large, Irish media and communications organisation. The chapter will outline the research philosophy in undertaking this task and why the it was appropriate to conduct a research that is qualitative in nature. Furthermore, the methodology will outline why eight semi structured interviews and snowballing sampling technique was most appropriate for this research.

4.2 Research Philosophy

In considering the research philosophy approach the researcher had examined all of the research philosophy's before deciding the appropriate approach. In academic literature there are numerous research philosophy's a researcher can adopt. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, p.130), "research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge". Saunders depicted the research onion in understanding research philosophy and approaches to theory development. The onion identifies two main literature viewpoints in research, epistemology and ontology.

Epistemology includes the assumption about human knowledge, the study of reality being objective or subjective (Saunders et al., 2019). In epistemology research there is a variety of choice of methods a researcher can adopt called positivism and interpretivist. In contrast, ontology, includes but is not limited to the assumptions about the knowledge of realities that is encountered in any research (Saunders et al., 2019). In ontology there are numerous types of assumptions, for example, objectivism and subjectivism. A researcher that is positivist might use existing theory to help develop a hypothesis statement that can be tested and tested to be valid or not (Saunders et al., 2019). Positivists results are systematized and results of the data

are organised and made part of the existing body of knowledge (Tessema, 2013). Conversely, interpretivism differs as this assumption is of the belief that “humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings” (Saunders et al., 2019, p.148).

4.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

In every piece of research there is a process where the researcher collects data using a type of technique (Tessema, 2013). Adams et al. (2014) suggests there are two main types of primary research that researchers can approach the measurement process differently, quantitative and qualitative.

Based on the methodological principles of positivism, quantitative data “adheres to the standards of a strict research design developed prior to the actual research” (Adams et al., 2014, p.6). Research that chooses this method extensively think about variable and include them in the research design process before gathering or analysis the data (Tessema, 2013). In contrast with qualitative studies the measurement occurs later in the research design phase in the data collection phase and data is often in the form of written or spoken words and generates rich descriptions (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

4.4 Research Design

The research has considered all of the research methodologies and this has allowed the researcher to make an informed decision about the research design for this study.

Due to the nature of this study, the research will not be pursuing ontology research. The research has selected the epistemology, interpretivist research philosophy. The researcher has decided not to use the positivists viewpoint as one argument on choosing this method is that is it less likely to offer rich and “complex view of organisational realities” (Saunders et al., 2019, p.134). The aim of this research is to gain new insight into employee’s understandings on employee engagement, selecting an interpretivist approach allows the research to achieve this aim.

As the research was looking to gather the viewpoints of employees at that point in time a cross-sectional research will be applied. Although, longitudinal research captures more complex viewpoints over a longer period of time and tends to be more powerful (Tessema, 2013) the researcher opted for cross-sectional as it's the least costly alternative when conducting a study.

In any research there are two types or styles of reasoning deductive and inductive (Adams, Khan and Raeside, 2014). Deductive research tests a theory and is based on a set of assumptions (Bougie and Sekaran, 2020) and a hypothesis is used to test the theory (Adams et al., 2014). Also known as the scientific method, inductive research operates from general to specific theory in verification (Saunders et al., 2019). It can therefore be argued using the inductive approach is more appropriate as it allows the researcher to gather themes on employee engagement to which then patterns will emerge that will formulate a general theory.

Literature in the field of employee engagement suggests that studies have been dominated by quantitative approaches, while earlier work in the field which led to the understanding of the concept as we know it today was qualitative methods (Shuck, 2019). It's important to point out that according to Bailey (2022) relatively few studies have explored qualitative methods to measuring engagement and suggests there is growing interest in moving away from the traditional positivistic research. The aim of this research is to gain insight into how employees view employee engagement, hence conducting qualitative work to understand the concept. Using a quantitative approach this will allow the research to be exploratory, capturing descriptive rich data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In addition, qualitative research will allow the researcher draw out an understanding on employee engagement at this point in time.

When considering what qualitative technique would be used for this research both focus groups and interviews were of choice for the researcher. The research did consider focus groups where the researcher could have used exploratory research to produce qualitative data with eight persons at one given time. Initially the researcher was of the view that this would have been a more time efficient way of gather the data. However, Tessema (2013) argues when choosing the techniques any researcher should consider the data itself and the timing in their decision making process. As this company has not captured the employee voice before in any sort of mechanism the researcher opted for semi structure interviews. One-to-one interview would allow the research grow rapport with each selected participant. In addition, conducting a focus group may cause speculation and hesitancy among the senior leadership management team on

certain questions asked. The research instrument for the semi structured interviews can be found in Appendix one. When designing the research question instrument several considerations were made. The researcher avoided asking questions that may be leading and double-barrelled questions.

4.5 Sampling Method

In selecting the sample size, several factors have been taken into consideration such as time and costing (Adams et al., 2014). The subject organisation is an Irish media and communication that is a large enterprise with more than 250 employees. A sample number of eight participants from this company have been selected for this research. The researcher had limited time available to them when conducting this research and this was why eight was selected. These eight participants will help to draw conclusions about the entire population of the workforce. A breakdown of the sample participants can be found in Table 1.0. To reflect the views of the different generations in the workforce and to ensure there is representation across all business entities and demographics. The sample included equal gender representation, four females, four males between the ages of 23 to 57 years.

When it came to choosing the type of selection, the research considered random and snowballing sampling. The researcher initially was going to choose random sampling as this method is objective in its method of selection (Adams et al., 2014). This researcher later felt that this was not an appropriate sample design. A snowballing sample is a sample size where the researcher takes advantage of their own networks by asking participants to take part (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The researcher chose snowballing sampling instead as of random sampling as snowballing is more useful where participants are difficult to identify as they are best located through referral networks (Tessema, 2013).

Once the participants had been identified through these referral networks, the researcher made contact via their work email to see if they had any interest in taking part. The researcher requested they respond before a deadline should they wish to be included in the invitation. This email can be found in Appendix two and included the participation information sheet can be found in Appendix three. The individuals who opted to take part in the research had been emailed the consent form and asked to complete. Once the consent form was returned, the

researcher scheduled the interviews for the participants. A copy of which can be found in Appendix four. Each participant was sent an invitation to take part via email for their interview slot that was organised for 45 minutes each.

4.6 Pilot Study

A pilot interview occurred in the research process to ensure when interviews were taking place that there was no issues with audio, internet connection and the external environment. This ensured that the questions the researcher asks are easy to understand. When conducting any type of audio recording in any time of setting, it may result in poor quality (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2000). This is why the researcher will conduct a pilot test on a colleague from the same department. The pilot study found there was no such issues which may have adversely impacted the quality and functionality of the interview.

It is suggested in literature that pilot testing is essential in any research that involves interviews. A pilot test or study is a trial run of the research instrument and is useful for establishing any errors (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It's important to carry out a pilot test to ensure the questions are also fully understood and are clear of the interviewee to respond (Tessema, 2013). The questions were fully understood and no errors appeared however, on the data analysis of the interview the instrument did not provide sufficient information on analysis. The researcher, therefore, decided to go back and review the interview questions. This is supported in literature that a preliminary analysis from a pilot interview can often illustrate that questions need to be revised in order to have a success in the instrument (Tessema, 2013).

4.7 Data Collection

The data collection phase is an integral part of the research design (Tessema, 2013) as highlighted in the research design the researcher will conduct semi structured interviews. All interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes and will be take place via the communications tool Microsoft teams. The recording of the interviews will be held on the researcher password protected company laptop. It's important to note the researcher received written consent for prior to the conducting the recordings and the researcher will only have access to these files. The researcher printed out the research instrument for each candidate of

which can be found in Appendix one. In supporting this research design the interviews will take place over two week period. This will allow the data collection to be gathered within a close time frame of the first and last participant interviewed.

The aim of this research is to gain insight into the how employees view employee engagement and to gather data that allows the participants to express their views. In supporting this the researchers instrument included open ended questions to facilitate the participants talking freely on the topic.

As part of the research design the researcher included probing questions, it is suggested probing questions are good when asking the interviewee for a clearer or comprehensive explanation (Tessema, 2013). The introduction questions were designed to be less probing as Braun and Clarke (2013) outline the early questions should be gentle questions easing participants into the interview process. While the questions asked around assessing the drivers of engagement were designed not to be open ended. The researcher was trying to understand based on findings in the literature review if the drivers asked are the core drivers of engagement.

4.8 Data Analysis

Once the interviews took place the researcher began transcribing the data using thematic analysis, this allows for themes and patterns to emerge in the data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). There was an advantage for the researcher in transcribing the audio as this is requested for the detailed analysis (Bloor et al., 2000). This type of analysis is a widely used approach when analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and this is why the researcher has chosen this type of data analysis.

4.9 Limitations

The researcher expected to have a number of limitations when conducting this research. The research philosophy focused on cross-sectional data due to time constraints and further research should focus on longitudinal studies. Research studies that include a longitudinal design is carried out over a long period of time on a particular cohort of people (Adams et al., 2014). In addition, due to time constraints only eight participants took part in the research. The researcher

also took into consideration their own biases when asking questions in influencing participants responses.

A limitation of this study was access to participants for interview in the organisation, hence why the researcher changed from a random to a snowballing method. Due to this reason, the researcher was limited to eight interviews although, this was of equal gender representation and variety of different ages. In addition, all eight individuals who took part had varied areas of expertise for example facilities and marketing. A full list of the departments can be found below in Table 1.0.

Lastly, hybrid working is still a relatively new working model introduced in many organisations since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. While literature is arguing remote working is here to stay the influence this has on employee engagement level will need to be evaluated to ensure research findings are accurate over a long period of time.

The limitations discussed have all been taken into consideration when conducting this research.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

There are ethical issues in conducting any piece of research, when considering this the researcher examined the definition of ethics. The goal of the researcher in considering the ethics was to ensure no participant was harmed or suffered adverse consequences and to ensure confidentiality all participants. Furthermore, all participants had the right to privacy and to withdraw from the research process at any stage.

The research obtained informed consent in fully disclosing the procedures of the interview before proceeding with the study. Tessema (2013) argues that where a researcher secures informed consent and obtain a signed consent form it informs the participant on the research design. Furthermore, it allows the participant their right to withdraw from the research (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The files have been safely secured on a laptop that is password protected and will be kept for as long as the National College of Ireland policy outline. In addition, these files are only accessible to the research.

To conclude as discussed in the data collection, semi structured interviews were conducted in this research, in order to safeguard each participants responses, ethical storage of the interview data has been actioned.

Chapter 5: Findings & Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The researcher outlined in Chapter 3 the objectives of this research, all of which have been taken into consideration when designing the research instrument. As highlighted the research instrument for the semi structured interviews can be found in Appendix one. As highlighted in the research sample, the researcher experience challenges in conducting a random sample design, therefore decided to utilize a snowballing sampling. As a result participants were easier to identify through referral networks.

5.2 Demographics

The age range of the participants was between of 23 and 57 years old. As highlighted in the methodology sampling method, in order to capture the views of the different generations and to ensure there is representation across all business entities, an example of the departments included technology, customer services, sales and marketing. Some of the participants were in management positions at the time of conducting this research while other were in junior positions. The shortest length of service was 11 months while the longest service is a significant 32 years. A breakdown of the sample demographics can be found in Table 1.0 below.

Participant number	Gender	Age Range	Department	Length of Service
A	Male	20-30	Technology	0-3 years
B	Female	30-40	Customer Service	0-3 years
C	Male	20-30	Sales	4-9 years
D	Female	50-60	Sales	more than 10 years
E	Male	30-40	Facilities	more than 10 years
F	Female	30-40	Marketing	4-9 years
G	Male	40-50	Management	4-9 years
H	Female	50-60	Management	more than 10 years

Table 1.0

Out of the eight participants three had more than ten years of service. Not surprisingly all three of these individuals found themselves in the 30 plus age range bracket. Interesting, three participants had between four and nine years length of service. While, one participant was in the middle to senior stage of their career in a management position, the other two individuals were not. The last two participants had the least length of service in the zero to three year service. Not surprisingly their ages and position were relatively junior in the organisation.

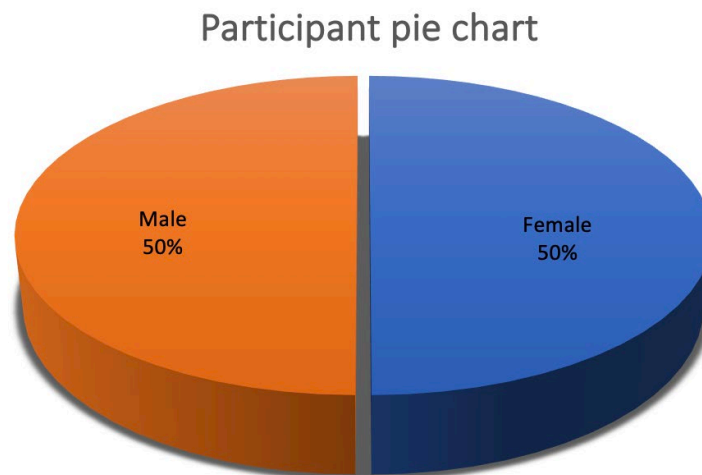


Figure 1

The gender distribution of all eight participants was of equal representation and can be seen above in Figure 1. The four females are in various departments, including managing, marketing, sales, and customer service. The age range of the female participants was between of 32 and 57 years old. While, the four male participants worked in sales, managing, facilities and technology. The age range of the male participants was between of 23 and 42 years old.

5.3 Themes

The researcher outlined in Chapter 4, that because of the nature of this research a qualitative approach and semi structured interviews were most appropriate. The semi structured interviews were recorded to allow for the researcher to transcribe each interview. In order to analyse the data obtained, the researcher then coded the common themes using thematic analysis. The researcher had to learn how to use thematic analysis and looked to a number of different sources for this.

Thematic analysis includes identifying patterns or, themes in data that is qualitative in nature (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) there are six phases in thematic analysis that includes, familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, a review of the themes before finally, defining and identifying the themes. Following the thematic review of the data, numerous patterns had been identified and can be categorised into the following themes identified in Figure 2 below.

1. Hybrid working
2. Flexibility
3. Job Design
4. Communication

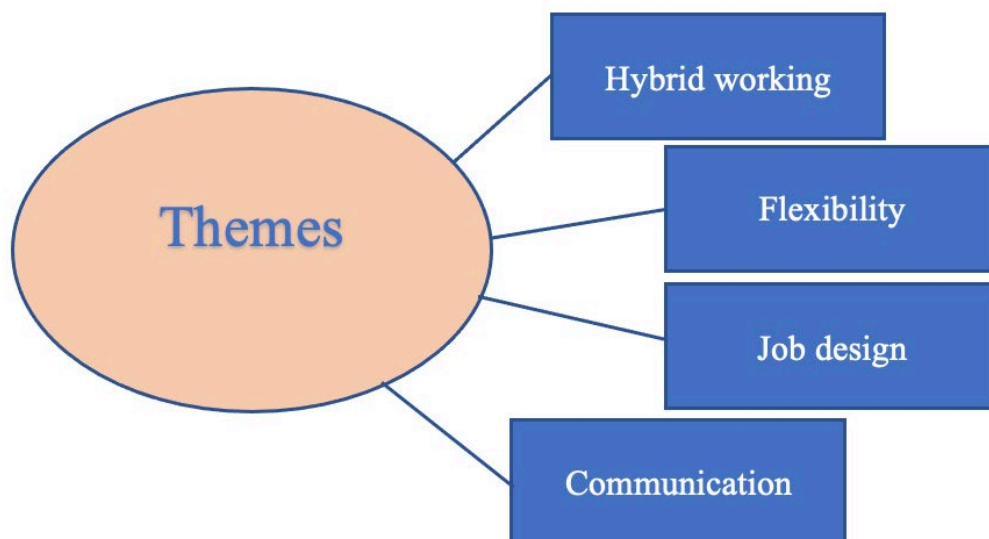


Figure 2

Highlighted in Figure 3 below is what will be discussed in each theme.

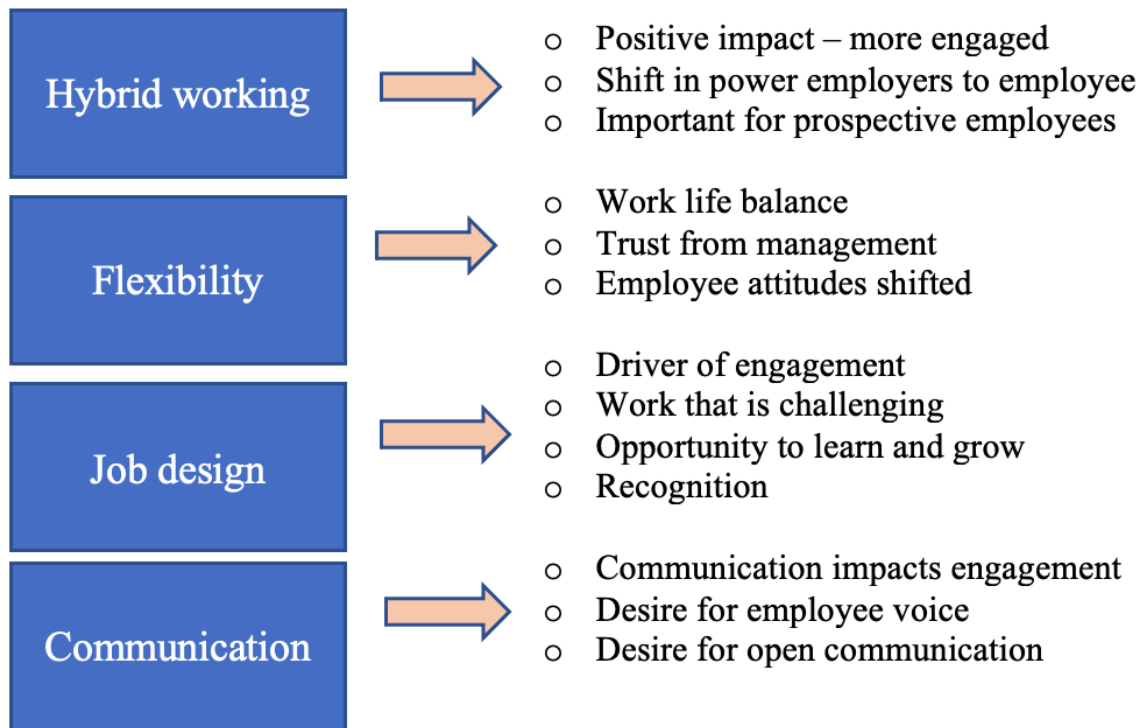


Figure 3

Following the write up of this findings and analysis chapter the researcher has shared high level feedback of the themes of the researcher to all participants. This good practice provided the researcher an incentive to build rapport and an incentive to participate in future research projects that may take place in the workplace (Tessema, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher selected the snowballing sampling technique to help draw upon this rapport.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Hybrid working

One of the objectives of this research was to understand the impact of hybrid working on employee engagement. The research instrument focused on asking particular questions on hybrid working and the impact this has had on the participant’s engagement levels. All of the eight participants drew upon hybrid working as having an positive impacted on their engagement levels. This is highlighted in Figure 4 below. The literature this is suggesting that working from home does not decrease engagement levels (Bojmel et al., 2023).

Impact of hybrid working on engagement levels



Figure 4

Participant A outlines *“I feel more engaged compared to what I would have been before the start of Covid”*.

Participant C in agreement states *“I would say since the pandemic and we switched to hybrid or remote working there’s probably more engagement now especially as you can work from home”*.

Participant E adds their engagement levels are *“for the better”* since the start of Covid-19 pandemic.

Participant G states *“I think in Covid it was hard to keep engaged because obviously we were working remotely all the time. I think hybrid is better and engagement has improved because obviously we’re doing team meetings in person and we’re in the office”*.

From the sample of participants findings it does appear this is backing what is being suggested in literature. While there is turbulence in the economy at this point in time employees have concluded that they feel more engaged than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic with hybrid working being the main reason. This is also suggested in literature that hybrid working is here to stay and has modelled a new way of working.

Furthermore, there appears to be a commonality that this has shifted since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic where hybrid working was pretty much non-existence prior to 2020. The findings indicated that there appears to be a shift in power from the employer to the employee. The finding also indicate this in what has been described as the great resignation a number of these individuals left their company upon being asked back to the office five days per week.

Participant D outlines *“People are now able to say they don’t want to come into the office, whereas before Covid employers would have said otherwise”*.

Furthermore Participant D adds *“I would say that having the opportunity of being able to do what I want makes me feels more engaged. If I was told to come in the office days, then I would be more hesitate in going in. Rather if I had the choice to come in one day or whatever then I would feel more engaged as then feel I have the choice”*.

Participant E also states something similar adding *“I think if people turn around and say next week you have to be in the office five days, there’ll be a lot of negative feelings”*.

Furthermore, Participant H outlines this has become so important in advertising new roles to prospective candidates. *“Employers are putting hybrid working or on-site in the actual job title, you know where the title would be, because it shows how important is it to people and you can know straight away how the company operates”*. This is important to stress to employees in attracting new talent.

In the literature review it is evident that hybrid working is here to stay, with thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world of work has been transformed. The findings from this research show employees feel they are more engaged as they have better work life balance. This is important as it stress to employers how employees feel about hybrid working and that employees view this as a new way of working and almost a norm. If employers want their employees to return to the office five days a week extra considerations must be made and a one size fit approach would not be appropriate.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Flexibility

Another objective of this research was to understand if employee's attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic and if this has impacted engagement levels. Several participants suggested that they have better work life balance since before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is highlighted in Figure 5 below. Due to a number of factors but the pattern that emerges is there is more flexibility in the workplace and as a result employees are more engaged.

Impacting work life balance

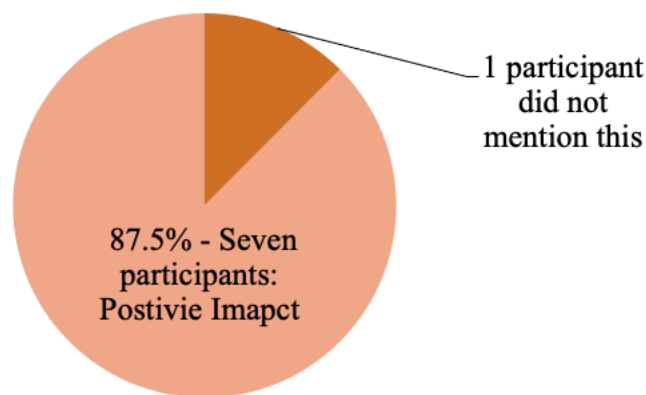


Figure 5

Participant F states *“being able to do the remote work and you don’t realize how much you have in the evenings to just go out and just for a walk”*.

Participant A drew upon how there has been a shift in attitudes towards a work life balance, *“I would say employee attitudes have shifts slightly, you’re more wary of work life balance and other issues there now then you have been before”*.

While Participant E has been working a four day working week for some time it was also indicated that it does impact positively on their engagement at work, *“I work 4 days per week, I believe that this definitely helps my work life balance and I definitely think it does push you to do more in the days that you’re working because you know you also have the time off”*.

Participant H *“I feel like there is an expectation there now almost like a right to work remotely, and I think it’s important there is good flexibility because if there isn’t it will make difficult for managers to retain good people”*.

Participant G response to when asked about employee attitudes shifts responded with *“All staff understand there is no need to be in the office five days a week and they need more flexibility and they kind of work better with that flexibility, I think people’s attitudes and approach to work has definitely changed”*.

In the literature review it was outlined that an outcome of employee engagement is employee’s wellbeing is improved. In addition, employees are less sick and absent from the workplace. This is important as it stresses to employers the greater flexibility in the workplace allows for better employee wellbeing and employee work life balance.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that employees appear to be going above and beyond more now for their employer and this is due to the Covid-19 pandemic as they have the flexibility in working from home. A total of two participants touch on this point.

Participant C adds *“You’re more likely to put in that, that bit extra, that bit of extra effect into work”*.

Participant E adds that they would go above and beyond for their employer as they can work from home *“Since Covid and the remote working it does make a difference, when in the office you didn’t bring your laptop home with you so you couldn’t be checking your emails”*.

The responses from these participant C and E, show that they are not silently quiet quitting at this time. As highlighted in Chapter 2, literature suggests that a number of employees are silently disengaging from the workplace. The quotes indicated that they would indeed go above and beyond their core tasks.

Interestingly, trust is also highlighted when it comes to flexible working. Participant A adds *“I think Covid kind of proves to the workplace that we’re going to get the job done and I suppose it showed a bit of trust as well in employees. Employers just know employees are working away and getting the job done”*.

While the research instrument does not specifically ask a question on trust, it is interesting that it arises in this question. The literature has pointed out that trust is a driver of engagement (Kossyva et al., 2022). In particular where there is trust between the employee and their manager.

To conclude, the participants are focused now more than ever on having not only hybrid working but additionally flexibility in the workplace. This is important as organisations try to be more diverse the only way of achieving this is through allowing flexibility.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Job design

An objective of this research was to understand what are the drivers of engagement in a hybrid working environment. This objective was to investigate and explore the key drivers of engagement in this organisation. Seven participants identified job design to be an important factor in their engagement levels at work highlighted in Figure 6. The findings indicated that work that is designed to be meaningful and challenging increases engagement levels.

Impact of job design on engagement levels

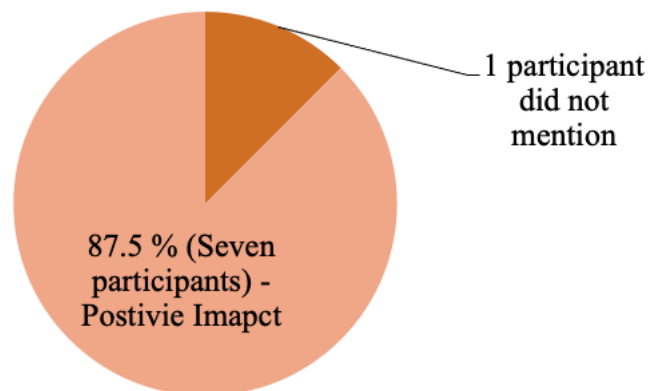


Figure 6

Participant C outlines *“I would say the main factor when it comes to engagement, is the level of work that you’re doing. So if it’s challenging work that you’re doing, you will feel more engaged with it as you are learning and developing. I would say more routine kind of administrative stuff that you’re doing naturally enough, you’re going to feel less engaged”*.

Participant D agrees with this adding that they feel engaged in work when feel they are being “*challenged in work*” . The participant also went on to add that a variety of tasks is important and they feel engaged when “*doing something different*”.

Participant H also in agreement identifies a driver of their engagement is “*the opportunity to learn and grow it what really what has me engaged*”. This shows there need to be more emphasis on job design when it comes to engaging employees.

In addition, assessing other drivers of engagement, five participants felt that compensation package does not affect their engagement levels.

Participant C adds that challenging work is more important than compensation package “*I don’t think compensation really has had that much of an impact on your level of engagement with work. I would say that kind of much stronger influence on your level of engagement will be that you should be the work you’re doing itself, its it challenging or of interest and if its varied*”.

However, interestingly the other three participants disagreed stating that compensation is just as important as having work that is challenging. Considering the context of this organisation, as the has been turbulent times from Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis these findings are of no surprise.

Participant H outlines that compensation is important for engagement but not being the main driver of engagement, “*We all need you know a salary to pay our bills and live the life’s we want to live. Money is very important like benefits, healthcare, pension and all that good stuff*”.

Participant G states and feels more strongly that compensation is just as important driver for engagement, “*I work for money, there’s the obviously the enjoyment but it’s a big part of it. So if you feel you are not getting appropriate salary for you role, you’re going to be disengaged. If you salary is not getting received, you’re on year and you don’t see a plan of how that’s going to be reviewed. There’s not much motivation*”.

Another theme in the transcripts is management and this appears to be a driver of engagement in this company. The findings suggest that managers who are good leaders, creating a learning culture and recognition is encouraged driver engagement.

Participant H highlights “*good leadership*” is a key drivers in impacting employee engagement.

Furthermore, this participant highlights “*you can never know everything and I think it’s really important to have opportunities to learn and grow and people to learn from and I think you know people have a huge impact on you*”.

Participant H also answered when going above and beyond at work “*not really no, the fact I have done it before and no acknowledgement or recognition and you’re kind of like what’s the point if you’re not getting recognized for it.*”

In the literature review the drivers of employee engagement was identified as management, job design, employee experience and communication. While this was not an exhaustive list there does appear to be some correlation with the findings from this research. Job design appears to be the main driver of employee engagement levels in this organisation. It’s important to highlight to employers that the other drivers should not be left in isolation.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Communication

Another objective of this research was to understand at this point in time whether employees within this media and communications organisation are engaged or disengaged.

A total of seven individuals felt they at that point in time they were engaged except for one participants responded to say that they felt disengaged. This can be seen in Figure 7 below.

Engagement levels

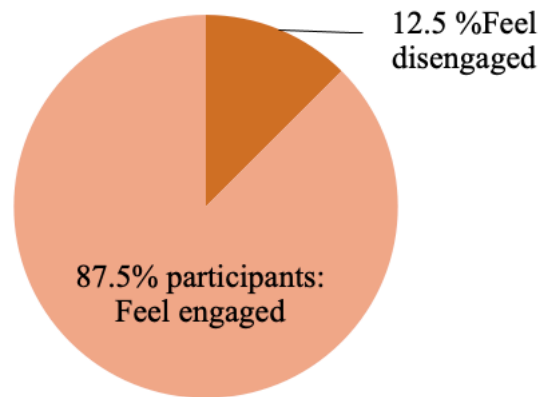


Figure 7

Participant G outlines they are “*quite disengaged as there is quite bad communication*”.

It was outlined in the literature review that communication is a key driver for engagement. From the data analysis it appears that communication is a common theme that appears consistently throughout the transcripts.

Participant A outlined that for the recommendations “*better communication*” between the management and staff population.

Participant E states when asked what they thought were the drivers of engagement they responded “*communication between all levels, management, employees so that they feel included*”.

When it came to ongoing conversations about development, Participant C responded with “*everything is communications, you know, so that people don't feel they've been left out or, you know, so that they feel that they are being kind of appreciated and you know, and making sure that that those help with their engagement*”.

When asked why Participant F felt they are engaged at work, one of the main reasons was they felt this was because “*communication is key*”.

Participant G also adds they felt a main driver of their predictors of engagement being ***“regular communication with my line manager”***.

The findings indicate that communication is an essential component of driving and sustaining employee engagement. Whether this being communication about an employee development, communication in employees being recognised for good work the findings reinforce the literature that communication is still a vital driver of engagement at this point in time in media and communications organisations.

Interestingly, communication and employee voice are discussed interchangeable throughout the transcripts.

Participant F highlights having an employee voice ***“even if you give an opinion and it doesn’t come into play or whatever at least you have a voice and your opinion is still being heard, so even if it doesn’t come into play your still contributing in a way.”***

In addition, Participant C states ***“I would say any sort of communication that would allow to capture employee voice”***.

Participant E adds also the importance of capturing employee voice whether this being through focus groups or employee surveys so long as ***“employees feel that the line of communication is open”***.

It’s important to stress the context to which this organisation finds itself at this point in time. As highlighted in the introduction the 21st century working includes management capturing forms of employee voice. And employees can voice concerns without fear of judgement from senior management teams.

5.4 Conclusion

When it comes to hybrid working the findings indicate that this has had a positive impact on employee engagement level in this organisation. While many participants expressed they would feel disengaged if asked to come back into the office full time. This is important as it stresses to employers that it is evident from the literature that hybrid working is here to stay with thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift of power to the employee.

The findings indicated that flexibility is important to employees now more than ever before as it has allowed for better work life balance. In addition, the literature review outlined an outcome of employee engagement is that employee's wellbeing is improved. In addition, employees are less sick and absent from the workplace. This is important as it stresses to employers that greater flexibility in the workplace allows for better employee wellbeing and work life balance.

There has always been argument and suggestions in the field in employee engagement literature and researcher as to the drivers of engagement. The findings from this research agree with the literature that job design and communication are drivers of engagement levels. In this media and communications organisation the findings highlighted that job design was indeed the main driver of engagement levels. While it was highlighted in terms of management how trust is important between the employee and their manager, the employee experience did not arise in the findings as literature suggested.

To conclude, the findings indicate that communication is a regular term that is referenced throughout the transcripts. Interestingly, employee voice is also mentioned in the context of employee voice. This is important as the nature of work is evolving to capture all essences of employee voice.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of this research in the context alongside the literature review. The themes identified are hybrid working, flexibility, job design and communication. The following discussion will focus on the broader implications of this research of what has been learned from the findings and the literature limitations.

6.2 Discussion Theme 1: Changing nature of work

Prior to the pandemic there was evidence that consumer patterns were changing. The change in the service industry from the traditional nine to five type working no longer supports the rising consumer demands (Taylor, 2018) and is replaced by a seven day a week 24 hour society (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2010).

6.2.1 New modes of working

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant the nature of work has had to change. The modes of working are slowly changing to include remote working and temporary work (Mariotti, Capdevila and Lange, 2023). This type of work is being described in literature and by professionals as gig type of work (Breadwell and Beardwell, 2007). The gig economy includes type of work that is also known as freelance and includes work that is freelance allowing autonomy for the individual choosing the hours they wish to work (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). This has given rise to the demand for flexibility in the workplace (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2010) which again has been highlighted in the findings of this research.

In addition to this, there has been growing interest in a four-day working week. The four-day working week aims to reduce employees working week from five to four days with no loss of pay. The aim is to increase productivity (Jolly, 2023) and increase employee wellbeing (Lockhart, 2021). While many organisations are trialing this worldwide and are reporting on its success, not many companies in Ireland are adopting this new working model. The findings

from this researcher indicate one participant who moved to a four-day working week prior to the pandemic and highlighted that this had improved their work life balance.

6.2.2 Redesigning the office for the future

The Covid-19 pandemic has redesigned the future of work. Co-working hub environment allows for collaborative spaces that encourages social interaction and professional networking (Mariotti et al., 2023). Some organisation have closed their offices completely allowing employees to work remote permanently. Recently, PayPal announced such change. The global technology giant, reduced job cuts and the sale of its Irish offices in Dundalk (Independent.ie, 2023). As many organisations continue into 2023 reducing headcount, there is no doubt that many will continue to rethink the need for large office space working and to take advantage of these new coworking spaces. As there is a talent shortage employers are recognising remote working allows to hire potential candidates who are working outside of their own country.

In addition, to coworking spaces, hot-desking has become the new norm as a workplace seating system. While multiple literature links hot-desking to increase collaboration and innovation in the workplace, essentially the aim is to create flexibility and maximise space efficiency in the workplace by offering desks on a first come first served basis (Bishop, 2021). This again shows how organisations are adapting to recent change and trying to be become more efficient in the way how work can be carried out.

6.2.3 Implications

The changing nature of work and remote working has created a power imbalance between the employee and employer. It's important to note that in the past employees had no right to request remote working. However, before the Covid-19 pandemic there were plans to make remote working a permanent feature of the workforce. In 2019 the European Union added a new European law which meant member states including Ireland within a three year timeframe to implement a new bill called remote working (European Commission, 2019). According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2023) the Irish government have since passed a new work life balance bill which will allow all employees to request remote working.

There have been a number of issues created by hybrid working such as presentism issues in the workplace. McElwee cited in O'Connell (2021) adds to this further explaining employers have genuine concerns from cybersecurity, data protection to health and safety. Beyond this it can lead to potential issues with growing rapport as employees are seeking connections in their role (Turner, 2023). This is supported by Pass and Ridgeway (2022) who outlines that social support is significantly impacted by working remotely. While there is still much to learn about the hybrid work era and what this will mean for the future, it appears that remote working is not going anywhere soon.

6.3 Discussion Theme 2: Post-pandemic work and demographics

The pandemic has created a once in a lifetime opportunity for employees to rethink what they want to do with their personnel and working lives. This discussion will focus what post-pandemic work means for both an ageing and young workforce population as both generations expect the workplace to provide them with their "own unique perspective" (Joshi, 2022, p. 26).

6.3.1 Ageing workforce

It has been discussed over the last century how people are living longer due to a variety of different factors such as better access to health care. WHO (2022) outlines as employees are living a longer life, this provides a greater number of opportunities to take up a new career or to further their education (WHO, 2020). In Ireland, recent statistics have shown that life expectancy has increased by almost two and half years since 2007 (Department of Health, 2019). In order to support longer retirements, employees are having to work longer (Future Agenda 2023). Furthermore, as many companies emerge from the pandemic many of this population left the workforce entirely due to health concerns. While many organisations are still struggling with getting the senior staff in non-management positions back to the office more than one day per week. It is now being suggested a movement called the great unretirement whereby many older individuals are returning to work due to a number of reasons such as the rising costs of living and the talent shortage caused by the great resignation (Stedman, 2023).

6.3.2 Younger generations

There has been a major shift in the attitudes of different demographics in particular new employees entering the labour market for the first time. Joshi (2022) suggests it's difficult for employer's to manage and retain this younger generation. There is argument in literature that millennials and employees in generation Y category, are ambitious and can be quite impatient with progress in the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2017). While literature does suggest they are less loyal, the great resignation has presented a significant opportunity for millennials and Gen Zs to rethink their priorities in search for many their second jobs (Deloitte, 2022). Since the pandemic literature suggests younger employees are eager and leading the way in terms of the return to the office (Williams, 2023).

6.3.3 Implications

It is argues that both generations unite in many ways desiring opportunities to learn, work that is meaningful and intellectually stimulating (Silkin, 2020). As the nature of work has changed and evolved over the last century this has also shifted the attitudes of employees. Employees no longer want a pensionable job for life instead their thinking shifted to have a job that has meaning and provides a purpose. This is support in literature that employees are seeking value in their role and a shared purpose in their role (Turner, 2023). This is reinforced by the findings from this research and is agreement with what literature is suggesting which is that job design is important and having a role that is challenging drives employee engagement levels. Seven of the eight participants suggested that this is a major factor in why they feel they're engaged at work. Also highlighted was also how hybrid working has created better work life balance improving the overall wellbeing.

In addition, this has broader implications in terms of skill capabilities as employees seek to progress. In support of this Armstrong and Taylor (2022) add there is a focus on upskilling employees due to the consideration of an ageing workforce. While, Silkin (2020) adds in keeping up with the pace of technological change and as working lives get longer, employee's need to adapt to constantly reskilling. While an ageing workforce requires employees to take on any health implications with getting older in the workplace, conducting health screening programmes is becoming more popular to help understand at high level confidentially the medical condition of employees.

6.4 Discussion Theme 3: Shift in employee attitudes

This final discussion will focus on how a greater emphasis a shift in employee attitudes towards on work life balance and employee voice has implications for management.

6.4.1 Work life balance

In Ireland and across the globe there has been a drastic shift in attitude towards work life balance that has translated into the workplace. Historically, employers concentrated on reducing employees stress levels such as providing therapy services for employees and since the pandemic there has been increased emphasis in the workplace on employee wellbeing (Stringer, 2023). As highlighted previously in this discussion chapter the Irish government has recently passed a new work life balance bill. This will provide better work life balance for employees in terms of the right to request flexible for parents and employees who are carers (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2023). This again highlighted how there is emphasis since the pandemic on employee wellbeing and employers creating a working environment that promotes a healthy work life balance.

6.4.2 Employee voice

In addition to the above, there has been a shift in employees joining trade unions. There are less employees joining trade unions nowadays. Taylor (2018) outlines that there is a decline in trade unions. For years many individuals joined trade unions as a way of having a voice. With globalisation many multinational companies are established in Ireland as the country is a tax haven (Holland, 2021).

6.4.3 Implications

It is important to remember that in employee engagement literature employees can become burnt out when they're too engaged with their work. This has an implication on managers. Where employees become so engaged with their works and take home their home it can lead also lead to distress and burnout (Walia and Balani, 2021). The has implication on managers in that they should be having ongoing conversations and regular check-ins with employees to ensure workload does not become excessive. This should be factored into the job design. It's

important to remember the recent bill that was passed into Irish legislation on the right for employee to disconnect from work.

Lastly, the implications of trade unions decreasing mean organisations must implement mechanisms that capture the employee voice. The findings of this research indicate that communications and employee voice are essential for driving engagement. Multinational companies bring advanced policies and procedures which many Irish organisations are now following one of which is capturing employee voice directly. Employee's feeling they have a voice has become a major part in 21st century working. Rees, Alfes and Gatenby (2013) outline that employee voice provides an opportunity for concerns to be raised without fear of judgement. Kumar (2021) outlines that listening to employee voice and amplifying this is for organisational benefit.

Going forward it is going to be super important for managers to keep the pulse on employee engagement levels. Competition is increasing across the media and communications industry as many multinational companies enter the Irish soil as a tax haven. While it can be agreed employee engagement is a complex concept but is a vital component for every company to thrive and exceed in this competitive ever changing industry.

6.5 Research Objectives

The research question for this study was “*How do employees feel about employee engagement in an hybrid working environment post the Covid-19 pandemic?*”

The research question can be answered in that employees feel positively about employee engagement in this organisation post the pandemic. From the findings and discussion it is apparent that the following objectives set out in this research have been achieved.

6.5.1 Objective 1

To understand at this point in time whether employees within this media and communications organisation are engaged or disengaged.

The research findings suggest employees in this organisation feel at this point in time engaged. The research instrument highlighted that out of the eight participants, seven feel engaged at this point in time in their work. While, one participant felt disengaged. In the literature sources suggest that employees are clearly disengaged from what has been evident in the great resignation and number of individuals quiet quitting.

6.5.2 Objective 2

To understand what are the drivers in a hybrid working environment that have an impact on employee engagement.

The findings suggest job design and communication are still essential drivers of engagement in this media and communications organisation operating on a hybrid working model. Literature suggests management is a driver of engagement this too was indicated in the findings of this research in terms of communication and trust. While, literature also suggests that the employee experience is also a driver of engagement this was not indicated in the findings of this study.

6.5.3 Objective 3

To understand if the recent economic turbulence is having an impact on employee engagement levels.

In literature there is little literature with regards to the impact recent economic turbulence is having on engagement levels. While the gap was identified to conduct this research in Ireland in a media and communications company operating in a hybrid working model. Surprisingly, this doesn't appear to be having an impacted as much as the researcher thought. Highlighted by the participants was communication appeared to be impacting negatively on engagement.

6.5.4 Objective 4

To understand the impact of hybrid working on employee engagement.

All participants highlighted that pandemic has played positive impact on engagement levels. Highlighted was how this has allowed for better work life balance and flexibility in the workplace. While literature indicate that hybrid working has changed the power dynamics from the employer towards to the employee. Highlighted in the findings was not employee could not image going back to the office five days a week.

6.5.5 Objective 5

To understand if employee attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The findings of this research indicate employee's attitudes have shifted in the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants highlight that they focus more now on their work life balance as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, they seek more that is more meaningful. The literature also supports that all generations of the workforce seek work that is now of value and has meaning.

6.6 Research Limitations

In completing this research a number of limitations existed. As the researcher was working full time and studying part time this research approach was cross-sectional. Unfortunately, the time constraints of conducting interviews and the time involved in transcribing the interviews meant only eight participants took part in the research.

In addition the researcher conducted the research in the company where they worked. During the research process the researcher found it difficult finding access to participants in the organisation where they work. To overcome this challenge, a snowballing sampling method was chosen over a randomised method. However this approach allowed the researcher to have eight participants of equal gender representation. In addition, all eight participants worked in various positions across the organisation and had varied lengths of service.

Lastly, this research was conducted in an organisation that is operating in a hybrid working environment. While the findings of this study indicate it had a positive effect on engagement levels in this media and communications organisation. The influence hybrid working has on engagement in the workplace is something that needs to be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure the findings of any data are accurate.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research is to gain insight into the how employees view employee engagement in this Irish media and communications organisation. This aim was evident in the research question highlighted in the research chapter “How do employees feel about employee engagement in an hybrid working environment post the Covid-19 pandemic?”

The explore the research question five objectives were identified to gain further insight into the term. The literature review identified the literature on what is engagement, the drivers of engagement management, job design, employee experience and communication. Furthermore, the outcomes of engagement for the organisation and individual including disengagement. In addition, how to academic measure the phenomenon. A gap in the literature was identified in conducting a study post the Covid-19 pandemic in an Irish communication and media organisation.

In order to gather the primary data the researcher conducted a cross sectional, qualitative study in a large sized, Irish media and communications organisation. In the form of semi structure interview this research interviewed eight participants who are employees work at this company.

A thematic analysis was applied in the data analysis and the themes of the findings were identified as hybrid working, job design, flexibility and communication. The findings indicated that communication and job design impact engagement levels in this organisation. In addition, highlighted was how hybrid working and flexibility has proven to have a positive impact on engagement levels. The discussion gave further insight into the broader implications of the literature review and the findings of this research, changing nature of work, post-pandemic work and demographics and lastly, shift in employee attitudes.

This research adds to current research who are interested in examining employee engagement in a post pandemic world where the nature of work is changing. This research extends the current literature by investigating employee engagement in a Irish media and communications

organisation. It was discovered that hybrid working has played a major factor in employee engagement levels post pandemic in this media and communications organisation.

7.2 Future Research

It's important to note that in literature there has been some argument on the drivers that affect employee engagement in recent times. As highlighted in this research the data was collected at one point in time due to time constraints. A recommendation for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal research. Teesma (2013) outlines that this type of research includes data collection over multiple points in time in different contexts and helps to improve the generalizability of the findings. Future research needs to be conducted to get a more accurate understanding on the correlation of management and employees engagement levels. This research should be conducted using a different research instrument, surveys across multiple industries.

Another area for future research would be to explore the drivers of engagement. As highlighted above this research did not ask questions on some drivers of engagement such as the employee experience. Future research needs to be carried out to examine a wide range of factors that can driver engagement and disengagement in the workplace. This study should be conducted in an large organisation and the research instrument should be quantitative in nature to test the variables i.e. conducting anonymised surveys.

7.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations can be applied within an Irish media and communications company across all organisational sizes. These recommendation are possible remedies to fix these issue of communication in this organisation.

7.3.1 Focus group engagement sessions

The findings of this research and within the literature review is that communication is a key driver of engagement. Highlighted was how employee voice is a driver of engagement, in the findings it was indicated that communication and often discussed interchangeably in literature

with employee voice. The recommendation can be applied to all medium or large media and communications organisations who are operating in a hybrid working model.

It would be recommended to conduct engagement sessions to capture employee voice through conducting quarterly focus groups. Most organisations would initially start with employee surveys and then conducting focus groups on any issues emerging however, focus groups are more cost effective.

Focus groups can be outsourced however due to tight budgets its recommended for focus groups to be facilitated in-house by the human resources department. A focus groups requires a scribe and a facilitator. There would be no financial cost associated with conducting the focus groups other than the cost of time and resources by the human resources team. In conducting the engagement session a human resources manager will have to act as a facilitator of the focus groups. The manager can upskill on how to conduct focus groups by engaging in focus group training on LinkedIn learning that the company currently has access to. In addition a human resource generalist who is experienced in note taking would be required in acting as a scribe and note taker in the focus groups a skill set the person already has.

The timescale in conducting this in-house is estimated at three weeks. The first week would be spent preparing the set of questions asked in the focus group and preparing a script or guide for the human resource manager to follow. The priority in the second week is to send out a colleague announcement on the focus groups and invite participants to come forward. In the final week the room would be organised and participants to be informed on the location of the focus group.

In selecting the participants, it would be recommended the manager send a staff notice out to all employees requesting volunteers for the focus group sessions. Once the participants are confirmed the generalist can email each of the participants with the location, date and time of the focus group. On the day of the focus groups the generalist can organise the location for the human resources training room to be arranged in a way encourages communication in the group. The chairs can be arranged in a circle shape to encourage discussion and name badges can be organised for each participant. A potential issue of implementing this is the concern that employees may not volunteer, to overcome this, management should be encouraging of employees to take part.

Once the focus group has taken place the human resource generalist can start to analyse any emerging themes or patterns from the focus group. The emerging themes can be benchmarked as areas to improve in and reviewed quarterly to see the improvements. In addition, any emerging themes can be developed into actions plans that should be actioned within a two-three month timeframe.

7.3.2. Employee wellbeing strategy

As indicated from the findings of this research hybrid working has played a significant role in improving employee's work life balance. In addition, literature suggested there has been a shift in employee attitudes towards wellbeing. A recommendation would be for this organisation to establish a wellbeing strategy. The recommendation can be applied to all organisations sizes.

A human resource generalist can research topics and current trends as to what organisations are doing currently as part of their wellbeing strategy. The generalist skill set would include organisation as part of their role and would not require to be upskilled for this. An recommendation would be to obtain costings from different providers on health screen programmes for employees. A PowerPoint presentation should be prepared by the generalist on the different costs, timelines and health screening options covered by each provider. The provider who is the most cost effective and able to deliver the screenings in a timeline that is appropriate should then obtain the board's sign off. An issue implementing this would be management approval, the screenings should be positioned as such that this would help steer the overall employee wellbeing strategy.

Once this has been approved the dates and locations of the screening should be decided upon. Two designated rooms that allow for privacy will be used for the screening and parking organised for the doctors on the day. Once this has been arranged by the generalist an email should be sent out to all employees including management, one month prior to the screenings. To encourage this management should communicate to employee the benefits of the screening i.e. it's free and that employees will receive a compressive health assessment that is confidential. It should also be acknowledge that management will receive a high level anonymised report on the overall wellbeing of employees and that this information will steer the companies wellbeing strategy.

Another issue of implementing is if the booking slots all book out leaving other employees disappointed. To avoid the human resource generalist would check with the provider from their experience as to what the standard percentage uptake of slots are this would be estimated at 70% uptake. When signing up the portal should ask for specific information i.e. name, department, email address to receive booking confirmation. A reminder email should be sent out to all colleagues who have not signed up.

After the screenings have taken place, the manager will receive a high level, anonymised report that can help establish a wellbeing strategy. For example, if the majority of employees are overweight nutrition and workplace activities that encourage movement i.e. step challenge should be introduced.

A review of this should be carried out every 18 months to two years, and screening programme's organised again to assess if there has been any improvement in general employee wellbeing. This would be made possible as the previous reports should be used as a benchmark. The costs associated with this has been costed at €3,100 per day. This cost would include two doctors on site per day to conduct the screenings. Looking at 70% uptake of this large organisation this would require around 330 x 15 mins slots are required over a five day period. The total cost including a €2,000 contribution from the employer would mean the final cost associated with the health screenings would be €13,500. While there would be a non-financial cost in time in setting this up by the HR generalist.

Personal Learning Statement

I found conducting my thesis on this topic thoroughly enjoyable as it challenged me to be constantly learn. I learned new skills in conducting this research in particular the range of methodologies a research can use. This research allow me to build new relationships with some of my colleagues who took part in the interviews. The interviews allowed me to get more comfortable with the research process, after conducting the first interview my confidence grew. I faced challenges while conducting this dissertation that I did not expect to which I overcame.

Firstly, as part of the research design I was considering using a random method of selection when selecting participants. I instead decided move to the snowballing method as it was discovered in the research process that a random approach was not possible in this organisation due to the availability of participants. I took advantage of using a snowballing sampling technique as it allowed me to have eight participants an equal spilt gender, across range of ages and experiences levels. I learned from this challenge that there is always something positive to take from a challenge.

Secondly, in the early stages I was considering conducting focus groups instead of interviews as part of the research design. While, the focus groups method was not as effective as semi structured interviews in this organisation, it equipped me with skills on how to conduct both focus groups and semi structured interviews. Furthermore, it gave me the confidence to laisse with senior management about conducting focus groups to capture employee feedback on a range of dimensions including employee voice. This challenge gave me the opportunity to further my skills on qualitative research types.

The research would have been undertaking more effectively by understanding not everything in research will go to plan. Sometimes a research may need to change their approach based on their external environment and the need to adapt is important.

To conclude, my research on employee engagement “How do employees in a Media and Communications feel about employee engagement in a hybrid working environment post the Covid-19 pandemic?” has been greatly beneficial to me as a professional in human resources management.

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Chapter 9: Appendix

Appendix 1 Research instrument: Participant interview questions

Interviewee Name:	Date:	
Consent form returned:	Gender:	Age:

Introduction:

1. How long have you been with the company?
2. What is your current role?
3. Has your role changed since you started in the company?
4. What is your understanding of employee engagement?
5. Would you describe that you feel you are engaged or disengaged in your work?
6. What do you think is the main factor that makes you [engaged/disengaged]?

Assessing the drivers of engagement:

7. Do you feel work life balance affects your engagement levels?
8. Do you feel valued in this organisation?
9. Do you have ongoing conversations with your line manager about your development?
10. Would you say the compensation package effects engagement levels?
11. Would having an employee voice play a part in your employee engagement levels?
12. Do you feel you would go above and beyond for your employer?
13. What do you feel are the drivers that impact employee engagement levels?

Assessing engagement:

14. Would you say your engagement levels have changed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?
15. Would you say your employee attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic?

16. Since the organisation has been working hybrid for over 6 months now, how do you feel the hybrid working has impacted your engagements levels at work?
17. The economy is at the forefront in 2023, (massive layoffs, focus on business expenses, many organisations feel the pressure to reduce costs) do you feel the recent turbulence in the Irish market is having an effect on your engagement levels?

Closing question:

18. What recommendations would you have for this organisation to improve employee engagement?

Appendix 2: Email to participants

Dear [participant name],

My names is Shauna and I am a colleague of yours working in the Human Resources Department. I am currently studying master's degree and as part of my degree. I am undertaking research which involves conducting interviews for research purposes on the topic of employee engagement.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study to explore your thoughts and ideas in employee engagement.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I would kindly ask you for to read the attached information document. This form will outline participation information that is important for you to consider should you wish to take part.

If you would like to take part, please can you respond to this email before Thursday 16th March 2023.

Thank you kindly for your time in reading this email and information sheet.

I hope to hear from you with regards to assisting in this study.

Kind regards,

Shauna Codd

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Examining employee engagement after the Covid-19 pandemic, from a human resource perspective: An investigation into an Irish Media and Communications Company.

Dear [participant name],

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. I would kindly ask you take some time to decide whether or not to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

Since September 2021, I have been study part time in National College of Ireland, studying a master's in human resource management. This research is being undertaken as part of this course and upon completion I will obtain a level 9 master's degree that is CIPD accredited. The aim of the study is to have an understanding on employee engagement at a point in time.

The five objectives of the study are as follows;

1. To understand at this point in time whether employees within this Media and Communications organisation are engaged or disengaged.
2. To understand what are the drivers in a hybrid working environment that have an impact on employee engagement.
3. To understand if the recent economic turbulence is having an impact on employee engagement levels.
4. To understand the impact of hybrid working on employee engagement.
5. To understand if employee attitudes have shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic.

What will be part of this research involve?

Should you decide to take part in my study, the research will involve assessing the key drivers of employee engagement and whether this has shifted since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The location of the interview will take place virtually via MS teams and the duration of the interview should take 45 minutes. It's important to note that due to time constraints I will record to audio record the interviews for transcribing purposes. The video camera will be turned off for the purpose of the audio recordings.

Important to note!

If you wish to take part it's important to note that throughout the interview and in this research study any information will be confidential. Your participation is voluntary and should you wish to refuse to answer any question or withdraw completely in the interview that is ok and will be without any consequences. Please note that a consent form will require to be completed prior to the interview.

There will be no risks associated with conducting this interview and data gathering process, in the event that the participant is uncomfortable at any stage with any question posed again please feel free to withdraw from the interview process without explanation. The data obtained in the interview will be captured via a recording on Microsoft teams, this will strictly be an audio recording for the purpose of transcribing the interview. This data will be stored on the researchers laptop that is securely locked under password.

Looking for further information?

In case you have any questions on what has been highlighted in this document, please do not hesitate to contact me on my student email, or my designated college supervisor.

My contact details: Shauna Codd x20252986@student.ncirl.ie

My supervisor contact details: Maurice Fitzgerald maurice.fitzgerald@ncirl.ie

Appendix 4: Consent form

Participant Consent Form

Examining employee engagement after the Covid-19 pandemic, from a human resource perspective: An investigation into an Irish Media and Communications Company.

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves assessing the drivers of engagement and assessing levels of engagement at this point in time.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcribing the interviews.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in Shauna's dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a file that is password protected in computer that only Shauna has access to. I understand that the recording will be kept in line with NCI policy.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained in line with NCI policy.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

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

Signature of participant

Date