

# **How Engaged Are The Engagers?**

**AN EXPLORATION INTO THE ENGAGEMENT LEVELS AND  
ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS OF MANAGERS IN IRELAND**

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## Abstract

The research dissertation explores the construct and concept of employee engagement from the perspective of managers in Ireland. In today's challenging economic environment managers are required to do more with less and to keep their staff motivated and engaged to achieve organisational objectives. This research focused on assessing managers' engagement levels, after all, managers are also employees and this aspect seemed not to have been addressed in any of the currently available industry surveys.

The research study was undertaken across a range of public and private sector organisations and included a cross-section of front-line, middle and senior management. The research method employed was primarily quantitative with qualitative aspects and data was collated through an on-line questionnaire survey.

The research found that managers in Ireland are highly engaged, and much more so than their international counterparts. Findings show that public sector managers are more engaged than their colleagues in the private sector, but not to any significant extent. It also established that employee engagement is a current strategic business issue for Irish organisations and that there are a wide variety of factors affecting the engagement, motivation and commitment level of this occupational group.

Research into managers' engagement levels has not been addressed before and therefore the findings contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on this area and should be of interest to top management in all sectors, HR practitioners and academics.

### Declaration

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

Signed :

  
Brenda Dooley

Date :

31/8/11

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# ***Chapter 1***

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework for this research including the background to the study, the context and the justifications for the research and also outlines the aims, objectives and the appropriate research questions.

### **1.2 *Background and Context***

Whether organisations are endeavouring to survive and respond to the current recessionary pressures or whether they are searching for the “holy grail” of sustained competitive advantage, the subject of *Employee Engagement* has recently gained in popularity as a means of enhancing organisational performance.

While the academic community has developed a number of constructs and the practitioner researchers have devised a variety of models, there is no one definition for Employee Engagement. The Corporate Leadership Council (2008) regarded as a world leading authority on the subject define it as “*the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment*”, and is based on the idea of discretionary effort.

Trends in the levels of employee engagement however have been declining since the commencement of the global economic downturn in 2008 and the most recent research by industry practitioners such as Gallup <sup>TM</sup> (2010) and Blessing White (2008 & 2011) report that disengagement is increasing and that less than 30% of employees are engaged with their organisations. (See Appendix 1).

The intensification of global competition has resulted in organisations attempting to harness the discretionary effort of employees in order to increase productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction. Thus, employee engagement is emerging as

a critical business driver with globally-focused organisations viewing it as a significant success factor in their ability to attract, develop and retain talent, through the effective and proactive management of the employment relationship. The potential of engagement is being taken very seriously within the UK with Prime Minister David Cameron giving his backing to a new national Engagement Task Force set up in March 2011 as a result of research conducted for BIS (The Department of Business, Innovation & Skills). BIS (2011) commissioned a report on Employee Engagement in 2009 and it concluded that wider delivery of employee engagement could have a positive impact on the country's competitiveness and performance both during the downturn and in "powering through to recovery".

The impact of the global economic recession has been particularly hard felt in Ireland. Compounded by the domestic fiscal and banking crisis, which resulted in the EU/IMF financial rescue package, the challenges for Irish employers and employees are particularly difficult. The four-year reversal of the country's fortunes from the height of the Celtic Tiger where unemployment was just 4.6% to current levels of nearly 15% has meant that organisations have to do more with less resource. Furthermore, the need to quickly and drastically cut public finances has meant that public sector organisations in particular face significant and unprecedented challenges to deliver quality services with severely curtailed funding, a recruitment freeze, combined with falling staff numbers.

The Labour Relations Commission (LRC) engaged Roche, Teague, Coughlan and Fahy (2011) to conduct a study on the effects of the Irish recession on the manner in which people are managed at work. Their research found that organisations took a versatile approach in their response to pressures by combining a wide range of hard and soft HR practices. Hard measures to reduce costs included pay cuts, pay freezes, recruitment freezes, and redundancies. Soft HR practices to maintain motivation and commitment included communications, talent management, redeployment and more than 50 percent of the respondents reported undertaking specific *employee engagement* measures. Roche et al concluded that employers are responding to the crisis by developing strategies and initiatives aimed at reducing costs while simultaneously introducing measures to improve innovation and enhance employee engagement in efforts to maintain organisational performance.

### ***1.3 Justification for the research***

The role of the manager in employee engagement is critical. According to Markos & Sridevi (2010) engagement involves a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee, facilitated through management action, attitude and behaviour. The research study found that strong relationships between management and employees presents a key ingredient in the employee engagement “formula” and therefore the responsibility for engagement clearly lies with management grades. Jenson McMullen & Stark (2007) concur that the generation of employee commitment and productivity is based on the ability of managers to create an engaging work climate.

Accepting the vital importance of management therefore in the engagement “equation”, it raised a question in the mind of this researcher as to the extent of engagement levels among managers themselves and, by extension, which organisational factors engage them? The EIU (2010) in their research sought to establish those groups of employees CEO’s considered most challenging to engage. 43% reported that the most difficult were the front-line, middle and senior management. Given that managers are responsible for inspiring their teams to share and deliver the organisation’s visions and goals it makes sense to assume that they too need to be engaged in order to do so.

According to Robertson-Smith & Markwick (2009) engagement levels can vary according to seniority, occupation and tenure but not by sector. They also posit that the more senior the individual’s role the greater the chance of the individual being engaged but they say that this varies between organisations. They emphasise that good quality line management is a fundamental building block in any attempt to raise engagement levels and by inference managers are automatically engaged.

In this researcher’s experience as an Executive Coach, some managers experience a tension between being responsible for ensuring that their teams are engaged, whilst they themselves experience varying levels of personal engagement and

commitment. The researcher is therefore interested in exploring whether or not Irish managers as an occupational grouping are engaged and if so, to what extent. An additional area of interest is to examine what might be their specific engagement drivers to determine if there are differentiating factors for managers over other employee groups.

#### **1.4 Research Sector**

The manager's role is similar in every organisation, whether it is a public or private enterprise, and involves the interdependent management processes of Planning, Organising, Leading and Controlling. While the context may differ the functions do not, so the requirement to deliver organisational objectives is the same for every manager regardless of their industry sector. Today's common management challenge is to motivate and engage staff in a recessionary environment and to deliver more with less and in many cases, deliver more *for* less. Private sector managers have had to accept pay freezes, loss of bonuses, diminished pension contributions, while public sector workers too have suffered pay cuts and levies of between 5% and 12%, with more expected in the 2012 Budget. Corcoran (2011) reported that since the recession began in 2007, the pay gap is widening with the public sector now exceeding private sector pay by as much as 44%. Thus pay cuts, freezes and gaps are affecting managers and their staff across all industry sectors and employment groups.

The researcher determined therefore that the research should be across the public, private, semi-states and not-for-profit sectors to give the widest possible view of Irish managers' engagement levels. Access was negotiated through the researcher's personal network of management contacts established amongst clients, colleagues and personal connections and the research was targeted at front-line, middle and senior managers representing a cross section of the following sectors:

Civil Service Departments	Banking/Insurance	Semi-State
Education	Professional Services	Not-for-Profit
HSE	ICT	Universities

**Fig 1: Target Research Sectors**

### **1.5 Research Aims**

The aims of the research were to examine the topic of employee engagement from the perspective of viewing managers as employees, and to specifically explore if Irish managers\* are engaged and if so, what drives their engagement. A personal aspiration is that this research would also contribute to the general body of knowledge on this subject matter and perhaps provide new insights managers' engagement and into what specifically engages that occupational group.

**\* Note: By Irish managers the researcher means managers of Irish organisations**

### **1.6 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research were:

- To examine and explore the various theories, constructs, concepts and models of employee engagement with the view to understanding what is meant by the term “employee engagement”
- To establish what the business case is for employee engagement and why organisations might be interested in it and what impact it might have on overall business performance
- To determine what factors contribute to and drive engagement in an effort to understand whether these factors are intrinsic or extrinsic
- To establish if Irish managers are engaged, to what extent, and what are their engagement drivers
- To determine if engagement levels differ across business sectors
- To explore whether managers engage in the same way as non-management staff or are there any other engagement factors which are peculiar to management grades

### **1.7 Research Questions (“RQs”)**

There was little reference found in the literature on employee engagement levels within different occupational groups other than in the study of Schaufeli & Bakker (2003) where they examined “vigor, dedication & absorption” as conditions of engagement and managers constituted just 6% of their sample. There is therefore an insufficient theoretical base from which to develop a hypothesis.

Consequently, this research study was undertaken with a view to answering the following key questions:

### **1.8     *Significance of the Study***

It was hoped that this research study would add to the general body of knowledge available on employee engagement as a subject matter and on how managers engage in particular, whilst also providing new insights into their specific engagement, motivation and commitment drivers.

## *Chapter 2*

### **Literature Review**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this research project and is contained in the following review of the latest academic literature and practitioner research.

#### *2.1 Introduction*

Employee engagement is the general term used to describe the extent to which employees are committed to their organisation. The term coined by the Gallup™ organisation is relatively new, but its definition continues to be debated among academics and practitioners, with more than 50 definitions abounding according to MacLeod & Clarke (2009). The term commitment is also used in relation to and sometimes interchangeably with engagement, so it was prudent to review both concepts. The supporting literature is relatively recent and was assessed from a number of perspectives:

- The concepts of engagement and commitment
- The relevance of motivation to the engagement debate
- Is employee engagement just another management fad?
- The industry business case for engagement
- Levels and drivers of engagement
- The role of the manager and the impact of psychological contract on engagement

#### *2.2 The concepts of Engagement and Commitment*

The development of the concept of employee engagement has its origins in the research of William Kahn. Kahn (1990) was the first theorist to describe the concept of “personal engagement” in a work context. He defined personal

engagement as “*the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles*” and that “*in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances*” (p.694). His research looked at the nature of engagement (and, conversely, disengagement), and the psychological conditions influencing individuals’ behaviour in the work environment. He found three psychological conditions, which shaped how people “inhabited” their roles - Meaningfulness, Safety and Availability. He described how people found *meaningfulness* when they felt worthwhile, useful and valuable, that they had made a difference and had not been taken for granted. *Safety* described how people felt able to show and employ themselves without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status or career in organisation and was dependent upon interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, management style and organisational norms. *Availability*, he defined as the extent to which people had the physical and emotional energy to engage, how secure they felt in their work and the impact of what was occurring in their personal lives at any given time. Kahn concluded that there were multiple influences shaping individuals’ personal level of engagement (or otherwise) and it is at the “swirling intersection” of these influences that people make clear choices to engage or disengage with their work and their organisation.

While Rothbard (2001) concurs with Kahn that engagement is a form of psychological presence at work, he contends that it possesses two vital components: *absorption* (the intensity of role focus) and *attention* (the amount of time spent thinking of the role). While these components correlate they are also distinct in that she describes attention as a material resource that people can choose to allocate in a number of ways, while absorption presents an intrinsic motivation in a job. Therefore, attention is something one gives to a task or a role, while absorption is something one feels about it, both represented motivational constructs. She argues that people may feel negative and/or positive affects associated with their role but “research suggests that negative and positive affect are not opposite ends of a continuum but, instead are orthogonal to one another” (p658). Thus she seems to contend that an individual can simultaneously feel both positive and negative emotions about their role engagement.



Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, (2002) again focused on the psychological aspects of engagement but added different dimensions when they defined it as a fulfilling positive state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption in one's work, which is persistent over time. *Vigour*, they describe as high energy, persistence and resilience while *dedication* determines how involved one is in the work and finally *absorption* involves being engrossed and fully concentrated. Thus, apart from strong job identification, they say that engagement is characterised by the demonstration of high energy and dedication.

Dedication is a form of commitment and McBain (2006) argues that there was a relationship between engagement and commitment to the organisation and/or to the individual job role. He looked at three components of commitment – *affective*, *normative* and *continuance* and that similarly to engagement, this model has both cognitive and emotional impacts and surrounds the notions of pride in and identification with the organisation and based on feelings of loyalty and obligation. McBain also reviewed the work of Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) who found that satisfying basic needs at work increases positive emotions in employees, which in turn benefits the organisation. He concluded that the consequences of engagement were personal fulfilment and self-significance, which can lead to greater job satisfaction and higher performance. So his view was that instead of engagement and commitment being interchangeable concepts, commitment was actually an outcome of engagement and that it provided significant benefits to the organisation. He concluded that the key issue was not whether engagement mattered, but how organisations could build on it in order to capitalise on the benefits of commitment. McBain thus made the connection to the possible business outcomes of engagement

Macey & Schneider (2008) highlighted the persistent ambiguity of the term engagement in that at different times it refers to traits, psychological states and behaviours and their antecedents and outcomes. They did establish that the common to any definition they found was the belief that engagement was a desirable state, had a clear organisational purpose and possessed behavioural and attitudinal elements of involvement, enthusiasm, trust, commitment, focus and energy. They offered a three-faceted framework for understanding the engagement construct - *trait*, *psychological state* and *behavioural* and that these were

dependent upon organisational conditions such as such as the nature of work in terms of challenge and variety and the nature of leadership. Similarly to McBain, they also made a connection between engagement and organisational commitment which they defined as *“an important facet of engagement when it is conceptualised as positive attachment to the larger organisational entity and measured as a willingness to exert energy in support of the organisation, to feel pride as an organisational member and to have personal identification with the organisation”* (pp8-9). They agreed with McBain that the practical effect of commitment and engagement is key to an organisation’s competitive advantage and that companies who can get the engagement conditions right will achieve something their competitors will find difficult to copy. This viewpoint clearly has considerable merit from a business perspective.

Research undertaken by the Corporate Leadership Council (2011) concluded, like McBain, that engagement involves commitment, but they argue that it has both rational and emotional components. Rational commitment they describe as the extent to which employees believe the organisation has their financial, development and professional self-interests in mind, in other words their extrinsic needs. Emotional commitment the CLC explain results from the extent to which the employee felt valued, enjoyed and believed in the work they were doing, in other words their intrinsic needs. The inputs of commitment they say, include the day-to-day work, the team, the direct manager and the organisation, while the outputs are an employee’s discretionary effort (the willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty) and intention to stay with the organisation over the following year. So, where managers are concerned, they generate not only their own commitment, they play a crucial role in determining the commitment levels of their staff given that all managerial activity impacts employee effort, positively or negatively.

Saks (2006) introduces the notion that there are two types of engagement – job and organisational which reflect two dominant roles for employees i.e., their work role and their role as organisational members. He also contends that the amount of emotional and cognitive resources one is prepared to devote to one’s job depends on the amount of economic and social-emotional resources received from the organisation. This he explained was founded on Social Exchange Theory, which

he believed provided the strongest rationale for engagement. He then developed what he determined are the antecedents and consequences of both forms of engagement described in his model below. Saks' antecedents could also be considered drivers of engagement and, similar to the conclusions of other researchers the outcomes of engagement include job satisfaction, organisational commitment combined with intention to stay.

Antecedents	Engagement	Consequences
Job Characteristics Perceived Organisational & Supervisor Support Rewards & Recognition Procedural Justice Distributive Justice	Job Engagement  Organisational Engagement	Job Satisfaction Organisational Commitment Intention to Quit Organisational Citizen Behaviour

**Fig 2 Saks' Model of the antecedents & consequences of employee engagement**

Rama Devi (2009) presents an opposing view to McBain (2006) and Saks (2006) in that he describes employee commitment as being a precursor to engagement as opposed to being an outcome of it as McBain proposes, or a consequence as Saks argues. Rama Devi does however, agree with Macey and Schneider (2008), that conditions of work and good leadership are key drivers of employee engagement and concludes that a highly engaged workforce is a sign of a healthy organisation whatever its size, location or sector.

Sharma & Anupama (2010) consider employee engagement as an “omnibus” term incorporating issues such as employee satisfaction, involvement, trust in organisational leadership, but they define it as “the extent to which employees are committed to the vision, mission and goals of the organisation and involved in the work they do” (p.52). They see the concept of engagement as an amalgam of the two constructs of organisational commitment and job involvement. They also suggest that predictors of both constructs relate to a variety of situational factors (similar to drivers) and personal attributes. Their recent research in a private sector organisation found that objectivity and recognition emerged as critical determinants of organisational commitment while career opportunities and reward determined job involvement. However, while they argued that employee engagement manifested itself in organisational commitment and job involvement, their findings in terms of critical determinants were different in both cases.

It is clear from reviewing the above academic literature that there is no agreement on a precise definition of engagement. Saks (2008) also expresses frustration about this imprecision saying “*if academics continue to define it as an aggregate of older constructs it is likely to muddy the engagement water even further and to perpetuate the belief that engagement is nothing more than old wine in a new bottle*” (pp43).

### **2.3     *The relevance of motivation to the engagement debate***

A review of the literature on employee engagement would not be complete without looking at the area of Motivation. Macey & Schneider (2008) had purposely excluded integrating engagement with motivation from their considerations but did acknowledge that as a hypothetical construct motivation is relevant to the debate. One of the most enduring motivational theories is Herzberg’s Two-Factor model (1957) of motivators and hygiene factors. In studies he found that for employees, job satisfaction involved them having opportunities to experience achievement, advancement, challenging work, and recognition (motivator factors) while job dissatisfaction revolved around the absence of these (hygiene factors). He explained that motivator factors were intrinsic in that they were self-generated, while hygiene factors were extrinsic to the employee, in that they were generated by the organisation. In terms of effectiveness, intrinsic motivation he argued had a more long lasting effect and impact on overall satisfaction and commitment. McClelland (1961) another pioneer of motivational thinking, developed a 3-needs based motivational model – the needs for *achievement, power & authority* and *affiliation* which he contended characterised a individual’s style and behaviour both in their own motivation and in the case of managers, the motivation and management of others.

Research has been conducted in both the USA and in the UK on the top ten motivating factors applicable to private sector managers. Some of these factors appear in the research as drivers of engagement (See Paragraph 2.5 below), which supports Macey & Schneider’s (2008) acknowledgement that motivation is a related construct to the engagement debate.

<b>Antonioni (1999) 1,000 USA Managers</b>	<b>Cook &amp; Jackson (2005) 1,800 UK Managers</b>
Respect as a competent person	Challenges of the job
Mutual trust with immediate manager	Personal development opportunities
Participation in decisions that affect my area	Career prospects
Enjoyment of the work	Reputation of Organisation
Opportunity for self-development	Working with like-minded people
Feeling that the job is important	Pay & Benefits
Upper management's awareness of job results	Job Security
Fairness in how people are rewarded for performance	Ethos/Culture
Full appreciation for work well done	Opportunities for flexible working
Working on special projects	Opportunity to travel

Fig 3

Managers' Motivating Factors

Looking to public sector workers Perry & Wise (1990) undertook a study on the motivational factors particular to this sector and highlighted that individuals can be predisposed to responding to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and that their motivation is most commonly “*associated with normative orientations including a desire to service public interest, loyalty to duty and social equity*” (pp369).

#### 2.4 *Is employee engagement just another management fad?*

Dunnette (1966) defined fads as short-lived ideas that quickly fade away and one must ask the question if engagement is just another fad, buzzword, myth, or hype. It is a concept not without its cynics. Little & Little (2006) raise the question of whether engagement is a meaningful construct that adds to academic knowledge or just a marketing tool promoted by consulting organisations and their clients. They consider its popularity is more due to the wish of organisations to find solutions to the sticky problems of performance and motivation. One could argue that if managers were doing their jobs properly by leading and managing their people in an effective manner, the need for addressing engagement as a specific issue, would be redundant. Wefald & Downey (2008) scepticism centres on whether engagement has met any standard of being a distinctly useful construct and they concluded that it is still very much a work in progress. They have concerns about what they view as a clear delineation between the academic and the practitioner views of engagement in that the academic researchers are concerned with the

psychological constructs while the industry is concerned with performance outcomes. They do conclude however that it is unlikely to be a fad as its popularity is growing amongst both communities.

## **2.5 *The industry business case for engagement***

Industry practitioners continue to make their case that engagement is not just a management fad it is a management necessity. Ongoing research has repeatedly demonstrated the links between the way people are managed and subsequent organisational performance.

The Corporate Leadership Council (2007 & 2008) claims that committed employees work 57% harder and are nine times less likely to leave organisations than uncommitted employees. If engaged employees are higher performing and longer tenured, this has implications for organisational productivity a current and pertinent issue in every organisation. The CLC studies have also found engagement drives financial performance and that average three-year revenue growth in high engagement organisations is 20%, compared with 9% in other organisations. It argues that organisations which improve employee commitment will see significant returns on employee effort resulting in higher performance across the organisation – they call this the 10:6:2 Rule whereby every 10% improvement in an employee's commitment level can increase his/her effort levels by 6% and for every 6% effort increase, performance increases by 2%. Buchanan (2004) reviewed research completed by the CLC on more than 50,000 employees across 59 worldwide organisations and found that increased engagement and organisational commitment could lead to a 57% increase in staff's discretionary effort. This increased discretionary effort, they found, produced a 20% improvement in individual performance output and an 87% reduction in turnover. The CLC also found that the emotional component of engagement was four times more likely to affect performance than the rational element and concluded that employee engagement was not only crucial to building a high performance workforce but was also an essential defence against attrition in a tight labour market. More recently, the CLC (2008) conducted further worldwide research and reviewed more than 300 drivers of engagement, which they distilled under 7 headings (See Fig 5 below). It also found that highly engaged organisations have

the capability to grow their profit base as much as three times faster than their competitors.

The Economic Intelligence Unit (2010) conducted a worldwide study of 330 CEO's and senior executives, 84% of whom said that disengaged employees were one of the three biggest threats facing their business yet, only 26% said that engagement was a "consistent agenda item" at board meetings. Despite disengagement being considered a business threat, only 12% of the respondents reported that the issue is actually being confronted. This clearly shows a mismatch between what the CEOs perceive as being a priority issue and what is actually being done to confront the problem. An interesting finding from this research is in relation to the groups, which these CEOs reported as finding the most challenging to engage. 35% of CEOs reported that middle management were the most difficult, followed by front-line managers at 17% and senior managers at 9%. This would imply therefore that management groups are not highly engaged

The evidence to support engagement as a strategic business issue continues to mount. In a review of a meta analysis of 42 studies and 7,939 business units, undertaken by Gallup™, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) found that high engagement levels are associated with higher levels of profitability, customer satisfaction, productivity and lower levels of employee turnover. The study concluded that business units, which had engagement levels above the median, were found to have a 70% higher probability of success than those below.

Wright, Gardner and Moynihan (2003) considered a study of over 5,600 employees in 50 autonomous business units within a large US-Canadian corporation and found a causal relationship between progressive human resource practices and increased organisational commitment. They argued that "*attitudes include behavioural as well as affective and cognitive components, they are important antecedents of employee participation and commitment*" (pp25). A meta-analysis found that a range of business outcomes was positively associated with worker attitudes and that HR practices are a vital lever in driving attitudes. The evidence therefore supported their hypothesised relationships of organisational commitment and human resource practices with operational performance and profitability.

The business case strengthened further with research undertaken by Towers Perrin (2004) In their Talent Study of 5,000 UK employees they used statistical techniques to evaluate the relationship between engagement levels and companies' operating margins and estimated that a 5% increase in engagement forecasts a 0.7% increase in operating margins – they illustrated that for a company with £5bn revenues this could contribute £32m to their bottom line. They argue that this type of financial modelling is helping organisations create a business case for improving employee engagement and equipping HR professionals with the financially orientated tools to discuss these “soft” issues with C-suite executives most used to dealing in hard financial measures.

Gallup™ (2010), the recognised world leader in research on employee engagement, has concluded that in the best organisations, engagement has become a strategic foundation for the way they do business and win market share. They have observed trends across many clients where the net gain in key business performance outcomes in those organisations that concentrate on improving employee engagement, provides a direct linkage to a Return on Investment. Gallup researchers Harter, Schmidt, Killham & Agrawal (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 152 organisations in 44 industries in 26 countries with nearly 1 million employees. They found a substantial relationship between engagement and nine different business outcomes including profitability, customer loyalty, productivity, turnover, quality, safety, absenteeism and shrinkage.

The MacLeod & Clarke (2009) report to the UK Government concluded “*there is evidence that improving engagement correlates with improving performance – and this is at the heart of our argument why employee engagement matters to the UK economy*” (pp11). They highlight evidence from Gallup, already referred to above, and from a Towers Perrin-ISR survey where high engagement companies reported a 19.2% increase in operating income while low engagement organisations showed a 32.7% decline in the same period. They also reviewed evidence from Standard Chartered Bank who reported that high engagement branches had on average a 16% higher profit margin than those with decreased engagement levels. Interestingly, MacLeod & Clarke also looked at the other side of the equation – the impact of engagement deficit - and they speculate that the disengagement gap



could be a contributing factor to the UK's lag in international productivity league table and that disengagement could be costing the economy £65bn per annum.

In summary, the research provides significant evidence to support the fact that high levels of employee engagement can contribute to business performance outcomes and as Lockwood (2007) argues, for that very reason, firms are now turning to HR to set an agenda for engagement and commitment in order to gain competitive advantage.

The influential ex-General Electric CEO Jack Welch (2006) cited employee engagement as the first measure of a company's state of health, followed by customer satisfaction and free cash flow. So, whether employee engagement is just another "fad" remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that there is considerable interest in it from the business community perspective. Macey & Schneider (2008) concur when they conclude that when companies get engagement conditions right they will have accomplished something that competitors will find very difficult to imitate and thus create a sustained competitive advantage – the "holy grail".

## **2.6 Levels and drivers of Engagement**

**2.6.1** Lockwood (2007) highlights that it is important for organisations to understand there are different levels of engagement and the impact these might have on employee behaviour either positively, or negatively:

*Engaged* – employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to the organisation. They drive innovation and move the company forward

*Partially/Not Engaged* – employees have "checked out" – they sleepwalk through their day, putting in time but not energy or passion into their work

*Actively Disengaged* – employees not merely unhappy at work, they act out their unhappiness, undermining what their engaged colleagues are trying to accomplish

O'Neal & Gebauer (2006) reporting on a Towers Perrin 2005 global workforce study found that engagement levels can differ significantly amongst countries and economies. This study asked not just if employees were engaged or not but to what degree were they engaged - *highly* or *moderately*. The challenge for management is to maintain and retain engaged employees, and work on those who may be

moderately or partially engaged by concentrating on developing and enhancing engagement drivers. There would seem to be a considerably more significant challenge in re-engaging with those who are already actively disengaged.

**2.6.2** A definitive list of engagement drivers does not exist and a review of the literature would support this. A selection of **academic** and **practitioner** research is provided in Figures 4 and 5 below:

**Engagement Drivers – Academic Research**

Vision – a sense of direction and purpose	Relationship with management
Opportunity – ability to grow and develop	Communication
Incentives – a fair salary	Pay and Reward
Impact – ability to see outcome or effect of work	Training & Development
Communication – knowing what is going on and why	Feedback
Community Sense – peers, bosses and leaders	Co-Operation
Entrepreneurship – flexibility and choice about terms and conditions	Health & Well-being
Organisation Affiliation	Social support from colleagues
Communciation	Performance Feedback
Autonomy & Influence	Skill Variety
Leadership & Supervision	Autonomy
Opportunities for Growth	Learning Opportunities
of Relationships	Management Support
Job characteristics	Rewards & Recognition
Perceived organisational support	Career Opportunity
Perceived supervisor support	Communication
Rewards & Recognition	Job Content
Procedural Justice	Participative Management
Distributive Justice	Training & Development

**Fig 4**

**Engagement Drivers – Academic Research**

## Engagement Drivers – Industry Practitioner Research

<b>CIPD<sup>2</sup> (2010)</b>	<b>Blessing White (2011)</b>
Meaningfulness of work	Relationship with management
Voice – being able to feed views upwards	Clarity about role
Senior Management communication and vision	Co-operation with colleagues
Supportive Work environment	Challenging work
Person-job fit	Opportunities to develop
Line management style	Flexible work conditions
<b>Towers Perrin (2004)</b>	<b>Gallup™ Engagement Hierarchy</b>
Organisation concern for employee well-being and health	Overall Growth (how can I grow?)
Ability to be able to voice ideas and have contributions valued	Teamwork (do I belong?)
Clear vision from senior management	Management Support (What do I give?)
Challenging work	Basic Needs (What do I get?)
Opportunities for development	
Regular feedback	
Collaborative work environment	
<b>Corporate Leadership Council (2008)</b>	<b>AON Hewitt (2010)</b>
Support from Manager	Career Path
Support from Senior Executive Team	Decision Making
Compensation & Benefits	Development
On Boarding	Co-operative co-workers
Day-To-Day Work	Understanding Management
Learning & Development	Teamwork
Organisational Culture	

Fig 5

Engagement Drivers – Industry Practitioner Research

It is clear that while differences exist, there are similarities to be found amongst the various models, and some common threads surface. In a distillation of the various models the following themes repeatedly emerge:

- *Opportunities for Development and Growth*
- *Supportive Relationships*
- *Communication & Recognition*
- *Leadership Effectiveness*

What is obvious from the models reviewed is that the organisation provides the drivers and given that management are agents of the organisation, it is now appropriate to review their role.

## ***2.7 The role of the manager and the impact of the psychological contract in engagement***

The well-known adage that people “don’t leave organisations, they leave managers” highlights the importance of the manager to the employment relationship and their impact of the positive or negative experiences of an employee, and therefore to their level of engagement. This link is supported by the literature:

### ***2.7.1. The role of the Manager***

The role of the manager is to provide the conditions within which employees can engage and having reviewed engagement drivers in paragraph 2.5 above, it is clear that support from one’s manager is a key factor. Referring back to Saks’ (2006) model the antecedents and consequences of engagement as described in Fig 1 above, one can see that the antecedents or conditions for engagement can only be provided by management. Saks also argues that supervisors are key in building engagement amongst staff and that they are at the “root” of any disengagement. Jensen, McMullen & Stark (2007) agree with the importance of the manager, in their ability to create an all round engaging work climate and the impact they can have on an employee’s commitment, performance and productivity. Yet, according to the EIU (2010) research 47% of CEO’s believe that it is the C-suite

executives (the CEO, CFO, and COO), who influence the level of employee engagement. As the EIU comment, the C-suite executives appear to display a “rose-tinted” view of their role in engagement, which is generally not shared by lower ranks who firmly believe that it is the effectiveness of the immediate manager which impacts on engagement

Towers Perrin (2004) in their research found that corporately aligned and effective front-line managers and supervisors are critical to responding effectively to the emotional dimension of an employee’s work experience. They also emphasised the importance of organisational leaders acting as role models who should demonstrate clear company values, which most UK employees see as a key driver of their engagement. AON Hewitt (2010) argue that in today’s economic downturn characterised by business restructuring and transformation programmes it is the impact of the immediate manager which would provide “engagement lift” to employees, more than any other factor. Robinson & Hayday (2009) carried out specific research into the importance of the line manager relationship in an effort to understand how “engaging managers” behave in their dealings with employees. They found that highly engaged managers led high performing teams. One can deduce therefore that engaged employees are supported by engaged and effective managers.

Luthens & Petersen (2001) had already investigated the link between engagement and managerial effectiveness. They found that, employees who believe that their managers value their opinions and have an interest in their development, develop strong ties with those managers resulting in higher performance output, resulting in higher managerial effectiveness. They also looked at the link between managerial self-efficacy and managerial effectiveness and they concluded, *“as the manager’s employees become more engaged (cognitively and/or emotionally) in their work, the manager acquires confidence and belief in his/her ability to create and build an engaged team successfully. This engaged team led by the efficacious manager results in desired unit/organisational outcomes”* (pp379). They thus established the link between managers’ self-belief, their effectiveness and increased engagement.

In contrast, the unengaged manager can only have a negative impact on engagement. Brewster, Higgs, Holley, McBain (2007) say that the manager is the lens through which the employee sees the organisation and therefore the manager is a key driver of engagement. However their research shows that if a line manager is not engaged or if their behaviour is inconsistent, engagement declines. One reporting organisation estimated that half of its managers were actually undermining employee engagement, especially if they didn't believe in it as a concept.

So, how then do managers build employee engagement? Melcrum (2005) identified the critical elements for line managers to build engagement amongst their teams. These elements include creating an open climate, communication, involvement in decision-making, empowerment, and most importantly trust. The existence of trust therefore is clearly a key factor in building engagement. Harding & Davenport (2010) have redefined the manager's role from the traditional process model (see Chapter 1.4) to one of Executing Tasks, Developing People, Delivering the Dealing, and Energising the Change, all of which, they argue, should be supported by a strong foundation of Authenticity and Trust.

In conclusion, managers can be powerful catalysts for engaging employees at all levels, as they form a direct link between employees and top management. They interact with staff on a daily basis and can positively impact organisational performance if they are effective in gaining employees' motivation and commitment through developing a climate of trust and authenticity. Their own levels of engagement can also impact on that of their staff, either positively or negatively. It would seem highly unlikely therefore that an unengaged manager would have an engaged team. Neither however can one assume that engaged manager ensures an engaged team, although the chances of doing so are obviously higher in their case.

### ***2.7.2 The impact of the psychological contract***

Given the relationship of trust to engagement and the importance of trust to the psychological contract, it would be remiss not to investigate the link between engagement and the psychological contract. Guest & Conway (2002) defined the

psychological contract as “*the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship, organisational and individual of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship*” and comprises reciprocity, mutuality of interests, promises, privileges, obligations and rights and can only thrive in conditions of trust and fairness. The pressure for change in the workplace environment due to the economic downturn, increasing competition and reducing costs, is reliant upon the mutual trust and co-operation of management and staff. It stands to reason therefore that engaging with employees depends on the cultivation of a positive psychological contract, neither of which is mutually exclusive. Brewster et al (2007) would seem to agree – they developed a model for engagement, satisfaction and commitment where they argue that a positive psychological contract constitutes a clear antecedent of engagement.

## **2.8 Conclusions**

In summary, employee engagement is a multi-dimensional construct with emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements, and in general it constitutes an active choice which employees make to engage or otherwise. Given that there are at least 50 definitions, and a variety of related constructs, this clearly demonstrates a problem for both academics and practitioners. The extant research points to the organisational performance indicators and outcomes of engagement and the importance of the conditions of the work environment and the effectiveness of management. Its relationship to commitment is less clear with some researchers believing they are interchangeable while others conclude that commitment is a product of engagement, and yet others believe it to be a precursor to it. The concept of motivation has an impact in fostering engagement, but it is not clear how it motivation on its own impacts performance. Thus employee engagement appears to be a general rubric for a variety of concepts and constructs including commitment and motivation.

There is clear agreement amongst the academic and practitioner community however that there is a potential for competitive advantage for those organisations that succeed in tapping into their employees’ engagement capability and that this is reliant upon managerial effectiveness.

What appears to be missing from the extensive body of literature however is any specific research into how managers themselves become and stay engaged, given they are a vital element of the engagement equation. As they too are employees, they fulfil joint and contemporaneous roles of “Engagers” and “Engagees”. The objective of this research was to investigate the level and drivers of engagement for managers in their roles as “engagees”.



## **Chapter 3**

### ***Research Methodology***

#### **3.1 *Introduction***

This chapter outlines the methodological framework in terms of the research strategy and design employed to conduct this research project. A detailed description justifying the chosen methodology is provided together with a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. A profile of the participants and the sampling method used are also described, together with a consideration of ethical issues and potential limitations.

#### **3.2 *Research Philosophy and Approach***

There are a number of issues that underlie the choice of data collection and analysis techniques. To depict these issues, Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) developed what they refer to as the research “onion”, which they suggest must be peeled away in order to determine the most appropriate research strategy, design and methodology for the study being undertaken.

Research philosophy relates to the development of knowledge, the nature of that knowledge, the process by which it is developed and the assumptions researchers make about it. These assumptions depend on the ontological or epistemological stance of the researcher. Ontology relates to the nature of reality and whether one subscribes to objectivism or subjectivism. Epistemology on the other hand, concerns the issue of what constitutes acceptable knowledge and this depends on whether the researcher adopts a positivist or interpretivist stance that is, whether one’s position is to rely on facts as opposed to impressions. Whichever philosophical stance one adopts determines the research approach, which in the case of positivism tends to be deductive and in the case of interpretivism tends to be inductive, although combining approaches is quite usual. The research strategy, design and methodology one decides upon is therefore framed by the philosophy and approach adopted. However, Saunders et al contend that one research philosophy is no better than another, because research questions “*rarely fall neatly into one philosophical domain*”, therefore strictly adopting one over

another is not practical in reality. They are describing the pragmatist philosophy, which espouses that the most important consideration in determining the appropriate strategy and methodology is the research question or questions.

### **3.3 Research Strategy, Design and Methodology**

This researcher supported the pragmatist philosophy in that the research method undertaken was that which the researcher concluded was most appropriately positioned to fulfil the research aims and objectives and answer the three key research questions as stated in Chapter 1.7 above.

Given that the intention was to explore engagement amongst a specific occupational group i.e., managers, in terms of how engaged they are and what factors engage them, this study is best described as *descripto-explanatory*. Saunders et al (2009) explain this type of study as descriptive research supported by explanation and that it is a portrayal of an accurate profile of persons, events or situations with a view to establishing causal relationships.

In order to research managers as a broad occupational group it is clearly advantageous to have a cross section of front-line, middle, and senior level managers across as wide a variety of organisations and sectors as possible. Therefore the researcher concluded that a *survey* was the most appropriate research strategy, which Saunders et al (2009) confirm is appropriate for descriptive and exploratory research. Bryman & Bell (2011 pp54) describe survey research as “*comprising a cross-sectional design in relation to which data are collected predominantly by questionnaire or by structured interview on more than one case, order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to detect patterns of association*”. This supports the conclusion that a survey represented the most appropriate strategy to understand the levels of engagement among a cross-section of managers and the factors affecting their engagement.

The research strategy therefore is primarily quantitative in that it, as Bryman & Bell (2011 pp27) describe it “*entails a deductive approach to the relationship*

*between theory and research in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories*". This strategy allowed for the measurement of engagement amongst managers and the production of appropriate statistical data and thus provided the answer to research question number one. Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005) counsel against mono-method research considering it to be the "*biggest threat to the advancement of social sciences*" (pp384). They recommend that pragmatic researchers incorporate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies within the same framework and that the inclusion of qualitative data in quantitative based research can aid the interpretation of the findings. Creswell (1995) also promotes the value of integrating methods within a single study in order to utilise the strengths of both.

The qualitative information required to answer research question number two, relating to the factors that keep managers motivated, committed and engaged therefore was included within the survey by means of a number of open questions designed to gain insights and allow respondents to answer in their own way. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods constitutes a process of triangulation as defined by Denzin's and cited in (Jick 1979, p502) as being "*the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon*". Jick goes on to explain that triangulation not only examines the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but can also enrich understanding by allow for new dimensions to emerge. The use of triangulation in this study therefore provided greater accuracy and validity in the research findings.

The survey method best facilitates standardised data and allows easy comparisons and analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics. Therefore it is useful for generalising across the sample, and across the sector or industry groups. It is acknowledged that the data collected through a survey may not be as wide-ranging as that collected by other research strategies due to the limitation on the number of questions considered practical, however this limitation was outweighed by the clear advantages in terms of cost and time efficiency and the industry breadth of the sample required.

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

The collection of primary data by way of a survey using a quantitative research method was achieved through the use of a *questionnaire*. This approach facilitated the gathering of a large amount of information in a timely manner from a reasonably sized sample. Given that the researcher and the target participants are personally known to one another, the use of a questionnaire also eliminated the possibility of any “interviewer effect” which might lead to answer bias. It is also acknowledged from a review of the research that employee engagement surveys are usually conducted through the use of the questionnaire method.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire (See Appendix 2) was designed using the Survey Monkey<sup>®</sup> software package which facilitated organisation, styling, administration and collation of results. Designed in two parts – the first part was entitled “About You and Your Organisation” and consisted of six background demographical questions to allow for statistical comparison. To ensure preservation of confidentiality and anonymity, it did not ask for any personal information or identifiable data other than information required to analyse data in terms of sector and factors to establish whether the respondent was a front-line, middle or senior manager. This was based on well-accepted criteria for determining management levels, such as number of staff, supervisors or managers reporting in to the manager, and on the level of management to whom the manager himself or herself reported to. Information in relation to the total number of staff employed in the organisation helped assess whether their organisation was considered small (less than 50), medium (more than 50 and less than 250) medium/large (250 to 500) and large (more than 500). While over 57% of the target sample were female managers, the researcher decided not to seek gender confirmation in the questionnaire, as this was not relevant to the research aims, objectives and questions. The final question in Part 1 was a closed question on whether Employee Engagement was a strategic issue for the respondent’s organisation. This was to help assess whether in Ireland employee engagement is a “fad” or a current strategic business issue as explored in the literature review in Chapter 2 above.

Part 2 of the questionnaire entitled “Questionnaire” consisted of 21 questions in total (all but one of which were compulsory). The first 16 were closed questions with a vertical format using a five-point Likert scale, which as Quinlan (2011) explains is useful in measuring the direction and force of attitudes. The five indicators ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The final 6 questions were open questions designed to seek additional information from respondents, to either triangulate the information provided in answers to questions 1-16, or to provide new information and insights. The value of the information sought was maximised by the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to increase validity and reliability.

Employee Engagement is normally measured in organisations through the use of Survey Questionnaires and there are a considerable number of reliable and validated questionnaires in the market including those administered by industry practitioners such as Towers Perrin, CIPD, AON Hewitt, Blessing White and Gallup<sup>Q12</sup>. Given the plethora of engagement surveys in the market, it was neither appropriate nor practical to replicate any one of the above surveys. However, consideration was given to each of them when designing the questions, as their surveys explored engagement from the perspectives listed in Fig 5 above. For this research the key points of reference in formulating the questions however, were those themes and relevant constructs, which had been identified in the extensive review of the academic literature conducted in Chapter 2.

These themes and their supporting questions are described below:

for & Growth  
Effectiveness

The consequences of engagement as identified in the academic literature were also included:

Commitment



Given the established relevance of motivation to the engagement construct, information was also sought on these factors:

#### Motivation

The inclusion of open questions to triangulate and provide new insights were posed in the following order:

Motivation Factors  
Commitment Factors  
Factors  
Reasons to

The final question (Q.21) was included to capture any additional comments and constituted the only optional question in the survey.

#### **3.4.2 Validity & Reliability**

According Saunders et al (2009) *reliability* refers to the extent to which data collection and analysis will yield consistent findings, while *validity* refers to the extent to which the data collection method accurately measures what it was intended to measure. This was achieved through the combined processes of oversight and pilot testing. An e-services librarian colleague with considerable experience in producing online questionnaires, reviewed the initial draft and suggested appropriate changes to structure, layout and design. The questionnaire was subsequently piloted as recommended by Saunders et al (2009) to ensure that the questions were easily understood and unambiguous and that the layout and question order was clear and attractive. To test its face validity and reliability, the pilot test was undertaken with a small group representative of the overall sample and included three individuals from the public and private sectors. Feedback was taken and relevant adjustments made to the layout and to the question content.

### **3.4.3 Questionnaire Administration**

The questionnaire was self-administered and internet-mediated. Bryman & Bell (2011) summarised the advantages of online web-based surveys over paper-based ones, as having low cost, faster responses, easier administration, generally have better responses to open questions, fewer unanswered questions and better data accuracy. Disadvantages they listed as potentially low response rates depending on sampling frame, possible lack of motivation to complete, the risk of multiple replies. The researcher concluded such disadvantages were mitigated in this instance by the fact that sample group were personal contacts and therefore low response rates, lack of motivation and/or multiple replies were not issues of sufficient concern not to reconsider online data collection.

The questionnaire included a covering email, which clearly outlined the background, purpose and confidential nature of the research (See Appendix 3) Dillman (2007) highlighted that the messages contained in the covering letter will affect response rates and the researcher adhered to Dillman's suggested structure, to ensure clarity and to increase the probability of gaining the highest possible response rates.

### **3.5 Sample**

This section outlines the fundamental elements of the methodological framework in terms of the research population, sample and sampling methods.

#### **3.5.1 Sampling Technique**

According to Saunders et al (2009 pp243) the choice of sampling techniques used depends on the "*feasibility and sensibility of collecting data to answer your research questions and to address your objectives from the entire population*". Given that a sampling frame for the Irish manager population was not convenient to construct pointed to the use of a non-probability sampling technique. Furthermore given that the research question related to managers as a homogenous group, this technique allowed the researcher the opportunity to purposively select the sample from her network of manager colleagues and clients. Non-probability sampling does have its drawbacks however. As Quinlan (2011 pp213) points out,

*“the sample is selected to represent the population, but cannot be said to be representative of the population in any statistical sense”*. Therefore, the emphasis is on the capacity of a relatively small sample number to comprehensively illustrate the phenomenon under investigation. Bryman & Bell (2011) also point out that external validity can be questionable when a non-random method of sampling is employed. The researcher accepts that there was an element of opportunism and convenience sampling in that the sample selected was from her personal network of professional contacts. Having said that, the researcher targeted ALL of her management contacts without discrimination and contends that external validity was achieved due to the fact that the sample was reasonably sized and included a cross representation of sectors and management level and thus generalisations were possible.

### **3.5.2 *Sample Size & Representation***

With regard to how large a sample should be for quantitative research, Neuman (2000 pp216) says “it depends”. He suggests that no less than 50 people, but Saunders et al (2009) indicate that a minimum sample of 30 is sufficient for statistical analysis. They also accept that sample size is influenced by what is practically possible in terms of both the availability of resources and of the ability to gain access.

A total of 50 front-line, middle and senior managers were approached in the public, private, semi-state and not-for-profit sectors. To preserve confidentiality and maintain the anonymity of both the participants and their organisations it is not appropriate to provide the list of the target sample. However, this list has been sighted by the researcher’s supervisor and is available for confidential inspection should it be required.

It was not possible to achieve equal representation across the various sectors and private sector managers constituted 40% of the target sample. This was a function of the number of front, middle and senior managers in the researcher’s professional network of contacts, but still constituted sufficient numbers from which to make comparisons.



### **3.5.3 *Sample inclusion & exclusion criteria***

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied for research sample:

- A cross-section of front-line, middle or senior managers were included
- All industry sectors were acceptable
- Excluded were the top management grades (C-suite executives such as the Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, or Chief Operating Officer)

### **3.6 *Ethical Considerations***

Ethical principles and standards were applied in the conduct of this research study. It was conducted with transparency and integrity and the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The principles as described by Bryman & Bell (2011) of non-harm to participants, informed consent, privacy and transparency were observed at all times.

While the researcher knew each of the targeted participants personally, she was concerned to ensure that people did not feel in any way obligated to participate on the basis of the relationship, personal or professional, which exists. Therefore no direct contact was made with the target participant group other than the invitation to participate, the covering e-mail and a reminder of the cut-off date for participation. Furthermore, while some of the participants constituted business clients of the researcher, there were no conflicts of interest in that any work previously conducted with these clients did not relate to the area of employee engagement.

The method of data collection conducted electronically via the web meant that respondents were unidentifiable, that their responses were non-attributable, and thus their anonymity was guaranteed and confidentiality preserved. The only identifier was the numbered IP (internet protocol) address from which the individual accessed the survey link and thus it was not within the capability of the researcher to identify the responders.

The data collected was used solely for the purpose of this academic research and assurances were given to participants to this effect, as was the offer to share the findings, should they be interested in reviewing them.

### **3.7 Limitations**

Quantitative research and its associated methods have its critics and its limitations as Bryman & Bell (2011) suggest. In this instance, it is accepted that quantitative analysis cannot provide as deep an understanding of individuals' attitudes as that which might be achieved from using qualitative methods. However, due cognisance was taken of the fact that employee engagement research normally employed by industry practitioners such as the CIPD, Blessing White, Towers Perrin and Gallup<sup>Q12</sup> is based on quantitative methods. The other limitations of this research can be attributable to the size of the participant sample which, being a function of the number of managers in the researcher's network.

### **3.8 Participant Response Rates & Profile**

The total response rate was 86%, however 3 participants did not fully complete the survey and have been removed from the findings. Therefore, the active response rate was 80%, representing 40 out of the 50 managers who were targeted. This compares vary favourably to Ghauri & Gronhaug's (2005) assertion that researchers are happy to get 30-40 percent response rate from surveys. This is also well above the Saunders et al (2009) recommended minimum sample of 30 as outlined in paragraph 3.4.2 above.

The 20% non-response was primarily in the private sector, which represented 70% of the total non-responses. The reason for a 20% non-response rate can only be speculative and may in part be due to the fact that this was the summer holiday period or time constraints. However, it is acknowledged that non-responses can be interpreted as refusal or lack of motivation to participate. It is harder to interpret why the private sector constituted the highest rate of non-responses or conversely why the public/civil sector had the highest response rate of 59%, or 90% of the overall public sector target group. Anecdotally it is understood that online surveys

are a regular practice in public sector organisations and this may be one attributing factor.

### 3.9 Participant Profile

Of the 40 responses, 24 were received the public/civil service industry which representing 59% of the total. One-third of responses were from 13 private sector participants with just 2 respondents from the semi-states and 1 from the not-for-profit respectively.

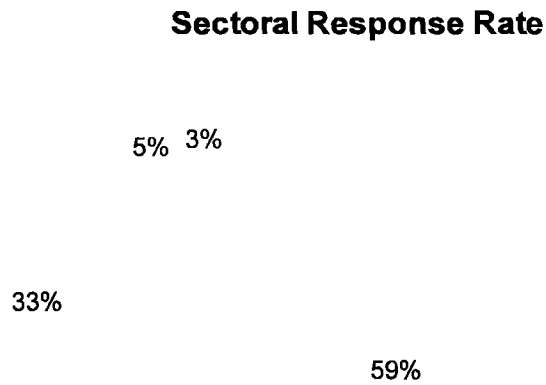


Fig 6 Sector Response Rate

In terms of sector size, there was a predominance of large organisations with 57% of participants working in organisations in excess of 1,000 staff. Medium to large organisations of 500-1000 staff constituted 17.5% of all respondents. 20% of responses were from medium-sized enterprises of 50-250 staff, with only 2 responses (5%) coming from the small business sector with less than 50 staff.

With respect to management grades, there was a relatively normal distribution between front-line managers (28%) middle managers (40%) and senior managers (33%) as demonstrated in the chart below:

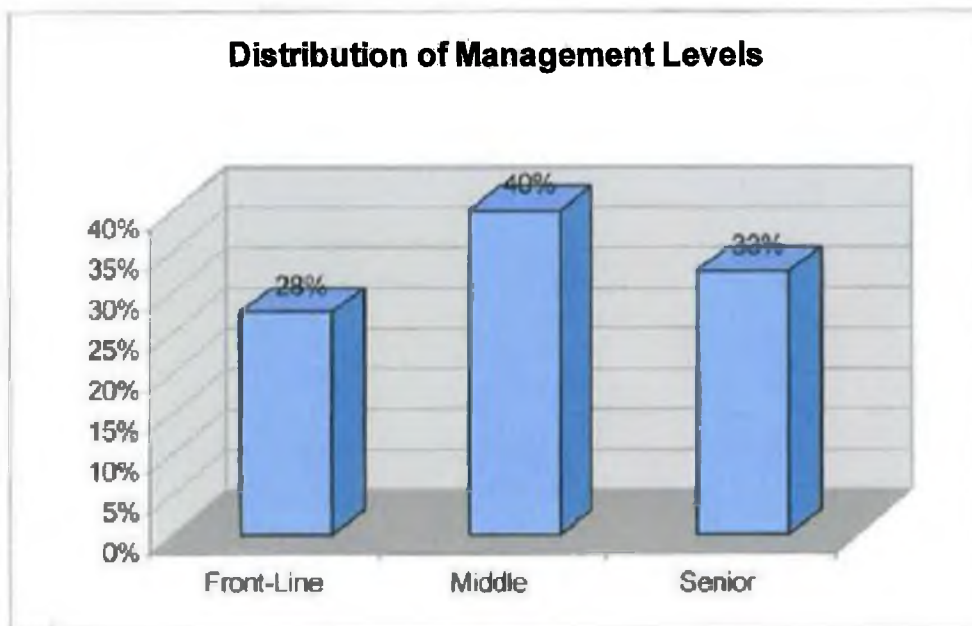


Fig 7 Distribution of Management Levels

However, given the relatively small size of the total sample it was not possible to make generalisations across the three management levels, although in some cases assumptions about the findings were made.

## Chapter 4

### Research Findings

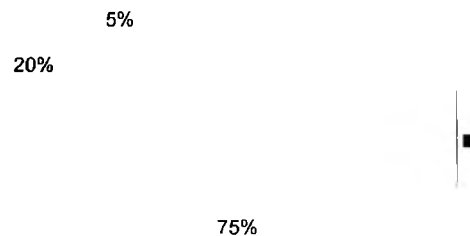
#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the analytical framework for this research project and contains the analysis of the data gathered with a focus on answering the research questions numbers 1, 2 and 3\* as outlined in Chapter 1.7. The analysis has been structured around the themes identified throughout the literature review and summarised in Chapter 3.3.1. The findings will be presented in the order outlined therein. . \* Each finding will carry a denotation to signify its relevance to RQ#1 or RQ#2, or RQ#3

#### 4.2 Findings in relation to whether Employee Engagement is a strategic issue for Irish organisations<sup>RQ#1</sup>

The research indicated that Employee Engagement is being considered as a strategic issue in Irish organisations with 75% answering yes to this question. A more interesting finding is that it is of concern in 100% of the private sector responses. One can conclude therefore that employee engagement is being actively addressed in private enterprises.

**Is Employee Engagement a strategic issue?  
- all sectors -**



**Is Employee Engagement a strategic issue -  
Private Sector**

■

92%

All of those who indicated that it was not a strategic issue for their organisation came from with public/civil service sector. Why engagement was identified as a strategic issue in two-thirds of public organisations and not for the remaining one-third could only mean that it is not being treated as a sector issue and must therefore be down to local factors and local management priorities.

**Is Employee Engagement a strategic issue?  
- Public Sector -**

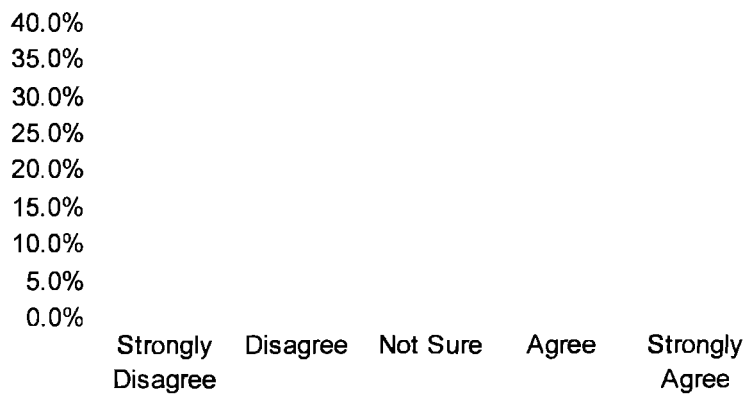
4%

■

### 4.3 Findings in relation to Opportunities for Development<sup>\*RQ#2</sup>

According to both the academic and practitioner research, the provision of sufficient opportunities for growth and self-development represents a significant factor in determining an individual's engagement levels and very high proportion of respondents reported that they receive such opportunities in their organisations – 77.5% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that such opportunities are provided. While 10% reported not having such opportunities, a more curious finding is that 12.5% or 5 participants indicated that were not sure they are being given opportunities to develop themselves. The researcher found this finding somewhat surprising in that the question did not appear to be ambiguous and the majority of respondents had no difficulty in providing a definitive answer to it.

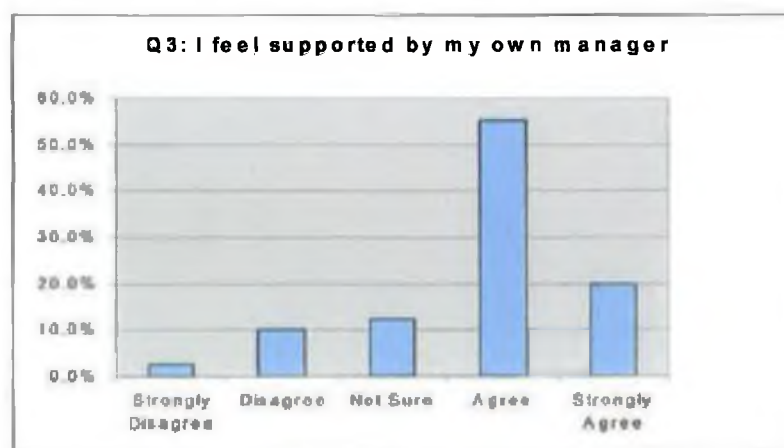
#### Q13: I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development



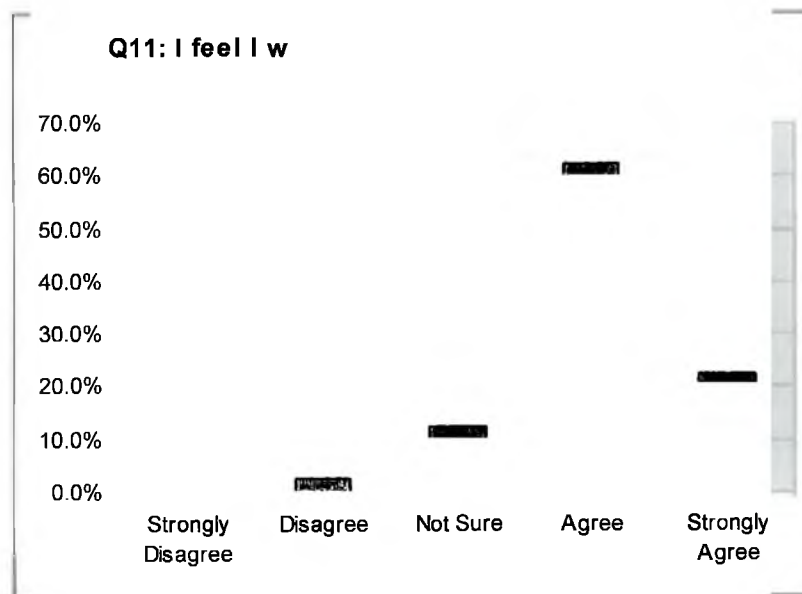
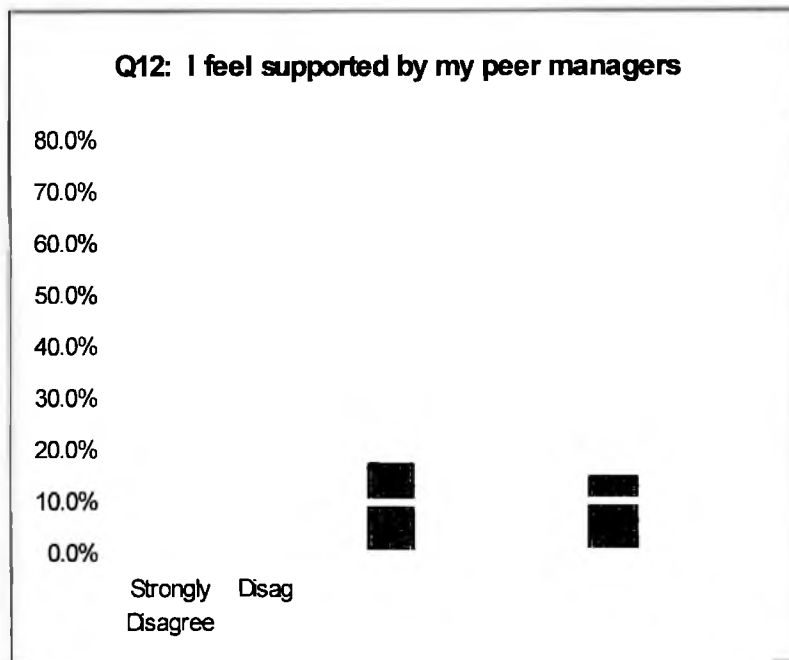
#### 4.4 Findings in relation to Supportive Relationships <sup>\*RQ02</sup>

Saks' (2006) model of engagement as outlined in Chapter 2.2 indicates that the existence of supportive organisational relationships represents one of a number of antecedents of engagement and therefore must exist in order for engagement to occur. Supportive relationships include those with one's immediate supervisor and with one's peers and by their nature, require reciprocation by the individual.

75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by their manager, with a much greater proportion of 82.5% reporting support from their peers. While 12.5% or 5 participants declared that they were unsure of the level of managerial support, a similar number of individuals reported feeling unsupported by their managers but there was no significant variation across sectors in this result. No one indicated a lack of support from peer managers, but 17.5% or 7 individuals reported that they were unsure of the support received from their manager colleagues and this was evenly split between sectors. Supportive relationships are two-way, and a question was included to ascertain how well the participants felt they worked with their peer group and perhaps not surprisingly and overwhelming majority of 85% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.







#### 4.4 Findings in relation to Communication & Recognition <sup>\*RQ#2</sup>

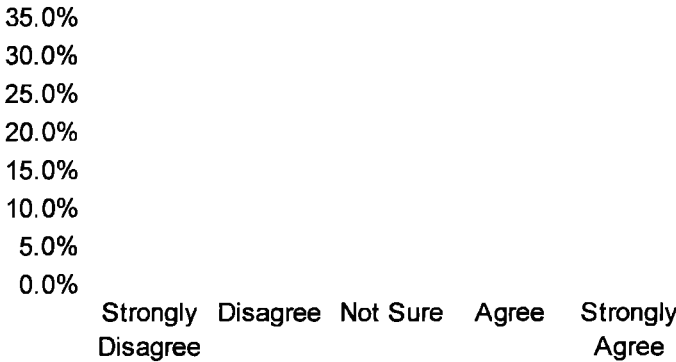
The desire for recognition relates back to Kahn's (1990) original study into the psychological factors affecting personal engagement in a work context, one of which was Meaningfulness, which Kahn described as feeling valued and recognised.

57.5% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they felt top management recognised and appreciated their work efforts, 67% of whom were public sector managers. But the result was much less positive in the private sector at 38.5% and this may be linked to the results of Q.5 below. Over 27% of all respondents indicated that they were not sure if their efforts were appreciated and this result was evenly split across the public and private sectors. Of 6 respondents who disagreed/strongly disagreed, 4 of these were in the public sector, but they represent just 10% of the total responses and therefore cannot be considered significant.



Receiving feedback on one's performance comes under the rubric of both communication and recognition, but less than half (45%) the respondents felt that they received meaningful feedback. While 20% reported that they were not sure, a significant 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement – 8 public sector managers and 4 private sector managers. The researcher considered whether the responses from the 8 public sector managers in any way related to the 20% of public sector organisations where employee engagement was not being treated as a strategic issue (see paragraph 4.2). Half of those public sector managers work for organisations where engagement is a strategic issue which might indicate that performance appraisals in those organisations are either not being conducted at all or if so, not in an effective manner.

**Q5: I receive meaningful feedback on my performance**



In Chapter 2.6.2, researchers such as Ulrich (2007), Stairs et al (2006), CIPD (2010) and Towers Perrin (2004) identified that voice, influence and opportunity to contribute to decision-making represent key engagement drivers and in terms of management levels one would expect that this is an even more significant factor for them than it is for “regular” employees.

57.5% of managers reported that they felt they have influence on organisational decision-making. Positive responses were primarily from those middle and senior managers who were closer to the C-suite executives and therefore nearer the centre of the organisation decision-making processes. Of those who did agree however, 67% were public sector managers with a much lower 38.5% coming from the private sector.

While 15% reported not being sure, 7.5% (3) strongly disagreed – interestingly these responses came from senior public service managers. The remaining 20% who disagreed were evenly split across sectors and primarily consisted of front-line managers.

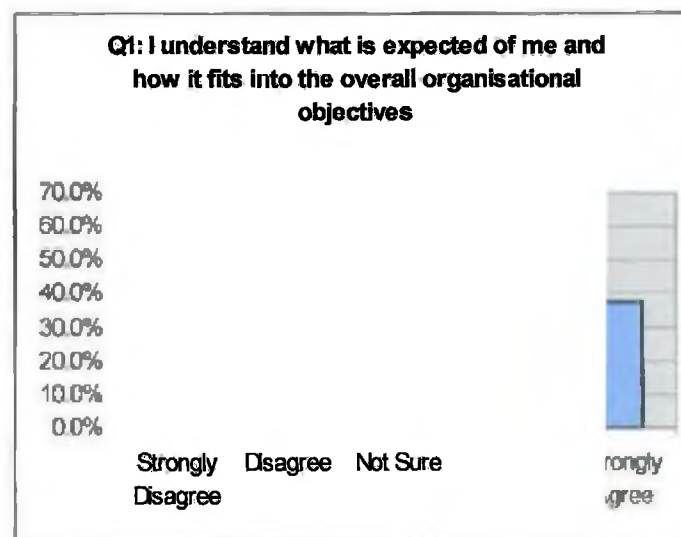
**Q9: I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making**



#### 4.6 Findings in relation to Leadership Effectiveness <sup>\*RQ2</sup>

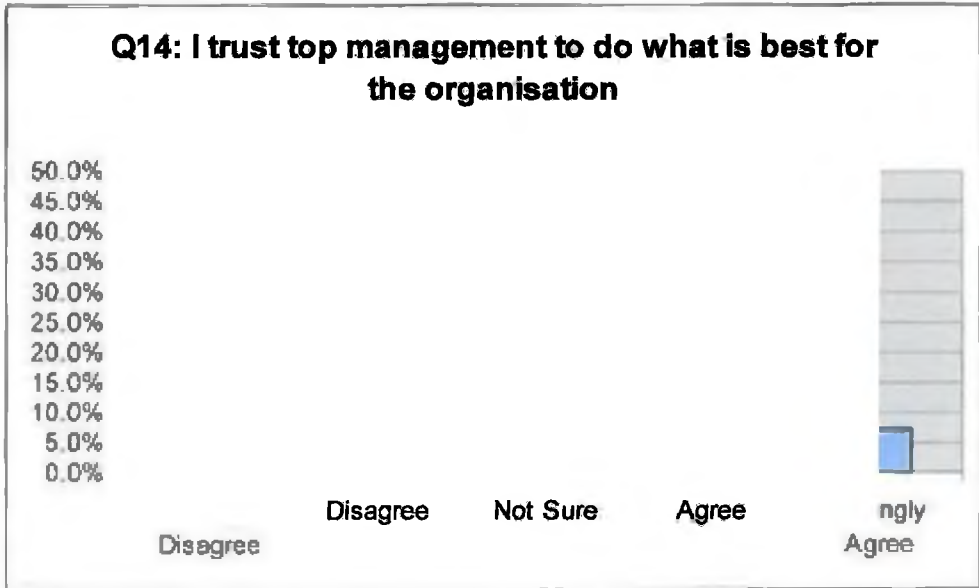
Under the general rubric of Leadership Effectiveness, the researcher has included the engagement factors and drivers identified in Chapter 2 which reside with the C-suite executive groups. These concern clarity of vision regarding organisational objectives and trust in the leadership team.

Results from the survey show an impressive 95% of managers understand what is required of them in their role and how that fits into the overall organisational objectives. The two individuals who disagreed were front-line managers with few staff reporting to them.



Macey & Schneider (2008) contended that one of the psychological facets of engagement was trust while Sharma & Anupama (2010) highlighted how organisational commitment too was predicated upon trust. Trust was also a factor considered in reviewing the link to psychological contract (Chapter 2.7.2) and the maintenance of a positive employment relationship.

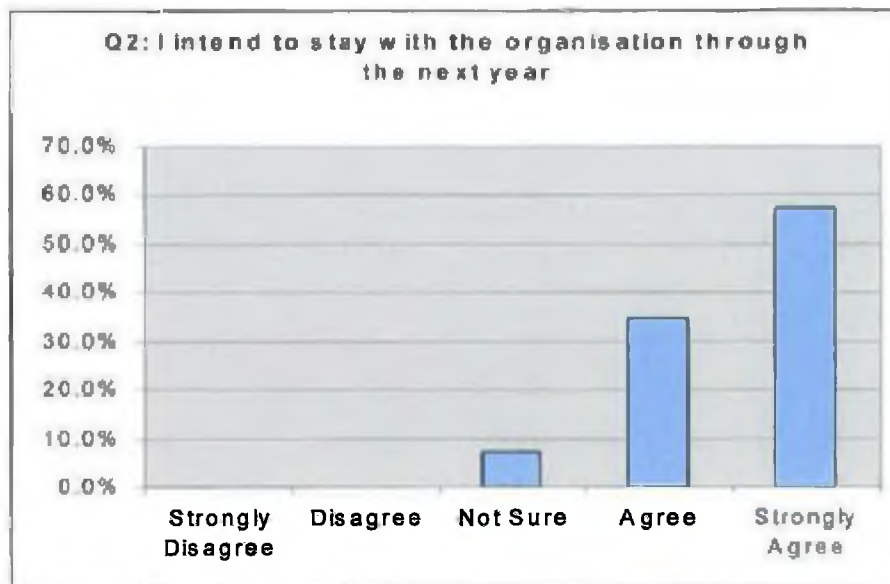
In investigating this aspect the results were not hugely positive. While a small majority of 52.5% agreed that they trusted top management to do what is right for the organisation, a significant 35% reported that they were not sure. This group was evenly split between the public and private sectors. It is also interesting to note that of the 5 that disagreed, 4 respondents were public sector managers and 2 of these were senior managers with several departments reporting to them. While in terms of the totality of responses this does not appear significant, one could speculate that this relates to the particular challenges facing public sector organisations.



#### 4.7 Findings in relation to Intention to Stay <sup>RQ#2</sup>

The intention to stay or to quit an organisation is considered to be an outcome engagement according to Saks (2006) and, according to industry practitioners such as the CLC (2007 & 2008) and Gallup™ (2010) high engagement equates to low employee turnover.

This research found that an overwhelming number of managers (92.5%) intend to stay with their organisation over the course of the next year. While just 3 individuals indicated that they were unsure, it was interesting to see that no one intended to leave their employment in the next 12 months. This may be due to high engagement levels or may be due to the prevailing economic conditions. The factors determining managers' decision to stay with their organisations are explored in paragraph 4.12.4 below.



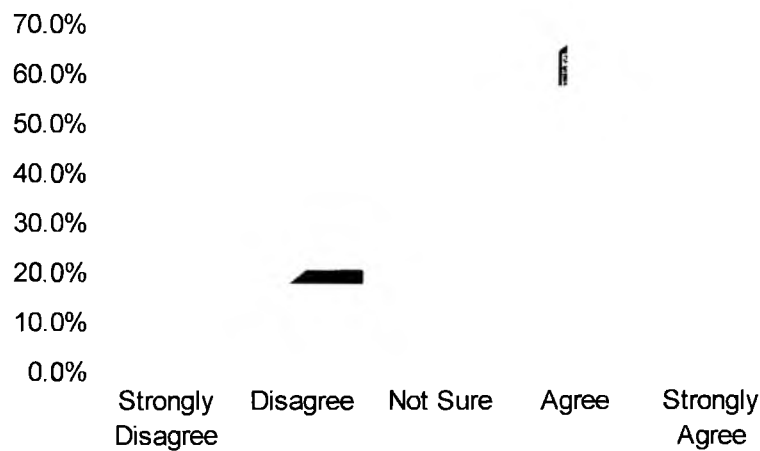
#### 4.8 Findings in relation to Job Satisfaction<sup>RQ#2</sup>

The academic researchers such Schmidt & Hayes (2002) and McBain (2006) argued that the consequences of engagement lead to greater job satisfaction and this too was reflected in the work of Saks (2006). The industry practitioners seem less concerned with the levels of employee satisfaction and more with the outcomes of satisfaction in terms of low turnover and greater productivity, however this researcher felt it appropriate to pose the question.

Three-quarters of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt satisfied in their jobs, but the public sector demonstrated higher satisfaction levels than the private sector at 83.4% versus 61.5%.

Of the remaining 10 respondents who disagreed or were unsure, there was an even distribution across both the public and private sectors.

#### Q15: I feel satisfied in my job





#### 4.9 Findings in relation to Organisational Commitment<sup>RQ#2</sup>

Macey & Schneider (2008) and McBain (2006) related the construct of engagement to organisational commitment, which they argued is displayed emotionally and cognitively in terms of identification with and pride in one's organisation and to see the organisation succeed.

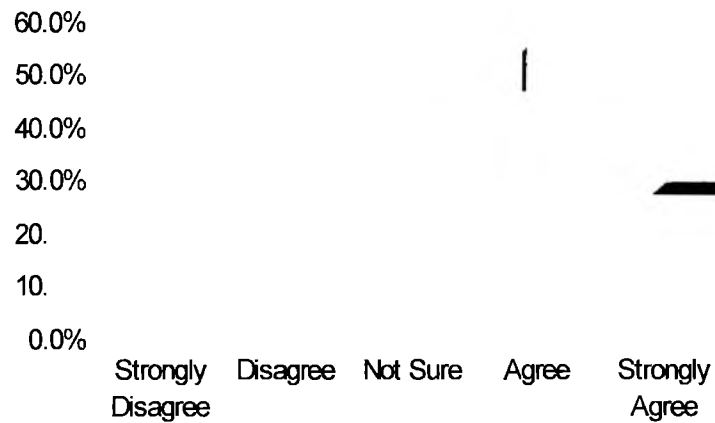
85% of respondents reported being proud to tell others that they worked for their organisation while 10% disagreed and 5% unsure. Looking specifically to the 10% who disagreed, it was evenly split between very large public and private sector organisations of over 1000 staff. More interestingly however was that these 10% were senior managers with at least 5 departments reporting into them.

#### **Q6: I am proud to tell other that I work for my organisation**



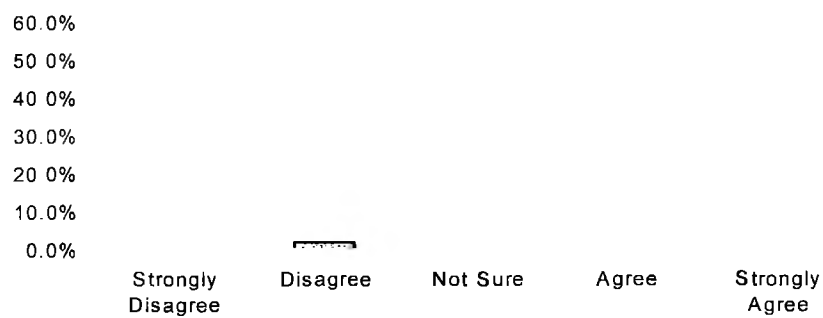
Looking to whether the participants would recommend their organisation as a good place to work, 77.5% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement – split 83.3% public sector and 61.5% private sector. Of those 9 respondents who were not sure or who disagreed, half of these were from private organisations while those from the public sector who responded had also answered negatively to the question on pride above.

**Q7: I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work**



Concern to help the organisation succeed also comes under the banner of organisational commitment and participants were asked if they were motivated to do so. An overwhelming 97.5% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement with only 1 individual from a large private sector organisation disagreeing. On reflection, this question may have been considered leading.

**Q8: I am personally motivated to help my organisation succeed**



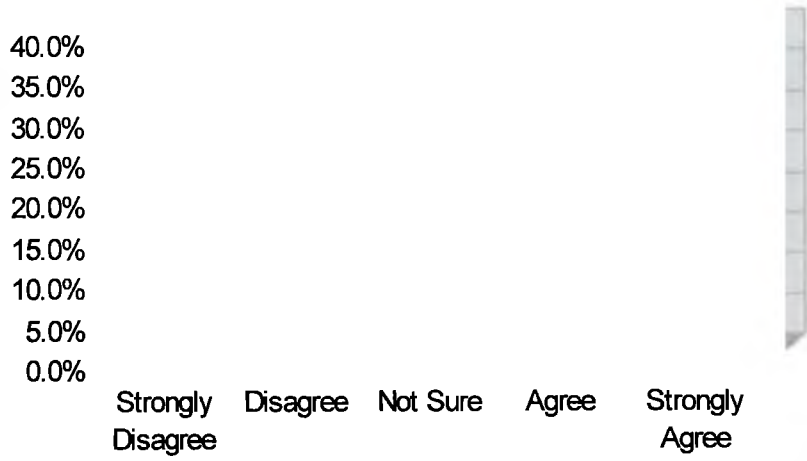
#### **4.10 Findings in relation to Motivation<sup>RQ#2</sup>**

Compensation, rewards and incentives emerged in the both the academic and the practitioner research as engagement drivers. Furthermore, there is a general presumption that pay and reward constitute greater motivators in the private sector than in the public sector. Thus a specific question was included in the survey, to explore if this is a fact and if so, is there any divergence in attitudes between the public and private sectors.

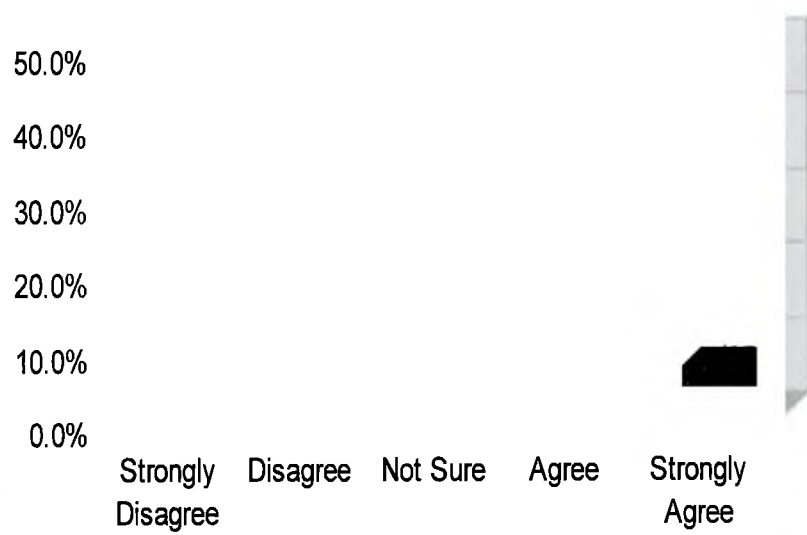
Only 47.5% of all managers agreed that compensation and rewards constituted a significant motivator for them with 40% disagreeing and 12.5% reported being unsure. This would infer that money is not a primary motivator amongst managers. However, when one reviews the sectoral breakdown, the picture is quite different and the variance striking. Nearly 85% of private sector managers indicated that it was a motivator for them which 29% of public sector managers agreeing. One can conclude therefore that the common presumption is correct in that pay is more of a motivation for private sector workers than for public sector. Having said that more than a quarter of public sector managers agreed, so it does exist to some extent as a motivator. One could speculate that with the recent levies and pay cuts across the public service that compensation has become more of a motivator. Motivation factors are explored in more detail in paragraph 4.12 and only 2 public sector managers raised it as an issue.

A specific question on whether status and power as a motivator was included to test McClelland's needs-based model and 50% of managers disagreed, 12.5% unsure and a minority 37.5% agreed or strongly agreed. Of those who did agree, 46% were private sector managers and 33% were from the public sector. The split within in the public sector between those who agreed and those who disagreed with the statement was relatively equal, as was the split within the private sector. This indicates that where status and power is a motivator, it is individual and not industry specific.

**Q10: Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me**

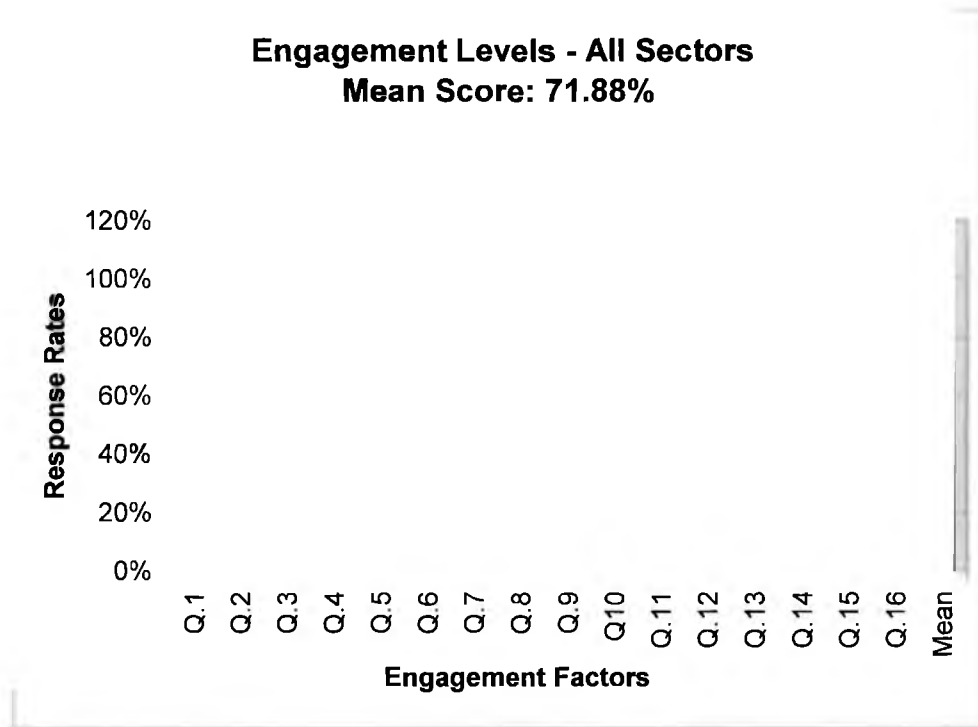


**Q16: Status and power are significant motivators for me**



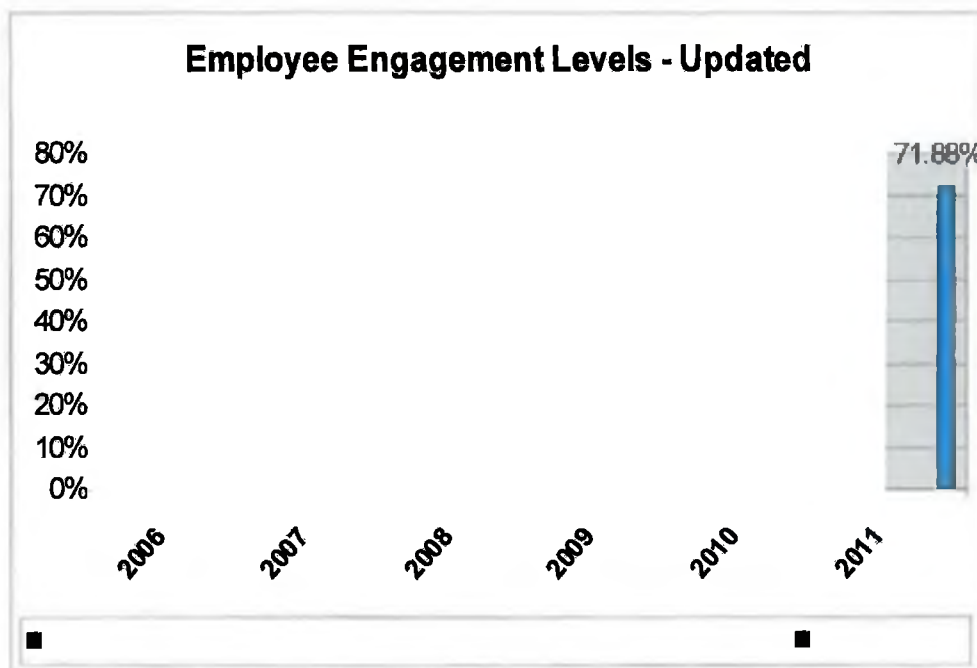
## 4.11 Findings in relation to Engagement Levels

### 4.11.1 All Sectors



Overall engagement levels have been determined by combining the positive responses of Questions 1-16, which have already been determined in Chapter 3.3.1 as relating to the various antecedents and consequences of this multi-dimensional construct outlined in the literature review.

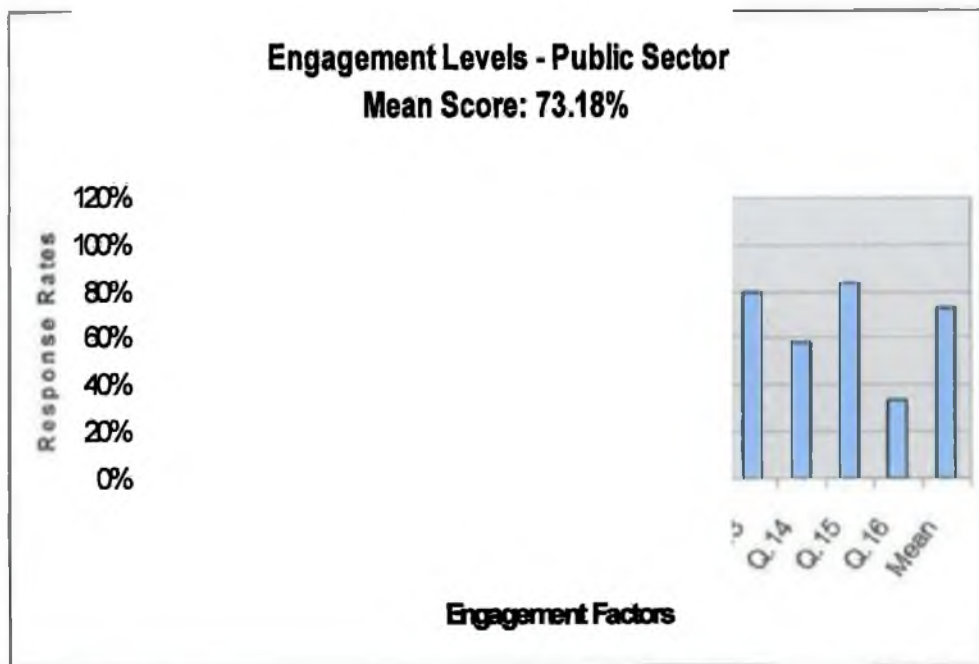
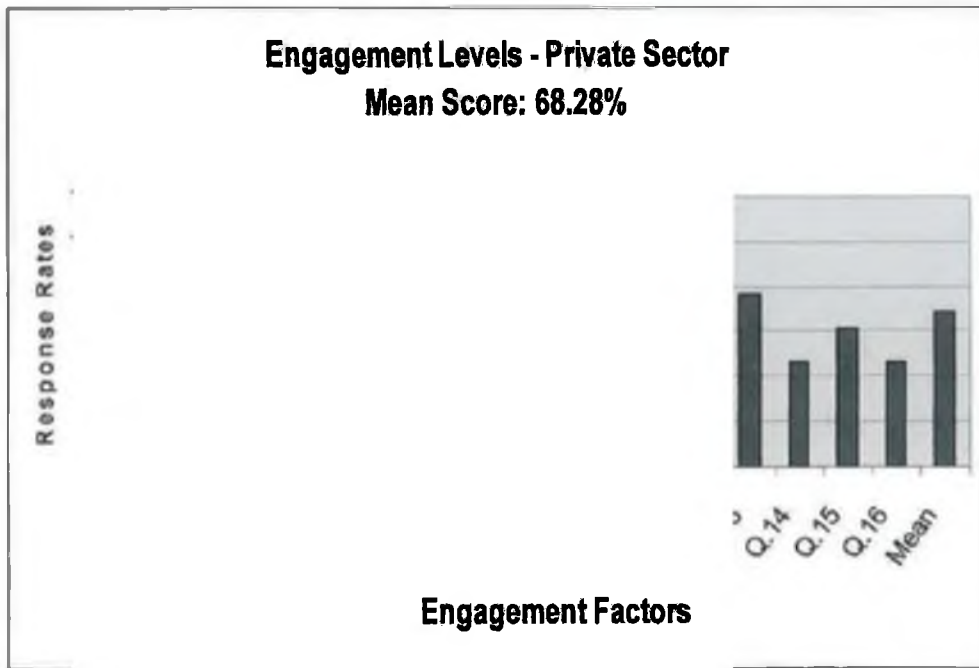
With a mean score of just under 72% this suggests that Irish managers as an occupational group are *highly engaged*. This compares extremely favourably and dramatically with the 2010 global research mean of 27% originally referred in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1. The global research has now been updated to include this research result, and graphically demonstrated below:



#### 4.11.2 Sectoral Comparisons and Variances

For the purposes of this section, a comparison has been made between the public and the private sectors only as the low number of respondents from the semi-states and the not-for-profit sectors means that it was impractical to make generalisations about those industry sectors.

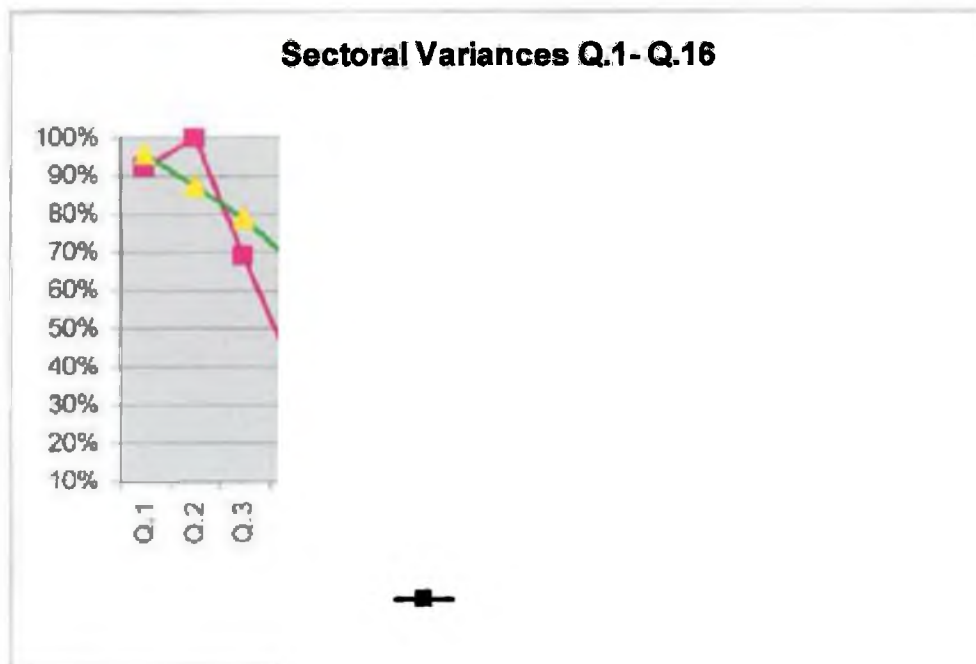
Looking to the extent of the variation in engagement levels between sectors – the mean scores for the private and public sectors are 68% and 73% respectively, implying that public sector managers are slightly more engaged than their private sector colleagues.



However, given the high result in both sectors a 4.9% mean differential cannot be considered to be a significant variation, on face value. It is acknowledged that it

would be useful to perform statistical tests of comparative differences, however this researcher does not have access to SPSS and therefore constitutes a limitation to this study.

Within questions 1-16 more significant variations between the sectors did occur and while they have already been commented upon in the analysis of the themed areas as outlined in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.10 above, it is useful to look at these again. Again, without the benefit of SPSS it has not been possible to conduct the tests of comparative differences, but the line graph below clearly shows the magnitude of the variances per question between the public and private sectors.



+



As these are total scores and not mean scores, it is not appropriate to calculate the standard deviation on these variances, so a crude but effective calculation is outlined below which clearly highlights the % variation between the responses of the private sector over the public sector:

Question No.		Private Sector	Public Sector	% Variance
1	I understand what is expected of me and how it fits into overall org	92.30%	95.80%	-3.50%
2	I intend to stay with the organisation through the next yr	100.00%	87.50%	12.50%
3	I feel supported by my own manager	69.20%	79.20%	-10.00%
4	Top management recognise & appreciate my efforts	<b>38.50%</b>	<b>66.70%</b>	-28.20%
5	I receive meaningful feedback on my performance	46.20%	54.10%	-7.90%
6	I am proud to tell others I work for my organisation	76.90%	87.50%	-10.60%
7	<b>I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work</b>	<b>61.50%</b>	<b>83.30%</b>	-21.80%
8	I am personally motivated to help my organisation succeed	92.30%	100.00%	-7.70%
9	<b>I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making</b>	<b>38.50%</b>	<b>66.70%</b>	-28.20%
10	<b>Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me</b>	<b>84.60%</b>	<b>29.10%</b>	55.50%
11	I work well with my peer managers	84.60%	83.40%	1.20%
12	I feel supported by me peer managers	76.90%	83.30%	-6.40%
13	I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development	77.00%	79.20%	-2.20%
14	I trust top management to do what is best for the organisation	46.20%	58.30%	-12.10%
15	<b>I feel satisfied in my job</b>	<b>61.50%</b>	<b>83.40%</b>	-21.90%
16	Status and power are significant motivators for me	46.20%	33.40%	12.80%

Attention is drawn to those questions where the variances exceeded +/-15%, a standard which in a small sample such as this would seem practical.

#### Question 4

38.5% of the private sector responded positively to this question in comparison with 66.7% of the public sector. This question had been paired with Question 5 as they both related to the theme of communication and feedback. However, there was little variance in the responses to Question 5, so that cannot be considered the reason for the disparity in Question 4. The reason could relate to the issue of compensation and reward insofar that compensation can be seen as a form of recognition and appreciation and private sector managers rank this a significant motivator for them.

### **Question 7**

There is a 22% variance in the response to this question, but it is not cause for concern because over 61% of the private sector managers agreed that they would recommend their organisation as a good place to work.

### **Question 9**

Positive responses to the question on influence over organisational decision-making came from a minority of 38.5% of managers in the private sector, against 66.7% of public sector managers. This can be explained by the fact that 46% of all private sector managers came from the front-line management grades, reporting to department heads, compared with 29% of the public sector managers. Therefore those private sector managers are further away from the centre of decision-making and consequently less influential to organisational decision-making.

### **Question 10**

The responses to this question provided the greatest variance with 84.6% of private sector managers agreeing that compensation is a significant motivator with a minority of 29% of public sector managers in agreement. While these results confirm the general assumption that pay is a motivator in the private sector, it also shows that it is not so in the public sector, to the same extent.

### **Question 15**

At 83.4%, the public sector responded very positively to the question on the job satisfaction levels. While there is a 22% variance between them and their private sector counterparts, the private sector managers still responded positively at 62% and therefore this variance cannot be considered overly significant.

### **Conclusion**

Only three questions posed variances significant enough to consider further. Less than 40% of private sector managers agreed that their efforts were sufficiently recognised by top management, which the researcher assumes relates to pay being a significant motivator for them. The variance in decision-making influence has been explained by the make-up of the participant groups.

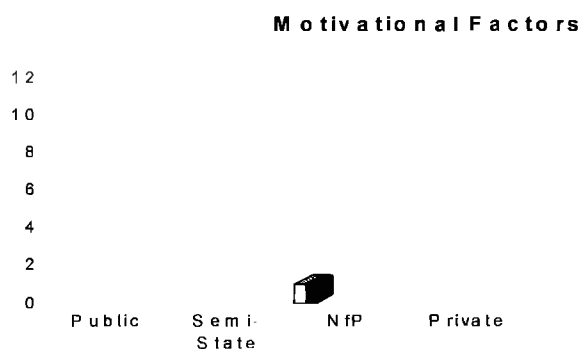
#### 4.12 Findings in relation to the specific factors that keep Irish managers motivated, committed and engaged with their organisation <sup>RQ#3</sup>

Open questions were posed to participants to obtain qualitative data on their motivation, commitment and engagement factors and considerable information was provided which demonstrates that a broad range of factors exist among and across the various sectors.

##### 4.12.1 Motivating Factors

All respondents highlighted intrinsic motivators such as those identified in Chapter 2.3 including challenges, sense of achievement, pride in their work, a desire for recognition and appreciation and the opportunities for self-development. There were however, some additional factors mentioned, including public service ethos and being part of a successful organisation. These were sector-specific and will be explored further below.

Two interesting findings presented contradictory evidence. Despite the fact that nearly 50% of the respondents agreed that compensation and reward were significant motivators (See paragraph 4.10 – Q10), when asked to list their motivation factors, only 5 people included monetary reward – two individuals in the public and three in the private sector. Neither did anyone submit that status and power were motivating factors despite nearly 40% agreeing that it was (See paragraph 4.10 – Q16). One can conclude therefore that when prompted as in Q.10 & Q16 people regard compensation and status as motivators but when asked an open question, intrinsic more than extrinsic factors emerge as being prevalent or indeed more relevant.



***Public Sector:***

Public Sector Ethos was quoted as a motivating factor by nearly 50 percent of public sector managers. Some individuals expanded and explained that this meant making a contribution to society, making a difference to people's lives, influencing policy, and providing a valuable public service. Koumenta (2011) commented that public service motivation constitutes the belief, values, and attitudes that go beyond self and organisational interest and the participant views would bear seem to support this perspective. A sense of achievement and personal pride also featured as motivational factors followed by recognition and appreciation.

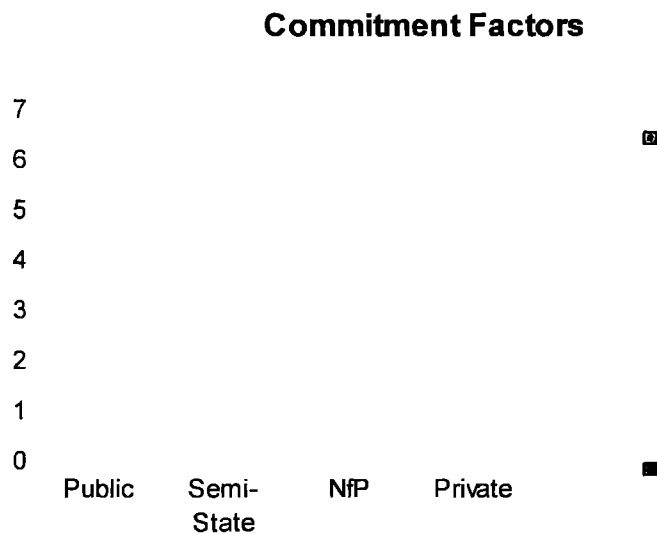
***Private Sector:***

There was a considerable spread of comments from the private sector and no one motivating factor dominated. Challenge, recognition and appreciation and a sense of achievement were commonly quoted. Loyalty and ability to contribute to the success of the organisation were motivating factors for some participants while others quoted autonomy and empowerment being determinants. Relationships with colleagues and helping staff to develop were mentioned by half of the private sector managers. It is interesting to note that this did not feature in the public sector responses.

"I like to help people develop as best they can, to believe in their full potential"  
"Developing staff to achieve and to look to higher personal goals"  
"Good work colleagues"  
"Success of the company and commitment to the business"  
Recognition and appreciation

#### 4.12.2 Findings in relation to Commitment Factors <sup>RQ#3</sup>

Commitment was identified in the literature review as an engagement-related construct and qualitative information was sought from candidates to ascertain what factors keep them committed to their organisations. A number of themes emerge, and are graphically described below.



Public Service Ethos emerged as a commitment factor although other public sector managers had previously identified it as a motivating factor (see paragraph 4.12). This may be due to the fact that motivation and commitment are terms, which are often used interchangeably.

Relationships with colleagues and team members featured highly in both public and private sector responses and this is not surprising insofar as supportive relationships constitute a significant engagement driver. Loyalty to colleagues, to team members and to the organisation emerged as a key commitment factor in the private sector with 54% of managers citing this as a significant driver. However, it is interesting to note that only 12.5% of public sector managers indicated that loyalty was a commitment component.

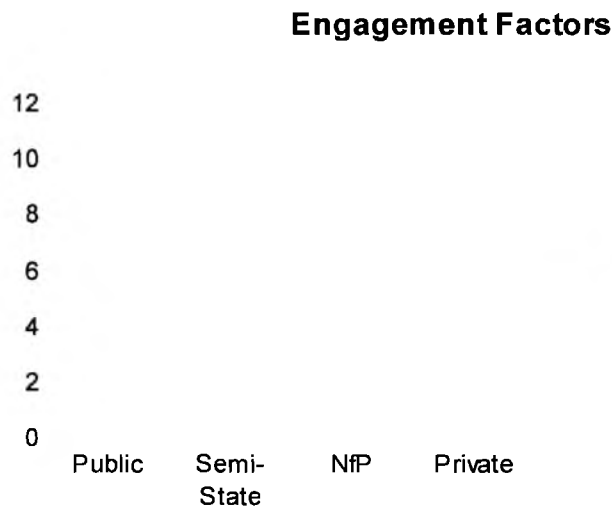
Unsurprisingly perhaps, the recession/job security was quoted by nearly 40% of private sector managers as a consideration in their commitment factors. While much less of an issue for public sector workers it did however feature in 8% of that participant group. So, it could be argued that in both the public and private sectors, people's ability or inability to change employment is affected by their current perceptions of job security.

Compensation constituted a commitment factor in both sectors but more so in the private sector, however, it is not considered to be a key factor, a finding similar that highlighted in paragraph 4.12.1. This finding also supports the fact that extrinsic elements such as pay and reward are not the key engagement drivers.

Just 30% of respondents in each sector indicated that a good working environment and corporate values system was important to them in terms of commitment factors which would indicate that this is not a key finding.

"My loyalty to my team" (public)  
"Money & pension" (private)  
"The lack of opportunity to move due to the recession" (public)  
"I have given long years of service, so it's part of me" (private)  
"It's a secure company" (private)  
"Collegiality" (private)  
"Support from corporate management team and peer team members" (public)  
"Alignment with company values" (private)  
"Employees treated very well" (public)

#### 4.12.3 Findings in relation to Engagement Factors <sup>RQ#3</sup>



Respondents were asked to describe what engages them in a work context and the comments received were very varied which seemed to support the fact that the term “engagement” means different things to different people and that fact that so many definitions abound. The responses to this Question in the majority related to the intrinsic aspects of people’s jobs and work relationships and the most common themes are summarized in the above chart.

Engaging with others including staff and customers featured as the most popular thread in both the public and the private sectors. The internal interactions reflect back to the engagement drivers identified in Chapter 2.6.2 such as supportive relationships, and teamwork, but a customer interface also featured highly in this research study.

Irish managers also tended to agree with the literature review in that the ability to engage in challenging and interesting work represented an engagement driver for them and in particular it is a feature for public sector respondents.

A general theme of achievement orientation emerged in 30 percent of responses with the successful achievement and delivery of outcomes being particular feature of engagement amongst half of the private sector managers.

The ability to make decisions and solve problems came through as something which public sector respondents identified more so than private sector managers. However, in terms of overall significance this represented just 30% of that sector.

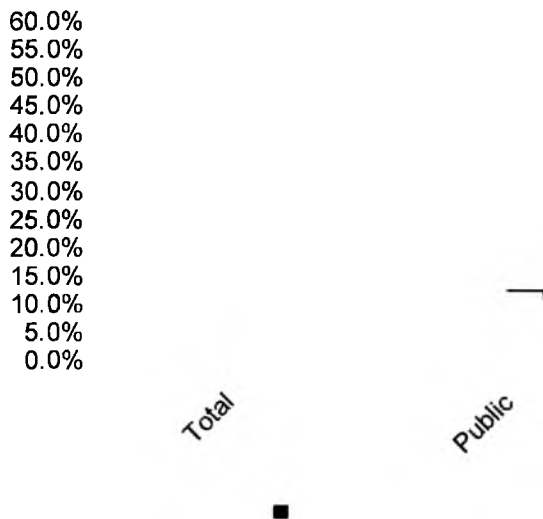
"Ability to interface and react" (Public)  
"Engaging with people outside of the organization" (Public)  
"Interaction with people internally and with external customers" (Private)  
"I like being with my clients and my colleagues" (Private)  
"Challenge and the odd firefight" (Public)  
"Being the best" (Private)  
"Learning from quality people" (Private)  
"Work is an opportunity to be a valuable part of a winning team" (Private)  
"Determination to get the job done" (Private)  
"Solving wicked and complex problems" (Private)  
"Stimulating work and intellectual challenge" (NIP)



#### 4.12.4 Findings in relation to Reasons to Stay <sup>RQ#3</sup>

92.5% of managers reported in paragraph 4.7 that they intended to stay with their organisations but they were also were asked to identify the reasons why they stay. Again the responses where were varied across all sectors.

### Reasons for Staying



Public Sector Ethos has already featured strongly in terms of Motivation and Commitment factors (See 4.12.1 and 4.12.2 above), and therefore it is not surprising that it is quoted as a reason why one-third of managers stay in the public/civil sector.

Job security, unsurprisingly, has been quoted by 30% of respondents in all sectors as one reason for retention in current employment. This may be down to a mixture of the recession not providing sufficient opportunity to move as well as a desire to remain in with a secure organisation. Economic factors also feature, particularly in the private sector and may constitute “golden handcuffs” in some instances.

One-third of public-sector managers disclose that opportunities for further development in terms of career paths and learning are a factor in their reason to

remain, however this was mentioned as a factor by only 1 of their private sector counterparts.

54% of private sector managers disclose that loyalty to their organisation and to their team is a key element in their decision to stay, while this does not represent a factor for public sector workers. This is the only majority finding under this section and can therefore be considered significant.

#### ***4.13 Findings in relation to Any Other Comments***

Nothing significant was included in this section that has not already been addressed previously.

## ***Chapter 5***

### **Discussion & Conclusions**

#### ***5.1 Introduction***

This chapter contains a detailed analysis and discussion of the key findings of this research project. These findings will be critically reviewed against the literature review of Chapter 2 and will demonstrate how they support and/or contradict the models, concepts and constructs identified therein.

#### ***5.2 Discussion of Key Findings***

This research project produced 10 key findings, which the researcher contends contributes significantly to the general body of knowledge on this subject matter.

##### ***5.2.1 Engagement is a strategic issue for Irish organisations***

The study undertaken by Roche et al (2011) on behalf of the LRC found that Irish organisations were implementing soft HR practices to manage their way through the recession and that more than 50 percent of organisations were considering employee engagement initiatives. This survey found even higher levels than the Roche et al research in that employee engagement is being dealt with as strategic issue in over 75% of Irish organisations, in all of the private sector representative organisations and in over two-thirds of the public/civil service sector. This finding would also tend to support and confirm the argument that engagement is not just a passing fad, but is a current business imperative.

##### ***5.2.2 Irish managers are highly engaged***

Robertson-Smith & Markwick (2009) had argued that engagement levels can vary according to how senior one is within his/her organisation and that the more senior

one is, the more likely they are to be engaged. Given that this research is showing very high levels of engagement amongst Irish managers, this would seem to support their assertion. They also contended that engagement levels can vary considerably across sectors, but in this study there is only a 5 percentage point differential between the public and the private sectors. While this finding supports the argument that sectoral engagement varies it does not do so to a considerable degree. The above researchers further emphasised that the quality of the management group is a fundamental key to achieving employee engagement across the organisation and the inference is that managers therefore must also be engaged. This research study finds that Irish managers are engaged to a high extent and while outside the scope of this project, it would be interesting to assess the engagement levels of the staff within these representative Irish organisations to see if there is any relationship between managerial engagement levels and those of their staff.

The EIU (2010) reported that the majority of CEO's considered disengagement as a serious business issue and in up to 43% of cases, these C-suite executives found that their management groups were the most challenging to engage, but this does not appear to be the case with Irish managers. It is accepted however that the findings from this research project represent the views of the managers themselves and may not necessarily always reflect the views of their C-suite managers to the same extent. Having said that it is highly unlikely, given the size and dispersion of this particular sample group that the Irish CEO's would disagree with their managers' self perceptions of their engagement levels to a significant level. One can deduce therefore that the results of this study do not support the EIU findings.

### ***5.2.3 Irish managers are more highly engaged than their international counterparts***

This research study confirms that the mean score for the engagement levels of Irish managers is nearly 72%. This result far surpasses the last five years' findings by global researchers such as Gallup <sup>TM</sup>, Blessing White, CIPD, Towers Perrin, and AON Hewitt (See Appendix 1). While their survey results however, do not provide a differentiated or cross sectional breakdown between managers and "regular" staff, the fact that the 2010 mean score of these industry surveys for all

employee groups is as low as 27%, allows this researcher to conclude that Irish managers are more highly engaged than their international counterparts. This conclusion is based on a logical assumption that if less than 30% of their sample group is engaged, it is highly unlikely that a segment within that sample i.e., managers could produce a score comparable to that found in this research study.

#### ***5.2.4 Public Sector Ethos is a significant motivating and commitment factor for managers in that sector***

The majority of public sector managers indicated that the ethos of serving the interests of the public and of society is a considerable motivational factor and also an indicator of their continued levels of commitment. Their views and comments highlighted the pride they hold in the role they perform in providing a valuable public service and making a difference to society as a whole. This would support Perry & Wise (1990) assertions that individuals working in this sector are predisposed to a particular set of motives grounded in a desire to serve the public interest. One can assume therefore that if the Public Sector Ethos is a significant motivator for managers, the same can be said for their staff and perhaps therefore this is undervalued as a general motivator.

#### ***5.2.5 Irish managers are well placed to provide “engagement lift” to their staff***

The high engagement levels amongst Irish managers found in this research study imply that they are well placed to encourage and develop engagement amongst their own staff. The literature review highlighted the importance of the manager in the development of an effective employment relationship and a positive psychological contract and their role as a lens through which employees view the organisation. Thus their own high level of engagement presents a significant advantage to them in getting the best out of their staff. Robinson & Hayday (2009) found evidence that highly engaged managers led to high performing teams while Brewster et al (2007) conversely contended that an unengaged manager impacts negatively on staff engagement levels. There is an opportunity to test this and a suggestion is included in paragraph 5.4 below.

### ***5.2.6 Irish managers do not receive meaningful feedback on their performance***

Less than half of the respondents reported that they received meaningful feedback on their performance. Feedback constitutes an element of communication and recognition and was highlighted by both the academic and the practitioner researchers as being a driver for engagement. However, it appears not to be a priority in Irish organisations for the management groups and it has not affected the engagement levels of Irish managers. Therefore it may not be as significant an engagement factor for managers as it is for “regular” staff.

### ***5.2.7 Irish managers are not motivated by status and power***

62.5% of Irish managers either disagreed or were unsure that status and power are strong motivators for them. Of the 37.5% of respondents who agreed, only 6 came from the private sector and 8 from the public sector and therefore constituted insufficient size to make cross sector generalisations. This would indicate that where it does exist as a motivating factor, it is individual and not industry specific. Having said that, the overall findings therefore would tend to contradict this aspect of McClelland’s (1961) model and his assertion that the need for power and authority is a motivator for managers.

### ***5.2.8 Irish managers uncertain that they trust top management***

A significant 35% of managers are unsure that they trust top management to do what is best for the organisation. As managers form a direct link between staff and the C-suite executives it would seem a surprising finding that over one-third are unsure of their own trust levels in the organisation’s top management. Trust, according to researchers such as Kahn (1990), McBain (2006) and Macey & Schneider (2008) forms part of the psychological and emotional conditions of engagement, but only half of Irish managers agree that this is so. However, the finding while significant does not affect overall engagement levels of this occupational group, perhaps due to Rothbard’s (2001) contention that an individual

can feel simultaneously both positive and negative emotions about their engagement levels.

### ***5.2.9 Loyalty to the organisation and to their teams is a significant factor for private sector managers***

While McBain (2006) referred to loyalty as being just one element of the emotional component of organisational commitment, it featured relatively highly in private sector responses, as a key commitment factor. Loyalty again featured significantly in private sector managers' responses to the reasons why they stay with their organisations. A majority of 54% disclosed that loyalty to their team and to the organisation as a key reason for them remaining in their roles. One can conclude therefore that loyalty is under-estimated as a reason why managers remain committed and motivated and thus is a key factor in their engagement levels.

### ***5.2.10 Multiplicity of factors ensure Irish managers are engaged, motivated and committed to their organisations***

Based on the qualitative responses received, Irish managers tend to consider engagement, motivation and commitment as interchangeable concepts and perhaps therefore suffer the same level of confusion that exists in the research. Their comments tended to be similar and repetitive and this would reflect the academic and practitioner research that engagement is a general rubric for a variety of inter-related construct and concepts. With the exception of Public Sector Ethos and Loyalty, the factors, which engage, motivate and commit Irish managers to their organisations appear to be similar to those general factors identified for all employee groups.

## ***5.3 Conclusions***

This research set out to achieve a variety of aims and objectives and the researcher contends that have been fulfilled in a logical, consistent and reliable manner. The

topic of employee engagement with its related theories, constructs and models was critically examined from both the academic and the industry practitioner perspectives. How and why engagement is of significant interest to businesses was explored with the consideration of hard evidence available in the literature on performance outcomes of engagement with the conclusion that it is not just another management fad, but an issue of strategic business importance.

The three research questions were answered through the survey questionnaire and the research categorically concludes that:

Employee engagement is a strategic issue for Irish organisations **RQ#1**

Irish managers are highly engaged **RQ#2**

Public Sector managers are slightly more highly engaged than their private sector counterparts **RQ#2**

A wide variety of factors keep Irish managers motivated, committed and engaged with their organisations. Within the public sector, the public service ethos is a strong determinant of managers' motivation, commitment and engagement. A key determinant for private sector managers is their loyalty to their staff and to the organisation in general **RQ#3**

It is very encouraging to note how highly engaged Irish managers are and the considerable difference, which exists between their engagement levels and those reported in global surveys. It is accepted that while the survey questionnaire used in this research is custom-made and not a replication of any one of the global industry surveys, it did contain all the elements and drivers of engagement referred to by those industry surveyors and by the academics and therefore the researcher contends that it is both valid and reliable.

This research has added to the general body of knowledge in that it has explored employee engagement from the perspective of managers as “engagees”, and not in their simultaneous role as “engagers” and it has determined the engagement levels of this distinct occupational group. Furthermore, the research has now provided a picture of management engagement levels across a variety of Irish organisations in both the public and the private sectors and has drawn the conclusion that while engagement levels vary, to do so only to a small extent. No evidence was found



that this type of research had not been conducted before and thus it can provide new insights into this occupational group.

### **5.3 *Limitations of the Research***

It is accepted however that this research study is not without its limitations. The sample size was comparatively small and it would be preferable to have been in a position to survey in higher numbers, but this was not practical.

The sample size together with the fact that there was no comparable survey available from which to make direct comparisons also meant that it was not possible to apply more sophisticated statistical measures. Neither did the researcher have access to or familiarity with SPSS, which may have contributed to the lack of additional inferential statistics.

The qualitative dimension of the survey was conducted through the use of open questions and while considerable views and opinions were expressed, there was no capacity to seek clarification on any issue, or indeed assist participants where they might have been unsure.

The literature review highlighted the importance of the role of the manager in building engagement in their staff and that the ability to deliver this is dependent upon the engagement levels of the managers themselves. While the engagement levels have been established during the course of this research, there is no insight into the effectiveness of these managers and if their high levels of engagement translate into efficacy and by extension into highly engaged staff.

### **5.4 *Opportunities for further Research***

Four opportunities for further research emerge from this study:

It would be valuable to conduct this survey amongst the general staff in these representative Irish organisations. The survey questions are not “manager specific” and therefore could easily be conducted amongst their staff. The results of the

managers and staff could then be compared to provide valuable information on the effectiveness of Irish managers in engaging their staff. Also, it could provide good feedback for this sample group of managers to ascertain the engagement levels of their teams.

A longitudinal analysis would prove interesting to see how management engagement levels differ over time and if the challenges managers continue to face in a recessionary environment has any ongoing impact on their personal engagement levels.

There is a clear opportunity for a more extensive Irish-based survey on management engagement levels, which would increase the validity and reliability of this survey and could provide helpful insights to Irish business leaders, in relation to their organisations and to their management groups.

It would also be beneficial to see the global researchers conduct a manager-specific engagement survey. This would allow for comparisons to be made with this research and to assess if engagement amongst managers is country-specific. It would also allow industry researchers to conduct a cross-sectional analysis between these two groups and determine how managers engagement levels impact on their staff.

### **5.5 *Personal Learning Statement***

I found this Dissertation extremely worthwhile, enjoyable and challenging. It has contributed immensely to my learning, to my continuous professional development and to my ability to remain focused on an outcome.

In terms of the questionnaire design, one question (Q8) was included that may, on reflection, have been considered leading question given that 98% answered positively to it and that it worded in such a way that could only attract positive answers. This question should be eliminated from a future survey as it did not add to the information in any meaningful way.

In hindsight, consideration should have been given to conducting a focus group to obtain the qualitative data required on the factors, which engage, commit and motivate managers i.e., Research Question #3. This method would have provided more definition and focus and enriched the information provided.

I acknowledge my weakness in the area of statistical analysis and while I was able to make logical conclusions throughout I feel the analysis could have been enriched had I had the time to undertake learning in this area and in perfecting the use of spreadsheet and/or statistical software.

Finally, I extremely pleased to have achieved a long-standing personal goal to challenge myself intellectually on an issue of workplace significance and to add to the general body of knowledge available on a current and pertinent topic.

*Brenda Dooley*  
*August 2011*

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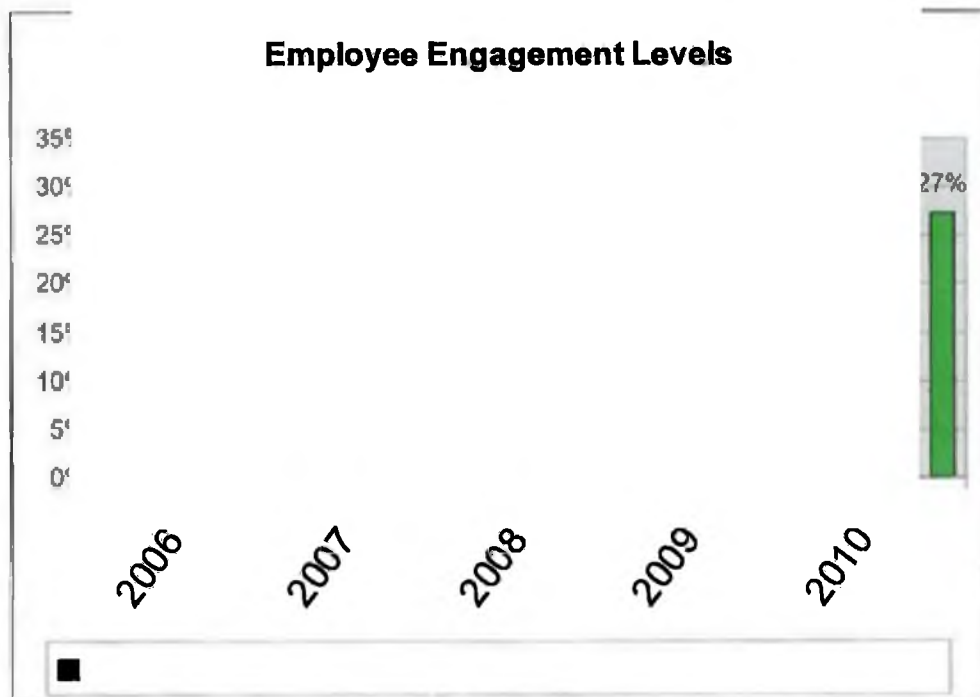
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**APPENDIX 2**

**ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE – BLANK**

# Managers Engagement Survey Final

## Page 1

About you and your organisation

### 1. Please indicate your employment sector

- Non-profit
- Commercial

2.  
3.  
4.

- 500 - 1000
- 1000+
- 50 - 100
- >100
- 5+

### 5. Please indicate to whom you directly report

- Department Head
- Division Head
- Assistant Director

- Director
- CEO

- Don't know

Questionnaire

**1. I understand what is expected of me and how it fits into** overall organisational objectives

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**2. I intend to stay with the organisation through the next year**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**3. I feel supported by my own manager**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

## Managers Engagement Survey Final

**4. I feel that top management recognise and appreciate my efforts.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**5. I receive meaningful feedback on my performance**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**6. I am proud to tell others that I work for my organisation**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Managers Engagement Survey Final

**7. I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**8. I am personally motivated to help my organisation succeed**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**9. I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree



Managers Engagement Survey Final

**10. Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me in my job**

Strongly Agree

Managers Engagement Survey Final

13. I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development in my organisation

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

management to do what is best for the organisation

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**Managers Engagement Survey Final**

16. Status and power are significant motivators for me in my job

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. Please list the factors that keep you motivated in your work

motivation

18. Describe what it is that engages you in a work context

20. \_\_\_\_\_ ry with this organization?

21. Any other comments?

**APPENDIX 3**

**Covering email**

## Shannon Consulting

**From:** Shannon Consulting [shannonconsulting@eircom.net]

**Sent:** 28 July 2011 09:50

**To:** brendadooley@eircom.net

**Subject:** Requesting your participation in my research project

Dear Friends & Colleagues

As you may be aware I am currently in the process of completing a Masters Degree in HRM, part of which is the submission of a dissertation. The subject matter of my research is that of Employee Engagement. While there has been a considerable amount of recent commentary on the area, there appears to be little research available on what keeps managers engaged and committed to their organisations, after all, managers are employees too. This is what I would like to explore.

I am targeting 50 front-line, middle and senior managers from my network of colleagues, clients and friends. I hope you will assist me in this piece of research by completing the attached questionnaire, which should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

The purpose of the research is to assess determine whether you are driven by the employees or if there is something else organisation. Today's work climate is required to do more with less while a motivated to deliver.

Naturally I will treat your responses with utmost confidentiality and only for the purposes of this research project. I will of course be delighted to share my findings with you, should you be interested.

Please click on the link below to complete :

I am sure you appreciate that like everyone, I am under pressure with deadlines so, I would be most grateful if you can take the time to complete it no later than Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> August.

Many thanks in advance for your assistance.

Kind regards, as always.

Brenda Dooley, FCIPD, Dip.Psych.  
Shannon Consulting  
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Mob: +353+87+2532394  
Email: shannonconsulting@eircom.net

28/08/2011

**Summary Responses – Survey Monkey**

## Managers Engagement Survey Final



1. Please indicate your employment sector

	Response Percent	Response Count
Public/Civil Service	86.0%	24
	32.5%	13
	5.0%	2
	2.5%	1
	0.0%	0
answered question		40
skipped question		0

**2. Please indicate the total number of staff in your organisation**

	Response Count
<50	5.0% 2
50 - 100	8.0% 4
100 - 250	17.5% 9
250 - 500	27.5% 14
500 - 1000	27.5% 14
1000+	8.0% 4
answered question	40
skipped question	0



**3. Please indicate the total number of staff for whom you are responsible**

	Response Percent	Response Count
>=10	40.0%	16
9	12.5%	5
8	20.0%	8
7		
6		
5	15.0%	6
4		
3		
2		
1		
answered by		40
skipped questions		0

4. Please indicate the number of managers (or supervisors or team leaders) reporting directly to you

	Response Percent	Response Count
0	27.5%	11
1	15.0%	6
2 - 4	25.0%	10
5+	3.0%	1
	34.5%	14
skipped question		46
skipped question		9

5. Please indicate to whom you directly report

Department Head

[Redacted]

CEO

Response Count

12.5%

5

9

6. In Example:

Yes

[Redacted]

45

Unanswered questions

9

7. I understand what is expected of me and how it fits into the overall organizational objectives

Not Sure

Strongly Agree

Unanswered questions

46

9

9. I intend to

Strongly Agree

35.0%

49

7 of 23

9. I feel supported by my own manager

██████████

12.5%

22

88.0%

20.0%

answered question

40

skipped question

0

8 of 23

10. I feel that top management recognise and appreciate my effort



7.5%

7.5%

27.5%

48.0%

12.5%

answered question

skipped question

11. I receive meaningful feedback on my performance



12. I am proud to tell others that I work for my organisation



13. I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<input type="radio"/> Disagree	7.5%	3
<input type="radio"/> Agree	25.0%	10
<b>answered question</b>		<b>40</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>



14. I am pers

	Response	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	2.5%	1
Not Sure	0.0%	0
Agree		
Strongly Agree		40

15. I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making

	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	0%	0
Disagree	7.5%	3
Neutral	20.0%	8
Agree	32.8%	13
Strongly Agree	40%	16

16. Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me in my job

	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Disagree	2.5%	1
Neutral	12.5%	5
Agree	62.5%	25
Strongly Agree	22.5%	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40</b>

17. I feel I work well with my peer managers

	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Disagree	2.5%	1
Neutral	12.5%	5
Agree	62.5%	25
Strongly Agree	22.5%	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40</b>

18. I feel supported by my peer managers



19. I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development in my organisation

	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	2.5%	1
Disagree	12.5%	3
Neutral	48.0%	16
Agree	37.5%	15
Strongly Agree		0

20. I trust top management



35.0%

46.0%

7.5%

answered question

skipped question

21. I feel satisfied in my job

		Response Percent	Response Count
	Strongly Disagree	2.5%	1
	Disagree	15.0%	6
14	Neutral	7.5%	3
18	Agree	62.8%	25
3	Strongly Agree		5
40			40
8			8

22.

me in my job



23. Please list the factors that keep you motivated in your work





24. Please list the factors that keep you committed to your organisation

	Response Count
	40
answered question	40
skipped question	0

25. Describe what it is that engages you in a work context

	Response Count
	40
	0

26. Assuming you had a choice to stay or leave, why do you stay with this organisation?

	Response Count
	40
answered question	
skipped question	

27. Any other comments?

Response  
Count

18

**APPENDIX 5**

**Sample Response – Private Sector Participant # 34**

- [View Summary](#)
- [Browse Responses](#)
- [Filter Responses](#)
- [Create New Responses](#)
- [Download Responses](#)
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**1. Please indicate your employment sector**

**2. Please indicate the total number of staff in your organisation**

**3. Please indicate the total number of staff for whom you are responsible**

**4. Please indicate the number of managers (or supervisors or team leaders) reporting directly to you**

**5. Please indicate to whom you directly report**

**6. Is Employee Engagement currently a strategic issue for your organisation?**

**1. I understand what is expected of me and how it fits into the overall organisational objectives**

**2. I intend to stay with the organisation through the next year**

**3. I feel supported by my own manager**

Agree

**4. I feel that top management recognise and appreciate my efforts.**

**5. I receive meaningful feedback on my performance**

**6. I am proud to tell others that I work for my organisation**

**7. I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work**

Agree

8. I am personally motivated to help my organisation succeed

9. I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making

10. Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me in my job

11. I feel I work well with my peer managers

12. I feel supported by my peer managers

13. I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development in my organisation

14. I trust top management to do what is best for the organisation

15. I feel satisfied in my job

16. Status and power are significant motivators for me in my job

17. Please list the factors that keep you motivated in your work

18. Please list the factors that keep you committed to your organisation

19. Describe what it is that engages you in a work context

my teams being the best being given

20. Assuming you had a choice to stay or leave, why do you stay with this organisation?

21. Any other comments?

No Response

**APPENDIX 6**

**Sample Response – Public Sector Participant # 16**

- [View Summary](#)
- [Browse Responses](#)
- [Filter Responses](#)
- [Cross-tab Responses](#)
- [Download Responses](#)
- [Share Responses](#)

**3. Please indicate the total number of staff for whom you are responsible**

**4. Please indicate the number of managers(or supervisors or team leaders)reporting directly to you**

**5. Please Indicate to whom you directly report**

**2. I intend to stay with the organisation through the next year**

**3. I feel supported by my own manager**

**4. I feel that top management recognise and appreciate my efforts.**

**5. I receive meaningful feedback on my performance**

**6. I am proud to tell others that I work for my organisation**

Agree

**7. I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work**

Agree

9. I feel I have influence on organisational decision-making

10. Compensation and reward are significant motivators for me in my job

12. I feel supported by my peer managers

13. I feel I am given opportunities for learning and self-development in my organisation

14. I trust top management to do what is best for the organisation

16. Status and power are significant motivators for me in my job

17. Please list the factors that keep you motivated in your work

Challenges, Opportunities to try new ideas, the team I work with, the uncertainty that comes with trying something new

18. Please list the factors that keep you committed to your organisation

1

Two

19. Describe what it is that engages you in a work context

1

Use

20. Assuming you had a choice to stay or leave, why do you stay with this organisation?

Because I still have (had possibly) things to learn

21. Any other comments?

The people I work with are to me as important as what I do and how I am rewarded for my efforts