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AN INVESTIGATION INTO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN IRELANDS FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to identify the current levels of engagement within the organisation, any differences in engagement levels between the different categories of employees, and recommendations for improvements that would enhance the organisation's employee engagement levels, and hopes to shed some light on the diverse and complex subject that is employee engagement. This dissertation examined employee engagement within a subsidiary of one of Irelands leading food service companies in the outskirts of Dublin. Data for this dissertation was collected through an anonymous survey questionnaire.

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: MA in Human Resource Management

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Chapter One

<u>Introduction</u>

Background

The topic of employee engagement is a relatively new in the world of Human Resource Management, and has gained the interest of both academics and practitioners alike, with Kahn (1990, p.700) describing how it can be found when employees *"employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances"*. The researcher was interested in investigating the level of employee engagement within Ireland's food service industry.

This dissertation aims to investigate employee engagement within the context of one of Irelands leading food service providers, whom will be referred to as the 'the organisation' throughout the dissertation. The organisation chosen for the research purposes is a subsidiary based in the outskirts of Dublin. Like many companies, the organisation chosen has been hit hard since the recession. It is now more important than ever to engage employees due to the current economic climate. An increasing number of employers are now introducing employee engagement practices and policies within organisations as it has been found that organisations with an engaged workforce are much more capable in recessionary times than that of organisations with employees whom are disengaged. McLeod & Clarke (2009, p.5) noted in their government report that *"it will be hard to get through the recession without engaging your workforce"*.

The organisation as a whole offers food services to various different sectors, including business and industry, government, education and healthcare. The organisation employs just over 3,000 staff in various categories from catering assistants, chefs and kitchen staff to managers, marketing managers, supervisors, health and safety officers and customer service agents. The researcher investigated employee engagement within a small subsidiary employing just over fifty staff on the outskirts of Dublin.

Employee engagement is also gaining considerable interest due to the benefits it can bring to an organisation. Mullins (2007) expressed how HR professionals need to consider ways in which to make full use of their organisations 'human capital' as a means of increasing the organisations efficiency, quality and innovation. Ferguson (2007) highlighted that employee engagement is now seen as the key to sustainable competitive advantage. Some benefits include increased profitability, higher levels of productivity, greater innovation and creativity, lower turnover and absenteeism rates along with higher levels of motivation, commitment satisfaction and morale throughout the workforce. Therefore it can be said to be best practice for any organisation to embrace employee engagement.

Kahn (1990, p.700) described engaged employees as being *"prepared to invest significant personal resources, in the form of time and effort, to the successful completion of their task"*, and *"engagement is at its*

greatest when an individual is driving personal energies into physical, cognitive and emotional labours".

Title of Dissertation

Title: 'An investigation into Employee Engagement in Irelands Food Service Industry'

Potential significance

The research conducted for this dissertation would greatly aid the authors chosen organisation in establishing an engagement programme for all categories of staff and as well as investigating which categories are more engaged and disengaged than others.

Research questions

In this dissertation the researcher addresses the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference in engagement levels between the different categories of employees within the organisation?

2. Is employee engagement measured within the organisation and what is the level of employee engagement within the organisation?

3. What recommendations can be made to assist in increasing the current level of employee engagement?

Research objectives

The objectives of the dissertation are to look into the level of employee engagement in the organisation and differentiate whether there are varying levels of engagement among the various categories of staff within the organisation and to make recommendations to engage and further engage employees.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research carried out for this dissertation was to explore employee engagement in a food service organisation with the hope to differentiate if there is a difference in levels of engagement between different categories of employees, whether engagement is measured within the organisation and what level is engagement at in the chosen organisation if any.

Process of the research

The research was accumulated via a survey questionnaire that was distributed on site in the organization across various categories of employees. The survey questionnaire was kept anonymous for confidential and ethical reasons. The survey questionnaire was made up of closed end questions, statements which required the use of the Linkert-scale and an open ended question requesting suggestions by employees to be made on how to keep staff engaged.

Limitations

The research conducted for this dissertation was obtained by using a single organization and adapted the case study approach for the purposes of data collection. The dissertation looks at the level of employee engagement in one organization while the data was collected on a particular given day. The author may therefore not have a concise picture of employee engagement across the food service industry as the research conducted merely

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter One: This chapter introduces the area of the proposed dissertation and its significance in investigating employee engagement within Ireland's food service industry. It also outlines the purpose and objectives of the dissertation, while giving a brief background into the organisation and their services they provide.

Chapter Two: Review's the literature surrounding the broad area of employee engagement. This chapter looks at the current literature available on employee engagement and its importance, definitions of engagement, measuring employee engagement, dimensions of engagement, drivers of engagement and barriers of employee engagement and disengagement. This section will initially justify the theoretical perspective for this researcher.

Chapter Three: Looks to how the research strategy was employed and how data was analysed. Initial findings will be detailed and

discussed with reference to their relationship with the questions posed. Data displays are utilised to summarise the findings discussed in each area and will conclude with a summary of the findings and their relationship to each other.

Chapter Four: will discuss a summary of the results of the study, detailing the main findings and their relationship to the research objectives and questions. Findings will be presented in graphs, pie charts and bar charts.

Chapter Five: will draw conclusions from the data gathered. The author will also issue recommendations for consideration to the organisation for the future of Employee Engagement.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The researchers' objective of this chapter is to review the existing literature available from both academics and practitioners on Employee Engagement. The literature used within this chapter had been cited from scholarly publications and peer reviewed academic journal articles, working papers, and published resources. Articles have been found on electronic databases such as Emerald Insight, ESBCO Business Source Premier and Google Scholar.

The topic of employee engagement has become considerably popular over the last decade. Employee engagement is a relatively new concept in the world of human resource management is loosely defined according to Armstrong (2012) whom expresses employee engagement as the 'willingness to go the extra mile'.

Reviewing the literature, the researcher will look at:

1. An Overview of Employee Engagement and its Importance

2. Definitions' of Employee Engagement

3. Measuring Employee Engagement and its Dimensions

4. Factors Influencing Employee Engagement

5. What are the drivers of Employee Engagement

6. Barriers to Engagement and Disengagement

An Overview of Employee Engagement and its Importance

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) expressed that 'will be hard to get through the recession without engaging your workforce' especially in the current economic climate. With the current economic climate organisations are looking for more ways to keep staff and employee engagement has emerged as a practice that brings substantial benefits such as profitability, higher levels of productivity, greater innovation and creativity, lower turnover and absenteeism rates, higher levels of motivation, commitment satisfaction and morale throughout the workforce.

Guest, Michie & Sheehan (2000, p.3) noted that an organisations human capital is a "*non-substitutable resource, which when tapped, can provide the firm with competitive advantage*", Guest *et al.* (2000) also went on to express when employees exceed more than the minimum requirement of the job, they are more 'engaged' and in turn contribute to the larger goals of the organisation. Employee Engagement has been studied by academics, practitioners, consultancy firms and corporations alike to investigate more about the affects it can have on an organisation and its human capital.

To understand more about employee engagement the author will look briefly into the history of engagement and where it originated. While Kahn (1990) was the first to coin the phrase of employee engagement and define it, Risher (2003) the value of the employee in the work

place has come a long way since Taylor's scientific management style of merely viewing the employee as a 'cog in the wheel'. Armstrong (2009) expressed that the success of today's organisations is their ability to hold onto a skilled workforce that's inimitable and not substitutable. Armstrong (2009) also went on to express that competitive advantage can only be achieved in the current climate by utilising employees skills and talents to the maximum and human capital is now more important then what once was top priority for many organisations, land, plant, machinery.

Definition of Employee Engagement

The lack of a universal definition of employee engagement has brought challenges to both academics and practitioners alike. Kahn's definition of engagement has been one of the most cited and referenced in literature of employee engagement. In his paper, Kahn (1990) defined engagement as "the harnessing of organizations members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance". The physical aspect of engagement is associated with the physical energy that is exercised for employees to fulfil their roles and their willingness to go the extra mile. While the cognitive and emotional aspects are concerned with how employees beliefs and how they feel towards their work and leaders and whether they feel positively or negatively towards their organisation.

Likewise, Macey & Schneider (2008) noted how numerous definitions of employee engagement have been brought to the fore from practitioners and researchers but there is yet to be a solid confirmed definition for the term. Moving on from that, Macey & Schneider (2008) dually noted that employee engagement is a "desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components."

Lawson, McKinsey & Company (2009) defined an employee who is engaged as 'Committed and will go above and beyond, passionate and takes personal ownership for the quality of their work, paints a positive image of the organisation and recommends it and its products/services to others, understands how their work results in meaningful outcomes and vigorously pursues the organisations goals'

Similarly, McCashland (1999) defined employee engagement as 'an emotional outcome to the employee resulting from the critical components of the workplace.' Miles (2001) sums the topic up as 'intensively involving all employees in high engagement cascades that create understanding, dialogue, feedback and accountability, empowers people to creatively align their subunits, teams and individual job with the major transformation of the whole enterprise.' Finally, Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price & Stine (2011) define employee engagement as 'those who feel involved, committed,

passionate and empowered and demonstrate these feelings in work behaviour'.

Howe (2003) outlined employee engagement as "the state of emotional and intellectual involvement that workers have in an organization." He also identified three key behaviours that exhibit employee engagement within an organisation.

Say- where employees speak positively of their organisation

Stay- employees have a desire to be an integral part of the organisation

Strive: employees exercise an extra effort and take on work that contributes to the organisations success..

While, Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) define engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work", the "desire to work to make things better", "working longer hours, trying harder, accomplishing more and speaking positively about the organization".

Saks (2006) discusses how employee engagement differs from organisational commitment, stating that organisational commitment represents attitude and a person's connection to the organisation. Alternatively, engagement is said to be more than an attitude. Engagement is, psychologically, cognitively and behaviourally employed by the individual in their role.

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To summarise, there has been no clear consistent definition of employee engagement. While many academics and practitioners have coined their own definitions of engagement there is yet to be a universally applied definition to the topic. However, academics have over the years have examined it more accurately than their practitioner peers and constantly go back to Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement. With that said we return to the definitions that are drawn from the literature state that "the notion of employee engagement is a desirable condition, has an organization purpose and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components." (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.4

Measuring Employee Engagement and its Dimensions

Watson (2011) stress the importance of measuring employee engagement to ensure consistent levels throughout the workplace, this is usually done through employee engagement surveys, questionnaires and one-to-one interviews along with daily dairy research.

Past literature has measured employee engagement on a daily basis, however, it is now believed that day-to-day measurement may be 'too rough an assessment' and an hourly assessment technique may be

needed due to the high fluctuations in engagement throughout the working day.

Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter (2011) believe that 'measure of engagement need to have a clear theoretical underpinning, should be clearly consistent with an associated definition, need to have published statistical evidence in support of their validity and reliability and need to be of practical utility in organisational contexts' (2011, p9). Sticking with this, Wiley, Herman and Kowske (2011), believe the most appropriate way to measure employee engagement is by using the four individual elements of pride, satisfaction, advocacy and retention, the rationale behind this is 'an engaged workforce is one whose employee have pride in and are satisfied with their organisation as a place of work and who advocate for and intend to remain with their organisation' (2011, p1).

Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova (2006) propose using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The UWES includes a subscale for measuring engagement under three headings; vigour, dedication and absorption and sets out to measure employees who have an energetic and effective connection with their work activities, and who are able to deal well with the demands of their jobs. The UWES originally a seventeen piece instrument can be shortened down to nine items. The UWES is well known for its reliability and validity and is highly regarded within the area of employee engagement.

The Gallup Q12 survey is one of the most practiced measurements of employee engagement. The Gallup Group has been surveying employees and the link between engaged employees and organisational performance regardless of industry concentrating on area's such as revenue, profit, customer engagement, work quality and employee retention. Lanphear (2004) expressed that employee engagement is linked with business outcomes, it is important to continually understand and foster employee engagement in the workplace.

As previously discussed Kahn (1990) outlined three dimensions of employee engagement as cogitative, physical and emotional. May, Gilson & Hater (2004) confirm Kahns dimensions and expressed that '*people employ and express themselves, cognitively, emotionally and physically during role performances*' when they are engaged. The ISR (2005) also claimed that engagement includes three dimensions, physical, emotional and cognitive dimension. The physical dimension refers how employees give extra effort performing in their job; the physical dimension can also be referred to as the behavioural dimension and relates to how employees act while performing their job. The emotional dimension looks to how employees feel about the work they carry out, the company and its management. Finally the cogitative dimension relates to how employees support the goals of the organisation and whether they believe in its values and leadership.

Factors Influencing Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) initial study created a solid foundation on the factors that could influence engagement where he found three psychological conditions that can at large be linked to engagement within the workplace. Kahns (1990) study found that if psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability are present in the organisation, then employees are more likely to be engaged. Robinson *et al.* (2004) expressed the how unlikely it is that there's a one-size-fits all approach of engagement drivers. He noted that many factors influence engagement that are interrelated and can vary from organisation to organisation, the job itself being carried out and the group of employees the individual is associated with.

The individual's perceived abilities and environment are strongly associated with employee engagement. Robinson *et al.* (2004) noted that personal and job characteristics were associated with different levels of engagement. This was found via a survey carried out in the UK with over 10,000 participants. The study outlined that employees that were highly educated tended to be more committed to their professions and displayed higher levels of engagement than their less skilled or less educated co workers. Following from that, those who occupy executive or managerial roles tend to be more engaged in their work than those offering support roles. Kahn (1990) and May *et al.* (2004) studies found that individuals perception of the availability of his

own physical, emotional and cognitive resources in order to engage at work were factors that related to engagement levels when looking into the concept of psychological availability.

In relation to the work itself, Armstrong (2009) noted that interesting and challenging work, responsibility and control over resources all have an influence on engagement. Kahn (1990) first expressed that "meaningfulness" had an influence on engagement with May *et al.* (2004, p.14) defining meaningfulness as *"the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards"*. Here they found that certain conditions of the job, such as job enrichment and work role fit were positive predictors of psychological *-meaningfulness, in turn leading towards employee engagement. Maslach, Schaufelli & Leiter (2001) found in their study that meaningful and valued work in conjunction with the employee having a sense of control over their work can have a substantial affect on engagement. These findings were further supported by the Towers Perrin Talent Report (2003) which noted challenging work and the authority to make decisions about one's own work as key drivers of employee engagement.

Glen (2006) suggested that the working environment may affect the employees engagement. Attridge (2009) outlined that the working environment is affected by factors such as relationships with colleagues and relationships with management. Kahn (1990) described psychological safety as a *"feeling of being able to show oneself without fear of negative consequences to one's self image, status, or career"*.

The relationship with management is another construct that affects employee engagement. A C1PD report (2006) suggested that communication, in particular from management, is a key driver in leading employee engagement in the workplace. The CIPD expressed that it is an opportunity for employees to feed their views and opinions upward in the organisation that is the most crucial driver of employee engagement. The "feeling of being well informed about what is happening in the organization" and "thinking that their manager is committed to the organization" were other important drivers according to the CIPD. Institute of Employment carried out a survey among employees in the NHS and suggested that the drivers of employee engagement were "a *sense of feeling valued and involved", and "the extent to which employees feel able to voice their ideas", along with "the opportunities employees have to develop their jobs","* (Robinson *et al*, 2004, p.15). Simon's (2011) study illustrated that two way communication; high quality line management, a development focus for employees and a commitment to employee's wellbeing are among the top drivers of employee engagement within organisations. Maslach *et al.* (2001) further noted that recognition and rewards along with a system that is fair and just are additional factors that drive employee engagement.

Numerous studies have shown that a supportive working community is a major contributing factor of an employee's work life that affects engagement (Maslach et al, 2001) Simon (2011) found, where there was

effective internal co-operation within an organisation employee engagement was present. Kahn (1990) was the first to note that in order for employees to have a sense of psychological safety, they must be able to express themselves at work without fear of it having a negative impact on their status or career. A cooperative working environment where employees value teamwork was also identified as a driver of employee engagement in the Towers Perrin Talent Report (2003)

The Towers Perrin Talent Report (2003) reported the need for organisational factors such as career advancement opportunities, the employers brand and reputation and clear visions from senior management, alongside the work itself and the working environment to influence employee engagement. Buckingham and Coffman (2005) expressed that rewards in the forms of pay and benefits are important but should be deployed in conjunction with management maximising employees' full potential, providing developmental opportunities and showing a commitment to their workforce.

What are the Drivers of Employee Engagement?

Lawson, McKinsey & Company (2009), McLeod and Clarke (2010) and Mone et al (2011) outline the drivers or enablers of successful engagement as follows:

Trust and Integrity: This involves the extent to which employees feel that management deals with issues with upmost integrity and trust and the extent to which it is felt that management care for the employee's health and well-being at work. As Mone et al found that 'having a

manager employee's trust is a primary driver of engagement' (2011, p209). Employees must feel a sense of integrity and trust surrounding the organisation from managers to co-workers.

The nature of the job: This involves whether the employees receives some form of stimulation from his/her job. This stimulation comes with having authority to make decisions, having control over one's own work and finding the nature of one's work enjoyable, active and interesting.

The link between company and individual gaols: This drives engagement as both parties' interests and goals align and both parties begin working towards achieving a common goal with the aim of success for all involved. Mone at al (2011) states the key here is to collaboratively design performance and development goals and targets which are aligned with both individual and environmental needs.

Career growth opportunities: The employee must feel that there are opportunities for career growth, progression and promotion within the company. This will the employee works harder to achieve company goals.

Employee development: Again, the employee must feel that there is ample opportunity for him/her to develop personally within the organisation, through acquiring new skills, knowledge and so forth. To do this, Mone et al (2011, p268) states that employees 'need

motivational support and the resources to accomplish their developmental goals'.

Co-workers: The relationship between co-workers is seen as a driver of engagement as 'multiple studies show that companies which invest in the social connection of their staff have lower turnover rates, higher satisfaction levels and contribute more to revenue growth' (Lawson, McKinsey & Company, 2009, p3). Also, it is believed that employee engagement is contagious, the positive experiences and pleasant humours of co-works are passed from one person to another, with the aim of surrounding the entire organisation. (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter (2011).

Personal Relationship with management: To become engaged, employees must also feel a personal connection or bond with their supervisor/manager. Employee must also feel that managers encourage, support and facilitate employees and provide all necessary resources to allow for maximum performance.

Providing ongoing recognition and feedback: It is crucially important that managers recognise and reward employees for their good work. Managers must also provide constructive feedback to allow employees to understand where they may be going wrong and how might they improve. Feedback can also be used to recognise the good work of employees and let them know of areas in which they excel. Here Mone et al (2011) highlights the importance of conducting mid-year and year-end appraisals to aloe for feedback and recognition.

Voice: Employee voice is vitally important for engaging employees. James Campbell Quick, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at the University of Texas, places particular emphasis on giving employees a voice, he states that 'people need to be listened to' and not listening forces people to psychologically withdraw (Lytle, 2011, p70). Here employee's opinions, views and concerns are sought out, listened to and appropriate action is taken.

Leadership: McLeod and Clarke believe having 'a strong, simple powerful story- a strategic narrative' (2010, p27), in which all managers and employees understand and are committed to, is a key aspect in enabling or driving engagement. Here, employees 'have a clear line of sight between their job and the narrative and understands where their work fits in' (2010, p28). According to Xu and Thomas, 'effective leadership, especially transformational leadership, is key to engagement', in addition to this there is also 'a direct relationship between leader behaviours and follower engagement' (2011, p400), therefore effective and positive leadership is vital.

Building the 'right' climate for engagement: In order for engagement to thrive, it is important that the organisation provides the right climate. Here six areas-'workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values'- all determine the climate and come about 'when employees perceive that their organisation provides a supportive, involving and challenging climate and hence accommodates their psychological needs' (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011, p79).

Managers must be seen to create the right climate for engagement through 'displaying an interest and showing confidence in employees, acting with integrity, demonstrating, acting as a trusted coach and managing the performance of employees' (Mone et al, 2011, p210).

Lawson, McKinsey & Company (2009) believes it is important to note here that financial rewards are not believed to be a driver of engagement.

Barriers to Engagement and Disengagement

Kahn (1990, p. 694) defined personal disengagement as "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively or emotionally during role performances."

Ferguson along with McLeod and Clarke (2009) believe the following factors may hinder or act as barriers to successful engagement:

Personal relationships and family life may hinder effective engagement as it has been found that 'family stress has a severe impact on work stresses'.

Gender differences: Men are more likely to be engaged and enriched at work compared to women who experience 'depletion from work to family' (Ferguson, p15).

Health and personal values: 'Some people work to live, while others live to work' (Ferguson, p15). Engaged employee are generally not workaholics and find a sense of balance between work and personal life.

Lack of awareness: This occurs when managers are not fully aware of employee engagement and the benefits it could have for an organisation.

Uncertainty: Here, some managers may be interested in the topic but are uncertain of where to start or how to address the topic. There is a general feeling that 'while employers recognise the importance of engagement they do not know what to do about it' (McLeod & Clarke, p72).

Managers and Organisational Culture: The third barrier is the large amount of disengaging workplace practices that still exist; such practices include slow decision making systems, lack of communication and knowledge sharing, poor work-life balance policies and practices and poor attitudes of managers and leaders (McLeod & Clarke, p72). Additionally, these poor actions of management increase the failure rate of engagement as 'leadership and management is the main cause of poor employee engagement' (McLeod & Clarke, p36).

The variation between views and commitment to engagement: In order to succeed in engagement clarity must prevail and all levels of the organisation must support the initiative.

Finally, additional barriers or stumbling blocks to effective employee engagement, according to Vaijayanthi, Shreenivasan & Prabhakaran (2011) include 'Inadequate interaction with peers from other locations/offices, lack of accountable response from the corporate office for issues including death of personnel, employee facilities, deficient communication regarding seminars, workshops and other training sessions from the corporate office and inadequate visits by the business team'.

Chapter Three

<u>Methodology</u>

This chapter outlines the research approach the researcher undertook to complete this study. In this dissertation the researcher addresses the following research questions:

4. Is there a difference in engagement levels between the different categories of employees within the organisation?

5. Is employee engagement measured within the organisation and what is the level of employee engagement within the organisation?

6. What recommendations can be made to assist in increasing the current level of employee engagement?

Research Methodology

The researcher adapted Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill research onion model when evaluating the appropriate data collection techniques for this dissertation. The research onion model clearly depicts each layer and assisted the author in determining the fitting philosophy, approach, strategy and data collection method. Quinlan (2011) expresses that all research projects are underpinned by a philosophical framework in which should be fitting within the worldview where the research is situated. The argument of 'fit' is of importance. Before

embarking on a research proposal Quinlan (2011) poised the questions all those undertaking research should ask them-selves:

1. What am I doing? (aim of the research);

2. How am I going to do it? (the methods to be used);

3. Where am I going to do it? (the site or location of the research);

4. Why am I going to do it? (the rationale behind the research).
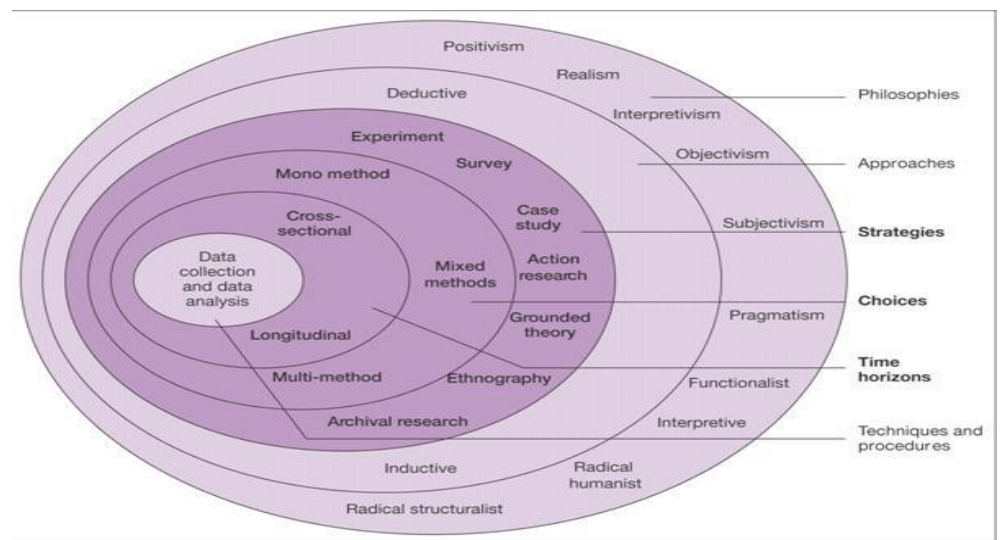
Source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) 'The Research Onion'. *Research Methods for Business Students.* 6th ed. p160, diagram.

Throughout the research process the philosophy the author adopted was positivism. Bryman and Bell defined positivism as 'an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond'

(2007, p16). The positivist researcher takes the stance of the natural scientist. Bryman and Bell (2007, p16) outline the following principles that are at large intrinsically linked with positivism:

1. The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and allow laws to be assessed;

2. Positivists arrive at knowledge that is gathered through facts that provide the basis for laws;

3. Science must be conducted in a manner that is value free and objective.

Following that, the author has adapted a deductive approach to research. Deduction according to Saunders *et al.* (2012) involves the development of a theory that is then put through rigorous tests and a series of propositions. Like as stated by Bryman & Bell (2007), Saunders *et al.* (2012) note that the deductive approach takes the form of the natural scientist, fitting with the positivistic approach. Blaikie (2010) listed six steps to be followed in deductive research

1. Put forward a t tentative idea, a premise, a hypothesis or a set of hypotheses to form a theory.

2. By using existing literature, or by specifying the conditions under which the theory are expected to hold, deduce a testable proposition or number of propositions.

3. Examine the premises and the logic of the argument that produced them, comparing this argument with existing theories to see if it offers an advance in understanding.

4. Test the premises by collecting appropriate data to measure the concepts or variables and analysing it.

5. If the results of the analysis are not consistent with the premises the theory is false and it must either be rejected or modified and the process restarted.

6. If the results of the analysis are consistent with the premises then the theory is corroborated.

The researcher took on the case study research approach. Hartley (2004, p323) expertly defines case study research as the following:

"Case study research consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of one or more organisations, or groups within organisations, with a view to provide an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study. The phenomenon is not isolated from its context (as in, say, laboratory research) but is of interest precisely because it is in relation to its context".

The case study approach involves gathering information within an organisational context and examines a particular issue, concern or problem. Yin (2003, p13) construes case study research as a method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life

context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not evident. The researcher deemed the case study approach was best suited towards the dissertation topic as it allowed the author to examine employee engagement within the organisation using a cross sectional study and investigate employee engagement at a single point in time , as opposed to a longitudinal study mapping change over time. The cross sectional study was deemed appropriate to the researcher due to the constrained time to complete the dissertation.

Sample and Sampling Method

For the purposes of this study the researcher undertook non-probability sampling. Quinlan (2011) identified non-probability sampling as the sample that is selected to represent the population, but unfortunately cannot be said to be representative of the population in a statistical sense. Convenience sampling was the method used for this study. Bryman & Bell (2007) note convenience sampling as one that is available to the researcher by its accessibility and is said to be used by researchers whom engage with participants that are easiest to include. Convenience sampling was utilised in the research conducted within the organisation as it allowed the participants to decide whether they were willing to part take in the study as it was a completely voluntary data collection process. Fortunately, the researcher ran into no difficulties while compiling a sample from the

population of the organisation. Participants from various categories of employees were willing to part take in the research and complete the survey questionnaire. A sample size of 39 employees of the total population of 53 employees' present part took in the study.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher was initially faced with the dilemma of whether to undergo qualitative or quantitative methods of research. However the later took precedence and quantitative methods were adopted in the form of a survey questionnaire. The quantitative research according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) is at large associated with positivism and usually falls in the form of survey research. Saunders *et al.* (2012) further outlines the characteristics of quantitative research and how it examines relationships between variables which are measured numerically and analysed using a range of statistical techniques.

May, Gilson and Harter's (2004) Scale for Engagement, was adapted for the survey questionnaire of this dissertation which Attridge (2009) found to be one of the few academic questionnaires available on engagement today. The original survey questionnaire by May *et al* (2004) was designed to measure employee engagement based upon the participants' perceptions about themselves, their work, supervisors, managers and co-workers.

Saunders *et al* (2012) aptly describe the survey questionnaire as a popular and common strategy in business and management research and is most frequently used to answer 'what', 'where', 'how much' and 'how many' questions.

The survey questionnaire provided statistical data to address the research questions asked. To facilitate the issues of reliability and validity an existing survey questionnaire was chosen that was designed to assess employee engagement in terms of meaningfulness, psychological safety, psychological availability, work role fit, co-worker relations, management relations, co-worker norm adherence, resources, and self-consciousness. The data gathered using the survey method provided information in relation to the first research question regarding the difference of employee engagement levels between the different categories of staff within the organisation. This was possible since the statistical findings from the data gathered through the survey would indicate whether a difference in results occurred between respondents who belonged to the various categories of employees. This method was used to answer the second research question in relation to the level of employee engagement within the organisation and if it measured. The third research question addressed used an open-ended question in the survey questionnaire and this was considered as a means to provide depth in relation to possible explanations as to the trends that came about from the survey results as well as the recommendations that would be provided at the end of the research study.

The survey questionnaire used a Likert-Style Rating Scale, which asked the participants to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the statements in the survey questionnaire.

The researcher utilised a five point Linkert Scale asking participants to indicate on a scale from (1)- Strongly Agree, (2)- Agree, (3)- Neither Agree or Disagree, 94)- Disagree or (5)-Strongly Disagree their agreement or disagreement to the statements provided in the survey questionnaire. Quinlan (2011) denotes the advantage of using the Linkert-Style Rating Scale in a survey questionnaire arguing that it is useful in not only measuring the direction of attitudes but also measures the force of the attitudes.

A total of fifty three survey questionnaires were circulated amongst staff within the organisation ranging from, supervisors, managers, chefs, catering assistants, kitchen staff and waiting staff and employees working within the marketing department. Of the fifty three survey questionnaires that were circulated within the organisation, thirty nine responses came back giving the response rate as 78 per cent of the population, however, only thirty seven of the responses could be counted, as the other remaining two were spoiled surveys and incorrectly completed. Participants received a hard copy of the survey questionnaire and were asked for their cooperation in completing the survey while still remaining completely voluntary. All responses maintained the participants' anonymity. Employees that participated in the survey were not asked for any identifiable data and the only identification each participant was asked to provide was their job title.

The researcher used Microsoft Office Excel to segment data in order to examine differences between subgroups, which included the different categories of staff within the organisation. This made it easier to draw out comparisons within the groups. This was needed in analysing the differences in results between the different categories of staff within the organisation.

This was useful in identifying the factors that were most closely related to employee engagement within the organisation. The overall results for each factor being studied, namely, Meaningfulness, Psychological Safety, Psychological Availability, Work Role Fit, Co-Worker Relations, Management Relations, Co-Worker Norm Adherence, Resources, and Self-Consciousness were compared to the overall engagement result for each category of staff.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

The author opted to use an existing survey questionnaire for assessing the current level of employee engagement within the organisation. In order for the researcher to maintain validity of the research data gathered, the survey questionnaire chosen needed to focus on answering the research questions that were put forward in this dissertation.

1. Is there a difference in engagement levels between the different categories of employees within the organisation?

2. Is employee engagement measured within the organisation and what is the level of employee engagement within the organisation?

3. What recommendations can be made to assist in increasing the current level of employee engagement?

Bryman & Bell (2007, p163) refer to reliability as being concerned with the issues of consistency in the measures used and there are three factors concerned whether a measure is reliable.

1. Stability: asks whether or not a measure is stable over time

2. Internal reliability: whether a participants score on any one indicator can be related to their scores on the other indictors

3. Inter- observer consistency: when the recording of observations or the translation of data into categories and there is more than one observer, there is a possibility that there may be a lack of consistency in their decisions.

Saunders *et al.* (2012) point out that while reliability is a key characteristic of quality research, it is not sufficient by itself to ensure good quality research. Reliability must be accompanied by validity. Again Saunders *et al.* (2012) outlines how validity is concerned with how your data collection methods, in this research case, the survey questionnaire, actually measure what you intended to.

The issues of reliability and validity were overcome by the decision of the researcher to use a survey questionnaire that has already been used in previous studies of employee engagement.

The survey questionnaire used in the dissertation was based on May, Gilson and Harter's
(2004) Scale for Engagement. The original survey questionnaire was designed to measure engagement based on the participants' perceptions about themselves, their jobs, their supervisors/ managers and their co-workers. As this research study was conducted in the case study of a small subsidiary organisation based in the outskirts of Dublin, in contrast to the original study by May et al (2004), the adjusted version of the survey questionnaire used had fewer items than the original questionnaire. However, the researcher maintained at least 2 items for every area being assessed in the questionnaire, including 'test' questions to check the reliability of the answers provided by each participant. The items used were chosen with care so that each area being studied in the original questionnaire was adequately tested by the author.

Ethical Considerations

Saunders *et al.* (2012) outlined ethics as standards of behaviour that guide the researcher in how to conduct research in relation to the rights of those whom participate in the research or whom are affected by the research. The researcher took the utmost care and consideration during the research process. Participants were informed

of the purpose of the research study and were asked to participate on a voluntary basis. A cover letter which accompanied the survey carefully outlined that the survey questionnaire was voluntary and strictly confidential and that all participants would remain anonymous. Permission to carry out the research within the organisation was granted by top management in which the researcher had sought after via a carefully compiled email requesting access and outlining the research to be carried out. Babbie (1998) expressed that survey research should be carried out on a voluntary basis, should refrain from harming participants and be anonymous and confidential. By means of no harms Babbie (1998) implied that the researcher should refrain from requesting the participant to reveal information that would be deemed embarrassing or of a danger to their home lives, friendships, work life and so forth.

Limitations:

It could be argued that the quantitative approach of research chosen may not have been enough to investigate employee engagement within Ireland's food service industry. It is likely that the researcher should have used triangulation and combined using a survey questionnaire and as well as conducting semi structured interviews to get a more in dept view of engagement within the organisation. It may also have been more appropriate for the author to have adopted a multiple case study approach rather than a single case study approach to obtain a broader more concise picture of employee engagement in the food service sector. The researcher also recognises the

questionnaire time constraints, it may have been more appropriate to distribute the survey questionnaire over a period of time rather than utilising the sample that was present on the given day the research was carried out.

Chapter Four

<u>Findings and Discussion</u>

The survey questionnaire was distributed among all members of staff on the day of data collection. A total of fifty three members of staff were present on the day of the data collection, while thirty seven voluntarily took part in the survey questionnaire, only thirty four of the respondents results could be counted due to three inadequately completed survey questionnaires.
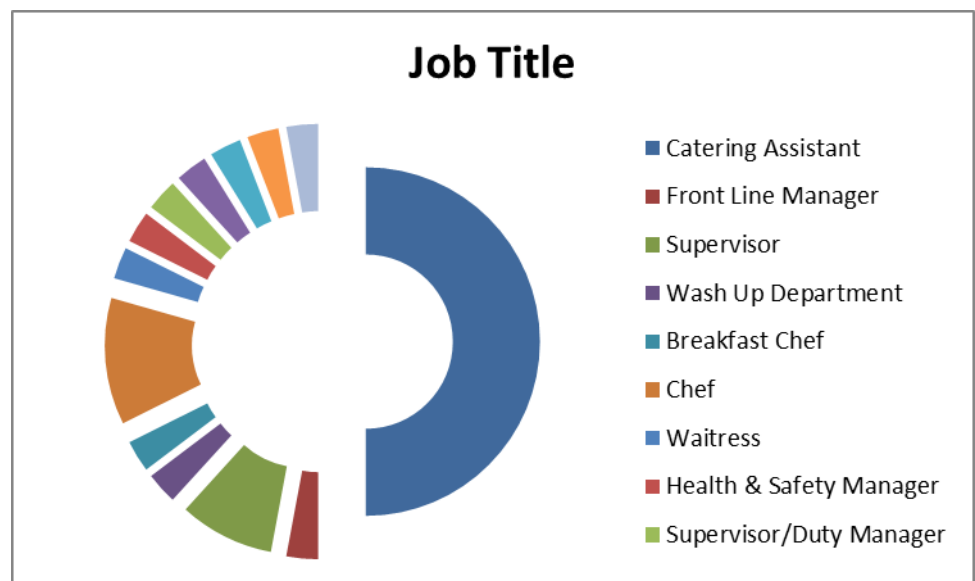
The population studied in the research spanned across all categories of employees. Catering Assistants comprised of fifty per cent of the sample surveyed while the remaining consisted of chefs (twelve per cent), supervisors (nine per cent) and the other categories such as

front line manager, the wash up department, waiting staff, health and safety manager, duty manager and breakfast chef making up the other twenty nine per cent.

Gender
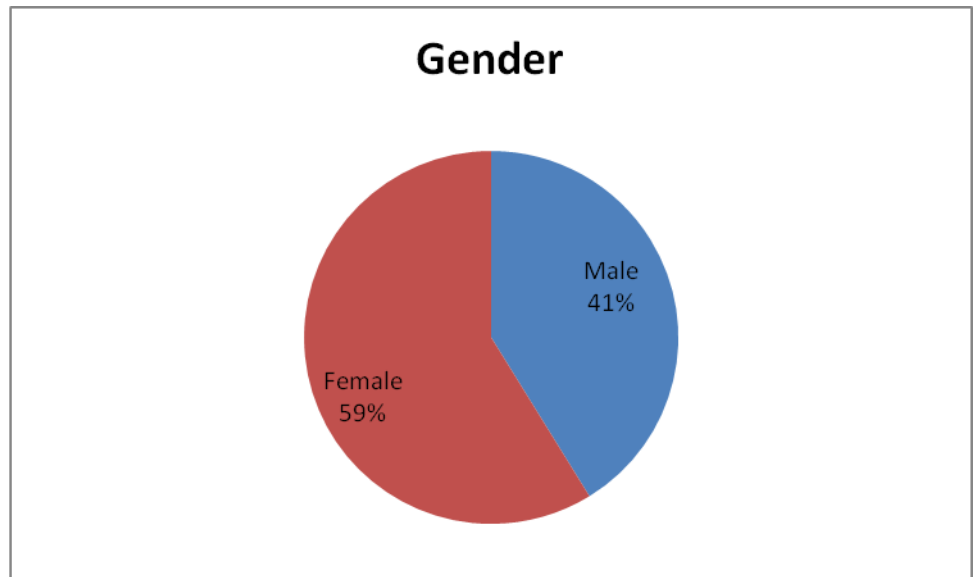
Respondants totled of fifty nine per cent female and forty one per cent male. Females comprised of the majority of the catering assistant category, while males dominated in the area's of wash up department, chefs and front line manager.

Years of Service
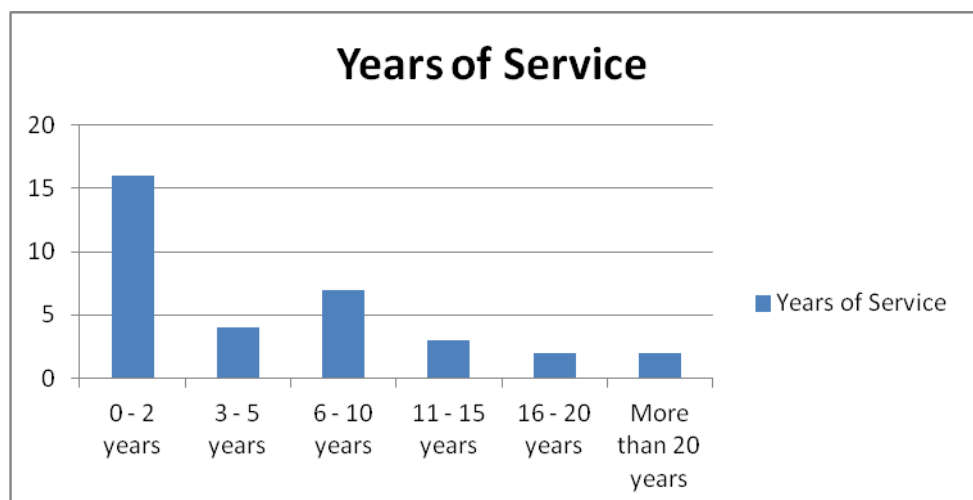
Interestling, forty seven per cent of employees within the organisation only had two or less years service with the company. With twenty percent having six to ten years service with the organisation. Twelve per cent had within three to five years service, with the remaining spread across having between eleven and twenty or more years service. Two respondants surveyed had been employed within the organisation for twenty or more years.
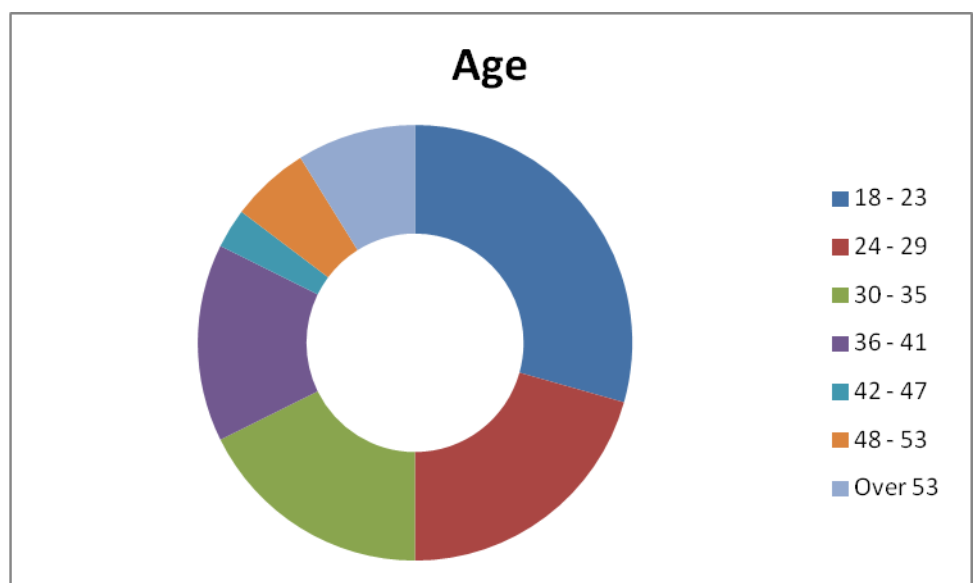
The age profile of the sample surveyed in the organisation is quite young. With twenty nine per cent of employees fallin in the 18-23 age bracket. Twenty one per cent of the sample were aged between 24-29 years, with the other sigifigant age proflies are seventeen per cent falling with the 30-35 bracket, fifteen per cent in the 36-41 age profile and the remaining with one employee aged between 42-47 yeas, two members of staff fell in the 48-53 age bracket and three employees occupying the over 53 years bracket.

There appears to be a relationship between age profile and the years of service to the organisation. Forty seven per cent of employees have had two or less years of service to this particular organisation, which in conjunction with the notable twenty nine per cent whom fall into the 18-23 age bracket it it clear that the organisation itself is having difficulty retaining staff.

The next section analyises thirty six statements that were measured using the Linkert scale. The thrity six statements were further divided down into seven sections that represent employee engagement on cognitative, physical and emotional levels.

Psychological Meaningfullness

Three items were adapted from May *et al.* (2004) survey to measure the degree of meaning that individuals discovered in their work related activities. The three statements poised looked at how employees percieved the imporance of their own work, how personally meaningful the job is to the employee and how they percieve the value of their work.

The work I do on this job is very important to me
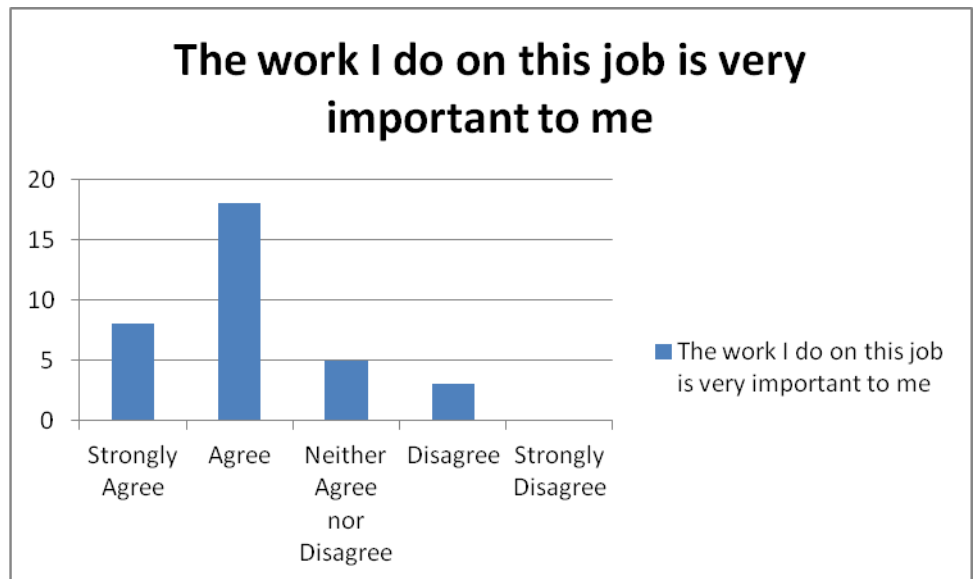
Fifty three per cent of respondants agreed that the work they carry out is signifigant and important to them. While twenty four per cent strongly agreed with the statement.

My job activities are personally meaningfull to me
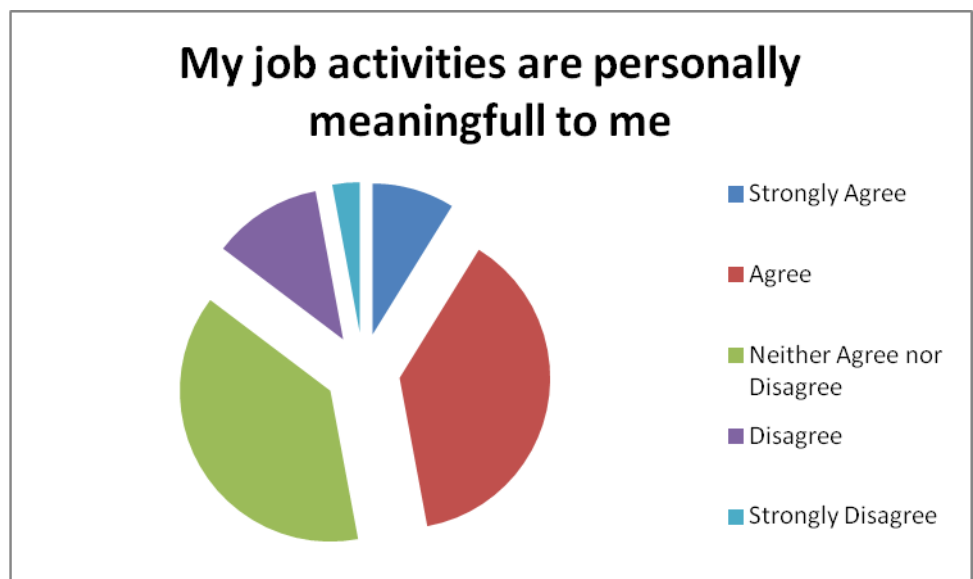
Interestingly, thirty eight per cent neither agreed nor disagreed that their job activities are meaningful to them. Another thirty eight agreed that their job activities were meaningful, while twelve per cent expressed they didn't find their job meaningful.

I feel the work I do on my job is valuable
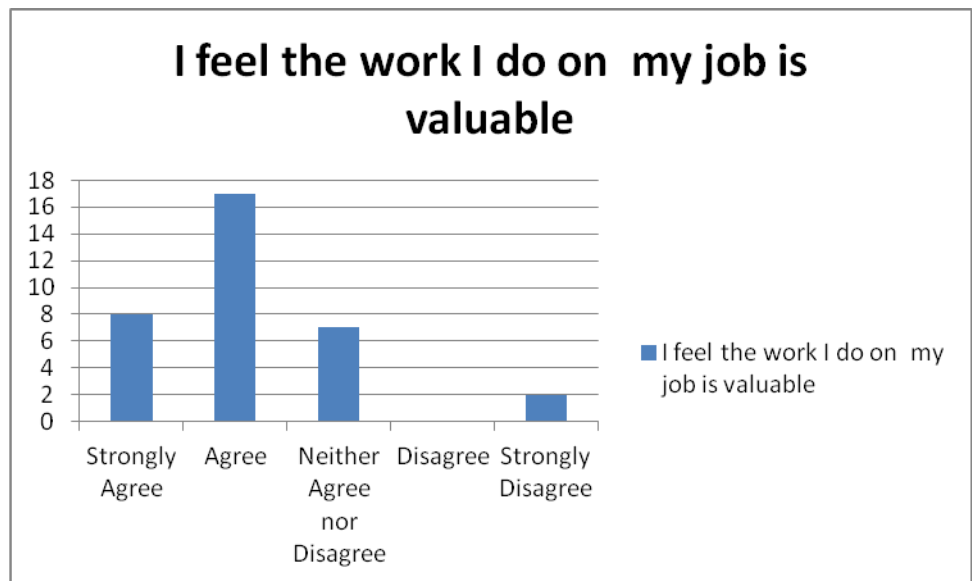
Notably half of the sample surveyed agreed with the statement and find their own work valuable. While twenty four per cent firmly believe the work they carry out is meaningful with twenty per cent neither agreeing or disagreeing.
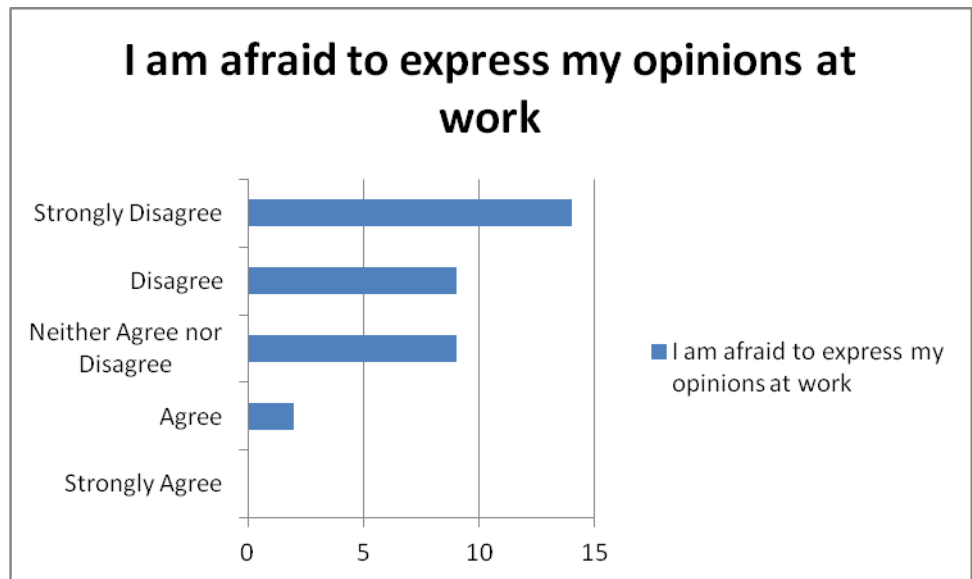
Aside from thirty eight per cent indifferent whether they personally find their job activities meaningfull. It can be concluded that most emolpyees surveyed find their jobs meaningfull which in turn leads to increased levels of engagement. According to Kahn (1990) meaningfulness is associated with roles where employees themselves feel valuable and useful to the organisation. Kahn (1990) went onto proclaim that meaningfulness comes from a sense of competence from the work being carried out and the ability to grow and learn new skills.

Psychological Safety

Kahn (1990, p708) defined psychological safety as "*the feeling of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of neagative consequences to self image, status or career*". Two statements were selected from May *et al.* (2004) syrvey to demomstrate how employees felt within their working environment, whether they felt threathened or comfortable expressing themselves and their opinions.
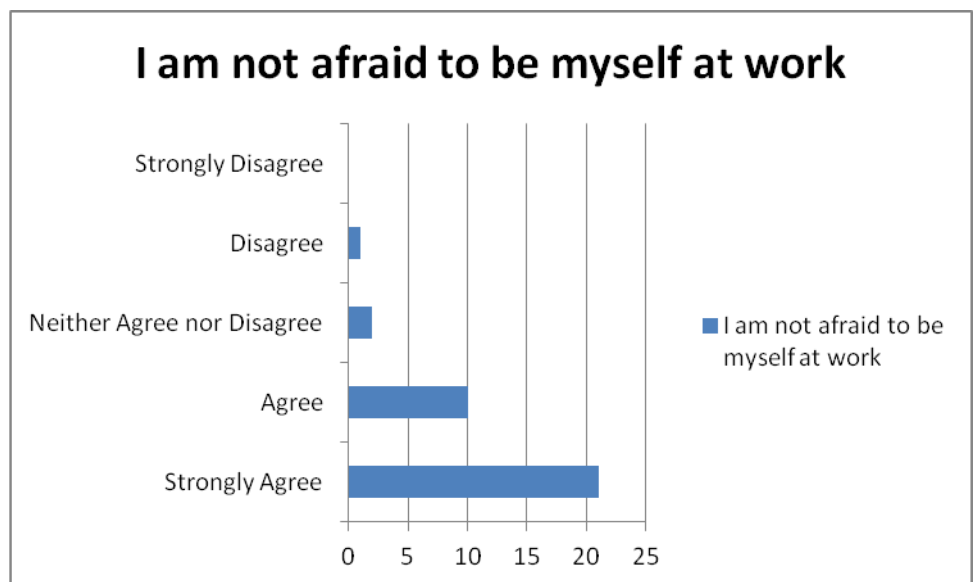
There is a strong element of psychological safety within the organisation with sixty two per cent strongly agreeing and twenty nine agreeing that they are able to be themselves in the workplace.

I am afraid to express my opinions at work

Strongly Disagree	████████████ 14
Disagree	████████ 9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	████████ 9
Agree	██ 2
Strongly Agree	

Legend: ■ I am afraid to express my opinions at work

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15)

A strong response of forty one per cent expressed that they are confident enough to express their opinions and voice how they feel at work. While twenty six percent also felt able to express themselves and their opinions in the work place, a further twenty six per cent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

These stetements represent a high level of psychological safety which is essentsil in engaging employees. Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard & Werner (1998) outlined that psychological safety may be as a result of embracing positive relationships with management and supervisors and and strong relationships with co workers. Engagement levels appear to be moderately high within the organisation. Glen (2006) claims that a safe working environment plays a vital part in employee engagement.

Psychological Availability

Three statements were chosen to represent how individuals percieve their own physical, emotional and cognitive abilities in order to engage at work. May *et al.* (2004, p.17) expressed that psychological availability as the *'confidence of a person to engage in his/herwork role given that individuals engage in many other life activities'*.
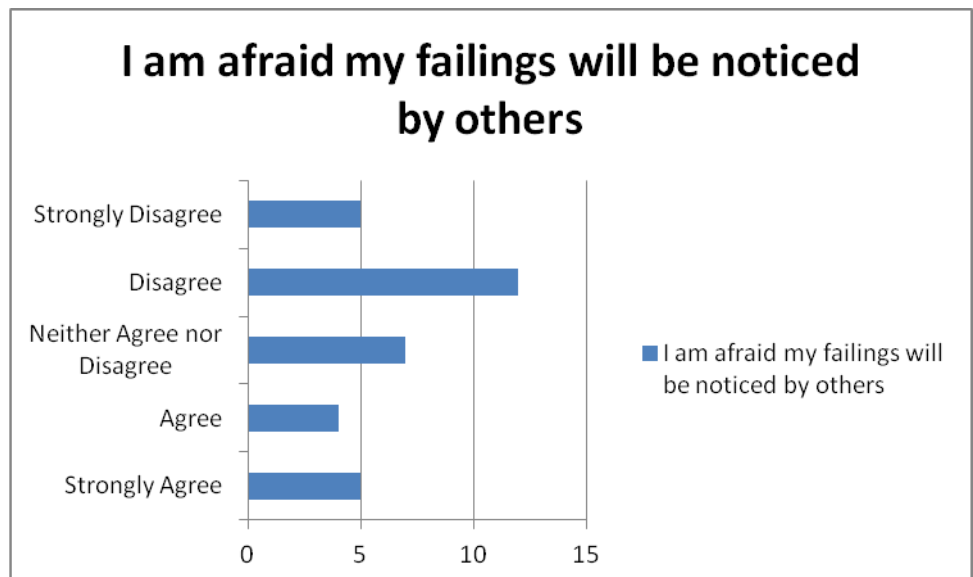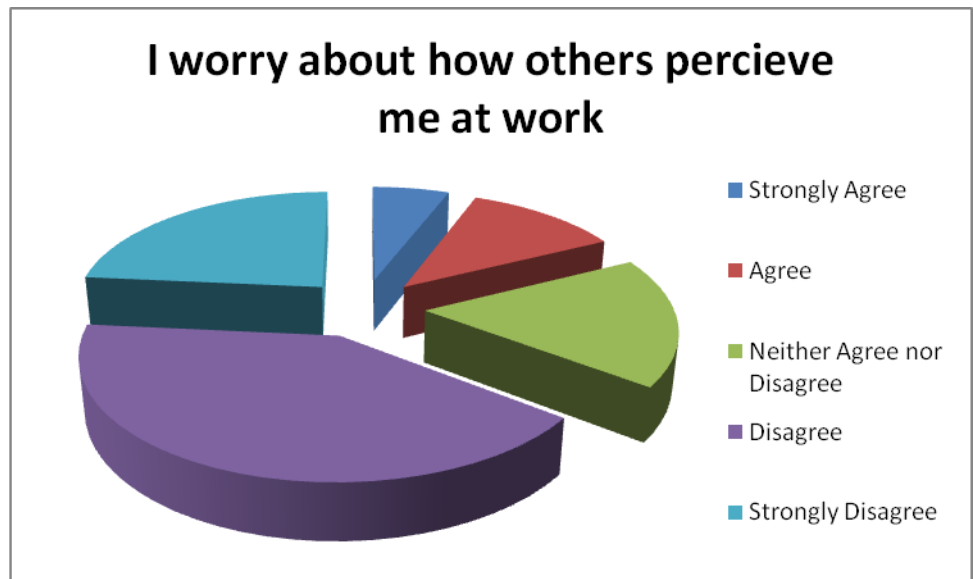
I am confident in my ability to display the appropiate emotions at work
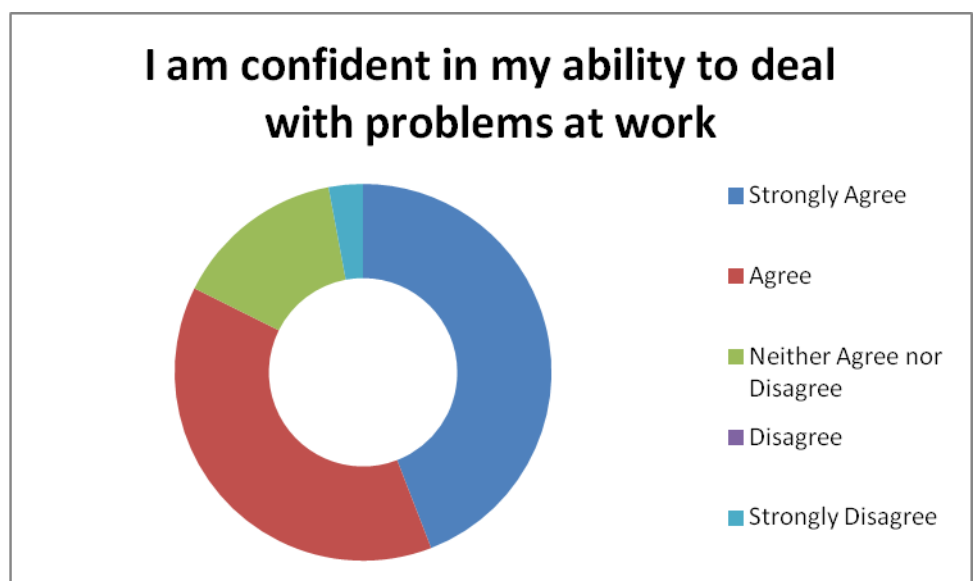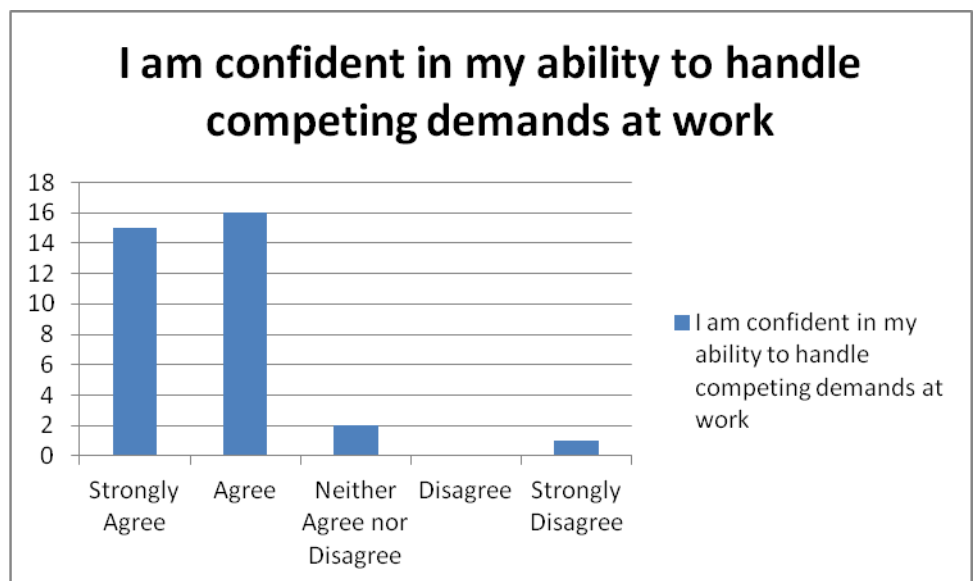
Ninety one per cent of respondants expressed that they feel confident in dealing with competing demands at work, this was reinforced with eighty two per cent of employees surveyed confident in dealing with problems at work and a further seventy one per cent agreeing to have the ability to display the appropriate emotions within the work place. The results suggest a high level of engagement, however, twenty six per cent expressed uncertainty as to whether they have the ability to display appropriate emotions at work, this suggests that participants may not have fully comprehended the statement being put forward.
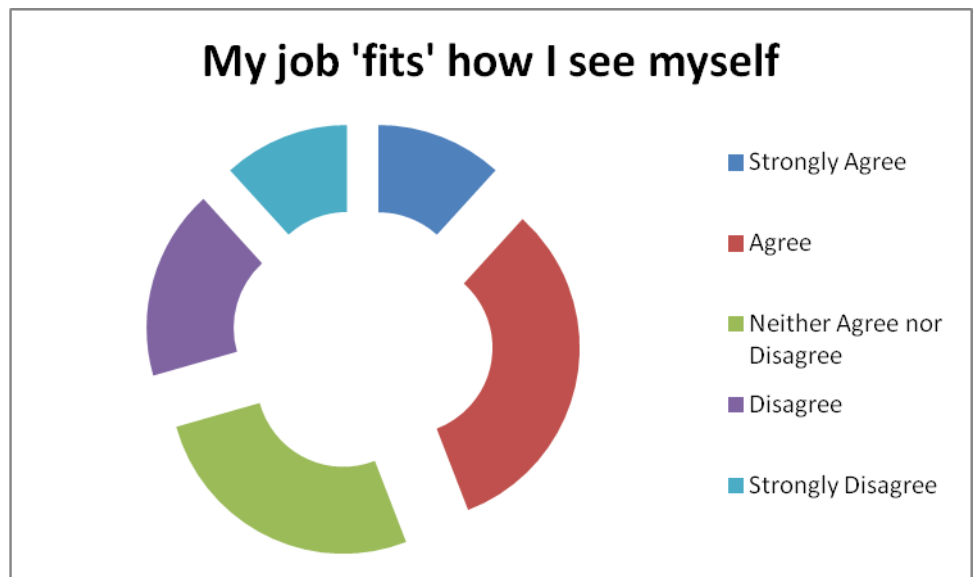
Self Consciousness

Two items from May *et al.* (2004) survey look at whether the individual is effected about how others percieve them at work and judge them.
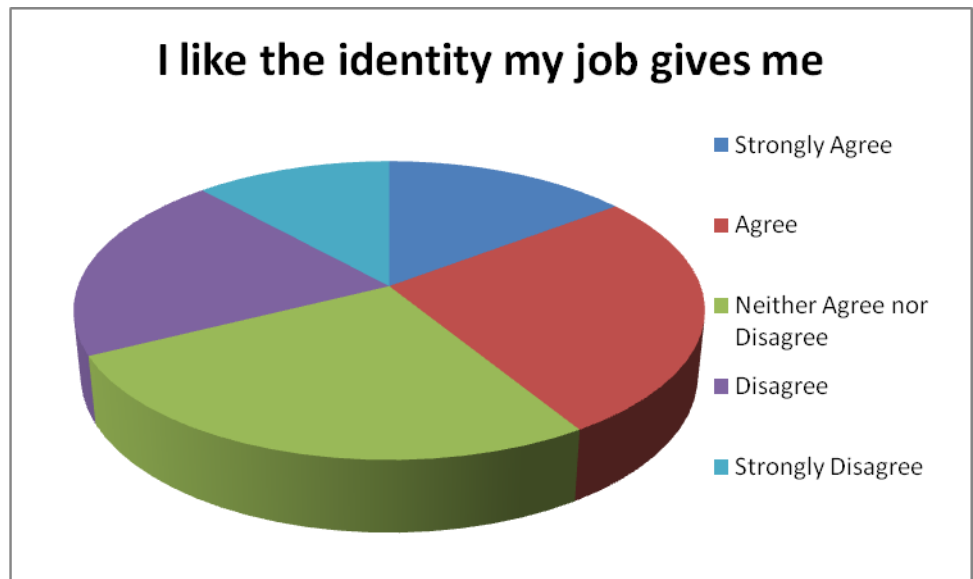
I worry about how others percieve me at work

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I am afraid my failings will be noticed by others

A signifigant sixty five per cent of respondants ststed they are indifferent in caring how others percieve them at work, with fifty per cent unafraid that their failings will be noticed by others. Twenty one per cent neither adgrred nor disagreed that their failings noticed by others in the work place would affect them. This demision ties in with positive co worker relationships and the element of trust and respect among employees.

Work-Fit Role

May *et al.* (2004) stated that work roles that are in alignment with the individuals self concepts lead to higher engagement levels as more meaningful work is provided. The resaercher chose two items to assess the employees work role fit and whether its aligned with their perception of themselves and and their jobs.
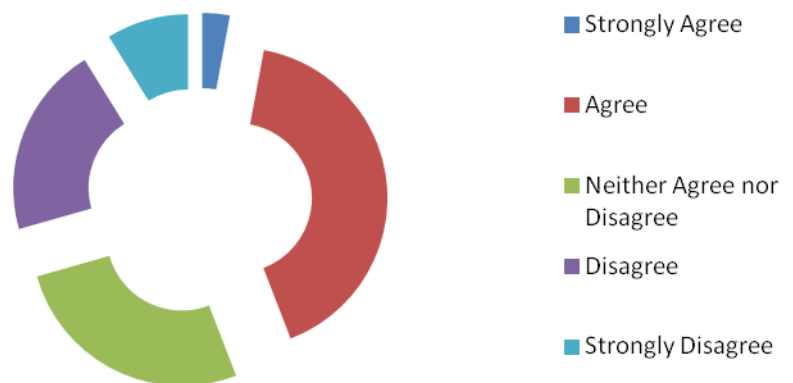
I like the identity my job gives me

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The results for work role fit were not as positive as other dimensions for measuring engagement. Only thirty two per cent of respondants agreed that their job fits them, while forty one per cent were satisfied with the identitiy their jobs gave them. This result is likely as the majority whom participated in the survey questionnaire occupied the lower end paying jobs such as catering assistants, waiting staff and the wash up department, suggesting that employees are mearly just carrying out their jobs to make ends meet.
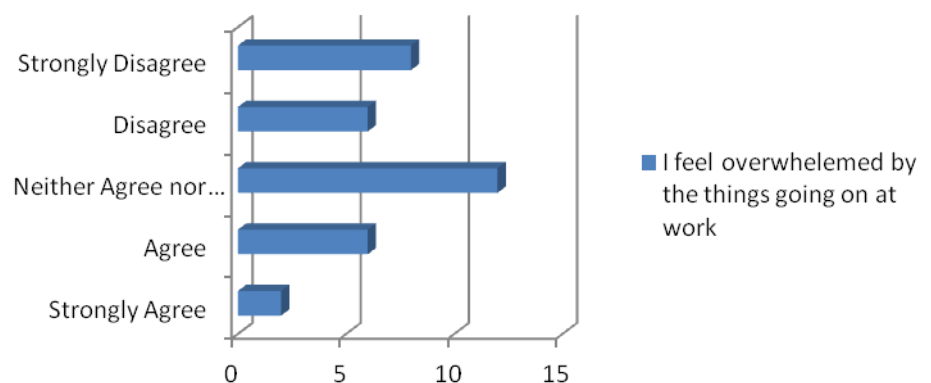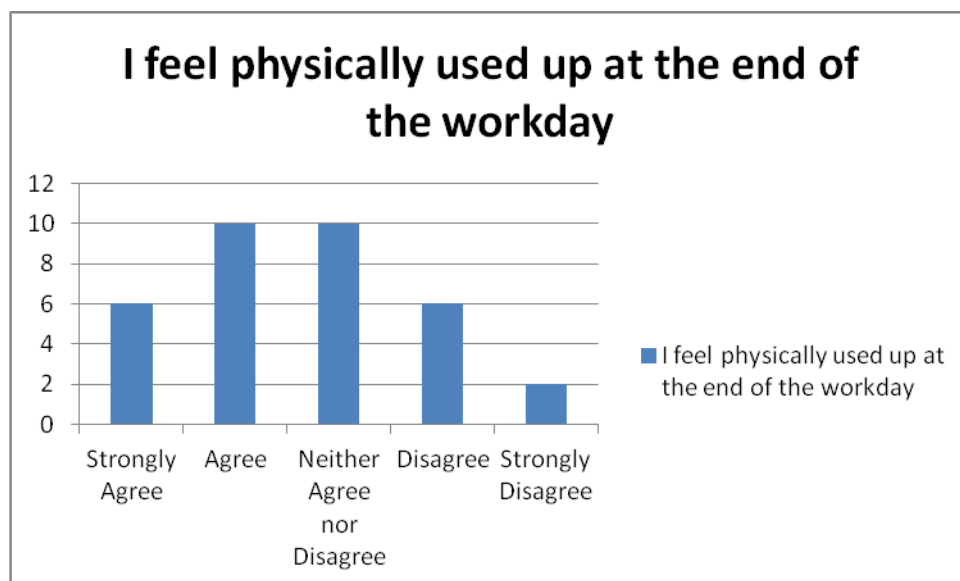
Resources

Three items were chosen from May *et al.* (2004) scale to assist in measuring whether employees have the adequate resources and tools to carry out their jobs and the demands of their work.

I feel mentally sharp at the end of the workday

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I feel overwhelemed by the things going on at work

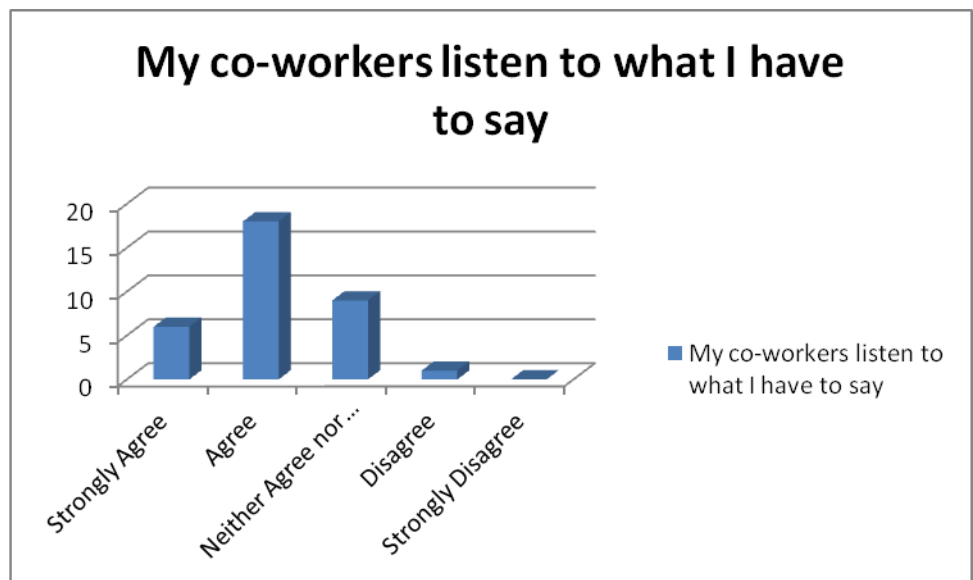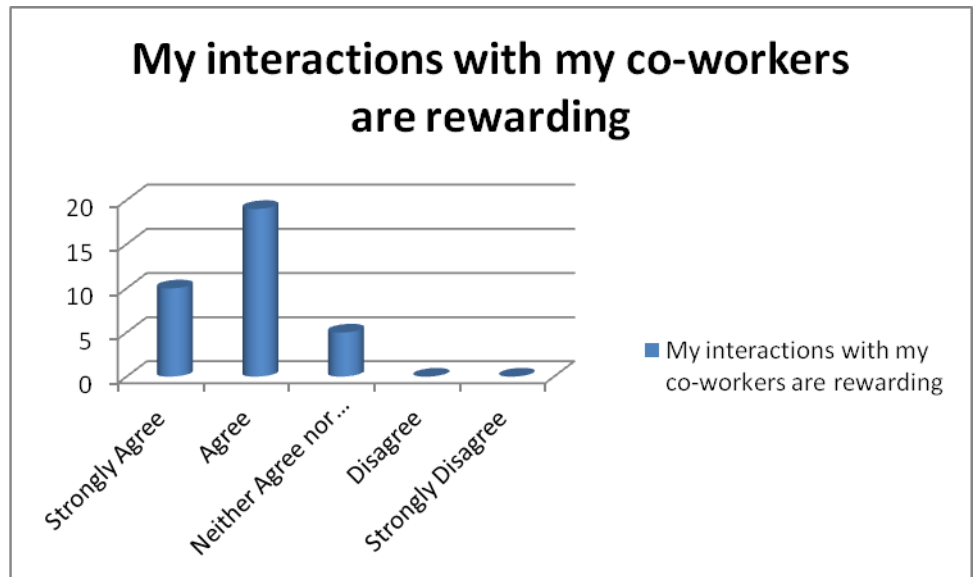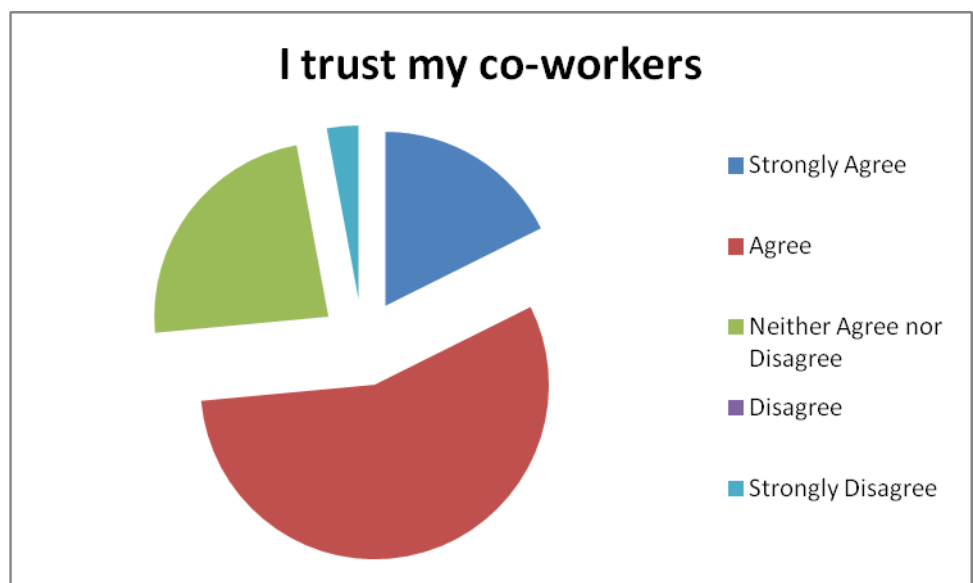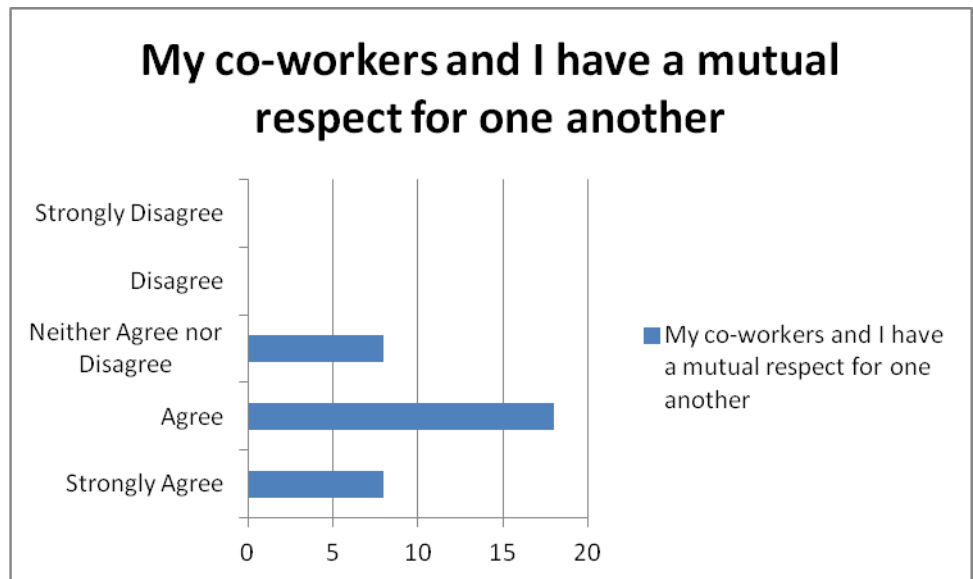## I feel physically used up at the end of the workday

This dimension looks at the individual's perception of whether they possess the necessary resources to meet the physical, emotional and cognitive demands of their work. Interestingly, forty one per cent expressed they feel mentally sharp at the end of the work day, while twenty percent disagreed with the statement. Forty seven per cent agreed and strongly agreed that they felt physically used up at the end of the work day, this is an understandable figure as the majority of those working within the organisation have physically demanding jobs. Sonnentage (2003, p.519) noted "*sufficient recovery during leisure time supports physical and psychological well-being and equips people with the resources needed to be engaged and show dedication, vigour and absorption at work*"

Co-Worker Relations

Four statements were adapted from May *et al* (2004) survey to examine the perception the individual has in the relationship with

their co workers and if their relationship is rewarding. The items look at elements of trust, respect and whether individusls feel they are listened to by their co workers.

My interactions with my co-workers are rewarding

My co-workers listen to what I have to say

My co-workers and I have a mutual respect for one another
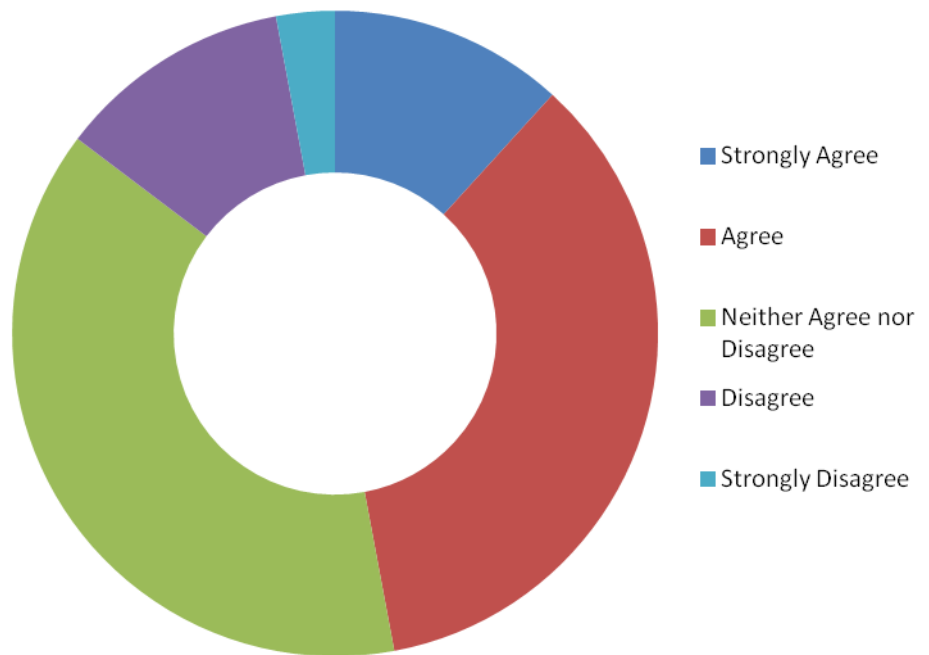

I trust my co-workers

Respondants that took part in survey questionnaire showed positive results in co worker relationships. Glen (2006) found that workplace culture is largely a factor for setting the tone for high engagement as is fostering good a good relationship with co workers. Trust and good relations with colleagues' increases employee engagement as employees tend to feel respected and valued by their colleagues, and
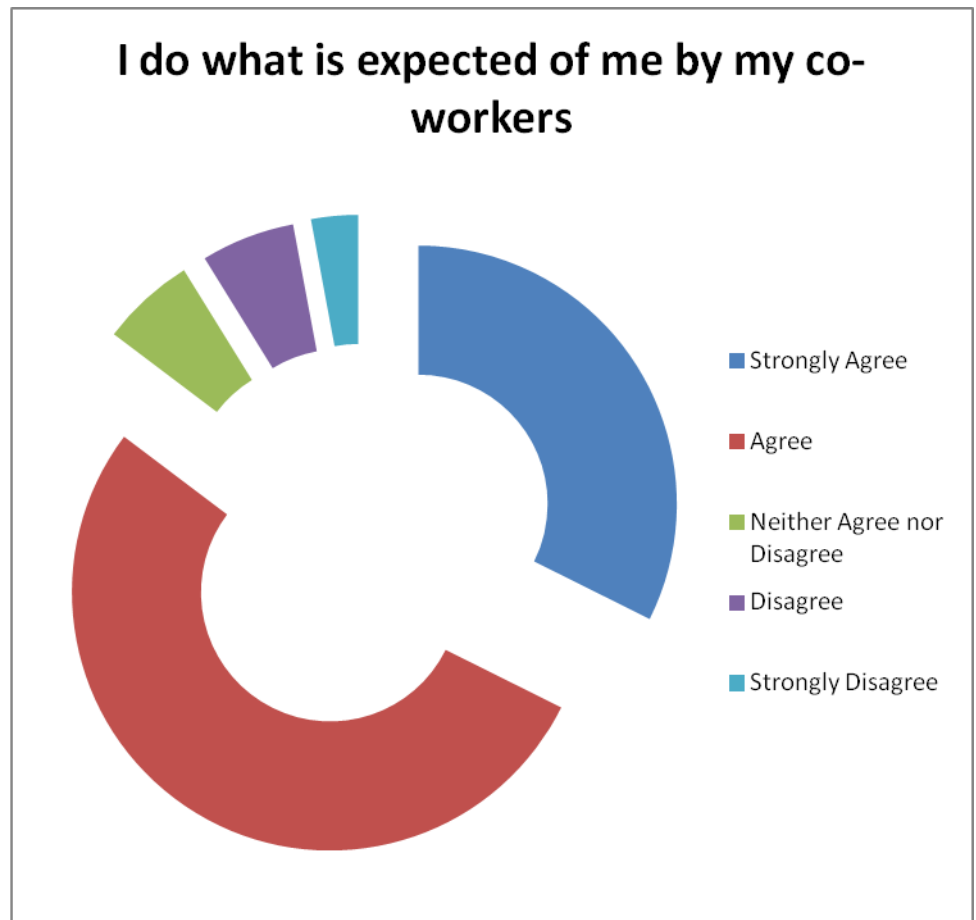
thus are more willing to increase their level of participation and exert more effort for the benefit of the team and its success.

Co-Worker Norm Adherence

The two statements selected investigates whether the individual feels that they fit in and follow what is expected of them by their co workers. Again, similar to the strong co worker relationship within the organisation, the survey showed resukts of positive co worker norm adherence. Eighty five per cent expressed that they are willing to do what is expected of them by their co workers. The 'rock the boat statement' received a mixed results with thirty eight per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing to the statement, while thirty five per cent agreed with the statement.

I don't 'rock the boat' with my co-workers

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I do what is expected of me by my co-workers

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
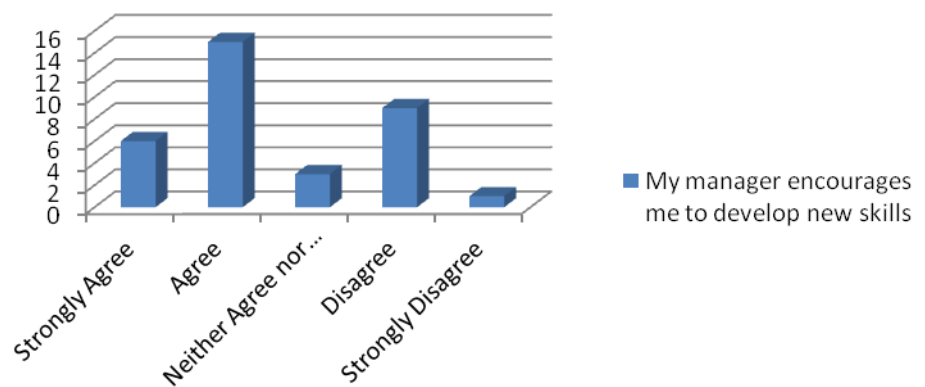- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Supervisor and Management Relations

Eight items were devised from May *et al.* (2004) engagement survey that looked at the employees relationship with their manager or supervisor. Questions spanned across from trustworthyness, whether the manager is helpful with regarding problems at work, encouraging and fair.

My manager helps me solve work related problems
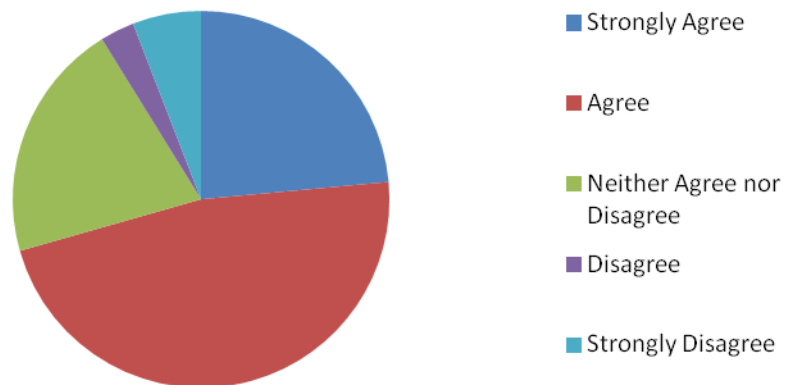
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

My manager encourages me to develop new skills

- My manager encourages me to develop new skills

My manager keeps informed about how employees think and feel about things

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree

My manager encourages employees to participate in important decisions

Legend:
- My manager encourages employees to participate in important decisions

My manager praises good work

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Employees are treated fairly by my manager

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I trust my manager

A bar chart titled "I trust my manager" showing responses across five categories:
- Strongly Agree: 8
- Agree: 19
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 4
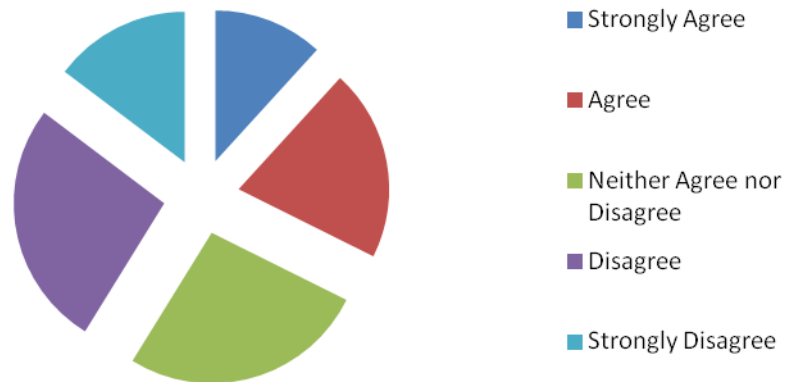- Disagree: 1
- Strongly Disagree: 2
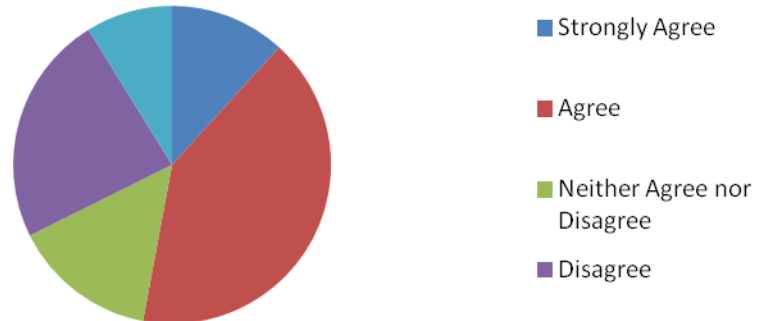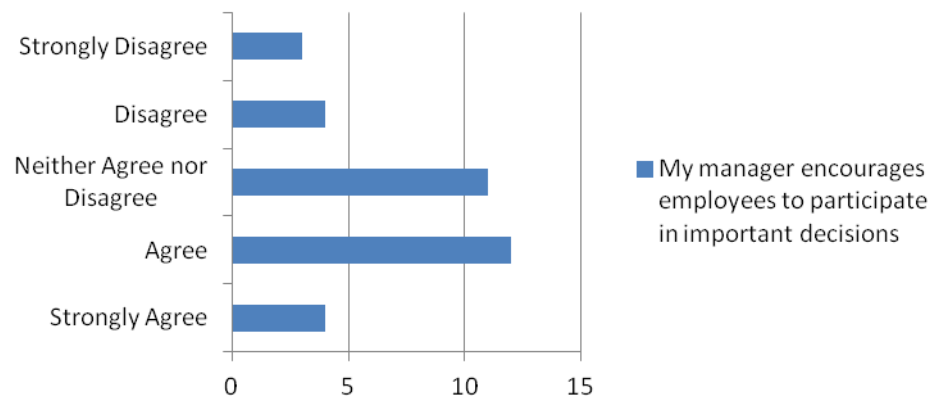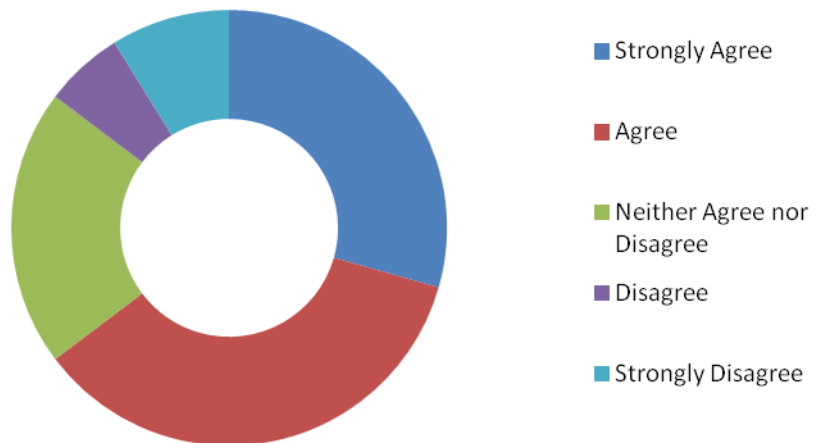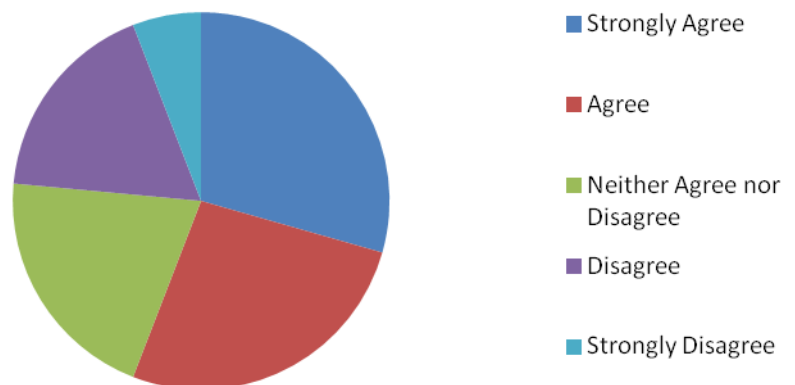
All statements that fell under the supportative manager demension received positive results, indicating that managers are actively engaged with their staff. Positive relationships with management is a key driver for employee engagement and the organisation is fostering this denension well. Robinson *et al*, (2004, p.15) outlined that engagement is a *"sense of feeling valued and involved".* The CIPD (2006) also reported that the "feeling of being well informed about what is happening in the organization" and "thinking that their manager is committed to the organization" were other important drivers of achieving high employee engagement.

Cognitative

Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Thirty two per cent strongly agreed and agreed that their jobs are so absorbing they forget about everything, twenty six per cent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, while forty one per cent disagreed that their jobs were too absorbing.

Time passes quickly when I perform my job

- Time passes quickly when I perform my job
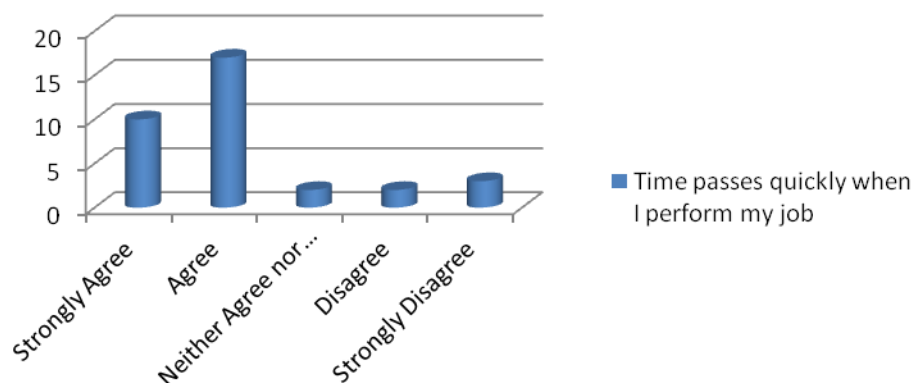
Seventy nine per cent positively answered that time passes quickly while performing their job. This indicates a high level of engagement as employees lose track of time they are so engrossed in their work.

Emotional
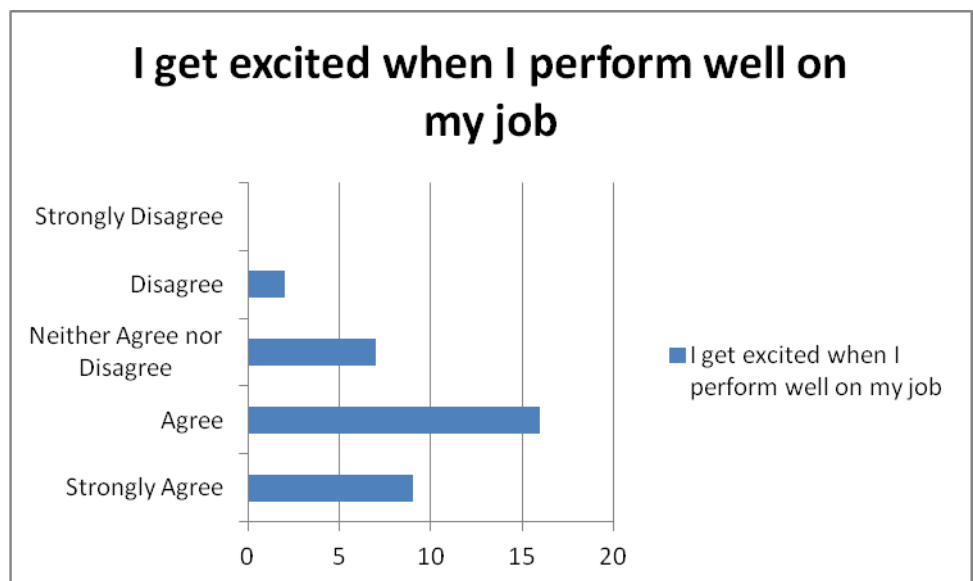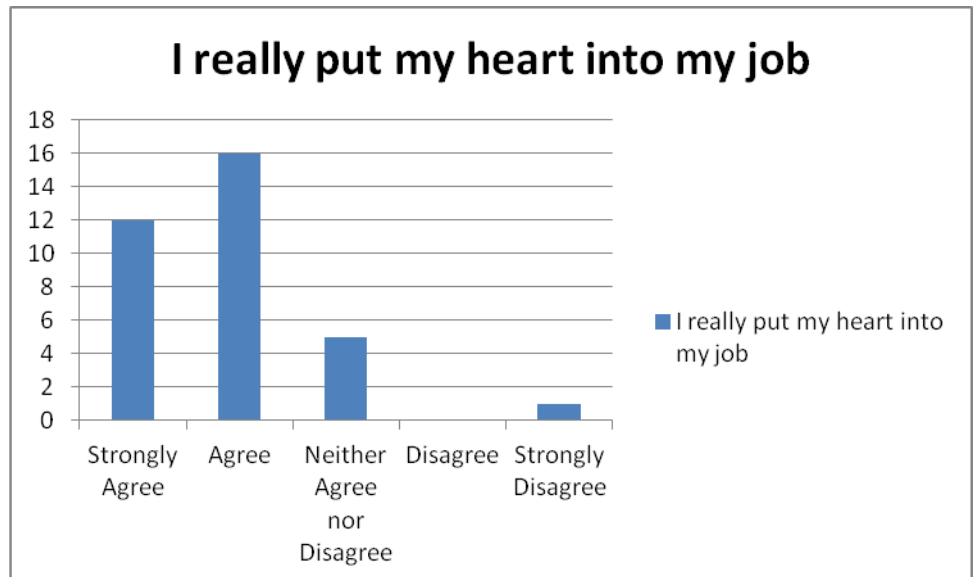
Again, the emotional dimension yielded positive results as eighty two per cent expressed they put their all into their job, while seventy four per cent of respondents stated that they feel excited when they perform well in their job. The ISR (2005) claimed that engagement includes three dimensions, physical, emotional and cognitive dimension.

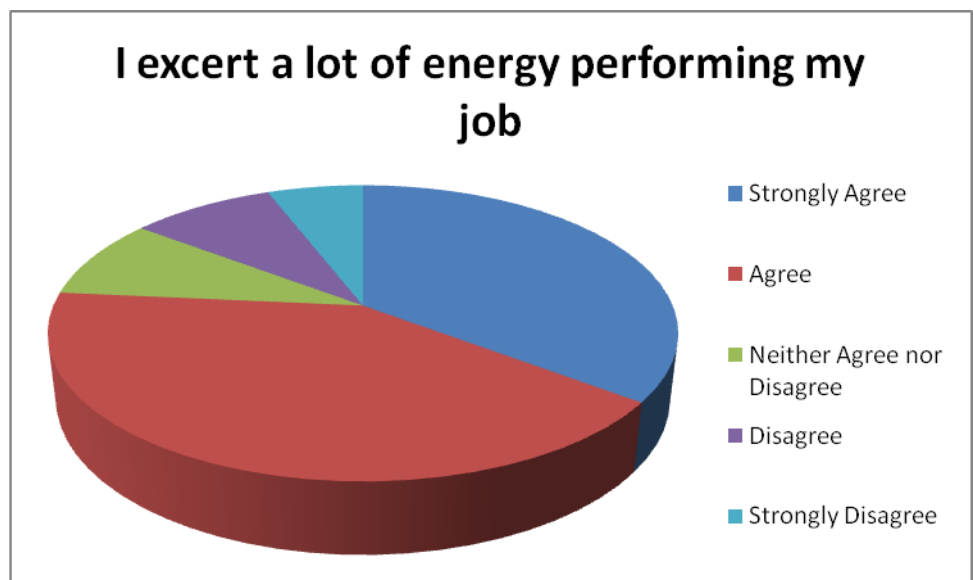The physical dimension refers how employees give extra effort performing in their job; the physical dimension can also be referred to as the behavioral dimension and relates to how employees act while performing their job. The emotional dimension looks to how employees feel about the work they carry out, the company and its management. Finally the cogitative dimension relates to how employees support the goals of the organisation and whether they believe in its values and leadership. Thus engagement can be deemed to be high within the organisation.

Physical

I excert a lot of energy performing my job

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I stay until the job is done

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
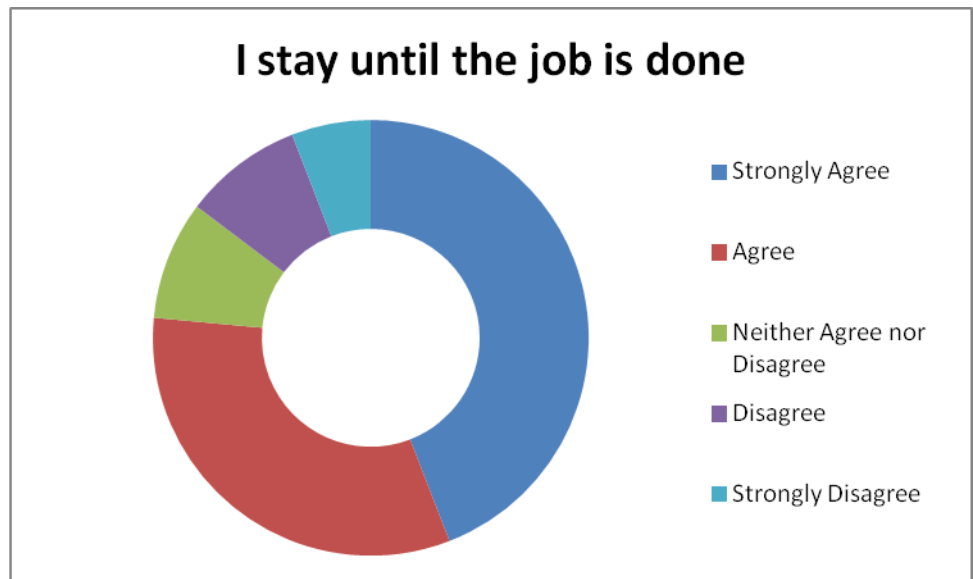
Like the cognitative demension, the physical construct reported a high seventy six per cent of respondants that exceed a lot of enegry while performing their job and expressed that they would stay in the work place until the job at hand is complete.

Job Enrichment

My manager gives me autonomy in my work

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	6
Agree	18
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	1
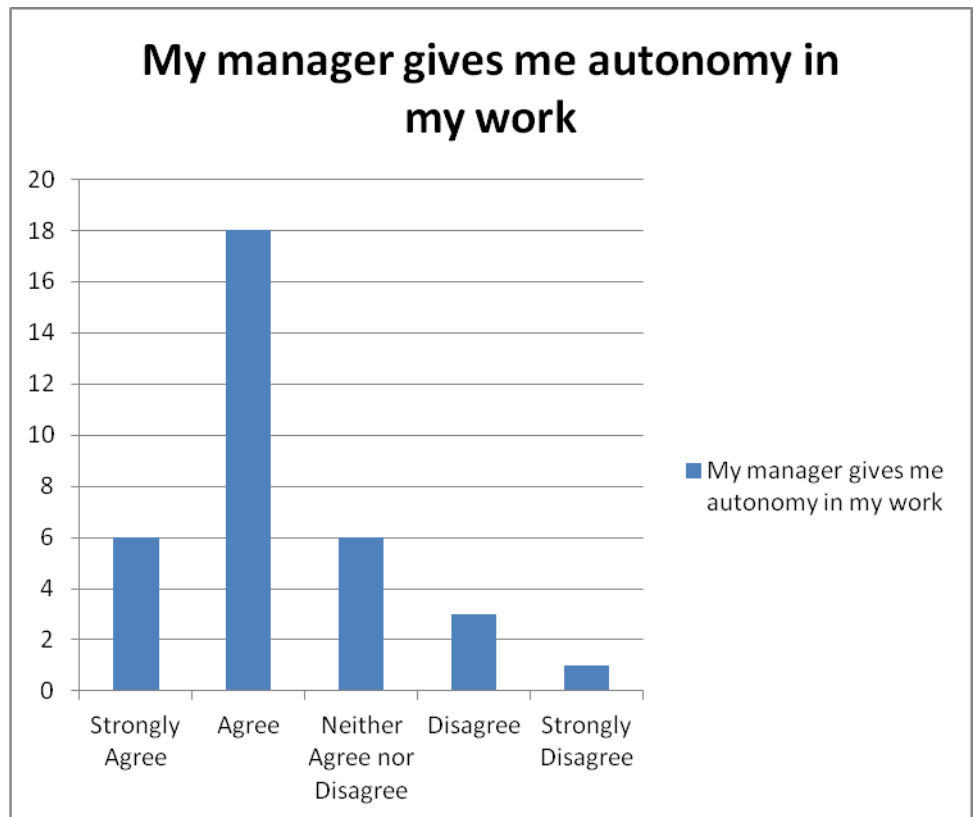
Seventy per cent of respondants expressed that their manager gives them autonomy in their work. This links in with a high level of employee engagement as there is an element of trustworthiness and a positive manager supervisory relationship with employees.

Physical Engagement

I avoid working overtime whenever possible
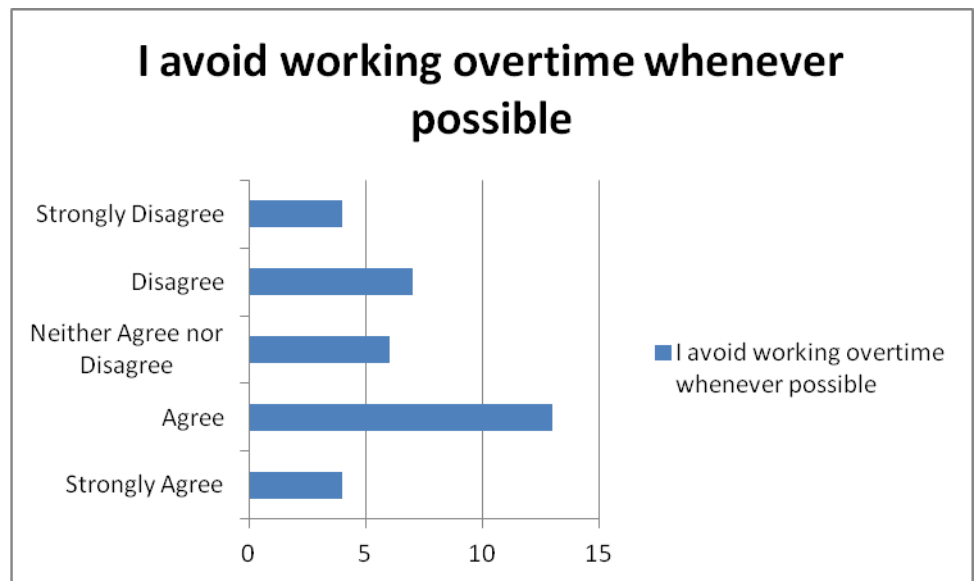
Half of the sample surveyed expressed that they would avoid working overtime whenever possible. This links in negatively with the physical construct of engagement as seventy six per cent of respondents stated they are willing to stay at the work place until the job is complete.

The question 'is employee engagement measured in the organisation' was poised at participants in which sixty eight of the respondents answered yes while the remaining thirty two per cent claimed that engagement is not measured within the organisation.

It is evident that employee engagement has not been communicated to all members of staff as some as still left in the dark as to what engagement is and what effects it can have on their work.

Is Engagement Measured
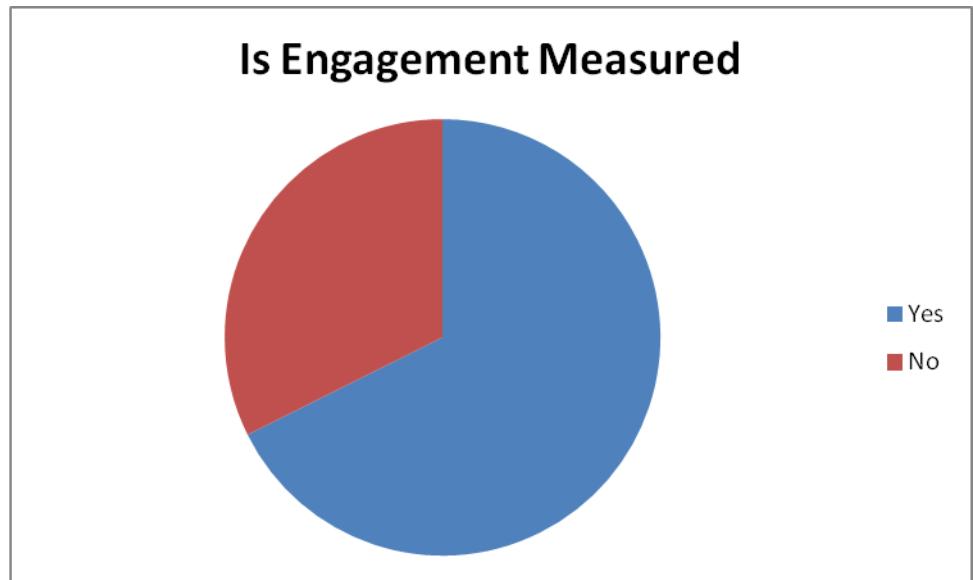
The final question of the survey was an open ended question that asked participants to make recommendations to the organisation on how to create and increase an engaged workforce.

The most cited recommendation made by staff was in relation to communication. Employees expressed they would be eager to have more two way communication with management listening to what they have to say. Another suggestion made was for management to hold weekly/fortnightly meetings with all members of staff keeping them informed as to how the organisation is performing, what improvements can be made and allow staff the opportunity to have a say in how the business is run and make suggestions on how work could be carried out more efficiently and effectively.

Another recommendation that reoccurred throughout the surveys was the need for career development and progression. As most of the staff fall within the age bracket of 18-23, it is important to utilise their talents and experience gained and develop them into supervisory and managerial roles. Career progression opportunities are likely to keep staff engaged and increase productivity.

Finally, the third reoccurring recommendation from staff came in the form of seeking recognition and respect from management for the hard work they complete and the targets they meet. This recognition need not necessarily come in the form of financial reward but a simple appreciation of the work completed would suffice.

Chapter Five

<u>Conclusion and Recommendations</u>

To conclude, this dissertation was aimed at investigating employee engagement within Ireland's food service industry. The research was carried out in a small subsidiary on the outskirts of Dublin. The organisation as a whole is one of Irelands largest food service providers across various sectors from business and industry, education, government and healthcare. However, only a small proportion was examined in the authors chosen subsidery. The literature on engagement is broad and complex and often conflicts in terms of having a single definition of engagement and one agreed upon measure of engagement.

The first research question addressed aimed to distinguish whether there was varying levels of engagement between different categories of staff. The research showed little variance in the level of engagement among the various categories of staff surveyed.

The second research question addressed the objective of measuring the level of engagement within the organisation. Levels of engagement within the organisation were found to be relatively high considering the work being carried out. May, Gilson & Harter (2004) Scale of Engagement was adjusted to measure levels of engagement

within the organisation. The survey questionnaire looked at dimensions of engagement such as psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, psychological availability, work-role fit, co-workers relations, co-worker norm adherence, supervisor and manager relations, resources and self-consciousness as well as looking at physical, emotional and cogitative engagement.

Psychological safety, co-worker relations, supervisor and manager relations and psychological availability all came out on top with positive agreements to the various statements.

The third objective of the dissertation was to make recommendations to the organisation on how to increase and obtain high levels of engagement. Employees across the board were asked to put forward their views on what they felt would help keep employees engaged. Increased communication was first on the agenda with many respondents requesting that communication become a two way street. It was further suggested that a weekly/fortnightly meeting be devised as a means for facilitating the need for increased communication between managers and employees and keeping staff updated and engaged on how the organisation is performing, what improvements can be made, as well as allocating a time where staff can make suggestions on where to cut costs, and how work can be carried out more effectively and allow staff to have an input in business related decisions.

Another recommendation that was mentioned numerous times by employees was the need for providing career development and progression. As the majority of the employees surveyed for this dissertation formed the profile of the unskilled worker by filling roles such as catering assistants, waiting staff and members of the wash up department, it would be advisable for the organisation to offer these categories of staff a developmental programme and allow them to progress through the organisation. Robinson *et al* (2004) noted that providing opportunities for employees to develop in their jobs is a key driver in employee engagement.

Lastly, employees suggested a greater emphasis be placed on rewards and recognition. Staff noted that greater attention should be placed on recognition and managers should notice and appreciate the hard work that is being carried out. Financial reward was not suggested, but a mere appreciation or gesture shown to staff when targets are met and work is carried out efficiently and effectively. Maslach *et al* (2001) illustrated that recognition and rewards along with a system that is deemed fair and just are other key factors in driving employee engagement within the organisation.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The key strength of the research carried out was the survey questionnaire's reliability and validity. The statements adopted from May, Gilson & Harter's Scale for Engagement were intrinsically

linked back to the literature and the dimensions and constructs that form employee engagement.

However, one of the limitations that author experienced was not utilising the research method of triangulation for their studies. By combing May, Gilson and Harters Scale for Engagement survey questionnaire with semi structured interviews, the researcher would have obtained a greater insight into employee engagement within the organisation.

Another limitation the author considered was the small sample size used within this study. The author aimed to investigate employee engagement within Ireland's food service industry and this simply could not have been adequately obtained by measuring the results of a small subsidiary based on the outskirts of Dublin. It would have been more feasible for the author to measure engagement across a number of the organisations subsidiaries across the varying sectors of business and industry, education, government and healthcare.

Recommendations

This dissertation aim was to provide recommendations to the organisation on how to obtain high levels of engagement. It would be advisable for the organisation to devise an engagement plan and introduce it to the organisations HR policies. First and foremost, Robinson *et al* (2004) suggests that engagement is a two way process and in order for employees to become more committed to their work

they needs to operate within a working environment that is fair and trustworthy.

Goals and objectives should be communicated to employees so they understand what is expected from them and their work.

Employees should be given the chance to progress within the organisation and develop and enhance their skills.

A fair and just rewards system should be put in place that rewards and recognises employees whom have gone above and beyond and excelled at their job.

It is advisable that these recommendations and changes come into play as soon as possible as an engaged workforce has numerous benefits to the organisation and the business as a whole by increasing customer loyalty, reducing turnover, increasing creativity and innovation and productivity. Engagement levels be measured and assessed quarterly during the initial start-up of the engagement programme and bi annually once the programme has been established and the organisation is reaping its beneficial outcomes.

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Appendix

My name is Kate Hughes. I am a student of National College of Ireland, and am currently undertaking a Master's program in Human Resource Management. As part of my course I am required to complete a dissertation. My research is a study of employee engagement within Irelands Food Service Industry. I would be very grateful if you could assist me in completing this survey regarding engagement levels and commitment to employers within the organisation.

Although your participation is voluntary, I would be grateful if you would take part in it as this will contribute to the reliability and validity of the data gathered in the research study.

I guarantee that the results of this survey will be kept anonymous and results will only be made visible to myself, and my lecturers at NCI. No information will be passed to employers and there are no identifying questions included.

I would appreciate if you could also share this survey with any willing participants who are also employed within the organisation. This survey will only take 5-10 minutes to complete.

I thank you greatly in advance for your participation and cooperation. If you wish to discuss this survey or enquire about the research please

do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Kate Hughes

kate.hughes@student.ncirl.ie

Please Place an 'X' in the relevant box

Q1. Male_____   Female_____

Q2. How Many Years Service have you with the organisation

0 -2 years   _____

3 – 5 years   _____

6 - 10 years   _____

11 – 15 years   _____

16 – 20 years   _____

More than 20 years   _____

Q3. What age bracket do you fall into?

18 – 23 _____

24 – 29 _____

30 – 35 _____

36 – 41 _____

42 – 47 _____

48 – 53 _____

Over 53 ____

Q4. Please indicate your job title in the space provided.

_____

Q5. Please indicate if you agree with the below statements by choosing one of the five

options . Please number the appropriate line space for your answer.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Agree

3= Neither Agree nor Disagree

4= Disagree

5=Strongly Disagree

- I feel mentally sharp at the end of the workday.

    _____

- Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else

    _____

- Time passes quickly when I perform my job.

    _____

- I really put my heart into my job

  _____

- I get excited when I perform well on my job.

  _____

- I exert a lot of energy performing my job.

  _____

- I stay until the job is done

  _____

- The work I do on this job is very important to me

  _____

- My job activities are personally meaningful to me.

  _____

- I feel that the work I do on my job is valuable

  _____

- I'm not afraid to be myself at work.

  _____

Q6. Please indicate if you agree with the below statements by choosing one of the five options. Please fill in the appropriate number for your answer in the space provided.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Agree

3= Neither Agree nor Disagree

4= Disagree

5= Strongly Disagree

- I am confident in my ability to handle competing demands at work.

    _____

- I am confident in my ability to deal with problems that come up at work.   _____

- I am confident in my ability to display the appropriate emotions at work. _____

- My job 'fits' how I see myself.

    _____

- I like the identity my job gives me.

    _____

- My interactions with my co-workers are rewarding.

    _____

- My co-workers listen to what I have to say.

    _____

- My co-workers and I have mutual respect for one another.

    _____

- I trust my co-workers.

    _____

- My manager helps me solve work-related problems.

    _____

- My manager encourages me to develop new skills.

    _____

- My manager keeps informed about how employees think and feel about things.

    _____

Q7. Please indicate if you agree with the below statements by choosing one of the five options. Please fill in the appropriate number for your answer in the space provided.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Agree

3= Neither Agree nor Disagree

4= Disagree

5= Strongly Disagree

- My manager encourages employees to participate in important decisions.   _____

- My manager praises good work

     _____

- Employees are treated fairly by my manager

     _____

- My manager gives me autonomy in my work

  _____

- I trust my manager.

  _____

- I avoid working overtime whenever possible.

  _____

- I am afraid to express my opinions at work

  _____

- I don't 'rock the boat' with my co-workers.

  _____

- I do what is expected of me by my co-workers.

  _____

- I feel overwhelmed by the things going on at work.

  _____

- I feel physically used up at the end of the workday.

  _____

- I worry about how others perceive me at work

   _____

- I am afraid my failings will be noticed by others.

Q8. Is engagement measured within the organisation? Yes/ No

   _____

Q9. What recommendations would you give to assist in keeping employees engaged?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____