Employee Engagement : A Line Managers Role

By

Seamus Brady

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Authorship Declaration

I herby certify that this material, which I submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) 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 Seamus Brady

Date 27/9/13

Student Number X08870349

Abstract

In the competitive business environment, much has been written about the important role of human capital in helping to create a competitive advantage. In an environment where the global recession has led to many organisations having to cut costs and increase performance while also producing a stronger focus on customer care, the solution of how to achieve these goals can be found in having an engaged workforce.

This study explored the topic of employee engagement in the public sector. The premise of this paper is that the work environment an employee works in must be conducive to the ingredients of employee engagement (trust, support, encouragement) before an employee will choose to engage in their role and that this work environment is influenced significantly by an employee's Line Manager.

The research question sought to measure the effects a Line Manager has on employee engagement in the public sector, a sector which has been hit hard by the global recession.

Research was conducted by using a two-part questionnaire which sought to determine a McGregor classification for each participant to this study before measuring their levels of engagement.

The findings indicate a strong link between the approach taken by the Line Manager and an employee's levels of engagement. Results indicate that employees respond to a McGregor Theory Y classification by displaying a commitment and enthusiasm to their role within the organisation. Respondents who felt their Line Manager had an approach which was supportive and trusting indicated that they take pride in their work and will exert extra effort while at work.

Dedication

This Dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful wife Lorraine. Thank you for all your help and encouragement, without which I could not have completed this paper.

This Dissertation is also dedicated to our wonderful children; Emma, Adam, Kate and James. It is my hope that seeing your dad studying hard will have a positive impact on all of you.

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Chapter One - Introduction

In the competitive business environment, much has been written about the important role of human capital in helping to create a competitive advantage. Employees are commonly viewed as an organisations most valuable assets and can help to create a competitive advantage. In an environment where the global recession has led to many organisations having to cut costs and increase performance while also producing a stronger focus on customer care, the solution to how to achieve these goals can be found in having an engaged workforce.

1.1 **Dissertation Topic**

The topic for this dissertation is Employee Engagement, a term which is certainly in vogue in the current climate. There are several definitions for employee engagement with (Sahoo & Mishra, 2012) describing it as the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee fully engaged in their role; understands how important their role is to the success of the organisation and is willing to do all they can 'willingly' to ensure the success of the organisation.

Unprecedented change in an increasingly global marketplace (Sarkar, 2011) has resulted in employers seeking to balance the scales of economic uncertainty and thinned resources through having a fully engaged workforce (Pater & Lewis, 2012). In the past, academics such as Gunnigle (2007) suggested that employees are an organisations most valuable assets and can create a unique competitive advantage. However, Sarkar (2011) appears to modify this view by implying that it is only engaged employees who are assets to the organisation. This view is supported by the sheer volume of academic literature available on the engagement construct which continually emphasises the benefits of an engaged employee who: exhibits

discretionary effort (Frank et al, 2004); who brings their hearts and minds to their job (Maylett & Nielson, 2012) and who are emotionally attached to their organisation (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).

The view of Sarakar (2011) that it is only engaged employees who are assets to an organisation gains further support by Pater & Lewis (2012) who discuss the opposite of engagement - Disengagement. Disengagement, they suggest is a term used to describe an individual who is disinterested in their job and the organisation and is 'retired on active duty' and results in disengaged employees "eroding an organisations bottom line while breaking the spirit of employees in the process" (Pater & Lewis, 2012, p32).

In spite of its importance and the efforts employers and managers exert into fostering an environment conducive to it, employee engagement is something which can be elusive. This is because engagement is a deeply personal emotion, one where an employee either feels they want to work to the best of their ability or they simply do not. There are many factors which influence an individual's desire to work to the best of their ability and to be ready for new challenges.

An employee's Line Manager plays a pivotal role in whether an employee decides to fully engage in their work, or whether they will disengage and not work to their full potential. The approach taken by Line Managers sets the tone for an employees working environment. When their Line Manager engages in classical or transactional leadership styles, this results in negative outcomes from employees (Soieb, Othman & D'Silva, 2013).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This paper is based on the premise that the work environment an employee works in must be conducive to the ingredients of employee engagement (trust, support, encouragement) before an employee will choose to engage in their role.

There are many things which influence whether an individual decides to fully engage in their work or to disengage and withdraw themselves from their role. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role the Line Manager has on employee engagement.

The researcher has chosen to conduct this study in the public sector, a sector which has not escaped the full force of the global recession. The collapse of the banking sector resulted in unprecedented scrutiny for the public sector. In the past, the Irish Government subsidised several public sector departments to help them balance the books. However, this grant was gradually reduced (see Appendix F for full figures). In a bid to work within the constraints of a smaller budget, early retirement schemes were introduced successfully and as a result there are fewer employees who are expected to work harder than before.

To maintain the highest levels of performance, managers require employees to work to their full potential, to be prepared to take on extra tasks and to understand the needs of the organisation, in essence, they require an engaged workforce.

1.3 Research Question

The research question is based on the engagement construct. In the modern business environment, unlike in times gone by, the public sector must compete with the private sector which is new ground for managers and employees within the public sector. Performance levels now have a direct connection with the performance of the organisation as employee engagement and organisational performance are highly interlinked (Concelman, 2005) and employee engagement drives bottom-line results (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

These comments highlight the importance of employee engagement and underline why employers see engagement as an important barometer of how the organisation is performing now and how it is equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

With the public sector firmly under the microscope after the Croke Park Agreement, the need for all employees within the public sector to produce the highest possible standards of performance are more important now than at any other time. This requires employees to be fully engaged in their roles, however, employee engagement is a deeply personal state of mind whereby the employee can choose to fully engage or disengage depending upon how they view their work environment; an environment which is profoundly affected by the employees Line Manager.

Relatively little is known about how employee engagement can be influenced by management (Sahoo & Mishra, 2012), so this research paper will attempt to develop an understanding of how much influence Line Managers have on employee engagement.

Pointing to the fact that studies consistently illuminate low levels of employee trust in organisational leadership, Pater & Lewis (2012) suggest that leaders have their work cut out for them to bridge the gap between a disengaged workforce and an engaged one. However, one has to first find out whether employees are indeed engaged or disengaged before deciding what steps to take.

With little research undertaken (to the researchers knowledge) pertaining to employee engagement and in the public sector, it is hoped that this paper will provide some answers about the levels of engagement, with these finding providing a basis upon which further research can be conducted to further investigate this topical subject.

The research question for this study is:

This paper will attempt to measure the effects Line Managers have on Employee Engagement in the public sector.

1.4 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy a researcher chooses to help conduct their study. This research design must incorporate the different components of the study which will all come together to form the overall plan for the research paper.

In planning a research design for this study, the researcher chose a quantitative methodology approach as this created a better opportunity to engage a larger number of employees in the study as opposed to a qualitative approach. As this study is looking at measuring the effects Line Managers have on employee engagement, a two part questionnaire was decided upon. The first part asking questions about how employees view their line manager and the second part asking questions about their levels of engagement.

The research location was two separate departments within the public sector which are very similar, one was a waste management department where the employees have everyday interaction with customers and the other was the customer service call centre.

The research design is based on the research statement with the constructs of employee engagement - and Line Managers approach used as a blueprint for the chosen methodology.

1.5 Background to personal interest in this topic

As a public sector worker myself, I have experienced several pay cuts and have seen many work colleagues accept early retirement offers. This has meant that the remaining employees are expected to work harder and maintain service levels while being paid less. In the thirteen years of working in the public sector I have also experienced different Line Managers with each one having their own unique approach to workforce management.

Employee engagement is not discussed but this is something I feel should be given priority by management. The researcher is unaware of any research having taken place on the

engagement construct and wanted to explore this topical subject to develop a better understanding of why people engage at work.

It is the researchers view that the best way to meet the demands for now and into the future, given the lack of financial and human resources, is to have an engaged workforce. With employee moral understandably low due to the continual erosion of employees pay, do Line Managers have an approach to workforce management which creates a working environment where people feel safe, valued and supported enough to become engaged in their work?

1.6 Importance of this study

Historically, the public sector was shielded from changes in the macro environment. While private sector organisations operated in a competitive environment for talented employees, for market share and were susceptible to changes in the macro environment, the public sector were protected by government grants and protective legislation.

However, the current government, in the aftermath of the banking crisis has adopted a Neo-Liberal approach and put legislation in place for the privatisation of services which were once sacred to the public sector (the privatisation of bin collections is a good example).

To assist the public sector to be in a position to compete with the private sector, it is hoped that the outcome of this study will shine a light on how employees feel about their work environment and provide important information pertaining to their levels of engagement.

This research also has the potential to encourage the creation of new strategies where the sole purpose is to foster a working environment conducive to the ingredients of employee engagement.

The results of this study may also lead to a closer examination of the role of the Line Manager in the public sector. As it is the Line Manager who has the most interaction with

employees, results from this study may serve as an indicator of whether training is required in more contemporary management techniques.

1.7 Structure of report

This report is broken up into five chapters. Chapter two provides a literature review of engagement and disengagement by looking at the origins of the engagement and disengagement constructs through Kahn's (1990) grounded theory, before looking at more contemporary views. In addition, this chapter also provides an examination of academic literature on the mangers role.

The conceptual framework is also included in this chapter and is based on Kahn's findings. The conceptual framework also includes a review of McGregor's contrasting assumptions on management, Theory X and Theory Y.

Chapter three is a detailed structure of the research design which includes a full explanation of the methodology chosen and information on the locations chosen for this study.

In chapter four, a detailed analysis of the results from the study will be conducted while chapter five will summarise the findings, with discussions of the implications of these findings also included.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Employee Engagement

To stay competitive, an organisation requires the highest levels of performance from its employees. Increased global competition has meant that the demands for higher productivity and efficiency are more important now than at any other time in history (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).

Employee Engagement is a term used to describe an employee who brings their hearts and minds to their job (Maylett & Nielson, 2012). It is a willingness on the employees behalf to go beyond the contractual agreement made with their employer to help the organisation to be successful. The term willingness is an integral part of the Employee Engagement construct. Engaged employees have a passion for work (Truss, Edwards, Wisdom, Croll & Burnett, 2006), are emotionally attached to their organisation (Markos & Sridevi, 2010) and give it their all (Simon, 2012) which goes beyond the requirements set out in the employment contract.

This emotional attachment and passion for the organisation is what distinguishes the Employee Engagement construct from past employer initiatives such as Total Quality Management which focused solely on operational improvements (Markus & Sridevi, 2010) or Job Satisfaction surveys which looked at how satisfied an employee was in their role. This approach was criticised as merely being a reflection of how an employee felt at that particular time and was only as good as the latest round of 'perks and bonuses' (Markus & Sriedi, 2010).

Employee Engagement goes beyond job satisfaction, it is something that an employee has to offer which is not dependent upon the possibility of financial gain. Engaged employees are

emotionally attached to their role and display what Frank, Finnegan & Taylor, (2004) describe as discretionary effort which means they take pride in their work and take extra time to complete complex tasks out of a sense of commitment to the organisation.

A significant amount of academic writing on the subject of Employee Engagement emanates from seminal work carried out by (Kahn, 1990). Kahn, whose work was so influential that he was described as an academic parent of Employee Engagement (Welch, 2011) believed that personal engagement is an expression of a person's 'preferred self'. Displaying real identity, thoughts and feelings and using non defensive communication are what Kahn (1990) believes are indications of an employee displaying their preferred self in their role. The belief that employees display their preferred self when they are engaged indicates that employees are naturally motivated and want to be engaged while at work. Indeed this view is supported by Maslow who stated that "Employees long to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1998, p3).

This is evident in engaged employees who have an emotional attachment to their organisation, take pride in their work, care about what they do, provide better quality customer service and are committed to their organisation.

2.2 Benefits of an engaged workforce

As already indicated, engaged employees work harder and offer more than ordinary employees. They are focused on their role, provide excellent customer service and have a genuine desire for the organisation to be successful. This is why many employers now believe that having an engaged workforce can be the catalyst for a sustained competitive advantage.

(Maylett & Nielson, 2012) suggested that employee engagement did not spring from managements noble effort to ensure employee happiness. They indicate that a clear link can

be drawn between employee engagement and important business factors such as quality, return on investment and increased customer service.

Several empirical studies demonstrate this clear link such as the Gallop Organisations study as described by Konrad (2006) where seven 7,939 business units in 36 companies found that employee engagement was positively associated with higher profitability, increased customer satisfaction, increased levels of productivity and reduced employee turnover.

In support of these findings, Shuck, Rocco & Albonoz (2010) discuss how investment in employees can lead to engagement which results in rewards for the company. North Shore LJT Health Systems invested $10 Million in their employees in the hope of improving employee engagement. This investment was spent in Training and Development and in helping employees to further their education. The results were that the company reported a 96% increase in employee retention, increased patient satisfaction and produced record profits. (Cited, Shuck, Rocco & Albonoz, 2010)

These empirical studies provide clear evidence of the link between employee engagement and increased productivity and profitability which is why Wiley (2012) believes that employee engagement can be used as a lever for enhanced business success.

The positive aspects of an engaged workforce such as employee retention, customer satisfaction, reduced levels of absenteeism and superior quality all lead to stability for an organisation as it seeks to compete with its competitors, something Xu & Thomas (2010) describes as commercial incentives for pursuing engagement.

In addition to these important factors of engagement, innovation and knowledge are also key ingredients for a competitive advantage in the contemporary business environment. This is due to the value of organisations changing from tangible assets such as equipment, bricks and

mortar to intellectual assets such as knowledge, creativity and intellectual property which Maylett & Nielson (2012) suggest means that what exists in people's minds and hearts are more valuable than tangible assets.

Intellectual property can create a competitive advantage through the ability to solve challenging and complex problems which has led to employers viewing their human resources as powerful contributors of a company's competitive position (Simon, 2012).

With attention firmly focused on getting the most out of its employees and resources, in organisations today, having a fully engaged workforce can be the difference between success and failure.

2.3 Disengagement

Disengaged employees are those who have mentally quit the organisation but stay on while their energies are unavailable to the organisation (Pech & Slade, 2006). While engaged employees are fully committed to the organisation and work to the best of their ability, disengaged employees can show up for work each day and use minimum effort just to get by. This means that they are physically present but not engaged cognitively. A person who fails to fully engage and is disconnecting themselves from their role is displaying personal disengagement, something Kahn (1990) describes as the unemployment of the self.

When this occurs it can be a source of concern for employers as symptoms of disengagement can be very damaging for the performance of the organisation such as increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, less commitment towards the organisation and reduced customer focus.

These symptoms, displayed by disengaged employees can become an even bigger problem if they seek out 'new recruits' (Sujindrll, 2010) by encouraging fellow employees to become less

focused on their role, to be less attentive to customer needs and by convincing them that the extra effort they put in is not appreciated.

The ultimate act of disengagement is for an employee to quit the organisation, something which leads to key talent being lost and are both costly and time consuming to replace. In addition, disengaged employees who eventually leave could possibly have been disengaged for a long time (sometimes years) before they eventually left which means that during this time these employees removed themselves *Physically* by turning up for work and doing as little as possible just to get by, *Cognitively* by going into auto-pilot mode and doing tasks without looking for better ways of improving their performance, something which leads to reduced levels of creativity, and *Emotionally* by removing themselves emotionally from their role and from the goals of the organisation.

In essence, Employee Disengagement is the polar opposite to Employee Engagement and is something which can have a damaging effect on the business. It ultimately means that an organisations most valuable resource (its employees) are not performing to their full potential. With disengagement being the central problem of a workers lack of commitment and motivation (Simon, 2012), the difference between having an engaged or disengaged employee can often mean the difference between success and failure (Maylett & Nielson, 2012).

2.4 A Line Managers Role

The work environment an employee operates in is highly influenced by their line manager. While there are other managers within the organisation with more power and status, the Line Manager is the most important as far as employees are concerned as they interact with them on a daily basis.

The important role of the manager was highlighted by Arakawa and Greenberg (2007) who suggested that an employee's manager is the most influential individual in an employee's working life, a point echoed by Kruger & Kilhan (2005) who also advocate that managers greatly influence engagement. It is clear therefore, that a managers ability to influence employee engagement is great.

2.4.1 Support

Employees who work in an environment where they feel supported by their manager work harder and are committed to the organisation (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2008). This can be achieved by taking a genuine interest in the employees personal development and also by focusing on what the employee does well and recognising their efforts. Showing genuine concern can generate an environment where employees feel they can be themselves and therefore are free to fully engage in their work.

2.4.2 Trust

Trust plays a vital role between an employee and their manager as employees respond positively to an environment where there is mutual trust (Pech & Slade, 2006), a view supported by Abraham (2012) who proposed that fair treatment invokes trust from employees and is a key element in Employee Engagement.

2.4.3 Communication

Communication is a key ingredient to employee engagement, however communication is not a one way street. It is about genuine two way dialogue (Parsle, 2006) as employee's need to feel they have been listened to, even if their suggestions have not been acted upon (Simon, 2012). Parsle (2006) suggested that communication is a soft approach to management which is an approach many managers find difficult as they are focused on 'hard' measures such as targets and deadlines. However, (Kahn, 1990) believes that if certain conditions are met,

people can personally engage in moments of task behaviour which lead to high performance, therefore managers need to embrace this soft approach and engage in direct communication to find out what matters to their own staff (Emmott, 2006).

In addition, Psychological Meaningfulness is a feeling that a person is receiving a return on investments in a "currency of physical, cognitive or emotional energy" (Kahn, 1990, p. 704). Implicit in this view is that people must not feel that they are being taken for granted. This is an important point as engaged employees deliver more than average employees (Maylett & Nielson, 2012) and therefore a manager needs to be mindful not to pile on the work to engaged employees who produce a higher volume and superior quality of work.

Line managers have the ability to greatly influence employee engagement. In fact, line managers have more influence over employee engagement than they may realise (Arakama & Greenberg, 2006). They can create a working environment where employees feel supported by their line manager, where they feel they can be trusted and supported enabling the employee to feel free to fully engage in their work and express their 'preferred self' which benefits the employee and the organisation as a whole.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Kahn's research led to the discovery of three psychological conditions "whose presence influenced people to personally engage and whose absence influenced them to personally disengage" (Kahn, 1990, p-703). These are, psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability.

2.6 Psychological Meaningfulness

Psychological meaningfulness is a feeling that an employee is valued by the organisation. A feeling that the role they have and the effort they exert in fulfilling this role makes a

difference to the organisation. There are three factors which influence Psychological Meaningfulness, Task Characteristics - Work Interactions - Role Characteristics.

2.6.1 Task Characteristics

"Characteristics of one's job can influence the degree of meaningfulness an employee experiences at work" (Douglas, Gilson, Harter, 2004, P-14). People need to feel challenged at work which can be achieved through effective job design where employees are provided with challenging work that is varied.

Meaningful tasks which are designed to allow the employee a certain amount of autonomy can lead to creativity and ownership which stimulates employees and provides a sense of meaningfulness in their roles. In the knowledge economy this can lead to creativity and entrepreneurship which is vital to help creating and sustaining a competitive advantage.

However, there is a need to find the right balance by allowing the employee to experience a sense of "competence through the routine and growth and learning from the new task" (Kahn, 1990, p706).

2.6.2 Role Characteristics

Maslow's hierarchy of needs model illustrates how people have a desire to become all they possibly can be. Esteem needs are characterised by personal achievement, responsibility and status. At work people like to feel important, to feel that they are valued by the organisation. The need to feel that they play a vital role in the success of the company and that without them fulfilling their role, the organisation would underperform.

Roles which carry a certain amount of status and influence can lead to the employee exerting this influence or power to achieve a desired outcome. Where this situation occurs, the employee is experiencing a sense of meaningfulness in their role.

In contrast, people who perform tasks which they feel are unimportant to the organisation do not experience a sense of meaningfulness in their role. Even if the role is important, it is the employees perception of their role which is important. Therefore it is up to the Line Manager to highlight just how important each role is to the organisation.

2.6.3 Work Interactions

People are often defined by the role they have in the organisation. This view can stereotype people based on the role they have. This type of stereotype does not reflect or consider the person performing the role. People are more likely to experience a sense of meaningfulness if they are treated not as role occupants, but as people who happen to occupy roles (Hochschild, 1983).

Implicit in this view is that it is important to get to know the person performing the role. This opens up the possibility of creating social interactions between workers on both a personal and professional level and loosens the boundaries separating the two (Kahn, 1990).

These meaningful interactions on both a personal and professional level foster a sense of belonging, a stronger sense of social identity and meaning should emerge (Douglas et al, 2004).

Feelings of mutual appreciation, respect and positive feedback are all positive outcomes from work interactions which increases the numbers of people feeling psychologically present and experiencing meaningfulness at work.

2.7 Psychological Availability

Khan's research (1990) indicates that personal engagement is connected to higher levels of Psychological availability. That is, they are physically and emotionally ready to fully engage in their work. This is what distinguished engaged employees from disengaged employees.

This requires demands of physical energy and strength. However, people are inherently different from one another. Some have the ability to physically meet the demands of the job more than others due to their physical strength, something managers need to be aware of as too much demand on an individual's physical energy can leave that person feeling physically exhausted and ultimately, disengage from their role.

Tasks also require emotional energy. As with physical energy, people have different levels of emotional energy which is more difficult to anticipate than for a manager. Failure to recognise that a person is at their limit can mean that they reach a point where they have no more to give and begin to disengage.

Engaged employees deliver more than disengaged employees. Given the demands for ever increasing levels of production, it is understandable that line managers would look to increase the workload of engaged employees as they deliver more.

However, every person has a tipping point. Individuals can become physically and emotionally drained due to excessive workloads which can mean that they are no longer psychologically available to engage in their work. From an organisational perspective, the line managers act of overloading / overworking engaged employees can be counter-productive.

2.8 Psychological Safety

This paper is based on the premise that people are naturally motivated and want to express their true identity at work and to reach their full potential. For this to happen, individuals need to feel that they can express themselves without fear of being put down, embarrassed or suffer negative consequences to their self-image or self-esteem. "For the human spirit to thrive at work, individuals must be able to completely immerse themselves in their work"

(Douglas et al, 2004, P-12). In order for this to happen, people need to feel safe in their working environment before they will feel safe enough to express their true identity.

Kahn (1990) identified four factors which directly influence Psychological Safety; Interpersonal Relationships - Group and intergroup dynamics - Management Style - Organisational norms. This paper will focus on the third option, Management Style.

The relationship between an employee and their line manager has a significant influence on an employees working environment and ultimately, their feelings of Psychological Safety. Supportive line managers create work environments where employees feel they can try new ways of doing their job and to make mistakes without fear of recrimination. Supportive line managers also encourage employees to learn new skills and show genuine concern for their employees.

For an employee to feel psychologically safe, a manager must communicate explicitly, where the boundaries are and the possible consequences of overstepping these boundaries. This is achieved through effective communication and is vital in creating an environment where employees feel psychologically safe as failure to clearly set and communicate boundaries will mean that employees will not feel psychologically safe enough to express their true identity at work. Managers who are unpredictable and inconsistent do not foster environments where psychological safety can exist.

People also need to feel in control of their work, something Douglas et al (2004) described as self-determination. This is having a sense of choice at work and a degree of autonomy. However, this is very much dependent upon the individuals line manager loosening their grip and relinquishing some of their control and power over employees. For this to happen, a manager must feel secure in their ability and position as insecurity would mean that they are

unwilling to afford employees greater autonomy and decision making pertaining to their working environment.

These assertions about what is required by managers, about their approaches to management, can be categorised by McGregor's study of Management Styles; Theory X and Theory Y.

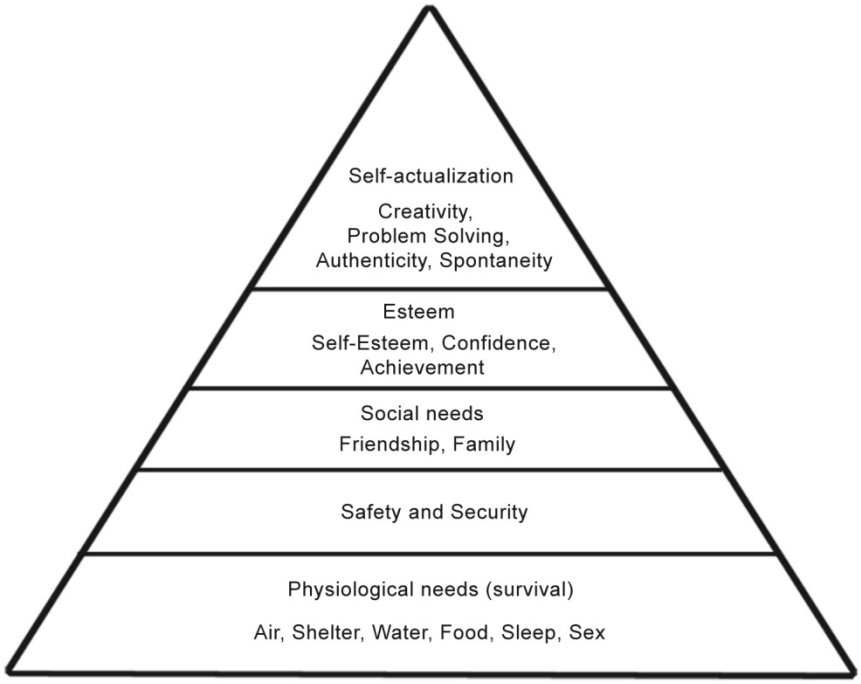
2.9 McGregor's Theory

Douglas McGregor offered managers a "new assumption of management (Theory Y) which could be more effective than what he considered then-current assumptions (Theory X)" (Bobic & Davis, 2003, p-239). Theory X and Theory Y are two different assumptions managers have about employees with each approach resulting in contrasting approaches to workforce management.

2.6.1 Theory X

The assumptions made by a theory X manager are that people are inherently lazy, they dislike work and have no ambition. People would prefer to be controlled and to be constantly told what to do rather than take responsibility for their own actions and performance. The assumption is that people will only work under a threat (dismissal) and lack the creativity needed to solve work-related problems.

Managers who possess these assumptions about people use an approach to workforce management which is characterised by strict rules and close supervision. Employees are denied control over their working environment and are not to be trusted. This pessimistic view is, according to (Bobic & Davis, 2003), partly due to the belief that employees are only concerned with physiological needs rather that needs higher up on Maslow's pyramid of needs.



The belief is that people desire security rather than challenging work and will put up with being closely supervised as long as they have job security. They do not look to fulfil their social or esteem needs while at work.

Figure 2.1 : Maslow's hierarchy of needs model.

2.9.2 Theory Y

The assumptions made by a theory Y manager are that people enjoy work as it comes naturally to them. They take pride in their work and is a source of personal satisfaction and achievement for them. People are capable of learning new tasks and skills and providing them with autonomy in their role will lead to them taking ownership of their role which will lead to higher levels of performance. It is a belief that employees are ambitious and can be a source of competitive advantage over competitors.

Managers who possess Theory Y assumptions about employees use an approach to workforce management which is characterised by trust and supportive behaviour. This approach seeks to unlock the talents of individuals by facilitating employees in their development. Theory Y

looks at the human potential requiring time and effort (Simonel, 2011) which focuses on long-term results for the organisation. This requires allowing people to develop by affording them the opportunity to try new things, new tasks and new ways of completing their jobs in the knowledge that if they make mistakes, they will not be punished. If people are treated this way, they will not only accept responsibility, they will seek it.

In the Theory X approach, the theory that employees only seek security and look no further that physiological needs is indicative of a time when employee's could expect to be with the same employer for a number of years and in some occasions, for their entire working life. However, today's workers face a fundamentally different environment and the loss of job security presents a serious challenge to managers (Bobic& Davis, 2003). Employees are now more aware of the need for the organisation they are working for to be competitive than at any other time.

Chapter 3 - Research Design

This chapter will discuss the research resign and preferred methodology for achieving the overall objective of this research paper. In explaining the reasons for the preferred methodology, alternative approaches are discussed with reasons given for not using these approaches.

3.1 The Research Paradigm

Research is something people carry out in order to find something in a systematic way (Sanders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). To conduct this research, it is important to know exactly what the purpose of the research is. This is stated in the research question / statement and it is the research statement which will guide the research design and methodology chosen. The

researcher, having decided on the research statement must decide what approach is the most appropriate for measuring the constructs of the research statement, whether a qualitative or qualitative approach or perhaps a combination of the two. No research strategy is inherently superior or inferior to any other (Sanders et al, 2007). To make a decision about what research strategy to take, one must fully understand what the different approaches are before choosing.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research pertains to the quality of the information gathered. It is a non-statistical approach which seeks to gain an understanding of a certain phenomenon. It is used to gain an understanding of what people think and why they think it. By its very nature, this approach is time consuming and requires more resources than a quantitative approach. Therefore the qualitative approach is usually concerned with working with a small number of respondents from a given population.

Data collection techniques vary from focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews. These in-depth interviews provide an opportunity to understand why people feel the way they do. Rhodes (2013) suggested that open-ended questions during an interview not only allows the researched to understand peoples experiences, it also highlight important antecedents and outcomes which may not be as apparent when surveyed with pre-determined questions. People can have a say in their own words as opposed to a structured questionnaire and while this could be viewed as anecdotal, when pooled across a number of participants it provides a conceptual understanding and evidence (Rhodes, 2013).

3.3 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is a scientific approach which is used to measure the views and opinions of many individuals pertaining to a given phenomenon. This approach does not seek

to understand people's deep feelings but is instead concerned with measuring the views of a large number of respondents and unlike the interview approach, respondents are asked specific, narrow questions about how they feel about a given subject. The researcher then analyses the data with the help of statistics.

The advantage of this approach is that it provides the opportunity to summarise the feelings of a large number of people and as such, allows for generalisation. Typical methods for obtaining quantitative data are surveys or questionnaires which according to (Sanders et al, 2007) provides an opportunity for possible reasons for particular relationships between variables. Questionnaires can be an effective way of gathering data as it can be completed in written or electronic form which is why (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009) assert that questionnaires are the most useful data collection method.

As the quantitative research approach enables the researcher to measure the views of a large portion of the population, this approach is justifiably used by researchers when the opinions a large percentage of a population is required or when the researcher desires to measure the effects of one construct against another.

3.4 Methodology

The researcher had to decide whether a quantitative or qualitative approach or indeed a combination of the two would be the most appropriate way of measuring the effects line managers have on employee engagement in the public sector.

A quantitative approach such as interviews enables the interviewer to develop a deeper understanding of peoples feeling, it is an opportunity to probe deeper into why people feel the way they do.

However, as this research paper requires engaging all employees within the two respective departments, it is not possible to engage every employee in 'in-depth research' (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore a quantitative approach was decided upon using a questionnaire for employees as it provided an opportunity to ask all employees to respond to the same set of questions and is an effective way of collecting responses from a large sample (Sanders et al, 2007).

The researcher chose to use a Likert-Style Ratings Scale for the questionnaire as this approach not only measures the direction of attitudes, it also measures the force of the attitude (Quinlan, 2011), for example: Strongly Agree - Agree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree. The researcher also choose to provide an equal number of options to choose from. This was chosen in an attempt to force respondents to express their true feelings. The alternative was to provide an uneven number of options to choose from which was rejected as it allows respondents to 'sit on the fence' (Sanders et al, 2007) by choosing the middle option.

Choosing a questionnaire as the main source of data collection provided an opportunity to separate the constructs of the research statement. Approaches by line managers were put into Part 1 of the questionnaire which sought to determine a McGregor classification for how respondents view their Line Manager while Part 2 attempts to measure how engaged respondents are, with these questions based on Kahn's (1990) discovery of the three psychological states which influence personal engagement.

This approach is used in an attempt to find a correlation between how employees view their Line Manager and their levels of engagement. For example, if an employee feels that they have a supportive line manager (Part 1 of questionnaire) and the second part reveals that they feel valued at work, this would indicate that the Line Manager has a positive effect on this employees levels of engagement.

Mail questionnaires can be an efficient method of data collection. It enables the researcher to cover a wide geographical area and also makes life easier for respondents as they can complete them in their own time. However, the researcher decided against this approach as employees working in the waste management department do not have access to computers at work while employees in the customer service call centre have. This created a problem as some employees indicated that they would be more likely to engage in the survey if it could be completed at work.

To circumvent this problem, the researcher chose an approach which was described by (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009) as a 'Personally Administered Questionnaire', an approach which has many advantages. It enables the researcher to collect responses more quickly and also to clarify any doubts respondents may have about questions on the spot. (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009) indicate that returns for mail questionnaires are often as low as 30%. As the researcher is attempting to measure as many employees as possible within the two departments, a higher return is needed so this approach was used to achieve a higher rate of completed questionnaires.

The benefits of a personally administered questionnaire over a mail questionnaire persuaded the researcher to use this method for customer service centre employees even though they could be accessed more easily through a mail survey. This was to ensure that all respondents received the questionnaire under the same conditions and with the same level of support from the researcher.

3.5 Research Location

The researcher focused attention on two departments within the public sector. It is hoped that achieving a high percentage of the total amount of employees within each department, the

results of this research paper will provide an indication of how line managers in the public sector effect employee engagement of employee disengagement.

The first department is the customer service call centre for Dublin City Council where there are thirty six employees working there. This department is a very busy department, dealing with over one thousand calls per day in areas relating to litter, parking, roads and pavements, water, drainage, council housing, housing maintenance, street and traffic lighting. Employee's of this department have extensive knowledge of these and other areas and work in a very dynamic and at times, pressurised environment.

The second department is the Waste Management Department. This department has five depots within Dublin City, the largest of which is based in Rathmines and is where the researcher focused on. This depot has a total of forty employees working there. This is also a busy department with employees carrying out a number of duties on a daily basis including street cleaning, graffiti removal, dealing with the public face-to-face and answering their queries, perform daily safety and maintenance checks on vehicles, maintain daily records of pickups and disposing of waste in accordance with set policies and procedures.

These departments were chosen initially due to the fact that the researcher has worked in each department and therefore was able to gain access due to good working relationships with the heads of each department. These departments were also chosen as they are both similar in that employees undertake a variety of tasks each day with these departments also having the most interaction with customers.

3.6 Gaining Access

The researcher encountered some difficulty in accessing employees from the Waste Management Department. Permission had initially been secured from the manager of this department, however this person was promoted to another department within the council. The

researcher contacted the new manager by sending a letter which contained a cover letter and a copy of the questionnaire, however the manager was sceptical of the researchers motives. To circumvent this unforeseen barrier, the researcher arranged a meeting where assurances were made that the research project was confidential and not sponsored by Dublin City Council. After this meeting, permission was granted to conduct the study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

"There are ethical issues in every aspect of the research process" (Quinlan, 2011, p69). These ethical issues include areas of the research project which may cause difficulty for participants in the form of stress, worry or potential harm for their reputation. It is important that a researcher is aware of these considerations prior to asking individuals to take part in the research project.

Of the questions Quinlan (2011) suggested a researcher should consider, below are the questions the researcher has focused on:

- How can I guarantee confidentiality and anonymity?
- Have I provided participants with my personal contact details should they have any concerns at any stage about the research?
- Do participants know they can withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences to them or for them?

The researcher has attempted to take these ethical issues into consideration by providing a cover letter for each questionnaire which outlined precisely why this research is being conducted and informed participants that responses would be kept strictly confidential. The issue of confidentiality became an important issue as many respondents indicated that they would not respond to the survey if they were required to provide any personal information. Therefore, names and other personal details are not required. Participants were also made

aware of the fact that their participation was on a voluntary basis and withdrawing from the process at any time was entirely acceptable.

Although the researcher was present when participants were filling out the questionnaire, the cover letter contained the researchers e-mail address and mobile telephone number for the purpose of being available after the survey to answer questions respondents may have.

3.8 Limitations of the Research Design

The methodology chosen provides an opportunity to measure the attitude of as many employees of each of the two departments as possible, this is why a quantitative approach was chosen. However, the researcher would like to acknowledge that the benefits of one approach become the disadvantages of the other. To explain, the advantages of the qualitative approach are that it provides an opportunity to interview individuals face to face and to develop a deeper understanding of how people feel by asking probing questions, an advantage that the questionnaire method (quantitative) is not capable of providing.

To overcome this, some researchers use a mixed method where a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Due to time constraints however, the researcher is unable to use this approach and therefore the findings will lack this deep understanding that the qualitative approach would provide.

3.9 Discussion

The research statement of this paper provides the foundation upon which the conceptual framework, research design and methodology are based. As very few research projects / papers have been written on the engagement construct in the public sector, the researcher has attempted to address this by designing a research project which measures the effects Line Managers have on employee engagement in two different, yet equally demanding and dynamic departments within the public sector.

This research paper requires as many employees from each department as possible to complete the questionnaire and it is hoped that a personally administered approach will result in a high percentage of individuals taking part. The higher the percentage of participants, the more confident the researcher will be about the overall results.

It is the researchers view that the research design chosen for this study, is the most appropriate way to measure the attitudes of numerous individuals regarding how Line managers effect their levels of engagement. It is hoped that these findings will provide important information which may result in follow-up research in the engagement construct for employees in the public sector.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Results

This chapter will focus on the results of each questionnaire and will provide an analysis of what the results mean in terms of how they reflect the constructs of the research statement.

4.1 Research statement recalled

This paper will attempt to measure the effects Line Managers have on Employee Engagement in the public sector.

From this statement, the researcher created the following hypothesis:

A McGregor classification as viewed by Employees influences Employee Engagement within an Organisation.

4.2 Scoring Criteria

The researcher chose a Likert Scale questionnaire as it not only measures how people feel, it also measures the force of their feelings. To measure the results statistically, each possible

answer to each question or statement was given a numerical value. The more positive the answer, the higher the value. For example:

How approachable is your Line Manager?

Very approachable	*Approachable*	*Unapproachable*	*Very Unapproachable*
4	**3**	**2**	**1**

4.3 Results and analysis of Part 1 (McGregor classification)

Part one of the survey is labelled **McGregor classification** and is designed to measure how respondents view their Line Manager, with these responses resulting in a McGregor classification for Line Managers.

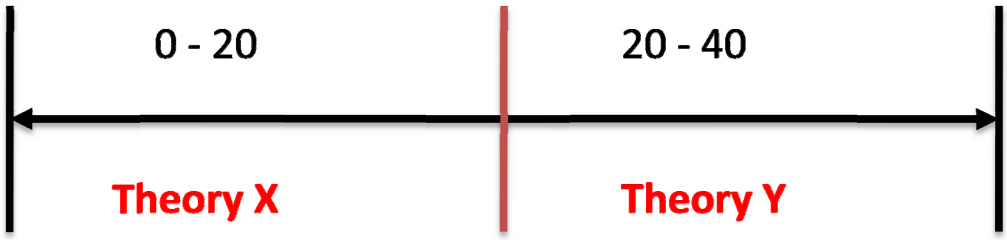


Figure 4.1 : Scoring criteria for McGregor Classification

Each question has four possible results (1-4) with four being the most positive and 1 being the most negative response. As there are ten questions, the highest score for any respondent is forty. Figure 4.1 illustrates how respondents who average twenty or less for part one of the survey will be put into the Theory X category. This will mean that they have a Line Manager

who, in accordance with the conceptual framework, has a pessimistic view of employees. Employees are denied control over their working environment and are not to be trusted.

Respondents who average twenty one or over, will be put into the Theory Y category. This will mean that they have a Line Manager who, in accordance with the conceptual framework, has an optimistic view of employees. That they can be trusted and can help create a competitive advantage over competitors.

Each question / statement will now be measured and discussed with each result displayed in a graph. The horizontal axis depicts categories of how respondents feel with the vertical axis depicting the percentage of respondents who responded.

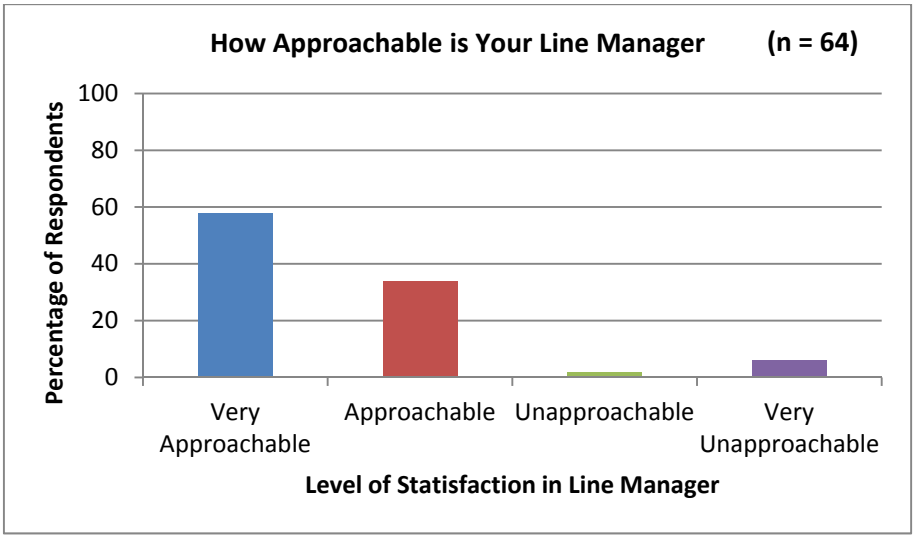


Figure 4.2: Approachability of Line Manager

The results from the first question within the first component of the exploratory survey are presented in **Figure 4.2.** This figure depicts a respondent's level of satisfaction in their line manager, this satisfaction variable being categorised through four levels which are: very approachable; approachable; un-approachable and finally very un-approachable. From figure 4.2 we can clearly see that 90% of respondents to this survey responded positively with respect to their opinion of their line manager, with the remaining having negative feelings. From an analysis perspective, a question that could be asked of this distribution of responses is: Do those respondents with a positive view of their line manager also express the view that they have a good working relationship with their Line Manager?. Results show that of the 90% who responded positively in figure 4.2, 88% also expressed the view that they have a good working relationship with their Line Manager. From this the researcher deducts that the overwhelming majority of respondents have a Line Manager who is approachable and whom they have a good working relationship.

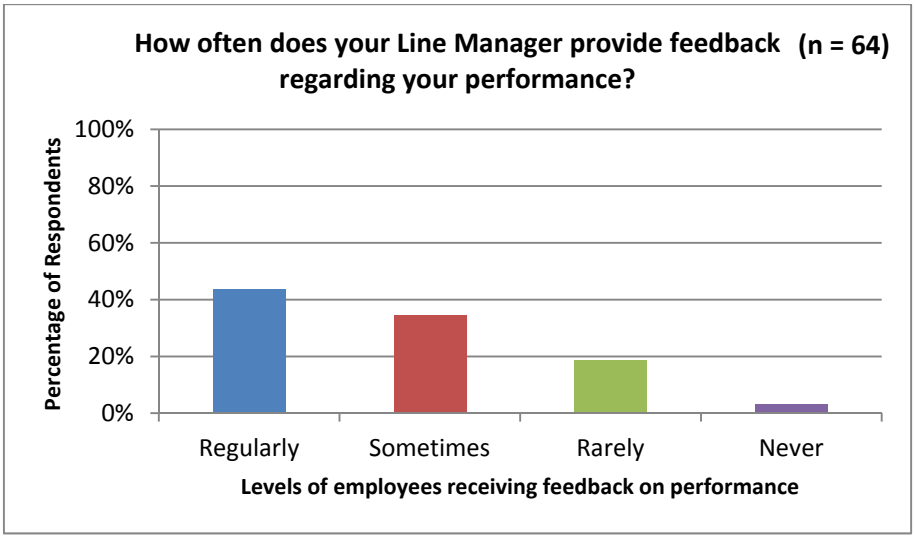


Figure 4.3: Feedback from Line Managers

Line Managers who provide feedback on an employee's performance are engaging in communication with the employee which helps in the development of a good working relationship. However, this is only possible when the communication is positive and constructive. **Figure 4.3** illustrates how respondents to the survey responded to how often their Line Manager provides feedback. This question was measured using the variables Regularly; Sometimes; Rarely and Never. From figure 4.3 it is evident that 44% of respondents regularly receive feedback while 34% receive it sometimes. To determine whether this feedback is viewed as a positive by respondents, the researcher compared these responses to question 'I have a good working relationship with my Line Manager'. Responses to this question were very positive with 86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they have a good working relationship with their Line Manager. From this, the researcher can infer that a strong majority of respondents receive feedback and that this feedback results in a good working relationship between respondents and their Line Manager.

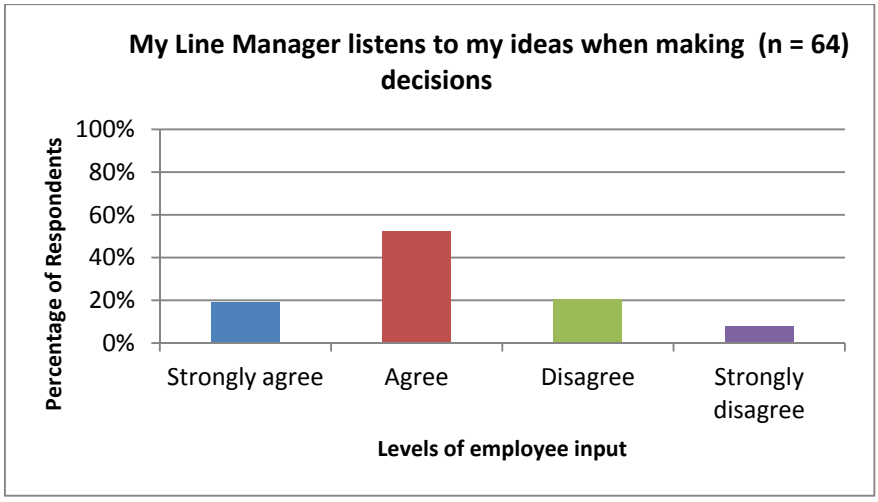


Figure 4.4: Line Manager listens to employee ideas

One way communication, where the Line Manager does all the talking, sends out a signal that the employees opinion is not important. The researcher chose this question as it is a key barometer of whether the Line Manager values an employee's opinion. **Figure 4.4** is a chart which illustrates whether employees feel their Line Manager values their opinion. The strongest result is the agree category with 52% agreeing that their opinion is valued, 19% strongly agreed, 21% disagreed and 8% strongly agreed. Figure 4.4 indicates that the majority of employees feel their opinion is valued by their Line Manager. While this is another positive result, the researcher conducted a further investigation to determine whether respondents to answered negatively, also felt their Line Manager values their opinion. Results show that of the 29% respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their Line Manager does not value their opinion, 61% also said their Line Manager does not engage in one-to-one communication with them. Therefore, a correlation can be made between Line Managers who do not engage in one-to-one communication and their employees feeling their opinion is not valued.

Figure 4.5: Employees experiencing criticism

Figure 4.5 illustrates responses of how critical a Line Manager is when an employee does something wrong. In a competitive environment where discovering more efficient ways of working are required, employees need to work in an environment where they can try new things or new approaches in the knowledge that they will not be criticised if they fail. The results from this chart are mixed. The strongest response category indicates that 45% of employees feel their Line Manager is critical when they do something wrong. This was supported by 16% of respondents who strongly agreed. These results indicate that respondents feel they work in an environment where there is no room for error. Looking specifically at these negative responses, the researcher compared these results with the corresponding question to ascertain whether these respondents also experienced close supervision. Results show that only 35% also experienced close supervision. This indicates that the majority of respondents who have a Line Manager who criticises them, are not closely supervised. They have a certain amount of freedom but mistakes are not tolerated.

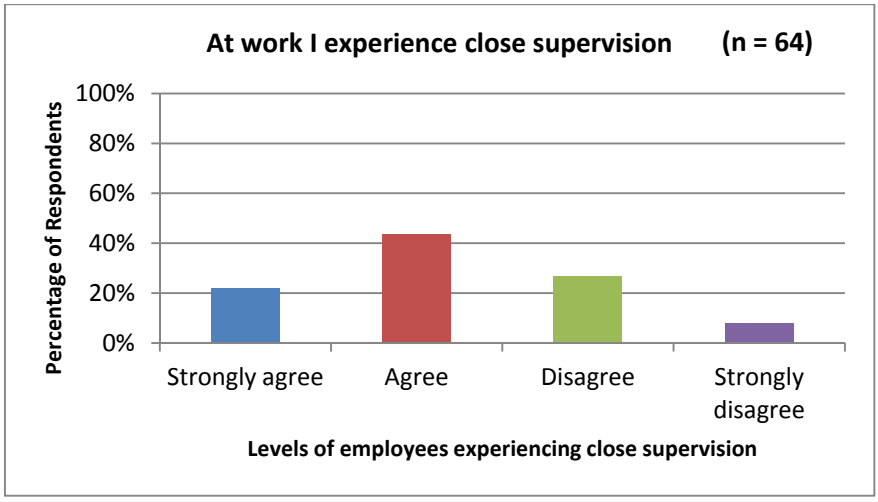


Figure 4.6: Employees who experience close supervision

Employees who work in an environment where there is close supervision may feel that they are not trusted by their Line Manager. **Figure 4.6** illustrates responses of how many respondents feel they experience close supervision while at work**.** Figure 4.6 illustrates that 66% either agreed or strongly agreed that their Line Manager engages in close supervision. It is the researchers view that an issue of trust may be implicit in this result. To further examine this possibility, the researcher compared negative responses to this question with the corresponding question - 'My Line Manager trusts me to do a good job'. Of the respondents who answer negatively to this question, only 46% also felt their Line Manager did not trust them. This is not enough to suggest that there is an issue of trust implicit with this negative result. It may be that this is simply the approach that some of the Line Managers have and may be something they are not aware of.

Figure 4.7 Employees who feel trusted

Figure 4.7 portrays responses of whether employees feel their Line Manager trusts them. Responses were heavily weighted towards the strongly agree and agree categories (92%), with 8% feeling their Line Manager does not trust them. As employees respond positively to work environments where there is mutual trust (Palse & Slade, 2006), this result strongly indicates that Line Managers trust their employees, something which encapsulates McGregor's Theory Y assumption. The researcher conducted a further investigation of these results by comparing the results from the respondents who answered positively to this question, with their responses to whether their Line Manager encourages them to learn new skills. Of the 92% of respondents who responded positively, 88% also felt their Line Managers encourages them to develop new skills. From this comparison, the researcher deducts that where the Line Manager trusts the employee, they will encourage them to learn new skills. This is representative of the majority of Line Managers who are covered by this survey and indicates that employees are viewed as assets for the organisation.

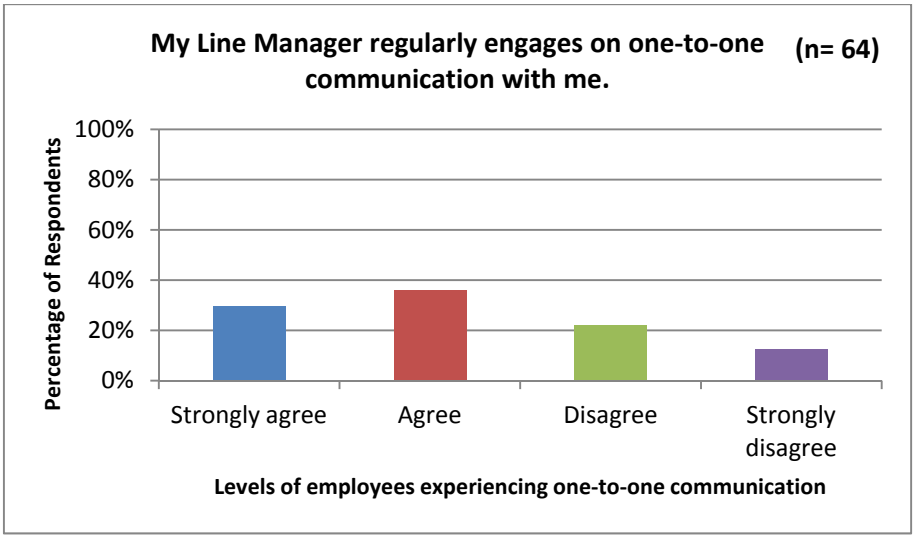


Figure 4.8: Employees who receive one-to-one communication

Communication, particularly one-to-one communication, is regarded by Palse (2006) as being a soft approach by a Line Manager. **Figure 4.8** indicates that the majority of respondents experienced one-to-one communication with their Line Manager with 66% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. The researcher wanted to identify whether the remaining respondents, of whom there are 34%, receive any other form of communication. The researcher compared their responses to this statement, with another which measure another form of communication - 'I receive feedback on my performance'. Results show that 46% of these respondents felt their Line Manager does not provide feedback on their performance. While overall, results indicate that the majority of employees receive one-to-one communication, just under have of those who do not, also feel they do not receive feedback on their performance. This indicates that some Line Managers do not realise the importance of communication.

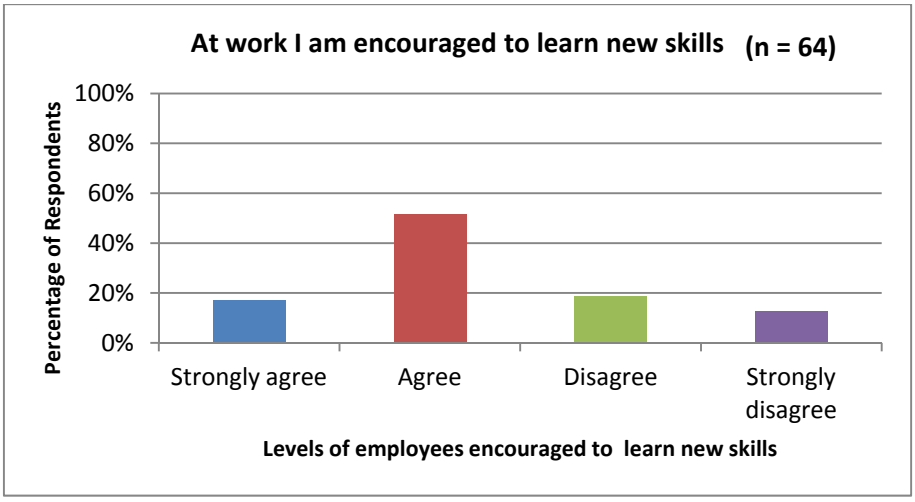


Figure 4.9: Employees who feel encouraged to up-skill

McGregor's Theory Y is a belief that people are capable of learning new tasks and skills and encouraging this behaviour will lead to higher levels of performance. **Figure 1.8** signifies that a high number of respondents are encouraged to learn new skills with 69% of respondents answering positively to this question. Encouraging employees to learn new skills is a positive approach which looks at employees as a source of competitive advantage through long-term investment in people. The results in figure 4.9 indicate that Line Managers, in encouraging employees to learn new skills, would offer their support. Looking at the results to the research statement which measures whether respondents feel supported by their Line Manager, results show that 78% of respondents also agree that their Line Manager supports them. A result which indicates that respondents are supported in their efforts to learn new skills, something which is in line with a Theory Y approach.

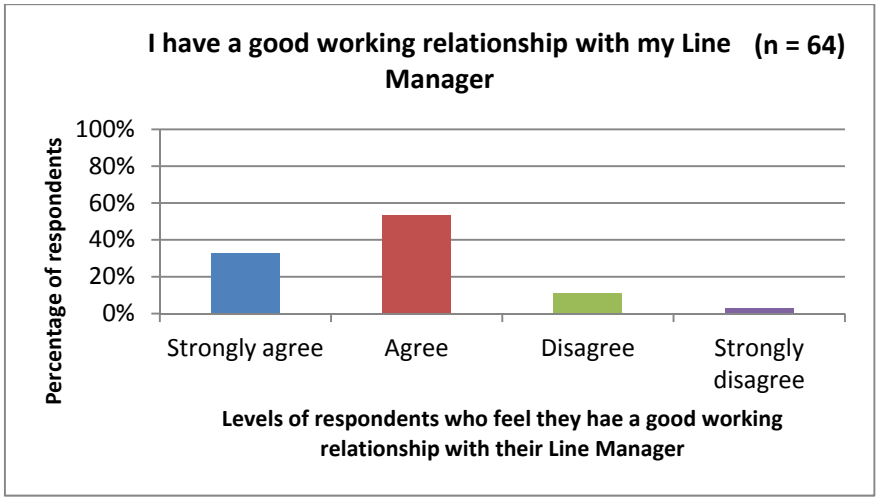


Figure 4.10: Employees who have a good working relationship with their Line Manager

Figure 4.10 illustrates what percentage of respondents have a good working relationship with their Line Manager. Where this positive working relationship occurs, employees often work in a positive working environment. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that they have a good working relationship with their Line Manager with 86% responding agree or strongly agree. From an analysis perspective, the researcher analysed these respondents also felt their Line Manager is approachable. The results indicate that of the 86% of respondents who feel they have a good working relationship with their Line Manager, 94% also indicated that they have a Line Manager who they feel is approachable. Further evidence was obtained by comparing negative respondents to figure 4.10 with whether they feel their Line Manager is approachable. Results show that 70% of respondents who answered negatively to figure 1.9, also felt their Line Manager is unapproachable.

This is strong evidence to suggest that a Line Manager who is approachable will foster a working environment where a good working relationship between the Line Manager and the employee will transpire, something which is evident in the working environment of these respondents.

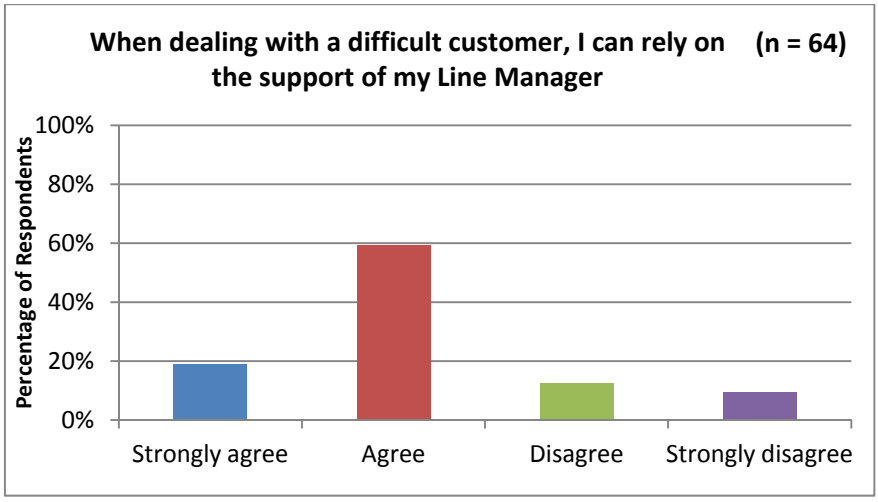


Figure 4.11: Employees who experience support from their Line Manager

Employees who work in an environment where they feel supported by their manager work harder and are committed to the organisation (Harter et al, 2008). **Figure 4.11** depicts what percentage of respondents feel they can rely on the support of their Line Manager. 78% of respondents either agree or strongly agree while 22% responded negatively. An employee who feels supported by their Line Manager may extra effort and fulfil their role to the best of their ability to repay the Line Manager for the support they give them. Figure 4.17 indicates that 90% of respondents are determined to give their best efforts at work each day. From this, the researcher feels it is logical to suggest that employees respond positively to a supportive Line Manager.

4.4 Overall analysis of Part 1 (McGregor classification)

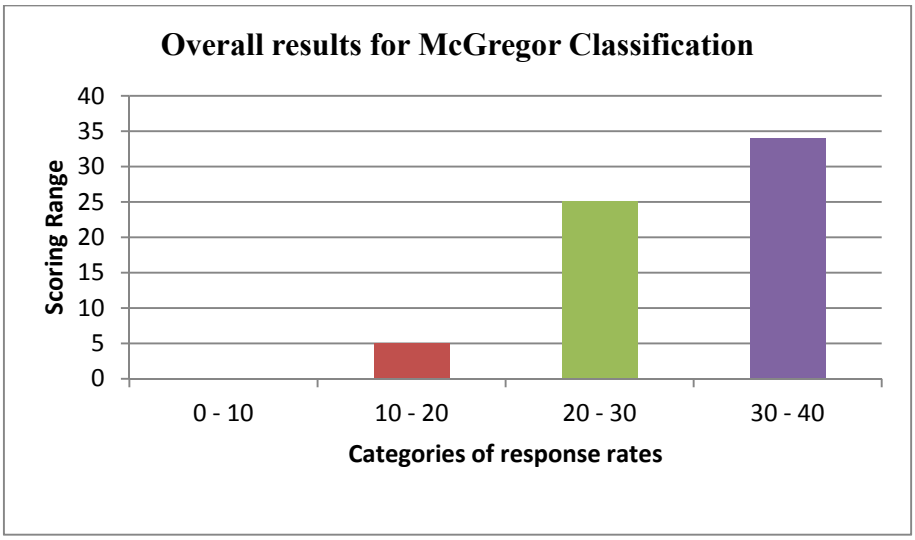


Figure 4.12 : Overall responses to McGregor classification survey

Figure 4.12 displays the overall responses to the McGregor classification part of the questionnaire. It is very evident from this graph that respondents to this survey have a Line Manager who falls into the category of Theory Y. These respondents have a Line manager who is approachable, a Line Manager who trusts them and who encourages them to develop and learn new skills. This classification, according to the conceptual framework, looks at the human potential requiring time and effort (Simonel, 2011) which focuses on long-term results for the organisation.

4.5 Results and analysis of Part Two (Levels of Engagement)

Part two of the survey is labelled **levels of engagement** and was designed to measure whether respondents feel engaged or disengaged in their work.

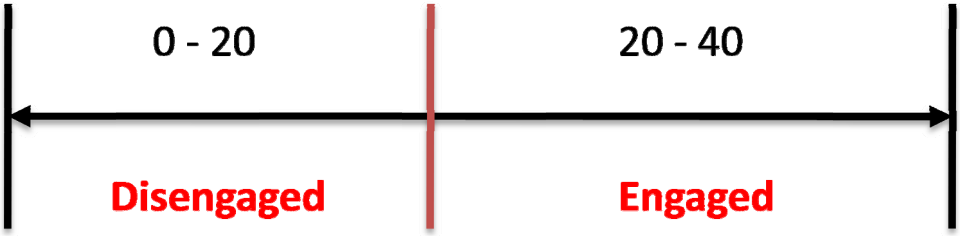


Figure 4.13 : Scoring criteria for Levels of Engagement

Each question has four possible results (1-4) with four being the most positive and 1 being the most negative response. As there are ten questions, the highest score for any respondent is forty. Respondents who average twenty or less for part one of the survey will be put into the Disengaged category, while respondents who average twenty one or over will be put into the Engaged category.

The questions / statements on this part of the questionnaire are based on Kahn's (1990) grounded theory which was discussed extensively in the conceptual framework of this research paper. In summary, these questions / statements are based on and measured against three psychological conditions "whose presence influenced people to personally engage and whose absence influenced them to personally disengage" (Kahn, 1990 - p- 703). These are, psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability.

Each question / statement will now be measured and discussed with each result displayed in a graph. The horizontal axis depicts categories of how respondents feel with the vertical axis depicting the percentage of respondents who responded.

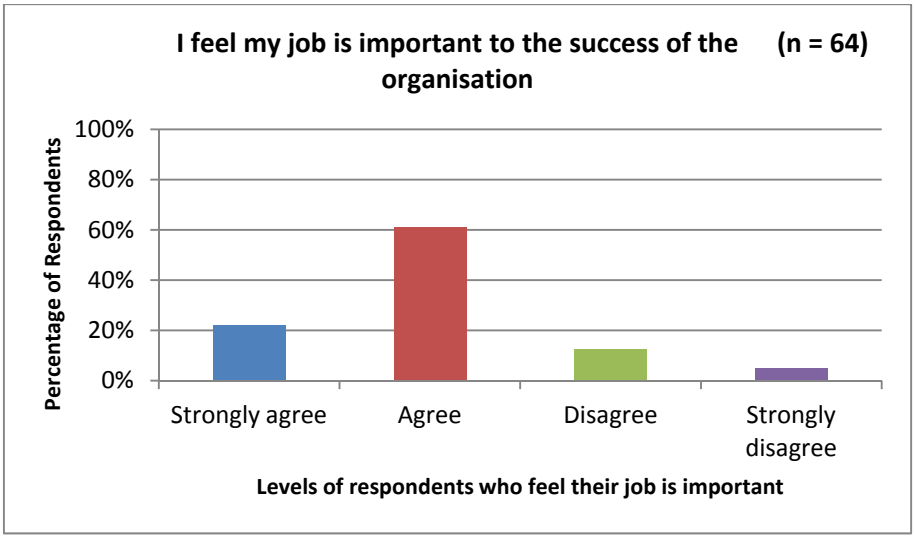


Figure 4.14: Employees who feel their job is important

People who feel that the role they have and the effort they exert in fulfilling this role makes a difference to the organisation experience Psychological Meaningfulness at work (Kahn, 1990). **Figure 4.14** is a chart which shows what percentage of respondents feel their job is important to the success of the organisation. Results clearly show that the majority of respondents feel their role is important with 83% agreeing or agreeing or strongly agreeing.

According to the conceptual framework, people who experience Psychological Meaningfulness feel valued by the organisation. Therefore, there should be a strong correlation between this question and the corresponding question which measures how many respondents feel valued at work. The results show that of the 83% who feel their job is important to the success of the organisation, 76% of these respondents also indicated that they feel valued at work. This result supports Kahn's findings that employees who experience Psychological Meaningfulness feel valued by the organisation, and indicates that these respondents are engaged in their work.

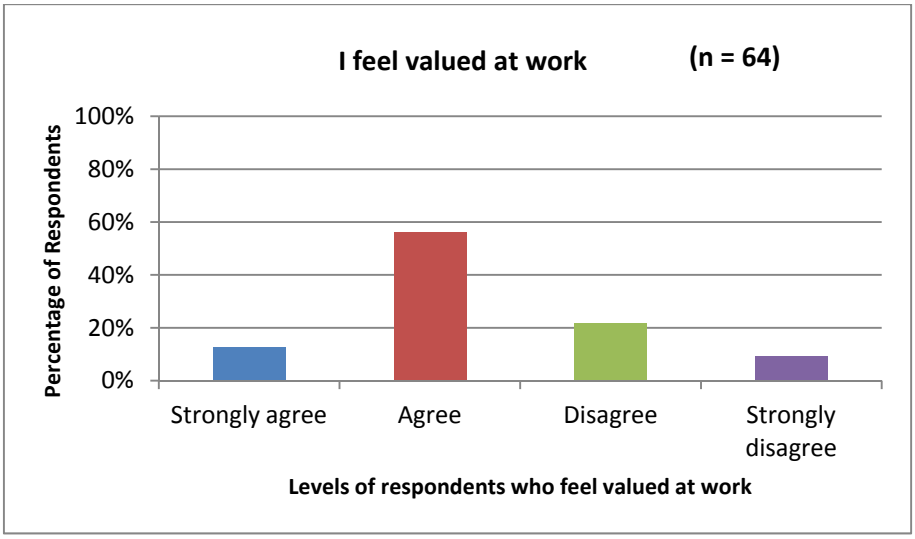


Figure 4.15: Employees who feel valued at work

Figure 4.15 illustrates what percentage of respondents feel valued at work. As Figure 4.15 already indicated, people who feel valued at work experience Psychological Meaningfulness in their role. Results show that 69% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they feel valued, with 31% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The researcher wanted to further investigate if there was an underlying problem which caused this reaction. Do these respondents feel they can voice their opinion on work related matters without suffering negative consequences

Results indicate that of the 31% of respondents who do not feel valued at work, just 37% of them also felt that they would suffer negative consequences for voicing their opinion on work related matters. From this, the researched deducts that there is not a strong correlation between the two variables and that the majority of respondents who do not feel valued, still feel they can express their opinion on work related matters. Not feeling valued at work does not dampen their employee voice!

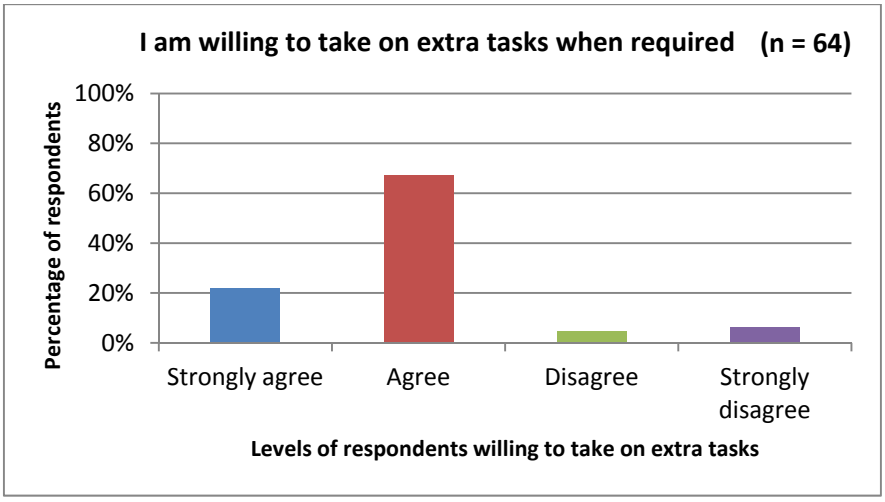


Figure 4.16: Employees who are will take on extra work when required

Engaged employees are ready to take on extra tasks when required, this is what Kahn (1990) describes as Psychological Availability. The conceptual framework closely associates personal engagement with Psychological Availability and is a good barometer of how engaged people are in their work. **Figure 4.16** indicates that the vast majority of respondent feel they are willing to take on extra tasks when required with 67% agreeing and a further 22% strongly agreeing. In fact, the 67% represents 43 respondents who selected the agree category which is the highest response rate of any category for all questions in the survey.

The researcher conducted a further investigation to determine whether these respondents also held very positive views to any other part of the survey. An analysis shows that of the respondents who are willing to take on extra tasks, 94% of them also take pride in their work. This comparison indicates that the majority of respondents who are willing to take on extra tasks when required also take pride in their work and consequently, these respondents experience Psychological Availability, something which Kahn (1990) believes is connected with personal engagement.

Figure 4.17: Employees determined to give their best efforts

Engaged employees turn up for work ready to give their best effort each day. This is what distinguishes engaged employees from disengaged employees. **Figure 4.17** provides the results of a question designed to measure how determined respondents are to fulfil their role to the best of their ability. From this chart, it is clear that the majority of respondents are determined to give their best efforts each day with 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

The conceptual framework discussed the fact that engaged employees work harder than non-engaged employees and that it is important not to pile on the work as this could be counterproductive. To determine whether this is the case, the researched also looked at responses to how willing respondents are to taking on new tasks. This shows that 89% are willing to take on extra tasks when required. From this information it is clear that the overwhelming majority of respondents who feel they give their best efforts each day are also willing to take on extra tasks, meaning that these engaged employees do not have a Line Manager who is piling on the work.

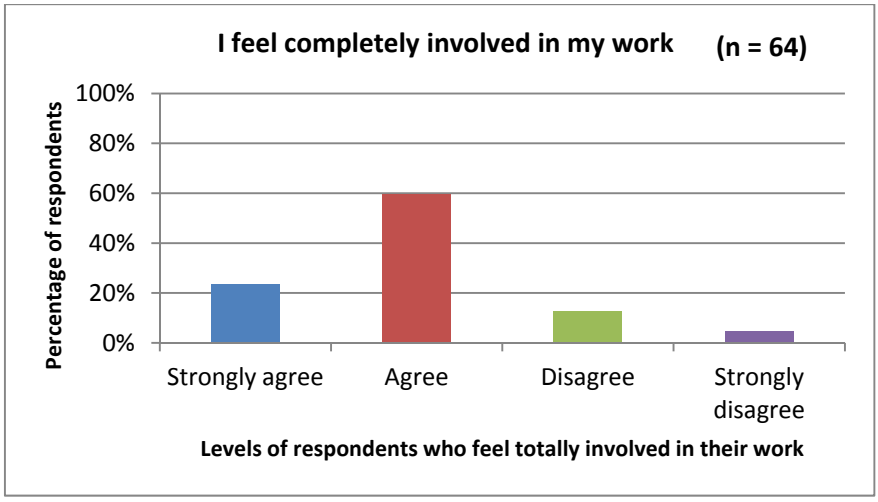


Figure 4.18: Employees who feel totally involved in their work

"For the human spirit to thrive at work, individuals must be able to completely immerse themselves in their work" (Douglas et al, 2004, P-12). **Figure 4.18** illustrates responses to whether employees feel completely involved in their work. This statement was used to measure whether respondents feel psychologically safe while at work. The results show that 82% of respondents either agree or strongly agree, with 18% responding negatively. People who are completely involved in their work are experiencing Psychological Safety (Kahn, 1990). Implicit in this view is that people who experience Psychological Safety, know where their boundaries are and know what is expected of them. The researcher compared these results with the another statement on the questionnaire which measured how many respondents know exactly what is expected from team at work, with results showing that 91% responded positively. Therefore, the high positive response rate of respondents who feel totally involved in their work corresponds to the high positive response rate of respondents who know what is expected from them. This clearly indicated that these respondents experience Psychological Safety while at work which according to Kahn (1990) means that they can express their true identity at work.

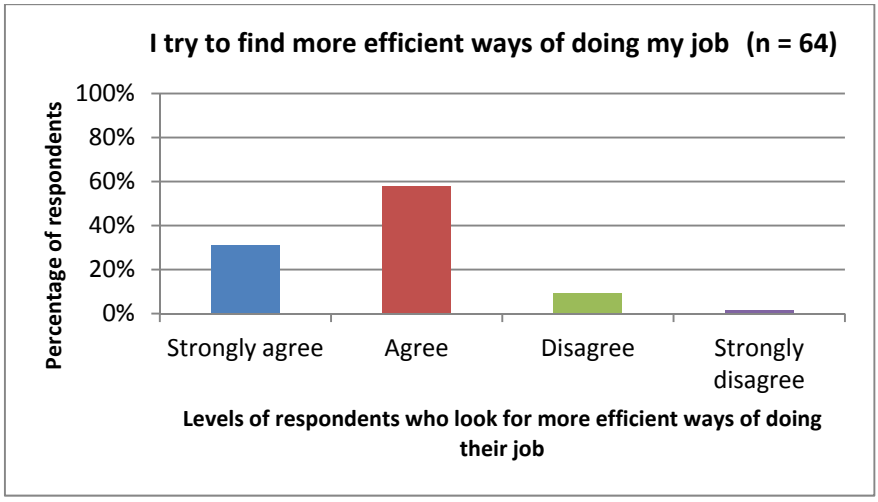


Figure 4.19: Employees who seek better ways of doing their job

Where employees are given a good deal of autonomy in their role, this can lead to creativity and ownership of that role. According to Kahn (1990), this stimulates employees and they may look to find more efficient ways of doing their job. **Figure 4.19** demonstrates response rates to the statement 'I try to find more efficient ways of doing my job'. The results show that 89% of respondents feel the desire to find more efficient ways of doing their job. This result shows that the majority of respondents experience autonomy in their role and that they can try new ways of completing their role in an effort to become more efficient.

It would seem logical that these respondents who responded positively to Figure 4.19 should also respond positively to figure 4.22 (I feel confident enough to express my opinion at work without suffering negative consequences). Results indicate that of these respondents, 88% also felt they can express their opinion without any adverse affects. Therefore the researcher can suggest that based on these results, respondents can feel free to find more efficient ways of doing their job as they will not suffer negative consequences for doing so.

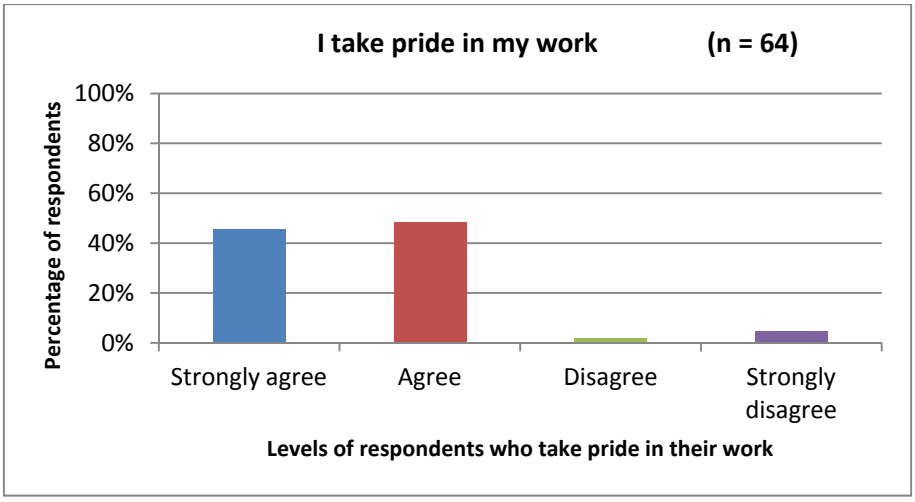


Figure 4.20: Employees who take pride in their work

People who take pride in their work are emotionally attached to their role and display what Frank et al, (2004) describe as 'discretionary effort' to ensure their work is at the highest standard possible. **Figure 4.20** illustrates the percentage of respondents who expressed the view that they take pride in their work. Results show that 93% of respondents take pride in their work with 7% responding negatively. According to the conceptual framework, at work, people like to feel they are valued by the organisation and that they play a pivotal role in its success. People who take pride in their work, may do so because they feel their job is important to the organisation. To further investigate this, the researcher compared the results of Figure 4.20 with the results from Figure 4.14 which measured whether respondents felt their job is important to the success of the organisation. Results demonstrate that of the 93% who take pride in their work, 81% also agreed that they felt their job is important to the success of the organisation. Therefore a clear link can be made with employees who feel their role is important to the success of their organisation and the same employees taking pride in their work with respondents to this survey responding very positively to both.

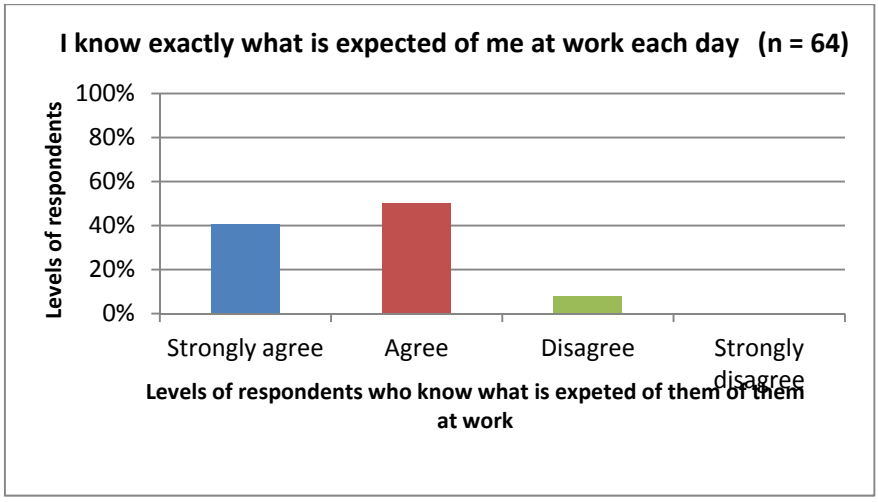


Figure 4.21: Employees who know what is expected of them

Employees who know exactly what is expected from them each day, work in an environment where there is communication, certainty and ultimately, employees can feel safe working in this environment. **Figure 4.21** illustrates response rates to the statement 'I know exactly what is expected from me at work each day'. Results were strongly in favour with this statement with 91% either strongly agree or agree. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of respondents know exactly what is expected from them each day and from this the researcher can deduce that these employees work in an atmosphere here there is certainty with Line Managers engaging in effective communication. This also, according to the conceptual framework, indicates that these respondents work with a Line Manager who is consistent, something which Kahn (1990) identified as an important factor in creating an environment where employees experience Psychological Safety.

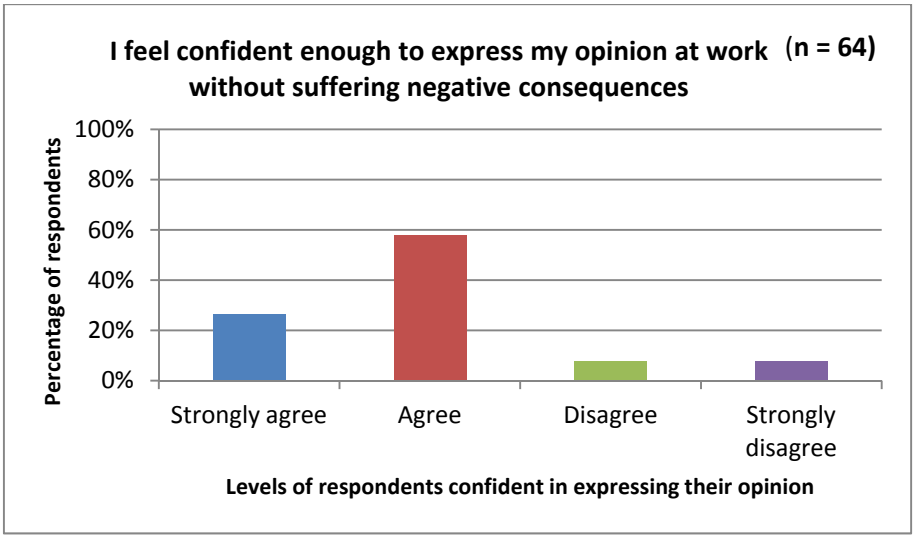


Figure 4.22: Employees who feel confident in expressing their opinion

In his seminal work on the engagement construct, Kahn (1990) found that people who to feel they can express themselves without fear of being put down, embarrassed or suffer negative consequences to their self-image or self-esteem can express their true identity at work which can ultimately lead to employee engagement. **Figure 4.22** illustrates response rates to a statement designed to measure how confident respondents are about expressing their opinion without suffering negative consequences. Results show that 85% of respondents either agreed or strongly agree to this statement. This in itself does not guarantee an engaged workforce, however, it is an important part in creating a working environment where employee engagement can take place.

From an analysis perspective, the researcher wanted to investigate whether people who responded negatively to this question had similar negative views in this survey. Results indicate that of the respondents who responded negatively to this statement, 78% of them also indicated that they do not feel valued at work.

Therefore, while the overall response to Figure 4.22 is very positive, respondents who do not feel confident in expressing their opinion at work may feel this way because they feel they are not trusted.

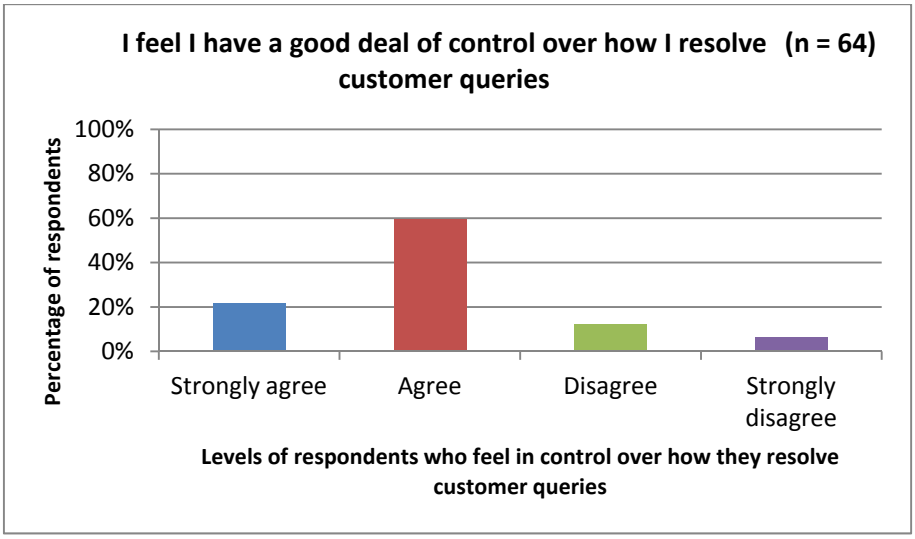


Figure 4.23: Employees who feel in control over how they resolve customer queries

People who feel in control of their work, experience what Douglas et al (2004) describes as self-determination. Being able to deal with customer queries and resolve them without interference demonstrates that employees have autonomy in their role and that they feel they are in control. **Figure 4.23** indicates that the majority of respondents enjoy a good deal of control over how they resolve customer queries with 81% with agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement.

Further analysis was conducted for these respondents with results indicating that of the respondents who responded positively to this statement, 81% of them also indicated that they feel their job is important to the success of the organisation, with a further 82% also expressing the view that they feel confident in expressing their opinion at work.

Having a feeling of control at work can create a feeling of self determination which can led to an employee taking ownership of their role. This can be expressed by expressing a personal opinion freely and also feeling the role this person has is important to the success of the organisation.

When this positive result is viewed alongside the also positive result of 89% who try to find more efficient ways of doing their job, it is the researchers view that the majority of respondents enjoy a good deal of autonomy in their role and experience self-determination.

4.6 Overall analysis of Part 2 (Levels of Engagement

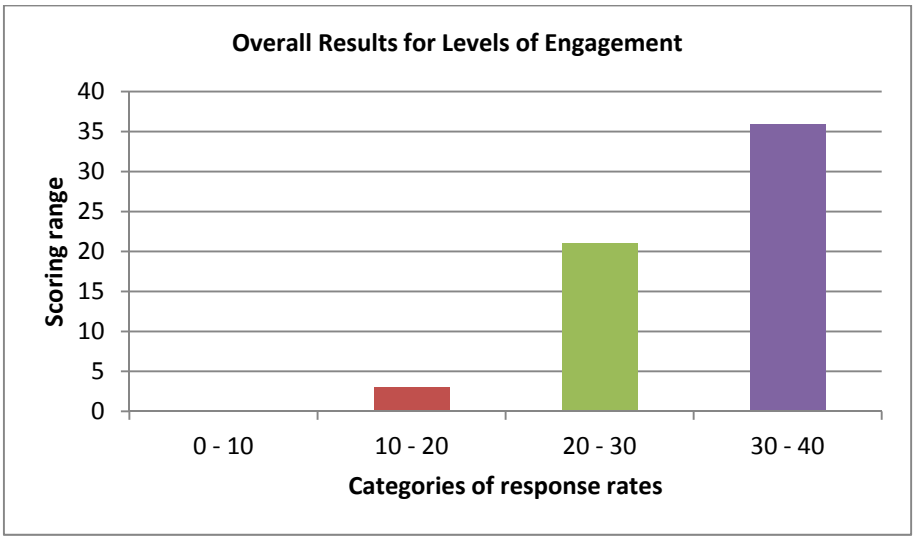


Figure 4.24 : Response rates and categories for levels of engagement

Figure 4.24 illustrates the overall responses to the levels of engagement part of the questionnaire. This result clearly shows that respondents to this part of the survey are engaged in their role. From this graph, it is clear that these respondents express their true self (Kahn 1990) while at work, and are an asset to their organisation. As the questions / statements were based on the conceptual framework, this indicates that these respondents experience Psychological Meaningfulness; a feeling that the role they have and the effort they exert in fulfilling this role makes a difference to the organisation. They are Psychologically Available to fully engage in their work and also experience Psychological Safety which is indicative of a supportive Line Manager.

4.7 Association between McGregor classification and levels of engagement

According to Quinlan (2011), a scatter plot is an effective way to visually determine whether there is relationship between two variables**. Figure 4.25** is a scatter plot which illustrates the association between a respondents McGregor classification and their Engagement score. This scatter plot clearly depicts a positive linear pattern of association between both the McGregor variable and the Engagement variable. It is evident that respondents to the survey who felt positively about their Line Managers approach also indicated that they are engaged in their work; something Caldwell (2007) describes as 'Positive or Direct Association' between two variables.

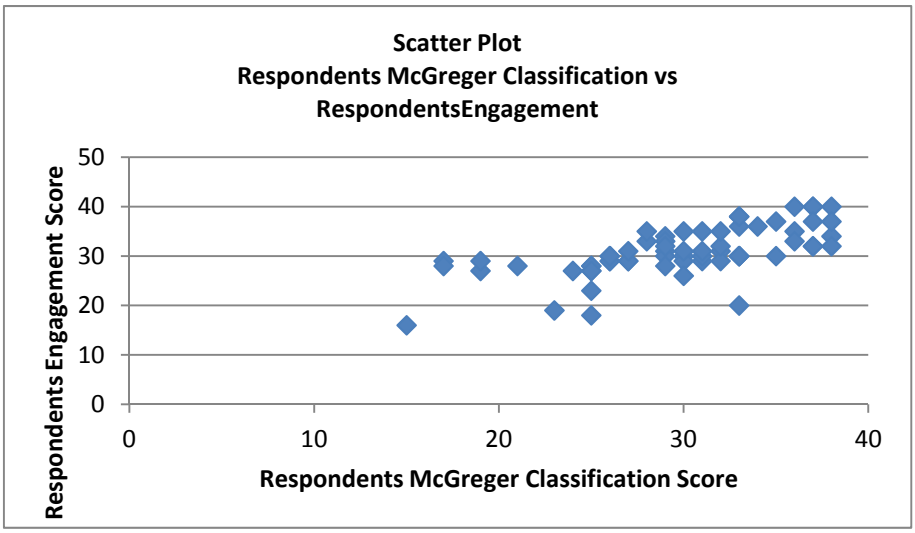


Figure 4.25 : Scatter plot which depicts the association between the two variables

In order to ascertain the strength of the linear association between both variables, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated. The Pearson Coefficient (r) is a measure of the association between two variables with the sign and value of r revealing a lot about their relationship (Caldwell, 2007). The closer the result is to +1.0 or - 1.0, the stronger the association is between the two variables. If the result of r is a positive sign, this indicated

that the two variables are associated in a positive way or conversely, if the result of r is a negative sign this indicates that the two variables are associated in a negative way.

Using Microsoft Excel, a correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between both variables was conducted and resulted in a correlation value of 0.662253. Salkind (2000) suggested that correlation coefficient results can be categorised as:

.0 to 02	No relationship to very weak relationship
.2 to .4	Weak association
.4 to .6	Moderate association
.6 to .8	Strong association.
.8 to .10	Very strong or perfect association.

Table 4.1 : Categories of correlation coefficient results

Based on the various categories of Table 4.1,it is clear that the two variables (McGregor classification and levels of Engagement) exhibit a Strong Positive Linear Association as classified by under the Salkind classification as the r score represents a strong association between the two variables.

The significance of this result was measured using a t-test to test the degree of confidence in the result (See Appendix F for calculation method). This test, tests a null hypothesis that there is no association between the two variables and that the experimental results are actually just by chance. The test resulted in a t-value of 6.917 ($t = 6.917$; $df = 62$) with an associated p-value of less than 0.01 ($p < 0.0000001$), a result that confirms our association.

Chi Square of Independence

According to Caldwell (2007), a Chi Square Test of Independence is a hypothesis-testing procedure which tests whether or not two variables are associated. If the Chi Square statistic

is small, one cannot conclude that a relationship between the two variables exist which means they are independent (Rumsey, 2007).

In conducting this test, the researcher is measuring whether to accept or reject the Null Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis - A McGregor classification does not affect Employee Engagement.

The results of this test indicated a Chi Square value of 2.7 and a p-value (significance level) approximately 0.10. The p value indicates probability and with a p value of 0.10 calculated, the researcher is 90% sure that a there is a relationship between the two variables and therefore, the researcher rejects the Null Hypothesis.

Chapter Five : Conclusion

The findings of this study have provided an insight into the personal thoughts and feelings of those who responded to this survey. These personal feelings have provided us with an insight into the work environment of these respondents and how conducive they are to creating an engaged workforce. This final chapter will summarise the findings of this study and discuss the implications of these findings.

5.1 Research Question / Statement revisited

Engagement is a deeply person experience and is something which a person decides to commit to or not. As engagement is a personal emotion, there are many things which influence it. The purpose of this paper was to measure what effect the most important person in an employee's daily working life has on their levels of engagement, their Line Manager. From this, the following research statement was constructed:

This paper will attempt to measure the effects Line Managers have on Employee Engagement in the public sector.

5.2 Summary of Findings

There are many things which influence an employee's decision to become engaged in their role, with their work environment playing a crucial role. This paper is based on the premise that an employee's Line Manager sets the tone for this working environment and as such, the Line Manager greatly influences employee engagement.

5.3 McGregor classification

The results of the McGregor classification part of the questionnaire show that respondents who took part in this research have a Line Manager with a Theory Y approach to workforce management. There is strong evidence which indicates that the respondents who agreed that they are encouraged to learn new skills, also have the trust and support of their Line Manager, something which embodies McGregor's Theory Y approach. Encouraging employees to learn new skills and supporting them to achieve this is a clear indication of a belief in human capital, a belief that by unlocking the talents of individuals and facilitating employees in their development will produce long term benefits to the employee and the organisation.

5.4 Levels of Engagement

The results of this part of the survey indicate a high degree of similarity with Kahn's (1990) findings on the engagement construct. Kahn found that that employees are naturally motivated and when engaged, express their true self. This became apparent as respondents revealed an insight about their feelings towards their role and working environment through this study.

Kahn (1990) identified that Psychological Meaningfulness is a feeling of being valued at work. This feeling was evident in respondents as they feel their job is important to the

success of the organisation, a feeling which was supported by the expression that they feel valued while at work.

When respondents expressed the view that they are willing to take on extra tasks, this suggested that they experience Psychological Availability while at work, a feeling that a person is physically and emotionally ready to engage in their work. The response rate to this measurement was the highest response rate to any category in the questionnaire, something which is strong evidence to suggest that respondents experience Psychological Availability at work.

If an employee does not feel safe in their working environment, they cannot express their true self. Knowing exactly what is expected each day and knowing where the boundaries are does not guarantee Psychological Safety, however, they are important elements of it. Respondents to the survey answered emphatically that they know exactly what is expected from them each day, something which signifies that they work in an atmosphere of certainty.

5.5 Implications of findings

The finding of this paper show that Line Managers have a positive influence on Employee Engagement. Line Managers have an approach to workforce management which creates a working environment where employees feel safe in expressing their true identity and are willing to fully engage in their work. As employee engagement is a much sought after condition, the fact that this study shows that respondents to the survey are engaged does not mean that this is something which can be taken for granted as the results also indicate where a different approach may be required in certain aspects of the Line Managers role.

Communication is a key ingredient of employee engagement, however 34% of respondents do not experience one-to-one communication with a further 22% not receiving feedback on their performance. Communication is key in building a trusting relationship and without it,

engagement cannot take place and it is possible that some Line Managers do not see the benefits of it, something which may require extra training for these Line Managers.

In addition, results also indicate that the majority of respondents experienced close supervision and that Line Managers who were critical if they do something wrong. This is something which needs to be addressed and may require Line Managers loosening their grip on employees and allowing them the freedom to make mistakes.

5.6 Limitations of this study

The purpose of this study was to measure the effects Line Managers have on Employee Engagement in the public sector. The approach taken for this research paper was that by surveying as many employees from two very busy and dynamic departments, these finding could conceivably become representative of the public sector as a whole.

However, current figures indicate that the public sector workforce is over 250,000. Therefore it is not possible that these findings can represent the entire public sector and consequently, this compromises the validity of this paper. While this papers findings offer a good insight into the effects Line Managers have on employee engagement, on reflection, these findings can only be valid for the two departments surveyed and not the entire public sector.

5.7 Further Research

The focus of this paper was to measure the effects Line Managers have on employee engagement, with the results showing strong evidence that they have a positive effect. However, the Line Manager is just one aspect (albeit a big one) on an employee's decision become engaged in their work. Other factors also influence engagement which warrant further research to gain a better understanding of why employees in the public sector become engaged.

The employee's perception of the culture of the organisation is also an important factor as well as the kinds of behaviour that get rewarded. In addition, further research on the effects the Psychological Contract and whether employees feel their employer delivers on their promises would also be beneficial and would help to provide a more balanced view of the engagement construct in the public sector.

5.6 Concluding thoughts

To stay competitive, an organisation requires the highest levels of performance from its employees. Given the difficult financial circumstances of the Irish economy, it is likely that the public sector will experience more cuts to its workforce, putting a further strain on managers and employees. As the public sector comes more in line with how private sector organisations operate and compete with one another, what is required is a stronger focus on creating and sustaining a workforce who are committed to their role, for it is through having an engaged workforce that the public sector can survive the competitive business environment.

While the researcher accepts that the findings of this paper are not representative of the public sector as a whole, the finding do however offer a degree of optimism. With this research paper showing that two very busy, dynamic and customer focused public sector departments have a workforce who are engaged in their work indicates that in spite of the continual decline in the numbers of public sector workers, the remaining workforce have the potential to sustain and even improve the high standards of service provided through their levels of engagement.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

Seamus Brady

91a Tolka Estate

Glasnevin

Dublin 11

Shaybrady91a@gmail.com

0861945965

Dear colleagues

My name is Seamus Brady, I work as a driver in the Waste Management Department. I am contacting you as I require your assistance to help me complete a research project for a course I have undertaken in college for an Honours Degree in Human Resource Maanagement. My project seeks to find out more about the subject of Employee Engagement. As little research has been conducted on this subject for the public sector, my paper will attempt to measure the effects Line Managers have on Employee Engagement in the public sector by the use of a questionnaire.

This questionnaire will have two parts with 20 questions in total. Part 1 will ask questions about how you perceive you Line Manager and part 2 will ask questions about your levels of engagement at work. The information you provide will help us to better understand the subject of employee engagement. Because you are the one who can give us a correct picture of how you experience your work life, I request you to respond to the questions frankly and honestly. Your response will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and withdraw from the process at any time. In order to ensure the upmost privacy, no personal details are required. Completed questionnaires will be kept confidential and the final paper will not be made available for any person within Dublin City Council to read.

I hope you will find completing the questionnaire enjoyable. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation and I greatly appreciate your help.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Yours Sincerely

Seamus

Appendix B

Questionnaire Part One

1. How approachable is your Line Manager?
   Very approachable *Approachable* *Unapproachable* *Very Unapproachable*

2. How often does your Line Manager provide feedback regarding your performance?
   Regularly *Sometimes* *Not very often* *Never*

3. My Line Manager listens to my ideas when making decisions.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

4. My Line Manager is very critical when I do something wrong.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

5. At work I experience close supervision.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

6. My Line Manager trusts me to do a good job.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

7. My Line Manager regularly engages on one-to-one communication with me.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

8. At work I am encouraged to learn new skills.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

9. I have a good working relationship with my Line Manager.
   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

10. When dealing with a difficult customer, I can rely on the support of my Line Manager.
    Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

Appendix C

Questionnaire Part Two

1. I feel my job is important to the success of the organisation.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

2. I feel valued at work.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

3. I am willing to take on extra tasks when required.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

4. I am determined to give my best efforts at work each day.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

5. I feel completely involved in my work.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

6. I try to find more efficient ways of doing my job.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

7. I take pride in my work.

   Strongly Agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

8. I know exactly what is expected of me at work each day.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I feel confident enough to express my opinion at work without suffering negative consequences.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I feel I have a good deal of control over how I resolve customer queries.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix D

Results from Part 1 (McGregor Classification) of the Questionnaire

Figures in red represent number of responses to each category.

1. How approachable is your Line Manager?

Very approachable	*Approachable*	*Unapproachable*	*Very Unapproachable*
37	**22**	**1**	**4**

2. How often does your Line Manager provide feedback regarding your performance?

Regularly	*Sometimes*	*Not very often*	*Never*
28	**22**	**12**	**2**

3. My Line Manager listens to my ideas when making decisions.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
12	**33**	**13**	**5**

4. My Line Manager is very critical when I do something wrong.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
10	**29**	**15**	**8**

5. At work I experience close supervision.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
14	**28**	**17**	**5**

6. My Line Manager trusts me to do a good job.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
22	**37**	**1**	**3**

7. My Line Manager regularly engages on one-to-one communication with me.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
19	**23**	**14**	**8**

8. At work I am encouraged to learn new skills.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
11	**33**	**12**	**8**

9. I have a good working relationship with my Line Manager.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
21	**34**	**7**	**2**

10. When dealing with a difficult customer, I can rely on the support of my Line Manager.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
12	**38**	**8**	**6**

Appendix E

Results from Part 2 (Levels of Engagement) of the Questionnaire

Figures in red represent number of responses to each category.

1. I feel my job is important to the success of the organisation.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
14	**39**	**8**	**3**

2. I feel valued at work.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
8	**36**	**14**	**6**

3. I am willing to take on extra tasks when required.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
14	**43**	**3**	**4**

4. I am determined to give my best efforts at work each day.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
27	**31**	**4**	**2**

5. I feel completely involved in my work.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
15	**38**	**8**	**3**

6. I try to find more efficient ways of doing my job.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
20	**37**	**6**	**1**

7. I take pride in my work.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
29	**31**	**1**	**3**

8. I know exactly what is expected of me at work each day.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26	**32**	**5**	**0**

9. I feel confident enough to express my opinion at work without suffering negative consequences.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17	**37**	**5**	**5**

10. I feel I have a good deal of control over how I resolve customer queries.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	**38**	**8**	**4**

Appendix F

Figures for Public Sector Grant

2008	Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	104,095,740
2009	Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	81,642,657
2010	Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	64,672,297
2011	Local Government Fund - General Purpose Grant	60,331,621

Figures available from:

http://www.dublincity.ie/YOURCOUNCIL/COUNCILPUBLICATIONS/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx

Appendix G

T- Test Calculation Method

$$t = \frac{r}{\text{sqrt}[(1-r^2)/(N-2)]}$$

is distributed approximately as **t** (see Chapters 9-12) with **df=N**−2. Application of this formula to any particular observed sample value of **r** will accordingly test the null hypothesis (see Chapter 4, et seq.) that the observed value comes from a population in which **rho=0.**

To assess the significance of any particular instance of **r**, enter the values of **N**[≥6] and **r** into the designated cells below, then click the 'Calculate' button. (For the distinction between a directional and non- directional test, see also Chapter 4, et seq.)

N = 64	r = .66
Reset	Calculate
t	df
6.917	62
Probability	
directional	<.0000001
non-directional	<.0000001