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**Understanding the Experience of High Workplace
Engagement in a Team Environment:
Workplace Contributors and Influences**

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the degree of**

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Abstract

This research endeavors to understand peoples' experience of working in a highly engaged team, and specifically to understand the aspects of the work environment that contribute to their engagement. As participants' own perspectives and views are central to gaining a rich insight, a qualitative approach is taken. Twenty-five participants from a large government agency who had worked in highly engaged teams took part in five focus group discussions. The discussions were analysed following thematic analysis techniques, and a thematic network of three interrelated layers was developed to explain the findings.

This thematic network focuses more on people's experiences of working in an engaging environment and the feelings associated with these experiences, whereas the literature focuses more on describing engagement and the aspects of the environment which contributes to engagement. At the base of the engagement model, developed from this research, are the seven aspects of the workplace that contribute to people's engagement: leadership; challenging and or varied work; access to knowledge; latitude and responsibility; social atmosphere; safety, trust and support; and respect. Above this are the feelings people connect with working in this environment: feeling at ease and relaxed, having a sense of achievement and satisfaction, and being valued or validated. The top layer of the model is the overall sense of what working in an engaging environment is about: feeling good in one's self.

Three further observations are made. Firstly, the team is an important aspect in peoples' engagement, and a duality exists where the person and the team simultaneously influence each other. Secondly, engagement is an active process; it changes over time, has a lifecycle over peoples' careers, actively transfers between people and exists within a reinforcing loop. Lastly, engagement within this organisation, refers to a connection to the work or workplace: people were interested, participated, enjoyed and were connected to their work, but maintained a separation. There was no sense of merging one's identity with the work as noted within some of the literature on engagement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Growing public sector expenditure and greater public scrutiny mean Government agencies are searching for ways to improve their performance and the effectiveness with which they transform taxpayers' money into meaningful outcomes for the community (The Treasury, 2005; Economic Policy Committee, 2007). At the same time, despite the current financial upheaval, government organisations are searching for the means to attract and retain talented staff, as they endeavor to build the skill level of those working for them.

Engagement Benefits both the Organisation and Employees

Increasing staff engagement is a means to achieve both improved performance and staff retention, as it is associated with positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation. The term engagement refers to the connection employees have with their work - how personally involved, immersed and energised they are with their work and their workplace. Research into workplace engagement is relatively new. In the main, it stems from practitioner interest in improving organisational performance. Academic interest in engagement occurs mainly through the work on managing burnout. These different interests lead to a variety of definitions for engagement, which encompass: absorption, connection, involvement, energy, dedication and fulfillment (Freeney & Tiernan, 2006; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Research by Gallup (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) and others (Amble, 2006; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004) indicates that engaged workers not only are fulfilled and have positive well being, but also improve organisational performance. Thus improving employee engagement achieves economic benefits for the organisation and positive outcomes for its employees. This association between engagement and business performance is one of the main reasons for practitioner and management interest in engagement. Organisational performance data from across the world shows engaged employees make large positive differences to financial results. In addition, engagement is associated with other organisational performance indicators, for example, loyalty, safety, turnover and retention, as well as customer satisfaction

(Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2007; Erickson, 2005). Authors, such as Bhatnagar, go so far as to claim engagement can make or break an organisation, as engaged workers invest more of themselves in their jobs, and perform better. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, in investigating the correlation between a common organisational engagement survey and key business performance indicators, (for example customer satisfaction and loyalty, productivity, turnover, safety, and profitability), concluded a strong correlation exists between engagement and business performance. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) also supports this association, claiming engaged employees try harder, are less likely to leave, and perform better.

Engagement not only benefits the organisation but also benefits employees through the associated positive emotions and relationships that engaged workers have with the workplace. Engagement is connected with improved individual well-being and good health, as the freedom engaged workers feel to immerse themselves in their work engenders an enthusiasm, sense of enjoyment, and fulfillment whilst at work, which spills over into other aspects of their life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Koyuncu, Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2006; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Description of the Organisation this Research is Located in

Maintaining this balance between improving performance, recruitment, and retention, whilst also maintaining the health and well being of employees, is a significant concern for the organisation within which this research takes place. The main reason for managerial interest in measuring and building engagement across the organisation is as a means to meet significant work pressures and achieve improved recruitment and retention whilst also maintaining or improving employee well-being. This interest in improving well-being is also through what appears to be a genuine interest by management in the well-being of staff.

For confidentiality reasons the organisation included in this thesis cannot be named. Nevertheless to allow a better understanding of the organisation within which this research is located, a limited description follows. The organisation is a large government agency has a sizeable workforce of approximately 6000 employees in 17 centres across New Zealand, although the majority of the workforce is based in the Wellington national office. The organisation has a large percentage of staff with over 10

years of service, which may in part be explained by the specific nature of the work it does. The organisation also has a very high ratio of professional and skilled roles to non-skilled roles. The work undertaken by the organisation encompasses diverse functions and roles, for example; clerical processing of transactions in both a manual and automated environment (which requires significant information technology support), front-line customer enquiry and service provision, and the resolution of highly complex issues requiring specific professional expertise and experience. The organisation also has a large professional corporate services area to support front-line services. Over the past few years, the agency has faced significant growth and change to its operations as it strives to implement a sizeable government policy programme. This workload is not anticipated to abate in the near future. Added to this, the organisation faces challenges in retaining and recruiting staff across a variety of roles as, until the beginning of the current recession, it competed for skilled labour in a tight market.

For many years the organisation has conducted a complex organisational climate survey. Six months prior to commencing this thesis research, it replaced this survey with an engagement survey. The core reason for this change was a perception that the climate survey was overly complex and did not provide managers with practical information useful in developing their teams. This agency is interested in researching the concept of engagement because engagement measures (for example the Gallup WorkPlace Audit) are perceived by management to go much further than other employee measures (for example satisfaction) and provide an indication of not only how much people want to perform but also how much they are actually performing. Management also believe, and are interested in engagement survey vendors claims that engagement measures can identify the cognitive (employees' logical evaluation of organisational goals, values and commitment), emotional (employees' sense of pride and belonging), and behavioural (actions, for example, retention) aspects of employees' relationship with the workplace (Storey, Ulrich, Welbourne & Wright, 2009).

For this agency, the first step in the engagement journey, was to determine the level of employee engagement through conducting a site-wide engagement survey; the Gallup WorkPlace Audit (GWA). The agency selected the GWA engagement survey because the Gallup survey shows correlations between engagement as measured by the GWA survey and organisational performance in terms of turnover, retention, customer satisfaction, safety, greater efficiency and improved outputs. The survey also provided management with information on which areas to focus on to enhance employee engagement. The 12 questions within the survey each measure different conditions

required for engagement, this was an important feature for the organisation as for some time it has been frustrated with a lack of information about how to improve employee satisfaction and performance.

The GWA assesses the strength of a workplace with 12 self-report questions, which seek to understand what is important to high performers (defined as those who are loyal and productive). Interestingly, many expected areas (for example, pay and benefits, management, and structure) are not included within the GWA as the developers found these did not distinguish between high or low performance. As such they were considered hygiene or entry factors required by all employees, but alone they do not contribute to improved performance. Instead the survey focuses on what people get from their role, what they have to give to their role, if they feel a sense of belonging within the organisation, and if they have the opportunity to develop (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). The 12 questions used in the GWA engagement survey were developed deductively, and are based on the information generated from the thousands of focus groups Gallop conducted as they investigated the factors associated with organisational success. Through factor analysis of this information, Gallup identified five conditions that contribute to high engagement: a) the work environment and procedures, b) the immediate supervisor, c) the immediate team and co-workers, d) senior management and e) the individual's sense of commitment to the organisation. Following this, various regression analyses identified the core twelve questions, which were then confirmed by meta-analysis (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002).

The first time the GWA engagement survey was administered in the organisation of interest, the results indicated (when compared with similar organisations across the world) a medium level of engagement for the entire organisation (as defined by Gallup), although survey results varied significantly across the organisation, at both a business unit level and across individual teams within business units. Organisationally, scores also varied across the twelve questions. Management interpreted this to mean the organisation scored well on providing basic needs and opportunities for development, but not so well on providing people with the ability to contribute or with a sense of belonging. As expected, hierarchical level within the organisation did have some influence as those in more senior roles were slightly more engaged. Support for the survey was high with over 80% of staff completing the survey. This rate is similar to the response rate for the previous climate survey.

Organisational analysis also supported the link between engaged teams and higher performance as those teams with higher team engagement scores also had higher performance scores as defined by achievement of organisational targets. Anecdotally, all teams that scored highly on the GWA were known to senior management and considered through the organisation as “high performing”. As such this link between team performance and engagement is not assessed within this research. Interestingly, during the empirical research, a number of team members used the term “high performing” in preference to the term “high engagement” when describing their team.

Although the GWA engagement survey provides information on the individual team’s level of engagement and a very broad indication of the conditions contributing to that engagement, the survey does not provide detailed, in-depth information on what contributes to a team’s engagement. Management specifically wanted to know what in the workplace environment influenced engagement. They were interested in developing an organisation-specific guidebook detailing how managers should improve the work environment and build engagement for their team. Fortuitously, at the time the Human Resource Department was grappling with this idea I was discussing the concept of undertaking some academic research into engagement. Through these discussions we developed the concept of undertaking in-depth research into understanding employees’ experiences of engagement and using this information as an input into the guide for managers. This opportunity occurred because I work within the agency and had done so for approximately three year at the time of the research. Working at the agency provided some advantages, as I was able to understand organisational “jargon” and some of the history or context behind participants’ comments.

Research Description

The purpose of this research is to: build on the GWA engagement survey information (which only identified those that were engaged); and add qualitative information as to what specifically within the agency’s work environment was associated with high team engagement. The objective is to understand, specifically within this organisation, employees’ experiences of engagement, and in particular to understand the features of the work environment that influenced or contributed to people’s engagement. This research also seeks to investigate the influence of the immediate work team on engagement. In doing so the research is approached from the premise that the team

itself is an important aspect of a person's engagement and that engagement cannot be studied separately from the team.

Team engagement is an important component of this research because, to maintain worker anonymity, GWA survey scores are aggregated and only reported at a team level. This focus on team level engagement scores makes sense as the majority of work is undertaken within a team environment, and thus for most people the team environment is an important context within which they belong and work.

Some literature supports this interest in team-level engagement; Pugh and Deitz (2008) for example, support aggregating engagement scores to the team level and justify doing so as the team or unit is the level of intervention and organisational interest. However, most literature on engagement focuses at an individual level and the team is really only considered from the perspective of the social relationships between team members. This individual focus within the engagement literature occurs despite the fact that the majority of engagement measures reflect team engagement not individual engagement. Even authors, (for example Clayton, 2006), who specifically consider team engagement do not distinguish between individual and team level engagement within their work. Investigating the team influence means this research seeks to go beyond the main literature on engagement and explore how engagement exists within teams, thus providing a deeper insight into team engagement, an important area largely ignored within the literature.

This research considers only the experiences of highly engaged teams and their team members. This approach stems from a belief in the need to understand optimal functioning from the perspective of what is right within the environment. Further it is often through building on strengths that negative aspects can be buffered (Gable & Haidt, 2005, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

A qualitative approach is utilised within this research. The desire is to genuinely understand what was working within the environment for those who were engaged. This requires gaining a rich or in-depth understanding of people's experiences from their perspective and in their words, which can only be achieved through qualitative methods. Qualitative methods encourage an in-depth understanding because they are flexible and do not constraint participants, allowing them to use and convey their thoughts on the things that are important in the terms and manner they choose.

Focus groups were selected as a research method as they offer a means to get closer to team members' understandings, or perspectives, on engagement. They also generate a much clearer, more detailed understanding of the nuances in the work environment that contributed to team members' engagement. As a more naturalistic research method, focus groups allow spontaneity and take advantage of our human tendency to discuss issues. Consequently, they provide a mechanism for people to access previously unarticulated thoughts (Bryman, 2008; Colucci, 2007; Morgan, 1993; Sim, 1998). Focus groups also afford the researcher the opportunity to witness how team members explore a range of different views; as such focus groups generate rich meaningful data on people's experiences (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Wibeck, Abrandt-Dahlgren & Oberg, 2007). Conducting focus groups held the additional benefit of credibility within the organisation, as this method is frequently used to gather information.

Five focus group discussions were included within this research, and participants were all team members from high engagement teams, as defined by their scores on the GWA engagement survey. To ensure the research gained a variety of views from employees across the organisation, the respondent pool included areas with different roles and functions, including customer-facing and back-office teams, professional and non-professional teams, and teams from both operational and corporate areas of the organisation. Because engagement scores measure the team's aggregated level of engagement and not the individual's engagement, each participant acted as a representative of their team and put forth not just their own personal views and beliefs but also those of their teams.

Transcripts from the focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis techniques and followed Attride-Stirling's (2001) network process. The network process depicts themes within a web-like network and allows exploration of the relationships between themes. As the literature indicates a myriad of aspects influence people's engagement, this network process is particularly appropriate.

As stated at the beginning, engagement offers benefits to both employees and management. This research provides information to aid management to improve performance. Understanding the contextual aspects associated with high engagement is useful from management's perspective as this information can be used to determine which aspects of the work environment need attention to improve employee engagement and thereby organisational performance. In addition this research

provides a better understanding of engagement as it occurs within a team environment, the work environment that predominates most organisations. Importantly, a better understanding of engagement provides information that will enable managers and employees to undertake interventions aimed at improving employee's workplace experience and their well-being at work. Gaining the perspective of those actually working in an engaging environment ensures the comments and thoughts are those of importance to employees and not those of the researcher, practitioner or manager, whose interpretations have biases.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Workplace engagement as a concept has grown out of practitioner interest. Academic interest in engagement is in its infancy, and as such academic research in the area is relatively sparse. As a result, the theories underlying engagement have not been rigorously investigated (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Bhatnagar, 2007; Freaney & Tiernan, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Despite the qualitative nature of Kahn's (1990) seminal research on engagement, the majority of subsequent authors have investigated engagement from a quantitative perspective and have not followed Kahn's desire to "deeply probe people's experiences and situations during the discrete moments that make up their work lives" (Kahn 1990, p. 593). Instead most of the academic work on engagement attempted to specify the construct of engagement and establish "conceptual precision" (Macey & Schneider, 2008 p4), or "*demarcate*" the construct (Dalal, Brummel, Wee & Thomas, 2008). Other research focused on developing causal models, which attempted to develop an "overall model that can be used to develop work engagement in today's workplace and advance career developmen." (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 209).

This research instead endeavours to follow Kahn's (1990) work and probe into individuals' experiences of engagement and the context surrounding those experiences, with the desire to gain an in-depth, situation-specific understanding of engagement within a team environment, and to understand the influence the team has on engagement.

The purpose of this literature review is to understand engagement as it is depicted and discussed within psychological and practitioner literature. It also seeks to understand what aspects of the workplace influence, or are associated with, engagement. The first section on definitions of engagement explores the different ways engagement is defined and characterised within the literature. As engagement is often depicted as similar or related to other workplace phenomena (e.g. commitment, satisfaction, job involvement, burnout, and organisational citizenship behaviour), a very brief review of these phenomena follows in the second section. In section three, three relevant models of engagement are reviewed: Kahn's (1990) qualitative model, (the approach that most closely mirrors that of this research); the Gallup GWA (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999)

model (the model of engagement used within the organisation in which this research is located); and the Utrecht (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli, et al., 2002) model (the more common and academically supported model). The fourth section reviews the literature on team effectiveness. This literature was particularly relevant as the purpose of this research is to understand the organisational influences on engagement, and in particular, the influence of teams on engagement. Lastly, the huge raft of potential influences associated with people's experiences of engagement are drawn into a coherent framework based on Kahn's model of engagement. Kahn's model is most appropriate for this purpose as his work is one of the few that focuses qualitatively on the conditions of engagement.

Engagement Defined

Engagement could be considered a positive psychological phenomenon, as it focuses on the positive aspects of the workplace and the organisational behaviour that contributes to people's optimal functioning and successful work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Engagement provides positive benefits to both the organisation and the individual. Being engaged in one's work improves an individual's well-being and good health. Those who are engaged experience a pleasant and fulfilling state, which spills over into other aspects of their life and contributes to their health and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; May, Gilson & Harter; Saks, 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Despite these links to well-being, Macey & Schneider (2008) noted the possibility for engagement to lead to burnout. However, as will be shown later, research indicates burnout and engagement are in fact polar opposites. Engagement is about a healthy, fulfilling immersion in one's work and is the antithesis of burnout and as such engagement is considered a preventative for burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The benefits of engagement extended not just to employees but also to organisations. This apparent relationship between engagement and business performance is one of the main reasons practitioners and organisations are interested in engagement. A number of authors and organisation cited data from many different countries that showed engaged employees make a difference to an organisation's financial results. This is because engaged workers invest more of themselves in their jobs, perform at a higher level and stay longer. Further, they showed engagement was also associated

with other organisational performance indicators, for example loyalty, safety, turnover and retention, and customer satisfaction (Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2007; Erickson, 2005; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002).

Numerous definitions of engagement can be found across both practitioner and academic literature (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). All viewed engagement from different perspectives and included different characteristics. Kahn's (1990) qualitative work defined engagement as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work-role" (p. 694). Kahn's work expanded on this definition and provided a more complete description of engagement; "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), and active full role performance" (p. 700). In Kahn's (1992) later work on psychological presence, being fully present in one's work means people display physical, cognitive and emotional engagement. Consequently engagement is the outcome of psychological presence.

More recent definitions have described engagement quite differently, focusing less on a person's immersion in the role and more on efficacy and fulfillment (Freeney & Tiernan, 2006). Maslach and Leiter (2008) defined engagement as "*an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy*" (p. 498). Similarly Freeney and Tiernan (2006) described engaged employees as having a "sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of the job" (p. 132). Schaufeli, et al. (2002) added the concept of "absorption" as a relevant aspect of engagement and defined engagement as a "positive fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour dedication and absorption" (p. 74). This definition was the more commonly used definition within the current literature on engagement (Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Engagement could thus be considered a persistent, affective and cognitive state of mind that is not focused on any specific object (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The difference between the definitions of Maslach and Leiter (1997, 2008) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) appear to hold little importance conceptually, as authors discussing engagement utilised aspects of both. For example Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli and Salanova (2006), based their definition on Maslach and Leiter's work: "work engagement is defined as the polar opposite of burnout namely as a positive affective motivational state of

fulfillment in employees” (p. 379). On the other hand they used Schaufeli et al.s' (2002) aspects of vigour, dedication and absorption, rather than Maslach and Leiter's energy, involvement and efficacy, within their study.

The definitions found in practitioner-based articles focused more on those aspects relevant to the organisation and its managers. For example, The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) described engagement as, "The extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organisation and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result" (un-paginated web document) and Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) described engagement as "the individuals involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (P. 269.). Further Bhatnagar (2007) defined engagement as a heightened emotional connection to both the job and the organisation, which goes beyond satisfaction, enabling workers to perform well and encouraging them to stay and say good things about their employer.

Characteristics of engagement. The variety of definitions above all provided concise descriptions of what engagement means. However these definitions do not offer details of what engagement encompasses. This section on characteristics fleshes out the definitions above to provide a more full understanding of engagement as it is conceived within the literature.

Descriptions of engagement have commonly centred on five core aspects, i) an immersion in work, ii) meaning and fulfillment, iii) positive emotions, iv) dedication and v) energy. The first of these, an immersion in work refers to how much a person is absorbed or engrossed in what they were doing. It reflects Kahn's (1990, 1992) depiction of harnessing oneself to the work-role, or being fully psychologically present in the role, where a person is fully attentive, integrated and focused on the task. These descriptions highlight the importance of the role in how immersed people are in their work. Considered in this light, engagement could be thought of as similar to the concept flow, which is described as a peak experience of effortless action where one is immersed in, motivated by, and enjoying the task (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen & Schaufeli, 2006; Saks 2006; Salanova, Bakker & Llorens, 2006).

The second characteristic, meaning, is closely associated with how immersed people are in their work, as the amount people put into their role varies based on how meaningful the work is to them (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Authors' have shown that

people who work in meaningful roles gained a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, which was associated with feelings of efficacy and being able to meet the needs of the job. These feelings of fulfillment and efficacy have a motivational quality, which in turn fosters an attachment to work (Langelaan et al., 2006; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006).

Thirdly, being engaged has been characterised as experiencing positive emotions and deriving pleasure or enjoyment from one's work. This positive affect encourages people to feel emotionally connected to their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Erickson, 2005; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006; Hallburg & Schaufeli, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Other authors, particularly practitioners who are associated with organisations administering engagement surveys, depicted more extreme positive emotions, for example being passionate about one's work and the organisation (Harter & Schmidt, 2008).

Dedication, the fourth characteristic, encompasses being committed, persistent and striving to succeed. In essence, engaged workers care about the results. This dedication is based on people's perceptions that, they have the ability to meet work demands, they are available to undertake the work, and they have the resources internally and externally to meet work demands. People who hold these perceptions could be deemed to hold positive efficacy beliefs (Erickson, 2005; Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Lastly, being engaged included having energy and being actively involved in ones work. Engagement is thus behavioural and involves the active use of emotions and cognition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006).

A few authors have also characterised engagement as existing within a process or reinforcing spiral. Freeney and Tiernan's (2006) review of engagement developed a process model of engagement, where aspects of the work and work environment led to engagement through an individual's cognitive and emotional responses to the work environment. This in turn led to greater positive affect. Freeney and Tiernan postulate that this process may exist as a reinforcing spiral.

This concept of reinforcing spirals can be found within Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova's (2007) work on reinforcing motivational spirals. In their work on job resources, Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova hypothesised that a reinforcing

relationship exists between engagement, task resources and efficacy beliefs, as task resources led to engagement and engagement led to higher efficacy beliefs, which in turn improved access to task resources. Bakker, van Emmerik and Euwema (2006) also pointed to the possibility of positive reinforcing spirals existing within engagement; they found that those who are engaged exercise proactive behaviours which generates rewards for themselves. These rewards are motivating in their own right and thus act to continue the reinforcing spiral. Kahn's (1992) model of psychological presence also depicts a recursive loop where engagement results in outcomes, which feed back into the system through rewards or punishments.

Similar Work-related Phenomena

Engagement as a broad psychological phenomena shares many characteristics with other workplace phenomena. As such it could be viewed as existing in a constellation of similar work-related phenomena, which all describe in different but overlapping ways how people relate to work (Bhatnagar, 2007; Saks 2006). Concepts, such as job involvement, satisfaction, Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), and organisational commitment, are all a variation on the same core theme of people's perceptions and attitudes to their work environment (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Some authors consider engagement as merely a blend of these traditional concepts (Newman & Harrison, 2008). For example, Macey and Schneider (2008) consider that engagement includes, but goes beyond, the contentment of job involvement and job satisfaction, and encompasses positive affect in terms of pleasure, enthusiasm, emotional energy and feelings of being persistent and absorbed. Other authors consider engagement as sharing similar aspects, but at the same time existing as a unique and separate phenomena (Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Interestingly, Harter and Schmidt (2008) observed that the differences are semantic, as those in the actual workplace fail to grasp or see the subtle conceptual differences and as such they are considered almost meaningless.

Given the association between engagement and other common psychological workplace phenomena – specifically OCB, commitment, job involvement and job satisfaction - each of these will be briefly reviewed and then their relationship with engagement discussed.

Organisational citizenship behaviour. Organ (1997) defined OCB as “contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance” (p. 91). Thus OCB concerns contextual performance or those activities that employees undertake, which facilitates the task or technical aspects of the job (LePine, Erez & Johnson, 2002). Borman, Motowidlo, Rose, and Hanser (1983, cited in Borman, 2004) conceptualised OCB as incorporating three aspects: the first, providing personal support, includes helping, cooperating with others and showing consideration; the second, showing organisational support by defending and promoting the organisation and complying with rules and procedures; and the last, conscientious initiative, includes persisting in difficult situations, taking initiative and volunteering to go beyond formal role requirements. Whilst these behaviours are similar to those of engaged workers, differences exist between engagement and OCB. Literature on organisational citizenship behaviour focuses on extra role behaviour (Hetty van Emmerik, Jawahar, Thomas & Stone, 2005), whilst the engagement literature focuses on performance in the formal role, which may or may not include extra role activity. Thus engagement is concerned with the manner in which people approach what they are supposed to do in a role (Saks, 2006; Saks 2008). Engaged workers may not necessarily do anything extra, but may persist, work smarter, or invest greater effort in their work. As such the behaviours typically characterised as OCB are incorporated within engagement and exhibited by engaged workers whilst undertaking their formal role (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Commitment. Commitment has been closely associated with positive organisational behaviour. The most common, but by no means unanimously accepted, conceptualisation of organisational commitment is the three component model, which describes commitment as a “pattern of relations among three mind-sets of commitment to the organisation, designated as desire, cost, and obligation” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301, cited in Solinger, van Olffen & Roe, 2008). In this definition, desire refers to the employee’s bond to the organisation, cost refers to the cost to leave, and obligation to the employee’s obligation to remain. Commitment is thus a force that binds individuals to an organisation and includes a sense of persistence. It is typically displayed by employees through their belief in organisational values, as well as their desire to remain with the organisation and exert effort for the organisation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004).

As with engagement, commitment is also related to other work-related behaviour, for example work avoidance or turnover (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). Cooper-

Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) consider commitment to include job involvement and that satisfaction is the most popular outcome of commitment. Added to this the definitions of OCB provided above appears to include the concept of commitment. Llorens' et al. (2006) description of engagement highlighted this association: "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and a definite desire to maintain organisational membership" (p. 37).

Some authors, for example Llorens et al. (2006), consider engagement to be an outcome of commitment. Engagement could also be considered to encompass commitment, as the sense of binding to the task or the organisation, which is essentially commitment, is a core aspect of engagement. However, engagement extends further than this binding and includes, for example, perceptions of safety, being engrossed or absorbed in the role (Macey & Schneider 2008; Saks, 2006).

Job involvement. Job involvement, another work-related phenomenon, conceptually includes four dimensions: i) work centrality, ii) participation in the job, iii) influences on self-esteem and iv) consistency with self concept (Saleh & Hosek, 1976). Definitions of job involvement share striking similarities to those of engagement, for example, "Job involvement is defined as the degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and to the work performed therein" (Kanungo, 1982, p. 342). Some authors even use the term engagement within their definitions of job involvement, for example, "A state of involvement implies a positive and relatively complete state of engagement of core aspects of the self in the job, whereas a state of alienation implies a loss of individuality and separation of the self from the work environment (Brown, 1996, p. 236). In addition, Brown's (1996) discussions of job involvement does not distinguish between engagement and job involvement as he quotes Kahn's (1990) study to support the importance of the organisational environment to changes in job involvement. In more recent work, engagement is often portrayed as an antecedent to job involvement (Macey & Schneider 2008; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006). These all indicated the close association between job involvement and engagement.

However, literature also indicates differences between engagement and job involvement, as engagement focuses more on how the individual employs themselves during the job and entails the active use of emotions and behaviours. These go beyond the purely cognitive elements of job involvement (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter,

2001). In addition compared to involvement, engagement focuses more on optimal functioning and well-being, two aspects not included in descriptions of job involvement.

Satisfaction. Satisfaction refers to a person's feelings towards their job or role. It is an evaluation of the fulfillment one receives from one's work. One of the definitions included within Sharp's (2008) article on satisfaction is "the feelings an employee has about the job in general" (p. 374), whereas Pilkington and Wood (1986) define job satisfaction as "a positive affective response to work" (p.4). Based on these definitions, satisfaction varies from person to person and varies within an individual over time (Sharp, 2008). The similarity and overlap between engagement and satisfaction is highlighted by Svensen, Arnetz, Ursin and Eriksen, (2007) in their use of the Gallup GWA engagement survey to assess satisfaction. Within this study, examining subjective health complaints, the authors stated, "The 12 questions in the Q12 [Gallup GWA] are assumed to be measures of satisfaction and are likely to correlate with an overall measure of job satisfaction" (Svensen et al., 2007, p. 569). Furthermore, other authors' descriptions and measures of engagement include satisfaction. For example one of the engagement definitions utilised to support the Gallup GWA engagement survey is "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002, p. 269). However other authors do not consider engagement and satisfaction to be the same; some descriptions of satisfaction refer more to a sense of sufficiency and experiencing no major problems, whilst engagement extends much further to include enthusiasm, passion, commitment and high levels of activation and energy (Erickson, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Well-being. The literature provides ample support for the notion of engagement as a state of well-being, and numerous authors associate well-being with engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Freeney and Tiernan (2006) depict well-being as a core value of engagement, and consider that well-being is one aspect which differentiates engagement from other related workplace phenomena. Halberg and Schaufeli (2006) also conceptualise engagement as a state of well-being characterised by energy, dedication, and attachment. Their research shows engagement to be associated with a lack of health complaints. They argue that is this well-being which differentiates engagement from other work concepts, namely involvement and commitment. Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2007) investigated the engagement and burnout continuum from the perspective of

conservation of resources theory. They consider well-being as a job resource, which leads to increased engagement, and they consider this process to exist within a continuous motivating or gain spiral.

One of the core connections between well-being and engagement is their association with positive affect. Macy and Schneider (2008) describe engagement as “*an activated pleasant affect*” (p.11) and others depict engagement as a positive, pleasant, fulfilling state or emotion (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002; Harter Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). On the other hand, Harter, Schmidt and Keys, in their work on well-being, also link well-being with positive affect, reporting its association with the presence of positive emotions, a positive appraisal of the workplace, and the individual’s relationship with that workplace. These are all aspects included within discussions on engagement.

Well-being, however, is often not well defined, and within the work on engagement can often simply refer to a lack of health complaints. For example, Koyuncu, Burke and Fiksenbaum’s (2006) study of engagement in Turkish professional women found that engagement was positively associated with indicators of well-being. These indicators of well-being, however, are the absence of psychosomatic symptoms and exhaustion rather than the positive aspects of happiness, joy contentment and caring more usually associated with engagement. This may in part be due to the focus of the work on psychological well-being in the workplace having been driven by an interest in stress work and an absence of negative factors.

In summary, engagement has many aspects in common with other similar work-related psychological phenomena, for example commitment, job involvement, satisfaction, and OCB. However differences exist in that engagement goes further than the mere satiation and contentment often depicted by descriptions of these phenomena. Further engagement incorporates aspects of emotion (particularly passion, enthusiasm and pleasure), identity and positive-activated energy which are often not included in other similar work related concepts (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Models of Engagement

A number of authors have attempted to bring together the various characteristics of engagement into workable models. Three are relevant to this research. Firstly, Kahn’s

(1990) study into the experience of engagement - which identifies the three psychological conditions of engagement - is particularly pertinent, as this research mirrors Kahn's desire to deeply understand the experience of engagement. The second model is the Gallup GWA model of engagement (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). This model is relevant as it is the measure of engagement used within the organisation studied in this research. The third model, the Utrecht model, is the more commonly accepted academic model of engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). These three models are now briefly discussed.

Kahn's tripartite engagement model. Kahn's (1990) study sought to understand what it means to be psychologically present and draw oneself into a task or role. His focus was on the context that contributed to people's motivations and sense of meaning. Through in-depth participant observation in a summer camp situation and in-depth interviews in a large architectural firm, Kahn identified three psychological conditions that influenced people's engagement in the role. The first is meaningfulness, where people perceived they gained value from undertaking the work and felt a sense of return from investing themselves in the role. Good interpersonal relationships and being involved in challenging work contributed to this sense of meaningfulness. The second condition is safety, where a person felt safe from any negative consequences of showing their real self in the role. The last condition is availability, where a person felt they had the resources internally and externally to meet the demands of the work. Kahn's work and theories were quantitatively tested by May, Gilson and Harter (2004) through a field study in a large insurance firm based in Midwestern USA. This research found meaningfulness had the strongest association with engagement. The association with safety closely followed this. Availability however had much weaker associations.

This model was further developed in Kahn's (1992) article, on psychological presence and a "recursive model of psychological engagement" (p.340), where three aspects, the work, the social system and individual distractions, lead to the three conditions of engagement these conditions in turn lead to a psychological presence and engagement in the work, which then feeds back into the system through performance results, reinforcements and punishments.

The Gallup model of engagement. The Gallup GWA engagement model is relevant to this research because it is the model of engagement used by the organisation in which this research took place. The Gallup organisation developed the 12 questions of the Gallup GWA through deductive analysis of the information

generated from the thousands of focus groups Gallup conducted in investigating success in the workplace. The Gallup GWA was designed to assess a workplace with 12 self-report questions. These 12 questions sought to understand what is important to high performers (defined by Gallup as those who are loyal and productive) (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). The Gallup engagement model was strongly influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970, cited in Freaney & Tiernan, 2006), where those aspects at the bottom of the needs pyramid must be met before any "higher" needs can be fulfilled. Within the Gallup GWA model of engagement, an employees' most basic requirement is to be provided with the resources or the materials to do the job. This includes having clear goals and directions. Once these needs are met employees want to feel they are contributing to the organisation and that they receive something in return, namely they have an opportunity to use their skills and talents and they receive recognition and feedback. At the third level within the Gallup GWA engagement model employees want to experience a sense of belonging, to be involved in decision making, and to have positive relationships with their coworkers and supervisors. Lastly, at the top of the pyramid is self actualisation or the opportunity for personal development within the work environment (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002; Freaney & Tiernan, 2006).

The two models outlined above, although not necessarily opposing, have different starting points and perspectives. However they can be considered complimentary especially if Kahn's (1990) three conditions - meaningfulness, safety and availability - are utilised as an umbrella framework and the 12 questions of the Gallup model are placed within these three conditions. Luthans and Peterson's (2002) article considering engagement and self efficacy also hypothesized this fit of the Gallup GWA engagement model with Kahn's.

Within the Gallup model the first tier of the hierarchy (the provision of the resources to do the job) reflects the availability component of Khan's (1990) model, as the provision of resources (i.e. the materials to do the job, clear goals and clear directions) contribute to people's ability to successfully undertake the task. Although clear directions could be argued to also provide people safety. The second tier within the Gallup model, peoples perceptions of their contribution (for example, having an opportunity to use one's skills and talents and receiving recognition and feedback), reflects Khan's meaningfulness condition. The aspects within this second level of the hierarchy depict a person's fit with the environment which in turn contributes to their perceiving meaning in their work. In

Gallup's third stage employees experience a sense of belonging, this belonging echoes aspects of both Kahn's meaningfulness and safety aspects, as being involved in decision making and having positive relationships contributes to the meaning in one's work and positive relationships contribute to perceptions of safety. At the top of the Gallup engagement pyramid being provided with opportunities for personal development can also be seen as part of Khan's meaningfulness condition. Although the Gallup model can be considered to reflect aspects of Khan's three conditions, the Gallup model is much narrower than Kahn's, as it focuses more on the organisational aspects of engagement and less on the individual's feelings and attitudes. In particular aspects of Kahn's safety condition are missing within the Gallup GWA model (Freeney & Tiernan 2006).

The Utrecht model of engagement. The third and most common model of engagement found within the engagement literature is the Utrecht work engagement scale. The Utrecht model was originally developed as a 24-item self-response survey, however this has since been reduced to 17 items (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006).

This model is based on the work surrounding burnout, in which engagement is considered to be the opposite of burnout and is cast as a prevention for burnout. The original work by Maslach and Leiter (1997) conceptualised engagement as a polar opposite of burnout, where engagement incorporated energy, involvement and efficacy, and was the polar opposite of burnout's exhaustion, cynicism and lack of efficacy. Schaufeli et al. (2002) instead regard engagement as an opposite but independent concept. Their definition of engagement includes three aspects: vigour, dedication (which together could be judged as similar to energy and involvement), and absorption. Vigour refers to an activation and energy. It describes workers who have resilience and a willingness to invest effort in their work. Dedication refers to an involvement and identification with work and a sense of enthusiasm, pride and challenge. Absorption refers to being deeply engrossed and concentrating on the work. This third aspect, absorption, is not related to the third aspect of the burnout model, lack of efficacy, and this is where Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakkers' (2002) model of engagement departs from that of Maslach and Leiter (1997). Absorption has been included and excluded over time depending on where authors place it in the engagement model, with later literature tending to place absorption as a consequence of engagement (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). As absorption is not a polar opposite to a lack of efficacy, engagement is thus not a polar opposite but a separate phenomenon to burnout.

However, in general authors tend to treat the two phenomena as polar ends of a continuum (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

This Utrecht model departs from both Kahn's (1990) and the Gallup GWA models as it only considers aspects or affective conditions within the individual, whilst both Kahn's and the Gallup GWA focus on the conditions that contribute to engagement. However many similarities exist, particularly with Kahn's (1990) work. The deeply engrossed state of dedication is reflected within Kahn's definition of engagement, harnessing one's self to the role. The identification, enthusiasm and pride included within the dedication component could be considered to fit within Kahn's meaningfulness condition. Lastly, vigour could be considered as part of Kahn's availability condition, that is having the mental or physical energy to undertake the task. As with the Gallup GWA, the Utrecht model does not really reflect Kahn's safety condition.

Teamwork and Engagement

The work on engagement discussed above, although noting the importance of interpersonal relationships, says very little on the influence of teams to engagement. Only one article investigates the influence of the team and team engagement on the individual. Bakker, Emmerick and Euwema (2006) investigates the cross over of burnout and engagement between teams and individuals, drawing the conclusion that the "collective mood" of engagement transfers from the team to the individual.

As the purpose of this research is to understand the influences and aspects of the workplace that contributes to engagement, a brief review of the team is appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly as most people work within a team environment, the team forms an important contextual aspect of their work life (Powell, Galvin & Piccoli, 2006; Sundstrom & Demeuse, 1990). This is certainly true for the organisation in which this research is located, where all employees belong to a work team and this team forms an important aspect of their work environment. Secondly, Mathieu, Maynard, Taylor, Gilson and Ruddy (2007) recommend that to fully understand people's experiences a meso-perspective is required, which is looking at the layers or levels of environment surrounding the person. Within this research two layers are studied, the individual themselves and their immediate work team. Although wider organisational work units and the entire organisation are also applicable, they are beyond the scope of this work.

One area of the team literature, team effectiveness, is particularly pertinent to this research as the research on team effectiveness has the same ultimate purpose of uncovering what influences successful performance. Secondly, both engagement and team effectiveness are grounded in a positivist perspective. The most prevalent model, which has implicitly and explicitly shaped the last 40 years of theory and research into team effectiveness, is the IPO (input-process-output) model developed by McGrath (1964, cited in Gil, Alcover & Peiro, 2005) and refined by Hackman and Morris (1975, cited in Gil, Alcover & Peiro, 2005).

Input-process-output team effectiveness models. IPO models reduce team functioning to a simple causal chain in which inputs (the characteristics of the individuals, the team, the task and the organisation) influence the processes or activities team members interdependently employ to turn inputs into outputs. Outputs refer to the products of team activities or the team's performance, and they incorporate team members' attitudes about the quality of worklife, group viability and a quality or quantity measure (Gil, Alcover & Peiro, 2005; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al, 2007; Powell, Galvin & Piccoli, 2006; Salas, Stagl Burke & Goodwin, 2007). Differences in the various IPO models centre on mediators and moderators, however all describe the complex dynamics of team functioning and the numerous influences on teams within contemporary organisations (Gil, Alcover & Peiro, 2005; Salas et al., 2007).

Salas et al. (2007) extended the IPO model to develop an integrative model, in which team inputs (including the organisational environment) were actively interpreted by team members to form expectations regarding their responsibilities. These interpretations informed team members as to which team processes to engage in at specific times. The integrative model developed included the same inputs as other IPO models, however in this model team processes also acted as an input. This is because the authors considered that working as a team in itself led to shared cognition (e.g. mental models, situation awareness and safety), which in turn led to individual and team performance. This performance provided feedback to team members and became an input, hence a constant and re-occurring loop existed. Salas et al. (2007) were not alone. A number of other authors have extended the IPO model to create feedback loops. Gersick's (1988) model of team effectiveness highlights the dynamic aspect of teamwork and describes how teams adapt the way they work to the changing environment around them. Marks, Mathieu and Zoccaro's (2001) team effectiveness model also depicts teams as going through recursive loops of IPO processes, where

outputs become inputs. Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson and Jundt (2005) also suggest the need for feedback loops within IPO models, criticising IPO models for implying a single linear path that does not account for interactions between inputs and for not making feedback loops explicit.

Fitting with these extended IPO models, engagement can be thought of as both an input and an output. Engagement is described as either a motivational or attitudinal phenomenon, and is a characteristic of both the individuals within the team and the team as a whole, as such engagement is an input to team processes. Engagement can also be considered an output of team processes, as the products of team activity (for example satisfaction, meeting team member needs and the willingness to remain within the team) are also associated with engagement. Further, Mathieu et al. (2007) specifically stated withdrawal behaviours (the polar opposite of engagement) to be an output of team effectiveness. In addition, engagement within this framework can be conceived as a constantly reinforcing spiral, where a person's or team's engagement feeds into the work process, which in turn influences both team processes and team outputs.

Given engagement's existence as both an input and output of team processes, the team processes themselves are of interest. Firstly, it is reasonable to expect that the processes contributing to effective team performance (and therefore by extension, good teams) and engagement would show high commonality. Secondly it is within team processes that the "action" of teamwork occurs, and this action is likely to form an important part of the environment contributing to engagement. The following section explores the similarities between team processes and engagement.

Kozlowski and Ilgen's (2006) article focuses on team processes under three headings; cognitive, affective and behavioural. This tripartite view of team processes mirrors the tripartite view of engagement that practitioners commonly hold (Story et al., 2009). It thus provides an ideal framework within which to base a review of team processes and how they can be associated with, or influence, engagement.

Cognitive team processes. In Kozlowski and Ilgen's (2006) article, cognitive processes include four aspects: team climate, team learning, team mental models, and transactive memory. These cognitive team processes are based on a foundation of safety, one of Kahn's (1990) conditions of engagement. Within this work, team climate refers to interpretations of the salient features, processes and events within the

organisational situation. A positive team climate is built on a foundation of safety and trust, and team members need both trust and safety (among other things) to believe the team collectively could achieve its tasks (Ilgen et al., 2005). Team learning processes capture the collective pool of knowledge, skills and performance capabilities within a team. They are also based on a supportive organisational context and psychological safety, as safety facilitated and enabled people to seek feedback, share information, ask for help, and experiment. All these activities foster learning within the team (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Although safety and trust are arguably affective, not cognitive, concepts, they are recurrent themes within the literature on engagement. Safety is one of Kahn's three conditions required for engagement, and, May, Gilson and Harter (2004), Saks (2006), and Wildermuth and Pauken (2008) all note the need for an environment of trust and safety in building engagement.

The last two cognitive processes - mental models and transactive memory - could also be considered to contribute loosely to perceptions of safety. Mental models refer to the shared knowledge of the task, other team members and processes that enable team members to more effectively coordinate their behaviour. These are developed through common experience and training (Paris & Salas, 2000). Transactive memory refers to the team's knowledge of who knows what in the team and is developed through shared experience, face-to-face meetings, and access to information. Both mental models and transactive memory are associated with perceptions of safety. Knowledge of processes includes knowledge of group dynamics and norms important for feelings of safety. Shared experiences could also lead to increased perceptions of safety.

Affective team processes. Affective processes are considered the glue that holds teams together. The affective processes most relevant to engagement are team cohesion and potency/efficacy beliefs. Cohesion is the force that binds the team. It is a team-established bond that includes and extends beyond trust and refers to the strength of team members' emotional attachment to the group. Cohesion improves the motivation of team members to work hard on behalf of the team and is facilitated by interdependence, as well as undertaking tasks that require coordinating information, effort and team relationship. Core aspects of cohesion are commitment, trust and strong interpersonal relationships (Powell, Galvin & Piccoli's, 2006). The commonality between team effectiveness and engagement is evident. Cohesion could be seen to play an important part in engagement, as commitment, trust and strong interpersonal relationships also play a core role in people's engagement, in part through providing meaning to their work but also in building their perceptions of safety and trust

(Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). A supportive environment Working is characterised by strong and positive interpersonal relationships and it is these perceptions of support that contribute to individuals' safety perceptions and to engagement (Edmondson, 1999).

Efficacy or potency beliefs, refer to the team's collective beliefs regarding their ability to achieve or succeed. Jordan, Field and Armenakis' (2002) work found a very high correlation between social cohesion and group potency, and both had a strong correlation with team performance. They considered efficacy or potency to develop through increased interdependence, shared experiences, leadership and team training. Efficacy and potency beliefs are also associated with engagement as common definitions of engagement incorporate feelings of efficacy. Freeney and Tiernan (2006) highlight the centrality of efficacy and potency to engagement. Maslach and Leiter 1(1997) show an association between meaningful work and feelings of fulfillment and efficacy which in turn provide an attachment to work or engagement (Langelaan et al., 2006; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006). Within Kahn's (1990) model, perceptions of efficacy and potency are most closely associated with availability, a persons appraisal of how able they are to undertake the work.

Behavioural team processes. The last group of team processes within Kozlowski and Ilgen's (2006) work is behaviour. Specifically discussed are coordinating actions, which refer to the synchronisation and combination of team members' activity. Fleishman and Zaccaro (1992, cited in Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006) developed a taxonomy of seven different behaviours that contribute to synchronising team activity and thus enabling team performance. These behaviours are grouped as i) orientation activities, such as exchanging information, ii) resource distribution activities, iii) timing or work pacing activities, iv) coordination activities, v) motivational activities, vi) monitoring work and vii) general procedures. The literature on engagement and team behavioural processes appears to have less overlap with engagement. However, exchanging and gaining information could contribute to people's engagement, and it would be reasonable to expect that monitoring work would provide information on goals and objectives that are important to people's engagement.

Leadership. Leadership, although included in Kozlowski and Ilgens' (2006) affect category, is pervasive across both the literature on team effectiveness and engagement. Zaccaro, Rittman and Marks (2001) in particular noted that leaders are pivotal to team effectiveness through their role in supporting all team processes, as

leaders play a core role in managing task accomplishment, group integration and group maintenance processes. The engagement literature also points to a leader's pivotal role through their ability to influence the contextual aspects that influence a person's work experience, and hence nearly every aspect of engagement (Bhatnager, 2007; Erickson, 2005; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Comparing IPO models to Kahn's engagement model. The IPO model can, as with other models associated with engagement, be matched to Kahn's (1990) three conditions of engagement, lending additional support for the supposition that teams contribute to engagement. Team inputs most closely align with meaningful work as team inputs reflect many of the characteristics that contribute to meaningful work. For example characteristics of the task contribute to a person's perceiving meaning in their work and characteristics of the individual contribute to a positive work-role-fit – an aspect of meaningfulness. Team processes could be considered to provide the conditions to build perceptions of safety. For example shared mental models enable team members to understand how others interpret actions. Group norms and dynamics also indicate to team members what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, and therefore what a person could safely do within a team. Affective processes, in particular cohesion, provide team members with the support and interpersonal relationship necessary for them to feel safe. The work on team processes also indicates the important place of trust and respect in ensuring team effectiveness; trust and respect are also core to team members feeling safe. Affective processes include team potency beliefs, and these influence how available team members believe they and their teams' are to carry out the task. Coordinating behaviours or processes enable teams to combine their resources and achieve goals, As such they could be conceptualised as a resource included within Kahn's availability conditions.

Additional support for the importance of the team and in particular team processes on team members' engagement could be seen within work on teams and other work-related phenomena. For example, Powell, Galvin and Piccoli (2006) and Bishop, Scott, and Burroughs (2000) have shown how team processes have an important influence on commitment and satisfaction both at the team and individual level. Powell, Galvin, and Piccoli's research into commitment in teams considered how task, affective and teamwork processes influenced a teams' commitment attitudes. They found trust to be the single most important contributor to commitment. Bishop, Scott and Burroughs also investigated team commitment, but considered commitment from the perspective of social exchange theory. Their findings indicate employees' reciprocated support from

their team members (in terms of knowing others value your contributions and care about your well being) by investing increased effort as part of the team. Further, beliefs that these supporting actions are part of the team's values and norms encourage individual team members to reciprocate and act in a supportive manner themselves. Both pieces of research provide support for the premise that teams and especially team processes are important for engagement. As noted earlier within this document, there is a strong link and overlap between commitment, satisfaction and engagement. It is therefore reasonable to extrapolate the influence of team processes to commitment, and satisfaction to engagement.

Other authors made brief reference to the influence of teamwork on various phenomena associated with engagement. Lepine, Piccolo, Jackson, Mathieu, and Saul's (2008) meta analysis of teamwork processes also noted citizenship behaviours as indicators of team function and mediators between team inputs and outcomes. Both Xyrichis and Ream (2008) and Drach-Zahavy (2004) discussed how team support influences various team outcomes, including improved satisfaction.

The literature on team effectiveness provides ample support for the premise that teams and team processes are important to engagement: firstly because engagement could be considered both an input and an output of teamwork, and secondly because many core team processes are associated with building safety meaning and availability, Kahn's (1990) three conditions of engagement.

Influences on the Experience of Engagement

The core purpose of this research was to understand the aspects of the workplace that influences engagement and particularly the influence of the work team. This section draws on the concepts described in the previous section and draws out the common influences on engagement from these. Because people work for a variety of reasons and gain a variety of things from their work, a range of things contribute to positive work lives (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Erickson, 2005). Not surprisingly, the literature on engagement points to a raft of potential influences on team members' engagement. To provide a coherent, logical review, these numerous and varied contextual influences are considered within Kahn's (1990, 1992) three conditions engagement; meaningfulness, safety and availability. Kahn's framework is appropriate as is it is one

of the few to consider the conditions required for engagement at a conceptual level, and other models of engagement appear to fit within Kahn's three conditions.

Meaningfulness. Work consumes a significant proportion of people's lives and is a fundamentally important aspect of their life (Brown, 1996). People are looking for their work to hold meaning, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life" (Frankle, 1984, cited in Cartwright & Holmes, 2006 p. 199). Research shows people look for much more out of work than just financial gains. They are looking for a sense of purpose, a sense of goodness, a positivity to life, a sense of efficacy and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991, cited in Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). "Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash for astonishment rather than torpor, in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying." (Terkel 1972, cited in Cartwright & Holmes 2006, p. 206).

People experience meaningfulness in their work when they feel worthwhile and valuable, when they have a purpose, are fulfilled and feel a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment. Thus they feel they are receiving a benefit or return for investing themselves in their work (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). This description highlights the association of work satisfaction with meaningful work. People derive meaning when their own goals or values align with organisational goals and values (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Further a respectful climate with positive interpersonal relationships improves people's sense of meaning in their work.

Kahn (1990, 1992), Llorens et al. (2006), and Salanova, Agnut, and Peiro (2005) all highlight the importance of enriched work to engagement; people who work in rich roles that fit their personal situation experience greater meaningfulness in their work. People experience meaningfulness when they are working on stimulating, challenging, complex tasks, when the work is interesting, varied, and when they have some autonomy in how they undertake that work. Thus the design of work itself is important; a meaningful work experience is based in the job itself and an enriched job is one that utilises people's capabilities, intellect, energy, and strengths, and allows them to experience a sense of competence and growth simultaneously (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Erickson, 2005). This influence of enriched work with the meaning people experience in their work is the premise on which the Job Characteristics Model is based (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). This model emphasises the importance of designing jobs to provide skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback on results. Kahn's 1992 work on psychological presence outlines how jobs

that are high on these characteristics improve people's presence in and engagement with the task or work.

Saks (2006) looked at engagement from a social exchange perspective, his work provides an explanation for the importance of enriched work to engagement. Within social exchange theory people's interactions are characterised by reciprocity, thus as people receive resources and benefits from the organisation, they repay these with higher levels of engagement. Providing people with enriching and challenging jobs encourages them to invest more of themselves into the work as they feel an obligation to reciprocate with higher engagement (Saks, 2006).

Much of the literature discussing the contextual aspects that influence engagement is based on the Job Demands Resources model (or variants of it). Simplistically, the model specifies that job demands beyond which the individual can cope lead to burnout, whilst resources (the five components of the Job Characteristics Model) lead to engagement. The presence of the five resources have a motivational quality, which in turn leads to positive workplace outcomes (performance, low turnover etc). However in investigating the Job Demands Resources model, authors have used the concept of resources rather than the actual five listed resources. For example Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) only used three: variety, feedback and autonomy. The regularly quoted Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) article includes 11 working conditions and in a later article Bakker, van Emmerik and Euwema (2006) include only three work demands.

People also derive meaning from their personal interactions and the relationships they have with their coworkers and supervisors. A good workplace is an enjoyable one with friendly and supportive colleagues; people are looking to their workplace to provide them with a sense of community and connectedness, hence the importance of workplace relationships and interactions (Cartwright & Holmes 2006). Interactions that promote dignity, self appreciation, a sense of being valued and a connection in turn promote a sense of meaning (Cartwright & Holmes 2006).

In summary, gaining satisfaction from one's work, working where your people's are aligned and they have a positive work-role fit, working in an enriched job, and being in an environment of positive interpersonal relationships all provide a context within which people experience meaning in their work. All of these aspects contribute to their level of engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Safety. Kahn's (1990) work on engagement identifies the second condition of engagement as psychological safety. People invest their full selves in a role when they feel safe to do so, when they believe they would not be embarrassed, rejected, harmed or suffer in anyway from doing so. Edmondson (1999) investigated beliefs about how the interpersonal context varies and how this effects team outcomes. Through this work she defines psychological safety as the "shared belief held by members of the team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354). A safe environment facilitates performance as it allows people to take appropriate action to achieve work goals. Safety also enables team members to embrace and learn from errors and to receive feedback as this feedback is interpreted as helpful (Edmondson, 1999).

Safety was built on a foundation of trust; people have the confidence and feel safe to be themselves in a role when they trust it is safe to do so (Khan, 1990; Edmondson, 1999). Trust has been defined as "one's expectations, assumptions or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, or at least not detrimental to one's interests" (Cartwright & Holmes 1996, p. 205). However, psychological safety requires more than just trust; mutual respect is also important. If people feel respected, they also feel more confident to speak up as their comments would be given more weight (Edmondson, 1999).

Employees perceive they are safer when working in a supportive environment. Feeling the organisation, supervisors and coworkers care encourages people to repay the obligation with higher engagement. In addition, coworkers' supporting each other through showing mutual respect and valuing each other builds both trust and perceptions of safety (Edmondson 1999).

A supportive management style also builds trust and safety through providing predictable, clear and consistent directions, and through providing situations with explicit boundaries that allow people to try and fail without negative consequences. Managers who develop an environment that encourages open and constructive sharing and discussion of ideas also increases perceptions of safety (Cartwright & Holmes 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Leaders' also role-model safety behaviours through providing non-defensive responses to team members' challenges and questions (Edmondson, 1999).

Although group norms and dynamics could act to limit freedom, understanding group norms and group dynamics could also increase safety. Safety beliefs are generally a tacit, “taken for granted” assessment of the way things are done. Understanding these norms allows people to feel more confident in their choice of actions as they are able to determine the appropriateness of these actions (Edmondson, 1999). Safety also requires a predictable and constant environment. Both procedural and distributive justice contributed to perceptions of safety; when employees perceived they are being treated fairly, they felt obliged to perform in a fair manner in return (Saks, 2006). Those working in an environment with appropriate resources have increased perceptions of safety as access to resources reduces insecurity and defensiveness within the team (Edmondson, 1999).

OCB, an associated work phenomenon, is facilitated by a less formal environment, one which is characterised by positive group norms, a satisfying job, perceptions of fairness, goal setting and leadership. The majority of these aspects support providing a safe environment as the hierarchy within a formal environment can constrain people’s ability to be themselves.

In summary, trust and safety are inferred from interpersonal relationships, group dynamics and norms, a supportive management style, a predictable or fair environment and also access to resources, particularly information and rewards (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Availability. Availability, the third of Kahn’s (1990) conditions for engagement, had the weakest relationship with engagement in May, Gilson and Harter’s (2004) research. This finding is reflected in the literature as relatively few pieces of research describe aspects of the workplace environment that contribute to availability. Employees’ availability to engage themselves in the role, is influenced by the resources people perceive they have and the demands of outside activities. People are available to engage in the role or task when they have the psychological, emotional and physical resources to do so, when they believe they are ready or have the confidence to cope with the demands of the work. People disengage when they don’t have the emotional or physical energy to cope with the work. Insecurities and lack of confidence also distract people from engaging in the task as they concern themselves more with how they are perceived than in the task. Outside lives also distracted people from their roles and tasks since concerns or issues from outside work could be carried into the role,

reducing the emotional, cognitive or physical resources a person has to put into their work (Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Leadership. Underpinning all the aspects discussed above are team leaders. Zaccaro, Rittman and Marks (2001) investigated teams using a functional perspective of leadership; their work emphasises the pivotal role of leadership to team effectiveness through the leaders' ability to foster the integration of team members' actions, and supporting team sense making and communication, and through encouraging team members participation in problem solving, decision making and learning. Leaders are also considered to support team motivation through planning, goals setting and providing personal development opportunities and feedback. Lastly, team leaders influence team affect through providing clarity and direction (which in turn reduces the stress of team members), encouraging norms of emotional control, providing feedback and development, and selecting people appropriate for the team (Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001).

The literature on engagement and teams highlights the pivotal role of leaders as they manage many of the contextual features that influence a person's work experience (Bhatnager, 2007; Erickson, 2005). Leaders who encourage engagement tend to have a transformational and/or authentic leadership style. They make meaningful connections with those working for them. Their behaviour demonstrates emotional literacy, and a real interest in their employees well-being. They also have an ability to recognise differences in individuals and their needs. Thus they display integrity, authenticity and confidence, and treat employees as adults. Employees are more engaged when their managers are clear about expectations and the results they wish. They are transparent and share information, they gain agreement about those expectations, and they provide consequences for meeting or not meeting expectations (Bhatnagar, 2007; Cartwright & Holmes 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Summary

Engagement is a broad concept concerned with how connected people are to their work or role. As a concept, engagement shares many characteristics with other work-related phenomena (for example work satisfaction, job involvement or commitment) and, not surprisingly, the contextual aspects that influence people's experiences of these phenomena are similar to the aspects important to people's experiences of

engagement. The aspects of the environment that create engagement are diverse and no one thing alone contributes to engagement. The experience of engagement is influenced by three broad sets of characteristics: how meaningful their work is, how safe people feel, and how available they are to perform their work or role. Meaningful work stems from being aligned with the organisation and the role one inhabits, having an enriched job, and working within positive interpersonal relationships. A safe environment is created by a supportive, trusting and predictable environment. People and teams are available to undertake the work when they have the team efficacy beliefs, the resources (cognitive and physical), and when they are free from undue outside influences. Leaders hold a special role in building the engagement of their staff as they have the greatest ability to create and influence an environment that is conducive to the engagement of the teams working for them.

Teams are important to engagement. Engagement could be considered both an input and output of team processes, illustrating the dynamic nature of engagement as an individual both influences and is influenced by the team. Further similarities exist between the processes important to a team's effectiveness and those important for engagement. Lastly, the literature indicates a connection between teamwork and team processes to other similar workplace phenomena, namely satisfaction, commitment and job involvement, as all three have been shown to be associated with engagement. It is reasonable to extrapolate the importance of the team to engagement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand people's experiences of engagement within a team environment and in particular to understand the things within the workplace that influence engagement. This research specifically sought to investigate the influence of the immediate work team on engagement, with the underlying premise that the team plays an important part in a person's engagement.

Design

The aim of gaining a deep understanding of engagement within a particular organisation is particularly suited to a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods allows the researcher to explore people's experiences of engagement from their perspective, and enables individuals to use their own thoughts and words to describe their experiences. The research thus mirrors Khan's (1990) desire to understand engagement and his use of a qualitative approach. However, instead of interviews and participant observation, this research utilised focus group discussions.

The specific qualitative technique of focus groups was used as it generates rich data and allows exploration of the nuances within people's experiences (Creswell, 1998; Ohman, 2005). A focus group is defined by Sim (1998) as "a group interview centered on a specific topic and facilitated and coordinated by a moderator or facilitator, which seeks to generate primarily qualitative data by capitalising on the interaction that occurs within the group setting" (p. 346).

Four aspects of focus groups made them particularly suited to this research. Firstly, the focus groups provided a richer, more rounded, understanding of the range and depth of thoughts and feelings on engagement, as they allowed the researcher to examine the language participants used, how they expressed ideas, and how they formed meaning and opinions within a social context rather than in isolation (Bryman, 2008; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Cohen & Garrett, 1999; Kitzinger, 1994; Wibeck, Abrandt-Dahlgren & Oberg, 2007). Secondly the focus groups elicited a wide variety of viewpoints and

generated a greater volume and range of material as ideas were discussed, challenged and negotiated spontaneously. With a number of people sitting around the table, discussions flowed and were less likely to become “stuck” (Bryman, 2008; Kreuger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1993; Sim, 1998). Thirdly, the focus groups provided a forum to access unarticulated thoughts, as the more natural social discussions helped participants construct and verbalise their thoughts on engagement through reacting to and building on others’ comments (Bryman, 2008; Kitzinger, 1994; Plumer-D’Amato, 2008). Participants may also have felt safer, more supported and empowered through their ability to direct discussions and use their own words. This safety may have assisted participants in verbalising their thoughts (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Sim, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). This third aspect was particularly relevant, as prior discussions (outside of this research) on the engagement survey indicated people’s attitudes to the engagement survey were not necessarily positive, and participants may not have been particularly involved in the topic. Fourthly, group discussions on topics of this nature were common throughout the organisation, thus increasing the credibility of the information generated with managers across the organisation.

Participant Description

The 25 participants were all people who had experienced working in a highly engaged team, as only people who had actually experienced working within an engaged team could provide meaningful and detailed insights into what surrounded that experience. The team of interest within this research was the immediate work team - the colleagues people sit with each day and those who share the same leader or manager. Within this organisation, people at the lower hierarchical levels tend to work with only one team. This was true for all teams represented within this research.

Evidence of engagement used within this research was the engagement score on the Gallup GWA engagement survey. This survey was the only indicator of engagement within the organisation, and despite some questions within the literature as to the quality of the Gallup GWA engagement survey, it is widely used by organisations as a measure of engagement. To ensure confidentiality, Gallup GWA scores are aggregated at a team level. These are then further aggregated for each layer of the organisational hierarchy. The engagement score of relevance for this research was the immediate team score as this was the one most closely associated with individual participants and

was the engagement score for the team of interest. Although participants' individual engagement scores were not known, all participants had experienced working in a highly engaged team and could discuss their own and their fellow team members experiences. It was presumed throughout the research that as member's of a highly engaged team, respondents were most probably engaged. This is because at the team level the majority of teams are small enough (generally below 10) for one individual's low engagement score to adversely affect the entire team's score. Additionally, it is unlikely unengaged people would have volunteered to join the focus groups, and none of the comments voiced through the discussions indicated any of the participants were disengaged.

Participants within this research were all non-managerial staff. Although at different skill and professional levels, they did not belong to the top four hierarchical levels of the organisation. Depending on the functional area, the organisation has between four and seven hierarchical levels. For example, the policy area has four hierarchical levels and service delivery areas have up to seven levels.

Participants ranged in age from early twenties to early fifties. They had a mix of service lengths from a couple of months to decades. The groups included a total of 10 male and 15 female participants. Participants represented a variety of different roles and functional areas of the organisation covering professional and non-professional; customer facing and non customer facing; and operational and non-operational functions. They included teams from service delivery (two separate focus groups), operational support, corporate services, and an enforcement function.

Each focus group included participants from different teams working in similar roles. In some cases, participants were from the same team and in some cases from a number of different teams, and as such many participants knew the other members of their focus group. The value of this is supported in more recent literature, especially research focused on psychological and organisational focus groups, as knowing other participants allows the group to leverage existing group norms (Kitzinger, 1994; Plumer-D'Amato, 2008). Furthermore from a practical perspective, it would have been impossible to ensure participants did not know each other. Knowing other participants was not perceived as a concern because potential power imbalances were removed as team members were from similar roles.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, a common qualitative research approach, in which participants are selected according to the purpose of the research. The core selection criteria was to ensure participants had experienced working in a high-engagement team (as determined by the Gallup GWA survey scores), were interested in engagement, and were willing to discuss engagement (Plumer-D'Amato, 2008). Potential participants were identified based on three criteria. Firstly, all teams across the organisation that had scored highly on the Gallup GWA engagement survey were identified. Secondly, to ensure a large enough participant pool, this list of teams was then narrowed to include only those teams that had a number of other teams working in similar roles with high engagement scores. Lastly, this list was narrowed to include only those teams for which there were a number of suitable teams in the Wellington area. Care was also taken to ensure the pool included representation from across the organisation and included teams from a variety of role types.

The participant pool totalled 14 teams working in five different functional areas of the organisation. From this potential pool, 25 volunteers took part in five focus group discussions. Although this was only a small number of groups, the literature provides support for the legitimacy of small group numbers. Kitzinger (1994) for example stated that many studies have only 4-5 groups and this is perfectly adequate. For a variety of reasons (mainly lack of volunteers and sickness), a number of focus groups did not reach the intended five to eight participants per group. As a result one group had only three participants, two groups had four participants, another six and the largest group had eight participants. Again the literature indicated that, although small groups can mean less free flowing discussions (which did occur), groups with as few as three participants are acceptable (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Morgan, 1997).

Procedures

Organising the focus group sessions occurred in three discrete phases. Firstly, approval from the top three layers of management was obtained by an advisor working in the Human Resource Department. In addition the team members' immediate supervisors were notified of the research by email. The second phase in recruiting participants involved sending emails to all potential participants asking for their participation. This email contained a brief cover letter; a two-page information sheet

that outlined why the study was being conducted and the intended research process; an agreement to participate sheet; and confidentiality forms. Further information (a one-page outline of the topic areas and copies of the Massey University standard consent forms) were sent to participants on the day prior to the focus groups. These consent forms were signed and collected by the researcher at the beginning of the discussion (for copies of these documents refer to Appendix A). The last phase, organising the logistics of the sessions, was delegated to various administrators working in the five areas. These administrators organised participants and meeting rooms, and determined appropriate meeting times.

Focus group discussions took place during work hours and coincided with meal breaks; i.e. mid morning, lunch time and mid afternoon. Meetings were held onsite in small common meeting rooms. The sessions were scheduled to last 90 minutes and, given the pressures within the organisation, this time frame was strictly followed.

All focus groups were facilitated by the researcher and were tape recorded using a small dictaphone set up in the centre of the table, with written notes made as a back up. Prior to turning the recorder on, the researcher asked permission and stressed that participants should feel free to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time, or ask for any item to be removed from transcripts. This occurred on two occasions, one participant asked for a small part of the transcript to be deleted, and on another occasion a participant asked for the tape recorder to be switched off while a particularly sensitive issue was discussed.

Data Collection

The desire to understand participants perspectives and interpretations on engagement, required particular care to ensure that the researcher's preconceived biases did not influence participants, that participants were able to voice their own thoughts, and at the same time ensure discussions remained within the broad topic. To achieve this, a topic guide was developed, which provided prompts on the core areas to discuss and possible probes into key issues. Although the topic guide added some structure to the discussions, the open-ended prompts were loose enough to ensure relevant material was collected. Participants were encouraged to provide their own insights and explanations (Bryman, 2008; Millward & Jefferies, 2001; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Although this topic guide directed the flow of the discussions, how much time was

spent on each item and the order these were covered in varied depending on the flow of discussion.

The initial topic guide included five sections. Each focus group commenced with the researcher introducing the background to the study and covering ethical considerations. The format of this introduction varied depending on the situation, in some cases introductions occurred outside the room as people waited for the meeting room to be vacated. The discussion then turned to what participants perceived engagement to mean to them. After this the questions explored participants' perceptions of what contributes to engagement, and narrowed to discuss a specific incident. Lastly there was a discussion comparing engagement with other teams or situations. This initial topic guide can be found in Appendix B.

After the first two focus groups, this topic guide was changed in an attempt to increase participation and generate more in-depth discussion. The introduction was significantly shortened and the prompts changed to include just five prompts or questions:

- i) participants understanding of what they understood the term engagement to mean to them,
- ii) a discussion on one or more specific high engagement situations generated by participants,
- iii) a brief discussion on what they thought was special about their team that made them highly engaged,
- iv) aspects they believed would have changed their team's engagement if removed,
- v) a discussion on what advice they would provide to other teams regarding engagement.

Plus a general closing question regarding any other things the group wished to raise.

These changes were successful as participants were more comfortable discussing engagement from the perspective of a concrete incident, and they were also less likely to attempt to tie answers back to organisational material on the engagement survey.

Description of Focus Groups

The first focus group consisted of three male participants who were in technical support roles. Participants knew each other well and appeared to have a good working relationship. However the discussion evolved into a very rigid structure, in which the researcher asked a question, a gap followed then speaker one provided a considered answer, the other participants volunteered supporting information, and lastly all three turned to the researcher for a further question. As a result, although the group discussion was pleasant and participants interacted and endeavoured to answer the questions, there was a feeling of shallowness.

Group two consisted of five front-line officers, all from different teams and although they knew of each other, a cohesive group feel did not develop during the session. One person became very vocal throughout the discussion, and this may have acted to inhibit others in contributing to discussions. The group also had a pervading feeling of cynicism (whether this was directed at the organisation or the topic was unclear), and participants attempted to link any answers back to the Gallup GWA engagement survey.

All eight participants in the third focus group worked in clerical support roles. Although participants worked in a number of different teams, they known to each other well and at the outset, the group had a very warm convivial feel. They were also very supportive of each other. All team members contributed easily to the discussion and gave considered answers with much more discussion and less input from the researcher, than the previous two sessions. The group focused on consensus and agreement. However on one occasion where participants had different experiences, they talked openly. Participants were also able to talk freely even when straying onto sensitive ground.

Participants in the fourth group discussion all worked in a professional head office role. All participants were originally from the same team and well known to each other. They were also very comfortable discussing engagement and operating in a group environment. They appeared to enjoy the session as it provided a sense of the “old team back together” and were able to agree, disagree and question each other. Consequently as facilitator I had less input into the discussions.

Participants in the fifth focus group all filled professional front-line roles. Although

coming from a number of different teams, the participants knew each other and it transpired that many had been through a pretty “rough” time together. All were aware and supportive of each other, and this may have facilitated the positive atmosphere within the focus group. The participants openly discussed the topic and were comfortable to disagree and challenge or be challenged. As a result the discussions were free flowing and open.

Data Analysis

The analysis phase commenced with transcribing the audio recordings. Transcription followed Kruegar & Casey’s (2000) recommendation to establish procedures suited to the purpose of the research. Thus, as it was intended to undertake a thematic analysis of the data, only direct speech was transcribed and all speech was attributed to a speaker by numeric code.

Transcripts were emailed to participants with a cover note clearly outlining their right to ask for any material to be removed. Participants were also asked to check that the transcripts correctly reflected their memory of the discussions. Only one participant asked for a minor alteration to one line of the transcript, because they believed people might be able to identify them from the comment.

Focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis techniques, as thematic analysis is a research procedure suited to identifying and categorising data generated from interviews (Hayes, 2000; Miller & Keys, 2001; Schneider, Wheeler & Cox, 1992). Thematic analysis has been used in a wide variety of qualitative studies and although the exact procedures vary within each research situation, the analyses commonly involve three main phases;

- i) data reduction or breaking down the data in order to classify it; exploration, in which the data is classified,
- ii) interpreted and explained,
- iii) integration, where the researcher gains understanding of the interrelationship between concepts (Attride-Sterling, 2001; Dey, 1993; Hayes, 2000).

Breaking down the data. As a first step in coding or “breaking down the data”, each transcript was read as a whole to gain a general impression of each discussion

and of team members' experiences. This was an additional step to that outlined in Hayes (2000), however it provided a holistic understanding of the data and re-familiarised the researcher with the individual discussions (Creswell, 1998; Burnard, 1991).

Following this holistic reading, the hybrid deductive/inductive coding processes started. At first a deductive code list was developed to utilise and make explicit any pre existing knowledge (Schilling, 2006). This first deductive code list was established through identifying key concepts within the three areas of literature considered pertinent to the research; namely; the literature on team functioning; other related workplace phenomena (OCB, satisfaction, job involvement, commitment); and engagement. The three provisional code lists were then reviewed and similar concepts grouped (for example training, learning and skill acquisition). This process identified 57 items for use in the first coding phase.

Transcripts were then read in their entirety for a second time and descriptive expressions of interest and relevance to the topic highlighted (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Schilling, 2006). After this transcripts were re-read (again in their entirety) and highlighted excerpts given a provisional code from the 57 item pre-code list. Excerpts were given multiple codes, for example the excerpt, "committed to delivering things to our individual customers", was initially coded to both "commitment" and "performance". This multiple coding fits with the procedures outlined in Krueger & Casey (2000), Looman (2004), and Schilling (2006). Where items did not appear to fit the initial 57 item code list a new code was established and given a provisional name, the inductive coding process (Creswell, 1998; Morgan, 1993). This code list included only five new inductively developed codes; fun, time, pride, contagious, and dynamic. Given the complex nature of the data and the possibility of multiple meanings, the first coding phase was undertaken a number of times to ensure all possible interpretations were included.

The initial code list was then reduced to a smaller master code list of 27 codes (included in Appendix C). This involved grouping codes that appeared to be conceptually similar, especially in terms of the material provided within the transcripts, and splitting codes that contained more than one concept (Hayes, 2000). This process was not sequential, but involved significant rereading of transcripts to gain an understanding of the context surrounding the text (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999), to make sense of the data and to ensure coding remained grounded within the actual

discussions (Looman, 2004).

Exploring the data. After developing the 27 item master code list, the analysis process moved to exploring the meaning and understanding the transcripts in a more abstract manner. At this point the master code list was put aside, each transcription was reread as a whole, and notes were made of what appeared to be the key messages within each transcript (approximately eight per transcript). These messages were then collated and used to guide further refinement of the 27 item master code list. This refinement entailed rereading excerpts and transcripts, and continual referral to the data to confirm understanding and authenticity of the reduction. From this the 27 item master code list was regrouped to create an initial 19¹ themes. These 19 themes were then further refined to 11 themes. This involved gathering all “excerpts” (verbatim quotes from the transcripts) associated with each theme and reviewing these to compare with others in the same theme and contrast with excerpts from different themes. It also involved referring back through every transcript to ensure the themes and grouping made sense with the original data and that relevant data had not been omitted (Hayes, 2000).

Integration. In this last phase the 11 themes were integrated into a coherent picture of the data. Developing this coherent picture involved exploring the relationships between themes and followed Attride-Stirling’s (2001) network process, which depicted themes as web-like networks. The 11 themes were grouped into three levels: seven basic themes, the simplest characteristics or facts anchored in the text; three organising themes, more abstract themes that grouped the ideas of several basic themes; and lastly a global theme, a super-ordinate theme, which conveyed the meaning behind the entire text or discussion.

The last step of the analysis involved constructing a description of each theme and the relationships between themes, as well as providing a label, definition, and supporting data (Attride-Sterling, 2001). During this phase illustrative data excerpts were also selected for use in the result section of this report (Hayes, 2000). This process aided in discerning the meaning within themes and the relationships between them. Consequently it became obvious the data did not support two relationships, and the network was adjusted accordingly. Lastly, the transcripts were reviewed for any

¹ *The 19 key messages identified were, leader, atmosphere, people, connection, interaction, support, safety, trust, respect, treat as an adult, validation, achievement, satisfaction, work and task challenge, growth, knowledge, autonomy, freedom, increased responsibility, dynamic.*

patterns that may have been important, and any portions of text excluded. This step did not elicit any new material to be incorporated or any new meanings which contradicted the framework developed.

Determining Rigour

For any research the question of quality is an important one. As qualitative research is focused on understanding the world through the eyes of the people living and experiencing that world, the resulting interpretations are time and context bound and vary between different groups and people. As such a number of authors have argued against any attempts to transfer positivist concepts of validity and reliability to qualitative research and instead stress that rigour exists in the method. The rigour or quality of this research thus resides in undertaking a systematic method congruent with the purpose and subject matter of the research. Trustworthiness, or rigour, is evidenced through the explicit descriptions of the methods and processes used and details of decisions made during the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nixon & Power, 2007).

A specific quality concern associated with the subjective nature of interpretations is the undue influence of the researcher's own biases and experiences. The analysis method outlined above, which includes constant and numerous referral to the transcripts, attempts to ensure the interpretations are grounded in the discussions and not the researcher's experiences of the world. However, to provide further confidence that the interpretations do stem from the data, one of the participants (to maintain confidentiality) coded the focus group transcript of the session she participated in (Burnard, 1991; Evans & O'Brien, 2005). This dual coding provided a form of inter-rater agreement and indicated general alignment between the categories and themes developed, with agreement on approximately 70% of the codes. The main difference occurred in the size of coding frames as the researcher tended to code smaller frames of text, for example the second coder coded approximately 18 lines as "culture" whereas the researcher broke these down into "cohesion", "adaptive" and "context".

Summary

This research followed a qualitative design using focus group discussions to gain

insight into team members' experiences of engagement, and understand which aspects of the workplace influenced or were associated with engagement. A thematic analysis was undertaken in which transcripts of each focus group discussion were analysed through a rigorous process of data reduction, data exploration and integration. This process involved constant reading and rereading of the data to ensure the interpretations remained grounded in the data. The final stage of analysis involved creating an integrated thematic model of engagement, which is based on Attride-Stirlings (2001) thematic network. The model comprises seven basic themes, three organising themes and one global theme identified.

Chapter 4: Results

This section presents the researcher's interpretations of the focus group discussions and what features within the workplace contribute to team members' high engagement. Firstly, participants' interpretations and descriptions of what engagement is, or means, are described, as this provides a context within which to make sense of the themes identified. This is followed by a description of the thematic model of engagement developed using Attridge-Stirling's (2001) thematic network of basic, organising and global themes. Lastly, two important observations, the dynamic nature of engagement and the tension between team and individual engagement, is briefly reviewed.

Participants' Interpretations of what Engagement Means

As a precursor to understanding team members' experience of engagement, participants firstly explored what engagement meant to them. The discussions on meaning were all relatively short with a couple of attributes "thrown out" by team members. Other group members responded and then there was an apparent desire to move on. Team members' discussions were defined and clouded by the engagement survey previously undertaken across the organisation, as many team members attempted to link their thoughts on engagement back to the survey.

For those interviewed engagement was perceived as something that kept them involved in their work, thus they were interested in and enjoyed their job. Engagement for this group of people was also about being part of something and participating in what is going on around their work, as opposed to working in isolation.

I guess engagement is kind of hopping on board, being part of the whole thing that's going on and not sitting aside watching everyone else go that way But you're really only there to work until knock-off time and then go home sort of thing.

A number of people linked engagement to a positive atmosphere, one of fun or excitement.

Interestingly, a number of the comments focused on being “not disinterested” rather than focusing on positive aspects, and other descriptions indicated a very mild level of engagement.

How much it keeps you doing what you're doing...um...Keeps you happy I s'pose in your job. I think of it as an umbrella term just for, I mean not quite job satisfaction but more I mean job interest...Why more or less why do we come to work wasn't it, yeah why do we come to work.

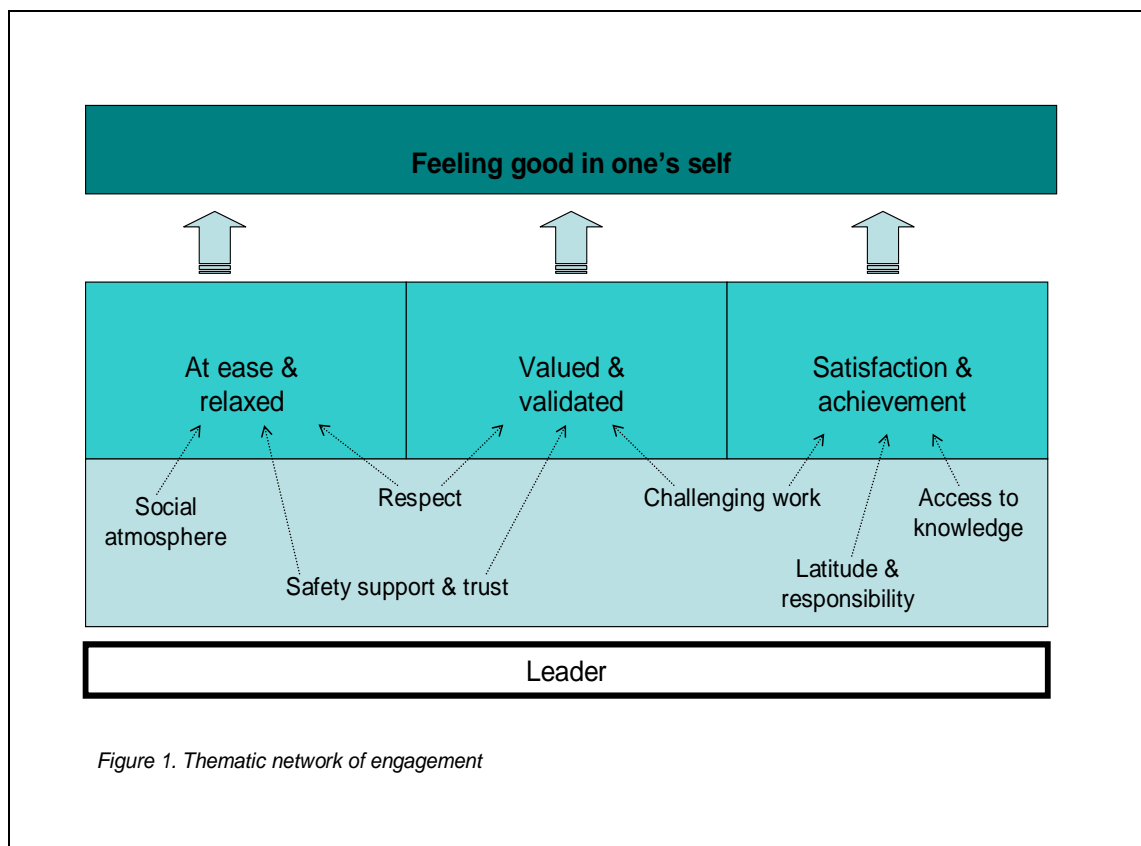
As such there appeared to be a real attempt to limit the meaning of engagement, and ensure the perception provided was not overly passionate. This attitude supports the moderate level of engagement across the organisation, as defined by the results of the Gallup GWA engagement survey.

Thus for those working in an engaged team, engagement means being part of something, being involved, interested, enjoying the job, and includes a sense of vibrancy, but team members worked to ensure engagement was not overstated.

Thematic Model of Engagement

The following section presents, for this particular organisation, a thematic model of the workplace contributors to engagement. It describes the eleven themes, identified from thematic analysis of participants' discussions on their experiences of working in an engaging environment. These eleven themes can be considered as an interrelated set, building on each other to provide an overall picture of engagement.

These eleven themes are developed into a model of engagement as depicted in Figure 1 below. Engagement, within this model, exists in three layers. At the base are the basic themes or direct features of the work environment that contribute to participants' engagement. Above this are the three categorical themes, the interpretations and feelings participants experience when working in this environment. These in turn produced an overall sense of feeling good in one's self; the one global theme or meaning gained from the research.



At the most basic level are the simple characteristics or themes found in the narratives of team members, which by themselves offer little additional meaning. Analysis of the transcripts identified 27 attributes (as listed in Appendix C) which were grouped into

seven themes. A foundational theme of leadership that contributed to all other themes, and six basic themes or aspects which contribute to team members' engagement: a) challenging and or varied work, b) access to knowledge, c) latitude and responsibility, d) social atmosphere, e) safety, trust and support, and f) respect.

Within the network basic themes mutually support each other. For example, feeling safe, trusted and supported allows team members to undertake challenging work. Or being provided with latitude and responsibility contributes to feeling respected as does being safe, trusted and supported. Also being surrounded by a fun, social atmosphere contributes to how safe and supported team members feel.

Basic themes combine and mutually support the more abstract organising and global themes. The three organising themes, feeling at ease and relaxed, having a sense of achievement and satisfaction, and being valued or validated - are the feelings participants experience when working in an environment characterised by the seven basic themes. They arise from different combinations of these basic themes. The three basic themes of working in a social atmosphere where one feels safe, trusted, supported and treated with respect all combine to afford an easy and relaxing working environment. Whilst undertaking challenging and or varied work, having the opportunity to grow and or gather knowledge, being provided with the latitude and responsibility to undertake the work, all contribute to having a sense of achievement and satisfaction in undertaking the work. Lastly team members felt valued and validated when they are provided with challenging work, when they are treated with respect or in a manner that indicates respect and they are trusted, supported and safe.

Underlying all discussions was a sense that the various basic and organising themes contribute to team members feeling good in themselves whilst at work. At the most abstract level, those aspects of their workplace that contribute to engagement also contribute to people feeling good in themselves. Although, when directly asked about the meaning of engagement, participants in no way indicated a connection with self identity, from a more abstract perspective the discussions provide a sense that the things which contribute to engagement also contribute to a sense of feeling good in oneself. People were engaged when the environment they work in encourages them to feel positive about themselves.

Workplace Contributors to Engagement

Basic Themes

Leadership. Leadership is a unique theme. The leader influenced the work environment and set the stage within which work occurs; as such the leader can influence all the direct environment or workplace contributors to engagement. Team members noted team leaders had the greatest impact on their engagement and this stems from the expectation that it is the team leader's role to manage the work and ensure people provided with work that fits their needs. Leaders influence the engagement of their team in three ways, through, a) how they manage and undertake the management task, b) how they treat people and c) their own level of engagement.

In this organisation, a person's manager tends to be called the leader, as the term "manager" denotes a specific senior level within the organisational hierarchy. Despite the organisation for a number of years trying to build leadership in everyone, power and leadership are generally vested in hierarchy. This did not appear to be a concern for these participants. The power that team leaders held was not considered unusual and was generally raised as an obvious fact. The language used indicated team members held expectations of their leaders. Of particular note was the expectation that the team leader, not individual team members, resolves undesirable behaviour within the team, for example conflict between people. This expectation is interesting given participants' stated desire to be treated as adults (particularly by their leader), as it could reasonably be argued that being an adult means taking responsibility for relationship issues.

How well managers undertake their role has an impact on the engagement of those working for them. The leader's job is considered to be more than just managing the work flow, but to actively provide assistance. Team members all strongly indicated a desire for leaders to lead and support them. Support referred to providing help and solutions, providing links to other areas, access to knowledge, training, or providing technical knowledge. Through providing this support, leaders aid the technical aspects of the work. Managers also influence people's engagement through their ability to provide the right level of challenge and interest. Doing this requires an understanding of the individual's skills and attitude towards challenging work. Those leaders who operate transparently and fairly were noted as encouraging engagement through team members knowing where they stand and allowing team members to confidently

respond in an objective manner. Team members also noted a desire for leaders to be accessible, not only physically accessible, but more importantly, mentally accessible. This stemmed from a desire to be able to talk through issues and concerns with the leader and for this leader to be able to take feedback. All groups also noted a dislike for micro management and noted actions of the leader that indicated a more hands off management style as contributing to their engagement.

Managers also influence engagement through how they go about their job. Leaders of engaged teams go further than just doing the right things; they do them in a way to encourage engagement, that is they treat people well. Treating people well covers a range of things: simple people skills, such as being friendly and showing appreciation; having social skills; and being calm when working through issues with people. Calm, objective treatment was of particular importance. One group described how their engagement improved when they were treated with neutral, less overbearing behaviour. This calm, objective manner gave team members the opportunity to respond in kind and allowed team members to act as rational adults, thereby maintaining respect and a positive self-image. Comments indicated that those who were engaged worked in a pleasant and less emotionally charged environment, which was easier to work in. Treating people well also included respecting and valuing those who work for them. Respectful treatment requires team leaders to know and understand those who work for them. To do this they need to take an interest in that person. This interest was interpreted by team members as appreciation of them as an individual.

I mean they know who I am. They know what's important to me and I do get this from my team leader and the other members of my team. It's like they know what's going on in my life. They know what the sort of person I am, what makes me laugh; they know these things and when you get to discuss these things and when you get to learn things about people.

In addition once leaders know and understand the individual, they are expected to be able to alter their management style to fit the needs of individuals. Team leaders were appreciated for their ability to understand the situations their teams experience. They “*know the gambit*” and can empathise with their employees. However they still asked for results but they did so with an understanding of the pressures on their team.

The trickle-down effect of the leaders' own personal attitude, engagement or

disengagement was noted by the majority of groups. Three of the five groups directly commented on the need for leaders to be genuinely engaged with their own work. This engagement was considered contagious. A positive leader is able through dint of their own energy to encourage others to share their engagement in the work. If the leader's attitude indicates they are not committed to their role, this leads those working for them to question their own level of commitment.

Safety, support and trust. Those in engaged teams felt safe, supported and worked within an atmosphere of trust. This support, safety and trust both stemmed from, and created the atmosphere within the team. In talking about support, safety and trust the clear focus was the team and leader; it did not appear to include the remainder of the organisation.

These three terms, safety, support and trust, although meaning distinct things were also used interchangeably by team members during the discussions. One group's conversation illustrated the connection between the three terms. For these team members, being given challenging work by their manager was interpreted as being trusted. However, team members needed to feel safe to undertake the work, particularly to take risks in doing something new. Thus they needed their manager to provide support and build the perception that they worked in a safe environment. Similarly these perceptions of safety or freedom to try something new increased the perception that people worked in a supportive environment. Further perceptions of working in a trusting environment allowed people to ask for and accept support.

Feelings of safety referred to being able to take on new things, to get on and do the job and being free to be themselves. People were free to ask silly questions, and as one participant described it, "*there are no dumb questions*".

My experience in a particular team was that there are no barriers. You could ask a stupid question, there is no inhibitions. You are quite happy to, I believe you are quite happy to...Trust...There is trust and there is no inhibition.

People were safe from other team members' judgment and criticisms and from a boss who "*jumps down their throat*" or from making mistakes. As team members were free to ask any questions, free from judgment and didn't feel inhibited, they felt free to do or try things and were not held back by concern about what others might think, do or say.

Safety also referred to having a leader who backed up their staff and the decisions or work they did. Those working for leaders who they felt the leader was prepared to cover them and “*had their back*” felt safe in going about their work and in particular in undertaking new tasks.

I've many managers in the past I've heard and experienced who say take a risk. It would have to be quite genuine and yes I have confidence, and I will take a risk and I know I won't be shafted... so she had your back, yeah you know you can trust.

Interestingly safety was mentioned less frequently by staff from the more technical areas. This could be due to the style of the leaders in that area or the type of people working in those areas. However, as this was not identified during data collection, the researcher did not explore this further during the focus group discussions.

Trust was raised by all teams and intrinsically associated with safety, as feelings of safety required mutual trust. Discussions on perceptions of safety all noted trust. It was due to team members being able to trust both their leaders and their fellow team members that they felt safe. Engaged team members noted that they felt trusted by their leader to get on and do their job.

“What gives you the ability to do quite a lot? A combination both the nature of our job but also the trust and the freedom we are given by our team leaders.”

In other discussions this link was less apparent. For example, people who were given more responsibility felt as if they were given more trust to do the job.

Team members used the term support to refer to both support around aspects of their work and support in terms of emotional support. Support came from both leaders and team members, but the type of support offered differed. The support offered by team leaders was focused on the work, and included providing the “tools” required to complete the job, such as providing information or access to resources. Leaders also provided support through “*backing up*” and facilitating initiatives and ideas developed by their team members. A number of groups raised the concept that leaders “*support not monitor*”. This related to the expectation that a leader solved problems, worked through issues and led or did much more than “*just manage*”.

They need to focus on moving forward and say to improve it, 'We can help you, what can I do to help you?' Cos that's what their role is. I think they're more in a support role for us than a monitoring role. They're not supervisors, they're leaders and I think sometimes that balance isn't necessarily met. They try and supervise more than they try and lead.

This is not to say that leaders were emotionally distant from their staff, but rather that for emotional support, team members generally looked to their team not their leader. However leaders were expected to know and understand their staff, which could be interpreted as being capable of providing emotional support, and of possessing emotional intelligence.

Team members provided emotional support to each other and picked each other up on bad days or during bad moments.

But our support is us, as far as each other yes."

This need for support appeared to be driven from an understanding that not every day is a good day and some days they need support from their peers. Only one focus group noted that the job was difficult and thus to get through or cope you needed your peers.

You know when your stats are bad and everything's not going good it's only your team that can really pick you up....What do they do?.. They listen to you, um you know they relate to you, they understand what you're going through because they're going through exactly the same kind of situation.

Team members support each other emotionally through being compassionate, showing understanding and being attune to one another. Team members also support each other through sharing knowledge and information.

Social atmosphere. The social atmosphere strongly relates to the theme covered above on safety, trust and support. A positive social atmosphere, with ample opportunity to interact and connect with colleagues, contributed significantly to team members' engagement. All team members noted how they liked the people around them and enjoyed the social environment surrounding them. For some teams the social atmosphere buffered negative aspects of the task, for others, particularly in more professional roles, the people surrounding them added to the work they already

enjoyed.

The atmosphere within these engaged teams could be described as social, warm, friendly, fun, safe and supportive. In some areas this extended further to a compassionate, warm, caring environment - much more like a family. The atmospheres described, although associated with high-engagement teams, do not deviate far from descriptions others have used for the entire organisation. One group's use of the family metaphor was notable.

I think it's getting to know each other. We understand each other and what we can. Yeah we do become a bit like a family. Quite a special place isn't it really. I think we stand alone out here. Trusting, trusting that's another thing yeah, and tolerance too isn't it? Respecting other people's, you know, views and things.

This metaphor indicated a stronger acceptance of the entire person and tolerance of the person as an individual. Other teams noted a connection and social atmosphere, but this was quite different to the family familiarity described above. For example, in one focus group comprised predominantly of younger people, the atmosphere was more akin to a young adult social mode.

I think with regards to the society within the team, well it has to do with the people and at the risk of rehashing it was they were all roughly the similar ages and that includes the 2IC [second in charge] and that there was a regular go out after work and socialise, so it was a lot of joking around inside the team. It was enjoyable to see those people and you know you do spend a lot of time with your work mates. You're here for you know 37.55 but often it's frequently longer, and yeah it was just a really good vibrant culture and the intent or the willingness to work.

All groups noted a fun atmosphere and that the fun stemmed from their work colleagues and the interaction they had within the team whilst working.

I still really feel the people around me make the day enjoyable. We have fun in our team, we laugh, we tell jokes.

This fun was linked by team members to an environment of happier, more productive people. Teams varied in the importance they attached to this fun, for some it was a key

reason for them enjoying their work,

I think for me in my team I think a lot of it's the people.

For other areas the people and social atmosphere were an added bonus.

Yeah the first one, it's the first one [the work]. For me, wow, I've got this to do and on top of that I've got a great group of people to work with.

Team members attempted to determine the priority between the task and the people aspects of engagement and in general determined both task and people were important. For some respondents, colleagues and the social atmosphere were more important and for others, the task was more important.

Reviewing all group discussions it is clear the importance of social aspects varied by the roles people occupied. For those involved in more clerical roles, within which the work was depicted as mundane and not particularly enjoyable, the social aspects were of prime importance and acknowledged as the contributor to “*keeping them there*”. Comments clearly showed people were more important, as a good group of people made up for a poor task. For those in more technical roles, where the challenge of the job was more important, social interaction was less important although still a contributor to their engagement.

All team members gained social interaction through undertaking work tasks. Working together provided a sense of connection and developed relationships. In the main, the connection was made through the work, not through idle chit chat. The desire for work-related interaction was indicated by one team particularly referring to attempts by management to organise after-hour's social interaction. However this clearly did not meet their needs; team members wanted interaction during work. People also noted a preference for asking someone how to do something rather than consult a computer or manual. There was a sense that this was a much more enjoyable and satisfying way of gaining information.

A number of teams gave examples of how the social aspects and/or a sense of fun acted as a buffer for other more negative aspects of the job. The social aspects enabled team members to detach from issues within the work because they enjoyed the people and the social or fun environment around them.

Personally I think that keeping myself engaged is getting to the point where I can almost detach myself from the work I'm doing and enjoy the environment I'm in, because the I'm saying the work isn't... I can't speak for everyone, but I don't find the work fun.

Other groups commented that despite experiencing leadership issues, team members working together and supporting each other allowed them to cope with poor or absent leadership, and continue to be engaged in their work.

Challenging work. All groups in some way raised the importance to their engagement of challenging tasks. Team member's defined challenging work as work that required greater technical knowledge or was more complex; challenging work, knowledge and growth, although arguably separate concepts, are combined in one theme. Participants provided the impression that challenging work was work that requires more knowledge and that their growth stemmed from, or was acquired through, gaining this knowledge. New work was depicted as both interesting and challenging, with team members stating that new people coming into the area were always more interested and hence more engaged in the work.

There was a sense that people who felt challenged were more involved with their work, and that the interaction and intensity of work and engagement increased as people worked together and worked to solve a problem.

So if someone has a curly strange technical question people will generally sit up and take notice when you raise it they're like they'll be interested.

Although the comments regarding challenging work tended to be more individualistic and reflected the individual's interpretations of what was challenging work, the team played a very important role in terms of allowing other team members to access the knowledge required to undertake challenging work. The team provided support, thus people didn't feel alone in undertaking challenging work.

Being allocated what participants termed "*poor work*" was of concern to people, particularly those in more professional roles. Poor-quality work was that which was not challenging and did not seem to be particularly important or relevant to the organisation. Not only did poor-quality work have a detrimental effect on their

engagement but it also impacted on how people thought about themselves. A discussion on being given poor quality work highlighted the link between the type of work you were given, what you believe the organisation thought of you and how you felt in yourself.

Which of course makes you think, well what did I do wrong to be put in a of team [of] people, where I'm almost, not expected to achieve a good deal.

The team leader was often the gatekeeper for the quality of work team members' received. Team members measured how good their leader was by the leader's capability to attract interesting work to the team and their ability to ensure everyone in the team had work that matched their capability and desire for challenge.

Receiving challenging work encouraged team members to feel better about themselves. Being considered capable to do the work indicated others had confidence in their abilities, which in turn validated technical and intellectual capabilities. Also challenging work in itself is interesting and the satisfaction from having achieved increased team member's confidence in themselves.

Discussions on challenging work were one of the very few times in which team members raised the topic of their work having meaning. Receiving challenging work meant they were allocated more meaningful or important work. Successfully completing this work mattered to the organisation as a whole and thus to a person's general sense of value. In contrast, undertaking poor-quality work (work which was considered to be unimportant or irrelevant) was seen as a waste of time, and team members' noted they had difficulty staying motivated especially when they were given continual or significant amounts of poor-quality work.

Because at the end of the day, they all know that they're here to do this job and if they don't feel motivated that they are contributing to the grand scheme of things ... if you know you are better than what you are actually doing, then you are not going to come away at the end of the day feeling that you have put in a good day's work, and that you are valued and that someone is glad that you work where you work.

Challenging work was not a priority for some team members. A couple of team members noted that the work they did, could at times, be boring and the way to cope

with this boredom was variety. Variety in work broke up the “*boring bits*” with either different or more challenging tasks. For others it was apparent their engagement stemmed from social aspects, the fun and buzz of the team and less so from the work they undertook.

Access to knowledge. Gaining knowledge contributed to engagement. All discussion groups noted their engagement improved when they had access to knowledge, both access to people who held the knowledge and access to third-party knowledge, for example databases, or the internet. Other team members were an important source of knowledge and information.

I'd say that in terms of engagement, I used to sit next to [name], and she's a very good, you know, very knowledgeable and extremely helpful person... and I'm definitely more engaged because my cases are going better and because of knowledge, because I can.

Knowledge within the organisation was generally accessed through people, and knowledge gained from others (within the organisation) was held up as superior to reference material. This appeared to be due in part to the greater efficiency in getting the information, which improved team members' satisfaction in the process of gaining the information. For example “*nothing beats five minutes talking to some one*”. There was a sense that talking to some one was more pleasant than accessing third-party data.

Is a lot better and a lot more satisfying than 4 hours trolling through assorted libraries on the internet, which may leave you even more confused than when you started. You just can't beat a two minute or five minute discussion with someone. But in terms of getting advice and stuff, really if you feel like you have got good sources of advice, I think you're a much more engaged person.

Other discussions on the importance of human interaction, access to knowledgeable people, and resolving issues together supports the importance of access to others. However it was noted that at times, particularly when the information is not clearly defined, being able to “*play with*” third-party data could be better than asking others as team members' were able to pick up things others may have missed.

Team members provided the distinct impression that not everyone is willing or able to

share, thus access to others who were willing and able to share knowledge and experience was important. In one area a specific person was noted as being particularly helpful and knowledgeable and the discussion indicated that person was a “rare find”. In other groups comments about “the willingness to share” indicate not all people did or were open to sharing. Further some groups noted leaders acted to broker links outside the team, this indicates that finding the people who hold the knowledge is not that easy, and these people are not always willing or able (i.e. they are not released from their role) to share or help.

Comments on knowledge and growth and their contribution to engagement were not surprising, as knowledge regarding how to do things (technical or professional) held high status in the organisation. Further, technical knowledge was generally gained by undertaking work and progressing through roles requiring increasingly specific technical knowledge. Being able to “do the job” for many areas of the organisation required procedural, technical and or professional knowledge, including interpretation of complex policy and the law. As result the nature of the work was precise. The organisation also encouraged growth and training through numerous organisational benefits (paid study leave, paid tuition, significant and broad training packages, a large training budget). It also valued up-skilling staff. However, the growth most people mentioned came from on-the-job learning.

Respected and treated like an adult. In every session, groups mentioned the desire to be treated like an adult numerous times.

I mean, a lot of the keys to being engaged, is recognition that I'm doing my job and.... And you're an adult.

This appeared to refer to the desire to be treated as a capable, intelligent and rational person, who may not necessarily have the technical expertise but never the less was able to learn and provide intelligent thought to a situation. Team members' felt they were treated as an adult when their views, knowledge and capabilities were respected.

It's respectful of your knowledge isn't it ... it is and your understanding, it's like treating you like you could understand things.

Leaders who treated their employees as adults allowed them to respond in a calm, objective manner. There was a feeling that it was easier to move forward, easier to

speak up, as meetings focused more on the job at hand and not the subjective issues surrounding it. There was no sense that people were attempting to hide from problems, rather that they preferred the environment of being able to discuss the issue at hand in a non-personal manner, and that this made it easier to work through the issue. It could be interpreted as a desire for any situation to be handled in a manner that allowed people to maintain their dignity and self-image.

The desire to be treated as an adult narrowly referred to work capabilities, and in particular was associated with the way the team leader treated team members.

I think what has made it engaging though is that when I did change teams the last time the team leader was like 'Ok, what are your expectations?...these are my expectations' and for me straight away we've had it. We know exactly where we stand. I know what you expect, you know what I expect and it just gave me more confidence in saying 'Well, actually I don't like this or I don't like that and that doesn't help me'.

Respect was inferred from leaders who provided support in terms of the tools and resources required to do the job instead of standing over or monitoring staff. Respect was also inferred from the amount of latitude and responsibility leader's gave to their team members.

We have a team leader that leaves us to do what we're doing kind of thing. You know so I mean that person's there if you need something sorted out, but its you're treated as an adult and I think that's what helps people be, kind of, you know engaged.

Although, discussions on respect tended to focus on leaders, other discussions on how team members interrelated indicate that those teams with high engagement showed respect for each other and treated each other well. In particular the more professional areas tended to look more to their team for respect than to their leader. This may be a function of the increased teamwork required as the less professional areas tended to undertake more individualised work.

Latitude and responsibility. Team members expressed appreciation of and a desire to be provided with latitude in how they undertook their work.

I think allowing you the responsibility to make your own decisions. Yes I just think it's too many stipulations instead of you can see, and you know how to do something and you can find out how to do something. And to be allowed to get ahead and just do that makes an enormous difference.

Latitude in this context referred to how the work was undertaken, not what roles people undertook or the composition of the team as is commonly described within the literature on autonomy. This difference may be explained by the fact that the literature on autonomy is generally based in manufacturing industries, a very different context to this government agency, where the work requires knowledge-based workers. However, investigating this difference was outside the scope of this research.

Latitude or freedom related to what was reasonable in the situation. The desire for latitude appeared to be driven by a desire to achieve, and be able to make the decisions required to successfully undertake the job or solve a problem. It mainly referred to having the latitude to access knowledge and being able to determine the process to resolve issues. Perceptions of latitude extended to being able to access the tools and resources, and as a result being able to accept increased responsibility.

I suppose it's because ... they've brought the knowledge base in here for us to use has shown that they would give you more responsibility and appreciate that you could do it.

Latitude was associated with having a sense of mental freedom based on perceptions of being safe, secure and supported. Thus, team members who felt safe and trusted also felt cognitively free to do the job in the way they wanted. This in part may link to the organisational style, which is highly process-based and has a large number of prescriptive processes designed to ensure success in a highly regulated environment.

Providing the team and individuals within the team with the latitude to do the work indicated to people that they were trusted, respected and capable of making their own decisions, which in turn improved their perceptions of self-worth and the positive feelings people held of themselves.

I think allowing you responsibility to make your own decisions.

Perceptions of latitude and responsibility were closely linked to how the leader treated

those within the team. This influence by leaders was logical when considered within the context of the organisation. Leaders control the aspects of the role that contributed to perceptions of latitude, as leaders chose how prescriptively they assigned work and how much support and freedom team members were given to access resources. Thus a leader's behaviour was integral to team members' perceptions of latitude and responsibility.

Latitude was more important in the more controlled, less professional roles where work processes were prescriptive and less freedom existed in how tasks were undertaken. In the most controlled environment, team members desired a level of latitude that extended to being able to stretch the rules where necessary. However, this was only to enable them to get on with the job.

The end result is what the business is after and that is because when you've had a bad call you're allowed to vent a little bit at the time. We had this thing with one team leader that says 'Oh you're not allowed to do that, we'll wait and have a 15 minute session in our team meeting where you can vent'. But because we do it - sound off. Right, bang, get back in, start taking the calls again. We probably get our calls going better and get back into it quicker than possibly some of these teams that aren't as engaged, because maybe they haven't figured out how they can bend the rules. I s'pose, stretch them or whatever you want to call it.

Those in more professional roles were more concerned with being given the support to enable them to succeed rather than with the amount of latitude provided. The more professional areas were also more concerned with the challenge inherent in the work or task.

Although team members all expressed a desire for latitude in the way they approached their work, this doesn't stem from a desire to shirk responsibility. In fact all teams through other comments indicated a desire to get the work done. Comments throughout the focus groups indicate an assumption of performance and achieving the work goals. One team, in discussing how they worked together to resolve problems commented that,

To make sure we're doing the best we can for the rest of [Name] and for the rest of [organisation name] wide really.

Two teams in particular attempted to dispel thoughts that their requests for latitude were so they could shirk responsibility through specifically noting their performance and achievement.

Organising Themes

The second layer, within this model of engagement, moves from the direct aspects of the workplace to the more abstract internal themes that reflect people's feelings.

At ease and relaxed. A number of basic themes convey the combined impression of team members feeling at ease, relaxed and working in a pleasant atmosphere. This is the first organising theme; a more abstract theme that draws together the meaning of several basic themes, namely a social atmosphere, being treated with respect, and working in a safe, supportive and trusting environment.

All groups provided a similar impression of the atmosphere they worked in as safe, comfortable, social, fun and enjoyable. The pleasure team members gained from working in this environment was obvious. For these team members, having fun, social interaction and relating with colleagues were the most important aspects in their being engaged in the workplace. This pleasure contributed to them relaxing within the environment, and there was a sense participants did not feel it was all hard work, which made for an easier, more pleasant day. For example, in answering the question why their team was higher in engagement than other teams working in the same area, there was a real sense of enjoyment.

It sort of sounds a bit silly but something that assists me is I like everyone that I work with, which I think is quite valuable really. I enjoy the people I'm around when I come to work each day. So that helps a lot that I like coming to work and I like interacting with these people.

This enjoyment was clear from their use of the words, "fun", "we have a good time", "we are social", "I enjoy the people around me", and "I enjoy the environment around me", throughout the discussions.

This easy social environment relied on team members being treated with respect by

team leaders and other team members, as respectful treatment allowed participants to feel at ease and be themselves. Those leaders who handled issues objectively and calmly, without drama or bombastic treatment, provided a more pleasant environment that made it easier to find solutions and complete the work, as such people were relaxed within the environment. One team member, describing a disrespectful and un-engaging environment, used words such as “*pick pick pick*” and “*it just drives you nutty*”, which depicted a rather unpleasant environment. This image was also described by another team member as being “*told off*”, a rather child-like image and not particularly pleasant. These situations were directly contrasted with descriptions of more engaging situations where respectful leaders developed a more pleasant atmosphere and where things were calmly explained, which in turn allowed team members to easily move forward in a relaxed manner.

Feeling safe, trusted and supported also provided an easier environment to work in. When people felt as a team they looked out for each other, they felt safe and comfortable and thus were able to be at ease, relax within the environment and get on with the job. Participants gave the impressions that those who perceived support was available also appeared to feel more at ease asking for that support. The connection between being supported, trusted or feeling safe and an easy work atmosphere is interpreted through the use of phrases such as, “*you are quite happy to*”, “*it was an easier time*” or “*people feel comfortable that they can say it*”, when team member’s discussed their work environment. A safe environment contributed to participants perceptions of being at ease, as a safe environment was one in which team members were free from criticism and judgment and were free to be themselves. They were thus more relaxed, and worked in a more open, less constraining environment which as a result was much easier and more pleasant to operate in.

Valued and validated. Engaged team members conveyed a sense of feeling valued and validated. These perceptions were built through how the leader treated them, the respect they were afforded by the leader and their team members, the support, safety and trust they had, and also from undertaking challenging work. For team members ‘being valued’ meant they felt wanted by others, they felt others were pleased they were part of the team, and they perceived others valued their capabilities. Being valued or validated thus concerned participants’ assessment of others’ opinions and judgments of them.

Team members who worked in a safe, supportive and trusting environment interpreted

this as a signal they were valued. In essence for others to provide support they must value you enough to warrant providing the support. Feeling valued was about feeling someone cares for you.

How leaders treated their staff had implications for how team members perceived they were valued, namely: through the interest the leader took in team members as individuals, through showing respect for team members, and through treating the team members working for them as capable adults. Leaders also had responsibility for the allocation of work. Their allocation of challenging work indicated to team members' that they and their capabilities were valued and respected, especially as more complex challenging work is generally considered more meaningful and important, and thus in undertaking it their contribution was more valuable to the organisation.

Achievement and satisfaction. Team members conveyed a sense of satisfaction and achievement through undertaking challenging and interesting work; being given latitude and responsibility to undertake that work; and being given opportunities to gather knowledge and grow. They noted that their interest in the work increased when they were achieving. Thus being satisfied in the work in itself improved team members' motivation. These feelings were all individuals' own internal judgments of their personal satisfaction, in contrast to the previous theme, which relied on others' judgments. Satisfaction also increased when achievement occurred as a team. A sense of achievement and satisfaction was often discussed at the team level and focused on team achievement of goals, in contrast to most of the other discussions, which focused on the individual. One area specifically noted that achieving as a team was more motivating and provided a "buzz".

Participants all felt a sense of satisfaction and achievement in the work they did when they were working in an engaging environment.

There's a sense that you can resolve issues... so rather than discussing it and identifying what's what's our problem. You can actually put your heads together, put some ideas around, and work how the issue is going to be resolved... which gives you a much greater sense of achievement.

So that's one of the big differences, one of the big things which make it a team because you can see the work that you've done and the ideas that you've put together having an impact on the environment.

Participants were obviously frustrated with barriers to their being able to get on with the task, for example extra paperwork that didn't appear to add to the job or onerous performance review processes. This frustration indicated people were looking to achieve and perform and gained a sense of satisfaction from doing so.

A number of team members communicated pleasure and satisfaction in achieving. The common comment was:

It feels good"... I was just going to say that you get that good feeling knowing that you've reached your goal and did what you did.... Well you know you've achieved what you've set out to do. That's good.

Team members also noted they felt engaged when and because their work was progressing well, which in turn provided a sense of accomplishment.

Solving issues, successfully undertaking challenging or complex work and therefore feeling as if they had made an impact, all provided team members with a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Consequently, not providing people with challenging work meant they lost the opportunity for satisfaction, achievement and the associated recognition or respect. As a result they lost an opportunity to improve their feelings of self-worth and to be engaged in their work.

Global Theme: Feeling Good in Oneself

One overriding theme emerged from the focus groups: people who were engaged in their work felt good in themselves. Within this organisation the things that contributed to team members feeling good in themselves were the same as those that contributed to their engagement in work. Team members may have felt good because their capabilities were validated and respected, they worked in a positive social atmosphere, or they worked in a relaxing environment. The specific mix of contributing themes varied for each individual, although generally the type of work undertaken, role occupied, and the length of time in that role influenced which themes are important for a specific individual.

Respect. Although respect is a core theme, from participants comments, being

treated with respect appeared to directly contribute to their being able to feel good in themselves. Team members interpreted respect through a number of avenues - how they were treated by their leaders and team members, and through the work they received. All these improved how engaged those team members were in their work and at the same time built their feelings of self-worth and how good they felt in themselves. Team members commonly voiced a desire to be treated as an adult. It is logical to assume being treated as an adult and thus as a capable person encouraged team members to feel more positive about themselves. A discussion on being asked advice by a more experienced colleague illustrated how being treated with respect raised this participant's estimation of their self-worth, and how this encouraged them to feel good in themselves. Within the same focus group when commenting on their role, there was a real sense of status and pride. The tone and comments indicated people gained or improved their self-image from others' respect.

One focus group specifically discussed how they were continually allocated low-value work and commented, "*well how seriously do they take me.*" Being allocated low-value or meaningless work invoked obvious negative feelings and caused team members to question others' estimation of their capabilities, which led them to question their perceptions of self-worth. The association with engagement was apparent as these comments formed part of a wider discussion on how being allocated poor work impacted their engagement.

Participants also interpreted respect through how others, especially leaders and managers, treated their views and thoughts. Phrases such as, "*respecting other peoples views and things*", "*its respectful of your knowledge*" and "*we get consulted mode don't we yeah they listen to us*", show the importance of consulting and listening to people's views.

Whilst reliving a programme roll-out, another team highlighted how their advice had been ignored. As a result the problem they forecasted occurred, stopping an entire project. This recollection had a sense of both vindication and frustration that management had not listened to them, had not valued their contribution, and wouldn't take on board their views. Use of the words, "*stubborn*" and "*ignored,*" provides the feeling of being disregarded and this disregard could be considered to lessen one's belief in oneself.

At ease and relaxed. The social atmosphere, combined with a respectful, safe,

supportive and trusting environment, encouraged participants to feel at ease and relaxed within that environment, which in turn contributed to team members feeling good in themselves whilst at work. It also encouraged them to be more involved and participate more in their team and the work. Feeling at ease and relaxed is pleasurable and comfortable. There was a sense of contentment, which meant those working in this environment were able to feel good in themselves.

One group, describing their environment, used the terms, “*special*”, “*a bit like a family*”, “*very caring*”, “*trusting*”, “*tolerance*”, “*respecting other people’s views*”, “*more relaxed*” and “*more free.*” Collectively these terms presented the impression of a very easy, enjoyable and relaxing environment. The interpretation is that it feels good to be in this environment, and those who have good interpersonal relationships, are happy and thus feel good. For example phrases such as, “*I really feel the people around me*”, “*valuable*“, and “*it really assists me,*” showed how important work colleagues were and the influence they had over how team members’ felt. The pleasure in those around them contributed to those working in the team feeling good in themselves.

As discussed in the previous section, being treated with respect and perceiving they work in a safe environment allowed participants to be themselves and maintain their belief in themselves. This made working in that environment much easier. Respect and support both contribute to people feeling at ease and relaxed and contribute to people feeling good in themselves.

Valued and validated. Others’ judgments, and in particular those of team members and leaders, were important as they contributed a sense of being valued and validated. This in turn improved team members’ own feelings of self-worth and happiness in themselves. Thus being valued not only increased team members’ engagement in their work but also their positive sense of self. They felt good in themselves. For example, one team member related how being given confidential information made them feel good, as the trust provided through doing this made the person feel good in themselves. Discussions on being trusted, relied upon, and, as a team, having little or no supervision, again provided a real sense of capability, importance and a positive self-image.

Being valued was in part about participants having their capabilities recognised and validated by those around them,

Someone whose more experienced than you is asking you for your opinion of something that they are having difficulty with and you think wholly crap. So it's a validating. That's exactly what it is, a validation of your ability and they always look so surprised and happy.

However being valued was also about participants having a sense of being wanted as a person by their colleagues and leader.

I think you're... really engaged cos you're valued as a person. Your not just, so I am mean I am an employee, but I am valued as a person.

Another discussion regarding a team member not feeling valued clearly indicated the desire to be valued and the link between being valued and being engaged. Further it showed how this sense of value contributed to a sense of feeling good. The quote below also highlighted how not being valued can result in people disengaging from the workplace, disengaging from a place that was perceived as not holding a positive image of them, and how this is not pleasant and does not contribute to a sense of self-worth. The comments also showed how care and support acted to reinforce the perception others valued them. The underlying impression is that this lack of value from others leads to a loss of self-worth and belief in one's self which does not feel good.

Part of engagement I think comes down to how you feel in the team in terms of how valued you are by your manager and teammate. It's not just the work that you are doing. I think that there is a sense... when they don't feel valued, they thought, 'well why should I care? No one cares about me,'... and there really was that feeling, when you don't have someone has got your back, there that they become quite disengaged and siloed themselves. Well I'll just do what I need to do and kick off home at the end of the day.

Achievement and satisfaction. Team members were more engaged when they experienced satisfaction in the work they undertook and were able to achieve. Being satisfied and achieving also contributed to team members feelings of self-worth and feeling good in themselves. Team members' discussions on the work they undertook revealed participants gained a sense of personal satisfaction through achieving in their work. This in turn improved how they felt in or about themselves. In a discussion regarding being given the mandate to solve issues and subsequently receiving positive feedback, team members used words such as, *"it really must be*

wonderful, *Rewarding*, *a good feeling*, and *it's lovely* to describe the associated feelings. All are adjectives that describe feeling good, which stems from two things: firstly an altruistic desire to help people and, secondly a sense of achievement and the positive feedback and recognition from having done so.

In the same group during a further discussion on wanting a good result and wanting to make sure everything goes right for the staff around them (the customers for this team), participants made the comment, *“you feel good when you get it good,”* which highlighted the association between achievement and positive feelings. The conversation continued with:

I was just going to say that you get that good feeling knowing that you've reached your goal and did what you did Then well you know you've achieved what you set out to do. That's good”.

This indicated satisfaction or achievement, which provided a validation that team members could do what they set out to do, and reinforced or strengthened their feelings of self-worth.

Discussions on situations that prevented participants from achieving indicated a strong desire for the opportunity to achieve and be part of a successful environment, both of which fueled a positive self-image. Thwarting either of these had negative implications for engagement, and for team members' perceptions of self-worth and positive feelings.

In summary, the one underlying theme from this research was that participants who worked in an engaging environment felt good in themselves. Throughout the discussions, when talking about the individual aspects of the environment - for example being treated with respect, working in a fun social environment or having challenging work - participants all conveyed a sense of feeling good. Being engaged and working in an engaging environment for these participants is connected to feeling good in themselves.

Other Observations from the Discussions

Throughout the focus group discussions a tension existed between engagement at an individual and a team level. Discussions and language predominantly focused on individual engagement, with a notable exception being the discussions on achieving as a team. Engagement thus appeared to be a personal phenomenon. The experience and feelings were personal, but the team environment was very important to those feelings. A duality existed. The team had a significant impact on a person's engagement, and the person had a significant impact on the team. This was particularly noticeable in anecdotes where a single person made a dramatic difference to the dynamics and engagement within the team. People also noted increased engagement, achievement and satisfaction when working through and resolving issues as a team. This positive sense of satisfaction stemmed not just from having resolved the issue, but from the connections established through resolving it, and the relationships developed through having worked and achieved together as a team. Also noticeable was how team members thought of the team. The language they used regarding the team, rarely presented the team as an independent object in its own right but as a collection of individuals who worked within it. This does not mean team members did not feel connected to the team they worked in, as strong evidence of the pride and connection to the team existed.

Also of note during the focus group discussions was the active nature of engagement. Team members indicated their engagement built and changed over time. Engagement grew as the team developed and members got to know each other through the interaction of working together on issues and resolving problems. However people also noted how engagement could change over time. It could dip for a day or two. Consequently, there was a sense people's engagement was not static, and it did not build at a constant rate. Not only did participants comment on engagement changing over time, but they also developed the concept of engagement existing as a lifecycle in that different aspects of the work environment contributed to people's engagement over time. Further participants thought that to maintain engagement through a person's career, the aspects contributing to engagement would need to change. For example, those commencing in a role may be engaged through the challenge in the work, but as they mastered the role, their engagement relied on the social aspects of the work.

Engagement was contagious and actively transferred between people within the team, with one individual's engagement (positive or negative) having a strong influence on

others engagement. All groups noted the impact one unengaged person had on others. Often it only took one person to change the atmosphere within the team. One team described the impact of a negative person on others in the team.

Division, things like barriers started to come up. Not wanting to share. People start to question their own engagement as well... Yeah do they want to be here? Exactly, exactly right it spirals down to that. It can be draining, really draining.

One person's positive attitude also influenced the team's engagement. However, in discussing the transfer of positive attitudes, participants tended to focus on the positive attitude of their team leader and not of other team members, with a trickle-down effect of engagement commonly noted. One group noted engagement can be role modeled, particularly by leaders, but also by others in the team, and related how people join a team and pick up their colleagues' behaviours and attitudes.

You know like the teams humming so don't you come in and this is how we work here. It might have been a bit contagious, when you get into a new organisation. You are learning what is happening around. So the team is showing you what is expected from you so you start to try to do things that are aligned with that sort of thing... I suppose its like that whole role modeling thing, like if you see everybody else leaving at you know 3.30 when they should be leaving at 5.00. So I suppose it works in the positive as well.

Engagement also appeared to exist in a reinforcing spiral, where being engaged increased participant's connection with work. Because of this connection, they gained more from the work and therefore were inclined to put more into their work, which increased their satisfaction and engagement. This cycle can be seen in the discussions on interesting or "curly questions," which made people interact and think or engage with the topic. This interaction in turn improved the sense of cohesion and satisfaction across the team, which increased engagement and also appeared to increase the likelihood of future interaction. This spiral all started because the team was engaged enough at the outset to participate in discussing the question. Further examples exist where engaged people accept challenging work, which in turn leads to a sense of satisfaction and achievement and increases the person's engagement. Engagement thus appears to have a self-motivating force.

Summary

In summary, for this group of team members, being engaged was ultimately about feeling good in themselves. Team members were engaged when they worked in an easy social environment that was enjoyable, safe and supportive; when they were treated with respect; when they had challenging work with the access to knowledge and the latitude to undertake that work; and when they were able to achieve. These conditions led to a validation from both their colleagues and leader and increased their own personal satisfaction. The leader plays a unique and important role. Team members considered the leader to have the most direct influence over the environment they worked in and thus over their engagement. The team itself was also an important aspect of peoples' work life and their engagement, as the team provided support, knowledge, social contact and interpersonal relationships.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research set out to understand the aspects of the workplace that contributed to, or influenced, people's engagement when working in a team environment. The following discussion examines the findings from this research in two sections. The first section explores the results of the empirical research in terms of how it allows us to critique the literature on engagement. The thematic analysis highlighted three areas of difference to the literature. Firstly, the research indicated engagement for this group was about a connection to work rather than a harnessing of oneself to the work as discussed within Kahn's (1990) and others' work on engagement. Engagement was not about social identity. The integration of one's identity with the work or role as portrayed within much of the literature on engagement was not present within this research. Secondly, the vast majority of the literature discusses engagement from an individual perspective and ignores the collective or team. In contrast this research highlighted the importance of teams to engagement as participants' engagement did not occur in isolation. People came to work with unique personal characteristics, but once at work their engagement was influenced by, and they influenced, their team's engagement. Thirdly, the research provided an active impression of engagement that is largely absent from the literature on engagement.

The second section discusses the layered model of engagement developed from the empirical research. The first layer encompasses the direct aspects of the workplace that contributed to participant's engagement. Above these workplace aspects is a more abstract layer - the feelings associated with working in this engaged environment. For participants the experience of being engaged was associated with feeling at ease, valued and satisfied. The final layer is the global or overarching theme identified from the research. Underlying all discussions was the pervading sense that those who were engaged experienced a sense of feeling good in themselves. These findings make sense intuitively as they are what we would expect people to want in work. Although these conclusions do not contradict the common models of engagement, they do provide a different perspective that focuses much more on the individual's feelings associated than appears in much of the literature, especially the commonly cited and utilized Gallop or Utrecht models.

Part One: Critique of the Engagement Literature

Engagement is About a Connection to Work

For participants, being engaged meant being involved, participating and not working in isolation. It was also about being interested and enjoying the job, and included a sense of vibrancy, fun and excitement. These characteristics of engagement discussed by participants are all reflected to some degree within the definitions and descriptions of engagement.

Participants perceived and understood engagement in much the same way as that portrayed within the literature. However, this research revealed a much less intense picture of engagement than that described throughout much of the literature. In particular participants did not mention some key themes associated with engagement in the literature, also notable was the complete omission by participants of any comments on identification with the organisation.

The definitions and meanings participants' attached to engagement departs from Kahn's (1990) sense of harnessing and expressing one's self in the role. Kahn's (1990, 1992) descriptions of engagement did include a sense of connection, and the intensity of this connection is much greater than that portrayed by participants within this research. This empirical research indicated much less integration of the self within the role, than depicted within Kahn's work. Participants put effort into their roles and gained satisfaction but did not in any way refer to the status and identity they gained from their role. Throughout the research there was a strong sense people worked as an entity in a role and maintained a separation from the role, however, there was no sense of a merging between the self and role and building an identity through the work one does.

Other descriptions of engagement, in particular the commonly accepted definition from Schaufeli et al. (2002), are also different from the meaning participants within this research attributed to engagement. The sense of time flying, not knowing what else was going on, and being completely lost in one's work found within the literature was missing during all discussions. A much better description of engagement for these participants is that of a connection to work, as this sense of connection indicates a separation between the person and the work. The more moderate tone used by participants paints a picture of engagement that is closer to Freaney and Tiernans'

(2006) description of engagement as an “energetic effective connection” (p.132) than to the harnessing or absorption within Kahn’s (1990) or Schaufeli’s et al. (2002) work.

The Team is Important to Engagement

One of the primary objectives of this research was to understand the team’s influence on engagement. Much of the literature on engagement focuses on the individual and only considers work colleagues from the perspective that good interpersonal relationships are important to a person’s engagement. However the review of team literature indicated ample support for the hypothesis that team processes have an important influence on engagement. This research convincingly supports the notion that teams play an important role in participants’ engagement. It showed, although people enter the workplace as an individual with their own personal differences, once they are at work they become part of the collective. What happens to them in the team is very important to how engaged they are; equally they also have an important influence on the team and its engagement.

This reciprocal influence between the individual and the team, is illustrated by a number of the examples. Firstly, participants’ discussions portrayed engagement as contagious where one person was able to influence the atmosphere and engagement of the whole team. Secondly, in discussions regarding how the team atmosphere or climate influenced people’s engagement and how one individual could influence the team climate. This reciprocal nature is also apparent in discussions on engagement growing as team members worked together, indicating the interaction of the team mutually built engagement for the team and individuals within the team.

The one article to consider engagement as a team-level phenomenon supports this dual influence between the team and the individual. Bakker, van Emmerik and Euwema (2006) conclude that engagement exists at the team-level and this team level engagement can influence the engagement of individuals within the team. They also conclude that engagement transfers between team members to develop an overall team climate.

The importance of teams pervaded all group discussions. Participants explicitly connected the immediate work team to engagement in all but one of the 11 themes identified. The only exception was the basic theme of latitude and responsibility, in

which only the team leader was mentioned. In particular the team contributed to the three feelings associated with the experience of engagement. Firstly, for all participants the social atmosphere and the relationships they had with their colleagues was an important aspect of their work, and this contributed to their perceptions of being at ease and relaxed. All participants commented positively on the pleasant and fun atmosphere surrounding them, how team members provided the support (especially the emotional support) they required, and that the team environment was important to how safe they felt. Thus the team contributed to making individuals feel safe, at ease and relaxed. Secondly, perceptions of being valued and validated were interpreted through team members' (and leaders') treatment of each other. Participants specifically noted they wanted to know someone (generally a team member) cared about them as a person and that someone was pleased they were at work. Thirdly, a sense of satisfaction and achievement was most often associated with achieving as a team. Participants noted an additional buzz to achieving as a team rather than as an individual. People were not looking to achieve alone; they wanted support and social interaction in doing so and gained satisfaction from working on challenging tasks and achieving these tasks as a team. The team also increased people's ability to achieve through providing the support and access to knowledge required to undertake the work.

This empirical research indicates that the team's contribution to engagement is through the role team processes have in building people's perceptions that they work in a safe environment and are available to undertake the work. This finding is different to much of the team process literature, which indicates the opposite route, where safety and availability contribute to team processes.

In summary, this research indicates people's individual differences and preferences influence their engagement, but these are subject to team process. When investigating engagement one cannot look at the individual in isolation; the team is important as it offers many of the contextual features necessary for engagement.

Engagement is Active

Although not included within the model of engagement developed by this research, the concept of engagement being active was integral to participants' discussions and is clearly an important aspect of engagement. This active nature occurred in a variety of

ways. Firstly engagement was seen to change; it grew over time, and people experienced dips and peaks in their engagement. Secondly, engagement had a lifecycle with the reasons for people's engagement changing over time and for each individual. Thirdly, engagement (high or low) was contagious as it transferred between people. Lastly, engagement seemed to exist in a reinforcing spiral where being engaged assisted people to behave in ways that further increased their engagement. This active nature of engagement reflected within this research can only be found to a limited degree within the literature on engagement.

Engagement changes. The focus group discussions portrayed engagement as essentially stable but with momentary or short-term ebbs and flows. This is highlighted by one group, which noted the ability for individuals to be "grumpy" on occasion, but that this did not reflect their overall engagement. Comments and discussions within this research that highlight the difference the work environment, leaders and other team members made to engagement point to engagement existing as a state. In this case a state is defined as "determined by the inputs from the work environment" (Freeney & Tierana, 2006, p.133) if Freeney & Tierana's definition is followed. Nevertheless, other comments from participants would appear to indicate engagement can be considered a trait, an essentially stable phenomena (Dalal et al., 2008). Participants referred to an underlying level of engagement, which takes time to build and once established lasts a long time. Participants also noted that engagement does not grow at a constant rate, as at times a person's engagement could dip (i.e. for a day or so), but this was not indication of their underlying level of engagement.

Participants' comments and discussions indicated engagement can be both a state and a trait. The literature also highlights engagement's dual changeability and stability, and authors have attempted to classify, inconclusively, whether engagement is a trait or a state. In general the literature appears to conclude that engagement can be both a trait and a state (Macy & Schneider, 2008; Dalal et al., 2008).

Participants indicated their own attitudes and affective states were important. However they were malleable, as the environment around them had a significant impact on their engagement. This premise appears to more closely fit with Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement in which people varied their level of engagement depending on the characteristics of the work and the work environment, but context alone did not determine engagement. Kahn considered context to be mediated by people's perceptions and thus engagement was also influenced by individual

differences. In conclusion, both the literature and this research highlight the changeable nature of engagement; it is relatively stable but at the same time different features of the external work environment can alter a person's engagement.

Engagement has a lifecycle. Team members commented how for each individual different aspects of the environment weighted more heavily in their engagement than for other people, and these tended to change over time. Within the focus groups the most common example came through discussions attempting to determine which was more important - the task or the social, aspects of the work. Another example is the difference in the need for latitude. Professional workers were less concerned with latitude and more concerned with the support they needed, in contrast to clerical workers who required more latitude. Erickson (2005) also notes this variety, finding that people are engaged for different reasons. Within one focus group discussion, participants developed the idea of engagement existing as a lifecycle, where different things in the environment or work contribute to their engagement at different times in their career. For example, for some at the outset the learning aspects of the job were important, and the team contributed to their engagement through the team's ability to provide access to knowledge. However later the social aspects of work became more important, and the team contributed through providing a rich social environment. For others this process was reversed, with the social aspects being important until people gained the necessary skills to undertake challenging work, at this point the challenge in the work became important and the team contributed through providing knowledge and support. Thus, irrespective of the original basis for engagement, a change of focus to other aspects was required to maintain a high level of engagement throughout one's work. In this way engagement has a lifecycle, with the factors contributing to a person's engagement varying over the person's work-life. This lifecycle concept does not appear within the main literature on engagement and therefore adds to the picture of engagement.

Engagement is contagious. Engagement appears within this research as a contagious phenomenon where one person's engagement, positive or negative, can impact on the entire team's level of engagement. Interestingly all focus group discussions concentrated on the impact one unengaged person had on others and how it only took one person to change the atmosphere. They also noted how when this changed, things were much easier in the team. Much less focus was given to the contagious nature of one engaged person. Although some discussion groups specifically mentioned examples of the team's engagement influencing individuals

joining the team, as these individuals tended to increase their engagement to match that of the entire team. This contagious nature of engagement is reflected in Bakker, van Emmerik and Euwema's (2006) work on the crossover of burnout and engagement. Within this work, engagement can be transferred to others in the team through shared events and through emotional contagion, as empathetic relationships encourage team members to tune in and assimilate others emotions.

Engagement has a reinforcing spiral. Engagement also appeared to exist within its own reinforcing spiral. Feeling good had a motivational quality that encouraged people to increase their engagement and thereby reinforce their sense of feeling good. It could also be argued that "feeling good" is a beneficial outcome of engagement, which in turn provides the motivation for people to further engage in their work. For example, being engaged encourages one to accept challenging work; because the person works in a safe environment, they are encouraged to ask for support, which in turn increases their access to knowledge and their ability to do the job. This in turn leads to a sense of satisfaction and increased engagement. This engagement is contagious and feeds through the entire team, encouraging the team to work together and resolve issues. As a result the team becomes a more cohesive unit and gains a sense of joint achievement and satisfaction, which further reinforces their engagement.

These reinforcing spirals, although not common within the engagement literature, are hypothesised within four authors' work and included within the more recent team process literature. However Llorens et al (2007) and Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, (2007) are the only authors to specifically investigate reinforcing spirals.

The findings from this research reveal an active nature to engagement, as engagement changes over time, actively transfers between team members and exists within a constantly reinforcing spiral. This active nature, although not commonly discussed, can be found in some of the work on engagement.

Part Two: Thematic model of Engagement

Engagement Exists in Layers

The model developed from the empirical research (depicted in Figure 1. page 54), provides a picture of engagement from the perspective of the person working within an engaged team. This model conceptualises engagement as existing in three layers, which move from the work environment, to the feelings participants experience working in that environment, to the overall feeling connected with being engaged. This section introduces the model as a whole and in particular the rationale behind the three layers. The individual components of the model are then examined.

At the base of the proposed engagement model are the seven aspects of the workplace, which contribute to people's engagement in work. One of these aspects, leadership, has a foundational role, as leaders have the formal authority to influence the work environment and subsequently most of the aspects associated with engagement. The other six workplace aspects - social atmosphere, respect, safety, support and trust, challenging work, latitude and responsibility, and access to knowledge - all mutually support and reinforce each other.

Above these workplace aspects are a set of three more abstract themes that are removed from the direct workplace and are more closely centred in the person and their feelings. These three categorical themes - being at ease and relaxed, being valued and validated and being satisfied - are the feelings participants associated with the aspects of the workplace that contributed to their engagement. They are the internalised associations and interpretations of what the combined influence of the workplace means to the individual and accordingly moves from away from the external environment. However they remain rooted in the external environment because they are the feelings connected with working in that environment.

The third layer reflects the underlying feeling that pervaded the discussions on engagement. It is the sense of "what" the discussions were all about. Engaged people work in an environment that contributes to their feeling good in themselves. This "feeling good" could be considered to describe "what" a person gains from working in an engaged team. This last layer of the model is more centred within the individual, their experience of being engaged and what engagement meant to them. As such it is

further removed from the work environment and is thus more abstract than the previous layer.

Although the components of the model are similar to aspects of the literature this model of engagement both borrows and departs from the common engagement models. Its layered approach is similar to the pyramid approach of the Gallup GWA engagement model. The Gallup model of engagement provides conceptual support for the notion of engagement existing in a hierarchy, as their 12 questions are grouped into four hierarchical “camps”. Freaney and Tiernan’s (2006) review of engagement and engagement models also provides support for a layered model of engagement in which the work environment is interpreted by the individual to result in emotive responses. As they depict engagement, it is a process that moves from aspects directly within the work environment to the person’s cognitive and emotive response to these. These responses then in turn lead to engagement.

Kahn’s (1990) work depicts a person’s level of engagement as dependant on three conditions, and all three conditions are required to be engaged. People need to know the work is meaningful; that it is safe to invest themselves in the work; and that they have the resources to do so. The underlying perceptions and descriptions provided by participants closely match those within Kahn’s work and strongly reflect the three conditions. However, how the themes are grouped differ. Kahn’s work has three essentially equal conditions (meaningfulness, safety and availability), which all work to provide a sense of engagement. However, the interrelationships between these are not explored. In contrast, this research includes a larger set of themes and provides a form of hierarchy between them. The themes that relate to two of Kahn’s conditions, safety and availability, are core themes existing at the bottom of the proposed model while Kahn’s third condition, meaningfulness, more closely relates to the top two layers. This could indicate that the seven aspects of the workplace form a platform on which the next layers exist. Consequently, for people to experience meaning within their work, they first must believe they are safe and available to undertake that work. May, Gilson and Hartners (2004) tested Kahn’s model and also found that each of Kahn’s three conditions held a different level of influence over a person’s engagement, with meaningfulness having a stronger influence on engagement than safety and availability. In summary, this research suggests being safe and available are the foundations that allow people to experience meaning and engagement within their work.

At the Base: The Workplace Contributors to Engagement

This research identified seven basic aspects of the workplace that contribute to people's engagement. These bear a remarkable resemblance to the literature on engagement and as a group offer a fairly comprehensive set of contributors. As such, despite the research only being conducted with a limited number of participants, the comments and thoughts from these participants have covered a surprisingly wide variety of aspects.

A comprehensive set of workplace contributors. Kahn's (1990) tripartite model of engagement has been used throughout this thesis as a framework to review the literature on engagement, and it is appropriate to continue to use this framework in assessing the comprehensiveness of these seven workplace contributors.

Meaningfulness within the literature stemmed from enriched work, positive interpersonal relationships, alignment with the organisation and a positive work-role fit. The only notable exception is a person's alignment with the organisation in terms of values and work-role fit; the focus group discussions did not at any point include comments concerning the values of people and the organisation, and only rarely discussed any altruistic value or meaning within the work they did. Also participants in this research held a different view regarding positive work-role fit to those found within the literature. Participants desired to take on work for which they did not have experience in and could arguably be considered to have a negative work-role fit.

Safety was one of the most clear and repeated contributors to engagement for participants within this research. Participants included within their discussions on safety most of the aspects associated with building safety identified within the literature, namely: having support, having strong interpersonal relationships, working in a predictable environment and having access to resources (especially knowledge). Similar to the literature, trust was woven through participants' discussions and comments supporting the interrelationship of safety and trust.

Lastly, although availability had the weakest links with engagement in the literature, for these participants availability was quite important. Team members frequently talked about the importance of having access to knowledge, which in this organisation can be considered a work resource and thus part of the availability condition. Their comments on feeling free to "*get on and do the job*" because they are supported, indicates the

importance of cognitive availability and feeling that they are able to do the job. A person's availability to engage in the work is generally influenced, according to the literature, by five areas: confidence, experience, resources, energy and outside demands. Confidence, and having the experience or capability to undertake the work were both reflected in participants' discussions. Experience was discussed only to a limited degree, and it appears participants felt access to advice, support and knowledge made up for experience. Resources were discussed especially from the perspective of access to knowledge. Having or needing more energy was not noted by participants, however the sense of fun and vibrancy conveyed by participants during their discussions suggests energy was present. Outside demands were also omitted from participants' discussions. Potentially this could be attributed to the work focus of the conversations, and the fact that most participants rarely need to work long hours.

Each of the seven direct work aspects are further explored below.

Leadership. The literature on engagement, teams and leadership highlight the core role of the leader and the importance of a bureaucratic or transformational leadership style (Bhatnager, 2007; Erickson, 2005; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002; Zaccaro, Ritteman & Marks, 2001).

This research does not differ from these findings, as all focus groups discussed repeatedly the important influence their leader had on their engagement. Leaders were important to participants' engagement, as they influenced or controlled much of the workplace environment. This influence is due to the role leaders had in managing the work, providing support in the form of access to knowledge and resources, treating people fairly, objectively and respectfully, understanding their staff, and lastly through their own engagement. These leadership functions do not differ from those outlined within the literature. For example, managing the work and providing support are two core aspects of the leaders' influence within Zaccaro, Ritteman and Marks' (2001) work. Not only did this research reflect the importance of leaders, but it also indicated a similar style of leadership conducive to engagement as that depicted within the literature. Treating employees as adults, taking an interest in employees' well-being, providing support and being fair and transparent are all aspects of bureaucratic leadership. Is a style of leadership many authors associate with developing engagement (Bhatnager, 2007; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Erickson, 2005; and Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008).

Social atmosphere. The importance of a positive social environment to people's engagement pervaded the focus group discussions. Time and again participants noted the importance of their work colleagues and the social atmosphere surrounding them. In particular participants valued a social atmosphere characterised by friendly, supportive colleagues and interactions that promoted dignity. A positive social environment directly contributed to participants' enjoyment of the job and to their sense of value. It also made asking for and receiving support much easier and played a part in how safe people felt.

This importance of positive interpersonal relationships can also be observed within the literature on meaning and safety. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) discussed the role interpersonal interactions play in developing a sense of connectedness and meaning. Other authors include positive interpersonal relationships within their lists of the contextual contributors to engagement (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; May, Gilson & Hartner, 2004). Kahn (1990) also discusses the need for interpersonal relationships, however Kahn narrowly focuses on the sense of dignity and not on the fun or enjoyment of the social interaction that is included within other literature and evidently so important to participants within this research.

Respect. Being treated with respect, or as most participants termed it, "*being treated as an adult,*" contributed to people's engagement and allowed them to respond to issues in a calm, objective manner. This in turn facilitated the resolution of issues and maintained a pleasant work environment. Whilst not all authors included respect as a contributor to engagement, Cartwright and Holmes (2006), Kahn (1990), and Saks (2006) all discussed the importance of social interactions that maintain dignity. Dignity is a concept associated with respect, as being treated with respect allows people to maintain their dignity. Participants also wanted to be respected for their abilities and for what they could do. In part this could be interpreted as a request for recognition. The importance of recognition is noted within a number of authors' work. Recognition is one of the work-life areas within Maslach and Leites' (2008) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) work on burnout and engagement. Recognition is also included within Kahn's meaningfulness condition as recognition provides a form of benefit or return for the investment of effort. Gallup acknowledges the importance of recognition as it is included as a specific question within the GWA engagement survey (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Saks (2006) approaches engagement from the perspective of social exchange theory; one of his conclusions was that when employees receive recognition or rewards, they reciprocate with higher engagement. This coupling of rewards and

recognition is not unusual, and most of the literature appears to treat them as one item, using the term “recognition and rewards”. However this coupling is not applicable within this research as comments on rewards were noticeably absent, and participants only discussed recognition in terms of others recognising one’s capability or achievement of a task.

Safety, support and trust. Participants continually underscored the association between being safe and being engaged. Team members were able to engage in the work when they perceived they were in a safe environment. This need for safety can be interpreted from participants’ descriptions of wanting to work in an environment where they felt free to ask any questions, were not inhibited, and felt safe from judgment and criticism. A safe environment was one characterised by trust, predictability, and ample emotional and technical support from both colleagues and leaders. Working in a safe environment meant participants had freedom to be themselves and to do the work the way they thought best. It also allowed people to try something new and take on challenges.

The theme of safety and the characteristics of a safe environment bear a strong resemblance to Kahn’s (1990) discussions on safety. Further both Kahn and Edmondson (1999) found the same link between safety, support and trust, as identified in this research.

Challenging work. Undertaking challenging work had a motivational quality because it encouraged participants to increase their interaction with, and the intensity of, their work. Participants’ engagement increased when confronted with a challenging task. However within this research, complex or enriched work was only of importance to those who were primarily engaged through the task or technical aspects of their work. For others the work itself was not the primary motivator. Their job was enriched through social aspects. Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) identify and discuss this motivational quality of challenging work within their discussions on job resources. They include challenging work as a job resource though its role in enriching work. Many definitions of an enriched job do not specifically include challenge per se. Despite this, challenging work can be considered enriched work as it includes the ability to undertake new or complex work that requires technical knowledge - a core aspect of enriched work. Bakker, van Emmerik and Euwemas’ (2006) description of job resources as those aspects of the job that encourage personal development or increase their meaningfulness supports this conceptualization of challenging work as enriched work

and therefore a job resource. A number of other authors include challenging work as an important contributor to engagement (Bakker, van Emmerik & Euwema, 2006; Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006).

Access to knowledge. Successfully undertaking challenging work was closely associated with having access to appropriate technical and procedural knowledge. Having access to knowledge can be considered a desire to have the tools necessary to successfully complete the work. Given this interpretation, “access to knowledge” is reflected within the literature on engagement. Firstly, access to knowledge facilitates getting the job done, and stimulates growth or development (as noted above), two aspects included within descriptions of job resources (Bakker, van Emmerik & Euwemas, 2006; Demerouti et al., 2001). Secondly, Kahn’s (1990) availability condition refers to having the resources necessary to invest oneself in the task. It appears to embrace having or being able to access the knowledge required to complete the role. Lastly, Gallup highlighted the importance of having the tools to do the job (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

Latitude and responsibility. Participants’ engagement increased when they had latitude in the way they went about or undertook their tasks. This stemmed from a desire to, do the job and achieve the desired outcome in the manner they deemed to best fit the situation. Providing people with latitude further indicated to them they were trusted and their capability was respected thus improving their belief in themselves and their ability.

This desire for latitude is not surprising. A variety of literature, not just those limited to engagement, points to the importance of providing people with autonomy in how they undertake their work. Further this literature highlights the motivational quality of this autonomy. Enriched work (an important contributor to people experiencing meaning in their work) is often depicted as work that includes the five aspects within the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) and within the JCM, autonomy is one of the core aspects required to motivate people (Hackman and Morris, 1975, cited in Gil, Alcover & Peiro, 2005). In other work autonomy is linked to stimulating positive work outcomes. For example, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) included job control as one of the resources necessary to build engagement. Salanova and Schaufelis’ (2008) recent work illustrates the role of job control (as a job resource) in generating higher levels of engagement. The importance of having latitude and responsibility for the work one undertakes is not a surprising finding and fits with much of the literature.

The Next Level: The Feelings Connected with Working in this Environment

The second layer of the engagement model developed within this research moves from the work environment to the feelings (being at ease and relaxed, being valued and validated, and having a sense of satisfaction and achievement) associated with working in an engaging environment.

Of these three themes, only the one regarding satisfaction is directly discussed within the literature. However, indirect support can be found in the literature for the other two. One explanation for this departure is that the engagement literature tends to focus more on descriptions of what engagement is, how engagement is characterised and on the aspects of the workplace associated with engagement. It does not take the perspective, of a person's experience whilst working in an engaging environment, that this research does. For example, the Gallup GWA engagement model took the perspective of what makes a successful organisation and not the perspective of the person's feelings (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Hartner, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). The Utrecht model, with its focus on investigating the psychometric properties of engagement, describes the state of engagement (i.e. the three aspects of dedication, vigour and absorption) more than the feelings associated with being engaged (Schaufeli et al ., 2002). One of the few authors to consider engagement from a qualitative perspective is Kahn (1990), and his findings fit more closely with the conclusions from this research.

All three feelings (being at ease, valued and satisfied) relate to Kahn's (1990) meaningfulness condition of engagement. Firstly, being at ease and relaxed is derived from interpersonal relationship, an important aspect of meaningfulness. Secondly, being valued and validated can be regarded as contributing to a sense of meaningfulness; Kahn's description of "people experiencing engagement when they felt worthwhile, useful and valuable" (p. 704) resonates strongly with the sentiments voiced by participants in their desire to be wanted and have their capabilities valued or validated by others. Lastly, the theme of satisfaction and achievement clearly reflects the condition of meaningfulness, as people working in meaningful roles gain a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. However meaningfulness as described within Kahn's work does not reflect the complete sense contained within the theme of being at ease, and working in a pleasant, safe and comfortable environment. This description appears to resonate more with Kahn's safety condition, where people are "able to show and employ ones self" (p. 708). It appears from this research that because participants

perceived they were safe, they felt at ease and relaxed in how they went about their work, allowing them to be more engaged with their work.

At ease and relaxed. Feeling at ease and relaxed stemmed mainly from two interrelated aspects: perceptions of safety and a positive social environment. Feeling safe encouraged participants to feel at ease and relaxed because participants were not concerned about other's criticisms and judgments, and they were free to be themselves. A positive social environment was an important contributor to feeling at ease and relaxed, as positive interrelationships added to the pleasantness of the environment. A positive social environment also contributed to perceptions of safety.

Although the literature discusses the importance of safety within the work environment, in general it does not discuss the relationship between safety and engagement. However, a few authors offer support for the relationship found within this research. For example Wildermuth and Pauken (2008), in their discussion on the importance of interpersonal relationships to engagement, include safety and social relationships as aspects integral to building a comfortable work environment. They describe this environment as one that reflects the "at ease and relaxed" feeling experienced by participants within this research. Further, Maslach and Leiter (2008) indicate the importance of a quality work environment and describe this environment as one with positive social interaction, support and minimal conflict. This description fits with the theme on being at ease and relaxed and provides support for the finding that engagement is associated with being at ease and relaxed.

Valued and validated. Participants also experienced a sense of being valued and validated, when working in an engaging environment. This sense of value is interpreted from how others treat them. Being treated with respect and "like an adult" made a considerable difference to how valued participants felt, as did the support provided from colleagues and the type of work allocated. Gallup emphasise the concept of being valued, with four of the 12 GWA questions encompassing both how the individual and others judge the persons performance (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Furthermore, the Gallup engagement pyramid places being valued as one of the more basic requirements in building engagement. However Gallup does not appear to differentiate, as this research does, between personally derived satisfaction and external validation.

Other than Kahn (1990) and the literature on the Gallup model, much less is written about this sense of value and validation. The literature generally only refers to recognition and rewards, which although separate from engagement, does indicate engagement is associated with the individual receiving some intrinsic benefit from others' positive appraisals of them and their work. Saks (2006) for example, whilst investigating engagement from the perspective of Social Exchange Theory stated that because individuals perceive the organisation to provide recognition and rewards for their contribution, they reciprocate with higher levels of engagement. Maslach and Leiter (2008), in their development of the Job Demands Resources model, include recognition and rewards as one of their work domains, where recognition and rewards provide both material and intrinsic benefits, whilst a lack of recognition devalued both the individual and the work they did.

Satisfaction and achievement. In contrast to the theme above, which reflects external judgments of a person's value, this theme reflects participants' own judgment of whether they received a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction from the work environment. Satisfaction, is commonly included in definitions and descriptions of engagement. Therefore it is no surprise, that satisfaction occurs within this research as one of the feelings associated with working in an engaged environment. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) list satisfaction as a value or benefit people receive from their work, and specifically note that satisfaction is rated as more important than money. Other authors regularly comment on the association between engagement and satisfaction (Macy & Schneider, 2008; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008).

The findings from this empirical research highlight the importance of participants' feelings. When people work in an engaging environment, they experience a sense of being at ease and relaxed, of being valued and validated, and having a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Although the literature does not specifically point to these feelings, literature can be found to support their association with engagement.

At the Top: Engagement is About Feeling Good in One's Self

Feeling good in one's self is the underlying theme identified from the focus group discussions. The various aspects that comprise engagement all contributed to participants feeling good in themselves. The importance of the various aspects of the work environment varies for each individual. For example, for some participants,

working in a pleasant social environment was most important. However they still needed to be treated with respect, feel wanted, have their capabilities valued, and gain a sense of personal satisfaction. For others the most important aspect was the sense of personal satisfaction gained from achieving complex tasks and the other aspects were not as important but still necessary.

This sense of feeling good in one's self was not superficial. It was evident from participants' tone, which conveyed a deep inner pleasure when talking about the aspects of the environment that led to their engagement. An example is participants enjoying the company of work colleagues, being treated with respect or achieving a challenging task. This experience of feeling good in one's self was built through aspects of the work environment that are embedded in the culture and structure of the organisation, for example treating people with genuine respect, and providing real freedom for people to manage their work. It was not built on superficial events grafted onto the work environment, such as after-work-drinks, or casual Fridays. These add to the work environment but alone do not build a sense of feeling good in one's self.

This conceptualisation of engagement as being connected to feeling good in one's self makes intuitive sense. If the work environment contributes to a person feeling good in themselves, then they are much more likely to invest more of themselves and increase their participation in work. The theme of "feeling good" is not a concise psychological construct, but a qualitative impression built from an immersion in the discussions of team members who had experienced working in an engaged team. It clearly incorporates aspects of self-worth, a belief in one's self and one's abilities, and a positive self-image, derived from being treated with respect, being given challenging work and from achieving. Feeling good, however, goes beyond self efficacy and self-image to include pleasure and a sense of happiness. This is especially notable within participants' discussions on the social aspects of their work.

To date there appears to be relatively little research directly investigating how engagement relates to an individual's sense of self. The only aspects of self that are positively related to engagement are self efficacy and, to a limited degree, self identity (Freeney & Tiernan, 2006). Efficacy is linked to engagement through a person's sense of availability, namely their belief they and/or the team have the capabilities and resources to undertake the work. Maslach and Leiter (2008) include concepts of efficacy within their descriptions and definitions of engagement and include efficacy within their burnout-engagement model. Self identity is only indirectly mentioned within

the literature through descriptions of engagement, which refer to the harnessing of one's self with the role indicate self identity. This self identity is not further explored. However, Cartwright and Holmes' (2006) discussion on meaning at work briefly noted the association between engagement and self identity.

The sense of feeling good in one's self identified within this research has much in common with the concept well-being. Harter, Schmidt and Keys (2002) consider well-being to be associated with the presence of positive emotions, a positive appraisal of the workplace and the individual's relationship with that workplace, all of which resonate with the comments from the participants within this research. Numerous authors provide ample support for conceptualising engagement as a state of well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Freeney & Tiernan, 2006; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Well-being also appears to operate within a reinforcing spiral, as this research proposes engagement does. Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2007) considered well-being as a motivating resource that operates in a positive-gain spiral, in which people work to maintain and build resources and by doing so increase the resources available to them. Hence it is possible, that people who work in an engaging environment (for example one containing the seven aspects identified within this research) gain a sense of well-being, and as this sense of well-being is a valued resource that they work to build and maintain.

Recommendations

This research provides rich insights, from those working in an engaged team, into the experience of engagement of and contributors to engagement. One practical aim for this research was to provide managers with information to use in developing engagement within their teams. As such the recommendations made below are focused on what managers can do. However this does not discount the individual's ability to influence their environment. Individuals are not powerless; even without management support they can take responsibility and ownership of their environment. For example, through improving the social atmosphere between themselves and work colleagues, through providing safety and validation between themselves and through personally seeking out avenues to improve the challenge and enjoyment within their work.

The insights from this research provide management with a rich picture of the work environment that offers employees a positive, engaging work experience. There is much managers and the organisation can do to improve engagement and performance across the organisation. The range of GWA engagement scores across the organisation indicate there are many teams that are not engaged. The work environment for these teams likely differs to that described within this research. This offers an opportunity for management and leaders to improve engagement through altering the work environment of non engaged teams to better meet that depicted within this research. Three areas are of particular importance: a) building an environment that encourages people to feel good, b) managing in a bureaucratic style and c) focusing on teams and encouraging teamwork.

Encouraging people to feel good. The findings of this research highlight the importance of ensuring people work within an environment that allows and encourages them to feel good in themselves. Participants felt good in themselves at work, when they had a positive self-worth, a belief in their ability to do the work and a sense of pleasure in their work. Engagement can be improved through management and leaders taking a more holistic approach to consider not just the direct aspects of the work environment but also how these combine and what feelings these produce for those people working in that environment. Are they building an environment where people can feel at ease and relaxed, where they are valued and satisfied?

Managers and leaders can build a relaxing and easy environment for their staff through managing how team members treat each other and encouraging an environment in

which people are able to express their thoughts without criticism or judgment. This requires managers to role model and guide appropriate behaviour, and to encourage people to express their thoughts. For example those leaders who encouraged employees to share experiences provided an environment where people felt comfortable expressing themselves and their views. Also leaders who coached their employees through difficult situations rather than dictated solutions made life easier and more pleasant for their employees.

The leader has an important influence on how valued a person feels. Managers can improve employees perception of their value through treating their employees with respect, that is, as a capable person who is able to provide intelligent thought to a situation. Simply asking for and listening to employees' ideas and supporting their initiatives went a long way in building participants' perception of self-worth. Treating people with respect requires strong people skills. Improving engagement requires an organisational culture that values and prioritises people skills. This is likely to require some form of culture change across the organisation, which will need to be role modeled from the top down. At the same time the organisation will need to invest in training and to consistently reward those who display people skills. The organisation will also need to place attention on both selecting and developing leaders to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary. Employees also interpret value through the type of work they are allocated by their leader. Leaders need to understand the skills and desires of each individual and of the team as a whole, and ensure they allocate work to provide the level of challenge that meets both the needs of individuals and the team. This means managers need to know and take an interest in their employees as individuals, for example managers who regularly held "one-on-one" meetings with employees to discuss individuals aspirations encouraged the engagement of their staff.

Managers also have several avenues to build the satisfaction employees gain from their work. Taking a less prescriptive role and allowing employees the latitude to solve issues and complete the work as they believes is most appropriate, enables employees to feel more satisfied and engaged with their work. This means managers needed to empower their staff, they needed to provide the autonomy, resources and training to allow their staff to achieve. For example, within some areas of the organisation the tasks are so prescriptive that customer service officers are unable to consult the relevant information and provide the information customers desire. To make this worse on occasion they are taken to task by their managers for referring calls to more senior

staff (as suggested by organisational processes). Empowering staff through allowing judgment and less prescriptive task requirements and through providing access to knowledge would improve engagement and customer service. This is a significant culture change for this organisation as it is hierarchical, and decision making is vested in seniority. Managers can also encourage satisfaction through simple recognition and feedback. Participants gained a sense of satisfaction from managers who merely commented or noted achievement and performance. This requires managers to be aware of team and individual achievements and to take the time to talk to their employees.

Managing in a bureaucratic style. Leaders influence engagement in two ways: how they manage their teams and through their own level of engagement. Managers who undertook a more “hands off” or bureaucratic management style and in particular avoided micro-management techniques encouraged the engagement of their staff. For example one group preferred the manager to hold regular meetings that covered the objectives and goals of the work but did not delve into details of how the tasks were being undertaken. Often managers within the organisation focus on highlighting gaps or issues in performance. However those managers who focus on jointly (with the employee) developing solutions to issues and who provide support in terms of resources, training or access to information generate greater engagement from their staff. For leaders and managers to provide support, they need to broker access to resources across the organisation. This means leaders need to develop strong networks (both formal and informal) across the organisation. This is of particular importance in this organisation as knowledge often resides in specific individuals.

Understanding and responding to the situation and needs of their staff was an important requirement that participants had of their leader. Leaders need to understand the different motivations of those working for them; they also need to understand that people are individuals and respond differently to various management behaviours. Thus leaders need to vary their style to suit the requirements of the situation and the individual within the situation. This means managers need to be trained in the different management styles or options available to them.

Leaders who manage their teams in a transparent, fair and objective manner developed an engaging work environment. Two simple examples demonstrate how managers can encourage perceptions of fairness and transparency. Leaders within the organisation have discretion over the allocation of work and work rosters; as a result

work allocation is managed in a variety of ad hoc ways. This can be improved in many cases: firstly through making explicit the requirements and career progression steps and how different types of work are allocated; and secondly through developing an agreed, clear programme to allocate rosters.

Participants also found they were more engaged when leaders displayed a proactive, calm and objective management style. This was most apparent in managing conflict situations as participants regularly demonstrated a desire for managers to tackle conflict situations early, and to do so in a clear objective way. This means managers need to be trained in identifying and handling conflict situation; they also need confidence in their own ability.

As engagement has a trickle-down effect, the leaders' own attitude to their job is important. All layers of the organisation need to pay attention to and develop their engagement with the work. This means managers and leaders need to work with their own colleagues in identifying mechanisms and tools to develop and maintain their own engagement. Leaders also need to visibly portray engagement and enthusiasm for their work.

Encouraging teamwork. Engagement occurs within a team environment, and the team is an important contributor to people's engagement. Engagement needs to be considered at both an individual and team level and not solely as an individual phenomenon. One of the main contributions the team made was through a positive social environment. Management can encourage this social environment through increasing the ability of team members to interact and work together on tasks. For example within call centres staff are not allowed to talk to each other except in formal breaks. However this prevents staff from interacting and gaining the support they require, especially as call centre work is emotionally draining, and staff look to each other to "*pick-them up*" after a difficult call. It also prevents staff from accessing the knowledge and experience necessary to do their job. Providing employees with the latitude to undertake the work and interact (appropriately) with their peers would improve both engagement and performance.

Leaders can also alter rewards to encourage teamwork and sharing of knowledge. In general case work within the organisation is recorded at an individual level; although people work within a team performance is not monitored at a team level. Performance measures could be refocused on the team's workload, with the intention of encouraging

the team to work together and identify the tasks which need team support and prioritise effort based on the entire team's work load. Leaders can also encourage interaction by structuring work so team members need to interact to complete the work. The leader can encourage those within the team to share their knowledge and expertise, in part this encouragement requires providing team members with the time and freedom from their own tasks.

Further Research

This thesis reports on a qualitative research project that takes an in-depth look at the experience of engagement for 25 participants within one organisation. The discussions painted a rich picture of engagement and what within the work environment was associated with these participants' engagement experience. Through analysing these discussions, this research added to the work on engagement in three areas: namely engagement is about feeling good, engagement is an active process that exists within a reinforcing spiral and lastly engagement is strongly influenced by the team environment, rather than being a purely an individual phenomena. However these contributions are only premises derived from this empirical research; much further exploration is required to add to our understanding of people's engagement with work.

This research found that for these participants engagement was associated with feeling good. This "feeling good" however is an initial concept; as it is an insight from months of immersion in participants' discussions, it was not probed or explored in any manner during the actual focus group discussions. Further research is needed to explore what this feeling good really is. What does it encompass, what do participants experience as "feeling good"? For example is feeling good the same as well-being, as suggested within this work? How is "feeling good" associated with self efficacy and self identity? How is "feeling good" associated with engagement? As the concept "feeling good" is a loose concept centred on people's experiences, further qualitative research to explore what it is and how people experience it is a first step. These are all possible starting questions to open up discussions with participants from highly engaged teams in trying to further understand the concept of feeling good and its association with engagement.

Participants' discussions also gave the impression of engagement as active. This thesis puts forward the premise that engagement is a process that exists as a reinforcing spiral. Although reinforcing spirals are mentioned within select literature on engagement, very little research exists into the process of engagement and specifically on the existence of reinforcing feedback loops. Exploring this conceptualisation of engagement would improve our understanding of engagement. However Luthans and Peterson (2002), Llorens et al. (2007) and Bakker and Demerouti (2008) explored the concept of reinforcing spirals through the use of statistical modeling, which requires the use of an engagement measure (for example the Gallup GWA or the Utrecht) of engagement. The premise of this research is that it is people's feelings which act in a reinforcing manner. As these feelings are not incorporated within current models of

engagement, statistical modeling is inappropriate. A more useful mechanism would be to undertake in-depth individual interviews specifically focusing on drawing out participants' causal thoughts and experiences. This would have the advantage of adding to our understanding of the feelings associated with engagement and how these are experienced by participants.

Very little literature explores engagement within a team. The notion of the team making a significant contribution to engagement receives very little attention from the engagement literature. However this research highlights the integral part the team played. Our understanding of engagement requires much more work on the interaction between the team and the individual. How does an individual's own personality traits and individual differences influence and interact with the team and team processes, and what does this mean for engagement? Equally what difference does the team make to these individual differences? The hypothesis put forward within this research is that, within engagement, a reciprocal, influence exists between the team and the individual members of the team. The team can be seen to influence nearly all aspects of the engagement model developed within this research. It would be interesting and valuable to gain a more in-depth understanding of how and what team actions and/or processes promote engagement, and how they interact with the dimensions identified through this research. For example the impression provided through this research was that team processes and interaction built perceptions of safety. The literature on teams, however, provides the impression that safety promotes teamwork. Investigating this would aid our understanding of dual influences and how different aspects of engagement are influenced by teams and team processes.

This research has focused on engagement within a team environment and the aspects of the environment that influenced or contributed to people's engagement. As such it specifically did not consider or address the influence of individual differences to engagement. An obvious area of further work is to understand the relationship between individual differences, the environment and the feelings associated with working in that environment.

The field of engagement is academically immature, with many avenues for research to improve our understanding of engagement. Gaining a more in-depth picture of the feelings people experience whilst engaged, the process of engagement (in particular any reinforcing loops), and the interaction of teams and individuals through qualitative

research will improve our knowledge of engagement and what contributes to or influences people's experience of engagement.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research developed a model of engagement that focused much more on the individual and the feelings they associated with the experience of working in an engaging environment than is found within much of the literature on engagement. The participants in this research felt at ease and relaxed. They gained a sense of value or validation from those around them, and further they had a sense of satisfaction and achievement from the work they did. These all ultimately added to a sense of feeling good in themselves. This feeling good is similar in nature to the well-being some authors associate with engagement. This research portrayed engagement as having much less intensity in terms of absorption and harnessing oneself to the role, and instead was more about a connection with work. However the research found that similar aspects of the environment contributed to engagement as those outlined within the literature, for example leadership, social relationships, respect, safety, challenging work, access to knowledge (or tools to do the job) and latitude. The model of engagement developed through this research shows engagement as existing in layers, which move from the features of the direct workplace environment to the feelings associated with working in that environment. This work adds new light to engagement in three areas: firstly engagement is connected with feeling good and individual well-being; participants were engaged when the work they do and the environment they work in contributed to their feelings of self-worth and well-being. Secondly the team plays an important part in people's engagement and acts in a reciprocal manner, both influencing and being influenced by an individual's engagement. Thirdly, engagement is active; although some articles discuss engagement as either a state or trait, generally the articles do not conceive of engagement as an active process. They also don't highlight the constant reinforcing spiral or feedback loops, identified within team process literature, which are highly applicable to engagement.

Appendix A

Respondent Information Pack

Copy of Participant Email Cover Note

What makes your workplace a great place to work? Massey student (and [Organisation Name] staff member) Kirsten Ralph would love to hear your thoughts! And, she'll feed you!

Kirsten Ralph is researching what makes highly engaged workplaces tick; what are the good things that go on within [Organisation Name] most engaged teams?

During the least two weeks of December Kirsten will be visiting your workplace and holding a short workshop to get people's thoughts on what makes the difference in their workplace. Kirsten's resulting research will not only help Kirsten (pass her study) but also help [Organisation Name] identify and share the best practices, identified from the discussions, to other teams.

So we would really appreciate any time that you can spare. There's no preparation, no tricky questions, the discussions are confidential, the time is paid for by [Organisation Name], and she'll bring the coffee. The attached information sheet provides some more information and if you'd like to find out even more, or would like to participate, please contact Kirsten on. 04 905 9291 or email mkralph@paradise.net.nz.

Copy of Participant Information Sheet

Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]
[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

[Organisation Name] Engagement Manager Interviews **INFORMATION SHEET**

As part of a high engagement team, we would like to hear your thoughts on what makes your team highly engaged. We want to know from the people that work in [Organisation Name] what specifically within [Organisation Name] makes an enjoyable and productive workplace. To do this we are organising a number of discussion groups with team members of high engagement teams to share their ideas.

The information from these groups will also be used in the research project undertaken by Kirsten Ralph as part of her Masters Degree in Psychology. Kirsten Ralph is an [Organisation Name] staff member within the [Name] group; although she is currently on maternity leave. This research is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jocelyn Handy, Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology, Massey University.

Discussion group members

To gain a range of perspectives, teams from five areas across [Organisation Name] have been asked to join the discussion groups; Call Centres, Investigations, Human Resources and Processing Delivery. All team members within the selected teams are invited to join the discussion group.

Discussion group and interview details

Discussion groups and manager interviews will follow an open discussion format on the topic of what contributes to high engagement. These groups will be facilitated by Kirsten Ralph and will be tape-recorded.

Discussion groups and manager interviews will be held during work hours and are expected to take approximately 90 minutes for discussion groups and 60 minutes for manager interviews. All groups (with the exception of Call Centres) will meet in Wellington on [Organisation Name] premises. Specific locations and times will be determined when we know who wishes to join the discussion groups. Call Centre

discussions will be held as a teleconference, specific times and dial in details are still to be determined.

Information use

All transcripts will be analysed by Kirsten Ralph with a summary findings report completed for [Organisation Name]. This report will be held by Corporate HR and the information utilised in constructing an [Organisation Name] specific engagement guide. The findings will also be incorporated into Kirsten Ralph's thesis and submitted for the degree of Masters in Psychology.

For confidentiality reasons all names will be replaced by a numeric code within the transcripts. Within the report or thesis any comments reported, will only be identified (if required) by numeric code and any identifying details, for example the area worked in, third parties, or specific work information removed.

A copy of the relevant discussion group transcript will be made available to all participating in the discussion for comment, and any areas of concern removed if required.

Kirsten Ralph will hold copies of the discussion group transcripts, as part of her Masters project. These copies held by Kirsten will be subject to Massey University's data storage requirements. Essentially the copy will be held on CD as a confidential computer file for five years and will not be shown to any other party outside of the academic requirements. After the five year period the computer file will be deleted and destroyed.

Your rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study at any time prior to or during the discussion groups
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

This project has been evaluated by an academic peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above (Kirsten Ralph) is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Joining In

Your comments and thoughts are important please consider taking some time out from your busy day to join with others discussing what makes working where you are engaging. The sessions are purely discussions with other team members and do not require any preparation, sitting tests or answering sensitive/tricky questions.

Your manager has already agreed for people within your team to participate in these discussions, thus if you wish to be included please let Kirsten Ralph know by email mkralph@paradise.net or phone 04 905 9291. Please also contact Kirsten if you have any questions or queries. Kirsten will organise dates and times and be back in contact with you directly.

Copy of Participant Consent Form

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

[Organisation Name] Engagement interview

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the interview .

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I understand I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Copy of Participant Authority for Release of Transcript Form

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

[Organisation Name] Engagement interview

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Kirsten Ralph in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Appendix B

Topic Guide

Study objectives

The purpose of the proposed research is to investigate from team members' perspective the organisational environment or factors which contribute to high team engagement. This will provide information for team leaders and managers to use in developing and increasing engagement levels for their teams.

Focus Group Outline and Questions

Introduction. Cover research objectives and process, ethical aspects (e.g. right to withdraw, treating each other with respect, confidentiality), and personal introductions.

Ensure to highlight the people present are representatives of a high engagement team and as such, we are looking for their thoughts as a representative of the team.

Estimated time: 5-10 minutes

Definitions. Open with a discussion on what engagement is.

Question 1: What do we understand team engagement to mean or be in a general sense?

Prompts

- *what does it feel like?*
- *what's around the team?*
- *what does engagement look like?*
- *how would a non-team member know it?*
- *what is different when the team is engaged as to when it is not?*

If a clear understanding does not exist, explain what the research interpretation is, encouraging discussion on and reaction to the concept of engagement as an absorption, a buzz exists, a time when the team are into what they are doing, when the team is attentive, interested, and want to be where they are.

Estimated time: 10 minutes

General engagement. Follow with a discussion on engagement within teams at a general level.

Question 2: As a member of a highly engaged team, what things do you think contribute to high engagement in your team?

Prompts

- *What facilitates or allows the team to be engaged?*
- *What resources does your team have during high engagement?*
- *What aspects of a situation are involving for the team? What grabs your team?*
- *When is the team most involved and into what they are doing?*
- *What sort of things are going on, what is around or within the team when engaged, what makes it so involving?*

If required, further probes into aspects raised in the literature for example:

- *control and autonomy*
- *value or meaning in work*
- *resources and skills available*
- *relationships*
- *trust and justice*
- *communication*
- *work-life balance*
- *feeling cared for and valued*

Question 3: Why do you think these things contribute to high team engagement?

Question 4: What things if removed would threaten or decrease your team's engagement. What do you think the team would work to protect

Question 5: What things do you think the team would like to see happen to further improve engagement?

Question 6: Are there any issues for your team(s) in being highly engaged?

Prompts

- *Negative issues, harm to team members or downsides.*

All questions probed for group reaction and comment for example:

- *Is this the same in your (plural) teams?*
- *Does anyone see anything different or any slight variations to what was found in XYZ team?*
- *Do you (plural) think the same would apply in your teams (why or why not)?*
- *How does that fit for the other teams represented around the table?*

Estimated time: 25 -35 minutes

Specific situation. Gain more in-depth or specific details on engagement through a discussion on one or more specific situations.

Question 7: Describe a time or situation you remember your team being highly engaged.

Prompts

- *What happened, particularly what happened from the whole team's perspective?*
- *How did it feel?*
- *What happened before? What was the build up?*
- *What happened after?*
- *What was around the team at the time?*
- *What resources were available or important?*
- *What contributed to the high engagement?*
- *What things influenced how engaged the team was?*
- *Why do you think the team was so engaged in that situation or at that time?*
- *What made it so engaging for the team?*
- *Were there any downsides or negatives?*

Depending on time constraints, the discussion may cover two or three different situations. Discussion around the table will focus on how the facets raised may or may not fit other teams' and volunteers' reactions to these.

Estimated time: 25 minutes

Comparison. Expand the discussion to gain more information, focusing on comparisons, especially if other questions do not generate information.

Question 8: What do you think is special about your team that makes it a highly engaged team?

Prompts

- *What's here (in this team) that may not be in other teams?*

Question 9: Comparing a time when your team was engaged to when it was not, what is different?

Prompts

- *What is present?*
- *Did the team lose anything?*

Question 10: Has anyone worked in a team that has not always been as highly engaged, and if so what changed within the team to produce high engagement?

If more than one situation raised within the group, probe for similarities and differences.

As with the general engagement questions, all questions probed for group reaction and comment for example:

- *Is this the same in your (plural) teams?*
- *Does anyone see anything different or any slight variations to what was found in XYZ team?*
- *Do you (plural) think the same would apply in your teams (why or why not)?*
- *How does that fit for the other teams represented around the table?*

Estimated time: 10-20 minutes

Projection. Lastly, if required to generate more information and if time permits, close with a discussion on advising other teams.

Question 11: If you were advising another team, what aspects would you tell them to focus on to build higher engagement?

Prompts:

- *How do you think another team should go about becoming more engaged?*
- *What would you recommend the team does?*
- *What things are important?*
- *What advice would you give team members, team leaders or the organisation?*

- *What things should the team watch out for that could harm them as they build engagement?*

Estimate time: 10 minutes

Appendix C

Master Code List

1. Task
2. Resources and knowledge
3. Autonomy
4. Feedback and recognition
5. Rewards and grow opportunities
6. Training
7. Motivation
8. Work meaning
9. Altruism
10. Pride
11. Safety
12. Trust
13. Team cooperation and cohesion
14. Team support and caring
15. Team composition
16. Sense of community
17. Relationships and interaction
18. Fun
19. People and social aspects
20. Culture
21. Performance and achievement
22. Leadership
23. Respect and value
24. Justice and fair treatment
25. Context
26. Time
27. Mix of things

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