
Employee Engagement

A review of current thinking

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Summary

1. Engagement is consistently shown as something given by the employee which can benefit the organisation through commitment and dedication, advocacy, discretionary effort, using talents to the fullest and being supportive of the organisation's goals and values. Engaged employees feel a sense of attachment towards their organisation, investing themselves not only in their role, but in the organisation as a whole.
2. Engaged employees are more likely to stay with the organisation, perform 20 per cent better than their colleagues and act as advocates of the business. Engagement can enhance bottom-line profit and enable organisational agility and improved efficiency in driving change initiatives. Engaged individuals invest themselves fully in their work, with increased self-efficacy and a positive impact upon health and well-being, which in turn evokes increased employee support for the organisation.
3. Engagement levels can vary according to different biographical and personality characteristics. Younger employees may be positive when they first join an organisation, but can quickly become disengaged. Highly extravert and adaptable individuals find it easier to engage. Engagement is a choice, dependent upon what the employee considers is worth investing themselves in.
4. Engagement levels vary according to seniority, occupation and length of service in an organisation but not by sector. The more senior an individual's role, the greater the chance of being engaged. Presidents, managers, operational and hands-on staff tend to be the most engaged, professionals and support staff the least, but this varies between organisations.
5. There are seven commonly referenced drivers of engagement: the nature of the work undertaken, work that has transparent meaning and purpose, development opportunities, receiving timely recognition and rewards, building respectful and assertive relationships, having open two-way communication systems and inspiring leadership.

6. There are a variety of measures of engagement available. However, the lack of a clear definition of employee engagement and the differing requirements of each organisation means there is likely to be considerable variation in what is measured in these surveys.
7. Being satisfied at work is a weaker predictor of business outcomes than engagement and lacks the two-way reciprocal relationship characteristic of engagement. There is a very strong relationship between organisational citizenship and engagement, as both focus upon going beyond the expected. Both engagement and the psychological contract have a cognitive and emotional element and can depict the two-way employee-employer relationship.

1 Introduction

1.1 Why is engagement of importance and interest?

In his 2004 book entitled *The New Rules of Engagement*, Mike Johnson wrote '*the ability to engage employees, to make them work with our business, is going to be one of the greatest organisational battles of the coming 10 years*' (p. 1). Five years on and employee engagement is now a management hot topic and one which has quickly absorbed into the HR agenda. It is a key challenge which is capturing the attention of executives and HR professionals alike (Soldati, 2007; HR Focus, 2006) and, increasingly, the acceptance of academics.

Today, it is a rare to find articles in the popular HR or management press without some mention of engagement and how to enable it. Yet, to date there is no one clear and agreed definition of engagement and many researchers and practitioners describe the term in very different ways (Soldati, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is an increasing awareness that employee engagement is pivotal to successful commercial and business performance, where engaged employees are the '*backbone of good working environments where people are industrious, ethical and accountable*' (Levinson, 2007a; Cleland et al, 2008).

Engagement can affect employees' attitudes, absence and turnover levels and various studies have demonstrated links with productivity, increasingly pointing to a high correlation with individual, group and organisational performance, a success measured through the quality of customer experience and customer loyalty (Hemsley Fraser, 2008, cited in The HR Director, 2008; The Conference Board, 2006). Organisations with higher engagement levels tend to have lower employee turnover, higher productivity, higher total shareholder returns and better financial performance (Baumruk, 2006). Towers Perrin (2007) found that organisations with the highest percentage of engaged employees increased their operating income by 19 per cent and their earnings per share by 28 per cent year-to-year. Highly engaging organisational cultures may also have an attractive

employer brand, being an employer of choice which attracts and retains the best talent (eg Martin and Hetrick, 2006).

By building a culture that enables employees to engage in their work, organisations may benefit from staff who are willing to go the extra mile and achieve better financial performance (Baumruk, 2006).

However, despite the potential gains of improved engagement levels, Gallup found that more than 80 per cent of British workers are not truly committed to their work, and a quarter of these are dissatisfied and '*actively disengaged*', putting no passion into their work (Flade, 2003). Gallup (2006) proposed that employees could be divided into three types with regard to their level of engagement, the engaged, not-engaged and the actively disengaged, with the latter being of most concern to the employer brand as a result of sharing their discontent with their co-workers and the wider world (see Figure 1.1). Hukerby (2002, cited in Pech and Slade, 2006) suggested that 20 per cent of employees in the UK are disengaged, having '*mentally quit*', yet they continue to stay with the company. As Tasker (2004) pointed out, there is an increasing trend of disengagement, yet only 52 per cent of organisations are doing anything about it, and 44 per cent of a study of 400 HR professionals considered tackling the issue to be an '*overwhelming challenge*'. One explanation may be that whilst many employers are aware of the importance of employee engagement and that HR and organisational development professionals have a strategic and pivotal role in raising levels (Hemsley Fraser, 2008 cited in The HR Director, 2008), many are uncertain of how to enable the conditions for engagement to flourish (Pech and Slade, 2006).

Figure 1.1: The three types of employees

The Three Types of Employees	
3	ENGAGED employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
2	NOT-ENGAGED employees are essentially 'checked out'. They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time - but not energy or passion - into their work.
3	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

Source: Gallup (2006)

1.1.1 New expectations

'The new generation didn't sign up for the old deal' (Kinsey Goman, President of Kinsey Consulting Services quoted in Bates, 2004).

Over recent years there has been seen a significant shift in the employee-employer relationship.

With increasingly competitive markets, globalisation, a volatile economic climate, demands for constant change and the war for talent, organisations face significant challenges in their pursuit for business success. The psychological contract is now different to what it once was; for many, there is no longer a job for life, and indeed redundancy is a very real possibility. There is also evidence that expectations of employers and employees differ from those of the past. In increasingly turbulent times engagement may therefore be the 'deal-breaker' for organisations seeking sustainable success.

Some employees now seek short-term careers in different organisations with the expectation that they will commit for the short-term and move on from jobs that are not satisfying, or simply use experience gained in one role as a stepping stone to another job (Bates, 2004). Organisations want people to put in extra effort and generate innovative ideas to improve services and save money (Skapinker, 2005). Managers need to recognise this shift and refrain from using an autocratic management style, which is likely to disengage employees who seek more collaborative and empowering management, and inhibit innovation and a willingness to exert extra effort (Bates, 2004).

1.2 IES research to date

IES research into engagement to date has been widely tested, firstly in the NHS and then in eight other organisations spanning the private and public sectors. Our key research to date has focused on:

- **defining and measuring engagement:** IES' first research step was to investigate what HR professionals understood when they used the term engagement and this prompted IES to offer our own definition (Robinson et al., 2004)
- **identifying engagement drivers:** promoted by the interest of IES HR Network members,¹ IES undertook a study to define engagement, devise a method of measuring it and establish its drivers (Robinson et al., 2004)

¹ The IES HR Network combines membership of a select community with access to leading edge research carried out by IES. Membership is by invitation to organisations that will both gain from membership and also contribute to the collective success of the community. Further information can be found at www.employment-studies.co.uk

- **developing an engagement diagnostic tool:** IES has developed a robust measure of engagement which can be assessed using a series of attitude statements (Robinson et al., 2007).

1.3 Purpose of review

To continue our extensive work to date and in an endeavour to bring some clarity in an area of much confusion, this paper, based on a systematic review of the literature on employee engagement, seeks to synthesise the current thinking and evidence. This review will:

- explore how engagement is defined in the practitioner, consultancy and academic literature and overlaps with other concepts
- explore what are thought to be the outcomes of engagement for organisations and their employees and how they can be measured
- consider if some people are more likely to engage than others
- review what the current literature tells us are the key drivers and barriers to engagement
- finally, consider how to develop a culture supportive of engagement.

This review will be relevant to a wide audience whether you are new to engagement or whether you are working to improve and maintain engagement levels in your organisation.

1.4 Method

Literature for this review was predominantly sourced from general internet searches and the use of online management journal databases including Ebscohost®.

2 What is Engagement?

Understanding what engagement is, is an important yet complex challenge, and there remains a great deal of scope for discussing the various approaches. This section will explore definitions of engagement used by companies, consultancies and academics, shedding light on similarities and differences in these definitions and drawing together common themes.

Key points

- Numerous, often inconsistent, definitions of engagement exist in the literature. It is variously conceived as a psychological or affective state, a performance construct or an attitude.
- Company based models view engagement as an outcome – engaged employees show commitment, loyalty, exert discretionary effort, use their talents to the fullest and are enthusiastic advocates of their organisation’s values and goals. Many see engagement as a step higher than satisfaction or motivation.
- Academic definitions focus on outcomes of engagement (advocacy, dedication, discretionary effort, fostering change); the psychological state (employees fully involve themselves in work, are absorbed, focused and energised); and the two-way beneficial relationship between employer and employee.
- Consultancy-based models define engagement as a psychological state with numerous outcomes for the organisation, and consider the role of the organisation in enabling it. Engagement results from having a line of sight between individual and business performance so staff understand their contribution, as well as a culture that values, encourages and listens to staff.
- All sources define engagement to some degree by its outcomes and something given by the employee which can benefit the organisation. They generally agree that engaged employees feel a sense of attachment towards their organisation, investing themselves not only in their role, but in the organisation as a whole.

2.1 Defining engagement

As a concept that has developed over time, engagement has been defined in numerous, often inconsistent, ways in the literature, so much so that the term has become ambiguous to many and it is rare to find two people defining it in same way (Macey and Schneider, 2008a). It has variously been conceived as a psychological or affective state (eg commitment, involvement, attachment etc.), a performance construct (eg role performance, effort, observable behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour etc; Macey and Schneider, 2008a) or an attitude. Some even relate the concept to other specific constructs such as altruism or initiative (Macey and Schneider, 2008a) and little consensus has been reached in the literature as to which of these definitions is the definitive, or at least, 'best-fit' model of engagement.

A good definition of a concept especially one of a cognitive or subjective nature *'leads to common understanding ... is illustrated with many behavioural examples ... stated in such a way that the operations for its measurement are ... clear ... and widely accepted as logical and reasonable'* (Rotter, 1990 p. 490). The importance of defining terms such as engagement was highlighted by Rotter, who suggested that different meanings that are read into the term result in considerable variation in what is being measured, which *'produces a series of contradictory and non-replicable studies'*.

2.1.1 Company definitions

Organisations are where the theory of engagement is ultimately put into practice; they offer a great insight into how engagement is viewed and used in 'the real world'. The following examples illustrate how organisations across various industries in the public and private sectors define employee engagement.

Examples of how organisations in the private sector define engagement

Vodafone defines employee engagement as *'an outcome "measured or seen as a result of people being committed to something or someone in the business – a very best effort that is willingly given".'*

(Suff, 2008)

Johnson and Johnson defines employee engagement as *'the degree to which employees are satisfied with their jobs, feel valued, and experience collaboration and trust. Engaged employees will stay with the company longer and continually find smarter, more effective ways to add value to the organisation. The end result is a high performing company where people are flourishing and productivity is increased and sustained'.*

(Catteeuw et al., 2007 p. 152)

BT believes employee engagement is *'a combination of attitudes, thoughts and behaviours that relate to satisfaction, advocacy, commitment, pride, loyalty and responsibility'.* BT claims it is *'broader than the more traditional concept of employee satisfaction and relates to the extent to which employees are fully engaged with the company and their work'.*

(BT, 2008)

Barclays suggests a formal definition of employee engagement might be, *'the extent to which an employee feels a sense of attachment to the organisation he or she works for, believes in its goals and supports its values.'* Barclays also suggest that it is possible to *'gain a good sense of someone's engagement by asking a simple question, would you recommend Barclays as a good place to work?'*

(Barclays, 2008)

Dell refers to being engaged as *'giving time and talent to team building activities'.*

(Dell, 2008)

Nokia Siemens Networks describes being engaged as *'an emotional attachment to the organisation, pride and a willingness to be an advocate of the organisation, a rational understanding of the organisation's strategic goals, values, and how employees fit and motivation and willingness to invest discretionary effort to go above and beyond'.*

(Nokia Siemens Networks, 2008)

Examples of how organisations in the public sector define engagement

The University of York suggests that *'employee engagement is a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues Employee Engagement goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation'*

(University of York, 2008)

The Civil Service sees being engaged as *'more than just being satisfied or motivated. Engaged employees have a sense of personal attachment to their work and organisation that means they want to give of their best to help it succeed. Engaged employees tend to speak positively about their organisation and have an active desire to stay.'*

(Civil Service, 2008)

Leeds Metropolitan University refers to engagement through employees using their *'talents to the full wherever possible'*

(Leeds Metropolitan University, 2008)

The NHS sees engagement as *'a measure of how people connect in their work and feel committed to their organisation and its goals. People who are highly engaged in an activity feel excited and enthusiastic about their role, say time passes quickly at work, devote extra effort to the activity, identify with the task and describe themselves to others in the context of their task (doctor, nurse, NHS manager), think about the questions or challenges posed by the activity during their spare moments (for example when travelling to and from work), resist distractions, find it easy to stay focused and invite others into the activity or organisation (their enthusiasm is contagious)'*

(NHS National Workforce Projects, 2007)

Source: Definitions drawn from organisations' websites

Summary of company definitions

These company definitions tend to view engagement as an outcome, something given by the employee. They often refer to the employee's attachment, commitment and loyalty to the organisation. They refer to the effort and time they are willing to expend, whilst constantly finding ways to add value and use talents to the fullest. Several of the definitions refer to the employee as an enthusiastic advocate showing pride and support for the organisation's values and goals. Many see engagement as a step higher than satisfaction or motivation at work. However, with the exception of Johnson and Johnson, who indicate that engaged employees experience collaboration and feel valued, there is little mention of a reciprocal relationship and what the employer offers to enable engagement.

2.1.2 Academic definitions

In 2006, Saks commented that there is comparatively sparse academic literature on employee engagement and much of the research has been within the practitioner and consultancy sectors. Whilst academic literature may offer fewer definitions, academics are increasingly showing interest in the debate with many seeking to understand different aspects of engagement from the drivers to its impact on organisational performance.

However, there is a conflicting use of the term engagement in the academic literature. In their recent review, 'The Meaning of Employee Engagement', Macey and Schneider (2008a) propose that engagement is sometimes defined on the basis of what it 'is' (psychological state), whilst on other occasions on the basis of the behaviours it produces (behavioural) and sometimes as a disposition or attitude towards one's work (trait).

In defining engagement, Macey and Schneider (2008a p.6) split engagement into these three areas and propose that '*trait engagement*' is an inclination to see the world from a particular vantage point and this is reflected in the individual's '*state engagement*' which leads to '*behavioural engagement*', defined in terms of exerting discretionary effort. This proposition has, however received criticism by Newman and Harrison (2008) who argue that when engagement is broken up into the separate aspects of state, trait and behaviour, state engagement becomes a redundant construct and tells us nothing more than an individual's attitude towards their job which, as they point out, has been suitably measured by other constructs in the past. Instead, they argue that the defining features of employee engagement are the simultaneous presence of three behaviours in employees, namely their performance in the job, citizenship behaviour and involvement. However, this proposition shies away from defining the psychological state of engagement and merely describes its outcomes.

Engagement as a psychological state

Much of the academic research on engagement has been inspired by the definition proposed by Kahn in 1990 (eg Rothbard, 2001). Kahn (1990) defined engagement in terms of a psychological state as *'the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances'* (p. 694). In his qualitative study of summer camp counsellors and architects, Kahn explored the workplace conditions in which people engage with or disengage from their organisation. He found that engaged individuals express and fully involve their sense of self in their role with no sacrifice of one for the other. Kahn proposed that engaged individuals are prepared to invest significant personal resources, in the form of time and effort, to the successful completion of their task, and that engagement is at its greatest when an individual is driving *'personal energies into physical, cognitive and emotional labours'* (p. 700).

This *'self-employment'*, as Kahn refers to it, resembles what other researchers have termed *'effort, involvement, flow, mindfulness and intrinsic motivation'* (Deci, 1975; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Langer, 1989; Lawler & Hall, 1970; all cited in Kahn, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1982). For instance, Kahn's definition resembles the flow-like experience proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1982), which implies being *'psychologically present'*, where an employee is so mentally, physically and emotionally involved in their work that they are unaware of the passage of time at work. This concept was also referred to in the NHS definition of engagement.

Similar to Kahn's definition, Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001, p. 417) also refer to engagement as a psychological and emotional state, a *'persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment'* and Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) define it as *'being charged with energy and fully dedicated to one's work'*. Rothbard (2001) supports and expands Kahn's definition to suggest that engagement also reflects being absorbed and intensely focused in one's work. This is consistent with Schaufeli et al.'s (2002, cited in Sonnentag, 2003) definition which reports vigour, dedication and absorption as being the core dimensions of engagement.

Engagement as a behavioural outcome

Other academic definitions have focused more on the outcomes of engagement, much in the same way as those proposed by companies:

'An engaged employee extends themselves to meet the organisation's needs, takes initiative, is proactive, reinforces and supports the organisation's culture and values, is in the flow, shares the values of the organisation, stays focused and vigilant and believes he/she can make a difference'.

(Macey, 2006 cited in Kaufman et al., 2007).

Macey and Schneider (2008a) define engagement as *'discretionary effort or a form of in-role or extra-role effort or behaviour'* (p. 6), involving innovative and adaptive performance and going *'beyond preserving the status quo, and instead focus on initiating or fostering change in the sense of doing something more and/or different'* (p. 24). Similarly, Tasker (2004) describes engagement as *'a beneficial two-way relationship where employees and employers "go the extra mile" for one another'*.

Summary of academic definitions

Whilst academic definitions of engagement also tend to focus on the outcomes of engagement (advocacy, dedication, discretionary effort), much in the same way as companies, they do, however, pay more attention to the psychological state of engagement. They describe engaged employees as being fully involved in their task, absorbed, charged with energy, vigour and focused, so much so that they lose track of time at work. The academic definitions are consistent with those posed by the companies in their view of engagement as an outcome. However, they pick up on additional outcomes such as fostering change, being innovative and doing something different. They also point to the two-way beneficial relationship between employer and employee, but do not mention anything about what organisations do in practice to enable experience of the state of engagement and to experience the outcomes. However, as Balain and Sparrow (2009) also note, the problem with academic definitions is they often do not offer an explanation of how engagement is distinct from other concepts such as job commitment and involvement. Overlaps between engagement and other concepts will be explored later in the report.

2.1.3 Consultancy and research institute definitions

The majority of definitions of employee engagement are found in the consultancy literature. However, Macey and Schneider (2008a) point out that many HR consultants have avoided defining the term in favour of making reference only to probable positive consequences. This is consistent with our findings so far, that there has been a focus on outcomes in definitions, particularly notable in company definitions, with little if any reference to the role of the organisation. The following definitions have been proposed by several high profile consultancy and research institutions.

Examples of how consultancy and research institutions define engagement

Mercer defines engagement as *'a state of mind in which employees feel a vested interest in the company's success and are both willing and motivated to perform to levels that exceed the stated job requirements. It is the result of how employees feel about the work experience – the organisation, its leaders, the work and the work environment'*.

(Mercer, 2007)

The CIPD suggests engagement *'can be seen as a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues (organisational citizenship). It goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation. Engagement is something the employee has to offer: it cannot be 'required' as part of the employment contract'*.

(CIPD, 2007)

Ixia consultancy defines emotional engagement as *'employees feeling safe and secure enough to be their best selves at work, to bring their 'whole' selves to work, and to feel respected and valued for 'who they are being' in their job role and responsibilities. It is also about feeling connected to something bigger by way of feeling part of something that matters and at the same time feeling that individual contribution matters, that individuals can and do make a difference to the bigger picture. Employees feel both emotionally engaged with each other as well as with the work'*.

(Cleland et al., 2008)

Ipsos Mori describes engaged employees as individuals who are *'satisfied and get fulfilment from their job role ... feel motivated to do a good job and help the company succeed ... understand their personal contribution and can link it to the success of the company ... feel committed to helping the company achieve its objectives ... have a desire to be involved in what is happening within the company ... have a sense of pride in working for the company ... speak highly about the company as an employer and its services'*.

(Ipsos Mori, 2008)

Hewitt Associates defines engagement as *'the energy, passion or "fire in the belly" employees have for their employer or more specifically what their employer is trying to achieve in the market'. Hewitt Associates also suggest that engaged employees stay, say and strive. In other words, engaged employees 'have an intense desire to be members of the organisation ... are passionate advocates for their workplace ... they refer potential employees and customers ... they go beyond what is minimally required to produce extraordinary service and results for customers and colleagues'*.

(Baumruk and Maruszczak, 2004)

Towers Perrin believes that engagement involves both *'emotional and rational factors relating to work and the overall work experience. The emotional factors tie to people's personal satisfaction and the sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from their work and from being part of their organisation ... for instance ... having a strong sense of personal accomplishment from one's job. The rational factors, by contrast, generally relate to the relationship between the individual and the broader corporation; for instance, the extent to which employees understand their role, and their unit's role, relative to company objectives'*.

(Towers Perrin, 2003)

The Readership Institute defines fully engaged employees as *'those who go beyond what their job requires, putting in extra effort to make the company succeed'*.

(Readership Institute, 2004)

The Corporate Leadership Council (2004) defines engagement as *'the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organisation, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment'*.

(Corporate Leadership Council, 2004)

Gallup suggested that engaged employees are *'psychologically committed to their work, go above and beyond their basic job expectations, and want to play a key role in fulfilling the mission of their organisations'*, whilst disengaged employees were said to be *'uninvolved and unenthusiastic about their jobs and love to tell others how bad things are'*.

(Blizzard, 2004)

The Conference Board reviewed definitions through a meta-analysis of 12 largely consultancy based studies of employee engagement and proposed a composite definition that *'employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organisation, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work'*.

(The Conference Board, 2006)

The Philadelphia Human Resource Planning Society (PHRPS) Research Committee suggests that employee engagement goes beyond job satisfaction and is defined as a *'personal state of authentic involvement, contribution and ownership'*.

(PHRPS Research Committee, 2002)

Best Companies suggests engagement can be defined as *'an employee's drive to use all their ingenuity and resources for the benefit of the company'*.

(Best Companies, 2009)

The Work Foundation suggests that *'employee engagement describes employees' emotional and intellectual commitment to their organisation and its success.*

Engaged employees experience a compelling purpose and meaning in their work and give of their discrete effort to advance the organisation's objectives'.

(The Work Foundation cited at IDeA, 2008)

Roffey Park Institute refers to engagement as something employees seek suggesting *'employees want stimulating and worthwhile jobs, to feel part of a successful organisation and for their work to contribute to their general happiness.*

Organisations benefit by employees being committed, motivated and "going the extra mile".'

(Roffey Park Institute, 2008)

BlessingWhite defines full engagement as pertaining to *'maximum job*

satisfaction' and 'maximum job contribution'.

(BlessingWhite, 2008)

Source: Definitions drawn from company websites

In 2003, an IES consultation of HR professionals from 46 organisations found they perceived engaged employees to be individuals who show a belief in the organisation, have a desire to work to make things better, have an understanding of the business context and the 'bigger picture', respect and help their colleagues, have a willingness to 'go the extra mile' and keep up-to-date with developments in the field (Robinson et al., 2004). As a result of this study, IES defined and developed a comprehensive definition of engagement:

'A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee'.

Robinson et al., 2004, p. 4

Summary of consultancy and research institute definitions

Similar to the company and academic definitions, consultancies and research institutes also define engagement as a psychological state in the employee with numerous outcomes for the organisation. However, in addition they also consider the role the organisation may play in enabling engagement. The definitions from these sources indicate a need to align individual or team performance with organisational objectives and success so employees know that they are contributing to something worthwhile and meaningful. They also indicate a need to create cultures that value, encourage and respect their staff and that listen to and understand their needs. The definitions also highlight that employees need to feel safe and secure to

be themselves, to be engaged, without fear of repercussions. As with other definitions, consultants and researchers also define engagement as a state of mind, where people involve themselves fully and have considerable energy and passion for their work and an intellectual and emotional connection to their work and firm.

2.1.4 General thoughts

There are several key differences between these definitions of engagement dependent upon their source. Company definitions focus heavily on what the organisation gets from the 'engagement', without acknowledging the role of the organisation or explaining the state of engagement. Academic and consultancy definitions acknowledge that it is a mutually beneficial relationship. However, there is little explanation in the definitions as to the efforts expelled by the organisation in this relationship and where this is explained, consultancies are the only institutions to pursue this. Academics and consultants also provide some explanation of the psychological state of engagement, which is lacking in company definitions. Consultancy based models tend to focus heavily on employee productivity and identifying oneself with the organisation; they tend to see engagement at a department, or company-wide level, rather than considering how individuals are investing themselves in their personal work. However, both academic and company based models include being in a persistent state of fulfilment in their definitions.

As Macey and Schneider (2008a) suggest, a commonality exists amongst all definitions of engagement, regardless of the source, which in essence depicts employee engagement as a '*desirable condition*' that has an organisational purpose and '*connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components*' (p. 4).

Whilst there are notable differences in the understanding of what the term 'engagement' represents from different business sectors, there are themes on which they all agree. They all define engagement to varying degrees by its outcomes. They all consistently suggest engagement is something given by the employee for the benefit of the organisation through commitment and dedication, advocacy, discretionary effort, using talents to the fullest and being supportive of the organisation's goals and values. They also generally agree on the emphasis of engaged employees feeling a sense of attachment towards the organisation for which they work. In this sense, the employees are not just investing themselves in their role, but in the organisation as a whole.

This section has explored the numerous definitions of engagement that exist throughout the existing literature and what the term may represent. The next section will explore what the literature says about the benefits and outcomes of engagement.

3 Outcomes of Engagement

'Work engagement is a positive experience in itself' (Schaufeli et al., 2002 cited in Sonnentag, 2003). *'Employee engagement is a hard-nosed proposition that not only shows results but can be measured in costs of recruitment and employee output'* (Johnson, 2004 p. 1). As the latter quote suggests there are numerous outcomes of investing in improving employee engagement and there is a fair amount of consistency in the practitioner and academic literature regarding the benefits of doing so. This section will explore the current thinking on the organisational and individual outcomes of employee engagement.

Key points

- Research suggests a positive relationship between engaged employees and customer engagement, expressed in customer loyalty and recommendations to others.
- Engaged employees are more likely to stay with the organisation, perform 20 per cent better than their colleagues, and act as advocates of the organisation.
- Engagement can have a significant impact on the performance of the organisation, driving bottom-line profit and enabling organisational agility and improved efficiency in driving change initiatives.
- Engagement may enable individuals to invest themselves fully in their work, with increased self-efficacy and a positive impact upon the employees health and well-being, which in turn evokes increased employee support for the organisation.
- Boosting engagement may have negative repercussions for retention of the 'almost engaged'.

3.1 Organisational outcomes

3.1.1 Customer loyalty

Levinson (2007a) suggests that employees who are happy in their work are more likely to create loyal customers. Engaged employees tend to have a better understanding of how to meet customer needs (Right Management, 2006) and, as a result, customer loyalty tends to be better in organisations where the employees are engaged (Pont, 2004). Levinson (2007a) claims that *'in departments where [highly] engaged employees sell to engaged customers, customer loyalty, repeat purchases and recommendations to friends are double that of companies with average employee engagement'*. Ultimately, this may lead to what is sometimes termed *'customer engagement'*, where there is a mental and emotional connection between the organisation and the customer (Bates, 2004).

3.1.2 Employee retention

Levinson (2007a) also suggests that employees who are happy in their work are more likely to stay in the organisation, and Demourouti et al. (2001, cited in Sonnentag, 2003) found that work engagement is indeed positively related to organisational commitment. BlessingWhite (2008) reports that 85 per cent of engaged employees plan on sticking around compared to 27 per cent of disengaged employees. In addition, 41 per cent of engaged employees said that they would stay if the organisation is struggling to survive.

3.1.3 Employee productivity

Engagement affects employee performance (Kahn, 1990). *'Engaged employees work harder, are more loyal and are more likely to go the 'extra mile' for the corporation'* (Lockwood, 2007, p. 3).

Wellins and Concelman (2005 p. 1, cited in Macey and Schneider, 2008a) suggest that engagement is an *'illusive force'* that motivates an individual to achieve higher levels of performance. A study of 50,000 employees found that the most engaged and committed perform 20 per cent better than their colleagues (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004).

Sonnentag's (2003) survey of employees from six public service organisations found that high levels of engagement at work support employees in *'taking initiative and pursuing learning goals'* (p. 525).

Likewise, Watson Wyatt's (2007) survey of 946 companies across 22 countries found that employees who are highly engaged are more than twice as likely to be top performers than are other employees.

However, Balain and Sparrow (2009) argue that the idea, often presented in practitioner literature, that once an employee is engaged, the impact on performance is linear, whereby more engagement equals more performance, is somewhat simplistic. They suggest that at an individual level engagement is too complex to be able to reliably explain much performance and that engagement surveys measure the symptoms of performance rather than the causes.

3.1.4 Advocacy of the organisation

'Engaged employees are more likely to advocate the organisation as a place to work and actively promote its products and services' (Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007 p. 23). In the same way, Penna (2006) found that some organisations contain particularly disengaged individuals who would actually discourage others from joining their current organisation. These individuals are referred to as *'corporate terrorists'* (Penna, 2006).

3.1.5 Manager self-efficacy

Academic research by Luthans and Peterson (2002) found employees who are engaged in their organisation and their work are more likely to respond positively to their managers, demonstrate good performance and achieve success. This then helps their manager to be more effective and successful, which in turn increases the manager's self-efficacy. Research has shown that self-efficacy is positively linked to work performance, in that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to be proactive in initiating work, and show sustained effort and determination in their pursuit to achieve the task, even when problems occur (Bandura 1986, 1997, cited in Luthans and Peterson, 2002). Luthans and Peterson (2002) suggest that engaged employees bring about the psychological arousal of the manager. The manager becomes enthusiastic about their employees which enhances their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, cited in Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Luthans and Peterson, 2002): *'they feel good and efficacious about being able to build an engaged work team'* (Luthans and Peterson, 2002 p. 385). The reverse may also occur whereby manager self-efficacy can lead to enhanced employee engagement. Therefore, both engagement and manager self-efficacy can have a positive effect on one another to lead to more effective managers and employees (Luthans and Peterson, 2002).

3.1.6 Organisational Performance

'The best (performers) tended to be those with the highest engagement scores' (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 26). In 2000 and 2002, Harter and colleagues' meta-analysis of 7,939 business units in 36 companies found a relationship between employee engagement, customer satisfaction, productivity, profit and employee turnover

(Harter et al., 2002; Harter, 2000). They concluded that increasing employee engagement and building an environment to support this can significantly increase the likelihood of business success.

However, despite these findings, Balain and Sparrow (2009) suggest that the evidence of an engagement-organisational performance link is not particularly robust and suggest that a number of studies have found a reverse causation between performance and attitudes, ie that it is the organisation's performance that is causing positive attitudes amongst employees not necessarily the other way round. Other studies have suggested a series of mediating factors between attitudes and performance (eg Schneider et al, 2002 cited in Balain and Sparrow, 2009), which makes causal links more difficult to determine.

3.1.7 Bottom-line profit

'The appeal of employee engagement to management is its proven links to bottom-line results' (People Management, 2008). These results may manifest in various ways such as through increased productivity, customer loyalty, increased sales or better retention levels (Cleland et al., 2008). Gallup found that employees are more productive and contribute more financially to the organisation if they feel involved in, and are committed to the organisation (Gallup cited in Levinson, 2007a). Hewitt Associates (2004) also identified a relationship between engagement and profitability through higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction and employee retention. Towers Perrin-ISR's (2007 cited in Crush, 2007) investigation into the operating income (OI) of 50 financial companies, found that companies with high levels of employee engagement (ie 70 per cent of staff say they are engaged) showed OI improvements of 19.1 per cent in a 12-month period and a combined additional income of over £192 million. Conversely, the OI of organisations with low engagement (ie under 70 per cent of staff say they are engaged) declined by 32.7 per cent in the same time period, a combined loss of over £448 million. The net income of the high engagement financial companies was +13.7 per cent compared to -3.8 per cent in low engagement organisations. Similarly, a study of 2,000 banks in the UK found that with every 10 per cent rise in engagement levels comes a four per cent rise in sales (Young, 2007, cited in Crush 2007).

Whilst a number of studies suggest increases in bottom-line profit as a result of improved employee engagement levels (eg Harter et al., 2002; Hewitt Associates, 2005 cited in Macey and Schneider, 2008a), a recurring problem is that many studies attribute certain employee attitudes as engagement and relate these to organisational outcomes. These attitudes do not necessarily accurately reflect the concept of engagement. In addition, the studies often tend to be based on correlating high employee engagement with increased profit (Macey and

Schneider, 2008a). For example, there have been claims of employee engagement levels being 20 per cent higher in companies achieving double digit growth in profit compared to those that demonstrate single digit growth (Treacy, 2003 cited in Hewitt Associates, 2004). Whilst this establishes a link between the two concepts, it does not imply directionality or causality, and so allows for the possibility that organisations with growth and profit increases bring about a very engaged workforce, not the other way around. As profits go up, the potential for pay or bonus rises also increases which is likely to elicit a positive feeling in employees and may thus increase their feeling of attachment to the organisation.

To determine whether increases in profit are due to an engaged workforce, it is necessary to measure an organisation's engagement and performance over a period of time and compare the changes during this period. If engagement is the cause of profit increase then an increase in engagement levels should precede an increase in profit. Such a study by Hewitt Associates (2004, cited in The Conference Board, 2006), found indications that engagement does indeed drive bottom-line profit.

3.1.8 Successful organisational change

Research suggests that employee engagement might play a key role in aiding the successful implementation of organisational change (eg Graen, 2008) and may be particularly important to enabling organisational agility in companies forced to adapt to the changing market. For instance, Cambridgeshire County Council (cited in Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007) found that their engagement improvement initiatives had led to time savings when introducing new policies and implementing change. Graen (2008) proposes that engagement may protect an organisation's bottom-line profit when the local or global economy is in the midst of a recession.

3.2 Employee outcomes

3.2.1 Clarifying expectations

Cartwright and Holmes (2006) suggest that the rapidly changing environments in today's workplaces have brought with them a more transactional approach to the relationship between employer and employee. Where once an employee expected a job for life and promotion in exchange for their loyalty and commitment, employers now tend to offer higher salaries and increased 'employability' in exchange for employees' efforts, and even greater efforts are now expected than 20 years ago. They suggest that this shift in expectations has frustrated many employees, and many are now questioning the meaning of work and seeking greater fulfilment from their employment. Engagement, then, may offer a solution

for the individual, providing them with the opportunity to invest themselves in their work. *'The combination of employing and expressing a person's preferred self yields behaviours that bring alive the relation of self to role'* (Kahn, 1990 p. 700). Indeed, an increase in an employee's sense of self efficacy has also been suggested to be an outcome of employee engagement (Seijts and Crim, 2006).

3.2.2 Health and well-being

Research has indicated that engagement may result in positive health effects and positive feelings towards work and the organisation (eg Mauno et al., 2007; Rothbard, 2001). Gallup (Crabtree, 2005, cited in Lockwood, 2007) reported increased health and well-being in engaged employees, with 62 per cent of engaged employees reporting a positive effect of work upon their physical health. Gallup also suggests that perceptions of the organisation as a healthy place to work increases the employees' level of support for their organisation: *'engaged employees are more likely to view the organisation and job as a healthy environment and therefore more likely to support the organisation'* (p. 3). Engagement and investment of the self into one's work may lead to mindfulness, intrinsic motivation, creativity, authenticity, non-defensive communication, playfulness, ethical behaviour, increased effort and involvement and overall a more productive and happy employee (Kahn, 1990).

3.3 The downside of engagement

There is remarkably little literature that reports the costs attached to engaging a workforce. One of the few organisations to approach a cost-benefit analysis of engagement is Cambridgeshire County Council, described in the Scottish Executive Social Research (2007). Although significant costs were attached to their engagement initiatives, staff survey results showed considerable improvement. At the same time, HR benchmarking placed their absence performance in the top quartile, and their HR delivery costs in the bottom quartile. Overall, they concluded that engaging employees had benefited the organisation. This report also raises the point that as there is so little discussion as to the costs of engagement, it makes it hard to ascertain how far companies should go in the attempt to raise engagement in the disengaged.

Masson et al. (2008) raise the important question of whether the potential benefits of engagement have overshadowed the possible downsides. They cite the work of Britt (2003), who examined the engagement of U.S. Army rangers and discovered that those who were the most engaged with their work, *'the ones who ranked work-relevant values as the most important'*(p. 16), also reported being the most demoralised when they were faced with obstacles to high performance. It is suggested as a result that such individuals are actually more prone to leave the

organisation in question as these blocks in the way of them engaging with their work are of the organisation's own making, and so outside of the employee's control. This may be the same as the '*Almost Engaged*' to which BlessingWhite (2008) refers.

Likewise, Bates (2004) suggests that trying to boost engagement can have negative repercussions for retention, claiming that '*one of the paradoxes that many organisations discover when boosting engagement is that the kind of training that gives workers higher feelings of engagement also gives them more opportunities to leave your firm*' (online).

As such, it appears likely that there are both financial costs and possibly costs to employee retention from engaging the workforce, but the balance of the limited data available suggests that engagement remains a desirable aim for organisations.

This section has explored the current thinking and evidence of the potential outcomes of engagement, the next section will explore whether some people are more likely to engage than others.

4 Variations in Employee Engagement

The experience of engagement at work can vary between individuals over time and is likely to fluctuate on a daily basis within one person (Sonnentag, 2003; Kahn, 1990). This section explores the debate about whether some people are more likely to engage at work than others, focusing on the differences between individuals, as well as how engagement is affected by job and organisational characteristics.

Key points

- Engagement levels can vary according to different biographical and personality characteristics.
- Where younger employees are the least positive and most disengaged in the workplace, this may be a reflection of low organisational seniority and power or the different expectations and values of Generation Y.
- There may be aspects of a person that are likely to give them a tendency for being engaged. Being low in neuroticism, high in extraversion, and having a temperament that allows one to adapt and switch between activities may make it easier to engage. The selection of such predisposed individuals may help further the creation of high-performance cultures.
- Engagement begins with what an employee considers is worth investing themselves in; the choice to engage lies with the employee, not the organisation.
- Engagement levels vary according to seniority, occupation and length of service in an organisation, but not by sector. The more senior an individual's role, the greater the chance of being engaged. Presidents and vice presidents, managers, and operational hands-on staff tend to be the most engaged, and professionals and backroom support staff the least, but this varies between organisations. Despite the link between engagement and seniority, in general levels of engagement decline with increasing length of service.

4.1 Are some people more likely to engage than others?

A number of biographical details have been shown to affect scores in engagement surveys. The impact of personal characteristics on engagement was identified in Robinson et al.'s (2007) survey of employee engagement in eight organisations spanning a range of sectors. The organisations included the retail arm of a mobile telephone company, a government agency, a charity and part of a police force. The survey revealed differences in levels according to gender, age, ethnicity, disability and those with caring responsibilities:

- Gender: women appeared slightly more engaged than men in some organisations.
- Age: engagement was highest in those under 20 years old and those 60 years plus, but dropped between 20 and 39 years old, before climbing again.
- Ethnicity: ethnic minority groups reported slightly higher engagement levels than their white counterparts.
- Disability: generally, disabled individuals reported higher engagement than those without a disability or medical condition.
- Caring responsibilities: overall those with adult caring responsibilities had the lowest engagement levels with their organisation, whilst those who cared for both adults and children had the highest.

It is important to note, however, that within individual organisations these general findings did not always hold true.

Similarly, Balain and Sparrow (2009) agree that engagement levels co-vary with biographical factors such as how old a person is and their gender, as well as more work-related factors such as how new they are to the organisation, their working hours, their pay and where they sit in the organisation.

4.1.1 Generation Y

BlessingWhite's survey of over 7,500 individuals and interviews with senior human resource and line managers found that at least a quarter of Generation Y employees globally are disengaged with the exception of India, where all generations have higher engagement levels than other regions. They suggest that the older the employee, the more engaged they are, with employees born since 1980 being the least engaged members of the workplace (BlessingWhite, 2008). BlessingWhite suggests that these findings may reflect low seniority in organisations, where older generations, eg baby boomers, would more likely be

expected to hold leadership roles, with increased engagement expected to be an outcome from power and position (BlessingWhite, 2008).

Similar to BlessingWhite's findings, Roffey Park Institute's survey of UK managers revealed that younger managers are not as positive about their organisations as their older counterparts (Sinclair et al., 2008) and are indeed more likely to be in junior levels of the organisation. BlessingWhite (2008) suggests that the lack of experience had by younger employees may also bring them a lack of clarity over what they want from their workplace. This suggestion is somewhat negated however by Talentsmoothie's research which found that Generation Y seek jobs that they love and do not 'live to work' (Talentsmoothie, 2008, cited in Asthana, 2008). They have a confidence derived from a feeling of security having grown up in a recession-free era of full employment and unprecedented economic growth. This confidence and complacency may now come to an end with the global economic crisis (Talentsmoothie, 2008, cited in Asthana, 2008). Talentsmoothie's research suggests that Generation Y know exactly what they want: they seek work-life balance, personal development, exciting jobs and motivating managers, and have an overwhelming desire to be fulfilled in their jobs. If these demands are not met, they are likely to leave their organisation in search of them elsewhere (Talentsmoothie, 2008, cited in Asthana, 2008). However, Robinson et al. (2004, 2007) found that the youngest employees had the highest engagement levels when compared to all other age groups.

Generation Y's apparent low engagement with their organisations, compared to their older colleagues, may be a result of their different values, their different attitudes towards work and the different demands they have of their work and their employers. If the organisation does not respond to these, then non-engagement or even disengagement may be almost inevitable.

4.1.2 Engaging personality traits

Engagement levels have also been linked to individual attitudes and traits (trait engagement). Engagement has been linked to having a 'positive affect', having a proactive and autotelic personality (ie carrying out activities for their own sake rather than reward) and being conscientious (Macey and Schneider, 2008a). Some individuals may have engagement orientating personality traits, that is aspects of a person that are likely to give them a predilection for being engaged. These traits may also cause the individual to suffer when they are prevented from engaging. Vosburgh (2008) has highlighted the need for practitioners and researchers to identify those characteristics that predispose individuals to engage. Specifically, he calls for a tool that would enable selection of such predisposed individuals. When combined with work conditions that promote quality performance, he argues that this will help further the creation of high-performance cultures. At

present, no such tool exists and it is likely to be some time before a reliable and valid scale can be empirically tested. As a starting point, however, Hirschfeld and Thomas (2008) suggest two constructs that may offer insight into the defining characteristics of, and potential measurements for, a tendency to be engaged with one's work. They posit that the Work Centrality Scale (Paullay et al., 1994) and Work Alienation Scale (Maddi et al., 1979) illustrate trait engagement. Hirschfeld and Field (2000) used data from over 300 employees and found that, of the two scales, Work Centrality was more associated with tendencies towards work or leisure and an individual's identification with work. In comparison, Work Alienation correlated more strongly with measures of locus of control, work self-discipline and affective organisational commitment. As such, it can be hypothesised that individuals with an external locus of control, low work self-discipline and low affective organisational commitment will find it harder to become engaged with their work.

Langelaan et al. (2006) also examined the connection between engagement and certain personality dispositions (using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey; Schaufeli et al., 1996), and found that highly neurotic individuals are more likely to burn out. Those who were low in neuroticism and high in extraversion, as well as individuals with a temperament that allowed them to adapt and switch between activities, were more likely to be engaged. This research may prove useful in identifying individuals who are more likely to burn out or disengage from their work, or conversely indicate which individuals are most likely to become engaged and involved in their work. However, further research to validate and measure the effectiveness of this approach is still needed at this time.

4.1.3 Differences in employee lifestyle expectations

Organisations need to realise that they are not managing the same world as they were five years ago. The technology, people, and the overall work environment have moved on, meaning that today's organisations need to be flexible (Johnson, 2004). Employees now define themselves not by the work they do but by the lifestyles they have chosen to lead. Engagement now begins with employees' lifestyles and what they consider is worth investing themselves in; the choice to engage lies with the employee (Johnson, 2004). It is something that is given, not taken, by the employer.

4.1.4 Roles, seniority and engagement

The range of job roles an organisation has may well make a big difference to the level of engagement of its employees. For example, Towers Perrin (2003) survey data suggests that, generally, the more senior an individual's role within an organisation, the greater the chance of being engaged. This is akin to studies of

Generation Y which suggested that increased engagement is expected to be an outcome of power and position (BlessingWhite, 2008). Robinson et al. (2007) highlighted that there are associations between role and engagement levels, whereby senior managers, managers and operational hands-on employees have the highest engagement levels, whilst professionals and 'back-room staff' are less likely to be highly engaged with their organisations. Similarly, BlessingWhite (2008) also found a difference in engagement across occupations. They found that 71 per cent of presidents and vice-presidents were engaged or almost engaged, whereas only 49 per cent of individuals who classed themselves as professionals fell into these groups. This supports the findings of Robinson et al. (2007) who generally found a tendency for professionals and support staff to report below average engagement. BlessingWhite (2008) found, however, that this can vary between organisations. In one of the organisations sampled, for example, professionals formed the most highly engaged out of all the role groups. In general, one might expect length of service to be positively correlated with level of seniority in an organisation. However, in contrast to the increases in engagement at higher levels of seniority, Robinson et al. (2007) observed declining levels of engagement with increasing length of service, until very high lengths of service were achieved.

4.1.5 Sector

As yet, there has been no evidence in the literature to suggest a difference in engagement levels between public and private sector organisations. In 2008, Roffey Park Institute found no differences across sectors in managers' levels of engagement (Sinclair et al., 2008). Similarly, the Scottish Executive Social Research reports:

'There is no evidence in the literature of significant differences between how the concept of employee engagement can be applied to private and public sector organisations. Rather, there are significant differences between organisations within each sector.'

(Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007, p.54)

This is consistent with the findings of Robinson et al. (2007), who found no clear pattern amongst the eight organisations they examined that might predict the level of employee engagement. Private sector companies had both the highest and the lowest levels of employee engagement.

This section has explored variations in employee engagement. With the known benefits likely outweighing the costs of any intervention aimed at raising engagement levels and given that some people are more predisposed to engage than others, how do organisations enable engagement in practice? The next section will explore the drivers and barriers to enhancing engagement.

5 Enabling Engagement in Practice

Numerous studies in the consultancy literature, and some in the academic literature, have explored what drives employee engagement. This section will explore the current thinking and evidence on the catalysts and barriers for engagement and the manager's role in enabling it.

Key points

Existing research most frequently highlights seven key drivers of engagement:

- The nature of the employee's work has a clear influence on their level of engagement. It is important to have challenging, creative and varied work that utilises old and new skills.
- A perception that the work undertaken is important, and has a clear purpose and meaning.
- Having equal opportunities for, and access to, career growth, development and training opportunities is considered important in enabling employees to engage with the organisation.
- Receiving timely recognition and rewards is a key driver. Salary is important but more as a disengager than an engager.
- Building good relationships between co-workers is important, especially the relationship between employee and manager. This critical relationship needs to be a reciprocal one of making time for, and listening to, one another.
- Employees may engage in an organisation if they can understand the organisation's values and goals, and how their own role contributes to these.
- Leaders and managers who inspire confidence in individuals, giving them autonomy to make decisions with clear goals and accountability, are perceived as engaging.

5.1 Drivers of engagement

Discerning what enables engaged behaviours is almost as tricky as identifying a single concrete definition of employee engagement. This is mainly because within the consultancy literature, and to some extent the academic literature, a multitude of different drivers are suggested.

5.1.1 Practitioner perspectives on the drivers of engagement

Research conducted by IES in 2004 (Robinson et al., 2004) found considerable variation in the views of authors in what drives engagement and pointed out that *'there is no easy answer as far as engagement is concerned – no simple pulling of one or two levers to raise engagement levels'* (p. 26). It is unlikely that a 'one size fits all' approach is effective, as levels of engagement and its drivers vary according to the organisation, employee group, the individual and the job itself (Robinson, 2007). There is *'no definitive all-purpose list of engagement drivers'* (CIPD, 2007). Employee engagement is likely, therefore, to be influenced by many interrelated factors.

Such variation is illustrated in the work of The Conference Board (2006) who found that 26 different drivers of engagement were proposed in 12 largely consultancy-based studies of engagement. The most commonly reported drivers were trust and integrity; the nature of the job; the line-of-sight between individual performance and company performance; career growth opportunities; pride in the company; relationships with co-workers/team members; employee development and the personal relationship with one's manager (The Conference Board, 2006, p. 6).

Whilst these drivers were primarily sourced from consultancy literature, largely neglecting academic sources, there are some notable similarities with drivers suggested by other studies. For instance, in her paper 'Leveraging employee engagement for competitive advantage: HR's strategic role', Nancy Lockwood (2007) suggests that engagement is influenced by the culture of the organisation, its leadership, the quality of communication, the styles of management, levels of trust and respect, and the organisation's reputation. Lockwood suggests that a key lever for engagement, and ultimately effective performance, is an employee's emotional commitment to the organisation and the job, the *'extent to which the employee derives enjoyment, meaning, pride and inspiration from something or someone in the organisation'* (p. 4).

Numerous studies such as these have proposed a variety of different drivers of engagement. A breakdown of the key themes arising from recent research findings are presented below.

Workplace culture and being an employer of choice

Analysis of engagement within the NHS by IES (Robinson et al., 2004) indicated that opinions about, and experiences of, the different aspects of working life are strongly correlated with levels of engagement. Workplace culture may be key to setting the tone for engagement (Lockwood, 2007; Glen, 2006). Organisations considered an 'employer of choice' are more likely to have higher levels of employee engagement as they create workplace environments in which employees feel respected and valued, and the connection they feel with the organisation is such that they are willing to exert discretionary effort in the pursuit of its success (Leary-Joyce, 2004). Accordingly, Glen (2006) suggests that the work environment may play a key role in predicting engagement along with organisational processes, role challenge, values, work-life balance, information, reward/recognition, management and product service.

Similarly, workplace communications consultancy CHA found that building a positive and appreciative culture was found to keep staff motivated, especially if financial rewards are not available, which may be particularly relevant in today's economic climate (CHA, 2008 cited in Peacock, 2008). Lloyd Morgan (2004) found that numerous cultural traits are critical for increasing engagement levels, particularly having a culture of innovation, having good internal communication and having a reputation of integrity.

Participative management style and relationships

Levinson (2007a) suggests that organisational cultures in which there is a collaborative leadership style (ie everyone is a stakeholder and can participate in all aspects of the business) drives engagement. This proposition is supported by Lloyd Morgan who found that certain characteristics of managers can be critical for engagement – specifically having good communication systems (Lloyd Morgan, 2004). Macey and Schneider (2008a) suggest that the nature of an organisation's leadership and management can have an indirect impact on engagement behaviours demonstrated by employees, through leaders building trust in their staff.

In 2004, a study by the Corporate Leadership Council of 50,000 employees worldwide showed that 22 of the top 25 drivers of employee engagement are related to the manager. They found a high correlation between engagement and the extent to which the manager clearly articulates to their staff the organisational goals, the extent to which they set realistic performance expectations and the extent to which they are flexible and adapt to changing situations (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004 cited in Thompson, 2007). Similarly, a survey by Melcrum found that both large and small organisations rated the actions of senior

leaders and direct supervisors as the most important drivers of employee engagement (Melcrum, 2007).

The CIPD (2007) proposes that employee engagement is driven by opportunities for upwards feedback, effective consultation and communication systems, and a manager who is fair and visibly committed to the organisation. Moreover, in their recent White Paper, Ixia Consultancy reported that employees feel most engaged when they have a good relationship with their manager, when they can be professional and have autonomy to make decisions, when they feel valued and feel confident in their own role and feel proud of the work they do (Cleland et al., 2008). They identified three key critical drivers which underpin engagement, namely the work undertaken, the managers, and the level of autonomy and control bestowed on the individual. Within each of these meta-categories Ixia proposed a number of sub-factors which were shown to have the greatest influence on engagement and were recognised by managers and employees as being positively associated with feeling engaged and motivated to go the extra mile. These were:

Work: job challenge; clear goals and accountability; freedom to act; purpose and meaning; important work; resources available.

Manager: listens; develops; open communication; makes time; respects individuals; encourages; is fair; provides feedback.

Autonomy: confident in achieving; feels respected; feels valued; is in control; has the skills; opportunity to perform; motivated; feels work is important.

Effective and assertive relationships are a vital lever for engagement, within which the attitudes of managers and staff have an impact upon the development of relationships (Cleland et al., 2008, p. 5).

Parallel findings were shown in a recent report by Kenexa Research Institute (2008) which was based on research looking globally at the current state of engagement in countries including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, the Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. Kenexa proposed four key universal drivers of engagement, all of which they relate to leadership. They suggest that employees are engaged by leaders *'who inspire confidence in the future; managers who respect and appreciate their employees; exciting work that employees know how to do; and employers who display a genuine responsibility to employees and communities'* (Jack Wiley, executive director, Kenexa Research Institute quoted in Wayne, 2008). In order to inspire confidence, leaders and managers may need a degree of their own self-belief. Luthans and Peterson (2002) found that a manager's self-efficacy can, indeed, lead to enhanced employee engagement.

The importance of management in driving engagement is further explored in the sub-section 'Manager's influence'.

Demonstrating commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee well-being

The importance of displaying a genuine responsibility to employees and communities, and investing in CSR activities in order to secure engagement, is upheld by many researchers. Sirota Survey Intelligence's (cited in Levinson, 2007b) survey of employees from more than 70 organisations found that 86 per cent of employees who are satisfied with their organisation's CSR commitment have high levels of engagement and have positive views of their employer's sense of direction, integrity, and interest in employee well-being among others. However, when employees were sceptical of the organisation's commitment to CSR, only 37 per cent were engaged (Sirota Survey Intelligence of Purchase, 2007 cited in Smith, 2007). Robinson et al. (2007) found that individuals who have had an accident at work tend to have lower levels of engagement. Being harassed at work also had a detrimental impact on engagement, particularly if the perpetrator of the harassment was a manager. When organisations demonstrate a commitment to *'improving the human or environmental condition, it creates meaning and value for employees, customers, and shareholders alike'* and is most likely to encourage engagement in employees when they understand how this commitment is making a difference (Levinson, 2007b).

Development opportunities

The importance of development opportunities in enabling engagement is a view upheld by many organisations. For instance, four studies conducted by Gallup, Learning and Development Round Table, The Conference Board, and the Corporate Leadership Council, showed *'a cross-validation for the link between employee development and high engagement. Together, they create a compelling business case for investing in the development of people.'* (Levinson, 2007a). Levinson (2007a) suggests that organisational cultures where there is a belief in and practice of employee development enables employees to engage in the organisation. Likewise, Robinson (2007, p. 37) found that employees who have a *'personal development plan and are satisfied with access to development opportunities ... typically have high engagement levels'*. Moreover, research by Roffey Park Institute suggests that development opportunities are one of several key enablers of engagement, along with good management and leadership. Managers have a crucial role to play in promoting clear, shared vision and values, effective communication and recognition (Sinclair et al., 2008). Similarly, besides the importance of good leadership and management, Melcrom's (2007) research found that opportunities for career advancement, and training and development, were important drivers of

engagement. As with other research, they also found people highly rated the importance of a people-centric culture, belief in company direction, formal internal communication, and involvement and consultation on company decisions in driving engagement.

Moreover, Robinson et al. (2007) found several elements of performance management and development processes can have positive effects on engagement levels. For instance, receiving an appraisal and training were shown to increase engagement in some organisations (although this may be dependent upon the quality of appraisal or training received), with engagement lowest in those who had received no recent training. Similarly, having a performance development plan was seen to have a positive impact on engagement. Opportunities for informal development through secondments, coaching etc. were associated with higher engagement levels.

Pay, reward and working hours

Melcrum (2007) also cites the importance of compensation, benefits and formal recognition in instilling employee engagement. In 2008, a survey by CHA asked one thousand employees what single action their employer could take immediately to help improve engagement during the economic downturn (CHA, 2008 cited in Peacock, 2008). First and foremost, a pay rise including bonus or incentives was requested, followed by company-organised social events, praise, encouragement, flexible working and reassurance about job security. In line with other research, they also asked for honest and positive senior management that is in touch, good communication, and more staff training.

Parallel to CHA's findings on the importance of flexible working, Lockwood (2007) also suggests that work-life balance is an important lever for engagement, and that this has an impact upon staff retention. This is especially relevant as different generations have different expectations of the workplace, with access to training and career opportunities, work/life balance and empowerment to make decisions now increasingly important.

In 2005, IES (Robinson et al.) reported that job satisfaction, feeling valued and involved and equality of opportunity are the three strongest drivers of engagement (see Figure 5.1). This echoes BlessingWhite's (2008) finding that rewarding efforts and encouragement are of great importance to employees.

Watson Wyatt (2007) found that having clear expectations and delivering promised rewards is key to engaging the workforce. They found that 69 per cent of employees who report that their employers set clear expectations and deliver on promises are highly engaged compared to around 25 per cent who say their employers do not.

Figure 5.1: Engagement drivers

Source: IES Engagement Survey, 2005

However, Robinson et al. (2007) suggest that, whilst satisfaction with salary and rewards can be a driver of engagement, it usually is often overshadowed by other factors and is typically more likely a disengager, when one is dissatisfied, than an engager.

Linking performance to business outcomes

In a global study of engagement levels of 50,000 employees worldwide by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004), the top 25 drivers of employee engagement identified in the study all highlight the importance of employees' connection to the organisation. The most important lever was the connection between the employee's job, organisational strategy and the employee's understanding of how important their job is to the organisation's success.

5.1.2 Academic perspectives on the drivers of engagement

Very few academic studies have explored the antecedents of employee engagement. Those which have include Kahn (1990), Saks (2006), Langelan et al. (2006) and Mauno et al. (2007).

Kahn (1990) found that the presence of three psychological conditions influenced people to personally engage in their work and the absence of which encouraged disengagement. These are meaningfulness, safety and availability. Kahn suggests that people vary their degree of engagement in a given situation according to their perception of the benefits and the guarantees, and also by the resources they perceive themselves to have.

A culture of meaningfulness

Kahn found that people are more likely to engage in situations that are high on meaningfulness. This proposition is supported by Lockwood (2007) who suggests that organisations who build a culture of meaningfulness are more likely to have engaged employees. Meaningfulness represents the sense of a return on investing the self and exerting energies into a task, and occurs when people feel they are valued and making a difference. It is important that the task is challenging, offers some autonomy and ownership, has clearly defined goals, is creative and varied, demands both routine and new skills, and has some influence and ownership over the work. Also important are rewarding and mutually supportive interpersonal interactions, and a sense of sharing experiences with clients and colleagues. May et al (2004) also support Kahn's assertion and found that job fit and job enrichment positively predict meaningfulness at work.

A safe environment

Feeling able to express and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career is another key determinant of engagement according to Kahn (1990). People personally engage in situations perceived as safe, trustworthy, predictable and clear in terms of behavioural consequences (Kahn, 1990). Safety is largely promoted by the quality of relationships with colleagues and managers, which need to be open, trusting and supportive (Kahn, 1990). The perception of power and unconscious roles people play in group dynamics – roles that are accepted and played along with by other group members, such as being cast in a supporting rather than leading role – may inhibit feeling able to safely personally engage, and such voices may be repressed in group situations (Kahn, 1990).

Personal resources

'Physical, emotional and psychological resources are a necessary pre-requisite for engaging at work'

(Kahn, 1990, cited in Sonnentag, 2003 p. 519)

Research has shown that having life-work balance is an important factor in enabling engagement (Johnson, 2004) and that sufficient recovery during leisure time supports physical, and psychological well-being and equips people with the resources needed to be engaged and to show dedication, vigour and absorption at work (Sonnentag, 2003 p. 519).

The level of availability that an individual has at work is determined by their own personal resources, their recovery during leisure time and their participation in activities outside of work. Such participation, research controversially suggests,

can divert energy and focus away from work and thus reduces individual investment in the workplace (Kahn, 1990).

'Life outside work has an impact on how one feels and behaves at work'
(Sonnentag, 2003, p. 518)

'Periods of rest at home are particularly important for maintaining well-being at work'
(Eden, 2001, cited in Sonnentag, 2003, p. 518)

'Vacations and other periods of rest decrease perceived job stress and burnout and can increase life satisfaction'
(Etzion et al., 1998; Lounsbury and Hoopes, 1986,
both cited in Sonnentag, 2003, p. 518)

According to Sonnentag (2003), individuals who sufficiently recover *'experience a higher level of work engagement during the subsequent work day'* (p. 519). Sonnentag suggests that it is an individual's tendency to experience engagement and to take initiative, as well as their level of recovery during leisure time, which together account for feelings of engagement and actions of initiative on a given working day.

5.1.3 Manager's influence

Both the academic and the practitioner literature, as shown earlier in the review, highlight the significant influence that management can have on engagement levels from the moment people are recruited into the organisation:

'Employee engagement research shows that the right managers can have a direct impact on bringing people into the organisation who are committed to doing quality work and facilitating a fun and caring atmosphere, which can nurture friendships among employees.'
(Ott et al, 2007)

As Ott et al. (2007) suggest, through reputation and through the ability to select the right people, good management can bring people into the organisation with the potential to be highly engaged in their work. Throughout an individual's employment in the organisation, it is the quality of the relationship between a manager and employee that can be a crucial driver of engagement and satisfaction with the organisation:

'The quality of the relationship that an employee has with his or her immediate manager is one of the most influential factors driving engagement and satisfaction.'
(Dulye, 2006)

The assertion that the supervisor is of key importance to employee engagement is backed up by a number of sources. A study by Kenexa Research Institute found that managers are critical to engagement, with effective managers having more engaged staff than ineffective (Kenexa, 2008 cited in WFC, 2008). An individual level meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2001), also found that individual performance was closely tied to satisfaction with one's supervisor. Indeed, in Kahn's initial description of the contributors to employee engagement, he identified management style and process as a key source of employees feeling psychologically safe in their work environment:

'People need to feel that their authority figures are competent enough and secure enough in their own visions to create paths along which subordinates can safely travel.'

(Kahn, 1990, p. 712)

This finding was supported by an empirical test of Kahn's model of engagement, conducted by May et al. (2004). They found a strong link between employees' self-reported engagement and perceptions of supportive supervisor relations, in a sample of insurance company workers. Indeed, Towers Perrin (2006) suggests that a lack of 'soft skills' in managers has led to widespread disengagement across Europe.

'The relationship with a direct manager is critical for both engagement and also in managing retention. Many of the factors that influence employee engagement and retention are factors directly or indirectly within the manager's control.'

(Towers Perrin, 2006, p. 11)

Managers' belief in their own capabilities can have a positive influence over the engagement of their staff. In their survey of 170 managers and their subordinates, Luthans and Peterson (2002) found that a manager's self-efficacy² can lead to increases in the engagement and effectiveness of their subordinates. This confidence may be picked up on by employees who, as a result, feel confident in their leadership enabling them to engage with their organisation. Such an assumption is supported by the Kenexa Research Institute who found employees who have confidence in their senior leadership are more likely to have higher engagement scores than those who lacked confidence (Kenexa, 2008 cited in WFC, 2008).

² Self-efficacy is defined as a person's beliefs in their ability to mobilise their cognitive resources and specific actions that are required to successfully complete a task and a concept known to have a strong positive relationship with work performance (Bandura, 1986, 1997 and Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998 both cited in Luthans and Peterson, 2002).

However, the involvement of the supervisor in engaging employees may be quite complicated. In their annual report on 'The State of Employee Engagement' BlessingWhite (2008) surveyed over 7000 employees from varying industries across the world. Considering that they report that only one third, on average, of respondents were engaged, it seems somewhat surprising that they found that only five per cent of *all* their respondents felt a better relationship with their manager would make them more satisfied, and 75 per cent of north American respondents trusted their manager. Perhaps then, it is not trust in one's manager that produces engagement. However, trust of an organisation's senior managers appeared to be far more of an issue with those who were disengaged, with 52 per cent of them reporting a lack of trust for senior leaders of the organisation. Therefore, it may be the case that having trust does not directly influence engagement levels, but when it is lacking, disengagement results.

The issues that BlessingWhite (2008) report as being of most concern across the whole of their sample are that managers are not effectively recognising and rewarding achievements, and not effectively encouraging the use of their talents. This lends support to Robinson et al.'s (2007) proposition that line management may not have a direct influence on engagement levels, but rather acts as a sub-driver, affecting those factors, such as feeling valued, that directly influence levels of perceived engagement.

'The immediate manager influences many aspects of working life, leading ultimately to higher or lower engagement levels.'

(Robinson et al., 2007, p. 19)

'The line manager clearly has a very important role in fostering employees' sense of involvement and value.'

(Robinson et al., 2004, p. xii)

If managers can enable their staff to feel involved and valued in their work, with freedom and support, then they play a very important role in nurturing engagement. This is explored further in the work of Saks (2008) who used the demands-resource model (Demourouti et al., 2001) in attempting to explain engagement drivers. Saks proposed that when job demands are low (such as job security, undemanding workloads) and job resources are present (factors that promote work goals and stimulate personal development) employees are more engaged with their work. Therefore, aspects such as autonomy, support from managers and co-workers and constructive feedback promote engagement, whereas bad managerial practices that lead to work overload, job insecurity and role ambiguity act as barriers to engagement.

5.2 Barriers to engagement

Whilst much of the literature has focused upon the drivers of engagement, there is also a growing focus upon identifying those factors that will inhibit employees' ability to engage. Key factors include bureaucracy and heavy workloads.

Lockwood (2007) maintains that bureaucratic behaviour in organisations severely handicaps the potential of an organisation to engage its employees, as well as being over-worked, as both increase an employee's susceptibility to stress. These findings are supported by research by Roffey Park Institute, who found, in their survey of UK managers, that workload pressure along with poor management and poor communication were key barriers to engagement. This was particularly true during times of change, with bureaucracy and lack of time to achieve workload being the biggest de-motivators, and workload being one of the biggest causes of stress (Sinclair et al., 2008).

Speaking at the Employee Engagement Summit in 2009, John Purcell, Strategic Academic Advisor at Acas National, suggested six key factors that limit or damage engagement:

- Job insecurity: fear of job loss is particularly likely during a recession.
- Unfairness, particularly in reward and pay systems.
- Jobs with no space ie repetitive work with short cycle times such as call centre work with very short call times.
- Highly stressful jobs with very little flexibility or autonomy.
- Poor line management behaviour and bullying.
- Working for long periods of time without a break.

Other research, such as that of Beech and Akerson (2003, cited in Pech and Slade, 2006) and BlessingWhite (2008) found that a lack of trust may be a precursor to disengagement in organisations, particularly a lack of trust in senior leadership

This is particularly poignant during tough economic times and Purcell (2009) suggests trust can have a considerable effect on employee commitment when the question of who is to blame in tough times is raised, 'us and them' (ie management) or 'we'.

Other factors that are said to influence disengagement include an individual's availability at work. The lower the availability, the lower the engagement. May et al. (2004) found evidence to suggest that time spent on activities outside work predicted lower availability scores. They suggest that people only have so much of themselves that they can devote to their various life roles, and therefore individuals with significant commitments outside work may find it harder to

engage than other employees. This emphasis on limited resources is supported by evidence that day-level engagement and proactive behaviour are linked to the extent to which employees have recovered, during leisure time, from their previous day's work (Sonnentag, 2003). Employees who do not 'unwind' occasionally are likely to find it increasingly hard to engage as a result. These two pieces of evidence combine to illustrate the importance of ensuring employees have a sensible work-life balance and well-being, so that employees are able to engage to the fullest extent:

'People cannot expend their energy at the highest levels all the time – there is a need for recovery to ensure continued employee wellbeing.'

(Macey and Schneider, 2008b)

5.3 In summary

A 'one size fits all' approach to enabling engagement is ineffective, because levels of engagement and its drivers vary according to the organisation, employee group, the individual and the job itself. Robinson (2007) suggests that it is very clear that *'an organisation, personal characteristics, job characteristics and employee experiences all influence engagement levels'*. This assumption is clearly supported by the numerous drivers, spanning these themes, presented in the practitioner and academic literature to date. Overall, however, existing research most frequently highlights seven key drivers of employee engagement, these are:

1. **The nature of the work:** in line with many of the definitions of engagement, the nature of the employee's work has a clear influence on their level of engagement. Much of the literature has spoken of the importance of having challenging and varied work that utilises old and new skills. The work needs to be perceived as creative and exciting for the employee. Employees also need to feel that the work they are doing is important for themselves and for others. This is a key driver highlighted in both the practitioner and academic literature.
2. **Meaningful and purposeful work:** a perception that the work undertaken is important, and has a clear purpose and meaning, is an important precursor for engagement. Employees need to feel proud of the work they and their organisation do, and they need to feel as though they are making a difference. Having a line of sight between individual and organisational performance, and an organisation that shows how important individuals' roles are to organisational success, may be important in enabling this. This is seen as a key driver in both the practitioner and academic literature.
3. **Development opportunities:** having equal opportunities for, and access to, career growth, development and training opportunities is considered important in enabling employees to engage with the organisation. For employees to

perform well they need to have the right skills for the job, and their roles need to encompass work that the employee knows how to do but with scope to learn new skills and develop the role. This development needs to be encouraged by managers and the organisation, and continuous feedback mechanisms should be in place to tackle development needs as they arise. Employees who are engaged feel empowered, are confident in achieving in their role and have opportunities to perform at their best. Whilst the development of new skills is mentioned in the academic literature, it is proposed more strongly in the practitioner.

4. **Recognition and reward:** receiving timely recognition and rewards is a key driver of engagement. The degree of formality of such recognition is determined by circumstances and what is appropriate. Salary is important but more as a disengager than an engager. Employees need to feel valued and appreciated in the work they do.
5. **Effective and assertive relationships:** building good relationships between co-workers is important, especially the relationship between employee and manager. This critical relationship needs to be a reciprocal one of making time for, and listening to, one another. This is potentially achieved by rewarding achievement, and demonstrating trust by allowing autonomy. Developing mutual respect and trust between colleagues and managers is seen as key to enabling employees to engage with the organisation. Employees want to be respected as individuals and the culture needs to deliver this.
6. **Quality communications:** employees may engage in an organisation if they can understand the organisation's values and goals, and developments in these. They need to understand how their own role contributes to these, and the resources available to deliver them, as well as feeling well-informed about what is happening in the organisation. Only through having formal and open two-way communication between managers and staff, such as having opportunities for upwards feedback without fear of repercussions, can employees access this information. Consulting employees in decision-making processes enables them to feel that they are being heard, and may instil a sense of ownership over the outcomes.
7. **Inspiring leadership:** leaders and managers who inspire confidence in individuals, giving them autonomy to make decisions with clear goals and accountability, are perceived as engaging. Organisational processes must give managers the flexibility to instil this in employees and adopt a collaborative management style. The actions and integrity of leaders and line managers are vitally important in enabling engagement. Managers must also be visibly committed to the organisation and display a genuine responsibility to their employees and the wider communities, particularly in terms of their well-being.

Managers need also to be fair and honest in their judgements and responsibilities and foster a sense of involvement and value.

This section has explored what the literature says enables employees to engage with their work and their organisations. The next section will explore the various tools available to measure levels of employee engagement in organisations.

6 Measuring Employee Engagement

Engagement is a measurable construct. There are numerous employee attitude surveys in use currently, many developed in-house by organisations' HR departments with the aim of measuring engagement levels in the company. There are also a number of measures produced by large consultancies and survey houses that allow organisations to benchmark their levels of engagement against data derived from hundreds or thousands of companies.

Key points

- The lack of a clear definition of employee engagement and the differing requirements of each organisation means there is likely to be considerable variation in what is measured in engagement surveys.
- IES has developed a statistically reliable measure of engagement which focuses on organisational citizenship, commitment, aligning individual and organisational values, and the extent to which the organisation enables the individual to perform well.
- Other measures available include The Gallup Workplace Audit (q12), Roffey Park Institute's Engagement Diagnostic Service, NetPromoter, The Towers Perrin Rapid Engagement Diagnostic Survey and The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.
- To achieve employee confidence and trust in the actions taken as a result of a survey, feedback needs to be transparent and shown to be directly related to the feedback received.

Balain and Sparrow (2009) suggest that engagement surveys represent a mechanism for employee feedback which are used periodically as a gauge to show how well the organisation is doing. However, because of the diversity in the definition, assumptions and use of employee engagement, and the differing requirements of every organisation, there is likely to be a wide variation between

all such measures in what is actually measured and organisations are advised to benchmark their engagement scores with caution (Balain and Sparrow, 2009). Organisations are therefore left with a dilemma when choosing how to go about measuring engagement:

'Organisations may have to choose between a standard measure that does not quite meet their requirements, but enables benchmarking, and a customised measure that is ideal in everyway except for the ability to compare with other organisations.'

(Robinson et al., 2007, p. 24)

When measuring engagement, employers can explore a variety of factors including the extent of an employee's pride in their organisation, their willingness to go the extra mile, be selfless and act as a team player, their belief in the organisation's products and services and their belief that the organisation enables them to perform at their best (Robinson, 2007).

'The employee survey is the diagnostic tool of choice in the battle for the hearts of employees. Some companies ask workers about their work experiences as infrequently as every other year, looking for major trends. Others take the pulse of the people as often as every month to address the little things that get in the way of employees doing their jobs. Regardless of frequency, the most effective surveys ask questions that can lead to specific corrective actions and that demonstrate a long-term commitment to providing a rewarding work experience, as several organisations have found.'

(Bates, 2004)

The following measurements offer an idea of the range available.

6.1 Existing measures

6.1.1 IES Engagement Survey

The engagement indicator consists of twelve attitudinal statements that examine organisational citizenship, organisational commitment, the extent to which individuals identify with the values of the organisation, and their belief that the organisation enables the individual to perform well. Respondents mark their level of agreement with each statement on a scale of one to five. It is also available in a shorter five statements indicator, and has demonstrated good statistical reliability (Robinson et al., 2007).

6.1.2 Gallup Workplace Audit (q12)

This measure of employee engagement is based upon the work of Buckingham and Coffman (1999), who derived 12 questions to measure employee engagement

from thousands of focus groups across 2,500 business, healthcare and education units (Luthans and Peterson, 2002). The questions address issues such as understanding what is expected of you at work, having the resources to perform well, recognition and praise, encouragement to develop, being listened to and friendships at work (Bates, 2004). Responses to these questions have been linked to business outcomes such as bottom-line profit, productivity, employee retention, and customer loyalty and engagement. Whilst the tool has undergone tests of its reliability, Bhatnagar (2007) asserts that the q12 contains some contamination from concepts such as employee satisfaction, commitment and involvement and so further work is required to determine the validity of this measure.

6.1.3 NetPromoter®

Barclays suggest that it is possible to *'gain a good sense of someone's engagement by asking a simple question, would you recommend Barclays as a good place to work?'* (Barclays, 2008). This idea is the essence of NetPromoter (Satmetrix Systems, 2006). The tool is an example of a metric for customer engagement and similar to Gallup's (2006) idea of the engaged, almost engaged and disengaged employees, NetPromoter is based upon the premise that an organisation's customers fall into three categories, promoters (loyal enthusiasts), passives (satisfied but unenthusiastic, may stray to the competition), and detractors (unhappy, may speak negatively of the organisation). By asking a single question, 'how likely is it that you would recommend the company to a friend or colleague?' these groups can be identified and organisations can get a measure of customer loyalty.

The company's NetPromoter score is calculated by taking a percentage of the promoters and subtracting the percentage of detractors (Satmetrix Systems, 2006). Much in the same way as customers are, employees can also act as promoters, passives and detractors.

Research suggests that being a positive advocate for the organisation is a key outcome of employee engagement (eg Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007; Penna, 2006). Measuring such word-of-mouth advertising by employees and identifying promoters and NetPromoter scores may therefore provide organisations with an engagement gauge, and an idea of where to intervene to increase numbers of the promoting engaged, and decrease the detracting disengaged.

6.1.4 Roffey Park Institute's Engagement Diagnostic Service

Roffey Park Institute has developed an engagement scale as part of a package service to allow organisations to determine and understand their engagement levels. Their statistically validated engagement scale benchmarks organisations on

four key indicators, namely employees' commitment to the organisation, their relationships at work, the payback they receive and their feelings relating to their job and role. The service also identifies how organisations can improve employee engagement (Roffey Park Institute, 2008).

6.1.5 Towers Perrin Rapid Engagement Diagnostic Survey

This web- or paper-based survey offers the ability to measure and benchmark organisations' engagement levels, and identifies what may drive engagement in a given organisation, and where organisations can intervene. The survey is developed from work undertaken with 40,000 employees in northern America. (Towers Perrin, 2003; Towers Perrin, 2005). The survey is grounded in nine factors that Towers Perrin propose *'truly define'* engagement. According to Towers Perrin, the advantage of this survey is that it is faster and cheaper than more traditional measures of engagement (Towers Perrin, 2005).

6.1.6 Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

Based upon the Engagement-Burnout model forwarded by Maslach et al. (2001), this scale is designed to determine engagement based on the assumption that it is a *'positive work-related state of fulfilment that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption'* (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006). It is composed of three scales each measuring one of these three constructs. The scale is available in long and short form (17 or 9 items). The UWES-9 has been shown to have good construct validity, suggesting high correlation to the theorised construct of engagement (Seppälä et al., 2008). Tests have shown that the three scales have good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, indicating that the scale is reliable (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006), but it does lack benchmarking data. Schaufeli et al. (2006) found that the tool is a suitable measure in studies of positive organisational behaviour.

6.1.7 Workplace Insight Tool (WIT™)

Best Companies' WIT is a survey of employees based on the assumption that businesses can improve engagement levels in many areas and what is key is trust, listening, flexible working and avoiding a long hours culture. Responses to the survey are analysed to explore the correlation between employee engagement and *'areas which can be targeted for change'* (Best Companies, 2009). Organisations can explore how performance has changed over the years and benchmark themselves against other companies (Best Companies, 2009).

6.2 Acting on feedback

For any organisation wishing to understand their levels of engagement, they need to consider how the results will be translated into action. To achieve employee buy-in to, confidence and trust in the survey, actions that will be taken as a result of the survey feedback need to be transparent. Employees also need to be aware that actions taken will be directly related to the feedback received, so they feel listened to and that what they say counts (Ayers, quoted in Bates, 2004).

This section has given a snapshot of some of the measures of engagement currently available and in use by organisations. The next section will explore the overlap between engagement and other concepts.

7 Areas of Overlap With Other Concepts

Whilst many definitions of engagement exist, it is important to show if and how the concept is distinct from other similar constructs with which it may be confused (Rotter, 1990). This is particularly important as questions have been raised over whether engagement is indeed a unique concept or whether it is a rebranding of an existing construct (Macey and Schneider, 2008a). Therefore, this section will explore areas of overlap between engagement and the existing concepts of job satisfaction, commitment and job involvement, the psychological contract and motivation, with a view to understanding how the concept is distinct.

Key points

- Satisfaction and engagement differ in their predictive power over business outcomes. Satisfaction is a weaker predictor and lacks the two-way reciprocal relationship characteristic of engagement.
- Whilst engagement shares some characteristics with organisational commitment and job involvement, the emotional and physical elements of engagement are not necessarily found in job involvement, and the absorption and self-expression is lacking in organisational commitment.
- Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and engagement are strongly related as both focus upon going beyond the expected and both are negatively affected by poor management. Both engagement and the psychological contract have a cognitive and emotional element and depict the two-way employee-employer relationship.
- For some, engagement equates to a state of high internal motivation, whilst others suggest one can be motivated without necessarily feeling attached to the organisation.
- Despite engagement showing many shared characteristics with existing concepts, there are distinct elements that make the concept unique.

7.1 Similar concepts

7.1.1 Satisfaction at work

Some definitions and measures equate engagement with employee satisfaction (eg BlessingWhite, 2008; Harter et al., 2002). However, many suggest engagement is broader than, in some cases distinct from, satisfaction (eg BT, 2008; Blizzard, 2004; Bates, 2004).

A recent survey by Gallup showed that the more a customer is satisfied with their bank's services, the more they are engaged with the bank. Extremely satisfied customers were up to 15 times more likely to be engaged with the bank than less satisfied customers (Gallup, 2008, cited in Scarborough, 2008). By the same token, they also propose that employee engagement may be the '*ultimate expression*' of employee satisfaction (Koscec, 2003): the more satisfied they are, the more engaged they are with the company. However, whilst Gallup see a connection between the concepts, they also see a clear distinction between them in their relationship to performance. They argue that satisfaction is often not directly related to performance and business outcomes, whilst engagement can predict satisfaction and other business outcomes (Bizzard, 2004). In turn, people who are happy and satisfied in their work will often be satisfied with their pay and benefits, yet these are not directly related to engagement (Blizzard, 2004). These findings are supported by Young (2007, cited in Crush 2007) who claims that satisfaction occurs at approximately the same levels regardless of whether the company is high or low performing and employees can be satisfied in companies that perform poorly, suggesting no relationship exists between satisfaction and performance. Young suggests that engagement, not satisfaction, is a strong predictor of organisational performance. However, in contrast to this view BlessingWhite (2007, cited in Crush, 2007) suggest that engagement comes from '*matching maximum satisfaction with maximum contribution*' (p. 41).

In addition, Koscec (2003) suggests that a difference exists in relation to the measurement of both concepts, and claims that satisfaction is a passive employee state, whilst engagement is an active state:

'An employee that is not engaged at work might ... indicate a high level of satisfaction with their organisation. This employee is getting everything they wish: a steady pay check, benefits, sick leave and paid vacation. Their actual contribution to the well being of the organisation in terms of innovation, creativity and productivity is negligible. But they are satisfied'

(Koscec, 2003)

By the same token, Perelman (2007) claims that the difference lies in the exertion of discretionary effort, suggesting that a satisfied employee will not go the extra mile

to get the job done, whilst an engaged employee *'doesn't think twice before pulling out all of the stops'*.

Macey and Schneider (2008a) similarly indicate that although someone may be satisfied with their job, this does not necessarily mean they are engaged. Indeed, Frese (2008) goes a step further to argue that engagement often occurs in situations other than where one is satisfied with their work, such as when imminent deadlines and time pressures require an individual to work particularly hard. Whilst increased initiative, not necessarily engagement, may result from such stressors, increased dissatisfaction with work is also often caused (Fay and Sonnentag, 2002).

Overall, findings from existing research suggest two possibilities:

1. Satisfaction at work is actually a relatively minor outcome of, or even completely absent from, a state of engagement. As such, whether an employee derives fulfilment and satisfaction from an action may be down to other factors, like whether they get a sense of fulfilment from completing a piece of work. This is consistent with the assertion of Macey and Schneider (2008a) and Frese (2008).
2. Satisfaction is related to employee engagement, but the behaviour that occurs as a result of stressors does not fall under the domain of engagement. It could be argued that an individual under pressure may display similar dedication and absorption, but it seems unlikely that they will experience the vigour and passion that tend to characterise engagement.

Particularly if the employee feels they have to 'knuckle down', it seems that this is an enforced sense of concentration rather than engagement. Further research in this area is required to determine how the behaviour of individuals under stressors differs, if at all, from engaged employees. Similarly, the exact connection between satisfaction and employee engagement is yet to be defined.

7.1.2 Commitment and job involvement

Engagement and commitment are often used interchangeably in some of the literature (eg Heintzman and Marson, 2006) and Gallup (2003, cited in Koscec, 2003) suggests that engagement may be an expression of employee commitment and other elements of satisfaction, however commitment lacks a number of the qualities commonly associated with engagement, such as absorption and self-expression. In 2006, Hallberg and Schaufeli conducted a survey of 186 Swedish IT consultants and administrative personnel to determine whether a measure of work engagement could discriminate against measures of job involvement and organisational commitment. The study found that work engagement, job

involvement and organisational commitment represent three distinct constructs and reflect different aspects of work attachment.

Furthermore, May et al. (2004) suggest that job involvement is conceptually different to engagement, as job involvement is a purely cognitive act, whereas engagement contains an emotional and physical element. However, they suggest that job involvement may result from employees being deeply engaged in their work.

Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) have statistically compared scores on psychometric tests of employee engagement with those of job involvement and organisational commitment, the findings of which suggest engagement is a distinct concept, rather than a blend of the other two constructs. In contrast, Ferguson (unpublished paper) claimed engagement is a global construct which combines job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intention to stay with an organisation.

Overall, findings from existing research suggest that organisational commitment and job involvement may be encapsulated within the concept of engagement, and may result from engagement. Alternatively, engagement may share some characteristics of organisational commitment and job involvement, but have distinct elements such as the emotional and physical elements that are not found in job involvement, and the absorption and self-expression lacking in organisational commitment. The literature is still in debate over the distinction between these concepts, and more research is required to tap into this.

7.1.3 Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)

A review of the research literature by Barkworth (2004, cited in Robinson et al. 2004) defines the key characteristic of OCB as discretionary 'extra-role' behaviour. Podsakoff et al. (2000, quoted in Barkworth, 2004, cited in Robinson et al., 2004) classified definitions of OCB into seven key themes: helping behaviour in terms of helping others voluntarily, sportsmanship (having a positive attitude in the face of adversity and setting aside personal interests for the good of the organisation or team), commitment and loyalty through promoting the organisation to the outside world, organisational compliance through following the organisations rules, individual initiative ie going the extra mile over and above what is expected, civic virtue and self-development by voluntarily improving one's own knowledge, skills and abilities in order to help the organisation. There is a very strong relationship between OCB and engagement, with both focusing upon going the extra mile beyond what is expected. There are also links between the negative impact of poor leadership and the demonstration of OCB, linking strongly to the need for good management in securing engagement. Although engagement, therefore, may be a new term, it may not be a new concept, but rather a

combination of organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Meyer, 1997; Podsakoff et al., 2000, both cited in Burke and Cooper, 2009).

7.1.4 Psychological contract

In many ways, the concept of engagement appears to resemble the psychological contract as both depict the two-way employee-employer relationship, both have a cognitive and emotional element and both have been called into question as measurable constructs (Garrow, unpublished).

7.1.5 Intrinsic 'extreme' motivation

Mount, Harter, Witt and Barrick (2004, cited in Macey and Schneider, 2008a) suggest that engagement equates to a state of high internal motivation. In contrast, Sharpley (2006, quoted in Harrad, 2006, cited in Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007) suggests a distinction exists in that it is possible to be motivated in one's job without necessarily feeling an attachment to the organisation.

7.2 General thoughts

Following a review of literature on employee engagement in the public sector, Scottish Executive Social Research (2007) suggested that whilst engagement may show shared characteristics with existing concepts, it is about more than these. As Macey and Schneider (2008a) suggest, the state of engagement is a blend of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment, a concept that is greater than the sum of its parts.

This section has explored where engagement may overlap with other organisational concepts and how it may differ. The next section will draw together the findings from this review and suggest the implications for organisations and for future research.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Developing a culture supportive of engagement

'One question still challenges many organisations in their quest to improve performance – what can be done to significantly impact employee engagement?' (People Management, 2008). Improving levels of employee engagement does not have to be expensive; it just takes some time and energy, but benefits will outweigh these costs (Bates, 2004; Robinson, 2007). *'A lot of the drivers of engagement are subtle issues that don't require a lot of capital outlay. They take work'* (Watts quoted in Bates, 2004).

In 2004 (Robinson et al., 2004, p. xii), IES proposed that attempts to increase levels of engagement are likely be ineffective, unless several factors are present in the organisation:

- Good quality line management.
- Two-way communication.
- Effective internal co-operation.
- A focus on development.
- Commitment to employee well-being.
- Clear, accessible HR policies and practices and visible commitment by managers at all levels.

These clearly resemble the common drivers found in the literature, namely the nature of the work, work that has transparent meaning and purpose, development opportunities, receiving timely recognition and rewards, building respectful and assertive relationships, having open and honest two-way communication and consultation systems and having inspiring leadership.

Awareness of these drivers suggests several implications for organisations in their endeavour to increase levels of engagement. These are described below:

- **Understand that engagement is a two-way proposition:** nurturing engagement requires a two-way relationship and commitment between employer and employee (Robinson, 2007; Johnson, 2004 p. 2). It is *'a mutual contract between employer and employee, the company is responsible for building a meaningful workplace. Employees have a responsibility for contributing to an engaging workplace'* (Mike Rude, Vice President of HR at Stryker Corp quoted in Bates, 2004, online). Organisations therefore must seek to build cultures where people are not afraid to give upwards feedback and have honest and open communication at all levels.
- **Understand the needs and expectations of employees:** to enable engagement, employers need to understand their employee's expectations and motivations. This has significant implications for job design to ensure that the meaning and purpose of the role are clearly defined. By designing jobs that promote employee engagement, organisations can create jobs where workers will be challenged and stimulated, be given authority and autonomy, and have access to information and resources as well as growth and development opportunities, all of which are considered important drivers in many of the studies mentioned.
- **Demonstrate commitment to the well-being of employees and the wider world:** as Levinson (2007b) suggests, engagement is most likely to occur when employees understand how their organisation's commitment to CSR activities is making a difference to employees and their communities. Thus, companies must understand that CSR is important to their employees. They need to seek the views of employees over how best to engage in CSR and well-being activities. This can be achieved through mechanisms such as employee surveys.
- **HR and line managers: both managers and HR have a key role in enabling engagement.** *'Employee engagement is ... something that can't succeed by being managed by HR alone. Certainly HR has the skills and tools to assist but it is the line managers who need to know how to engage their people'* (Johnson, 2004, p. 1). The provision of support and training to employees is vital. HR must have transparent and fair policies and systems which managers are committed to and trained in how to implement effectively.
- **Link individual and organisational performance:** organisations need to communicate the importance of individual contribution to successful business outcomes and there needs to be a clear line of sight between the two. Linking individual assessment to business outcomes may help embed this.
- **Encourage and enable development:** the development needs of employees must be identified and acted upon.

8.2 Future research into engagement

There is a clear gap in the literature at the moment, which is the dearth of qualitative data. With few exceptions (eg Kahn, 1990), research to date on employee engagement has utilised a survey methodology, with the intention of aggregating the individual scores into overall trends. Qualitative data would offer a greater insight into the perspective of those experiencing engagement and a better understanding of its constituent parts.

There is also a need for longitudinal studies of engagement, to demonstrate a clear link between engagement and organisational performance, and also to assess long-term outcomes and benefits. Much of the research to date has focused upon short-term gains.

Any future research into engagement should bear in mind the practical usage of engagement, particularly if practitioners seek to identify individuals who are more likely to engage. This necessitates a reliable and valid measurement of the propensity to engage, which could potentially be based upon the Work Alienation Scale (Maddi et al., 1979).

The importance of the line manager in engaging employees has also been clearly established. As a sub-driver to engagement they potentially have the most impact on employees engagement levels (Robinson et al., 2007). At the same time, it is unclear exactly *how* the manager does this, and what distinguishes an engaging manager from their fellows. Further research might not only identify what these differences are, but potentially reveal what training managers could undergo to improve their ability to engage their staff.

Whilst several potentially overlapping concepts have been explored in this review, there may be scope in future research to explore the overlap of engagement with concepts such as corporate social responsibility and organisational identification. Several authors have already begun to explore these links.

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