

**SOME REASONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR EMPLOYEE  
DISENGAGEMENT IN A REINSURANCE ORGANISATION IN GAUTENG**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Gaongaleloe Ruth Sello, student number 30224004, declare that this dissertation, entitled “**Some reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng**”, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



23 January 2019

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Gaongaleloe Ruth Sello

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DATE

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my late nephew Motlatsi Desmond Thabeng.

Also to my supportive husband Moroanaka Andrew Sello and my awesome son Obakeng Karabo Keketso Sello. This has been a long and arduous journey that would have been impossible without your motivation and continuous encouragement.

Furthermore, I would like to dedicate this body of knowledge to the Botlholo/Sello families: Develop a passion for learning and strive to become part of an educated nation!

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“Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” – Isaiah 41:10.

All thanks to my Father in heaven for affording me the opportunity to complete this study.

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## **ABSTRACT**

A reinsurance organisation in Gauteng conducted an employee engagement survey in November 2013 to gauge the employee engagement level amongst its employees. The survey revealed that the employee engagement level was at 24% across all the organisational levels. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore whether the employees are still disengaged and describe the current reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six managers and focus groups with 27 general employees. Data analysis followed Tesch's eight steps in the coding process.

The findings revealed that a lack of management's experience, styles and skills; poor communication and a lack of a robust performance management system promoted employee disengagement. Recommendations include leadership training for managers; improving communication and reviewing the performance management system.

**Key Words:** Reinsurance organisation, employee engagement, employee disengagement, organisational culture, motivation and leadership.

## KAKARETSO

Setheo sa go enšora sešwa sa kwa Gauteng se ile sa dira patlisiso ya tirisano ya bathapiwa ka kgwedi ya Ngwanaitseele 2013 go lekanya tekanyetso ya tirisano ya bathapiwa mo gare ga bathapiwa ba bone. Patlisiso e bontshitse gore tekanyetso ya tirisano ya bathapiwa e ne e le mo go 24% mo ditekanyetsong tsotlhe tsa bathapiwa ba setheo. Maikaelelo a ithuto e ya boleng e ne a le go sekaseka gore a bathapiwa ba santse ba sa dirisane le go tlhalosa gore mabaka a jaanong jaana ke afe le go bona ditharabololo tsa tlhokego ya tirisano ya bathapiwa.

Go tseilwe sesupo sa maikaelelo go tlhaolola batsayakarolo. Dipotsolotso tsa seka-thulaganyo di tshwerwe le balaodi ba barataro le ditlhopha tsa tsepamo le bathapiwa ba kakaretso ba le 27. Morago ga moo ga diriwa tokololo ya data ya ga Tesch ya dikgato tse di robedi mo tiregong ya go tlhaola.

Ditshwetso tsa patlisiso di bontshitse gore tlhokego ya maitemogelo, mekgwa le bokgoni jwa balaodi, le tlhaeletsano e e sa siamang le tlhokego ya thulaganyo e e maatla ga go laola tiro, di tsholeditse tirisano e e tlhokegang mo bathapiweng. Dikatlanegiso di akaretsa katiso ya boeteledipele ya balaodi; tokafatso ya tlhaeletsano le gore go boeletswe thulaganyo ya go laola ditiro.

**Mafoko a go batla mo inthaneteng:** Tirisano ya bathapiwa, tlhokego ya tirisano ya bathapiwa, setso sa mo setheong, tllhabego le boeteledipele.

## OPSOMMING

'n Herversekeringsorganisasie in Gauteng het in November 2013 'n werknemerbetrokkenheidsopname onder sy werknemers uitgevoer om die werknemers se betrokkenheidsvlak te bepaal. Die opname het getoon dat die werknemerbetrokkenheidsvlak regoor al die organisasievlakke 24% was. Die doel van hierdie kwalitatiewe studie was om te ondersoek of die werknemers steeds onbetrokke is, en die huidige redes en moontlike oplossings vir die onbetrokkenheid van werknemers te beskryf .

Doelgerigte steekproefneming is gebruik om die deelnemers te kies. Semigestruktureerde onderhoude is met ses bestuurders en fokusgroepe met 27 algemene werknemers gevoer. Die data-ontleding het Tesch se agt stappe in die koderingsproses gevolg.

Die bevindings het getoon dat 'n gebrek aan bestuurservaring, style en vaardighede, swak kommunikasie, en 'n gebrek aan 'n sterk prestasiebestuurstelsel die onbetrokkenheid van werknemers bevorder het. Aanbevelings sluit leierskapsopleiding vir bestuurders, die verbetering van kommunikasie en die hersiening van die prestasiebestuurstelsel in.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Herversekering, werknemerbetrokkenheid, werknemeronbetrokkenheid, organisasiekultuur, motivering en leierskap.

## ACRONYMS

ASTD	- American Society for Training and Development
CA	- Chartered Accountant
EI	- Emotional Intelligence
ERG	- Existence, relatedness and growth
EXCO	- Executive Committee
FRLT	- Full Range Leadership Theory
HR	- Human Resource
HRD	- Human Resource Development
HRM	- Human Resource Management
HRO	- Human Resource Officer
IOP	- Industrial and Organisational Psychology
KPMG	- Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler
MBO	- Management by Objectives
SIOP	- Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology
PDT	- Public Display Technologies
PWC	- PricewaterhouseCoopers
UAE	- United Arab Emirates
UNISA	- University of South Africa
UK	- United Kingdom
US	- United States
UWES	- Utrecht Work Engagement Scale



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## **CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION AND SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Employee engagement is a mutual relationship between an employer and an employee that occurs to create positive organisational performance. It refers to the emotional, rational and inspirational connection that employees have with their organisation (Marais & Hofmeyr 2013:13). Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014:187) concur that engaged employees have a solid emotional bond with their employer; they commit time and effort to help their organisation to succeed. In contrast, employee disengagement is a psychological condition in which employees selectively and actively make a choice to uncouple from their work roles. This behaviour leads to a lack of employee commitment to the organisational vision and mission (Aturamu 2016:5). According to Amos (2016:4) employee disengagement is the outcome of work that one perceives to be meaningless to one's life, dreadful work conditions and unhealthy relationships with managers and co-workers. Aturamu (2016:4) states that leaders who focus on preventing employees from becoming actively disengaged maintain high productivity and profitability for their organisations.

As noted by Tladinyane and Van Der Merwe (2016:4), Human Resource (HR) professionals face the enormous challenge of finding ways of encouraging employees to be more committed to their employers, increase the levels of employee engagement and enhance productivity in the workplace. The fact is that HR is expected to identify innovative and creative behaviours to build a dynamic, lively, exciting and profitable workplace where employees will be fond of their jobs (Sartain & Finney 2003 as cited in Tladinyane & Van Der Merwe 2016:4).

This study focuses on the high levels of disengaged employees at a reinsurance organisation based in Gauteng. The intention was to find the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to rectify the current situation. This chapter presents the background of the organisation, the employee engagement survey, the meta-theoretical statements, the motivation and the problem statement, the research questions and the objectives of the research and the potential

value of the study. It also outlines the assumptions of the study, the research methodology, population and sampling, data collection method and data analysis. Lastly, it will discuss trustworthiness, the ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations of the study, definitions of key terms, along with the layout of chapters. The chapter will end with a summary.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANISATION**

The organisation, founded in 1966, is the third largest reinsurance entity in the world. It is head-quartered in Germany, with its South African head office based in Johannesburg. The staff complement of 133 are all based in Johannesburg. Employees are appointed at different organisational levels ranging from level 2 to level 3 (general staff), level 4 (assistant managers), level 5 to level 6 (managers and senior managers) and level 7 (executive committee). The organisation's core business is reinsurance in the areas of non-life, life and health reinsurance. Sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 describe these areas of the core business in detail.

### **1.2.1 Non-life reinsurance**

Non-life reinsurance is often referred to as the property and casualty division. It offers standard reinsurance products and also tailors solutions that add value to the clients' needs. The non-life division is made up of 12 departments namely: actuarial risk management and solutions, catering, internal services, communications and marketing, legal and compliance, investment asset management, human resource management, risk management, information technology, consolidations and projects, investment operations and re-finance.

### **1.2.2 Life and health reinsurance**

This division offers clients the services of business development, underwriting, claims, medical, actuarial and finance expertise. There are nine departments in the life and health reinsurance namely: life finance, systems research and development, broker distribution, underwriting and medical, claims and risk management, corporate

actuarial, life technical accounts, actuarial pricing research and business development. The nature of reinsurance is discussed in section 1.2.3.

### **1.2.3 Reinsurance**

Reinsurance occurs when multiple insurance companies use reinsurance to share parts of their risk exposures with reinsurance organisations. The two common types of reinsurance policies are proportional reinsurance and excess-of-loss reinsurance (Liu, Yiu, Siu & Ching 2013:263). Proportional reinsurance means the insurer and the reinsurer participate in each risk on a proportional (equal) basis. On the other hand excess-of-loss reinsurance refers to the reinsurer being held accountable for the total amount of losses exceeding a certain boundary. Reinsurers conduct their business with insurance organisations and not directly with the public.

Rejda and McNamara (2014:128-129) elaborate that reinsurance is an agreement between the primary insurer (referred to as the ceding company) and the other insurer (referred to as the reinsurer) to purchase insurance. The two parties enter into a contract which details the conditions upon which the reinsurer would pay a share of the claims incurred by the ceding company. The reinsurer may in turn reinsure part or all the risk to another insurer and this is known as retrocession and the second reinsurer is called the retrocessionaire.

Bednarczyk (2014:28-29) states that the reinsurance market is an essential part of the insurance market and is repeatedly compared to the interbank market. Reinsurance plays a vital role in the financial economy of primary insurers by absorbing the losses and protecting them from financial ruin. This allows the insurers, especially the small and medium sized insurers, to get a chance to function increasingly in the competitive insurance market. In addition, reinsurers often offer the insurers extra services such as: transfer of knowledge, assistance in managing the market and financial advice (Bednarczyk 2014:28-29). According to Rejda and McNamara (2014:129) the most important reasons why insurers make use of reinsurance are: to increase the underwriting capacity, to stabilise profits, to reduce the unearned reserves and to provide protection against catastrophic losses.

### 1.2.3.1 Types of reinsurance

Birds (2013:7) singles out facultative and treaty reinsurance as the two types of reinsurance. In facultative reinsurance neither the insurer nor the reinsurer are compelled to enter into a contract whereas with treaty reinsurance, a contract is negotiated under which the insurer covers a specified share issued by the reinsurer. Facultative and treaty reinsurance are defined as follows:

- **Facultative reinsurance** is an optional case by case method used by the insurer to negotiate a separate contract with the reinsurer. This method is often used when the primary insurer has a need for a substantial amount of risk sharing and approaches the reinsurer for capacity and the willingness to accept and share of the risk (Birds 2013:7). The advantage of facultative reinsurance is that it can be tailored to fit any contract and can increase the capacity of the primary insurer to write large amounts of insurance. The disadvantages of this kind of reinsurance are: (1) the uncertainty of the primary insurer not knowing if the reinsurer will accept any part of the insurance, (2) there can be a delay in issuing a policy as this can only be done once the reinsurance has been obtained and (3) facultative reinsurance can be difficult to obtain during periods of poor loss experience resulting in this kind of reinsurance being expensive and difficult to obtain (Rejda & McNamara 2014:131).
- **Treaty reinsurance** means both the insurer and the reinsurer agree to cede and accept a portfolio of risks. The business covered on the scope of the agreement is automatically reinsured according to the terms of the treaty agreement. The treaty reinsurance has these advantages to the primary insurer: (1) the agreement is automatic with no uncertainty and (2) it is cost effective as there is no need to negotiate reinsurance terms. The disadvantage of treaty reinsurance to the reinsurer is that it can be unprofitable and the reinsurer relies on the underwriting judgment of the primary reinsurer (Rejda & McNamara 2014:131).

Simpson (2014:341) concludes that an active market for reinsurance is to enable primary insurers to transfer some of the insurance risk to reinsurers to permit insurers to lower their risk profiles through diversification of insurance risk.

#### **1.2.4 Mission of the organisation**

The organisation's mission is that of aspiring to be a preferred choice for its business partners when selecting a reinsurance partner, with the ability to innovate and leverage the capabilities of the worldwide group, for the benefits of the clients. The organisation's goal is to attract and retain high performing, delivery-orientated people with the best skills in the market. Employee engagement is encouraged in the pursuit of performance excellence. As the success of the organisation depends on the successful work of employees, individuals in this organisation are therefore recognised as the critical success factor and the most important asset of this reinsurance organisation.

### **1.3 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**

As the organisation operates in a highly competitive environment, it is important to ensure that employees remain actively engaged in order to retain critical talent, ensuring optimal productivity and innovation, thus achieving its mission as set out above. The leadership of this organisation took a decision to conduct an on-line employee engagement survey with the intention to measure the engagement levels amongst the employees. In addition, the leadership wanted to find out how willing and involved the employees are to perform their duties and contribute to the success of the organisation. An external consulting company conducted the employee engagement analysis to identify the levels of engagement amongst all employees in order to strive towards accomplishing effective employee engagement within the organisation. The survey was executed on 23 November 2013. The survey was distributed to a total of 158 participants (including the participants from a subsidiary of this reinsurance organisation) and a total of 121 responses were obtained.

The findings of the employee engagement survey can be summarised as follows:

- The average employee engagement level was reported at 24% across all the organisational levels, 65% of employees were not engaged and 11% were actively disengaged. These results, although statistically worse, are in line with research on this topic by others. For instance, research conducted by Gallup Consulting (2014) between January and December 2014 representing 2.5 million United States (U.S) employees, indicated that 31.5% of employees were engaged, 51% of employees were not engaged and 17.5% were actively disengaged. Further observation indicates that 26% of employees are engaged in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while 60% are not engaged and 14% are actively disengaged (Al Mehrzi & Singh 2016:832). In a study authorised by the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) on employee engagement, the research team found that about a third of the average respondent's workforce is highly engaged and nearly a quarter (23%) is disengaged or somewhat engaged (ASTD 2014).
- A drop in employee engagement levels between the ages of 26 and 35, as well as employees who have been in this reinsurance organisation for more than three years was revealed by the survey. This potential risk could have an impact on the organisational culture, leading to a disengaged and stagnant culture that does not drive both innovation and performance.
- The survey revealed valuable information that some managers are successful in managing and promoting employee engagement by providing feedback and recognition to their direct reports.
- The survey data indicated that management capacity building could impact positively to improve the current employee engagement, performance and productivity.

- Furthermore, the survey data displayed that a significant number of employees sense that management do not value their opinions and viewpoints. As such, these employees feel that there is no room for their participation outside of the rules and regulations.

If these findings are addressed, the opportunities for improvement will contribute to increased employee engagement levels leading to low levels of employee disengagement in this organisation. Some of the previous research studies conducted on employee engagement in South Africa are discussed below.

- The intention of de Jager (2017)'s quantitative study conducted within a South African Food and Beverage company's manufacturing division, was to describe the relationship between different leadership styles, experiences of performance management systems and employee engagement. The findings of the study revealed that there is a positive relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles and experiences of the performance management process as well as employee engagement. The Transformational leadership style motivates employees to be engaged by raising their emotional commitment and inspires them to focus on the leader's vision and goals. The Transactional leadership style clarifies the roles and responsibilities of employees, motivates them to get the work done and also rewards them.
- Moela (2017) conducted a quantitative study within a public service department to: (1) investigate the relationship between each of the dimensions of organisational culture and employee engagement respectively, (2) determine whether organisational culture is a statistically significant predictor of employee engagement, and (3) investigate the significant difference between demographical groups. The findings of the study indicated that organisational culture is positively linked to employee engagement and that the leadership dimension of organisational culture is a major, statistically significant predictor of the dimensions of employee engagement.
- The main aim of a quantitative study conducted by Ahmed (2016) was focused on the influence of leadership, organisational values and organisational change on employee engagement within a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous

environment. The study was conducted in a retail operation specialities function of South Africa's largest non-food retailer. The results suggested that the employees' senior leaders have a stronger influence on the levels of employee engagement amongst the employees compared to the employees' line managers. Furthermore, the study found that organisational values and organisational change have a positive and solid influence on employee engagement.

- Hlapo (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study within two of the largest platinum organisations situated in the North West province of South Africa. The aim of the study was to determine the levels of employee engagement in these large South African platinum mines, what the key drivers of employee engagement were and whether these drivers differed between management and employees. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study revealed that the levels of employee engagement were high amongst the majority of the participants. In addition, job design and characteristics, supervision, relationship with co-workers, workplace environment and Human Resource Development (HRD) practices were proven to be the drivers of employee engagement.
- The purpose of Pather's (2015) qualitative study was to examine the performance management processes in the context of employee engagement to overcome the employee engagement barriers, and to design an optimal employee engagement framework. The study was conducted with human resource professionals, senior, middle and change management who actively participated in both performance management and employee engagement strategies. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The author uncovered that the barriers to performance management go hand in hand with employee engagement. The barriers identified were: (1) leadership behaviours and traits which determine the level of trust, and (2) the complex design of the performance system which determines the participation level and leadership commitment. Therefore, employee engagement improves when these barriers are overcome.



- The primary objective of a quantitative study researched by Hill (2015) was to determine the influence of employee engagement on the customer experience of employee performance and the influence of customer experience of employee performance on overall customer experience and customer loyalty. The study was carried out in a South African mining and construction firm. The first finding showed that employee engagement had no influence on the customer experience of employee performance and the second finding revealed that the customer experience on employee performance did not have an influence on customer loyalty but had an influence on the overall customer experience due to the responsibility of the employee ensuring continuous communication and feedback to the customer.
- Seymour (2015) investigated the influence that dialogue sessions in work teams may have on employee engagement. The study used a quasi-experimental approach. The main findings of the study showed that team dialogues involve and influence the major dimensions of discretionary effort, turnover intention, rational and emotional commitment, communication, perceived supervisory support and co-worker relations/perceived team support that contribute to employee engagement.

Centred on the employee engagement research cited above, the researcher is of the opinion that organisations should pay more attention to the employee disengagement phenomenon because it has not been giving the same attention as the employee engagement phenomenon and yet employee disengagement has similar influence on both the employer and the employees as the employee engagement phenomenon.

This study focuses on the employees of a reinsurance organisation to find their reasons for disengagement. The study was not extended to the organisation's subsidiary as it is not in the same building as the reinsurance organisation but in another location in the Gauteng province. This was also due to budget and time constraints in finalising the research project. The study is important as no research has been conducted on employee disengagement in this organisation or in the reinsurance industry in Gauteng. In addition, very few studies have been done on employee disengagement as the focus has mainly been on the employee engagement phenomenon (Parkinson

& McBain 2014:71). Section 2.3 discusses in detail some previous studies conducted on employee disengagement.

This research will be useful for management of this organisation to identify the reasons for employee disengagement, notice early signs and be able to improve them. Also, the study will add to a broader knowledge in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), HRD and Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) in so far as both the identification and management of employee disengagement are concerned. Therefore, the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement are the main research objective of this study.

#### **1.4 META-THEORETICAL STATEMENTS**

Meta-theoretical statements or assumptions, imply the researcher's beliefs about the human being, society, the discipline and the purpose of the discipline. These assumptions are often enclosed in the worldview or paradigms and are not meant to be tested (Klopper 2008:67). The Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (SIOP) as cited in Giberson (2015:8) define Industrial and Organisational Psychology as the scientific study of the workplace. Within this study, employee engagement and disengagement are explored within the field of Organisational Psychology, HRM and HRD. Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes and Delbridge (2013:2666) go on to comment that employee engagement is being probed by scholars with diverse perspectives in industrial relations, work sociology, HRM and critical management studies. These scholars are raising new and challenging questions about the status of the employee engagement construct and the relevance thereof within the context of broader debates about the employment relationship.

##### **1.4.1 Literature Study**

For the literature study, the researcher consulted the following resources: textbooks, peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, reports, dissertations and theses from various universities. Internet searches were executed using the Nexus database, Ebsco Host, Google Scholar, South African Journal database, International Journal database, Emerald, Sage Journals Online and Sabinet. The literature study will cover

the definitions of key terms and the empirical study will cover the research design and methodology (section 3.2 and 3.3), data collection methods (3.4), data analysis (section 3.9), ethical considerations (section 3.10), trustworthiness (section 3.11) and triangulation (section 3.12). The literature will be compared with the findings obtained from the individual and focus group interviews as a control to the research findings in sections 4.6 to 4.10 and sections 5.6 to 5.10. The researcher used the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing method.

Keywords for searches were: reinsurance, employee engagement, employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation.

### **1.4.2 Empirical Study**

The study was conducted in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng. The target population was all the employees (levels 2 to 7) who were employed by this organisation when the employee engagement survey was conducted on 23 November 2013.

For this study, individual interviews, also referred to as one-on-one or face-to-face interviews aimed at managers from level 5 to level 7 (section 3.5.1 ) and focus group interviews aimed at the general staff and specialists/ assistant managers from level 2 to level 4 (section 3.5.2 ) were used to collect qualitative data.

## **1.5 MOTIVATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

This study has been motivated by management's desire to take action based on the results of the on-line employee engagement survey initiated on 23 November 2013. The survey disclosed a high level of employee disengagement in this organisation which is a great concern. Furthermore, the survey revealed that this high number of not engaged and actively disengaged employees (76%) poses a risk to the organisation. These employees will have a detrimental influence on the performance and organisational culture if not managed accordingly. It is crucial that employees remain actively engaged for the organisation to survive and yield anticipated results.

In return, these will add to the organisation's bottom line in terms of growth and profitability.

Centred on the above-mentioned survey results and the fact that most of the previous studies on employee engagement in South Africa were quantitative (Hill 2015; Ahmed 2016; Moela 2017 & de Jager 2017) , a qualitative study is deemed the best approach to identify the reasons for employee disengagement by obtaining rich and detailed information from the participants. Furthermore, it is essential to validate the results of the employee engagement survey as this instrument is still in the validation phase. The survey did not investigate the reasons for employee disengagement; therefore there is a real need for this research to find out what the current situation is and also to validate the results of the 2013 employee engagement survey.

The study focuses on all the levels of employees. The intention is to pinpoint the reasons for employee disengagement and to research what possible solutions can be put in place to address this phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, disengaged employees refer to not engaged and actively disengaged employees. The researcher chose the reinsurance organisation based on convenience as she is employed as a Human Resource Officer (HRO) in this organisation and has been granted permission to conduct this research. Additionally, there is a lack of research on employee disengagement in the reinsurance industry.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

The following research questions and research objectives were developed for the literature and empirical studies in order to achieve the main objective of this study.

### **1.6.1 Research questions**

The main questions that arise from this study are formulated as follows:

What are the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to improve the employee disengagement phenomenon at a reinsurance organisation?

### **1.6.2 Research questions of the literature study**

The research questions of the literature study are defined as:

- How are employee engagement and employee disengagement conceptualised in the literature?
- What reasons for employee engagement and employee disengagement are conceptualised in the literature?
- What solutions for employee disengagement are conceptualised in the literature?

### **1.6.3 Research questions of the empirical study**

The research questions of the empirical study are described as:

- What are the reasons for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- What are the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- Which recommendations and guidelines can be explored and developed to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?

### **1.6.4 Research objectives**

The primary objective of the study is to establish the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to improve the employee disengagement phenomenon at a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.

### **1.6.5 Research objectives of the literature study**

The following are the proposed objectives of the literature study:

- To conceptualise employee engagement and employee disengagement from the literature perspective.
- To conceptualise reasons for employee engagement and employee disengagement from the literature perspective.
- To conceptualise the possible solutions for employee disengagement from the literature perspective.

### **1.6.6 Research objectives of the empirical study**

The following are the objectives of the empirical study:

- To explore and describe the views of employees and managers with regard to the reasons for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.
- To explore and describe the views of employees and managers with regard to the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.
- To develop recommendations and guidelines to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.

## **1.7 POTENTIAL VALUE OF THE STUDY**

This study will potentially add value to this reinsurance organisation as it will probe the reasons contributing to employee disengagement and thus enable the Human Resource department, management and the employees to gain insight and understanding about the possible solutions to promote employee engagement. The possible solutions might lead to increased productivity, employee willingness and

commitment, which in turn might influence employee engagement and sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation. Likewise, the study may present other organisations with greater understanding of why employees become disengaged and what possible solutions they may put in place to address the issues at hand. The theoretical contribution will provide an understanding of the relationship between employee engagement and leadership, organisational culture and motivation. Due to the lack of sufficient literature on employee disengagement, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge.

In addition, this study aims to contribute and add value to the body of knowledge in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) by establishing best practices and providing both the employer and employees with the information that will assist them to become engaged in an appropriate way, to combat the employee disengagement phenomenon.

## **1.8 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The philosophy of science refers to understanding science which involves insight into discussions on matters such as the nature of science, scientific knowledge, methods and the value of science. Authors who have started discussions on this philosophy have tried to answer the metaphysical problems in the search to answer ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological questions (Petrovic, Koprivica & Bokan 2017:181). The ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological assumptions are discussed for this study:

### **1.8.1 Ontological assumptions**

According to Carey (2012:79) and Guba (1990) as cited in Johnson and Christensen (2014:31) and Fletcher (2017:182) ontology symbolises what is real and asks extensive questions about the nature of the object to be known. The researcher believes that by interacting with the research participants, it would be possible to establish the truth about the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement in this organisation.

### **1.8.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemology assumptions refers to the association of a researcher to the subject of research. It includes the researcher's method of acquiring knowledge and answers the question, "How do we know?" (Veal 2011:31; Hays & Singh 2012:35; Guba 1990; as cited in Johnson & Christensen 2014:31; Fletcher 2017:182). The researcher is employed as a Human Resource Officer in the organisation, therefore has a relationship with the participants and strived to be as objective as possible throughout the research process. The researcher's conviction is that through own interaction with the research participants, by means of individual and focus group interviews, they will provide valuable information that can be analysed and interpreted to understand the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement in this organisation.

### **1.8.3 Methodological assumptions**

Methodological assumptions refers to decisions taken by a researcher regarding the selection of research paradigms, research questions and data collection methods to be used or followed in a particular study (Hays & Singh 2012:36-37; Guba 1990; as cited in Johnson & Christensen 2014:31). The researcher identified the constructivist and interpretivist research paradigms, research questions and individual and focus groups interviews as data collection methods to be followed for this study. These aspects will be discussed in sections 3.2.2, 3.4, 3.5.1 and 3.5.2. The researcher's assumptions for this research study is that these approaches would enable the researcher to gain deeper understanding of reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement from numerous viewpoints. The individual and focus group interviews would enable the researcher to collect adequate evidence of the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement in this organisation.

### **1.8.4 Axiological assumptions**

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016:128) state that axiology refers to the role of values and ethics within the research procedure. This includes the questions about how researchers deal with their own values and those of the research participants. For



this study, the researcher's own values and those of the research participants play an important role if the research findings are to be trustworthy. Furthermore, the researcher values the personal interaction with the research participants through the individual and focus group interviews.

## **1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research methodology was followed since this is an explorative and descriptive type of study. According to Grove, Gray and Burns (2015:77) and Struwig and Stead (2013:6-7) explorative research investigate a problem which is little known while descriptive research aims to present a comprehensive description of a setting or situation. In qualitative research the approach is of openness, the participant is an expert and the duty of a researcher is to listen and learn (Hedges & Williams 2014:188).

Glasper and Rees (2013:129) affirm that qualitative studies "revolve around the attempt to construct a view of the social world of the participants in a study from their own perspective and by concentrating on the richness and depth of information that is possible from the processes involved". A more detailed description of the research design (section 3.2), research methodology (section 3.3), sampling (section 3.3.4), data collection methods (sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2) and data analysis (section 3.9) are specified in chapter 3.

## **1.10 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The population is described as a number of people, organisations or objects from which a researcher draws a sample (Gray 2014:688). The population in this study consisted of employees who were in the employ of this reinsurance organisation in Gauteng when the employee engagement survey was conducted on 23 November 2013. When this study was conducted, the total population of the targeted participants was eighty two (82) employees.

According to Kumar (2014:229) sampling refers to a process of selecting a sample from a population. The purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to gain in-depth information about the situation or an individual with assumptions that the respective

individual will provide insight into the group (Kumar 2014:228). The researcher used purposive sampling in this study. Johnson and Christensen (2014:264) and Gupta and Pathak (2017:783) state that purposive or judgemental sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which uses the researcher's judgement to select the participants with specific characteristics to participate in the research study. Sections 3.3.3 to 3.3.4 discuss in detail population and sampling of this study.

### **1.11 DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

Observation, semi-structured, unstructured and group interviews are commonly used to collect data in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews also referred to as formal interviews are supplemented by an interview guide to confirm that the researcher gathers the same data from each participant. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data with managers and focus groups. Section 3.4 will discuss these aspects in more detail.

### **1.12 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic analysis that involves the coding of data into themes. This manual analysis involves reading through the gathered information and identifying patterns, words and phrases common to all participants (Quick & Hall 2015:132). The researcher followed the seven steps involved in analysing data and Tesch's eight steps in the coding process as described by Creswell (2014:197- 200) in section 3.9.

### **1.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Babbie (2016:62) ethics is usually associated with morality and deals with matters of right and wrong. The author citing from *Webster's New World Dictionary*, defines ethical as "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group". Therefore, the requirements for anyone involved in social science research, is to be aware of the general agreements shared by researchers about what is right and wrong in the conduct of a scientific investigation. The aim is to protect the dignity, safety

and interests of the participants who participate in a research study (Quick & Hall 2015:130). The researcher obtained the signed consent forms from the participants who participated in the study and maintained fairness, confidentiality and anonymity during the process of this study. Therefore, the researcher was guided by the ethics procedures of the University of South Africa and adhered to all the ethical requirements. These principles are elaborated on in detail in Section 3.10.

#### **1.14 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

In qualitative research, the alternative ways to assess the quality of data are trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness reveals the degree of confidence that qualitative researchers have in their data (Gray 2014:185-6). Lincoln and Guba (1994) as cited in Gray (2014:185) identify criteria to ensure trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to Holtzhausen (2017:770) trustworthiness is deemed to be important as it impacts on the quality of the findings as well as the ethical and responsible use of the results. These aspects are discussed in more detail in Section 3.11 of this study.

#### **1.15 LIMITATIONS**

Limitations refers to problems a researcher might encounter when carrying out his or her study (Kumar 2014:273). This study was limited to one reinsurance organisation only in Gauteng as the disengagement problem was identified in this organisation. Although permission was given to conduct the research, some employees were reluctant and uncomfortable to participate in the study as the researcher was their colleague who knew them and who was used as a tool to conduct the research. To avoid this, the researcher was open and honest; assured the participants that information will be kept confidential and that the participants will remain anonymous.

#### **1.16 DELIMITATIONS**

Delimitations refer to boundaries or choices that a researcher has set for his/her study (Simon 2010:277; Steven 2016:42). For this study, the researcher chose qualitative

research methodology over quantitative research methodology. The employee engagement survey conducted in 2013 was a quantitative study and the results thereof were validated by conducting individual and focus group interviews. This method allowed the researcher to actively engage with the participants, while the aim was to probe and gain new insights into the problem of employee disengagement. Also, the researcher's focus was only on one reinsurance organisation in the Gauteng province.

## 1.17 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

The following are key terms used in this study:

**Reinsurance:** Biener, Eling and Jia (2017:213) describe reinsurance as the last resort for the insurance industry and global economy as it functions as shock absorbers and risk bearers for them. A reinsurance contract consists of the insurance company referred to as the cedent, purchasing the reinsurance and the company selling the reinsurance is referred to as the reinsurer (D'Ortona & Marcarelli 2017:366). Reinsurance provide primary insurers with services such as underwriting, pricing, claim management and consultancy assisting primary insurers to protect their policy holders against risks such as natural catastrophes, terrorism and longevity (Biener et al. 2017:213).

**Employee engagement:** Employee engagement is explained as a phenomenon that becomes apparent when employees have a sense of control over what they are responsible for and they feel competent and efficient in their ability to do their work (Csikszentmihalyi 1990 as cited in Rothmann & Welsh 2013:15). Tucker (2017:107) describes employee engagement as a multiple-stakeholder process involving HR, leaders, managers and employees. Employee engagement is summarised by Cook (2008), as quoted in Khuong and Yen (2014:125), as how positively the employee thinks and feels about the organisation and how proactive an employee is in relation to achieving organisational goals for customers, colleagues and other stakeholders.

Vorina, Simonič and Vlasova (2017:246) elaborate that employee engagement implies the employees' competency and willingness to contribute to the success of the organisation, going beyond what is expected of them to make the organisation

successful. For the purpose of this study, employee engagement refers to employees who are generally committed, loyal and willing to assist others and are productive, innovative and more likely to stay with the organisation in the long run to improve overall profitability.

**Employee disengagement:** According to Sibiya, Buitendach, Kanengoni and Bobat (2014:132) employee disengagement refers to when employees uncouple themselves from their work roles, withdrawing and disconnecting from a given area of performance and disengage from their work or from certain aspects of their jobs. Barros, Costello, Beaman and Westover (2015:90) highlight that organisations that disregard aspects of employee engagement are possibly losing returns because of costs associated with employee turnover and loss of productivity from disengaged employees. For this study, employee disengagement refers to both not engaged and actively disengaged employees.

## 1.18 CHAPTER LAYOUT

**Chapter 1** introduces the background of the organisation, the findings of the 2013 employee engagement survey, the meta-theoretical statements, the motivation and the problem statement, the research questions and the objectives of the research and the potential value of the study. It also outlines the assumptions of the study, the research methodology, population and sampling, data collection method and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the ethical considerations, trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations of the study, definitions of key terms, along with the layout of chapters.

**Chapter 2** provides the literature review on aspects dealing with employee engagement and employee disengagement. This chapter reviews books, reports, peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, reports, dissertations and theses from various universities on the topics of employee engagement and employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation.

**Chapter 3** explains the qualitative research design, the research methods, the data collection process (individual and focus group interviews), the process of data analysis and the use of an independent coder and transcriber.

**Chapter 4** interprets the data analysis and discusses five main themes and 14 sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the focus group interviews.

**Chapter 5** discusses the data analysis from the individual interviews. Five main themes and 13 sub-themes emerged from the data analysis of the individual interviews.

**Chapter 6** states the conclusions, strength, limitations, recommendations and guidelines of the study. The study also points out areas for future research.

## **1.19 SUMMARY**

Chapter 1 presented the introduction and background of the reinsurance organisation; the findings of a previous employee engagement survey conducted at the organisation, the motivation of the study, the research questions and the objectives of the study. The chapter included the qualitative research methodology and the assumptions of the study, the ethical considerations as well as the limitations and the delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 will provide a literature review on the aspects of employee engagement and disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation.

## **CHAPTER 2 : ASPECTS DEALING WITH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 provided the introduction to this study which covered the background of the reinsurance organisation, the employee engagement survey, the meta-theoretical statements, the motivation and the problem statement, the research questions and the objectives of the research and the potential value of the study. It also outlined the assumptions of the study, the research methodology, population and sampling, data collection method and data analysis. Lastly, it discussed the ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations of the study and presented definitions of key terms, along with the chapter layout.

Steinert and Thomas (2016:398) explain that literature reviews in general, describe what is known or not known about a particular topic and can identify the background for a larger portion of empirical work or stand on their own. Also, literature reviews highlight gaps for future guidelines in the field being studied. In this chapter the literature will be reviewed in order to search for knowledge and understanding on the major aspects of this research. Researchers such as Alarcon, Lyons and Tartaglia (2010:302), Naidoo and Martins (2014:432) and Cheng and Chang (2019:31) have expounded that leadership, organisational culture and motivation are organisational factors or aspects that influence employee engagement. Therefore, the aspects identified by the researcher for this chapter and which will be covered in the literature review are:

- Employee engagement
- Employee disengagement
- Leadership and employee engagement
- Organisational culture and employee engagement
- Motivation and employee engagement

These aspects will now be discussed in detail.

## 2.2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement is an exceptionally popular concept in the field of Human Resources Development (HRD) and it is intensifying in other academic disciplines such as psychology and management. The healthcare discipline has also reported similar increases in scholarly interest in the construct (Shuck & Reio 2011:420; Shuck, Twyford, Reio & Shuck 2014:244; Rana 2015:308). Clifton and Nelson cited in Shuck and Reio (2011:420) comment that employee engagement has gained recognition in the practitioner literature since early 1990s; authors and consulting groups have staked their claim to the employee engagement construct. Many have developed unique human resource and organisational development offerings and interventions around this construct.

According to Nimon, Shuck and Zigarmi (2016:1150) and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG)'s research (2012:4) the well-known method of gauging employee engagement in an organisation is to perform a quantitative survey. The analysis thereof provides an organisation with the numbers and statistics to determine the extent of employee engagement, and put in place certain interventions to raise morale and commitment.

Sinha and Trivedi (2014:22) advocate that measuring employee engagement has become a crucial aspect in any organisation. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC)'s research study (2015:3) asserts that high performing organisations and those conducting frequent engagement surveys including taking action on the survey results, disclose an extensively higher performance compared to their competitors. Engagement levels are approximately 20% higher at organisations who frequently conduct employee engagement studies.

Employee engagement is intensely connected to business outcomes such as productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction. These outcomes are essential to an organisation's fiscal success (Gallup 2013:12; Rothmann 2017:317). Aslam, Muqadas, Imran and Rahman (2018:149) declare that organisations that have a huge



percentage of engaged employees have 51 percent better productivity compared to organisations with low employee engagement levels.

### **2.2.1 Definition of employee engagement**

Employee engagement has been defined in various ways and has attracted much empirical research, yet there is no agreement reached on its precise meaning. This confusion is further made complex or complicated by misuse of the terms “work engagement” and “employee engagement” (Nienaber & Martins 2016:3). Du Plessis and Martins (2017:26) and Nienaber and Martins (2016:3-4) state that the term “employee engagement” is more accepted among the professionals and includes the relationship between employees’ occupational roles and their organisation. By contrast, “work engagement” is the favourite concept used by academics because the focus is on the relationships employees have with their work activities. Saunders and Tiwari (2014:44) and Vorina et al. (2017:247) concur that employee engagement is equally referred to as work engagement. It is a business management concept and a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are motivated to contribute to the organisational success and committed to their organisation’s goals and values (Vorina et al. 2017:247).

Macey and Schneider, as cited in Nienaber and Martins (2016:4), emphasise that whilst the concept of “employee engagement” has grown drastically in terms of definition and measurement, empirical research on the concept within the academic approach has trailed behind. There is room for scholarly exploration, growth and discussion around the topic of employee engagement as no evaluative method for HRD has been proposed (Shuck & Reio 2011:420; Shuck et al. 2014:244). Lewis (2011), as quoted in Rothmann and Baumann (2014:517), postulates that employee engagement is a state that resides within a person rather than the job. It can be interpreted as a mixture of a positive psychological contract and the willingness to offer discretionary behaviour (Shultz & Bezuidenhout 2013:1). Employee engagement is the employees’ ability and willingness to contribute, give discretionary effort and go beyond what is usually required in their position to make the organisation successful (Vorina et al. 2017:246).

Similarly, Macey and Schneider, as cited in Mishra, Sharma and Bhaskar (2015:470), define employee engagement as enthusiasm regarding work, absorption in work, and high energy towards work. Furthermore, Kahn (1990:694) and Kahn and Heaphy (2014), as quoted in Rothmann and Baumann (2014:515), define employee engagement as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance”. Rothmann and Baumann (2014:515-516) supplemented this definition by describing the physical state as having high levels of energy and mental flexibility while working and willing to put extra effort into one’s work. The cognitive state refers to an individual being entirely focused and contently immersed in his/her work, whilst the emotional state refers to a strong involvement with one’s work while experiencing a sense of worth, interest and self-importance.

Schaufeli (2002), in Rothmann (2017:319), argues that employee engagement consists of three dimensions, namely vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour is described by high energy levels whilst working and the willingness to put more effort into work tasks, including persistence during difficult times. Dedication is illustrated by a sense of inspiration, pride, enthusiasm and looking forward to challenges. Absorption refers to the concentration, whereby time passes quickly and employees find it difficult to detach from their work (Rothmann & Rothmann 2010:2; Bakker 2011:265; Chaudhary, Rangnekar & Barua 2013:93; Bakker 2014:228; Nienaber & Martins 2016:12-13). Albrecht (2010), in Parkinson and McBain (2014:71), contends that although the different employee engagement definitions are highlighted by overlapping constructs (cognitive, emotional and physical components or meaningfulness, safety and availability conditions), they all apply to positive, work-related psychological states and that employee engagement is a unique construct.

Anitha (2014:308) concurs that employee engagement is expressed as the level of commitment and involvement employees have towards their organisation and its values. An engaged employee has a positive attitude and understands the business goals. He or she is aware of his responsibilities and motivates his or her colleagues alongside, for the success of the organisation. Gallup researchers Fleming and Asplund (2007:2), as cited in Anitha (2014:310), elaborated that employee

engagement is: “the ability to capture the heads, hearts and souls of your employees to instil an intrinsic desire and passion for excellence”.

Marais (2013:82) states that engagement means making a meaningful contribution by successfully completing a project and being rewarded immediately. Also, engagement is about having utmost access to technology to enhance performance and having a work environment where one has the independence and freedom to balance work and one’s life. For this study, the researcher is of the opinion that it is important for organisations to understand the levels of employee engagement, the characteristics of engaged employees, conditions of employee engagement, determinants of employee engagement and the drivers of employee engagement. This understanding could assist in dealing with issues hindering employee engagement in the organisations. In this study “employee engagement” is regarded as the relationship between the employee’s work, occupation and the organisation, as postulated by Nienaber and Martins (2016:3-4).

### **2.2.2 Levels of employee engagement**

Khuong and Yen (2014:125), when citing Sanchez and McCauley (2006), suggest that knowing the employee engagement levels may possibly assist leaders to enhance the employee-employer relationship and facilitate employees in moving to the next engagement level. The levels of employee engagement and the corresponding descriptions described by Dash (2013:85-86) are depicted in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Levels of employee engagement**

Types of employees	Their nature
Engaged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employees work with passion.</li> <li>2. They feel a profound connection to their company.</li> <li>3. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward.</li> </ol>
Not engaged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employees are essentially checked out.</li> <li>2. They are sleepwalking through their workday, putting time, but not energy or passion into their work.</li> </ol>
Actively disengaged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employees are just unhappy at work.</li> <li>2. They are busy acting out their unhappiness.</li> <li>3. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.</li> </ol>

Source: Dash (2013:85)

Similarly, the three categories of employees in the workplace identified by Gallup (2017:63) are:

1. Engaged employees are highly involved, passionate about their work and their workplace. These employees are psychological “owners”, they are innovative, drive performance and they move their organisation forward.
2. Not engaged employees can be difficult to spot as these employees are not hostile and disruptive (Gallup 2013:17). According to Purcell (2014:243) not engaged employees are employees who are basically ‘checked-out’, they have no passion and do not put energy into their work.

3. Actively disengaged employees can be described as employees who are not happy at work but are resentful that their needs are not being met. (Gallup 2017:63).

The main similarities between the levels of engagement and the categories above are: engaged employees are passionate, innovative and are eager to move their organisation forward, whereas the not engaged employees are checked-out and have no passion or energy for their work. Likewise, the actively disengaged employees are unhappy at work. Gallup (2017:17) states that the not engaged employees are difficult to spot while Dash (2013:85) mentions that the not engaged employees sleepwalk through their work day. The other difference is that actively disengaged employees undermine what engaged employees are accomplishing (Dash 2013:85) while Gallup (2017:63) reveals that disengaged employees are resentful that their needs are not being met.

Gallup's (2017:63) categories and Dash's (2013:85-86) levels of employee engagement were also confirmed by Aon's (2015:13) study of employee engagement which also ranked employee engagement levels into three categories. The Aon (2015:13) study provided the following three categories of employee engagement levels:

1. The engaged employees can further be split into highly and moderately engaged employees. Highly engaged employees deliver the most value to the organisation, well beyond the moderately engaged employees.
2. The not engaged or passive employees display uncertainty toward their jobs and their employers which is sometimes positive or negative. These employees could either become more engaged or they could disengage completely if not effectively managed.
3. Actively disengaged employees do not strive to go an extra mile, do not see a long-term path and do not say positive things about the organisation. Almost two out of ten employees in an organisation are actively disengaged.

PWC (2015:07) contends that there are four categories of employees in the workplace namely: champions, tenants, captives and disconnected employees.

1. The champions are employees who are motivated, energised to achieve and reveal a high desire to remain in the organisation.
2. The tenants are the opposite of the champions in the sense that they are energised and motivated but are less committed to stay in an organisation. The tenants are not bad for the organisation as they bring energy and focus but they may require additional guidance to help stay on track.
3. The captives are less energised or motivated and show low levels of engagement but have a strong desire to stay in an organisation. These employees are often the biggest risk in an organisation because they are not planning to go anywhere.
4. The disconnected employees are neither committed to stay nor motivated to contribute in the organisation. Although it is likely that they are actively doing so on their own, the best strategy is to help these employees find ways to leave the organisation (PWC 2015:07).

The Gallup (2017:61) study indicated that 33% of US employees are engaged at work, this is the highest figure in Gallup's fifteen (15) plus years of tracing employee engagement. It is a concern that the majority of 51% of employees are not engaged while 16% of employees are actively disengaged. In South Africa, 9% of employees are engaged, 46% of employees are not engaged while 45% of employees are actively disengaged (Gallup 2013:56). According to Aon (2017:7), 2016 trends in a global engagement report revealed that 24% of employees around the world are highly engaged, 39% are moderately engaged, 22% are passive while 15% are actively disengaged.

Schultz and Bezuidenhout (2013:1) point out that an average five-year return on investments to shareholders of more than 20% is as a result of organisations in which 60% of employees are engaged. That compares to organisations where only 46% of the employees are engaged, rendering an average total return on investment to shareholders of about 6% (Schultz & Bezuidenhout 2013:1).

### 2.2.3 Characteristics of engaged employees

Research has advocated that engaged employees are more likely to be productive, remain with their current employer and relate positively with their customers (Shuck, Reio & Rocco, 2011; Chalofsky, 2010 as cited in Shuck & Reio 2014:43). Engaged employees are involved and are 100% psychologically committed to their work, they know the scope of their jobs and look for innovative and better ways to achieve outcomes. These employees are best colleagues and the only people in the organisation who create new customers (Gallup 2013:17).

According to Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout (2014:326) typically engaged employees likewise have the following characteristics:

- They are active agents - engaged employees are optimistic and trust themselves. They take initiative and have a plan for their lives.
- They generate their own positive feedback – through their attitudes, engaged employees generate their own feedback and create “rewards in the form of recognition and success”.
- They are also engaged outside their work – engaged employees have energy that never seems to dwindle both in their private and work lives.
- They have values that match the organisation’s values – engaged employees experience meaning through their work due to their norms and values which correspond with those of their organisation.
- They sometimes feel tired as well – engaged employees experience exhaustion because their energy reserves are also limited. However, the exhaustion can be described as “exhausted but satisfied”.
- They want to work less as they are not “workaholics” – engaged employees derive satisfaction in their work and also enjoy participating in community work.

Kahn and Fellows (2013:109) state that engaged employees experience four dimensions that describe them as fully engaged namely: attentive, connected, integrated and absorbed.

- Attentive – engaged employees pay attention to their surroundings.
- Connected – engaged employees are connected to their organisations' mission and purpose, and feel connected to those working towards the similar goal.
- Integrated – engaged employees are attentive towards the work they do, they are there to act instead of observing while at work.
- Absorbed – engaged employees absorb themselves in the work they do instead of remaining distant and apart from a situation.

Engaged employees perform better than non-engaged employees, they always experience positive emotions which includes enthusiasm. These employees experience better health, create their own job satisfaction and transfer their engagement to others. They are totally dedicated to their work (Purcell 2014:243). In addition, engaged employees are passionate about their work, feel connected to their organisations, drive innovation and move their organisations forward (Gallup 2013) in Rothmann (2017:327). Khattak, Batool, Rehman, Fayaz and Asif (2017:62) assert that engaged employees contribute extensively to the bottom line of the organisation which may lead to organisational growth, and productivity. The Public Display Technologies (PDT) survey (2014:02) explains that building an engaged workforce is a long term and ongoing initiative.

To retain engaged employees, it is essential for organisations to implement strategies such as building a positive and supportive healthy work environment, providing employees with appropriate resources, continuous monitoring of any doubt in the workplace which may bring happier and productive employees, which in turn leads to organisational accomplishment (Bhuvanaiah & Raya 2014:69; Khattak et al. 2017:62).

According to Hoole and Bonnema (2015:2) an engaged workforce may increase the competitive edge required in the current economic landscape. Although high levels of employee engagement add value, low levels can have unfavourable and negative results on the bottom line of organisations. The authors elaborate that disengaged employee-related productivity losses translate into billions of dollars per year. The employee disengagement cost is explained in detail in section 2.3 of this chapter.



## **2.2.4 Conditions for employee engagement**

As stated by Kahn (1990:703) there are three psychological conditions that employees experience at work and which influence them to personally engage. The conditions are meaningfulness, safety and availability. Meaningfulness refers to the feeling of being worthwhile, useful and valuable as experienced by employees. Safety refers to the trust the employees have that they are safe to engage and express themselves without fear. Availability denotes the psychological, physical and emotional resources available to employees at a particular moment to personally engage. Furthermore, employees in each work situation ask themselves three questions which determine if they are engaged or not, depending on their answers: (1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance? (2) How safe is it do to so? and (3) How available am I to do so?

Rothmann and Welsh (2013:16) and Rothmann and Baumann (2014:516) concur that the psychological meaningfulness relates to the value that people attach to a work goal compared to their own personal goals. Psychological safety refers to the experience of being able to act in a natural way and to be able to employ and use all skills in a role without negative consequences. Finally, psychological availability denotes the competence to engage as repayment for the resources employees receive from their organisation. The three conditions have a significant influence on both employee engagement and employee disengagement.

## **2.2.5 Determinants of employee engagement**

Anitha (2014:310) conducted a quantitative study to identify the vital determinants of employee engagement and their predictability of the concept. The study consolidated a number of elements that contributed to Kahn's (1990:703) three psychological conditions of employee engagement (meaningless, safety and availability) and employee engagement in general. These elements were empirically tested and found to be legitimate determinants of employee engagement. Figure 2.1 denotes the elements facilitating employee engagement and are discussed below.

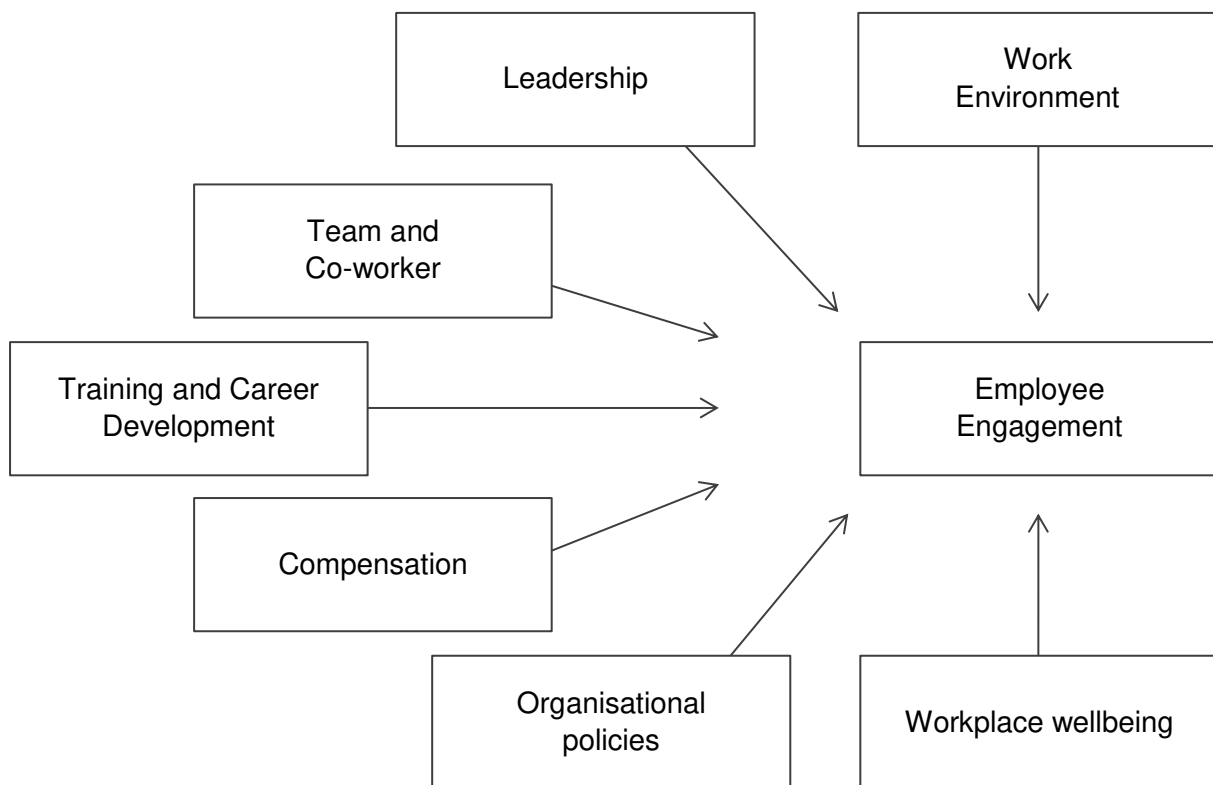


Figure 2.1: Determinants of employee engagement

Source: Anitha (2014:311)

**Work environment** was found to be an important element that determines employee levels of engagement. A supportive working environment which displays concern for employees' needs and feelings, develops the skills of employees, provides positive feedback and encourages employees to raise their concerns and is believed to be a key determinant of employee engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1987 as cited in Anitha 2014:311).

**Leadership** was identified as a fundamental element to inform employee engagement. Wallace and Trinka (2009)'s study as cited in Anitha (2014:311) demonstrates that when leaders are aspiring, employee engagement happens naturally. It is the duty of leaders to communicate to employees that their efforts play a huge role in the success of the business, this leads to the employees' increased interest and engagement.

**Team and co-worker relationship** is another element identified as a determinant of employee engagement. A supportive team as well as trusting interpersonal relationships promote employee engagement. Supportive work environments give employees an opportunity to experiment or try new things and even fail without fear of being punished (Kahn 1990 cited in Anitha 2014:311).

**Training and career development** is also important as it improves the confidence of employees who undergo training and learning development programmes. Alderfer (1972) as cited in Anitha (2014:312) indicates that when an organisation offers employees a chance to grow, it is equivalent to rewarding people. Management needs to give attention to their career path ladder through training and development, which leads to opportunities for growth and development. This improves employee engagement levels amongst the employees.

**Compensation and remuneration** is an essential motivator for employees to achieve more and focus on their work and personal development as it involves both non-financial and financial rewards. Recognition and rewards lead to higher levels of employee engagement amongst the employees (Saks & Rotman 2010 as quoted in Anitha 2014:312).

**Organisational policies, procedures, structures and systems** are also crucial as they identify the extent to which employees are engaged in an organisation. Also, the achievement of business goals can be measured (Anitha 2014:312).

**Workplace well-being** is an overall measure that improves employee engagement as it is used to gauge the influence the organisation has on its employees. According to the Towers Perrin Talent Report (2003) cited in Anitha (2014:313), the vital influencer of employee engagement was senior management's interest in their employee wellbeing.

Anitha (2014:320) reckons that these key determinants of employee engagements should be fostered by managers and employers to provide a work environment whereby employees will become positively engaged. Figure 2.1 in this section can be

used by organisations to focus on the outcomes that would be beneficial to both employers and employees. Section 2.2.6 will discuss the drivers of employee engagement.

### **2.2.6 Drivers of employee engagement**

Dávila and Piña-Ramírez (2014:6) hold the position that employee engagement is self-motivated because it changes throughout the course of an employee's tenure in the workplace; therefore it is important to address the factors that contribute in moving employee engagement in a particular direction. These factors are often referred to as drivers of employee engagement and are utilised to influence employee engagement. Managers are encouraged to implement these drivers in conjunction with the culture of the organisation to have an impact on employee engagement.

PWC (2015:10) suggests that employee engagement drivers are directed and shaped by leadership vision and manager effectiveness. The more employees experience these drivers, the more likely they are to demonstrate higher levels of employee engagement. The main drivers of employee engagement which have been identified are: leadership vision, respect and fairness, growth and development, commitment to quality and co-operation/collaboration. The summarised drivers (PWC 2015:12-14) are:

- Leadership vision – this is the strongest driver of employee engagement worldwide. It reflects the trust and confidence the employees have in the leadership of an organisation. The employees are motivated by the vision for the future including stability and job security.
- Respect and fairness – employees are likely to be engaged when they feel that they are treated fairly and with respect. If employees feel that the work environment is one of favouritism, their levels of employee engagement will decline.
- Growth and development – this driver reveals how justly employees are supported in their growth and development. If employees cannot see their own future in an organisation, they will likely have decreased levels of employee engagement.

- Commitment to quality – when an organisation supports its employees' efforts to deliver excellence, the levels of employee engagement will increase.
- Co-operation/collaboration – co-operation and collaboration between departments create a more innovative work culture. The more the employees feel supported by colleagues, the more engaging the work environment becomes.

Mindset (2013) concurs that there are a number of employee engagement drivers that impact on the levels of willingness and commitment within an organisation. These drivers, except for the strategic direction and personal development, differ with the drivers identified by PWC (2015:12-14) above and are summarised below:

- Strategic direction – this driver refers to whether employees are aware of and understand the organisation strategy.
- Line of sight on corporate goals – this driver measures whether the employees understand how they contribute towards the organisational goals.
- Employee voice and participation – this driver measures whether the employees feel empowered to contribute and participate in the decision making.
- Enabling work environment – this driver refers to factors related to the physical environment in which the employees find themselves when driving the engaged practices.
- Feedback and recognition – this driver alludes to employees receiving regular feedback including recognition and being appreciated.
- Personal development – this driver refers to the individual development and opportunities to grow.
- Engaging manager – this driver measures whether managers are perceived as fair and consistent in their interaction with employees.

Furthermore, Dávila and Piña-Ramírez (2016:7) assert that in career development, financial and external incentives are important to the employees and do impact on their decision to either stay or leave the organisation. The employees' qualities and contributions, regardless of their job levels are respected by successful organisations. These organisations also acknowledge that empowering its employees by involving

them in decisions that affect their jobs, increases the levels of employee engagement in their organisations (Gupta 2015:46).

### **2.2.7 The importance of employee engagement**

Ibrahim and Falasi (2014), as cited in Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016:831), established that managers ought to address the importance of employee engagement because it will enhance employee performance, increase job satisfaction and thus lead the organisation to achieve goals. Therefore employee engagement is a crucial subject for organisational leaders. Dash (2013:86) concurs that employee engagement is a mixture of factors such as organisational commitment, belongingness, job satisfaction, employee involvement and organisational citizenship. The success of employee engagement links to higher levels of productivity, added customer satisfaction and low rates of absence.

Khattak et al. (2017:62) and Rao (2017:128) emphasise that employee engagement can be a valuable resource of competitive advantage for the organisation. It improves performance and productivity in the organisation. It also provides customer satisfaction and improves the organisational bottom lines. Ultimately, employee engagement increases shareholders value. Engaged employees are more attentive and alert, they are responsible for the results of their work and that of the organisation; they are creative and help other employees see the connection between their everyday work and the larger purpose or mission of the organisation.

Bhuvanaiah and Raya (2015:95) assert that employee engagement is an important contemporary phenomenon. Engaged employees are satisfied, committed, highly performing and innovated, and this leads to a healthy organisation. With a genuine effort from management, it is possible to achieve engaged employees by facilitating them with suitable opportunities. Creating a platform for employees to express themselves and understanding their preferences, is management's major responsibility to drive employee engagement as it motivates employees to increase both their performance and employee engagement levels.

Employee engagement has an influence on the areas of HRD and HRM practice as well as the successful development thereof, and it is anticipated to increase organisational performance (Shuck & Wollard 2010:92; Shuck et al. 2014:240). Likewise, HR initiative programmes such as training, the recruiting process, employee branding, employee well-being, work/life balance and leadership development all lead an employee to be fully engaged and a productive human resource (Dash 2013:86). The United Kingdom (UK) National Health Service, as cited in Purcell (2014:241), echoes that well-constructed studies of employee engagement can inform policies and practices to improve employees' health, work relations and all aspects of performance.

Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016:832) highlight that employee engagement is critical for the success of the organisation. Therefore, managers have a duty to make work meaningful by resolving any difficulties faced by employees. Furthermore, clear guidance and direction should be offered to employees in order to empower them. This will make employees feel that their contributions are valued and important to the achievement of their organisation. Rothmann and Welsh (2013:17) and Rothmann and Baumann (2014:517) conclude that an individual who does not possess the correct amount of resources to complete his/her tasks, may disengage from his/her role.

In conclusion, PDT (2015:16) states that it is also important to acknowledge the challenges faced by organisations worldwide in dealing with employee engagement. The challenges are: leadership quality, which is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to progress; the requirements of new methods of engagement and retention due to a different 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce; HR falling behind in structure, skills, analytics and technology; employees being overwhelmed by data and finally, a skills gap and the need for next generation learning.

### **2.2.8 Strategies to improve employee engagement**

According to Young and Steelman (2016:797), evolving research has revealed that interventions intended at enhancing employee engagement can lead to beneficial outcomes for both employees and the organisation. Gupta (2015:46) points out that by encouraging the employees' involvement in organisation's initiatives, encouraging

creativity, innovation and open communication, offering educational opportunities and sharing information on what is going on within the organisation will increase the levels of employee engagement. PDT (2014:10) suggests that building an engaged workforce is a long-term and ongoing initiative which can be achieved as follows:

- Senior leadership must communicate a clear vision to all employees.
- Employees should be encouraged to communicate openly and through their input, influence the company's vision.
- Direct managers should foster healthy relationships with their employees.
- Managers should show employees that they are valued by giving them a sense of empowerment.
- Senior leadership should continuously demonstrate that employees have an impact on their work environment.

Lather and Jain (2015:61) concur that it is essential for leaders to identify the level of engagement in the organisation and execute behavioural strategies to encourage maximum engagement. Seijts and Dan Crim (2006), as quoted in Lather and Jain (2015:61), propose that the leaders can do so through the ten C's of leadership, which are:

- Connect – leaders must show that they value employees.
- Career – challenging and meaningful work with opportunities for career advancement should be provided by the leaders.
- Clarity – leaders must communicate a clear vision.
- Convey – leaders must clarify their expectations to the employees and provide feedback on their functioning in the organisation.
- Congratulate – praises for good work done must be provided by the leaders to the employees.
- Contribute – employees want to know if they are contributing to the organisation's success in a meaningful way.
- Control – leaders can create opportunities for employees to exercise control as they (employees) value control over the flow and pace of their jobs.



- Collaborate – when employees work in a team and have the trust and cooperation of their team members, they outdo individuals and teams which lack good relationships.
- Credibility – leaders should endeavour to maintain a company's reputation and demonstrate high ethical standards.
- Confidence – respectable leaders assist to create confidence in a company by being examples of high ethical and performance standards.

In expanding on employee engagement strategies, Cheng and Chang (2019:30) articulate that rewards, leadership, motivation, involvement and communication, and training and development are all strategies to utilise as a key instrument of employee engagement in the organisation. These strategies are discussed in detail:

### **Rewards**

Management can regard the rewards strategies as a tool to increase employee engagement. Rewards are classified as intrinsic (non-financial) or extrinsic (financial) payment to an employee for work and service rendered in the organisation. Extrinsic rewards are tangible monetary rewards in the form of a salary and benefits while intrinsic rewards are intangible such as recognition, achievement, self-actualisation or development and empowerment. Tangible and non-tangible rewards are one of the antecedents of employee engagement. It is vital for management to offer an acceptable standard of both monetary and non-monetary rewards to increase the levels of employee engagement in an organisation.

### **Leadership**

The type of leadership employed in an organisation affects employee engagement. The managers are responsible for communicating and offering support to the employees who, in turn, need to function on the job. Genuine and supportive leadership influences employee engagement by increasing the employees' involvement, enthusiasm and satisfaction for work and the organisation.

## **Motivation**

Motivation refers to a will to act and the extent to which an individual is committed to accomplish a set of goals. Motivated employees immerse themselves in their jobs and the organisation and are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that the objectives of the organisation are achieved. Moreover, when employees are involved in the decisions affecting their job or work they become highly engaged.

## **Involvement and communication**

Employee involvement and communication are key aspects in employee engagement. It is essential for management to build and sustain the relationship between themselves and the employees to maintain high employee engagement levels in the work environment. Communication is recognised as an underlying factor associated with employee engagement. Upward and downward communication processes create a trusting work environment and increase the levels of engagement in an organisation.

## **Training and development**

Training and development are regarded as additional aspects to be considered in the process of engaging employees. Training and development programmes including career development for employees, boost employee confidence. When employees feel that the organisation is investing in them and developing their talents, they will go the extra mile and in turn promote a high level of engagement amongst employees.

Pandita and Ray (2018:198) argue that the most effective strategy to keep the employees engaged and committed in their work is talent management. Keeping key talent engaged is a crucial “to-do” of talent management. This can be achieved by providing key talent with the required support, tools and know-how to perform their duties effectively, ensuring that these employees stay connected to their work, feel empowered by the sense of accomplishment it gives them and therefore stay on at the organisation. The second technique is to ensure that key talents have a healthy

workplace environment, assuring these employees' physical, social and emotional well-being.

### **2.2.9 Current issues about employee engagement**

According to Rothschild (2011), as cited in Phillips and Gully (2014:451), organisations are looking at the difference between engaged and satisfied employees opting for engaged employees as they have an emotional attachment to the organisation and go above and beyond their job description. The author elaborates that simply being satisfied is not good enough. Bakker (2011:268) points out that although the research on employee engagement is on the increase, many lessons are still to be learned about this topic. For example, not all researchers agree on the definition and measurement of engagement. The author goes on to comment that most authors have disagreed on including a behavioural dimension onto the three dimensional model of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004:295) which currently includes vigour, dedication and absorption. Furthermore, not much is known about how leaders influence or fulfil the basic needs for competence for their followers to keep them engaged (Bakker 2011:268).

Employees have different expectations and aspirations therefore it becomes challenging for managers to keep them engaged. In addition, cultural and generational factors matter hugely when trying to engage employees successfully (Rao 2017:128). Jenkins and Delbridge (2013:2688) support this view by stating that employee engagement presents numerous challenges for management in terms of their ability to develop a reasonable organisational strategy to encourage employee participation and the development of mutual employment relations. Therefore, it is essential for HR managers to have the skills to promote and manage employee engagement (Dessler 2013:45).

Similarly, HRD professionals may also encourage the development of employee engagement by training supervisors, managers and leaders about the conditions that have a relation to employee engagement as these interventions provide opportunities for self-awareness, self-reflection and real time feedback (Shuck, Reio & Rocco 2011:442).

According to Nienaber and Martins (2016:63) a survey was conducted in South Africa between 2014 and 2015 to presume the engagement levels of employees in the South African business environment. The results of this survey revealed that team work and organisational commitment, which focus on individual and team assessment of employee engagement, are the most positive engagement dimensions. The authors go on to state that the strategy and implementation dimensions appear to be the lowest ranked statement by the employees. The other lowest ranked dimensions which are obstacles to employee engagement in South Africa are: the immediate manager; accepting responsibility for one's own performance; performance evaluation and feedback; involving employees in implementing the strategy and giving the employees direction for the future (Nienaber & Martins 2016:66). In conclusion, Gopal, as cited in Johnson (2011:15), and Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou and Wang (2016:727) all remark that poor leadership is usually at the root of employee disengagement. According to Aturamu (2016:28), when an employer is unable to recognise the secrets of the employees' source of satisfaction, disengagement sets up among the employees. The employee disengagement concept is discussed in section 2.3.

## **2.3 EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT**

On the other side of the spectrum there is employee disengagement. Simply put, employee disengagement is thus seen as the opposite of employee engagement. It is not viable to explore employee disengagement while not including employee engagement as the amount of available literature on employee disengagement is very limited (Johnson 2016:17). Medlin and Green (2009), as cited in Johnson (2016:17), maintain that between 2000 and 2009 there were over 900 articles accessible on the subject of employee engagement but they failed to reference employee disengagement. Wollard (2011:531) and Parkinson and McBain (2014:71) concur that research literature indicates that there is copious research on employee engagement but the focus on employee disengagement is very limited.

Some literature does exist on employee disengagement, for example, Johnson (2016) explored the drivers of employee disengagement across four generations of United States employees and looked into whether or not the drivers are the same across the

four generations of workers. Semi structured interviews of randomly selected workers from each generation residing in the tri-county region of Southern Florida were conducted. The findings of the study revealed that lack of respect and recognition, inadequate communication and weak quality of leadership were the drivers of employee disengagement.

In a qualitative exploratory case study conducted by Aturamu (2016), the purpose was to explore employee perceptions regarding employee disengagement and continuous destruction among production workers of two Canadian manufacturing organisations. Data collection involved semi structured interviews with 18 participants from the two organisations and reviews of relevant documents in two case organisations. The findings uncovered that poor employee-employer communication and ineffective listening, unfavourable shift patterns, insufficient training support and limited career development opportunities influence employee disengagement and continuous destruction among production workers.

The purpose of Myers (2018)'s case study was to understand the factors that lead to employee disengagement in Generation X employees in the workplace. The findings revealed that work environment, surroundings and the work itself; quality of management; management recognition and internal motivation were the factors influencing employee disengagement.

Kahn (1990:694) defines employee disengagement as detaching of selves from work roles. Employees withdraw and defend themselves physically and emotionally during role performances often caused by the lack of meaningful work and participation or not knowing what is expected of them. Simply put, disengaged employees go through emotions and are physically present but mentally drifting to other ideas while delegating tasks to their colleagues (Byrne 2015, as cited in Hollis 2015:3). According to Kasa and Hassan (2017:686) disengaged employees disconnect from their work, display negative attitudes with the work objectives or tasks in general and are likely to be less involved and do not have passion to exert maximum effort for goal attainments.

Bhuvanaiah and Raya (2014:67) state that disengaged employees are employees with high levels of dissatisfaction and a negative view or attitude towards the organisational

approach. These employees are the biggest liability for an organisation as they are the unhappiest employees with intentions to spread their misery to other employees, bringing about a decline in both employee contribution and satisfaction (Saunders & Tiwari 2014:46; Bhuvanaiah & Raya 2015:93). Aslam et al. (2018:151) assert that disengaged employees are mostly not interested in their jobs and tend to be less loyal and effective in the workplace. Furthermore, they are unsatisfied with their professional career and experience more job insecurity and stress. Disengaged employees impact negatively on the revenues and morale of the organisation and can damage the organisation's reputation due to negative conduct towards the customers.

These employees undermine what their engaged counterparts achieve, they are poor performers, openly despise their work place and take unnecessary sick leave (Purcell 2014:243). Milgrom and Roberts (1992:42), as cited in Purcell (2014:243), further describe disengaged employees as "people who will be fundamentally amoral, ignoring rules, breaking agreements, sly, manipulative, and deceptive if they see personal gain in doing so". The primary motive of these employees is to produce minimal work and yet maintain their employment with the organisation (Srivastava 2013, as cited in White 2017:26). This negative behaviour is harmful to both the organisation and other employees. Pech (2009), as cited in Johnson (2016:23), stresses that employees who do not finish their tasks on time, who are always late for work and are on the web for hours surfing and chatting are indeed disengaged.

Furthermore, Pech and Slade (2006), as cited in Johnson (2016:21), elaborate that disengagement exists where employees lack psychological identification and meaningfulness. The authors took note that when the quality of leadership was poor and when the element of trust between managers and staff was low, the level of disengagement rose. Wollard (2011:532) and Aslam et al. (2018:152) highlight that disengagement has been experienced by various employees, nonetheless the process by which an employee moves from being engaged to not being engaged and finally being actively disengaged has not been fully investigated.

Cowart (2014:45) argues that employee disengagement is the core aspect in higher absenteeism amongst employees, which leads to low productivity and poor performance; resulting in high costs of managing an organisation. Nair (2013:40)

emphasises that many organisations fail to identify and understand the causes and the results of employee disengagement as well as the cost thereof. Gallup (2016:5) contends that the employee disengagement phenomenon costs the Germany economy between 75.6 billion and 99.2 billion euros annually in lost productivity while Munshi and Marulasiddaiah (2015:80) elaborate that in the US alone, the cost of employees who are disengaged amounts to about \$500 billion a year. According to Aslam et al. (2018:150) it is essential to explore measures which can decrease the levels of employee disengagement in the workplace as the expense of hiring and training newly recruits can vary between 25-200 percent of annual compensation.

Employee disengagement is a negative situation for any organisation, while employee engagement is well understood in the corporate world. Hernandez, Stanley and Miller (2014:343) echo that the most identified factors linked to employee disengagement are a lack of appropriate opportunity for self-care, participation in the workplace decision making, recognition, procedural justice, supportive supervisor or co-worker and a lack of realistic job preview upon hire.

Negative emotions or low self-efficacy could lead to employee disengagement or lack of employee engagement depending on how an employee understands the situation or their level of self-efficacy. In employee disengagement emotions play a mediating role possibly in stressful situations such as role conflict, interpersonal conflict and situational constraints depending on an individual's perception of those situations. This leads to counterproductive work behaviours, anger, aggression, bullying, anti-social behaviour or even crafting revenge on the organisation in an abnormal way (Fox, Spector & Miles 2010 as cited in Parkinson & McBain 2014:74).

### **2.3.1 The process of employee disengagement**

Kahn (1990:719) admitted that employee disengagement is a process whereby individuals make choices at different levels of awareness to withdraw and defend themselves during role performances. According to Wollard (2011:530-531) it is possible for employee disengagement to occur in stages and under different behaviours (cognitive, emotional and physical). The author states that the process of disengagement starts when employees becomes cognitively disengaged by being,

amongst other symptoms, confused and not knowing what is expected from them. If the problem is not addressed, the emotional aspect of the situation leads to stress which may result in an employee either addressing the problem or planning to leave the organisation. The economic climate may not permit an employee to leave the organisation and ultimately, the employee’s behaviour becomes aggressive like: withholding information, absenteeism, work slowdowns, theft and possibly encouraging other employees to disengage. Table 2.2 presents the components of employee disengagement.

**Table 2.2: The components of employee disengagement**

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Physical/Behaviour</b>
Confusion	Perceived safety threats	Lack of
Don't know what's expected	Passive aggression	communication
Lack of voice options	Burnout	Exhaustion
Psychological disconnect	Stress (sick and tired)	Production deviance
Passive endurance	Frustration	Absenteeism
Organisational change cynicism	Resignation	Work slowdowns
Intent to quit	Unfairness	Incivility
Diminished commitment	Inferiority	Theft
Loss of trust	Hopelessness	Distancing
		Lack of performance
		Turnover

Source: Wollard (2011:532)

Munshi and Marulasiddaiah (2015:80) draw attention to the following as common signs of employee disengagement:

- Attitude of disinterest – employees are not interested in their work and do not care about their work activities or their organisation’s overall mission.
- Decreased work initiatives – employees stick to the monotonous tasks and do not want to try new tasks and challenges.



- Deteriorating quality of work – employees fail to meet deadlines and do the bare minimum of work.
- Increased mistakes/defects in work – frequent mistakes and a lack of commitment and focus.
- Mood drifting – a lack of attention to detail with fluctuating moods, also a lack of interest.
- Increased tardiness or absences – a sluggish behavioural pattern and being absent at work.

Khattak et al. (2017:62) concur that disengaged employees are psychologically absent at work which may affect their productivity. According to Jindal, Shaikh and Shashank (2017:10) additional symptoms of employee disengagement are increased turnover, missed deadlines, low morale, high burnouts, complacency, lack of accountability and responsibility. These common signs of employee disengagement contribute to the misery levels of the employees which are dynamic in nature and are subject to change from time to time and even from one workplace to another (Munshi & Marulasiddaiah 2015: 80).

### **2.3.2 Reasons for employee disengagement**

According to Rao (2017:128) some of the reasons for employee disengagement are the toxic work environment, a lack of a value system in the organisation, a lack of inspired leadership, organisational politics and an enormous gap between the employees' expectations and the realities. Leaders need to create a value system, bridge the gap between the expectations and realities, and do away with organisational politics to ensure that employee engagement takes place.

Ramsey (2013:9) maintains that a winning and successful organisation requires employees who are inspired by its mission, take pride in their contribution and are eager to be at work most days. The opposite leads to an organisation that limps along and cannot survive over time. The author mentions the following as reasons why employees become disengaged:

- Uncertain job security – it is difficult for employees to remain engaged if job security is in doubt.
- Dead-end jobs – unclear career paths and jobs with no growth leads to disengaged employees.
- Lack of meaning – when employees do not feel worthwhile or that they are adding value to the organisation.
- Worker invisibility – when employees feel not recognised or unknown.
- Corporate coldness – corporate culture with an absence of humanity.
- Working in the dark – a lack of communication and transparency.
- Unrealistic expectations – by setting unrealistic goals.
- Questionable business practice – unethical business standards of behaviour.
- All work no play – this environment leads to stress-filled employees, who never have fun and eventually get burned out.

On the other hand, Pawar and Chakravarthy's (2014) study, as cited in Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016:833), discovered that the following are barriers that lead to a decline or low employee engagement: employees leave their employment due to not getting along with the manager or financial reasons, lack of career development, role ambiguity or a lack of information on the job description and colleague cooperation. Equally, managers or leaders may contribute to employee disengagement by providing little feedback, appreciation or recognition which leads to employees not trusting or having confidence in the organisation's management. Also, the variety of jobs can make it challenging for managers to define roles and tasks, however a culture in which employees' jobs do not match their expectations creates further employee engagement barriers (Al Mehrzi & Singh 2016:833).

The additional reasons for employee disengagement are unproductive team-mates, doing work that is not part of your job, a lack of clarity about the decision making process, lack of clear priorities and poor or inefficient processes (PWC 2015:19). What's more, Parkinson and McBain (2014:75) hold the position that the lack of autonomy and social support are seen as vital predictors of employee disengagement.

Ramsey (2013:12) points out that the greatest cause of employee disengagement is a disengaged manager. For employees to be engaged, a manager should be visible,

accessible and be engaged. When individuals are involved in an individual relationship with their line managers, they will become engaged. If an organisation is characterised by trust and loyalty, employees become engaged. Should this be violated, employee disengagement will follow (Parkinson & McBain 2014:75). According to Gurchiek (2008), as cited in Phillips and Gully (2014:451), more than 50 percent of senior executives have less than ideal emotional connections and alignment to their organisation. Therefore, poor managers can easily demotivate and disrupt an organisation's future leaders and top performers through their own disengagement (Phillips & Gully 2014:452).

According to Parkinson and McBain (2014:81), disengaging work drains an individual of psychological energy and encourages work avoidance tactics, taking short cuts, taking time off and lower productivity. The breakdown of trust can pave the way for disengagement and lead to cynicism, lower levels of loyalty, negative mindsets or resignations. Employee disengagement is the consequence of unfulfilled needs. Disengaged employees keep looking at the clock while at work and have left their hearts and minds at home (Jindal et al. 2017:10).

## **2.4 LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Leadership refers to the ability of a leader to get people to do things willingly and achieve effective performance from others. It is about influencing the behaviour or actions of other people. The leader-follower relationship is a two-way process that encourages, motivates and influences both employees and the organisational performance. Leadership has moved away from the concept of command and control. The focus is now on the concept of teamwork, cohesion, inspiration and creating a vision with which others can identify (Mullins 2011:256; Mullins & Christy 2013:369).

One of the leading authors on leadership, Kotter (1996:63), as cited in Bezuidenhout and Schultz (2013:280), believes that the value of leadership lies in the way that an effective leader scrutinises the future, aligns people with that vision and inspires them to make it happen. Furthermore, it is testified that leadership has a direct connection with employee engagement (Joubert & Roodt 2011:96 as cited in Bezuidenhout & Schultz 2013:280; Khuong & Yen 2014:125). Caplan (2014:77) concurs that

“leadership is about creating a free and open conversation within a clearly communicated strategic framework”. This empowers and innovates the employees to respond and make suitable decisions relating to the organisation’s vision and viewpoint. Moreover, employees turn out to be motivated and engaged. The author elaborates that a foundation for a climate of innovation is created when employees understand what the organisation is trying to achieve, what it represents and that they are encouraged to propose new ideas and try them without being penalised should they fail.

Leaders who are actively working towards fully engaging their employees benefit by having high levels of productivity, organisational citizenship behaviour, overall job performance and high competitive advantage which is crucial in the current competitive economic market conditions. In short, leaders who are engaging their employees are making a measurable difference in their workplace (Shuck & Herd 2012:158).

#### **2.4.1 Difference between leadership and management**

Van Fleet, Van Fleet and Seperich (2014:352) postulate that it is vital to understand the difference between leadership and management as leaders can lead without managing and managers can manage without leading. The authors articulate that the difference between leadership and management is that management emphasises on planning, organising people and focusing on solving problems in an organisation; whereas leadership tend to focus more on the organisation’s vision (a sense of direction), communication, cooperation and motivation.

The influence of management style accounts for 45% to 65% on whether the organisation will do well or not. The important topic is whether an organisation can implement the right management style and whether it understands how employees feel about their work. Therefore, an organisation’s management style plays a vital role in influencing job satisfaction and performance of employees (Chung-Hsuan & Ting-Ya 2017:186). Hassan and Ahmed (2011:173) and Janse van Rensburg, Boonzaier and Boonzaier (2013:7) believe that authentic leadership is important because leaders with this quality display a high degree of integrity and are committed to their core values and those of an organisation. As a result, a relationship of trust is formed between

employees and leaders, contributing to work engagement and high productivity. The PDT survey (2014:08) echoes that engaged leaders promote an environment of open communication, teamwork, loyalty and motivating of employees to perform to their best ability.

According to Spano-Szekely, Quinn Griffin, Clavelle and Fitzpatrick (2016:102) the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) was developed to deal with the aspects of leadership that lead the organisation to success. The FRLT recognises three contrasting leadership styles as: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire (passive/avoidant) leadership. Table 2.3 illustrates the definitions of FRLT.

**Table 2.3: FRLT definitions**

<b>Leadership Style</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example behaviours</b>
Transformational leadership	<p>Idealised attributes</p> <p>Idealised behaviours</p> <p>Inspirational motivation</p> <p>Intellectual stimulation</p> <p>Individualised consideration</p>	<p>Committed and trustworthy</p> <p>Ethical consequences are considered important</p> <p>Confident, articulates vision of future and encourages others</p> <p>Questions the norm and facilitates expression of ideas</p> <p>Considers individual abilities, needs and aspirations</p>
Transactional leadership	<p>Contingent reward</p> <p>Management-by-exception active</p>	<p>Negotiates for resources and rewards achievements</p> <p>Takes action following mistakes</p>
Passive/avoidant leadership	<p>Management-by-exception passive</p>	<p>Does not take action until mistakes are noticed and problems escalate</p>

	Laissez-faire	Unwilling to accept responsibilities and not present when needed
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Source: Spano-Szekely et al. (2016:102)

Transformational leaders are capable of encouraging enthusiasm among an organisation's employees to tap into the values they place on the purpose and meaning of their work. In the past ten years, numerous studies outside healthcare including business, retail, hospitality, government and academia explored the connection between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence (EI). On the other hand, both the transactional and laissez-faire leadership were found to have a negative connection with emotional intelligence (Spano-Szekely et al. 2016:102).

Phipps, Prieto and Ndinguri (2014:76) state that there is significant reason to believe that EI is associated with and would play a role in transformational leaders. Emotionally intelligent leaders easily acquire trust and respect from followers, understand followers' needs, interact and understand the extent to which followers' expectations could be raised (Barling et al. 2000 as cited in Phipps et al. 2014:76). Mandell and Pherwani (2003), as in Phipps et al. (2014:77), concur that there is a predictive relationship between EI and the transformational leadership style and clarify that both constructs have several characteristics in common including the ability to inspire others and stimulate enthusiasm for a shared vision, the ability to display empathy and motivation, and the skill to gain respect and trust.

According to Khuong and Yen (2014:125), some researchers discovered that leaders who possessed a high level of emotional intelligence aided to positively impact business performance.

## 2.4.2 Emotional intelligence

Spano-Szekely et al. (2016:102) maintain that one potential characteristic of transformational leadership is emotional intelligence and defines EI as an individual's ability to manage themselves and their relationships efficiently. According to Mullins and Christy (2013:147); Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2000), as cited in Shuck and Herd (2012:166) emotional intelligence is described as the capacity to understand and express emotions with one's self, to use emotions to simplify one's thinking, to recognise and reason with emotions, and to manage emotions within relationships with others. The authors state that emotional intelligence is conceptualised into four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (Shuck & Herd 2012:167; Mullins & Christy 2013:148).

- Self-awareness – refers to the ability of a leader to recognise and understand moods and emotions. Leaders with this ability do not act impulsively and are psychologically secure, yet leaders who lack this skill isolate their followers.
- Self-management – applies to the skilfulness of leaders to control their emotions. Leaders with this skill act with honesty and integrity to make better decisions and have improved interpersonal performance.
- Social awareness – relates to the capability for a leader to sense the emotional tone of the organisation and the employees. Leaders with high social awareness skills understand the culture of the organisation as well.
- Relationship management – concerns the know-how for leaders to manage their own emotions and those of their followers.

In the quantitative study done by Crandell (2015), the author found that the emotionally intelligent conduct of organisational leaders was exposed to influence subordinate job satisfaction, organisational commitment, employee engagement and performance. The study concluded that self-management, social awareness and relationship management are correlated and predictive of increasing employee engagement among virtual team remote employees except for self-awareness which is correlated to employee engagement but not essentially predictive of employee engagement.

However, Washington (2017:129) also conducted a quantitative study to determine if a relationship existed between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. The author cautions that while a moderate relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement is present between the two variables, there may be unknown variables that may reinforce the correlation between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. Even though the research results represent only a moderate relationship between the two variables, leaders are urged to use this information to identify additional areas of opportunity to strengthen emotional intelligence competencies and employee engagement as both variables independently signal positive organisational outcomes (Washington 2017:133).

Echevarria, Patterson and Krouse (2017:168) advocate that emotional intelligence has been described as a predictor of management and leadership success as it is the capacity acquired through learning and experience. Numerous scholars have uncovered that leaders' emotional intelligence explains a high proportion of variance in leadership effectiveness and organisational outcomes as well as transformational leadership. Leaders managing their emotions and those of others, engaging in specific self-assessment that brings to mind an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, maintaining high levels of personal integrity, exercising determination and instilling trust are some of the important attributes of emotional intelligence (Parrish 2015:822).

In the words of Mozammel and Haan (2016:43): "Transformational leadership is needed today to facilitate employee engagement and increase productivity. Effective leadership and engaged employees are important in any organisation". Bezuidenhout and Schultz (2013:290) conducted a study in the mining industry in South Africa to determine if there was a relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement at a mine in the North West Province. The study confirmed that there is a correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement. This suggests that the transformational leaders who succeed in creating a work climate that enables subordinates to achieve their work objectives, are expected to be successful in engaging employees.



Bezuidenhout and Schultz (2013:297) point out that there is a growing awareness of the value of transformational leadership from the line manager in the moulding of human resource functions including employee training and development. The direct manager plays a crucial role in the development of an employee with particular reference to knowledge, abilities and skills. Therefore, transformational leadership is essential for organisational success (Mokgolo 2012:8, as cited in Bezuidenhout & Schultz 2013:285).

According to the PDT survey (2014:10) building an engaged workforce is a long term and ongoing initiative which can improve employee engagement. Managers can achieve this by communicating a clear organisational vision to all employees, influencing the vision through their output, encouraging employees to communicate openly, fostering healthy relationships with employees, valuing and empowering employees, and lastly, continuing to demonstrate that employees have an impact on the work environment.

In conclusion, Romans and Tobaben (2016:76) concur that building a high performance organisation with engaged employees starts with ensuring that it has the right leaders. The engagement culture is advanced by the top team of leaders that make employee engagement non-negotiable by establishing two things: importance and accountability. Everyone is held accountable on a daily basis and the employees' capabilities are built to meet and exceed the stakeholders' expectations and demands. These leaders are not petrified or troubled by employees who ask tough questions and make challenging comments. They seek out those employees who are up for the challenge and engage in tough conversations to build their capabilities and those of the organisation.

## **2.5 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Every organisation, big or small, is influenced by its organisational environment. The two organisational environments identified by Van Fleet et al. (2014:68) are: the external environment and the internal environment. The external environment refers to the factors outside the organisation that affect its capability to perform. On the other

hand, the internal environment of an organisation consists of its employees, management and organisational culture.

Moorhead and Griffin (2012:505); Naidoo and Martins (2014:432); Belias, Velissariou, Yyriakou, Gkolia, Sdrolias, Koustelios and Varsanis (2016:124) define organisational culture as the norms and values that are held by employees on how they should behave and treat each other, also the manner in which they should conduct themselves in a work environment. Van Fleet et al. (2014:76) emphasise that these values assist the employees to identify with what the organisation stands for, what is expected from them, and also to understand how things are done. Organisational culture plays a huge role in shaping the employees' behaviour, the organisations' effectiveness and its long term success.

Mullins and Christy (2013:696-697) and Phillips and Gully (2014:35) assert that organisational culture is simply "the way things are done here". It is the collection of traditions, values, policies, beliefs and attitudes that guide the behaviour of employees in an organisation. The values of an organisation are determined by the organisation and the requirements of its working environment (Belias et al. 2016:124).

A positive organisational culture and strong workplace relationships may be the most influential tools to promote employee engagement (Hernandez et al. 2014:342). The authors elaborate that establishing a culture of trust in the workplace allows employees to become engaged, which in turn helps create a supportive place to work. Engaged employees have numerous benefits for an organisation such as a reduction in employee turnover and a rise in employee satisfaction and productivity. Furthermore, a culture that has qualities of engaged employees, promotes a sense of affective commitment because of the foundation of trust (Hernandez et al. 2014: 340).

Likewise, Chaudhary, Rangnekar and Barua (2012:98) and Chaudhary et al. (2013:94-96) established that both the HRD climate (general climate, culture of openness, confrontation, trust, autonomy, proactivity, authenticity, and collaboration; and implementation of HRD mechanisms) and self-efficacy were discovered to be significant predictors of employee engagement. Bouffard (2012), as cited in Lather and

Jain (2015:63), advocates that the key to engaging the employees is to understand how they feel about their organisation, its culture and business practices.

Newstrom (2014:100) and Taylor and Haneberg (2011:87) state that each organisation has its own unique culture which changes over time. Also, there are subcultures and cultural differences within subgroups of an organisation (Johnston & Christensen 2014:451). A culture that encourages positive work attitudes, giving support and creating excitement in the jobs people do, will increase employee engagement (Armstrong 2011:207; Plester & Hutchison 2015:342). Phillip and Gully (2014:35) elaborate that there are four visible types of organisational culture and these are discussed in section 2.5.1.

### **2.5.1 Types of organisational culture**

Phillip and Gully (2014:35) suggest the four types of organisational culture as:

- Entrepreneurial – this type of culture highlights innovation, creativity and risk taking.
- Bureaucratic – this type of culture highlights formal structures and accurate procedures, norms and rules of the organisation. This culture is linked to high ethical standards.
- Consensual – this culture highlights loyalty and encourages employees to stay in an organisation for a long period of time.
- Competitive – this culture highlights a competitive advantage and being a market leader. High stress levels are produced in this type of culture.

With some emphasis on one over the other, organisations, however, often have a combination of these four types of culture (Phillip & Gully 2014:35).

### **2.5.2 Characteristics of organisational culture**

Lussier and Achnal (2013:342) identified four characteristics of high-performing cultures that have a great impact on an organisation as:

- Effective use of culture reinforcement tools – which consists of rewards, ceremonies, stories, rituals and policies. Stories are told to new employees to create a shared understanding of primary values among employees. Rituals are used to convey meaning and value in the organisation. Ceremonies are used to reinforce the values and the policies of the organisation which includes celebrating and rewarding high performers.
- Intensely people oriented – an organisation that views its employees as the most valuable assets and is able to attract, recruit, retain and reward outstanding performers. These employees are treated with respect, involved in decision making and individual and team achievements are celebrated.
- Results oriented – employees take ownership of their goals by demonstrating their commitment and motivation to achieve them. Both managers and employees are trained in the goal setting process as the reward system is linked to performance.
- Emphasis on excellence – pursuit of excellence is a crucial part of the culture and a way of life.

A solid and well managed organisational culture encourages individuals to take risks, be creative and innovative. It communicates a sense that innovation will be rewarded; rare failure is acceptable and expected in the pursuit of new thinking and viewpoints (Van Fleet et al. 2014:297). Chaudhary et al. (2012:100) emphasise that a culture of openness, collaboration, trust, autonomy, proactivity, authenticity, and confrontation should be encouraged and developed in an organisation. Such an environment helps in satisfying some basic needs of belongingness and competence which in turn increases the employees' determination and dedication in their work.

Kinicki and Fugate (2012:158) elaborate that when an organisation has a culture that promotes employee recognition, development and trust between management and its employees then the employees in that organisation are more likely to be engaged. According to Hollis (2015:3), trust encourages a joint culture which improves the

creativity of a team. Without trust individuals and teams will neither engage in the risk involved for innovation nor offer ideas that develop processes and cut costs. The author goes on to say that a leader who encourages employees to create trust through concern, honest communication and fairness, creates a healthy and safe workplace in which employees could engage. Therefore it is crucial for employees and management in an organisation to understand what organisational culture is all about as it plays a major role in the success of any organisation (DuBrin 2012:289; Hernandez et al. 2014: 338).

Organisational cultures are important to an organisational success because they outline the vision of what an organisation stands for; they provide a sense of security to its employees and help new employees to integrate into an organisation. Above all, organisational cultures assist by stimulating employee passion for their tasks. In conclusion a culture of productivity is a crucial element in organisational success (Newstrom 2014:99).

## **2.6 MOTIVATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Motivation is one of the most essential attributes of the HRM process and probably the least understood. It has always been a concern of behavioural experts that trying to understand what motivates the human behaviour of diverse employees is complex. Motivation is regarded as a complex process, one with individual, managerial and organisational implications. Also, motivation is about the environmental issues encompassing the job i.e. the ability and willingness to do the job (DeCenzo, Robbins & Verhulst 2013:36). Moorhead and Griffin (2012:92) and Mullins and Christy (2013:246) elaborate that motivation is a set of facts that cause people to engage or behave in a certain way. From a management point of view, the aim is to inspire people to behave in ways beneficial to the organisation's best interest (Moorhead & Griffin 2012:92; Mullins & Christy 2013:246).

In view of the fact that motivation originates within an individual, it requires detecting and understanding an employee's drive and needs. Employees tend to be more motivated when they have clear and achievable goals (Newstrom 2014:116). The author elaborates that people are likely to develop certain motivational drives which

affect the way people view their jobs and how they approach their lives (Newstrom 2014:118). These drives will be discussed in detail under the McClelland's achievement motivation theory in section 2.6.3.

DeCenzo et al. (2013:37) state that a lot of organisations recognise that a level of respect is required between management and employees. These organisations involve their employees in decisions that affect them by listening to the employees and implementing their input where applicable.

According to Mullins and Christy (2013:251) and Mullins (2011:172-174) there is no single motivation theory that is commonly acknowledged. Guillén, Ferrero and Hoffman (2015:804) concur that there is no single theory of motivation that is entirely accepted and they elaborate that after an exhaustive revision of the motivation research in the 90s, researchers Ambrose and Kulik pointed out seven main theories which they named "old friends". These are: Motives and needs, Expectancy Theory, Equity Theory, Goal-Setting, Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Work Design, and Reinforcement Theory. Amongst the old friends' theories regarding employee motives and needs, they highlighted that Maslow, McClelland, Alderfer and Herzberg are four classical groups of theories that speak to employee motives and needs.

Mullins and Christy (2013:252); Mullins (2011:172-174); Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson (2014:115) and Konopaske, Ivancevich and Matteson (2018:105) concur that the four emphasised theories of motivation are: Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Herzberg's two-factor theory, McClelland's achievement motivation theory and Alderfer's modified needs hierarchy model. Since this study focuses on steering the employees to perform to the best of their ability and increase employee engagement, the four motivation theories are discussed to understand what motivates employees and how employees should be motivated. The four theories are discussed in detail in sections 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3 and 2.6.4. Figure 2.2 displays a comparison between the Maslow, Herzberg, Alderfer and McClelland models.

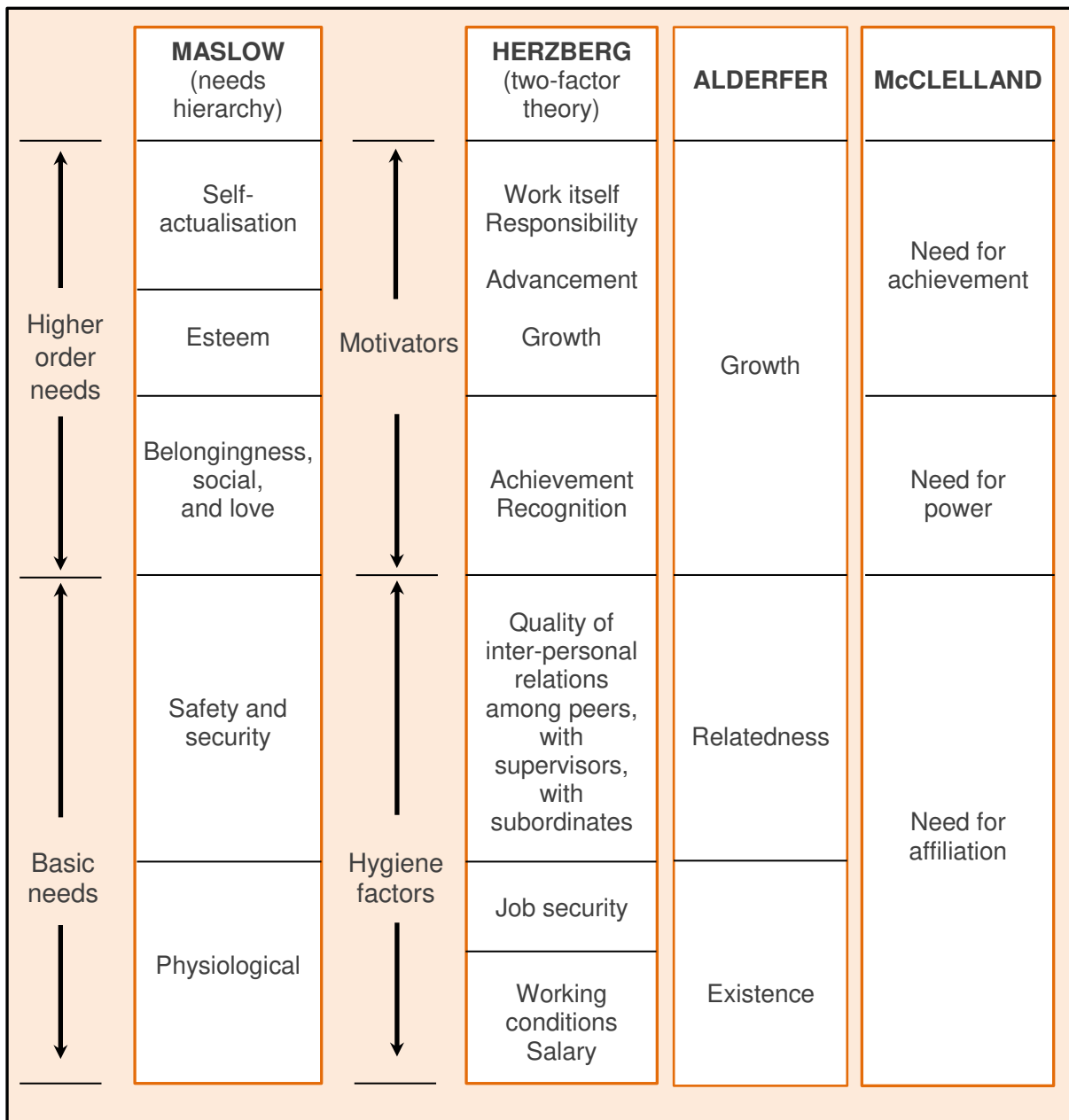


Figure 2.2: A graphic comparison of four content approaches to motivation

Source: Ivancevich et al. (2014:123) and Konopaske et al. (2018:113)

### 2.6.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was proposed by Abraham Maslow, the pioneering humanistic psychologist (Winston 2016:142). Figure 2.2 is used to describe the entire variety of human conduct by identifying five levels of individual needs. These individual

needs ranges from physiological needs at the bottom to self-actualisation at the top. Once the lower level need is satisfied, the next higher need in the hierarchy is activated until the self-actualisation need is achieved (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien & Hunt 2012:103; Dessler 2013:419; Konopaske et al. 2018:105).

DuBrin (2012:398-399) and Mullins and Christy (2013:254-255) maintain that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is a suitable way of classifying needs and is relevant in the current era because thousands of managers have been encouraged to take the subject of motivation more seriously in order to motivate employees. This theory also demonstrates why employees are difficult to satisfy. Singh (2016:198) points out that Maslow's work has stood the test of time and readily predicts and explains human conduct during difficult economic times and changing work conditions improving or reducing their productivity.

Research has exposed that the weakness of this theory is that not all five levels of needs are always present and that the actual hierarchy of needs does not always conform to Maslow's model. Therefore, the main contribution of this theory seems to lie in providing a general framework for classifying needs (Moorhead & Griffin 2012:97; Mullins & Christy 2013:253). Winston (2016:43) points out that the hierarchy of needs is not open to scientific validation and a number of attempts have been made to "reconsider", "reconfigure", "rebuild", "renovate" and "rewire" Maslow's theory.

### **2.6.2 Herzberg's two-factor theory**

According to Schermerhorn et al. (2012:106), Ivancevich et al. (2014:118) and Konopaske et al. (2018:108), Herzberg's two factor theory classifies job content as a source of job satisfaction (motivator factors) and job context as source of dissatisfaction (hygiene factors).

- Motivator factors – these factors relate to work content (sense of achievement, recognition, responsibility and personal growth).
- Hygiene factors – these factors speak about the work environment (work conditions, relationships, supervision, status, job security and salary).



Gomez-Mejia, Balkin and Cardy (2014:73) point out that motivator factors are internal job factors leading to job satisfaction and greater motivation. Employees will most likely be unsatisfied with their work and unmotivated to perform up to their potential in the absence of motivator factors. On the other hand, the hygiene factors are the external factors located in the work environment. In the absence of hygiene factors, employee dissatisfaction and demotivation are activated. In extreme situations, avoidance of work altogether is triggered. Hygiene factors (Gomez-Mejia et al. 2014:73) include:

- Company policies
- Working conditions
- Job security
- Salary
- Employee benefits
- Relationships with supervisors and managers
- Relationships with co-workers
- Relationships with subordinates

Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono and Schultz (2010:340) and Mullins and Christy (2013:257) conclude that there is a link between the Herzberg theory and the Maslow hierarchy of needs theory as the hygiene factors are related to the lower level needs in the hierarchy; while the motivator factors are similar to the higher level needs in the hierarchy.

According to Schermerhorn (2012:313) and Mullins and Christy (2013:258) scholars have criticised Herzberg's theory as method-bound and challenging to replicate. It is claimed that the vital incident method and the description of events giving rise to good and bad feelings manipulate the results, Also, the theory has only limited application to 'manual' workers (Mullins & Christy 2013:258). Some scholars are certain that Herzberg's theory oversimplifies the nature of job satisfaction and that the theory has directed little attention toward testing the motivational and performance outcomes of the theory itself (Ivancevich et al. 2014:120; Konopaske et al. 2018:110).

### **2.6.3 McClelland's achievement motivation theory**

Newstrom (2014:118) states that McClelland identified three dominant motivational drives or needs. His investigation revealed that people's motivational drives display the elements of the culture in which they grew up such as their family, school, books and church. One or two motivational drives are inclined to be powerful among the employees because of the similar backgrounds wherein they grew up.

As McClelland believed that numerous needs are picked up from the culture, his theory was noted for defining three types of motivational needs or drives as achievement, affiliation and power (Ivancevich et al. 2014:122; Newstrom 2014:118; Konopaske 2018:111). The authors insist that when a person has a strong need, its influence is to motivate the person to use the behaviour that leads to its satisfaction (Ivancevich et al. 2014:122; Konopaske et al. 2018:112).

Employees with high achievement needs are high achievers who are innovative and find satisfaction when challenging tasks are completed. Therefore, the achievement need is a self-actualising need. Affiliation is a need for belonging and companionship. Employees with the strong affiliation need to aim at building relationships with other employees. An affiliation need is therefore a social need (DuBrin 2012:399; Ivancevich et al. 2014:122).

According to Kinicki and Fugate (2012:149) and Ivancevich et al. (2014:122) the power need signals are reflected by the desire to influence, teach and inspire others to achieve goals. Employees with a strong need for power are hard workers concerned with discipline and self-respect. McClelland recommends that senior managers should have a high need for power combined with a low need for affiliation. Furthermore, McClelland contends that motivation needs differs from person to person with some people being motivated mainly by achievement while the others are motivated by power or affiliation (Williams 2013:516).

Ivancevich et al. (2014:122) and Konopaske (2018:112) caution that the scientific basis of the McClelland's use of projective psychological personality tests has been queried and that most of the available evidence supporting this theory has been provided by McClelland and his associates only. Also, the theory is questioned on grounds of whether the needs are permanently acquired. Therefore research is crucial to determine whether acquired needs last.

#### **2.6.4 Alderfer's modified needs hierarchy model**

Moorhead and Griffin (2012:97), Ivancevich et al. (2014:118) and Konopaske et al. (2018:107) point out that this model also known as the ERG theory, is another historically significant needs motivation theory. The E, R, G denotes the three basic need categories: existence, relatedness and growth. Alderfer's three needs correspond to Maslow's needs in that the existence needs are comparable to Maslow's physiological and safety needs; the relatedness needs are similar to the belongingness, social and love needs; and the growth needs match the esteem and self-actualisation needs (Konopaske et al. 2018:107).

Williams (2013:516) concurs that unlike Maslow who believed that basic needs must be satisfied before continuing to the next level, Alderfer's modified needs hierarchy model, also known as Alderfer's ERG theory, points out that employees are likely to be motivated by more than one need at a time and that if needs remain unsatisfied at the highest level, the employees might go back to pursuing needs at the lowest level. This theory condenses Maslow's five human needs into three categories which are: existence, relatedness and growth (Williams 2013:516).

- Existence – includes physiological needs such as food, water and safety.
- Relatedness – encompasses social esteem and relationships. A need to belong is important.
- Growth – refers to the internal esteem, personal development and self actualisation.

According to Arnolds and Boshoff (2002:698), Ivancevich et al. (2014:118) and Konopaske et al. (2018:108) the Alderfer's ERG theory has not inspired a great deal of research therefore no empirical verification can be called for. This theory has the support of modern researchers as far as motivation is concerned in the workplace. Also, it is considered as a more valid version of needs hierarchy and its major strength is the job-specific nature of its focus (Arnolds & Boshoff 2002:698). Guillén et al. (2015:804) point out that both the Alderfer ERG and McClelland theories do not follow a chronological process as Maslow advocated and have advanced upon Maslow's theory by allowing more flexibility of movement between needs.

Ivancevich et al. (2014:123) and Konopaske (2018:112) are of the opinion that the four content theories mentioned above seek to explain behaviour from a slightly different perspective and that none of the theories have been accepted as the only basis for explaining motivation. Each of the theories offers the manager with some understanding of behaviour and performance. The authors go on to compare the theories as follows: McClelland proposed no lower-order needs. Besides, his needs for achievement and power are not identical with Herzberg's motivators, Maslow's higher-order needs or Alderfer's growth needs. The key difference between the four content theories is McClelland's weight is on socially acquired needs, the Maslow theory offers a static need-hierarchy system, the Alderfer theory offers a flexible, three-need-classification approach and the Herzberg theory discusses the intrinsic and extrinsic job factors. In reality, each of these theories has its strengths and weaknesses that managers need to consider. Managers need to look at all of these approaches to provide insights that can be applied to specific challenges and problems (Ivancevich et al. 2014:123; Konopaske et al. 2018:113).

According to Singh (2016:198) motivation is a very complicated concept, which entails the extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics influenced by the expectations and personality of each individual. The two characteristics used together can create an effective workplace. The characteristics are discussed below (Singh 2016:199):

- Intrinsic motivation – is motivation that comes from performing an activity for its intrinsic satisfaction. It causes an individual to be motivated and perform well.

Intrinsic factors may increase satisfaction and organisational commitment. Therefore, the intrinsic motivators are psychological feelings that employees get from undertaking meaningful work and performing well.

- Extrinsic motivation – is motivation encouraged by a reward rather than enjoyment. It is usually a financial reward. The other factors considered to be extrinsic are job security, type of work and organisation characteristics which take the focus off doing the job well rather to doing what is necessary to earn a reward.

Singh (2016:200) remarks that managers should explore the concept of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators as they are crucial for both individual performance and critical for influencing team performance in a project. The ability to strike the balance between the two concepts is a fine art and may result in positive outcomes for workers at an individual, team and organisational level.

Employee motivation is influenced by a mixture of factors related to management (recognition, autonomy and engagement in the work itself). Recognition might be understood both intrinsically and extrinsically and the extrinsic emphasis might decrease intrinsic motivation and will be short-lived. Therefore, it would be more useful to depend on the emphasis of the intrinsic motivators. For instance, showing appreciation and thanking employees for their contribution for a sustainable and long term success of the organisation (Singh 2016:202-203).

Sehunoë, Viviers and Mayer (2015:135) conducted a study to explore the relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment and work engagement. The authors found a significant relationship between job satisfaction, and components of work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption) and organisational commitment. The positive relationships between the constructs indicated that employees who experience job satisfaction, will be committed, motivated and engaged.

Victor and Hoole (2017:4) concur that employee engagement helps to enhance employee motivation, confidence, job satisfaction and psychological well-being. On the opposite end, disengaged employees tend to be less committed and are more likely to leave their organisation or desert their jobs.

## **2.7 SUMMARY**

Chapter 2 presented the literature study relevant to the concepts of employee engagement and employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation. The chapter highlighted the challenges around the lack of unanimous definition of employee engagement. The literature further revealed the importance of certain organisational elements linked to employee engagement such as employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and employee motivation. In order to explore and understand the concept of employee disengagement, the researcher included employee engagement in her search as the amount of literature on employee disengagement is very limited.

Leadership plays a huge role in the promotion of employee engagement. Understanding the influence of different leadership styles especially the transformational leadership, can be effective in driving employee engagement. The organisational culture was defined as the norms, values, perceptions and beliefs that guide the behaviour of employees in an organisation. These shared perceptions and beliefs about the work environment are deemed to facilitate employee engagement. Furthermore, organisational culture is foreseeable as an antecedent to employee engagement. The theories of motivation were discussed and it was found that there is a relationship between these theories and the concept of employee engagement. Motivated employees are committed to achieving set goals and are therefore engaged. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion on the four content approaches to motivation and its comparisons. From the theoretical perspective, it can be concluded that the aspects discussed play a significant role in engaging employees. Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The background, motivation and problem statement, research questions and objectives of the study were discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provided the literature review based on the aspects of employee engagement, employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design and methods adopted for this study. The aim is to explain why the research approach chosen is suitable to answer the research questions. In this chapter an overview of the qualitative research design will be discussed first, followed by a description of qualitative research, population, sampling and data collection process. Also, the data analysis process including data transcription and coding process, the criteria to ensure quality of data in a qualitative research namely trustworthiness and authenticity; triangulation and the ethical considerations applicable to qualitative studies and specifically this study are discussed in detail.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is a researcher's detailed plan that outlines how the research will be conducted. This plan will include what research method and research techniques will be used to collect data and how this data will be analysed (Klopper 2008:69; Gray 2014:128; Babbie 2016:91). Kumar (2014:123) and Yin (2016:83) elaborate that the research design is a plan to select the research participants and gather relevant information from them. The plan outlines the procedure to be followed to obtain accurate answers to the research questions and how to communicate the research findings (Johnson & Christensen 2014:332; Yin 2016:83). The research design that will be used for this study is qualitative research and is discussed in detail in section 3.2.1.

### 3.2.1 Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2014:246) and Tappen (2016:43) qualitative research is a process of research flowing from philosophical assumptions involved in studying social and human problems. Instead of depending on a single source, data is collected by observing behaviour, conducting interviews and through examining documents in a natural setting. Qualitative researchers analyse and interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people or participants bring to them and report detailed views of the participants (Gupta & Pathak 2017:782).

Furthermore qualitative research is a systematic approach used to find out more about ways in which a group of people relate to each other and make sense of their experiences of the world with the intention of understanding and interpreting the people's behaviour, moreover to explain the dynamics of the society (McIntosh-Scott, Mason, Mason-Whitehead & Coyle 2013:23; Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard 2014:39).

Kumar (2014:171) explains that the qualitative research method follows a philosophy of empiricism whereby the information is collected through an unstructured approach which aims to explore the feelings, perceptions and experiences of participants. This information is recorded in a descriptive format which is subjected to categorical and descriptive analysis and the findings are not generalised but communicated in a narrative manner.

In addition, according to David and Sutton (2011:118) and Beaudry and Miller (2016:39), a qualitative approach allows the researcher to actively engage with the participants and ask questions. This was an explorative, descriptive and contextual qualitative research study:

- Explorative – the study explored the reasons for employee disengagement and the possible solutions thereof by conducting individual semi-structured interviews with managers (levels 5 to 7) and focus group (levels 2 to 4) interviews with general staff.



- Descriptive – the researcher’s intention was to describe the participants’ perceptions, feelings and the reasons towards the employee disengagement phenomenon.
- Contextual – in this study, the researcher actively engaged with the participants in their place of work as this is their natural environment.

The researcher’s aim was to gain a deeper understanding and new insights into the problem of employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.

### **3.2.2 Research paradigm**

A paradigm refers to a way of thinking, it includes basic assumptions and influences what should be studied, the research techniques to be used, the interpretation of results and how problems should be solved (Bryman & Bell 2015:381). For the purpose of this qualitative study, the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms are deemed to be the most appropriate for studying the questions asked by the researcher, which will provide the insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Section 3.2.2.1 and 3.2.2.2 explains in detail the paradigms.

#### **3.2.2.1 Constructivist paradigm**

According to Carey (2012:34) and Bryman and Bell (2015:18) constructivism is a qualitative approach built on the belief that meanings are constructed through the interaction of the researcher with the participants. It focuses more on how human practices and culture help to create and define social reality. Constructivism also considers the importance of meaning and relationships in the social world held between people and how they might develop and change over time. It acknowledges that people have their choices and influence their present but are likely to be restricted by group norms, traditions and institutional rules. This qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as data collected and examined from various angles intend to construct a meaningful picture of the reasons and possible solutions of the employee disengagement phenomenon in this organisation.

### **3.2.2.2 Interpretivist paradigm**

Ivey (2013:27) and Fourie and Deacon (2015:2) and Schultz (2017:1148) state that the interpretivist paradigm can be described as the experiences lived by individuals. These individuals express and describe their experiences as they go through them. The value of this approach is that it provides understanding into an individual's experience that is not understood by others. Gray (2014:23) highlights that interpretivism is a theoretical perspective closely linked to constructivism. The focus of interpretivism is to discover how people interpret and understand their experiences in the social world. For this study, the researcher is seeking to interpret and understand how the participants describe their lived experiences of employee disengagement in this organisation.

### **3.2.3 Rationale for conducting qualitative research**

Yin (2016:3) and Hedges and Williams (2014:188) propose that researchers who are interested in understanding the inner lives of the participants, the subjective elements of their lives and their functioning make use of qualitative methods to investigate these issues. This method offers rich insights into the lives of the participants by either talking to them or conducting interviews in their natural settings. This close contact with the participants is more pleasant than collecting quantitative surveys and crunching the figures (Johnson & Christensen 2014:38).

In this study, it was important for the researcher to understand the participants' views/experiences of the employee disengagement phenomenon. This could be achieved by the researcher developing a close and well defined relationship with the participants. The aim was to capture and communicate the participants' experiences and feelings in their own words through the interviews (Yilmaz 2013:313; Taylor, DeVault & Bogdan 2016:102). The researcher in this study has experience in conducting interviews and the research questions allowed the participants to construct the meaning of the phenomenon. Also, the employee engagement survey conducted by the researcher's organisation in November 2013 was a quantitative study; therefore a qualitative study was useful to validate the results of that survey.

### 3.2.4 Characteristics of qualitative research

Tappen (2016:54-55) proposes that in illustrating the extent to which qualitative research is all about, the following characteristics must be considered:

- Qualitative study commences with a researcher's effort to set aside their own beliefs and assumptions.
- Qualitative research is generally inductive.
- The researcher is the primary instrument, it is therefore crucial to take into consideration his or her values.
- The natural setting is used to collect data.
- Purposive or purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research.
- Multiple, holistic and constructed realities exist in qualitative research.
- Unlimited, rich and descriptive data is achieved in qualitative research.
- The planned study may change as understanding improves and expands.
- The main aim is to capture the insider's perspective, not the outsider's perspective.
- The vigorous interaction happens between the researcher and the participants.
- Both the researcher and the participants' input generate the outcomes that may be negotiated as part of the research process.
- Insight, creativity and reflexivity are valued as the researcher acknowledges them in writing.
- Authenticity is crucial; the voices of both the researcher and the participants are echoed in the writing.

Qualitative research assists researchers to understand human experiences; it is extremely beneficial for investigating areas where there is a lack of knowledge. Additionally, there is a close relationship between the researcher and the participants encompassing respect and mutual trust (McIntosh-Scott et al. 2013:24; Babbie 2016:310).

Yilmaz (2013:317) elaborates that qualitative research requires researchers to stay in the setting for a long period as this will assist them to develop a model of what occurred in the social setting. The data analysis is time consuming to allow themes and patterns to emerge from data and finally, it is responsive to ethical concerns and involves informed consent rulings. It can be deduced from the literature (Punch & Oancea 2014:147; Babbie 2016:391) that in qualitative research most data analysis is done with words which can be assembled, sub-clustered and broken into semiotic segments. These words can be structured to allow the researcher to contrast, compare, analyse and present patterns accordingly.

### **3.2.5 Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research**

Qualitative research offers in-depth and valuable information about participants' worldviews and detailed information about why a phenomenon occurs (Johnson & Christensen 2014:487). Some of the key strengths of qualitative research proposed by Clow and James (2014:41) are pointed out below:

- The main strength of qualitative research is that it is unstructured.
- The researcher is guided by the interview guide sheet to ensure that all the questions relating to the topic are covered during the interview.
- The interview process in qualitative research is open, flexible and the researcher is allowed to ask probing questions to better understand the participants' feelings and behaviour.
- Most qualitative research is conducted with a small sample.

Qualitative research also has its shortcomings. Johnson and Christensen (2014:488) proposed the following as the weaknesses of qualitative research:

- The findings might be unique to those who participated in the study and might not be generalised to other people or other settings.
- It takes time to collect data.
- The findings are more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and observations.

The researcher addressed the shortcomings or weaknesses as follows:

- It was not the intention of the study to generalise the findings to other settings but to explore and describe the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement.
- The researcher scheduled interviews well in advance with the intention of conducting all the interviews within a period of one month.
- The researcher made use of an independent coder and transcriber to speed up the process of data analysis.
- The researcher avoided influencing the findings of the research by setting aside her experiences and focusing on the data provided by the participants to ensure no bias.

### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODS**

Grove et al. (2015:81) and Johnson and Christensen (2014:116) point out that research methodology incorporates the methods used to collect data. It is also referred to as a technique or a tool of data collection (Green & Thorogood 2014:57; Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg 2018:187). Sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 will discuss the research setting and researcher's role, population, sampling method and the biographic characteristics of the participants.

#### **3.3.1 Research setting and participants**

The research was conducted within a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng which employs 133 employees at various organisational levels. Table 3.1 provides information on the levels of employees at this reinsurance organisation:

**Table 3.1: Employee levels information**

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of employees in each category</b>	<b>Percentage of each category</b>
Level 2-3	General Staff	68	52.5%
Level 4	Specialists/Assistant Managers	27	19.7%
Level 5	Managers	24	17.5%
Level 6	Senior Managers	9	6.6%
Level 7	Executive Committee Members	5	3.7%
		<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

The researcher made use of the Human Resource (HR) database to select the participants as she is employed as a Human Resource Officer (HRO) in this organisation and thus has access to the database on a daily basis. The organisational levels in the organisation are from levels two (2) to seven (7) and the participants were selected from these levels. Following the selection of these participants, the researcher scheduled meetings with them via the organisation's email facility to explain the purpose of the research, based on the results of the employee engagement survey conducted on 30 November 2013 and asked them if they were willing to participate. The researcher provided details about the interviews to those who were willing to partake in this study. The participants were invited to indicate their availability for the interviews with the emphasis that participation is voluntary. The researcher assured the participants that they will remain anonymous and that the information gathered during the interviews will be kept confidential.

### **3.3.2 Researcher's role**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Maritz & Jooste 2011:973; Yegidis, Weinbach & Myers 2012:22; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2013:92; Beaudry & Miller 2016:45). Maritz and Jooste (2011:973) and

Terrell (2016:151) elaborate that for a researcher to understand the phenomenon of the study, a researcher needs to reflect and put aside all preconceived mindsets and experiences as far as humanly possible.

Although one's personal experiences cannot be completely set aside when conducting an investigation, most qualitative methods compel bracketing – a process whereby the researcher assesses and sets aside their own beliefs, views, assumptions and personal experiences (Quinlan 2011:429; Beaudry & Miller 2016:92; Vicary, Young & Hicks 2017:552). This researcher was the instrument to obtain data by conducting focus group interviews with the employees and individual interviews with the managers. In addition, this researcher's role was to analyse and code the data, create themes and discuss the findings. She applied the bracketing technique to help her detach from the research and avoid biases that might shape the interpretations formed during the data analysis stage of this study.

Gray (2014:382) and Brink et al. (2018:143) state that the aim of the interviewer is to gather information from the interviewee, taking into consideration the interviewee's behaviour, beliefs, norms and values during the interview. For this current study, the researcher was the interviewer and conducted individual and focus groups interviews to gather information. The researcher ensured that the audio recorder was in a good working condition and that all the interviews were accurately recorded. Also, this researcher analysed the data, interpreted the research findings and made recommendations for this organisation and for future research.

### **3.3.3 Population**

Sekaran and Bougie (2016:236) and Bachmann and Schutt (2017:116) define a population as the entire group of people, incidents or things of interest that the researcher desires to study. Saunders et al. (2016:274) highlight that researcher may define a population as something more flexible and often referred to as the target population. The target population in this study comprised of 82 employees (from level 2 to level 7). The researcher was convinced that these employees would contribute meaning fully to this study as they were in the employ of this organisation when the employee engagement survey was conducted on 23 November 2013.

Forty employees left the employ of the organisation between 01 December 2013 to date and have since been replaced.

### **3.3.4 Sampling**

A sample is a subset of a population whilst sampling is defined as a technique used to select and access a portion of a population (Johnson & Christensen 2014:248; Terrell 2016:265). According to Grove et al. (2015:270) and Brink et al. (2018:115) the purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to gain in-depth information about the situation or phenomenon in a way that represents the study population.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2014:264) and Babbie (2016:196) purposive or judgemental sampling is a non-probability sampling method whereby a researcher uses his or her judgement to select the participants with specific characteristics to participate in the research study. It is essential for the researcher to specify the criteria that potential participants must meet to be included in the research study. In the words of Kumar (2014:376) and Bachman and Schutt (2017:122), non-probability sampling is piloted without any knowledge of whether those selected in the sample are representative of the entire population. Furthermore, purposive samples are used to choose participants who are known to provide essential information that could not be acquired from other sample designs (Gray 2014:217; Sekaran & Bougie 2016:248).

Sekaran and Bougie (2016:247) elaborate that the non-probability sampling is the most cost effective and less complex data technique used in small scales of social research depending on the purpose of the study.

#### **3.3.4.1 Characteristics of purposive sampling**

According to Struwig and Stead (2013:127) and Beaudry and Miller (2016:41) the aim of purposive sampling is to identify information-rich participants with certain characteristics to be included in the sample. Struwig and Stead (2013:127) pinpoint the following as the major characteristics of purposive sampling:



- Unlike in the case of a quantitative research, the total sample is not selected in advance.
- It aims to identify the characteristics of the participants needed in the final sample.
- The sample size may change as the study continues.
- Each sampling unit is selected after the information from the previous unit has been analysed.
- If the previous sampling unit provides insufficient information, an additional sampling unit will be essential.
- The sampling of new units will continue until no new information is being revealed.

Grove et al. (2015:270) point out that in qualitative studies, purposive sampling appears to be the best way to gain insights into a new area of study, discover new meaning or obtain in-depth understanding of a complex experience, situation or event. This researcher used the purposive sampling technique for this study.

#### **3.3.4.2 Sampling Frame**

Bachman and Schutt (2017:116) and Babbie (2016:211) describe sampling frame as a list of all elements in a population from which a sample is selected. The researcher made use of the employees' date of employment database to select the participants. The employee engagement survey initiated on 23 November 2013 was anonymous therefore the assumption is that the participants selected would have participated.

For this study, 43 employees were selected to participate. The sample comprised of seven managers (level 5 to level 7) and an assortment of 36 employees consisting of general staff and specialists/assistant managers (level 2 to level 4). The researcher was convinced that these employees would contribute meaningfully to the study. They could express themselves and provide valuable inputs on their feelings towards the results of the 2013 employee engagement survey. Also, describe employee disengagement and provide the possible reasons and solutions to address the employee disengagement phenomenon.

Seven managers were invited to participate in the individual interviews but only six managers were prepared to participate in the study. For the focus group interviews, 36 general staff and specialists/assistant managers were invited, but only 27 staff members were prepared to participate.

#### **3.3.4.3 Sampling criteria**

The participants' criteria for this study were employees who were in the employ of this reinsurance organisation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2013 when the employee engagement survey was conducted. Characteristics of the participants of the individual and focus group interviews can be summarised as follows:

- There are both males and females.
- They have been employed for more than three years with the organisation.
- Their ages range between 26 and 65 years.
- They are employed at different organisational levels (level 2 – level 7).
- They understand and speak English.
- They are characterised by different ethnic groups (African, Coloured, Indian and White).

#### **3.3.4.4 Biographic characteristics of participants**

All the participants were asked to complete their biographical details on a form before the interviews were recorded. The biographical details of the individuals selected to participate in both the individual and focus group interviews are presented in Table 3.2:

**Table 3.2: Biographical details of participants**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of the participants</b>	<b>Percentage of the participants</b>
Gender	Male	17	52%
	Female	16	48%
Marital status	Single	6	18%
	Married	25	76%
	Other	2	6%
Age	20-30	3	9%
	31-40	12	36%
	41-50	14	43%
	51-60	4	12%
Job levels	Level 2	3	9%
	Level 3	18	55%
	Level 4	6	18%
	Level 5	2	6%
	Level 6	3	9%
	Level 7	1	3%
Years of service	0-3	2	6%
	4-6	6	18%
	7-9	9	28%
	10 and more	16	48%
Qualifications	Matric	8	24%
	National Diploma	7	21%
	Degree	18	55%

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Bryman (2012:380) and Bryman and Bell (2015:51) state that qualitative research concentrates more on words than figures and has several research methods associated with it. The main research methods are observation (direct and participant),

open-ended surveys, language-based methods, focus groups and interviews (Bryman & Bell 2015:42; Belk 2017:37). Furthermore, Gray (2014:177) and Grove et al. (2015:302) elaborate that conducting interviews can be used as the main data collection instrument by way of unstructured and semi-structured interviews or using open-ended and close-ended questions.

The research methods identified for this study were individual interviews, also referred to as one-on-one or face-to-face interviews aimed at managers from level 5 to level 7 and focus group interviews aimed at the general staff and specialists/ assistant managers from level 2 to level 4.

Bryman and Bell (2015:237) acknowledge that it is not surprising for research studies conducted in the business context to use a mixture of individual interviews and focus group interviews for the purpose of triangulation and to boost the depth and richness of the data. The advantage of using triangulation is that it allows the researcher to use more than one source of data to ensure that the findings from each are similar (Terrell 2016:174). For this study, this researcher used both individual and focus group interviews to collect data.

### **3.5 HOW TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH INTERVIEW**

As Babbie (2016:317) points out, in qualitative research it is important for a researcher to have an open and trusting relationship with the participants. This will give them a sense of self-worth, which will increase their willingness to open up. Also, for this study the researcher drafted a list of questions (interview guide) to be asked during the interviews (Kumar 2014:177; Johnson & Christensen 2014:233; Gupta & Pathak 2017:783; Brink et al. 2018:143).

According to Gray (2014:391) and Altinay, Jang and Paraskevas (2016:137) before an interview is conducted, a researcher should prepare the interview guide, ask the participants to complete a pre-interview questionnaire (dealing with biographic details such as age, gender, occupation and their length of service with the organisation) to avoid wasting time during the interview to ask those questions. The researcher should

also confirm the time and the location of where the interview will be held (Gray 2014:391).

Denscombe (2014:194) suggests the following steps to be followed by a researcher during the interview:

- Greet the participants, do some introductions, explain the aim of the interview and mention how long it should last.
- Ask for permission to record the discussion and undertake to maintain confidentiality. This will assist in building trust and rapport with the participants.
- Prepare the recording equipment.
- Ask the participants if they have any questions.
- The researcher will start by asking the participants the questions that will allow them to settle down and relax, followed by the questions that the interviewer is seeking to focus on.
- Ask follow-up questions.
- Make notes and keep eye contact throughout the interview.
- Give appropriate verbal and non-verbal feedback.
- Identify main points stated by the interviewee, paraphrase and clarify them.
- Keep an eye on the time during the interview and ensure that the required areas of the discussion are covered.
- Allow the participants to raise points that they would like to be covered.

The steps mentioned above were followed by the researcher to conduct interviews for this study. The audio recorder was placed on top of the table between the participants in the focus group interviews and the same applied during the individual interviews. The researcher also had a pen, notebook and a spare audio recorder as a backup during all the interviews conducted. The notebook was used to make notes of what the researcher was observing during the interviews and the spare audio recorder would have been used in the event of the main audio recording equipment failing.

After each interview, the researcher thanked the participants for the time they took to participate in the interview and asked if they would like to add anything. The researcher indicated as to when the feedback on the research would be provided to the

participants. Some participants tried to engage the researcher about the purpose of the research after the interview had been concluded. As stated by Bryman and Bell (2015:221), the researcher resisted to elaborate beyond the guidelines provided at the beginning of the interview as this could be communicated to other participants and could prejudice the findings. All the participants received a follow-up e-mail after the interviews thanking them for making the time to be interviewed.

Open-ended questions were built in the interview guide to provide more depth to the data. Section 3.5.1 will discuss the individual interviews followed by focus group interviews in section 3.5.2. The interview guides for individual interviews (managers from levels 5 to 7) and focus group interviews (general staff from levels 2 to 4) will be discussed in sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4.

### **3.5.1 Individual interviews**

Gray (2014:382) and Babbie (2016:311) explain an interview as a verbal exchange of a conversation between an interviewer and the interviewee with the intention of gathering relevant information. Interviews and observations are the main foundation of data collection in qualitative research (Hedges & Williams 2014:1920). Clow and James (2014:108) elaborate that a researcher may conduct an in-depth interview which is a qualitative method encompassing one-on-one interviews. The one-on-one interviews or individual interviews, afford the researcher the opportunity to gather detailed information that is useful and essential for the research. As the attitudes and the feelings of participants will be involved (Gray 2014:383), conducting individual interviews was the appropriate method for this study.

The researcher conducted individual interviews with managers from level 5 to level 7 for this study. The researcher had a short briefing session with each manager to remind them of the findings of the employee engagement survey conducted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2013. Individual interviews were booked for one hour to one hour and 30 minutes with each manager during working hours in a meeting room to avoid distractions as recording devices can be sensitive to background noise (De Vos et al. 2011:350; Bryman & Bell 2015:228). During the interviews, all the participants were positive, relaxed and were free to express their feelings and views. All the interviews

were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed by the transcriber.

The individual interviews were conducted with managers until the point of data saturation was reached during the sixth and final interview. Creswell (2014:189) and Beaudry and Miller (2016:42) and Gupta and Pathak (2017:784) clarify that data saturation is reached when no new information is being revealed and redundancy is achieved. The individual interviews allowed the researcher to ask questions pertaining to the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to improve the current state of employee disengagement in this organisation. The advantages and disadvantages of individual interviews are discussed in section 3.5.1.1.

#### **3.5.1.1 Advantages of individual interviews**

According to Denscombe (2014:187), the following are advantages of individual interviews:

- Individual interviews are fairly straightforward to arrange.
- The opinions and views expressed throughout the interview stem from the interviewee.
- Individual interviews are relatively easy to control as the interviewer has only one person's ideas to grasp and interrogate.
- Finally, it is uncomplicated for the researcher to transcribe a recorded interview as there is only one voice to recognise.

#### **3.5.1.2 Disadvantages of individual interviews**

According to Altinay et al. (2016:136) the main disadvantages of individual interviews are:

- It may be difficult to secure the interview itself.
- Access to the participants may be denied due to their busy schedules.

- The participants may be reluctant to participate due to sensitivities associated with the confidentiality of the information.
- The participants rely on the interviewer to keep their identity confidential and hope that their responses will not be discussed outside the context of the research project (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 2012:103; Parahoo 2014:325-326).

Furthermore, Cronin, Coughlan and Smith (2015:134) explain that interviews are more demanding in terms of time and can be expensive compared to other methods. Also, the more flexible and in-depth the interview, the more generation of data there is, which makes it difficult to analyse the data. These disadvantages were addressed in the following way:

- The researcher checked the participants' calendars for availability before scheduling the interviews.
- The participants were briefed about the purpose of the interviews and were assured that they will remain anonymous.
- The researcher was entrusted with private and confidential information about the organisation and its employees. Therefore she strived to maintain confidentiality.
- Access to the participants was not time consuming as the participants were in the same location as that of the researcher.
- The data analysis process involved making use of a coder and this made it easier to analyse the data accordingly.

### **3.5.2 Focus group interviews**

Wimmer and Dominick (2014:136) and Terrell (2016:162) define a focus group as group interviewing and a research strategy for understanding people's behaviour and attitudes toward an event, product or concept. Denscombe (2014:188) states that focus groups comprise of a small group of people with particular characteristics and similar knowledge, brought together by a researcher to explore their attitudes, perceptions and feelings about a particular topic.



Babbie (2016:313) and Parahoo (2014:321) concur that focus group interviews allow a researcher to pose the questions to the participants thoroughly and simultaneously. The intention of the focus group interviews is to generate data that can be easily compared with the data generated from the individual or face-to-face interviews to enable comparison between the selected participants (David & Sutton 2011:133; Wimmer & Dominick 2014:137). The group gathers around the table to ensure full contribution from all and the participants will be audio recorded. Furthermore, the researcher is permitted to record his or her observations and impressions about the participants (Quinlan 2011:224; Wimmer & Dominick 2014:136).

According to Githaiga (2015:412) and Jones (2015:565) a focus group can consist of two to ten participants depending on the homogeneity or heterogeneity needed as long as the participants share a common experience and are willing to participate in the discussion. In a qualitative study conducted by Kubayi, Coopoo and Morris-Eyton (2015:726), the authors argue that focus group interviews should consist of a minimum of four to a maximum of twelve participants. The sample for their study was two focus groups each consisting of five participants. Quinlan (2011:224) and Wimmer and Dominick (2014:136) further express that the number of participants in a focus group ranges from six to twelve.

Clow and James (2014:97-98) emphasise that a focus group may consist of eight to twelve individuals. The main reason is that the group members discuss their thoughts and share knowledge that individuals who are interviewed individually may not consider (Grove et al. 2015:85). Clow and James (2014:97-98) elaborate that one participant will feed off other participants comments, generating new thoughts and ideas.

For this study, the researcher selected the participants from level 2 to level 4 which represented general staff and specialists/assistant managers to conduct the focus group interviews. The focus groups were restricted to participants who were in the employ of the organisation when the 2013 employee engagement survey was conducted. The researcher assembled each focus group with a mixture of diverse age groups, marital status, gender, tenure and qualifications to allow different opinions.

The researcher's aim was to conduct six focus group interviews with each focus group consisting of six participants each to generate rich discussion and to encourage all the participants to participate in the discussion. However, the breakdown of the actual number of participants who participated in the five focus group interviews conducted was the following:

- Focus group 1 (six participants – FGP1 to FGP6)
- Focus group 2 (six participants – FGP7 to FGP12)
- Focus group 3 (five participants – FGP13 to FGP17)
- Focus group 4 ( six participants – FGP18 to FGP23)
- Focus group 5 (four participants – FGP24 to FGP27)

The researcher had a short briefing session with each focus group to remind them of the findings of the employee engagement survey conducted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2013. These interviews were booked for one hour to one hour and thirty minutes during working hours in a meeting room and permission to record the interviews was solicited from the participants. This setting encouraged employees to participate, and they were therefore willing to talk while they were amongst their peers. Since the confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the participants were asked to respect the privacy of everyone participating in the focus group session.

The researcher's interviewing skills were beneficial to intervene and take control of the group by setting ground rules before the discussion. The researcher made it very clear to the participants that the interviews were not to be misunderstood as a grumbling session against management and constantly reminded the participants of the purpose of the discussion. The researcher did not allow certain individuals to dominate the discussion but ensured that everyone in the group was involved in discussing the questions. It was noted that most of the participants freely expressed their feelings of frustration and sadness during the interviews and were willing to share their experiences for the benefit of this study and for the organisation. All the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The audio recording of all the interviews enabled the researcher to listen carefully to what was said during the interviews and allowed the researcher to pay attention to non-verbal cues that might be relevant to

the research findings. Data saturation means no new information has been found during the data collection process (Tavakol & Sandars 2014:841; Brink et al. 2018:126). For this study data saturation was reached after five focus group interviews had been conducted as no new information was then revealed.

Also, the researcher was able to observe the body language of participants in addition to their verbal comments and used this opportunity by encouraging the participants to share their ideas and thoughts.

The following are advantages and disadvantages of focus group interviews:

### **3.5.2.1 Advantages of focus group interviews**

Gray (2014:469) and Belk (2017:37) state that the significant advantages of focus groups are that they can be quickly and easily gathered; are useful for innovative idea creation; permit observation of non-verbal responses such as gestures; provide opportunities to clarify responses and the data can be analysed immediately after the session has finished.

According to Gray (2014:470) and Brink et al. (2018:144) focus groups allow the participants their viewpoints and also stimulate various responses which might lead participants to debate and argue with each other and challenge each other's views. This process of arguing is beneficial to the researcher as it gives an indication of a realistic account of the people's thinking and their feelings. Furthermore, focus groups permit the participants to hear the ideas of others and elaborate on the issues that others have raised. This helps the participants to formulate their own opinions, and add to other's points thus delivering rich data (Bradley-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine 2009:666; Kumar 2014:193).

### **3.5.2.2 Disadvantages of focus group interviews**

Babbie (2016:314) highlights that letting one person dominate the group interview decreases the likelihood of other group members expressing themselves. This may lead to a discussion whereby less dominant participants withhold their views or go

along with the views of vocal and dominant participants (David & Sutton 2011:134; Clow & James 2014:105; Parahoo 2014:322; Aurini, Heath & Howells 2016:137).

The participants are likely to go off track and it is the responsibility of the experienced researcher to ensure that the discussion gets back on track (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati & Brackstone 2014:118; Babbie 2016:322). Aurini et al. (2016:137) and Clow and James (2014:105) point out that the primary disadvantage of a focus group is that each represents the opinions of only a few participants and the results may not speak for the large population of participants. Sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4 discusses the interview guides for focus group interviews and individual interviews with the managers. These interview questions were guided by the factors (leadership, organisational culture and motivation) and acknowledged as influencing employee engagement as discussed in section 2.1 of this study.

### **3.5.3 Interview guide for focus group interviews**

Interview questions for the focus group interviews addressed management, motivation, organisational culture and general questions about employee engagement and employee disengagement:

1. How do you feel about the survey results?
2. What is your understanding of employee disengagement?
3. Please share your experiences about employee disengagement or being disengaged in this organisation. Give examples or motivate your answer.
4. In your opinion why are the employees disengaged in this organisation?
5. In your opinion what interventions can be implemented to address employee disengagement in this organisation?
6. In your view, what role does your manager currently play to engage you in this organisation?
7. Have you ever considered leaving the organisation? If yes, what were your reasons to consider opportunities elsewhere?

8. In your opinion, how does the organisational culture promote employee engagement in this organisation?
9. In your opinion, how can this organisation rectify the disengagement problem?

### **3.5.4 Interview guide for individual interviews**

Interview questions for managers addressed the leadership, organisational culture and general questions about employee engagement and employee disengagement:

1. How do you feel about the survey results?
2. What is your understanding of employee disengagement?
3. Please share your experiences about employee disengagement or being disengaged in this organisation. Give examples or motivate your answer.
4. In your opinion why are the employees disengaged in this organisation?
5. In your opinion what interventions can be implemented to address employee disengagement in this organisation?
6. In your experience as a manager, what role does management currently play to engage the employees in this organisation?
7. What strategy are you following to create a successful team in this organisation?
8. In your view, how does the organisational culture promote employee engagement in this organisation?
9. In your opinion, how can this organisation rectify the disengagement problem?

### **3.6 PILOT STUDY**

In research, a small scale trial run of research interviews or observations is vital to avoid collecting large data that might produce the information a researcher does not need. The interview guide needs to be tested to ensure that the participants follow and clearly understand the researcher's questions (Laws, Harper, Jones & Marcus 2013:149; Kumar 2014:178 & Grove et al. 2015:45).

For this study, a pilot trial was performed to ensure that the questions in the interview guide were well constructed, understood by the participants and that the information met the objectives of the research study. The individual interview was conducted on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 with the Human Resource manager who has a good understanding of the employee engagement and employee disengagement phenomenon. The interview was conducted at 12h00 in a meeting room with no distractions and the meeting lasted for 20 minutes and 11 seconds. During this interview, the manager was relaxed, positive and was willing to share her experiences.

The focus group interview was conducted on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2016 with six participants selected from general staff and specialists/assistant managers (level 2 to level 4). The interview was conducted at 11h00 in a meeting room with no distractions and the meeting lasted for one hour, 19 minutes and 11 seconds. The participants were a bit reluctant to answer the questions but did become relaxed and started to open up. Both interviews were scheduled during working hours. This varied selection of participants allowed the researcher to test the logical flow of the interview guide. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the biographical details of the pilot study participants.

**Table 3.3: Biographical details of the participants in the pilot study**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of the participants</b>	<b>Percentage of the participants</b>
Gender	Male	3	43%
	Female	4	57%
Marital status	Single	2	29%
	Married	5	71%
Age	31-40	3	42%
	41-50	2	29%
	51-60	2	29%
Job levels	Level 3	2	29%
	Level 4	4	57%
	Level 6	1	14%
Years of service	4-6	1	14%
	7-9	3	43%

	10 and more	3	43%
Qualifications	Matric	3	43%
	National Diploma	1	14%
	Degree	3	43%

A pilot study was conducted with one manager and one focus group consisting of six participants. The pilot trial provided the researcher with an opportunity to establish if the questions were consistent and effective to generate the relevant views on the subject of employee disengagement.

Roth (2015:263) describes debriefing as a cultural practice used to reflect on and review, after some action has taken place to improve understanding and performance in numerous areas. It simply means learning from experience with the purpose of analysing, reviewing and discussing to develop new strategies. According to Maritz and Jooste (2011:974) and Mothokoa (2015:25) debriefing discussions may clarify challenges as they emerge during the research process and may allow alterations to be made, thus serving as a self-correcting measure during the research process.

In total, the pilot trail was conducted in one hour, 39 minutes and 19 seconds and was followed by a debriefing discussion between the researcher and two supervisors. During the discussion, it was agreed that some of the interview questions be altered as there was a repetition of certain questions where the participants mentioned that they had already answered them during the interviews. The necessary alterations were made to the final interview question guides and the data collection process, which consisted of five individual interviews and four focus groups.

### **3.7 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN DATA COLLECTION**

The interviews were conducted between the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2016 and the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2016. The biggest challenge was to co-ordinate the interviews due to:

- The participants' availability – as it was during the examination time and some of the participants especially for the focus groups were on study leave. The final

individual interview was conducted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2016, after it had been postponed several times, as the manager was only available then.

- The organisation's financial year end – both the managers and focus group participants were not available most of the time due to work pressure and deadlines to meet.
- The organisation's move to a new location on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2016 had an impact on some of the scheduled interviews as the meeting rooms were not easily available and the interviews had to be re-scheduled to accommodate all the participants.

There were noise disruptions outside the meeting room during some of the interviews due to the preparations for the office move from the old location to a new location. The researcher's intention was to conduct all the focus group interviews at the old premises to ensure that confidentiality was maintained as the new office's meeting rooms were transparent and privacy could have been jeopardised. The interviews conducted at the new location were mainly with the managers and there were noise disruptions outside the meeting room as the building was still a construction site. These interviews were booked and conducted during mid-morning or late afternoon to minimise the disruptions.

### **3.8 TRANSCRIBING PROCESS**

Parahoo (2014:367) and Grove et al. (2015:88) state that unlike quantitative data, qualitative data is gathered in a non-standardised method such as interviews. This data is analysed by creating and assessing propositions described using words. Qualitative data is divided into two major types namely non-text and text. Non-text refers to images, audio and video recordings. Text data as the name implies, is data in the form of words that have been recorded as text, transcribed and word processed to prepare for data analysis (Saunders & Lewis 2012:167; Parahoo 2014:367; Terrell 2016:264).

Transcription is the process of converting recordings into written words (Howitt & Cramer 2014:363 & Grove et al. 2015:513). The audio recordings of both the individual and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim (Mabuza, Govender, Ogunbanjo



& Mash 2014:1; Tappen 2016:268 & Fletcher 2017:185). The researcher involved a professional transcriber to transcribe all the audio recordings to ensure credibility of the data presented in this study. An agreement was signed between the transcriber and the researcher after a discussion relating to how confidentiality will be kept and how data should be transcribed. Upon receiving the transcribed data, the researcher would check the transcriptions for accuracy. The researcher was constantly communicating with the transcriber via e-mail or telephonically until the transcribing process came to an end. All the transcriptions were protected with a password and kept confidential on two computers (office and home) and an external hard drive.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Tavakol and Sandars (2014:845) and Bachman and Schutt (2017:419) in qualitative data analysis, the researcher's focus is on meaning instead of measurable phenomena. The researcher's mission is to group together the similar data in meaning with the intention of generating categories and finally creating themes. A theme describes a view or concept that emerges from the data and brings meaning and identity to a current experience and its alternate manifestations. Meng and Berger, as cited in White (2017:23), advise researchers to ensure that themes reflect the factors of the study. Crowe, Inder and Porter (2015:618) emphasise that as soon as each theme is distinctly defined and described, it needs to be pointed out with reference to the transcripts by using extracts or quotes that capture the essence of the theme.

Houghton, Murphy, Shaw and Casey (2015:9) point out that there are no systematic rules to follow when analysing qualitative data as this process is the most complex throughout all the phases of a qualitative project. Kumar (2014:318) and Tappen (2016:405) describe data analysis as the process of analysing the contents of data in order to identify the main themes, assigning codes to the main themes, classifying responses under main themes, integrating themes and responses into the text for the researcher's report. Essentially, the data analysis process brings order, structure and meaning to the bulk of data collected (Hedges & Williams 2014:196; Brink et al. 2018:180). A researcher can achieve this process by immersing him/herself in the data and subsequently begin to understand it well (Saunders & Lewis 2012:187; Creswell 2013:183; Githaiga 2015:413).

The additional process of analysing text in qualitative research starts when a researcher codes the data. Coding is the key analysis of qualitative research. The retrieval system is crucial to this process and includes categorising and classifying the data collected (Creswell 2014:198; Babbie 2016:397). The process converts words to numbers or symbols and uses these words together with numbers or symbols throughout the analysis (Babbie 2014:409; Brink et al. 2018:180).

As Sekaran and Bougie (2016:334) point out, the purpose of coding is to assist the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the data. The authors elaborate that coding is a repetitive process as you may have to return to your data to increase your understanding of the data. David and Sutton (2011:342); Creswell (2014:198) and Cronin et al. (2015:161) state that 'In Vivo' coding refers to terms that are in the language of those either interviewed or who wrote the text data collected by the researcher. The In Vivo coding, regarded as the verbatim coding process, was followed in this study as the researcher's focus was on the actual language and the words generated by the participants.

### **How to analyse data**

Creswell (2014:196) advises qualitative researchers to follow the steps presented in Figure 3.1 when analysing data. This figure proposes a linear, hierarchical approach building from the bottom to the top with various stages interrelated and not always followed in the order presented. The seven steps involved in analysing data as described by Creswell (2014:197- 200) are:

1. Look at the raw data – be familiar with the interview transcripts and field notes.
2. Organise and prepare data – transcribe all interviews verbatim, sort and arrange data into different types. This will bring structure and order to the mass of data.
3. Read or look at all the data – read or view the material collected repeatedly to reflect on the overall meaning.

4. Start coding all of the data – mark sections of data and assign labels or names. Also, single out words or phrases used by participants (In Vivo codes).
5. Generate a description of the setting as well as categories and themes for analysis from the coding process – provide detailed information about people or events in the setting. Also, generate categories and themes supported by specific evidence.
6. Represent the description and themes in a qualitative narrative – mention the events in a chronological way and provide detailed discussions of some themes from individuals and quotations.
7. Interpret the findings or results – determine how far the findings fit into existing knowledge on the area. The interpretations of the findings can also suggest new questions to be asked for future research.

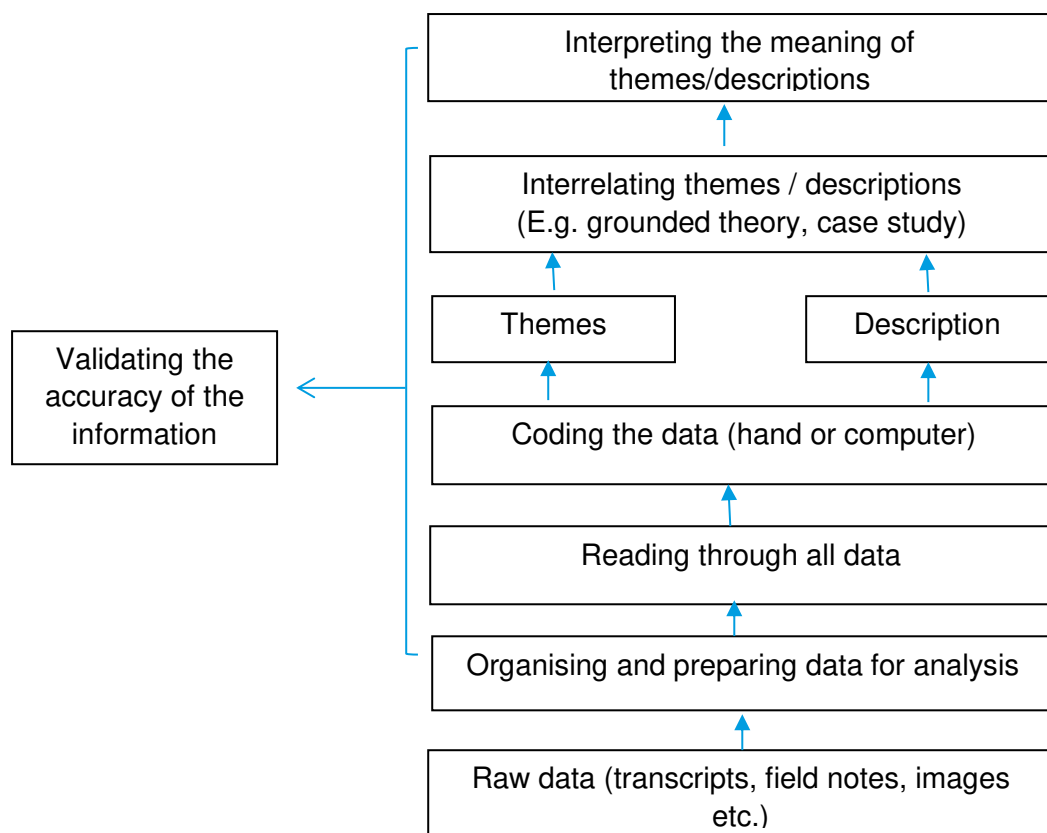


Figure 3.1 Data analysis in qualitative research

Source: Creswell (2014: 197)

## Data coding process

The researcher followed the steps mentioned above to analyse all data. Rosiek and Heffernan (2014:727) and Croninet et al. (2015:161) emphasise that researchers can only code what is actually said therefore one of the tacit qualities of coding methods in qualitative analysis is its privileging of the presence over absence; and voice over silence of the participants. The data collected from the individual and focus group interviews was coded following Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (Creswell 2014:198), to code what was articulated by participants during the interviews. The data was coded as follows:

1. The researcher read through all the transcriptions of the individual and focus group interviews to understand the experiences of the participants and made notes as she read.
2. The researcher chose a short and interesting interview transcript, went through it while asking "what is this about?" and wrote the thoughts in the margin.
3. After completing the task mentioned above, a list of all topics was composed. Similar topics were grouped together in different columns arranged as major topics, unique topics and leftover topics.
4. This list of topics was studied again against the data collected. The topics were abbreviated as codes and these codes were written next to the appropriate sections of the text. By doing so, an opportunity for new categories and themes emerged.
5. The researcher found the most descriptive wording of her topics and turned them into categories. The total list of categories was reduced by grouping the topics that relate to each other.
6. A final decision was made on what abbreviations would be used for each category and the codes were alphabetised.
7. A preliminary analysis was performed after assembling the data material belonging to each category.
8. Existing data could be re-coded by the researcher if necessary.

The researcher was able to group keywords with similar meanings into codes and these were written next to the suitable parts of text. As soon as data was coded, words were arranged into categories and this led to themes emerging from the data (St. Pierre & Jackson 2014:716; Brink et al. 2018:181). According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013:97), a theme can be regarded as a red thread of underlying meaning that connects the data together as it answers the question, “why?” and is expressed in an active voice. The steps followed above assisted the researcher to answer the research questions.

After the researcher coded the data, all the transcripts of the individual and focus group interviews were sent to an external coder to enhance the credibility of the data for this study. Once completed, the external coder and the researcher met to discuss and compare the themes. A consensus was reached by both the researcher and the external coder. The findings of the discussion between the researcher and the external coder are discussed in sections 4.5 to 4.10 and sections 5.5 to 5.10 of this study.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2014:65) and Babbie (2016:62) ethics deals with what is right or wrong, and proper or improper when conducting a scientific research. Gray (2014:68) and Cronin et al. (2015:100) highlight that ethics refers to the morally accepted norms, values and expected conduct abiding by ethical principles. Ethics examines the values of a researcher and focusses on the role and integrity of the research inquiry to protect the participants (May 2011:61; Bryman & Bell 2015:120).

Veal (2011:101) and Bryman and Bell (2015:122) emphasise that in any form of research, ethical behaviour is vital; the standards of research ethics are consistent worldwide concerning matters of honesty and respect for the rights of the individuals.

The researcher adhered to UNISA’s Research and Ethics Policy. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of this study to prospective participants. The process and the details provided to the participants allowed and guided them to decide if they were willing to participate in the research or not. The researcher ensured that participation was voluntary by providing sufficient information

to the potential participants about the research to be conducted and respected their right to privacy including the right to refuse to participate in the study. Those who wished to participate were asked to sign the consent forms before the interviews were conducted. During the interviews, the researcher kept the participants' information confidential by not discussing the contents of their interviews with other participants already interviewed and ensured that all the participants remained anonymous by not mentioning names on the research reports. The data collected was kept in a safe place with controlled access (to the researcher) situated in the organisation's Human Resource department's filing room which is kept locked at all times. The electronic data files were backed up regularly and the researcher used passwords to protect the information. The researcher will discard data (make use of a software to destroy data and shred all the paperwork) after the minimum required storage period (5 years) to avoid it being accessed by unauthorised people. Also, management of the reinsurance organisation granted permission to the researcher to have access to the employee engagement survey that was conducted on 23 November 2013.

### **3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Gray (2014:186) and Cronin et al. (2015:18) explain that the alternative ways to assess the quality of data in a qualitative research are trustworthiness and authenticity. Terrell (2016:173) elaborates that in a qualitative research, the focus is on the overall trustworthiness of the study instead of reliability and validity. According to Cronin et al. (2015:192) and Daniel (2018:265), trustworthiness refers to having trust in the findings of a study and knowing them to be reliable and true. The criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability), as justified by Lincoln and Guba (1994) and cited in Gray (2014:185) and Cronin et al. (2015:124), to ensure trustworthiness are explained below.

#### **3.11.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to assurance in the truth of the data and the interpretations thereof. Lincoln and Guba pointed out that credibility involves the acceptability and demonstrates the credibility of the findings (Polit & Beck 2012:585; Terrell 2016:173; Daniel 2018:266). The researcher ensured that the research was carried out according

to the standards of good practice. She provided an in-depth explanation to the participants regarding the study to obtain appropriate responses from them, to listen and allow the participants to speak during the individual and focus group interviews, to determine the validity of assumptions drawn from the data and to check and re-check the transcriptions and emerging themes from the data. Making use of an external coder enhanced the credibility of the data.

### **3.11.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possible transferability of the findings to other settings (Polit & Beck 2012:585; Terrell 2016:174; Daniel 2018:266). The researcher described the research setting, the purpose of the qualitative design and the sampling to be used for this study, should there be a need by other researchers to transfer the findings to other contexts or settings. For the purpose of this study, the aim of qualitative research is not to transfer to other contexts.

### **3.11.3 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the reliability of data over time and conditions by asking the question: "Would the findings of the research be the same if they were replicated with the same participants in a similar context?" (Polit & Beck 2012:585; Terrell 2016:175). The researcher explained the data analysis procedure to ensure that when the procedure is replicated, it will produce the same results.

### **3.11.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability corresponds with objectivity to ensure that the conducting of the research and the findings thereof are objective and free from the researcher's influence by reflecting only the participants' voices (Polit & Beck 2012:585; Terrell 2016:175). The researcher acted in good faith by not allowing personal principles to influence the research findings. The findings are based on the data and not on the researcher's preferences. The interview transcriptions and interview notes were confirmed with the

participants (member checking). Nothing was changed by the participants in the transcriptions.

Finally, Gray (2014:186) and Bachman and Schutt (2017:54) conclude that authenticity raises concerns around the fairness and the authenticity of the research conducted. This appears in the findings when it conveys the feeling, tone and perception of participants' lives as they are lived. The researcher ensured that the research represents the different viewpoints of participants accurately. The researcher's aim was to collect authentic data from participants without influencing or changing the setting.

### **3.12 TRIANGULATION**

Triangulation refers to the interpretation of research problems from a variety of perspectives by not relying on the findings from a single method or approach (Denscombe 2014:147; Babbie 2016:119). Terrell (2016:174) and LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2014:125) define triangulation as using two kinds of information to uncover a unique result. This information from different sources can be used to collaborate, elaborate or irradiate the phenomenon in question. In a qualitative study, triangulation might involve attempting to disclose the complexity of a phenomenon by using multiple means of data collection to validate the truth (Mabuza et al. 2014:3 & Brink et al. 2018:84). Klopper (2008:70); Hays and Singh (2012:207); Mabuza et al. (2014:3) and Bachman and Schutt (2017:97) agree that triangulation is a popular approach for enhancing trustworthiness from different perspectives.

Bryman and Bell (2015:237) acknowledge that it is not surprising for research studies conducted in the business context to use a mixture of individual interviews and focus group interviews for the purpose of triangulation and to boost the depth and richness of the data. For this study, the researcher applied data triangulation by using multiple sources of data (individual and focus group interviews, interview notes and literature control) to support and interpret the findings of the research. The advantage of using triangulation is that it allows the researcher to compare the findings and make conclusions based on a mixture of data to improve the accuracy of the findings (Moule & Goodman 2014:306; Terrell 2016:174).



In addition, an independent coder with qualitative research experience was sourced to assess the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data analysis process. This was done to compare the similarities and differences in coding data already collected by the researcher.

### **3.13 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented in detail the research design and the qualitative research method that informed all the research decisions in this study, the population, sampling (purposive sampling technique) and data collection process (individual and focus group interviews). Also, the data analysis process included Tesch's eight steps in the coding process, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and triangulation applicable to qualitative studies and specifically this study were discussed. Chapter 4 will discuss in detail the findings of the focus group interviews as they pertain to the research questions. These findings will be interpreted and compared with the existing literature.

**CHAPTER 4 : FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 discussed the background, motivation and problem statement, research questions and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 provided the literature review based on the aspects of employee engagement and employee disengagement. Chapter 3 discussed in detail the qualitative research methodology of the study including the population, sampling, data collection method (semi-structured individual and focus group interviews), pilot study as well as the data analysis process.

The main purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the qualitative data gathered from the focus group interviews. The empirical findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 27 participants (general staff and specialists/assistant managers) from level 2 to level 4. Section 4.2 outlines the profile of the participants.

**4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

The biographical information on gender, marital status, age, job levels, tenure and qualifications was collected from the participants by using a standardised form which had to be completed by all participants before the interviews. Tables 4.1 to 4.6 display the biographical information of the participants:

**Table 4.1: Gender split focus groups**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Females	14	52%
Males	13	48%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.1 signals that even though this organisation is female dominant, the number of females and males was almost even with slightly more females representing 52% than the males representing 48%.

**Table 4.2: Marital status split focus groups**

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	6	22%
Married	20	74%
Other	1	4%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

According to Table 4.2, the majority of the employees in this organisation are married.

**Table 4.3: Age split focus groups**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
25-30	3	11%
31-35	4	15%
36-40	7	26%
41-45	3	11%
46-50	6	22%
51-55	4	15%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.3 indicates that the empirical data was collected from a diverse age group. The participants represented three different generations namely baby boomers (between 55 and 75 years), Generation X (between 40 and 54 years) and millennials (between 25 and 39 years). Although the participants from all age groups were comfortable and conversed effortlessly among themselves due to the relaxed culture in the organisation, the millennials were more vocal than the other generations.

**Table 4.4: Job level split focus groups**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
2	3	11%
3	18	67%
4	6	22%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.4 demonstrates that due to the organisation's flat structure, the majority of the employees in this organisation are employed at level three (3). Since the participants were all from these organisational levels, it will improve the trustworthiness of the study.

**Table 4.5: Tenure split focus groups**

<b>Years of service</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0-3	2	7%
4-6	5	19%
7-9	6	22%
10 and more	14	52%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.5 demonstrates that the majority of the participants (52%) have been with the organisation for more than 10 years. This was an indication that these participants can be regarded as the longest serving employees with an extensive working history in this organisation.

**Table 4.6: Qualification split focus groups**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Matric	6	22%
National Diploma	11	41%
Degree	10	37%
	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.6 shows that the participants were all educated and could produce a meaningful contribution to the study. It is worth noting that all the participants contributed information equally regardless of their qualification status. The following section presents the duration of focus group interviews.

### 4.3 DURATION OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The total duration for the focus group interviews was seven hours, 35 minutes and 21 seconds. Table 4.7 summarises the duration of these interviews.

**Table 4.7: Duration of focus group interviews**

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Interviews dates</b>	<b>Interviews times</b>	<b>Duration of interviews (hours, minutes and seconds)</b>
Focus Group 1 FG P1- P6	15 Aug 2016	11:00	01:19:08
Focus Group 2 FG P7- P12	20 Sep 2016	14:00	01:35:00
Focus Group 3 FG P13- P17	11 Oct 2016	09:30	01:58:59
Focus Group 4 FG P18- P23	12 Oct 2016	14:00	01:32:41
Focus Group 5 FG P24- P27	08 Nov 2016	14:00	01:09:33
<b>Total time</b>			<b>07:35:21</b>

The interviews were scheduled at different times based on the participants’ availability and their convenience. The researcher anticipated that the duration of the focus group interviews would not be longer than an hour. However the active participation of the group members and their contributions were of such a nature that all the focus group interviews exceeded the expected duration. To adhere to the ethical requirements of confidentiality and privacy, the researcher coded the participants from one to 27 during the transcribing of the focus group interviews. Examples of these coding are FGP1 to

FGP27. As a reference, the participants' pseudonym (e.g. FGP1) is used when quotations are alluded to.

The main objective of this study as per section 1.6 was to explore the reasons for employee disengagement and describe the possible solutions that can be put in place to improve the employee disengagement phenomenon at a reinsurance organisation. The findings of the study answer to the research questions outlined in section 1.6.3. For ease of reference, the research questions are:

- What are the reasons for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- What are the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- Which recommendations and guidelines can be explored and developed to address employee disengagement in this reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?

#### **4.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The purpose of the findings is to discuss the themes that emerged from the data analysis process in detail. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with nine open-ended questions for focus group interviews (Annexure A). All the interviews were conducted in English and data saturation was reached during the fifth focus group interview (focus group interview five). The data was analysed using the method as recommended by Tesch's eight steps in Creswell (2014:197-200) in section 3.9.

#### **4.5 DISCUSSION OF THE THEMES OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

Five main themes emerged from the analysis of the focus groups interviews. Each theme with its sub-themes is presented in this chapter with extracts in the form of quotations from the transcripts of the interviews to support the findings. Table 4.8 provides a summary of the themes and the sub-themes of the focus group interviews.

**Table 4.8: Themes, sub-themes and codes from the focus group interviews**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Code (characteristics)</b>
1. Employee disengagement is understood as a perfunctory attitude revealed in different forms of behaviour	1.1 Understanding of employee disengagement 1.2 Lack of interest and caring 1.3 Mismatch in personal and organisational objectives or goals and values	Individual attitude and emotions
2. The state of employee disengagement was for most unexpected	2.1 Emotional responses to the survey	Shocked Not shocked Disappointed
3. Organisational culture is positively perceived in its promotion of employee engagement	3.1 Unique and good benefits 3.2 Open door policy 3.3 Collective team is valued	Caring Accommodating
4. Management's role in employee engagement and the challenges perceived by employees	4.1 Managers' experiences and personalities influence engagement 4.2 Engaging manager 4.3 Disengaging manager 4.5 Understanding and respecting that the employees are different	Respectful Identifying strengths of employees Disengaging managers
5. Motives for employees' disengagement	5.1 Considering leaving or staying in the organisation 5.2 Reasons for employee disengagement 5.3 Moving towards consistent employee engagement	Yes No Management styles Communication Remuneration Flat structure Survey Performance management system

Section 4.6 presents the five main themes and the 14 sub-themes of focus group interviews. Direct quotes from the transcribed interviews are used as evidence. Literature control is used to compare the findings with the literature.

## **4.6 THEME 1: EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT IS UNDERSTOOD AS A PERFUNCTORY ATTITUDE REVEALED IN DIFFERENT FORMS OF BEHAVIOUR**

The participants from the focus group interviews provided various views on their understanding of employee disengagement. The findings revealed that most of the participants understood employee disengagement as a condition whereby employees come to work and do the bare minimal work. These employees lack commitment and do not go the extra mile. They do not care about what is happening in an organisation as long as they are salaried at the end of every month. The three most prevalent sub-themes that fall under Theme 1 are:

1. Understanding of employee disengagement
2. Lack of interest and caring
3. Mismatch in personal and organisational objectives or goals and values

### **4.6.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding of employee disengagement**

From the transcripts of the interviews and the process of analysing data, it was evident that the participants held various views on their understanding of employee disengagement and were quoted as saying:

*“You’re not committed; you’re not excited about your work.” (FGP5)*

*“Employee disengagement is actually just someone who does not want to work in that organisation and is looking for their no...next job opportunity or whatever. I think someone who is disengaged is not actually interested in the company at all.” (FGP7)*

*“I think another, uh, example of a disengaged employee is when...when somebody else needs information, like asking a question, then he gives...or she gives the minimal information or response. That, for me, is then dis...a disengaged person.” (FGP10)*



*“Ja, I think, uh, em...employee disengagement is a situation whereby somebody just comes to work just for the sake of it, but not that they love to come into work.” (FGP12)*

*“I agree with participant number twelve. I think...ja, I can't add anything extra from what he said. It's...it's just that it's not being happy to want to do your job or not going a fur...a step further. Just doing the minimal.” (FGP9)*

*“To be present at work but not give 100% in terms of focus and output. This could be due to being demotivated for whatever reasons or just being disengaged for other reasons.” (FGP21)*

*“My understanding of employee disengagement is a situation when an employee is sort of detached from what they do. They basically don't have their hearts into what they do. They just do the bare minimum, just so they can get paid at the end of the month. They don't go an extra mile to make sure their work is done to the best of their abilities.” (FGP24)*

*“Um, from my side, I would think, um, not happy and maybe not feeling not being appreciated in the company because most of the employees they are disengaged because they feel that, uh, their contribution to the company is not, uh...it's not important. They feel that their managers they don't take them...they take them for granted...for granted, for example.” (FGP25)*

*“I concur. I think, um, people that don't feel part of the team or they don't feel like they, um...that they add much value to the units.” (FGP26)*

This finding shares similarities with the study of Magano and Thomas (2017:6) who revealed that although employees attend and participate at work, they are not engaged in their work but merely serving time putting no passion or energy into their work. Hollis (2015:7) found that undermined and frustrated employees disengage from their tasks and chose to focus on self-care.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants' opinions were that employee disengagement refers to employees who come to work but are not committed and not willing to share information or provide minimal information when asked to do so. Disengaged employees feel unappreciated, are of the opinion that their contribution does not add value, they believe that they are taken for granted. These employees are simply spending time at work and therefore

do not have the energy to improve or go the extra mile and yet expect to be paid a salary. Furthermore, disengaged employees are on the lookout for job opportunities elsewhere. Section 4.6.2 and 4.6.3 will explore how the participants described disengaged employees.

#### **4.6.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of interest and caring**

The researcher probed for examples of disengaged employees. The participants declared that disengaged employees are those employees who are no longer interested in the organisation anymore and they do not care about their work or the organisation. Similarly, disengaged employees are not innovative and produce minimal output. The following quotes confirm this statement:

*“I think, uh, an employee who is disengaged is someone who actually just doesn’t care. They come here, they do their work, they leave. They’re not interested in how things...processes are working. They’re not interested in, um, improving anything, making...finding new solutions. That’s disengagement, for me.” (FGP7)*

*“I also agree it’s about doing the bare minimum, you not inspired or encouraged to do anything extra. It’s like, oh, you...you don’t care about your work or you’re not taking responsibility....” (FGP9)*

*“So you end up just being disengaged, being less interested, and other stuff.” (FGP11)*

*“So when you are such...when you are such...in...in such a position, your...you don’t have the energy to...to further yourself or you...you don’t have the energy to improve things.” (FGP12)*

*“Um, my understanding is, uh, not really caring much about the organisation. It’s just about pitching up, doing what you supposed to be doing, and going home. You come from eight; five o’clock you go home. Then, at the end...end of the month, you get your salary, you happy.” (FGP13)*

*“My understanding is, uh, like, lack of interest. Like, you do not care what happened as long as you go and you get what you can get.” (FGP15)*

*“I think my own understanding of, eh, employee disengagement is when someone just comes to work, do their part, and leave eh, without caring.” (FGP20)*

This is in agreement with the finding of Richards (2013:68) that disengaged employees perform minimally and only work to get a payment of a salary. Parkinson and McBain (2014:78) found that disengaged employees pay lip service, do not focus on their job, feel bored, are under stimulated and do not believe in the value of the work they are undertaking.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The researcher is of the view that the majority of the participants had an understanding of employee disengagement as they pointed out that disengaged employees possess an attitude of disinterest, do not take responsibility for their work and do not care about work performance. These employees are not innovative and productive and will not go the extra mile but expect a salary every month.

#### **4.6.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Mismatch in personal and organisational objectives or goals and values**

Some of the participants elaborated that employee disengagement is also a condition whereby the employees do not know or understand what the organisation is striving for and these employees are not in line with the organisation’s objectives and values:

*“Um, I think...I think it’s, um...it’s cultures that aren’t in line. Your...your cultures and values aren’t in line with, um, the company’s. You’re not a match with...with...with, uh...with...with the company.” (FGP14)*

*“You’re not interested to make a...like, you don’t have the same goals, the same as the organisation. You just want your own thing and go.” (FGP15)*

*“Employee disengagement, Um, there is, um...like you say, um, the staff or your personal goals and the company goals are not in line.” (FGP16)*

*“I think it’s when employees are not really fully participating in the organisational, eh, goals. That’s what...so I feel that, when employees are not completely, eh, in line with the objectives of the company and they’re not really contributing to the growth.” (FGP18)*

*“Your goals are a little bit different from the organisation’s goals.” (FGP19)*

*“Without understanding what is it that, eh, the company is striving for in its strategy as well as its goals.” (FGP20)*

The study of PDT (2014:10) found that senior leadership must communicate a clear vision to all employees and this will increase the levels of employee engagement. Albrecht, Breidahl and Marty (2018:79) revealed that strategic alignment and organisational autonomy have a direct association with employee engagement by aligning the employees with the organisational goals and priorities.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

From the above findings, it is evident that the participants individually understood the employee disengagement phenomenon and were able to describe and provide the signs of disengaged employees in detail. Furthermore, the participants indicated that when the employees lack interest in their work, they do not contribute to the growth of the organisation as their goals or objectives do not match those of the organisation, this leads to employee disengagement.

#### **4.7 THEME 2: THE STATE OF EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT IN 2013 WAS FOR MOST UNEXPECTED**

Theme 2 explores the participants’ feelings towards the results of the survey conducted in 2013 as it is important to understand the individual feelings towards the survey results. The researcher asked the participants to share their feelings about the employee engagement survey results which disclosed that only 24% of the employees were engaged. Some of the participants’ interpretations of the results were that there must have been a misunderstanding when the employees were responding to the survey, because they could not believe that such a low figure of employee engagement

levels was the outcome of the survey. This reaction led to identifying one sub-theme under Theme 2:

#### **4.7.1 Sub-theme 2:1: Emotional responses to the 2013 survey**

The participants' responses to the 2013 employee engagement survey outcome, was for most unexpected, with diverse emotional responses. The participants had mixed feelings about the results of the survey. The majority of the participants were shocked; some indicated that they were concerned while the others expressed their disappointment as they thought the levels of employee engagement were higher. The participants emotionally expressed their feelings as:

*“Very strange ‘cause, I mean, I must admit, I mean, because my impression is that a lot of the people that I...that I work with personally are...are very engaged, very committed.” (FGP6)*

*“I thought the company’s doing well, uh, so I was a bit shocked. I thought maybe it would differ from maybe one unit or another unit but, uh, I was quite, uh, shocked and surprised.”(FGP10)*

*“Ja, I also agree that the results of the survey were shocking and disappointing. I would have expected that, uh, a lot of us...a lot of people are more engaged than what was revealed by the survey.” (FGP12)*

*“I think the results were shocking, um. Twenty-four percent being, uh, engaged.” (FGP18)*

*“Um, I...I agree with twenty. Um, I think, ja, I felt there might be misunderstanding somewhere or misinterpretation of what they were trying to ask.” (FGP22)*

*“Quite shocking. You’d expect that number to be higher than this.” (FGP24)*

Only a minority of the participants indicated that they expected the negative survey results and were cited as saying:

*“Um, it was not shocking for me to find that...I think it said about twenty-four percent of the people are engaged. I was not really surprised but just concerned.” (FGP8)*

*“Um, I’m actually also not shocked by the results.” (FGP9)*

*“I wasn’t shocked, uh, by the survey because I think the managers here at [organisation name withheld], some of them lack manage...eh, people skills.” (FGP11)*

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The preceding findings provide evidence that the participants were emotional and had mixed feelings about the survey results. The majority of the participants pointed out that they were not aware of the high levels of employee disengagement as revealed by the employee engagement survey. Similarly, the minority of the participants indicated that they were not shocked by the survey results. The researcher probed to establish why these participants were not shocked by the survey results and the participants articulated that the lack of management skills and management styles of some managers were the reasons why they were not shocked at the results. The participants uttered that the repetitive work that most of the employees in the organisation are involved in lead them to disengage in their work. These participants also stated that the majority of the employees do talk about their unhappiness and emphasised that all they want to do is work during the hours that they are supposed to be at work and then go home. The researcher is of the opinion that the organisation should offer training to both employees and management about employee disengagement to enlighten them about what signs to look out for in a disengaged employee and implement interventions which might increase employee engagement levels in the organisation. Theme 3 and its sub-themes in section 4.8 will look at the culture of the organisation with the intention of understanding how the participants perceived the culture of this reinsurance organisation.

### **4.8 THEME 3: ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IS POSITIVELY PERCEIVED IN ITS PROMOTION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

From the focus group interview transcripts and the data analysis process, the organisational culture proved to be one of the important themes from the participants’ responses in terms of promoting employee engagement. When the researcher asked the participants to share their opinions on how the organisational culture promotes employee engagement, the majority acknowledged that the culture offered by colleagues and management in this organisation is friendly, caring and supportive. The

participants elaborated that they appreciated the friendly atmosphere in which people were prepared to help one another. Three sub-themes emerged and were associated with promoting employee engagement. The sub-themes under Theme 3 are:

1. Unique culture with good benefits
2. Open door policy
3. Collective teamwork is valued

#### **4.8.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Unique culture and good benefits**

The majority of the participants agreed that the atmosphere is pleasant, relaxed and the people in the organisation are nice. Furthermore, the organisation is generous with the benefits it offers to the employees. The following comments from the interview transcripts support this view:

*“I mean, by far, this organisation is one of best companies that I’ve worked for in terms of just how they treat people. What we have here in terms of the culture is very unique, it’s very unique, and I don’t take that for granted.” (FGP5)*

*“I think there...the way they promote it is by the monetary things. They do...they do give bonuses, they do give lunch, they do give benefits.” (FGP7)*

*“Accommodated are all the different kind of culture and mutual respect between employee and employer. [organisation name withheld] has achieved this and carry on improving if things changes.” (FGP3)*

*“I think they do their best in giving us all these nice things like bonuses, allowing us to travel, and-and-and.” (FGP12)*

*“I...I think, to a certain extent, eh, there’s certain times where they try to...to promote employee engagement but the...with the yearend functions and staff going together as...as a team and randomly being selected to be in anyone’s team. I don’t know if...if that’s a way of colour-coating it but I would think that that promotes employee engagement in...in the sense that you...you...you know...you know everyone, literally.” (FGP14)*

*“It’s, um...they look after us, um, in quite a few incentives. Um, if they find...if they find a problem or if they find change, they do support the staff. Um, we get fed. We get very spoilt. Um, they do. They look after...they do look after the staff. So, staff that are here, um, there’s lots of incentives that we get over and above that other companies offer. So we are privileged in working for this company.” (FG26)*

*“Well, I...I agree with, uh, participant number twenty-six. They looking after us. Um, there’s quite a lot of things that we are getting of which other organisations they don’t offer their employees. Um, the food that we are getting, for an example, that’d one of the things that I think the organisation is looking after their employees.” (FG25)*

*“Ja, I think, having said everything, this is not a bad organisation. It...it...it’s a good company.” (FGP13)*

*“I think I’ll agree with, eh, participant number eighteen on that, I think it’s a new culture. It’s good. Personally I...I think I enjoy it.” (FGP20)*

This is consistent with the findings of Anitha (2014:318) that the desirable work environment comprises both a physical and emotionally safe environment that will motivate the employee to engage in work. In the study conducted by Victor and Hoole (2017:9) it was revealed that different types of organisational rewards, both extrinsic and intrinsic have a positive relationship with employee engagement. Moela (2017:114) found that organisational culture is an essential consideration in understanding employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The majority of the participants expressed that this organisation has its own unique culture, therefore it is one of the best organisations to work for. The participants elaborated that there is mutual respect between the employees and the employer. Likewise, they believe that the employees are well looked after in the organisation. The participants stated that the organisation provides lunch on a daily basis for its employees and rewards the employees with good bonuses amongst the numerous benefits that the organisation offers to the employees. Furthermore, the environment is positive, accommodating and learning is encouraged. The participants affirmed that



organisational culture plays a pivotal role in increasing the levels of employee engagement in the organisation.

#### **4.8.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Open door policy**

According to the majority of the participants, the senior management team encourages openness and transparency with the employees of this organisation. Some of the participants pointed out that they are comfortable to engage with the Executive Committee (EXCO) team:

*“Where I think the problem is is not on the fourth floor. Like, in my...in my...in my situation, the problem is not on the fourth floor. It’s lower than that. The...the...the working relationship with guys there is excellent. We can actually sit and have a chat with guys on the fourth floor. It can never happen with my own manager whom I spent eight hours facing.” (FGP12)*

*“We have an open-door policy. I’m always told that it’s an open-door policy. So, whenever you feeling frustrated or disengaged, please come and have a chat.” (FGP19)*

*“I think, with the flat structure, we also have more access to the EXCO member. So, I mean, we have an open-door policy.” (FGP21)*

*“I also think, to some extent, uh, the EXCO guys seem accessible.” (FGP27)*

Although two of the participants agreed with the open door policy and an approachable EXCO team, they stated that the team is ill-informed about what is happening on the ground:

*“Maybe EXCO can talk to people except...and not just through their managers.” (FGP7)*

*“EXCO...there’s a...a big disconnect. They don’t know how we feel and they don’t know how frustrated we are. So we look like ungrateful people just leaving.” (FGP9)*

FGP7 emphasised that not all employees have access to the EXCO team since the EXCO team communicates with the employees through their managers which was contradictory to what most of the participants uttered. While FGP9 indicated that even though the organisation has the culture of open door, the EXCO team is not connected

to the employees on the lower levels and therefore, do not always know how the employees feel as in “EXCO, like, um, participant number twelve was saying. We get along with them very well. I think they are very disengaged from the issues themselves. They don’t know that these issues are actually happening.” (FGP9). The majority of the participants were of the view that senior management is very open and always willing to engage with them.

These findings share similarities with the study of Jiang and Men (2017:239) which revealed that the mediation effects from authentic leadership to employee engagement via transparent organisational communication and work-life enrichment were strong and significant. In addition, a study by Gupta (2015:51) revealed that open communication is a vital employee engagement tool.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

According to the participants some of the managers, especially senior management in this organisation encourages the employees to ask questions and feel free to address or raise concerns with management. Most of the participants elaborated that senior management is more approachable than their own line managers. The participants described the EXCO team as having an open relationship with employees and they are always willing to listen or discuss any matters of importance with them compared to the managers on the levels 5 and 6 below them. It is vital to note that two participants cautioned that even though senior management is approachable they are not aware of the challenges faced by the employees on the lower levels and often are shocked and upset when employees leave the organisation.

#### **4.8.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Collective teamwork is valued**

It was worth noting from the interview transcripts and the analysis of data that some of the participants pointed out that the organisation encourages teamwork which in turn influences interaction among the employees. The participants indicated that most employees work very well as a team leading to high levels of engagement. This also encourages communication with managers. The participants elaborated that teamwork is also critical for the success of the organisation:

*“On our...my...my team I think the reason we get along so well is that nobody is, like, in-your-face.” (FGP5)*

*“I think most of the units are small teams, it’s not a lot of people in a team, so that increases the level of communication amongst the colleagues but I could be wrong but I think that works because then you’ve got easier contact with management. So I think that is good in a way. It does increase your engagement.” (FGP18)*

*“I’m in part of a smaller team. It’s easy for me to speak to my manager.” (FGP20)*

*“There’s a lot of collaboration amongst, uh, you know, the different parties. There’s a lot of working together and there’s also not a lot of people in...in one building. Collective success for the team, it’s very, very motivational.” (FGP27)*

This finding is in agreement with Anitha (2014:319) who found that an effective team and healthy co-worker relationship is notably influential on employee engagement as it encourages employees to connect emotionally with one another to achieve high levels of engagement. In the study of Jindal et al. (2017:13) it was found that co-workers support promotes employee engagement. Additionally Hlapo (2016:70) revealed that perceived supervisors’ support and co-worker relationship is positively related to employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants stated that teamwork increases engagement by encouraging communication amongst the employees and makes it easier for them to communicate directly with their managers but also with colleagues in other departments. This collaboration is vital as it encourages employees to work together towards the success of both teams and the organisation.

In conclusion, it is evident that the supportive and caring culture experienced by the employees, an approachable EXCO team that encourages open relationship with all employees, the good incentives provided by the organisation and teamwork create a unique culture that promotes employee engagement in this organisation. Theme 4 will

explore the role that managers play to engage the employees and the challenges identified by the employees.

#### **4.9 THEME 4: MANAGEMENT'S ROLE IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND THE CHALLENGES PERCEIVED BY EMPLOYEES**

The participants displayed mixed views when asked about the role played by their respective managers to engage them in the organisation. Some mentioned that a manager's experience in managing employees and the personality displayed does affect employee engagement. The other participants indicated that their managers do engage them while others disclosed that their managers do not engage them at all. Four sub-themes transpired under Theme 4 as:

1. Managers' experience and personalities influence engagement
2. Engaging manager
3. Disengaging manager
4. Understanding and respecting that the employees are different

##### **4.9.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Managers' experience and personalities influence engagement**

Based on the participants' responses and the analysis of the interview transcripts the participants mentioned that the nature, personality, background and the experience of a manager plays a role and influences employee engagement. Additionally, the participants highlighted that the management style of a leader often creates an environment where it becomes hard to accomplish employee engagement. The quotes below reflect this observation:

*“So it sometimes can...management sometimes can cause people to be disengaged because you may be trying to do...you may be doing your...your job to the best of your ability but because of maybe just, you know, personality clash – I suppose, um, it can bring disengagement.” (FGP2)*

*“Um, just an example of, uh, disengagement. I’ve experienced this situation whereby, uh, I got a feeling that this manager is always out to crack the whip. It’s always the wrong answers coming from the subordinate and the manager’s always right.” (FGP12)*

*“I’d say, lack of management experience. Um, in most cases, you’ll find that people move into management just by qualification. The fact that you are qualified as a CA or an accountant...or actuary or anything does not make you a leader.” (FGP13)*

*“sometimes the management skills and experience is lacking.” (FGP15)*

*“it depends on the person that you report to and, eh, also the department that you work in think the others is because of lack of experience and also their own understanding of being managers and I think, eh...eh, managers are also individuals.” (FGP20)*

*“it comes back to the nature of the person and maybe the education they can get to sort certain things out, if they need to be sorted out.” (FGP27)*

Bezuidenhout and Schultz (2013:291) found that the leaders, who manage to create a work climate that enables subordinates to achieve their work goals, are expected to be highly successful in engaging employees. Furthermore, White (2017:100) conducted a study among Las Vegas Five Star hospitality organisations and found out that it is vital to provide basic skills training to leaders as it has a positive effect on employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It was concerning to note that the lack of management skills and experience were brought up once more when the participants were asked to share their perceptions about the role played by management in promoting employee engagement. The participants pointed out that most of the managers in this organisation are promoted because of their qualifications therefore do not have management skills and experience to manage their employees. This often leads to personality clashes with the employees causing them to disengage. This indicates that most of the participants perceived poor leadership in the organisation. According to the participants, the lack of experience and management skills hampers employee engagement.

#### 4.9.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Engaging manager

From the participants' responses, it was evident that managers have different management styles on how they manage their employees. Some participants indicated that their managers are supportive, consultative, inclusive and do allow them the autonomy to do their work. In return they become motivated and engaged:

*“So we have a lot of interaction all the time. We don't have to have so-called managers' meetings. We've got a problem we just walk into his office and we talk to each other.” (FGP3)*

*“Because I'm dealing with new product, uh, we are interacting quite a lot, uh, but previously, you know, my manager is...is the...is the type of manager who just trusts you to do what you have to do, ja, and I am quite comfortable with that.” (FGP4)*

*“I...I think some...um, my manager, personally, sometimes, um...um, tries to...to engage us by giving us feedback from these strat meetings that they have. So she'd come and call us into a meeting and explain to us this is what we discussed and this is what we'd like to do going forward. So I...I think that's quite nice of her to...to...to engage us in that...in that form.” (FGP14)*

*“I've had those meetings where I'm just called to...to...to be told that you doing such a great job and it does motivate me a great deal. Uh, I think, um, most, um...I don't know whether most managers think, for you to motivate somebody, you have to...to...to give them more money.” (FGP24)*

*“I...I do agree with that. My...I think motivation is very important and I think it...it does encourage employees, uh, especially...I will, uh, talk about my manager. She does encourage us a lot.” (FGP25)*

De Klerk, Nel and Koekemoer (2015:544) found that employees who have autonomy in their work are more satisfied and comfortable and in turn become more engaged. The study of Mishra et al. (2015:476) revealed that participative management is a critical predictor of employee engagement. Furthermore, Jindal et al. (2017:14) found

that interaction with a manager is an important aspect with respect to the study of employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It is evident that some managers do play a role in engaging their team members since the participants indicated that their managers make an effort to keep them informed about what is happening in the organisation. There is a lot of interaction relating to their work and often a manager will tell them that they are doing a great job and that leads to employees becoming more engaging and motivated in their work.

#### **4.9.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Disengaging manager**

The data analysis revealed that there were managers who were struggling to engage their employees as the participants justified their responses with mixed views regarding their respective managers. Some indicated that their managers play a huge role in disengaging them while the other participants mentioned that their managers help to engage them (section 4.9.2). The employees gave examples such as managers not talking to them, working long hours and managers becoming involved during the Management by Objectives (MBO) process. The researcher probed to understand how the managers were disengaging them. The following comments illustrate the discussion:

*“For me, personally, there was a time, it’s better now, when I did not get along with my boss. He just simply would not engage me. He disengaged me. He actually never talked to me directly, he would communicate via someone, which made me think I didn’t understand where it was coming from.” (FGP2)*

*“The long hours for me they sometimes disengage me ‘cause it doesn’t matter how many hours you...you give it’s just a take, take, take.” (FGP8)*

*“Okay. So the example’s where I’ve felt, um, I’m being led to be disengaged...participant number eight, I think, mentioned this a bit. Sometimes the long hours, the expectation that sometimes you must put work before your personal life even during your work...your personal hours. So I’m finding the hour...the long hours for me they sometimes disengage me.” (FGP9)*

*“My feeling though is that I think it just goes as far as setting up, um, the MBOs. Uh, you sit down, you set up your objectives, and then make sure you meet them, and then it ends there, um, and, uh, end of a period, you get scored.” (FGP13)*

*“I actually think it’s the other way around that they cause the disengagement, I think, because, normally...like, in my case, I really don’t deal with EXCO, I do more with my manager, and that’s where the issue is. They make me disengaged and lack interest.” (FGP15)*

Richards (2013:72) discovered that leadership is eventually responsible for the engagement of their employees and if employees are disengaged, it reflects negatively on the leader. Khattak et al. (2017:75) found that disengaged employees are more likely to report deviant behaviour when they feel that their manager does not support them. In the same way, a lack of support from a manager may motivate disengaged employees to practice deviance in the workplace or they may leave the organisation.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

From the interview transcripts, it is evident that some managers play a role in disengaging their team members. Some of the participants believed that their managers were the reason for their disengagement. These participants indicated that factors such as being overlooked, expected to put work before your personal life and work long hours, were the reasons for disengagement. Other participants mentioned that their managers barely engage them during the process of setting the objectives and reviewing them (MBO process). If not these employees are disregarded throughout the year leading to their disengagement.

#### **4.9.4 Sub-theme 4.4: Understanding and respecting that the employees are different**

During the interviews, some of the participants indicated that their managers’ emotional intelligence and their communication skills play a huge role in engaging them. They stated that a manager’s qualities should be able to relate, protect, respect and identify



the strengths of his or her employees and be open to ideas and approach employees differently:

*“Every individual needs to be addressed or respected in any way, form, or shape because of our personalities. So you need to be very, very careful of the group of people that you are dealing with. You need to respect their religions, you need to respect...respect their cultures, you need...need to respect whatever that person and...or whoever that person is.” (FGP16)*

*“Like, uh, participant number twenty-one said, each, uh...you know, you might have a manager who would find different employees but you can’t, um, apply a style of management to all of them because we all different individuals. One person would probably need to be micromanaged but the other one doesn’t have to be.” (FGP19)*

*“I also think each manager has their own style but they also need to consider the employees that they...that are under them because, um, each employee’s personality is different. So the approaches that you use for one employee might not be the same that you, uh, use for someone else.” (FGP21)*

*“And don’t make people feel stupid. So I think you should encourage people and build that confidence that, okay, my ideas matter as well but, if you don’t and you just take number twenty-seven, then number twenty-seven will speak and we’ll all keep quiet.” (FGP24)*

*“My particular manager, um, she always puts us in the best light, internally and externally. Where things go wrong, it’s...it’s handled or dealt with in our own space in a nice way and it’s sorted but the...the manager fights for you, presents you in the best light, whether dealing with external or internal people, and I think that makes a difference.” (FGP27)*

*“One thing that’s important is for managers, especially, in the work environment to understand that people are different and they’ve got different strengths. Understand your environment, understand your people, give those opportunities around, play everyone to their best strength.” (FGP26)*

White (2017:82) supports this finding that mutual respect between leaders and subordinates contributes to successful employee engagement if stakeholders harness those mixed effects. Lather and Jain (2015:68) conducted a study in the tourism industry and asserted that employees prefer a democratic or servant leadership where they wish their leader would get their opinions, understand their individual needs, act

as a facilitator and yet keep an eye on the flow and pace of work. Additionally, Aslam et al. (2018:157) found that there is a positive relationship between employee disengagement and organisational injustice such as disrespectful attitudes of managers. A study by Parrish (2015:829) found that leaders need to accurately identify and understand a person in the light of this understanding, to promote productivity and success.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The finding above reveals that some managers lack an understanding that employees are different and should be treated as such by acknowledging and respecting that employees are different. The participants admitted that most of the managers do treat them as individuals and show respect towards them, but there are a few managers who do not have this quality.

The researcher is of the view that managers' experience and personalities; an engaging and disengaging manager; and understanding and respecting that employees are different all play a role in employee engagement. Section 4.10 discusses the motives for employees' detachment and whether the participants had considered leaving or staying in the organisation.

#### **4.10 THEME 5: MOTIVES FOR EMPLOYEES' DISENGAGEMENT AND CONSIDERING LEAVING OR STAYING**

The researcher's intention was to understand if (1) the participants had ever considered leaving the organisation, (2) the reasons why the employees were disengaged in this organisation and (3) what interventions the organisation can put in place to address the employee disengagement challenge that it is currently facing. The participants indicated that there are a variety of reasons as to why employees disengage. Robust and informative discussions surfaced from these questions. Firstly, the participants were open to disclose and give reasons if they have considered leaving or staying in the organisation. Secondly, they shared their reasons for employee disengagement in this organisation and lastly, they were willing to put forward their

recommendations to assist the organisation to address the employee disengagement phenomenon. Three sub-themes that emerged under Theme 5 were:

1. Considering leaving or staying in the organisation
2. Reasons for employee disengagement
3. Moving towards consistent employee engagement

#### **4.10.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Considering leaving or staying in the organisation**

Overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants voluntarily gave a response to the question. Eight participants indicated that they have never considered leaving the organisation and three participants were not willing to divulge their position. It was concerning to note that 16 participants confirmed that they have considered leaving for greener pastures. The participants who revealed that they have never considered leaving the organisation provided the following comments:

*“If...if I may say, I...I have not ever seriously considered leaving just because, at the times where I’ve really felt very upset or whatever, I’ve realised that this could exist in another company.” (FGP7)*

*“No, no. I’m not looking.” (FGP12)*

*“I’m not really unhappy but I think sometimes, when you’ve been through certain things that have happened, you just feel, oh, this is it.” (FGP17)*

*“I must say, there are days where I could, as I said, literally run away but it’s not for wanting to go to a better organisation.” (FGP19)*

*“No, I haven’t.” (FGP21)*

*“Mm, no, I haven’t, uh, but, I’ve been as indicated earlier on, I’ve been disengaged and I’ve been confronting...I’ve been vocal about my frustrations.” (FGP23)*

*“No, I haven’t considered leaving.” (FGP26)*

*"I'd only consider it if I got what I'm looking for that's different." (FGP27)*

Even though the researcher was probing, three participants (FGP6, FGP10 and FGP16) did not indicate their position and the remaining number of the participants revealed that they have considered leaving and shared their reasons; except for one participant (FGP9). These participants revealed that:

*"I did consider. It was to do with the salary." (FGP1)*

*"Yes, I have. I was very unhappy. There was just no relationship with my boss but it's gotten better now. I am good now." (FGP2)*

*"Yes, mostly for money and not given the credit for doing your job perfectly. Because of the level setup at [organisation name withheld] I am been at the same level for ever which is an issue with the money being paid." (FGP3)*

*"Yes. I have been to three companies. I wanted to explore those opportunities." (FGP4)*

*"didn't like our manager." (FGP5)*

*"Um, I think...I think, to be honest, any...anyone who's worked here for three years has considered leaving. You can't work here for three years and, um, want to stay." (FGP8)*

*"I've considered it and considered when would be the ideal time." (FGP9)*

*"Always consider it. Eh, the problem with this, uh, company sometimes, sometimes you take your work problems, you take them home with you." (FGP11)*

*"Ja, I have considered it and reasons being, uh...number one being remuneration and growth, um, of which I've tried to...to address, uh, unsuccessfully." (FGP13)*

*"I...I...I have a couple of times and my...my reasons were...one was money. The second one was, um, uh, we have kind of hit the...the ceiling." (FGP14)*

*"Yes, I have considered leaving the organisation and the reason was that, uh, it feels like your skills or...are not being recognised or you are not valued. From the way you are treated, you feel that, no, you could do better elsewhere." (FGP15)*

*“I’ve once considered leaving but not now. At some point, I felt that, like, the resources were not available to me to complete my work.” (FGP18)*

*“...I think my own, eh, personal history is that, like, yes, I’ve had that before, eh, feeling of wanting to leave and, eh, the reasons being that, like, it depended on the person that you are reporting to because I’ve had managers...different managers before.” (FGP20)*

*“I have resigned before. I didn’t see myself fitting into the, um, department.” (FGP22)*

*“I have but, um, only because I was offered another job.” (FGP24)*

*“Well, I have considered leaving the organisation and the re...the reason was, well, I wanted growth somewhere else ‘cause I felt that...I think, um, there’s not enough growth where I am.” (FGP25)*

The findings above share some similarities with the study of Nawaz and Pangil (2016:39) that lack of a better salary and lack of career growth influences the intention to leave the organisation. Except for a lack of growth, the findings in this current study contradicts the findings of Pang, Kucukusta and Chan (2015:585-586) who found that job dissatisfaction, job hopping, lack of job security and lack of training opportunities influence the employees’ intention to leave the organisation.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It was concerning to observe that the majority of the participants indicated that they have considered leaving the organisation. The participants revealed the following reasons for considering leaving the organisation: lack of promotion and growth; lack of resources to do their jobs; being approached and offered a job elsewhere; lack of recognition and not being valued; lack of a relationship with their manager; eagerness to explore opportunities at other organisations; not fitting in the department where employed and finally being unhappy with the salaries being paid by the organisation.

#### **4.10.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Reasons for employee disengagement**

Although some of the participants had divulged their reasons for their desires to leave the organisation, the researcher sought to understand what the reasons could be for employee disengagement in the organisation. The participants' responses and the analysis of the interview transcripts identified 10 reasons for employee disengagement as:

- 1) Line manager, personal circumstances and disengaging colleagues
- 2) Lack of experience, management styles and lack of management skills
- 3) Lack of communication and feedback
- 4) Ineffective performance management system
- 5) Inequitable remuneration process
- 6) Lack of recognition and appreciation
- 7) Flat organisational structure, lack of career growth and lack of promotions
- 8) Favouritism and racism
- 9) Voiceless employees and a lack of empowerment
- 10) Victimisation by management

These reasons for employee disengagement are discussed below:

##### **1) Line manager, personal circumstances and disengaging colleagues**

A handful of the participants pointed out that the conduct of a manager can lead to the employees becoming disengaged. These participants stated the following:

*“The other thing is sometimes micromanagement can make you disengaged. That is also frustrating and can create disengagement. And then, also being thrown under the bus. Sometimes management can throw you under the bus. Like when there is a mistake, it's the junior's fault but when there is something good done the, uh, praise goes to management.”*  
(FGP9)

*“Then, uh, somebody else or somebody from outside or one of the other departments was appointed and it made the whole unit, uh, disengaged because this person came in knowing nothing about the job.” (FGP10)*

*“I don’t think there’s much that’s being done, uh, from our side to get us engaged. Actually there is much that is being done to get us disengaged by our manager.” (FGP12)*

*“I think there’s so many factors for disengagement. There is lots of contributing factors. Firstly, I think its...depends on the person you report to. I think, for me, that’s first and foremost.” (FGP19)*

*“They don’t feel motivated. I think the managers need to motivate their employees as much as possible. Um, I think that would be the reason why I’m...I feel that they are being, um...they...they...they disengaged because of that.” (FGP25)*

*“Ja, I think it also depends, uh, on the type of manager as well. Some managers tend to be more receptive to, you know, working together as a team and valuing each one’s input whereas others their leadership style’s quite different.” (FGP27)*

Oddly, three participants indicated that an employee’s personal challenges based on an employee’s personal circumstances could trigger that employee to become disengaged:

*“disengagement is not always the company’s fault and now and again you do get this person that is not happy . I think the attitude and now and again you do get this person that is not happy and they still not happy and no matter what.” (FGP1)*

*“You know, um...um, sorry, employee disengagement. I think it can also be based on personal circumstances, uh, because at some stage in our life we all go through personal things and you might look at me superficially and everything could be fine but I might not know what you going through emotionally. So that’s normal and natural as well.” (FGP19)*

*“Uh, I mean, if one is going through that specific type of...and trying by all means not to affect your work and you have made your manager aware of it and you are constantly reminded you have to not bring your personal problems at work.” (FGP23)*

This finding is in line with the study of Asiwe, Rothmann, Jorgensen and Hill (2017:5) who revealed that there is a negative correlation between employee engagement and emotional exhaustion. In addition, Richards (2013:70) found that personal reasons like family obligations affect their reasons to stay with an organisation rather than their engagement level.

In addition, these participants uttered that colleagues too could initiate employee disengagement:

*“I would say that it puts a lot of pressure on everyone else because, once a person becomes disengaged or was caused to become disengaged, um, it puts pressure on the rest of the people because then you can’t get anything out of that person. Those negativities emotionally affects you as well as a co-worker.” (FGP16)*

*“It also could be the influence of your colleagues. Maybe they also disgruntled and the somehow...whether you allow it or not, they could actually influence you.” (FGP19)*

*“And, uh, the other thing I think the...sometimes the problem is not always with the...the manager. Uh, sometimes it’s the colleagues that lead you to be disengaged to an extent. If you work more than them, then you trying to be seen, you trying to be better, you trying to get us into trouble.” (FGP24)*

The finding above is consistent with the findings of PWC (2015:19) that additional reasons for employee disengagement are unproductive co-workers, doing work that is not part of your job, a lack of clarity about decision-making process, a lack of clear priorities and inefficient processes. Richards (2013:75) found that disengaged employees’ influence is contagious to other employees and costs the organisation through inefficiency and wasted resources. Highly engaged employees have to pick up the slack for disengaged employees, which has a negative effect on the morale of highly engaged employees.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

This finding reveals that a lack of leadership skills and motivation from some managers, personal situations and disengaged colleagues intensifies employee disengagement



levels in this organisation. The participants revealed that line managers with a lack of skills, colleagues with personal challenges and employees who are disengaged increase employee disengagement in an organisation.

## **2) Lack of experience, management styles and lack of management skills**

The lack of managerial experience and autocratic management style including micro-management, lack of motivation and support for employees from some of the managers were a few points that stood out as the reasons for employees disengaging. This section discusses these factors jointly. The participants disclosed that these factors are crucial to keep the employees engaged:

*“There is, eh, I’d say, a lot of lack of management experience. Um, in most cases, you’ll find that people move into management just by qualification. It does not necessarily make you a leader. So I think, most cases, leaders are appointed by qualification not by ability.” (FGP13)*

*“Uh, it also...I just want to agree with participant number thirteen that, uh, sometimes the management skills and experience is lacking. Yes, we know that there are different ways to approach people some...but sometimes we feel like we’re not consulted, like, you’re just told things.” (FGP15)*

*“I think the others is because of lack of experience and also their own understanding of being managers and I think, eh...eh, managers are also individuals. They’ve got different styles of understanding their...like, their work.” (FGP20)*

The participants indicated that it is essential for the organisation to furnish the managers with the skills on how to deal and manage their employees better. The quotations below elaborate on the need for training managers in the organisation:

*“they need to get some training to be managers, that’s the human part. I mean, sometimes they put emotions a bit too high.” (FGP3)*

*“our managers need help, they need support. They’re...they’re not managing us.” (FGP5)*

*“But I think that that boils down to what...what I think is a general discussion here is that managers don’t have the tools and the, um, structure or the...or the...or the framework to*

*manage us properly because that manager, for instance, um, has not been given a...a...a structure to say this is how you move from this level to this level and also they don't have the tools to manage everybody equally.” (FGP6)*

*“I think the managers here at...[organisation name withheld], some of them lack manage...eh, people skills. Eh, you find that a person...a manager sometimes don't [sic] take you serious or they make you feel that you are an employee or a subordinate. They don't have the people skills.” (FGP11)*

*“Um, adding to that, I...I think, um, it's also very important for the organisation to take these managers for the leadership skills. I think most of them they do need to...to get that...that...that kind of a training 'cause you might be a manager but you don't have those leadership skills. So they are very...very important as well to...to...to take them for that training as well.” (FGP25)*

A number of participants commented that managers' styles also have an impact on employees disengaging:

*“I do think managers need to...to separate their personal identity from when they're dealing with business, um, and...and it's...it's again what they were saying. It's management style. Some managers are very good at that. Other managers bring their personal likes and dislikes into the situation. And it makes you, as an employee, feel disliked which can make you, uh, um, not necessarily disengaged, it can make you unhappy, and, uh, perhaps, uh, that unhappiness can cause a [sic] employee to want to leave the organisation.” (FGP7)*

*“I think to throw money at people but if you not dealing with, like, real issues like management style, for example, even the way you talk to a person.” (FGP9)*

*“I got the feeling that this manager's style is always out to crack the whip You ask for training; you don't get it. When things start falling on that system the whip is cracked on you. What do you do? Are you expected to be all happy and all engaged? No.” (FGP12)*

*“Um, it's fine. I mean, I've been there for a long time. I understand the different styles of management. Somebody might call you in and very discretely say, you know, [participant's name withheld], this is what happened today and I hope it won't happen again and, you know, you discuss it and then...whereas somebody else is...has a different style would just storm out and...and, uh, ja.” (FGP19)*

This finding is in agreement with the finding of Johnson (2016:74) that the existence of poor quality and weak leadership might be considered as a driver for employee disengagement since it negatively influences employees to look at changing their jobs. White (2017:100) found that it is vital to provide basic skills training (emotional intelligence, listening skills and top-down communication) to leaders as it has a positive effect on employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It is evident from the above discussion that a manager's managing style, the absence of experience, skills and development impact negatively on employee engagement. In their opinions, the participants shared that some of the managers in this organisation are lacking experience and leadership skills to manage and lead because their promotions were encouraged by their qualifications only. For example, some participants' perceptions are that if you are a qualified Actuary or a Chartered Accountant (CA) in this organisation you stand a better chance of being promoted to a managerial position even though you have never managed before. The participants also questioned the management style and the approach used by managers when addressing issues in the workplace and emphasised that the managers need to be trained as this will assist them to improve on managing the employees.

### **3) Lack of communication and feedback**

According to the participants' responses and the interview transcripts, lack of communication and feedback is a contributing factor to employee disengagement in this organisation. The majority of the participants revealed that the organisation does not communicate enough, affecting the morale of the employees. Furthermore, they pointed out that an improvement in upward and downward communication is essential to rectify the situation. As stated by some of the participants, the two-way communication channel might put the employees in a better position to understand and know what role they are expected to play in the organisation. The following quotations substantiate this:

*“and being open about...communication is a very clique word.” (FGP1)*

*“I do think that, uh, communication in the...in the organisation is possibly a problem. Communication between people, upper management, lower management, or low staff and...and I think that there’s a...there’s a disconnection there.” (FGP7)*

*“If we have a better communication level, a better understanding, or people listening, then it will alleviate a lot of problems and get less people disengaged on every level.” (FGP16)*

*“think, uh, communication both, uh, from the employee and the employer is...is the key here. It shouldn’t only wait for...to be a one-sided or only address when things are...are not going the way you are expecting.” (FGP23)*

*“More communication from top management, more communication from your specific management, and more communication between the team members in a unit. Um, if there was more communication, there would be...people know where they stand or people know what is expected of them.” (FGP26)*

The majority of the participants suggested that feedback should also be two-way whereby employees will receive feedback from their managers and that they consecutively provide their managers with feedback. Below are the supporting quotations:

*“I also think that constant engagement with staff, um...‘cause like some...some of us, like, I’m surprised that, uh...as people that get, eh, feedback from management meetings, uh, some of us don’t even know that there’s management meetings.” (FGP13)*

*“I...I think some...um, my manager, personally, sometimes, um...um, tries to...to engage us by giving us feedback from these strat meetings that they have.” (FGP14)*

*“Give me regular updates about the company’s successes, failures, progress, non-progress, whatever it is, give me that feedback.” (FGP16)*

*“I must say, in my, uh, job, if I’ve done something that’s good, it’s always...I always have...would have my boss saying thank you very much, job well done.” (FGP18)*

*“I agree. And, uh, I think as well what plays a very important role is, um...is constant feedback from your manager as to where you going wrong or if you not doing something properly.” (FGP19)*

*“I think your...I think one needs to understand where they adding value in the organisation to actually be fully engaged and, if you don't see where you adding value, it's very easy to become disengaged.” (FGP21)*

*“I think just mere motivation, eh, goes a...a long way. Just, uh, the fact that somebody sees that you trying your best and the fact that somebody comes to you and says well done to you. Doesn't have to give me money, you don't have to promote me, but the only thing that I need is to feel appreciated.” (FGP24)*

*“I think they should be two way. I should get an opportunity to give feedback to my boss to tell them what I think, you know, where they should also improve.” (FGP27)*

The participants expressed that they are currently not being motivated, they do not understand where they are adding value, they are not being provided with feedback and their desire is for the overall communication process in this organisation to improve. Some of the participants put forward a suggestion that touch-base meetings with managers could be helpful to improve employee disengagement:

*“But wouldn't regular, like, touch-bases and, um...and just setting up a meeting with them every, like, two weeks to see where you at and how things are going and...don't...wouldn't that help a bit?” (FGP17)*

*“maybe like a weekly touch-base meeting with your boss or a coffee chat or something like that. Ja, so you shouldn't necessarily wait for the manager to give you feedback.” (FGP19)*

*“I also think one-on-one touch-bases are sometimes more useful than having, um...especially if you in a big team, to have, like, team touch-base which is...you need a team touch-base but you also sometimes need a one-on-one touch-base.” (FGP21)*

*“The more touch-base meetings we have, maybe every month there is a touch-base meeting, um, as a department and then you discuss the issues that you have as a dep...as a department, I think that will be...that's very...that's very important as well.” (FGP25)*

One participant was against touch-base meetings and provided this comment:

*“Maybe the other touch-bases are better than others but, in my own experience, the touch-bases are we doing this, we doing it like this, you doing this wrong, you doing this wrong. So it’s never, oh, you doing this right, congratulations or well done or whatever. Yes, I feel it’s all...it’s usually negative. Whenever we have a touch-base, it’s usually to point out the negatives more than the positives.” (FGP24)*

Johnson (2016:73) found that the lack of communication by management is deemed as a driver of employee disengagement. Aturamu (2016:102) discovered that the communication gap between the employees and management leads to employees’ disengagement, maintaining that management should consider employees’ concerns as important and provide feedback to employees in a timely manner.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

Most of the participants were of the opinion that open communication by management from top to bottom will improve the levels of employee engagement in the organisation. Regarding provision of feedback to the employees, some of the participants indicated that they do receive feedback relating to what is happening in the organisation including their performance while the other participants raised their concerns about the lack thereof. This finding suggest that a lack of effective dissemination of information and provision of feedback to employees within the organisation is a major concern. Employees need and want to know what is happening in order to understand how their contribution adds value. A lack of effective communication and feedback often leads people to disengage.

#### **4) Ineffective performance management system**

The participants disclosed that the performance management system referred to as the Management by Objectives (MBO) in the organisation could be another reason for employee disengagement. The majority indicated that this system is subjective with the process followed to rate the employees during the appraisal period and that instead of the system being used to address matters such as the employees’ career paths and

performance, some managers use it as a punitive mechanism. The following quotations reflect what the participants had to say:

*“the validation that you’re doing a good job and it’s so, like...I think that the thing that I struggle with the most is that, you know, while every year we do an appraisal and every year you’re constantly scoring high but then you’re told, well, I don’t think you’re ready for...well, for...for the next level but then what does that mean really?” (FGP5)*

*“Uh, I was talking in terms of the MBO that, if you’re scoring the same score or even if you are still...it means you are at the same level, you are not growing, you are not, like improving because the idea is you should improve with time, with more responsibilities, but, uh, my...the way the MBO is done is that, at one point, I was told that there is no person who’s ever scored this score, a certain score, say maybe eighty percent. No-one scores eighty percent in the organisation.” (FGP15)*

*“My contribution on the MBO form in terms of changing it is...because we set it in the beginning of the year that this is what you supposed to do for the entire year and then...during the year, then you get projects that you didn’t expect to take so much of your time that you neglect the other project that you’re supposed to do and then you find yourself panicking when it comes to MBO time.” (FGP18)*

*“I know that the MBO causes people a lot of stress. I mean, I’ve watched people get very stressed out about MBOs. I mean, it causes them a lot of stress.” (FGP19)*

*“I...I think the...one thing as well that, uh, I think tends to drive...or not drive engagement is, uh, um...I think the employee assessment system, um. The MBO I think may actually be too rigid in that it will...probably only measures a few things based on certain few measures but this employee could be adding so much other value that makes a huge difference.” (FGP27)*

Mmako and Schultz (2016:154) found that the employees did not feel that the recognition and feedback they received was satisfactory. The employees ought to be provided with straightforward feedback on their performance. Likewise, de Jager (2017:62) found that there is a relationship between employee perceptions of performance management and employee engagement. These perceptions indicated that employees who agreed with regular performance assessments; had measurable and achievable goals; received frequent feedback on their performance; and felt that

they were rewarded equitably for their efforts; were also more likely to report greater levels of engagement (de Jager 2017:79)

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

Most of the participants mentioned that the performance management system creates a lot of unhappiness amongst the employees in terms of the rating process whereby they are scored almost the same every year, as a result this hampers their career growth. The participants indicated that their biggest concern is that this system only gets rated once a year, instead of it being used as a tool to constantly assist with improving their performance. It is evident from the finding above that the current performance management system is not designed to measure and improve the levels of employee engagement.

The researcher is of the view that a thoroughly designed and well maintained performance management system can be a powerful tool that benefits both the employees and managers as it could be utilised to communicate, provide proper feedback, motivate, grow and engage with employees.

#### **5) Inequitable remuneration process**

A small number of the participants indicated that remuneration is another reason for employee disengagement in this organisation. These participants stated that the remuneration process is not fair and the salaries are not market related. The following statements reflect the participants' views on remuneration:

*“Um, the salary increments. Um, I’ve discussed this with the CEO. This blanket percentage, it’s...it’s really unfair. Uh, number one, it’s inflation based. I think people...people need to be rewarded. If we have the same titles and, um, I work twice as hard as you are and then I get the same, eh – increment as you are, um, it’s...it’s...it’s really not fair. Ja.” (FGP13)*

*“you can say fifty percent of people leaving is about salaries because, if you look at the industries, what they pay on certain levels, um, we are way underpaid, um, and, uh, it’s...it’s not an opinion, um, it’s the truth.” (FGP16)*



*“I think if we can have like a sort of, uh, way where we can have similar benchmarks to say, if me and him, we’ve got the same qualification, same experience...if we can have maybe a range of a salary maybe this could be where people with that particular skill and qualification.” (FGP15)*

*“It could be your remuneration. You not getting enough acknowledgement.” (FGP19)*

*“The work continues, you do the job, but, when it comes to remuneration, you are not recognised. You told that, like, look, you don’t have the qualification.” (FGP20)*

This finding is similar to the findings of Rana (2015:314) who found that for employees to be able to perceive that they are properly paid for their work effort and performance, an effective reward system should be in place. Jung and Yoon (2015:25) revealed that employees’ unhappiness with their pay increased their chances of job withdrawal, therefore, a fair pay system is essential because a pay structure is an important variable for job withdrawal. Furthermore, Johnson (2016:74) disclosed that a lack of trust of management to reward employees for their work would drive them to disengage.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

According to these participants, there is no transparency when it comes to how the salaries are determined for the employees in this organisation. The participants are of the opinion that the current reward system does not meet their expectations in terms of being remunerated equitably and they believe that they are under-paid compared to what other reinsurance organisations are paying their employees.

From the above finding, it is evident that should the organisation’s remuneration process be transparent for employees to understand, it might change this perception that the organisation does not remunerate them equitably and that it does not pay market related salaries.

## 6) Lack of recognition and appreciation

It is worth noting that the majority of the participants' responses pointed out that a lack of recognition and appreciation are also contributing to employee disengagement in this organisation. Most of the participants uttered that management does not recognise, appreciate and value their contribution and efforts. The participants verbalised the following:

*"So, ja, I think we all have for the reasons that we've been talking about here discussing the hours, the not growing in the work, the new changes, the managers not appreciating you as well." (FGP8)*

*"you have to work twice as hard or sometimes, even if you work twice...twice as hard, you still not...not recognised so you become disengaged." (FGP15)*

*"How many times do you perceive a manager who would say thank you to somebody? It's your job. Why must they say thank you?" (FGP16)*

*"Um, here's me that's given all my attention and done all the stuff that I was expected to do and I was never recognised." (FGP17)*

*"I think managers must, uh, give sort of an informal feedback...not this MBO feedback that we get but an informal one that, you know, I know you busy with this and this and I appreciate what you doing. Just that kind of recognition. It doesn't have to be the scoresheet that you ticking this and that but just that feedback that comes, like, you know, I see you've been working hard on this thing and I appreciate it. So we need more feedback and appreciation." (FGP18)*

*"I've had my own experience where you go the extra mile, you put yourself, you sacrifice your time, and...and stuff, and never get the, eh...the recognition or appreciation and, eh, it will be once, after some time." (FGP20)*

*"Like you just not, uh, appreciated. You just not valued. At the end of the day, I will come in and I will just, uh, do my eight to four and then I will go home. The...whatever I...I haven't finished, I'll finish the following day. So you don't put in the extra effort." (FGP24)*

*“Um, from my side, I would think, um, not happy and maybe not feeling not being appreciated in the company because most of the employees they are disengaged because they feel that, uh, their contribution to the company is not, uh...it’s not important. They feel that their managers they don’t take them...they take them for grant...for granted.” (FGP25)*

Some of the participants revealed that due to the lack of recognition and appreciation they feel like they are also not valued for their contribution in the organisation and this contributes to employees disengaging. The employees indicated that their efforts are not recognised. The following comments elaborate on this observation:

*“Core business and service levels or...you know. It’s...it’s...those terms shouldn’t be used. It’s...they’re discouraging and they can disengage people ‘cause then you don’t feel valued. I mean, if you don’t feel valued you wanna go somewhere where you’ll feel valued and, you know, you don’t want to be reminded that this is a job that you need the money for your family.” (FGP7)*

*“If you don’t see where you adding value, it’s very easy to become disengaged.” (FGP21)*

*“It’s all about valuing each employee. If, uh, somebody doesn’t feel like they are valued in a department, you don’t engage much. So you just go into your own cocoon, do whatever is, uh, expected of you, the bare minimum, that’s fine, but, if you feel like somebody appreciates that and actually praises you for it, then you think, oh, okay, I can do better.” (FGP24)*

*“Uh, most, uh, employees they don’t feel that they are valued enough in the...in the organisation. That is one of the reasons they...they disengaged. Their efforts are not, uh, being recognised. That could be one of the reasons that they decide to disengage.” (FGP25)*

This finding is similar to the findings of the study conducted by Mmako and Schultz (2016:153) which revealed that the academics did not perceive the recognition and feedback they received to be satisfactory. Furthermore, Richards (2013:68) explored how the experiences of salaried aerospace employees affected productivity and the financial performance of an organisation. The study revealed that lack of appreciation and positive feedback for employees’ work creates employee disengagement.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

The findings above provide evidence that a lack of appreciation and recognition from the managers demotivates the employees and drive them to become disengaged. It is essential for the organisation to recognise, appreciate and value the contribution made by its employees. This might encourage the employees to become highly engaged. The finding above emerged as one of the reasons for employee disengagement in the individual interviews in section 5.10.1. The managers acknowledged that it is vital to regularly show appreciation and give recognition to the employees.

### **7) Flat organisational structure, lack of career growth and lack of promotions**

The participants identified the organisation's flat structure, lack of career growth and promotions as other reasons why the employees are disengaged. Based on the interview transcripts and the data analysis, the participants stated that there are no clear career paths to indicate how employees can grow and move to the next level in terms of promotions. According to the participants, the organisational flat structure is hampering the promotion of the employees. The majority of the participants expressed their feelings and commented as follows:

*"That's where the disengagement comes. Maybe because of the flat structure of this company it's one of the reasons people become disengaged." (FGP3)*

*"On the flip side the company has a flat structure and because of that flat structure people who would feel like, you know, from a career professional development standpoint it's not satisfying or fulfilling that need." (FGP5)*

*"Uh, this organisation has a very...it has a flat structure and it looks like it's...I mean, they also said that you should...no-one works normal hours, it looks like it...it encourages working, um, extra hours due to lack of enough human resource." (FGP8)*

*"We don't have any career, uh, guidance from our management. So we don't have a...a thing to say, well, you in this...this specific role in the company. As...as part of your career we will push you to do these certain things." (FGP6)*

*"If you are given the same work and opportunities aren't given to you to do other things to grow your career, it's just copy, paste, copy, paste, copy, paste, you're not growing. It's gonna push you to be disengaged." (FGP9)*

*"Um, from my opinion, it's, uh...when you look at it in terms of, uh, personal development, it seems, uh, there is a bit of a challenge then. We looking more on getting the job done but, in terms of upskilling...okay, even though the company is giving the resources to us...to the individual to upskill themselves [sic], there's no clear path career in terms of in the department...in certain departments where we are." (FGP13)*

*"it means you are at the same level, you are not growing, you are not improving because the idea is you should improve with time, with more responsibilities." (FGP15)*

*"We need career growth more than the food, I think. People need more career growth, more than the food, more than going to these breakaways." (FGP24)*

*"so I need something that's gonna be more challenging for me. I need growth. I need to grow in life as well." (FGP25)*

*"If the company were to be open or if there was something...ja, if...if...if there was a structure whereby that was open that would explain how a person moves from one level to another level, how to get a promotion." (FGP2)*

*"Cause there is no structure but there is no route to say, well, this is what I must do over the next three years to move up a level or to be given the opportunity to move into a managerial position." (FGP6)*

*"Um, and then when it comes to things like promotions the flat structure in promotions, we've...we've all seen that. Um, because they don't...they don't promote as much as in other companies." (FGP8)*

*“Uh, I think there should be, like, maybe policies. Like, some documentation of...on...especially on promotions because here it means, if you not studying anything, if you’re not an actuary, your chances of getting promoted they are almost nil.” (FGP15)*

*“So, from my...from my side, I can only get to a level three. So I can’t go...so there’s no...I don’t know. There’s no prospects of getting to a higher level. I...I started in the company as a level three and I’ve stayed in the company as a level three and I won’t ever go higher than a level three because of my position in the company or my job title in the company.” (FGP26)*

*“The EXCO people or most of them, are really approachable so...which is positive but a lot more could be done in trying to understand what is it that they can do to better different people and, you know, career paths, different things.” (FGP27)*

Gupta (2015:51) revealed that career development encourages employee engagement and assists with retaining the most talented employees by providing them with opportunities for personal development. Sinha and Trivedi (2014:33) found that rewarding the employees through motivating them to accomplish their work, personal growth and job satisfaction increases their commitment and dedication level, which in turn increases their engagement level.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

Some of the participants pointed out that due to the flat structure, employees are expected to work long hours due to the organisation not having enough manpower. Furthermore, the participants indicated that the flat structure is an obstacle for employees to be promoted. They mentioned that there is no structure and transparency put in place to guide the employees on how to move to the next level in terms of promotions. In terms of career growth, the participants mentioned that they require challenging roles to assist them to grow and ultimately be promoted to the next level in the organisation.

It is evident from the findings above that the organisation’s flat structure, lack of career growth and promotions have a negative impact on employee engagement. Employees wish for an opportunity to use their current jobs as a platform to gain skills and

experience to grow inside the organisation and ultimately to be promoted to the next level on their career ladder.

## **8) Favouritism and racism**

The data analysis revealed that favouritism could be another reason for employee disengagement in this organisation. A handful of the participants indicated that you see and feel favouritism everywhere in this organisation. According to the participants, employees experience favouritism when it comes to promotions and giving preference to certain employees. These viewpoints are cited below:

*“But the point that I’m making is that I don’t want you to tell me that I can’t...I’m not promoting you but I’m going to go ahead and promote this person over here. To me it doesn’t feel fair.” (FGP5)*

*“If they choosing people that might be doing exactly what you doing but they getting promoted ahead of you and you think, well, what did they do differently?” (FGP6)*

*“Uh, I think favouritism in the company also creates, uh, the disengagement that we talking about. Uh, for an example, uh, with vacancies or job opportunities in the company you find that, uh, for a certain position they need someone with, uh, certain qualifications and you find that, uh, because they are eyeing someone or maybe someone is a favourite to a manager.” (FGP11)*

*“Uh, I think I will go back again to unequal treatment of favouritism, that’s the culture that...I think that’s the culture of this organisation and, uh, I think it does cause people to be disengaged.” (FGP15)*

*“I think...well, in my...my feeling, it’s fa...uh, favouritism and, over the years, I’ve noticed that there’s a lot of that. It doesn’t matter where...which position you in or where you are. It’s just what you see around you.” (FGP17)*

*“And sometimes there are clear favourites, I feel. So you know so-and-so is the favourite. Number twenty-seven is the favourite. Number twenty-five is the favourite. I am the favourite. So it’s fine. I don’t need to contribute much.” (FGP24)*

*“Ja, I...I would also add onto that that, um, it’s...it’s...you...you...it’s also about favouritism. You get people that’s [sic] get promoted to the next level but then there’s no basis for that...for that promotion but when you ask about it there’s a basis for your promotion. You’re told you need to achieve this first before you’re...you’re promoted to the next level. There’s people that have come here, within a year have got promoted.” (FGP14)*

Scott (2014:97) found that the perception of favouritism is a real concern for employees. The perceived treatment afforded to one employee versus another to be an opportunity for the chosen few and this leads employees to disengage.

Some of the participants revealed that they have also experienced racism in this organisation, based on the colour of their skin, while their opinion is not valued and one participant mentioned that the race representation in management levels is not equitable. This notion is illustrated by the participants’ responses below:

*“Unfortunately, it also happens with race. Because you are of a certain colour. The skin difference is very it’s visible. The skin difference is visible as well. Ja, so the...ja, the people that think because you’re a certain...of a certain race you’re probably slower...you’re probably slow, you’re slow, you don’t get the things quickly.” (FGP8)*

*“I mean just that. Race. Race plays a very, eh, crucial role, uh, in this organisation the, um, eh, your opinions are not as valued as much as the next race. That is just my ex...experience from where I come from.” (FGP13)*

*“If forty percent...if sixty percent of...like, we should have representation in management...being sixty percent management should be black and the other race...whatever...whatever the rest of the demographics should be the remainder. Just a representation of that.” (FGP14)*

*“I think it boils down to race as well that maybe our race is not trusted with something like that but that’s me.” (FGP15)*

Sibiya (2016:19) investigated the problem of racial harassment and discrimination in the workplace. The author found that the courts are of the opinion that racism is a negative or hurtful act which must be totally eradicated in the workplace and in society in general. Employers have the right and a duty to maintain discipline in the workplace



and the courts are of the view that employees who are guilty of racially harassing their colleagues should be dismissed. Mrwebi, Smith and Mazibuko (2018:26) found that employee engagement has no significant influence on organisational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) while trustworthiness of management, organisational transparency and organisational climate have positive influences on organisational justice.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The findings reveal that favouritism and racism are contributing towards employee disengagement. The employees experience favouritism in this organisation when it comes to promotions of employees. The participants indicated that employees in this organisation believe that managers do not promote their employees based on their skills level, but rather on how well they get along with the manager. Furthermore, the findings disclose that racism is common in terms of the representation on management levels and the EXCO team. Some participants felt that their race and opinions are not valued like the opinions of other races.

#### **9) Voiceless employees and a lack of empowerment**

Some of the participants indicated that management does not listen to the employees and does not empower or involve them. This could lead to the levels of employee disengagement increasing. The participants' views are provided in the quotations below:

*“Um, if I can say? I think that there’s a huge divide between management and their lower staff. There’s a huge divide between management and their staff. They’re not listening. They’re...they’re calling it teams but they’re not a team.” (FGP7)*

*“we a small company, I think maybe you could have enough time to meet with employees, junior employees, more so they can be heard ‘cause I...currently our voice is not being heard and so that’s why sometimes we’ve...we’ve even...ja, no, let me end there.” (FGP9)*

*“They make me disengaged and lack interest because, like I was saying, your views are not considered.” (FGP15)*

*“So I just feel that, if people are less...I don't know what the word is but, if people start listening and take into consideration that each of us are individuals, we all have opinions, it might not be what you want it to be but it's my opinion and we need to respect it. If, in any way, my opinion is a bit offline, you can get me on...you can get me in line with an explanation, the reason I say this is because of that, but don't just brush it off and treat me like an imbecile.” (FGP16)*

*“I would say, eh, more from encouragement from the management line. Sometimes they would, like, outline the role but, in terms of empowering you doing that role, are you empowered enough?” (FGP23)*

*“And sometimes you feel like, uh, some of these managers want to sort of think for you. Like, instead of showing me or telling me this thing should be done ABCD or this way or something, you...you do it for me and, once you do it for me, I will never learn.” (FGP24)*

*“So, um, ja, you not...you not actually heard. Yes, you have to sign you have to sign your MBO at the end of the day but how do you challenge your manager on what he actually puts down on that piece of paper?” (FGP26)*

Rees, Alfes and Gatenby (2013:2792) revealed that employees who perceive themselves as being allowed to raise their opinions and suggestions are more likely to be engaged with their work. Rana (2015:314) found that for employees to be highly engaged, it is essential for organisations to provide its employees with authority to make decisions, voice ideas and participate in decision-making processes. Additionally, Aturamu (2016:102) disclosed that the employees feel valued when they are involved in making decisions on problems directly affecting their jobs in the organisation.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The foregoing findings provide evidence that the employees feel that management does not empower and listen to them. Getting staff involved, listening to them and allowing them to make a contribution might boost their engagement levels. The participants mentioned that managers do not listen to their concerns and their opinions are not taken into consideration. The participants also raised their concerns regarding

the lack of empowerment whereby employees are not empowered to carry on with their work without interference.

## **10) Victimisation by management**

From the analysis and the interview transcripts, victimisation emerged as a reason that could lead to employee disengagement in this organisation. The minority of the participants mentioned that they are scared to raise work related issues as they are scared to be victimised by management and they provided the following comments:

*“I say what I think basically but there was a time when you have to hold back because you’ll know that if I say something to my boss, and he does not...he does not take kindly to what I’m saying it might be escalated up and now you kind of a pariah within the organisation.” (FGP2)*

*“So, in that way, next time I won’t be able to do anything because I know, like what she was saying, I will be a victim. I’ll be victimised.” (FGP15)*

*“The bad thing is that people are scared to be victimised because, if, for any reason, people are identified or people speak up, they become victims of circumstances and...and...and greatly so because you fight an organisation, not an individual, and, if you are identified as the ringleader, life becomes very unbearable for you and that’s the reality.” (FGP16)*

*“Uh, I think it would be best if we get somebody who is very neutral, somebody who won’t be biased, somebody who won’t victimise me. So I don’t want my manager there, I don’t want HR there, I don’t want anybody who knows me there. I want somebody who’s gonna take me as an anonymous person.” (FGP24)*

*“but I think the organisation should encourage that kind of open engagement culture without necessarily then victimising people for, you know, their aspirations. That...that’s my view.” (FGP27)*

Trépanier, Fernet and Austin (2015:112) conducted a quantitative study amongst nurses working in the public health sector in Canada. The study found that workplace bullying not only leads to burnout, it also reduces employees’ vitality and dedication at work (work engagement). Intimidated employees are more likely to leave an organisation over time. In addition, the South African Occupational Health and Safety

Act, no. 81 (1993:15) specifically forbids victimisation in the workplace. Furthermore, Hollis (2015:8) found that when leadership allowed bullying to thrive, employees disengage from work tasks spending hours regrouping from hostile interaction.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The researcher probed for specific incidents in the past about victimisation but the participants were not willing to share more information. Even though victimisation was raised by a minority of the participants as a reason for employee disengagement, it is advisable for management to look into it as it is evident from the findings that some employees are scared to raise certain issues because they feel that they might be victimised.

#### **4.10.3 Sub-theme 5.3: Moving towards consistent employee engagement**

The participants divulged the following as possible solutions to address the employee disengagement in this organisation:

- 1) A follow-up survey to gauge the current employee engagement levels
- 2) Leadership skills training
- 3) Relationship building between managers and employees
- 4) Feedback, recognition and appreciation
- 5) Improved communication
- 6) Revamped performance management system

These possible solutions for employee disengagement are discussed as follows:

##### **1) Follow-up survey to gauge the current employee engagement levels**

Based on the participants' responses, a follow-up survey to measure the current levels of employee engagement amongst the employees will give an indication if there has been an improvement since the last survey was conducted in 2013. The participants who agreed, elaborated by stating the following:

*“maybe management re-running that survey to check if there’s a difference or was there improvement.” (FGP10)*

*“And asking the right questions on the survey ‘cause they ask very general questions. So, like, a comment section where you can actually input and that...and that those comments are not dismissed and that they’re actually considered seriously.” (FGP7)*

*“But maybe another survey could actually help. Well, you’d get negative, you’d get positive, you’d see where...how...where to come help improve.” (FGP17)*

*“Just to add on that, if there was, like, maybe any...if there were any strategies put in place from those shortcomings, there should be a follow-up survey and see if there has been an improvement.” (FGP23)*

*“I think you mentioned a survey and what questions you would put in there. I think you need to understand what motivates employees and are...is their current line of work providing them with the challenges that they need to actually be engaged?” (FGP21)*

Gupta (2015:50) disclosed that it is essential to have a proper employee engagement system within an organisation since engaged employees care about the future of the organisation and are willing to invest a flexible effort to the benefit of the organisation. PWC (2015:3) found that high performing organisations and those conducting frequent engagement surveys including taking action on the survey results, disclose an extensively higher performance compared to their competitors.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants are of the opinion that a follow-up survey will give an indication of which areas have improved since the last survey and which areas need attention to improve engagement levels. According to the participants, there is a need to put an appropriate structure in place to measure the engagement levels in this organisation. Some of the participants even suggested which questions should be included in the survey.

Several suggestions were that the survey should ask the employees about what they like or dislike about the organisation, how they felt about the organisation and what the organisation could do to increase the levels of employee engagement.

## 2) Leadership skills

The majority of the participants are of the opinion that leadership training is essential for managers as it will assist in improving their management skills. The following quotations elaborate on the need for leadership skills training:

*“Managers need training. They need to get some training to be managers.” (FGP3)*

*“the managers should be trained. It’s part of management.” (FGP1)*

*“we spend most of our time here and I think if managers can try to improve and have people skills and be compassionate. They don’t have the people skills.” (FGP11)*

*“Managers need to go on training.” (FGP7)*

*“HR must take managers for some course or HR must talk to managers about this.” (FGP8)*

*“I think maybe training on leadership skills on the part of the managers because, like what we...uh, participant number thirteen said, some of them they don’t...yes, they’re qualified but they don’t have the leadership skills. So training I think would also help in that.” (FGP15)*

*“I think it’s, um, probably management training and that.” (FGP21)*

*“The other recommendation that I think would be a solution is, if employees come with problems and complaints, they...they...the managers should be seen to be addressing those problems.” (FGP27)*

*“I...I think, um, it’s also very important for the organisation to take these managers for the leadership skills.” (FGP25)*

*“There was a time when we attended, uh, intrapersonal skills training, I think that’s what it was called, and a lot of people in that training went like why are the managers not here? I think the managers should have been there as well. So, I don’t know why the managers don’t attend such things and only us attend. I have no idea.” (FGP24)*

Bornman and Puth (2017:1) found that organisations should implement training and development programmes for all individuals within leadership positions. This initiative would create awareness for leaders of what they are lacking and where they can improve themselves within their organisational environments. In addition, the study of Presbitero (2017:64) revealed that improvements of training and development in an organisation lead to high levels of employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants mentioned that managers have qualifications but lack people skills to handle the issues that employees expect them to deal with. Currently, the perception is that the managers are not capable of addressing the issues raised by the employees due to a lack of leadership skills. The participants are of the opinion that managers should be offered leadership skills training.

### **3) Relationship building between managers and employees**

It is worth noting that the participants believe that there is a need to work towards building relationships between the employees and the managers as they are of the opinion that relationships are currently non-existent. The participants quoted the following to substantiate this viewpoint:

*“They need to know that this is how people are actually feeling because we don’t get another platform to share exactly what we sharing here.” (FGP9)*

*“I...I think, uh, my last word will be like to...if maybe there’d...there’d be like, you know, feedback to management to say, look, people should feel free to engage them on any topic, people shouldn’t be discouraged.” (FGP20)*

*“I think sometimes people are afraid to actually, you know, be open and have open discussions with their bosses and their managers.” (FGP19)*

*“You know, I may be correct in...in...with respect to...to relationships between manager and...and staff is...is definitely a barrier.” (FGP6)*

*“I was not...there were no relationships between me and my manager and, um, it...ja, ja, that’s it. There was just no relationship but it’s gotten better now.” (FGP2)*

*“and I think if they can try to fix like the management/employee relationship I think that can...can really go a far way in problem-solving.” (FGP5)*

*“Managers should be more engaged in seeing what happens in the unit to build better relationships between team members.” (FGP26)*

Fulkerson, Thompson and Thompson (2015:30) revealed that efficient communication together with active listening could be an opportunity to build a trusting relationship. White (2017:82) found that employee engagement influences the relationship between employees and supervisors since it reduces the disparity between leadership and employees. In addition, Hlapo (2016:71) found that the role of managers is vital in creating a pleasant working environment that encourages employees to build interpersonal relationships.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants indicated that their expectation is for managers to build relationships with the employees as this will enable the employees to open up to their managers instead of being afraid of them. Furthermore, the employees will feel free to discuss their challenges with their managers. This could be facilitated by means of open discussions between managers and employees.

#### **4) Provide feedback, recognition and appreciation**

The participants expressed that they feel delighted when they are recognised, appreciated and provided with feedback when they have succeeded in doing their jobs. They stated that receiving feedback is important and motivates them. This is reflected by the participants in the following comments:

*“I think managers must, uh, give sort of an informal feedback. So we need more feedback and appreciation.” (FGP18)*



*“Oh, I agree with you. Feedback. I think feedback is key.” (FGP19)*

*“My personal opinion is...is...is for managers to recognise employees when they have done well, also as individuals because people are different. It’s not like one-size-fits-all.” (FGP20)*

*“I think feedback is important but it’s also...it’s also important that, um, managers have conversations with the people in their team and show appreciation.” (FGP21)*

*“Ja, I think what, uh, twenty-four and twenty-five have said is, uh... it’s that recognition and appreciation is quite important when someone has performed well.” (FGP27)*

*“I also think that constant engagement with staff, um...‘cause like some...some of us, like, I’m surprised that, uh...as people that get, eh, feedback from management meetings, uh, some of us don’t even know that there’s management meetings, um.” (FGP13)*

Fulkerson et al. (2015:27) found that good team leaders recognise and promote internal and external motivators that drive the effort to achieve goals. Furthermore, Hlapo (2016:71) revealed that HRD practices (training and development, employee feedback, career development opportunities, employee welfare schemes, reward and recognition schemes) are key drivers of employee engagement.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants emphasised that employees should be recognised, appreciated and be provided with feedback from their direct managers. This could increase the engagement levels amongst the employees.

### **5) Improved communication**

The majority indicated that communication between colleagues and communication between management and employees is essential as it will give the employees an indication of what is happening in the organisation and help them to be aware of the direction the organisation is taking. The participants elaborated by saying:

*“Constant communication about the direction the company’s taking, uh, if...if the company’s doing well, if it’s not doing well, what are the challenges that are facing the company? Uh, all*

*those kinds of things. Uh, most of times you find yourself just coming to work...you come to work, you go home, you don't know what's happening.” (FGP13)*

*“I think, uh, communication both, uh, from the employee and the employer is...is the key here. It shouldn't only wait for...to be a one-sided or only address when things are...are not going the way you are expecting.” (FGP23)*

*“More communication from top management, more communication from your specific management, and more communication between the team members in a unit. Um, if there was more communication, there would be...people know where they stand or people know what is expected of them.” (FGP26)*

*“Uh, oh, just still on the communication part, uh, the communication shouldn't just be top-down like you just dictating what I should do. My thoughts are not valued, my ideas are not valued if it's always top-down, top-down, top-down. I think, uh, maybe better communication, uh, not just communication, like, better communication.” (FGP24)*

*“Yes, I also agree with, eh, the communication. I think...I think it's very critical. The more touch-base meetings we have, maybe every month there is a touch-base meeting, um, as a department and then you discuss the issues that you have as a dep...as a department, I think that will be...that's very...that's very important as well.” (FGP25)*

*“you need, eh, regular, like, feedback and communication from your, eh, what do you call it? Your manager. Ja, I think that's the way I understand.” (FGP20)*

Fulkerson et al. (2015:27) revealed that effective, honest communication is a foundation for sharing information, building knowledge and developing competency. Furthermore, White (2017:77) revealed that internal communication resulted in great benefits for team cohesion.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants agreed that the organisation should undertake to establish a two-way communication in this organisation. The participants highlighted that communication of information about how the organisation is doing and what is expected from employees

is vital and could improve the employment relationship and sharing of information. This is important for the success of the organisation.

## **6) Revamp the performance management system**

The participants expressed their concern about the performance management system and suggested that the system needs to be restored citing that the inflexibility of the system causes panic amongst the employees. An example given was that in the event of projects changing during the year, the employees are disallowed to amend their objectives accordingly to accommodate changes. Furthermore, they stated that it is a concern that feedback is provided once a year hence the suggestion that the system be revised. The participants expressed that:

*“Uh, purpose of an MBO is to have constant feedback engagement with your boss and not waiting for them once a year or once every six months where you pull out that MBO from somewhere.” (FGP19)*

*“I think just to add on that, there’s a bit of, uh...a bit of inconsistency I would say in...in terms of ownership whereby you’ll get to do the MBO with your specific line manager.” (FGP23)*

*“Uh, the performance...the MBOs as you call them in this organisation. I think they should be two way. I should get an opportunity to give feedback to my boss to tell them what I think, you know, where they should also improve. It shouldn’t be one way. No-one is perfect. So I think that two-way kind of assessment, obviously within parameters, could actually benefit the organisation.” (FGP27)*

*“sometimes you feel that you...that you really go the extra mile and what if your manager doesn’t like you and he feels that you not going the extra mile and you know that you go the extra mile, how do you prove to management that you do put in more than what he’s actually putting down on the piece of paper? You have to sign your MBO at the end of the day but how do you challenge your manager on what he actually puts down on that piece of paper?” (FGP26)*

Taylor (2015:336) found that the stumbling blocks to high performance include perceptions of a poorly designed performance measurement system, an unsatisfactory level and mix of rewards offered, and inconsistencies in the implementation process.

In addition, Pather (2015:83) discovered that the design and execution of the performance management system was flawed rendering the achievement of its outcomes impossible. The design and support of the system negatively influenced participation in the process. De Jager (2017:79) revealed that employees who agreed with regular performance assessments, had measurable and achievable goals set, received regular performance feedback and felt that they were compensated fairly for their efforts, were more likely to report high levels of engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants stated that there is an inconsistent application of how the objectives are set, measured and reviewed in different departments. The participants disclosed that most of the employees see the process as stressful and see no value in participating as the performance system adds little value in their career growth. Furthermore, the participants indicated that they do not understand or see the link and the relationship between the current performance system, remuneration and promotions. Some of the participants were of the view that the system is subjective depending on the relationship one has with one's manager. Most of the participants agreed that regular face-to-face meetings and feedback held with their managers could positively influence engagement of employees.

### **4.11 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings of the focus group interviews with general staff from level 2 to level 4. The researcher identified five themes with sub-themes. These themes gave insight on how the participants understood the employee disengagement concept and expressed their feelings towards the results of the employee engagement survey that took place in this organisation in 2013. Furthermore, the participants communicated their perceptions about the positive, caring, accommodating and learning organisational culture the organisation has.

The employees also shared their challenges concerning the role that management plays to engage them. They revealed that the managers' experience and personalities influence employee engagement. They further raised concerns about the role played

by an engaging and disengaging manager to engage or disengage them. The participants also indicated that it is essential for managers to understand and respect that all employees are different.

Finally, the participants were open to disclose if they were considering leaving or staying in the organisation. They shared their reasons for employee disengagement in the organisation as being caused by an employees' line manager, personal circumstances and disengaging colleagues; a managers' lack of experience, management styles and lack of management skills; a lack of communication and providing feedback; an ineffective performance management system; inequitable remuneration process; a lack of recognition and appreciation; flat organisational structure, a lack of career path growth and lack of promotions; favouritism and racism; voiceless employees and a lack of empowerment and finally victimisation by management.

The participants also put forward their recommendations to assist the organisation to address the employee disengagement phenomenon. The recommendations suggested are: a follow-up survey to gauge the current employee engagement levels; leadership skills training; relationship building between managers and employees; providing feedback, recognising and appreciating the employees; improved communication and revamping the performance management system. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of the individual interviews with managers from level 5 to level 7.

**CHAPTER 5 : FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 introduced the background, motivation and problem statement, research questions and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 provided the literature review based on various aspects of employee engagement and employee disengagement. Chapter 3 presented in detail the qualitative research methodology of the study including the population, sampling, data collection method (semi-structured individual and focus group interviews), pilot study as well as the data analysis process. Chapter 4 reported the findings of the focus group interviews. The main purpose of Chapter 5 is to present and analyse the qualitative data from the individual interviews. The empirical findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six participants (managers) from level 5 to level 7. Section 5.2 outlines the profiles of the participants.

**5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

The biographical information on gender, marital status, age, job levels, tenure and qualifications was collected from the participants by using a standardised form which had to be completed by all participants before the interviews. Tables 5.1 to 5.6 display the biographical information of the participants:

**Table 5.1: Gender split managers**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Females	2	33%
Males	4	67%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

A point to note in Table 5.1 is that management levels are male dominated in this organisation and it is evident that the population was primarily representative of male managers. Three females and three males were invited to participate in the study. One

female manager rejected the invite to participate. On the other hand, one male manager asked to be allowed to participate in the study.

**Table 5.2: Marital status split managers**

Marital status	Total participants	Percentage
Married	5	83%
Other	1	17%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

According to Table 5.2, 17% of the participants did not disclose their marital status.

**Table 5.3: Age split managers**

Age	Total participants	Percentage
41-45	4	67%
46-51	2	33%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5.3 illustrates that all the participants represented Generation X. All the participants conversed easily with the researcher.

**Table 5.4: Job level split managers**

Level	Total participants	Percentage
5	2	33%
6	3	50%
7	1	17%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5.4 presents the different organisational job levels of the managers. These job levels were significant for this study as they represented the management of this organisation.

**Table 5.5: Tenure split managers**

<b>Years of service</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
4-6	1	17%
7-9	3	50%
10 and more	2	33%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5.5 displays that the majority of the participants have been with the organisation for a period varying from seven years to more than 10 years. This was an indication that these participants have huge experience in managing the employees in this organisation and they equally provided the information the researcher was striving for.

**Table 5.6: Qualification split managers**

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Matric	1	17%
Degree	5	83%
	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5.6 portrays the participants' qualifications. The table confirms that the majority of the participants were well educated and could produce a meaningful contribution to the study. Those with a degree qualification were on all management levels.

### **5.3 DURATION OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

The total duration for the individual interviews was five hours, 26 minutes and 51 seconds. Table 5.7 summarises the duration of these interviews.



**Table 5.7: Duration of interviews**

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Interviews dates</b>	<b>Interviews times</b>	<b>Duration of interviews (hours, minutes and seconds)</b>
Individual Interview 1 P1	29 Jul 2016	12:00	00:20:11
Individual Interview 2 P2	19 Sep 2016	10:00	00:48:11
Individual Interview 3 P3	01 Nov 2016	10:00	01:09:08
Individual Interview 4 P4	16 Nov 2016	10:30	00:59:33
Individual Interview 5 P5	29 Nov 2016	14:00	00:61:35
Individual Interview 6 P6	20 Dec 2016	11:30	01:08:13
<b>Total time</b>			<b>05:26:51</b>

The interviews were scheduled at different times based on the participants' availability and their convenience. The minimum time spent was on individual interview 1 which lasted for 20 minutes and 11 seconds due to the fact that the researcher did not probe enough. The maximum time was spent on interview 3 with one hour, nine minutes and eight seconds as the researcher probed more and the participant provided relevant responses. In the individual interviews, the participants were numbered and quoted from P1 to P6. As a reference, the participants' pseudonym (e.g. P1) is used when quotations are alluded to.

#### **5.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The purpose of the findings is to discuss the themes that emerged from the data analysis process in detail. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with nine open-ended questions (Annexure B). All the interviews were conducted in English and data saturation was reached during the final individual interview (individual

interview six). The data was analysed using the method as recommended by Tesch's eight steps in Creswell (2014:197-200) and the data analysis process was explained comprehensively in section 3.9.

## 5.5 DISCUSSION OF THE THEMES OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Five main themes emerged from the analysis of the individual interviews. Each theme with its sub-themes is presented in this chapter with extracts in the form of quotations from the transcripts of the interviews to support the findings. Table 5.8 provides a summary of the themes and the sub-themes of the individual interviews.

**Table 5.8 Themes, sub-themes and codes from the individual interviews**

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (characteristics)
1. Managers understood employee disengagement as a perfunctory attitude	1.1 Understanding of employee disengagement 1.2 Lack of interest	Individual attitude and emotions
2. The state of employee disengagement was for most unexpected	2.1 Emotional responses to the survey 2.2 Outcome led to concern	Appalled Worrying Strange
3. Organisational culture is positively perceived in its promotion of employee engagement	3.1 Unique and good benefits 3.2 Open door policy	Caring Accommodating
4. Challenges perceived by managers concerning their role in employee engagement	4.1 Reporting on a global platform 4.2 Poor performance is not easy to manage 4.3 Management styles, skills and personalities 4.4 High pressure environment 4.5 Managing career paths	International organisation Performance Experience Styles Skills Career paths
5. Motives for employees' disengagement	5.1 Reasons for employee disengagement 5.2 Moving towards consistent employee engagement	Strategic objectives Communication Remuneration Lack of recognition Flat structure

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Section 5.6 presents the five main themes together with 13 sub-themes of the individual interviews. Direct quotes from the transcribed interviews are used as evidence. Literature control is used to compare the findings with the literature.

## **5.6 THEME 1: MANAGERS UNDERSTOOD EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT AS A PERFUNCTORY ATTITUDE**

The one-on-one interview transcripts and the data analysis process revealed that there is no standardised definition of employee disengagement. The participants shared their diverse understanding of employee disengagement. The following sub-themes linked to Theme 1 emerged from the participants' responses:

1. Understanding of employee disengagement
2. Lack of interest

### **5.6.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding of employee disengagement**

The participants described their understanding of employee disengagement differently. Some of the participants stated that when employees do not understand what their jobs entail, they might not find meaning in those jobs leading them to disengage. The participants elaborated that disengaged employees go through emotions and their positive attitude towards work diminishes over time. One manager mentioned that employee disengagement refers to: *"...people who just don't care."* (P2). Another manager concurred and alleged that: *"employee disengagement refers to a situation where someone comes to work every day for the sake of coming and not being engaged in what they do."* (P1)

However, the participants uttered the following quotations regarding their understanding of employee disengagement:

*"but for me personally employee disengagement refers to situation where someone comes to work every day, some...so it doesn't mean that they necessarily absent from work."* (P1)

*“They just happy to be at work, to mark a register, and they don’t really take into account that the company makes profits.” (P2)*

*“My understanding of employee disengagement is, uh, very much just a question of a person coming into work, clocking his card, doing what is expected of him, and then leaving at...at the end...end of the day.” (P3)*

*“Uh...uh, the way I’d view it is...is there are employees who...uh, whose attitude to...to work and the...the level at which they do their work, their eagerness, their...their enthusiasm, eh...eh, diminishes over time.” (P4)*

*“Um, I think my understanding of normal disengagement is just that people are at work but they go through the motions, do what needs to be done, but nothing...nothing more, nothing less. So they base...basically coasting and that’s it. So, ja, doing what’s expected of them but not...nothing more, nothing less.” (P5)*

*“I...I...I think, for me, uh, engagement is, I think, do you basically align yourself with the values, the system...and that also talks about the work ethics of the organisation. Do you align yourself with what the organisation stands for?” (P6)*

Participant six (P6) preferred to share his understanding of employee engagement instead of employee disengagement. He understood employee engagement as aligning with the values and work ethics of the organisation. This participant elaborated that employee disengagement refers to misalignment in terms of what an individual expects from an organisation:

*“So...so sometimes, with the disengagement, it also means that there could be a misalignment in terms of what is expected, uh, by the individual, uh, from the company and it could also be vice versa as well because, uh, it’s...it’s like a contract.” (P6)*

Two managers elaborated that employee disengagement has to do with the employees who do not understand the organisation’s role and objectives. These employees do not make an effort to engage with their colleagues and come to work for the sake of being at work but not being engaged. Two participants were quoted as saying:

*“they don’t really make an effort to, um, engage with...even with their colleagues, so not only the work but even with their colleagues, and they...ja, they literally just come to work to...for the sake of...of...of coming and not being engaged in what they do.” (P1)*

*“it comes down to maybe not everyone really understanding what the company’s roles...uh, you know, what the objectives are or how well that gets translated in...into their diff...different units.” (P3)*

Myers (2018:80) found that disengaged employees portrayed their disengagement through temporary reduced effort in their work tasks, increased negativity or reduced productivity levels. Vogel, Rodell and Lynch (2016:1561) conducted a quantitative study amongst the employees from diverse organisations and found that employees whose values are misaligned with the organisational values are likely to be disengaged and unproductive at work.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

From the participants’ quotes, it is evident that they understood employee disengagement as a situation whereby employees come to work but are not productive and their values are misaligned with the organisation’s values and objectives. These employees are either not aware of the employer’s expectations or they do not understand the organisation’s objectives and above all, they do not know what role they play in the organisation. It is essential to affirm that in section 4.6.1, the focus group participants understood the employee disengagement phenomenon more or less the same as the managers.

#### **5.6.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of interest**

During the interviews, the majority of the participants indicated that due to a lack of interest employees tend to drift away and not focus on their jobs or on the matters that affects the organisation as a whole. The following comments reflect this perspective:

*“But when they here they are not really interest in what they do. They just get into a rut and just focus on that and not look at how that actually contributes to the bigger picture.” (P1)*

*“As long as they are at work they are happy and they will never give input in terms of the good things and the bad things so that the company can know which direction to take.” (P2)*

*“They are so...just too focused on their little world that they tend to lose the bigger picture.” (P3)*

*“In other words, they get to a point where they are probably just doing the bare minimum to...to remain an employee but are not going over and beyond in ...in their day-to-day work. I...I...I guess that’s how I’d view a disengaged employee.” (P4)*

*“on the other hand, I can see some employees who are doing more mundane jobs, so more routine jobs, who are disengaged because I...I guess because they’re not that interested in...in what they’re doing.” (P5)*

A study by Aon (2015:13) disclosed that disengaged employees do not strive to go the extra mile, do not see a long-term path and do not say positive things about the organisation. Parkinson and McBain (2014:78) revealed that disengaged employees express feelings of frustration, anger, disappointment and despair. They feel let down and stressed, withdraw from their jobs and do nothing extra.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

From the findings above, it is evident that disengaged employees are employees who are not interested in what is happening in the organisation and do not contribute towards matters relating to the organisation. Most of the participants were of the view that disengaged employees are not keen to understand the organisation’s vision, they produce minimal outputs and are not prepared to go the extra mile. It was interesting to note that one manager believed that certain employees, who are involved in routine jobs, are disengaged because they are not interested in what they are doing. It is essential to note that the focus group interviews in section 4.6.2 similarly revealed that disengaged employees lack interest in their jobs.

## **5.7 THEME 2: THE STATE OF EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT WAS FOR MOST UNEXPECTED**

From the participants' responses it was evident that the 2013 employee engagement survey results was a concern, in that only 24% of employees were engaged and that such a high rate of employee disengagement levels was revealed. Some of the participants interpreted that the survey results meant that the employees were working against the organisation, and yet they thought the organisation was one of the best organisations to work for. The following sub-themes linked to Theme 2 emerged from the participants' responses:

1. Emotional responses to the survey
2. Outcome led to concern

### **5.7.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Emotional responses to the survey**

The researcher asked the participants to share their feelings towards the results of the employee engagement survey conducted in November 2013. The participants had mixed feelings about the results and displayed different emotions when responding. Three participants expressed their disbelief by saying:

*"I find it quite strange that that is the situation at...at [organisation name withheld]. Um, in my opinion, um, people...ag, you know, this is one of those very few organisations that allow people a lot of autonomy to firstly decide how to do their jobs." (P1)*

*"I'm actually appalled at the...at the results cannot believe that so many employees are...are disengaged and yet I was under the impression that our company's the best company to work for with everything that they do for us." (P2)*

*"Um, I guess the...the results is [sic] quite...quite worrying that people are...that so few people are...are engaged." (P5)*

However, the other two participants based their acceptance of the survey results on factors such as the global trends and the size of the organisation. The quotations below are a reflection of what these participants had to say:

*“I think the...the...the results, in itself, does...does [sic] re...reflect, uh, you know, some...some of the, uh, glob...global trends but what is worrying is that it...it’s such a very low number of, uh...uh...uh, people who are actually...you know, actually engaged with their occupation versus the very high number who are either disengaged or actively dis...disengaged.” (P3)*

*“Ja, the survey results is [sic], uh...I would expect, like, with any large organisation, like ourselves, is...was obviously a mixed bag which, uh, one would expect.” (P6)*

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

Noticeably, one manager indicated that the results perhaps proved that the organisation had miscalculated the levels of disengagement. The participant provided the following comment:

*“Well, I...I...I think it’s more of, I guess, that they reflect what...what...what was said, I...I...I under...I think it shows probably a greater level of disengagement than one would have thought, eh, but I guess we have to accept the facts as they are.” (P4).*

Most of the participants expected employee engagement levels to be higher than what the survey revealed. It is evident from the findings that the participants were let down by the survey results and had mostly been unaware of the high levels of employee disengagement in the organisation. The focus group participants shared these sentiments in section 4.7.1.

#### **5.7.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Outcome led to concern**

The managers expressed various concerns regarding the outcome of the employee engagement survey. One manager hinted that it is unbelievable that such a high rate of employees were disengaged, while the other manager was perplexed at the results alleging that the organisation allows employees to decide on how to do their jobs. The other two managers disclosed that it was worrying that a significant number of



employees were disengaged with the remaining manager pointing out that the diverse demographics of employees were a concern. Reflections on these viewpoints are cited below:

*“I find it quite strange that that is the situation at...[organisation name withheld].. Um, in my opinion, um, people...ag, you know, this is one of those very few organisations that allow people a lot of autonomy to decide how to do their jobs.” (P1)*

*“I cannot believe that so many employees are...are disengaged..So it’s a bit, uh, concerning that so many people are disengaged.” (P2)*

*“I...I think it is a worrying factor. It’s something that you...that the company as a whole need...need [sic] to sort of general [sic] look at because...and it’s a wor...it’s...it’s worrying that almost as much as three quarters of the company’s, uh...uh...uh, em...employees are just here to come and earn...earn a salary.” (P3)*

*“I suppose, even more worrying that...that one in ten, uh, employees here are disengaged. So...which, I mean, from my understanding, means they working against...almost working against the organisation.” (P5)*

*“I think the big issue for us is, uh...is we’ve got quite a...a mix of, uh...of, uh, employees in terms of the age groups.We are a [sic] organisation that employ [sic], I would say, majority qualified professional individuals and, ja, I mean, the...the generation...the younger generation has [sic] a [sic] different needs compared to, I would say, the older generation uh, like myself that’s been with the company for a very, very long time. So, ja, I mean, it is a mixed bag which, uh, one would expect.” (P6)*

These findings are sustained by Nair (2013:40), i.e. that no organisation wishes for disengaged employees and yet many organisations fail to perceive and understand the cause and outcome of employee disengagement and therefore the cost of employee disengagement.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

From the findings above, it is clear that management was disturbed about the high levels of employee disengagement, yet they did not understand the causes of employee disengagement in the organisation.

### **5.8 THEME 3: ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IS POSITIVELY PERCEIVED IN ITS PROMOTION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

From the interview transcripts and the data analysis process, it was notable that all the participants perceived the organisational culture as positive, accommodating and supportive towards its employees. The participants overwhelmingly stated that they were fond of working for this organisation and elaborated that the culture is fair, reasonable and incredibly caring. The sub-themes that emerged under Theme 3 were:

1. Unique and good benefits
2. Open door policy

#### **5.8.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Unique and good benefits**

The majority of the managers indicated that this organisation has a unique culture of supporting one another and encouraging people to do well. These participants also expressed that the organisation is very generous with employee benefits. The following statements of the participants reflect this notion:

*“Um, I’d like to believe that, um, we support one another well. When we see that one person is going through a tough time the others will jump in and assist.” (P1)*

*“the flexibility of the company and the free lunch and in most instances I found, uh, many managers are very accommodating, supportive, moti...motivate their staff.” (P2)*

*“the culture itself lends it...uh, the culture within, you know, [org name withheld], uh...uh, lends itself almost to people talking and sharing, okay, uh, but I still don’t think that we sharing the right stuff at the right level.” (P3)*

*“I view it as...as a nice place to work for but nice is in the sense of good ve...eh, good...good benefits, good salary, um, work/life balance.” (P5)*

*“So I think it’s just the culture is very conducive, you know. It’s very open.” (P6)*

When the researcher probed participant three about ‘not sharing the right stuff at the right level’, this participant elaborated that, *“we’ve got to share a little more of the strategy, we’ve got to share a little more of where the company’s going, what the company’s goals are, uh, what it is that we actually trying to...to do here.” (P3)*

Oddly, one manager had a different view regarding the organisation’s culture stating that top management does not consult enough with the employees before taking decisions: *“I personally don’t think the organisational culture, especially at the...at the top end, is necessarily...necessarily follows what I would call a consultative approach. Eh, so there might not be opportunities for certain employees to be involved or engaged in certain aspects because the decisions are not at their level.” (P4)*

Walker (2016:74) found that a culture of caring for employees in an organisation promotes hard work and improves employee engagement. Shirin and Kleyn (2017:287) confirmed that positive perceptions of corporate reputation such as good feeling, admiration, respect and positive regard towards the organisation have a strong positive influence on employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It was evident that the majority of the participants agreed that the culture in this organisation is only one of its kind. It was emphasised that the employees are very supportive towards each other with everyone caring about each other as well. The organisation is regarded as a lovely company to work for with lots of good benefits like free lunches, good salaries and work and life balance. It is important to mention the concern from two participants that the organisation does not share the organisation’s strategy with the employees and that the organisation does not consult with the employees before making decisions which could hinder employee engagement. It is

also worth stating that in section 4.8.1 the employees in the focus group interviews shared the same sentiments as the managers about the culture in this organisation.

### **5.8.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Open door policy**

According to the interviews, the majority of the managers revealed that the management of this organisation encourages all the employees to approach them should they desire to do so. The majority of the participants indicated that it is comforting to know that the organisation does have an unwritten policy whereby employees are given an opportunity to talk to either their managers or senior management without any restrictions. The participants made the following comments:

*“I think [organisation name withheld] has a...has a very open, um, and...and very polite, um, culture. So we might not be that great at addressing, um, difficult things, I think there we...we need to improve.” (P1)*

*“I have an open-door policy where they can ask me for anything and everything. So I think, by so saying, I am supportive and accommodating of their needs, be it personal or work related.” (P2)*

*“So people are open, they talk, they share a lot, they...and now, with the new open can...canteen, I expect, you know, obviously a lot more of that sort of, you know, engagement going on.” (P3)*

*“I think also encouraging people to...to basically...I mean, the open-door policy says a lot, you know. People...most people are not afraid to just come in and...and have a chat.” (P6)*

Aturamu (2016:98) revealed that the concept of freedom of employees to approach their managers with their concerns on the job and the ability of their managers to listen to their concerns will re-engage the employees. The study conducted by Choi, Tran and Park (2015:940) disclosed that using an inclusive style of leadership (openness, accessibility and availability) makes employees feel more motivated to engage in work.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

Although it was disturbing that one manager declared that within this great culture managers shy away from addressing non-performing employees, it was encouraging that this manager believed that this hindrance might be improved. Other managers pointed out that the culture is supportive and accommodative in encouraging people to talk and share a lot and that encourages employee engagement.

From the findings above, it is evident that even though there are some challenges, the relaxed, open and transparent culture is highly favoured by most of the participants. It is also essential to mention that in section 4.8.1 the employees in the focus group interviews shared the same sentiments on the findings by the manager that the culture is pleasant, relaxed, caring and has good benefits but contradicted the managers' perceptions that they practice an open-door policy with their employees. The focus group interviews revealed that unlike their direct managers, the EXCO team is more approachable and always willing to listen to them.

### **5.9 THEME 4: CHALLENGES PERCEIVED BY MANAGERS CONCERNING THEIR ROLE IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to share the roles they played to engage their staff. It was apparent that managers have challenges that influence their role in employee engagement. In the end, the participants acknowledged that they are confronted with several challenges in their efforts to keep their employees engaged. Five sub-themes emerged under Theme 4:

1. Reporting on a global platform
2. Poor performance is not easy to manage
3. Management styles, skills and personalities differ
4. High pressure environment
5. Managing career paths

### 5.9.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Reporting on a global platform

The majority of the participants indicated that their biggest challenge which could be a contributing factor to the low levels of employee engagement, is reporting to the organisation's head office in Germany. The participants explained that the head office dictates the business and underwriting processes including the staff headcount and provided their viewpoints as follows:

*"I think the one thing that adds to...to the...the disengagement of...of staff is maybe, um, one reason I can think of is the fact that this is a...this is a [sic] international company, we are a German company, and I think over the last few years the German involvement, um, has become greater in that we have to send lots of reports to Germany, um, they, uh, dictate even maybe on the business side." (P1)*

*"Eh...eh...eh, we have to have a very justifiable case for us to...to...to get extra headcount, em, I...I think that's one, and then the extra headcount has to be...has to be agreed at a global level." (P4)*

The participants pointed out that the levels of workloads due to headcount could also be a contributing factor to employee disengagement. One manager specified that reporting on the global platform also impacts on the organisation's recruitment process and explained that: *"Also on the HR side, we cannot simply go ahead and replace vacancies, we need to obtain approval from Germany before we can continue with recruitment." (P1)*

Another manager commented that the head office has to approve certain training initiatives and elaborated by saying: *"At the moment, I mean, I've put two names forward for this training in Germany. The individuals doesn't [sic] know yet because we need a final clearance from Germany." (P6)*

### Critical interpretive discussion

It is clear from the findings above that management has a limited say or influence owing to reporting to the head office in Germany. This, in turn, impacts on the functions of human resource of recruiting and training of employees. Furthermore, both business and underwriting processes are delayed resulting in business decisions also being

delayed. The participants stated the fact that the organisation does not fully participate in the decisions taken by the home office could have an influence on the employees becoming disengaged. Management has to wait for approval from Germany before implementing certain decisions.

### **5.9.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Poor performance is not easy to manage**

Most of the participants revealed that they find it difficult to manage and deal with poor performance in the organisation including discussing and addressing issues as they transpire. The managers signified that they find it challenging to address the poor performers. This is reflected in the following quotations:

*“but I think we often unfortunately...I think we, um...um, ja, we not...we not good at...at addressing things as...as and when it happens.” (P1)*

*“I...I think, for the...for the employer or the manager, it’s...it’s not that easy to...to...to deal with disengagement or...or poor performance. If you push...because for...for someone to perform well, give them tasks that are harder than...than what they...what they can do so that they can develop themselves, give them very challenging things. The moment you do that then the employees complain of stress, they complain of working long hours, they complain...so it’s very difficult to...to have that ability to...to...to manage performance very tightly.” (P4)*

*“I think people are a little bit scared to have difficult conversations and to offend people. So often the difficult conversations aren’t had and, by the time they’re had, it’s...it’s too late to...to rectify the...the situation.” (P5)*

*“If there’s underperformance, it needs to be addressed but our professional younger managers are very scared even to raise that because it’s not their nature.” (P6)*

Even though it is not easy, one manager stated that she does initiate having these uncomfortable discussions with her team or individuals as and when matters arise, thereby trying to resolve them. The participant explained by saying: *“I’ve had to have a one-on-one with him and say I don’t mind you running your personal errands but can you do it within, um, reasonable times in terms of you respecting, um, working hours? As well as, um, if that situation ever happens show that you are putting back the time that you have lost, be it in*

*that week or on the same day where you work another thirty minutes or an hour extra. But you could see the individual is not happy with that arrangement.” (P2)*

Most of the managers stated that they think managers in this organisation are either reluctant or scared to have difficult conversations with their employees to avoid offending them and gave this reason: *“I think we...we really have a polite environment, um, I think so we not great at giving criticism.” (P1)*

Pather (2015:65) revealed that the manager is responsible for driving the performance process which can be effective if both the employee and manager are committed to the process. Anitha (2014:319) found that employee engagement produces adequate employee performance.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

From these findings, it is evident that the managers are reluctant to address poor performance. The participants acknowledged that poor performance is not dealt with in this organisation due to the pleasant culture of the organisation. The other reason was that most of the managers are young, and have no managerial experience. The participants elaborated that most of the managers are reluctant to address poor performance to avoid offending the employees. It is worth noting that the managers strongly believe that the improvements on the current performance management system will give the managers the opportunity to address the performance deficiencies and this might improve the employees' performance levels in the organisation.

### **5.9.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Management styles, skills and personalities differ**

Two participants stated that different management skills and personalities of managers are also intensifying the challenges faced by managers in the roles played by them in promoting employee engagement. Two other managers confessed to not spending sufficient time with their employees. The citations below illustrate this:



*“I think these...to some of their personalities, you know, they very good at numbers...I don't want to make an assumption here but, uh, maybe, you know, on the relationship side they might find it harder due to their personalities.” (P1)*

*“I think the problem is this organisation is we sort of neglect to involve staff or check up on the well-being of staff and unfortunately I think it's a problem that we cannot completely run away from but we need to be cons...constantly or consistently, uh, being aware of it and actually try and strike a balance.” (P2)*

*“I mean, to be honest, I don't think I...I manage all of the people in my department as...as well as I should.” (P5)*

One manager revealed that sometimes personalities come into play as the organisation employs, as an example, actuaries and accountants who eventually secure promotion to management levels and often they struggle to manage and form relationships with the employees. Some of the managers acknowledged that due to their workload they do not manage their employees appropriately. Another manager stated that managers often forget that people are different and have a habit of treating all the employees the same instead of dealing with them as individuals: *“I think it will always be difficult because you then run in...into the realm of...of standardising thing. People are different, people are appreciated differently. We just need to ensure that each employee is sufficiently appreciated in their own...in their own way.” (P4)*

According to the study on the management styles and job satisfaction of employees at Taiwan's architectural firms, conducted by Yeh and Hsieh (2017:185) the influence of management style accounts for 45% to 65% of whether an organisation will be successful or not. Therefore, the management style plays a very crucial role in influencing employees' job satisfaction and performance. Khuong and Yen (2014:129) found that the more ethical, visionary and organic leadership style a leader uses, the better employees engage in their jobs.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

In sections 4.9.1 and 4.10.2 the employees of the focus group interviews shared the same sentiments as the finding above; that the managers' management styles and

skills together with their personalities do have an impact on employee engagement. All managers pointed out that building relationships with the employees does influence employee engagement.

#### **5.9.4 Sub-theme 4.4: High pressure environment**

During the interviews, three participants indicated that the environment is stressful and that they are under pressure as managers to get things done. The participants were cited as saying:

*“there is so much pressure that things get done, um, and as managers, myself included, we get caught up in the day to day running of the company.” (P2)*

*“ Uh...uh, like I said, I...it might be disengagement, it might be just frustration about these...these levels of...of work or what they feel is may not be adequate appreciation of the...of the work done, the stressfulness of the environment or the...or the pressures.” (P4)*

*“I think people are under a...quite a lot of pressure and they don't spend as much time as they...they should on...with...in one-on-ones with employees.” (P5)*

Aslam et al. (2018:159) found that a negative organisational environment, such as the one with extreme workloads, leads to employee disengagement in the workplace. Richards (2013:77) revealed that leaders who use emotional intelligence (EI) to engage their employees would be more successful in overcoming harsh deadlines, aggressive schedules and labour shortages, which are barriers to employee engagement.

#### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The three managers acknowledged that work pressure results in them not spending time with their direct reports. Another manager alleged that an enormously pressured work environment leads to the disconnection between the employees and the managers with the end result of reduced levels of output from the employees.

### 5.9.5 Sub-theme 4.5: Managing career paths

According to the majority of the participants' responses, managing career paths in this organisation is a challenge that often increases the levels of employee disengagement amongst the employees or encourages them to leave the organisation. The participants elaborated that the organisation does not have a clear policy or guidance on how to manage career paths due to its flat organisational structure. The managers confirmed that the employees confront them frequently asking questions relating to career paths. The following statements of the participants reflect this notion:

*"sometimes people leave for, you know, better salaries or, you know, career growth, etcetera, that can't be offered by their current, um, company." (P1)*

*"something has to be given to the employee to say now this is where you are, this is the way forward, and...and in a flat structure it might not be able to...to offer people what they want or...or...or to make it...to make it clear." (P4)*

*"I guess, seeing a...a career path for them through the organisation that...that would then motivate them to...to perform and...and move on." (P5)*

*"I think the challenge that we have...or one of the bigger challenges that we have, as a [sic] organisation, is a fairly flat structure." (P6)*

In light of the above finding, Gupta (2016:51) revealed that career development is one of the determinants of employee engagement. The study of Lather and Jain (2015:69) disclosed that for employees to remain engaged, they want their leaders to focus on their career advancement, providing challenging and meaningful work.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The managers argued that for them to be able to manage the career paths, it is essential for the organisation to rethink the current career path structure which might motivate the employees and raise the levels of employee engagement.

It is interesting to note that this finding shares the same sentiment as those of the focus group views in section 4.10.2. Based on these findings, it is evident that the organisation is in need of a policy that will clarify the career paths of its employees on how to move to the next levels on their career paths.

## **5.10 THEME 5: MOTIVES FOR EMPLOYEES' DISENGAGEMENT**

As the researcher wanted to understand the reasons why the employees were disengaged and what interventions could be implemented in this organisation, the participants indicated that employee disengagement is motivated by several reasons. Both these questions produced vigorous and informative discussions as the participants shared their reasons based on their personal and work experience including the current work place. The participants were also willing to share the solutions that they thought could assist the organisation to deal with the disengagement predicament. The researcher grouped all the reasons for employee disengagement and the solutions submitted by the managers. Two sub-themes that emerged under Theme 5 were:

1. Reasons for employee disengagement
2. Moving towards consistent employee engagement

### **5.10.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Reasons for employee disengagement**

During the individual interviews, the participants pinpointed six reasons for employee disengagement. The subsequent section will discuss these reasons in detail.

- 1) Lack of translation of strategic objectives
- 2) Lack of communication and consultation
- 3) Lack of a robust performance management system
- 4) Insufficient remuneration
- 5) Lack of recognition and appreciation
- 6) Flat structure, lack of career paths and promotions

## 1) Lack of translation of strategic objectives

Three of the participants asserted that the lack of translation of strategic objectives was a reason for employee disengagement. Other participants expressed that the organisation is not good at sharing and making the employees understand the overall organisational objectives by painting a clear picture of where the organisation is going and how everyone fits in. Ultimately, the employees do not understand what value they are adding and how they are contributing to the success of the organisation. Below are the participants' supporting quotations:

*"I think for people to...to have meaning in their work or from their work they need to understand how their contribution leads to the success of the organisation and I don't think we are good at [organisation name withheld] to show that to people. Some managers are better at it – but I think in general that is something that we can improve." (P1)*

*"I think, eh, partly it has to do with the fact that the outcome of what they do or they have...there's no clear link between what they do on a day-to-day basis and the outcome of the organisation." (P4)*

*"We've got that in our strategy that we want to be a...well, we want to...all the things we want to be but I don't...I don't see that...I'm not sure I see that being lived out and being communicated everywhere." (P5)*

Similarly, the two other managers were certain that the lack of understanding of the organisational values influences the employees to disengage if they are nonaligned with the values.

*"I...I think it...it...it, um...it...it comes down to maybe not everyone really understanding what the company's roles and values...uh, you know, what the objectives are or how well that gets translated in...into their diff...different units." (P3)*

*"So with the disengagement, it also means a misalignment of what is expected. I think, do you basically align yourself with the values, the system...and that also talks about the work ethics of the organisation. Do you align yourself with what the organisation stands for?" (P6)*

The participants stated that the organisation has a strategy document which is not appropriately communicated to the employees. They elaborated that they do not see the passion and commitment from both the employees and management in terms of (1) what it is that the organisation would like to attain; (2) how to go about achieving that; and (3) where the organisation desires to be. Participant five (P5) said, *“If you don’t know what the company is trying to achieve, then...then I guess you...you’ve got nothing to...to be engaged in other than trying to be...do the best you can at your role.”*

This finding is similar to Bornman and Puth (2017:16) who found that employees perceived leaders as individuals who do not share the organisational vision with the employees and do not include them when formulating strategies for an organisation. Moela (2017:116) disclosed that leadership factors such as vision and organisational values have a significant influence on employees’ levels of engagement. Moreover, Mmope (2016:142) found that no specific communication channels are utilised to communicate key messages precisely to academic and support line managers regarding the strategic objectives and priorities of the university. The author concludes that when line managers are well informed about a university’s strategic plan, then they will be in a better position to ensure that their subordinates are also well informed and aligned to the strategic objectives of the university (Mmope 2016:143).

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants revealed that the organisation lacked translating the strategic objectives to its employees and this could be a reason why employees are disengaged. The employees do not know what role they are playing and what value are they adding to the success of the organisation. A few of participants indicated that the employees are not aligned with the values of the organisation and therefore do not understand what is expected of them.

#### **2) Lack of communication and consultation**

The data indicated that the majority of the managers were of the opinion that the lack of communication and consultation was another reason for employees disengaging. The participants stated that it is essential for the leadership to improve on the existing

communication strategy because there is no clear and regular communication and consultation with the employees in this organisation:

*“I don't think we great at [organisation name withheld] at really consulting and involving people. I think sometimes people feel a bit, um, uh...they...they feel as if they not really involved in making important and big decisions.” (P1)*

*“Communication, I would say, is...is the...is a...another factor. I mean, I'm not ranking it. I'm just saying that that is another factor. You know, quite clearly explain to the guys what is expected of them.” (P3)*

*“I think at the next level up, maybe there...there's more that needs to be done in terms of those regular discussions with employees, disseminating of information, eh, making sure that everyone knows where we are as a company, what are we doing? What's relevant? What's important? What's coming? What are the issues?” (P4)*

*“Ja, I mean, I...I don't...I don't know if we are...are we communicating that this is what we wanna achieve, this is how we want to achieve it, and this is where we want to go or are we going through the motions.” (P5)*

*“Uh, communication is a big issue, as always with most communication...uh, companies, and I think it's more miscommunication because sometimes there is communication but also at what level and how deep do you communication, you know, type of thing.” (P6)*

These findings are in line with the study of Johnson (2016:73) who found that a lack of communication corporately or individually by managers produces negative experiences for employees driving them to disengage on the job. Therefore, a lack of communication by management is believed to be a driver of employee disengagement. Furthermore, Scott (2014:102) revealed that managers tend to make decisions without consulting the employees in an organisation and this conduct tends to produce a withdrawn and disengaged workforce.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants indicated that a lack of communication in this organisation is a concern and needs improvement. It is clear from these findings and from the findings of the focus group interviews with employees in section 4.10.2 that communication is a challenge and a contributor of employee disengagement in this organisation.

The participants disclosed that human resources issues such as the lack of a robust performance management system; insufficient remuneration; lack of recognition and appreciation; the organisational flat structure and lack of career paths and promotions were also reasons for employee disengagement. These human resource issues are discussed as follows:

### **3) Lack of a robust performance management system**

The analysis of the interview transcripts and the participants' responses pointed out that the current performance management system branded Management by Objectives (MBO) is not effective in terms of measuring or assessing the objectives set for the employees. Additionally, the participants revealed that this system has the downfall of not providing feedback to the employees on a regular basis but only once a year during the annual review period. These viewpoints are quoted below:

*"I think we having...had also this typical example where we have a performance management system, um, that gets rated once a year and managers sort of park things for that discussion and that is when they give the feedback to the employee." (P1)*

*"I know some people would only do an...an annual re...re...review and then they sit there and they've got to now think about what the person has done for the year. Now there's...there's good and bad...there's pros and cons to that...that method." (P3)*

One manager raised the concern about the system's inability to allow the managers to address employees who are not performing at an acceptable level.

*"Our systems are not robust enough to make sure that it's not easy for someone to continue performing at a low level and still be part of the organisation and so it's two ways." (P4).*



When probed about why the performance management system is not strong enough, the participant elaborated that its weakness is as a result of, *“the performance management process that does not link to the outcomes of what they do.”* (P4)

Another manager declared that he is flexible with this process. This manager indicated that he does allow changes to be made on his team’s objectives depending on the business needs and was quoted as saying: *“So now I’m looking at this and I’m looking at maybe one or two items on my MBO which I said, mm, it’s important but guess where my focus is? So I’m very understanding, from that point of view. So I’ve got some people that, yes, we’ve done an MBO but then I would also say, ja, but I’m not gonna rate you solely on the MBO. I’m gonna rate you of some other activities that happened during the year which was more important, had a much greater impact on the financial standing of the organisation than what was on the MBO.”* (P6)

As one of the managers (P6) indicated that he does not follow the current performance process completely, another manager (P3) elaborated that he also does not fully agree with the process and as such he does not measure the performance of his team once a year but does so on a quarterly basis. The manager explained by saying: *“Every quarter...it’s a lot of work but every quarter I sit with my team and I do a mini MBO and I measure people in quarters. I don’t measure them for the year.”* (P3). This manager went on to say that there are advantages and disadvantages of having one review which impact on the employees’ performance: *“Now there’s...there’s good and bad...there’s pros and cons to that...that method. The pro is that, if you’ve done a really good job a month just before the survey, your manager will remember that and say, ha, I’m still very happy with [name of employee withheld]. The disadvantage is, if you really did a bad job, your manager’s gonna think, [name of employee withheld] did a bad thing, forgetting what the employee has done for the rest of...the rest of the year.”* (P3). The manager further stated that since the performance bonus is linked to each employee’s performance, the managers tend to focus on the negatives more than the positives during the performance appraisals. If an employee were to make a mistake like incorrect processing of accounts or claims closer to the finalisation of the bonuses, that employee will be penalised. All the positives are simply forgotten to the disadvantage of the employee. Therefore, this manager does not share the sentiments of other managers that the employees’ reviews gets done annually because circumstances do change during the year and that might affect the objectives agreed upon with the employees.

This finding is similar to the finding of Pather (2015:64) who conducted a study with senior management and Human Resource experts from the largest four banks in South Africa and found that the design and execution of the performance management systems were too complex, changed frequently and were too administrative. In a study conducted by Mbonambi (2016:127), the author found that there is subjectivity in the application of the performance management system as the focus is on monetary rewards and the performance management system is used as a punitive tool.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The managers mentioned that the current performance management system is subjective and not functional but also unfair and not consistent. The employees' appraisals are conducted differently causing a great deal of unhappiness amongst the employees. The participant indicated that a performance management system that is objective and understood by both managers and employees could be a solution for this challenge. Moreover, these findings are similar to the findings of the focus group interviews in section 4.10.2. The employees in the focus group interviews mentioned that the performance management system creates a lot of unhappiness and indicated that this system is subjective with the process followed to rate the employees during the appraisal period.

#### **4) Insufficient remuneration**

From the interview transcripts and the data analysis process, three participants indicated that insufficient remuneration is a reason why employees are disengaged in this organisation:

*“What we try to do is to explore the reasons why these things happen and they often come down to a number of things, some of which are beyond what we can do as a, uh...for example eh, incentives from a remuneration perspective, eh. So those are the things that, eh...eh...eh, some employees are looking for which...which...which we may not be able to do.” (P4)*

*“I think, up, uh...to a certain point it's financial.” (P5)*

The participants maintained that remuneration is one of the big issues that affect the employees. The participants stated that it is difficult to please all the employees when it comes to remuneration because some of the employees' remuneration expectations are beyond what managers can handle without consulting with the EXCO team. One manager was of the opinion that there is a correlation between remuneration and promotion amongst the employees of this organisation, as they see a promotion as an opportunity for them to earn more. Another manager reiterated that remuneration is one of the things that affects the employees and it should not be taken lightly and was quoted as saying: *"I think, coming in, from a financial point of view, and I think there might be a correlation between, uh, one, the financial, uh...uh, satisfaction, how do I get it? You can only get it by actually moving up in the organisation and I need to move up very quickly in order to get it because my needs are growing on a daily basis, my financial needs."* (P6)

This finding is in line with the study of Gosh, Satyawadi, Joshi and Shadman (2013:298) who revealed that employees believe that they should be paid market related salaries. The investigation of Ghose and Mohanty (2016:10) divulged that the employee recognition and reward system is an important element of employee engagement as well as the most important driver as it is visible in the conditions of employment. Additionally, Walker (2016:77) found that rewards, benefits and compensation are vital components of employee engagement since employees select an organisation based on the types of rewards, benefits and compensation they will receive.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The managers mentioned that the remuneration expectations by the employees cannot always be met and confirmed that it is difficult to meet everyone's remuneration expectation due to the remuneration process in place in the organisation. The employees are constantly enquiring about being promoted as they believe their salaries will increase with the promotion.

This finding is complemented by the finding of the focus group interviews in section 4.10.2 which indicated that it is essential to refurbish the current remuneration process and make it transparent for all the employees to understand.

## 5) Lack of recognition and appreciation

The data revealed that the participants pointed out that they tend to take recognition, appreciation and rewarding employees for granted. The participants confirmed that employees are not recognised, appreciated and rewarded the way they should be. The following quotes reflect this observation:

*“As I mentioned before, I think that we need to show more appreciation to staff, um, for them to also find meaning in their work and understanding how their work contributes to the...to the bigger...to the greater success of the organisation and I think that we need to really celebrate small successes. Um, ja.” (P1)*

*“So there’s...there’s some recognition and there’s some appreciation but I don’t think it’s as...to the extent that it...that it...that it should be.” (P3)*

*“the question is how...how then do you...do you recognise that and...and...and appreciate that? We just need to ensure that each employee is sufficiently appreciated in their own...in their own way.” (P4)*

*“I think we tend to take praise for granted...well, take good performance for granted as well. So there’s not that much praising and...and celebrating of...of people who have done well.” (P5)*

Oddly, one of the participants mentioned that the organisation should at times show appreciation towards the good performers by remunerating them satisfactorily and if possible by way of promoting those individuals. This manager said: *“So we try...we try the appreciation whenever we can, eh, but, of course, sometimes there’s a limit as to how much you can recognise that through extra remuneration or...which...which I think it’s...it’s essential to this.” (P4)*

On the contrary, participant six (P6) mentioned that it is difficult to give recognition to certain members of the team as it might be interpreted as favouritism. This participant emphasised that giving recognition and showing appreciation to certain employees could be positive and other team members could be encouraged to improve on their

performance knowing that they will also be recognised and be appreciated. The participant provided the following comment:

*“I mean, ja, now that’s favouritism, I mean, you know, type of thing. So it’s very difficult but also, on the one hand, you can say the flip side is, if you...if you do that and you give recognition, maybe the other people will pull up their standards.” (P6)*

Johnson (2016:70) revealed that lack of recognition is one of the drivers of employee disengagement. Additionally, Hlapo (2016:71) found that HRD practices (recognition schemes) are key drivers of employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

It was concerning to note that the majority of the participants acknowledged that more can be done by management to show appreciation towards the employees by giving recognition in the moment when someone does something well and immediately celebrate that success. The participants agreed that the employees love to be recognised and therefore thrive when they know that they are recognised for their contributions towards the success of the organisation. Furthermore, it is essential for the organisation to share the good news as and when it happens.

The finding above emerged as one of the reasons for employee disengagement in the focus group interviews in section 4.10.2. The employees stated that recognition and appreciation are vital for them and they expect their managers to show appreciation and recognise them when they do well.

### **6) Flat structure, lack of career paths and promotions**

The data analysis process revealed that three managers felt strongly that the flat organisational structure, lack of career paths and promotions are reasons for employee disengagement and they expressed the following:

*“Em, maybe also the...the flat structure forced us in which way, eh...eh, there’s probably no clear path...career path also for...for some. I think it could be one where, ja, they...they...they*

*don't need to be engaged that much because they don't see what that means to them in...in...in a career progression.” (P4)*

*“I guess, seeing a...a career path for them through the organisation that...that would then motivate them to...to perform and...and move on.” (P5)*

*“For example, uh...promotions as an example. I think the challenge that we have...or one of the bigger challenges that we have, as a [sic] organisation, is a fairly flat structure.” (P6)*

These findings are in line with the study of Sinha and Trivedi (2014:33) which emphasise that monetary benefits, career opportunities, job security etc. result in high retention of employees and this leads to improved employee engagement. Aturamu (2016:98) asserts that an organisation that has a defined career path for production employees will retain more than 60% of the employees disposed to exiting and will re-engage more than 80% of disengaged employees.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

These findings are similar to those of the focus group interviews in section 4.10.2 in that the flat structure, lack of career paths and lack of promotions are the contributors of employee disengagement in this organisation. It is evident that management needs to take these contributing factors serious if they are concerned about the high levels of employee disengagement in the organisation.

#### **5.10.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Moving towards consistent employee engagement**

The data analysis process and the interview transcripts divulged the following as possible solutions or interventions to address the employee disengagement in this organisation:

- 1) Decode the organisation's strategy
- 2) Revamp the performance management system
- 3) Have frank discussions with non-performers
- 4) Improve communication
- 5) Enhance relationships

- 6) Involve employees in the decision making process
- 7) Show appreciation and celebrate the successes of the organisation

These possible solutions or interventions will be discussed as follows:

### **1) Decode the organisation's strategy**

The majority of the participants expressed that not all employees understand the current organisation's strategy. The participants stated that it could be difficult for the employees to be engaged when they do not understand how their work contributes to the greater success of the organisation. The following comments substantiate this:

*"We can just get into a rut and just focus on getting the work done and not look at how the work we do and the effort we put in actually contributes to the bigger picture." (P1)*

*"So...so...so the one thing that...that...that stands out, uh, is understanding the company's strategy, understanding the company's goals, and how you, as the [department name withheld] unit, fit into that strategy and, once you understand that and you explain that and you work on that, then it just makes it clearer." (P3)*

*"How do we get employees to...to get to understand their relevance within the organisation? What is the...what is the impact of what they do on the outcomes? And what their role is. So those are...those are some of the things that...that can be...that can be done." (P4)*

*"So it's, I guess, leading by example and that engagement and that passion needs to...needs to be...well, that needs to be demonstrated. So to show that they...they believe in this company, they believe in where this company is going, and they can guide and...and lead the other people sort of underneath them in where...where they think this company's going and they can sell that vision to them." (P5)*

It was thought-provoking to note that one participant's opinion clashed with the majority since this participant's opinion was that the organisation's strategy is understood by all and that the organisation has produced good results over the years:

*“The strategy...shew. I mean, we...we obviously have the company strategy. Uh, I think each unit, obviously, know [sic] what needs to be done in terms of, uh, performance and, in all the softer issues, I think we are doing much more than what, in my opinion, is required.” (P6)*

A study of Lather and Jain (2015:69) uncovered that employees expect their leaders to maintain clarity about the vision, mission, goals and success of the organisation. Parkinson and McBain (2014:78) found that factors such as the lack of communication and understanding the future for the organisation are drivers of employee disengagement. De Jager (2017:75) discovered that the ability of a leader to inspire and motivate followers, convey a convincing vision and appeal to followers on an emotional level would appear to be critical characteristics to improve employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

All the participants except for participant six (P6) agreed that the strategy should be broken down and explained appropriately to all employees. The participants are of the opinion that this attempt might assist the employees to understand their roles and the value they will add going forward. The participants believe that this will lead to an increase in employee engagement levels amongst the employees of this organisation.

#### **2) Revamp the performance management system**

The data analysis process revealed that the participants are of the opinion that the current performance management system is not functioning since performance remains gauged once a year instead of it being a continuous process. The participants stated that:

*“Every quarter...it’s a lot of work but every quarter I sit with my team and I do a mini MBO and I measure people in quarters. I don’t measure them for the year.” (P3)*

*“So I...I think, eh, ja, our...our performance management process is not strong enough to...to ensure that someone has to perform at a certain level which in turn means they have to remain that engaged. I...I...I think it’s...it’s...it’s one...one...one weakness as well.” (P4)*



*“But I...I mean, I don’t think this is something that people actively think about. So I think you need to have a...you need to be given the opportunity...the forum to think about the MBO process...in order to come up with those...with these kind of ideas and these kind of solutions.”*  
(P5)

*“So we are saying how do we...I...I...I think that’s, um, more...I mean, I mentioned MBO, uh, as one avenue but maybe we need something fresh. Maybe something more different, more radical.”* (P6)

This finding contrasts with that of Taylor (2015:342) who found that most of the respondents did not believe that the performance system had a positive impact on their work behaviours and 51% disagreed that the quality of their work outputs had increased as a result of the performance management scheme. Some of the respondents (25%) agreed that employees did not need a performance management system to raise their levels of performance. Pather (2015:73) revealed that if performance management is designed, implemented and maintained correctly employees become the ambassadors for the organisation and they act and talk like owners of the business.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The managers stated that there is a need to improve the performance management system so that the performance assessments are not only conducted once a year and that remedial action is taken to address performance deficiencies. By improving the current performance management system, the participants are of the opinion that the performance levels amongst the employees will increase.

### **3) Frank discussions with non-performers**

Three of the participants alleged that the managers are reluctant to have direct discussions with the non-performers to address the issues relating to their performance:

*“having tough conversations with people, addressing poor performance, I think there we...we need to improve. You know, if someone hasn’t done something...something well or if you have to address an issue do it in the moment and be authentic about it.” (P1)*

*“A frank discussion. If someone is disengaged, then they will have to decide do they want to continue being part of the organisation or...or not part of the organisation? In other words, we need to go back to those.” (P4)*

*“Having difficult conversations and, firstly, making them aware that...that they’re not performing to the level they should be and then trying to understand from their point of view what the reasons are for those.” (P5)*

Taylor (2015:348) found that performance management schemes are important to raise employee performance and action can be taken against non-performers in the workplace using these performance management schemes. The study conducted by Scott (2014:93) revealed that employees support a culture where managers hold employees accountable for their poor work ethic. Furthermore, managers might possibly need training to learn how to hold employees accountable for their performance. De Jager (2017:87) disclosed that the consequences of leaders who avoid making decisions or delay action until it is too late, are lower levels of engagement and possibly poorer business performance.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The three participants concurred that managers need to start addressing issues that relate to non-performance as and when they occur. Having these conversations will also give an opportunity to the managers to understand the employees’ reasons for non-performance. Frank discussions, jointly with the improved performance management system, will enable the managers to handle underperformance better.

#### **4) Improved communication**

All the participants signalled that the organisation does not communicate enough therefore it is crucial to improve the mechanisms of communication in the organisation. The following quotations support this notion:

*“As mentioned, we need to tell people that what they did well lead to e.g. obtaining new business, saving costs, reaching deadlines, etc.” (P1)*

*“So I think the company is doing what it can to actually promote, eh, communication to staff but it...it might not be as frequent or regular as what staff would like.” (P2)*

*“Um, I understand that some things are sort of for your ears only or for your eyes only but I would also say, just from the top down, if...if...if management as a whole, if myself as a whole, if all the managers as a whole, start sharing a lot more, then, at ground level or even at mid-management level. So, uh, ja, my...the only answer I can think of there is that we’ve got to be more open about most things.” (P3)*

*“Eh...eh, I...I think that dissemination of information, eh...eh, probably more can be...can be done.” (P4)*

*“Um, I don’t know. Maybe we need to just appear to be more focused in what we’re doing and what we’re trying to achieve. So I’m...I’m not sure if that is being...that is being communicated everywhere and that...I mean, that might also feedback to why people are...are disengaged.” (P5)*

*“Uh, communication is a big issue, as always with most communication...uh, companies, and I think it’s more miscommunication because sometimes there is communication but also at what level and how deep do you communication. I think, currently, the system that we have is not working a hundred percent but I think maybe we should do something different.” (P6)*

Walker (2016:74) revealed that face-to-face communication is an essential strategy to increase employee engagement. Mishra et al. (2015:476) found that communication is a critical predictor of employee engagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The managers stated that regular management communication with the employees about what is going on in the organisation should become a tradition as it might improve employee engagement.

## 5) Enhance relationships

According to the participants' responses, building and improving relationships with the employees is key in the workplace. The following quotations elaborate on this comment:

*"So I firmly believe that relationships are key. So it's about that relationship that the manager has to...or has with his staff member. I think that more training can be done and I think that you...you know, to find a specific training course that's going to assist managers to build relationships." (P1)*

*"Um, as much as we keep saying people are disengaged and what not, we, as managers, have a role to play. I am planning to change things. I can also just find out how they are, how things are, how things can be done differently." (P2)*

*"You can start managing that but you...you a little more open to...when people talk...talk...talk about things. Sometimes things happen in our pers...personal lives and we just want to talk." (P3)*

*"it's an important aspect of the...of the management process that we get to understand outside the work because we have...we have work meetings regularly but these ones are where we are discussing anything other than work, the personal issues, you know, where they're... Is it...all these things which are not, eh...not work-related." (P4)*

Sinha and Trivedi (2014:33) found that a leader's personal touch helps members to execute their jobs efficiently, which leads to higher levels of engagement in their jobs. PDT (2014:10) revealed that direct managers should foster healthy relationships with their employees to build an engaged workforce. A study conducted by Crandell (2015:99) concluded that relationship management (one of emotional intelligence clusters) is correlated and predictive of increasing employee engagement among virtual team remote employees.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

One of the participants suggested that it is essential for the managers to be offered training that will boost their relationship with the employees. Another manager added that the lack of relationships between managers and employees could be the reason why the employees disengage. The managers admitted that it is essential to make an effort to start engaging their employees on not work-related matters to get to know them better.

### **6) Involve the employees in the decision making process**

From the responses of some of the managers, it is clear that this organisation rarely involves its employees before management executes its decisions. The following quotes support this viewpoint:

*“I think sometimes people feel a bit, um, uh...they...they feel as if they not really involved in making important and big decisions. So in my mind that is something that the...that the company can improve on.” (P1)*

*“So I don’t know if they are always kept...kept in...in the loop.” (P3)*

*“How do you engage every employee in...in...in decisions or in telling them what’s happening? So, while it can be done at the heads of level, that...that discussion is ongoing but I think more needs to be done at the other two levels. I...I think it’s something that’s not happening as much as it should...should be.” (P4).*

This finding contradicts the findings of Mmutle (2014:103). The author found that the employees of LG electronics Seoul in South Korea, formed part of strategic decision making in the organisation. They affirmed that their inputs and suggestions were incorporated in decision making. Furthermore, they asserted that the management of the organisation allowed them freedom to take favourable decisions based on their work. Gupta (2015:50) found that employee involvement in the companywide initiatives is acknowledged as a vital tool for employee engagement.

## **Critical interpretive discussion**

All the participants agreed that involving the employees and briefing them about decisions to be effected is something that should be done by this organisation and this may lead to having an engaged workforce.

### **7) Show appreciation and celebrate the successes of the organisation**

During the interviews the participants mentioned that showing appreciation towards the employees and celebrating the organisation's successes is something that the organisation should also improve on. This can be done by showing more appreciation and appreciating the employees differently. This perspective is reflected in the following quotations:

*"I think so we not great at giving criticism but we also not that good at...at appreciating and I really think that's something that we need to, um, change to show more appreciation and that should come from management level to their staff and also from EXCO level then to management level." (P1)*

*"People are different, people are appreciated differently. It's probably something that we have to live with. We just need to ensure that each employee is sufficiently appreciated in their own...in their own way." (P4)*

*"So there's...there's some recognition and there's some appreciation but I don't think it's as...to the extent that it...that it...that it should be." (P5)*

Two of the managers elaborated that not only should the appreciating of employees be looked at, but also the sharing of the successes of the organisation, as this will encourage the employees to work harder knowing that they are contributing to the success of the organisation:

*"I think that we need to really celebrate small successes. By sharing good news as and when it happens because I think that people thrive, you know, when they know that whatever they are doing is contributing to the success of the company." (P1)*

*“a culture of advertising the people who are doing well, making them...showing what they can achieve and what they have achieved and...and how that is benefiting the...the company.”*  
(P5)

Lather and Jain (2015:67) found that there is a correlation between employee engagement and three of the ten C's of leadership practices i.e. leaders must show that they value employees (connect), praise them for good work done (congratulate) and convey the message to the employees that their input is valued (contribute). Richards (2013:68) revealed that lack of appreciation and positive feedback for employees' work created employee disengagement.

### **Critical interpretive discussion**

The participants admitted that management should improve in showing appreciation and celebrating the successes of the organisation. They elaborated that each employee should be appreciated and more recognition should be given to employees. This will encourage the employees to be engaged in their work and work harder to increase productivity and engagement levels.

### **5.11 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the findings of the individual interviews with managers from level 5 to level 7 were presented. The researcher identified five themes for chapter 5. The findings of the individual interviews summarise how the participants understood the employee disengagement concept, how they expressed their mixed feelings towards the results of the employee engagement survey and communicated their perception about the organisational culture that is supportive and that encourages people to do well.

The managers shared their challenges concerning their roles in employee engagement as: reporting on the global platform; poor performance is not easy to manage; management styles, skills and personalities differ; high pressure environment and managing career paths. They revealed the possible motives for employees' disengagement as: a lack of translation of strategic objectives; a lack of communication

and consultation; a lack of a robust performance management system; insufficient remuneration; a lack of recognition and appreciation and a flat structure, a lack of career paths and promotions.

The managers also offered the following solutions to address the employee disengagement problem in the organisation: decode the organisation's strategy; revamp the performance management system; have frank discussions with non-performers; enhance relationships; involve employees in the decision making process and finally, show appreciation and celebrate the successes of the organisation. Similarly it was noted that some of the findings in this chapter are comparable to various findings from the focus group interviews in chapter 4. Chapter 6 will discuss the conclusions, the limitations of the study and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER 6 : CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 6 is the crest of the research objectives and findings of this study as discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 as well as the objectives of the study. The chapter summarises the conclusions of the study. The limitations of the study are decisively considered and the researcher makes recommendations for future research.

### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 of the study introduced the background of the study, the problem statement and the main study objective to establish the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to improve the employee disengagement phenomenon at a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng. The organisation initiated an employee engagement survey to gauge the levels of engagement amongst the employees. The survey revealed that the employee engagement level was at 24% across all the organisational levels.

Chapter 2 provided a detailed literature study on reinsurance, employee engagement and employee disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation. It was noted that scholars and researchers define employee engagement differently while there is limited literature on the employee disengagement phenomenon (sections 2.2 and 2.3). Sections 2.4 to 2.6 provided a definition of leadership, highlighted the difference between leadership and management and elaborated on the different styles of leadership. The concept of organisational culture was explained and different types of organisational cultures were described in detail. Additionally, the chapter outlined motivation and compared the four content approaches to motivation. Overall, this chapter reviewed how leadership, organisational culture and motivation influence employee engagement.

Chapter 3 presented the qualitative research methodology as well as the research assumptions. The participants were purposefully selected to participate in this study since this was a qualitative, explorative and descriptive study. The data analysis process that followed Tesch's eight steps in the coding process was discussed in section 3.9 and the researcher complied with ethical considerations (section 3.10) throughout the study. Data were collected from six individual interviews with managers from levels 5 to 7 and focus group interviews with general staff from levels 2 to 4 of a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng (sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2). As the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and an employee at this organisation, an external transcriber and coder was utilised to minimise the bias during the data analysis process. The researcher and the coder separately coded all the interview transcriptions, met to discuss the findings and reached consensus.

Chapter 4 reported the empirical findings acquired from the focus group interviews. Table 4.8 in section 4.5 presented the five main themes and sub-themes. These themes were displayed and each reinforced by exact quotes from the focus group interviews. The researcher noted that the following were the consistent findings from the employees: lack of communication and provision of feedback; lack of appreciation and recognition by managers; lack of promotions and career growth due to the flat structure; concern about the managers who have no management experience and skills and their management styles that were leading the employees to disengage. The majority of the participants commended the culture of the organisation including their access to the EXCO team. In contrast, some of the participants indicated that the EXCO team was disconnected from the employees as they do not know how they feel or how frustrated they are. Additionally, the participants disclosed that the current performance management system does not address matters such as employees' career paths and performance (sections 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10).

Chapter 5 reported the empirical findings obtained from the individual interviews. Table 5.8 in section 5.5 presented the five main themes and sub-themes. These themes were discussed, each supported by exact quotations from the individual interviews. A lack of translation of the strategic objectives; a lack of communication and consulting the employees before decisions are made; a lack of a robust performance management

system to address non-performers and enhance provision of feedback; a lack of showing appreciation and recognition towards the employees and finally a lack of promotions and the flat organisational structure were consistent findings from the managers as reasons for employee disengagement in the organisation. Moreover, all the managers disclosed that the culture of this organisation is supportive and caring and could be seen as the reason why managers find it difficult to manage poor performers (sections 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10).

### **6.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of the study was to determine the reasons for employee disengagement and what possible solutions can be put in place to improve the employee disengagement phenomenon at a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng. Three research questions and objectives were formulated from the main research objective as presented in Chapter 1 (section 1.6) and are presented in section 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 for ease of reference.

#### **6.3.1 Research questions**

The research questions of the empirical study were:

- What are the reasons for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- What are the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?
- Which recommendations and guidelines can be explored and developed to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng?

#### **6.3.2 Research objectives**

The research objectives of the empirical study were:

- To explore and describe the views of employees and managers with regard to the reasons for employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.
- To explore and describe the views of employees and managers with regard to the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.
- To develop recommendations and guidelines to address employee disengagement in a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.

Section 6.4 and 6.5 discusses the conclusions on the research findings of the focus group and individual interviews.

#### **6.4 THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS**

According to Nienaber and Martins (2016:3) employee engagement has been defined in various ways and yet there is no agreement reached on its specific meaning. The term “employee engagement” includes the relationship between employees’ occupational roles and their organisation and it is more accepted among the professionals while the term “work engagement” emphasises the relationship the employees have with their work activities (Nienaber & Martins 2016:3-4; Du Plessis & Martins 2017:26).

Gallup (2017:63) identified three categories of employees in the workplace as engaged, disengaged and actively disengaged employees. Engaged employees are passionate about their work and their work place and are highly involved. Disengaged employees can be difficult to spot as they are not hostile and disruptive in the workplace and finally, the actively disengaged employees who are not happy at work and resentful that their needs are not being met.

Johnson (2016:17) maintains that it is not feasible to explore employee disengagement if not including employee engagement as there is limited literature on employee disengagement. Employee disengagement is defined as detaching of selves from work roles. Employees withdraw and defend themselves physically and emotionally during role performances often caused by the lack of meaningful work and participation or not

knowing what is expected of them (Kahn 1990:694). Research confirms that employee disengagement has been experienced by various employees, nonetheless the process by which an employee moves from being engaged to not being engaged and finally being actively disengaged has not been fully investigated (Wollard 2011:532; Aslam 2018:152).

According to Gallup (2016:5) the employee disengagement phenomenon costs the German economy between 75.6 billion and 99.2 billion Euros annually in lost productivity while Munshi and Marulasiddaiah (2015:80) elaborate that in the US alone, the cost of employees who are disengaged amounts to about \$500 billion a year. Researchers acknowledge that some of the reasons for employee disengagement are as a result of: lack of communication; lack of recognition; lack of inspired leadership; disengaged managers; employees not getting along with their managers; financial reasons; career development (Ramsey 2013:12; Ramsey 2013:9; Al Mehrzi & Singh 2016:833; Rao 2017:128). Therefore, it can be deduced that the reasons provided above are similar to some of the reasons for employee disengagement disclosed by the participants of both the focus group and individual interviews in this study (sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1).

Leadership, organisational culture and motivation are all regarded as factors that influence employee engagement (Alarcon, Lyons & Tartaglia 2010:302; Naidoo & Martins 2014:432; Cheng & Chang 2019:31). Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 discussed the relationship between employee engagement and leadership, organisational culture and motivation in detail and it was verified that a relationship exists between employee engagement, disengagement, leadership, organisational culture and motivation.

Section 6.5 and 6.6 discusses the empirical conclusions based on the findings of this study.

## **6.5 CONCLUSIONS ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

From the data analysis five themes were revealed (section 4.5). These themes are:

### **6.5.1 Theme 1: Employee disengagement is understood as a perfunctory attitude revealed in different forms of behaviour**

This theme generated three sub-themes: understanding of employee disengagement; lack of interest and caring and mismatch in personal and organisational objectives or goals and values (section 4.6). The findings showed that the participants were able to clarify their understanding of the employee disengagement phenomenon.

Firstly, the employees understood disengaged employees as employees who come to work but are not committed or excited about their work. Disengaged employees feel unappreciated, are of the opinion that their contribution does not add value and they believe that they are often taken for granted (section 4.6.1). Secondly, the employees elaborated that lack of interest and not caring about one's work are signs of disengaged employees (section 4.6.2) and finally, the employees indicated that when employees are not aligned with the organisation's objectives or goals and values, this leads to employees becoming disengaged in an organisation (section 4.6.3).

The literature revealed that disengaged employees are employees with high levels of dissatisfaction and a negative view or attitude towards the organisational approach (Bhuvanaiah & Raya 2014:67). Aslam et al. (2018:151) assert that disengaged employees are mostly not interested in their jobs and tend to be less loyal and effective in the workplace.

From the interpretation of the findings, employee disengagement refers to employees who lack interest and do not care about their work. Disengaged employees are misaligned with the objectives or goals and values of an organisation. These employees are unproductive and not committed to an organisation.

### **6.5.2 Theme 2: The state of employee disengagement was for most unexpected**

Theme 2 (section 4.7) explored the participants' feelings towards the results of the employee engagement survey conducted in 2013 as it was significant for the researcher to understand their individual feelings towards the survey results. The employees had mixed feelings towards the survey results and expressed their emotions with the majority indicating that they were shocked since they were not aware of such high levels of employee disengagement in the organisation. Equally, the minority of the participants pointed out that they were not shocked but disappointed that the employee engagement levels were lower than they had expected.

Literature shows that negative emotions or low self-efficacy could lead to employee disengagement or lack of employee engagement depending on how an employee understands the situation or their level of self-efficacy. In employee disengagement emotions play a mediating role possibly in stressful situations such as role conflict, interpersonal conflict and situational constraints depending on an individual's perception of those situations. This leads to counterproductive work behaviours, anger, aggression, bullying, anti-social behaviour or even crafting revenge on the organisation in an abnormal way (Fox, Spector & Miles 2010 as cited in Parkinson & McBain 2014:74).

Based on the feelings and utterances of the participants, it can be concluded that while some of the participants were not shocked at the survey results most of them did not expect that the employee disengagement levels would be high and were therefore shocked at the 2013 employee engagement survey results.

### **6.5.3 Theme 3: Organisational culture is positively perceived in its promotion of employee engagement**

The culture of the organisation was scrutinised with the intention of understanding how the participants perceived it in this reinsurance organisation. The three sub-themes

that emerged were: unique culture with good benefits; open door policy and collective teamwork is valued (section 4.8).

The majority of the employees acknowledged that the organisation has a caring, supportive and friendly culture, stimulated by both the employees and management in this organisation. In addition, the participants disclosed that this organisation does offer its employees good benefits (section 4.8.1). The participants also revealed that the organisation has an open door policy and collective teamwork is prevalent (sections 4.8.2 and 4.8.3). The participants indicated that the EXCO team is more approachable making it easy for employees to engage with them. Collective teamwork was emphasised as vital for the success of the organisation. It is evident that a positive culture, an approachable EXCO team and collective teamwork creates a unique culture that promotes employee engagement in this organisation.

This finding is supported by literature revealing that a culture that encourages positive work attitudes, giving support and creating excitement in the jobs people do, will increase employee engagement (Armstrong 2011:207; Plester & Hutchison 2015:342). Chaudhary et al. (2012:100) emphasise that a culture of openness, collaboration, trust, autonomy, proactivity, authenticity, and confrontation should be encouraged and developed in an organisation.

#### **6.5.4 Theme 4: Management's role in employee engagement and the challenges perceived by employees**

The employees expressed mixed views when asked about the role played by their respective managers to engage them in the organisation (section 4.9). The four sub-themes revealed under this theme were: managers' experience and personalities influence engagement; engaging manager; disengaging manager and understanding and respecting that the employees are different.

In section 4.9.1 some of the participants mentioned that a manager's experience in managing employees and the personality displayed by a manager does affect employee engagement. Some of the participants disclosed that their managers do engage them while others declared that their managers do not engage them (sections



4.9.2 and 4.9.3). Furthermore, the employees mentioned that it is crucial for managers to understand and respect that the employees are different (section 4.9.4).

The PDT survey (2014:10) suggested that building an engaged workforce is a long term and ongoing initiative which can improve employee engagement. Managers can achieve this fostering healthy relationships with employees, valuing and empowering employees, and lastly, continuing to demonstrate that employees have an impact on the work environment.

From the findings, it can be deduced that the managers' experience and their personalities have an impact on employee engagement. Furthermore, engaging managers influence employee engagement positively while disengaging managers were the reason provided by some of the participants as leading them to disengage in their work. For employee engagement levels to expand, managers should understand and respect that employees are different and ought to be managed differently. The researcher is of the opinion that managers' training is essential to equip the managers with the skills needed to manage and understand their employees better and this could increase the engagement levels in the organisation.

#### **6.5.5 Theme 5: Motives for employees' disengagement**

The researcher sought to understand if (1) the participants had ever considered leaving the organisation or if they chose to stay, (2) the reasons why the employees were disengaged in this organisation and (3) what possible solutions or interventions the organisation can put in place to address the employee disengagement challenge that it is currently facing (section 4.10). The three sub-themes that emerged under this theme were: considering leaving or staying in the organisation; reasons for employee disengagement and moving towards consistent employee disengagement.

The majority of the participants revealed that they had considered leaving the organisation with a handful indicating that they had never considered leaving. Two participants did not respond. Those who responded shared their reasons for considering to leave the organisation as: the lack of resources to do their jobs; being approached and offered a job somewhere else; a lack of recognition and not being

valued; a lack of a relationship with their manager; eagerness to explore opportunities at other organisations; not fitting in the department they are employed in and finally, being unhappy with the salaries the organisation is paying to the employees of this organisation (section 4.10.1).

Subsequent to disclosing their reasons for considering leaving the organisation, the employees divulged their reasons for employee disengagement and then proposed their recommendations to address employee disengagement in this organisation.

In section 4.10.2, the participants provided a variety of reasons as to why the employees were disengaged in this organisation. The reasons disclosed were: line (direct) manager, personal circumstances and disengaging colleagues; a lack of experience, management styles and lack of management skills; a lack of communication and feedback; ineffective performance management system; inequitable remuneration process; a lack of recognition and appreciation; flat organisational structure: a lack of career growth and lack of promotions; favouritism and racism; voiceless employees and a lack of empowerment and victimisation by management.

Pawar and Chakravarthy's (2014) study, as cited in Al Mehrzi and Singh (2016:833), discovered that the following are barriers that lead to a decline or low employee engagement: employees leave their employment due to not getting along with the manager or financial reasons, lack of career development, role ambiguity or a lack of information on the job description and colleague cooperation. Furthermore, Ramsey (2013:12) points out that the greatest cause of employee disengagement is a disengaged manager. The additional reasons for employee disengagement are unproductive team-mates, doing work that is not part of your job, a lack of clarity about the decision making process, lack of clear priorities and poor or inefficient processes (PWC 2015:19).

According to Amos (2016:4) employee disengagement is the outcome of work that one perceives to be meaningless to one's life, dreadful work conditions and unhealthy relationships with managers and co-workers.

Finally, the employees proposed the following as their recommendations to improve the levels of employee engagement in this organisation: a follow-up survey to gauge the current employee engagement levels; leadership training skills; relationship building between managers and employees; provision of feedback, recognition and appreciation; improved communication and revamp of the performance management system (section 4.10.3).

According to Nimon, Shuck and Zigarmi (2016:1150) and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG)'s research (2012:4) the well-known method of gauging employee engagement in an organisation is to perform a quantitative survey. The analysis thereof provides an organisation with the numbers and statistics to determine the extent of employee engagement, and put in place certain interventions to raise morale and commitment.

The literature pointed out that mutual respect between leaders and subordinates contribute to successful employee engagement, which in turn influences the relationship between employees and managers (White 2017:82). The author uncovered that basic skills training for managers is important (White 2017:100). Aturamu (2016:98) revealed that some of the concepts needed by organisations to reengage the employees are: management communication; supervisor's listening skills and career development opportunities.

In conclusion, the majority of the participants admitted that they have considered leaving the organisation while the minority disclosed that they had never considered leaving this organisation. The participants were able to provide the reasons for considering leaving the organisation jointly with their reasons for employee disengagement. Likewise, they stipulated their solutions or interventions for addressing the employee disengagement challenge in this organisation.

## **6.6 CONCLUSIONS ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

From the data analysis five themes were exposed. These themes are:

### **6.6.1 Theme 1: Managers understood employee disengagement as a perfunctory attitude**

Theme 1 generated two sub-themes: understanding of employee disengagement and lack of interest. The findings showed that the participants were able to reveal their understanding of the employee disengagement. The managers divulged that they understood employee disengagement as a situation whereby employees come to work but are not productive and their values are misaligned with the organisation's values and objectives. Additionally, these employees are either not aware of the employer's expectations or they do not understand the organisation's objectives and above all, they do not know the role they are expected to play in the organisation (section 5.6.1). The managers elaborated that disengaged employees lack interest in their work and do not focus on the matters that affect the organisation as a whole and are not willing to go the extra mile (section 5.6.2).

Munshi and Marulasiddaiah (2015:80) highlighted that one of the common signs of employee disengagement is employees who are not interested in their work and do not care about their work activities or their organisation's overall mission.

From the interpretation of the findings, it can be concluded that disengaged employees are employees who do not understand the organisation's values and objectives, lack interest and they do not know or understand what role they are playing in contributing to the success of the organisation.

### **6.6.2 Theme 2: The state of employee disengagement was for most unexpected**

In section 5.7.1 the participants had diverse feelings and expressed different opinions and emotions when asked about their feelings towards the survey results. The managers were worried about the survey results and were mostly unaware of the high levels of employee disengagement in the organisation. They indicated that they did not envisage the levels of employee disengagement to be as high in the organisation as was revealed by the results of the 2013 employee engagement survey and this was a concern (section 5.7.2). It is evident from the findings that the participants did not expect the levels of employee engagement to be that low, they were therefore let down and concerned by the survey results.

### **6.6.3 Theme 3: Organisational culture is positively perceived in its promotion of employee engagement**

The managers indicated that the culture of this organisation is positive, caring, supportive and accommodating. The two sub-themes that emerged under Theme 3 were: unique and good benefits and open door policy (section 5.8). The participants stated that the culture of this organisation is unique, supportive and encourages everyone to do well. Likewise, the managers revealed that the organisation offered good benefits such as good bonuses and free lunch to its employees (section 5.8.1). Furthermore, the participants mentioned that the open door policy encourages the employees to communicate with their direct managers and senior managers without any restrictions (section 5.8.2).

The literature supported this finding by articulating that a positive organisational culture and strong workplace relationships may be the most influential tools to promote employee engagement (Hernandez et al. 2014:342). The authors elaborate that establishing a culture of trust in the workplace allows employees to become engaged, which in turn helps create a supportive place to work. Engaged employees have numerous benefits for an organisation such as a reduction in employee turnover and a rise in employee satisfaction and productivity.

In conclusion, the unique, positive, caring and supportive culture and the open door policy in this organisation does promote employee engagement in this organisation.

#### **6.6.4 Theme 4: Challenges perceived by managers concerning their role in employee engagement**

The managers did acknowledge that they have various challenges to keep the employees engaged. The five sub-themes revealed the challenges faced by managers as: reporting on a global platform; poor performance not being easy to manage; management styles, skills and personalities differ; high pressure environment and managing career paths (section 5.9).

The participants revealed that most of the decisions were implemented by the organisation's head office in Germany (section 5.9.1). In section 5.9.2, the managers asserted that they find it difficult to deal with poor performers. Similarly, the different management skills and personalities of managers intensified the challenges faced by managers in engaging the employees (section 5.9.3). Furthermore, in section 5.9.4, the managers indicated that they are under pressure to get things done. Ultimately, the organisation's flat structure is hindering guidance on how to manage the career paths for employees in this organisation (section 5.9.5). It is evident from the findings that reporting on a global platform; managing poor performers; the different management styles, skills and personalities; high pressure environment and managing career paths are the challenges faced by the managers in this organisation.

Literature indicates that training and career development is also important as it improves the confidence of employees who undergo training and learning development programmes. Alderfer (1972) as cited in Anitha (2014:312) indicates that when an organisation offers employees a chance to grow, it is equivalent to rewarding people. Management needs to give attention to their career path ladder through training and development, which leads to opportunities for growth and development. This improves employee engagement levels amongst the employees.

Mbonani (2016:24) argued that performance management is an important process to ensure organisational focus and alignment on individual level. This forms the basis to establish accountability for regular performance and development conversations and for achieving organisational and team targets. The author elaborated that poor performance is not managed properly. Some managers use performance management as a yard stick to discipline employees. As a result, there are a number of grievances relating to performance management and poor performance not being handled well (Mbonani 2016:5). It is therefore vital for managers to address poor performance in this organisation.

### **6.6.5 Theme 5: Motives for employees' disengagement**

The researcher needed to understand what the reasons could be why the employees were disengaged and what solutions or interventions could be implemented in this organisation (section 5.10). Reasons for employee disengagement and moving towards consistent engagement were the two sub-themes that emerged from Theme 5. The managers pointed out that the reasons for employee disengagement in this organisation were: a lack of translation of strategic objectives; a lack of communication and consultation; a lack of a robust performance management system; insufficient remuneration; a lack of recognition and appreciation; a flat structure, a lack of career paths and promotions (section 5.10.1)

The literature supported this finding by indicating that managers or leaders may contribute to employee disengagement by providing little feedback, appreciation or recognition which leads to employees not trusting or having confidence in the organisation's management. Also, the variety of jobs can make it challenging for managers to define roles and tasks, however a culture in which employees' jobs do not match their expectations creates further employee engagement barriers (Al Mehrzi & Singh 2016:833). Mmutle (2014:181) highlighted that internal communication as a strategic function was aimed at positioning employees as pivotal drivers of employee engagement and organisational culture.

The PDT survey (2014:10) concluded that managers could improve employee engagement by communicating a clear organisational vision to all employees, influencing the vision through their output

Furthermore, the participants shared their possible solutions or interventions to address employee disengagement in this organisation in section 5.10.2. The following are the possible solutions or interventions: decode the organisation's strategy; revamp the performance management system; have frank discussions with non-performers; improve communication; enhance relationships; involve employees in the decision making process; show appreciation and celebrate the successes of the organisation.

Johnson (2016:87) revealed that some of the drivers of employee disengagement are the absence of management respect and recognition; the lack of communication from management to employees and the existence of poor quality of leadership. The respondents from the study conducted by Mmutle (2014:103) highlighted that they formed part of the strategic decision making in the organisation. They maintained that their inputs and suggestion were incorporated in decision making; they also argued that the management of the organisation allowed them the freedom to take beneficial decisions based on their work. It was pointed out that the level of trust and open communication were imperative factors contributing to the freedom of imparting ideas and making key decisions relating to their duties and to improve the overall goals of the organisation.

Johnson (2016:21) showed that some of the strategies that managers can implement in order to transform the workplaces and increase employee engagement are praising employees publicly for doing a good job while mistakes are not disregarded but handled with care. In addition, managers should foster a culture of looking out for people who were doing things very well.

In conclusion, the managers were willing to disclose their reasons for employee disengagement in the organisations. Similarly, they suggested the solutions or interventions to address employee disengagement in this organisation.



Section 6.7 will compare and discuss in detail the reasons and solutions or interventions of the focus group and individual interviews as a validation of the results of the employee engagement survey conducted in November 2013.

## **6.7 DISCUSSION OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

The responses to the three research questions and objectives (sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2) are what brings the purpose of this study to completion. The researcher deems that the research questions have been answered and that the research objectives have been achieved. Sections 6.7.1, 6.7.2 and 6.7.3 confirm this.

### **6.7.1 Research question 1: What are the reasons for employee disengagement in this reinsurance organisation?**

Figure 6.1 presents a summary of the reasons for employee disengagement in the reinsurance organisation based on the perceptions of the participants from the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. The common reasons are pointed out in italics.

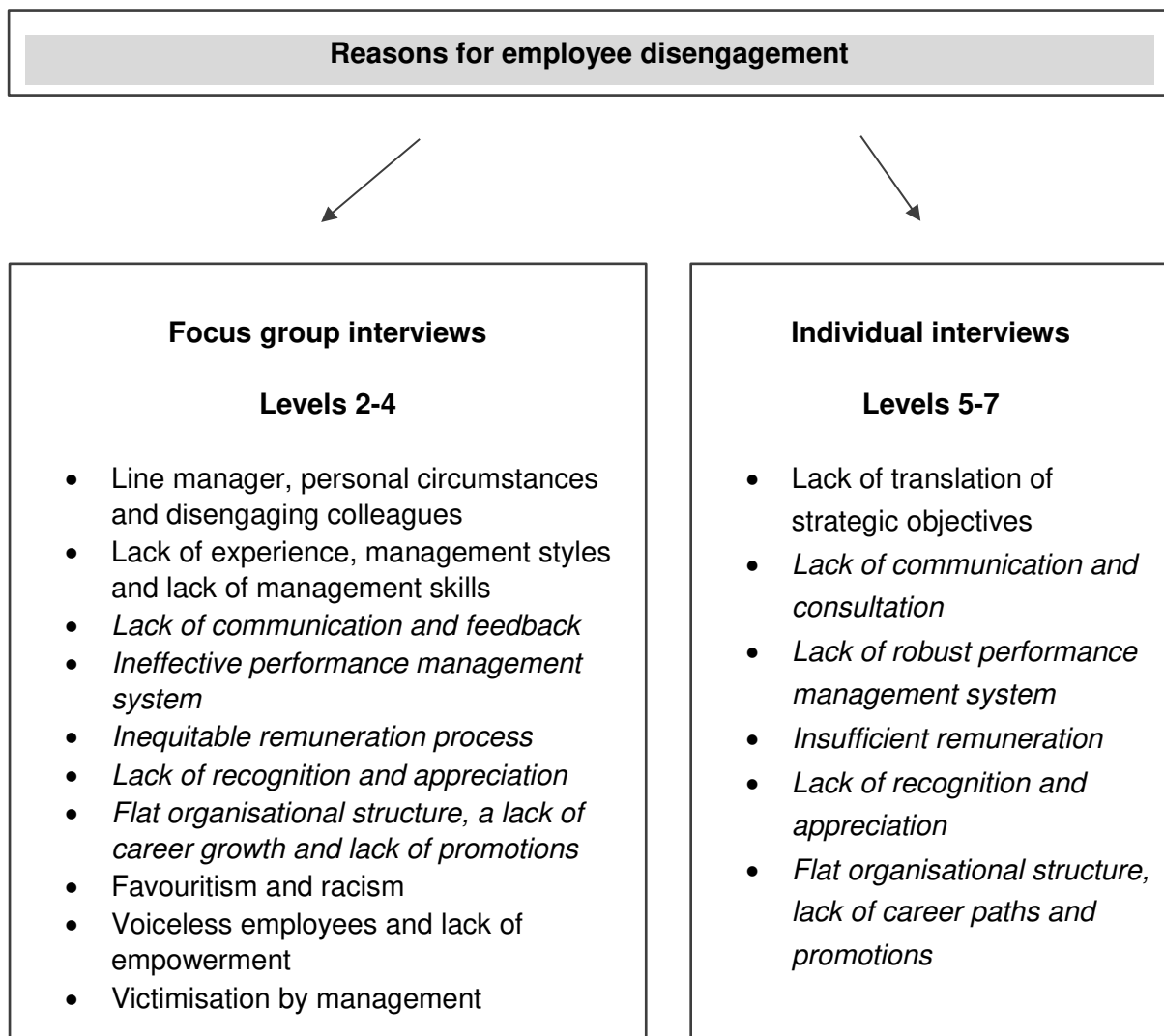


Figure 6.1: Reasons for employee disengagement

In sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1 the participants of the focus group interviews and the individual interviews disclosed various reasons for employee disengagement. The common employee disengagement reasons were also uncovered from both the focus group interviews and individual interviews. These common reasons are grouped as follows: a lack of communication, feedback and consultation; ineffective and lack of a robust performance management system; inequitable remuneration process and insufficient remuneration; a lack of recognition and appreciation; a flat organisational structure, a lack of career growth or paths and a lack of promotions.

Both employees and managers agreed that their desire is for the overall communication process in this organisation to improve because there is no clear and regular communication and consultation with the employees in this organisation (sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1).

The researcher is of the opinion that leaders must communicate more regularly and effortlessly with employees and provide feedback timeously. Leaders should strive to appreciate and recognise the employees' efforts since employees need to know when they have done their jobs well. This outcome will motivate and encourage employees to contribute towards the organisational effectiveness. A lack of communication, a lack of providing feedback timeously and a lack of recognition and appreciation by managers generate negative experiences for the employees and in turn this disengages employees on the job (sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1).

The participants of the focus group interviews divulged that the performance management system was ineffective and they were of the opinion that the system was used as a punitive mechanism towards the employees. On the other hand, the managers stated that the performance management system was weak and did not allow them to deal with poor performers in this organisation (sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1).

The researcher is of the view that performance management plays a role in employee engagement. A poorly designed performance management system hinders productivity in the organisation. The current system should be simple for everyone to understand and be able to use correctly and consistently. If not addressed, the performance management will not produce what it is intended to do.

In sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1, the employees disclosed that the remuneration process was unfair, not transparent and the salaries paid by the organisation were not market related. The managers indicated that the employees' remuneration expectations in the organisation were beyond their control without consulting the EXCO team. The researcher is of the opinion that it is essential for management to deal with the perception of the inequitable remuneration process raised by the employees and insufficient remuneration raised by the managers. The motivation theories of Maslow,

Herzberg, Alderfer and McClelland (Ivancevich et al. 2014:115 & Konopaske et al. 2018:105) in section 2.6 are a reminder that both basic and higher-order needs are important in motivating and raising the employee engagement levels in an organisation.

The employees and the managers acknowledged that the employees should be recognised and be appreciated for the work done as this will increase their engagement levels. Furthermore, both employees and managers disclosed that the organisational flat structure, lack of career growth or career paths and lack of promotions are other reasons for employee disengagement in this organisation. Employees expect to be afforded an opportunity to grow in their careers and to be promoted within the organisation's flat structure therefore management should think of ways to handle this (sections 4.10.2 and 5.10.1).

The other reasons revealed by the focus group interviews (section 4.10.2) which were different from the individual interviews were: line manager, personal circumstances and disengaging colleagues; a lack of experience, management styles and a lack of management skills; favouritism and racism; voiceless employees and a lack of empowerment and finally, victimisation by management. Some of the participants divulged that line managers can also lead employees to disengage through their management style. They further mentioned that employee disengagement may possibly be caused by personal circumstances (whereby an individual has personal problems) and by disengaging colleagues.

The researcher is of the view that leadership training is vital to deliver organisational effectiveness. Therefore, leaders need to acquire suitable training or skills to engage with employees. The organisation ought to correct these dysfunctional leadership behaviours to improve employee engagement. The researcher noted that even though both the employees and managers mentioned that the organisation has a positive culture with an open door policy (sections 4.8 and 5.8), some of the employees in the focus group interviews indicated that there is favouritism, racism and victimisation in the organisation. These negative perceptions cannot be ignored and management should eliminate them from the workplace. If not addressed they will overshadow the positive culture in this organisation. It is essential to form, influence and maintain a

culture of trust throughout the organisation. Finally, the employees should be granted the freedom to raise their concerns and be empowered to make certain decisions in their jobs, thus to be seen as being allowed the autonomy to do their jobs.

On the other hand, the participants of individual interviews exposed the additional reason for employee disengagement in the organisation (section 5.10.1) as a lack of translation of strategic objectives. It is clear that there is misalignment of strategic objectives that leads to conflict and disengagement. It is vital for management to create a common understanding by describing and explaining the organisation's strategic objectives to all the employees. The data from both individual interviews and focus group interviews (sections 4.6.3 and 5.10.1) confirmed that employees who do not understand the strategic objectives of their organisation are unable to be productive and add value to the organisation. In conclusion, both the participants of the focus group and individual interviews provided their reasons for employee disengagement and the researcher noted the similarities and differences in the reasons stated as promoting employee disengagement in this organisation. Section 6.7.2 will discuss the possible solutions offered by the participants from the focus group and individual interviews.

### **6.7.2 Research question 2: What are the possible solutions to address employee disengagement in this reinsurance organisation?**

When asked how the organisation can rectify or address employee disengagement in this organisation, the participants provided numerous possible solutions as presented in Figure 6.2. These possible solutions centred on the perceptions from both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. The common solutions are pointed out in italics in Figure 6.2.

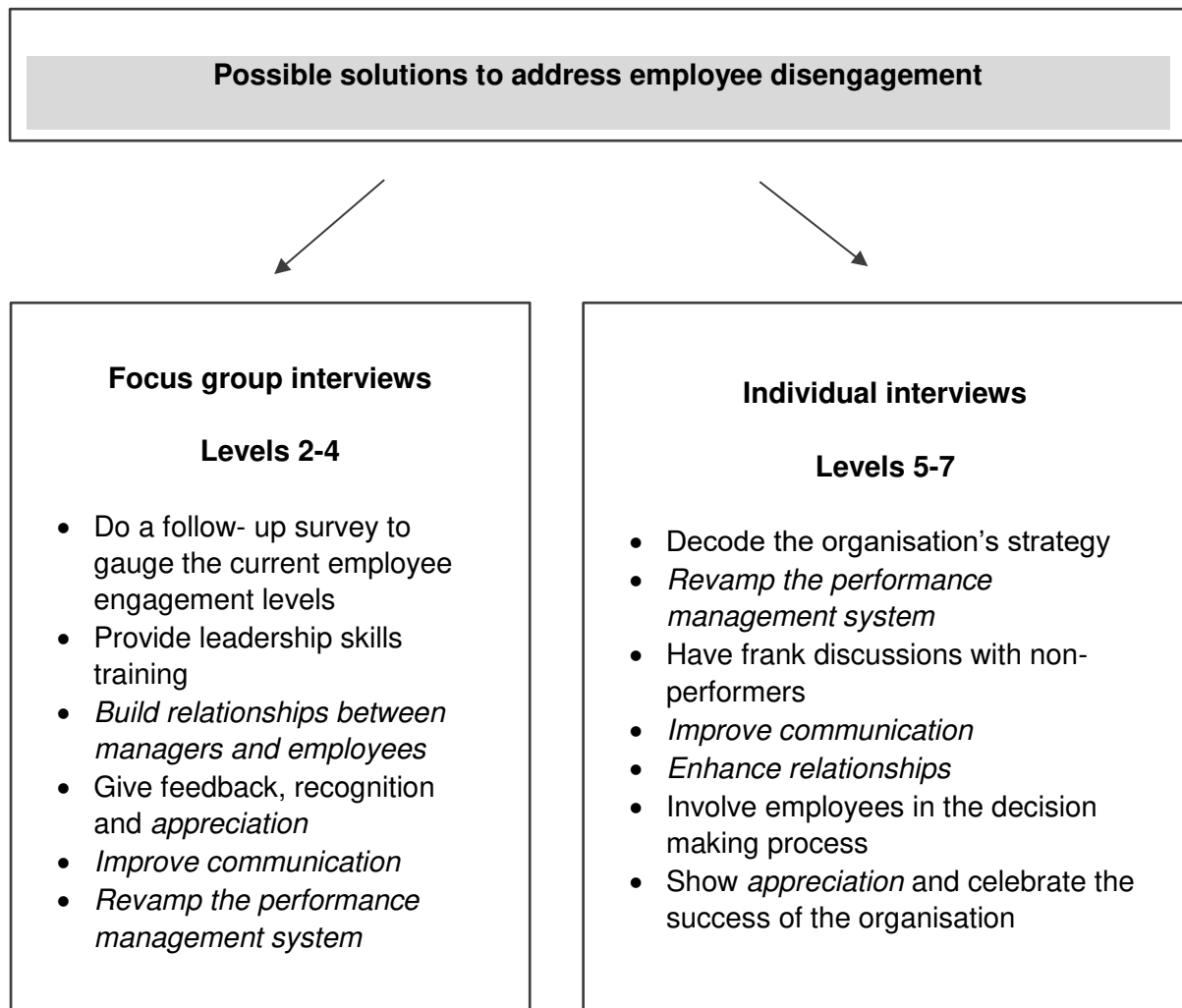


Figure 6.2: Possible solutions to address employee disengagement

In sections 4.10.3 and 5.10.2, the participants disclosed various solutions or interventions to address the employee disengagement in this organisation. The researcher observed that there were common possible solutions offered by the employees in the focus group interviews and the managers in the individual interviews. These possible solutions are as follows: relationship building or enhancement of relationships, improved communication and revamping the performance management system. The researcher is of the opinion that trust, respect and mindfulness are the foundations of every good relationship. Trust helps both an employee and the manager to form bonds that lead to honesty and openness. Mutual respect is about respecting and valuing each other and mindfulness refers to taking responsibility for being mindful of those around you and accepting diverse people and their opinions. These tools could be essential towards building relationships.

The participants further stated that management should aim towards improving communication in this organisation (sections 4.10.3 and 5.10.2). The researcher's view is that communication is a two way process that keeps all the employees up to date and involves them in the discussions that affect them and the organisation. Employees are likely to communicate well when they feel that they have a part to play in the communication process. Improved communication includes how messages are sent and received.

Additionally, both the employees and managers acknowledged that it is essential to improve the current performance management system (sections 4.10.3 and 5.10.2). The researcher is of the view that an effective performance management system can make a big difference in the workplace. A simple performance management system that allows clear goals to be set and is reviewed regularly, will keep the employees engaged and motivated.

The employees in the focus group interviews (section 4.10.3) further suggested different solutions or interventions from the individual interviews as: doing a follow-up survey to gauge the current employee engagement levels; providing leadership training to managers, also providing feedback and showing recognition and appreciation. The participants are of the opinion that from time to time the organisation should conduct employee engagement surveys to measure the engagement levels and make improvements based on the survey results. They emphasised that the managers should receive leadership training to improve their skills to manage better. The participants stated that feedback ought to be available to the employees on a regular basis and that employees need recognition and appreciation consistently.

The researcher is of the opinion that it is important for an organisation to conduct an employee engagement survey. This exercise assists management to uncover what drives the employees to perform and what expectations they have about the organisation. Moreover, the process will unveil the current employee engagement levels in the organisation and this might be helpful to identify what skills the managers need to keep their employees engaged in their work. Finally, the employees respond

well when they are appreciated, recognised and provided with feedback. This serves as confirmation that they are valued.

On the other hand, the individual interviews divulged the following solutions or interventions which were different from the focus group interviews to address the employee disengagement phenomenon: decode the organisation's strategy; have frank discussions with non-performers; involve employees in the decision making process; show appreciation and celebrate the successes in the organisation. The purpose of an organisation strategy is to ensure that everyone in an organisation understands what goal the organisation is working towards and what role each individual is expected to play in achieving the organisational goals. It is therefore vital for all employees to understand how their goals slot into the overall strategy (section 5.10.2).

It is encouraging that the managers have indicated that frank discussions with non-performers should become a norm in the organisation (section 5.10.2). The consequences of not addressing non-performing employees lead to the loss of productivity and employee disengagement. Moreover, the employees should be involved in the decision making process in the organisation. The researcher is of the opinion that this process empowers employees to become creative and contribute to the success of the organisation which includes increased productivity. Likewise, celebrating the successes of the organisation will boost motivation, increase engagement, intensify teambuilding and complement the great culture of this organisation.

It can be concluded that the possible solutions proposed by both the participants from the focus group interviews and the individual interviews (sections 4.10.3 and 5.10.2) to address employee disengagement could become a reality if all the stakeholders in this organisation become involved to address the employee disengagement phenomenon. By doing so, the levels of employee disengagement could improve and contribute positively in terms of the employees' productivity which will, in turn, be beneficial to the organisation as a whole.



### **6.7.3 Research question 3: Which recommendations and guidelines can be explored and developed to address employee disengagement in this reinsurance organisation?**

Sections 6.7.1 and 6.7.2 presented a summary of the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement based on the perceptions of the participants from the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. The recommendations and guidelines to address employee disengagement in the reinsurance organisation are discussed in section 6.10.

## **6.8 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

The main strength of this study was to obtain the participants' viewpoints and opinions on the employee disengagement phenomenon in this organisation. This was achieved by making use of an interview guide to ensure that all questions relating to the topic were covered during the interviews. The bias was reduced by gathering data using the focus group interviews with the employees and individual interviews with the managers. The bracketing technique (section 3.3.2) was observed throughout the data collection process and the researcher made use of a transcriber and coder for the data analysis process.

The interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to hear the voices of the participants and understand how they perceived what employee disengagement is, share their feelings, explain the reasons of employee disengagement and suggest possible solutions for the employee disengagement phenomenon (section 4.6.1, 4.7.1, 4.10.2, 4.10.3 and section 5.6.1, 5.7.1, 5.10.1, 5.10.2). Due to the lack of sufficient literature on employee disengagement in South Africa, this study might provide a platform for employee disengagement to be explored further by professionals in the HRM and IOP professions in South Africa.

## **6.9 LIMITATIONS**

This study was a qualitative study and only one reinsurance organisation participated in the study. The participants were purposefully selected as it is understood that qualitative and explorative studies lean towards collecting data from a small sample. The findings of this study can only be generalised to this particular sample and not to the entire reinsurance industry in South Africa.

## **6.10 RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES**

The third research question for this study was: “Which recommendations and guidelines can be explored and developed to address employee disengagement in this reinsurance organisation?”

Several recommendations for action stem from this study. Therefore, the researcher provides the following recommendations and guidelines to inspire the employees of this reinsurance organisation to be highly engaged.

### **Recommendations**

- Management should conduct an employee engagement survey every second year to measure the engagement levels. The organisation can either conduct their own survey or acquire the services of external consultants. This will assist management to understand employee engagement better and motivate the employees to become engaged knowing that their contribution is valued.
- Managers have to be offered leadership training to strengthen their management skills. A training needs analysis is an important pre-training practice to determine the correct training for managers. The leadership training identified could assist them to manage better and be able to address issues that the employees regard as important.
- The performance management system needs to be reviewed by management and the HR team to ensure that performance is effectively and efficiently managed, measured appropriately and provides ongoing performance

feedback. This can be achieved by setting specific, measureable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound objectives. Similarly, the employees should understand that performance management is also their responsibility and they should ensure that they understand how the performance management system works.

- The HR department should review the remuneration policy to ensure fairness in remunerating the employees of this organisation. The process should be transparent for employees to understand the procedure followed when determining their remuneration.
- Management must improve the communication in the organisation by developing a communication strategy that will encourage a two-way communication process. Communication should be regular, clear and transparent by means of the organisation's emails, intranet, internet, formal and informal meetings, open forums and through the organisation's newsletter. This could lead to positive results since the employees feel as part of the team when they know what is going on in the organisation. Effective communication is vital at all levels in the organisation.
- Managers must be reminded that employees value receiving recognition and being appreciated for their contribution in the organisation. Recognition and appreciation are key factors to engage employees. Managers can do so by acknowledging the employees' hard work and regularly telling them that they are appreciated. Furthermore, managers should start celebrating performance by recognising and appreciating employees who have achieved great results or those who helped in achieving those results. Celebrating success shows employees that their efforts are being valued. Likewise, employees should work diligently and efficiently, and show commitment in their work. This will enable the managers to recognise their output and show appreciation.
- It is vital for management to address the favouritism, racism and victimisation concerns by restoring the organisation's values. A culture of open communication will assist in addressing these issues. The HR team and management ought to develop policies on favouritism, racism and victimisation to ensure that these issues are eliminated in the workplace.

## Guidelines

- Providing feedback to employees on a regular basis is essential since employees thrive when they receive feedback. Employees are also encouraged to provide their managers with feedback on their work progress and notify their managers of their challenges and concerns. The one-on-one meetings between the employees and their managers can assist in achieving this.
- Breaking down the organisation's strategy is vital to provide clarity about the goals, vision and mission of the organisation. Each leader can be an agent to clarify the strategy to its direct reports by defining the overall goals, explaining what the goals intend to achieve and then making the employees understand how their individual goals fit into the overall organisational goals. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the employees to ensure that they understand the organisation's strategy and do their best to execute their individual goals.
- The promotions policy must be revamped by introducing new levels in between the current job levels structure. Likewise, design a career development policy as this will afford the employees and management with an understanding of the requirements essential for a promotion. It will also assist the employees with the opportunities for their growth and development.
- Training managers on how to use the performance management system can be initiated by HR department to minimise the subjectivity perceived by the employees regarding the performance management system. This training can be arranged once the performance management system has been restored. This will ensure that the system does not only focus on the bonuses but on all areas of the responsibilities of the employees.
- Use the organisational values as a strategy to assist in building relationships between managers and the employees. It is essential for all employees to understand, agree and follow the organisational values. Flawless organisational values should play a vital role in building a win-win relationship in the organisation.
- Submission of suggestions by means of a suggestion box is another avenue for employees to utilise. A suggestion box can be placed in the training room (ensuring employees' privacy). Employees should be encouraged to write and

submit their suggestions in the box. This will assist in gauging the mood in the organisation as the employees will be able to express themselves freely without fears of being victimised. This will allow management to be aware of what is happening in the organisation.

The researcher is of the opinion that the organisation should address the reasons stipulated to avoid high staff turnover and the recruitment cost associated with staff replacement.

### **6.11 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Since the findings of this study cannot be generalised, it is suggested that future studies on employee disengagement should be conducted with a large sample size from a number of various reinsurance organisations to enhance trustworthiness and authenticity. The employee engagement survey conducted in 2013 by this organisation used a quantitative method. Mixed method designs (i.e. qualitative and quantitative research designs) and longitudinal research might assist in gaining additional insights into the employee disengagement phenomenon.

### **6.12 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 6 discussed the conclusions of the study jointly with the limitations and suggestions for future research. It also provided recommendations for this reinsurance organisation. In this study, the focus was on the reasons that contribute to employee disengagement and what solutions can be put in place to increase the levels of employee engagement in the organisation. The common reasons, amongst other reasons, revealed by the participants from both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews were: a lack of communication and feedback; a lack of an effective performance management system; an inequitable remuneration process or insufficient remuneration; a lack of recognition and demonstrating of appreciation; a flat organisational structure and a lack of career growth and promotions. The participants indicated that these reasons obstruct employee engagement in this organisation.

Additionally, the participants also proposed the solutions to address the employee disengagement phenomenon in this organisation. The common solutions revealed by the participants from both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews were: relationship building or enhancement of relationships, improved communication and revamping the performance management system. The participants signified that these solutions could improve and increase the employee engagement levels in this organisation.

The findings contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) by establishing the best practices and providing both the employer and employees with the information that will assist them to become engaged in an appropriate way and to combat the employee disengagement phenomenon.

The researcher is of the view that employee disengagement might decline if the organisation reviews the themes that emerged from this study, utilises the findings arising from this study and implements the recommendations and guidelines presented by the researcher.

From the above analysis of literature and the research findings, it can thus be deduced that the research objectives have been achieved whereby the reasons and possible solutions for employee disengagement in this organisation have been conceded. This study has therefore validated the results of the employee engagement survey conducted in November 2013. It is now up to the management of this organisation to develop strategies in line with the organisation's policies and procedures in order to increase the levels of employee engagement amongst its employees.

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ANNEXURE C: BIOGRAPHICAL FORM FOR INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Focus Group Interview: 05

Participants Demographics				
Date: 08-11-2016				
Age	Marital Status	Gender	Race	Home Language
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Job Title	Job Level	Department Re / Life	Years of Service	Highest Qualification
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

Individual Interview: 02

Participants Demographics				
Date: 2016/09/19				
Age	Marital Status	Gender	Race	Home Language
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Job Title	Job Level	Department	Years of Service	Highest Qualification
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

## ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER



### DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH, ETHICS AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

26 February 2016

Ref #: 2015\_HRM\_017  
Name of applicant: G. R. Sello  
Student #: 30224004

Dear Mrs Gaongalele R. Sello,

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

**Name:** Mrs Gaongalele R. Sello, [30224004@mylife.unisa.ac.za, 011 461 6791]

**Name of Supervisor:** Prof M J Bushney [mbushney@unisa.ac.za; 012 429 3749]

**Proposal:** The reasons and remedies for employee disengagement at a reinsurance organisation in Gauteng.

**Qualification:** M.Com Business Management (with specialisation in Human Resource Management)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance to the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.

**Full approval:** The revised application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee on 17 February 2016 and full approval for the project is granted.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

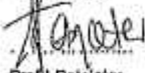


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**Note:**

The reference number (top right corner of this communiqué) should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication (e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters) with the intended research participants, as well as with the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof J Potgieter

Chairperson

012 429 3723 / vlesel@unisa.ac.za



Prof T Mogale

Executive Dean

College of Economic and Management Sciences



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**ANNEXURE E: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE ORGANISATION**

[REDACTED]

College of Economics and Management Sciences  
University of South Africa

Johannesburg, 20 February 2016

**Permission to conduct Research**

This letter serves to confirm that G.R. Sollo has been granted permission and approval by the management of [REDACTED] to conduct her research at the organisation.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Human Resource Senior Manager

[REDACTED]

## ANNEXURE F: EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW

Individual interview 4 [1]

I Thank you for the opportunity to interview you in connection with my study titled: The Reasons and Remedies for Employee Disengagement at a Reinsurance Organisation in Gauteng. Before we proceed, **may I record this interview?**

P Yes.

I Thank you for the permission to record this interview. The purpose for my study is to identify the reasons for employee disengagement in this organisation and to come up with remedies or strategies for this problem. **Any questions before we start?**

P No.

I **Based on the findings of the twenty thirteen employee engagement survey conducted by the organisation, how do you feel about the survey results?**

P Well, I...I...I think it's more of, I guess, that they reflect what...what...what was said, I...I...I under...I think it shows probably a greater level of disengagement than one would have thought, eh, but I guess we have to accept the facts as they are.

I Alright. Um, **what is your understanding of employee disengagement?**

P Uh...uh, the way I'd view it is...is there are employees who...uh, whose attitude to...to work and the...the level at which they do their work, their eagerness, their...their enthusiasm, eh...eh, diminishes over time. In other words, they get to a point where they are probably just doing the bare minimum to...to remain an employee but are not going over and beyond in ...in their day-to-day work. I...I...I guess that's how I'd view a disengaged employee.

I Okay. Please share your experiences in this organisation about employee disengagement or being disengaged. Give examples or motivate your answer. Let me repeat the question for you. **Please share your experiences in this organisation about employee disengagement or being disengaged. Give examples or motivate your answer.**

P Ja, uh, I...I...I think what I...what I can...what I can say is I see certain levels and ways in which, eh, certain employees operate and...and...and I can talk to that. Whether that's due to the disengagement or other reasons may need to be...to be looked at. Whether it's disengagement, whether it's lack of competence, whether, uh, there are other things that may come into it but, eh, what I...my examples. So, eh, uh, like I mentioned, it's...it's...it's about the...the...the quality work and service that goes out. So, in...in some examples, when people are supposed to...to provide responses, say, to clients on a certain piece of work, you can read from the correspondence that, eh...eh, the employee is just doing the bare minimum to be able to say I...I did send a response to a client or I did the work but, eh...eh, the work itself shows no, eh...eh, connection. The...the employee is not identifying themselves with the organisation in writing or doing the work, eh...eh...eh, so as to...to maximise the view of...of...of [INDISTINCT - whoever] we are dealing with when they view...when they view the companies. So that's one where...where we deal with what...what we call service units. These are units where employees are responding to queries sent by outside clients, if...if you...you find that. Then, of course, there's...there's...there's a lot of it which is internal and...and this is more particularly to...to...to my teams. When, eh...eh...eh, I think it's more...it's more of, uh...uh, it's...it's more of fluctuation in...in the quality of...of work that's done by...by people. So I...I...I don't think, eh...eh, there's almost like a permanent set of disengagement but I...I...I think there are phases in which you feel certain employees are disengaged and it depends on what's happening at the time, eh...eh...eh, a key

of which I think is, eh...eh...eh, maybe perception by employees about lack of appreciation of what...in the circumstances in which they operate, in...in...in how they view it, because we may not always agree but, eh...eh, you may find that an employee interprets the environment in which they operate. Firstly, the complexity of the work, the amount of input they are required to put in, both in terms of effort and time, eh, and then they assess the feedback in terms of how we, as...as, em...as employers, are interpreting that, eh, and sometimes I think it creates a situation in which employees perform below what they are capable of. Uh...uh, like I said, I...it might be disengagement, it might be just frustration about these...these levels of...of work or what they feel is may not be adequate appreciation of the...of the work done

I Mm.

P ...or inadequate appreciate of the stressfulness of the environment or the...or the pressures. So there's that disconnect between...between our...probably our views as employers and the view of the employee which results in what I would call, eh...eh, reduced level of output from the employee.

I Okay. So you've given me quite a few examples. **Amongst those you mentioned, eh, employees just doing the bare minimal and then you also mentioned the fluctuations in terms of, uh, the delivery of, uh, their output.**

P Mm hm.

I Um, **have you tried to address those issues?**

P Ja. So on the...on...on the one that, eh...eh, concerns external parties to us, in other words, to service units, eh, what we often do is we try to [INDISTINCT- continue] on a minimum level of standard because the problem with that is...is...is it affects how clients view us. So we try to put in measures that, uh...that the...the level of...of...of work that's portrayed to an external party is always...always meets a...a certain minimal standard. However, what it doesn't address is the attitude of the person behind doing the work. You almost, like, creating a...a...a filter there but, eh...eh, in...in terms of addressing that...because quite often it's...it's...it's other teams, so it's...it's outside our...our, uh...our [INDISTINCT-limit] but for...for...for my own team what we...what we often do is we try to keep our ear to the ground and understand how different employees are feeling about different...different things. The difficulty is...which...which is where...where, for me, uh...uh, is the...the primary problem is what do we attribute it to? Is it disengagement? Is it a temporary fluctuation? Uh, we...what we try to do is to explore the reasons why these things happen and they often come down to a number of things, some of which are beyond what we can do as a, uh...for example, as a...as a...as a direct client manager, you know. So these are things around, eh...eh, remuneration, for example, things around greater exposure to the...to the...to the [organisation name withheld] group, eh, greater exposure to...to different types of work which people would be expecting...employees would be expecting but which we may not be able to...to...to do –

I Mm.

P ...eh, more targeted, eh, incentives from a remuneration perspective, eh. So those are the things that, eh...eh...eh, some employees are looking for which...which...which we may not be able to do. What we often do, though, is to address things like appreciation wherever we can give back in terms of showing appreciation for the work that has been done to...to give...to give that level of engagement back, eh, some level of control of projects where we can...where we can...where we can provide that, em, ja, some level of control and ownership. So it's sometimes something they feel maybe...maybe causing that temporary fluctuation. Mm. Ja, so we try...we try and address things that, as...as managers, as we can



I Mm.

P Eh, it is my feeling thought that, uh, there's an emerging number of...of contributing factors that are often beyond what us, as...as...as a management team, can do without consulting with the broader group.

I **But have you tried to raise those issues, um, with, eh, senior management or the EXCO level?**

P Ja, ja. Yes. All...all...all those issues are...are a subject of, eh...eh...eh, it's...it's on record, both...both at...at...at our level and...and higher levels in terms of these are the things around...around, like we said, remuneration, those issues are...those issues are known. Issues around targeted remuneration, those ones are...are known. In...incentives, eh, greater exposure to the...to the group, eh, travel opportunities. Eh...eh, there are...there are things which are...which...which...which are known but I...I...I think there are always constraints as to how they can be dealt with. There are things like work level, for example, where...where sometimes levels of workloads that may be deemed to be very high can act as a disincentive or...or a contributing factor to...to the...to the, if I call it, disengagement, eh, and, again, these are things which depend on one of two factors. One, the number of...the headcount essentially which...which cannot be increased as and when and, of course, it's also a function of how this, eh...eh, business comes to us, you know. Clients can put ten thousand quote requests when they want. We have no control over how often this business comes through and, when it comes, it has to be dealt with which can, in the end, lead to...lead to people working long hours and longer than what is anticipated but the question is how...how then do you...do you recognise that and...and...and appreciate that. So we try...we try the appreciation whenever we can, eh, but, of course, sometimes there's a limit as to how much you can recognise that through extra remuneration or...which...which I think it's...it's essential to this. Then, of course, eh...eh, I think the other one is...is the...the broader flat structure we have in the organisation that we, uh...uh...uh, I think there's also an expectation of...of advancement...visible advancement that...that...that the employees expect which may not always be possible, eh, within...within a flat administrative structure, eh, and it's a question of, again, it's on...it's on record, it's known, that that's the kind of organisation we...we have, eh, and...and I think a number of issues are being currently explored, you know. How else do we...do we deal with...with that?

I Okay. **Earlier on you mentioned, eh, the headcount, um, and you also mentioned that it cannot be increased.**

P Not easily.

I Why...why not?

P Eh, the...the organisation has...has a...has a...an approach to employees that, eh...eh...eh, it...it...it does not want, and I...I...if I'm...if I stand to be corrected, eh, there's no record of the organisation, eh, retrenching people and I think there's an aversion to growing headcount without due regard what...what could happen in future and we could end up in a position where we'll find that we have too much headcount and then we have to...we have to retrench. So...so I think there's a careful consideration of...of any extra headcount that has to be given. Quite often it's...it's one of two things. Eh...eh...eh, we have to have a very justifiable case for us to...to...to get extra headcount, em, I...I think that's one, and then the extra headcount has to be...has to be agreed at a global level. What that means is that you have to do your motivation well in advance, eh, of the...the necessary Board's, uh, meeting. So, if there's a...if there's a temporary increase in...in work, it's...it's very difficult to...to adjust headcount to...to...to meet...to meet that and, of course, the problem is, uh, ja, you don't also want to...to increase headcount to deal with a

temporary problem because, later on, the...the...the work might die down and you don't...you have extra head.

I Alright. **You also mentioned, eh, appreciation. So how do you go about, eh, showing your team that you are appreciating the work that they are doing?**

P Uh...uh...uh, the...the easiest, which I...I try to do as...as...as often as I can, and I...I...I don't by all means think it's often enough, is...is...is the verbal one. That...that...that's the easiest one. I...I...I've been quite involved in the day-to-day workings that we do so I can...I understand the...the...the work itself, I've done it myself, so I know what's involved and I...I think the one thing that we...that...that...that I do is to give the verbal...you know, the verbal, eh...eh, appreciation. I...I...we have done a few where we try...if someone has worked, eh...eh, more hours than they should be, then we can give them maybe informal appreciation in terms of, eh, maybe what I'd call, you know, a few hours off, off the record, you know, to...to...or...or...or also not be too, eh, dogmatic when they leave early one day, given that they have worked a...a...a long time. So we try to...to counterbalance...to counterbalance, eh...eh, these things. Em, we try to organise almost like team building type, eh, days where people come out and...and also meet in an informal sec...eh, informal setup.

I Mm hm.

P Eh...eh, depending on where it is, sometimes the company can pay for it, sometimes we...we find other ways of...of doing that. Em, ja, just...just...just showing that this is...this is what we feel but key...key...key for me is...is...is the verbal...verbal one because that's...that's...that's, eh...eh, that one can be done on the go when an actual piece of work is...is happening. And, of course, the...the other appreciation then we try to show in some cases is through...through promotions, if...if...if it can be justified through that, through salary increases when it...when it's justified, eh, but...but these ones come, uh, if, uh...uh, it's...it's once a year that you can...you can express it in this way and...and sometimes it doesn't help, eh...eh, or by the time it comes this...this...this thing is long done. So the...the connection between the salary increase and the job that someone did it's difficult to produce that link.

I Okay. **But, when, eh, a promotion happens, don't you often, uh, sit with the...the employee concerned and, eh, discuss that, uh, a promotion is coming your way and give, eh, the reasons –**

P [CROSSTALK].

I ...as to why?

P Well, only after...after the promotion's been granted because, before that, the process is you can't discuss it with the client...with...with the employee just in case it doesn't...doesn't get approved, so you don't want to get...to get someone's hopes up, but, again, it's a, uh...it's a...it's a...it becomes...it's one event that you are linking to the work that has happened over three/four years because [INDISTINCT], you know, you might be promoting someone after three/four years. So it's accumulative thing and it happens once. So it...it...it works in some ways but it's...it's...it's not the same as, after a project is done, you know, well done, this project has been...has been done very well, you know, given that you have been working so hard, take...please take a half day off or something. Eh, that...that one is more linked to...to what's happening and...and it's...it's...it's probably something that's more identifiable and more valuable to...to the employee than the once-off.

I Okay. You mentioning the, eh, promotion. **Do you mind sharing with me the process that you have to go through to motivate, eh, to promote someone?**

P Ja, so, in advance of the...the promotion time, a...a circular is usually sent out to managers to...to motivate any...any...any promotions that...so, eh, what I do is to

write up for each...for the employee that I want to recommend, to write up, eh, the reasons why and the...the...the motivation is usually around, eh...eh, how the employee can operate at a different level because it's about the level, you know, to say are...are they now able to operate at a different level? Are they able to add value at...at...at that higher level? So...so we do the motivation and, for me, eh, currently, I submit that to...to...to my manager and then, eh, the...the determination is made. Em, I've had different experiences. Some...some there's an agreement and in some...I...I think also at...at the...at the higher levels they do consultations and so and so, sometimes, a manager and myself, there might be a disagreement on whether the promotion is granted...granted or not. So there's...there's some debates or discussions but these are happening at...at my level and above but we never inform the...the employee themselves and then, in the end, a call has to be made. We have to agree do we...do we go ahead or do we not go ahead?

I Okay. **So an employee will only be notified once it has been approved?**

P Once...not only once it's been approved. Usually employees only know once it's announced. Yes. Once...once the...the...the group MD makes the announcements of which promotions have been granted, that's usually the first time that the employee knows that they've been promoted.

I Okay. **And these announcements are done via the, eh, e-mail by the group MD?**

P It's usually by way...by way of e-mail, yes, or I think, in some cases, actually, ja, when...when the letters...when the...when the...when the salary increment letters are given and then...then the employee might...might know also then because they have to sign that they've...their level has changed but the official announcement is...is made by the...the group MD via...via e-mail.

I **Any other comments or can I move onto my next question?**

P I...I...I think, just to...to say, one of the issues that affect engagement or...or disengagement, especially on the side of the appreciation, is how...how [INDISTINCT- then] people perceive...employees perceive their own appreciation and probably one that goes on around them. So in...in terms of how...how do you...so, as...as an example, one might, eh...one person might work overtime, another, uh...another in a separate department might work...work overtime, and they might be...they might be appreciated differently and...and...and that often causes problem [sic] if one perceived that they're not being appreciated as much as another, eh...eh, as...as...as another, you know...another. So, eh...eh, and...and this...this works all the way, you know. So, for some, ja...for, eh, example, the...the seniors might mention when one team works, eh, very hard, eh, because maybe that team works in the visible environment but one other team works very hard but it's because behind the scenes it's...it might not be mentioned in the...so those...those teams also appreciate, uh...affect how employees are seen, how they are being perceived.

I Um, **do you think there could be another way of maybe handling these so that, uh, we don't end up having two different employ...employees obviously viewing it in different ways because of the way that it gets delivered to them?**

P I...I...I think it will always be difficult because you then run in...into the realm of...of standardising things or making things [INDISTINCT - of] which probably should not be the outcome. People are different, people are appreciated differently. It's probably something that we have to live with. We just need to ensure that each employee is sufficiently appreciated in their own...in their own way.

I **Can I move onto my next question?**

P Ja. Ja.

I **In your opinion, why are the employees disengaged in this organisation?**

P I think that there are a lot of employees who...I...I think, eh, partly it has to do with the fact that the outcome of what they do or they have...there's no clear link between what they do on a day-to-day basis and the outcome of the organisation. Their relevance is not immediately clear. That's...I...I think it's one part of it. So day-to-day work but someone has no idea of the importance or the relevance that they...that they play. That's, eh...that's one thing. Secondly, also, uh, the issue that we don't have mechanisms to induce engagement through remunerative structures. So it's...what I'm saying is that it's because we make it possible for someone to be disengaged and still remain in the organisation. We [CROSSTALK] –

I **Can you elaborate on that, please?**

P Ja. If someone...for example, if someone is...is not engaged and their work levels fall, our systems are not robust enough to make sure that it's not easy for someone to continue performing at a low level and still be part of the organisation and so it's two ways. So I...I think, eh, ja, our...our performance management process is not strong enough to...to ensure that someone has to perform at a certain level which in turn means they have to remain [INDISTINCT –that engaged] in order to be able to perform at a certain level. I...I think it's...it's...it's one...one...one weakness as well. Em, those...those...we...we talked about the...the...the level of or sort of, eh, attachment to or...or link to the outcomes of what they do. I...I think that's...that's...that's one. Em, maybe also the...the flat structure forced us in which way, eh...eh, there's probably no clear path...career path also for...for some. I think it could be one where, ja, they...they...they don't need to be engaged that much because they don't see what that means to them in...in...in a career progression. Eh, I...I...I have a feeling those could be major...major...and then, eh...eh, I think another disengagement one is, uh, I...I can't rule out the issue or the...the type of expectations employees have which may be a...a real or correct expect...expectations or sometimes unduly inflated expectations of what an organisation can...can...can do and also comparisons with maybe what other organisations do which might lead to some level of expectation which, when not met, leads to that level of, eh, detachment.

I Okay. **So you mentioned, eh, the performance system that, eh, we currently using at [organisation name withheld] Um, do you wanna elaborate on that? Because you mentioned that it's not robust enough.**

P Uh, to quote...to quote other people...to quote other people, eh...eh, we...we have a system that could be seen as allowing em...people perform at a mediocre level to...to become [INDISTINCT – comfortable?] in the organisation. We don't make it uncomfortable for...in other words, we...we don't...we have a very accommodating process where we try to get the best out of people and we...I don't think we run a very...what I would call a...a confrontational approach to...to how the performance is measured, yes, which I think is not necessarily a bad thing from the...from the identity that we want...the company wants to...wants to keep and also, especially for the...for the younger people where we take the view that we want to develop...develop, em...to develop people. So if...if someone is disengaged and starts performing poorly, eh...eh, there is no...there are no quick and swift consequences for that. We have a...we have a...we have a very gradual and accommodating process which may in turn perpetuate the disengagement. I'm...I'm not...I'm not in any way proposing an alternative approach but all I'm saying is the...the...the culture may also –

I [INDISTINCT].

P ...contribute to that.

I Okay. **But, as a manager, don't you think that, eh, you do have, uh...or you can, eh, make proposal to sort of make changes to the current system...the performance system?**

P Uh, I...I think the...the...the difficulty is I...I probably do not think that that system is something that's written down. It's...it's the way people operate. It's the way that we operate as managers is where the...the culture...the culture is now, uh...especially nowadays, I...I think, for the...for the employer or the manager, it's...it's not that easy to...to...to deal with disengagement or...or poor performance or whichever causes or, you know, whichever [INDISTINCT –causes or] cause and another one follows, eh...eh...eh, primarily, because there...there are a lot of avenues in which things happen and...and...and, uh, are discussed. I...I will give you an example, if...if it doesn't distract from...from the track...from...from the...from the main discussion. If you push...because for...for someone to perform well, especially in technical areas than the ones who work, you have to push someone, you have to stretch someone, give them tasks that are harder than...than what they...what they can do so that they can develop themselves, give them very challenging things. The moment you do that then the employees complain of stress, they complain of working long hours, they complain...so it's very difficult to...to have that ability to...to...to manage performance very tightly. Yes, we...we have...we have even had situations where certain projects are not [INDISTINCT – moving] well, then one becomes involved almost on a day-to-day, uh, side...side of it and, eh...eh, employees can complain of, eh, micromanagement. Then you...you...you can...can go the other route where you...you say, okay, here is a project, run it on its own, and...and then, eh...eh, you are deemed distant and...and not...not involved. So it...it's very difficult to get it right. It's...it's very difficult to get it right, eh, which is why, I mean, to...to go back to your question, uh, proposals can be made and I think it...it's just difficult when there's no...I don't think we have a...it's...it's...it's [INDISTINCT- written] because this is how you...how you manage. It's just how things have developed...eh, evolved, eh, and I don't think managers here have a lot of room to be very strict and hard on employees because then, eh...eh, people start leaving and, eh...eh, once they leave, then it's a...it's an issue. So it's...it's a complex...it's a complex environment.

I Okay. So you touched on two things earlier. The flat structure and the career paths.  
P Mm hm.

I **I want us to talk about the career paths please.**

P So, for example, in my...in my field, eh...eh, career progression is usually determined, especially in the early years, by the advances usually people make in...in Board exams. That's...that's usually the main...main...main progression path and that decides...that decides remunerations levels and, to some extent, promotion levels. So, in...in...in that regard, it's...it's...it's a...it's a...it's a...it's well-defined. The problem comes usually when people finish Board exams and they expect to have management roles, they expect to manage people, for those expectations are the things that then have to either be met or, if they are not met, some...and something has to be given to the employee to say now this is where you are, this is the way forward, and...and in a flat structure it might not be able to...to offer people what they want or...or...or to make it...to make it clear. So, to...to me, that's what...what might, eh, be the problem. Yes, there...we don't have enough managerial roles, we don't have enough, eh...eh, for...for...for these people as they advance.

I Um, **can I move onto my next question?**

P Mm.

I In your opinion, what interventions can be implemented to address employee disengagement in this organisation? Let me repeat. **In your opinion, what**

**interventions can be implemented to address employee disengagement in this organisation?**

P I...I...I think, primarily, uh...it...it's difficult to...to move to interventions before the root causes are known.

I Before?

P The root causes of the disengagement are known. So I...I...I think the...the...the survey that was done, eh...eh, pointed to the levels of disengagement. I...I have not been close enough to the actual study to understand if the reasons for disengagement were understood because, until we understand the reasons, it's very difficult to...and the reasons differ for different people. It...it differs by level, it differs by age, it...it...all...all these factors are...are coming in. Differs by type of work that people are doing. Is it service units? Is it frontline? Client-facing? So all those things have to be...to be considered before...before we can...we can look at solutions. However, having said that, I...I think some issues are probably going to...to come through anyway, you know, eh, we're talking...we are talking about things like appreciation and re...and remuneration and sort of targeted...targeted things. So, I...I...I think those are probably ones which can be looked at, eh, immediately. How...how do we appreciate people more, especially using...using structures like...such as remuneration? Of course, how do we encourage the managers more to...to...to address...to address the...the...the [INDISTINCT- issue], you know, verbal and ad hoc...ad hoc appreciation for...for...for work that's done? How do we get employees to...to get to understand their relevance within the organisation? What is the...what is the impact of what they do on the outcomes? So, eh, you could...you could talk of, eh...eh, an example is where you have back office people. Eh, taking them along to client visits so that they can see what's happening at the client, what the client expects of us as a company, and what their role as the...at the back office is and how it fits to...to...to that so they can see [INDISTINCT]. So those are...those are some of the things that...that can be...that can be done but I think, crucially, the...the...the survey, if...if it didn't give that already, then, eh, one has to...someone has to do, eh...eh, a job, whether it's on smaller groups, eh, just to get to understand what is...what are the causes of the disengagement and then obviously from that point on, eh...eh...eh, solutions can be, you know, [INDISTINCT].

I In your experience as a manager, what role does management currently play to engage the employees in this organisation? **In your experience as a manager, what role does management currently play to engage the employees in this organisation?**

P I...I...I think, uh, definitely management is playing a role, eh. So a...again there...there are two...two, if not three, layers of management in the organisation I would say. So you have the group, eh...the group management which...which...which manages the whole...the whole group and then each...each section, be in Life, non-Life, they have their own management within that, and then you have the departmental management. So...so they have three...three levels of which the departmental management, eh...eh, through the heads of, eh, departments, eh...eh, their...their day-to-day work requires them to be...to be...to be engaged with the...with the...with the employees and...and sort of discuss things. Eh, however, I think, at the next level up, maybe there...there's more that needs to be done in terms of those regular discussions with employees, disseminating of information, eh, making sure that everyone knows where we are as a company, what are we doing? What's relevant? What's important? What's coming? What are the issues? Eh...eh, I...I think that dissemination of information, eh...eh, probably more

can be...can be done. Then, of course, when we go to the group, eh, there's...there's even more that needs to be done there in terms of how do you engage the different levels of the organisation? How do you...how do you engage mid-management in decisions? How do you engage every employee in...in...in decisions or in telling them what's happening? So, while it can be done at the heads of level, that...that discussion is ongoing but I think more needs to be done at the other two levels, the group level and...and...and the Life...Life and non-Life in terms of just keeping, eh...eh, keeping it closer, understanding of what the employees are doing, what matters to them, how do they view the company? How do they view changes? How do they view their roles? All...all those things. I...I think it's something that's not happening as much as it should...should be. [INDISTINCT].

I Alright. **Any other comments or can I move on?**

P No, you can move on.

I Okay. **What strategy are you following to create a successful team in this organisation?**

P Ja, so...so...so, for me, uh, the...the primary strategy in building, eh, my team is to ensure each individual is technically capable to do their job. So...so...so capacity development. How do you make sure that each employee is able to...to do their job well? So, uh...uh, to me, that's...that's...that's important. So it's about giving them challenging tasks, making sure that we engage with them, that they understand the tasks and they do them. Are they learning? That's...that's...that's...that technical development is key, eh, to...to...to ensure...to ensure a successful...successful team because the team, eh...eh, the success of the team is this...is, in my view...or will be measured by the output, you know, the level of output or if I may call it the quantity of the output and the quality of the output. Those things are key because we...we...we also function in a service capacity and it's important that each team...each member of...of the team can pull their weight. So that's the first thing. Then, of course, you add to that the...the...the structural, eh, side where you then form sub-teams with...with...with managers and leaders so that...so that, em, each...each...the team members have sufficient, eh, access to...to the relevant people to enable things to...to work and...and...and then the team structures also allow us to...to provide ownership of projects so people can then be in a certain section they own this work there, and they're...and they're responsible for that. I think that that adds to...to...to achieving a successful team. Em, the one that we...we...we will need to work on and...and...and which creates a problem is then how do you preserve whatever team structure you have put in place? How do you retain the people? How do you ensure, uh, that you don't have to go to the drawing board all the time to...to...to create a new team? So the continue...continuity...the sustainability of whatever team structure is...is something that we...we need to...to look at. Ja, I think we...we have...we have been fairly fortunate, eh, but I...I think for me, to build...to build a successful team, we need to ensure continuity.

I Okay. Um, **any other comments?**

P I...I...I think the continuity aspect is...is probably one that then links to...to the engagement to say how do you...how do you ensure that especially the younger members of the team are continuously or are...eh, that...that, eh...eh, that there's a correct understanding of...between your management and...and all members of the team, particularly the younger members of the team in terms of how they view their...their role and...and how do they view...view their future because they...they have...they have an important part to play, eh, especially, eh...eh, when we are investing a lot in...in developing their capacity. How do we ensure that they, in particular, will be there in the middle if not long term?

I Okay.

P Ja.

I **So you mentioned, eh, the continuity aspect and you link...you say it links to employee engagement. In what way?**

P Ja, so I...I think, uh, we...we are...actually, [INDISTINCT- at least] the team that I work in. I am...I think I'm in the very privileged position...it can be a disadvantage in some cases but I'm in the privileged position that we are working in a...in...in a professional area where I think an...an employee is more likely to leave the organisation than to stay there unengaged, you know. So...so I think, if someone is not engaged, they are most likely to leave and then we don't have the continuity, you have to restart. Yes. So, to me, that's where...that's where the link comes in. We have to...to engage them to retain them...to retain people because, eh...and I hope it stays that way, eh, but sometimes it's just...you can...you don't want a situation which may, I think, affect other...other teams where the...the industry, the...the professional, eh, sector in which people sit, could be such that, if someone wants to leave, they can't because of various reasons which leads to the frustration and the disengagement but I think, for us, it's more likely that the moment someone disengaged...becomes disengaged or unhappy with things, they are more likely to leave. Ja.

I Alright. **On that note, what if you end up with a situation whereby an employee is disengaged but they not leaving?**

P Ja, the, uh...the...the difficulty is when someone then fails to pull their weight because they are disengaged and it affects others around and then we have to...to bring in other measures to make sure...because you don't want, uh...firstly, we can't compromise on the output of the team. The team has to continue producing work at the right level – in other words, the right quantity of work and the right quality of work – and...and, eh...eh, you will then have to balance between how much do we...do we try to accommodate it and engage the employee or how do we then find measures to ensure that they...they don't...for the lack of a better term, they don't distract what needs to be achieved.

I Okay. **So what measures are you referring to here?**

P I...I think...I think there will have to be a frank discussion. If someone –

I A?

P A frank discussion. If someone is disengaged, then they will have to decide do they want to continue being part of the organisation or...or not part of the organisation? In other words, we need to go back to those. What are...what are the causes of their disengagement? And I...I think we can have an honest approach. Can we...can we deal with those issues? And then, if...if we have dealt with the issues, then there's an expectancy in that the employee should then be engaged. Eh, I think...ja, so it has to be honest. The fact that they are disengaged has to be linked to specific reasons that we can address and...and...with the hope that, after those issues are addressed, the person will...will become engaged. The...the difficulty is, like we said earlier on, that there are certain things that may not be easy to address and...and...and, if it comes to a point where the...the...the employees are aware that they are disengaged because of things that we, as management, cannot change at the time, then they'll have to make a conscious decision whether they want to continue being part of the organisation or...or not.

I Okay. In your view, how does this organisational...sorry, let me repeat. In your view, how does the organisational culture promote employee engagement in this organisation? **In your view, how does the organisational culture promote employee engagement in this organisation?**



P It's...it's a difficult question because, again, eh...eh, going back to the organisational culture, it's...it's not...it's not something that's written down. It's...it's how people behave differently at different times, under different circumstances, and sometimes it differs from manager to...to manager and circumstances to circumstances. So...but, eh, I...I think it...it depends on the levels. I personally don't think the organisational culture, especially at the...at the top end, is necessarily...necessarily follows what I would call a consultative approach. Eh, so there might not be opportunities for certain employees to be involved or engaged in certain aspects because the decisions are not at their level. They are not being...they are not following a very consultative approach, uh...uh, which I think it's probably, ja, a valid approach to...to doing things. Uh, ja, I...I don't think enough is being done or there's enough in the organisational culture to promote engagement and...and here I'm doing it from...I'm...the way I'm...I'm looking into your question is...is...is the company...is the organisation doing its...enough on its side to promote engagement? Eh, and, eh, definitely not on the consultative front. I...I think, eh, very few things are...are put to the wider spectrum in order for decisions to be made or, em...so that's...that's one thing. Uh, I guess the organisational culture...from the meetings I attend, I think there's always...managers are encouraged to do the engagement. So we...as managers, I think we have been given, you know, sort of mandate. We should engage the...the...the employees and we should know what...what...what the issues are and, eh...but I think...ja, so it...it still follows the...the structures, ja, but I don't think it's, like, eh...I mean, of course, we have...you can...you can have issues like, you know, can we have a...a competition to name rooms, for example? That...that's...the...the...the employees are being engaged to do something that...that...that...that's a part of the process. So if you...such things are done but, eh...but I don't think, eh, in...in terms of decisions which way do we go about, uh, on a certain strategy? There's...there's little engagement from...from the, you know, sort of what you call down up in terms of that. More...more decisions are...are...are the other way around. I don't know if that...that...that...that's [INDISTINCT-the intention] of your question but, for me, I think more could be done to...to engage...to engage the employees on...on certain...certain...certain big decisions.

[INDISTINCT]

I **You mentioned that, um, managers are...have been given the mandate to engage...engage employees.**

P Ja.

I **Do you wanna elaborate on that for me please?**

P Uh...uh, ja, so...so...so, for example, I...I am required by my manager to...to...to have one-on-one meetings with...with my employees on a...on a regular basis. So this is outside...outside the normal...the normal work meetings. One-on-one meetings where I understand what they want, what are they looking at, their...their future. So...so this is done. Every manager has to...has to have that...that kind of meeting so they understand their [INDISTINCT- employees] and that...and that filters...filters...filters back. I...I am...I am allowed to, you know, under certain circumstances, take the team out, you know, and appreciate them, do the things. So...so there's that engagement that...that, as a manager, I...I [INDISTINCT- think] the authority to do [INDISTINCT-things]. So...and...and that is happening. I...I think there's probably more needs to be done at the bigger organisational level, you know, the standardised things, like we talked about the remuneration, the...the big things that affect the [INDISTINCT- employees] but, as managers, there's...there's...there's a lot of leeway to...to engage the client...the...the employees.

I Okay. So...**and how are you finding your one-on-one, eh, touch-base, eh, sessions with your employees?**

P Very, uh...very...very useful. Very useful. I...I...I think we...I...I should do more...more of them but they bring out issues around the personal side of things. Eh, we're talking about things like the studying, for example. A lot of the students are studying and...and there we can discuss and they often bring up issues about how they're progressing, you know, with...with their studies, it brings up issues about how they're, you know, relating with their managers, issues about how they're relating with other colleagues [INDISTINCT- in this organsation]. So I'll...I'll always ask them these questions about how they are relating with all these...if...if there are any issues and then...then we'll get to...we get to deal with them. Eh, I...I...I think they are invaluable, eh...they are a very...very important aspect and...and I...I try to have at...at...at least once a month. Sometimes, with time, it's not possible but, eh, it...it...it's an important aspect of the...of the management process that we get to understand outside the work because we have...we have work meetings regularly but these ones are where we are discussing anything other than work, the personal issues, you know, where they're...I mean, like a young student who comes we discuss where are you staying? Have you got a new...do you have a nice place to stay? Is it secure? Is it...all these things which are not, eh...not work-related.

I Okay. Do you wanna ela...eh, **do you have other comments to make or can I move onto my last question?**

P No. No, you can move on. You can move on.

I Okay. So this is my last question. **In your opinion, how can this organisation rectify the disengagement problem?**

P I think there are a number of...there are a number of...number of steps that need to be taken. One, eh, of course the survey probably gave the extent of the...of the disengagement. So understanding the...the magnitude of the problem. Eh, secondly, understand the causes of the problem. Thirdly, decide on how big a problem is it in the organisation. Is it a big thing? Is it something that we need to resolve or not? Eh...eh, so the first one was to un...eh, to...to discuss how many people in the...you know, are disengaged but the...the...my third point is we need to decide is it a risk to us? Is it a big thing to us as an organisation? Do we need to...to do anything about it or not? If we need to do anything about it, then it has to get the...the right, eh...the...the attention at the right levels in the organisation. Is it...is it a group MD thing or is it...is it a line manager's thing? Who needs to...who needs to...who needs to resolve it? Eh, and then the next stage will be...eh, it could one of two ways. Either you get...you get...you get, eh...once you know the causes, you get someone external or someone to say, okay, this is how we are going to resolve it and then managers are given the mandate to resolve this. So...so I...I...we can...we can summarise...I can go back but I...I...I will...I will finish first and say the managers are given the...the mandate to...to...to carry out the activities that have been identified either by an external person or by...by some internal discussion and then the survey is done again later on, maybe in one year, to see if there are changes. If...if there are...if there are...if the levels of engagement but I...I think, eh, there's always...the problem with things like engagement they...they have to be defined well which is...which comes down to your early...your first question. They have to be defined well, especially once they are used in a survey, to say what is the...what are the causes? And then, one year later/two years later, we do another survey. What are the levels of engagement? What are...what are the...the...the situations then? But the...the thing is the company needs to make a decision. Is it a...is it a...is it a [sic] issue or not an issue? Because some of those things where you could say,

- eh...eh, maybe it's...people are disengaged but it's not an issue, we can live with it, or people are disengaged and it's affecting our operations and we need to do something about it or, eh...eh, people are disengaged, it's a critical issue, the group MD has to...has to run with this project. So there...there has to be a decision at that point which is...I would...in my...in my view, almost as equally important as identification of the causes and...and the decision is taken on how to deal with it.
- I Okay. **So you also mentioned the external...getting the external person.**
- P Mm.
- I **Please can you elaborate on that?**
- P Ja. So...so...so this survey has said there is disengagement. Eh, in total seventy-six percent are...are disengaged. Em, so...so now the...the natural steps for this is to identify what are the causes and what are the potential remedies? So those are...those are the two...two things that need to be addressed and the question is who can do that? Is it...is it us internally or...or to...to drill down into that we need someone outside the organisation who has the...who has the training and the skills to be able to...to zero down on those two issues and then, afterwards, probably recommendation is made together with...with that crucial question of...well, maybe recommendation is made on...on...on the...on the...on the causes and the remedies and then the decision made...is made on the...on the relative importance of that issue in the organisation. That one [INDISTINCT-will have to be taken] internally but sometimes we distance...an external person might be better at...at identifying the causes and the potential remedies than...than someone internal, eh...eh, but probably it's one...one [INDISTINCT - route].
- I Okay. **So do you have anything else to add?**
- P No. No, no. I...I think...I think, eh...eh...eh, for me, eh, that...that...that delving deeper into the results is probably...probably important. Eh, identifying which sections because seventy-six is, eh, of course the overall number, eh, and I think there were...there were difference depending on...on the age of the...of the employees, on how long they have been with the company, probably with their level, probably with, eh, the, eh, area where they are working. All those things I think things have to be understood further in order to...to be able to drill down and...and come up with a...with a conclusion [INDISTINCT]. Then you can focus. You can...then you can have the focused, eh, remedies on those groups that are more affected than others.
- I Okay.
- P Ja.
- I Alright. So we've come to the end of, uh, my interview. I just wanna take you through my next steps which are I'm going to make, uh, the transcript available to check for correctness, this will be through member checking that we spoke about earlier on –
- P Ja.
- I ...and I'm going to use the date and time of, eh, this interview to ensure that, eh, the correct transcript reach [sic] the correct participant.
- P Okay.
- I **Do you find this arrangement in order?**
- P That's fine.
- I As soon as the report is completed, feedback will be given to all the participants and other stakeholders.
- P Ah, that's good. That's good.
- I Thank you so much for your time.
- P It's a pleasure.

I Have a good day.

P It's a pleasure. Thanks. Thanks [INDISTINCT].

**--- END OF AUDIO ---**