The importance of leader-member exchange quality in work engagement
An explorative interview study of employee experiences in UK organisations

Langenhan, Melissa

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE QUALITY IN WORK ENGAGEMENT:
An explorative interview study of employee experiences in UK organisations.

Melissa Katharina Langenhan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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School of Management
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_______________________
Melissa K. Langenhan
Abstract

With the rise of the knowledge economy, the world of work is increasingly characterised by work intensification, competition and uncertainty. Particularly in developed countries, meaning is becoming more important in one’s working life. In a similar vein, the shift in focus towards positive psychology and employee well-being has meant that work engagement is of growing interest to academics, practitioners and governments alike. The popularity and buzzword status of work engagement has been fuelled by claims of not only improving employee well-being but also organisational performance. Work engagement is understood “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74). In an effort to overcome the noted engagement deficit in the UK, understanding what drives and influences work engagement is at the top of organisational agendas.

Although there are many factors that can influence engagement, social support and in particular the line manager play a pivotal role in shaping an employee’s experience of their work. As agents of the organisation, it is argued that line managers help facilitate or diminish the psychological connection one has with work. Using social exchange theory (SET), this study explores the impact of leader-member exchange (LMX) quality in relation to employee experiences of work engagement. Moreover, it examines how perceived psychological contract breaches (PCB) further influence the relationship quality and how employees feel at work.

Despite the intuitive nature of this topic, the scarcity of research in this field is surprising and literature is still in its infancy at understanding the complexity that underpins this interaction. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews across three UK organisations, this study aims to extend literature in this field and answers calls for more research linking LMX and work engagement. It was found that LMX quality and POS function as distant predictors of work engagement, whereby they moderate the PCB and work engagement relationship. Theoretical and practical implications as well as limitations of the research will be discussed.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who sadly are no longer with us. Both of my grandmothers have now passed away during the final stages of my PhD. Whilst I can no longer make those last phone calls to say that ‘I finally finished school!’ - they will both be in my thoughts on graduation day.

To my father, who passed away so many years ago and yet remains ever so vivid in my memories. It is because of his legacy of hard work and dedication to doing what you love, that I am both passionate in what I do and that I have managed to persevere when I have faced difficulties along the way.
Acknowledgement

Looking back to when I first started, I did not yet know the scale of the task ahead of me and it has come to be an all-consuming adventure. At times it has been an uphill struggle, but most notably it has been a learning journey. I would not be here today without all of the people who have helped me move along this path.

First of all, thank you to my supervisors for taking me on and believing in me. Dr. Bruce Rayton for pushing me to go outside of my comfort zone, testing me at times and helping me to gain the big picture and Dr. Zeynep Yalabik for the continuous support, guidance and many chats along the way.

Next, I would like to thank the three organisations and many participants that took part in my research. I am forever grateful to them for letting me interview their employees and having them reveal such interesting stories to me.

I am also thankful for the other experiences that have helped put my PhD into perspective. Having worked as a research assistant to Dr. Graham Abbey and subsequently working on publishing a paper with Dr. Russ Vince and Dr. Diane Bell was invaluable to the rest of my research.

I would also like to thank my immediate family for the unconditional love and consistent encouragement that I have received throughout this time. To my mom who has taught me to embrace opportunities, the joy of lifelong learning and the unbreakable optimism required to endure life’s hardships. To my fiancé Fabian, whose patience has been tested with me and who has also had to endure me putting off any wedding planning until ‘after the PhD.’ He has spoiled me with the most incredible surprise weekend trips, movie nights and homemade Sunday brunches when I have needed them most. To my sister Meike, my brother Frederic - thank you for your persistent optimism that everything will be fine in the end.

To my friends within the PhD community, with a special mention to Elham, Helen, Marc, Sozy, Steffi, Johannes, Meggan and Sarah. Thank you for the endless catch-ups, impromptu walks and coffee breaks spent deliberating about the best way forward or simply offering to proofread my work. It has been a pleasure to work alongside you and I wish you all the success for the future.

To my friends outside of the PhD - Elli thank you for being my sports buddy and for keeping me sane, reminding me of what a life outside of the PhD looks like! Carlos, Milli, Khulani, Ella & Nick thank you for joining our random bakeathon’s, poker nights and social outings. Nadiya, Hardeep, Rouku & Daven, Sophia & Javi thank you for your kind and steady words of support and encouragement.

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<tr>
<td>AMO</td>
<td>Ability Motivation Opportunity (Model)</td>
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<td>CIT</td>
<td>Critical Incident Technique</td>
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<td>GTL</td>
<td>Global Transformational Leadership (Scale)</td>
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<td>HQ</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
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<td>ISA</td>
<td>Intellectual Social Affective (Scale)</td>
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<td>JCT</td>
<td>Job Characteristics Theory</td>
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<td>JD-R</td>
<td>Job Demands-Resources</td>
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<td>LMS-X</td>
<td>Leader-Member Social Exchange</td>
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<td>LMX</td>
<td>Leader-Member Exchange</td>
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<td>LQ</td>
<td>Low Quality</td>
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<td>MBI</td>
<td>Maslach Burn Out Inventory</td>
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<td>MLQ</td>
<td>Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCB</td>
<td>Organisational Citizenship Behaviour</td>
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<td>PC</td>
<td>Psychological Contract</td>
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<td>PCB</td>
<td>Psychological Contract Breach</td>
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<td>POS</td>
<td>Perceived Organisational Support</td>
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<td>SET</td>
<td>Social Exchange Theory</td>
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<td>UWES</td>
<td>Utrecht Work Engagement Scale</td>
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<td>VDL</td>
<td>Vertical Dyad Linkage</td>
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<td>WE</td>
<td>Work Engagement</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to Chapter

This chapter will help to set this research in the context of the broader debates. It will introduce the influencing factors relating to the growing profile and importance of the work engagement field. Engagement is a recent construct (Kahn, 1990) that has been popularised by a shift in focus away from burnout and towards optimising work performance (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and well-being (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Despite the intuitive appeal and vast interest in work engagement, its antecedents however are not yet clearly understood. Hence further investigation is required. The research aims to contribute to knowledge and practice, by exploring the role that perceived leader-, organisational support and psychological contract breach play in influencing the employee experience of work engagement. As such, the use of an iterative, inductive and explorative research design enabled gaining a deeper insight into these experiences amongst UK employees.

Following this, the narrative style adopted for this thesis will be outlined, and subsequently, the motivations for this research will be discussed. I close the chapter by providing an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2. Setting the Scene

Current ways of working have departed significantly from their more stable and traditional ways (Blackburn, 2001; Jackie Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). “Today we see a combination of globalisation, deregulation, managerialism, a decline in public trust and more knowledgeable workers” (Wilkinson et al., 2016, p. 3). Others concur that there has been a shift towards a new market economy, whereby organisations increasingly rely on flexible employment practices in order to stay competitive (Landsbergis, 2003). As a result, the business environment is now characterised by greater levels of turmoil and hence, job security, promotions, and career progression appear to be a thing of the past.

The changing nature of work also applies to the UK context. A study using 2007 and 2012 data from the UK Quality of Working Life survey found that the financial recession in 2008, has played a key factor in changing the work environment (Worrall, Mather, & Cooper, 2016). Whilst employees are said to have more discretion over their work than ever before (Blackburn, 2001). Worrall et al. (2016) found that despite increased accountability of managerial and professional work, these employees now suffer from work intensification and lower levels of control over their work. Consequently, they have noted lower levels of loyalty, morale and motivation.
In response to the increased focus on operational efficiencies and government driven austerity programmes, organisations are under pressure to perform with fewer resources (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Worrall et al., 2016). Schaufeli & Salanova (2007, p. 140) argue that “today’s organisations require their employees to be motivated, proactive, responsible and involved.” It follows that the employer-employee relationship, underpinned by the psychological contract, has changed. The psychological contract offers a useful way of understanding and managing how employees approach and behave at work (Conway & Briner, 2005). Hence, the psychological contract is inherently subjective and represents the employee’s perception of what obligations and future promises the organisation is required to fulfil (Rigotti, 2009, Rousseau, 1989). As such, employees are under pressure to demonstrate their added value to the organisation by working harder, longer and being more flexible (Karanika-Murray, Duncan, Pontes, & Griffths, 2015). In return for their efforts and going the extra mile, employee expectations are shifting towards having more meaningful work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Overell, 2008). Accordingly, employees feel that organisations are obligated to provide jobs and conditions of work that are more challenging and stimulating in order to provide opportunities for growth, fulfilment and meaning at work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009).

Some suggest that individuals need to feel that their work is meaningful in order to reach their full working potential (Maslow, 1974) and fostering an engaged workforce is seen as a key solution in addressing these problems (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane & Truss, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck, 2011; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes & Delbridge, 2013). Organisations therefore view work engagement as a key priority on the management agenda. “Work engagement plays a crucial role, not only to understand positive organisational behaviour but also to guide HRM and occupational health policies in organisations” (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007, p. 140). First, a focus on optimal functioning and well-being is more likely to lead to job satisfaction and meeting employee needs, thus increasing felt obligations to the leader and organisation to reciprocate (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Second, motivated and engaged staff also lead to greater levels of performance and help to establish the necessary competitive advantage that organisations need to survive in the new market economy (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). This underpins why work engagement is currently a topic of much debate in the management domain (Crawford, Rich, Buckman & Bergeron, 2014).

It is widely accepted that meaningful work is key in determining employees’ attitudes and behaviours at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The explosion of interest in the notion of work engagement, thus, highlights the shift in focus towards positive psychology and occupational health psychology, whilst also recognising the significance of human capital in driving organisational success (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Work engagement is understood “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74). However, several studies have suggested that the UK is suffering from an employee engagement deficit, with the majority of
employees being only somewhat engaged and lagging behind in international rankings (Towers Watson, 2012; Truss et al., 2006; Wiley, Kowske & Herman, 2010). It is to no surprise, then, that the focus of academics, practitioners and governments alike has been on determining the antecedents for engagement and how this can best be encouraged in work contexts.

Research suggests that high levels of work engagement lead to a number of positive outcomes. These include improved in-role and extra role performance (Salanova, Agut & Peiró, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). At the same time, it has been shown to be associated with increased commitment levels (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006; Halbesleben, 2010; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Yalabik, Rossenberg, Kinnie & Swart, 2014). Work engagement has also been linked to lower intention to quit and reduced levels of turnover (Hakanen et al., 2006; Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Saks, 2006). It follows that engaged employees are often seen as more confident, productive and resilient in facing the demands of their work environment. In other words, a disengaged workforce, thus, has the potential to be less productive, less committed and more likely to leave the organisation, which then incurs replacement and recruitment costs. Similarly, disengaged employees who stay can also present a threat to the organisation’s optimal functioning through negative attitudes and behaviours at work. Consequently, the costs of a disengaged workforce drive the need for further research of the antecedents and drivers of work engagement. Despite the recent increase in publications in this field, clarity about the influencing factors of work engagement is still limited (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014).

In the context of continued turmoil, organisations will most likely have greater difficulties in meeting these perceived obligations. In fact, Turnley & Feldman (1998) found that employees experiencing organisational changes, such as a merger, reorganisation or downsizing are more likely to perceive psychological contract breach (PCB). PCB is defined as the “cognition that one’s organisation has failed to meet one or more obligations within one’s psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one’s contributions” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Studies have found that PCBs can not only happen on a daily to weekly basis (Conway & Briner, 2002), but also that over 78% of public sector employees (Jackie Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000) and over 80% of managers (Turnley & Feldman, 2000) have experienced them. The perceived discrepancy between what employees felt they were promised and what they receive has potential detrimental effects for both the individual and organisation alike.

When employees perceive their psychological contracts to be fulfilled, they often feel a greater sense of job satisfaction, commitment and overall well-being (Conway, Guest & Trenberth, 2011). However the perception of breach can negate these effects. Research has also suggested that negative experiences, such as PCB, can have a significant impact on employee attitudes and behaviours. Exploring the impact of PCB on work engagement is, therefore, one useful way of exploring the reasons for the UK’s employee engagement deficit. Prior studies have predominantly focused on
investigating psychological contract fulfilment and work engagement, with Rayton & Yalabik’s (2014) being the first study to connect PCB with work engagement. They suggest that PCB is central to determining the quality of the social exchange relationship of the employee with their organisation. They conceptualise PCB as a resource loss, which can lower job satisfaction and prompt employees to reciprocate such frustration with lower levels of work engagement. As such, “The failure to deliver on expectations induces feelings of resource loss not only because of the initial failure to deliver, but also because the unmet expectations lead to changes in employee expectations about the delivery of other resources subject to the exchange relationship” (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014, p. 2383). In an effort to understand the antecedents of work engagement better, Rayton & Yalabik (2014) make calls for future research to investigate the breach-satisfaction-engagement relationship further using social support, such as leader-member exchange (LMX) or perceived organisational support (POS), to supplement their findings.

Hence, the central aim of this research is to investigate the role that perceived leader and organisational support (LMX, POS) play in the employee experience of work engagement. Moreover, the quality of these relationships and the variation in exchange content will be explored via perceived psychological contract breaches (PCB). To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to integrate these aspects into one study. As discussed previously, employees increasingly have to cope with higher demands and less resources in a turbulent environment and hence, the role of support is likely to play a key role in alleviating these.

Whilst employees develop a number of different interpersonal relationships when at work (Dutton & Ragins, 2007), the employee-line management relationship is seen to be most influential (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This is perhaps due to the proximity, power and level of discretion that they have in providing the relevant resources, challenges and opportunities to their staff. Some suggest line managers help to instil meaning into work and thus help drive the effectiveness of their employees (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer & Ferris, 2012; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1999). This view is mirrored by others who contend that trusting and supportive line manager relationships, in particular, can help drive a sense of belonging and identity within the organisation and as a result, help it achieve its objectives (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). It is therefore a question regarding the quality of the interpersonal relationship that can encourage or hinder employees from investing themselves and thus, fully engaging with their work (Kahn, 2010).

It becomes evident that the line manager can play a key role in influencing how the employee feels at work. Previous research, however, has rather investigated individual resource aspects rather than the impact of the line manager relationship itself (Schaufeli, 2015). Regarding which, autonomy has been found to be positively related to work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; De Lange, De Witte & Notelaers, 2008; Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2007). Moreover, other studies suggest that job insecurity (Mauno et al., 2007) role stressors, such as workload and a demanding work environment, lead to lower levels of work engagement (Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola, 2008). Other researchers have also used composite measures of
social support including colleagues and the organisation, but few studies have differentiated the role of supervisor support. One of which, a study of Finnish teachers, demonstrated that supervisor support, information, appreciation and organisational climate function as job resources and buffered the negative impact of students misbehaving on work engagement (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Another study, using data from two Irish maternity hospitals, advocated a “best fit model where perceived supervisor support, social support from peers, prosocial impact on others and autonomy explained more than 52 per cent of variance in work engagement” (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013, p. 1427). Lastly, perceived supervisory and organisational support alongside relevant development opportunities is thought to predict future work engagement (Barbier, Hansez, Chmiel, & Demerouti, 2013). In line with the notion of optimal functioning, a South African study claims that when organisations offer supervisory support that capitalises on employee strengths it will likely foster work engagement (Botha & Mostert, 2014).

However, social support, including support from the line manager, has often been conceptualised as an instrumental resource for achieving work goals, whilst buffering the impact of demands (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008). The generally held wisdom that employees leave line managers rather than organisations highlights the significance of this relationship. Kahn & Heaphy (2014) hold that research lacks knowledge of the components that make up the quality of the employee-line manager relationship, such as mutual trust, respect and likeability, which perhaps play a bigger role in driving work engagement. Some suggest that leaders can therefore play a key role in balancing the demands and resources of employees at work (Schaufeli, 2015).

Given the potential significance of this relationship, it is surprising to see that efforts to link work engagement with a more holistic representation of the employee-line manager relationship have only emerged recently. Most notably, work engagement has been connected to positive leadership styles such as transformational leadership (Gahdi, Fernando & Caputi, 2013; Kopperud, Martinsen & Humborstad, 2013; Song, Kolb, Lee & Kim, 2012; Tims, Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2011; Vincent-Höper, Muser & Janneck, 2012).

Social exchange theory recognises the potential significance of the line manager and this is captured by the Leader Member Exchange (LMX) construct (Wayne, Shor & Liden, 1997). This denotes the development of trusting, supporting and mutual relationships between the line manager and employee over time. In line with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) rule of social exchange, employees will aim to return interesting and meaningful work activities by exerting more effort and greater performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High levels of LMX lead to improved job performance, satisfaction, role clarity and lower turnover intentions, because they are often characterised by greater levels of support (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Li, Sanders, & Frenkel, 2012; Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012).

Calls for research linking LMX and work engagement have been made for some time (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010; Segers,
De Prins & Brouwers, 2010). Nonetheless, studies in this field are still in their infancy (Breevart, Bakker, Demerouti & van den Heuvel, 2015). In fact, Breevart et al. (2015, p. 765) regarding their work, claim “this study contributes to the literature by being one of the first to study the mechanism explaining the relationship between LMX and job performance and to explore the relationship between LMX and employee work engagement.” In their study of Dutch police officers, they concluded that high quality LMX relationships create a more resourceful work environment, which enables employees to feel engaged.

Despite some studies having suggested that supportive relationships help create an engaged workforce, it is not yet understood why some line managers do not engage employees. Some authors contend that employees only engage “when they feel they will be treated fairly in terms of the distribution of rewards, procedures by which decisions to rewards are made and finally, whether bosses and colleagues display courtesy, warmth and support in their interaction” (Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009, p. 13). Line manager discretion in the extent to which they fulfil these perceptions is likely to influence the degree to which employees engage with their work. Thus. Investigating the LMX-PCB-work engagement relationship offers one way of providing greater insight into this matter. To date and to the best of my knowledge, no studies have yet investigated this association and hence, it will represent the central focus of this research.

There continues to be a debate over whether line managers and leaders act as agents of the organisation or whether employees differentiate between these. In some cases, the supervisor is seen as key to delivering the organisation’s appreciation or concern for the employee’s well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In order to provide greater clarity of the antecedents of work engagement, the role of perceived organisational support (POS) alongside PCB is also be investigated in this research. Like LMX, POS is based on social exchange theory, with reciprocity being a key element (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). In line with this thinking, employees feel obliged to help their organisation through increased effort and commitment in exchange for relevant resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Some studies suggest that POS is a stronger predictor of commitment than supervisor support (Dawley, Andrews & Bucklew, 2008), whilst others note the positive impact of POS on employee performance and lower intention to leave (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle, Edmondson & Hansen, 2009).

1.2.1. Contributions to Theory

It is clear that the studies investigating PCB and work engagement as well as LMX and work engagement are still limited. In line with the aforementioned prevalence and potential negative impact of PCB (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia & Esposo, 2008; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski & Bravo, 2007), and along with the potential importance of the line manager relationship, this is surprising. Positioning variation in exchange content from both the leader (LMX) and the organisation (POS) as distant predictors of PCB is likely to
reveal the extent to which this impacts on work engagement. This is the first known study to investigate this relationship. As such, this study contributes to the body of research about antecedents of work engagement and extends social exchange theory to incorporate these aspects.

1.2.2. Contributions to Practice

This research highlights the importance of developing high quality social exchange relationships with both the leader and the organisation in engaging employees. The majority of employees perceive their managers as communicating ineffectively (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). Regular meetings and constructive feedback as part of performance reviews appear key in managing the employee-line manager relationship. Greater listening and relationship skills can be trained to improve this over time and hence, relevant training courses should be considered to develop line manager’s skills in relation to managing their staff (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982). In line with this thinking, role clarity can foster a feeling of ownership and improved performance (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Therefore, line managers, should outline the relevant roles and responsibilities as well as how these connect to the bigger organisational aims. Moreover, some suggest that high performance expectations can lead to future work engagement (Barbier et al., 2013). Consequently, line managers should communicate and challenge their employees in order for them to rise to the challenge and improve their performance.

Ineffective communication has been found to create an environment of mistrust (Timmins, 2011) and can increase the perception of breaches. In the first instance, organisations should provide clarity and realistic expectations from the moment that employees join the organisation. Organisations should try to make use of human resource initiatives, such as inductions, to improve the socialisation of newcomers. Social support from colleagues has been found to enhance positive experiences at work further in that socialisation efforts can help employees establish a support network. Moreover, organisational changes, such as mergers, expansion and restructuring activities, are also perceived as breaches by employees (Turnley & Feldman, 1998). Hence, changes in perceived promises around rewards and benefits, such as training courses and career progression opportunities due to reduced budgets or headcounts, should be clearly communicated so as to manage expectations.

1.3. Narrative Style of this Thesis

Some suggest that “the question of authorial voice is critical in qualitative research” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 16). Regarding which, the choice lies either between a detached third person style, or a more personal first person style of reporting. Whilst traditional and quantitative research often adopts the former in an effort to demonstrate rigour and the objective position of the researcher, qualitative research recognises that I as the researcher co-create meaning (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In line with the social
constructionist stance adopted for this research and as explained in Chapter 3, as the researcher, I become embedded into the research itself. Wolcott, thus, encourages qualitative researchers “to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research among others rather than on them” (2009, p. 17). Hence, it is important to recognise that my experiences, beliefs and interpretations shape this research as much as those of the participants that were involved in this research. Consequently, adopting a narrative first person style for this thesis appears coherent with the chosen philosophical approaches. With this in mind, it is deemed that a narrative style more readily acknowledges the critical role of the researcher as being part of the process. It, thus, helps to gain greater clarity over ownership of meaning. As a result, the reader can, for instance, differentiate more clearly between my own interpretations and those of my interview participants. It follows that I discuss my personal experiences and research motivation in line with this approach before detailing the structure of the overall thesis document.

1.4. Research Motivation

Interpersonal relations and organisational behaviour at work have been the central theme of my career to date, both in industry and academia. Following my undergraduate degree in Human Resource Management, I have worked within this field for a number of UK private sector organisations and have since experienced several different management styles. Throughout this time, I have been fortunate enough to experience high-quality relationships with managers. Some of these managers have taken on a mentor like role, making me feel not only more confident in seeking challenges and taking on additional responsibilities, but also being more willing to go the extra mile. This was particularly important in shaping my early career experiences and understanding the inner workings of organisations.

However, following the recession in 2008, I was also unfortunate to experience a low quality relationship with one of my line managers and the organisation. The environment at the time was characterised by numerous restructuring activities and an overarching lack of clarity over the future. What is interesting to note was the difference this environment made to my willingness to contribute over time and the extent to which it impacted on my personal ability and confidence to do my job. Looking back, it was the combination of both positive and negative experiences, which made me curious about the extent to which the line manager has power over employees’ attitudes and behaviours at work. In fact, it was the latter experience that led me to not only leave the organisation, but also to gain a better understanding of the complexities of interpersonal relationships. To this end, I pursued a Master’s degree in Management Psychology with my dissertation focusing on investigating psychosocial risks and work-related stress from different stakeholder perspectives. This interest in the impact of interpersonal relationships led me to my current PhD research exploring how support and the impact of psychological contract breaches relate to employee work engagement. Additionally, exploring this relationship within the context of recent organisational change, such as a merger, expansion and restructuring activities amongst UK organisations allowed me to relate to
my interview participants better. In sum, my motivation for my PhD research at the University of Bath is grounded in both my personal experience as well as in the desire to provide greater insights into the complexities of the workplace for both academia and industry.

1.5. Structure of the Document

This section provides an overview of the structure of this thesis. In this chapter, I have discussed the changing nature of work and the implications this has had for employees’ psychological contract. I have also reviewed the role of different types of support, in particular, line management support, in this context. Following this, I have highlighted the growing profile and importance of work engagement as the focus for this research. I have also addressed the importance of this research, first, in terms of it providing greater insights into the antecedents of work engagement. Second, this study also addresses gaps in the current literature by being the first, to my knowledge, to link PCB to work engagement, using employees’ exchange relationship with their line manager (LMX) and organisational support (POS). Similarly, contributions to practice in informing line manager training and organisational initiatives are also investigated. My motivation for this research as well as the overall style adopted for this thesis has also been discussed.

Chapter 2 builds on the contextual discussion of the first chapter and reviews the current thinking and key developments of the relevant literature. I discuss how the area of work engagement has grown over recent years and is becoming increasingly relevant as a means of organisational success. I also highlight the theoretical framework, namely social exchange theory, adopted for this study. Following this, I move on to detail current debates and key studies regarding LMX, POS and PCB in order to highlight gaps in the literature. This research then aims at addressing these gaps and thus, focuses on better understanding in regards to the impact of LMX and PCB on work engagement, thus providing additional insights into the antecedents of work engagement.

Chapter 3 details the methodological approach taken to address the overarching research question. The nature of this research is exploratory in order to investigate in depth the extent to which variation in exchange content influences extent employees' experience of work engagement. This chapter discusses the careful selection of and provides justification for the philosophical and theoretical perspectives adopted. I thus discuss and justify the chosen relativist ontological perspective as well as the social constructionist epistemological approach adopted for this research by contrasting these with other potential options. Following this, I describe the methods, tools and techniques used to collect and analyse the data. I provide comprehensive explanations for the procedures adopted for initiating access to organisation and recruiting participants, as well as for conducting interviews in an ethical and rigorous manner. I finish the chapter on considerations regarding the thematic analysis of the data.
Chapter 4 is a detailed presentation of the findings following thematic data analysis. This chapter is organised into three broad categories of understanding work engagement, exploring LMX and the impact on employees as well as exploring POS and the impact on employees. Within these sections, I present individual and integrated themes, which are supported by relevant quotations from interview transcripts.

In Chapter 5, I integrate the key insights from my findings with relevant literature to discuss the extent to which my research provides empirical evidence for previous studies and also, how my research provides new insights. This chapter addresses the research question and hence, the value of my research is assessed in relation to this. Finally, the second part of Chapter 5 concludes this thesis. I discuss the implications of my findings both for academic research and practice. My research, thus, not only responds to previous calls for research to link LMX, PCB and work engagement, for it also provides additional insights in relation to on-going debates. Practical implications are also discussed with regards to influencing line management training and organisational support initiatives in order to prevent the perception of breach amongst employees and to foster work engagement. This research highlights the importance of developing supportive social exchanges at work, which is particularly relevant in the context of organisational change. Accounts in relation to the limitations of my research and future directions for research are also provided.

1.6. Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter has set the scene for this research and has outlined the theoretical and practical contributions of my work. This research will thus facilitate a deeper understanding into the social exchange processes that employees engage in to reciprocate unfavourable treatment such as PCBs from their line manager and the organisation. Academically, this will provide further insights into the antecedents of work engagement; whilst practically, investigating this relationship will foster a better understanding of the importance of the line manager relationship in determining employee attitudes and behaviours at work. At the same time, this will also help to inform future line management training and organisational initiatives to prevent instances of breach as well as to encourage work engagement amongst employees.

I have also provided insights into how my personal experiences at work and interest in academia have shaped my motivations for this thesis. I have completed the chapter by providing an overview of the structure of this thesis. The next section will explore the key ideas presented in this chapter in more depth.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to Chapter

The introductory chapter has provided an overview of the rationale, importance and context of my study. It has highlighted how the world of work has changed the psychological contract of today’s employees. The new market economy is now characterised by a greater need for effectiveness with lower resource levels, whereby employees increasingly face work intensification and reduced job security. As a consequence, there has been a shift in focus towards more meaningful work for employees, and an explosion of interest in positive psychology and employee engagement for scholars and practitioners. Employee engagement is thus seen as a potential solution to improve both organisational efficiencies and employee well being in order to face these challenges better.

In addition, the previous chapter has emphasised the potential value of social support and how this is becoming increasingly important in this context. In this chapter, a review of the literature involves discussing the positive benefits of support regarding employee attitudes and behaviours, both from the line manager and the organisation, in more depth. It also considers that despite some recent research activity, there continues to be gaps in our understanding. One such gap is that we do not yet fully understand the processes by which employees change their work engagement levels in response to perceived exchange content from the leader and the organisation. Hence this will form the focus of this study.

In this chapter, I first critically evaluate the key studies, historical developments and debates in the field of employee engagement. I differentiate between academic and practitioner literature in the field and following this justify my narrower focus on work engagement (WE). I then explain my theoretical framework, namely social exchange theory (SET), which provides a sound rationale for understanding an employee’s motivation to engage in their work in exchange for support. Leader-member exchange (LMX) and perceived organisational support (POS) are positioned as key sources of support that can help drive an employee’s psychological connection or disconnection with their work. I therefore argue that psychological contract breach (PCB) can be interpreted as diminishing quality of exchange content and in line with SET prompts employees to reciprocate negatively by lowering their engagement level.

The focus of this study thus answers previous calls for more research linking LMX and work engagement. Moreover, it also but builds on recent research investigating the breach-satisfaction-engagement (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014) and the LMX-engagement-performance relationship (Breevaart et al., 2015). The overarching aim and research question will also be discussed.
2.2. Employee Engagement

The surge of interest in employee engagement, from practitioner and academic circles alike has elevated this concept to a ‘buzzword status’ (Halbesleben, 2011) since its first appearance (Kahn, 1990). Whilst academics were slow to follow the early practitioner hype surrounding engagement (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), research has since flourished (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Within the practitioner literature, engagement is said to lead to increased levels of productivity, customer satisfaction and employee retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). The popularity of employee engagement as an area of research has thus been fuelled by claims of a ‘dual promise’ improving not only employee well-being but also organisational performance (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck, 2011; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Through the eyes of the popular press, employee engagement has been positioned as a key way to enhancing profitability and establishing a competitive advantage (Rich et al., 2010). Schaufeli & Bakker (2010) however suggest that such inferences should be treated with caution as the majority of the practitioner literature lacks the academic rigour of peer reviewed publications, except for those conducted by the Gallup Organisation (Harter et al., 2002).

In recent years, the potential for increased performance and profitability of the concept of employee engagement has meant that it has not only attracted practitioners and academics, but also governments (Macleod & Clarke, 2009). The UK government for instance assembled the ‘Engage for Success’ taskforce in 2008 to investigate and gain understanding of engagement as well as its potential usefulness to businesses. This was particularly timely given the backdrop of the economic recession at the time. The taskforce has united representatives from business and academia in order to develop best practices and they have since identified four enablers of engagement namely strategic narrative, engaging managers, employee voice and integrity (Macleod & Clarke, 2009). Since then research has suggested a current lack of engagement in the UK. For instance, in a study comparing engagement levels across the 12 largest world economies, the UK only ranked 9th (Wiley et al., 2010) and other studies have found that less than a third of the UK workforce are highly engaged (Towers Watson, 2012). As part of the ‘Engage for Success’ taskforce, Rayton, Dodge, & D’Analeze (2012) combine academic and practitioner research to highlight further the potential positive impact of engagement on both individual and organisational performance. Developing an engaged workforce has become increasingly important to organisations (Shuck & Wollard, 2010) although it needs to be recognised that employees vary in what they value and what drives engagement at work (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, & Swart, 2005).

While engagement is a popular subject of study amongst practitioners, academics and beyond, it is apparent that the term is somewhat problematic due to its inconsistency in use. Not too long ago the engagement field was criticised for lacking rigorous research (Saks, 2006). Some use engagement in relation to one’s work, identifying what happens when people are interested in their job and what motivates them to partake in discretionary behaviour and higher performance levels (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli,
Salanova, et al., 2002). Others perceive engagement in relation to one’s employer and the degree to which they identify or feel connected to their organisation (Saks, 2006). Guest (2014) further distinguishes between work and organisation engagement, whereby the former is underpinned by a focus on well-being, whilst the latter pertains focusing on performance. The growing interest in this phenomenon has resulted in various different conceptualisations such as psychological, employee, job, work and organisational engagement to name but a few.

Another way to differentiate work engagement from the broader conceptualisations of employee engagement is the debate around state vs. trait. Previous work has suggested that engagement functions as something that varies between, rather than within individuals and has been criticised for viewing engagement as a static trait. For instance, low neuroticism, high extraversion, consciousness and emotional stability, optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem have been associated with engaged employees (Bakker, 2009). Trait engagement is concerned with an individual’s disposition to be engaged, whereas recognising engagement as a state reflects an individual’s feelings of being engaged (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Schaufeli & Salanova (2007) more accurately describe engagement as being a mood. Research however has since shown that levels of engagement can fluctuate, which suggests that engagement might be better conceptualised as a state (Sonnentag, 2003). This is consistent with Kahn’s (1990) work, which noted that levels of engagement can vary within as well as between individuals. Moreover, Schaufeli, Salanova et al.’s (2002) definition of work engagement also view engagement as a motivational-psychological state.

In an effort to provide a more unified definition, Macey & Schneider (2008, p. 4) offered a seemingly all-encompassing definition of engagement. They described it as “a desirable condition [that] has organisational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm and focused effort and energy.” This conceptualisation thus incorporated trait, state and behavioural engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Whilst a large number of different engagement definitions exist, there is general agreement that at the very least it is perceived to be something desirable and implying a level of energy. Engagement research has since undergone substantial research and it continues to be an area of hot debate (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Shuck, 2013). Whilst the initial criticism of the engagement literature as lacking a universally agreed definition still persist, there is evidence towards some convergence and hence, the key approaches to engagement and recent developments are discussed next.

2.2.1. Approaches to Employee Engagement

In order to be able to explore whether employees change how engaged they are in response to perceived exchange content from their leader and the organisation, we must first critically evaluate the literature and key developments within the engagement field. A helpful way to distinguish the different streams of engagement research and key contributions to the field is
Shuck’s (2011) categorisation into four key approaches to employee engagement.

The first approach is termed the *needs-satisfying* approach and is driven by Kahn’s (1990, 1992) work. Kahn’s was the first study to investigate engagement in a work context. By interviewing summer camp counsellors and employees of an architecture firm, he provided insights into engaging and disengaging experiences. Thus engagement is conceptualised as “harnessing of organisation’s members’ selves to their work roles” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). In essence, it is “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s preferred self in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Moreover, this connection to work can be differentiated in terms of being cognitively, emotionally and physically engaged.

Whilst Kahn’s work has been vastly influential in the engagement field (Schaufeli, 2014), he inferred principles of his work from sociologists, psychologists and group theorists. For instance, it is via role theory (Goffman, 1961) that Kahn suggests individuals either engage or disengage themselves from their work roles depending on the degree to which they identify with these. Disengagement is seen as withdrawing or distancing oneself from one’s work role. Broadly speaking, by suggesting that psychological experiences influence attitudes and behaviours at work, theories such as existence, relatedness and growth theory (Alderfer, 1972) as well as job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) have been key in informing Kahn’s (1990) three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability. If all three of these conditions are satisfied, then individuals feel cognitively, emotionally and physically engaged at work. Kahn found meaningfulness to be the strongest predictor for engagement and this was amplified when work was seen as challenging, varied, creative and fairly autonomous as well as being characterised by role clarity and rewarding interactions with others (Kahn, 1990). With reference to the focus of social support in my study, Kahn’s work also highlights the importance of management in providing psychological safety by delivering adequate support and clarity.

From this perspective, being engaged is ‘psychological’ and dynamic as it moves between active expressions of self and employment of self to performance of one’s work role. It is about the level that individuals invest energy into these activities so as to be psychologically present. Whilst Kahn’s work has laid the foundations of engagement research, he did not provide a way to operationalise this (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). In fact, it was not until May, Gilson & Harter (2004) developed a 13 item scale of cognitive, emotional and physical engagement, which was validated with a sample of 213 US insurance firm employees, that this issue was addressed. May et al. (2004) was the first study to test Kahn’s model empirically and it was found that all three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability were related to individual’s feeling engaged. Job enrichment and role fit functioned as antecedents to meaningfulness. At the same time, co-worker and supervisor relations predicted psychological safety, whilst available resources predicted psychological availability. Meaningfulness was
found to be the strongest predictor of engagement across a number of studies (Zhenjiao Chen, Zhang, & Vogel, 2011; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004).

More recently however, additional attempts to operationalise Kahn’s work have emerged. Building on Kahn’s conceptualisation, Rich et al. (2010) drew on measures such as work intensity and positive affect (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Russell & Barrett, 1999) to devise an 18 item scale of ‘job engagement.’ It was initially tested amongst 245 US fire fighters and a shorter version was later used in a UK study (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). Both of these studies showed that engagement relates to organisational citizenship behaviours, task performance as well as intention to quit (Alfes et al., 2013; Rich et al., 2010). When examining the impact of engagement on outcomes, Alfes et al. (2013) however stressed that perceived organisational and supervisor support play a key role in this relationship.

The most recently proposed nine item Intellectual Social Affective (ISA) scale used a sample of 683 UK retail staff (Soane et al., 2012). The initial findings suggest that ISA may have greater predictive power on individual level outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviours, in-task performance and turnover intention than UWES. Whilst Kahn’s (1990) work has substantially influenced our thinking and development regarding the engagement phenomenon, given three different measures have been put forward, this suggests that the best way to operationalise, this remains unclear. It has however helped to highlight the underlying complexities that drive individuals to express themselves in their work activities and of particular note has been the role of meaningful interaction and support from colleagues and supervisors.

The second approach to employee engagement is the burnout–antithesis approach, which is further divided into two schools of thought. In line with the positive psychology movement and according to the first school of thought, burnout was no longer positioned as a form of occupational stress in its own right, but rather as an erosion of job engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Initially challenging and meaningful work becomes increasingly unpleasant as the three dimensions of engagement (energy, involvement and efficacy) turn into burnout (exhaustion, involvement and inefficacy) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). From this perspective burnout and engagement are positioned as direct opposites and are operationalised as either positive or negative scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, it is suggested that burnout and engagement inversely mediate the six domains of work life (workload, control, rewards, recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values) (Maslach et al., 2001).

In contrast, the school of thought within the burnout–antithesis approach found a negative relationship between engagement and burnout and thus view these as related but independent constructs that should be measured by separate instruments (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). As a result, these two concepts are no longer at the opposite end of the same continuum and it is no longer appropriate to assess them using opposite MBI scores. Instead Schaufeli, Salanova, et al. (2002) suggested that engagement and
burnout were different kinds of well-being measured by activation (exhaustion to vigour) and identification (cynicism to dedication). Consequently engagement is characterised by high and burnout by low activation and identification levels (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). Absorption and efficacy however were not found to be opposites. Thus, engagement was defined “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” and subsequently referred to as work engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p.74). Engagement from this perspective refers to an omnipresent affective-cognitive state of mind at work.

There continues to be a debate about whether burnout and work engagement are in fact distinct concepts. A recent study of Dutch police officers suggests that burnout and work engagement can be seen to overlap rather than be conceptually distinct (Taris, Ybema & van Beek, 2017). However, it appears that a greater number of studies support the view that burnout and work engagement can be clearly differentiated. Recent meta-analytic studies suggest that burnout and work engagement are in fact distinct concepts that should be measured using different instruments (Goering, Shimazu, Zhou, Wada & Sakai, 2017; Maricutoiu, Sulea & Iancu, 2017). In a theoretical paper by Sonnentag (2017) it is argued that task specificity of work engagement explains the fluctuations within persons, from day to day and throughout the day (Sonnentag, 2003; Sonnentag, Demerouti & Dormann, 2010; Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). It is this fluctuation, which therefore differentiates work engagement from burnout, which is contrastingly conceptualised as a stable and prolonged state of depletion.

Work engagement is assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which is divided into three parts including vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Extensive care was taken in the development of this instrument in order to overcome the previous criticisms of the MBI. In a side by side comparison of the MBI and UWES measures, it was noted that the latter performed better with regards to convergent and predictive validity (Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas, & Saks, 2012). The authors also suggest that there continues to be a debate about whether engagement is best conceptualised as a multidimensional or one-dimensional construct. Given the vast amount of studies and research activity investigating work engagement from this perspective, it is no surprise that it is deemed the most extensively cited academic definition and that UWES is the most commonly used measure (Albrecht, 2010; Viljevac et al., 2012; Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013; Knight, Patterson & Dawson, 2017). Others highlight that the popularity of the UWES does not mean it is without flaws. Some propose that it shares similarities with other job attitudes (stress, job performance or organisational commitment) and its reliability and validity should be examined more closely (Byrne, Peters & Weston, 2016). At the same time, having a measure as popular as UWES supports efforts in unifying the otherwise fragmented field of engagement (Knight et al. 2017).

Later studies expanded on this school of thought and found that burnout was predicted by job demands and work engagement by job resources (Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009). This line of thinking has been instrumental in
driving forward the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model in explaining both the health-impairment and motivational processes that drive employees to feel engaged or not (Bakker, van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009). This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter when talking about antecedents of work engagement. Recent development within this approach suggest that rather than positioning engagement and burnout as related but independent, they are better understood as being distinct from one another (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012, Maricutoiu et al. 2017).

Schaufeli & Bakker (2010) argue that the key differences between the first and second approach to employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Kahn & Byosiere, 1992; Maslach et al., 1996, 2001; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002) is that the former centres on work roles and the extent to which individuals identify and invest energy into these. In contrast, the latter centres purely on the work activity. “Both of these conceptualisations however agree that it entails behavioural-energetic (vigour), and emotional (dedication) and a cognitive (absorption) component” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, both approaches recognise the value of resources in facilitating engagement. Similarly, others add that these approaches differ in terms of their nature and role regarding how they describe engagement (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2015). On the one hand, Kahn (1990) suggests that engagement is a short-lived behavioural response to work activities that can be measured qualitatively. On the other hand, Schaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) conceptualised engagement to be a more stable, persistent state of mind that can be captured quantitatively (Bailey et al., 2015).

The third approach is dubbed the satisfaction-engagement approach and was inspired by Harter et al.’s (2002) meta-analytic work of 7,939 business units in 36 companies from the Gallup database. Harter et al. (2002, p. 417) defined engagement as the “individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work.” They found that business unit outcomes such as customer satisfaction, productivity and profit were significantly and positively related to employee satisfaction and engagement (Harter et al., 2002). Furthermore, they identified employee satisfaction as an antecedent to engagement. They are thought to have published one of the “most read and cited” works of engagement (Shuck, 2011, p. 311). Additionally, this represents the only influential practitioner literature that has been acknowledged and published in peer reviewed journals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). In fact, one of the reasons for the popularity of this work is the suggestion that “changes in management practices that increase employee satisfaction may increase business-unit outcomes, including profit” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 268).

In 1998, the Gallup Organisation designed an instrument to measure engagement dubbed the ‘Q12.’ Up until 2006, the Q12 was administered to an impressive 7 million employees across 112 countries (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, & Asplund, 2006). Moreover, it includes studies across 21 industries, which have been grouped into five categories such as financial, manufacturing, retail, services and transportation (Harter et al., 2002). Its initial design was to facilitate ease of use in instigating change and embedding management interventions in the workplace (Macleod & Clarke,
Regardless of the intention however these measures have been heavily criticised for measuring an employee’s overall attitude or attachment to the organisation, rather than with work engagement itself (Briner, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). As a consequence, this approach is seen to blur the lines between engagement and constructs such as job satisfaction and job involvement (Bailey et al., 2015; Guest, 2014). Moreover, it does not adequately distinguish between antecedents and outcomes such as affective commitment and discretionary behaviour or organisational citizenship behaviours (Briner, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Truss et al., 2013). Overall, the operationalisation of this approach have been found to lack construct and discriminant validity (Guest, 2014).

Despite these criticisms, studies to this day continue to add to these findings. The suggested significant links between engagement and business outcomes thus continue to fuel the popularity of this approach. For instance, James, McKechnie & Swanberg (2011) using a sample of over 6,000 retail staff found that supervisor support and recognition, schedule satisfaction and job clarity significantly predicted engagement across all age groups. Furthermore, Abraham (2012) confirmed job satisfaction as being an antecedent to engagement and further highlighted that the nature of the job, the superior’s recognition of one’s work as well as comparative benefits are positively linked to engagement.

Lastly, the fourth approach is deemed multidimensional (Saks, 2006). In the words of Saks (2006, p. 602) engagement is understood as a “unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance.” It is evident that Saks (2006) built on previous work by Kahn (1990) in that both focused on the performance of work roles, however this approach suggests that engagement goes beyond the job. As a consequence, Saks (2006) created two six item measures, which were validated amongst a sample of 102 Canadian employees. His work thus differentiates between job engagement (performing the work role) and organisation engagement (performing the role as a member of the organisation). At the same time, Saks (2006) also innovatively suggested that engagement occurred through social exchange whereby those with higher levels of perceived organisational support are more likely to reciprocate with high levels of job and organisation engagement. He clearly highlighted the reciprocal and positive potential of support in the engagement-outcome relationship and arguing that “engaged employees are also more likely to have higher-quality relationships with their employer leading them to also have more positive attitudes, intentions and behaviours” (Saks, 2006, p. 607). Purcell (2014) however criticised Saks conceptualisation for focusing on managerial practices that seem related to this phenomenon, contending that it should perhaps more accurately be described as ‘behavioural engagement.’

Saks (2006) noted that whilst perceived organisational support (POS) predicts both job and organisation engagement, each type is driven by different antecedents and thus, they function as distinct constructs. That is, job characteristics predict job engagement and procedural justice was key for driving organisation engagement. Interestingly however both types of engagement were positively related with outcomes such as job satisfaction,
organisational citizenship behaviour and organisational commitment although organisation engagement appeared to be a stronger predictor of these (Saks, 2006). Whilst this conceptualisation has been criticised for having had limited uptake and application in practice (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), Saks bridged the previous work (Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002) and extended thinking by positioning engagement as a multidimensional state. Hence others suggest that this “approach is of value and could be useful in future development of employee engagement theory and practice” (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014). Despite this overview of the key approaches and development of the employee engagement literature not being exhaustive as this is beyond the current scope of the study, it has demonstrated that research in this field continues to evolve and there continues to be sustained interest and ambiguities surrounding this phenomenon. Each of these approaches has been useful and contributed to the body of literature in different ways.

Interestingly, most approaches have alluded to the positive potential and need for social connectedness to co-workers, supportive supervisors or perceived organisational support to different degrees. Feeling connected to others therefore can be a contributing factor to feeling engaged at work (Freeney & Tiernan, 2009), although co-workers may only have limited impact (Othman & Nasuradin, 2012). One study, reviewing work engagement in nursing, suggests that engagement not only improves quality of care by nurses but also that “nurse managers are key to promoting engagement” (Garcia-Sierra, Fernandez-Castro & Martinez-Zaragoza, 2015, p. 1). Whilst it is recognised that sources of support can play an important role in influencing engagement, more research is required to understand the ways in which this occurs. This study therefore explores the importance and impact of leader-member exchange on employee experiences of work engagement.

It is worth noting that some studies claiming to investigate engagement are perhaps more accurately measuring antecedents of engagement or an employee’s overall attitude at work. This confuses the boundaries between the antecedents, the experience of engagement at work and its outcomes. Hence it is important to differentiate academic and practitioner/consultancy literature and narrowing the focus from employee to work engagement respectively.

2.3. Narrowing the Focus to Work Engagement

Whilst there is no formal consensus on a universal definition of engagement amongst practitioners and academics, there is evidence to suggest that the conceptualization of work engagement could address this issue. Despite the popularity and research activity surrounding this phenomenon, practitioner and organisation engagement conceptualisations have been criticised for more accurately measuring job satisfaction, job involvement or affective commitment of employees rather than the phenomenon of engagement itself (Briner, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Truss et al., 2013). Macey & Schneider (2008, p. 4) highlighted that unfortunately most engagement definitions have come to include some or all of “involvement, commitment,
passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy.” Moreover Guest (2014) has argued that in particular organisation engagement lacks a sufficient-evidence base as well as construct and measurement clarity in comparison to work engagement. To add to this confusion, some have used the terms ‘employee engagement’ and ‘work engagement’ synonymously (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). For clarity and consistency purposes, this study will refer to work engagement and will use Schaufeli, Salanova et al.’s (2002) definition as “from a research perspective, diverse conceptualisations make it difficult to accumulate a coherent body of research knowledge and form a practice perspective, it becomes problematic to make recommendations for actions” (Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010, p. 31).

Taking into account the low levels of engagement among employees in different countries, it is clear that engagement matters and that more research is needed to advance our understanding of the major factors impacting this phenomenon. Despite many different conceptualisations and ways of measurement, there is evidence of there being some convergence. From the academic perspective, work engagement as outlined by Schaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) and as measured by UWES has become the most widely cited, used and validated scale across a number of settings and cultures. In fact, in a systematic synthesis of 214 studies, it was found that 86% adopted this approach (Bailey et al., 2015). Hence, for this study the focus is on employees’ relationship with work.

Work engagement is understood “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74). Following this conceptualisation also narrows down the focus from employee or organisation to work engagement. Put differently, work engagement is more specific as it denotes the employees’ experience with their work rather than with the organisation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). This helps distinguish it clearly from potentially related constructs and thus provides a more thorough foundation for theoretical development. Hence the rationale for adopting “work engagement is [because it is] the most discussed and empirically validated form of employee engagement in the current academic literature” (Yalabik et al., 2013, p. 2802). Others concur with this view and add that work engagement is now ‘well-established’ within this field. Widespread evidence suggests it is a valid construct, and it now functions as the most extensively cited academic definition (Albrecht, 2010; Bailey et al. 2015, Guest, 2014; Sparrow & Balain, 2010; Viljevac et al., 2012).

Given the research activity investigating work engagement from this perspective, it becomes clear that UWES is also the most commonly used measure (Albrecht, 2010; Bailey et al., 2015; Viljevac et al., 2012; Yalabik et al., 2013). UWES is divided into three substituent subscales including vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). It has been made available in 21 languages and an international database has been set up holding the engagement records of over 60,000 employees (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). The original 17-item UWES measure however has come under some criticism in that its three-factor structure is not sufficiently reliable (Wefald, Mills, Smith, & Downey, 2012). However, a shortened version of nine items (UWES-9) has been developed (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova,
2006), which has proven to be even more popular than the original UWES (Albrecht, 2010). This is perhaps because it offers greater construct validity across a more diverse set of occupations (Seppälä et al., 2009). As mentioned earlier, whilst UWES is not without its flaws, the popularity of this instrument helps streamline the body of work engagement research (Byrne et al., 2016). In an effort to further reduce the time constraints and demands for individuals and organisations alike, a three-item version (UWES-3) has been proposed and validated across five countries (Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, Salanova & De Witte, 2017). Results from this study suggest a similar performance to UWES-9, so that it may be seen as a shorter, yet reliable and valid measurement instrument. However more research must be done to validate the UWES-3, as convenience sampling rather than representative sampling was used for four out of the five countries.

Hence there continues to be debates about whether an overall score for work engagement can sometimes be equally useful or more in empirical research than scores on the three separate dimensions of the UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). In fact, most studies using this conceptualisation of work engagement combine these three factors into one higher order construct in order to achieve greater consistency (Bailey et al., 2015). Despite some criticisms, the UWES-17 and UWES-9 have demonstrated their suitability for measuring work engagement across various occupational groups, white collar, blue collar workers, health care workers as well as educators to name just a few. Moreover, whilst originating from Europe it has since been validated across several countries including Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Finland, South Africa, China and Canada (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). However some scepticism remains around the international transferability of this measure (Goliath-Yarde & Roodt, 2011).

Vigour denotes an individual’s willingness to invest effort whilst at work, whereby it is representative of high energy levels and mental resilience as individuals persevere through difficult situations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It is assessed using items such as “At work, I feel bursting with energy”, “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.” The dedication dimension mirrors the extent to which an employee identifies and is involved with his/her work through feelings of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Sample items for this include “I am enthusiastic about my job” and “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.” Lastly, absorption is characterised by the extent to which an employee is engrossed in their work, whereby they lose their sense of time and find it challenging to detach themselves from their work (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). Examples of items from this dimension include “I am immersed in my work” and “When I am working, I forget everything else around me.” Some have suggested that the absorption dimension is very similar to the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a momentary state of optimal functioning, however absorption differs from this in that it reflects a more “pervasive and persistent state of mind” and is only focused on the work context not beyond (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74).
2.3.1. Differentiating Work Engagement from Other Constructs

In order to provide a firmer foundation for later theoretical development, it is important to establish clarity about the work engagement construct in terms of what it is and what it is not. Part of the confusion surrounding engagement literature is the debate over whether it is simply ‘old wine in new bottles.’ In the words of Albrecht (2010, p. 5) “to be of any practical value [work] engagement needs to be shown to be different from related organisational constructs such as job involvement, job satisfaction, commitment, discretionary effort and turnover intention.”

Clarity about the work engagement construct will help us to better differentiate between the antecedents, experiences and outcomes of work engagement. It is thus important to first establish how work engagement differs from related concepts. Consequently, several studies have investigated this area and support that work engagement is a distinct construct (Christian et al., 2011; Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). According to Schaufeli & Bakker (2010) these can be usefully grouped into beliefs (job involvement, organisational commitment), affect (job satisfaction), psychological states (flow, workaholism) and behaviours (extra-role behaviour), which will serve as a guide for a more detailed discussion below.

Job involvement has been positioned as the construct relating most closely to work engagement. This is because it is deemed similar in relation to employees’ enthusiasm and resulting self-efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Lodahl & Kejner (1965) however define job involvement as “the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work, or the importance of work in his total self-image.” Thus job involvement relates more accurately to the belief or ‘cognitive judgement’ about how work relates to one’s self-worth rather (May et al., 2004). They further suggest that job involvement would be better positioned as an antecedent to engagement rather than engagement itself. Moreover, organisational commitment mirrors elements of identification, but centres more on an individual’s attachment and attitude to the organisation. Work engagement, however, is concerned with being attentive and absorbed when at work, rather than feeling connected with the organisation. In line with the emphasis on positive psychology, Hallberg & Schaufeli (2006) found strong correlations between health and work engagement, which highlight its focus on well-being and help to distance it from both job involvement and organisational commitment. Based on a factor analysis, they conclude that each of these three constructs is distinct (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006).

According to Locke (1976) job satisfaction can be defined as a “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job.” This is similar to work engagement to the extent it is defined as a positive mental state at work. However, others argue that job satisfaction and work engagement are located in different areas of job-related affect (Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010). From this perspective, job satisfaction appears more passive and is the degree to which an individual is content with one’s work. In contrast, work engagement speaks to the active investing of energy and feeling enthused by one’s work.
Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) is deemed as being the subjective experience of optimal functioning. It appears similar to work engagement and its absorption dimension as both are characterised as being immersed and focused on an activity, losing track of time and having a sense of enjoyment (Albrecht, 2010; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Interestingly, even the founders of the work engagement approach have commented that ‘absorption which is akin to the concept of flow […] should be considered as a consequence of work engagement, rather than one of its components’ (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 118). Whilst there are some similarities, flow is viewed as a short-term experience in life, which can include work. In contrast, although work engagement is known to fluctuate it refers to an overall more and persistent state of mind at work (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). It follows that these constructs differ most notably in terms of the range of context and duration of the experience.

Workaholism and work engagement are similar with regards to the emphasis on individuals working hard. Most simply put, “workaholism, a bad type of working hard, and work engagement, a good type of working hard” (Van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012, p. 30). These authors found that workaholics are pushed to stay at work for long hours in an effort to prove themselves and because they are more likely to be extrinsically motivated. In contrast, engaged employees might lose track of time because they are pulled towards an activity as they find it intrinsically motivating, challenging and enjoyable (Schaufeli, Bakker, van der Heijden, & Prins, 2009; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008; van Beek et al., 2012).

In the public domain, being engaged is often referred to as ‘going the extra mile’ however engagement needs to be more clearly differentiated. As such, extra-role behaviour denotes voluntary or discretionary effort on top of one’s formal role requirements and at times is also referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010). In-role behaviour for instance is what is required by the organisation and a meta-analysis showed that extra-role behaviour is better viewed as a potential outcome of engagement (Christian et al., 2011). In essence, an engaged employee may choose to go the ‘extra mile’ however it is not necessary to feeling engaged with one’s work. Lastly, whilst all of these essentially refer to positive aspects of organisational life, Albrecht (2010) suggests that some of this debate is founded due to empirical overlap and measurement imprecisions.

In response to the accusations that work engagement is simply ‘old wine in new bottles’ a number of studies have since investigated the validity of the concept of work engagement. Whilst some overlap has been recognised, work engagement has been clearly differentiated from for example job satisfaction, commitment and workaholism. Arguably, work engagement is most closely related to job involvement and flow. However, numerous studies have since investigated this and it has been concluded that work engagement be best seen as being useful, distinct and valid construct that is related to other well-established constructs in the organisational domain.
More importantly, “work engagement has added value over and above these related concepts” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010, p. 15) and hence continued research interest in this phenomenon is thus justified.

2.4. Establishing Social Exchange Theory as a Theoretical Framework

To date, researchers have used a number of different theoretical lenses to study work engagement. These include theories such as social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) job characteristics theory (JCT) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) self-determination theory (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989), conservation of resources (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), role theory (Kahn, 1990) broaden and build theory (Frederickson, 2001), as well as the job demands-resources model (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

According to Bailey et al. (2015) JD-R and SET are the two most commonly used frameworks to investigate this phenomenon. Hence, it follows that the potential usefulness of the JD-R theoretical framework will be evaluated and the reasons for choosing the SET framework are justified in this section.

2.4.1. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)

The findings of research have suggested that the JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) model is a valuable way of understanding engagement and its underlying motivational processes. In fact, it has become one of the most popular and most widely cited models to investigate this phenomenon (Albrecht, 2010). Whilst JD-R has recently been extended to include personal resources, there are also calls in the literature to extend this model to include relational factors such as leadership as well as contextual factors, including uncertain environments (Albrecht, 2010).

JD-R was initially developed in order to overcome the shortcomings of the demand-control (Karasek, 1979) and job-control-support models (Johnson & Hall, 1988). Hence, the fundamental premise and strength of the JD-R model is that it functions as an overarching model regardless of occupation and recognises that different occupations may face different risks (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). It organises work characteristics into job demands and resources in order to explain the underlying health impairment process that leads to burnout as well as the motivation process that leads to work engagement. It is worth noting however that job demands such as workload or job insecurity are not negative per se, but instead have the potential to turn into stressors if these demands persist over time (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Job demands have been defined as “aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills and are therefore associated with psychological costs” (Bakker et al., 2003, p. 20). In contrast, job resources (i.e. job control and support) have been defined as those aspects that help to achieve work goals, reduce potential costs of job demands as well as stimulate personal development (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Both job demands and job resources include a range of different
physical, psychological, social as well as organisational aspects of the work environment. Some suggest that job resources speak to intrinsic motivation of employees as they help in meeting basic needs of competence, autonomy and a sense of belonging (van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008).

In addition JD-R offers a useful way to organise the motivational process. Job resources have motivational potential and lead to high work engagement and excellent performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which is particularly applicable when job demands are high (Bakker et al., 2007). Hence job resources either play an intrinsic motivational role because they foster an employee’s growth, learning and development or an extrinsic role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. The JD-R model has since been extended to include personal resources (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007, 2009). Hence both job and personal resources foster work engagement according to JD-R.

Under this lens, job demands are seen to affect the strength of the association between resources (job, personal) and work engagement. In fact, a meta-analysis (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011) suggested that job demands can not only reduce the effect of job resources, but can actively hinder employees in feeling engaged.

Despite the popularity and merits of the JD-R theoretical framework, it has come under recent criticism for not being as clear as it makes out to be. In the first instance, it may oversimplify the motivation and health impairment process. A number of studies insist that although demands can be differentiated into negative hindrances or more positive challenges, it does not take into account the possibility of there being a neutral impact (Crawford, Lepine, & Rich, 2010; de Braine & Roodt, 2011). Others point out that the JD-R “fails to take account of heterogeneous, micro-and macro-level contextual factors, interpersonal interactions and emotional or irrational responses [and] issues of power and politics within the workplace [and] who controls resources and demands” (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 7). Without these influencing factors, under the JD-R it is implied that individuals respond rationally and in a linear fashion to resources and demands, which is not always the case.

### 2.4.2. Social Exchange Theory (SET)

One way to overcome the weaknesses of the JD-R approach is to use the SET as a theoretical framework for this study. Contrary to JD-R, SET denotes interpersonal interactions as well as the power and politics within these interactions. In relation to the focus of leader and organisational support, the ‘who’ controls the resources and demands of the employee becomes clear. SET thus lends itself nicely to exploring the emotions and perhaps irrational responses in relation to employees’ reactions to varying or diminishing levels of support.

Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005, p. 874) argue that “[SET] is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour.” For
instance, SET as used by Saks (2006) helped to explain why subordinates feel indebted to their leader or supervisor beyond what is specified in their job role and employment contract. It was found that social exchanges with higher levels of mutual respect, trust, loyalty and interpersonal affect leads to reciprocation of more positive attitudes and behaviours at work. The suitability of SET for this study lies in the fact that it helps provide understanding regarding the significance of social support including supervisor support in encouraging positive behaviours at work, which is discussed in more detail in the later section entitled Antecedents of Work Engagement (Section 2.6). The exchange content in this study will focus on job related aspects, as such, SET might help to highlight additional job related factors. As the aim of this research is to explore the interaction between the quality of exchange relationships and the level of work engagement, SET appears most appropriate for helping to understand this interaction.

Saks (2006) thought that a strong theoretical rationale for engagement was provided by SET. He argued that one way to repay the organisation is through their level of organisation in response to the resources that they receive from their organisation. Basic tenet of SET is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments as long as both parties abide by certain rules of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and are in a ‘state of reciprocal interdependence’ (Saks, 2006, p. 603).

The majority of theorists have suggested that at its most basic level, SET is concerned with a series of interactions that instil a sense of obligation in one party to return a favour of some kind to another party (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960). Blau (1964) described the nature of exchange relationships as carrying either economic or social properties, his conceptualisation of social exchange is in line with that of Gouldner (1960). In other words, the central idea of SET revolves around an on-going reciprocal relationship that is governed by a specific set of rules. Such rules include Gouldner’s (1960) universal rule of ‘norm of reciprocity’ which denotes an individual’s motivation to engage in an exchange relationship, because they anticipate a favourable return at a future point in time. In keeping with these rules, the parties indicate fairness and thus increase their obligations to one another, thus ensuring that the exchange relationship continues to evolve over time (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Such interplay is a key characteristic of the employment relationship.

Blau (1964) separated social and economic exchanges using three criteria, including the specificity of obligations, the time frame and the norm of reciprocity. Whilst economic exchanges are deemed more straightforward, social exchanges can be more problematic due to unspecified obligations, as the nature of the benefit are not normally specified in advance (Blau, 1964) Moreover, as no return of benefit is guaranteed, both in content and time, the parties of the exchange need to trust that others will reciprocate accordingly (Emerson, 1976). Thus "vulnerability and risk are inherent in exchange relationships in organisations" (Whitener et al., 1998, p. 525). In fact, social exchanges are much more difficult to quantify, as they are often characterised by feelings of trust, gratitude and obligations (Gouldner, 1960). Hence some individuals may value a benefit more strongly than others due to
societal context, but this also means that they will feel a greater obligation to reciprocate in some form (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). Within social exchanges there are two classifications of reciprocity, whereby homeomorphic is defined as identical repayment, and heteromorphic is defined as differential repayment, as long as it is perceived to be of similar or equal value. Blau (1964) adds that some benefits may be valued not for the benefits sake, but instead for being representative of a high quality relationship. However, if one party of the exchange perceive an imbalance in the relationship it will be discontinued.

According to Settoon, Bennett & Liden (1996, p. 220) “the two main ways [SET] has been conceptualised in the management literature are a global exchange relationship between employees and the organisation and a more focused, dyadic relationship between subordinates and their superiors.” Hence, global exchange is concerned with perceived organisational support (POS), whereby the employees evaluate the extent to which the organisation looks after their employees’ welfare (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Regarding which, higher levels of POS have been found to be related to higher levels of trust, performance, commitment and citizenship behaviour (Settoon et al., 1996).

The dyadic relationship is concerned with the concept of leader-member exchange (LMX), whereby leaders are seen to develop different quality relationships with each of their subordinates. SET implies that the quality of the exchange relationship at work has a bearing on the “[...] managers' willingness to initiate and escalate the exchange of such rewards.” (Whitener et al., 1998, p. 518). Thus the quality of LMX relationships shapes the extent to which employees access resources. In line with the SET and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), high quality relationships from the leader are reciprocated with higher levels of performance and other positive behaviours that the leader may value (Erdogan & Enders, 2007).

Consequently, for this study it is held that employees respond to higher quality relationships from the leader and the organisation by feeling obliged to reciprocate. One way in which employees can reciprocate is through greater work engagement, however, additional beneficial outcomes will also be addressed.

Whilst the literature is still unclear as to whether LMX contributes to POS or vice versa, it is widely accepted that these two are inter-related regardless of the direction of their relationship. In fact, SET predicts that resources received by one party can be given to another (Molm, Peterson, & Takahashi, 2001). Moreover, some employees interpret their leader to function as an agent of the organisation whereas others differentiate between LMX and POS exchanges. As a result “POS and LMX [can] have similar effects on some employee attitudes and behaviours, but not on others” (Wayne et al., 1997). For instance, both LMX and POS are said to result in citizenship behaviours. Whilst they are seen to have distinct antecedents and outcomes (Wayne et al., 1997), the focus of this study will encompass both LMX and POS in relation to work engagement.
In order to understand the existing body of literature better, in particular, in relation to how perceived leadership acts as an antecedent or outcome of work engagement, the next section will discuss LMX in more detail. Hence the theoretical underpinnings, key developments as well as the antecedents and outcomes of LMX are considered before moving on to examining how leadership and support function as possible antecedents and drivers of work engagement. In addition, POS literature is reviewed in more detailed before examining its antecedents and links to work engagement.

2.5. Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-member exchange (LMX) has received notable research attention over the last few years and is deemed as one of the "more interesting and useful approaches for studying hypothesised linkages between leadership processes and outcomes" (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p. 827). Its popularity can be attributed to its breaking with traditional leadership theories, which explain leadership as a function of personal characteristics, situational aspects, or an interaction between these (Gerstner & Day, 1997). First, LMX focuses on the dyadic exchange relationship between leaders and subordinates. Second, it stipulates that leaders develop significantly different quality relationships with their subordinate employees (Larsen, 2006; van Breukelen, Shyns, & Le Blanc, 2006). In addition, LMX is grounded in the aforementioned SET (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). It thus recognises that leaders vary in their interaction with subordinates and this is represented by the extent to which they mutually exchange resources and support.

The central premise of LMX is to establish unique, dyadic relationships that are negotiated and manifested over time (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006; Volmer, Spurk, & Niessen, 2012). In this process an organisation’s formal hierarchy implies the definition of a leader through a set of pre-existing supervisory responsibilities. Inherent in this conceptualisation is the assumption that the relationship with the most influence on employees is that between the leader and subordinate. It becomes clear that the quality of the relationship is key to influencing outcomes and this individual level functions as the basic unit of analysis (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). As such, LMX functions as a useful mechanism for understanding organisational behaviour as it highlights the importance of communication and reciprocity in work relationships. Consequently, by focusing on creating more high quality dyads, the focus lies simultaneously in improving organisational performance.

2.5.1. Development and Features of LMX

LMX theory has undergone a series of developments, since its beginnings in the 1970s, including a shift in focus from the individual dyad towards groups and most recently organisational networks (van Breukelen et al., 2006). Despite some criticism around how substantiated these changes are (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999), LMX continues to function as a viable alternative to traditional leadership approaches (Gerstner & Day,
Early conceptualisations of LMX, started as the notion of the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) theory, which was the first to propose a dual focus on the relationship between leader and subordinates. This research began with a series of longitudinal studies (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975). These studies highlighted that leaders do not use the same leadership style with all of their subordinates as advocated in traditional leadership approaches. Instead it was found that leaders develop different relationships with each one of their direct reports. Their findings showed that when managers and their direct reports are asked to describe their working relationship in reference to inputs, process and outcomes, there is a large discrepancy between descriptions of the same individual. As such, two types of relationships were recognised: (a) those grounded in obligations of the employment contract (low quality LMX) (b) and those characterised by mutual trust, respect and influence negotiated going beyond the formal role definition (high quality LMX). Relationships were thus classified into in-, and out-group members, whereby the in-group is characterised by high quality LMX. Graen (1976) explained that LMX develops through a series of role taking and making behaviours by the leader and subordinate, whereby responsibilities beyond the formal job description are negotiated (Larson & Gouwens, 2008). While the term vertical dyad linkage is no longer used, the vertical dyad between the leader and subordinate still signifies the core focus of LMX.

The focus of the literature then shifted to investigating the effects of the nature of these differentiated relationships on organisations. In doing so, the second stream of research further documented the presence of these different relationships in an organisational setting, but also provided an insight into what these relationships look like and how they develop over time. As such, High Quality (HQ) LMX is characterised by greater levels of support, encouragement and subsequent responsibility levels providing more opportunities for future career advancement (Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). In contrast, Low Quality (LQ) LMX is confined to the boundaries of the employment contract and the formal role obligations (Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Winkler, 2010b). As such, communication and interpersonal interaction can be limited in order to achieve contractual commitments. Moreover, the nature of the LQ LMX relationship that it is more distant than HQ LMX. In essence, HQ LMX can be described as having high levels of mutual trust, respect and obligation whereas LQ LMX have low levels of these (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). HQ LMX symbolises the social exchange of resources of more intangible rewards, whereas LQ LMX represents a more transactional economic exchange focused on tangible rewards (Anand, Hu, Liden, & Vidyarthi, 2011). LMX differentiation thus allows leaders to use their often limited resources more effectively by focusing on those who contribute more.

The third stage of research is characterised by recent studies attempting to move away from the in-, and out-group classifications. Specifically, the emphasis has shifted to creating more effective leadership processes by means of better relationships (also referred to as leadership making or
leadership lifecycle). LMX can be understood within the leadership making model (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1991), which advocates that leaders should allow all of their subordinates to engage in a relationship of mutual trust and respect. It follows that there is a shift in focus, whereby leadership is viewed as a partnership amongst members of the dyad. Whilst it is clear that this is not necessarily plausible, this view encourages leaders to provide their subordinates with the opportunity to increase their responsibilities and negotiate their roles over time (Northouse, 2013). To date the majority of research has focused on independent and more recently on work group dyads and most studies have explored this from the employee perspective. However, the latest developments in LMX research have started to see studies investigating relationships from multiple perspectives (Chen, Lam, & Zhong, 2007; Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008; Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). Most recently scholars have come to recognise that organisations are complex and are made up of a multitude of interdependent relationships. Under this perspective, it is proposed that existing LMX concepts should be extended towards networks, by which organisations are viewed as a system of interconnected relationships or network assemblies (Scandura, 1999).

Despite these recent developments in regards to the many interpersonal relationships that employees can develop at work, the focus of this study remains on the individual and their inner psychological experiences of work engagement. Hence a focus on co-worker exchange or team member exchange or greater networks is beyond the scope of this research and instead the focus remains on the employee experience within the dyad.

2.5.2. Antecedents and Outcomes of LMX

Positive trusting work relationships are a useful way to heighten meaning and purpose at work and assist in to energising individuals when at work (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Hence key drivers of LMX include similarity and mutual liking (Bauer & Green, 1996; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993), which is reiterated in that LMX is greatly influenced by affect between the leader and the subordinate (Anand et al., 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that open communication, as well as frequency and patterns of communication, genuineness and high engagement with their jobs are key to facilitating HQ LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Interestingly, it was found that when members are empowered to define career objectives and development needs, this is more likely to lead to HQ LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hiller, DeChurch, Murase, & Doty, 2011). Other authors concur with this view, in that similarities in perspective towards work and commitment to the organisation facilitate HQ LMX (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). In addition, it was found that dyads with similar wants and needs for career growth are more likely to develop HQ LMX (Liden et al., 2006; Schriesheim et al., 1999). It follows that the mutual, collaborative nature and compatibility between leader and subordinate are key to developing HQ LMX. In addition interactional justice is related to LMX (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). Psychological empowerment functioned as a mediator between the LMX and performance.
relationship (Chen et al., 2007). These are deemed key constituent parts to establishing shared work values such as respect, honesty, affect as well as expectations of contribution and obligations (van Breukelen et al., 2006; Winkler, 2010b). Through the social exchange lens, it appears that a HQ LMX will instil a sense of obligation in the subordinate and they may reciprocate accordingly (Wayne et al., 2002). Within HQ LMX, leaders may offer mentoring (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994) in exchange for either organisational citizenship behaviours from their subordinates (Settoon et al., 1996) or task performance (Wayne et al., 1997).

Across the LMX literature it is argued that the quality and characteristics of the relationship is indicative of the outcome at several levels, including the individual, group and organisational level (Wayne et al., 1997). It follows that the majority of empirical research has focused on testing relationships between LMX quality and outcomes at work (Zhu et al., 2009). Over the last 40 years a wealth of research has connected LMX to a large variety of concepts and thus highlighted the often positive outcomes associated with high quality exchanges. The majority of outcomes are often related to performance, including in-role performance, citizenship behaviours, overall job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies et al., 2007).

Research has shown that subordinates in a HQ LMX, are more likely to reciprocate by engaging in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) at work, as well as demonstrating improved performance, satisfaction with supervisors and overall job satisfaction (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies et al., 2007; Wayne et al., 2002, 1997). However, some studies have reported non-significant relationships or only performance improvements at the individual level (Liden et al., 1993). Meanwhile, HQ LMX has also been associated with enhancing employees' work motivation (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Hiller et al., 2011) as well as organisational commitment (Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, & McNamara, 2005; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Studies such as those by Dansereau et al. (1975) and Liden & Maslyn (1998) also suggested that HQ LMX result in lower turnover intentions. On the negative side, Harris & Kacmar (2006) found that HQ LMX might not always have positive outcomes for subordinates, as it can potentially lead to higher stress levels.

Whilst a lot of research has been focused on the effects of HQ LMX on subordinates, less attention has been paid to the effect on leaders, whereby some suggest that lower stress and higher well-being are likely outcomes (Schriesheim et al., 1999). “Each of us is more or less performing some fleeting, pre-conscious calculus whose results lead us toward truly engaging in the situations we find ourselves” (Kahn, 2010, p. 24). In line with SET, it is to be expected that a HQ LMX involves a high exchange of resources, such as recognition, interpersonal support and appreciation (Volmer et al., 2012). In addition, these often share a more privileged (in-group) relationship with the supervisor, receiving more resources (time, information, emotional support, mentoring role) than lower quality dyads (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). When sufficient development opportunities, autonomous, fair and meaningful work are provided, employees reciprocate with commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours, competence and trust (Bauer & Green, 1996; Ilies et al., 2007;
Martin et al., 2005). Thus HQ LMX are more likely to result in more positive attitudes or effective work behaviours and one way for them to reciprocate is via work engagement.

LQ LMX are characterised by a low exchange of resources, less privileged and part of the out-group. Under those circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that the performance of subordinates as well as leaders will suffer as a result (Schriesheim et al., 1999). Nonetheless, “the preponderance of empirical evidence surrounding the quality of the supervisor–subordinate relationship has led researchers to conclude that this relationship is one of the most important an employee has, and potentially one of the most important predictors of workplace outcomes” (Harris & Kacmar, 2006, p. 371). Because the leader has direct influence over the rewards and resources that an employee receives they are seen to be more proximal, tangible, stable and valued than for instance colleague support (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). That is, leaders have formal power over their subordinates, controlling resources, job opportunities, and promotions. Historically, relationships with supervisors have been considered the most important work relationship an employee has (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

While it is clear that many studies have investigated LMX in relation to many different combinations, such as leadership style, employee personality (Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009), top management support (Erdogan & Enders, 2007), and task characteristics (Dunegan, Uhl-Bien, & Duchon, 2002). To date, van Breukelen (2006) suggests that LMX has contributed to understanding organisational behaviour by identifying antecedents and outcomes of low and high quality relationships. As engagement is part of the positive psychology movement, studies investigating associations with positive leadership forms are to be expected (Segers et al., 2010). However, not many studies have investigated the LMX-engagement relationship. As such, “clearly more work needs to be done exploring the relationship between LMX and engagement” (Crawford et al., 2014, p. 64). Soane (2014, p. 149) argues that despite its “intuitive appeal” there is “little research that provides a direct test of the association between LMX and engagement”. Before reviewing the different types of leadership theories and studies that have been associated with work engagement to date, the key antecedents of work engagement will be discussed next. This will include the impact of perceived leadership.

2.6. Antecedents of Work Engagement

Meta-analytical, cross sectional and more recently longitudinal studies have examined various work-related antecedents and outcomes in relation to engagement (Mauno, Kinnunen, Maekikangas, & Feldt, 2010). Before examining the role of perceived leadership and social support in relation to work engagement, one must first acknowledge other key drivers that have been reported to date. However not all studies used the work engagement approach. For consistency purposes only those studies using Schaufeli, Salanova et al.’s (2002) work engagement definition and UWES measurement are referred to.
In a systematic synthesis of engagement studies, a focus on psychological states such as self-efficacy, resilience and personal resources were the most frequently investigated as antecedents of work engagement (Bailey et al., 2015). Most recently, personal resources have been added to the JD-R model, so that day level job resources related to daily levels of work engagement via personal resources (self-efficacy, self-esteem) (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009a). Optimism was noted to mediate the relationship between these. A meta-analysis by Halbesleben (2010) further suggested that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of work engagement and hence development of employee resources were seen as key to engagement interventions. The simultaneous support for buffering and boosting hypothesis of personal resources, particularly self-efficacy, is strengthened when demands are high (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Fischbach, 2013). This suggests that employees with high levels of self-efficacy may become more easily bored when they are not sufficiently challenged at work.

To date there have been mixed findings regarding gain cycles or reciprocal causality. Such relations form cycles in which resources lead to work engagement and work engagement leads to more resources. In a longitudinal study of Finnish dentists, job resources and work engagement as well as work engagement and personal resources such as initiative were found to be positively and reciprocally related (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). A study by Xanthopoulou et al. (2009a) confirmed such a gain spiral as high job resources at time 1 predicted future engagement at time 2 as well as the other way around. Similarly, in a study of Dutch telecom managers and executives work engagement was found to predict an increase in job resources (social support, autonomy, performance feedback, learning opportunities), which then also increased work engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009). Most recently, opportunities for development, perceived supervisory and organisational support, organisation based self-esteem and optimism predict a higher work engagement in the future (Barbier et al., 2013). They are the first study to show that changes in performance expectations can predict future levels of work engagement. However, they did not find a reciprocal relationship back to future increases in job or personal resources. Previously found gain spirals between job resources, personal resources and work engagement (Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a).

To date the predominant focus of studies has reviewed job resources and its positive effect on work engagement and/or buffering effects of job demands (Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011; Simpson, 2009). Job control and levels of support have been the most frequently investigated job resources in relation to work engagement. A longitudinal study investigated relations between job resources and work engagement amongst Belgian ‘stayers’ and ‘movers’ employees (De Lange et al., 2008). They found that low autonomy and departmental resources were associated with low work engagement and subsequently left the organisation. For those employees who stayed autonomy was positively and reversely related to work engagement, particularly for ‘external movers and promotion makers’ (De Lange et al., 2008). High work engagement was
found to predict positive employee evaluations of co-worker and supervisor support as well as departmental resources (De Lange et al., 2008).

Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola (2008) using a sample of Finnish dentists, job resources were found to predict future work engagement, whereas job demands were negatively related to future work engagement. Autonomy as well as the possibility to use one’s skills, performance feedback and challenges were also key in predicting work engagement experiences (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2007; Mauno et al., 2007). A longitudinal study measured over two time points, also found that autonomy predicted future work engagement (De Lange et al., 2008).

Whilst job demands have received less attention in the literature, one of the assumptions of the JD-R model suggests that high job demands lead to lower levels of work engagement. Studies have shown this to be true, for instance quantitative workload, stressful work content and physically demanding work environment decreased work engagement over time (Hakanen, Schaufeli, et al., 2008). Meanwhile, Mauno et al. (2007) showed that job insecurity negatively affected the dedication dimension of work engagement. However, others disagree and suggest that a number of studies have been inconclusive in this regard because not all demands are negative and are more usefully differentiated into hindrance (negative) and challenge (positive) stressors (Bailey et al., 2015; LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005).

Several studies have also highlighted the importance of social support. However, it is worth noting that social support includes that given by co-workers and supervisors as not all studies have investigated these separately. Hence these will be reviewed before discussing perceived leadership and work engagement more exclusively in the next section.

Moreover daily levels of colleague support and self-efficacy were seen to contribute to performance via work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). Within the context of nursing, Freeney & Tiernan (2009) advocate the benefits of social support in that feeling connected to a community can drive engagement. On the other hand however, Othman & Nasadin (2012) found that colleagues have a limited impact on work engagement. Another study using data from two Irish maternity hospitals advocated a “best fit model where perceived supervisor support, social support from peers, prosocial impact on others and autonomy explained more than 52 per cent of variance in work engagement” (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013, p. 1427). They highlight that whilst autonomy predicted work engagement in this context, it only became meaningful because supervisor support was linked to prosocial impact. Contrary to Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) they did not find support for peer social support in predicting work engagement (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013).

Social support in particular from supervisors appears key in facilitating work engagement. For instance, in a study amongst Finnish teachers, it was found that job resources (supervisor support and appreciation) related to engagement, particularly when emotional demands were high (pupil misbehaviour) (Bakker et al., 2007). In this instance, supervisor support and
appreciation was thought to alleviate demands and help the employee to persevere.

Moreover, a meta-analysis by Christian & Slaughter (2007) found a strong link between cognitive job demands and two dimensions of work engagement (vigour and dedication). Amongst a sample of manufacturing and pharmaceutical organisations in India, Agarwal (2014) suggests that procedural, interactional justice and psychological contract fulfilment are positively related to work engagement, which was mediated by trust. A longitudinal study showed that psychological contract fulfilment was related to future work engagement and lower turnover intentions, but only for employees with low tenure (Bal, De Cooman, & Mol, 2013). At the same time, they also noted that for employees with high tenure, work engagement was more stable. Job satisfaction was found to act as an antecedent to work engagement (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Simpson, 2009). Conversely a recent study found that the relationship between psychological contract breach and work engagement was mediated by job satisfaction (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014).

Interestingly, in the absence of a daily leader, personal resources such as employee self-management was seen to positively influence the resourcefulness of the work environment, which then facilitated work engagement (Breevaart, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014). However it is worth noting that data was collected in a health care setting amongst 72 maternity nurses using an online diary study, thus it would be interesting to examine this in other settings (Breevaart et al., 2014). Similarly, a small scale diary study amongst flight attendants found that a supportive work environment had a positive impact on work engagement and self-efficacy beliefs (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). It follows that there are a number of antecedents of work engagement, most prominently social support and personal resources. This suggests that leadership may play a crucial role in impacting the experience of feeling engaged at work.

2.6.1. Perceived Leadership and Work Engagement

It makes intuitive sense that good leaders are likely to result in positive outcomes for employees both at the individual and organisational level. In part this is due to leaders having the power and opportunities to shape the working environment and conditions in which employees can actively perform (Kahn, 2010; Soane, 2014; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012). “Given that work engagement belongs to positive organisational behaviour movement, it is not surprising that some studies have researched its link with positive forms of leadership (transformational, empowering, coaching style of leadership)” (Segers et al., 2010, p. 149). More recent studies still mirror this view in that leadership and work engagement have not yet been explored sufficiently (Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim, 2015). Although research on leadership and engagement is still limited (Shuck & Herd, 2012), studies connecting work engagement to different types of leadership will be briefly discussed below.
2.6.2. Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

Zhu, Avolio & Walumbwa (2009) claimed to be the first study investigating transformational leadership-engagement relationship and examined this in relation to positive follower characteristics (innovative, creative and proactive behaviour). This study was conducted in South Africa using senior managers and their respective executive leaders mostly from private organisations such as manufacturing, retail as well as banking. Individuals were encouraged to rate their own level of engagement and the extent to which they felt their leader expressed transformational leadership qualities. Similarly, executive managers were asked to rate their followers key characteristics. This study however used the Gallup Workplace Audit rather than UWES engagement scale and is only included as it is considered key in this field. Results suggest that positive follower characteristics acted as a mediator of the transformational leadership and engagement relationship.

In a cross-sectional survey data from nearly 3,000 participants from Belgium, (Segers et al., 2010) showed that transformational leadership was indirectly as well as positively related to work engagement. This applied to all three components (vigour, dedication, absorption) of work engagement. Interestingly, followers who thought of their leader as transformational, saw their relationship high in mutual respect, trust and career oriented obligation thus mirroring key characteristics of HQ LMX. This in turn enhanced followers’ sense of hope and optimism, leading to higher engagement levels.

A daily diary study of consultants working at a temporary and an industrial work agency in the Netherlands, demonstrated that daily levels of transformational leadership corresponded to daily work engagement levels via optimism (Tims et al., 2011). Using the theoretical underpinnings of the JD-R model, their study consisted of a general questionnaire including the nine-item UWES scale as well as a 12-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to assess transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990). This was then followed by a five-day diary survey, which used the same scales as the questionnaire but with a focus on measuring levels for each specific working day. This study highlighted the value of personal resources (optimism) and work engagement in understanding the transformational leadership and performance relationship. In other words, a resourceful working environment characterised by quality coaching, feedback and support is likely to impact followers’ self-beliefs, which act as personal resources. Whilst these results are certainly valuable, 42 respondents for both the questionnaire and diary survey are low and as such give caution to generalisations in other contexts.

Meanwhile a study by Vincent-Höper, Muser, & Janneck (2012) used a gender sensitive approach to investigate the interaction between transformational leadership, well-being and occupational success over a four month period. Occupational success in this instance encompassed career satisfaction, social and career success. Similar to the above study, they employed the UWES-9 but used the shortened MLQ5x as part of their questionnaire. Out of the 1,132 respondents most were predominantly engineering and computer professionals. This was because the study was part of a larger research project about women in engineering and most
respondents were recruited via professional associations and opinion polls. Data from women and men in large organisations in Germany showed that transformational leadership style related positively to work engagement and occupational success. Interestingly, work engagement was found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and subjective occupational success. This was in particular true for women who made up approximately half of the sample.

A study of low level employees and middle managers from six Fortune 100 companies in South Korea found transformational leadership to predict work engagement and organisational knowledge creation practices (Song et al., 2012). 432 respondents took part in this questionnaire, which encompassed the MLQ 6S and UWES-9. Here too, work engagement functioned as a mediator between transformational leadership and knowledge creation practices.

More recently, a study of 530 full time employees across a variety of sectors in Sydney, Australia further linked transformational leadership and work engagement (Ghadi et al., 2013). Using the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTL) rather than the MLQ and the UWES-17 they demonstrated that employee perceptions of meaning can partially explain this relationship. Hence this research provided empirical evidence for Bakker et al.’s (2011b) theoretical proposition that transformational leadership may enhance meaning and thus facilitate work engagement.

Kopperud, Martinsen & Humborstad (2013) concluded that work engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and service climate. Using an employee report version of the MLQ and UWES-9, they conducted this study using two samples from 1,226 employees from a financial services organisation and 291 employees and 30 leaders from an audit organisation in Norway. Interestingly, their findings only hold true when employees rather their leaders to be transformational rather than self-reports.

This review suggests that most of the research activity within the leadership and work engagement domain has focused on transformational leadership. Another observation that results from this review is that work engagement often acts as a mediator between transformational leadership and organisational outcomes. Moreover, it is also evident that personal resources such as optimism play a key role in this relationship. However, in recent years other leadership theories have also been become more popular, which will be discussed next.

2.6.3. Other Leadership Theories (Charismatic, Ethical, Empowering, Servant and Authentic)

In addition to the predominant focus of investigating work engagement in relationship to transformational leadership, a few individual studies relating to other leadership theories have emerged.
For instance, one study found that charismatic leadership related significantly to organisational citizenship behaviours via work engagement (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010). Interestingly they used the MLQ and UWES-17 for their questionnaire. However the fact that the sample consisted of only 91 undergraduate psychology students, suggests that this finding is difficult to generalise to other settings.

Like charismatic leadership, ethical leadership is also seen to be ‘value driven’ and thus suggested to enhance meaning and subsequent work engagement. In line with this thinking, Den Hartog & Belschak (2012) conducted a multi-source study, which found that work engagement acted as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee initiative. Questionnaires including the UWES-9 were administered to 167 employee-supervisor dyads in Study 1 and 200 employee-supervisor dyads in Study 2. Respondents were employees from various occupations such as lawyers, sales, account managers and consultants.

In an Australian survey study of 540 fire fighters from 68 fire brigades, it was found that increased levels of cognitive demands and resources partially mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement (Tuckey et al., 2012). The mail survey questionnaire included the UWES-9, although two items were removed, as they were not seen as applicable to the volunteering profession and had negative implications for the nature of this work. Using the JD-R model, this study suggests that challenging work and supervisor encouragement to lead and self-manage work facilitated work engagement. This study highlighted how levels of work engagement can be enhanced when empowering leaders increase positive challenge demands and in turn create a working environment consistent of meaningful challenges in which sufficient resources exist to handle such demands.

Contrary to transformational leadership where the focus is on leaders inspiring followers, servant leadership focuses on meeting the needs of followers. A sample of 263 Ukrainian IT professionals from four organisations showed that under conditions of high social interaction, shared goals related more strongly to servant leadership and work engagement (Clercq, Bouckenooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014). It is suggested that high social interaction will help leaders to form better quality relationships and thus form deeper insights about employee goals and how to best meet these.

Current studies have examined work engagement in relation to authentic leadership. Hence, in a study of 48 Taiwanese manufacturing and service organisations employee trust was seen to mediate between authentic leadership and work engagement (Hsieh & Wang, 2015). This study administered the UWES-17 alongside employee trust and authentic leadership scales to 94 supervisors and 345 completed and matched employee questionnaires. On the one hand, trust was seen to fully mediate supervisor perceived authentic leadership and employee’s work engagement. On the other hand however, employee trust only partially explained the link between employee perceived authentic leadership and their work engagement levels.
Most recently, a study sampling an United Arab Emirates (UAE) petroleum sector found that authentic leadership related positively to work engagement and OCB, via psychological empowerment (Al Sahi AL Zaabi, Ahmad, & Hossan, 2016). However only 189 surveys including the UWES-9 measure were completed and thus caution is warranted when interpreting these results.

Whilst this research represents the growing interest of the association between leadership and work engagement, this field is still limited. Hence “there remains a gap in understanding what leadership behaviors could affect engagement-encouraging cultures as well as the processes around which leader behaviors bring about higher levels of engagement” (Carasco-Saul et al. 2015, p. 39). As such, the studies to date can only be seen as a step in the right direction as research linking LMX and work engagement has not yet been investigated extensively.

2.6.4. LMX and Work Engagement

Despite calls for research linking LMX and work engagement since 2010 (Crawford, Rich, Buckman, & Bergeron, 2014; Segers et al., 2010; Soane, 2014). It was only very recently that academics have explored this domain.

For instance, one study investigated how LMX, work engagement and HRM consistency explain employee job performance in a Southern Chinese luxury hotel (Li et al., 2012). Whilst 298 employees with 54 of their respective supervisors took part in this study, a closer look at the make-up of their questionnaire raises some questions. Rather than using the popular and validated LMX-7 scale, the questionnaire contained a shortened version of the Leader-member social exchange (LMSX) scale (Bernerth, Armanakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007). Also instead of using the well-established UWES-17 or its shortened version UWES-9, they only included five items relating to vigour. In its place they added sub scales concerned with task proficiency, task adaptability and task proactivity. Despite the concerns around their measurement, Li et al. (2012, p. 1059) found “LMX was positively related to employee job performance. Moreover, as expected, work engagement mediated this relationship and HRM consistency strengthened the influence of LMX on work engagement.”

Although Cheng, Lu, Chang & Johnstone (2013) do not directly examine LMX-work engagement relationship, it is still worth noting. The focus instead lies on voice behaviour and work engagement. Rather innovatively they used supervisor attributed motivation theory and observed that voice behaviour influences LMX quality and work engagement. This however was less true when supervisor’s perceived their employees to be using their voice for impression management purposes. This is an interesting finding as it suggests that supervisors, particularly in HQ LMX, appear more willing to provide resources and support when employees appear authentic in voicing concerns and needs.

Arguably a more convincing case of directly investigating the LMX-work engagement relationship is made by a very recent study of 847 Dutch police
officers (Breevaart et al., 2015). “[It is] one of the first to examine LMX as a distal predictor of job performance and relatedly, one of the first to test a sequentially mediating mechanism that can account for the LMX-job performance relationship” (Breevaart et al., 2015). Using a Dutch version of the LMX scale and UWES-9, this study found that HQ LMX facilitated work engagement and job performance by creating a more resourceful working environment. Surprisingly, whilst job resources such as social support and developmental opportunities functioned as mediators in this relationship, autonomy did not. In part this may be due to the police profession acting under strict protocols in order to operate within the law. Furthermore, whilst they examined LMX as a potential job resource they clarify that LMX is better seen as an antecedent to other resources.

Having reviewed a number of different leadership styles and aspects of management, it appears clear that there is a link between positive leader behaviours and work engagement. Yet despite growing interest in this field, “studies of LMX and engagement have been few in numbers [and] clearly more work needs to be done” (Crawford et al., 2014, p. 64). It is notable that with the exception of one diary study, all research to date has used quantitative survey methods. In response to this, LMX-work engagement relationship may not only be explored in another occupational setting but also using a qualitative frame of enquiry. To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet investigated the impact of both LMX and POS on WE, via PCB in a qualitative study. Whilst particularly the latter study represents a key milestone in this domain, it does not include other sources of support such as perceived organisational support. This will be discussed in the next section.

2.7. Perceived Organisational Support

The discussion to date has highlighted the importance of social support in positively influencing employee attitudes and behaviours. However, in this regard perceived organisational support (POS) appears to have received much less interest than leadership research per se.

POS is defined as the “beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger & Huntington, 1986, p. 501). POS suggests that employees form a general view of how much their organisation cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Key facets of POS will be discussed before reviewing antecedents and existing studies of POS and work engagement.

Like LMX, perceived organisational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) is based on SET making reciprocity a key element of POS. In line with this thinking, employees feel obliged to help the organisation through increased effort and commitment, in exchange for relevant resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Feeling valued can yield additional benefits for the employee. For instance, employees can receive tangible benefits such as pay, promotion, training and development opportunities or more intangible benefits such as increased approval, respect and access to information (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This indicates
that POS enables employees to perform their job more effectively because they can rely on relevant support when faced with hindrance stressors.

POS is thought to develop because employees ascribe humanlike characteristics to organisations (Eisenberger et al., 1986). However, the psychological contract is inherently complex because it does not speak with one voice but rather through several voices from line management, HR, senior management and colleagues. What was particularly interesting to note is that when employees interpret favourable treatment as discretionary, POS tended to be six times stronger. In contrast, favourable treatment that was classed as insincere or outside of the control of the organisation led to lower levels of POS (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997).

Positive actions by organisational agents such as supervisors are often interpreted as the organisation valuing employee contributions and showing an interest in their well-being and development (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003). In theory all favourable treatment by organisational agents such as supervisors, should contribute to POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Whilst a meta-analysis by Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) confirms supervisor support is most strongly associated with POS. They however note that fairness acted as the most dominant driver (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Others concur and in particular procedural justice but also interpersonal and informational justice were seen as key (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). However, not all organisational members are seen as organisational agents (Kurtessis et al., 2016; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). For instance co-worker and team support were less strongly related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2015). One reason for this is that supervisors have greater authority and discretion over administering relevant resources and implementing HR practices than colleagues (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Wayne et al., 1997b).

It is worth noting that not all those in management roles act as organisational agents per se. A recent meta-analytic review found that employee trust in senior management feeds into POS more strongly than trust in immediate supervisors (Kurtessis et al., 2015). In part this is because the administration of fairness via policies and employee voice is often controlled by senior management and is thus more indicative of the organisation’s focus on employee well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In this respect, trust in senior management should equate to trust in the organisation and hence not all supportive supervisors or LMX relationships lead to high POS. However, there is mixed evidence around whether LMX leads to POS or vice versa. Some even suggest this relationship to be bidirectional as POS has found to relate to LMX (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

Others only observed POS leading to LMX (Wayne et al., 2002). At the same time, supervisor support was related to POS (Robert Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) and LMX was seen to relate to POS (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003). Consistent with previous discussions, positive forms of leadership such as HQ LMX or transformational leadership are strongly related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Despite this ambiguity, more support has been found whereby employees with HQ LMX are also more likely to establish high levels of POS.
In addition, supervisors with high levels of POS have been found to not only have greater access to resources but also to be more supportive of their subordinates. Consequently, supervisor POS can drive LMX quality and subsequent job satisfaction and performance (Erdogan & Enders, 2007).

On the other hand, a lack of supervisor support could negatively affect employee attitudes and behaviours (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). However not all employees aggregate supervisor and organisational support and instead treat them as unique sources of support with differential outcomes. Employees will have high levels of POS when organisations are seen to fulfil socio-emotional needs (approval, esteem, affiliation), as well as valuing their contribution and well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Psychological contract fulfilment has also been associated with POS (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005; Guerrero & Herrbach, 2007), this however will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

Overall studies suggest that employees with high levels of POS are more positively oriented towards their work and the organisation (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Job satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al. 2006), positive mood (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001), affective commitment (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson, & Wayne, 2008; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), performance and lower intention to quit and withdrawal behaviours were noted as outcomes of POS (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, Riggle et al. 2009). POS has also been associated with trust and job involvement (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Lastly, employees with high POS are more satisfied with their job, maintain a better work life balance and are seen to contribute to organisational citizenship behaviours (Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, & Kessler, 2006).

Similarly, in a study of over 700 National Health Service employees, Edwards & Pecci (2010) found support that POS positively related to individuals being able to identify themselves with their employer. Employees could identify more readily with the organisation when they believed that the organisation cared for them. More recent meta-analysis concur and suggest POS has been linked to outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Ahmed, Nawaz, Ali, & Islam, 2015; Riggle et al., 2009). POS is related to effort on behalf of the organisation; hence outcomes are often associated with in-role performance. Although POS had weaker associations with task and contextual performance (Riggle et al., 2009). Interestingly, POS appeared less relevant for frontline employees because they are more removed from relevant support programmes and opportunities (Riggle et al., 2009).

A buffering effect of POS has also been noted. For instance, Byrne, Kacmar, Stoner & Hochwarter (2005) found that POS reduced the negative impact of organisational politics on individual’s depressed mood. In addition, POS buffered work-reward imbalance relationship, resulting in lower turnover intentions (Kinnunen, Feldt, & Mäkikangas, 2008). Others also highlight the potential of POS to reduce negative outcomes of stress such as fatigue and burnout as well as anxiety (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Thus POS can
be potentially useful in alleviating stressors at work as well as reduce the negative impact of these on individuals, contributing to overall levels of well-being. This may be particularly applicable in times of insecurity or organisational change.

### 2.7.1. POS and Work Engagement

The review of key underpinnings, antecedents and outcomes of POS above suggests that it can usefully help employees execute their jobs more effectively whilst also buffering against stressful or difficult situations.

In line with SET’s norm of reciprocity, POS should increase an employee’s felt obligation to care about organisational welfare and work towards achieving its goals. It is thus reasonable to assume that employees will reciprocate needs fulfilment and support with work engagement. However to date, studies that have directly investigated POS-engagement relationship are relatively scarce.

Using JD-R, one study found that job resources such as opportunity to grow, organisational and social support functioned as antecedents to work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Interestingly, opportunities to grow such as relevant learning opportunities, autonomy and variety were found to function as the strongest predictors.

Job control, support, feedback and positive organisational climate related positively with work engagement (Christian et al, 2007 cited in Maunou et al., 2010, p. 113). Likewise, Halbesleben (2010) also found that a positive organisational climate predicts work engagement.

In a study investigating job burnout and work engagement amongst managers at a platinum mine in South Africa, work engagement was predicted by POS (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). Unsurprisingly, workload, job insecurity and lacking resources were seen to contribute to the exhaustion component of burnout. A lack of POS and relevant development opportunities acted as antecedents to cynicism, another dimension of burnout. Conversely, POS predicted work engagement and its dimensions of vigour and dedication. Surprisingly, dedication was also predicted by high workloads.

Kinnunen et al. (2008) investigated POS, effort-reward imbalance and over-commitment in relation to turnover intention and work engagement amongst Finnish trade union managerial level employees. As such, they noted POS to be positively related to all three dimensions of work engagement, namely vigour, dedication and absorption. However this study demonstrated that POS was the strongest predictor of job attitudes (lower turnover intention) and well-being at work (higher work engagement) in relation to effort-reward imbalance and over-commitment.

Poon (2013) suggested that employees who perceive their organisations to be supportive of their career and affective commitment are more likely to feel engaged. Although this Malaysian study of part-time employees did not
measure POS per se, perceived career support can be viewed as a subset of this and was thus included. In a study of French police officers, POS and supervisor support related to work engagement via self-determined motivation (Gillet, Huart, Colombat, & Fouquereau, 2013). Hence those who perceived higher levels of POS also felt more motivated and subsequently more engaged with their work as well as training activities. A study of 183 midwives in two Irish maternity hospitals highlighted the importance of relational resources in contributing to work engagement (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013). In fact, autonomy, perceived supervisor support, social support from peers and prosocial impact on others were found to be predictors of work engagement.

Contrary to research suggesting that low engagement results in negative outcomes, this study found that POS compensated for low levels of engagement and led to low levels of turnover intention and deviant behaviours (Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2016). Although this study focused on Kahn’s (1990) conceptualisation of engagement rather than work engagement, it was included because it provided innovative insights into the POS-engagement relationship. In line with Conservation of Resources theory they suggested that engagement itself functions as a work-related energy resource and can be replaced by other means if this is lacking. However both Shantz et al. (2016) as well as Gillet et al. (2013) appear to have neglected more traditional white collar office settings and as such it would be a useful avenue for future research.

2.8. Outcomes of Work Engagement

The focus on outcomes has been less prominent in the work engagement literature, in part because work engagement itself is viewed as a key outcome. However, several studies have provided increasing evidence that work engagement leads to important outcomes that will be of interest to organisations. In the first instance work engagement is associated with better health (Seppälä et al., 2009). However, engaged employees are also seen to be active learners who take personal initiative (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, et al., 2008; Sonntag, 2003) with greater levels of affective commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). Halbesleben’s (Halbesleben, 2010) meta-analysis further supports this and points to strong relationships between work engagement and dedication, commitment and turnover intention. Others studies find that work engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and organisational commitment (Hakanen, Schaufeli, et al., 2008). Most recently, a significant positive relationship has been found between work engagement (vigour, dedication) and organisational commitment in a study of a global professional services firm (Yalabik et al., 2014). Previous work also highlights a negative relationship between work engagement and intention to quit (Hakanen et al., 2006; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Halbesleben, 2010). Moreover work-engagement has also been linked to both in-role (Salanova et al., 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a) and extra-role behaviour (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). This has also been confirmed in more recent studies (J.R.B. Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). In addition, work
engagement and service climate, employee performance and customer loyalty have been positively associated (Salanova et al., 2005). Similarly, Halbesleben & Wheeler (2008) find that work engagement explains self-, supervisor- and co-worker rated in role performance of employees. Xanthopolou et al. (2009b) in a diary study showed a strong relationship between daily levels of engagement and daily financial returns in a Greek fast food restaurant. These studies denote the positive potential of work engagement on performance and profit.

The review of these studies clearly shows that there is a lot of potential for work engagement to have positive outcomes both for the employees but also for the organisation. In spite of this, as suggested by Macey & Schneider (2008, p. 80) “people cannot expend their energy at the highest level all of the time, there is a need for recovery to ensure continued employee well-being.” At the same time, it is important to note that some studies also suggest a potential ‘dark side’ of work engagement. In a commentary, George (2011, p. 53) highlights that “high work engagement may not necessarily be a win-win for all involved [...] and the cost of high work engagement for employees deserve far greater attention.” As such, engagement has been criticised for omitting the long term consequences of high engagement levels and providing a distorted representation of organisational reality (Purcell, 2014).

Halbesleben et al. (2009) provided empirical evidence that higher engagement can result in higher interference with family, yet this relationship was mediated by organisational citizenship behaviours. Interestingly this relationship was weaker for individuals with high consciousness levels. It was found that over time, high levels of engagement erode the resources it requires to sustain itself. Studies suggest that too much engagement can actually exacerbate work-family and family work conflicts (Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2009). Besides potential methodological issues, it is argued that employees who are highly engaged are perhaps less interested, or have less available time to participate and focus on family life or areas outside of work.

A 12-month longitudinal study of human service employees investigated whether psychological detachment or recovery buffers the negative impact of high job demands on work engagement. Interestingly, high job demands predicted emotional exhaustion, complaints and low work engagement. Moreover, detachment from work also appeared to buffer the relationship between job demands and lower work engagement (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010). Whilst working hard and enjoying one’s work appears positive, it is also important to remove oneself from work in order to adequately recover from the demands and strains associated with it. This may be one way to overcome the potential dark side of work engagement. George (2010) agrees and advocates that a fluctuation of engagement levels may be more realistic, sustainable and lead to more desirable long term outcomes. This is perhaps of particular relevance in conditions of ambiguity such as job insecurity or creative industries whereby a greater focus on extrinsic work outcomes for highly engaged employees may be useful (George, 2010). Despite these criticisms and the risk of work intensification if unsustainable levels of work engagement persist, Purcell (2013, p. 247)
argued that “engagement is worth pursuing, not as an end in itself, but as a means of improving working lives and company performance.”

In summary, the review of existing antecedents and outcomes of engagement has highlighted the importance of the causal chain of job resources, personal resources, work engagement and positive outcomes. Specifically speaking, they denote the importance of social support in facilitating psychological contract fulfilment establishing a positive, supportive and enabling work environment that is perceived as fair. At the same time, we have also had the first study connecting psychological contract breaches to work engagement via job satisfaction (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). This also highlights the potential negative influencing factors on work engagement. On the one hand, studies point to the significance of the psychological connection or lack of, between employees, sources of social support and work engagement. On the other hand, it appears that there is an underlying assumption in that supervisors act as agents of their organisation and are thus perceived as one unit of support from the employees’ point of view. In order to better understand potential drivers it is useful to first differentiate sources of support and determine their impact on employees’ perception of psychological contract breach.

It is true that ambiguities remain about whether gain cycles exist and what drives leadership to impact engagement, both positively and negatively. It suggests that the psychological connection that employees have with their line manager, team and organisation have the potential to either drive or wither their engagement levels at work. Sparrow (2013) cautioned in assuming that high engagement leads to high performance and instead suggests that more research is required on how well-performing teams (including leaders) drive engagement of others. Given that social support has significant potential in enhancing an employee’s psychological connection with their work by fulfilling socio-emotional needs, LMX and POS will be discussed next.

2.9. Psychological Contract and Psychological Contract Breach

Psychological contracts have been recognised as a key way to explore, understand and predict organisational behaviour (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rigotti, 2009). Whilst the initial conceptualisation of the psychological contract can be traced back as early as the 1960s, it was Rousseau’s (1989) work that notably shaped today’s understanding and interest in this construct. Hence psychological contracts are seen to consist of three constituent parts. First, the focus is on perceived rather than actual promises employees believe have been made between them and their organisation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Second, psychological contracts are inherently subjective and as such they are held by the employee alone, rather than in mutual agreement with the organisation. Lastly, employees perception of unfulfilled or breached promises serves as the central mechanism to explain the impact on employee attitudes and behaviours (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Zhao et al., 2007). Studies have since demonstrated that psychological contracts are likely to change over the time of one’s career (Bal et al., 2013).
Moreover, psychological contract breach (PCB) is not only the most studied phenomenon in this domain (Rigotti, 2009), but crucial in understanding how emotions, attitudes and behaviours of employees may be negatively affected by the psychological contract (Conway & Briner, 2005). As such, this functions as a useful way of exploring the impact of LMX and POS on employees’ work engagement levels. PCB is thus defined as the “cognition that one’s organisation has failed to meet one or more obligations within one’s psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one’s contributions” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Therefore, PCBs are idiosyncratic and refers to a perceived discrepancy in relation to promises from others. Given the subjective nature of the psychological contract and perceptions of breach, it therefore seems logical to explore this from the employee perspective with regards to this study.

PCB has commonly been explored using the SET framework discussed earlier in the chapter. In line with this, the ‘norm of reciprocity’ rule suggests that PC fulfilment will lead the employee to engage in positive attitudes and behaviours (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Whereas PCB may cause employees to re-evaluate their relationship and subsequent contributions to the organisation and other sources of support (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). It follows that PCB is perceived as an imbalance of exchange, which is then reciprocated negatively. Whilst some have suggested that PCB adds little value beyond the known effects of unmet expectations, studies have since explored and found these two to be conceptually and empirically distinct (Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Sutton & Griffin, 2004). Moreover, several studies have observed stronger associations between breach and outcomes, than for unmet expectations. This was true with regards to predicting job dissatisfaction and turnover (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), citizenship behaviour (Robinson, 1996), but also turnover intentions and in-role performance (Sutton & Griffin, 2004; Turnley & Feldman, 2000).

Recent studies further highlight the negative potential impact of PCB on employee attitudes and behaviours. As such, PCB has been found to reduce job performance (Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004; Zhao et al., 2007), job satisfaction (Dupre & Day, 2007; Tekleab, Takeuchi, & Taylor, 2005), organisational commitment (Conway & Briner, 2002), and organisation citizenship behaviours (Bal, Chiaburu, & Jansen, 2010; Dulac et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2007). Moreover, PCBs also result in lower levels of trust in the organisation (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposo, 2008) leading to higher levels of turnover intention (Raja et al., 2004; Tekleab et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2007).

It is worth noting that psychological contract fulfilment and PCB are unique and thus impact organisational outcomes in different ways (Lambert, Edwards & Cable, 2003, Lambert, 2011). In a daily diary study Conway & Briner (2002) found that broken promises had a greater effect on daily mood due to feelings of betrayal and hurt, whereas exceeded promises showed only moderate or no difference. Whilst, fulfilment or exceeding of promises related to an employee’s sense of self-worth and feeling cared for (Conway & Briner, 2002) it also depends on how important delivered promises are to satisfying employee’s personal needs (Lambert, 2011). However, two longitudinal studies found that PCB in fact outweighed the effects on job
satisfaction, organisational commitment and well-being when compared to PC fulfilment (Conway et al., 2011). Research suggests that negative experiences such as PCB have more impact on an employee’s attitudes and behaviours and hence offer a useful concept for investigating LMX, POS and work engagement.

Whilst previous research has used the terms breach and violation interchangeably, Morrison & Robinson (1997) proposed a conceptual distinction. Under this view, PCB is defined as the employee’s mental evaluation of whether promises have been fulfilled or broke, whereas psychological contract violation reflects the emotional reaction to this evaluation. Robinson & Morrison (2000) add that although these two concepts are related, breach does not necessarily lead to feelings of violation. Instead they are seen to have different antecedents. PCB “stem[s] from factors that may cause organisations to renege on promises, factors that create incongruent perceptions between the employee and organisational agents, and factors that affect how actively the employee monitors the organisation’s actions regarding contract fulfilment” (Robinson & Morrison, 2000, p. 543). In contrast, violation results from the perception that principles of fair treatment have not been adhered to. Conway & Briner (2002) add that feelings of violation depend on the importance of the broken promise. Yet despite these conceptual developments in distinguishing between breach and violation, the vast majority of research has focused on exploring breach. In the words of Ng, Feldman & Butts (2014, p. 538) “Theoretically we are more interested in how cognitive assessments of breaches prompt employees to dissociate themselves from their relationships with their employer” through lowering their work engagement. Hence this study will also focus on exploring PCB from the employee perspective.

PCBs were more common amongst those employees who had encountered PCBs at their previous employer (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). As a result, employees were less trusting of their environment and were more actively monitoring for PCBs. This study also noted that employees with less alternative employment opportunities may be more forgiving or less inclined to detect PCBs.

Despite some studies having suggested that supportive relationships help create an engaged workforce, it is not yet understood why some line managers do not engage employees. As such, PCB may act as the missing explanatory mechanism in this relationship and existing links to sources of support will be discussed in the next section.

2.9.1. PCB and LMX/POS

When evaluating the extent to which PCs are fulfilled, some authors suggest that employees usefully combine perceptions of support (POS, LMX) (Zagenczyk, Gibney, Kiewitz, & Restubog, 2009). It is said that sources of PCB are differentiated so as to reciprocate appropriately to the relevant source (Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2006). Moreover, previous research suggests that LMX and POS result in different outcomes (Wayne et al., 1997).
In part this may be because organisations set the perimeters of the PC (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, Rousseau, 1995), whereas leaders have a more direct impact with regards to resources allocation (Yukl, 2010). To date, a relatively small number of studies have investigated the relationship between PCBs and work outcomes using LMX and/or POS as an intermediate variable.

On the one hand, a longitudinal study of three Belgian organisations highlighted how social exchange relationships with both the organisation (POS) and supervisor (LMX) moderated relationship between breach and violation (Dulac et al., 2008). At the same time, violation was found to mediate the relationship between breach and employee attitudes (commitment, trust, turnover intention). Findings correlate with the buffering hypothesis and social support perspective whereby less negative emotions were associated with higher-quality exchange relationships. Consequently feelings of violation following PCBs were associated with employees in lower quality exchanges.

Another longitudinal study by Dulac & Henderson (2008) showed that PCB partially mediated effects of POS and LMX on intention to quit, whereas violation fully mediated the effects of breach on commitment and trust. In line with the buffering hypothesis, a survey study sampling a wide range of white-collar jobs found that individuals who received support from their supervisor and felt they had a mentor reduced the negative impact of PCB (deviance) on POS (Zagenczyk et al., 2009). Employees with high levels of POS have been suggested to be more forgiving of PCBs and monitor the environment less closely (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Tekleab, Takeuchi & Taylor (2005) suggested that depending on POS quality employees are either protected or more likely to experience PCB. However, feelings of violations, rather than POS related to lower job satisfaction and subsequently their turnover intention and ultimately turnover itself.

On the other hand, studies have also found support for the intensification hypothesis, also termed betrayal perspective. As such, a longitudinal study of three samples found when employees were in high-quality LMX relationships, PCBs related negatively to organisational citizenship behaviours and in-role performance (Restubog, Bordia, Tang, & Krebs, 2010). This suggests that although PCBs are found to be less common in high-quality LMX, employees also find these more detrimental and possibly interpret these as being less valued. In another study of US hospital employees and full time employees from a Master of Business Administration (MBA) course, found that POS functions as a moderator between breach-violation-behaviour relationship (in-role performance, organisational citizenship behaviour at individual and organisational level) (Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011). At the same time, they emphasise that these relations were stronger for employees who felt had higher levels of POS. This study also suggests that a negative attitude towards work can further aggravate this relationship.

Other literature concurs, PCBs appear more severe to those employees who place greater value on the employment relationship (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Similarly, employees in HQ exchanges with their organisation react more strongly to PCBs (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). One reason for this
is that employees are more invested with their organisation over time (Tekleab et al., 2005). In comparison, PCB for those in low quality exchanges suggests not only that promises are not met, but also that sufficient resources are lacking (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). However, a more recent US study found that LMX moderated the relationship between PCB and aggressive voice behaviour (Ng et al., 2014). Overall this study suggests that high-quality exchanges with supervisors (LMX) and co-workers (CWX) support the buffering hypothesis in that PCBs are perceived less severe under these conditions. They caution that a focus on close relationships (LMX, CWX) may come at a cost of reducing commitment to the organisation.

On another but related note and in line with the aforementioned SET, PCs have been most frequently divided according to transactional (explicit, tangible, time-bound) and relational (implicit, infinite, intangible) types (Conway & Briner, 2009). Arguably, this shares some overlap with the conceptualisations of low-quality and high-quality LMX relationships discussed previously in this chapter. As such, the following studies will also be taken into account.

Morrison & Robinson (1997) posit that PCB leads to more intense feelings of violation in relational exchange relationships because of the inconsistency between prior and current exchanges. This is because when employees perceive higher levels of trust and subsequent POS, PCBs may be attributed to circumstances. In this view, low-quality exchanges will react to PCBs more strongly as they cannot buffer. Consistent with this, a more recent study found that relational breach leads to more severe consequences such as counterproductive work behaviours (abuse, production deviance and withdrawal) (Jensen, Opland, & Ryan, 2010). Moreover, social exchanges were found to moderate the relationship between PCB and work performance, supporting the intensifying hypothesis as those in high-quality trusting exchanges feel particularly betrayed as a result of PCB (Bal et al., 2010). Overall, as there is mixed evidence for both the buffering and the intensification hypothesis, clearly more work is required to provide further insights into whether high quality exchanges with the supervisor (LMX) as well as with the organisation (POS) buffer the impact of PCB and its effect on work engagement.

### 2.9.2. PCB and Work Engagement

Whilst there are numerous studies on PC and PCBs, studies investigating links with work engagement have been few and far in between (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). For example, Parzefall & Hakanen (2010) investigated the motivational and health enhancing effects of PC fulfilment in a Finnish public sector organisation. Whilst they found support for both effects of fulfilment, work engagement functioned as a mediator between the fulfilment, affective commitment and turnover intention relationship. Further to previous studies, which have suggested that fulfilment only has a moderate to no impact on attitudes, this study demonstrates that upholding promises can also result in energising employees as per the JD-R model.
This study suggests that an employee’s psychological bond as evident in the quality of relationship with one’s line manager or organisation is likely to affect both impact of breach on outcomes such as work engagement. Engaged employees may not only identify more strongly with their work, but they may also immerse themselves more deeply in negative aspects at work (Britt, Castro, & Adler, 2005). Others concur and argue that because work is more meaningful to engaged employees they find it more difficult to detach from work including stressful situations (Sonntag, Mojza, Binnewies, & Scholl, 2008).

A Dutch study of health care employees investigating PCs, job attitudes and age, showed that work centrality is key to establishing a relational contract with the organisation (Bal & Kooij, 2011). As a result, employees had higher levels of job satisfaction, work engagement and lower turnover intentions. What was interesting to note however, was that age and relational contracts were negatively related. This suggests that older workers either have less opportunity or are less interested in developing such relationships with the organisation as they are more careful where to invest their time and energy (Bal & Kooij, 2011). In relation to LMX-work engagement focus, those who view work as central to their life are more willing and dedicated to develop a high-quality relationship with both the organisation (POS) as well as their supervisor (LMX) and are thus more likely to feel engaged.

More recently, PCs and work engagement have been investigated in relation to tenure (Bal et al., 2013). Interestingly, this study highlights a feedback loop, whereby high work engagement and low turnover intention help the employee to negotiate better PCs with the organisation. As tenure increases, so do the perceived obligations of the organisation, as initial incentives are no longer as fulfilling for employees. A study of manufacturing and pharmaceutical managers in India highlights that perceptions of justice (procedural, interactional) and PC fulfilment relate positively with work engagement through building trusting relationships (Agarwal, 2014). They use both SET and JD-R to suggest that these types of justice function as a resource and thus predictor of work engagement and innovative work behaviour.

However, these studies have also been criticised for positioning PCB as an imbalance in SET exchanges rather than a resource loss as per the JD-R model (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). In addition, they did not include job satisfaction as a mediating variable. In an effort to overcome this, Rayton & Yalabik (2014) integrate both SET and JD-R frameworks to demonstrate that PCBs symbolises a resource loss when tasks are not challenging or too limiting, which results in lower job satisfaction and is reciprocated by lower levels of work engagement. Conversely, PCBs act as an imbalance in the exchange and act outside of the ‘norm of reciprocity’ whereby the exchange relationship then changes. How long these changes last and the severity of PCBs in this instance are not addressed. Similarly, they make a call for future research to not only focus more on the content of exchange but to also extend the current breach-satisfaction-engagement relationship using social support, POS, LMX or psychological contract violation as useful starting points.
Given the prevalence and cost of PCBs and the popularity and promise of work engagement in alleviating pressing organisational issues, it is surprising that research in this area is still limited.

2.10. Research Aim

It looks as though scholars have started to respond to criticisms, by which “the academic literature [...] has hardly addressed the question of how leaders influence the engagement level of their followers” (Segers et al., 2010). Research has since demonstrated that positive leadership styles such as empowerment, ethical or transformational leadership and most recently HQ LMX have both a direct and indirect effect on work engagement. Leaders thus help to create a supportive work environment by improving followers’ personal (hope, optimism, self-efficacy) and job resources (meaningful work, involvement).

However, several authors concur that there continues to be a gap, whereby the understanding of the impact of the leader on engagement is not yet well established and has received limited research attention (Segers et al., 2010; Soane, 2014; Tims et al., 2011, Carasco-Saul et al. 2015). More specifically there appears to be “little research that provides a direct test of the association between LMX and engagement [...] it seems reasonable to propose that focusing on developing HQ LMX is likely to yield engagement with work” (Soane, 2014, p. 154). Thus, it seems that literature is still in its infancy at understanding “how these relationships vary as a function of an employee’s relationship with his or her line manager and the organisation” (Alfes et al., 2013, p. 335).

This study will focus on exploring how sources of social support namely LMX and POS relate to work engagement, in particular via PCB. This study thus aims to extend recent research investigating the breach-satisfaction-engagement relationship (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014) and the LMX-engagement-performance relationship (Breevaart et al., 2015) and therefore answering calls for more research linking LMX and work engagement. Therefore, the overarching research question is as follows:

In what way does the quality of the relationship and the exchange content from the line manager and organisation impact the employees’ experience of work engagement?

2.11. Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter has presented an extensive review of the key areas of literature regarding work engagement and associated antecedents. It has identified gaps in the literature as LMX and work engagement have not yet been thoroughly connected and it is not yet understood how employees respond to variation in exchange content from their leader and the organisation. Similarly, evaluating both LMX and POS as potential antecedents to work engagement provides an interesting foundation for this research.
In this study, PCB is positioned as variation in exchange content from sources such as the leader and organisation and thus represents a potentially diminished social exchange quality. It is argued that in line with SET and the norm of reciprocity, employees return such unfavourable treatment by reducing their work engagement and subsequent performance.

Overall studies have shown that HQ LMX can provide a more resourceful and thus more engaging work environment. As such, these types of exchanges often appear more privileged in that they receive more access and more diverse resources which are reciprocated with greater levels of trust, commitment, citizenship behaviours and competence as well as lower intention to quit. As suggested by a number of authors, most notably Saks (2006), work engagement offers an alternative way for employees to reciprocate such relationships. However there is still some debate about whether high quality social exchanges help to buffer job demands and a lack of resources or whether a sense of betrayal becomes greater because of the sudden discrepancy in the relationship. Studies thus need to more accurately differentiate between sources and severity of breach and the resulting impact this has on the employee in terms of violation, work engagement and other possible outcomes.

This chapter has found that according to existing academic literature, the quality of social exchanges play an important role in providing a resourceful work environment. Whilst social support from colleagues can aid employees, LMX relationships and POS appear to have a greater impact on the employees’ ability to perform their job effectively. It is clear that there continues to be a debate about whether LMX feeds into POS, vice versa or whether employees differentiate LMX and POS as distinct exchange relationships. Intuitively and empirically it appears that those in close proximity and operating with their own discretion are most likely to have a greater impact on an employee’s psychological contract. By the same token, these sources are then also those most likely to be sources of psychological contract breach if they fail to uphold their side of the exchange. It was also noted that employees differentiate sources of psychological contract breach.

Despite previous calls in literature to investigate LMX and work engagement more closely, it is only very recently that this has been done. Breevaart et al. (2015) are the first study to investigate the LMX-work engagement-performance relationship. Rayton & Yalabik (2014) are the first to connect breach and engagement via job satisfaction, whilst also innovatively positioning PCB as a resource loss. Whilst these studies represent notable milestones in the literature, they can be further extended to take into account both proximal and more distant measures of support (LMX, POS). Moreover, they further differentiate between relationship quality, severity of breaches and its impact on work engagement. A qualitative methodology to provide better insights into these relationships will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction to Chapter

The introductory chapters 1 and 2 have provided a critical discussion of the background and developments in the field, the key drivers and outcomes as well as how aspects of leadership and engagement have been connected in the literature to date. The two chapters have shown that job resources, such as social support from colleagues and their line manager, play an important role in facilitating engagement. Underpinning this research is the notion that whilst leaders are not the only aspect influencing engagement, they play a pivotal role in shaping employees’ experiences of work. Moreover, a recent study by Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti & Heuvel (Breevaart et al., 2015) has further highlighted the importance of a good working relationship by demonstrating that HQ LMX help to create a resourceful and hence, more engaging work environment for employees. Despite previous calls in the literature, this is the first known study to establish this connection and thus, verifies the importance of exploring this research area. The literature review has highlighted that more work still needs to be done in order to understand the impact of leaders on employee’s work engagement.

This chapter discusses the methodology for the research and details the philosophical and theoretical approaches underpinning this study. A coherent and rigorous research design was developed in order to address the research question appropriately.

Firstly, I outline and provide justification for the adopted research philosophy. Regarding which, I hold a relativist ontological perspective that frames a social constructionist epistemological approach. Because this research was exploratory and interpretive in nature, the focus was on understanding the world through the experiences and meanings of participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This was seen as most appropriate because the research focuses on gaining an understanding of the impact of the line manager on the employee, which is referred to as leader-member exchange (LMX) thereafter. I also detail potential alternative approaches and justify why these were not adopted for this research.

Secondly, I discuss the overall research design as well as the methods and techniques used to collect and analyse the data as well as how these fit the overarching research philosophy. I provide relevant detail around how the interview guide was established and how ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to for this research. I then detail the procedure for gaining access to organisations and the research context, followed by a discussion of approaches to sampling. The procedure and particulars of the pilot study and subsequent interviews will also be explained. I then conclude this chapter by explaining and justifying the methods adopted for the data analysis. I adopted an iterative approach moving back and forth between literature and the data when analysing findings thematically.
3.2. Research Philosophy & Approaches

Research can be differentiated according to whether a qualitative or quantitative approach is followed. Arguably a more “[...] useful way to classify research methods is to distinguish between the underlying philosophical assumptions guiding the research” (Myers, 2009, p. 35). Understanding the different philosophical assumptions of management research is key to good research design (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, knowledge of the associated strengths and weaknesses of philosophical approaches, can guide the researcher to recognise suitable designs in order to answer the research question (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

However, there continues to be widespread debate and inconsistencies in the literature regarding which philosophies and approaches belong to which research paradigm. For instance, Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) position realism, relativism and nominalism as ontological positions as well as positivism and constructionism as epistemological opposites. Whereas Bryman (2012) suggests that constructionism is an ontological position and epistemological approaches are classified as positivism or interpretivism. Further inconsistencies can be found in Crotty (1998) and Blaikie (2009), where again, the groupings of ontology and epistemology vary. It is also worth noting that Burrell & Morgan’s (1979) anti-positivism epistemology has been more recently understood as interpretivism (Bryman, 2012) and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Similarly, Klenke (2016) suggests that in fact constructionism and interpretivism are essentially the same in the social sciences literature and best represent epistemological assumptions. It becomes clear that there is some inconsistency in how the philosophical terminology is used.

The chosen philosophical viewpoint informs all aspects of research and hence, shapes the questions we ask, the way in which we conduct research and how we interpret the results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Whilst there is undoubtedly some overlap between ontology and epistemology, I will follow the conceptualisation of Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) for greater clarity. I start with a discussion of the ontological perspective, which acts as the foundation of the research methodology in that it clarifies the nature of reality. Following this, I establish the epistemological underpinnings of this research in relation to the nature of knowledge, before linking these overarching approaches to the methods and techniques adopted for this research.

3.2.1. Ontology

FIGURE 1 below depicts the opposite ends of the ontological perspectives and briefly points out key distinctions between these, with the chosen perspective of ‘relativism’ underlined.
Ontology is best understood as the “philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 18). At one extreme is the realist perspective, where a single truth exists, which is external and independent to that of the researcher (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). It is said to be the leading paradigm for conducting management research (Myers, 2009). Within this perspective, the social and natural worlds are treated in the same way by focusing on observations and objective measurements that serve as concrete facts (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Moreover, realism centres on understanding the world through causal relationships in order to produce universal laws (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

However, as the current research is focused on exploring internal psychological experiences of the employee, namely work engagement, which is subjective and varies amongst individuals, realism was not deemed as an appropriate ontological perspective for this research.

There are additional variations of each ontological perspective, such as transcendentalism, which has more recently become part of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008) and nominalism that goes beyond relativism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). From the critical realism perspective, the social world is understood as an on-going process, where reality is likely to be temporary and shaped by multiple interpretations (Bryman, 2012). “It [thus] recognises and differentiates between different levels of phenomena” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 29). Critical realism involves focusing on causal relationships through understanding underlying structures and mechanisms that are likely to change over time (Bryman, 2012). Its focus therefore lies on investigating these mechanisms via experiments and contributing to understanding causal relationships and making policy recommendations. Whilst critical realists tend to use qualitative techniques, few studies appear to have fully adopted this approach and instead, only draw on certain aspects such as challenging the status-quo (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). In part this is due to limited guidance on how to conduct such research and its predominant use in economic and international relations research (Fletcher, 2016).
Although the critical realism perspective in its entirety is not suited for the purposes of this research, it can act as a useful guide in investigating the causal relationships of how LMX quality impacts employees’ work engagement. Therefore, as per previous qualitative studies, this research too will draw on the elements relevant to this study.

With regards to the nominalist perspective, there is some overlap with relativism in that both question the existence of a universal truth. The nominalist perspective can be seen as another variation beyond relativism, under which it is suggested that there is no truth and instead, facts are created, not observed, as per the realist perspective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Nominalism can be likened to strong constructionism, with its focus being on sense making and understanding, which could have made it an appropriate ontological perspective for addressing the research question. However, the emphasis on discourses and creating new insights and actions meant that it no longer fit the key aim of generating theory.

The relativist perspective was found to be most appropriate for this research in that under this lens multiple truths and facts are accepted as being dependent on the observer. As such, reality is subjective and relative to existing knowledge (Crotty, 1998). It is given meaning to by people, through their interpretations of actions and experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The researcher becomes part of the phenomenon being researched and is thus internal to this reality. “Qualitative researchers endorse a relativistic ontology that is always intersubjective, is socially constructed and shaped by context” (Klenke 2016, p.15). In sum, the relativist perspective recognises the importance that people play in shaping their reality (Burr, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). Again, as previously discussed, there is inconsistency in how terms are used in the literature. For instance, some suggest that qualitative constructionist approaches best fit the ontological perspective of nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), whereas others endorse a relativist perspective (Klenke, 2016).

In reality, research boundaries are not as clear-cut and therefore, an approach situated between the relativist and nominalist perspective is a more realistic representation of the adopted approach. However, for the purposes of clarity an overall relativist ontological perspective mirrors the focus of this research best. This is because reality is subjective and created within the individual person, hence capturing the different psychological experiences that employees have at work. Moreover, it is also consistent with how employees attribute meanings and actions to the quality of their line manager relationship as evident by receiving job resources or perceived psychological contract breaches. It follows that I adopted the relativist perspective as it serves the purposes of the research well and it helps to address the overarching research question.

### 3.2.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is defined as the basic set of beliefs about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Myers, 2009). More succinctly put, it focuses on “the relationship between
the knower and what is known” (Klenke, 2016, p. 15). Ontology and epistemology are linked and consequently, what we adopt about the nature of reality will undoubtedly inform how we know about it. Essentially, the core philosophical distinction amongst epistemological perspectives is between positivism and social constructionism (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The key features of these two perspectives are listed below in TABLE 1, with the chosen perspective of ‘social constructionism’ underlined. Whilst many more philosophical positions and groupings exist, this study will focus on the most fundamental viewpoints of management research and discuss their suitability for this research.

**TABLE 1 Key distinctions between Positivism and Social Constructionism (Adapted from Source: Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 24)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>POSITIVISM</th>
<th>SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Part of what is observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Progress</td>
<td>Hypothesis &amp; deductions</td>
<td>Gathering rich data &amp; induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>Demonstrate causality</td>
<td>Increase understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalisation</td>
<td>Statistical probability</td>
<td>Theoretical abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Large random sample</td>
<td>Small number of cases</td>
</tr>
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</table>

It needs to be recognised that whilst these conceptualisations of positivism and social constructionism are philosophically distinct, in practice such clarity is often lacking (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Myers, 2009). Thus, it is worth noting that even though each philosophical stance has a multitude of underlying philosophical assumptions and methodological implications, most researchers will only identify with a limited number of these (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

In line with the realist ontology discussed above, the relationship between the researcher and knowledge is seen to be independent and hence involves larger samples (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Positivism has been popularised by the notion that laws of the natural sciences are transferable to the social world. It suggests that observations are the only meaningful way to gather knowledge (Crotty, 1998; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Hence, positivist research is primarily concerned with testing theory, verifying or disproving hypothesis grounded in literature (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and establishing causal relationships (Bhaskar, 2008). Positivism requires the operationalisation of quantifiable constructs, which is difficult regarding the current research, as it is focused on exploring experiences that are not yet fully understood in the literature. Moreover, as positivism usually involves adopting deductive reasoning, whereby the “researcher starts top-down” and
seeks to be confirmative (Myers, 2009, p. 23), it was deemed not suitable for the exploratory nature of this research.

The main aim of the positivist paradigm is to generate significant results that can be generalised back to the population under investigation, in order to help increase predictive validity of certain phenomena (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). Whilst the generalisability of findings is certainly a key strength of this perspective and it is often more time and cost effective to use survey methods under this lens, it also requires sufficiently large samples to make valid inferences (Myers, 2009). Hence, positivism fails to take into account the nature of this research as the focus was on gaining an in-depth understanding how LMX impacts work engagement experiences of employees. Instead of random, representative and significantly large sample sizes, this study was aimed at understanding the meaning of a smaller number of participants. In sum, a positivist epistemological perspective was not adopted for this research because it was inconsistent with the aims and purposes of this research.

Social constructionism was seen as the most appropriate perspective for addressing the research question. It is worth noting, however, that inconsistencies even amongst this epistemological perspective continue to persist in the literature (Crotty, 1998). For instance, some advocate a ‘constructivist’ stance where sense making is limited to the individual level. In contrast, a ‘constructionist’ view, recognises that meaning stems from social interaction, hence there is emphasis placed on the importance of context and culture on individual sense making processes (Crotty, 1998). However, authors often use these terms interchangeably, because of the difficulty of clearly distinguishing between (Patton, 2002). For clarity, the epistemological perspective adopted here is that of social constructionism for exploring LMX and its impact on the employee experience at work, because it is inherently linked to the interaction between the line manager and employee.

Initial post-positivistic or what later became known as social constructionism or interpretivist perspectives (Klenke, 2016), developed in opposition to positivism and “the notion that science can generate objective knowledge” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 5). Authors, such as Berger & Luckmann (1967) as well as Lincoln & Guba (1985) were seen as key to popularising this stance. The social world was seen as ‘relative’ to the subject, whereby reality is co-constructed and phenomena can only be understood within the relevant study context (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Myers, 2009). Moreover, this view suggests that the researcher becomes embedded and central to the research as the findings themselves are constructed and interpreted (Lincoln et al., 2011; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). One of the underlying assumptions of social constructionism is challenging taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2015). “At its most general, it implies that social researchers [...] are always implicated and engaged in the process of inquiry” (Delamont & Atkinson, 2009, p. 673). As such, it encourages ‘reflexivity’ to question and be aware of how one’s motivations past experiences, cultural background and context can shape interpretations of findings (Lincoln et al., 2011). Consequently, a reflective research diary was kept throughout the data collection process and discussions with peers and supervisors were also used to evaluate emerging issues and ideas.
Central to the social constructionist paradigm is the aim of generating new insights and theory through rich data collected from a small sample size (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Hibberd, 2005). This corresponds well with the research purpose, in that a less distant and interactive relationship with a small number of participants enabled the elicitation of rich insights into the inner psychological experiences of the employee and the exchange content of the LMX and POS. Whilst both deductive and inductive reasoning can be used as part of qualitative research, inductive or ‘bottom up’ logic is often preferred and was thus chosen (Myers, 2009). Within this perspective, the different meanings that individuals place on their experiences are recognised as well as for instance the importance that they place on how their line manager impacts on how they feel at work.

To summarise, the social constructionist perspective offers many advantages and hence, was considered well matched for the purposes of this research. The flexibility in exploring the subjective nature of this topic, is useful when exploring the way in which support from the leader and organisation impact how employees feel at work.

3.2.3. Reflexivity of the Researcher

Consistent with the social constructionist stance adopted for this research, knowledge is considered as being essentially co-constructed with the participant. Lincoln et al. (2011) note that researchers adopting a qualitative approach often focus on studying phenomena in their natural settings, but also become part of the sense making and interpretation process that follows. Regarding which, it is recognised that the researcher becomes part of the research, because her/his past experience and cultural background inevitably shape how she/he observes, interprets, analyses and describes the phenomena under study.

Reflexivity encompasses the entire process of conducting research, from the initial design to executing this in practice as well as the analysis and interpretation of findings (Lee & Lings, 2008). Moreover, this is helpfully distinguished by Johnson and Duberley (2000) into two further categories. On the one hand, epistemic reflexivity focuses on challenging the researcher’s belief and value system and how these influence our taken for granted knowledge. On the other hand, methodological reflexivity is concerned with how the researcher’s behaviour helps to shape the outcomes of the research. As a consequence, both types of reflexivity should encourage the researcher to develop “critical self-awareness” as well as being self-conscious about the choices one makes in terms of the research design, execution and analysis (Ransome, 2013, p. 139).

Whilst reflexivity has come under some scrutiny for focusing too heavily on the individual researcher, it still provides a useful way of making careful and informed choices about conducting research (Lee & Lings, 2008; Ransome, 2013). For the duration of this research, reflexivity was exercised through the use of a research diary as well as seeking feedback and advice from my supervisors and other relevant colleagues. Seeking feedback from supervisors and colleagues was key to resolving initial issues in gaining
access and in securing organisations for participation. The research diary proved particularly useful for gathering thoughts and first impressions about the sample size and the approach to the pilot interviews. Throughout the data collection the research diary was also used to note down participant observations whilst on site for each organisation and during the interviews. This later led to more detailed memo’s or journal entries to reflect on initial codes and themes.

3.3. Research Design & Approach

It is clear that the set of philosophical assumptions underlying this study, informs the research design, approach and the choice of appropriate methods. The chosen relativist and social constructionist paradigms have influenced the research in terms of how it should be conducted and how findings should be interpreted and evaluated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The choice was essentially between a quantitative or qualitative approach. “It should be clear by now that there is a link between epistemology and ontology, with positivism fitting realist ontologies” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 25). Hence, quantitative approaches are concerned with using objective measures and testing causal relationships rather than providing detailed insights into variables. This meant that a quantitative approach was rejected due to the inherent mismatch with the aims of this research. Moreover, the fact that the relationship between LMX and work engagement has not yet been adequately addressed in the literature meant that a qualitative approach was best suited to explore this territory.

Corbin & Strauss (2008, p. 12) highlight that “qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables.” That is, qualitative approaches centre around subjectivity and are concerned with sense making and understanding meaning (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Hibberd, 2005). As such, Klenke (2016) notes that a qualitative approach is particularly suited to exploring aspects of organisational behaviour, because it provides sufficiently rich detail to capture and truthfully to reflect the phenomena under study. The research was concerned with exploring and understanding the impact on employees’ working lives in terms of how support, i.e. LMX quality, influences their experience of work engagement. Hence a qualitative approach was best suited to explore this phenomenon. “Qualitative research makes it possible to reveal the often invisible but no less real complexities of social structures and opens venues for knowing human and social life more fully” (Halquist & Musanti, 2010, p. 449).

The next sub-sections contain a discussion on the methods chosen to collect data, whilst also evaluating the usefulness of potential alternatives for this research. I also address the types of questions used to create the interview guide and how ethical considerations and guidelines were adhered to throughout this study. Following this the procedure for access and the research context will be discussed, whilst providing further insights into the approaches to sampling and interview procedure.
3.3.1. Data Collection Methods

Whilst there are several methods that potentially fit with the chosen philosophical perspectives, it is important to recognise that there is often no single best research design and thus, it is not always easy to identify appropriate methods. Throughout the course of the design, data collection, analysis and beyond, reflexivity regarding one’s own research is crucial (Lincoln et al., 2011). Before discussing the chosen method of semi-structured interviews, the suitability of potential alternatives will also be evaluated.

Survey or questionnaire methods are the most popular way of collecting data for management research (Myers, 2009). They are often quantitative in nature, focusing on testing causal relationships from a large and statistically representative sample (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In the first instance, this approach was rejected due to the opposing logic to the adopted qualitative approach. Moreover, as the research involved seeking to gain in depth insights into the employee experience of support and work engagement, the survey method was rejected, because it would not provide sufficiently rich data to provide comprehensive understanding in relation to this under investigated area of research.

The use of diary methods can be differentiated into quantitative ‘time spent’ or more qualitative ‘free text’ approaches (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However diary methods often collect data over prolonged periods of time and tend to focus on the frequency that participants capture occurrences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Whilst the quantitative use of this method facilitates access to larger samples, it is also limited to a set of questions and scales that only capture such issues as how often a behaviour occurs. Therefore, the qualitative use of the diary method was considered more appropriate, as it would allow for the capturing of more detail and contextual factors, such as how variation in LMX exchange content impacted on their work engagement as it happened on a particular day. However, the fact that diary methods often involve a predefined set of questions, limits the flexibility of adapting the research to take into account aspects that are of particular significance to the participant. Whilst each of these approaches have their own merits, they were seen to be too ‘researcher driven’ (Bryman & Bell, 2011). They were thus discounted as a primary method of data collection, as they did not match the requirements of this research. Instead ‘free text’ diary studies may prove to be a useful avenue for future studies once a better understanding of this field has been established.

Consistent with the adopted qualitative approach, the ethnographic method was also plausible. It provides rich insights into “behaviours, language and interactions” of individuals in a social context, such as an organisational setting (Klenke, 2016, p. 193). The value of this approach lies in the opportunity to learn rather than to predict or prove predetermined associations. In fact, ethnographic research is the “earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 81) and certainly the most detailed (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Myers, 2009). It is often paired with a case study approach drawing on multiple sources of data, such as participant observation, informal discussions and more formal individual or focus group
interviews (Patton, 2002). Hence, it invariably requires the researcher to be immersed in the social context for prolonged periods of time (Bryman, 2012). This method also lends itself to collecting longitudinal data, which involves data collection on two or more occasions over a period of time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). However, in order to do this, this would require the researcher closely monitoring the same participants or the same variables to ensure consistency and to note relevant variation (Patton, 2002). Whilst this is not only time and resource intense (Bryman & Bell, 2011), longitudinal data collection is also vulnerable to changes in the business or participants due to reorganisation, redundancy or staff simply moving on.

Given this research was aimed at gaining a deeper understanding in relation the work engagement phenomena and how sources of support shape this experience, a longitudinal research approach was not deemed necessary. That is, the focus of the study was not to explore fluctuations within the same participants, but rather, to investigate the extent to which social exchanges with their line manager and the organisation contribute to their feeling engaged at work. Consequently, a cross-sectional design that involved collecting detailed interview data at one point in time was seen as suitable for meeting the aims of this study.

Whilst ethnographic, case study or longitudinal data collection would provide more detailed and broad insights into organisational life than cross-sectional interviews per se, the time constraints of this research meant that this was not feasible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Myers, 2009). In part, this was due to the associated difficulty of gaining access and subsequent lengthy data analysis. At the same time, the observational element of ethnography would perhaps have provided a better understanding of the power dynamics within the organisational context. However, this was discounted because it was seen as focusing heavily on observable behaviours, rather than providing insights into internal employee experiences and meanings. It would, thus, not provide sufficient understanding about how, for instance, LMX shapes the employee experience of work engagement. Despite rejecting observation as the main form of data collection, it was used as an additional means to gather insights into the organisational culture in between interviews and when first familiarising myself with each organisation. This was so as to acquire a more holistic impression of the day-to-day business and overall atmosphere at each location.

The literature points out that interviewing is the most popular method in qualitative research, because it is well suited to exploring complex and subtle phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Hence, interviews were seen to be most suited to the purposes and constraints of this research. The fundamental advantage of interviews is that they involve interaction between the researcher and the participant and thus, lead to the co-creation of knowledge (Lee & Lings, 2008). This not only mirrors the social constructionist stance adopted for this research, but also encourages a continuous cycle of critical inquiry into what is meaningful to participants and the researcher’s interpretations throughout the data collection.
Before discussing the chosen method of semi-structured interviews in more detail, alternative types of interviews such as focus groups as well as structured and unstructured interviews will be discussed. In focus group interviews, the researcher acts as a moderator asking a small set of questions within a fairly tightly defined topic to an ideal group size of six to ten participants (Lee & Lings, 2008). They are often used to explore common public topics, in particular, market research regarding advertising, health and politics (Fontana & Frey, 2005). However, they have also been used to explore issues, such as change management and organisational policies (Lee & Lings, 2008). Despite the free reign approach of the focus group interviews making them somewhat difficult to control and sometimes leading to irrelevant discussions, they do offer an opportunity for individuals to highlight areas that are particularly meaningful to them. At the same time, having multiple participants also provides greater scope for challenging views, encouraging others to speak up as well as co-creating meaning (Myers, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009).

Given it would have been possible to select and cluster focus group participants based on their demographics, area of work or rank, i.e. employee, middle manager or senior manager (Lee & Lings, 2008), further unknown underlying power dynamics such as rivalries between departments could exist. The extent to which this would have impacted on the research is also questionable. For instance, such power dynamics could result in participants being less open and honest about their work engagement experiences or result in social desirability bias in their responses, whereby they agree with the dominant opinion (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Not only are focus groups somewhat difficult to control and hence, require experienced or professional moderators, they also involve more complex transcription than individual interviews due to the number of participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lee & Lings, 2008). Focus group interviews were rejected as a means of data collection as this research was concerned with exploring individual stories about the extent to which support influences work engagement experiences. This is an inherently subjective and sensitive topic that would, therefore, not lend itself easily to group discussions.

In contrast, individual interviews offer greater privacy and control over the discussion as the researcher can focus her/his attention on a single participant rather than several speakers (Lee & Lings, 2008; Myers, 2009). This not only enables the exploration of the participant’s perspective and context more deeply, but also allows a more empathetic approach to any uncovered issues or emotions throughout this process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Although one hour of interview often results in up to five hours of verbatim transcription, this is often considerably less than transcribing focus group interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Further strengths of the individual interview will be discussed in the section justifying the use of the semi-structured interview after evaluating the merits and limitations of structured and unstructured interview methods.

There is much debate about whether structured interviews still fall within the qualitative interviewing sphere or whether they are essentially quantitative in nature (Lee & Lings, 2008). This is because they often involve adopting a questionnaire approach using either face-to-face or telephone interviews.
Regardless of which domain these interviews fall into, the strength of structured interviews lies in offering consistency across participants, as the interview guide consists of a pre-defined and often closed set of questions with a prescribed order (Myers, 2009). However, it thus sacrifices the possibility to change the order or types of questions asked, thereby thwarting a natural conversational style and the opportunity to establish rapport with the participant. A further criticism of this method is that it only reflects the researcher's perspective on what aspects are important or relevant. Moreover, it does not allow for additional exploration of topics that might be of greater significance to the participant (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Myers, 2009) and hence additional insights might be missed. As a result, it is perhaps the 'least effective' method of interviewing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), being simply too limiting (Saunders et al., 2009). Structured interviews were discounted for being too static and researcher driven.

At the other extreme lies the unstructured interview, which are more informal free-flowing conversations with very limited probing (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In essence, unstructured interviews often only require a few brief topics or in some cases only one to provide a rough direction for the interview (Myers, 2009). In this scenario, the participant can exert more control over what is discussed and to what depth, whilst the researcher is unobtrusive and rather passive (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Some describe unstructured interviews as not being true interviews, but rather snippets of conversations that can at times be irrelevant or an unproductive use of time (Lee & Lings, 2008). However, others argue that unstructured interviews provide the most detailed foundations on which to generate theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Whilst this research was exploratory in nature and aimed at generating theoretical insights, an unstructured interview would not guarantee sufficient relevance of the findings so as to be able to address the research question. The need to capture individual experiences of how support influences a participant’s willingness to contribute and reciprocate via their work engagement levels was key and hence, a semi-structured interview approach was deemed more fitting for meeting these aims.

Some view unstructured and semi-structured interviews as end points of the same continuum (Lee & Lings, 2008), such that the latter method offers significant benefits in relation to gathering relevant data to answer the research question that the former cannot offer. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow for the collection of sufficient in-depth insights into employee experiences of work engagement. “Stories open valuable windows into the emotional, political and symbolic lives of organisations, offering researchers a powerful instrument for carrying out research [and] gain access to deeper organizational realities” (Gabriel, 2000, p. 2). Having literature inform a set of predefined questions helps to situate the collected data in relation to the research questions and area of study. Moreover, such a predefined interview guide also increases transparency of the research, as multiple researchers would end up asking the same types of questions and thus, achieve comparable research data (Lee & Lings, 2008). At the same time, semi-structured interviews are flexible enough so that the researcher can adapt subsequent interviews regarding emerging areas of interest (Saunders et al., 2009). Similarly, follow up questions and probes enable the researcher to explore both breadth and depth (Bryman & Bell,
2011; Myers, 2009) of the employee experiences of work engagement in relation to organisational support. It becomes evident from the critical review of other methods that semi-structured interviews provide the necessary framework to gain rich insights that are relevant in helping to answer the research question.

### 3.3.2. Interview Guide

In order to create a conversation with a purpose, the interview guide (see Appendix 1) contained a set of pre-defined open and closed questions around three key areas of the literature discussed in chapter 2. The initial section of the interview guide was concerned with introductory questions (i.e. Can you very briefly tell me what your current role and responsibilities are? How long have you worked here?), as well as demographic questions (i.e. Would you mind if I also asked about your age for research purposes?). This was in order to get to know the participant and their respective background, so as to be able to interpret their responses within the appropriate context.

As recommended in the literature, the interview guide contained informal, relatively short and simple questions as well as the types of questions being varied so as to keep the participant interested (Bryman, 2012; Lee & Lings, 2008). Moreover, the questions moved from being general (i.e. How do you feel at work? What motivates you at work?) to becoming more specific over time (i.e. Choosing between your job, line manager, co-workers, or family and friends – which one acts as the key source of motivation for you?). Opening or introductory questions were used to ease participants into different topic areas and provide a foundation for further discussion (i.e. What does a good working relationship look like to you? How would you describe your relationship with your current line manager?). Questions like this were often followed by specifying questions (i.e. How long have you had your current line manager? What is working well?). Probing questions were also used to elicit further detail from the participants about particular situations (i.e. How did you react? How does it compare to the current situation? Has this changed over time?).

At times, hypothetical scenarios were also used to prompt the participants and to help reveal further details about the dynamics of their relationship with their line manager or the organisation (i.e. Let’s imagine your line manager did change their behaviour in a positive way. How would that make you feel? How would you feel if [the organisation] listened to your feedback and implemented your suggestions at work?). This also offered the opportunity to follow up and clarify potential misunderstandings or inconsistencies in what the participants reported (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Critical Incident Technique (CIT) style questions were also used as part of the interview guide to encourage an open discussion about specific situations or experiences, rather than always asking direct questions (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundsen & Maglio, 2005; Flanagan, 1954). CIT was initially developed within a positivist paradigm by Flanagan (1954) over 60 years ago. By observing and measuring human behaviour, experts used CIT to solve practical issues or derive psychological principles for further study (Flanagan,
These expert observers would often follow five key phases, covering: 1) understanding activity aims; 2) asserting a plan; 3) collecting relevant data; 4) analysing data; and 5) interpreting and analysing the results (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 477). However, this method has since evolved and established itself as a qualitative research method embracing the social constructionist paradigm and moved away from its organisational psychology roots (Butterfield et al., 2005; Halquist & Musanti, 2010). Rather than prescribing a set of rigid processes, Flanagan (1954) encouraged that CIT be adapted to the needs and context of the research.

Through asking participants to provide detailed accounts and thus, relive certain situations and experiences, the benefits of CIT lie in uncovering feelings and deeper insights that are associated with these events. Relevant questions from the interview guide ranged from asking about work engagement experiences (i.e. Can you describe a situation where you felt [particularly] engaged/disengaged with your work? What happened? How did it make you feel?) to exploring inconsistencies in the line management relationship (i.e. Think about a time when you felt that your current line manager broke perceived expectations or promises between the two of you). Participants were not only encouraged to recall the most recent situations, but also those that made a particularly memorable impression on them. This was in order to capture accurate and sufficiently detailed participant accounts about engaging experiences at work (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954). In addition, they were also encouraged to reflect on why these situations impacted on them either positively or negatively.

“Critical incidents are not ‘things’ that exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands, but like all data, critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation.” (Tripp, 1993, p. 8).

Hence, these incidents are no longer any observable human activity or event, for they can also be collected empirically via retrospective self-reports from participants and can range from an everyday event to a problematic or memorable situation (Halquist & Musanti, 2010). Thus a shift in focus has taken place from the expert observer to the participant and the meaning that they ascribe to such incidents (Tripp, 1993). However, fundamental principles of CIT still revolve around four constituent parts, whereby the participant: 1) describes the situation; 2) reflects upon and interprets the emotional impact it has had on them; 3) any subsequent actions taken; and finally, 4) a report on the outcome of the situation (Butterfield et al., 2005).

Despite CIT having been criticised in the past for emphasising meaning, interpretation and reflection, this does not negate the value of this method, but rather highlights its suitability for qualitative research (Halquist & Musanti, 2010). Through its emphasis on exploring meaning, CIT is well matched to the assumptions of the social constructionist paradigm. This is because within this view, reality depends on the individual and is co-constructed through social interactions. Moreover, the focus on understanding the individual’s perspective and context is a key advantage of this method. Whilst CIT has been criticised for relying on retrospective self-reports, the accuracy
and level of detail that the participant is able to recall should counteract these doubts (Flanagan, 1954; Tripp, 1993).

In fact, the usefulness and robustness of CIT has been demonstrated in terms of “studying effective and ineffective ways of doing something, looking at helping and hindering factors, collecting functional or behavioural descriptions of events or problems, examining successes and failures, or determining characteristics that are critical to important aspects of an activity or event” (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 476). From its initial inception within organisational psychology, it has since been applied to diverse settings including marketing, communication, health, politics as well as change management and organisational policies (Butterfield et al., 2005; Halquist & Musanti, 2010).

In addition to varying the types and style of questions asked, the interview guide consisted of three sections, which drew on a range of themes from the literature as well as the most commonly used and validated measures employed. The first section revolved around exploring the participants’ understanding and experiences of work engagement, followed by describing the current and past line manager relationships in relation to these experiences. The third and final section of the interview guide was focused on perceptions of organisation support.

Questions in relation to work engagement stemmed from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and revolved around the aspects of vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova & Bakker, 2002). In an effort to avoid bias, the participants were asked about their understanding of what being engaged at work meant (i.e. In your own words, what does being engaged at work mean to you?). This was to avoid the researcher imposing the academic definition and to explore whether they had similar understandings of the phenomenon. For those individuals who were more hesitant in coming forward with their own definition of engagement, additional questions included (i.e. Do you find the work that you do interesting? Do you feel like time flies by at work? Can you identify yourself with your work? Are you dedicated to your work?). As mentioned above, other questions in this section include CIT style questions to reveal situations where the participants felt particularly engaged or disengaged with their work and why.

The second section of the interview guide pertained to the participants’ relationship with their current and at times, their past line manager. Initial inspiration for the questions in this section were drawn from the LMX7 scale (Scandura & Graen, 1984) (i.e. Do you know where you stand with your leader? How would you characterise your working relationship with your leader?). Moreover, the questions focused on identifying the time spent with their current line manager as well as exploring the quality of this relationship (i.e. What is working well? What is not working so well?). In order to evaluate better the nature of the social exchange relationship, the participants were also asked more generic questions about ideal working relationships (i.e. What do you think is the most effective way in which line managers can engage their staff?). This later provided a foundation from which to compare and contrast the existing relationship quality with the ideal, as well as the
extent to which the psychological contract was met (i.e. What expectations did you have of your working relationship when you first started? Has this developed as you expected or hoped?).

With regards to the exchange content, items from the Economic and Social Exchange scale (Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006) were used to inspire interview questions in this area. Of particular interest were “I watch very carefully what I get from my organisation, relative to what I contribute” “I don’t mind working hard today, I know I will eventually be rewarded by my organisation” and “I try to look out for the best interests of the organisation because I can rely on my organisation to take care of me.” In the interview guide, these statements were translated into examining the level of perceived support received from the employer (i.e. Are you happy with the training and career opportunities this organisation provides? Are the level of pay and benefits adequate for the work that you do? Who do you turn to for help?). Supplementary questions revolved around exploring reasons for changes in the exchange relationship (i.e. Does your employer appreciate the work that you do? How would you feel if your employer broke perceived promises?) and the impact these had on the participant with regards to how they felt at work.

In addition to the Economic and Social Exchange scale, in order to identify psychological contract breaches, the Perceived Breach Scale was used as an initial guide (Robinson & Morrison, 2000) (i.e. I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions. Almost all the promises made by my employer during recruitment have been kept). However, psychological contract breaches were initially explored via general questions in the interview guide (i.e. What challenges have you experienced in terms of working with your line manager? Have you ever disagreed or fallen out with your line manager?). These then moved to more specific questions about whether participants had experienced a breach in expectations or promises between them and their line manager as well as to what extent this impacted on how engaged they felt at work. Example items from the perceived breach scale were translated as follows (i.e. Looking back at your recruitment and selection, do you remember this as shaping your expectations for what to expect once at work? What type of recognition do you expect to receive?).

Some questions, however, were not captured in the interview guide and resulted in situ from active listening and the researcher cross checking certain details. These included follow up and interpretation questions (i.e. If I understand you correctly, you haven’t felt engaged in a long time?) to structuring questions (i.e. I am quite aware of the time, let’s move on to the next section. You mentioned earlier that […] let’s revisit that briefly). Whilst having a number of pre-determined questions helps to provide sufficient focus for the interview, it also created a sense of consistency across participants in that all were asked similar questions on the main topics (Myers, 2009). This was key to gaining a better understanding of both the experiences of work engagement amongst employees and how sources of support shape and drive this phenomenon. In sum, semi-structured interviews were well matched to the aims and needs of this research and allowed for sufficient flexibility and empathy towards the participants.
Similarly emerging areas of interest that had not previously been considered were added to the interview guide where applicable (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4. Ethical Research

Within management and social science research there are a multitude of ethical codes and guidelines for researchers to choose from. But despite ongoing debates about the ambiguity of some codes, there is agreement that the central concern of research ethics should revolve around the relationship between the researcher and research participants throughout the process of conducting research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Ransome, 2013). Similarly, Maylor & Blackman (2005) as well as Myers (2009) highlight that the 'golden rule' for qualitative researchers is defined as treating participating individuals and organisations with respect, providing mutual trust, benefit and protection. Accordingly, the key ethical concern is to protect participants by providing informed consent, privacy and acting honestly (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). For a more detailed list of key ethical principles see TABLE 2 below.

TABLE 2 Key Principles of Ethical Research (Adapted from Source: Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 134)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Principles of Ethical Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Ensuring that no harm comes to the participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Respecting the dignity of the research participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Ensuring fully informed consent of the research participants</td>
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<td>4 Protecting the privacy of the research subjects</td>
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<td>5 Ensuring the confidentiality of the research data</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Protecting the anonymity of individuals or organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Avoiding deception about the nature or aims of the research</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Declaration of affiliations, funding sources and conflicts of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Honesty and transparency in communicating about the research</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Avoidance of any misleading or false reporting of the research findings</td>
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</table>

In practice, it is more difficult to establish a completely clear set of ethical principles (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Myers, 2009). However, key ethical principles were strictly adhered to in this research and ethical approval from the University of Bath Ethics Committee was sought and received prior to conducting data collection. In addition, deception was avoided by being as transparent as possible, thus avoiding hidden agendas or dishonesty (Myers,
2009; Patton, 2002). This was in order to avoid introducing bias to the participants. Prior to their agreeing to participate, all organisations received a one-page research brief detailing the aims and uses of the research and had access to me for subsequent questions or clarifications. Similarly, all prospective interview participants received the same information, such as the ‘calls for participants’ poster and ‘consent form’. In the first instance, this form detailed my professional background and my position as an external researcher with no associations to their employer. Secondly, it also reiterated the aims, uses, qualifying criteria and example questions and timing of my research.

Whilst there is considerable debate regarding whether one should record interviews or not, audio recording and transcripts help to provide a true account of participants’ views (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). At the same time, these help to avoid misinterpretation of data, thus enabling an unbiased record of the conversations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As previously discussed, all the participants received a consent form, which was signed either in advance or at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix 2). This was to ensure that participants understood their role in the research process and were aware that the interview would be audio recorded for research purposes. It further highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary and could be withdrawn from at any point in time, if they wished to do so. Moreover, the consent form reiterated the research purpose, whilst acknowledging the commitment of the researcher to treat all information from the interviews as confidential. This meant that all potential identifying factors were removed and the interview transcripts were anonymised by removing names, job titles, departments, employer, product or site references. Additionally, confidential meeting rooms were booked for interviews where possible and were only revealed to participants so as to ensure that peers or managers were not able to witness any employee’s participation in this research. Lastly, all the data and notes from the data collection as well as audio recordings that could not be anonymised had limited password protected access and were stored in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

3.5. Procedure for Access & Research Context

In an effort to secure organisations that would participate in my research, I approached a number from my personal and professional network. The early stages often involved having a key contact, such as a friend, former colleague or a recommended point of contact, for instance, a senior manager or HR, who acted as a potential point of access. Communication with organisations was initiated by email or in person where possible, where I briefly introduced myself, the key research aims as well as providing an overview of the type of access required (see Appendix 3). Once organisations expressed an interest, I followed this up by a face-to-face meeting or a telephone call in order to build a rapport with key staff, such as the CEO, senior management or other employees. Access to the interview guide was also provided on the condition that this was not circulated to prospective participants in order to avoid bias in their responses (Myers, 2009). In line with the previously discussed ethical principles, it was agreed
that all data would be treated confidentially and that the participants as well as each research organisation would remain anonymous. In addition, no information that could reveal the identity of participants would be fed back to the organisation so as to protect them and thus, encourage honest and open answers.

The research was positioned as a win-win situation to prospective organisations in that I took on the role of a free consultant in exchange for access and support of my research. In exchange for their participation, I offered a two-page ‘initial debrief’ report following completion of interviews and a 10-page ‘detailed debrief report with supporting quotations following completion of the transcription. 10-15 randomly selected interviews alongside observational notes, emails and organisational charts were used to inform these reports for each organisation. I also made myself available for additional follow up sessions to discuss the reports in more depth and advise on potential next steps to the relevant point of contact in each organisation.

Whilst initial enthusiasm to participate was high, securing final access and confirmation from the organisations was more difficult. Despite on-going discussions throughout Summer 2014, one organisation withdrew their participation on the basis of emerging differences over the perceived level of involvement by wanting to act as a third supervisor in my study. Similarly, in two other organisations, Human Resources (HR) and senior management acted as a gatekeeper either prolonging discussions over several months without agreement or blocking access completely due to local restructuring. In agreement with my supervisors, we both reviewed the existing approach and agreed to source additional organisations who were willing and suitable to participate.

For two out of the three organisations, it was my key contacts who championed my research and thus assisted in securing final access. Organisation B was an exception as I was introduced to the CEO in January 2015, who was immediately on board with my research and put me in touch with the designated project team. From this point however, it still took 14 weeks of emailing and telephone chasing to agree a course of action with the project team members. Once all three organisations had agreed to participate, they were keen to introduce me to the rest of the staff and start the data collection process. In part, this was due to wanting to receive feedback and relevant recommendations so that this could feed into their organisational strategy as soon as possible.

The research was carried out in three UK organisations over a period of seven months from January to July 2015. Limiting data collection to three organisations set in the UK, provided some consistency with regards to potential influencing factors, such as organisational culture and the external business environment. This also made practical sense, as a focus on the UK provided easier access to organisations and face-to-face interviews as well as minimising the resource requirements for each organisation.

As the research focused on exploring the individual experience of work engagement, the number of organisations that participated was not seen as being academically significant. This is because the experience of being
engaged and how individuals perceive the level of support that they receive from the organisation and through the LMX is inherently subjective. A single case study or multiple organisations were understood to provide similar levels of variation in exchange content and engagement levels. At the same time, having three organisations participate also mitigated the risk of organisations withdrawing and not having a big enough sample. In practice, this meant that participants were sourced from three organisations within the researcher’s wider personal and professional network.

The name of Organisation A will not be revealed, but instead can be loosely described as one of the largest charities in the UK focused on ‘providing services and support on a national and local level’ (Anon. 2015). It is headquartered in London and has a sister charity operating at an international level. At the time of this study, Organisation A was part of a network with just fewer than 500 shops and over 100 service centres across the UK. It is also the result of the merger of two former charities. Initial concerns around Organisation A not meeting the professional sample criteria, were discussed and subsequently dismissed. By choosing to focus on those employed at headquarters and the enterprise behind the charity, it was considered to be operating like other private sector organisations and thus, became a comparable sample. Whilst it still possessed the values of a charity, it was clear in the way that the organisation was managed that in order to stay competitive it had to drive operational efficiencies and ultimately profits. Following initial telephone calls and meetings in December 2014, the key contact at Organisation A informed me that within the last year their local HR services had conducted an internal engagement survey. They explained that they were keen to participate in order to check for consistency in the upcoming survey results and interview data so as to guide the next steps for the business.

Organisation B is a leading British manufacturer based in England focusing on producing, distributing as well as providing products and relevant services on a global scale. It was a former family business, where the previous board and director structure remained the same, despite having been recently purchased by investors in 2013, who are pursuing an ambitious and global five year expansion plan. At the time of the research, it employed just over 100 employees in the UK. Organisation B had a project team consisting of the CEO, some senior managers and representatives from different departments designated to investigate the engagement levels across the business. Accordingly, the CEO welcomed my research and saw this as added value to the internal engagement survey that they had designed and rolled out just prior to meeting me back in January 2015.

Organisation C is a leading engineering business in England, with European headquarters and production facilities. At the time of research, it employed around 10,000 employees in the UK and just fewer than 70 employees in the respective function under study. This engineering function was subject to reorganisation from a programme to a functional/shared service set up in late 2014. Whilst a number of the participants simply had a change of job title, others had experienced more radical changes, such as changes in line manager and/or job. Organisation C was keen to participate in my research
as they had recently conducted the Gallup engagement survey and felt that they still needed more detailed insights to inform their engagement plan for the next year.

Whilst all three organisations operated internationally, to some extent, it was felt that extending the research to an international context was beyond the scope of this research. What these three research contexts have in common is the focus on operational efficiencies as well as adapting to fairly recent and significant organisational changes. Furthermore, all three organisations had conducted either their own version or a Gallup engagement survey within the last six to twelve months at the time of participation in this research. The overall consensus amongst these organisations was that they were keen to gather additional feedback and to receive specific recommendations for action from their employees.

3.6. Approaches to Sampling

Whilst interviews are well matched to the nature of this research, they are also time-consuming. Hence, selecting participants who had the appropriate knowledge or experiences necessary required purposive sampling in the first instance as well as a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to gain sufficient participant numbers from the three organisations. This section clarifies the unit of analysis and methods, which informed the sample as well as setting out the final research context.

Whilst it would have been interesting to use the LMX dyad as the unit of analysis, this research was focused, primarily, on understanding the employee experience within the dyad. An employee-only view pertained to exploring how perceptions of leadership and support influence how they feel at work, and what they do to maintain or repair relationships as well as the impact this has on their work engagement experiences. This was particularly relevant with regards to psychological contract breaches (PCB) and how/why/when individuals reciprocate these perceived breaches with lowering their work engagement.

Purposive sampling encourages researchers to be strategic and selective in their sampling so as to ensure they collect data with the greatest relevance to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In the first instance, purposive sampling focused on finding those individuals with a minimum of six months tenure in their current job and with their current line manager. Some suggest that “the interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and time; past events or far away experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them” (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 529). Because the research aimed at gaining a detailed understanding of how LMX impacts employee experiences of engagement, both current and previous work relationships within the same organisation were accepted. Whilst some argue that retrospective recollection of situations bear potential recollection biases (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), additional probing was used to elicit sufficient detail about the situation, circumstances and impact.
Moreover, the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) model (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000) provided a useful theoretical framework for understanding the underlying mechanisms of employee and motivational linkages to organisational performance. It suggests that “employees must have the skill needed to exercise discretion (ability), the desire to do so (motivation) and they must be given the opportunity to do so by their organisation and line manager” (Purcell, Kinnie, Swart, Rayton, & Hutchinson, 2009a, p. 76). As such, this study focused on sampling employees from a wide variety of occupations in UK organisations.

Whilst an exclusive focus on one occupation would have been preferable, literature recognises that professionals and knowledge workers are often found across organisations and are more difficult to distinguish. Moreover, the literature suggests that these workers have higher degrees of discretion and commitment to their work (Alvesson, 2000, 2004; Kinnie et al., 2005; Purcell, Kinnie, Swart, Rayton, & Hutchinson, 2009b). In essence knowledge workers are deemed to have greater expertise, experience and therefore knowledge of their work (Drucker, 1999). However, there is still some debate in this field as others claim that all types of jobs require knowledge and it is therefore difficult to determine the exact qualifying criteria for knowledge workers (Collins, 1997). Reinhardt, Schmidt, Sloep & Drachsler (2011, p.150) counter such claims and argue that:

“Although all types of jobs entail a mix of physical, social, and mental work, it is the perennial processing of non-routine problems that require non-linear and creative thinking that characterizes knowledge work.”

Following this, knowledge workers have been defined as “employees who apply their valuable knowledge and skills (developed through experience) to complex, novel and distinct problems in environments that provide rich collective knowledge and relational resources” (Swart 2007, p. 452). Such work therefore revolves around processing information in order to advance products or services. The majority of the sample can therefore be better conceptualised as knowledge workers. This will be discussed in more detail when talking about participants in Section 3.7.3.

Convenience and snowball sampling were used to complement the purposive sampling of employees in order to enable relevant access within the time and resource constraints of my research (Lee & Lings, 2008). Convenience samples are based on how easily accessible the sample is, whilst snowball sampling pertains to getting the existing participants to recruit additional and relevant subjects from their peer group. Throughout the data collection the key criterion of a minimum of six months with the same line manager and job was heavily encouraged in order to recruit participants that could provide relevant insights in relation to my research questions. This sampling strategy was applicable both to gathering access to suitable organisations and to securing sufficient participants within the organisations.

Once the organisations had agreed to participate, subsequent communication revolved around additional meetings to discuss the final details of data collection and to raise awareness about this study. Further information about the procedure for conducting interviews can be found as
part of the next section, where the pilot interviews and interview procedure are discussed. The purposive and convenience sampling methods meant that the available organisations were predominantly in the private sector and varied in organisational size.

3.7. Pilot Study & Interview Procedure

The literature suggests that in order to conduct interviews appropriately, this requires a number of skills that need to be mastered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Kvale, 2007). Familiarity with the subject matter can be more easily established than other more tacit skills, and hence expertise was acquired through conducting a thorough literature review for this research. Tacit skills, which revolve around sound judgement, sensitivity to participants and recognising relevance to the research question, however, require practice. Previously conducted semi-structured interviews as part of my Bachelors and Masters degrees had provided me with appropriate experience, which I could transfer to this research. I also took part in a University of Bath postgraduate interview skills session before conducting the interviews. This acted as a 'refresher' to be mindful of potential issues, such as social desirability, emotional or difficult respondents and how to best handle these. Whilst I am not an expert in the field of interviewing, I felt that these experiences provided me with a solid foundation with which to conduct further interviews for the purposes of this research.

Whilst qualitative interviews offer many benefits when conducting research, they are also challenging to conduct. Some suggest that qualitative interviewing faces five key challenges, which include: 1) researcher biases; 2) unpredicted participant behaviour or disruptions in the setting; 3) maintaining focus; 4) showing empathy to sensitive issues; and lastly, 5) transcription (Roulston, DeMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). In an attempt to address these challenges, pilot interviews and additional practice with the interview guide is encouraged. Whilst semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used qualitative method, they can be equally challenging to the researcher and participant. One associated weakness of interviews is the artificial and time pressured scenario, which can lead to participants providing socially desirable answers, rather than reporting their true experience or opinion (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lee & Lings, 2008). Moreover, a balance between establishing a rapport with the participants so as to encourage open and honest answers, as well as avoiding bias through, for instance, asking leading questions, needs to be adhered to (Patton, 2002; Saunders et al., 2009). In an effort to overcome some of the challenges that qualitative interviewing entails, pilot interviews are a useful way to refine and practise the existing interview guide so as to enable a relatively smooth collection of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Patton, 2002). At the same time, pilot interviews also provide an opportunity to test different ways of conducting interviews i.e. face-to-face or via telephone.

Consequently, the first 10 interviews at Organisation A were treated as pilot interviews to check the logic of the interview guide and test the general approach to the interviewing procedure (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In
order to recruit participants, the key contact at Organisation A sent out an open email invitation endorsing my research and announcing a ‘meet and greet’ opportunity in advance of the interviews. In this invitation, it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and would take place during core work hours so as to demonstrate the commitment of Organisation A to supporting my research. Moreover, in the first instance it was suggested that employees should contact me via email or telephone if they were interested in participating and to discuss the next steps. Through this invitation, I had access to all employees located at their headquarters premises in London.

Following the initial invitation, I proceeded to show up for the ‘meet and greet’ in mid January 2015, where I was shown around the site and introduced to different departments. This also provided a great opportunity to hand out and pin up ‘calls for participation’ posters (see Appendix 4) on local noticeboards to raise awareness of my study. These posters detailed the broad area and purpose of my research, three example questions, the qualifying criteria of a minimum of six months service with their current line manager and job as well as my contact details. Participants were free to contact me via email or telephone, through which individual availability and further details were discussed.

Due to specific time constraints and limited availability of participants as well as the geographical distance from Bristol to London, the first four interviews at Organisation A were conducted via telephone. The six pilot interviews that followed the telephone based interviews, however, were conducted in person and helped to establish that there were no notable differences in how the participants understood or responded to the questions through either method and thus, removed initial concerns around this. This meant that later requests for telephone interviews due to participant’s limited availability or remote location were seen as possible, if the participant was otherwise not available. Pilot interviews therefore reassured me that participants were thinking about similar types of experiences with regards to the interview questions. This meant that the interview guide only required minor tweaking, such as adding additional probes, reversing the question negatively or having back up hypothetical scenarios to probe participants. This was to instigate discussion about whether they had experienced similar challenges during their time with their line manager. The interviews were initially set up to last from 45 to a maximum of 60 minutes. However, after the first few pilot interviews, it became clear that most participants were more talkative than expected and the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes, with the average lasting 60 minutes. Consequently, timings between different interview slots were expanded to 1 hour and 30 minutes to account for this.

In advance of each face-to-face interview, I secured private meeting rooms where possible, which were booked through the local security and receptionist services. The room was arranged so that the audio recording equipment was positioned on the centre of the table and the participant could sit in close proximity to ensure good audio quality. Where appropriate, windows and air condition units were shut off to minimise traffic and other noise interference, whilst I provided some refreshments and snacks to create a relaxed atmosphere.
Moreover, in line with guidance from the literature (Kvale, 2007; Roulston et al., 2003), a rapport with participants was sought through brief introductions, reiteration of the research purpose and use as well as the opportunity to share any questions or areas of concern before starting. I also reassured the participants that all the interviews were to be treated as confidential and whilst they were going to be audio recorded, the interview transcripts would be anonymised so as to remove identifiers such as job title, department, employer, detailed product descriptions or company sites. Throughout the data collection, there were no objections to the interviews being audio recorded. If consent forms had not already previously been signed electronically, I offered a printed copy and reiterated that the participants would be able to withdraw from the study at any time, if they wished to do so. They were also assured that they would receive a scanned or paper copy of the signed consent form for their records. This was to create a comfortable environment, where the participants felt at ease to speak openly and honestly about their experiences of work engagement and how different levels of support from both their line manager and the organisation influenced these.

Following initial introductions, I opened the interviews by asking non-confrontational questions regarding age, job title and tenure at the respective organisation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Kvale, 2007). The literature suggests alternating between short questions, and more broad open-ended as well as some closed questions to facilitate movement between more succinct and fuller narratives (Myers, 2009). As detailed in the description of the interview guide, the interview questions varied and moved from general to more specific questions to gather detailed insights. Where appropriate or needed, mirroring body language and asking participants to recall more specific experiences was also used to make them feel at ease and be open to new lines of questioning (Myers, 2009). Throughout each interview, an empathetic approach was engaged in and the participants were not interrupted or rushed when sharing their stories. The interviews were closed with a statement offering the participants to ask any additional questions that they might have had, reiterating the uses of this research and thanking them for their participation and time.

Despite Organisation A’s support for my research, initial participation in the pilot interviews got off to a slow start and ranged from one participant per week at the end of January, early February 2015 to a number of weeks, where no one was available due to a frantic period of annual performance reviews being conducted and the tax year coming to an end. In fear of not gaining sufficient participant numbers, I sought advice from peers and supervisors, who suggested that rather than waiting for participants to indicate their availability to me, I had to impose a set time frame where I was available to the organisation for interviews and be patient and persistent. This was then first tested over a two-day period in March 2015, when I conducted four interviews, followed by a three-day period in April/May 2015, where I secured 14 interviews for the same organisation. Data collection for Organisation A was stopped after securing an additional three interviews over a two-day period in mid-May 2015, totalling 26 interviews.
Pilot interviews were thus a valuable learning experience in refining the approach to recruiting suitable participants and defined the approach for interviews with Organisation B and C. Moreover, they revealed that some participants could be more hesitant or closed in answering some questions and this prompted me to come up with and include hypothetical questions and scenarios in the interview guide (i.e. Do you trust your line manager? Have they done anything to lose that trust from you? Let’s imagine your line manager did change their behaviour in a positive way. How would that make you feel?).

This approach was later transferred to the other organisations. Due to project and travel requirements on the employees, it was mutually agreed that I would make myself available for interviews at Organisation B for one working week. In addition, depending on participation levels, I would make myself available for additional days as and when needed. However, with 22 participants within one working week in early June 2015, this approach proved to be so successful that no additional dates were required. Likewise, this approach was also proposed and agreed with Organisation C in order to minimise impact on their business operations. Accordingly, 20 individuals from Organisation C participated towards the end of June 2015. Whilst I was glad about the high uptake and interest in my research, I also felt that doing so many interviews in such a short period of time was not only draining my energy, but also meant that I had less time to build a rapport with the participants. Furthermore, it required careful scheduling and timekeeping so as to not run over my contingency times in between interviews. By early July 2015, I had managed to secure 20+ participants for each organisation. Interestingly, there were only around two participants per organisation that were more hesitant in coming forward with sufficiently detailed information about their experiences and this perhaps could be attributed to an underlying fear of repercussions at work.

3.7.1. Sample Size

Whilst there continues to be a debate about the right sample size in qualitative studies, most scholars recognise that, in fact, “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative enquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). Bryman & Bell (2011) suggest that qualitative research tends to have smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies, because the aim is to seek rich information rather than needing to generalise to the wider population. Consistent with the philosophical assumptions and approaches adopted for this research, a quantitative, random and statistically representative sample was not appropriate. Instead purposive, snowballing and convenience sampling as well as my own judgement determined the relevant participants for this study (Lee & Lings, 2008; Patton, 2002).

In agreement with the participating organisations, a minimum number of 15 participants per organisation was set prior to data collection. This was to ensure anonymity in numbers and help to protect further the identity of the participants within each organisation (Lee & Lings, 2008). At the same time, this number struck the balance between providing sufficiently detailed
insights whilst creating minimal disruption to the business. However, given the exploratory nature of this research the exact number of participants was flexible and hence, participants beyond this initial figure were encouraged. The actual sample size was, therefore, determined by finding sufficient numbers of relevant participants and also by practical concerns, such as their availability. Some suggest that theoretical saturation can provide an additional useful way for determining at what point to stop data collection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Lee & Lings, 2008). Regarding which, data collection will be stopped when no further themes or additional insights are obtained from the data. In practice, however, determining when saturation is reached is more problematic and is not as clear-cut as it seems (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, personal judgement is often required to make decisions around adequate sample size and when to seize data collection. In this instance, data collection was stopped after observational notes and initial impressions suggested there were no new areas of interest to be discovered or inconsistencies to be resolved.

3.7.2. Triangulation & Respondent Validation

Whilst qualitative research does not aim for validation and generalisation to other contexts, it does aim to demonstrate rigor and depth in its application and interpretation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Myers, 2009). In an effort to overcome criticism of qualitative research, such as lacking reliability and validity, triangulation of methods, data or theories offers the opportunity to counter this (Lee & Lings, 2008; Lincoln et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). As such, these can assist in ensuring consistency across data, across sources and by using different perspectives or theories in the interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is a way of cross examining and providing greater confidence to the results of a study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Whilst semi-structured interviews represent the greater proportion of the data collection, these were also supplemented by participant observations as well as email communications and local documentation, such as organisation charts, in order to provide a more holistic interpretation of the organisational culture and power dynamics of each organisation.

Because qualitative research accepts multiple truths, triangulation of data sources was also seen as relevant. Hence, this is not only true for gathering data from three different organisations, for the participants were also differentiated into senior management, middle manager and employee views, where applicable. This was so as to provide a more rounded view of how variation of support and experiences of work engagement differ amongst different levels of seniority and ranks within organisations. It follows that senior managers were defined as holding a director level position, whilst middle management was characterised by individuals who were either ‘heads of’ or ‘team leaders’ and who had a number of subordinate reports at the time of interviewing. Whilst the primary aim was to explore the extent to which support from the line manager or organisation impacted on a participant’s work engagement experiences, this was seen as appropriate because it allowed for the integration of the results from multiple perspectives.
In an effort to provide further rigor and accurate representation of the participant views, respondent validation (Lee & Lings, 2008) was sought from them where possible. In agreement with the key contacts from Organisation A, all participants received both the initial debrief as well as the final debrief reports and had two weeks to respond, should they disagree with any points made. However, none of the participants came back with recommendations for improvements and this was interpreted as agreement with the findings. Respondent validation was not possible in Organisation B and instead, only the project team members, including the CEO and representatives of different departments, were privy to viewing these reports. At Organisation C, the senior management decided to roll out both the initial as well as the final debrief reports on my behalf, kindly inviting feedback in an attempt to foster continued interest in improving and assimilating the newly reorganised function.

3.7.3. Description of Interview Participants

As discussed earlier in approaches to sampling (section 3.6), purposive sampling of employees with a minimum of six months in the same job or with the same line manager was set. However, in reality due to the complementary use of convenience and snowball sampling this also meant that a small minority of non-knowledge workers also formed part of the sample.

The sample therefore consisted predominantly of Project, Policy and Research staff (Organisation A), employees in Marketing, Finance, Business Development/Sales, Engineering, Purchasing and HR (Organisation B), and lastly Engineering and Business Management (Organisation C). Only a small minority of participants represented Administration and Warehouse staff (Organisation B). Knowledge workers are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, by for instance preferring a challenging nature of work and gaining satisfaction from this. Having the ability, motivation and opportunity to engage with one’s work because of high-quality support from the leader and the organization is therefore likely to facilitate engaging experiences at work. It is therefore useful to conceptualize the sample in this way.

Employees represented the majority participants representing 47 out of 68 participants, followed by 18 middle managers and only three senior managers across Organisations A-C. Moreover, 21 Engineers represented the largest proportion of participants from one occupation, followed closely by 13 participants in Sales/Business Development, seven in Project Management as well as Research, whilst there were five participants from Purchasing/Supply and slightly smaller numbers from Marketing/Public Relations, Finance/Economics, Policy and the HR functions. A detailed list of how the participants were grouped and their respective job titles alongside the exact length of service or time spent with current line manager cannot be shown in order to protect the identity of the participants.

In terms of the demographics, the most common participant age group was 30-39, followed by 40-49 and 20-29 years of age. A total of 16 participants were above the age of 50. The distribution of gender was fairly even across
Organisation A and Organisation B, whereas Organisation C was all male participants due to the nature of it having an engineering function. This, however, skewed the distribution of gender towards 26 female and 42 male participants across all three organisations. Length of service also ranged from six months to an impressive 30 years plus. There was only one participant who had less than six months service with the current organisation, but they were included because they could draw on lengthy experience with their previous employer. The majority of participants were found to have between two and five years employment, followed by the second highest group with five to nine years of service at their respective employer.

Most participants (21) had spent a minimum of six months to a year with their current line manager, whereas 19 participants had had the same line manager for one to two years, 18 participants for two to five years and only five participants had spent five to nine years with their current line manager. There were only five participants out of 68 that had spent less than six months with their current line manager. This was due to the recent reorganisation in Organisation B and C, often blurring the lines between official and transitioning managers. Literature however suggests that PCBs are likely to occur weekly rather than annually, hence a shorter period with their line managers were also accepted for this research (Conway & Briner, 2002). In those instances participants were also encouraged to refer to relevant previous working relationships in the same organisation where possible. Recalling a relatively recent experience in sufficient detail meant that this was not an issue, as previously discussed in the section reviewing CIT (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Length of Service</th>
<th>Length of Current LM</th>
<th>Job Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29 (14)</td>
<td>Less than 6 months (1)</td>
<td>Less than 6 months (5)</td>
<td>Employee (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 (22)</td>
<td>6 months to 1 year (1)</td>
<td>6 months to 1 year (21)</td>
<td>Middle Management (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 (16)</td>
<td>1-2 years (6)</td>
<td>1-2 years (19)</td>
<td>Senior Management (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 (10)</td>
<td>2-5 years (27)</td>
<td>2-5 years (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ (6)</td>
<td>5-9 years (12)</td>
<td>5-9 years (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst the unit of analysis for this research concerned the individual employee experience, by coincidence I managed to collect a number of
leader-member exchange dyads across all three organisations. From the Organisation A group of participants, I had five employees reporting to a senior manager, one of whom was a middle manager with two participant reports. At Organisation B I had dyads participate from two different functions. There was one senior manager with their respective subordinate middle manager and furthermore, four of their direct reports. Regarding the other function, there was a middle manager and their respective subordinate participate. In relation to the Organisation C group of participants, there were dyads from four different areas. It is worth noting that the participants did not know whether their colleagues or respective line manager had participated and consequently, the dyads were matched using organisation charts, job titles and other information, such as names from the interviews.

3.8. Data Analysis

Myers (2009) argues that coding is one of the best ways to analyse qualitative information, whereby codes can be used to describe, summarise and organise observations made. By reducing the amount of overall data, it facilitates more effective data analysis and aids in interpreting aspects of the subject under study (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012a). In essence, data analysis thus involves “condensing the bulk of our data sets into analysable units by creating categories [themes] with and from our data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). Whilst coding offers a useful first step to analysing data, there are many different ways of doing this (Hardy & Bryman, 2009). Grounded theory, according to Glaser & Strauss (1967), offers one such way of analysing data. Its focus on generating theory without the researcher having in-depth and pre-existing knowledge of the research area, lends itself to research where relationships and contextual factors are not yet known. Whilst there is no one right way to analyse data, grounded theory was not deemed appropriate for this study as collecting research without prior knowledge would prove difficult in practice in accomplishing a PhD.

Instead, Braun & Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns [themes] within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Thematic analysis entails six key phases: 1) familiarising with data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first instance, phase 1 of this process was achieved by transcribing all of the 68 interviews. As each hour of interview could take up to five hours to transcribe it provided an opportunity to relive each interview and note down key highlights or areas of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Revisiting the finished transcripts provided a smooth transition into Phase 2 and enabled initial codes to be generated. Using open coding, I conducted a preliminary data analysis, whereby I coded the transcripts manually using descriptive labels and colours to differentiate and mark similar codes (Hardy & Bryman, 2009; Lee & Lings, 2008). Examples of initial codes pertaining relationships with line managers included ‘balanced exchange’ ‘shared expectations’ ‘feeling obliged to reciprocate’ and ‘lacking honest/open communications.’ As such, codes can be seen as a useful way to break a large data set into more manageable sections.
In contrast, themes are often broader than codes and “interpret aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii). Hence, Phase 3 of data analysis included grouping the initial codes of ‘frustration’ ‘lacking honest/open communications’ ‘mixed messages’ ‘two way communication’ were filtered into ‘communication issues’. Phase 4, reviewing initial themes, is demonstrated by moving from ‘communication issues’ to barriers to work engagement and differentiating into ‘silo mentality’ ‘sources of support and trust’, to name a few. Moreover, redundant or duplicated themes were removed to streamline the existing ones at this stage. In line with this phase, data was revisited and analysed again so as to finalise and adapt existing coding structures. Phases 4 and 5 can be usefully grouped together as defining and naming themes as well as writing these up in greater detail.

In order to create a coherent set of findings that add to the previous body of literature, the researcher needs to be selective, whilst also open to unanticipated conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009). Data analysis requires “constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 15). Hence it was first useful to conduct a preliminary analysis of printed transcripts, whereby I coded completed transcripts openly, in order to revisit and execute a more in-depth analysis of all the transcripts using the QRS Nvivo software for Mac Version 10.2.1.

Analysing data on an individual organisational case basis is well suited to understanding socially constructed realities of individuals and how LMX shaped their experiences at work. Hence the initial analysis revolved around informing company reports, to then be revisited and adapted in view of the aim and research question of this study.
Regardless of the method adopted for data collection, it needs to be recognised that these only aid the researcher in their interpretation of the data and do not remove the decision making element from this process (Hardy & Bryman, 2009). Analysing and coding data is inherently subjective as the researcher always has some theoretical assumptions embedded within themselves, which will influence their interpretation of the findings (Lee & Lings, 2008). Following initial manual coding, all interview transcripts were recoded thematically in NVivo as this offered a more flexible and better way of reordering themes and sub-themes than manual coding.

Whilst the initial data analysis was inductive, thereby allowing for new themes to emerge with no preconceived ideas or structure, analysis later became more iterative as relevant constructs from the literature were applied to the identified themes and helped to organise these hierarchically. Consequently, the codes moved from being descriptive (‘changing mind’ ‘positive’, ‘not letting it affect work’) to more analytical (‘cognitive job crafting’, ‘minor breach’). In an effort to create more meaningful themes and a logical order as to how these are associated (Braun & Clarke, 2006), codes are continuously revised and collapsed in accordance with concepts familiar from the literature, thus removing redundant categories or duplication (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Moreover, patterns and contradictions were scrutinised and revisited. Memos in NVivo were used as an extension of the reflective research diary throughout the data collection and helped to capture thoughts and concerns around establishing common links. At this stage, the process of writing was initialised and became part of the data analysis to clarify connections, as well as to abstract findings in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.9. Summary of the Chapter

In the first section, the different ontological and epistemological perspectives were evaluated in terms of their suitability for this research. A relativist ontological perspective was chosen, because it involves acknowledging the importance of a subjective reality and is thus, consistent with how employees attribute meanings and actions within social exchange relationships with both their line manager and their organisations. The social constructionist perspective recognises that whilst the experiences of work engagement are similar, how and the degree to which these influences are impacted upon by the LMX and POS quality.

In the second section, how the chosen philosophical assumptions informed the research design, data collection and analysis was discussed. A qualitative approach was adopted as it was considered as addressing the purposes of this research best. That is, it enabled an exploration of LMX and work engagement, which is not yet fully understood in the literature. In order to gain rich insights into the interactions and variation in the exchange content of the LMX, 68 semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees in three UK based organisations. Quality and ethical considerations were also discussed, thereby demonstrating rigour in the conduct of this research and that the participant experiences were valid and in fact, relate to a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised
by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74). Lastly, this chapter has concluded by describing the iterative thematic data analysis that was conducted to assimilate the key findings.

The next chapter will detail the key findings from those interviews in accordance with both the overarching and sub level research questions. Differences between individuals in terms of their level of seniority and their respective organisations and other characteristics will be discussed where appropriate.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction to Chapter

This chapter presents the key findings from the thematic data analysis. Whilst data from three different organisations were used to inform this study, the findings will be discussed by overarching themes across the data rather than on an individual case study basis. Noteworthy differences between Organisation A (charity), B (former family business), and C (engineering function) or differences in perspectives amongst employees, middle management and senior management will be discussed as appropriate. Whilst the identity of interview participants will not be revealed, quotes will be linked to an identifier where P stands for the participant and the relevant participant number.

The research questions from Chapter 2 and the interview guide from Chapter 3 will act as a guideline to structure this chapter. Hence, this chapter consists of three sections, namely, understanding work engagement (WE), exploring the impact of the leader-member exchange (LMX) and variation in exchange content and the role of perceived organisational support (POS). A brief overview of key themes and sub-themes as well as associated definitions can be found in Appendix 7.

4.2. Understanding Work Engagement

In order to explore the impact that LMX and POS have on work engagement, it is first necessary to understand how the interview participants conceptualised this experience. Regarding which, the interviewees were either asked to describe what being engaged at work meant to them or to visualise someone who was really engaged. Conceptualisations and experiences of feeling engaged and the importance of the line manager relationship did not significantly differ between the three organisations. Hence, the differences are discussed on an individual basis. The findings suggest that there were more notable differences when exploring the impact of perceived organisational support (POS) and consequently, those between the organisations are discussed in more depth.

4.2.1. Participant Definitions of WE

The interviewees were asked to describe what being engaged at work meant to them. In the first instance, work engagement was often described synonymously with feeling positive, enjoying work and being energetic. “For me if I consider myself fully engaged, [I] get ready and enjoy coming to work.
Likewise, others noted that feeling engaged meant, “[…] doing your best with your work” (Organisation C, P61).

Individuals explained that they felt energetic, because of the varied and challenging nature of work. The sense of being interested in one’s work was consistent across the majority of participants. “I’m picturing this person really proactive and interested in their work” (Organisation B, P48). Others agreed:

“I guess it means feeling interested, obviously, feeling kind of immersed in it, seeing the value of it, and purpose and meaning are very important to feeling engaged I think. So, the sense that I am making a contribution and that my time is being used in a valuable way.” (Organisation A, P4)

“It means being interested and having a balance between being a challenging task that drives you, but not too challenging that you can’t ever achieve it. So, it is not too easy where it makes you feel bored, instead the work keeps you interested” (Organisation B, P46).

“I think if you are engaged at work, A) you are interested in what you do, B) you try to be industrious in what you do, you don’t want to sit around and it is all very easy and you know. You want to be busy, I like to be busy, so if I am busy I feel engaged.” (Organisation C, P49)

Some participants highlighted that when you are engaged in your work, time appears to move faster “[…] then that two hours disappears in no time” (Organisation A, P12). This is evident in the large number of comments such as “Yeah most of the time it does actually feel like [time flies]” (Organisation A, P15) and “You are taking work in a stride, it flows and then as the end of the day approaches you wonder where time went.” (Organisation B, P34). As a result, participants described feeling more productive. “I would say someone who is really into their work, focused and everything is getting done and you are up to date on most things” (Organisation B, P34).

Others noted that interesting and varied work also helped to provide a “sense of purpose and also pride” (Organisation A, P12). Findings suggest that “the direct sort of impact” (Organisation A, P16) leant meaning and direction to their working life. Having meaningful work was seen as particularly key for Organisation A, due to the charity’s focus on contributing to the greater societal good. “I suppose it’s about, for me it’s about being passionate about work and feeling connected or doing something that you really think is a worthwhile kind of thing.” (Organisation A, P16).

As a result of interesting, varied and meaningful work, participants described that feeling engaged also created a sense of obligation to complete the job to the best of one’s ability. “I am dedicated, like I really really want to do a good job and I’m a bit of a perfectionist so it doesn’t matter to me doing extra hours, if that gets the job done well.” (Organisation A, P15). Others added that they cared about their work and wanted to make a positive impact on their employer.

“I don’t think I would or could be engaged if I didn’t think that what I was doing was genuinely making a difference and actually changing things. I feel that is probably one of the reasons I feel engaged, because I feel motivated
to change things and I have the ability to change things. So, I am contributing to the bigger picture and I feel connected.” (Organisation B, P33)

One participant provided a well-rounded description of what feeling engaged at work meant to them:

“Being engaged at work, it means that you want to do your best when you get to work. Everything you do, you know exactly why you are doing it, what the greater impact is, what the purpose is of your task and you know how it fits into the bigger picture.” (Organisation C, P68)

Being engaged at work was described as knowing the boundaries of your role. “Understanding how your role fits into the bigger picture” (Organisation B, P37). Individuals felt that they could engage when they had relevant clarity and adequate resources to do their job. “If you feel that you have got adequate resource and time within the confines of what is feasible, you then feel that you can do a job” (Organisation C, P49).

In essence, work engagement was commonly described as having an interest and passion for your work, where varied and challenging work had meaning and purpose to the individual. How these participant definitions map onto the work engagement concept will be discussed in more detail in the next Chapter.

4.2.2. The Importance of Feeling Engaged at Work

Whilst there were mixed levels of engagement amongst the 68 participants and across the three organisations, there was an overarching consensus that feeling engaged at work was a desirable state.

“Well, I think [feeling engaged] is really important, because at the end of the day you are at your work 95% of the time, for the majority of people. So, I think if you are unhappy at work, your life is going to be unhappy, because most of your life is at work.” (Organisation B, P27)

Work engagement was seen as “fundamental” (Organisation A, P23, Organisation C, P64) to the majority of participants, including those at different levels of seniority and across the organisations, even if not everyone felt engaged all of the time. “It doesn't matter where you are in the chain, it is important that you understand what the point of your work is and whether you know what the ultimate outcome is meant to be” (Organisation A, P21). For some, being engaged was seen as “my primary motivator, more so than money for example” (Organisation A, P10). Not feeling engaged was seen as “a nightmare” (Organisation A, P14), meaning that “life is full of dreary if the job is not going well” (Organisation A, P11). Others added “without engagement you quite quickly get bored” (Organisation A, P23). In fact, a number of individuals commented on looking for alternative employment, if they did not feel engaged most of the time. “I think if I wasn't engaged I would probably leave” (Organisation A, P18).
The importance of feeling engaged was described nicely by one participant, who emphasised its positive outcomes, such as improved well-being, reduced turnover intention, higher productivity and contributing to a better overall work atmosphere.

“Yeah, I think it’s quite important. I couldn’t really imagine not being engaged at work or dreading what I do. I think if I came to a point where I wasn’t engaged, then I would lose my motivation to improve things in the company and maybe look for different work. You have got to be happy and engaged with the work that you do and where you are, because otherwise you are not very productive and it is not good for you or the company that you are working for. And if you are engaged, then that makes everybody in the team feel good and feel more productive too.” (Organisation B, P45)

Others, who believed that not feeling engaged at work resulted in lower productivity and a negative working environment, mirrored this view. “Being engaged at work is very [important to me]. If you are not engaged with your work then your productivity will suffer, the manager is not going to be very happy, you will influence others” (Organisation C, P67).

Whilst feeling engaged at work was seen as important to most participants, some suggested that it is not everything. “Up to a point yes being engaged at work is important to me, because I spend a lot of time at work” (Organisation C, P59). This interviewee further explained that:

“So yes, I want a certain level of engagement and motivation to get me through the day, so having diverse and interesting work, so that is important to me and that has improved over the last couple of months. But I don't want to be too engaged, because I keep telling myself I have only got [10-19 years] left, so that is how I look at it.” (Organisation C, P59)

The next section will discuss variation of engagement levels across all three organisations. As such, the notion of not wanting to feel ‘too engaged’ may be useful in this context as a minority of participants alluded to the potential ‘dark side of engagement.’

4.2.3. Participant Stories of Feeling Engaged

A fair number of participants described feeling generally engaged with their work or feeling engaged “most of the time” (Organisation B, P29). At the same time, there was also an understanding that feeling engaged at work generally “varies” (Organisation A, P54), that “there are good days and bad days” (Organisation A, P13). Work engagement was seen to not only fluctuate during the day, but also fluctuate depending on the type of activity.

“Most of the time, sometimes it is a bit of a challenge when you have to drag yourself out of bed or have boring things to do. 80% of the time I feel engaged and interested in what is happening around me.” (Organisation B, P46)
“Certainly at times, I think I probably have been even more engaged than I am now and I have probably been less engaged at times. I enjoy my work, I enjoy coming in and it just varies.” (Organisation C, P51)

The fluctuation in engagement levels was often reported as being associated with having to do more tedious or less interesting tasks, such as administrative aspects of the job. “I am fully engaged with my work and if I think that a topic is not strategic or not something that we should be doing, I just switch to something else and nobody is telling me not to, which is brilliant” (Organisation A, P3). A small number of participants said they could switch activities in order to feel more engaged with other aspects of their work.

However, there are also further distinctions to be made in relation to the extent to which individuals engaged with their work. It is not as clear-cut as saying that participants are either engaged or disengaged. Instead, the findings of this study show a range of responses that can be more broadly categorised into feeling engaged, lacking engagement and feeling disengaged. Feeling engaged is where someone is drawn to a work activity and might want to increase their level of involvement and effort, because they enjoy their work.

“I am dedicated, like I really really want to do a good job and I’m a bit of a perfectionist, so it doesn’t matter to me doing extra hours, if that gets the job done well.” (Organisation A, P15)

Overall, work engagement was associated with having a positive outlook on organisational life. It seems that, in general, the more optimistic individuals talk about feeling engaged or that those feeling engaged feel more optimistic about their work. Most participants associated feeling engaged with being enthused, focused and immersed in their work. But also with a sense of time passing by quickly when engrossed in their task, “I love it, you are so involved you just forget yourself” (Organisation B, P41) and “when I am doing the work, it does fly by” (Organisation A, P15). Overall, this was best summarised by the following respondent, who felt very happy and engaged with their work:

“If you are engaged then you are enjoying your job, you are driven to do the best you can do. I would say someone who is really into their work, focused and everything is getting done and you are up to date on most things. You are taking your work in your stride, it flows and then the end of the day approaches and you wonder where the time went.” (Organisation A, P34)

Moreover, being engaged at work resulted in employees feeling and being perceived as more proactive, “productive” (Organisation C, P62) and having “a real desire to create new ideas” (Organisation A, P12).

“I am picturing this person to be really proactive and interested in their work. Like I would picture this person to really love this company, to think seriously about what can be better and what they can do to help it to improve.” (Organisation B, P48)

Feeling engaged was associated with positive benefits for the individual in terms of happiness, productivity and job satisfaction. At the same time, there
were also positive effects for the team, where participants observed a positive contagion effect. “Oh yeah, because we work so much collaboratively that has a positive impact on the work that we produce” (Organisation A, P3). On the one hand, there was an overarching sense that feeling engaged helped to create a positive working atmosphere and as a result also had a positive impact on the quality of work. This was explained as, “an engaged team is going to work far better together and be more productive than a disengaged one” (Organisation C, P62).

“I also think that having a group of [engaged] people working around you is another good thing. It makes you feel like you’re actually doing something that you enjoy, it just rubs off on you. So everyone is really focused, but you get to do different things and there is trust and freedom to get on with your job.” (Organisation B, P32)

There was also the impression that different age groups engage to varying degrees with their work. For instance, younger members of staff, age groups 20-29 and 30-39, commented on being still being “young enough to be energetic” (Organisation C, P68) to cope better with workloads. Concurring with this, one 50-59 year old remarked, “I feel as if my professional stamina is a bit more limited than perhaps it used to be” (Organisation A, P24). Whilst most participants still want to feel engaged, older workers might be less able to sustain high levels of engagement through persisting difficulties or high workloads. This goes hand in hand with the perception that younger members (age group 20-29) are perhaps more highly engaged, because of the need to prove themselves, establish a career and where work predominantly gives purpose (Organisation C, P52). Older workers (age groups 40-49, 50-59 and 60+) may well have already accomplished key milestones in their career, so that “work isn’t everything” (Organisation A, P15) and there is “[no] need to keep proving myself all the time” (Organisation A, P24). In the words of one participant, “I am always trying to do the best I can do, but I try not to let it overtake the other parts of my life” (Organisation A, P16). This suggests that perhaps for some, being older enabled them to better detach from work and they are “no longer as preoccupied with work in the evenings” (Organisation A, P24). Moreover, they also appeared more pragmatic “I engage where I can” (Organisation A, P23) as “it is all relative” (Organisation B, P34).

Following on from this, it was interesting that particularly younger and lower ranking individuals noted feeling too engaged (age groups 20-29, 30-39) and finding it difficult to detach themselves from work. “More than I should be […] being dedicated to my work is not an issue” (Organisation A, P14). Another concurred, “So there are a few of us that work very late hours in order to get the job done and we are probably the most engaged members of the team.” (Organisation C, P68). However, this raises the question of how sustainable high levels of engagement are. Periods of feeling too engaged can also function as a reminder to regain control over the situation and how much time work is taking up to avoid breakdowns or “feeling burned out” (Organisation A P9).

“I hadn’t realised how much that was impacting me to be working all the time. So, it was an eye opener and I am trying to have more control over that to
get that work life balance. Looking back it took up quite a few weekends, and I don't quite know I coped.” (Organisation C, P56)

Whilst being engaged is generally desirable it is also essential to maintain a careful balance so as not to get lost within work. That is, perhaps not being engaged all of the time is not necessarily a bad thing. Perhaps employees who lacked adequate personal resources and surrounding support from their line managers, were more likely to feel that

Another factor that feeds into the extent to which individuals engage with their work are personal resources. Interview participants from all three organisations and from a variety of ranks and age groups suggested that being self-motivated, having a sense of self-efficacy and optimism were key to both facilitating as well as maintaining engagement throughout difficulties.

“I feel very positive and it is a positive environment to work in even though generally I work on my own and see different people, so I am very excited about my role [...] it is down to me. You need to have a thick skin to be independent and self-motivating, you need to be able to get on by yourself” (Organisation B, P46)

While colleagues and line managers were keen as seen as key influencing factors on their motivation, others noted that it was key to be primarily “self motivated” (Organisation A, P1, P2, Organisation B, P41, Organisation C, P49, P68) or “naturally motivated because of the work” (Organisation A, P8). Others agreed in that a positive working environment only helped to boost personal motivation “I have always been quite motivated as an individual. I have always found it quite easy to come to work and [this organisation] is an easy place to come to work in” (Organisation A, P15). Likewise, “You need to motivate yourself, and I feel nobody influences me that much, I feel I have to motivate myself” (Organisation B, P36) and “I would say most of the time a lot of it is just being self-motivated by my job and overcoming challenges, problem solving” (Organisation B, P46).

Furthermore, interview participants explained that over time they felt more confident in doing their job and more self-efficacious which helped them feel engaged with their work. As such, the belief in their ability to perform appeared to determine the degree to which they felt able to engage with their work. “I feel engaged because [...] I have the ability to change things” (Organisation B, P31). This is perhaps because individuals felt that were able to capitalise on their existing strengths and skills. “[I feel engaged] when either I feel that I am needed, because I have a greater understanding of the subject than everybody else, so things wouldn't happen if I wasn't there. So being able to use my expertise” (Organisation A, P10). The notion of work playing to one’s skills and abilities appeared central to the experience of feeling engaged. “I mean a big part is that sense of knowledge or expertise that we have created for that so it makes me feel good” (Organisation A, P12). Similarly, “I’m actually working using my capability or whatever intelligence, [which is] splendid really” (Organisation B, P48). As a result of having relevant expertise, individuals described feeling “quite self-sufficient.” (Organisation B, P47). Moreover, findings suggest that a sense of expertise and confidence develops over time as individuals get to know their personal
abilities and limitations better. “I feel confident in what I am doing most of the time, because of how long I have been here” (Organisation B, P31) because “you are learning about yourself in terms of what you can do” (Organisation B, P47). One participant captured the sense of feeling self-efficacious nicely:

“I think I have just become more confident in knowing the job and understanding what I need to do and what I think the priorities are and not necessary that I’m right, but just that I’m working on specific things and I just can’t drop them to deal with something else” (Organisation A, P16).

Others explain that they feel more self-efficacious about their work because they know both the limits of their abilities as well as how to compensate for these. “I feel reasonably confident in what I am doing, I know where the sources of support are and I know some of the barriers as well” (Organisation A, P24).

Besides self-efficacy, participants also explained needing “an air of positivity” (Organisation B, P39) in order to persevere through difficulties at work. A sense of optimism about the situation improving at some point in the future, enabled participants to move past initial frustrations. “I try and be quite positive, because if you are not, you can’t get anywhere. There are some days when you do get bogged down obviously, but more often than not I am positive” (Organisation B, P40). Participants highlighted that “it is so important to be positive at work” (Organisation C, P52) because it helps to “keep looking forward” (Organisation B, P45) in order to improve the current circumstances. As such, being optimistic was described as being synonymous with being able to cope with high demands. “I feel that if you’re in a good place, you feel that when pressure is applied, you are more likely to stick to the process and be more attentive to your work and the quality of it” (Organisation C, P57). Generally, participants agreed that a positive attitude helped to persevere through frustration and led to greater rewards. “Sometimes you have to see things through and stick around and after a while your performance does get noticed an you get the benefits from it. If you stay positive about it” (Organisation C, P68).

Limited or lacking engagement can be understood as feeling neutral towards work activity and remaining ambivalent about that situation. “I feel well very interested in what I do and discouraged at the same time” (Organisation A, P6). Another participant captured this sense of neither feeling engaged nor disengaged succinctly as:

“I wouldn’t say that I look forward to coming to work in the morning, I just know it is something to do and I don't mind coming to work so let’s put it that way.” (Organisation C, P64)

Despite being ambivalent, this participant expressed that they had no problems with their work and also had no ambition to leave the company. Whilst for some individuals this situation appeared to be perfectly acceptable, others suggested that engagement decreases over time and that one could move from lacking engagement to feeling disengaged, if issues with the nature or circumstances of the job persist. “Certain aspects have just lost their interest and they have become very mundane” (Organisation B, P28).
Whilst all participants could relate to moments of frustration and feeling disengaged with their work, there were noticeable differences between short bursts of frustration and being able to move on after a few hours or days. “Sometimes things can annoy me. I mean I normally shake it off fairly quickly, so I might just be in a mood for half an hour and then get back to work” (Organisation B, P35). As opposed to the frustration lingering for weeks, months or even years on end, for instance, where participants “last felt engaged 8-9 years ago” (Organisation A, P9) and “last felt engaged a long time ago [4 years]” (Organisation C, P62). It was interesting that some individuals who felt disengaged would rather do a disengaging task, as there “is nothing worse than no work” (Organisation B, P33).

Feeling thoroughly disengaged refers to where some participants described feeling emotionally repelled by the work activity and as a result withdrew from additional involvement and inputs, maintained in-role performance or sought alternative employment. In the first instance, participants suggested that not having enough work to do was equally as disengaging as not finding the work interesting. Participants commented “there is nothing worse than not having any work” (Organisation A, P13) and “At the moment, there is one thing that I find sort of very demotivating, if there is not enough work there” (Organisation C, P53). However, most participants felt that a lack of interesting and varied work was the key reason causing them to disengage from their work. “It’s not my ideal choice, what I want to be doing with my time […] it is difficult because the things I do, they just don’t interest me” (Organisation A, P9). For some, the longer that they stayed in their current role the less appealing and interesting it became to them. “I have been [this job for] so long, […] it is what I know and there is comfort in that, it is nice. I mean I know everybody, how things work and I do want to stay here” (Organisation C, P57). Others agree:

“Aspects of it are [interesting], some aspects of it were interesting when I first started because I have probably been in the job now for five years. Certain aspects have just lost their interest and they have become very mundane.” (Organisation B, P28).

As such, a lack of interest in work was “because there are no challenges as such, like you do the same thing day in day out.” (Organisation B, P44).

On the one hand participants noted feeling disengaged because they felt that there was not enough interesting and varied work available. On the other hand, participants have also commented that a lack of personal resources (self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism) hindered them from building on their strengths.

“I don’t particularly enjoy the majority of the time here, the work can be interesting sometimes, although it is getting less and less interesting, because you are not doing new things […] it barely touches on my strengths and it is forcing me down ways I don’t particularly want to go” (Organisation C, P62)

As a result, disengagement was not only associated with a lack of motivation, but also with lower energy levels: “I’m just tired” (Organisation A, P9) and “It’s exhausting” (Organisation A, P10). Similarly, feeling disengaged was also
connected to negative health effects, from “going home with stress and an extreme burden” (Organisation B, P42) to “I feel like I am heading [into rapid depression]” (Organisation A, P26). Others emphasised that not feeling engaged would result in a lower commitment to the job, “I mean I don’t think I could come to a job and remain happy, if I ever wasn’t fully engaged with my work” (Organisation A, P12). When feeling disengaged, participants noted having less confidence, being more likely to make mistakes and generally feeling less focused and taking less care about the quality of work that they delivered. “It makes me feel bad that I am not doing as good a job as I should be, someone should be paying more attention to this” (Organisation A, P19). At the same time, a lack of engagement was also associated with being less committed to their employer:

“I feel I am still trying hard to get engaged and to grow what I do and to get recognised. But I have been doing that for some time and it has worn me down a bit. It is probably approaching that in terms of realising that I need to look elsewhere.” (Organisation C, P55)

Not feeling engaged, actively disengaging and having disengaged were attributes associated with frustrations, disappointments and annoyances of the work environment causing a negative response or reaction. Findings showed that disengagement breeds further frustrations amongst the team, as “negativity does rub off on people, it can be contagious” (Organisation C, P64). Moreover “if someone is stressed or if someone is in a bad mood it definitely does transcend across this department” (Organisation B, P41). Findings suggest that colleagues can have either a positive or negative impact on the working atmosphere and an individual's subsequent work engagement level.

“So if there is negative communication, then I start feeling anxious and stressed and my perception changes. Or even the way [my colleagues] receive comments or feedback, if they feel like something is going wrong then it is contagious I would say.” (Organisation C, P52)

For a select few participants, however, feeling disengaged with their work, because it lacked meaning and purpose, was frustrating, but did not this didn't mean that they gave up on the quality of their work. “So, I don’t feel dedicated to wanting to continue it, but I feel dedicated to keeping up the quality of it” (Organisation A, P19). Interestingly, they were able to feel less affected by negative team dynamics. There was a sense of upholding a professional reputation and feeling obliged to do the best they could despite the circumstances.

4.3. Influencing Factors At Work

Regardless of their current level of engagement, most participants felt that being engaged was “very important” (Organisation C, P52) and acted as a “primary motivator” (Organisation A, P10). Hence, “if you are not engaged then what is the point in coming here, then you should be doing something else” (Organisation C, P49). Participants talked about their motivation being
fuelled by wanting to do a good job, “being quite a conscientious worker” (Organisation B, P35) and “caring about the outcome” (Organisation B, P47).

The interview guide detailed a number of questions around influencing factors at work. As such, participants were asked more generally what motivated them at work, but also to detail situations when they felt engaged and why this was the case. Moreover, when asked to rank influencing factors on their motivations, most participants commented that the nature of work, followed by the people at work (including peers, line manager) were key to how they felt at work. “There is probably two equal [motivating factors], which is the work and co-workers” (Organisation A, P2). Other participants mirrored this view. “If I have to rank it; the first one will still be the sense of accomplishment, sense of fulfilment, so my job. And the second will be the people here.” (Organisation B, P48).

Therefore, the first overarching theme is the ‘Nature of Work.’ This category was made up of a number of sub-themes such as ‘Interest & Ability’, ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’ ‘Meaning & Having an Impact.’

4.3.1. Interest & Ability

This is the first sub-theme of the overarching theme ‘Nature of Work’. Work that therefore speaks to one’s personal and professional interests can be engaging to an individual because it enables them to better relate and capitalise on their abilities in the field. When participants talked about motivating factors or times at which they felt highly engaged, most stories revolved around enjoying the task at hand. Hence, “enjoying what I am actually doing and the content of what I am doing” (Organisation A, P1) acts as a key influencing factor in how one feels at work. This was evident across all three organisations “the main motivation would have to be that I enjoyed what I do” (Organisation B, P41) because “I am very interested in the issues” (Organisation A, P12) and “I like the [end product]” (Organisation C, P49). It becomes clear that an interest in the issues, service or product translates into enjoying one’s work. “You like what products you make and if you are interested in it, so that is probably where I get my motivation from” (Organisation C, P49). Overall, “I enjoy my work and [therefore] I do enjoy going to work” (Organisation C, P68).

One participant explained that being interested and hence enjoying one’s work, provides both a sense of motivation and satisfaction at work. “The main motivation would have to be that I enjoyed what I did, if you don’t enjoy what you did, you can’t be motivated to do it. So definitely there has got to be some job satisfaction there” (Organisation B, P41). Moreover, having interesting work also related to participants feeling more committed to stay with their current employer. “[...] Whether the work is interesting, that is what is motivating to me and if I didn’t find that, then I would probably leave” (Organisation A, P18).

Enjoying one’s job because of being able and feeling confident in doing the work goes hand in hand. Participants explained, “I like coming to work, [...] I know what to do” (Organisation C, P57). When participants talked about the
times they felt engaged, their stories revolved around having the ability to do their work. Hence these were seen as key influencing factors for driving motivation and engagement. “Just being given the opportunity to do what I feel I am best at is motivating for me” (Organisation C, P68). In addition, there is a clear underlying sense of feeling needed or useful because of one’s expertise in their field of work. “It tends to be when either I feel that I am needed, because I have a greater understanding of the subject than everybody else, so things wouldn’t happen if I wasn’t there. So being able to use my expertise” (Organisation A, P10). Using one’s expertise therefore makes the work more enjoyable and engaging. “You feel like a real lynchpin in the business, so that is probably the time when I am most engaged and the time I am putting most hours and the time when I am really just completely on it” (Organisation B, P33).

Findings suggest that expertise and confidence develop over time as individuals become used to their abilities and limitations. “I think I have just become more confident in knowing the job and understanding what I need to do and what I think the priorities are” (Organisation A, P16). As such, the belief in their ability to perform determined the degree to which they felt able to engage with their work. “I feel engaged because I have the ability to change things” (Organisation B, P31). Participants described themselves as “quite self-sufficient” (Organisation B, P47) as well as “confident [because] they know where the sources of support are and […] some of the barriers” (Organisation A, P24). The notion of work playing into one’s skills and abilities appeared central to the experience of feeling engaged. “I mean a big part is that sense of knowledge or expertise that we have created, so it makes me feel good” (Organisation B, P48) and “I am actually working using my capability, [which is] splendid really” (organisation B, P47).

The interdependence between one’s interest and ability at work becomes even more significant when reviewing participant stories of disengagement.

“At the moment, it is not enjoyable […] It is partly possibly my inexperience in the role. Partly the workload or me not choosing the right parts of the workload to concentrate on, which would link back again to inexperience” (Organisation C, P50)

Similarly, having the ability but not the interest in one’s work also connected with feeling disengaged. “I feel fairly ok, confident in what I am doing most of the time because of how long I have been here […] It is not my favourite job in the world” (Org B, P31). Hence having an interesting role that one does not yet feel able to do is demotivating, but having a role that one feels confident in doing but does not speak to one’s interest is equally demotivating. It is evident that both interest and ability are key in facilitating motivation and engagement at work.

For participants who described feeling disengaged and were unable to easily change jobs due to their current circumstances, financial security became their key motivating factor for coming to work. “It is just a general feeling of let’s get on with work to pay the bills at the end of the day” (Organisation B, P31). However the “financial element” (Organisation A, P21) took priority for only a minority of participants. “I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t being paid”
(Organisation C, P63). However, as these are not the only influencing factors, additional sub-themes will also be discussed.

4.3.2. Variety, Challenge & Growth

This sub-theme of ‘Nature of Work’ can best be defined by work needing to be varied and stimulating, whilst also offering opportunities for personal growth and career progression. Variety is key in keeping participants interested in their work, ideally “no two days are the same” (Organisation B, P33). One participant explained this best:

“My job is so broad with me doing a range of projects and with the types of issues that I deal with at any one time, there is variety and there are different levels of complexity. So, there is the opportunity to learn new stuff and that is what I find stimulating about it.” (Organisation A, P14).

Several participants highlighted that wanting to feel challenged is a key aspect of why they feel motivated and engaged at work. For instance, the nature of the work can be challenging because of the variety involved. “I like the challenges. One of the advantages is my role is quite varied, there is a lot going on. I am supporting a lot of different teams, so I get to touch on a lot of different issues” (Organisation C, P53). At the same time, work can also be challenging because of the workload.

“It is quite a challenging role as well so I am never bored at work, which is another important factor for me […] I do feel energetic at work […] I am doing these two positions at the same time, it is just a lot on my plate” (Organisation C, P68).

Whilst workloads can be demanding, being busy and avoiding boredom is often seen as a positive influencing factor. For other participants the work is challenging because of the time pressure for completion. “Whilst these situations are stressful, I thrive on that, you have got to be creative” (Organisation A, P17).

Although having a challenging job can be a difficult balancing act, it can also help create a sense of job satisfaction. “You are all rushing trying to get it done, you feel a sense of achievement, because I had finished it on time for the client” (Organisation B, P35).

“It is a hell of a challenge to manage people […] But at least it keeps it interesting, because you think how the hell are you going to deal with that and then you end up doing it and it is just so satisfying” (Organisation B, P29).

Work that requires one to go beyond their current skills and capacities in order to expand their existing knowledge or acquire new skills is important in influencing participant motivation and engagement.

“Oh, it’s probably the best job that I’ve ever had. […] I don’t know of any other jobs out there that would suit me. Because I am constantly learning
new things, I get bored really quickly. So this is, you can’t get bored, you are learning new things every day” (Organisation A, P1).

In particular, the nature of a challenging job was appealing to the engineering participants from Organisation C because it spoke to the preferences and key skills in their profession. “I genuinely do love my job, I love working in engineering, you know problem solving, problem fixing” (Organisation C, P50). At the same time, this can however also be problematic as “engineers [...] become very frustrated when they can’t do that” (Organisation C, P49).

4.3.3. Meaning & Having an Impact

As the third and final sub-theme of ‘Nature of Work’, it is defined as participants having meaningful work, which provides them with a sense of purpose for their tasks and a feeling that their work contributes to the bigger picture. “Knowing that I am not just doing work for the sake of doing work, that is what really motivates me” (Organisation C, P67). Others concur in that “feeling like I am doing something that matters and is worthwhile is a huge part of that.” (Organisation A, P1). The effort that they invest into their work becomes worthwhile as a result of having an impact.

What is interesting to note is that participants felt most strongly about this being fundamental to feeling engaged. “I don’t think I would or could be engaged, if I didn’t think that what I was doing was genuinely making a difference” (Organisation B, P33). The importance of meaning became even more evident when one participant cited the reason for their disengagement. “I mean a lot of it I feel disengaged because I don’t feel like I am doing anything meaningful” (Organisation C, P50). Hence, a sense of meaning and impact in one’s work appears key to facilitating work engagement.

Having meaning and a sense of impact on the external world, meant that participants felt more connected to the wider organisational aims. By being “a part of something that is making a difference” (Organisation A, P12), it creates a perception of a shared purpose for staff. “I am contributing to the bigger picture and I feel connected” (Organisation B, P33). Moreover, this shared purpose not only drives work engagement but also their commitment to stay with their employer.

“It is true that the work does seems meaningful for the most part, that is one of the reasons why I have stayed at [this organisation] for so long, because I feel like I am part of something, doing something important.” (Organisation A, P1).

It is clear however that participants felt the contribution and impact of their work to varying degrees. “So we can see results as we go through things” (Organisation A, P12) but also “actually contributing to the company” (Organisation B, P28). Most notably the engineers from Organisation C highlighted that being able to “create parts” (P52) and “seeing the products in real life” (P68) was key to feeling motivated and engaged at work. “Being involved in the design and it is pretty hands on stuff, [...] it is the actual stuff
that you see on the [product] It is something tangible, so that is my biggest motivating factor" (Organisation C, P68).

Having an impact was for instance felt when a task was seen through “from start to finish” (Organisation B, P41). Providing participants with a sense of achievement, pride and greater confidence levels. “When I finished it […] it was immense pleasure actually, it was a great feeling. And pride no doubt about it […] It was my baby and it gives you a kind of confidence, immense confidence” (Organisation C, P58). As a result, participants felt motivated and engaged with their work when they sense meaning and were able to make an impact on services and products of their organisation or contribute to the greater societal good.

4.4. Interactions of High Quality (HQ) LMX & Impact on WE

This section discusses key aspects of HQ LMX and how these relate to enhancing participant’s motivation and how they feel at work. This section highlights how sufficient or good LMX can help facilitate a resourceful work environment for employees, thus encouraging work engagement. Unsurprisingly, descriptions of HQ LMXs were often very similar to the participant descriptions of good working relationships. Those who felt that they had “absolutely brilliant” (Organisation B, P34) or good relationships with their line manager regularly felt more engaged at work. Having “mutual respect, trust and openness” (Organisation B, P29) was key to creating a resourceful work environment in which employees could focus and become more involved with the task at hand. HQ LMX is characterised by ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’, ‘Effective & Open Communication’ as well as ‘Adequate Support’.

4.4.1. Mutual Respect & Trust

The sub-theme ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’ related to a sense of mutual inputs from both the line manager and the employee. Participants respected and trusted the line manager when they felt empowered to perform their work autonomously, providing a sense of ownership and control.

Participants particularly emphasised the need for mutual and professional input for a good working relationship, which suggests a degree of compatibility in approaches. “You just need to have the manager and the minion with matching expectations and preferences, [that] is the most effective way [to engage staff]” (Organisation A, P1). Regarding the relationship being mutual, one participant stated that employees needed to “share [their] aspirations, [and] development needs” (Organisation C, P60). Hence, key aspects of a good working relationship revolved around ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’, ‘Effective & Open Communication’ and ‘Adequate Support’, so that the participants felt they could do their job. There was a clear sense of needing to “earn trust” (Organisation C, P59) on both sides of the employee-line manager relationship and a feeling “that they are looking out for you” (Organisation C, P57). Line managers “need to lead by example”
and can earn respect by demonstrating their credibility through technical or managerial skills and exuding a level of authority in the organisation.

In addition, participants revealed that whilst likeability was certainly helpful in establishing a sound working relationship, it was not seen as essential for respecting the line manager.

“In an ideal world your personalities would work well together [...] I think in a professional scenario you can still have a good working relationship even if you don't get on [on] a personal level.” (Organisation A, P17)

At the same time, there were a few instances where employees were good friends with their line manager outside of work, but they did not necessarily feel that they were a good manager. So, credibility in the job, in terms of respect and confidence in the line manager’s abilities, perhaps outweighs the importance of likeability.

There was a sense of being on an equal playing field, where employees were given ownership and responsibility for their work along with greater degrees of latitude when it came to decision making. This was best summarised by one participant:

“Our boss puts a high level of trust in us to make judgements and to get on with our work, and to make decisions. So, we operate for our level in [this organisation], we work to a fairly high level of autonomy and responsibility [...] We have considerable freedom of action and freedom of judgement, all of which is pretty motivating.” (Organisation A, P2)

Some participants expressed feeling empowered and autonomous regarding their work, because their line manager trusted them. “So they are happy for me to produce things that I think are important and that if there wasn't that mutual expectation and trust then I guess they wouldn't leave me to it” (Organisation A, P12). Moreover, they felt that they had a sense of control and ownership over their responsibilities “it is very much thought of as my project and that is hugely motivational for me” (Organisation A, P14). A sense of ownership was seen as key to facilitating job satisfaction, sense of achievement and pride when something was successfully completed, which encouraged engagement. “I do have a high level of responsibility, which is motivational.” (Organisation B, P33)

### 4.4.2. Effective & Open Communication

This sub-theme follows on from the previous one as when you trust and respect someone, this helps to establish rapport and is conducive to more effective communication. ‘Effective & Open Communication’ is characterised by a sense of clarity and direction, as well as receiving adequate feedback, praise and recognition. It is defined by a mutual exchange in information that is required to do the job.
“Good communication is the most important thing, so to know what, why and when you are doing your work and being given all the correct information to be able to do the job.” (Organisation B, P38)

Good communication is about providing “clarity in terms of expectations and knowing the overall direction” (Organisation A, P11). Communication was effective when it was seen as mutual or “two way communication” (Organisation C, P56) that was open and honest, providing regular performance feedback, role clarity as well as adequate praise and recognition. One person described how a good line manager enables a good working relationship and subsequent work engagement:

“It is about giving them enough support so that they feel they can do their job. Giving them enough space to do so, that you show trust and let them get on with their job. Giving them enough responsibility that they feel challenged” (Organisation A, P15).

Moreover, genuine interest, empathy and feeling listened to also played into how line managers could be supportive to staff. Regarding which, a good working relationship made up of effective and consistent communication could best be achieved by “contact, contact, human contact that isn’t email or phone, so informal contact and catch ups” (Organisation C, P63).

Overall the line manager is consistent in how they communicate with their direct report and are often more likely to follow through on promises made. There was an understanding that the quality of relationship develops and can improve over time. “I’ve gotten to know him and [I am] becoming more confident in what I am doing and feeling more competent as I’ve learned what to do” (Organisation A, P1). Moreover, effective communication, such as performance feedback or praise, can enhance an individual’s job satisfaction and confidence at work, speak to influencing factors such as ‘Interest & Ability’ and ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’. That is, small gestures of praise or positive feedback via email or in person can be as powerful as a pay rise and whilst not expected, they are a nice surprise that make employees feel valued and more likely to return the favour.

“We also have regular catch-ups and talk about things. […] So, I think we are growing in this team together, so when I give him good feedback and that makes him happy and the same applies when I get good feedback too.” (Organisation B, P32)

Participants recalled being able to focus on their work, if they had clarity and an indication of direction or purpose in relation to it.

“Well I’m quite happy with my line manager, I am quite happy to work on my own and get on with things. The only support really I need is guidance or direction, so I know what to do and what my objectives are.” (Organisation A, P13)

Whereas consistency in communication speaks to line managers following up on promises and communicating if these are no longer applicable, realistic or delayed in being fulfilled. “She is very honest, she would always double check things before promising anything. She is very careful at managing
expectations” (Organisation B, P34). Others add “it has been quite consistent, from what I expected he behaved in line with that” (Organisation A, P8) and “No unfulfilled promises, I mean working with [my current line manager] has been very open and honest. I know exactly where I stand with him and he has the same with me” (Organisation C, P55). HQ LMX are therefore characterised by consistency in exchange content and a level of being able to predict what to expect from one another. As such, participants commented “I could guarantee that if I went to see [my line manager] about a question or problem I had, he would help me” (Organisation C, P65) and “the big ones, if I escalate them, I do expect my line manager to do something about it and to be fair he normally does” (Organisation C, P68).

“If my line manager says he is going to do something, he then does it. And that is one of the reasons why I like him as a manager, because he sticks to the promises he has made unless there is a very good reason for changing his mind or something has come in to change the situation.” (Organisation B, P29)

It is through empowerment that line managers enhance the satisfaction and confidence of their employees and thus help build skills and abilities required to perform one’s role. This clearly speaks to key influencing factors such as ‘Interest & Ability’ whilst maintaining opportunities for ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth.’ At the same time, it appears that through having a trusting, supportive and developmental relationship with the line manager an employee’s work engagement tends to increase. HQ LMX and adequate levels of support can help buffer overwhelming job demands and assist in turning potential hindrance challenges into personal growth opportunities. Consequently, the employees not only feel able to do their job, but they feel optimistic, confident and capable enough to seize challenges and learn to grow both as a person and a professional employee. However, it must be recognised that HQ LMX can only help facilitate work engagement, so if the work itself lacks opportunity for development, challenge and significance as per the key drivers for participants, then they are unlikely to feel engaged.

Elements of fairness and consistency in communication were also a key aspect of communication being effective. These were seen as critical to enabling a good working relationship in terms of being mindful of what and how things were said and whether promises were followed up. Overpromising and under delivering can be hugely demotivating for employees and expectations should be managed on a continuous basis. Regarding which, there was a strong consensus amongst the participants that good relationships at work take time to establish and require careful maintenance on an on-going basis.

4.4.3. Adequate Support

Whilst colleagues can certainly aid motivation and potentially help overcome difficulties at work, the line manager was seen as having a bigger effect on how one feels at work than social support from colleagues. Receiving ‘Adequate Support’ was central to deeming LMX a good working relationship. This is because adequate support helps to sustain ‘Interest & Ability’ in one’s
work, whilst also communicating ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ to participants about their work.

One participant suggests “management does have an impact on my motivation and their actions can influence what my motivation looks like” (Organisation C, P68). Most participants agreed that line manager support was key to effective working. “[It is] very very important. I mean you are reliant on them really. Within an organisation, if you don’t have the support from your line manager then it can be very very difficult” (Organisation A, P4).

Social support from the line manager was seen as a key influencing factor. For instance, some felt that they “wouldn’t be able to do [their] job” (Organisation A, P17) without this support. Others agreed as “you can only motivate yourself so far” (Organisation B, P41) and you could “lose enthusiasm for [work] and wonder what the point was” (Organisation B, P40). Overall, “if I felt that I wasn’t getting the support then that would be one of the key reasons for me not being motivated” (Organisation B, P33).

This was because the line manager was seen to hold a greater level of authority over allocating interesting or challenging tasks as well as determining the wider impact and visibility of your work.

“It is important they are there for you and a big part of the motivation comes from having a supportive line manager. It is very well to have your colleagues to support and recognise your efforts, but it needs to come from a higher level, so that you know that you are doing a good job” (Organisation B, P31).

For the majority of participants, the relationship with the line manager was seen as having a significant impact on their motivation as this enabled them to understand the impact and purpose of their work.

“I mean a lot of how I feel about the importance of my work comes from [my line manager], telling me how it is being used by other people […] All the things behind the scenes, the political stuff going on and there is a whole other world to it that goes on without my knowledge” (Organisation A, P1).

The importance of line manager support in facilitating motivation and engagement at work, becomes clear when reviewing stories of how individuals overcame difficulties. “I then went into the role with very little experience and it was quite an abrupt learning curve, without the support from the manager […] I think I would have fallen through some cracks, but they tapered them” (Organisation A, P8).

One participant explained the importance and the way in which line manager’s can influence them at work perfectly:

“I think that the support has a big influence on how engaged I feel. If you respect your line manager and they trust and empower you to get on with your job, and support you throughout, you know that they are there for you even if you don’t need it, you feel like you can get on with your job better and even do a better job. You feel more confident and less stupid” (Organisation B, P31)
Similar to the positive contagion from peers, participants recalled social support from line manager’s being key to taking on additional responsibilities, which speaks to the influencing factor of ‘Interest & Ability’.

“My line manager at the time was really good and a lot of the reason why I am wanting to do stuff more, sort of take on more responsibilities, is because of his mentoring a few years ago. He had a very profound effect on me in terms of where I saw myself and where I wanted to be” (Organisation C, P50).

In addition, line manager’s can lead by example and inspire their staff to emulate their behaviour in an attempt to motivate and engage their own direct reports to a similar level. “I think the way he engages me, has made me think about how I engage my team. I have learned a lot from him” (Organisation A, P8).

However, the majority of participants noted that a combination of influencing factors were key to facilitating motivation and engagement at work.

“The fundamental thing is, if I didn’t get paid I wouldn’t come to work at all. So obviously that is a big drive, but certainly the atmosphere, the friendliness of the staff, whether the work is interesting, that is what is motivating” (Organisation A, P18)

Participants who reported feeling highly engaged most of the time, spoke about how the nature of the work and social support were key influencing factors in how they felt at work.

Interestingly, most participants mentioned having no or low expectations when they first started working with their line managers, as very few had known her/him previously or had an idea of what was to come. At the same time, if participants already enjoyed their job because of the content and challenging nature of it, whilst offering social interaction and support, the underlying expectations of their line manager essentially revolved around the mutual and professional aspects of a good working relationship. That is, there was an assumption that the relationship would most likely be positive unless told otherwise beforehand and that this would probably entail adequate levels of trust, respect, support and feedback.

4.5. Interactions of Lower Quality (LQ) LMX & Impact on WE

It must be recognised that the differentiation between HQ and LQ LMXs are not as clear-cut and separate as one might think. For, there are also mixed levels of LMX, where participants perceive it to be neither HQ nor mutual nor LQ and one sided. For instance, one participant talked about their LMX quality being “successful, focussed...by and large open, but also a little bit guarded” (Organisation A, P23). Instead, they often found themselves in between either categories and frustrated as a result of lacking clarity in expectations and behaviour norms.
4.5.1. One-sided Inputs & Trust Issues

In stark contrast to HQ LMX, LQ LMX scenarios suffer from, low levels of trust, respect and support or perhaps the complete lack of some or all of these aspects. Participants who had experienced or were experiencing this situation recalled feeling that LQ LMX often appeared one sided and that demands would be made of them, with there being no regular support in the form of answering queries or providing guidance. “I think they need to understand that it works both ways” (Organisation B, P41). This suggests that LQ LMX involves less or limited access to resources, such as performance feedback, clarity and direction, praise and recognition.

It follows that there is often a sense of distance, whereby LQ LMX are “quite [at] arms length” (Organisation C, P50) so that “when somebody is showing no interest, it is easy to become disengaged” (Organisation C, P57). This feeling of distance creates the impression that “you get talked at rather than talked to” (Organisation C, P50) and often prevents effective and open communication, which is a key aspect in HQ LMX. One-to-one meetings happen infrequently and there is overarching role ambiguity: “I often come away more confused than when I went in” (Organisation A, P21). Overall, there is clear lack of rapport and opportunity for informal interaction. In return, the participants subject to this condition often resorted to performing strictly to their in-role performance, which is captured particularly well by the following quote:

“If you don’t like them, you don’t invest in them. You will just do the bare minimum of what you need to do, to make sure the job is effective, however, if they ask you to do a bit more, you would be more inclined to go [no].” (Organisation C, P57)

In some instances, participants felt that their line manager’s loyalty was to senior management rather than accepting a responsibility for their direct reports, which creates additional trust issues. This often resulted in them acting more guarded manner or being cynical towards their line manager, “I feel like I wouldn’t go to him and unload things in detail to him. I feel like he’s got a lot of loyalty to the director” (Organisation A, P15). Likewise, others mentioned a sense of cliquishness amongst managers, thereby creating a ‘them and us’ divide. “Managers getting in with other managers and it is for their self status” (Organisation B, P27). Consequently, communication with the line manager would become increasingly filtered or censored out of a fear of potential repercussions.

Participants described that they felt disengaged because they no longer felt able or confident to do their job. This relates to the previous influencing factor of ‘Interest & Ability.’ “I just didn’t feel like I could lead a meeting properly, because of a lack of skill or confidence at the time and that made me feel disengaged because I felt like I could not do my job” (Organisation C, P52). Findings suggest that a lack of skill or a lack of focus on capitalising employee strengths and abilities is key in causing employees to invest less effort into their work. “I don’t particularly enjoy my role, I don’t enjoy what is expected of me because it doesn’t focus on the bits that I am good at” (Organisation C, P62).
With the recent functional reorganisation in Organisation C, a number of participants felt frustrated by attempts at finding their feet and in taking on roles that are perhaps too challenging to overcome. “I still have that feeling that I don’t have enough time or skills to do the work. And that is a little bit unsettling and overwhelming at times” (Organisation C, P61). In part, the frustration and sense of feeling overwhelmed by either the workload or the challenging nature of work exceeding current skills can be traced back to the LMX quality. Therefore not having ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’, ‘Effective & Open Communication’ as well as ‘Adequate Support’ from their line manager limits the ability to overcome these difficulties, as such employees feel unable to perform their work. This then has a knock on effect on how satisfied they feel with their work and ultimately impacts on their ability to engage at work.

“The workplace has changed I think. I don’t know if I am entirely suited to what I am doing now, so I am kind of grieving about the bit I lost [...] Whereas what I am doing at the moment, I don’t get a big sense of achievement and I just feel like I am clutching on to straws” (Organisation A, P26)

“I am quite aware that this is the first time that I have ever felt trapped, as in physically I don’t know where to turn next. […] it is partly possibly my inexperience in the role. Partly the workload or me not choosing the right parts of the workload to concentrate on, which would link back again to inexperience” (Organisation C, P50).

From these insights, it becomes clear that the role of the line manager is to help align skills and abilities of the employees with the work. In addition, line managers can help overcome potential skill shortages by providing relevant support and opportunities for growth so that employees can feel confident and optimistic about performing their duties at work. Feeling able to do one’s job and having someone to go to for additional support are key factors that feed into feeling satisfied with one’s job and facilitating a positive attitude towards work.

4.5.2. Inconsistent Communication & Mismatches

Contrary to HQ LMX, LQ MX was characterised by a lack of mutual and effective communication. Instead, participants told stories about feeling confused and frustrated with their line manager because the behaviour did not always match what was agreed. Participants recall questioning their line manager’s loyalty to them and the extent to which they are show interest for the reports or for their own strategic career progression. Concurring with this confusion, one participant reported:

“my current line manager is good in that he takes a step back and lets us get on with it. So, I have autonomy [but] we are not always on the same page. I feel like he is maybe communicating more with his seniors than with us.” (Organisation A, P20)
As a result of ineffective communication, participants felt frustrated with their line managers. In part this is because success, challenges or concerns regarding the work may not be clearly communicated to the individual. The role of the line manager is therefore not only to address these issues, but to help connect the employees to the bigger picture. A lack of clear communication in this regard leads to feeling disengaged because a sense of ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ is not communicated adequately. “I feel disengaged because I don’t feel like I am doing something meaningful” (Organisation C, P50).

At the same time however potential successes may not be communicated upwards, therefore the participant lacks a representational voice in the organisation.

“I do feel autonomous; I don’t feel like I am being dictated to so that is the good side to it. The bad side I suppose which built up over time, because he has been my line manager pretty well all the time, is the sort of frustration that the messages don’t get through the system, through the line management system to the senior management team and so on. Which is sort of a lead in the chain wasting away, he is not really doing what he should be doing.” (Organisation A, P3)

It becomes evident that LQ LMX suffers from infrequent, limited or dishonest communication and therefore readily managing expectations becomes more difficult. Consequently, LQ LMX tends to be associated with a distinct mismatch in expectations “it was the sort of dream job on paper. But the reality is very different” (Organisation A, P9). In part, this mismatch was due to not having “entirely realistic expectations” (Organisation A, P3) or false promises being made at the interview stage, where both the job and prospective employee put forward their “best version” of self (Organisation A, P9). This mismatch in expectations is further demonstrated by the following quote:

“I am quite struggling with that as well at the moment, not because my line manager is not a nice person, but it is because he obviously has expectations that are different from mine at times. Also, the level of support that I am looking for or is needed is different from what he would like to give.” (Organisation C, P50)

Continuously feeling frustrated and disappointed by one’s line manager, again has a knock on effect on positive attitudes at work and hence job satisfaction and feelings of engagement are impacted.

Another feature of LQ LMX is the perceived mismatch in values and approaches between the line manager and employee. “That is partly upbringing, I am very much a civilian, he is very much an army person, certainly left wing and radical. It is just a mismatch I suppose” (Organisation A, P3).

LQ LMXs is not only characterised by a mismatch in expectations, but in some instances also by inappropriate behaviour by the line manager early on. Favouritism, dishonesty or feeling marginalised by the line manager
could act as significant breaches leading to lower engagement or complete disengagement from work.

“So, the manager has very strong favourites and so it is about the destructive power of that relationship […] by that they decide the fate of people sort of whether they are successful or fail.” (Organisation A, P10)

Moreover, the sense of not feeling included or marginalised by their line manager not only led to reduced job satisfaction and as well as a fall off in work engagement, for it also often lowered commitment levels to the organisation.

Whilst it appears that LQ LMXs are much less desirable than the HQ equivalent, it must be noted that LQ is not all bad. For, it was also associated with lower expectations on both sides of the relationship in that, for instance, limited support and back up is provided, thus ironically providing a degree of consistency. Hence, a known lack of support or resources prompts the employee to create her/his own resources in order to cope with the situation or sustain engagement with work. Some participants described “working harder” as a result of this or engaging in different types of job crafting so as to be able to cope or sustain some level of satisfaction and engagement with their work.

In a formerly LQ LMX one participant described conducting relational job crafting to compensate for the lack of line manager support at the time.

“I don’t know, I feel like I have kind of created my own support to be honest. So, I feel very independent in that regard and I don’t naturally think that [my line manager] has my back as such. The people that I look to support and direction aren’t necessarily leaders of this organisation.” (Organisation A, P14)

This individual also conducted physical job crafting in terms of changing the scope or type of jobs that they were working on. “I am a bit of a bulldozer […] I will literally become a walking nightmare to make things happen. I would find a way until somebody either shuts me down or let’s me get on with things” (Organisation A, P14). Similarly, others related how they also conducted physical job crafting in order to reengage with their work. “I made a very conscious decision to move into this field and as I said earlier, I think I prefer this work because it is more varied and satisfying” (Organisation B, P29).

4.6. Importance of Line Manager Support

Regardless of the LMX quality, for the majority of the participants the line manager relationship was seen as having a significant impact on their motivation as this enabled them to understand the impact and purpose of their work. ‘Adequate Support’ as discussed in HQ LMX includes aspects of feeling mentored and having development opportunities, as well as feeling listened to and represented in the organisation. This corresponds well with all three influencing factors at work such as “Interest & Ability and, “Variety,
Challenge & Growth’ as well as ‘Meaning & Having An Impact’ and are most often found under HQ LMX rather than LQ LMX.

“Oh yeah, because I mean a lot of how I feel about the importance of my work comes from [my line manager], telling me how it is being used by other people […] All the things behind the scenes, the political stuff going on and there’s a whole other world to it that goes on without my knowledge.” (Organisation A, P1)

“I then went into the role with very little experience and it was quite an abrupt learning curve, without the support from the manager […] I think I would have fallen through some cracks otherwise but they tapered them” (Organisation A, P8)

“I think that the support has a big influence on how engaged I feel. If you respect your line manager and they trust and empower you to get on with your job and support you throughout, and you know that they are there for you even if you don’t need it, you feel like you can get on with your job better and even do a better job. You feel more confident and less stupid.” (Organisation B, P31)

This was also true when the employee voice had to be carried forward and employees felt supported by being represented. “I think she’s a really, really good advocate for all of us and in the right times, so that’s really good” (Organisation A, P12).

Some participants suggested that the positive contagion effect of line managers also relates to them acting as mentors.

“Really positive. I think he’s got some really good strengths in terms of bringing people together and he is very diplomatic. I continue to learn from him and we have very honest feedback sessions, so yeah I think we’ve got a good relationship.” (Organisation A, P22)

“My line manager at the time was really good and a lot of the reason why I am wanting to do stuff more, sort of take on more responsibilities, is because of his mentoring a few years ago. He had a very profound effect on me in terms of where I saw myself and where I wanted to be.” (Organisation C, P50)

An extension of this contagion effect was where middle management employees in HQ LMX relationships tried to emulate and mirror their line manager’s behaviour and attempt to apply the same level of support to their direct reports.

“He doesn’t try to have control. He involves us a lot in decision-making. I think the way he engages me has made me think about how I engage my team. I have learned a lot from him, […] I think it is give and take with me. He is very good at setting the line and rules, we know what is right and what is wrong. I think he is very keen on happy productive staff.” (Organisation A, P8)
Participants generally agreed that line manager support was key to effective working. “Very very important, I mean you are reliant on them really. Within an organisation, if you don’t have the support from your line manager then it can be very very difficult” (Organisation A, P4). Others suggested that line manager support was more important than support from colleagues:

“A big part of your motivation comes from having a supportive line manager. It is all very well to have your colleagues to support and recognise your efforts, but it needs to come from a higher level so that you know you are appreciated and doing a good job” (Organisation B, P31)

Whilst the support wasn’t always obvious and could occur on a varying basis, most participants “wouldn’t be able to do [their] job” (Organisation A, P17) or felt that they could not cope without line manager support. Participants commented that “you can only motivate yourself so far” (Organisation B, P41, Organisation C, P68) and the line manager helps to not only put things into perspective but provide purpose to one’s work. Others noted that “if I felt that I wasn’t getting the support then that would be one of the key reasons of me not being motivated” (Organisation B, P33). Similarly, not having line management support suggest that individuals “lose enthusiasm for [work] and wonder what the point was” (Organisation B, P40), overall “I can feel really demotivated if I am not getting good feedback from my line manager” (Organisation A, P20).

The exchange content that employees received or which leaders provided as part of HQ LMX, are were most frequently cited as being supportive through performance feedback, praise and recognition, as well as support in the form of being available and approachable to talk to regarding questions, concerns and difficult situations. The following quotes emphasise why some LMX are perceived to be HQ:

“[My line manager] in particular is very collaborative. So you feel more on an even footing, rather than that dictator tone telling you what to do and I really appreciate that. An we can have discussions about, so when work gets in and he wants us to do something, we have discussions about it” (Organisation A, P1)

“Yes, in that I know that he trusts me and I know that when the ship is down he will support me. Secondly, his hands off approach and his willingness to give freedom of action and judgement, that actually comes back to trust, because he knows that he can trust me to get on to be doing the right things and getting priorities right and to be doing a good job and to make sound decisions when I need to make a decision. But I know that, I can trust him to support and make decisions as and when there is something at his level, that really only he can decide. So I think, mutual trust is very important to a line management relationship. Empowering, and I guess you could describe him as empowering in that he doesn’t breathe down our necks and doesn’t give constant instruction.” (Organisation A, P2)

“My line manager knows that he can count on me, so when he needs support he knows that I can help out and that makes me happy. He keeps things under control and he is very calm and gets you into the right mind-set to get
the job done. He is reassuring and you feel comfortable around him.” (Organisation C, P52)

One particular important aspect of line manager support was in the form of “he has always got my back […] he encourages and supports me” (Organisation A, P17). Line managers in HQ LMX situations often act as a sounding board for discussing conflict and potential solutions to it. As such, it was understood that line managers are needed “when things go wrong” (Organisation A, P8). Others agreed “I need that authority and knowledge in the background” (Organisation B, P48).

“Absolutely, because then you don’t feel that anxiety when something goes wrong and you have no one to ask, it’s awful. So when you have someone to go to, to defend you and your work or help you out of a situation it highlights how important [line manager] support is at work” (Organisation C, P52).

Having that reinforcement that you are on the right path increases confidence and proactive behaviour in the employee. The importance of line manager support is best expressed by the following quote:

“I think the more tasks at work are new and complex, the more essential it is to have that line manager support. If you are dealing with handling relationships in the way that we are, sometimes at crisis point as well, so that is a huge burden and responsibility and you need someone to back you up and get that support. So you need confidence from the other person that everything is ok to help you know what you should own.” (Organisation A, P14)

Participants felt comforted, relaxed and being able to focus on their work, because of that having ‘Adequate Support’, rather than fearing potential repercussions of not handling issues correctly. As such, participants noted that if they didn’t have relevant support they would feel less satisfied and consequently less engaged with their work. “If I didn’t have that support […] then there would be more threats to me being satisfied with my job, so it may not directly impact on that but it may increase the likelihood of issues coming in and reducing overall satisfaction” (Organisation A, P12).

“If I feel supported and I am bolstered by that, so I can focus on doing a good job and getting the job done. I feel like I have got back up if I need it and I feel like, I can probably take more risks or challenges. So yes I feel more engaged if I know that my line manager trusts me and supports me when I run into difficulties […] so yeah level of support does make a difference” (Organisation A, P14)

At the same time, there was also a strong theme that the support was mutual, “we are there for one another, it is very two way” (Organisation B, P34), as they felt an obligation to reciprocate the support provided “especially since I have been given so much freedom and flexibility working from home, […] that I am as productive as [my line manager] expects” (Organisation A, P1). Others suggested that they felt highly engaged and were happy to go the extra mile “doing certain jobs for my boss that any of the other girls might not do” (Organisation B, P27). Another participant agreed with this view:
“I get on well with my line manager, you don’t mind going the extra mile sometimes, if he needs you to. You don’t mind putting yourself out there for him, because he will do the same for you.” (Organisation B, P35)

Interestingly, one of those who felt they were in an HQ LMX relationship and in need of additional support to cope with difficult situations mentioned that “At times I felt that I couldn’t go to her, because I didn’t want to add to her workload” (Organisation B, P34). There was a sense of mutual consideration and professional distance in not wanting to burden the line manager with additional workload and needing to find alternative coping mechanisms.

Only a minority of participants noted that the extent to which their line manager influenced their work was minimal and for some this was only negative. “It’s not a big factor, but it is a small negative factor.” (Organisation A, P3).

The exchange content in LQ LMX was often more transactional, where employees resorted to in-role performance doing the minimum that they were expected to do. Only very few participants talked about their line manager having no or limited impact on their motivation. “As long as I get a bit of support now and again, then I am quite self-sufficient” (Organisation B, P47). This was particularly true for senior managers who felt that whilst they certainly appreciated the support that they received, there was an expectation to simply be able to do the job. On the other hand, they also admitted that not having that support in place could impact on them negatively, particularly in crisis moments. This speaks to the importance of knowing that support is available if needed rather than receiving it all of the time and this is certainly true for both HQ and LQ LMX.

However, whilst line manager support can buffer outside negative influences from colleagues, the job, or the rest of the organisation, they can also be a factor causing distress to the employees by not providing adequate resources. As such the difference between support from the line manager and the organisation is not always as clear-cut.

However what was notable the emphasis on feeling engaged being seen as “a reciprocal thing” (Organisation A, P3), where favourable working conditions are returned by going the extra mile for their line manager “it’s mutual consideration, when I know that he is under enormous pressure and he does need help with things, then I am happy to go the extra mile to support him” (Organisation A P2). Others agreed, “because I get on well with my line manager, I don’t mind going the extra mile” (Organisation B, P35). This was particularly true when line managers had not only provided interesting working conditions but supported their direct reports in times of need. “Honestly if [my line manager] asked me to do something for her, I would have gone out of the way, I would have gone over and above what was expected because she head helped me” (Organisation C, P57).
4.7. Fluctuations in LMX Quality

The findings show that a relationship can deteriorate over time, if either party is seen to be one sided and no longer contributing to it. Lack of care or increase in the frequency and severity of breaches can aid this negative change. There were approximately six instances out of 68 interviews, where a change from HQ to LQ LMX was reported. “I loved my job, I loved my manager and I loved everyone that I worked with and I just don't know where it has gone wrong” (Organisation B, P27). This participant was frustrated because they could not understand why the line manager had changed their behaviour and why this resulted in an increase of breach occurrences. Interestingly, other members of the same team and with the same line manager talked about similar experiences and frustration. For participants under different circumstances, they highlight having an HQ LMX, which seemed supportive, autonomous and trusting at the beginning to then “feeling undermined” (Organisation A, P9) when a sudden lack of interest in a particular employee occurred (Organisation A, P13). Changes from HQ to LQ often have a detrimental impact on an employee’s motivation levels and are often associated with a loss of trust, respect and the employee seeking alternative employment either inside or outside of the organisation.

On the flipside, examples of positive change from LQ to HQ LMX provide an understanding that, over time, relationships can improve if both parties become committed to improving their relationship. One participant described having a difficult start and complete clash of working styles, where they felt trapped by being micro-managed, but over time had managed to establish clear boundaries, communicating expectations and work preferences.

“It is a difficult one and we have had an interesting journey over the last two years and I think where we have come out is that we have worked really hard at our relationship so that we now respect each other.” (Organisation A, P14)

Line manager support can also help revive lost engagement, by fostering development opportunities for the employee. “I now have a sense of direction […] I have gone from doing a couple of hours of work [to] time is now moving quite quickly again” (Organisation C, P56). This was mirrored by another participant: “So, I went from being disengaged, frustrated and not achieving as much […] how my line manager dealt with that situation was a big contribution on why I felt engaged again” (Organisation A, P12).

HQ LMXs are not always good and LQ LMXs are not always bad, if they remain relatively stable over time it is also associated with clarity and direction of what the parties can and cannot expect from one another. Whilst positive changes are beneficial to reengaging employees, one must be careful of negative changes in LMX quality and the detrimental impact these can have on job satisfaction, work engagement and commitment levels. Knowing the boundaries of LMX also provides lucidity in terms of what support can be sought from the manager and what support needs to be sought elsewhere, thus opening up opportunities for different types of job crafting in order to remain engaged.
4.8. Interactions of LMX, PCB and WE

It needs to be recognised that in addition to LMX quality, actions by the line manager such as PCBs and the severity of these can also be the cause of lower engagement amongst participants. This could be a key reason as to why employees disengage over short or long periods of time.

The findings suggest that minor breaches of the psychological contract were often associated with small “disagreements” (Organisation A, P16). For instance, the line manager forgetting to do something (Organisation A, P1), or not providing all the necessary information (Organisation B, P45). Furthermore, minor PCBs were seen as causing brief periods of frustration, but not having a lasting impression, thus enabling individuals to move on after a few hours or days. “I don’t think it’s ever really that serious, it’s not serious enough to get very upset about it to me. It’s more an inconvenience to me” (Organisation A, P1). Others described minor PCBs as being “just small niggles really. Sometimes you would appreciate more of a back up and support on the things that you are working on” (Organisation B, 37). Minor breaches are then perhaps best understood as not significantly impacting on an employee’s ‘Interest & Ability’, ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’ as well as ‘Meaning & Having an Impact.’

One person suggested a useful way of differentiating minor and major instances of breach.

“If you think you need it to do your job, yes it will impact your engagement, but if it just matches your plan or your desire for certain things then it will have less of an impact, because you can still do your job to an extent […] If I didn't have the confidence or appropriate training to do my job, I would feel terrified” (Organisation C, P61)

HQ LMX are seen to buffer minor PCBs, whereby employees can use open and honest communication to express their frustration, clarify expectations of one another and help avoid future occurrences. “You know because I am aware of it, I usually catch things fairly soon and we can have discussions about things before they become big problems” (Organisation A, P1). Others agreed “if it’s minor, we just talk it through but yeah I would react differently depending on what it is” (Organisation A, P22) and “if I have a disagreement with him, he normally explains it in detail” (Organisation B, P48). Being able to resolve a small misunderstanding therefore does not impact on the relationship quality and therefore does not change the nature of exchange between the parties, enabling employees to stay engaged with their work. Likewise, “if there was something slightly irritating we might talk about it one to one or something, but nothing major has happened so far. But if there was a situation I would definitely talk face to face rather than let it fester” (Organisation A, P25). The consensus here is that employees in perceived HQ LMX feel that they can openly address and therefore resolve issues before they escalate and significantly impact their ability to feel engaged at work.

Hence participants described disengaging for only brief periods of time and it not having any significant impact on their job satisfaction or work engagement levels. “So if someone asks if I have a good relationship with my
line manager, then yeah I do have that because it is mainly little annoyances and unless I think about them they are gone out of my mind.” (Organisation A, P19). Participant stories in this case revolve around being able to continue as normal, rather than feeling limited in one’s ability or motivation for the job. “At the moment I am just accepting that this is my position and there may be a day where it causes stress or anxiety or things like that, but after a day it goes away” (Organisation B, P33).

Employees felt that when instances of breach were outside of their line manager’s control or not intentional in the first place, then this had a lesser impact.

“I think there have been plenty of things where we have discussed a plan and it never happened, but the reason it never happened has never been because of things that I or he hasn’t done. It is quite evident that he is trying his best to do what we agreed.” (Organisation A, P17)

However, one participant noted that whilst generally they have a good relationship with their line manager and having autonomy, they felt that their line manager’s behaviour was intentional. “[He] does not have our best interest at heart. […] When I feel my line manager being really negative, then that makes me feel really disengaged and think what was the point in my work if you are not going to appreciate it” (Organisation A, P20). Such behaviour makes employees question the mutual nature of their relationship and furthermore it can undermine existing respect and trust for their line manager. Stories of PCBs in HQ LMX therefore result in individuals being more cautious in their interactions with their line manager. It is when instances of PCB persist and they are classed as intentional and impacting one’s ability to perform that this then relates to employees reciprocating via lower effort and engagement levels. “Obviously I am putting less effort in because things were said and promised and nothing has changed or improved” (Organisation A, P28).

In contrast, LQ LMX and minor PCBs range from having a neutral to a slightly negative impact on employees work engagement levels, depending on the type of issue. LQ LMX were not able to buffer the impact of PCB, but rather resulted in additional frustrations. Whilst it is still not thought to have a lasting impression on participants, it can cause individuals to feel apprehensive about what is to come next and makes some feel more guarded or cynical as a result. In part, this appears to be because there is no ‘Mutual Trust & Respect’ or ‘Open & Honest Communication’ as is the case for HQ LMX. So that employees struggle to understand whether actions by the line manager were intentional or malicious.

“All I can say is it just made me feel very much like he was out for himself and not supporting me. It just made me tell him less, which maybe now why I don't tell him very much” (Organisation A, P18)

“So, it actually made me even less happy with what I was doing, because the prospect of something else was extinguished or kept being moved further and further away. I didn’t feel resentful, just, I don't know, frustrated, it just worsened the situation.” (Organisation A, P19)
Participants explained that the one sided nature of exchange is mirrored by employees reciprocating and reducing their efforts and engagement at work. “When somebody is showing no interest, it’s very easy to become disengaged […] you will just do the bare minimum of what you need to do, to make sure the job is effective” (Organisation C, P57).

This is particularly true if the participant had encountered previous negative experiences that had resulted in them leaving an organisation or job. “I have certainly been in roles where line management say one thing and do another. That just makes you feel really insecure and unmotivated” (Organisation A, P17). However, others talked about working harder to prove a point or move on. “It makes me more determined to be honest. It does influence my engagement and maybe makes me work harder to make sure that we do get more recognition” (Organisation A, P8). As such, participants appeared more sensitive to future breaches if they had encountered previous negative experiences either in the same relationship or elsewhere.

“I would say a minor breach that alarmed me. I think it is the point about my previous negative experience making an impression on me […] I get apprehensive about what to expect and then it is difficult to trust him as well” (Organisation A, P9)

What was interesting to note was that there was an overarching consensus that minor breaches add up over time regardless of LMX quality. They were felt to have a cumulative effect that ends up being equivalent to the impact of major breaches and often resulted in a loss of trust, respect or seeking alternative employment. “The minor niggles don’t come out straight away and they add up over time into one big issue and then you just explode with frustration” (Organisation B, P31). Similarly, “I think they do add up, but perhaps the big issues add up a bit more or quicker. […] So if it happened too many times, I would perhaps then think about leaving the organisation as a consequence” (Organisation C, P52).

In the context of an LQ LMX, the cumulative effect of minor breaches can lead to feeling disengaged and resorting to strict in-role performance. “We feel like everything we do is wrong at the moment. Our or my manager just seems to be niggling at us [constantly]” (Organisation B, P27). Several instances of minor breaches had a cumulative effect, which were seen as the “the flipping point” (Organisation A, P19) or the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” (Organisation B, P41). The cumulative effect of breaches indicated to participants that their line managers were inconsistent and their ability to perform their job was significantly impacted by this. A perceived one-sided exchange characterised by PCBs is demotivating for employees. Consequently, some adopt a “zero tolerance mode because it might be part of a bigger pattern” (Organisation A, P10). The following quote is a good example of how an initial minor issue of starting to dislike work turned into a major problem:

“I have made [my line manager] aware that I no longer like it and they said that things were going to change. But we are now seven months down the line and still there is no change, so I am finding myself everyday becoming more and more disengaged. Obviously, I am putting less effort in because
things were said and promised and nothing has changed or improved.” (Organisation B, P28).

Major breaches were often associated with having a lasting impression on employees over several months and years at a time. A rare few participants described, “last [feeling] engaged a long time ago [4 years]” (Organisation C, P62). Consequently, major breaches can have a significant and detrimental impact on job satisfaction, work engagement and commitment levels. Moreover, they were pin-pointed more easily for participants, as “it has consequences for you” (Organisation A, P10). Major breaches therefore impact employees ‘Interest & Ability’ to do one’s job, but also they can disrupt the sense of ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ as well as limiting the nature of work by impacting on ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth.’ Most commonly cited major breaches included a sense of line managers acting unfairly, unprofessional ly, dishonestly or marginalising team members.

“There is not always the same expectation of work between the three reports […] If I felt like I had been treated fairly from day one, then I would have a greater level of trust that I was being treated fairly, which I don’t necessarily now have” (Organisation B, P33).

Others explain however “It is only the big issues that really stick with me. […] they were unacceptable situations and I don’t want anyone behaving that way, but I can live with it” (Organisation A, P19).

Regarding a formerly HQ LMX, one participant described feeling engaged and energised by being promoted to middle management, but feeling instantly crushed when the line manager had been withholding the fact that the direct reports were on equivalent or more pay than their new line manager (Organisation B, P33). It resulted in a “deep level of demotivation with the whole business and the line manager for undercutting me for a long period of time, which was hugely demotivating” (Organisation B, P33) in relation to managing the new team effectively. Thus, it would appear that major breaches result in HQ LMX no longer being able to buffer the impact on how they feel at work. Whilst this participant negotiated harder for pay following this instance, they had now also lost trust in their line manager.

For LQ LMX and major PCB a similar effect was found where participants disengaged and resorted to in-role performance.

“I can’t talk to her about anything anymore, because there was this thing last year where I had a health problem, I told her in private and she told everyone. My team told me and I felt, “how did you know?” So, there’s no trust anymore and I can’t really talk to her about anything anymore.” (Organisation B, P30)

“Also confidence in support, my line manager takes a lot of actions but it is very difficult in seeing the results of those action […] always talk, but no action” (Organisation C, P50)

Feeling disengaged resulted in employees caring less about work, making more mistakes and looking to leave the line manager or organisation. What was interesting to note was that regardless of LMX quality at the time that
cumulative effect as well as more major breaches impacted the level of support that employees felt that they received from their organisation. Within HQ LMX, persistent breaches result in “losing faith in your line manager and the company a little bit” (Organisation C, P68) but this was also mirrored by someone in a LQ LMX (Organisation B, P41). As such, persistent issues such as lacking ‘Adequate Support’ to do one’s work and role overload reflected negatively on the line manager. But it also reflected negatively on the organisation not being able to provide the overarching resources to facilitate such help. It appears that whilst participants distinguish between frustrations and breaches from their line manager and the organisation, these are also inherently linked. For instance, under circumstances where the individual perceives mixed to LQ LMX, having greater organisational support available may help to overcome initial frustrations.

“Definitely, being in an environment where you feel you are being taken care of and if you need something you can go and ask there are opportunities, so that makes a big difference. [...] Without all those things I might not feel so motivated to go to work to work in the morning.” (Organisation A, P20)

4.9. Moderating Factors of LMX PCB

Participant stories revealed a number of potential moderating factors that could help reduce the negative impact of PCBs from their line manager, hence sub-themes of this section include ‘Age, Maturity & Length of Service’ as well as ‘Job Crafting’.

4.9.1. Age, Maturity & Length of Service

This sub-theme is characterised by how the age and length of service of participants help alleviate the impact of PCBs from their line managers. This is regardless of existing LMX quality. It is therefore interesting to note that a number of participant stories revolved around age, maturity and length of service and how this buffered the severity of the impact of PCBs on how they felt at work. Subsequently participants talked about ways in which that they felt they could remove themselves from sources of stress and frustrations in order to both focus and engage with their work.

“I think I have got a bit more perspective as I’ve got older. You know, priorities change, as you get older. It’s not like work isn’t my life kind of thing. I mean I want to do a good job, so I’m always trying to do the best I can do, but I try not to let it overtake the other parts of my life.” (Organisation A, P16)

Older workers realise that “work isn’t everything” (Organisation A, P15) and that “it is all relative” (Organisation B, P34). So minor issues are perhaps more easily tolerated in the big picture. If older participants disliked their line manager or felt they were in an LQ LMX, they could still feel engaged with their work, if they enjoyed the content of the job and the social environment around it, perhaps by means of relational job crafting.
“Well I think I'm old enough and I've had enough experience to know it's not to be all and end all when things go wrong. So, as long as the line manager is there for me to support me through it then that will do for me.” (Organisation A, P21)

This suggests that minor and major breaches are evaluated on a case-by-case basis to identify whether they affect job satisfaction and work engagement. A change in priority to a work/life balance means that while older workers still feel engaged with their work, they are no longer be absorbed in making it their number one priority.

A number of older participants recalled that given the same situation, they would have react differently now in comparison to when they were younger. They described that at a younger age they were more easily frustrated and more likely to feel disengaged as a result of these situations. “Because with age I have mellowed a lot, whereas before my first reaction was probably, metaphorically was to attack all the time or kick off whereas now, I listen, I absorb and I mull it over” (Organisation B, P39).

Younger staff said that they felt more energised and able to do their work because of their age. “I am fortunate enough to still be young enough to do these jobs” (Organisation C, P68). They also felt that it was easier to move around and look elsewhere, if they were truly dissatisfied with their job, line manager or the organisation. Meanwhile, older staff described having less “stamina” and interest in pursuing a demanding career because “[they] have done all that” (Organisation A, P26).

In addition to age, length of service helped to “let it wash over me and I no longer take it personally anymore, because of the length of time that I have been here” (Organisation B, P31). This was associated with a sense of pragmatism in that they had seen better and worse managers and organisations to work for, so overall it was seen as not a bad deal. Or they were not willing to give up the autonomy and freedom that they had in their current job for something else. “Having been here for so many years, I no longer expect these things to happen – I don't expect much these days” (Organisation C, P59) and “in the end nothing really changes” (Organisation C, P62). It was also associated with being more cynical and lowering expectations.

The findings suggest that whether participants classify breaches into minor or major, depends on whether this impacts on their immediate ability to do their job or whether this reflects a disappointment about something nice to have in the near future. Major breaches revolved around issues not being resolved immediately by the line manager. These often included role ambiguity, role overload, mixed messages, lack of relevant support to solve crisis or pressurised situations and a lack of technical training to be able to perform their job. In response, employees reciprocated this by lowering their work engagement or actively disengaging from work, because they felt that they could no longer adequately perform their work without negative repercussions. In contrast, less severe breaches might revolve around misunderstandings, needing to prompt or chase a line manager to
action/authorise budgets or work or a nice to have training course being delayed or not materialising due to budget cuts or workload pressure.

Whilst most participants in HQ LMX situations were predominantly positive, it is also worth mentioning that the reality is not always as clear-cut. At times, line managers might not be available or too busy to be able to provide the necessary support to the employee and in these instances, employees need to be proactive in creating their own resources in order to cope. Job crafting therefore enables employees to adapt the demands and resources accordingly to their needs.

### 4.9.2. Job Crafting

Findings suggest that in particular younger and engaged employees try to maintain their levels of satisfaction and engagement by crafting their job. This relates to some individuals changing their mind-set in order to overcome the impact of perceived breaches. An interesting example of cognitive job crafting in an HQ LMX was a scenario where the employee did not feel up to the job of leading a meeting and started to feel disengaged. However, because they had the backing of the line manager they felt they could be proactive, work harder and “I realised that I needed to change my mind set. Now I have recalibrated myself a little bit and I have learned a lot from that experience” (Organisation C, P52). As a result, they became more assertive and confident in their ability to lead that meeting on the next occasion. Similarly, one participant explained that “I just become very disengaged with it, because otherwise I feel too bad so I have had to disengage emotionally from it affecting the rest of my work” (Organisation A, P1).

Other participants explained that cognitive job crafting was a way of coping with negative experiences from their line manager by shifting their focus it allowed them to do their work.

“So I put it to one side whatever my line manager thought and just focused on what I do well and not put too much weight on their opinion. So it was more of a gradual reengagement with my work, so getting back to normal now” (Organisation A, P20).

Choosing to switch the way one views their work, was seen as a popular way of dealing with frustrations from line managers. “I am trying to stay positive. So I am just going to put that behind me and just carry on and see how it goes” (Organisation B, P30).

Findings indicate that age, maturity and length of service may be one reason that individuals craft their jobs cognitively. There were a number of participants that spoke about how with growing age (age group 30-39+) they felt that frustrations had less impact on how they felt at work. “I am 48 years old now and I understand these things. It is not a huge problem […] it can be intensely frustrating too sometimes, but at the same time any job will be” (Organisation A, P4). Others mirrored this view:
“I think because I am a little bit older, I don’t get worried about it any longer, I engage where I can and if not I just get on with what I have to do […] I would say that it was touching my engagement with my work, but then you just get on with it, move on as best as you can” (Organisation A, P23).

It appears that not just age but also overall work experience help employees to assess the extent to which they choose to let it impact their work.

“Now I let it wash over me and I no longer take it personal anymore because of the length of time that I have been here. You get that thick skin, but I know that some of the other girls take it a bit more personal, maybe because they are a bit more younger and they are not used to dealing with issues like that. Especially when they are relatively new to the job as well”

There was a clear sense of choosing to persevere in order not to let it affect the quality and enjoyment of one’s work. “It is not in my nature to withdraw from anything […] so I think even if I have come across times [where I feel disengaged] I would definitely power through” (Organisation A, P25). One participant asserted that “perhaps it is a personality thing, where I will always find a way to be engaged” (Organisation B, P47).

On a rare occasion, job crafting is also seen to offer a way of coping with more significant breaches of trust. For instance, one participant described that they had already resigned from the organisation as a result of the breach and the line manager persuaded them to stay and offered them another way to contribute to the organisation. As a result the participant asserts, “trust has been breached, but it is not the end of the world” (Organisation A, P14).

Physical job crafting refers to when an individual seeks to change the scope or type of tasks in order to engage with their work more meaningfully. Interestingly, some participants appear to use a combination of job crafting behaviours to stay engaged with their work. One person noted that they used both cognitive and physical job crafting to do so.

“To be honest it is the way it is, I mean I have gotten used to it – it was a shock when I first came here […] because I have got my project where I am in charge and I have control of that, then that is what I see as my domain and that is where I get my sense of satisfaction from. […] any frustrations I have got, I can change them to what I need it to be later on” (Organisation A, P21)

Within a HQ LMX, physical job crafting might take on a more collaborative approach where new set of responsibilities or area of work is agreed.

“I have been able to buck the trend on the way that we prescribe projects […] That has not been the typical way of doing things here, but they have allowed me that freedom and allowed me to tackle any problems that come up my way rather than a process driven way” (Organisation A, P14)

Surprisingly even under conditions of LQ LMX, some participants find a way to craft their job in order to stay connected and interested in their work. One participant commented, “if I think that a topic is not strategic or not something that we should be doing, I just switch to something else and nobody is telling me not to, which is brilliant” (Organisation A, P3).
As a source of last resort, some individuals suggest that they will leave the organisation to reengage with their area of interest. “So you get to a point where you will take action to change your circumstances. That then doesn’t involve [this organisation] because you think it’s time to leave” (Organisation C, P63).

Relational job crafting refers to the employee seeking alternative sources of support in order to stay engaged. In particular colleagues tended to provide emotional support and make a job more bearable. “I have had a few times where I felt like I could have been busier or more challenging work, but the fact that I get on so well with my colleagues meant that I didn’t really mind that much” (Organisation A, P20). One participant described how they used relational job crafting to drive an agenda that they felt didn’t get enough visibility. “Colleagues but more broadly across the organisation. We have got quite a good network of colleagues who I know feel very strongly about this agenda and are my key allies if you like and advisers, so that is a really important network for me” (Organisation A, P24).

Some suggested that the reason they sought additional support from colleagues was because they didn’t want to burden their current line manager with additional work. However, there appeared to be a consensus amongst participants in that colleagues provided a useful way of coping with minor frustrations whilst preserving one’s professional identity. “I felt quite down, but then I got back into it and it didn’t affect me anymore [because] I found it got better when I spoke to people about my frustrations and took action rather than waiting for things to improve” (Organisation C, P56).

One type of relational job crafting in an HQ LMX took the form of seeking support from colleagues or other senior managers when the line manager had limited availability and there was pressure to deliver.

“I can bring other members to the team to get the work done if need be. So, what I would do is ask another couple of the team members, so that we could move that on together quickly.” (Organisation A, P25)

Others felt the same way:

“I do think that if I didn't receive the support that I needed from [my line manager] then I wouldn't have any issues with escalating things beyond him to the wider senior management.” (Organisation C, P68)

Surprisingly, one middle manager also suggested that their subordinates acted as a source of support for them. “As I said it is not my team driving the lack of engagement, if anything my team increases it, it keeps it up […] it buffers the negativity around me” (Organisation C, P63).

It appears that job crafting offers a useful way to cope with growing frustrations and instances of breach from their line manager and in preventing further disengagement. What was noticeable was that participants most often talked about changing their mind-set and trying to stay positive to face these challenges. Personal resources such as optimism appear to play a key part in being able to craft ones job in this way. This was then followed by relational job crafting and seeking support from colleagues, mentors or their subordinates. It appears that physical job crafting was less common,
although findings suggest that some individuals may employ a combination of techniques to stay engaged with their work.

4.10. Understanding Expectations and the Importance of POS

As part of the interview questions around perceived organisational support (POS), participants were asked to describe what a good working atmosphere looked like in order to provide an indication of their expectations of their employer. In the first instance, references were made to having a safe and adequate work environment. Ideally, a good working atmosphere was characterised by having a clear and consistent set of procedures and policies to regulate interactions and processes around pay, benefits and training. A sense of fairness of opportunity was seen as central to this. Similarly, good mutual communication channels were seen as vital to both informing employees of relevant changes in the business, whilst also enabling feedback mechanisms to drive improvements. This was nicely captured in the following two participants quoted.

“Security, comfort, nice colleagues or like a caring culture. So that the company treats us as people not just resources” (Organisation B, P48).

“I guess a lot of that comes down to clarity and communication. If everyone knows what the ground rules are in any setting and decide to play by those rules, then it makes for a good atmosphere. [...] It is a healthy and safe environment to work in and all of those things matter in a work setting” (Organisation A, P4).

There was a clear sense of employee efforts needing to feel genuinely appreciated or recognised in order to feel supported.

“So that the company treats us as people and not just resources. Also, in terms of welfare, do they look after our safety and create a good working environment to be in? So, nice offices are good, because it feels like we are valued as well and we are not just helping them secure profits” (Organisation B, P48).

Whilst the findings from the previous section highlighted the importance of line manager support in being able to do one’s job effectively, levels of organisational support were seen as less important in day-to-day activities. One participant commented that as long as they enjoyed their job and received occasional support from their line manager, they were not as interested in receiving support from the organisation (Organisation B, P27).

“That is not to say that the organisation doesn’t try and make efforts in supporting its staff. I just don’t feel a need or desire to engage with them day-to-day. [...] So yeah, overall the organisation is supportive and it is trying to be supportive and wants to be seen by staff to be supportive.” (Organisation A, P2).

However, because all three organisations were facing the repercussions of recent organisational changes POS should be key to providing stability and
future direction. Following a merger in 2009, Organisation A was focusing on reducing the headcount in order to drive operational efficiencies and was facing a potential move away from the third sector to becoming a private sector organisation.

“So it’s not about, you know, the charitable sort of voluntary sector service identity. [...] well we’ve got retail, and we’ve got enterprises, we’ve got products [...] And now guess what? We’re going to start designing some of our services as more commercial products and I’m a bit suspicious of all that really, because I am not sure where this journey is going.” (Organisation A, P24)

Organisation B had recently been acquired and was moving from a former family business into an ambitious five-year international expansion plan.

“Overall yes, but I am apprehensive about where this company is going. You see we were bought out two years ago now and there have been a lot of changes. So, I know the senior management and directors quite well and I wonder if there comes a point, where they think we are going to ship out and then I wonder what will happen.” (Organisation B, P37)

“I do like [this organisation] I have been here for nine years and they have been supportive of me […] But within the last few years it is lacking on a lot of things and there are a lot of unhappy people here” (Organisation B, P28)

Meanwhile, Organisation C had undergone a functional reorganisation in order to create a shared service engineering function, whilst suffering from reduced budgets and headcounts. Higher management decisions around these priorities undoubtedly would change, which impact on the current ways of working.

“I don't have the same relationship or level of confidence in the higher level senior manager's, because they lack an understanding of what we are trying to do. In my eyes they lack credibility and it is all to do with the organisation and supporting me to do what I do”.” (Organisation C, P55).

“I think the morale is not as good as it has been over the years. I think it is just the uncertain future, because a lot of people don't really know, so what work is coming and what the overall plan is.” (Organisation C, P56).

The findings suggest that the levels of POS varied across all three organisations. Overall responses typically ranged from individuals feeling very happy or somewhat satisfied with their employer to more critical voices. The latter group of participants expressed the feeling that the level of support from their employer had worsened as part of recent organisational changes. This was particularly true for Organisation B and C. Organisation A, however, was also criticised for not providing adequate levels of support and recognition to their employees following the merger. Because of this variation, I first discuss how participants perceived high levels of organisation support and its subsequent impact on employees. Following this, I consider mixed and lower levels of POS as well as PCBs in these contexts.
4.10.1. Interactions of High POS & WE

Overall, the majority of participants indicated to be either content or satisfied with the level of support that they received from their employer. Positive voices expressed sentiments such as “[…] very happy with the company and this is definitely one of the best companies that I have worked for” (Organisation B, P29). A number of participants from Organisation B appeared particularly enthusiastic about their employer, in part this seemed to be because their efforts resulted in tangible products and services around its distribution.

“I feel very happy and satisfied with this organisation, we are a good company with a good quality product and offering something different to our competitors and I am proud to represent them. This has stayed consistent over the last few years as well.” (Organisation B, P46).

At the same time, participants of this company also felt that the smaller organisational size and the former family business mentality embedded in senior management further enhanced this connection.

“The company I really like, I like the products, the people and the senior management are amazing and inspirational. I like the friendly atmosphere […] Generally, I would say yes [I am happy here].” (Organisation B, P38).

Participants from the other organisations felt supported because of the opportunities and benefits that they had received to date. “I didn't realise that there is an awful lot about this company […] the level of support that they will give you for certain things is pretty impressive” (Organisation C, P57). A large proportion of the interviewees felt similarly, showing how they appreciated additional benefits, such as training and travel. Feelings of support therefore relate to key influencing factors such as ‘Interest & Ability’ as well as ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’ in order to create ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ at work.

“I feel like they do take care of their staff and provide opportunities. There is training and I feel like there are the mechanisms in place for staff. So, it is a good environment for staff and individuals, it is one of the best places I have worked for in terms of opportunities and knowing that there are those things you can do if you need them.” (Organisation A, P20).

“Oh yeah, I am satisfied with [this organisation], I have had some good opportunities and obviously the benefits that you get through working for [this organisation]. […] I have had the chance to work abroad so that is nice.” (Organisation C, P49).

Being given relevant training and career progression opportunities was seen as essential to maintain adequate levels of POS. Having the opportunity to expand one’s role and responsibilities over time, was seen as having an indirect impact on one’s ability to enjoy one’s job intently. Providing a continuous stream of varied and ideally challenging work helped to maintain employees’ interest at work and loyalty to their employer.
“In that I have been given some brilliant opportunities in my [...] years at [this organisation] [...] I’ve got a chance to do a job I enjoy and also feel that within boundaries there is the opportunity for me to move around the company.” (Organisation C, P53).

It is evident from the interviews that participants viewed the relationship with their employer as one of mutual exchange. That is, high levels of POS were associated with participants feeling obliged to act favourably towards the organisation. Participants from Organisation A, in particular, highlighted that they were grateful for the opportunity to be working in a successful charity that helps contribute to the greater societal good and upholds high ethical standards. One explained that they were satisfied with this organisation, “because of the nature of the organisation and the nature of my role, and the colleagues I work with and what the organisation is trying to do for a very large sector of society” (Organisation A, P2). Likewise, others asserted that as long as the organisation stayed true to its original values and contributed towards making a positive impact, they were happy to stay. “As long as it continues to achieve its aims and holds strong principles and has really good people working for it, then yeah [I am happy with this organisation]” (Organisation A, P12).

“I couldn't really work somewhere where I didn't feel like I was making a difference or doing something important or doing something that I didn't believe in. I think to me that is intrinsic to how I work, but it is about a reciprocal relationship. It is always really nice to get a sense that it matters not only to you, but also is useful to the organisation. It is being recognised, so I guess that can be good and bad like they recognise when people aren’t engaged and contributing, but also they recognise when they are.” (Organisation A, P15)

Hence, these participants felt an obligation to reciprocate the organisational support by working harder and more effectively. On the one hand, this was seen to contribute to the organisation’s overall success, whilst on the other hand, reciprocating support was deemed key to securing future resources and favourable opportunities for one’s career.

“It makes you feel really valued and part of a team. It makes you feel like you are an asset to the company and they want to invest in you. Ultimately, it makes you work harder for the organisation, because you want to prove to them that you are the right person for them to support and nurture for the future” (Organisation B, P46).

Whilst a number of participants recognised the supporting efforts of their employers, individuals noted being unsure about the extent to which POS impacted on how they felt at work. However, most agreed that feeling supported by their employer and having relevant opportunities to grow had a positive impact. Interestingly, one participant commented that perhaps POS was taken for granted and thus, became more significant when it was noticeably lacking. “How much I don’t know, but it is part of that. Without all those things I might not feel so motivated to go to work in the morning” (Organisation A, P20).
Whilst POS was not seen as crucial as line management support, interview participants remarked that feeling supported and enabled to do their job contributed to job satisfaction, overall motivation and ultimately performance at work.

“Definitely, being in an environment where you feel you are being taken care of and if you need something you can go and ask. There are opportunities, so that makes a big difference [to my job satisfaction]” (Organisation A, P20).

For some interview participants the opportunities also reflected in their progress and subsequent engagement with their work.

“They have probably lived up to and beyond my expectations, I didn’t know how much fun you could have in this job. So, it is the freedom and choices that you get to make about how you work with your customers that make me feel engaged.” (Organisation B, P46).

“Yes, I am very happy with how far I have come so far in this organisation and I think I have been given quite a lot of opportunity, which I have been lucky to have. I have tried to make the most of it and because I have been given those opportunities, I therefore feel engaged with my work.” (Organisation C, P67).

There was a strong consensus amongst participants from all three organisations that their level of satisfaction with their employer had impacted positively on their commitment and also contributed to low turnover intentions. “On the whole, I would say yes. I have been working for this organisation for [over 10 years], so we have had a [long] relationship, which has been mostly supportive” (Organisation A, P4). Participants talked about high levels of POS having been key to their commitment and loyalty to their employer. A commitment to stay was particularly noticeable amongst professional and more senior employees in Research, Finance, Marketing and Sales as well as some Engineering staff. “I am certainly not looking anywhere else or thinking of leaving. I like the place, I like the people and I am more than happy here” (Organisation B, P40). Other participants shared this view. “Massively, I only wanted to stay for two years and I have been here for [more than 10 years], So that says something about how happy I am here.” (Organisation B, P34). This was also reflected in some of Organisation C’s participants “Yeah, no it is a good company, because I have been here a long time” (Organisation C, P55).

Several suggested that whilst they recognised that their employer had some weaknesses, they grateful for it being an overall positive experience. Hence, several participants noted feeling more committed than in previous jobs.

“I feel enormously obligated to [this organisation]. I mean any organisation has got its good and its bad side and if you excuse my French, all my team know that I refer to it as organisational bollocks. […] Overall, [this organisation] is a pretty good place to work at” (Organisation A, P7).

“I can hand on heart say that if the competition offered me another 30k extra a year, I wouldn't move jobs. I don't think my brain can cope with it, it is so
geared to this company, I am dedicated to this company and I just know how things work and tick around here.” (Organisation B, P29).

Exchange content with the organisation was associated with setting the ground rules, such as pay and benefits, but also in offering relevant training and career progression opportunities so that staff felt valued.

“It’s doing all the right sort of things, it’s got Investors in People accreditation, it consults staff on updates to staff policies, it provides quite a few internal opportunities for learning and development.” (Organisation A, P2).

“In terms of career development and learning development as well, we are always encouraged to do a bit extra. So, there is always time, money and allowances there to do it. So they are very good about it.” (Organisation A, P8).

Consequently, a large proportion of participants talked about feeling satisfied or supported by their organisation because of the opportunities that they had received over time.

“For my motivation, I think it is the overall atmosphere in the office because it is really good. [...] There is a general sense of trust in the company for us to get on with our job. [...] Very happy, it’s a great place to work in, and they do offer you the opportunities, if you work up to their standard, then they will not hesitate to pay the extra for you,” (Organisation B, P32).

Some participants also noted that they were satisfied with their organisation, because they were able to compare and contrast previous experiences. “Yeah, overall. For the most part, I have worked for a lot of different companies and organisations, so I think I am rather well placed to say this is one of the better ones to work for” (Organisation A, P1). Similarly, “Overall, [this organisation] is a pretty good place to work at” (Organisation A, P7).

Whilst a large number of participants shared certain frustrations about their employers, in that pay, recognition and in particular training could be improved, most still felt somewhat supported and recognised that their employers were trying to make things better.

“[…] because of the results of the staff survey, they try to implement lots of different things to address all of the concerns. So, I do think they are trying to respond to some of the stuff that we are doing, so I do think that it is a good organisation.” (Organisation A, P15).

In spite of a growing amount of frustration, participants momentarily appreciated their employer’s efforts and admitted that overall “I am relatively happy here” (Organisation A, P10). In addition, as long as participants felt that they contributed to something useful and meaningful they felt more satisfied with their work. The findings suggest that the interview participants recognised the value of organisational support in positively impacting on how they felt at work. This was partly because they had evaluated the current levels of support against previous employers and concluded “this is one of the better [organisations] to work for” (Organisation A, P1). At the same time, they noted feeling increasingly uneasy and concerned about the direction
that their employer was pursuing and whether the current levels of support would change as a result of recent organisational changes.

Moreover, it is clear that individuals perceive the relationship both with their line manager as well as with the organisation as mutual give and take. Whilst HQ LMX were often associated with mutual consideration of the line manager and going the extra mile for them, high levels of POS were often reciprocated by a sense of loyalty and commitment. The notion of wanting to return the favour for interesting work also applied to wanting to benefit the organisation. “I think to me that is intrinsic to how I work, but it is about a reciprocal relationship. It is always nice to get a sense that it matters not only to you, but also is useful to the organisation” (Organisation A, P15). Likewise, interview participants explained that feeling engaged and appreciated made them work hard to provide benefits to the organisation. “Wanting to go above and beyond; actually seeing the company succeed and move forwards” (Organisation B, P33).

Similar to a supportive line manager relationship, employees alluded to knowing that the relevant organizational support mechanisms are in place is comforting even if they are not needed on a daily basis. “Personally, I don't feel the need for any more support than they are already giving because I am pretty self sufficient, because the opportunities are there if you want to take them up, but I don't really need more support.” (Organisation A, P3).

4.10.2. Interactions of LQ POS & WE

Even though POS can clearly have a positive impact on employees, the participant voices also included those who were less enthusiastic about their employer. Only a minority of participants, however, pointed out that they did not feel supported by their employer. “I don't know about this organisation, I don't feel supported to help me professionally. I feel supported by my colleagues and my friends, but not the organisation, no” (Organisation A, P19).

Low levels of POS were often associated with a lack of confidence in higher management. As such, higher management and HR in particular were most reliably seen as the representing the organisation’s vision.

“I think the team atmosphere is very very bad, I don’t think [my current line manager] enjoys a lot of support from [the new engineering function], I don’t think his seniors enjoy a lot of support from the team and to some extent a lot of them are seen as a joke within the team.” (Organisation C, P60).

In part, this was explained by a “frustration with the way the business operates, the way they treat people, and what is going on in general” (Organisation C, P60) in conjunction with the lack of clarity and progress since the reorganisation. Similarly, a lack of direction had resulted in limited buy-in from various individuals and created a somewhat tense and political environment. Individuals felt that higher management did not have the necessary understanding of how their decision-making influenced day-to-day work activities. Consequently, a lack of confidence in higher management
making the right decisions was seen as the key driver for limiting clear communication, continuous pressure to deliver whilst lacking adequate resources and rightly skilled staff.

It needs to be recognised that not feeling supported and recognised by the organisation can result in significant negative outcomes, such as higher turnover intention as well as reduced motivation and engagement. Interviewees also talked about previous instances where after having felt engaged with their work, they became increasingly unhappy with the organisation.

“I was still engaged with the content of what I was doing, but it was set in an environment that was different to what I expected. So, then there is a conflict going on between what I feel should be going on and the feeling of what is actually happening. So, then there is a mismatch on either side” (Organisation A, P11).

A lack of honesty and consistency also related to lower levels of POS and high turnover intention.

“I joined a printing company once and I remember we agreed the car, the salary and the commission and when I joined it was all different. From day one, I [wanted to] leave immediately because of that. Honesty and trust are a big deal for me.” (Organisation B, P29).

In fact, some participants left their former employer as a result of growing frustration with the direction and lack of support available. One individual explained that the combined frustration of the line manager and lack of support from the organisation was a key factor in leaving that organisation.

“But that is why I left my last job, where I got a sense of...that loss of motivation was starting to creep in, because of my line manager and how things were going in the organisation at the time.” (Organisation A, P12).

Hence, lower levels of exchange content were associated with the failure of the relationship to be mutual. Moreover, organisational efforts that were seen as a ‘tick box approach’, rather than genuine attempts to support and develop employees, resulted in lower levels of POS.

“[…] they just don't care about people and they just want to tick the boxes. So it's, it is about inconsistent approaches, but also that you are brought in thinking that there is progression and there isn't. So, where the promise is broken is between the organisation and the employees, rather than the managers and their direct reports because their hands are tied.” (Organisation A, P15)

Ineffective communication and lack of clarity from the top of the organisation contributed to growing feelings of frustration. Some suggested that this led to them feeling powerless. “The big thing this year has been lack of guidance and clarity, I almost felt like a baby left on a doorstep, because no one knew what was going on” (Organisation C, P56). Lacking power or authority to change things for the better was often associated with stifling motivation at work. “When you have got lots of things and inputs and things, which are
outside of your control that demoralises you to a point” (Organisation C, P49). Others agreed and felt that they were less able to engage with their work. “Now it is a lot more distant and I have less control over things so this has affected how engaged I feel” (Organisation A, P21).

Low levels of POS were interpreted as feeling left alone to cope with the difficulties of organisational pressures and not getting the relevant support in particular from higher management. “I sometimes find that we are lacking support in that I think quite a lot of, we have very little support over the workload that we have. (Organisation B, P29).

Consequently, individuals spoke about feeling disconnected and more distant to the organisation and removed from wanting to contribute to its success. “That really weighs you down, because you think to yourself why bother, especially based on what has happened in the past. You only get so far and then it stops” (Organisation A, P5). In fact, many employees could relate and identify much more easily to their work, team or division rather than their organisation.

“Yeah on a day-to-day basis I wouldn't say that I particularly identify with the organisation, you know I wouldn't say anything like, ‘Oh, I am a member of [this organisation]’ or anything like that, but I definitely identify with the team and the people I work with” (Organisation A, P4).

“You certainly do in your own department, but whether you do elsewhere, whether you feel part of that in the overall company is another thing, because it seems to be getting a lot bigger than what it used to be. […] you are just doing your thing and they are doing theirs” (Organisation B, P40).

Another interviewee clarified that it is not as clear-cut as feeling supported or unsupported by the organisation, but rather that there were phases where support appeared to be lacking. This individual explained that a lack of POS over time translated into feeling disappointed and not valued by management as well as the organisation. Which subsequently impacted on their ability and desire to engage with their work.

“I was still doing my job obviously and trying to move things on, but disengaged in the way that I would do my job and my hours and that was it. I wasn't getting the right or sufficient organisational support and so that felt disappointing in a way. Whilst I am obviously very interested and passionate in the products that we make, if the right organisational support isn't there it is disappointing and you get into a state where you are not just disappointed by your own management, but the company as a whole” (Organisation C, P68).

A lack of POS was not only seen to affect engagement levels but overall morale across staff appeared particularly true for participants from Organisation C, who had recently undergone a functional reorganisation.

“I think the morale is not as good as it has been over the years. I think it is just the uncertain future […] they can’t see what they are going to be doing in five years’ time. So, there are a lot of people who have disengaged, because
they know they will retire in the next few years. I try not to let it affect me.” (Organisation C, P56).

Not improving or resolving known sources of frustration across the organisation were likened to not caring about the well-being of employees. Regarding which, interviewed participants pointed out that if current issues such as pay, training or clarity about the future were not resolved it would prompt them to leave the organisation.

“I think probably that lack of support, is why I feel that I have to leave the organisation rather than just kind of move around it. I just can’t see myself progressing here.” (Organisation A, P19).

When issues continued to persist, this indicate to the participants that their concerns were not being taken seriously and hence, they felt less valued by the organisation, which was then reflected in the level of motivation at work. “You just get pissed off and think to yourself here we go again. So, you just get demotivated” (Organisation C, P59). In return, employees reciprocated by withdrawing either from their work or the organisation as a whole.

“I suppose sometimes it was like we weren’t getting enough support from senior management. But one of the reasons why I left was because I was constantly saying that we need to have the services and capacities in place before we make the bids, but I felt pissed off that […] it was being dismissed. My role was becoming smaller and smaller, whilst my manager could see that and she felt the same way, but there was nothing she could do about it” (Organisation A, P15).

For some, this resulted in additional negative outcomes. One participant explained that after returning from maternity leave, a lack of communication and clarity around her previous job being merged with other roles was the source of continued stress and uncertainty. Because the role was no longer available, this not only resulted in a disconnect with the organisation, but also in health issues. “Depressed, like I always say I feel pretty worthless. I’ve got brains, I’ve worked very, very hard to get where I am and just feel like, I just feel worthless.” (Organisation A, P13).

A sense of insecurity about next steps resulted in lower levels of commitment and connection to the organisation along with lower levels of work engagement. Accepting lower pay for the hours worked is seen as sufficient for low POS.

“As an organisation, it feels rather distant to me. I mean I feel obliged to uphold a professional image and do not, I don’t speak badly about it, […] but I think that putting in the hours that I do for a lower wage than I could get elsewhere is a pretty good contribution” (Organisation A, P1).

“I suppose I feel disengaged with the organisation, I get reengaged because I am involved with other groups outside of the organisation so that gets me engaged again with the overall purpose.” (Organisation A, P10).
Additional reasons for variation in exchange content from the organisation and the corresponding levels of POS due to perceptions of minor and major breaches are explored in the next section.

4.11. Organisational PCBs & Cumulative Effect

Participants agreed on the fact that a single incident of breach, regardless of severity, did not immediately impact on their ability to do their job. However, it was the continued existence of frustrations that led to a cumulative effect and the perception of it being a major breach. For instance, “Yeah to me, people not delivering things is a minor thing” (Organisation C, P63). Whereas others saw a mismatch in promises and actions as major source of frustration:

“It is a strange organisation, so when I joined I was told to do this, this and this and when I got here, everything was done to stop me doing this, this and this” (Organisation A, P5).

Participants explained that “it tends to be the back end function, so things like Finance, HR, IT, Procurement are basically barriers to us getting things done” (Organisation A, P17). In fact, initial frustrations revolved around the level of bureaucracy of “existing processes” (Organisation A, P14) in all three organisations.

“There are some terrible structures for things like claiming annual leave, expenses and all of that is made unnecessarily difficult for staff to do. Investment in the basic processes for running an organisation, I would really like [this organisation] to do better at that” (Organisation A, P4).

“It just seems that [this organisation] is inherently complex. It can be quite slow, there is a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of the ways people are working, so you have to find things out in order to get stuff done” (Organisation C, P50).

Whilst most indicated receiving adequate amounts of support from their employer, all three organisations were criticised for needing to improve the current training and development opportunities. Participants pointed out that there was a clear sense of frustration with the types and frequency of courses available as well as with the booking process.

“There aren’t enough courses and the ones they do have that are relevant get booked up really quickly, so you don’t have access to them. It has been difficult to get money for training [later on] the budget has been spent and you can’t get access to it” (Organisation A, P17).

Others highlighted that requests for training were not only lengthy but also are not always answered. “I mean some of the training I’ve gone for, have been one particular training course the entire team has been trying to do for four years and it’s never been run, so it just never happens.” (Organisation C, P51). Participants from Organisation B explained that “our training programme at the moment isn’t very good at all. There isn’t one that is set in stone, it is purely what each person decides.” (Organisation B, P28). In
addition, a lack of budget and time often resulted in a number of participants not receiving any training. Consequently, they expressed the views that “training is probably the worst [...] because I haven't had any” (Organisation B, P41) and “training? I've never had any training in this place” (Organisation B, P43).

Operating on a first come, first served basis made securing relevant and timely training difficult, because the courses needed to be planned far in advance before knowing exact work requirements. One participant explained:

“I think the training processes are terrible, I can't remember the last time I had any. In the next month we have to decide what training we want to do next year, which baffles me, because we could all be on different projects. We don't know what next year looks like” (Organisation C, P51).

Similarly, their inefficiencies of booking training have knock on effects on the usefulness in day-to-day work activities.

“You request the training when you need it and by the time you get it you don't flipping need it. [...] Or when you have had the training, sometimes it is difficult to put it into practice, because your job has moved on [or there is no time].” (Organisation C, P49).

In an effort to overcome the lack of available and relevant training, participants also expressed the desire for such as expert or TED talks, peer mentoring and coaching to be implemented. However, these suggestions did not appear to have been taken on board and further added to the current frustration that was leading individuals to withdraw. “I don't know where they come up with their ideas to provide, and they don't listen to any of the suggestions that I am making.” (Organisation A, P14). It is evident that existing processes around training needed to be revisited and perhaps better structured so as to better suit the staff’s development needs.

With regards to pay structures, participants often associated these with ineffective HR departments. It is worth noting that at the time of research, Organisations A and C had HR departments in place, while Organisation B used an external agency for official queries. The majority of the participants agreed that whether HR was available or not, procedures and policies around pay, benefits, training were not adhered to consistently. This was evident in a number of comments, such as:

“Our HR procedures are abysmal, we didn't have a performance review book until the week that they were due to be completed. We still haven't got our performance grades from last year. If the processes worked properly and we felt that HR supported us that would make a big difference” (Organisation A, P17).

“There isn't much progression here. [...] I suppose its implementation of quality staffing is very poor. They have strong policies on promotion and selection, but people don’t go through this process for promotion, in practice it is all a lot more informal” (Organisation A, P10).
Higher management in organisations was often seen to adopt the processes and policies to their liking, rather than implement standardised ones. As a result, some felt that certain departments and individuals were disadvantaged in terms of pay grades and development opportunities. This was because “I have never worked with an HR department that has been there to support the employee, it is more about protecting the organisation’s backside” (Organisation A, P9).

Interview participants felt that HR should help provide standardised and transparent pay grades to encourage employees to work harder and feel recognised for their efforts. “It would be nice to be graded and paid at the right level for the work that I am doing, rather than playing catch up” (Organisation C, P51). Participants from Organisations A and C, who had an HR department in place agree, agreed that they often do not act in the interest of the employee. “I don’t trust HR, so as again with the team rumours with everything being so negative, HR is also perceived as being something quite negative in this company (Organisation C, P52). As a consequence, employees felt that HR often was as not as objective as they set out to be and the lack of transparency caused individuals to trust the organisation less.

Participants from Organisation B who did not have an in house HR department envisaged this to be the solution to overcoming the bureaucratic inefficiencies. When participants were asked what they would like to see improved at their employer – most mentioned an internal objective HR department that could provide fair and consistent procedures, policies and benefits. This ranged from standardising recruitment and selection process, to helping to create more transparent pay scales and introducing performance related pay so as to recognise high performers.

“I would [rank] HR number one; I really feel safer or more secure with a company that has got a proper HR department as well. So, they have experience and knowledge about HR issues and all the policies and processes and employment law I guess too.” (Organisation B, P48).

Whilst better pay, more training opportunities and better career progression were desirable, they were not seen as immediate deal breakers. Instead, they were frustrations and potential threats to employees’ future commitment to the organisation. Minor breaches were, thus, associated with small annoyances and inconveniences.

What is interesting to note it that there was also a cumulative effect, which applied to both minor and major forms of breach. That is, interview participants felt increasingly frustrated that their concerns were not being addressed and this led to lower levels of motivation and ultimately higher turnover intention.

“I think they all add up, but perhaps the big issues add up a bit more or quicker. It is just the big things that would really have an impact on me. So, if it happens too many times I would perhaps then think about leaving the organisation as a consequence, whereas the small things you will find anywhere in any company” (Organisation C, P52).
PCBs from the organisation took on various forms such as ‘Lack of Leadership, Communication & Future Clarity’ as well as ‘Issues of Voice, Representation & Feeling Divided.’

### 4.11.1. Lack of Leadership, Communication & Future Clarity

A dominant theme that was associated with significantly impairing one’s ability to work effectively was a lack of confidence in higher management. “I think overall yes [I feel supported], but in lots of ways I don't have a huge amount of confidence in the current leadership” (Organisation A, P24). Similarly, “I don’t think that there is strong leadership in this organisation. We have very indecisive, unsure people, lacking direction” (Organisation A, P14).

Participants from all three organisations commented on this lack of confidence in leadership contributing to a lack of effective communication, limited and inadequately skilled staff, significant pressure to deliver as well as job insecurity. In the first instance, ineffective communication manifested itself in an overarching lack of clarity. “One of the key issues about this organisation and probably not just this organisation is that clarity is in pretty short supply” (Organisation A, P4). Furthermore, a lack of effective communication led to mixed messages and often more instances of perceived breach, thereby creating an atmosphere of mistrust. “It made me more cautious, because I now can't place my implicit faith in everything that is said to me from a senior organisation” (Organisation A, P7).

Previous negative experiences around ineffective communication and lack of transparency, made individuals wary about how much they could trust the future vision of the organisation and its key agents.

“We have had recent shake-ups about redundancies and things and that has been done really last minute. So, we will be told everything is great and rosy and then suddenly, it is recruitment freeze, pay freeze, budget cuts” (Organisation A, P17)

“I think one of the biggest problems, as a whole, going right up the ladder, communication has been very poor across the board. […] where we don’t understand who we are, what we are doing, why we are doing it. […] the business hasn't really communicated down to their teams on what the changes have been for the last six months” (Organisation C, P50)

The findings reveal that participants felt that organisational size is one driver of ineffective communication and lack of connection with the employer. Regarding which, this was seen to be most applicable to Organisations A and C. “The larger the organisation, the bigger the challenges are in engaging staff. […] as the organisation grows bigger, you lose touch” (Organisation A, P8).

Others agreed:
“I think this size of the organisation precedes it really. I don’t honestly think you can get an organisation of this size to have effective communication. I just don’t” (Organisation C, P63).

“One thing that has never been very good both in the current and previous organisation. There is a lot of unnecessary communication, but the important useful and interpersonal communication doesn’t happen” (Organisation A, P5).

Participant stories therefore revolve around organisational size being a key barrier to having effective ‘Open & Honest Communication’ ensuring greater clarity about the future and a sense of job security. This was particularly noticeable in Organisation C as participants felt that the functional reorganisation was not managed effectively and helped to further undermine confidence and trust in their employer. Shadows of job insecurity were cast as a result and a number of participants who already felt frustrated and disengaged reported higher intentions to quit.

4.11.2. Issues of Voice, Representation & Feeling Divided

This sub-theme highlights the difficulties of not feeling listened to and represented at the top of the organisation. Feeling isolated and removed from decision-making processes that impact one’s work. Interview participants noted that a lack of effective communication from the top down, drove a lack of effective communication throughout the business which was noticeable both within and across departments as well as amongst line managers and their reports. As a result, there was a strong consensus of an existing silo mentality. Whilst this was a topic of much debate for both Organisations B and C, a smaller number of participants from Organisation A highlighted this issue. “I think there are a lot of silos within [this organisation]. [...] it’s kind of de-motivating” (Organisation A, P22). This view also rang true for the interaction between departments: “people in other departments don’t care about what is going on in other departments” (Organisation A, P1). Others suggested that silos were associated with differentiating higher management from employees. “If people don’t deem that you are high enough in the hierarchy, they just totally ignore you. I think that’s the most frustrating thing I find about working over here” (Organisation A, P1).

Organisation B suffered from a division between warehouse and office staff workers, as well as management and employees. “There is a divide between office, warehouse […] I think everyone has got tunnel vision or is set in their ways” (Organisation B, P28). Similarly:

“They say that we are still a family business and that we don’t treat anybody differently, but there is a big divide between office workers and warehouse staff. Even just look at the managers, they have different uniforms so they stand out […] So, there is a lack of appreciation.” (Organisation B, P43).

Even senior managers had taken notice of the divide between employees and management.
“One thing I do notice here […], they talk about the directors like it means something, like you are some senior person, it doesn’t.” (Organisation B, P47).

Whereas Organisation C felt that their new functional division was overlooked in comparison to other divisions within the same organisation. In part this was explained by needing to be “directed more as a team” (Organisation C, P50) in order to raise its visibility and profile within the organisation. Others attributed this to the team not being assertive enough, “we are not the greatest advocates of what we do […] but at the same time that is probably because we are sick to death of having to fight for the ground to do that basic work.” (Organisation C, P50). Some suggested “it is a question of representation at the top” (Organisation C, P68). As such, POS was low because middle management did not communicate the value of the team to higher management. The existing silo mentality was seen as a key barrier to facilitating this visibility. “It is just small empires, people don’t talk to each other. There is a lack of interaction and information transfer” (Organisation C, P62).

“I think it is just seen as a thorn in people’s sides. […] just from experience on other programmes and the levels that I have been operating at, it is not seen as a particularly important function.” (Organisation C, P50)

Individuals, who had been working for Organisation C for a number of years, explained that the current functional division being overlooked was a historical issue that continued to persist. Consequently, the current division was “partly not recognised and partly not respected” (Organisation C, P60).

4.11.3. Sense of Injustice

This sub-theme can be characterised by an unfair allocation of responsibilities, but also associated difficulties of feeling under staffed, over worked and under appreciated. As a consequence of existing silos in all three organisations, interviewees described a feeling of injustice and uneven access to relevant resources, such as training, pay and career opportunities. Whilst the majority of participants in Organisation A appeared to enjoy their work and felt that they had progressed over time, there were mixed levels of satisfaction regarding training, recognition and career opportunities.

“There's no career progression. I mean once I have won this job over, depending on what happens I will probably have to leave […] I also think the pay scale is weighted too much towards senior staff and I don't think it is weighted very well in terms of responsibilities that people carry” (Organisation A, P15).

This had led to the belief that “we feel like we are not being given the opportunity to develop” (Organisation A, P17). The impression that higher management and the HR department “don’t listen” (Organisation A, P14) to staff suggestions for improvements further enhanced the feeling that the organisation favoured some staff over others.
Whilst participants in Organisation B were appreciative of its success and subsequent expansion plans, they had shared concerns about whether they had adequate resources to meet these demands. Others commented there was a “lack of back up” and a risk of “lagging behind in resources” (Organisation B, P29) as the business continued to expand.

“One of the key challenges that we have is that we are constantly expanding, but the staff level follows the curve rather than leading it, so we are always playing catch up” (Organisation B, P33).

“It is very nice to say ok well our most valued assets are people, but you don’t treat your valued assets like you are […] You know you can’t expect the company to grow twice fold and not increase the employment level” (Organisation B, P43).

As a result, employees did not feel appropriately equipped and supported to meet the workloads.

“You end up losing faith in your line manager and the company a little bit […] you can only do up until your knowledge amounts really. If I don’t know something I can’t do it really” (Organisation B, P41).

Overall, some participants felt that there was a sense of favouritism across the organisation. “It seems to me in [this organisation] there are certain departments that are given everything they want, they are given more money, they get more training […]” (Organisation B, P42). In particular, middle and higher management were seen to receive more and specialised training. “We’ve got management training programmes for all management in the company. But I don’t see similar things for the normal staff” (Organisation B, P48). In spite of this, they were seen as incompetent in managing the workflow and dealing with direct reports, thus adding to the cumulative effect of breach amongst employees.

Alongside other frustrations, this had led to the perception of cumulative and hence, major breaches further reducing POS. Whilst there was an increasing pressure to deliver, the lack of adequate staffing to meet demands and recognition for increased efforts impacted on employee motivation and well-being. “Our work has literally quadrupled. And we have got no thanks for it, we get no incentives for it, we get no pay for it and it is not a very nice [team] atmosphere” (Organisation B, P27). For some individuals, this was starting to take its toll on their home life, whereby “it is putting more and more time pressure on me outside of the business as well” (Organisation B, P33).

Moreover, staff felt unappreciated, as the increased workload was not reflected in their current salaries, bonuses or future career opportunities. In return, this meant that employees were less keen to behave positively towards the organisation.

“I just feel that higher management are looking at us and thinking, actually you can do more and they don’t bother paying us more for more work and effort. Yeah, but actually the more we do, the more deflating it is, because they communicate top down and don’t listen to us, the more frustrated we get.” (Organisation B, P42).
Organisation C faced similar difficulties. Only a few participants mentioned pay in regards to being fair and consistent with the rewards that colleagues in other countries receive. “I think financially rewarding people for technical authority. Germany and our French colleagues do it. They gain signatory and they gain additional money” (Organisation C, P50). However, rather than concerns around pay, having both adequate staffing levels and rightly skilled staff for meeting workloads and were seen as the most significant barriers to doing one’s job to the best of one’s ability.

As part of the reorganisation towards a shared service, Organisation C had had to cope with lower headcount and training budgets. “They are happy for me to carry on and support the business generally, but I am not getting support or resources to do what my previous boss did” (Organisation C, P55). Consequently, the situation at the time was described as “under resourced [with] quite a few people that are just running around like headless chickens” (Organisation C, P49). There was a strong consensus that “everyone is a little fraught because they are maxed out and everything is difficult because there is just not enough people” (Organisation C, P60). The constant firefighting as well as pressure to deliver and to get the work right first time led to a cumulative negative effect on individuals’ engagement and job satisfaction levels. This was due to their being significantly understaffed, having heavy workloads and “double hatting” in functional and operational support roles, simultaneously.

Participants explained that besides not having enough staff, there is also an issue of not having appropriately trained or skilled staff to do the job, leading to individuals feeling increasingly demoralised. This lack of effective communication also created mixed messages which they interpreted as a lack of caring. “It says to me that there isn’t the investment and the mandate for people development […] but nothing has happened” (Organisation C, P55). Others added that there did not feel like there was a genuine effort to support staff, “There is the aspiration to develop others, but then budgets and resources become an issue” (Organisation C, P57). This was also evident in comments such as:

“We need to spend more money on developing people correctly. […] this company should be based on knowledge, so we have to know that and to do that you have train your people.” (Organisation C, P61).

Accordingly a number of participants from Organisation C felt that they “haven’t got the expertise” (Organisation C, P63) to perform, thus limiting opportunities for them to be thoroughly engaged with their work. “When you cannot find that time, you start to become disengaged, because you find you cannot do your job” (Organisation C, P49).

Not having the right level of staff and skill set in the current workforce left participants concerned about their employer’s commitment to them as well as creating job insecurity. This was true for all three organisations and was reflected in the high number of comments around not knowing if they would still be there in five years time.
“I have had thoughts about leaving the company and going elsewhere, because of these frustrations and promotion issues, but I stayed because at the time I still saw potential for me to grow.” (Organisation C, P52).

A lack of commitment to succession planning and knowledge transfer amongst staff further enhanced the view that “it is all lip service” (Organisation C, P64). Hence, a lack of clear consistent communication from higher management had resulted in participants questioning their commitment to their employer.

“The most frustrating thing apart from what I discussed earlier is, like, clarity over the future. Being so guarded about future prospects and changes that are going to happen in the business, can almost make me feel unstable and feel that there isn’t that commitment.” (Organisation B, P33).

In summary, higher management needed to demonstrate competence and clarity in their decisions and to communicate this consistently to the rest of the organisation. The findings suggest that a clear commitment to incorporating and developing existing staff into the future workforce is key to employees feeling engaged with their work and committed to the organisation.

Whilst there continues to be a debate about whether LMX feeds into POS or vice versa, on the one hand, the findings seem to suggest that participants clearly differentiate between exchanges with their line manager and those with the organisation. On the other hand, it is evident that higher management and HR tend to be associated with representing the organisation. Similarly, a cumulative effect of breaches and lack of support from their line manager can feed into perceived lack of support from the organisation for a select few individuals.

In essence, high levels of POS often instil an obligation to reciprocate with employees expending greater efforts. Thus, feeling more satisfied and engaged with their work as well as more committed to their employer. Whilst the findings suggest that POS can contribute to positive outcomes, employees reported that it was perhaps less important than line manager support as this had more indirect effects on being able to work effectively. At the same time, low levels of POS and instances of PCBs can negatively impact on employees at work. Moreover, it can lead employees to withdraw from the organisation and work by feeling less committed and engaged, with higher levels of turnover intention. Generally, breaches and low levels of POS were associated with employees wanting to act less favourably towards their employer.

In contrast to the previous section, where HQ LMX was seen to buffer instances of breach, this does not hold true for high levels of POS. Potential moderators of breaches are therefore discussed in the next section.
4.12. Moderating Factors of Organisational Breaches

The findings suggest that there are a number of things that would appear help to buffer the negative impact of PCBs from the organisation.

4.12.1. Social Support

Numerous participants discussed the social support from their colleagues and immediate line manager as being a key influencing factor on how they felt at work.

“Motivation for work would be, yeah, probably colleagues. But I would include my line manager in there, he’s more like a colleague than you know, he’s not a big bad authority figure. [...] Feeling part of a team and of people who are working towards a similar goal is also a big important part of it. Oh it’s camaraderie, [...] I guess they just make everything kind of seem a lot more fun.” (Organisation A, P1)

Surprisingly over half of the participants from Organisation A cited social support from colleagues and their line manager as key to their motivation throughout the ups and downs of organisational life. This was because “having a really good team around you who are supportive, who are funny and with a good level of mutual cooperation is a very positive thing to have at work” (Organisation A, P2). Friendships and mutual trust amongst peers at work can encourage an atmosphere of camaraderie whereby colleagues are jointly working towards a common goal. “Camaraderie in a team is important and you want to feel that the team has a shared enthusiasm and interest in what they are doing” (Organisation A, P11).

However, participants from the other organisations also commented on the power of peers and superiors impacting their work. For instance, “I definitely think that my peers have a big impact on my motivation and a bit of job satisfaction as well I think” (Organisation B, P41). When asked to name the biggest influencing factors on how they felt at work, others agreed that “the people here, the colleagues, my line manager [...] I would group him into this group” (Organisation B, P48) followed after the nature of work.

Some participants highlighted that there is both a potential positive and negative effect of their peers and line manager on their work. “If I were in a place where I really didn’t enjoy [being around my peers], I certainly wouldn’t find work nearly as fun” (Organisation A, P1). Others agree, “any job is enjoyable with the people that you are working with. It doesn’t come down to one person, although a negative factor could be a bad climate” (Organisation A, P11).

In particular, support from colleagues was not only seen to positively influence their motivation at work, but also act as a way of reducing the
impact of an otherwise boring job, high workloads or other issues. Social support from peers made a job that is potentially less interesting and engaging more bearable in the short-term. “I have got lovely colleagues, which is always good. So that is good to know, that should prop me up, but for the work itself, it is not for me” (Organisation A, P19). Others suggested that colleagues helped to buffer high workloads. “I think I am much more engaged if I have people around me that I can lean on, especially if there is a lot of pressure on me. If I didn’t have that, I think that would make me feel a little more stressed” (Organisation A, P25). Peer support was also key in relation to potential issues with senior authority figures. “[My colleagues] have certainly kept me going when I have had a struggle through work with managers or other situations as well, they are my support network and keep me going” (Organisation B, P31).

In the first instance, social support from colleagues and friends was seen to help calm initial disappointments about what had been promised or suggested by the organisation.

“I know where the sources of support are around the organisation and I know where some of the barriers are as well. So, I kind of feel reasonably comfortable.” (Organisation A, P24).

Line manager support seemed key to overcoming frustrations and a sense of disconnection with the organisation. “So, as long as the line manager is there for me to support me through it then that will do for me” (Organisation A, P21). Likewise, “Yes, because if I didn’t feel sufficiently supported by my line manager, then I don’t think I would support [this organisation] as much as I do. It is a two-way process” (Organisation B, P46).

“There are five or six small things a day that can annoy you about the business, not necessarily about your line manager, and if I was younger, yeah it probably would have really upset me, but you just learn to get over it and move on.” (Organisation B, P39).

4.12.2. Age, Maturity & Length of Service

At the same time, an individual’s age, maturity and experience to date, can also moderate the negative impact of organisational breaches. Participants explained that their experience helped to compare and contrast current frustrations with their organisations and thus, placed this in context.

“Yes well I think I’m old enough and I’ve had enough experience to know it’s not the be all and end all when things go wrong” (Organisation A, P21).

“Maybe because of my age, I can now afford to be a bit more relaxed about these things. So, I have seen this all before, I have seen better and I have seen worse, but in the big scheme of things this isn’t so bad. So, it is about seeing the big picture, so if I like my job then I can deal with smaller issues better than if I already dislike my job.” (Organisation A, P7).
“I suppose it’s a negative impact, it’s not particularly disengaging for me, but it used to be. I would shrug the shoulders and I just wouldn't be able to answer or inform others, so it’s not addressed or explained why there is a delay or it doesn’t happen. It just disappears into a black hole and never gets talked about” (Organisation C, P63).

Moreover, length of service with the same organisation can lower expectations over time and lessen the perceptions of breach.

“Yes, but I would think that going from past experience and knowing how this place works, I would just see it as that […] way. Having been here for so many years, I no longer expect these things to happen – I don't expect much these days.” (Organisation C, P59).

Liking one’s current job because of the convenience and benefits can counteract the negativity associated with lower levels of POS and breaches. “I don’t know, but the main thing that keeps me here is locality, because I live here and my kids are in schools that are literally just a few minutes away” (Organisation B, P37). Others agreed with this perspective, which was captured nicely by one participant:

“That is difficult. I mean there are things that keep me motivated and there are other reasons why I am at work. And I need to be frank, I am [50-59 years old], I have been here [over 20 years], I think the business is in a bit of a rocky position. And if they want to get rid of me, they will have to pay me redundancy and potentially pension me off. So, I am not going to throw that away and that is a reason to stay here, maybe the wrong reason, but it is the reason for me” (Organisation C, P60).

Whilst low levels of POS and instances of breach are often associated with negative outcomes, the findings reveal that an individual’s age and experience, length of service as well as social support from colleagues and the line manager can alleviate these.

4.13. Summary of the Chapter

Engagement varies throughout the day and depending on the activity. Work engagement ranges from feeling too engaged, engaged, not engaged to disengaged. Strong engagement often leads to positive outcomes, such as feeling good, happy and satisfied, being more productive, creative and risk taking. Employees often associate feeling not engaged or disengaged with negative outcomes such as frustration, dissatisfaction, lower energy, less care/more mistakes and withdrawing to in-role performance.

The findings have revealed that the line managers play a significant role in influencing employee motivation at work and this can be either positive or negative. Whilst there are many desirable attributes to a good working relationship between line managers and their employees, the reality of the working relationship often looks different and can take on many different variations. In essence, findings show that a good working relationship takes time to establish and requires careful maintenance throughout. Once
established, relationships remain relatively stable over time and whilst HQ LMX is certainly desirable, LQ LMX is not always bad per se. In fact, the stability of a relationship allows clarity in expectations for employees and enables them to seek additional support or resources through job crafting. That is, a mismatch in expectations appears to have a much more significant impact than LQ LMX.

HQ LMX can buffer the impact of minor PCBs through open and honest communication. This also helps to clarify expectations and boundaries within the working relationship, thus preventing future occurrences of minor breaches, or preventing these from becoming more frequent or turning into a major breach. Whereas LQ LMX is less effective at buffering the impact of PCBs on employees work engagement levels because of less interaction and ineffective communication with their manager. Instances of breach are seen as having a cumulative effect and result in feelings of mistrust, betrayal and cynicism. Whilst previous negative experiences can prevent employees forming HQ LMX in the first place due to a lack of trust, these experiences can also heighten an individual’s sensitivity towards future breaches. Because of this, employees are less able to feel satisfied and engaged with their work. On the contrary, there were also a number of moderating factors, which can alleviate the impact of breaches. Age, maturity and length of service for instance enabled cognitive job crafting, whilst other employees also used physical and relational job crafting in order to sustain their engagement.

Findings suggest that LMX quality was seen as more important than POS because it can have a more direct impact on one’s work. As such, POS was useful in further enhancing a positive experience characterised by liking one’s job and their line manager. At the same time, LQ POS was often associated with a perceived lack of fairness and consistency, which tended to be associated with higher management and HR failing to deliver on their promises. Job crafting was also useful in coping with breaches from the organisation, although age and length of service helped to place the current level of POS into context. The findings chapter has highlighted that both the initial quality of LMX and POS relationships can significantly influence participant motivation and how they feel at work. Moreover, PCBs both minor and major can lead to have a cumulative effect on individuals further eroding opportunities to engage with one’s work.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Introduction to Chapter

In the previous chapter, I summarised and noted key findings from sixty-eight interview transcripts across three UK organisations. The chapter was divided into three key sections such as understanding work engagement, exploring interactions of LMX as well as interactions of POS, with PCB and WE. Relevant moderating factors were also highlighted.

This chapter discusses the significance of my findings and integrates these with relevant literature from both chapters 1 and 2, but also provides additional insights into other bodies of literature where this was seen as relevant. As I mentioned in chapter 3, the aim of this qualitative exploratory research was not to provide findings that can be generalised readily into other contexts. Instead it was to provide an insight into the employee experiences of work engagement and its influencing factors. I contribute to knowledge by identifying patterns and themes in my data and allowing others to carefully infer and adapt its relevance to their contexts.

This research aimed to explore the impact of the leader-member exchange (LMX) in both facilitating work engagement but also in how variations in the exchange content via psychological contract breaches (PCB) influenced employees' ability to feel engaged at work. In a similar fashion this research also aimed to understand the extent to which perceived organisational support (POS) and the perception of PCB influenced employee experience of work engagement.

Following the discussion of my findings, I also highlight the theoretical and practical implications of my research. In an effort to conclude this thesis, I will discuss the limitations of my research and recommendations for future areas of research.

5.2. Understanding Work Engagement

Work engagement can be seen as an effective way of doing one’s job. As such understanding the importance and impact of feeling engaged at work is key.

Whilst the literature review in chapter 2 highlighted that a universally agreed definition of work engagement does not yet exist, it suggested that there was some evidence towards a consensus. It noted that the most common definition conceptualised work engagement “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002, p. 74).
Findings from this research seem to agree with this conceptualisation. Interview participants described feeling positive towards work, having a sense of energy and feeling that time flies by when focused on the task. They described losing track of time and wanting to do the best job possible. Participant definitions also included being able to identify with one’s work because of the varied, challenging nature making it a satisfying experience. At the same time, work was more meaningful and provided a sense of direction as they felt they were contributing to the organisation or society as a whole. This is consistent with the body of literature about work engagement, so that engaged employees are enthusiastic about their work and feel energetic (vigor), whilst they also work harder to do the best possible job (dedication) and find themselves immersed and focused (absorption) in their work.

Participants also highlighted being a conscientious worker, caring about the quality and level of effort in performing their duties and going the extra mile in order to repay favourable and motivating working conditions to the organisation. This denotes the social exchange dynamics that employees perceive at work.

The high level of consensus amongst interview participants about the importance of feeling engaged when at work, appears to concur with the associated academic and practitioner interest in this field. Participants cited work engagement being fundamental to enjoying their work. As a result of feeling engaged individuals were proactive and more willing to take risks, they felt that it improved their well-being, satisfaction with work and productivity whilst contributing to a more positive work atmosphere. Similarly, they pointed out that if they felt disengaged they were likely to feel less productive and more likely to leave the organisation. This confirms literature to date, which suggests that work engagement is related to a range of positive outcomes. These include improved in-role and extra role performance (Salanova et al., 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009b). At the same time, it has been shown to be associated with increased commitment levels (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Halbesleben, 2010; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Yalabik, Rossenberg, Kinnie, & Swart, 2014). Conversely, disengaged employees are likely to have greater intentions to quit and higher turnover levels (Hakanen et al., 2006; Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Saks, 2006). However all of these studies are quantitative in nature and while they demonstrate the statistical association between these constructs, they are unable to demonstrate the mechanisms through which this correlation arises because of their methodological choices. This thesis is the first to do that.

Participants who recalled feeling disengaged often associated this state with negative outcomes such as frustration, dissatisfaction, lower energy, less care/more mistakes, doing bare minimum in their work and lastly negatively affecting others. Research has noted the positive outcomes of work engagement in increasing job satisfaction, well-being, in- and extra- role performance, commitment and lowering turnover intentions (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011a; Halbesleben, 2010). Conversely disengaged employees are associated with indirect costs such as reduced performance and commitment as well as higher turnover intention. As such, individuals that leave are likely
to incur high recruitment and replacement training costs, whilst disengaged employees who choose to stay can participate in counterproductive or deviant working behaviours preventing others from doing their job.

Although literature suggests that work engagement is a more persistent emotional state (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002), interview findings suggest that levels of engagement fluctuate. On average, some people felt engaged most of the time, whereas others only felt somewhat engaged and a small minority felt that they were disengaging or already felt disengaged with their work. In particular previous daily diary studies captured that the levels of work engagement can fluctuate somewhat (Sonnentag, 2003; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009b). Findings suggested that participants feel more engaged with some tasks (project work) than others (administrative duties) and this view is mirrored in recent studies (Sonnentag, 2017, Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Sonnentag (2017) argues that task specificity is not only a key distinguishing factor for work engagement from burnout, but also that this acts as one explanation for why engagement experiences can fluctuate.

What was most surprising in the category of understanding work engagement was that different age groups appeared to engage to different degrees with their work. For the majority of participants feeling highly or somewhat engaged were generally associated with positive outcomes. A few interviewees (in particular age groups 20-29, 30-39) however noted feeling too engaged with their work and for a small minority this has led to a physical and mental breakdown. This alludes to the potential dark side of work engagement, which has been noted in some of the work engagement literature. It suggests that employees find it difficult to psychologically detach themselves from their work (George, 2011; Halbesleben et al., 2009; Halbesleben, 2011; van Beek, Taris, Schaufeli, & Brenninkmeijer, 2014). As a result of being highly absorbed there is more potential for work-family conflict (Halbesleben et al., 2009) and a greater need for recovery periods outside of work (Sonnentag, 2003). Others explain that being highly absorbed in one’s work also relates to being more engrossed in stressful circumstances (Sonnentag et al., 2008).

However a study by Bal & Kooij (2011) suggest that in particularly younger workers tend to possess higher levels of work centrality. Thus they are more willing to invest into the exchange relationship and drive relational psychological contracts, which helps drive job satisfaction, work engagement but also commitment to the organisation. This is not to say that older workers have low levels of work centrality, but rather that there can be a notable difference between age groups. This may provide insight into why younger workers appear to struggle detaching themselves from work. A recent longitudinal study suggests that well-being varies over time and this is particularly notable in younger employees or following job changes (Mäkikangas et al. 2016). An alternative explanation is that within the context of organisational change and uncertainty, employees may perceive a greater pressure to demonstrate their involvement and commitment to the organisation. As a consequence, they may feel pressured rather than intrinsically driven to perform and absorb in their work activities (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). This pressure to deliver alongside limited resources was
particularly noticeable in Organisation B and C given the organisational changes that they were facing at the time.

Whilst influencing factors for motivation and work engagement varied somewhat amongst interview participants, the majority cited intrinsic motivation being key, which relates to the work engagement literature. Intrinsic motivation from the nature and content of the work matching personal values, interests and/or abilities, was particularly applicable to Organisation C and more senior ranking professionals in Organisation A and B. This is consistent with literature on knowledge workers who tend to be driven by intrinsic motivation but also by a commitment to their work rather than to the organisation ( Alvesson, 2000). Similarly, a large majority of participants felt that social support from their line manager and colleagues was key to maintaining motivation. The importance of line manager support will be discussed in the next section.

5.3. LMX Quality and Work Engagement

Previous research suggests that line managers are key to influencing how employees feel at work. It was therefore argued that LMX quality would likely be a key influencing factor in facilitating or inhibiting employees’ work engagement.

Findings revealed that a good working relationship involved ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’, ‘Open & Honest Communication’ and ‘Adequate Support’ which mirrors key features of HQ LMX in the literature (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Moreover participants understood that good relationships take time and effort to establish. This is consistent as the central premise of LMX is to establish unique, dyadic relationships that are negotiated and manifested over time (Liden et al., 2006; Volmer et al., 2012).

Interview participants stated that good relationships with their line managers were due to good two-way communication demonstrating genuine interest. This is in line with research that suggests open communication, as well as frequency and patterns of communication, genuineness and high involvement with their jobs key to facilitating HQ LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Overall findings and LMX literature achieve a consensus in that employees in HQ LMX relationships receive greater access to resources including more frequent interactions and support from their line manager and sense of empowerment to perform their work (Breevaart et al., 2015).

Previous studies however have failed to capture the underlying mechanisms by which LMX leads to work engagement. This thesis is the first to do this and to highlight the way in which line manager’s impact the employee experience of work engagement. As such, what became key to feeling engaged was feeling involved, informed and that they were making a contribution to the big picture. Disengaged participants often cited feeling isolated and lacking a sense of purpose and meaning in their work because a lack of involvement, communication and clarity. Therefore being able to be part of decision making processes or being ‘in the know’ about what is going
on in the business is a key factor in engaging employees. Participants identified trust as key to experiencing positive relationships with their line manager. Providing autonomy and thus trusting them to complete their work without being micromanaged and empowered to contributed ideas, significantly impacted how engaged employees felt.

The role of the line manager is therefore to facilitate positive influencing factors such as 'Interest & Ability' 'Variety, Challenge & Growth' as well as 'Meaning & Having an Impact' which help establish job satisfaction and work engagement. Giving employees the opportunity to use their initiative, knowledge, skills and capabilities in an environment in which they feel trusted to fulfil their roles served as a form of job resources supplied by the line manager. Thus providing exchange content for the social exchange with the employee. At the same time, having the ability to do one’s job competently whilst having the opportunity to challenge and grow skills for the future were key factors. For instance, participants responded to challenging work (workload or content) with feeling engaged and being interested in what they did. Findings also emphasised that employees recognised that it was mutual exchange and they were therefore more than happy to go the extra mile for their line manager in return for such favourable work conditions. Employees who felt empowered by being able to perform their work autonomously, whilst also having access to support when needed were more likely to invest themselves fully into their work.

Findings have highlighted that employees perceive the relationships with their line manager and the organisation as a social exchange. The activator of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is key evidence for this. Participants noted that they felt obliged to reciprocate favourable working conditions, opportunities and levels of support by going the extra mile in order to benefit their line manager. For instance, under conditions of HQ LMX employees felt that the level of trust and mutual consideration meant that employees felt more satisfied and often more engaged with their work. To incentivise employees to engage in social exchange relationships, HQ LMX is needed to establish rapport with the employee, so as to provide interesting, autonomous and challenging work that would help grow their capabilities over time. Under conditions of LQ LMX, employees resorted to their in-role performance because they felt that the social exchange was transactional in nature and did not incentivise them to expend greater efforts. As such, it is the level of resources and demands that are placed on the individual by their line manager that determine the extent to which employees are willing to engage with their work.

Literature supports the notion that leaders can establish a more resourceful working environment which is likely to increase the opportunities for engaging with one’s work (Breevaart et al., 2015; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In line with the JD-R model, studies suggest that line managers can be engaging because of the resources they provide (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2007). Whilst they differentiate between job resources and demands driving motivational processes, this model does not take into account the dynamics and interdependences of exchange relationships. Moreover, Saks (2006) suggested that employees would reciprocate positive social exchanges by greater levels of engagement.
Findings from this study however provide an alternative to the popular JD-R model of resources and demands at work. Moreover, this qualitative study sheds light on the importance of LMX quality but also the role of the line manager in driving work engagement using SET. The exchange content from the manager can therefore be more usefully conceptualised and related to the aforementioned ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) model (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000). This framework suggests that “employees must have the skill needed to exercise discretion (ability), the desire to do so (motivation) and they must be given the opportunity to do so by their organisation and line manager” (Purcell, Kinnie, Swart, Rayton, & Hutchinson, 2009a, p. 76).

Hence findings revealed that the influencing factors such as ‘Interest & Ability’ relate to employees feeling competent and invested into their work because they believed they had adequate skills, experience and support to perform their job. Similarly, the theme ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ conveys the motivational aspect of the AMO model. For instance HQ LMX is characterised by mutual inputs (trust, respect, consideration), but also by effective communication so that the individual feels that their work is connected to the big picture. By providing feedback and for instance communicating successes they create more meaningful work for the individual in that they can feel connected to a wider purpose. Lastly, the theme ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’ relates to the opportunity aspect of the AMO model. Hence progress of personal goals and a sense of growth or development is said to foster well-being (Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Feldt & Schaufeli, 2016). Having a line manager that provides challenging work in the nature or workload that allows one to acquire additional skills sets and secures future opportunities seemed essential in feeling engaged. This study therefore extends SET by defining the exchange content (AMO) that drives work engagement more clearly thus providing a greater insight into the people-performance link.

What was interesting to note from this study was a positive contagion effect in that HQ LMX could motivate middle managers to imitate this relationship quality with their subordinates. Similarly, older colleagues who were engaged and enthusiastic about their work appeared to rub off on more junior colleagues. Literature suggests that there may be a number of reasons for this effect. First, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) propose that individuals can learn new information and behaviours by observing and mimicking others. This suggests that middle managers observing a HQ LMX with their line manager may feel inspired to continue this. Second, social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that employees observe others in order to understand how to think and behave in a certain setting. Recent additions to this perspective, propose that interpersonal sense making can infer meaning from one individual to another. It thus seems reasonable to believe that individuals feel engaged because they mirror their immediate surroundings. As such ‘leading by example’ is taken literal in this context.

In contrast, participant stories of both HQ LMX and major PCBs, as well as LQ LMX highlighted that not having ‘Adequate Support’ or ‘Open & Honest Communication’ and ‘Mutual Respect & Trust’ are factors which threaten
one’s job satisfaction and ultimately one’s ability to engage at work. This is consistent with findings from Rayton & Yalabik (2014) who advocate that PCBs symbolise a resource loss, which consequently results in lower job satisfaction and work engagement levels.

Conversely, interview findings and literature suggest that LQ LMX suffers from no or low levels of trust, respect and support (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Participants recalled feeling that LQ LMX often appeared one sided and that demands will be made on them, but regular support in the form of answering queries or providing guidance is not given. By the same token, this is likely to prevent opportunities to focus and engage appropriately with one’s work. For those that did not have positive experiences with their line manager, their work engagement appeared to fluctuate. As such, some described the negative impact that their line manager has had on their level of job satisfaction, motivation and ability to engage with their work. This illustrated the level of impact that the line manager has on the employee.

Findings revealed that feeling trusted and supported by their line manager meant that employees were more willing to take risks and be creative in their work. Whilst social support from a range of sources is clearly important in the work setting, participants and literature agrees that line manager support is more influential (Dienesch & Liden, 1986) than support from colleagues. In part, this is due to the power and discretion that they have over allocating resources to enable optimal functioning at work (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1999). At the same time, they are also seen to instil a sense of belonging and meaning, which should be key in facilitating work engagement (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014).

Moreover, in the absence of the line manager due to frequent travelling, interview participants also noted that some colleagues acted as mentors or interim line managers. However overall, it was recognised that line manager support was more important in achieving one’s job because of the associated authority that they had. Blau (1981) found that supervisor support was related to job performance, whereas co-worker support was not. Other studies strengthen this view, in a meta-analysis study, Ng & Sorensen (2008) conclude that supervisor support had a stronger influence on job satisfaction, affective commitment and turnover intention.

Studies suggest that support from colleagues can act as a job resource facilitating work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). My findings suggested that although support from peers was important, colleagues tended to provide emotional support and thus help to buffer demands and frustrations with their line manager or their work environment. Participants explained that despite being in a HQ LMX they were not willing to reveal all of their concerns and personal issues with their line manager in order to uphold a professional image. The next section will discuss the impact of breaches and social support on how the employee feels at work.
5.4. Exploring the Impact of Breach & Social Support

First, in line with social exchange theory, psychological contract breaches (PCB) were suggested to impact the extent to which employees engaged with their work. Second, social support was seen a way of alleviating the negative impact of PCBs.

Findings indicated that breaches could in fact greatly determine the extent to which employees are able to engage with their work. Participants clearly differentiated between minor and major instances of breach, whereby minor breaches were seen to be smaller annoyances that did not have a lasting impression on the individual. Major breaches were seen as greatly impacting one’s ability to perform and hence had a greater knock on effect on work engagement levels. Literature to date however only distinguishes between breach and violation, whereby breach is seen as the cognitive evaluation and violation as the emotional response (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). However, my study suggests that there may be additional value in differentiating experiences of breach further. Whilst studies have demonstrated that breach and violation are closely correlated, they have also noted that not all instances of breach lead to an emotional reaction of betrayal or inequity (Conway & Briner, 2002; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Instead, my study suggests that employees aim to reciprocate unfavourable treatment by lowering their work engagement.

Besides the severity of breach, this study also highlighted that the impact of breach is complex and influenced by other factors such as previous negative experiences as well as current levels of exchange quality with the leader and the organisation. With regards to previous negative experiences, both my findings and the literature note that this made individuals more sensitive to future breaches. Participants described being more cynical, cautious and less trusting of their social exchange party as a result. This is consistent with literature as Robinson & Morrison (2000) noted that employees with a history of PCBs may be less trusting of others and more sensitive to future breaches. Consequently these employees are more likely to actively scan and detect breaches in their environment. PCB can therefore leave a lasting impression on employees beyond the social exchange relationship with their line manager and prevent them from developing future HQ LMX or POS. This suggests a potential negative spiral where the individual may get more mistrusting with each instance of breach. On the other hand, Robinson & Morrison (2000) also claim that a lack of alternative employment options will have the opposite effect on employees and encourage them to be less watchful for PCBs. It is worth noting however, that a lack of alternatives may not make employees more trusting and invincible to the impact of PCB but rather lead them to withdraw psychologically from the organisation. Conversely, those who face repeated instances of breach but have alternative employment options are likely to be more vigilant about additional PCBs and leave the organisation if these persist.

Other studies concur with the notion of previous negative experiences leaving a lasting impression on employees. Hence positive social experiences were less significant than negative social experiences in influencing how an employee feels and acts at work (Duffy, Ganster, &
Dasborough et al. (2006) adds that previous negative experience can shape perceptions of PCBs because of an asymmetry effect, whereby individuals can recall negative experiences more easily and in greater detail than positive experiences. Others suggest that leaders become sources of hassles or uplifts (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002), hence the perception of breach is likely to negate any praise or favourable treatment that employees may have received prior.

The reason why PCB impacts work engagement is because it can have direct consequences on the ability, motivation or opportunities (AMO) to perform one’s job both now or in the near future. Therefore a former HQ or LQ LMX characterised by major or cumulative breaches inhibits the employee in feeling satisfied and engaged with their work.

A number of studies assert that employees distinguish between social exchanges with the line manager and the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2006; Yalabik, Chen, Lawler, & Kim, 2008). Ng et al. (2014) concur this view but also point out that line managers can act as agents of the organisation and thus be seen as jointly responsible for PCB. Findings from my study confirm that employees distinguish LMX and POS relationships, for the majority of participants only higher level management and HR were seen to act as agents of the organisations. It is only a minority of individuals that perceived that a cumulative effect of breaches led to losing faith in both management and the organisation simultaneously. This cumulative effect of breaches has only recently been noted in literature. Solinger, Hofmans, Bal & Jansen (2016, p. 509) suggested that “breach accumulation did result in a disproportionate decline of commitment [delaying] recovery for a while.” However this study used a quantitative design sampling 160 Dutch and Flemish PhD graduates. My study therefore extends the ‘breach accumulation’ effect among a sample of employees from different occupational groups. This thesis is therefore the first known qualitative study demonstrating the mechanism by which this can impact work engagement.

Contrary to the suggestion that effective supervisors manage high demands by providing additional job resources (Yukl, 2010), my study suggests that some things are outside of the line manager’s control. As such, under conditions of HQ LMX and low POS, individuals can still feel overwhelmed by their workloads and pressure to deliver, resulting in them disengaging. Consequently employees can still perceive their line manager to be supportive even under conditions of low POS (Zagenczyk et al., 2009). Research suggests this may be because when line managers are loyal and protective of them (i.e. HQ LMX), this can reduce the association between breach and turnover intention (Stoner, Gallagher, & Stoner, 2011).

Previous studies suggest that supervisor and organisational support are inherently linked and that support from the line manager is indicative of POS (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). Saks (2006) suggests that POS predicts engagement, whilst others observed that the level of satisfaction with LMX and POS facilitates work engagement amongst employees (Brunetto, Shacklock, Teo, & Farr-Wharton, 2014). Similarly, my study found that a HQ LMX and high levels of POS contributed to an overall positive and
satisfying experience at work, enabling employees to feel engaged with their work.

Whilst it is generally accepted that LMX and POS are distinct, yet interrelated, findings from my study indicate that the source of breach also has a bearing on the extent to which employees feel engaged. In line with the minor and major breach differentiation made earlier, breaches from line managers are more likely to have a direct bearing on doing one’s job effectively and how engaged someone feels. Line manager’s level of discretion and potential lack of interest in their employees’ well-being can have considerable impact on employees’ sense of feeling valued. Whilst minor breaches were attributed to small misunderstandings and issues outside of the line manager’s control, major breaches were seen to be more intentional and caused employees to feel less confident and sure of the resources and opportunities that they would receive in the future. Despite claims in the literature that LMX levels remain relatively stable, a cumulative effect or major breach can lead the employee to believe that the mutual relational contract (HQ) has moved to a transactional contract (LQ). In line with the norm of reciprocity rule, employees adapt their work engagement in return (Gouldner, 1960).

Findings from my study found that HQ LMX can buffer the impact of minor PCBs. Participants explained that because of the frequent interaction and good communication with their line manager, employees felt comfortable enough to voice frustrations, clarify expectations and set boundaries. Thus preventing future instances of breach or before small issues become more problematic and start to affecting them at work. Another factor in how employees react to breaches is whether they believe the PCB was intentional or accidental and hence good communication channels are more likely to supply a rationale for these. Previous research suggests that LMX quality can act as a form of social support to alleviate negative experiences (Restubog, Bordia, Tang, & Krebs, 2010). Some authors add that employee voice is key to first facilitating a HQ LMX, but also in resolving work related issues (Cheng, Lu, Chang, & Johnstone, 2013) and this clearly speaks in support of the buffering effect of HQ exchanges. In line with this, findings also highlighted that LQ LMX was seen to be less effective at buffering the impact of PCB on employees and their ability to feel engaged at work. Despite these findings however, HQ LMX were not able to buffer the negative cumulative effect and more major instances of breach, which resulted in lower levels of job satisfaction and work engagement.

One study investigated questionable leader behaviour such as offensive behaviour (disrespectful remarks, loss of temper), abusive supervision, interactional injustice or antisocial behaviours and whether HQ leaders were judged less harshly for these (Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011). They used Hollander’s (1958) idiosyncratic credit theory of leadership, which suggests that employees may be more forgiving for abnormal behaviour when leaders generally possess more positive characteristics. Shapiro et al. (2011) observed that leaders with higher LMX tended to escape harsh judgements by employees and that in part this was associated with the value and status that they had in the organisation. Interestingly, employees who held their leaders accountable for these negative behaviours were more likely to quit and withdrawn psychologically from their employer.
With relates to my findings, because questionable leader behaviour can be likened to PCB and it may thus provide an alternative explanation for why HQ LMX could buffer PCB. At the same time, it could also help explain why some employees lower their engagement in reaction to PCB and others do not.

There is considerable debate in the literature over whether HQ exchanges buffer the negative impact (buffering hypothesis) of breaches or whether employees will feel a greater sense of betrayal because of these (intensification hypothesis). Interestingly Suazo & Stone-Romero (2011) argued that both effects may be possible. They proposed that new employees may feel buffered by adequate support and more established employees may feel a greater sense of betrayal as a result of breach in a supportive relationship. Despite having a varied sample with length of service ranging from six months to 30 years+, my study could not find support for this observation.

On the one hand, studies have found that line managers, mentors and colleagues can alleviate the impact of PCBs (Dulac et al., 2008; Zagenczyk et al., 2009). Dulac et al. (2008) provided additional support for the buffering hypothesis in that POS and LMX quality moderated the association between breach and violation. They explained that employees in HQ exchanges are more likely to have effective communication channels to understand why the breach has occurred and consequently reduce the likelihood of violation. However recent studies suggest that fostering HQ LMX and relationships with colleagues, may come at the expense of POS (Ng, Feldman, & Butts, 2014). Although they provide support for the buffering hypothesis in that HQ LMX are likely to buffer PCBs. It was explained that rather than for instance centrally controlled pay scales and criteria of promotion, employees may come to expect promotions on the basis of their HQ LMX which is not always feasible and could increase perceptions of breach. On the other hand, studies also suggest that HQ LMX mediated the relationship between breach and organisational citizenship behaviour and in-role performance (Restubog et al., 2010; Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011).

Similarly to HQ LMX buffering minor breaches, high levels of POS can also buffer minor breaches because employees feel that their organisation is generally committed to promoting employee well-being (Tekleab et al., 2005). A recent study provides additional support for the buffering hypothesis with regards to the organisation. Breaches are seen as less severe when the organisation communicates the rationale, offers compensation or genuine apologies for lack of consistency (Tomprou, Rousseau, & Hansen, 2015). In line with this, research demonstrated that the emotional severity of the breach but also the level of post-breach POS is key to whether employees can recover from the negative impacts of breach (Solinger et al., 2016).

Organisational breaches were also associated with a lack of consistent HR policies and procedures that helped to standardise recruitment, pay, grievance and pay/promotion. Whilst some studies suggest that HR practices encourage psychological contract fulfilment (Guest & Conway, 2002). It may also be a question of consistency between management communication and HR practices. This is perhaps because different types of justice such as procedural or interactional justice help to establish trust and a trusting
environment is more likely to facilitate work engagement (Agarwal, 2014). Findings from my study also mirrored this stance in that a lack of an effective, objective HR department was seen as lacking the necessary commitment to treat their staff as their most valuable asset. In particular this applied to training and development opportunities across all three organisations.

Robinson & Rousseau (1994) explain that organisational breaches reduce incentives for employees to work hard and consequently result in lower levels of job satisfaction and motivation. Furthermore, they highlight that the resulting loss of trust is more difficult to recover than perceived inequity. Breaches from the organisation were seen to have an indirect impact on how employees felt at work. As such, individuals described not having some level of job security and clarity over the future resulted in them being less committed to that organisation. At the same time, it was also seen to affect the extent to which they were willing to engage with their work. This rings true in that trust is an essential component of social exchange relationships and that breach results in questioning organisational integrity in their concern for employee well-being (McAllister, 1995). Consistent with my findings, employees can continue to have effective social exchange relationships with their supervisors and the organisation, but they are often less trusting and more cynical of the other party as a result of experienced breaches.

Participants expressed that breaches represented potential threats to their job satisfaction and work engagement. This is consistent with recent studies, which have found that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between breach and work engagement (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Interestingly, a Korean study about the effects of workplace bullying on work engagement shares some similarities with how PCBs impact work engagement from my findings (Park & Ono, 2017). As such, victims of bullying can either perceive it as threatening their well-being, or learn to deal with the situation through means of other resources (social support from peers or line manager) in order to stay engaged.

In an effort to address these threats to well-being, findings indicate that there are a number of moderating factors which reduce the negative impact of PCBs. Employees use a number of job crafting techniques to alleviate the impact of breaches. In addition to HQ LMX, findings from my interview study suggest that there may be a number of moderators that help to further alleviate the negative impact of PCB. Something I did not anticipate was that interviews highlighted age to be a significant influencing factor in how employees perceive breach and the extent to which it affects their work engagement. Participants described that they would have been more easily frustrated and likely to react more strongly when they were younger to the perception of breach. Contrary to ageist stereotypes that older workers appear less creative and innovative in their work, in reality they observed the opposite effect (Ng & Feldman, 2013). In fact, undermining supervisor behaviour (i.e. PCB) and lack of personal resources such as a proactive personality was the only negatively associated factor with age. This could be one explanation for why older workers are seen to react less severely to breaches. Greater levels of maturity and experience may mean that older employees are better able to cope with stressors (Mano et al. 2013).
It is interesting to note that line managers or organisations with a negative perception towards older workers can evoke the self-fulfilling prophecy (Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde, & De Vos, 2009). Studies that suggest that older workers tend to be overlooked in decision making and career development opportunities (Gaillard & Desmotte, 2010; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001; Niessen, Swarowsky, & Leiz, 2010). Consequently older workers then start to disengage and be less involved with their work in return for having limited opportunities for development. This is certainly true for a minority of my sample, which felt overlooked in project allocation. Although no underlying ageist views were noted amongst participants, this may provide an insight into why some older workers were disengaged. In line with this thinking, positive perception of older workers is likely to result in more motivated employees (Gaillard & Desmotte, 2010).

Older workers are seen to struggle with relevant job searching skills that might offer some alternative employment options (Adler & Hilber, 2009; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001). As such, the perception of no alternatives may be one reason why employees react less strongly to PCBs. However it raises the question to what extent this may be applicable to office and professional knowledge workers as they may more sought after due to their expertise (Worrall et al., 2016). Similarly, findings from my study indicated that small annoyances no longer had the same impact on older workers because they had changed their priorities to improve work-life balance. This links back to the notion of work centrality, which was discussed earlier in section 5.2. Using lifespan psychology, Bal & Kooij (2011) suggested that age moderated interactions between work centrality and work attitudes. Older workers have lower levels of work centrality and are thus less willing to invest themselves at work (Bal & Kooij, 2011). Others concur and found that work engagement was more stable for high tenure staff (Bal & Kooij, 2011) although it can vary over time (Mäkikangas et al. 2016). However, in a study of Australian intensive care professionals it was found that age and years of experience did not impact work engagement (van Mol, Nijkamp, Bakker, Schaufeli & Kopmanje, 2017). This is surprising given the high workload and emotional challenges associated with the nature of this work.

While studies have reported that older workers are subject to some positive stereotypes regarding their experience, reliability and loyalty, some negative beliefs are prevalent (Gaillard & Desmotte, 2010; Hassell & Perrew, 1995). Hassell & Perrew (1995) demonstrated that the number of interactions younger workers have with older workers significantly and positively affected their beliefs towards older workers. This suggests direct and frequent exposure to range of age groups may reduce negative beliefs towards other age groups. This is supported by Cheung and Wu (2013) who observed that perceived organisational support was positively related to measures of successful ageing in the workplace. In relation to age, my findings also indicated that length of service moderated the impact of PCB. Participants explained that they had lowered their expectations as a result of continued disappointments over time. These views were often accompanied by a sense of pragmatism, but also cynicism. This appeared contrary to work by Ng & Sorensen (2008) who found no support for organisational tenure with regards to the support-satisfaction relationship. Niessen et al. (2010) suggest that job experiences made it more difficult to adapt to changes at work. Regardless,
lowering expectations may link into cognitive job crafting in order to maintain some level of satisfaction and engagement with work, these will shortly be discussed after the importance of personal resources.

Most recently, personal resources have been added to the JD-R model, so that day level job resources related to daily levels of work engagement via personal resources (self-efficacy, self-esteem) (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a). Optimism was noted to mediate the relationship between these. A meta-analysis by Halbesleben (2010) further suggested that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of work engagement and hence development of employee resources were seen as key to engagement interventions. The simultaneous support for buffering and boosting hypothesis of personal resources, particularly self-efficacy, is strengthened when demands are high (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). This suggests that employees with high levels of self-efficacy may become more easily bored when they are not sufficiently challenged at work.

Findings from my study indicate that employees who felt optimistic and had greater levels of self-efficacy felt less negatively affected by PCBs from their line manager. In part, this was because some participants resorted to job crafting behaviours in order to maintain their level of engagement and not get disheartened by instances of breach. Job crafting is thus understood by “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). This is a relatively new field of research and recent studies have categorised job crafting into three types of proactive behaviour such as increasing job resources, increasing job challenges and decreasing job demands (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012). Accordingly, employees can choose to change their mind-set (cognitive), number or scope of tasks (physical) or change who they seek for additional support (relational). This is consistent with my research finding in that self-efficacy and proactive personality predict job crafting (M. Tims & Bakker, 2010).

Research has found that individuals use job crafting behaviours to improve their well-being and maintain motivation levels (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012). This daily diary study concluded that on days where employees used job crafting (seeking resources and challenges) this then also related to their work engagement levels. In line with previous findings suggesting that younger workers appeared more engaged with higher levels of work centricity, some suggest that younger workers are also more likely to job craft (seek challenges) in order to maintain engagement levels (Harju, Hakanen, & Schaufeli, 2016). It thus appears true that younger workers were more aspirational and willing to go the extra mile for their line manager and this was demonstrated by greater efforts and higher engagement. In a qualitative study, it was found that lower ranking employees were more likely to use job crafting behaviour in part because of greater autonomy (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010). Higher ranking staff felt more restrained and used less job crafting behaviours than lower ranking colleagues. This was also reflected in the findings of my study as employees and middle management talked about crafting their jobs to feel engaged. None of the senior managers suggested similar behaviours, however this may be because they only represented a minority of the sample. In part,
lower uptake of job crafting behaviours amongst higher ranking or older employees may be due to feeling more stressed when seeking additional challenges (Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani, & Slowik, 2007).

Harju et al. (2016) conceptualise job crafting as proactive coping behaviour in preventing boredom at work and maintaining their well-being. Whilst studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of job crafting in relation to driving work engagement, it appears that to date no research has positioned job crafting as coping behaviour in alleviating the impact of PCBs in order to prevent disengagement. This link does not appear to have been made in previous research.

My findings concur with the recent literature because it tended to be already engaged employees who used cognitive, physical or relational job crafting methods to maintain their engagement (Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014) despite instances of breach from their line manager or the organisation. In terms of cognitive job crafting, participants described ‘recalibrating’ themselves and choosing to no longer let it affect their work. Physical job crafting related to participants seeking more challenging work or switching up tasks. Whilst relational job crafting included seeking additional support from colleagues when the line manager was not readily available due to travels etc. Under conditions of HQ LMX, participants had greater autonomy and trust in the employee meant that individuals had greater ability to choose how they can maintain their engagement. Studies suggest that line managers are key in enabling job crafting due to the autonomy, feedback and general support that they provide (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012). Moreover van Mol et al. (2017) found that social support in terms of heightened team spirit, efficacy, autonomy and good peer communication related positively to work engagement. It is to no surprise then that job crafting leads to higher levels of job engagement (Chen, Yen, & Tsai, 2014) as well as work engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015) by increasing person-job fit (Lu et al., 2014).

5.5. Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study has focused on providing greater clarity and insight into the antecedents of work engagement.

Despite the popularity of work engagement, LMX, POS and PCB it is surprising that these constructs were not previously connected and hence chapter 1 and 2 highlighted this gap in research. Accordingly, work engagement literature has demonstrated limited references to the role of the line manager (Carasco-Saul et al. 2015). This is astonishing given both the intuitive appeal and the interest in the value of the line manager and the employment relationship other domains such as HRM.

Likewise, calls for research linking LMX and work engagement have been made for some time (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Segers et al., 2010). At the time of starting this research no literature had yet explored the PCB and work engagement relationship but also the LMX and work engagement relationship. Since then however recent studies have started to
address this. This research thus builds on these contributions to knowledge which have investigated the breach-satisfaction-engagement relationship (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014) and the LMX-engagement-performance relationship (Breevaart et al., 2015). Whilst these studies represent significant milestones in the field, it is also clear that the studies investigating PCB and work engagement, but also LMX and work engagement are still limited. In line with the aforementioned prevalence and potential negative impact of POS (Restubog et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2007), and the potential importance of the line manager relationship this is surprising. Positioning variation in exchange content from both the leader (LMX) and the organisation (POS) as distant predictors of PCB has demonstrated that employees return unfavourable treatment by being less engaged with their work.

Moreover, conceptualising the exchange content in terms of the AMO model (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000) is a useful way of illustrating how the line manager can impact the engagement of their employees. Findings revealed that ‘Interest & Ability’, ‘Variety, Challenge & Growth’ and ‘Meaning & Having an Impact’ feed into the constituent parts of the AMO model. HQ LMX are therefore characterised by line manager’s enabling these influencing factors, which then provides employees with the ability, motivation and opportunity to engage with their work. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to extend SET with AMO and provide qualitative insights into the underlying mechanisms of knowledge workers and motivational linkages to organisational performance. Line managers can therefore inspire, motivate, strengthen and provide a sense of job security for employees.

In addition, this study has provided support for the buffering hypothesis and recognises that HQ LMX is valuable in reducing the negative impact of PCBs regardless of the source of breach. Similarly, this study has made valuable contributions in light of potential moderators within this relationship and hence age, length of service, personal resources (optimism, self-efficacy) and job crafting behaviours led to alleviate negative impact of PCB. Harju et al. (2016) conceptualise job crafting as proactive coping behaviour in preventing boredom at work and maintaining their well-being. Whilst studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of job crafting in relation to driving work engagement, it appears that to date no research has positioned job crafting as coping behaviour in response to alleviating the impact of PCBs or future instances of breach in order to prevent disengagement. As such, this appears to be a novel and unexpected contribution of my research.

At the same time, it is evident that LMX quality is more likely to have an impact on facilitating work engagement directly than POS. Furthermore, empirical evidence has been provided that demonstrates employees differentiate between exchange relationships with their line manager and the organisation. This study therefore adds to the body of research that advocates that LMX and POS are distinct yet interrelated constructs. Lastly, the context of organisational change increases the perception of PCB in that constrained headcount and budgets make fulfilling perceived obligations more difficult. Therefore this contributes to the handful of studies, which have explored PCB in this context.
Finally the study makes a methodological contribution to the field, particularly with regards to work engagement. Previous research has been dominated by cross-sectional, self-administered questionnaires (Simpson, 2009) and hence more in-depth qualitative insights into work engagement provide a useful addition to the existing body of research.

This is the first known study to investigate the POS-LMX-PCB-work engagement relationship. As such, this study contributes to the body of research about antecedents of work engagement and extends social exchange theory by conceptualising the content of exchange as the ability, motivation and opportunity to feel satisfied and engaged at work. The line manager therefore plays a central role in creating a work climate that facilitates positive influencing factors. The perception of PCBs regardless of LMX quality therefore symbolise a threat to job satisfaction and work engagement of employees and consequently can result in reduced relationship quality and a reluctance of employees to reciprocate.

PCB appears to impact a number of work related outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement and commitment to the organisation. It thus demonstrates the importance of the psychological contract in understanding employee attitudes and behaviours. In line with social exchange, it becomes clear that breaches result in lower levels of trust towards the line manager and the organisation. Shifting the focus from more relational to more transactional and lower quality exchanges. In summary, this research brings to light the importance of the managerial role in providing resources and facilitating work engagement amongst employees through social exchange and the norms of reciprocity.

5.6. Practical Implications

Findings from the research may be applied in a number of different ways in order to improve the quality of LMX, but also help minimise instances of breach and its potential negative impact on employee attitudes and behaviours at work. An understanding of the experience of feeling engaged and the drivers behind this can help to provide the relevant support and individualised approach to drive engagement in their subordinates.

Features of a good working relationship and HQ LMX highlight the importance of mutual, trusting relationships where parties feel obligated to support one another (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Some point out that expectations can be managed even at the very early recruitment and selection stages (Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998). Initial interviews and selection procedures can help provide a realistic insight into the nature of the work as well as clarity expectations about the benefits and responsibilities. Maintaining a fair and consistent social exchange was seen as key to enabling employees to perform both within and beyond their role. Hence once individuals have been hired, in the first instance managers should aim to develop trusting and supporting relationships by welcoming newcomers and building rapport. HQ LMX can be established not only by mutual levels of
respect, liking and obligation, but also by means of leading by example, open communication and providing autonomy and ownership over work.

Initial meetings can help establish a mutual understanding of expectations and can help prevent early instances of breach. By showing interest and concern for the employee’s progress, line managers can also become more aware and appreciative of their efforts (George, 2000). Small tokens of gratitude demonstrate that the employee’s efforts are being valued. Genuine examples of praise and recognition of doing a job well can help boost employee mood. At the same time, praise and recognition can also transfer to others in the team through emotional contagion contributing to an overall more positive working atmosphere (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992). As a result, employees feel motivated to perform because they feel that they are visible and accountable for their work.

Some suggest that employees perceive their line managers to communicate ineffectively. Relatedly, listening and interpersonal skills can be learned in order to improve managers’ ability to communicate effectively and be empathetic to subordinate concerns (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982). As such, managers should seek informal catch-ups to check in with their direct reports, but also schedule more formal meetings to provide constructive performance feedback and whether expectations around the quality of work are being met. This provides opportunities to air any concerns but also to specify any further development needs such as specialist training. Improved interpersonal skills can help the manager to prevent the perception or further escalation of breaches. Similarly, establishing rapport with employees provides better insights into what drives their motivation and what they value in a work setting. As such, recognising individual differences is key to feeling valued but also key to tailoring one’s approach in an effort to meet those perceived obligations. Some individuals may be more extrinsically motivated by pay, status and prestige associated with the line manager’s position. Others however may place a greater emphasis on being intrinsically motivated by having an interesting, challenging and varied role that is meaningful to them and their life.

Within the security, trust and mutual support of HQ LMX, employees who are engaged in their work may feel at liberty to approach tasks more innovatively, without fear of being reprimanded. Failed innovative approaches may be viewed as learning opportunities within HQ relationships. Conversely, LQ may be interpreted as a lack of interest in employee aspirations and thus are less they are incentivised to go beyond in-role job performance. Therefore, line managers should aim to maximise positive experiences at work by being respectful and motivating employees to be accountable and empowered about their work (Dasborough, 2006). Providing employees with a sense of autonomy enables employees to control the direction of their work and contributing to feeling more involved and interested. By the same token, line managers should also receive relevant one-to-one coaching or counselling sessions in order to minimise negative emotional experiences for the employee (Dasborough, 2006) but also in dealing with disengaged employees following the perception of breach. Whilst trust can be restored, this takes time and effort in providing employees with greater opportunities to
voice their concerns and include them in relevant decision-making processes (Solinger et al., 2016).

In order to prevent employees from disengaging with their work, role clarity can foster a sense of ownership, contribution leading to better performance (Griffin et al., 2007). Hence line managers, should outline the relevant role and responsibilities as well as how this connects to the bigger organisational aims. Good working relationships instil knowledge and provide opportunities for employees to learn and grow over time. Consequently, line managers should communicate and challenge their employees in order for them to rise to the challenge and improve their performance. Yukl (2010) has noted that leaders can help inspire employees to be more creative in their work by pushing them beyond their comfort zones. A study by Barbier et al. (2013) concurs with this view, in that high performance expectations can lead to future work engagement. Empowering employees is a demonstration of trust and appreciation of their efforts, thus helping to motivate them to go the extra mile, whilst keeping them interested about their current work and how to improve existing ways of working (Amabile, Schatzela, Monetaa, & Kramer, 2004).

In an effort to address issues of limited or a lack of adequate resources, managers can make greater use of the tacit knowledge that already exists in the organisation. However, negative views and ageist stereotypes often present significant barriers to engaging older workers. Ageist stereotypes often perceive these workers to be less motivated and less flexible to adapt to changes (Gaillard & Desmotte, 2010; Hassell & Perrewe, 1995) but also less able to learn new skills (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001). Hence, older workers are often overlooked or excluded from key workplace decisions and relevant development opportunities (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001). But recent studies have demonstrated that older workers generally have more positive attitudes at work and are more loyal (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Consequently, managers should ensure that their promotion systems and recommendations for training or internal career opportunities are not biased towards younger colleagues but reflect the skill needs and ambitions of the individual subordinate. In addition, research also suggests that interactions between younger and older workers can help alleviate ageist stereotypes (Hassell & Perrewe, 1995) and that keeping important tacit knowledge in-house provides opportunities for mentoring and knowledge sharing and thus up skilling younger colleagues. Whereas losing experienced and skilled workers may be seen as a loss to the organisation. Another way to establish a positive engaging work environment is for managers to acknowledge and encourage subordinates to take ownership over their job satisfaction and career development to encourage greater performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011). One way of doing this is to encourage cognitive, physical or relational job crafting behaviours so as to enable employees to maintain their engagement and interest in their work. Clear communication and recognition of these efforts by the manager can also help spread from the individual to the team as proposed by Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory. This suggests that individuals learn new information and behaviours by observing and imitating others. Hence a supportive line manager and proactive employee are likely to encourage others to mimic this
if it is perceived as a positive and desirable state. A recent study suggests that this holds true in practice and job crafting behaviours can be extended towards the wider team (Bakker, Rodriguez-Munoz, & Vergel, 2016). Over time such job crafting behaviours will lead to a better-perceived fit with the environment and help instil greater levels of work engagement.

Findings also demonstrate important implications for organisations in driving perceptions of support, fairness and consistency to promote an engaged workforce. In order to demonstrate that employees are truly an organisation’s most valued asset – organisations should aim to encourage HQ LMX amongst managers and their subordinates. One innovative way would be to communicate the importance of maintaining a good quality working relationship by providing formal training for employees and managers alike. Some suggest that an explanation of the LMX process and outcomes helps to provide a better a foundation and likelihood of fostering supportive relationships at work (Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998). Research suggests that LMX relationships can improve when trained accordingly (Scandura & Graen, 1984).

Clarity over the direction of the organisation informs the resource and skills requirements of staff. Hence rigorous recruitment and selection procedures provide the first opportunity for organisations to manage expectations. Bal & Kooij (2011) suggest that individuals with high levels of work centrality are more likely to invest efforts in developing relational psychological contracts (i.e. HQ LMX). They also found that individuals in these relationships are more likely to feel satisfied with their job and more likely to feel engaged and express loyalty to the organisation (Raja et al., 2004). Accordingly, organisations need to realise that such relationships take a considerably amount of time and effort to establish and maintain and should therefore support these efforts. Employees are motivated when organisations are supportive and flexible to meet individual needs. Providing relevant opportunities for growth and skill development through training courses will help to instil a degree of job security for the immediate future in securing relevant career prospects within the organisation. A lack of such opportunities can lead to employees to reduce feelings of work centrality with a knock on effect to reduce satisfaction, engagement and loyalty. Such conditions create more transactional psychological contracts, which can be likened to LQ LMX.

Following this line of thought, organisations should support relevant training, coaching and counselling to managers in order to manage the repercussions of perceived breaches and disengaged staff. As line managers, particularly those in higher ranks, are perceived as agents of the organisation they can provide training to managers in providing adequate justifications and explanations for organisational decisions. This is particularly relevant for managing the impact of organisational change activities such as mergers and restructuring. Wherever possible, managers and the organisation should aim to include employees into their decision making process so as to feel valued for their inputs (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006). In addition appropriate channels for feedback and encouraging employee voice alongside relevant recognition initiatives such as on the spot rewards, announcements of key achievements and performance related pay can help
create an environment of trust (Handley et al., 2006). Moreover, day-to-day interactions with supportive, interested and approachable senior management staff are more likely to engender trust and high perceptions of POS. Similar to line managers, organisations should try to prevent negative emotional experiences (Dasborough, 2006) as trust is more difficult to restore once this has been significantly breached (Solinger et al., 2016).

In order to cultivate trust amongst employees, organisations should aim to provide clarity about the rules of acceptable behaviour (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). An environment, which preaches inclusiveness and equal opportunities to staff, is also key to encouraging trust (Whitener et al., 1998). In other words, ineffective communication has been found to create an environment of mistrust (Timmins, 2011) and may increase the perception of breaches. In the first instance, organisations should provide clarity and realistic expectations from the moment that employees join the organisation. Organisations should try to make use of human resource initiatives such as inductions to improve socialisation of newcomers. Social support from colleagues has been found to further enhance positive experiences at work and hence socialisation efforts can help employees establish a support network.

Organisational changes such as mergers, expansion and restructuring activities are often perceived as breaches by employees (Turnley & Feldman, 1998). Hence, changes in perceived promises around rewards and benefits such as training courses and career progression opportunities due to reduced budgets or headcounts should be clearly communicated to manage expectations (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999) and to prevent perceptions of breach. In order to build perceptions of justice among employees, organisations should be transparent and consistent in the criteria and administration of rewards, including one-off payments for significant contributions, as well as promotion opportunities and overall benefits packages. HR takes on a key role in keeping the relevant policies and guidance documents up to date and accessible to employees to ensure greater transparency. A sense of fair and consistent treatment encourages employees to trust the organisation (Whitener et al., 1998), which acts the foundation for later work engagement.

As discussed earlier, line managers share a responsibility to overcome ageist stereotypes against older workers and provide greater opportunity for visibility and engagement. Organisations can support these efforts through succession planning and knowledge sharing initiatives such as peer mentoring and coaching. However in order to stop older workers from disengaging with their work and withdrawing from the organisation by early retirement, organisations must ensure that HR practices are in place to reward older works for their general positive attitudes and loyalty (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Performance related pay or length of service awards could be one way of showing appreciation for this group of workers. Studies suggest that offering opportunities for older workers to develop and feel like a valuable resource is likely to reflect in their retirement intentions (Gaillard & Desmoule, 2010). Hence POS can provide ways for successful integration of older workers by wanting to be more motivated and learn new skills (Cheung & Wu, 2013). Interestingly, a lack of support towards older workers can
create the self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to older workers feeling less willing to participate (Buyens et al., 2009).

Lastly, studies suggest that promoting social networks may offer not only a useful way of buffering PCB but also contributes to perceptions of POS (Hayton, Carnabuci, & Eisenberger, 2012). Consequently, organisations should aim to provide opportunities for socials, peer mentoring and team working so as to foster more positive perceptions towards the organisation.

The primary practical implication of the present study is to ensure that employees trust the organisation and have a high quality relationship with their leader. Ensuring that relevant resources are in place to do their job is advantageous for organisations. The research also adds to the knowledge in how to best engage the workforce following recent organisational changes such as mergers, expansion and restructuring plans. The research clearly highlights the need for managers to acknowledge the social exchange dynamic and as such should aim to provide the relevant support and resources to encourage employees to invest relevant efforts into their work. The notion of trust and fairness was also very important in this relationship and as such it is something that greatly contributes to an engaging workforce that is more productive and innovative in improving existing processes and ways of working. This research thus adds value in understanding potential barriers to engagement and ways of managing the negative repercussions of perceived breaches.

5.7. Limitations of the Current Study

Although the findings of this research have provided a number of interesting insights and various contributions to knowledge, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this study so as to inform future studies. The first limitation is that this research adopted a cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal design. Despite collecting data over a period of several months, it remained cross-sectional in nature because interview participants were only interviewed at one point in time. Whilst observations at each site visit were also made, these were more informal in nature and the focus varied on different departments and interactions on each occasion. However, repeated and prolonged visits to each organisation also enabled a greater insight into underlying dynamics and politics and as such provided some additional strength beyond the normal cross-sectional research designs.

In contrast a longitudinal design involves either taking repeated measurements or monitoring the same people over time in order to assess changes in what is being observed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This is particularly relevant for in depth ethnographic studies or for more quantitative diary survey methods. It needs to be recognised that adopting a cross-sectional research design means that causality between sources of support PCB and work engagement cannot be established. Future research however may benefit from using quantitative longitudinal designs to track changes in the quality of these relationships or moreover use a number of methods to triangulate data within this approach.
It follows that the nature of this research only represents a snapshot in time and as such the conditions of research from then to now are likely to have changed and are likely to reveal a different emphasis on the identified predictors of work engagement. Following participation in the interview study, organisations were offered initial and detailed debrief reports detailing the current levels of engagement, key drivers and barriers as well as some recommendations in order to inform the future action plans. As a result of these reports, Organisation B has informed me that they have since put in place an in-house HR department to provide greater consistency across recruitment and employee relations matters, but also to initiate more transparent pay scales, training opportunities and address the lack or adequate staffing levels across departments. Similarly, Organisation C has integrated the reports of the results into their annual engagement plan and has since collocated into the same office space. Greater efforts to retain high performing employees have also been made by ensuring necessary training gets approved and attended, but also in providing ‘on the spot awards’ as a small token of appreciation of employee efforts. Although Organisation A amalgamated the findings of these reports with those findings of their in-house engagement survey, they have not fed back on any particular actions.

Another limitation refers to the generalisability of this research to other contexts (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Instead of pursuing generalisability, the focus of this study was rather on providing theoretical insights and development. In line with the social constructionist stance adopted and discussed in chapter 3, it becomes a question whether the sample is sufficiently diverse so as to allow transferability and applicability to other contexts (Patton, 2002). In line with this, it is thought that “all organisational cultures are unique, yet at the same time they share similar features” (Parker, 2000, p. 222). Whilst this study was conducted in two private sector and one third sector organisation, the charity’s focus on operational efficiency made it similar to those organisations in the private sector. Similarly, organisations which are recovering from recent organisational changes such as a merger, rapid expansion or restructuring activities may also be able to deduce relevant findings for their setting. The fact that this study was carried out in a Western national culture and UK context further limits the generalisability of this research. As such, future research efforts may also explore the focus of this study in non-Western settings to contribute to a broader understanding of the importance of support and variation in exchange content in relation to work engagement.

A further limitation is that the current study was conducted in organisational context following recent organisational change. Moreover, as participation was voluntary for organisations and their staff, the sample may be biased towards organisations that are more inclined to develop employee well-being as well as employees who are more engaged in their work. It could be that unsatisfied or less engaged employees are both less willing to express their opinion and participate in activities outside of their in-role performance. However, the fact that this research revealed mixed levels of engagement across the sample suggests that this was not an issue for the current study. Relatedly, although this was largely a self-selecting sample, guidelines for participation requested that individuals should have had the same line manager and role for a minimum of six months in order to recall relevant
experiences. Some suggest that retrospective self-reports of experiences are subject to recollection biases. Interviews act as:

“stories [that] open valuable windows into the emotional, political and symbolic lives of organisations, offering researchers a powerful instrument for carrying out research [and] gain access to deeper organizational realities” (Gabriel, 2000, p. 2)

Moreover, participants were assured that all data from this study would be anonymised and treated confidential so as to encourage honest responses (Hardy & Bryman, 2009; Patton, 2002). Whilst some criticise that using retrospective recollections can contain biases, allowing interviewees to reveal sufficient detail about their experience of work engagement and influencing factors meant that this was addressed.

5.8. Recommendations for Future Research

In the first instance, it would be interesting to investigate the linkages of this research in a non-Western context. In line with Hofstede’s (1983) framework of national culture, a collectivist and high power distance culture may provide an interesting avenue for future research. It raises the question whether the emphasis on hierarchy and obedience would allow for the same negative impact of psychological contract breach amongst employees and similarly whether line manager of support has the same potential buffering effect. This also applies to the job crafting techniques that employees use to maintain their engagement level. Research suggests that not only lower ranking employees but also flat hierarchy organisations are conducive to job crafting (Berg et al., 2010), hence it would be interesting to explore this in more hierarchical organisations.

Worrall et al. (2016) found that despite increased accountability of managerial and professional work, these employees now suffer from work intensification and lower levels of control over their work. As a result, they have noted lower levels of loyalty, morale and motivation. Accordingly adopting a longitudinal approach to capture the continued changing nature of knowledge work may reveal additional influencing factors of work engagement that have not yet emerged as part of this research.

As the majority of the sample were conceptualised as knowledge workers, the extent to which they may engage with their work and the reasons for their motivations are consistent with literature. Hence conditions of autonomy and a sense of challenge and growth were central in shaping positive attitudes at work. As this research was carried out in two private sector and one third sector organisation, it raises the question of whether the research findings would be significantly different in the context of public sector organisations.

Organisation C was restructured to form a shared service and matrix organisation, where employees had both a functional and a project line manager. However a more established matrix organisation may present more differentiated insights into the dynamics of multi-foci commitment and
how this impacts employees’ social exchange relationships and perception of breaches at work.

Previous research has indicated that younger employees tend to display higher levels of work centrality and are thus more willing to invest effort into their work (Bal & Kooij, 2011). Others however suggest that age and experience may have limited to no impact on work engagement (Mäkkikangas et al, 2016). Accordingly, given the importance that age and length of service have played in moderating the impact of PCB, future studies should investigate the notion of work centrality in relation to PCB.

This chapter has highlighted the importance of job crafting behaviours in maintaining engagement levels despite PCBs. However, some studies suggest that job crafting behaviours such as seeking challenges not only reduces boredom and increases work engagement, it can also encourage other job crafting behaviours (Harju et al., 2016). Whilst this was a cross-sectional study, future research should aim to test potential gain spirals among job crafting behaviours in response to PCB in more depth using a longitudinal design.

5.9. Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter has integrated the key findings and conclusions of this research in relation to current literature. The theoretical, empirical and practical implications have been discussed, whilst the limitations and directions for future research have also been put forward.

This study demonstrated that employees perceive breach as an imbalance to the social exchange and a threat to their existing job satisfaction and work engagement. They therefore aim to reciprocate unfavourable treatment by lowering their work engagement. The importance of LMX quality and the role of the line manager become key to facilitating positive influencing factors such as ability, motivation and opportunity to feel engaged at work. Findings support the buffering effect of HQ exchanges with regards to breaches. Overall, this study has demonstrated the value of the line manager in influencing employee attitudes and behaviours and has clarified that LMX functions as more important predictor of work engagement than POS. At the same time, variation in exchange content as characterised by the severity and cumulative effect of PCB also significantly impact the employees’ experience of engagement at work. Findings suggest that PCBs are an alternative explanation for why the experience of work engagement may fluctuate.

The key contributions of this thesis highlighted the importance of the line manager in facilitating work engagement. This thesis is the first research to highlight the importance of the line manager in first facilitating work engagement amongst employees and second in buffering the potential negative impact of breaches regardless of the source of breach. This is the first study to investigate both LMX and POS as distant predictors of work engagement via the perception of breach. Exchange content is characterised by not only providing support, but by involving employees in decision making
and lending them a voice and sense of self-worth. The findings of the thesis indicated that employees reciprocated favourable treatment with greater job satisfaction, work engagement, creativity/innovation and well-being. Moreover, this study found that employees differentiate exchange content from their line manager and exchange content received from the organisation. As such, higher management and HR delivered organisational exchange content, which revolved around having the right skills set and job security. Therefore engaged employees reciprocated by working harder, often also demonstrating higher levels of commitment to the organisation. Under conditions of HQ LMX, employees felt greater autonomy and ownership over their work leading to more job crafting and creation of a better person-job fit. Job crafting acted as a key way in which employees alleviated the impacts on work engagement of breaches from both LMX and POS, suggesting gain spiral.

Researchers have long argued that the role of the line manager is central to the ways employees experience work. This thesis has supported and extended that body of work in meaningful ways. Clearly, future academic work should explore these issues further and future policies of organisations should reflect the central importance of line managers in delivering social exchange content in pursuit of organisational objectives.
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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

First of all thank you again for offering to help and giving your permission to be recorded. Today I will be asking you some questions as part of my PhD research at the University of Bath.

I have worked within the HR field for a number of UK companies and that is one of the reasons I am interested in researching leadership by line managers and employee engagement. The questions that I ask will revolve around your experiences of your work. If you don’t feel comfortable answering certain questions, you don’t need to do so and we can also stop the tape recorder.

- Do you have any questions before we go ahead with the interview?
- Can you very briefly tell me what your current role and responsibilities are?
- How long have you worked here [Insert Company Name]?
  - How long have you been in the same profession?
- Would you mind if I also asked you about your age for research purposes?
- Tick Gender:
  [ ] Female  [ ] Male

Section 1: Understanding Engagement

- In general, how do you feel at work?
  - Do you look forward to going to work in the morning?
  - Do you think you are actively involved with your work?
  - Do you feel energetic when at work?
- What would you say motivates you at work?
  - Do you have any examples?
  (Ex. Work climate, support network, ownership, autonomy, sense of accomplishment)
- Choosing between your job, line manager, coworkers, or family & friends which one acts as the key source of motivation for you?
  - For instance, to what extent do your colleagues influence how you feel at work?
  - Also, what role does your line manager play in your motivation at work?
- In your own words, what does being engaged at work mean to you?
  - Do you feel like time flies by at work?
    - Do you find the work that you do interesting?
  - Is your work meaningful and purposeful?
    - Can you identify yourself with your work?
  - Are you dedicated to your work?
• Can you describe a situation where you have felt engaged with your work?
  o (Ex. Have you worked on a project or task that you felt really immersed with? Did you find it satisfying and interesting to work on?)
  o What happened?
  o How did it make you feel?
• How important is being engaged with your work to you?
  o … And to your line manager?
  o … And to [Insert Company Name]?
• Can you also think of a time when you have felt disengaged with your work?
  o Can you recall why you felt that way?
  o Have you felt engaged with your work since this time?
  o If so, what helped you?
  o If not, what do you think needs to change?

Section 2: Perceptions of Line Manager & Impact on Engagement

• What does a good working relationship look like to you?
  o Why do you think that is?
• What do you think is the most effective way in which line managers can engage their staff?
  o Which are the most important factors to you?
  o Why?
  o (Ex. Creating trust, employee voice, involvement, accountability, clear communication, integrity, clear performance standards)
• How long have you had your current line manager?
• How would you describe your relationship with your current line manager?
  o What is working well?
  o What is not working so well?
  o How does this compare to others in a similar role or in your team?
• What expectations did you have of your working relationship when you first started?
  o And has that changed over time?
  o Did you experience this as a positive or negative change?
  o Has your working relationship developed as you expected or hoped?
  o Why/Why not?
• How important is it for you to receive support from your current line manager?
  o In what way do or don’t they support you?
  o Do you feel that the level of guidance and support from your manager is appropriate to do your job well?
  o Does the level of line manager support impact on how engaged you are with your work?
  o Why/Why not?
• What challenges have you experienced in terms of working with your
line manager?
  o How did you resolve the situation?
  o Is there mutual trust, respect, obligation & open communication?
  o (Ex. Have you ever disagreed or fallen out with your line manager? How did that make you feel?)
• Think about a time when you felt that your current line manager broke perceived expectations or promises between you.
  o What happened?
  o Did this have a lasting impression on you?
  o (Ex. Have you ever been overlooked for a promotion that you felt you deserved?)
  o (Ex. Do you trust your line manager? Have they done anything to lose that trust from you?)
  o (Ex. Well, let’s imagine your line manager did change their behaviour in a positive way. How would that make you feel?)
  o To what extent did this impact your job satisfaction?
  o Did this influence your engagement with your work?
  o Do you think your line manager was aware of how you felt?
• Do you think both you & your line manager perceive expectations and promises in the same way?
  o Do you differentiate between minor and major breaches?
  o (Ex. Well, let’s imagine you and your line manager did perceive things in a similar way. How would that make you feel?)
  o What does a major breach look like to you? Examples?
  o Do you react differently depending on the severity of the breach?
• Can you describe a less severe situation where your current line manager breached perceived expectations or promises?
  o How did you react?
  o What were the consequences? (Loss of trust, active disengagement from work)
• Can you tell me about your relationship with your previous line manager?
  o How long ago was this?
  o How long for?
  o How does it compare to the current situation?

Section 3: Perceptions of Organisational Support

• What do you believe contributes to a good working atmosphere?
(Ex. Work climate, interest & pride in work, colleagues, line manager, salary & benefits, training & career opportunities)

• Do you feel satisfied with [Insert Company Name]?
  o Has this changed over time?
  o Why/Why not?
  o In what way do you feel obliged to your employer?
• Do you think [Insert Company Name] supports you?
  o What does this mean to you?
• Are you happy with the training, career opportunities as well as pay
and benefits they provide?
  - How could they support you more?
  - How would you feel if they listened to your feedback and implemented your suggestions at work?
  - On the contrary how would you feel if no improvements were made, would you still be satisfied and engaged with your work?

• Looking back at your recruitment and selection, do you remember this as shaping your expectations for what to expect once at work? [Depends on tenure]
  - Have they lived up to your expectations?

• Does [Insert Company Name] appreciate the work that you do?
  - How do they show this?
  - What types of recognition do you expect to receive?
  - How does this make you feel at work? (Job satisfaction, engagement?)
  - How would you feel if your employer breached your perceived expectations?

• Who do you turn to for help?
  - What impact does this have on your job satisfaction?
  - Does your support network also influence how engaged you are with your work?

• What would [Insert Company Name] have to do for you to feel more engaged with your work?
  - Do you think others would feel the same way?

• What do you think are the key obstacles that organisations face in engaging staff?
  - How can they overcome these obstacles?

(Ex. Power dynamics, politics, financial situation)

Closing Statement

• Do you have any questions or comments that you wish to add?

Again, thank you for your time today. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or additional comments that you wish to add at a later stage.

* Please note that the interviews will be semi-structured in nature and as such the above will only act as a guide for the interview and will be subject to the direction that the participant wishes to pursue. All interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and made anonymous so as not to reveal the identity of the individual participant or the organisation.
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title:
Exploring the impact of leadership on employee engagement

About the Project:
These interviews are part of my PhD at the University of Bath. As such, I am looking to investigate how leadership by line managers and organisational support impacts employee engagement levels in a number of UK organisations. The questions that I ask will revolve around individual experiences of work. This research will add to the small yet growing body of literature in this field, and should provide practical insights that will inform future engagement initiatives.

Confidentiality
I am aware that all data from this study will be treated with confidence and stored securely and in line with the Data Protection Act.

Anonymity
I understand that the interviews will be recorded, transcribed and made anonymous so as not to reveal my or my organisation’s identity. I am aware that interview extracts will be used as part of the researcher’s PhD and subsequent publications or conferences.

Consent
By signing this document, I confirm that I have read and understood the above information and hereby agree to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

Participant Name: .................................................................
Participant Signature: .............................................................
Date: ....................................................................................
Researcher Signature: .........................................................
Date: ....................................................................................

Contact Details:
If you have any questions regarding this study or your participation in this research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the below details:

Melissa K. Langenhan  
Doctoral Researcher  
School of Management  
University of Bath  
E: …
APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH BRIEF

Research Title: “Exploring the impact of leadership on employee engagement”

My PhD research at the University of Bath investigates how leadership by line managers drives employee engagement in UK based organisations. I am looking to find organisations that are willing to participate in this research, by allowing me to interview some of their employees about their perceptions of how line managers and organisational support influences employee engagement levels at work.

Underpinning this research is the idea that whilst line managers are not the only aspect influencing engagement, they play a pivotal role in shaping employees’ experiences at work. They have the potential to create the conditions under which engagement can thrive, thus also creating benefits for the organisation. Understanding how the quality of leadership drives work engagement brings us one step closer to establishing a clear link between employee motivations to behave in ways that enhance organisational performance. This research will add to the small yet growing body of literature in this field, and should provide practical insights that will inform future engagement interventions.

In addition to my first class degree BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management from the University of Gloucestershire and distinction level MSc in Management Psychology from the University of Nottingham, I have worked in this field for Endsleigh Insurance Services, AkzoNobel, Gallagher Heath Insurance Brokerage and Capital Insight HR & Management Consultancy. As such, my motivation for my PhD research at the University of Bath is grounded in both my personal experience but also in a drive to provide greater insights into the complexities of the workplace.

What is Required:

- Looking for 15-20 UK based professionals
- Individuals who have not changed job or line manager in the last 6 months or longer
- Approximately 45-60 minutes per interview.

About the Interviews:

- The interviews will consist of a mix of previously prepared, open as well as closed questions. Responses will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- Interviews can be conducted in person, over the telephone or online via Skype in order to accommodate preferences and availability.
- A consent form, whereby participants agree to take part, will be signed prior to interviews.

Benefits of Participation:
• Overall results about my research can be shared with the organisation and discussed with the researcher. This will provide insights into the current state of engagement and leadership that can inform future actions.
• Transcripts and other data will be made anonymous to ensure confidentiality for participants as well as the organisation.

Timescales:

• The interviews will take place ideally from […]
• Preliminary results will be circulated and followed up by a final report of results and recommendations
APPENDIX 4: CALL FOR PARTICIPATION POSTER

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
What does it mean to you?

Call for Interview Participants:

This research is part of my PhD at the University of Bath and explores how leadership by line management and organisational support influence employee engagement.

- What would you say motivates you at work?
- What role do your colleagues or line manager play in your motivation?
- What are the key barriers to engaging staff? What improvements could be made?

If you have had the same line manager & job for 6 months or longer, come have your say in a 45 minute interview. All data will be anonymised and treated confidential.

Please contact me to participate:
Melissa K. Langenhan
Doctoral Researcher
E: m.l.langenhan@bath.ac.uk
[Organisation A, P8]

[START OF RECORDING]

Researcher: Do you have any questions before we start?

Participant: I don’t think so.

Great, let’s get started then. So the way this works is I will move from general to more specific questions about your work.

Can you very briefly tell me a little bit about your current role and responsibilities at this organisation?

[Research]

How long have you worked at [this organisation]?

Almost [3-5 years]

Do you mind if I ask your age for research purposes?

[20-29 years]

So let’s move on to the employee engagement questions. We start quite general and then work our way through to different scenarios and examples. In general, how do you feel at work?

Naturally motivated, partly because of the work. Actually it is two things, the work is really interesting and you do feel like you can make a difference. We are one step back, so we are not working on the ground but we do see that a lot of what we do does help. It is a couple of stages removed but you can see the contribution we are making and that is important to know that we are doing this for something, the greater public good. So that is what gets me out of bed actually, I get quite inspired by that. Because all of my other mates, I call them sell outs, they work in the private sector. There is the nature of the job, the topic is interesting and the nature of the impact that we have makes it worthwhile. The people that I work with that are also really important to me, I am really lucky because the team are a really nice bunch. I feel as enthusiastic as they are. I have more energy now at work, whereas the PhD did exhaust me at the end.

What motivates you at work? Or perhaps what is your biggest motivator?

Good question, difficult question. My biggest motivator, it is going to have to be a selfish one and that would be my career progression. At the end of the day, it is about my job and feeling good about my contribution and myself. A by-product of that is that yes hopefully my job helps to do some good and makes a difference to people, but actually I want to further myself and challenge myself so that I can get to the next level whatever that might be.
and that probably drives me more than anything. I want to think that I am doing well, did well in my performance review, next step – I always think that I need something bigger and better. I can’t sit still for very long. I need to feel like I am challenging myself.

In your own words, what does being engaged at work mean to you?

So involving and listening to the voices of people who work in an organisation. I think involvement is essential. Engagement then needs to start with the actual operation of the organisation at the highest level, if you have got strategic thinking and goal setting at the start, engage employees at all levels in that so that naturally they might feel more empowered and bought into and therefore enthused by the workings of the organisation.

How would you describe someone who is particularly engaged with their work? How would that manifest itself?

I think you can see in terms of the productivity when people are more engaged. So I think both the quality of work and also the productivity, these are slightly different things but people are producing work that is on the brief. If you are engaged with the work from the start then you are very clear about the aims and purpose of it. So if you engage somebody, you are not preaching to them as a manager, you need to allow them to feed into the work. Someone is then often more able to work quickly because they feel involved and interested in the work. I think in terms of what you can see, you can measure engagement based on how people are behaving and performing. I think all different personality types can be engaged, but you need to approach different people in different ways. So you get to know the people that you work with and you know what makes them tick. It is funny, because I have three people in my team and they are all completely different. Different approaches to different people.

Do you have a sense of meaning or purpose in your work?

I think so. There are some situations where you get told to do something and then you may produce it because you have to, but most of the things we do we are proactive about it. So if we are not engaged, it is our problem because we should set ourselves a task that we can engage with. Having that autonomy and being able to make choices about your work is a really big part of it. Sometimes it just a means to an end and you think the department will look good if we do this, so you are engaged in that respect, but you are not necessarily engaged in believing that the work is relevant or useful, it is for a different purpose. You have to have some justifications for doing it and more often than not it is the ramifications of not doing it that drives such work. Again, I am engaged.

Can you describe a situation where you felt particularly engaged with your work?

That is a nice question, I can think of quite a few examples. So we did a really big piece of work called [...] and what we tried to do was review the [...] and see if it was fit for purpose. We had so many reasons for doing it so we knew that it was very unlikely that the work would be unsuccessful unless
we messed it up. I was working in a team, so it wasn't just me. So we did this huge technical report and it took us about two months and really it was four months work in two. So that in itself was quite gratifying so we were really pleased that we turned it around quite quickly. What is key in making sure that it is going to be a relevant and useful piece of work, is that you consult people widely. The problem with that of course is that you then have too many cooks for the broth, so many people’s views. So it is trying to please all the different stakeholders and we would never look to be economical with the truth but we then just wouldn't say something if we couldn't say it and anything we could say we would say accurately. The best thing about it was because we had so many different reasons for doing it, [...] there is not enough money for social care, give us more money basically and we made that argument very loudly. We managed to influence part of the [...] so it was a really big piece of work and it had great publicity, the media work was great.

**How did it make you feel to be a part of that?**

Purpose, sense of purpose, achievement. It is nice to do a long piece of work, I still compare this to my PhD but two months vs. four years of work and similar levels of impact? Come on. Quite satisfying and it has given me so much and opened so many doors. I did my first sort of radio work as well and had a nice experience. I think so, the way I tend to feel about stuff is so before I did it I would have said if I achieved that I would be so proud, so I achieved it and I felt proud, but I move the goal posts so quickly that I look forward to the next challenge. So I never sit back and pat myself on the shoulders saying well done, so I then say to myself yeah you should have done that. Stop basking in your glory.

**How important is being engaged at work to you?**

I think it is pretty fundamental, I think I need to be engaged with my work. I don't know, I have got patience to withstand something for a while but sometimes if I don't believe in something I don't know how long I can do it. I would worry about the longevity of my commitment here if I wasn't enthused and engaged, I would then probably be more distracted and looking to do something else. I know that being here right now is good for me in terms of my career path. I would say it is really important that I am engaged. A lot of that is how I look to people who I think have got more experience than I have, so my line manager and other colleagues seem engaged with their work and that makes me feel engaged, so it rubs off. So it is leading by example, I think it must be that. That spurns me on. I think if something doesn't naturally engage me, I think there might be something wrong with the work I am seeing it and I will look to my colleagues and think I am not seeing it right and I then say it is engaging. Other times there is also work that is not as engaging, like the admin, financial and legal side of that stuff is not particularly thrilling.

**Is employee engagement important to your line manager?**

As a military man, he believes in no ‘I’ in “Team’ he is all about team work and engaging all of us. He doesn't try to have control, he involves us a lot in decision making. I think the way he engages me has made me think about how I engage my team. I have learned a lot from him, he is also a lot about
order as well. He makes sure that he is naturally engaging us, he needs to make sure that the door for that is open and he has as much responsibility for that as we do. I think it is kind of a half way house in those respects. I think it is give and take with me. He is very good at setting the line and rules, we know what is right and what is wrong. I think he is very keen on happy productive staff.

Are you saying that you feel empowered by your line manager?

Yes I do and because his work is a lot more external than mine. My line manager does a lot, which means that he is not always here. Because he is not here I experience quite a lot, very quickly. I experience more than maybe I should in my job, which means I get a richer, steeper learning curve admittedly because he is not here. We have had that conversation, it is not micro management, I have colleagues to lean on and even though he is there he is not always going to be physically there. He is approachable, he says you know off you go, but if anything is going wrong let me know before I find out otherwise. He doesn't want any bad surprises.

I started my first role as [...] and I was only in post for about a year and three months and then my then boss left and I had an opportunity to do his job. It was interesting because at the time I was doing quite well in my role and I felt pretty happy, I asked my colleagues if I should go for this and they said you know it is a bit soon but give it a try. So I decided maybe I wont go for it, so I didn't go for the internal process and then I spoke to someone else and they said why aren't you going for it, why am I not ambitious enough and going for this role? So I then had to battle with external candidates, which worked well for me because I felt that I earned the role when I got it and the other colleagues were then also more likely to believe in me. Then my staff who are quite a bit older than me and for whom age could have been an issue, then thought actually he didn't just get it, he earned it. Age isn't everything, but experience is quite important. I then went into the role with very little experience and it was quite an abrupt learning curve, without that support from the manager, even my colleagues acted as informal managers or my support network, so they are there whenever I need them and I am very grateful to them actually. I think I would have fallen through some cracks otherwise but they tapered them.

On that note, can you think of a time when you have felt disengaged with your work?

Yes I can. There is quite a recent example; there haven’t been too many instances. I mean most of the time, it is a mostly positive experience but there is always the odd thing here or there. I was working on a project with [...] division, they speak a different language to us and it is very new for us to work with them and them to work with us. It is a learning experience so there are lots of hurdles and you learn from them. I think it is the way they think and what they want from it. So starting on this project, I didn't feel like I quite knew what the client wanted from the work and I felt that the person who was commissioning the work, was changing the brief. Bless her, she was changing it a couple of times but implied that that is how it was in the first place, so it made us look like we were doing things that weren’t what she
wanted when things were moved continuously. It was quite a tricky process and relationship and it got quite frustrating because we were producing stuff and this is what they need and I thought they needed, but they then changed their mind and I think a bit of forgetfulness was coming in. The person had a lot of time for the job initially but then she withdrew from it, she then put other people in charge of it from her end and it turned into Chinese whispers. She was wanting something and she wasn't telling her staff correctly, so miscommunication, also the research project is inherently a really challenging one, quite niche, quite new, but difficult to work as well. You know you are resilient after a couple of set backs, but there were quite a few and I wouldn't say I put the foot off the gas, but I was quite unusual for me I took a step back and almost said ok you guys figure out what you want and then we will come in later. I was quite clear in why I said I was taking a step back. So maybe 10% of it was I am giving up on this now, but 90% was ok the best way to succeed is for you to know what you want and need and then come back to us. I felt less engaged with the project at that point, but I am hoping it made sense because it will come back to me. So let’s see how they reconfigured.

**How did you feel when you had to take a step back from your work?**

I am always one to blame myself first off, I needed to go through it a few times to realise it wasn’t me or my team. Initially I felt like I failed so I felt disappointed, because in a way I was disappointed with how things have gone so far but I do also know that there is potential to turn it around. Me disengaging is unusual, so for me to think that a problem can be resolved without me is unusual. So I have had to learn to step away, it will be fine.

**What does a good working relationship between a line manager and employee look like to you?**

I would say, one that is open, so that responsibilities are open and set out from the start. So clarity in the role and the purpose of the relationship as well, what does each person bring or contribute to that relationship and there is mutual respect but also a knowledge of boundaries. Open communication is probably one of the most important things, there can be good and bad and if it is bad be diplomatic if possible, because some people take things badly, others take it well.

**Ok and how can line managers best engage their staff?**

Open communication is in there, but it might be surpassed by other things actually. No maybe still communication is pretty key. I think open but also constant communication, to look like you are paying attention to somebody and something. To engage somebody you need to be interested in what they are doing and who they are. Value somebody and let them know, because that engages them with your relationship but also with the work itself. Let them know about the impact and quality of the work they do. You have got to give people attention.

**How long have you had your current line manager?**

[1-2 years]
What works well in your working relationship with your line manager?

Easy going, he values and believes in me. My line manager truly had a very important say in recruiting me and I don't forget the fact that he initially said that I might not have enough experience, I didn't take that personally. I have proved myself and we have a very good personal relationship, we just enjoy each other's company. I think we can have a better working relationship, but I don't know how important that is because I have so much autonomy that he is almost a pastoral support for me, a general overseer from the distance. Sometimes a bit more strategic direction would be useful for the whole department, but then this gives me the chance to wrangle the responsibility off of him and have that opportunity to do that myself. If I ever wanted a position like his or at that level, I have actually had a bit of sneaky experience without putting it down officially in my role description.

If you had to summarise what is going well and what is not going so well, what would that look like?

So going well, I like that he can see what I am doing, the effect it is having and how he is quick to tell me when things are going well and he will let me know and encourage me that whatever I am doing is right and encourage me to keep doing it. I am pretty sure that if things were bad that he would also let me know, because he hasn't I don't know what that means. Overall, he is pretty fair and there have been very few things, so I don't ever think that he would hide things or not tell me stuff. In terms of being very open, encouraging and very good. There are a lot of good things and he makes me feel, he gives me good support. Even though he is not always there, the phone call is there if I need it. The heavy hitters, he will always come in if it is needed. So he will represent my interest and concerns and he will say to me if you think so, then I will go and say it for you. It is conducive to a good open and honest working relationship, whenever I have an issue I find my line manager very approachable.

Going badly, I would say in some ways we would benefit from him being around a little bit more. He has competing priorities, so I understand that that happens. In terms of the leadership it would be great if he was slightly louder with we need to go into this direction or that direction, but I think I can construe that as meaning I trust you to go in the right direction and let me know. The relationship can sometimes be too nice and we lose out on the more serious conversations about work. Hence we could probably talk about work a bit more on a one-to-one basis. I don’t know how much of a bad thing that is because I think it is made up for by other members of staff. If I was assessing our relationship in isolation, we could both look to engage each other a little more in work. But overall it is a predominantly positive relationship.

Do others in the team feel the same way about your line manager?

Probably not to the same degree, I think it is quite unique to us. I am not sure what it is down to, maybe because I am quite new to the role and probably because I am quite a bit younger as well so that could impact on that. So the relationship he holds with other members of staff is more on an equal footing, the conversation is more formal or work focused and therefore it dictates how
productive you feel. My relationship is productive in a different way to how theirs is. I think ours is unique.

What expectations did you have of your working relationship when you started working with your current line manager?

I had some expectations because when I started, my current line manager was my bosses boss at the time. I got to know him and I saw the way he managed others, so rather than coming in afresh and my current line manager managing me right away, I knew a little bit about him before. So I knew about his management style also through what my boss was telling me at the time, so my expectation was that he was not hot on micro management because he is often externally base but when things happen he would always be there to back you up. And that has certainly been the case when he became my current line manager, I have had some advice from him and he has wanted me to get the experience where I can and on occasion if it needed his support, he was dependable and available.

Has that since changed over time?

I would say it has been quite consistent, from what I expected he behaved in line with that. The changes are positive, because over time he has increased his belief in me whereas before he was optimistic but he hired me on the basis on potential. His confidence is reflected in the nature of our relationship, he doesn't feel the need to talk about work all that much because he knows it is in hand.

How important is it for you to receive support from your current line manager?

Oh yes, very important. It is not on a day-to-day but it is more a knowing he is there when needed. You need your line manager when things are going wrong, so I know I could grab him to be there and I think that he is a good feedback mechanism from personal performance point of view and the impact of our department across the organisation. I am quite enthused by making a difference and if we hear that we are doing something that is making that difference it motivates you to keep doing what you are doing.

In what way do you feel supported by your line manager?

I am thinking of a couple of instances where I have needed my line manager’s support. One time we were dealing with a local […] and we had made a half promise that a selection of these branches would get a training package that we had just started developing. We tried to get some interest so who would like to receive this pilot training package, but we also knew that because of limited resources not everyone who is interested would get a space on the training. We made the point quite clearly and unfortunately this local branch wasn’t selected and the [person] took it quite badly and I gave my line manager the heads up about it, saying it could be quite serious. My line manager was very quick to say ok firstly, what would you do? What have you thought about doing? So rather than taking control of the situation, he was interested in hearing about my line of thinking about how I would go about this situation. So I would be quite diplomatic and say that we had made
this clear from the beginning, but we will keep you in the loop for further support offers for after the pilot. So my line manager then said, great that is what I would do, go off and do it, you have got my backing. If he reacts badly, then sign post the [person] to me. So he didn't tell me what to do, he listened to me, agreed that my approach was sensible and then said if all else fails, I am here. My line manager is assertive and fills me with confidence that he will support me if things go wrong, if you really need him. Such a support network is nice to have.

**Ok great. In what way does that kind of support from your line manager impact how you feel at work?**

I don’t think I could behave with such confidence if I didn't have my line manager. There are moments where I wouldn't feel comfortable, so risk taking comes into our work because we are trying to be new and adventurous and sometimes we are trailblazing something that we are doing. But you need the backing of somebody else of authority to do that and because he is there, I do feel comfortable taking risks. Risk taking at work, I think tends to yield better results at work and I am more engaged because I think it is more successful and there is more coming out of it. With that in mind, I feel that my line manager’s support has a direct impact on how engaged I am with my work. I can't complain, he is very good.

**What kind of challenges have you experienced in working with your line manager?**

Not really, it is just down to when my line manager is not about and it would be useful to have his input. Like I said, he is always there when I need him but he is not just there so I can’t turn to him because he has got so many commitments outside of the building. So it does mean that the department sometimes misses his leadership or representation in senior management meetings within the organisation, so that our department can feel missed out. We need a system where one of our managers sits in those meetings to represent us whilst he is away, so that we can also have our say. So that is a bit of a challenge when your boss is so busy, you miss his presence physically. But we speak about that quite openly and he knows that. So we are discussing substitutes for him in certain situations.

**Have you ever disagreed or fallen out with your line manager?**

No, not yet. I am sure one day, but fingers crossed hopefully not.

**Do you feel in any way obliged to your line manager, because you are receiving so much support and flexibility from him?**

Yes I do. I think naturally one does because of the line manager responsibility and how you are asked to answer to him in that respect, but I would also like to reciprocate that wherever possible because of that trust and support that he has given me. It is something about not wanting to let him down, because some people take advantage of trust like that but personally I am not used to being micro managed and I wouldn’t want him to start doing that and I think he would do it if he felt there was a need to do it, if we broke that trust for whatever reason. I feel obliged but also compelled to
continue the way that we are really for that reason. So I am happy with the way things are and I wouldn't want things to change.

**Do you and your line manager see eye to eye in terms of your expectations of one another?**

Yes, I would say so because our relationship is open enough, so if there was a change in expectations we would probably let the others know in our way. Currently expectations are pretty clear from both sides and I just had my performance review so I know what he expects. Going forward we have already talked about next year and there are a couple of things he wants me to start doing. Because he is so approachable that makes it easier for me to let him know quite openly what I expect of him in terms of support, but also how we work together going forward.

**Has there ever been a time where you felt that your current line manager broke perceived expectations or promises between you two?**

No.

**So you have never been overlooked for a promotion that you felt you deserved or things like that?**

No, just slightly I was looking for him to apply more confidence in me applying for this role than he was showing at the time. But I wouldn't have said that he should have believed more in me because it was so much of a long punt for him in the organisation. He didn't know that I was going to deliver, so there is potential and there is risk in potential. I am not disappointed in him, it was just a reminder to me that what I was going for was quite ambitious at the time, but I wouldn't say it was fairly placed on his part. If anything it was a bit of honesty that I needed at the time.

**Have you experienced a breach with a previous line manager? Where something was agreed or promised and they let you down in some way?**

Yes all the time.

**In what way?**

I think the relationship was too competitive, he was close to me in age and even though he had hired me in the first place, I don't think he knew what he let himself in for. I don't think he knew how he was going to react or behave following that, there were a lot of instances where I didn't feel that support or trust that I get now. I think he saw me as a threat to his position, where I wasn't at the time, I was trying to learn from him where possible. It was only because he left that I was able to take his position up. There were expectations that he was clear on what he wanted, but I would say he was and he didn't lead the way or particularly supportive either. So in everything he was the complete opposite of my current line manager but I learned a lot, I learned how not to manage from him. You can learn from bad experiences just as much as good ones.
How did it make you feel at the time? How did you respond?

I tried to respond positively, I was quite neutral. I think now I probably would have given him a harder time because I have got more experience. I just went along with it at the time. I did see the reactions of the other colleagues in my team who were also managed by him and they didn't warm up to him either, so it wasn't just me that felt that way, which made me feel better about how I was feeling. We were more similar in age as well so I felt that had an impact.

Did this lack of support and getting along with your line manager have an impact on how satisfied you were with your job at the time?

Looking back it did, it wasn't as enjoyable as it could have been and I didn't feel like I had a supportive environment where I could learn the way that I wanted to. But on the plus side, because there wasn't all that much support I took on quite a few experiences quite quickly as well, so I was getting things that I maybe wouldn't have been allowed to do if he was a bit more involved. I know I can tell when I compare that situation to now, where I enjoy the role.

Do you think it would have influenced how engaged you were with your work at the time?

So I think it would have, because I already wasn't enjoying my work as much as I am now. So absolutely, I was quite new and enthusiastic but I wasn't comfortable, therefore confident and therefore not that enthused. It wanes off after a while.

Was your previous line manager aware of how you felt at the time?

Maybe, but maybe he was misreading some of the signals as well. But it wasn't communicated, so one of the problems was communication. If there were any issues, they were very rarely spoken about.

How did this impact you, was it just minor instances or more major breaches of trust?

No it had been about a year and a few months, so it wasn't long enough. Things were probably getting better over time because I was becoming more confident in the role, so he had less reasons to be appear less supportive. I think in terms of competition I think that might have increased because he may have noticed my growing confidence and not seen that as a positive thing. It wasn't a major issue. In general it was just a personality thing but not a significant enough problem.

Ok let's move onto the wider organisational questions. Again we start off quite general. What do you believe contributes to a good working atmosphere?

Clear leadership and direction from directors all the way down to senior management, so that means that everybody in the team is aware and bought into the direction that the charity is moving in for that year. And also they know what implication that has for individual teams and departments. You
have got people working together on common aims, so you are probably quite engaged and you are more likely to enjoy your work and if you are enjoying your work, the work atmosphere tends to be quite a bit better across the team. Directors and management need to listen to all staff across all levels, so that you feel like you have a say and aren't seen as too small or insignificant. A good work atmosphere is quite dependent on who is in your team and who you work with. You need to employ the right people, you don't want people who are too withdrawn and too involved with their work, you want some team workers. You don't want disruptive people either. I would say opportunities to have down time with the team is also important so social occasions, if you like who you work with it helps. Work atmosphere depends on the dynamics between teams.

Do you feel satisfied with [this organisation]?

I do very much so, from a personal perspective the nature of the work is easy to talk about to other people and you feel that you are making a difference. From a career perspective, I am really happy with how things are going because they are moving fairly quickly.

Do you feel supported by [this organisation] and if so, in what way?

Certainly in terms of the way I am managed, also I feel like what I am aiming to do myself beyond this organisation, I let people know about that but people are also supportive of that. The directors know what I want to get out of the role and what I probably want to do next and they are very supportive of that, allowing me to continue to grow and keep doors open within this organisation and maybe outside of this as well.

Are you satisfied with the pay and benefits at [this organisation]?

Yes they are along the lines of what I expect. In terms of the responsibility I have, I would get paid more in the other sectors but you have to accept it is a different sector and I am working for a charity. I am not disappointed, but I could always do with a bit more. If I could amend my job description to reflect all my current responsibilities, then I could probably ask for a bit more and my line manager would be quite supportive of that.

In terms of career development and learning development as well, we are always encouraged to do a bit extra. So there is always time, money and allowances there to do it. So they are very good about it.

Does [this organisation] appreciate the work that you do?

Yes I would say so. The department itself, so on an individual level definitely, but in terms of what our department does but we are producing research to inform thinking and if you do that then often the outputs is what people noticed as opposed to that initial blue skies brainstorming. That can get lost, the credit tends to get to the department who is delivering it so often the hands on division are not as involved in producing things the same way, so we do get missed out of the credit line for that but we are kind of used to it. It is not too much of a problem.
We are not very good at blowing our own trumpet so we need to do that a bit more, we also need to have better representation in meetings and take opportunities to showcase our work better. So it is our fault as well so I would hope in doing that, that we would get more recognition or we would find out if we are ignored. It is not that our work isn't respected or recognised but I feel that people don't like to give us the credit.

Does that influence your engagement or job satisfaction?

It makes me more determined to be honest, it does influence my engagement and maybe makes me work harder to make sure that we do get more recognition. To be honest, that is not the primary aim. At the end of the day we do what we do to improve the services and influencing work for other people.

Who do you turn to for help?

It would be my line manager for that, he is the person that I am supposed to but also we get along well. If I didn't feel like I could talk to him then I would go to somebody else, but he is both of those things.

You mentioned your colleagues as acting as an additional support network, would you also seek their advice too?

Yes I do look to one or two of them because I have got quite close relationships with them. It is funny, it sounds corny. There are some things that I would approach some people for and others for other things, so they all have their use so to speak both in a work and non-work sense.

We are almost finished, just the last two questions. What can [this organisation] do to make you feel more engaged with your work?

I would say two things, from a personal and career point of view I would like to think if there are any further opportunities out there for me I would hope that I would be encouraged towards them rather than finding them out myself. I would like to think that I am connected with opportunities or connected to certain areas because they believed in me, so more of that would be helpful. Then in terms of what we our doing we are so disconnected from front line services, it would be nice to have more feedback on that evidence that we produced and what it was used for. We get to hear about that a bit more so that we know what we are doing has a real impact. So more transparency where our work is being used, so greater visibility.

What do you think are the key obstacles that organisations face in engaging staff?

Good question. The larger the organisation, the bigger the challenges are in engaging staff. So I think quality relationships with individual members of staff and making them feel listened to and wanted and therefor engaging them is difficult as the organisation grows bigger, you lose touch. [This organisation] is quite a large size organisation so what that needs is very good lines of senior and middle management and team leadership where there are lots of avenues for communication both upwards and downwards.
So your views are considered important and listened to. In the third sector, it is difficult. If you are doing things that are not financially driven, but more for altruistic purposes, then it is probably easier to motivate staff in that respect. But then again private sector are completely different and tie things to incentives that dwarf what the third sector can.

Fantastic that is it. Do you have any other questions or comments?

No, I just hope that this was useful to you.

Thank you very much for your time. It was lovely to meet you.

You too. Thank you.

[END OF RECORDING]
[Organisation C, P50]

[START OF RECORDING]

Researcher: Great, do you have any questions before we start?

Participant: no not really, I was just kind of going to throw myself into it and see if at the end there are any things that stick out.

As you may already know, these interviews form part of my PhD at the University of Bath about experiences at work. If at any point in time you don't know how to answer a question or you don't want to answer a question, we can come back to it or skip it etc.

Ok.

Brilliant, so let's get started then. Can we just start by you telling about your background, current job and responsibilities?

Yeah I have been in engineering for [15-19 years] now so always in [...] and predominantly always in [...]. So I took on the position of [...] in January this year, having been the past [few] years in the [...] team. It has been quite an interesting six months. There is plenty of opportunities to learn from it, I don't think I have ever found a job as challenging as this. With my imaginative hat on there are plenty of opportunities, the reality is that I have been very fortunate in my career so far that I have genuinely loved my job and loved coming in. This has rocked my world a little bit because I am not in that position at the moment where I am getting the enjoyment out of work. It is dealing with a lot of change on many different levels. It is quite interesting to say the least.

Of course, I suppose it is still early days as well. How long have you been in [this organisation]?

I have been in [this organisation] for [2-5 years], but I was a contractor with [this organisation] for [5-9 years] before that and before that I was at [...].

Ok great, do you mind me asking your age for research purposes?

No, [30-39 years].

Let's get cracking then. The way it works is we start very general and then work our way through different scenarios.

How would you describe an average working day?

At the moment it is generally full of meetings, I have tried to limit myself in terms of the number of meetings that I go to but it is a lot of operating of how the team will work and getting the mechanism in place for how to get work into the team. Also budget, resource etc. all the things you expect with a role like this, the bit that I am trying to get right at the moment is getting the...
priority right of which bits to look at and even though there are all these options that are happening, that there is progress happening on the important ones.

**How big is your team currently?**

There are about [15-19] people.

**Do you look forward to coming to work?**

At the moment, it is not enjoyable.

**What keeps you motivated at work?**

Hope of it getting better, obviously you don't want to let the team down so you don't want to chuck my responsibilities if possible because ultimately someone will have to pick it up. If it is someone in my team then I would feel bad personally because I failed to do my job. If it is my manager then I don't want to be seen as passing on responsibility. It is that plus I mean my biggest driver is that I have got a young family at home – if I don't work then I don't get paid. It is a necessary evil at the moment. I am very, I am quite aware that this is the first time that I have ever felt trapped as in I physically don't know where to turn to next.

**Could you please elaborate – why is that?**

Little bit of dealing with some of the, when I work my approach is to get on with people, I don't like conflict. I am not afraid of it but I think the place works better without it, but when I took this role it was properly not a popular choice and there was quite a bit of conflict and politics that follow that decision. People obviously quite unsure about my experience and capability, possibly my age, possibly that I am not as well established in the company as some of the other people that were up for the role at the time. From my side of that there is a bit of… [competing for credibility?], yeah, on the other side I have worked for them and then they have also gone for the same role and they have not been selected so I don't know if they see that as me side stepping them or I don't know, I don't want to assume.

**Are you saying that there is some resentment from those who didn't get the role?**

Definitely from one of the individuals who didn't get the role, from my team I have to say that they have been very adult and professional about it. I have been very lucky in that respect that I don't have anyone in the team that has openly displayed that resentment.

**What kind of impact do your colleagues have on your motivation?**

Quite a lot, especially as you have highlighted before trying to earn and maintain credibility. You know I feel as though I am still trying to prove myself to some of my peers and the more experienced people in my team. I am quite happy to admit that I don't know something, but it is also at the same
time quite difficult to admit that because actually possibly I should know that. That is an interesting game that I am not used to playing as well.

**What about your line manager, do they have a bearing on how you feel at work?**

Yeah I am quite struggling with that as well at the moment, not because my line manager is not a nice person, but it is because he obviously has expectations that are different from mine at times. Also the level of support that I am looking for or is needed is different from what he would like to give and I think that is partly down to my inexperience with the role but also partly his inexperience with working in [...] I don't know, I haven't quite worked out where the differences are yet.

**Ok, we will explore line manager issues a little bit later on. What does being engaged with your work mean to you?**

Enjoying what I do, understanding what I do as well and why I do it. I enjoy working with people, with people of the same mind and that we get along. Obviously you are always going to have a few in the team that think very differently to other people but I enjoy that, providing everyone gets on within the team I genuinely enjoy that environment. You always need diversity within the team, but what I do like about the job is ultimately the engineering and why I do it.

**Do you feel that your current role has meaning and purpose?**

At the moment no, in my previous life yes.

**Why do you say that?**

I don't necessarily feel connected with the role yet, I don't feel as though it is me. Whether that will change over time or whether I will make that role more me, I am still trying to find that balance.

**So it is almost a question of ownership and finding your place?**

Yeah trying to define the boundaries of what I should or shouldn't be doing. Possibly delegating a bit more than I do at the moment. It is ...there are many many words for it, challenging at the moment.

**Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly engaged with your work?**

Yeah...I mean my last role to this was that, but the role before that, so two roles ago, I was working on [...] doing the [...] So I was leading the [...] team to do that and that was a good job that was very satisfying.

**How did it make you feel?**

Yeah it was one of those jobs where you could see it from start to finish. We did the architecture and you know I worked on it through to when it left the [...]. So I followed the design right through, so it is very unusual to be in that scenario. But I mean the team that I worked with was great, my line manager
at the time was really good and a lot of the reason why I am wanting to do stuff more sort of, take on more responsibilities is because of his mentoring a few years ago. He had a very profound affect on me in terms of where I saw myself and where I wanted to be. It was good work and it was change of work as well, so it wasn't you come in and everyday you do the same thing, it was diverse and evolved all the time. So you would do a bit in this section and it would evolve into something else and then you would follow that and you would evolve and evolve...Eventually you find yourself on the [product], screwing in the bolts etc. So it was very satisfying to see that and when it took off and flew and everything worked fine. They even flew the [product] for an extra five hours because it worked that well. So you couldn't have asked for a better result.

How important is feeling engaged at work to you?

Oh yeah, like I said before I genuinely do love my job, I love working in engineering you know problem solving, problem fixing. I just enjoy my work, I enjoy the design side of it. I wouldn't rule out the managerial side completely because that was something I did in my previous job as well but this is just taking it to something else that I didn't expect.

If you had to think of a time where you have disengaged from your work, could you talk me through that?

I would say this is probably the most disengaged in a long time. But yeah, it is just I have never really taken work home before and I find that it just follows me home. I mean a lot of it I feel disengaged because I don't feel like I am doing anything meaningful.

Why do you say that?

A lot of the time, I find myself taking actions more than I feel as though I have resolved them. So I go into a meeting with four actions and I come out with 500. I don't feel like I am making any meaningful steps to remedy the situation, it is almost as though we are doing little sticky plasters here and there. When what we should be doing or what I should be doing is stepping back and looking at how the whole thing fits together and fixing that. But I don't feel there yet.

What do you think are the issues behind that?

It is partly that, it is party possibly my inexperience in the role. Partly the workload or me not choosing the right parts of the workload to concentrate on, which would link back again to inexperience. Well one of the things that I am slightly missing at the moment and I have had a couple of mentors over the years and they have both moved on to pastures new now so I feel a little bit isolated, floating on my own at the moment. That does not help.

Do you feel that you are getting the support you would like or need?

Not at the moment no. Just possibly someone with the experience that I could just draw from within the team.
Ok let's talk about your current line manager in that regard. How long have you had your current line manager?

(6 months to 1 year).

And how would you describe that relationship with him?

Ok still quite arms length. It is not as close as I have had with previous line managers, which again is something quite new. It is still work in progress, there is no direct conflict but it doesn't feel smooth and punctual quite yet.

What would you say is working well? Do you trust and respect your line manager?

I respect him, I am not, trust hasn't been fully earned yet but I think the whole team is in that situation. I think from my line manager’s point of view he is still finding his feet as well, so he is in the same boat as me.

So you are saying that there is some kind of knock on effect?

Yeah and I am trying to stop that within my team at the moment because I have started to noticed that a little bit as everyone is starting to pick up more and more. I am trying to stop them getting overloaded as well but I think it is just emanated from the whole, cascaded down.

Actually on that note, do you think that your team trusts you as well?

I don't think so yet, I think that is going to be a longer journey getting that level of trust out of them.

If you had to summarise the key issues between you and your line manager, what would they be?

Obviously communication would be one of them, there is lots of it but sometimes there is too much of it.

So it is the clarity of communication that is important to you?

Yes. Also confidence in support, my line manager takes on a lot of actions but it is very difficult in seeing the results of those actions so you almost get the feeling that ok so I know that nothing is going to happen with that, so I might as well just carry on as I was before.

So your line manager is not very good at following things through?

No, but I think I am quite bad for that as well at the moment.

In what way does your line manager support you? Is there anything missing?

I think probably just a bit more tangible support in terms of if I have got queries or wishes, I don't necessarily want the answers, but just the feeling that actually what I am doing is right and maybe a bit of guidance as to when
I am not going quite down the right path. It doesn't have to be anything as formal as one-to-ones, just a bit of…

**Are you saying that you want to feel listened to or taken more seriously?**

Possibly, a bit of that as part of the communication because sometimes you get talked at rather than talked to. But yeah it is just more of the backing of me and the team.

**Have there been any situations where you felt that expectations or promises weren't followed through or breached?**

Unfortunately there are quite a few instances at the moment.

**What kind of instances? Can you tell me more?**

Well for this particular one, we talked about contract and raising, trying to bring contractors into the company so that we can get people at short notice to work. So the initial action was to take steps to put that in place, but then I was told not to do that and do something else, then I waited and waited on that and nothing happened, then I tried to do something again and when I asked a question about what was happening over there, I was told well no you are sorting it. So it feels as though nothing really happens, there is always lots of talk but no action.

**Has your line manager tried to remedy the situation?**

There is passing comments and I am sorry because of this or that, so there is acknowledgement that the promises haven’t been fulfilled as originally requested but it is never as an informal setting, it is always part of oh we are running late.

**What kind of impact has that had on you?**

Good question…

**Has this behaviour had a lasting impression on you?**

It just leaves me, going back to what I said earlier, it just makes me feel isolated and not really knowing where I sit and where I am meant to sit. How that affects the team, I can only guess at the moment. I imagine if I am feeling that way, they are going to be feeling some of that as well.

**Does it have an impact on how engaged you are at work?**

Oh God yeah massively. That is probably why I am checking job adverts most nights of the week.

**And how does your line manager's behaviour relate to your satisfaction at work?**

Yeah at the moment there is none, there are little glimmers of hope here and there.
Do you perceive these instances of not following through on promises as little niggles or actually breached expectations, breached promises?

I would say it hits the full spectrum. From my own personal point of view it is more of a breach, but that is because that is just my train of thought really. If you make a promise, you try and do your bit. Like I said, at the moment I can’t really, I have too much cause for concern because I do it myself at the moment so I can understand why it happens, it is just frustrating trying to deal with the consequences of it.

Ok what do you think are the key factors in a good working relationship between a line manager and employee?

Clear roles and responsibilities so that nobody feels as though they are doing something, which should have been someone else. Obviously trust and openness, I am trying not to go for the textbook but for me it openness and trust are the two big things plus clear roles and responsibilities so that everybody knows what they should be doing. Because that is partly why I feel like I do at the moment, because I don't really know the full perimeter of my job so I feel a bit disengaged because I don't know what I am meant to be doing. Should I be doing this or that? And nobody is really in a position to tell me otherwise at the moment.

I was just going to ask, how could that situation be alleviated?

Well I have tried looking internally, sort of going through the HR system and find a mentor just to try to bottom out those questions as well. I don't have an answer for that but I am trying to find some sort of solution at the moment.

It sounds as though your manager has had quite a big negative impact on your motivation, behaviour and how connected you feel with your team?

If you had to compare your current situation to your previous one, how would you summarise it?

It is a 180 flip, it has completely changed. On my last job I had two line managers who left the business, so I got on with both of my line managers great and their manager's as well, so when they left I stepped in to fill the boots whilst they found replacements. So the relationship in all three directions was very good. I had full trust, didn't necessarily always agree, but I had all trust in the people that I was working for and I felt confident in the direction that they were giving me was – I might not always understand, but I knew it was for good reason. I felt it was justified or fair. At the moment I don't have the confidence, I miss that almost a bit like a safety blanket. Possibly it is me stepping out into the real world now as opposed to my sheltered previous life.

Ok, let’s talk through a hypothetical situation. So on the flipside, if we imagined that your current line manager turned around to you and said ok we have not had the best start, but I want to tackle things head on and I want to improve things. Perhaps he wants to involve you in key
decision-making and have more regular one-to-ones to have an open forum for any concerns that you might have…etc.

How would that make you feel?

It would help to some degree, but I think the personality of the line manager would have to change. So I have initially tried some of those one-to-ones or just to understand the person a bit more and his personality is different from my own, but also from my previous experiences of other line managers. So the responses have probably been a bit less supportive than I would have initially thought. Possibly that is just a change in personality or change in position with expectations, I am quite sure where that part fits.

Going back to expectations, how was the reorganisation communicated by your current line manager? Was there any initial interaction to give you an indication of the way forward?

No we all pretty much got selected in the same week, so come January so we were all in the same boat. He had a few ideas, which he laid out on how he could do it. So there was a general gist of communication, which was cascaded through the team. I think one of the biggest problems as a whole, going right up the ladder, communication has been very poor across the board. Not just Systems Installation team but [this organisation] as a whole with trying to deal with people, where we don't understand who we are, what we are doing, why we are doing it. Yes we me individually need to communicate better with those, but at the same time the business hasn’t really communicated down to their teams on what the changes have been for the last six months.

So it almost sounds like a lack of transparency in terms of the way forward?

You know it is almost like these changes have been made, I hate saying they because it is very disembodied and you are just shouting at the clouds, but the people, the architects of this Systems team or the key players have almost left it up to the individuals to do the communication on behalf of the wider team, which is one way of doing it. But I would have thought that you would have a cascaded message down to distribute what the intentions were rather than assume it is going to happen at the lower levels and work its way back up.

Is there anything else that can be done to rectify the atmosphere in the team?

It is going to be all about building trust, trust between ourselves and programme, trust back with the individuals in the team...as I was saying I am trying to think of reasons how we can do that. From a programme point of view we need to deliver and manage out the message to the other teams so that they have got confidence and we know what we are doing within the team. I am going to have to make sure that the team delivers on its promises internally, so if people are promised development opportunities that those opportunities are given to those individuals. Technically we need to be strong in what we say and how we say it. Consistent messages indeed… It is a long
journey that one. I mean part of it is getting enough people to do the day-to-
day workflow, because at the moment we are just fighting fires all the time. 
Workload is too high for the size of the team that we have and I think that is 
partly why we have got issues with the programme because we have not 
displayed enough control so that they are happy that they are going to get 
what they want.

**So it sounds like you are saying it is a catch 22?**

Exactly, so work never really finishes and you feel like you haven’t done 
anything meaningful, achieved anything that day. Sounds like I am not the 
only person to have experienced this so thank God for that. It all feels, I 
usually used the word murky and swimming through mud, it is all very grey 
and woolly at the moment.

**Would you say that there is a team spirit or atmosphere in [this organisation]?**

There is for some of the teams, other teams no not yet. I think partly because 
some of the teams are spread out in different locations. I am not pinning all 
my hopes on this, but with collocating the team, apparently so should be 
happening the next couple of months or so I have been told. Again this is one 
of those sort of things, the action is meant to be taken by somebody and then 
it sort of drags on for a while. The expectation is yes by the end of 
September we are all collocated, so that would be good. Obviously we will all 
go back into the storming phase again, because there is going to be new 
location, different ways of working, there is going to be a new dynamic in the 
team. Although we are one team already, it is going to bring in the individuals 
into the fold. Occasionally, the contact is once or twice a week, as opposed 
to everyday.

**What do you think is required for a good team atmosphere?**

Engineers overall are quite invisible most of the time, I think we need to get 
the team a bit more engaged and to have a better atmosphere we need to 
start acting more as a team and be directed more as a team. So socials will 
work to some degree, but they are only now and again it is not like every 
weekend. If people are not engaged, then they wont go to the socials anyway, 
so it is a catch 22. What I would like to do is just get more regular comms 
with the team, we have got a weekly meetings but on a daily basis to have 
more informal interaction, even 10-15 minutes just to knock heads together. 
At least it gets people talking together, even if they wouldn't necessarily be 
talking to each other for the rest of the day. But yeah I would like to get some 
socials to get the team out and about and find a social that everyone will go 
to.

**So that would be step in the right direction. Do you feel satisfied with [this organisation] overall?**

There is always room for improvement. I don't think there is anywhere that 
does it brilliantly. I am quite limited in experience only working for three 
companies, but all three of them seem to be particularly rubbish at organising 
the workforce. I think [this organisation] is a bit too fragmented, so to do one
thing you then need a committee of about 50 people, whereas speaking to
people who have worked for various other places and different models of
working rightly or wrongly. It just seems that [this organisation] is inherently
complex. It can be quite slow, there is a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of the
ways people are working you have to find things out in order to get stuff done.
I mean it is also an age problem as well, because the people that did this
originally have now either retired or left so for example Neo aircraft has been
largely untouched for the last 20 years or so and now we are opening up all
the can of worms again. The few people that are left in the business that
worked on it the first time and said oh we did it like this, but if that person
wasn't there to answer that question then you basically have to go back in
history and try to find out how stuff worked.

There is definitely a recognised age gap within the business. I wasn't an
apprentice with the business but the last apprentice here was my age. So
there is a good ten years between that batch and the last batch that came
afterwards. So that is ten years of knowledge that effectively hasn't been
passed on.

**What do you think needs to happen?**

Mentoring, definitely we need to get the younger members of the team
working with the more experienced, slightly older members of the team. Also
we need to make that we have the knowledge in house to be able to do that,
because if you haven't got the work then…

**So contractors aren't always the solution as the tacit knowledge is
being hired outside of the business?**

Some of the work we have lost the ability to do internally because we
inherently passed it to a contract agency. Some of it as well we have not
necessarily done the work in house and it is being done by a different
company or we have done the work and then given it elsewhere because
those people have now retired, we have lost that ability of attrition to do that
piece of work. Also the future of [our site] is in the back of everyone’s mind.

**Why do you say that?**

Well over the years it has just reduced and reduced and reduced. Over the
years [this organisation has changed] so there is uncertainty there […]. We
do miss internally that bottom tier of designers, we have got lots people, well
not lots but some, which can approve but we don't have many people to do
this design work. It needs designers, they are the checkers and approvers of
the future. If we don't have designers then we have got a missing generation
again, so we fill it with contractors which is great, but then the contractors go
off again and that knowledge still hasn't been passed on. You just get slightly
better checkers and approvers, but you still don't have the designers
underneath.

**I have heard that one third of the team is to become checkers, one third
approver and the rest developing towards either of those. Do you think
that is a way to counteract this issue?**
Well the only reason to get that is to bring designers in, that is the only way we can do that. It is good for a vision but at the moment the decisions that are being made [...] actually goes against that because we are reducing headcount and not bringing additional people on board. It takes years for people to train so if we have this 20/20 vision then that is 25 years away and the longer you leave it, the less chance you get to develop those individuals.

In terms of training and career progression, are you happy with what is available in this organisation?

No, there is a definite pressure to develop too quickly too soon. My personal belief is that everybody needs, if you are an engineer you need a core skill to fall back on, I wouldn't go as far as saying specialism but you need a good core base at which to start from, which you will only get from doing the design work and earning your time. I am not naïve enough to think that everyone does five years, five years it is going to be a bit of mix and match depending on the capabilities of the people. But you do need that core skill, if you want to be an engineer working within the engineering community it is so fundamental to have that there. If you have not got the work there then you can't do that, at this place [this organisation's] culture seems to be that everyone wants to get to Lead Design, Manager and then move on and move on, lots of fast tracking, which is great but that is sometimes detrimental to the development of the people around you. Or you don't necessarily focus on gaining the area, you just see it as a stepping stone for the next move.

I think financially rewarding people for technical authority, colleagues [in other countries] do it. They gain signatory and they gain additional money. It is also you are taking on responsibility from an authoritative point of view then you have the ability to sign, you then therefore by law are responsible for the document that you are signing. You know you not just signing something that could affect your work life, but touch wood, legally you could be responsible for the consequences. So to not have any financial reward for that or something to recognise that rather than the kudos, is not a big driver for people. To make sure that it is something that everyone wants and something to strive towards. You can't rely on the integrity of people, because everyone wants different things. Everyone is at work for different reasons, nobody is here for free.

Do you feel supported by this organisation?

I think from [our team] point of view, no I don't. I think it is just seen as a thorn in people's sides. I mean I don't get to see [one of the senior managers] and his bosses view of the [...] team but just from experience on other programmes and the levels that I have been operating at, it is not seen a as a particularly important function.

So it is almost overlooked or not very visible in what this team does?

A bit of both. I mean we are not the greatest advocates of what we do and servants to the world, but at the same time that is probably because we are sick to death of having to fight to the ground to do that basic work. So you put
a statement of work in, a budget request and straight away it is batted back now.

**Why is that?**

Partly because the business wants to get everything for as cheaply as possible. Partly because we probably need to think about the robustness of the statements of work we put in place, but a lot of the times it is because people don't really understand what you are costing for. They see it as well I am not paying that much for that, because in their head that job is that big, the reality the job is that big but you have to do that, that and that to get the whole picture.

**So is it people not understanding the technical depth and complexities of the work involved?**

I personally think it is. I don't get the whole end to end job a lot of the time, it is a vast field and there are lots of experts in there that know way more than I do and even they still learn most of the time. So for someone outside that environment to have an assumption or a view of it is obviously vastly different from mine.

**Is there anything else that this organisation should be doing to help with that?**

So from my point of view I will be giving more visibility of what the team does and what we are doing and how we do it. I am trying to get a hold of bits of electrical harnesses, connectors, so that we can get a glass cabinet next to the team so it is just visual indicators of what we do. It is not just for the benefit of others but within our own team as well. You want to know what a connector looks like? So you walk up to the cabinet and there is a connector there. Whereas at the moment, you could be an IKEA salesman sat at a desk for want of visual indicators associated with the team. I have seen in other teams as well and it works quite well because it just helps centre yourself sometimes on actually that is what I am here to do. It is just little reminders of why we are here. Part of that with [our site], especially with an open office environment with lots of skill sets, you kind of detract from what you do sometimes so it is good to have something to bring you back.

It is exactly, this place is almost disassociated from the [...] industry sometimes, so it is easy to lose yourself in your day-to-day work. It would be good to just have to get those things into the office and get the people a bit of ownership of what they have done or sense of achievements. It shouldn’t be difficult to get this stuff in, but the reality is that [this organisation] is a big bureaucratic beast. Because of the way we are set up, [our team] is detached from the rest of the business so if I want to get any budget, I have to go to programme to do a piece of work to get budget for them. Which means I get money to do that piece of work, not to do that piece of work and say a display cabinet.
How do you see the team going forward?

Going forward, I don't think it will remain as it is today, into what I am not quite sure. They are having to go out into each individual programme and request training and budget and resources and that needs to change. Now whether we get a lot smarter at doing it, we still go to the programmes but we do it in a way that is a bit more flexible with the programme so you will do this, then you get that for money and then give us that job back. The easiest way in our view would be to just have one booking code that everyone books to and then the money goes in to cover the people for the job, but from a business point of view that will never work because you need tangible resource. So how do I show that I am saving the business money when all we are doing is pouring money into a pot and it just disappears, so we still need the boundaries and the constraints of each individual task to validate ourselves against. I guess ultimately we are funded from the programmes, but at [one of the senior managers'] level rather than at our level and then we manage it that way, that gives us the freedom to do a bit from this programme that actually got rolled over, but we saved a bit on this programme. So internally we can monitor it on who has done which job, but the financial burden on the individuals of the team is taken off and it resides at the senior management level who monitor it across all the teams. If it is supported properly with the programmes it would work, but that is a caveat. If the programmes want the cheapest price for the most amount of work as always…I mean the fact that we are no longer in their control, the way they handle us and the money is very much evident of that. They are reluctant to release it sometimes. Some of the Heads of Engineering in the programmes, some of them are big characters and they are used to getting their own way, they also used to be in charge of that team for the programme so they have now lost that.

Who do you turn to for help?

Yeah I don't really have one at the moment. Technically, if there is a technical issue there are a few people around, the technical expert and what he doesn't know about electrical installations isn't worth knowing so he is a good person technically and I can approach him but anything beyond that I am kind of on my own at the moment. HR do the one-to-ones but I don't necessarily, I mean some of the stuff that I want to talk about I feel as though shouldn't be left to a formal setting like that, I would prefer it more ad hoc which is what I have had previously.

What impact does this have on you, not knowing who to talk to or consult with?

Yeah definitely, well it definitely contributes towards it, because I don't feel like I have an answer for anything anymore. If I haven't got the answer myself and I have tried to find it and I am still coming out at a loss, then it is what do I do now?

Why do you think that is?

I mean there are a lot of politics around this. Partly me getting the role, partly to the organisation as it is today, even people within the organisation that
aren't happy with the structure that has been put in place. You know some of the people were key players in the original inception of the idea and what they originally wanted is different, so they are not happy. These are very senior experts, who have been there done that so they feel as though they have got the experience and the influence let's say to say well it should be done like this for that reason. It has got into the senior management sausage machine and it has come out slightly differently. So they have obviously lost, or got their own personal problems with certain situations.

**How would you like to see things change in the short to medium term?**

I think I would like to have more resource amount in the team, not a stupid amount but just one or two more people. The team desperately needs some additional key players to help with the workload. I personally would like to feel more comfortable in my abilities within the role. Training or mentoring would help and also me doing the job more I guess. Ultimately whatever the structure of the team or what it looks like, we need to be in more control of how we are today, because if we are still fire fighting in two years time then we have failed.

**So the short term needs are around resources to manage the workload and free up thinking time and managing the team.**

Yeah. I mean I don't want to hide behind resource, because everyone working a bit smarter can relieve pressure as well but additional resources would definitely help. Whatever the mechanism is whether more resources or a different way of working, we need to demonstrate and show more control in what we do. At the moment, we have got different programmes all working in their isolated pockets, some of the bigger programmes are starting to wind down now so we are not going to get any more resource but the workload is going to decrease. If we can work more out of the silos that they are based in and start picking up each other’s work and spread the load that way. More socials…

**Do you think that there is anything else that [this organisation] could be doing to engage staff more? What are the key barriers to this?**

Well trust in the senior management is needed and them showing competence in the decision that they make as well, so it is not just following through on some of the decisions that have been made, people don't even understand or people don't agree with the direction some of those are taking. Confidence that we are still going to be here in a few years time as well, which a lot of people seem to be not actively worried about but it is never far from people’s mind, particularly when we are reducing headcount this year as well. Yeah I mean no one is ever going to be truly happy.

**Ok I am quite aware of the time, do you have any other questions or comments?**

No not at the moment I don't think. I have just been basically moaning for the last 45 minutes.
That is fine, sometimes that is what is needed but it speaks to people caring about the organisation and the future. Thank you very much again for your time today.

[END OF RECORDING]
### APPENDIX 7: THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>SUB-THEME</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding WE</td>
<td>Participant Definitions of WE</td>
<td>Work engagement was often described synonymously with feeling positive, enjoying work and being energetic.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Importance of Feeling Engaged At Work</td>
<td>Feeling engaged at work was a desirable state. It was seen as key to effective working, participants felt more productive and positive when engaged.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant Stories of Feeling Engaged</td>
<td>Exploring participant stories of feeling more and less engaged over time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing Factors At Work</td>
<td>Interest &amp; Ability</td>
<td>Work that therefore speaks to one’s personal and professional interests can be engaging to an individual because it enables them to better relate and capitalise on their abilities in the field.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety, Challenge &amp; Growth</td>
<td>Work that is varied and stimulating, whilst also offering opportunities for personal growth and career progression.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meaning &amp; Having An Impact</td>
<td>Defined as participants having meaningful work, which provides them with a sense of purpose for their tasks and a feeling that their work contributes to the bigger picture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions of HQ</td>
<td>Mutual Respect &amp; Trust</td>
<td>HQ LMX is characterised by mutual efforts, resulting in a sense of respect and trust amongst both parties. Thus participants feel as though they can focus on</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Effective & Open Communication**

Defined by a sense of clarity and direction, as well as receiving adequate feedback, praise and recognition. It is defined by a mutual exchange of information that is required to do the job.

**Adequate Support**

Relates to participant stories about how necessary support is in order to do one’s job effectively. Talks about availability, empathy, and backing up participants when needed.

**Inconsistent Communication & Mismatches**

LQ LMX is further characterised by infrequent and inconsistent communication, resulting in a mismatch of expectations, values and a lack of clarity. This often results in trust issues and limiting opportunities to feel engaged at work.

**One-sided Inputs & Trust**

Contrary to HQ LMX, LQ LMX is characterised by one-sided efforts and lacking mutual respect and trust. Therefore, often resulting in trust issues and limiting opportunities to feel engaged at work.

**Interactions of LQ**

One-sided Inputs & Trust

Contrary to HQ LMX, LQ LMX is characterised by one-sided efforts and lacking mutual respect and trust. Therefore, often resulting in trust issues and limiting opportunities to feel engaged at work.

**Importance of LM Support**

Relates to participant stories about how necessary support is in order to do one’s job effectively. Talks about availability, empathy and backing up participants when needed.

**Fluctuations in LMX Quality**

Highlights how LMX quality can change over time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactions of LMX, PCB &amp; WE</th>
<th>In addition to LMX quality, actions by the line manager such as PCBs and the severity of these can also be the cause of lower engagement amongst participants.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potential Moderators of LMX PCB</td>
<td>Age, Maturity &amp; Length of Service</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Job Crafting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding Expectations &amp; the Importance of POS</td>
<td>Interactions of HQ POS &amp; WE</td>
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<td>Interactions of LQ POS &amp; WE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Organisational PCBs &amp; WE</td>
<td>Lack of Leadership, Communication &amp; Future Clarity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Issues of Voice, Representation &amp; Feeling Divided</td>
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<td>Sense of Injustice</td>
<td>Moderating Factors of Organisational Breaches</td>
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<td>This relates to participant stories of unfair allocation of responsibilities, but also associated difficulties of feeling under-staffed, over-worked and under-appreciated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The negative impact of PCBs from the organisation relates to participant stories of unfair allocation of responsibilities, but also associated difficulties of feeling under-staffed, over-worked and under-appreciated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Support, Age, Maturity &amp; Length of Service</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights the importance of social support from both peers and the line manager in buffering the impact of organisational breaches.</td>
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