



**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT HEAD OFFICE IN LESOTHO**

BY

TOLI LEJALLA

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**Supervisor: Dr Masonnette Du Toit**

## **Declaration**

The research methods (Chapter 3) are written in the past tense in anticipation of an examination in the MBA programme. Therefore, I, Toli Lejalla, student number 2017348026, hereby declare that no data collection on this project has or will commence until such a time that ethical clearance has been received from the GHREC.

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Signed: Toli Lejalla

Date: 15-September-2023

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## **Abstract**

The study focused on employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. The primary focus was on analysing factors influencing employee engagement at the department. Engaged employees improve service delivery and contribute positively towards the economy of the Kingdom of Lesotho. It is the department's responsibility to include employee engagement as part of the agenda in strategic planning forums. Public sector organisations often concentrate on achieving results while undermining the factors that influence employee engagement as an important factor towards achieving organisational goals and objectives. The study investigated factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho, and the researcher obtained information from the different sections in the department from top, middle and senior management officers. The study used a semi-structured interview and questions were open-ended questions. The interview schedule intended to cover all areas of concern. This study will contribute towards helping the public service organisations to introspect and realise factors that influence engagement within the organisation and develop employee engagement strategies that will improve engagement levels and contribute positively towards achievement of goals and objectives of the organisation.

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# **1 Introduction and Background**

## **1.1 Introduction**

According to the Department of Social Development Strategic Plan (2019), the Government of Lesotho established the Department of Social Welfare in 1976. At the time, it was part of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The department delivered remedial and curative services and was seen by some members of the public as an approach to create dependency on the government. It was also seen as a failed approach to helping beneficiaries recover from poverty.

The Principal Secretary of the Department of Social Development was appointed in November 2010 to improve the department's capacity to deliver social development services to the public with the European Union's (EU) support (Social Development Strategic Plan, 2019). In June 2012, the Government of Lesotho established the Ministry of Social Development after elevating the Department of Social Welfare to an independent ministry. The Ministry of Social Development was merged with other ministries and changed its name to the Department of Social Development under the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports, Arts, Culture and Social Development.

The Budget Speech to the Parliament of the Kingdom of Lesotho (2023) explains that the living conditions of the vulnerable population have worsened, and poverty levels have increased. Consequently, the total budget of the Department of Social Development was increased. Because of deteriorated conditions and the expansion of the strategic objectives of the Department of Social Development, there has been an increase in the number of programmes, new job designs, and operational activities. For these objectives to be successful, engagement is one of the many determining factors. Engagement is the first critical element in achieving competitive advantage in any organisation. Organisations with high levels of employee engagement experience low staff turnover compared to those characterised by lower levels of engagement (Elliot, 2021). Arimbra (2018) explains that to achieve business success, organisations need to manage their level of employee engagement. Therefore, for the Department of Social Development to successfully achieve its goals and objectives, employees must engage with the organisation. Based on the

researcher's observations, the following are behavioural characteristics of many of the employees of the Department of Social Development:

- Employees do not make any follow-up efforts on their past meetings unless they have to react to an event resulting from that meeting.
- Employees feel a high level of distrust toward the senior management team.
- Employees think they are only present in the organisation because of the high unemployment conditions in Lesotho.
- There are uncoordinated decisions among the leadership of these organisations.

Hodges (2018) suggests that disengagement refers to the disassociation of someone from their work. This creates emotional detachment, which ultimately removes the employee's sense of identity within the job and organisation as a whole. Disengagement could also potentially create many problems for the organisation. The Senior Management Team Committee (2020) argues that some problems faced by the Department of Social Development and its partners include uncoordinated planning activities, disjointed implementation processes of plans, uncommitted members of staff, no clear work designs, inefficient communication strategies, and poor service delivery. The Senior Management Team Committee (2020) further states that duplication of roles among many staff members has resulted in committed employees being taken advantage of and experiencing an overflow in their workload. The result is a creation of coordination gaps in the implementation processes of the Department of Social Development and further disengagement of the few committed employees.

According to the World Bank (2021), the Lesotho government has made considerable investments in creating social protection policies and programmes over the past years. These programmes aim at tackling the vulnerabilities of both young and older people in the country. However, they are costly and constitute about 6.4% of Lesotho's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making Lesotho one of the highest spending nations in Africa. It is important to analyse the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho, considering the significant influence of the department's expenditure on the

fiscal budget, its share of country's GDP, and the various problems experienced during the implementation of policies and strategic objectives.

## **1.2 Background**

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is an individual's preference for expressing themselves in commitments that promote connection between themselves, their work, and team members. It can be reasoned that organisations need employees to be fully committed and emotionally involved in achieving organisational goals and objectives in the current dynamic economic environment. Employee engagement also helps organisations to efficiently utilise available talent to achieve their purpose. Shuck (2019) argues that employees who show a high level of engagement work faster and are more creative, focused, profitable, and committed to their work. They also experience individual benefits that highly impact their overall quality of life. Therefore, employee engagement is essential to the organisation's overall performance and employees' personal quality of life.

According to Gallup (2023), the global engagement level is constantly low at 21%, and 19% of the global workforce is entirely disengaged. This indicates that many organisations worldwide struggle to achieve high engagement levels from their workforce. According to Public Service Reforms Team (2022), the quality of service delivery in public services remains too low due to failed attempts to implement a customer care culture among public service employees and establish the means to meet public preferences. Across many civil service structures, low employee engagement levels contribute to poor service delivery. The situation deteriorated even further during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the business world, forcing organisations to adapt to new business models and technology while being agile enough to adapt to the new working environments. The pandemic also accelerated many transformations and changed organisations permanently by forcing them to adapt to new work environments. This also affected different organisational cultures across the globe, posing a significant challenge towards engagement levels. As a result, management today, is responsible for introducing policies and work methods that

can help to create emotional connections between employees and their working environments (Kewalramani, 2023).

Chiwawa (2022) also explains that organisations that prioritise the development of engaged employees are in a better position to reap rewards in terms of productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. Employee engagement is directly linked to the performance outcomes of the organisations. This leads to optimised organisational resources and creates a competitive advantage. As such, it is critical that employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho become more engaged so the department can effectively and efficiently manage various projects and operations to combat poverty and other vulnerabilities in Lesotho.

Unfortunately, according to the minutes of the meeting of the Senior Management Team Committee (2020), there is a lack of coordinated planning, commitment and dedication of employees during the implementation processes of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. It further states that there is poor communication and advocacy support between the Department of Social Development Head Office and the relevant personnel at the district level. Insufficient staff and disengaged employees have become problematic within the department, and many employees only do what their job requires without making any extra effort to achieve the department's objectives. Moreover, there is a high level of absenteeism and poor service delivery. Jayarathna and Shermila (2019) suggest that engaged employees are more productive, less likely to be absent in the workplace, and willing to work harder for the organisation's benefit. Because of the factors mentioned, analysing factors that influence employee engagement in the Department of Social Development Head Office is very important.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

There are numerous signs of disengagement by many of the Department of Social Development Head Office employees in Lesotho. Failure to address the factors that lead to disengagement might cause a lack of service delivery, loss of money through high-risk cash movement operations, dysfunctional technological systems, wasteful operational costs, and lack of accountability. Consequently, this may create a

negative public reputation for the Department of Social Development and the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho as a whole.

### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed in an attempt to address the above-described study problem and reach possible solutions:

- What does the literature indicate about employee engagement?
- What are the barriers to employee engagement in the head office of Lesotho's Department of Social Development?
- What are the enablers of employee engagement?
- What major factors influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development head office in Lesotho?

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

This section discusses the research objectives of this study.

### **1.4.1 Primary Research Objective**

The primary research objective of this study is:

- To analyse factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

### **1.4.2 Secondary Research Objectives**

The secondary research objectives of the study are as follows:

- To provide an overview of factors influencing employee engagement.
- To provide an overview of enablers of employee engagement.
- To provide an overview of barriers to employee engagement.
- To determine the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

The following section discusses the research paradigm, research design, sampling method, method of data collection, and ethical considerations of the study. In addition, qualitative methods were followed to determine factors influencing

employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

### **1.5.1 Research Paradigm**

Soo et al. (2020) explain the research paradigm as guidance through underlying assumptions and principles in scientific research. It is the understanding that guides the quality of the research. Furthermore, Nickerson (2023) believes that interpretivism is a social science where reality is subjective and the phenomena of understanding is purely from the individual's perspective.

### **1.5.2 Research Design**

Research design can be described as various frameworks used in business research to collect data (Bryman & Bell, 2018). This study used the qualitative research design to investigate the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Nassaji (2020) explains that this method involves understanding and exploring the topic. It is interpretive and, therefore, is an appropriate method to investigate and achieve the study objectives. Qualitative research design is also based on three core concepts, according to Tracy (2019), namely self-reflexivity, context, and thick description:

- Self-reflexivity refers to the phenomenon where people's experiences and points of view impact how they interact and interpret different events and contexts.
- Context refers to the fact that qualitative research is about involving oneself in an event while trying to make sense of it. This is where qualitative researchers intentionally and purposely examine an event to determine how to behave and make sense of the context to build knowledge.
- Thick description refers to how researchers involve themselves in a culture and investigate a particular event present in that scene so that they can interpret statements and theories.

The qualitative research method was suitable for this study because the research objective was to understand the factors that influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office. More specifically, an explorative and descriptive design was used in this study. Firstly, the exploratory approach is

qualitative in nature and is used to investigate research questions that have not previously been studied in depth (George, 2023). The new study and data collection processes are also more challenging. It is also suitable for research questions designed to assist the researcher in better understanding the topic of interest without adding any preconceived assumptions. In particular, this study aimed to explore and understand the factors that influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development without any preconceived assumptions, thus making it an explorative study.

The descriptive research design can be seen as a second step where the researcher attempts to gain knowledge and understanding of the research questions while exploring situations to provide more information about the study (Skidmore, 2022). This study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the literature on employee engagement and investigate factors influencing employee engagement at the department in question, making it a more descriptive study.

### ***1.5.3 Population***

Population refers to all the units or objects a researcher seeks knowledge or information about (Chadwick, 2017). For the purpose of this investigation, the population consists of 178 employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. The sample and participants of the study were selected from this population. The email addresses of participants were requested from Department of Human Resources to contact participants, and permission was granted (see Annexure C).

### ***1.5.4 Sampling Method***

According to McCombes (2023), the sampling method is the process of selecting a sample that represents the total population. A non-probability sampling design was used to select a sample. This method uses a non-random format and is primarily suitable for unknown population parameters (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This research used a purposive sampling approach.

### **1.5.5 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling is used to select a sample based on the characteristics of the study's purpose (Andrade, 2021). It involves the selection of a sample of specific interest within the population. Marshall (1996) defines purposive sampling as a method where the researcher selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions. It involves developing a framework on variables that have the potential to influence participants' contributions and are based on the researcher's knowledge of the research topic. For this study, 20 participants were selected as the sample from employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. This comprised six directors and 14 middle managers and senior staff members. Since the participants did not report directly to the researcher, they were not vulnerable. All participants were based at the head office and had more than two years of experience in the department. The selected participants were interviewed until data saturation, a point at which no new themes were identified during the interviews and which was a sign that all data has been explored (Naeem et al., 2024).

### **1.5.6 Data Collection Method**

Taherdoost (2021) defines data collection as a method of collecting data to be analysed with the objective of gaining insights regarding the topic of the research. For this study, data was collected using semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed understanding of the research questions. The one-on-one interviews were conducted at the Department of Social Development's Head Office's boardroom. Interviews were also conducted through digital platforms without affecting the participants' location. According to George (2023), semi-structured interviews are a data collection method that relies on asking questions within a predetermined framework. These questions are not set in order and are a mix of both structured and unstructured interview questions. They can be used when answers guide future research questions and can assist in developing a much stronger understanding and knowledge of future research. The questions in the interview guide were outlined to convey the objectives of the study. This method was chosen because its flexibility allowed follow-up questions, and provided comparable and reliable data.

## 1.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process where the researcher explores, interprets, and makes subjective observations of the realities of the situations in the selection unit (Snelgrove & Vaismoradi, 2019). Jankielewicz (2023) adds that data analysis involves applying systematic methods to describe, make conclusions, and evaluate data. It is a process of collecting and organising data to determine relationships. The researcher recorded all the interviews and summarised the findings from the interviews in Microsoft Word documents. This included identifying topics to summaries, providing examples of what participants said and specifying timecodes as a reference to indicate where data appeared during the interview. It was also critical for the researcher to repeatedly listen to the recordings, read and reread the summaries in order to validate the data that is being analysed.

### 1.6.1 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis can be defined as systematic methods applied to describe, make conclusions, and evaluate data (Jankielewicz, 2023). It is a process of collecting and organising data for the researcher to determine relationships. In this study, data collected in the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach to produce relationships, patterns, and themes. Through thematic analysis, qualitative data can be examined to select common themes, topics, patterns, and ideas of meaning that repeatedly come from an interview (Caulfield, 2019).

## 1.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics means the application of oneself in a manner that shows respect towards others (University of Stirling, n.d). The following ethical considerations were applied in this study.

- **Permission obtained:** Permission from the respected authorities of the study sites must be sought first (Arifin, 2018). An application letter was sent to the principal secretary of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho, asking for permission to conduct the study and gain access to the participants.

- **Consent:** The principle of consent requires that participants be fully informed about the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2018). The researcher informed each participant of the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the information was provided, and participants were informed of their rights concerning the study. All participants were provided with a consent form.
- **Voluntary participation:** Arifin (2018) suggests that participants must be fully informed about the research, able to comprehend all the information, and be free to decide whether to accept or deny participation in the research project. Participants were given a clear explanation of their rights and were not coerced to participate in the study. The participants were provided information leaflet and consent form.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** It is vital that participants remain anonymous, and their information be kept safe (Bryman & Bell, 2018). With this assurance, participants can be encouraged to open up and give more information regarding the study's objectives. The researcher did not record the names of the participants and documents were stored securely in emails. The files were locked with a password to minimise accessibility.
- **No harm:** The researcher is responsible for ensuring that participants are not harmed in the study and are fully heard (Knight, 2022). This ethical standard aims to protect both the researcher and participants against any emotional harm during the research process.
- **Conflict of interest:** Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) state that any existing relationship between the researcher and participants that might create a conflict of interest must be addressed. It must be reported so that participants can be given guidance around the situation. This enables transparency and reliability of the data collected to third parties. The researcher ensured that no staff members under their supervision would form part of the participants chosen for the study's sample. It was also ensured that participants were from different positions in various sections of the Department of Social Development and none of them worked in the same department as the

researcher. Participants were also informed that they participated in the study on their own free will to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

### **1.8 Demarcation**

The study focused on employee engagement in the field of human resource management. It was conducted in Maseru, where the head office of the Department of Social Development in Lesotho is based. The total population of the organisation is 178 staff members, and it is the population from which the sample was selected.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the researcher analysed factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. This chapter explained the problems, research questions and objectives that would be investigated.

The next chapter will be a literature review.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided an introduction and background to the study. This chapter will be a literature review of the study. A literature review is a process of identifying scholarly sources on a particular topic to provide an overview of the current knowledge available, relevant theories and assumptions (McCombes, 2023). It also plays a critical role in identifying gaps in knowledge that could be useful to be investigated later.

It is reasonable to think and suggest that for any organisation to perform well, it directly or indirectly depends on its employees. Their personal feelings and behaviour about working for the organisation will ultimately impact the performance of the whole. Organisations must have engaging employees to improve performance and enable them to thrive in new and challenging environments. In addition, the behaviour and personal feelings of employees towards the organisation will determine the level of success it will attain during its existence. Organisations need their employees to adapt to changes as the world goes through paradigm shifts in the global economy (Bridger, 2022).

Khan and Iqbal (2018) reiterate that employees who are engaged in their roles invest all their efforts through their hands, heads, and hearts. They invest their emotional being in performing their duties to help the organisation achieve its strategic goals and objectives. Furthermore, when employees are psychologically present in their jobs, they will concentrate, participate, associate, and focus on their roles.

Today's work environment seems to be going through a major shift due to factors such as globalisation and technological advancements. These factors create new opportunities and challenges in the working environment and global economy (Anjali, 2020). These global changes invoke new expectations and views from employees and employers on factors that enable engagement. Therefore, organisations must be proactive and remain relevant to the new enablers of employee engagement in the new economic environment. For instance, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

has brought significant change in the global economy, forcing organisations to adopt a hybrid kind of work environment.

Considering the essential role that employees play in the success of an organisation, the following research questions were used to inform this literature review: (i) What does the literature indicate about employee engagement? (ii) What are the barriers to employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho? (iii) What are the enablers of employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho? (iv) What major factors influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho?

## **2.2 Definitions Of Employee Engagement**

Ryba (2022) defines employee engagement as the mental strength and emotional connection of employees towards the organisation they work for, their team members, and the type of work they do. In addition, employee engagement can be used as the crucial measurement of how employees feel about the organisations they work for.

MacLeod (2021) describes employee engagement as an approach in the workplace that creates the right conditions for staff members of the organisation to give their best while performing their duties. It enables employee commitment to the organisation's strategic values and goals. Employee engagement is an approach that motivates employees to contribute to the organisation's success. Khan and Iqbal (2018) further describe employee engagement as physically, cognitively, and emotionally harnessing organisational staff members to their jobs during performance.

Furthermore, Gallup (2023) defines employee engagement as the enthusiasm and involvement that employees show during the performance of their work and in the work environment. Similarly, Awan (2019) explains employee engagement as the extent to which an employee shows attentiveness and absorption to improve performance on their job. Employee engagement is concerned with how an individual portrays themselves during the performance of their roles.

On the other hand, Betterworks (2022) argues that employee engagement has a lot to do with commitment and a shared vision among the members. Engaged employees feel a meaningful connection toward their work, their colleagues, and the whole organisation. Highly engaged employees are motivated to succeed since they see their efforts as an essential part of the whole organisation. Masese and Muindi (2018) agree by defining employee engagement as an individual's involvement and enthusiasm for their work. Engaged employees are the most productive at work due to the positive job experiences they encounter in the work environment. In return, the organisation will experience increased profits and fewer employees willing to leave the organisation. Masese and Muindi (2018) further suggest that engaged employees can be regarded as the foundation of organisational growth due to their pivotal role in achieving organisational goals and objectives.

Employee engagement over the years has become an important factor both in the theory and practice (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). However, there has not been a single unifying definition for employee engagement. Based on the definitions above, key elements identified in the literature regarding employee engagement will be used and considered as the definition of employee engagement in this research study. These include connection with organisational strategic goals, a discretionary effort to go the extra mile, emotional commitment, physical and cognitive application, and enthusiasm during work performance and in the work environment.

### **2.3 Factors Influencing Employee Engagement**

Among many factors influencing organisations—such as business growth, development, and profits—employee engagement has become one of the critical ones warranting discussion when generating different organisational strategies (Kundar & Pakkeerappa, 2022). It is pivotal in enhancing the overall productivity levels and organisational performance. Many factors influence employee engagement and must be considered carefully to achieve the desired organisational results. This study will discuss factors that either enable or hinder employee engagement.

### **2.3.1 Enablers of Employee Engagement**

A considerable amount of research supports the significance of employee engagement and its influence on organisational performance (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2018). Organisations that facilitate intensive employee engagement strategies will eventually reap returns on their teams and the organisation as a whole. The following factors are some of the enablers of employee engagement.

#### 2.3.1.1 Leadership Factors

Leadership is one of the main factors influencing employee engagement. Effective leadership is a fundamental multidimensional high-level construct that entails self-awareness, transparency, integrity, internalised moral standards, and balanced information processing. As a result, employee engagement happens naturally when leaders inspire and acknowledge that employees play an essential role in the organisation's success (Mughal, 2020). When the leadership recognises an employee's work as important, it creates a high level of employee engagement. Some leadership factors in the literature that enable employee engagement include visible empowering leadership, engaging managers, leadership integrity, and leadership style.

Macleod and Clarke 2009 (cited in Bridger, 2022) suggest that visible empowering leadership that provides a powerful strategic narrative of where the organisation is going and where it comes from has the potential to create engagement among its employees. Employees' perceptions about their work and commitment to the goals of the organisations can potentially be improved if they understand where they come from and where they are heading. Engaging managers will also influence inspiration for engagement among junior employees. Engaging leaders and managers improve motivation for action in those who follow them (Shahid, 2019). The level of engagement within the organisation improves when leaders collaborate with their employees, work beside them, and provide physical and psychological support for them to succeed. According to Pappas (2023), it is not only the responsibility of top management to drive engagement within the organisation. The level of engagement within middle management directly impacts the employees' overall engagement. Managers must create time for their teams and frequently engage with them to

create positive work experiences and enhance engagement. Leadership integrity is another factor that impact on engagement.

Kent (2019) argues that organisational leadership integrity is the foundation of engagement, and it develops trust among the organisation's employees. On the other hand, a lack of integrity creates distrust among the employees, which may lead to disengagement. Organisational leadership should not allow a gap between promises made to the employees and actual implementation. In addition, authentic leadership increases the level of engagement within the organisation.

#### *2.3.1.1.1 Authentic Leadership Style*

Authentic leadership style influences moral components such as honesty, fairness, and respect, which are critical in effective leadership. This leadership style prioritises self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing and rational transparency, positively impacting employee engagement (Obuba, 2023). The following characteristics explained below are indicators of an authentic leadership style.

Leadership self-awareness is one of the important characteristics of authentic leadership style. Leaders who understand their own behavioural weaknesses and strengths will likely understand their influence on the lives of those they lead. In addition, leaders with strong self-awareness are expected to improve employee engagement within the organisation due to their genuine, transparent, and trusting relationships with the employees (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Another indicator of authentic leadership style is leadership relational transparency.

Obuba (2023) suggests relational transparency is another example of authentic leadership. In this case, an accessible, honest, and open leader can improve the performance of employees. Authentic leadership components are interconnected, and when a leader has all of them, this will ultimately lead to an inclusive environment and increased employee engagement. Leaders that are perceived to have a balanced processing of events when making decisions influence the level of engagement within the organisation.

Authentic leadership can also be evidenced through a leadership-balanced processing of events. When leaders weigh the different facts and consider multiple

perspectives, they are likely to make better decisions for the organisation. This leadership style has been linked to increased employee engagement (Obuba, 2023). In addition to this indicator, the internal moral control standards of a leader bear influence on the level of engagement within the organisation. Crawford et al. (2019) argue that leaders can improve engagement by guiding their internal moral standards to regulate their behaviour while considering the common good of others and promoting employee welfare. Additionally, employees trust leadership to inspire engagement within the organisation. Leaders who are inspirational, transparent, and continuously invest in their employees are likely to increase employee engagement within the organisation due to a high level of trust fostered within the employees (Bersin, 2015).

#### 2.3.1.2 Communication Factors

Communication is an essential factor influencing employee engagement within the organisation (Yaneva, 2018). Organisations should communicate the right policies and processes that have been put in place in order to be successful. In addition, employees should always be aware of the organisation's circumstances to increase their engagement levels. Eka and Anik (2020) state that organisational communication strategies directly and significantly influence employee engagement. Therefore, organisations must continuously improve their communication strategy through their management team.

It is essential to have positive communication and organisational leadership that listens to employees' concerns. An improvement in engagement is seen when employees feel they are part of the organisation's solutions (Kent, 2019). Giving employees the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the organisation has the likelihood of enabling them to feel valued and, as a result, increase their levels of engagement. Kalogiannidis (2020) further states that the nature in which the organisation communicates with its employees acts as a source of motivation and plays an important role in their performance.

#### 2.3.1.3 Demographic Factors

Demographic factors such as gender and age are some of the critical factors that influence employee engagement within the organisation. Tarekegn (2019) argues that women are more engaged since they find more fulfilment in their work than is

the case for men. He further states that this might have conflicting results considering differences between countries and the nature of the industry in question. For example, Das et al. (2021) claim that male employees are more engaged than female employees within the information technology industry are. Female employees experience higher engagement levels than men at the entry level, which is the basic-need dimension of employee engagement in the information technology industry. Employee engagement in males is also higher than in females on the dimensions of growth and management support in the information technology industry.

Age is one important factor that influence engagement. Employees who are over the age of 50 years have shown a higher engagement level than those below. Older employees have also shown high scores in absorption and dedication to their work environment. Despite the negativity surrounding older workers, such as negative stereotypes that are assumed to create disengagement, they have shown higher engagement levels than their younger contemporaries (Douglas & Roberts, 2020). Similarly, Roberts (2020) argues that employees over 50 display a higher level of engagement than younger employees. Additionally, Alam et al. (2022) agree that age is a crucial factor influencing employee engagement and reported that older employees show higher engagement than younger employees in the study.

#### 2.3.1.4 Work-Life Factors

Babu et al. (2020) emphasise that employees are located in various roles to perform the different tasks aimed at harnessing the proper functioning of the organisation. To fit their roles, employees must show a certain level of commitment and engagement by expressing themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively in organisational roles. In addition, the organisation can suitably utilise employee engagement knowledge and create a conducive environment for employees to express themselves. Some factors regarding work life are outlined below and include job characteristics, workplace culture, positive work environment, team effectiveness, rewards, and recognition strategy within the organisation.

Job characteristics affect employee engagement within the organisation. Five elements of job characteristics that affect positively on employee engagement include autonomy, skill variety, feedback, task identity, and significance (Adiarani, 2019). Other elements that further impact employee engagement are inherent job

characteristics that lead to an employee's complete understanding of their role, a feeling of responsibility for the outcomes, concern for the impact of the job, and positive influences on the employees' normal behaviours. Additionally, workplace culture is another enabler of employee engagement.

Organisational culture is vital for employee engagement. Since the world has moved through generational transitions, most managers and leaders today are millennials. Baby boomers are rapidly going into retirement, while Generation Z is coming into the work environment. This has brought a shift in the work culture since leadership is now filled with many technological users. Personal fulfilment and meaningful missions have become the realities of the new work environment. Furthermore, organisations are responsible for creating environments that enable the performance of employees. Creating a supportive work environment makes employees more attached to their roles and increases employee engagement (Judeh, 2021). Another important work-life factor that enables employee engagement is team effectiveness.

Interactions and interdependent relationships established during team-based work among members are critical in the work environment. Knowledge sharing and exchange creates individual team member knowledge, contributing to team effectiveness (Lin & Huang, 2020). Chakraborty and Ray (2018) argue that enhancing team effectiveness has a positive impact on the level of employee engagement within the organisation. Employee engagement is enhanced when organisations improve collaboration and employee relations. Mughal (2020) suggests that an interrelationship exists between the team and the peers within an organisation, and it specifically affects the employees' interpersonal relationships and engagement levels. Thus, trustworthy interpersonal relationships and supportive teams enhance employee engagement. Open and supportive environments allow employees to make innovative and creative decisions without fear of consequences from retaliatory organisations, and it enhances employee engagement. Apart from team effectiveness, reward and recognition criteria influences the level of employee engagement.

Research suggests that there is a direct relationship between rewards, recognition and employee engagement. Rewards are also a valuable tool for the enhancement of employee engagement; by providing reward and recognition strategies, the

organisation can improve employee performance, productivity, motivation, and engagement (Baqir et al., 2020). As a result, dedicated and committed employees will be more involved and productive when they believe they are recognised for their efforts (Recognize, 2022). Engaged employees are well aware of their responsibilities. When an organisation has invested in recognition and incentive programmes, it is highly likely to improve the level of engagement in the organisation. Rewards and recognition programmes positively influence employee's performance and behaviour in the organisation. Lartey (2021) adds that recognition is another form of offering a reward for accomplishing specific tasks within the organisation. It can come in either financial or non-financial forms, such as written or verbal appreciation.

#### 2.3.1.5 Personal Factors

Kokemuller (2021) argues that competing career opportunities, family, personality, and social responsibilities play a huge role in the engagement of employees within the organisation. People are emotional beings and will not be engaged when some of these personal factors are not as they should be. Personal factors discussed in the section below include individual personality, individual career development and psychological factors that influence employee engagement.

Some of the personality factors include personality traits of an individual employee in the social environment (Borah & Barua, 2018). Chakraborty and Ray (2018) explain personality as an overall profile of psychological traits that uniquely identify a person's natural abilities. It combines physical and mental characteristics that reflect how the person thinks, interprets, and reacts to the circumstances surrounding their environment. Ababneh (2020) reiterates that in addition to human and resources management practices, individual abilities are critical in influencing employee engagement within the organisation. Conscientiousness and extraversion are some of the traits that are positively related to engagement while neuroticism relate to low levels of dedication and vigour (Janssens et al., 2019). Other than personality factors, individual career development opportunities influence the level of employee engagement within the organisation.

Career development is a subjective measure of the development of an individual across their career path that involves occupation in their entire working life (Houssein

et al., 2020). Furthermore, Son and Kim (2019) suggest that career growth is directly linked to employee engagement. Organisations that have meaningful career opportunity policies for their employees experience a high level of employee engagement. Houssein et al. (2020) further suggest that since a positive relationship exists between career development and employee engagement, employees will not leave an organisation that provides career development opportunities. Besides the mentioned personal factors, there are psychological elements that influence the level of employee engagement within the organisation.

#### *2.3.1.5.1 Psychological Factors*

A psychological contract is one of the critical factors for both an employer and an employee. It is important for both parties to have the same understanding of the different types of psychological contracts because of their engagement. Mutual beliefs emanating from an employer and employee's psychological contract influence the level of engagement within the organisation. Some factors that enable employee engagement within the organisation are discussed below, specifically, psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and resource availability (Soares & Mosquera, 2019).

Mansoor (2019) defines psychological meaningfulness as an emotional feeling an individual experiences in exchange for mental, passionate, and intellectual energy spent to achieve a particular objective or perform a specific task. Employees demonstrate engagement when they feel they have an essential role in the organisation and can dedicate their efforts willingly without holding back. Bersin (2015) further states that job-person fit is a critical element in engagement. Organisations need to create meaningful work characteristics and provide tools and enough autonomy for people to succeed in their roles. Apart from this factor, psychological safety contributes intensely towards employee engagement.

Psychological safety is a state in which employees feel the highest level of safety to express themselves without fear of being victimised, negatively affecting their career, or experiencing any negative consequences in the organisation. In a climate with organisational safety, employees have a positive outlook and enhanced confidence to accomplish organisational goals and objectives (Liu et al., 2023). Employees feel safe when they perceive that they can express themselves safely without

experiencing any form of retaliation from their leaders. This enhances their level of engagement within the organisation. Along with psychological safety, an availability of resources influences the level of engagement within the organisation.

Psychological resources, such as opportunities for development, job variety, autonomy, and feedback have a significant and direct relationship with employee engagement. When employees perceive that the organisation is willing to provide both physical and psychological resources as the need arises during their work performances, they increase their desire to take risks and contribute towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the organisation. This ultimately increases the level of engagement within the organisation (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018).

### **2.3.2 Barriers to Employee Engagement**

Committed, motivated and engaged employees are crucial for achieving the organisation's goals and objectives. Commonly known barriers to employee engagement discussed below include organisational strategy, technological factors, COVID-19 pandemic, workflow processes, poor communication, and workplace violence (Helbig, 2023).

#### **2.3.2.1 Organisational Strategy**

Bakker and Albrecht (2018) explain that organisations should understand that employees experience fluctuating levels of employee engagement during their job performance. Organisations must investigate the general levels of employee engagement within the organisation and develop human-resource strategies that can positively influence the level of employee engagement. Some of the organisational strategic factors that are barriers to engagement discussed in the literature include employee misalignment to corporate values and lack of employee engagement strategy.

Employee misalignment with corporate values is one of the barriers to employee engagement. According to Shadle (2019), the organisational mission and values have become the first critical element that influences the corporate behaviour and decision-making processes for many employees. It is also important to realise that an employee's alignment with these organisational values could become a massive

barrier to engagement if they feel organisational values do not represent part of their personal identity. In addition, organisational lack of employee engagement strategy creates another barrier to employee engagement.

A lack of employee engagement strategies has a negative influence towards engagement levels of employees. Organisational failure to develop an employee engagement strategy creates difficulties in removing barriers, thus discouraging employees from engaging in the organisation (Service Brand Global, 2021).

#### 2.3.2.2 Technological Factors

Molino et al. (2020) state that implementing new technological systems typically fails due to employee resistance, inadequate technology management, and the effects of new technology on various organisational elements. Employee resistance may be due to distrust, lack of training on digital skills, and fear of job loss, which impact employee engagement within the organisation. Some of the technological barriers to employee engagement include new workplace worries, information overload and work-life balance.

New workplace worries and information overload created by processes automation and influence employee engagement within the organisations. Shadle (2019) explains that concerns regarding new technology – such as worries of machinery replacing humanity and expanding communication channels creating information overload – may create a barrier to employee engagement due to employees worrying they may not be able to keep up with the pace of change within the organisation. Information technology used within the organisation must provide benefits and be supported by human resources with expertise to create climate that support employees and overall organisational performance (Heslina & Syahrini, 2021). Employees might struggle to find work-life balance due to new technological changes within the organisation. Shadle (2019) suggests that not finding a balance between work and personal life due to extensive use of technology creates new barriers to employee engagement within the organisation.

#### 2.3.2.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic created another barrier to employee engagement. It created a challenging human and resources management environment due to the fundamental changes in the work and social environment (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-

Sánchez, 2021). The changes to remote work and new work policies that limit contact have created new problems for workers, such as difficulties separating private and work life, which creates other psychological risks such as isolation. The effect of COVID-19 has also caused uncertainty among employees and has resulted in compromised engagement levels within the workplace environment.

According to Surma et al. (2021), the workplace environment is regarded as a social environment more than just the physical presence of an employee. This supports the assertion that a workplace is an environment where social relationships with co-workers and other stakeholders are built for better employee engagement. However, the hybrid work setting has impacted the ecosystem in the work environment due to the dominance of remote working approaches and virtual relationships. These new dynamics have significantly affected employee engagement. The pandemic has become a major factor in influencing the work environmental culture that affects employee engagement within organisations.

New work environment cultures have developed in organisations due to COVID-19 pandemic. Majority of the workforce has been working from home, and that has changed perceptions on jobs. The dramatic changes in the working environment have been characterised as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Lopus & Hartman, 2022). The new work environment has also resulted in organisations redesigning their work environment to influence engagement. Redesigning the workplace environment associated with employee engagement in the post-COVID-19 era requires a holistic approach and advancement of skills from human resources management. Surma et al. (2021) state that although working from home due to COVID-19 has positive outcomes such as employee well-being and improved productivity, the long-term home confinements have other risks linked to the mental health of employees, which create a significant barrier in engagement.

#### 2.3.2.4 Leadership Style

Based on a study by Chukwusa (2018), organisational leaders should refrain from using an extreme autocratic leadership style. This style prevents the use of creativity in problem-solving situations. Autocratic leadership makes choices based on personal ideas and rarely accepts advice, thus affecting employee engagement within the organisation. Furthermore, autocratic leaders generally rely on threatening

and punishing employees as their source of influence. They do not trust their employees or allow staff members to give their input in decision-making processes.

Middle managers play a huge role in aligning teams toward the organisation's goals. Their inspiration and transparency in communicating the objectives of the organisations are critical in solving employee engagement problems (Blink, 2023).

#### 2.3.2.5 Workplace Violence

Workplace violence is one of the critical factors that affects employee engagement. Managing the impacts of workplace violence on employee well-being, team member relationships, and the overall performance of the whole organisation has become a challenge for many organisations across the globe. Failure to manage this factor leads to employee insecurities, which reduces employee engagement in the workplace (Saleem et al., 2020).

Workplace aggression within the working environment is a critical issue in the context of employee engagement. Johnson et al. (2018) explain workplace aggression as an individual's desire to either verbally, or physically harm other employees in the work environment. Although studies have not fully explored the effect of workplace violence on overall organisational performance, literature has indicated that it significantly influences individual safety, health, and productivity, which is ultimately linked to employee engagement. Organisational risks such as aggression in the working environment are barriers to engagement in the working environment.

Rasool et al. (2021) indicate that there is a direct relationship between toxic workplace environment and employee engagement. Employees who experience harassment, ostracism, or bullying are likely to feel unnecessary stress, depression and anxiety. They will also spread negativity among other employees within the organisation. This will affect employee behaviours that influence employee engagement within their work and organisation as a whole.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored factors influencing employee engagement and barriers to engagement levels within the organisation. It is evident in the literature that no factor

can increase employee engagement more than the other can, and organisations must not employ only a single approach to improve employee engagement levels.

Throughout most of the literature, the frequently mentioned variables in the definition of employee engagement include commitment, satisfaction, and alignment with organisational goals, emotional relationship, and enthusiasm during work performance, a discretionary effort to go the extra mile, cognitive and physical application of oneself, as well as vigorous behaviour of the employees. These variables are key in defining employee engagement in this research, in addition to identifying factors that influence these variables in the organisation.

The chapter that follows will discuss the research methodology used in the study.

### **3 Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter reviewed literature pertinent to this study. This chapter explains the relevant research techniques used to conduct this study, more specifically, the methodology used to clarify the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Bouchrika (2023) describes research methodology as a systematic approach to solving a research problem using various data-gathering techniques, providing interpretation, and creating conclusions about the data. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design, methodology, sampling method, data collection method, data analysis, and ethical considerations that guided the research and conduct of the researcher throughout the study.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

A research design is the set arrangement of the terms and conditions employed in the collection and analysis of data. Data are collected and analysed in a way that combines relevance to the purpose of the research and the economy of the procedure. The researcher must choose the most effective method that will be used to investigate and provide a complete understanding and exploration of the research objectives. The research design is the conceptual structure that enables the research to be conducted or the plan for data collection, measurement, and analysis (Sharma, 2020).

The qualitative design method was identified as the appropriate approach in determining the factors that influence engagement in the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Flick (2018) explains that qualitative research uses text as opposed to numbers as empirical material, and it originates from the notion of the social construction of realities of the research. It is interested in the participants' perspectives, practices, and knowledge of the issue under study. The qualitative research approach also includes data gathering and interpretation of non-numerical data while using sources such as interviews, focus groups, or informal discussions to collect data. It is a flexible method in nature. Furthermore,

interpretivism, qualitative exploratory and descriptive research were the best approaches in this investigation (Bougie & Sekaran, 2021). Interpretivism is more concerned with factors related to context. It reviews humans as different from any physical phenomena because they create further meaning that human beings cannot be analysed in a similar way to other physical phenomena (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Descriptive research is simply an approach that describes the topic of interest. Descriptive studies assist the researcher in gaining an understanding of the characteristics of a group in a particular situation, while thinking systematically about the different areas, and offering ideas for further research (Bougie & Sekaran, 2021).

### **3.3 Sampling Design**

A sampling design involves particular techniques and procedures used to extract a sample from a provided population. It is predetermined, and there are various sampling designs from which researchers choose. This depends on reliability and appropriateness for the study (Rashid, 2020). The sample for this study was selected from a population of 178 staff members of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

#### **3.3.1 Non-Probability Sampling**

Qualitative research aims to acquire a fully detailed contextualised understanding of the study. It requires that issues be explored using deeper, but flexible sampling processes to accurately record diverse issues from the data (Hennink et al., 2020). This study used a non-probability sampling method to identify the sample to participate in the research. Statistics Canada (2021) defines a non-probability sampling strategy as a method of selecting sample units by using a non-random method. It is a quick, simple, and inexpensive way of collecting data from a population, and it is one of the relevant methods to conduct a qualitative study. The method used in this study was purposive sampling.

#### **3.3.2 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling can be described as the non-probability sampling method that selects units based on the characteristics required from the sample. The technique that relies on the researcher's judgement. The researcher selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This

technique is the most relevant for this research. It is cost efficient and eliminates irrelevant members of the population that would have been part the sample. This method is also time efficient and collects information from the best-fit participants. It also lowers sampling error, which leads to results that are relevant to the research context (Obilor, 2023).

### **3.3.3 Population**

A population is the entire group of targeted objects and the group from which the sample is selected (Shukla, 2020). Employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office were the chosen population in the study, and they were 178 total. The focus was also specifically on senior officials, middle managers, and directors of the organisation to deeply analyse employee engagement and achieve the objectives of the study.

### **3.3.4 Recruitment Strategy**

The recruitment strategy is an essential phase of the research project wherein all the processes, from initial planning to securing all the ethical approvals needed to conduct participants. It also encompasses the implementation and completion of the recruitment plan. This phase should also include maintaining participant engagement as part of the post-recruitment process (Bonisteel et al., 2021). The researcher was granted permission to conduct a study at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho and was given full access to acquire contact information and request all other information, including organisational minutes, presentations, and reports required during the study. The permission also included the use of the organisational name in the study (see Annexure C). The researcher requested employees' email addresses from the Human Resources Department in order to contact the participants for the purposes of this study as the researcher gained permission to use this information (see Annexure C).

Participants who were selected for the study were members of the organisational structure who were most likely to provide detailed insights into the objectives and research questions. The researcher ensured that the study did not include vulnerable participants. Vulnerability is defined as capability of being harmed or injured physically, psychologically and emotionally in some way. This includes people with permanent cognitive impairment, traumatised, ill people, elderly and students in the

work environment (Levine et al., 2004). In this research, participants such as those under direct supervision did not form part of the sample to avoid investigating participants with limited capacity to provide informed consent. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the research participants was based on the following recruitment criteria:

- Directors, middle managers, and senior officers based at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho
- Employed for more than two years by the Department of Social Development
- Did not report directly to the researcher

### **3.3.5 Sample Size**

The sample selection is crucial to any study because it is impractical and unethical to study the whole population. Appropriate sample size is also necessary to precisely answer the research questions. Marshall (1996) suggests that qualitative researchers mostly fail to understand the importance of studying small samples, which is frequently misinterpreted concerning the generalisation of the study.

Choosing an appropriate sample design is still under debate and poses processes of practical uncertainties. Adequacy of the sample pertains to the appropriateness of the composition and size of the sample. The principle of saturation is widely used in determining the sample size and evaluating whether it is sufficient. Saturation occurs when there are no new codes, themes, or data received during a qualitative investigation (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The researcher thus conducted interviews until the data was saturated.

As mentioned earlier, the population was 178 employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho, consisting of directors, middle managers, and senior members. 20 employees were selected as the sample, comprising six directors and 14 middle management and senior staff members. This criterion was used because top management, middle management, and senior members of the organisation had experience and knowledge about the organisation. This enabled the acquisition of detailed data to analyse the topic.

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

Appropriate data collection tools have to be used to collect data from the right sources; not all methods are used for all studies and therefore researchers have to use appropriate method to collect the data (Mwita, 2022). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a relevant data collection method for this study. Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe a semi-structured interview as explorative method, mainly used for qualitative research objectives. It follows a particular protocol prepared before the interview and emphasises the topic to give a general structure. According to George (2023, semi-structured interviews rely on asking predetermined questions within a thematic structure. The questions in the interview guide were designed in a manner that addressed the research questions and the objectives of the study (see Annexure A).

The interviews were conducted either online or face-to-face with the participants during regular working hours. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the boardroom of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. In addition, to minimise the risk of consuming a lot of time writing notes, the researcher audio-recorded the interactions with the participants' consent. The interviews were conducted for 12 working days to minimise pressure and potential ethical problems for the participants. The interviews were set to each take 45-60 minutes during work breaks or after work so that they did not negatively affect the employees' working hours.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves organising data to make informed decisions for the organisation. The process identifies patterns and possible trends that inform the decision-making process (Bender, 2023). Bhandari (2021) further describes data analysis as organising and summarising the different dataset characteristics. Upon completion of data collection, the researcher summarised data from the interviews in a Microsoft Word document by heading summaries with identifying topics appearing in each interview and indicated timecodes as a reference to indicate where the data appeared during the course of the interview.

It is key for the researcher to read and reread summaries thoroughly before starting data analysis to enhance validity. Making summaries is a key step that condenses interviews into points relevant to the research objectives and questions. This involves identifying relevant sections to the objectives in the summaries, deciding on opinions most relevant to the objectives, eliminating repetitions, and briefly writing notes (Harding, 2018). Data analysis is one of the most crucial processes of the research project as it summarises and interprets all the collected data through analytical patterns (University of Pretoria, 2023). This can involve cleaning data, analysing, creating reports, and interpreting the collected data. Yet, Timmermans and Tavory (2022) argue that, regardless of the qualitative research objectives, coding is a crucial analytical activity in the data analysis.

### **3.5.1 Data Coding**

According to Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), coding is an operation that involves the identification of segments of meaning in the data and labelling them with a code. This crucial tool turns raw qualitative data into useful and communicative stories. It involves assessing a coherent part of words or paragraphs and labelling it with short phrases or words summarising the content. This is done to reduce large amounts of material, thus making it easily accessible for analysis, and improving the quality of the analysis and findings. Likewise, Caulfield (2019) describes coding as highlighting sections of phrases and sentences, while creating shorthand codes that describe their content. Sullivan and Forrester (2018) reiterate that coding is where the researcher systematically identifies how the data relates to the research questions and the phenomenon being investigated. It is where the researcher starts organising data. Gibbs (2018) suggests that transcription, coding, and theme identifications are critical phases in qualitative coding.

- **Transcript preparation:** Transcription refers to the process that transforms recorded audio, usually spoken, into written form that can be interpreted and used to analyse a certain phenomenon (McMullin, 2021). Therefore, the researcher transformed the audio from the interview sessions and created a script that enabled coding and analysis of collected data. However, transcripts are not a straightforward route toward uncovering reality; rather an outcome of a series of theoretical decisions and human assumptions about how to

represent talk from audio as texts (Sullivan & Forrester, 2018). The researcher summarised data from the interviews using Microsoft Word.

- Data coding: Again, data coding is the process of assigning a descriptive attribute to a set of data (Mahdi Riazi et al., 2023). This study used transcribed interviews to identify patterns and common phrases that would be assigned codes. The researcher identified topics in the data, created codes for each topic and combined all data together that related to the code.
- Themes identification: The researcher analysed the identified patterns and phrases as themes.

### **3.5.2 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is the most popularly used qualitative research method (Majumdar, 2022). It provides a lot of descriptions and interpretations in the form of themes and patterns from the dataset. It provides theoretical freedom, flexible and rich analytical and theoretical content, and is the preferred method for this study. The following process of thematic analysis was followed:

- Familiarising yourself with data: Cernasev and Axon (2023) suggest that at this phase, the researcher takes notes while reading the script to familiarise themselves with the dataset.
- Generating initial codes: This is one of the critical steps where the researcher starts the coding process. It can be done following either a deductive or an inductive coding process. Inductive coding implies that the researcher reads a few sentences and generates a code as they experience a breakdown. In contrast, deductive coding refers to the process where the researcher creates codes using the framework that was developed in the design of the study (Cernasev & Axon, 2023).
- Searching for themes: According to Caulfield (2019), the researcher looks through the created codes to identify patterns that would enable the generation of themes.

- **Reviewing themes:** At this stage, the researcher verifies that the themes are useful and provide an accurate and reliable representation of the data. The researcher also compares the dataset with the themes to check for missing data (Caulfield, 2019).
- **Defining and naming themes:** At this point, the researcher is tasked with providing a detailed analysis of the thematic framework. Each theme is expressed in relation to the dataset and the research questions (Byrne, 2022).
- **Producing a report:** The final phase of the analysis involves the completion and last inspection of the report. This is where the order in which the themes are reported is established, and where themes are connected in a logical and meaningful way while creating the narrative of the data (Byrne, 2022).

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is a code of conduct and behavioural norms that are expected from research participants. Ethics begins with the researcher, who should participate in the research in good faith and pay attention to the outcome of the results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). The following ethical considerations were followed in conducting this research:

- **Permission obtained:** Obtaining permission can be made in writing using a request letter to the organisation's leadership, asking for access to collect data from the study population (Liberty University, 2023). An application letter was sent to the principal secretary of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho, asking for permission to conduct the study and access to the employees at the head office.
- **Informed consent:** The researcher should inform the participants about the purpose, benefits, risks, and funding behind the study so that they can decide on their participation (Bhandari, 2021). In this study, the researcher informed participants about the study's purpose and provided information to enlighten them on their rights concerning the study. All participants were provided with a research information leaflet and consent form.

- Confidentiality: According to Hair et al. (2019), it is the participants' right to have their information used only for the purpose it was meant for. Individual participant responses were always held in strict confidence unless any contrary agreement was reached between the researcher and the participants.
- No harm: Hair et al. (2019) also argue that participants must be protected from any physical or psychological harm. The participants were at all times protected from any form of harm because of their voluntary participation in the research.
- Voluntary participation: Participants should always be free to participate or opt out of a research study at any time (Bhandari, 2021). In the process of this investigation, no form of force was applied to influence participants to participate in the study. Their rights were also clearly explained, and they were encouraged to voluntarily participate in the project.
- Conflict of interest: Research participants have diverse interests, which may create different sources of conflicting interest in the organisation. Therefore, any other incentive that may compromise a researcher's independence, integrity, and neutrality must be managed and controlled (Drolet et al., 2022). Therefore, the researcher showed ethical character during the execution of the research and ensured that there were no conflicting interests between the researcher, participants, and the organisation. In addition, the sample included staff members not directly supervised by the researcher, or participants from numerous positions in the different sections of the Department of Social Development to avoid any potential conflict of interest during the research. The researcher ensured that there were no pre-existing relationships with the participants. The participants were also fully informed that they engaged in the research voluntarily and they could stop anytime. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, the researcher adhered to a self-reflexive approach in the assumptions and bias during the execution of the study. The researcher was also conscious of the positionality influence on the outcome. Elicor (2022) states that positionality moulds people's perceptions of the world. It determines the researcher's position to be listened to and

considered seriously by others. Elicor (2022) further explains that individuals' values, culture, age, education and background inform the way people view the world.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study aimed to analyse the factors that influence engagement at the Department of Social Development. This will benefit the Department of Social Development Head Office by providing a researched outcome that can assist the department in reflecting on its employee engagement. It will contain a researched analysis of the factors that influence employee engagement and will show how the organisation currently influences the engagement of employees. It will also recommend the necessary strategies and recommendations that will assist the organisation in enhancing engagement levels. Finally, the research design, sampling design, data collection method, data analysis, recruitment strategy, and ethical considerations have been fully explored in this chapter to clarify the research methodology used to address the research objectives of this research.

The next chapter will be on data interpretation and analysis.

## **4 Data Interpretation and Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter emphasised more on research design method, data collection and research methodology of the research. This chapter will focus on the findings from the interviews conducted with the different sections of the department on directors, managers and senior officers of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. A detailed semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 14 detailed questions was used to collect information from participants (see Annexure A).

### **4.2 Data Collection**

All the participants were sent invitations via emails to participate in the study and were fully informed about the study through an information leaflet before they took part in the study. The researcher also informed the participants about their rights and their voluntary participation in the study. Participants showed interest in the study and wanted to learn more about the factors that influence engagement. They were also interested in the outcome of the study. All participants that showed interest in the study signed the consent forms. Data was collected from 15 July 2024 to the 7 August 2024, which was around 3 weeks. 13 participants were interviewed before the researcher reached saturation point. The face-to-face interviews took between 30 to 50 minutes and were audio-recorded.

The researcher repeatedly listened to the audios to summarise all data from the interviews in Microsoft Word document, heading the summaries with identifying topics and indicating time codes to give reference on where the data appeared in the dataset. The data analysis followed a manual process. The researcher searched for themes from the summaries in order to code the data. As part of the thematic analysis process, the researcher linked similarities to connect the data themes. The researcher carefully reviewed and categorised the data based on recurring patterns, topics and concepts observed across the dataset.

### 4.3 Demographic Data

Employment status, number of years working with the department and position of the participant were critical elements for data analysis. These elements helped to determine how members of staff with knowledge about the organisation interpreted the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Table 4.1 provides the details of this elements and are further explained thereafter.

Table 4.1: Participants' demographic information

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Position in the department</b>	<b>Number of years working for the department</b>	<b>Knowledge about the topic</b>
Full time	Senior officer	8 years	Yes
Full time	Manager	12 years	Yes
Full time	Manager	12 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	3 years	Yes
Full time	Director	8 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	7 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	11 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	14 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	6 years	Yes
Full time	Director	4 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	12 years	Yes
Full time	Manager	7 years	Yes
Full time	Senior officer	3 years	Yes

#### 4.3.1 Employment Status

Table 4.1 indicates that 13 participants were fully employed by the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho when they participated in the study.

### ***4.3.2 Position in the Department***

Table 4.1 indicates the different positions of participants employed by the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. The criteria set to select participants from top management, middle management, and senior members of the organisation who had experience and knowledge about the organisation was met.

### ***4.3.3 Number of Years Working for the Department of Social Development***

The selected participants had more than two years working at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. They were knowledgeable about factors influencing employee engagement at the department due to knowledge and experiences they had acquired about the organisation.

### ***4.3.4 Knowledge About the Topic***

All 13 participants were familiar with employee engagement and were all given the briefing about the definition of employee engagement before beginning with the interviews.

## **4.4 Themes**

The researcher repeatedly listened to audios and created summaries on a Microsoft Word document. Summaries were headed with topics that related to them, and time codes were indicated as reference to identify from the dataset. The interview questions were neutral and gave participants an opportunity to indicate views, which were either positive or negative; however, the answers were negative. Five themes were recognised from the patterns and trends from each interview. Table 4.2 shows five themes, which were identified from the data patterns. The numbers accompanying the codes in the table indicate the frequency with which the participants mentioned each code.

Table 4.2: Codes, themes and their descriptions

<b>Codes and frequency</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Description of themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No clear strategic direction (4)</li> <li>• Expired strategic plan (3)</li> <li>• Overlapping roles (5)</li> <li>• Lack of engagement strategy within the organisation (10)</li> </ul>	Poor development of organisational strategic plan	This theme explains the influence of poor organisational strategic development as well as lack of engagement strategy within the organisation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders are not engaging key staff members in key decision-making processes (5)</li> <li>• Commanding leaders (5)</li> <li>• No open discussions on work-related issues between junior employees and leaders (4)</li> </ul>	Extreme autocratic style of leadership	The theme highlights the impact of the preferred style of leadership on engagement within the organisation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work overload (5)</li> <li>• Older employees' contribution to disengagement (5)</li> <li>• No teamwork culture (5)</li> </ul>	Unsupportive work-life environment	This theme indicates the influence of unsupportive work environment on engagement within the department.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of psychological resources (6)</li> <li>• Lack of physical resources (7)</li> </ul>	Discouragement to engage in organisational activities	The theme indicates the influence of psychological despair by employees to engage in organisational activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive responses</li> </ul>	Workplace aggression	This theme highlights the

by majority of the leadership (7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Artificial harmony between members of the organisation (6)</li> </ul>		influence of workplace aggression on employee engagement within the organisation.
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The following themes showed the trends and patterns which were identified from the data collected during the interviews. Figure 4.1 portrays a picture of four themes.

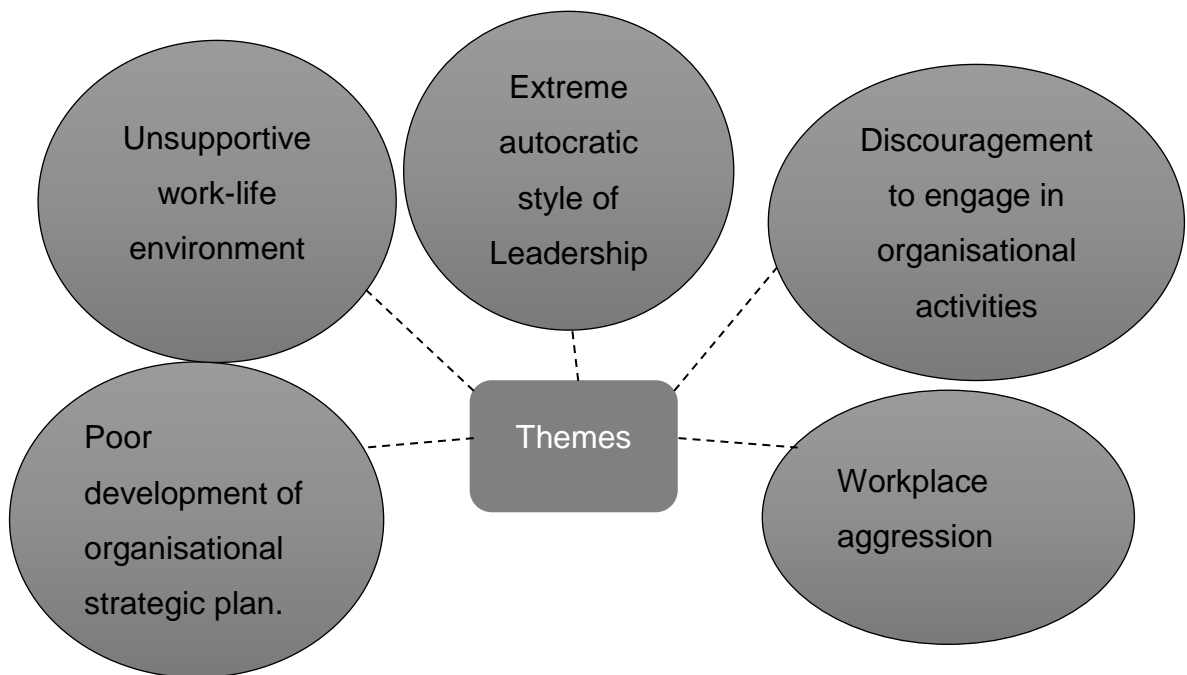


Figure 4.1: Thematic Map (Source: own)

#### **4.4.1 Theme One: Poor Development of Organisational Strategic Plan**

The theme highlights the impact of the poor development of organisational strategic plan as well as lack of strategy on engagement within the organisation. The participants were asked the following questions:

*C1: How does the organisational strategy affect engagement within the organisation?*

During the interviews, the participants were asked the above-mentioned questions to find out about the influence of the organisational strategic plan on engagement within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Most participants explained that there were a lot of overlapping roles within the department and there was no valid organisational strategic plan. Employees knew it as a senior management team document which was never communicated to the junior staff members of the organisation. The literature supports the views that appropriate communication of the strategic plan to all relevant members of the organisation plays a critical role in aligning employees to the vision, mission and strategic values of the organisation. This influences corporate behaviour and the decision-making process of employees (Shadle, 2019). This theme was generated from the following codes.

##### **4.4.1.1 No Clear Strategic Direction**

Most participants shared the sentiments that there was no clear strategic direction of the organisation's future. The literature states that the organisation's vision, mission and objectives are critical factors that influence the decision-making process and behaviour of employees, and therefore bears an impact on the engagement of employees (Shadle, 2019). Here are what the participants articulated regarding the strategic direction of the organisation:

*RP-3 "I think people talk about the strategic plan a lot of times but with no impact; it is prepared and shelved. It is only created to establish positions within the department and does not impact on the direction of the organisation."*

*RP-2 "Strategy is important towards aligning everybody to the mission and objectives of the organisation, and through understanding their roles; but from our organisation, people are just pushed to work and there is no time*

*for measuring progress towards achieving goals and objectives of the organisation.”*

*RP-5 “There is no direction within the department and there is a lot of frustration regarding the new strategic plan of the department. Direction of the organisation is set by the accepted individuals of the department.”*

*RP-8 “There is demotivation from us because of leadership not setting the direction at the top. There are many plans and decisions made by leadership but there is no implementation, and sometimes key decisions take a very long time before they are implemented.”*

#### 4.4.1.2 Expired Strategic Plan

Majority of the participants explained that the organisation strategy has expired, and the organisation was still in the process of developing the new organisational strategic plan. However, it is vital for the organisation to develop strategies that positively influence the level of employee engagement within the organisation. The literature supports the view that employee engagement levels fluctuate in the performance of their job and the organisation needs to have appropriate strategies to influence the level of engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Below are the views of the participants regarding the expired organisational strategic plan:

*RP-6 “Merging the ministries has affected the strategic direction of the organisation. There is also variety of overlapping and conflicting objectives of the various sections within the department due to lack of valid strategic plan. There is no employee engagement strategy.”*

*RP-11 “Organisational strategy is outdated; the Ministry is working towards developing the new one. There were some departments from the expired strategy that were not well structured.”*

*RP-12 “We are in the process of developing a new strategic plan and you already find that the new departments such as Youth and Gender are dominating Social Development in the boardroom, but they are silent on the ground. Really, our strategy now; we are confused.”*

#### 4.4.1.3 Overlapping Roles

Many participants mentioned that they were experiencing a significant number of overlapping roles and objectives within the department due to the expansion of the Ministry. In this case, the department needs to redesign and realign some of the objectives of the different departments to remove conflicting objectives. The overlap contributes to disengagement within the organisation. Literature indicates that job characteristics that inspire an employee to fully understand their roles are also responsible for positively influencing employee engagement within the organisation (Adiarani, 2019). Below are the responses from many of the participants:

*RP-11 "There are some departments within the strategic plan which were not well structured. Strategy influences a lot of on employee engagement. Clear job descriptions influence performance of employees when they clearly know what they have to do."*

*RP-13 "People seem to not understand the core business of the organisation and sometimes it looks like there is misalignment of responsibilities. People are confused about roles of the different departments."*

*RP-6 "Merging different departments has affected oneness within the organisation. The direction has changed in order to accommodate different departments. There are conflicting roles between the different departments of Social Development."*

*RP-3 "There are no clear roles between the top management of the organisation. Leaders dismantle the Ministry instead of building it and it disengages people."*

*RP-12 "Reconfiguration of Ministries has created chaos within the department. The department has to change the vision, mission and objectives of the organisation."*

*Tell me about the organisation's engagement strategy.*

Participants were asked about organisation engagement strategy to find out about its influence on engagement within the Department. Majority of the participants highlighted that the organisation did not have an engagement strategy.

#### 4.4.1.4 Lack of Engagement Strategy

Most of the participants indicated that they were not aware of any engagement strategy within the organisation. Service Brand Global (2021) supports the view from the literature that it is considerably difficult for organisations to overcome any barriers to engagement when there is no engagement strategy within the department. Their responses are mentioned in the following section.

*RP-3 “There is no engagement strategy here; even the initiatives are not that impactful.”*

*RP-6 “There is no engagement strategy.”*

*RP-2 “The strategy is not updated and is expired; there is no engagement strategy.”*

#### **4.4.2 Theme Two: Extreme Autocratic Style of Leadership**

This theme explains the impact of the preferred style of leadership on employee engagement within the organisation. The participants were asked the following question to find out about the impact of the leadership on engagement:

*How does the style of leadership impact engagement within the organisation?*

All participants were asked about how they observed the leadership factors preferred by the top management of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Most of participants shared sentiments that their leadership teams negatively influenced their engagement levels within the organisation. Many employees were not involved in decision-making processes that affected their work environments. Instead, they were mostly engaged when the outcomes of the leadership decisions were negative. Participants further stated that leadership approaches were based on commands and were forcing decisions on the junior officers without giving them enough opportunities to discuss work-related issues with their managers. Department leaders avoided having open discussions on work-

related matters with the junior staff members and some employees felt the leadership discouraged engagement within the organisation. The literature indicates that engaging leaders enhance employee motivation to implement decisions from their managers. The level of engagement improves within the organisation when leaders collaborate with their employees and providing both physical and psychological support that encourages them to succeed (Shahid, 2019). This theme was developed from the codes that follow.

#### 4.4.2.1 Leaders are not Engaging key Staff Members in key Decision-Making Processes

Majority of participants mentioned that the leadership of the organisation did not include them in decision-making processes that required their contribution to be successfully implemented. Literature states that leaders who engage their employees improve motivation. The level of engagement improves when there is collaboration between leaders and their employees within the organisation (Shahid, 2019). These are the responses from the participants regarding engagement of leaders and employees within the organisation:

*RP-9 “Leaders engage their junior staff members when they realise that they have imposed the wrong decisions they made without their contributions.”*

*RP-3 “Leaders of the organisation depend more on technical staff members to implement their work, but they do not accord them enough opportunities to show case their talent. The leadership is not making it easy to make collaborative decisions with the technical staff members of the organisation.”*

*RP-6 “No allowance for collaboration with other team members; leaders make lone decisions without engaging key staff members of the organisation.”*

*RP-5 “People are busy here, and there is no time for anyone; leaders are failing to understand their subordinates or pay attention to the challenges that employees have.”*

#### 4.4.2.2 Commanding Leaders

Most participants expressed that they had experienced commanding leaders during their job performances. However, literature supports the view that leaders should refrain from commanding and using extreme autocratic leadership since it

undermines creativity in problem-solving conditions. Autocratic leaders rely on threatening and punishing their employees, while doubting their employees and excluding them in decision-making processes (Chukwusa, 2018). These are the responses of participants regarding commanding experiences from their leaders:

*RP-5 “People are forced to work through commands without proper guidance to succeed in implementing the decisions. People are just thrown to work without being supported enough to do their work. Leaders make their own decisions without engaging staff members. They also don’t require assistance from others.”*

*RP-6 “People are forced to work by commands and not even by guidelines with no opportunity to have a discussion with their manager.”*

*RP-11 “We still use the old style of leadership. Instead of looking at the deliverables, we still want people in their offices. It is a more autocratic style; leaders still want to impose work on their employees.”*

*RP-2 “Leaders trample on everyone to get what they want.”*

#### **4.4.3 No Open Discussions on Work-related Issues Between Junior Employees and Leaders**

Most of the participants mentioned that their leaders did not create an open environment to discuss work-related issues with their junior employees. The literature supports the opinion that managers play a significant role in communicating objectives of the organisation to the operational staff members. In addition, managers improve employee engagement levels within the organisation. Their transparency and inspiration when communicating objectives play a critical role in influencing engagement within the organisation (Obuba, 2023). These are the responses of participants regarding the experiences on their work environments:

*RP-6 “They do not create an open environment where everyone discusses issues related to work challenges and contribute to decision-making processes of the organisation.”*

*RP-3 “The leaders depend more on operational staff members, but do not give them enough opportunity to be involved and show their talent.”*

*RP-1 “Leaders still use top to bottom style of leadership; they impose ideas without allowing people to be creative.”*

*RP-13 “Senior officers are not making it easy for their juniors to discuss issues with them, they always remind them of their tittle and that makes them inferior when initiating discussion with them in their line of work.”*

#### **4.4.4 Theme Three: Unsupportive Work-Life Environment**

This theme highlights the influence of work-life environment on employee engagement within the organisation. The following question was asked to find out about the impact of work environment within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho:

*What influence does work life have on engagement within the organisation?*

All participants were asked the above question to find out about the influence of work-life experiences on engagement within the organisation. Most participants shared sentiments that leaders misinterpreted the government policies and did not give clear instructions to the implementing officers, and consequently frustrated subordinates. Many employees were carrying out duties they were not initially hired for. In most instances, they assumed multiple roles and even greater responsibilities. Interviewed employees also highlighted that there were no smooth transitions of the workflow processes within interconnected sections at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Employees felt that they were pushed to achieve extraordinary objectives without sufficient support and resources. They also lamented the lack of recognition and acknowledgement for their efforts in the organisation. Some participants also noted that their colleagues frustrated them instead of providing support during crises. They also expressed that the prominence of older employees in the senior management roles of the organisation affected engagement within the organisation.

The literature supports the notion that work culture is another enabler of engagement. In addition, some of the inherent characteristics of the job such as

understanding one's roles and responsibilities affects the nature of accountability for the outcomes and enhances the level of engagement within the organisation (Adiarani, 2019). Furthermore, most baby boomers who are leaders in the organisation are being replaced by generation Z within the organisation, which influences culture in the work environment. The working environment due to technology innovation. This has also led to a rise in users who prefer to do work that is meaningful and provides personal fulfilment in the work environment (Judeh, 2021). These changes in the work environment and culture are affecting the department in multiple ways. Below are the views of the participants with regard to the work-life environmental factors that influence engagement within the department.

#### 4.4.4.1 Work Overload

Many participants mentioned that they experienced work overload and were often deployed to various and higher roles that they were not initially hired for, which further increased their workload. It is indicated in the literature that employers need to utilise employee engagement knowledge to develop a conducive environment for their employees (Babu et al., 2020). These are the views of the participants regarding work overload and its impact on engagement within the organisation:

*RP-9 "I think there are clear policies created by Public Service Department, but supervisors always misinterpret them. It makes work life frustrating. People end up being overloaded and doing work they were not hired for, including roles and responsibilities of their leaders."*

*RP-3 "Some of us work different positions at once. People are deployed in many roles, even higher roles without compensation."*

*RP-2 "People are pushed to work without being rewarded enough; the rewards are always being taken out and the workload is always increasing."*

*RP-13 "There is a shortage of staff within the organisation and majority of the staff feel overworked, I want to develop but I don't even see how I can create time to develop myself."*

*RP-12 “Employees doing registration and capturing of pensioners are being deployed to go make payments. When they return, there is a huge overload on their jobs. The leadership approach is not effective.”*

#### 4.4.4.2 Older Employees Contribute to Disengagement

Some of the participants shared the views that majority of older employees were in the management team of the organisation and contributed significantly towards disengagement of employees. Many of the older employees were closer to retirement, ill and showed no interest in learning new ideas in the work environment. Consequently, this affected the engagement level of within the organisation. This is in contrast to the views of Roberts (2020) and Alam et al. (2022), who are of the opinion that older employees show higher levels of engagement than younger employees do. Participants shared the following responses:

*RP-3 “There is high performance among the youth compared to the older employees. Due to dynamic changes within the working environment, younger employees seem to adapt quicker than their older counterparts.”*

*RP-6 “I think older employees are getting disengaged; they are tired, and they mention it. They mostly withdraw from their duties. Disengagement from older employees affects younger employees who are trying to engage because many of them are in the higher positions.”*

*RP-12 “Most people at the top-level management come from the formation of the department and are of the same age group. They are older employees. Older people are rigid and impede on younger employees’ trying to do the right things.”*

*RP-8 “Older people hold higher positions, and they are tired. In most cases, they are not fully able to set the tone at the top. Sometimes they are already on their way to retirement, and they seem bored. Their mentality makes a lot of things fail. They are resistant to changes within the organisation.”*

#### 4.4.4.3 No Teamwork Culture

Participants indicated that they worked in environments that had no teamwork culture and there was no cohesion between the members of the organisation. The expansion of the ministries by the Lesotho government has also negatively

influenced cohesion within the department. Literature indicates that interactions and relationships built during teamwork play an important role in developing knowledge sharing and creating team member knowledge that contributes towards team effectiveness (Lin & Huang, 2020). It is, thus, the responsibility of the organisation to develop a culture that contributes positively towards engagement. Here are the views stated by the participants:

*RP-6 “The nature of the work is stressful; there is no interaction among teams to discuss experiences faced in their line of duty. Everyone minds their own business in their corner.”*

*RP-11 “The expansion of the department has diluted culture within the organisation. There is no cohesion among the team members.”*

*RP-13 “Ever since I arrived at the ministry, I have observed that people here work in silos. There is a problem with working together between different sections in the department.”*

#### **4.4.5 Theme Four: Discouragement to Engage in Organisational Activities.**

The identified theme highlights the effect of employees’ psychological despair to engage in organisational activities at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho due to lack of resources. The following question was asked the participants:

*What psychological factors might influence engagement within the organisation?*

Participants were asked the above question to gain understanding of the psychological factors that influence employee engagement. Participants shared the views that there were no psychological resources to enable their work objectives. The organisation was reported to be struggling to allocate human and administrative resources necessary to meet the objectives. The literature posits that employers and employees must have mutual understanding with regard to their engagement. Emotions, mental, passionate and intellectual energy spent to achieve objectives are key towards influencing engagement within the organisation. When the organisation provides opportunities for development, physical and psychological resources, it

influences employee engagement within the organisation (Soares & Mosquera, 2019).

#### 4.4.5.1 Lack of Psychological Resources

Most of the participants indicated that the organisation did not invest in psychological resources required by employees for optimal performance of their jobs. The organisation rather prefers to buy tools necessary to perform the job than provide psychological resources required for the performance of the job. The literature indicates that psychological resources such as opportunities for development, autonomy and feedback contribute positively towards employee engagement within the organisation (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018). These are the sentiments that participants shared:

*RP-9 “The organisation does not prioritise personal development. I developed myself with the psychological expectation to develop within the organisational structure. I feel frustrated and lack motivation to continue developing myself with the expectation that I will get a promotion within the organisation.”*

*RP-5 “The organisation has no sense of purpose; there is no support from management for their junior employees; people work for the sake of working without providing enough care to discuss and solve issues in detail. It is a depressing work environment instead.”*

*RP-6 “Having to change a beneficiary’s life is fulfilling and it psychologically affects us when we don’t always have resources to assist beneficiaries. Motivation to assist is depleted every time; they know there are no resources available to assist the beneficiaries.”*

*RP-8 “There is no opportunity for upward mobility within the structures of the organisation. People get demotivated. We also lack team building activities.”*

#### 4.4.5.2 Lack of Physical Resources

Some of the participants explained that there was lack of resources within the organisation. They mentioned that the department lacked enough members of staff and physical resources to enable the achievement of goals and objectives. Literature indicates that when employees perceive that the organisation is willing to provide

both physical and psychological resources when the need arises during their work performances, they increase their desire to take risks and contribute towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the organisation. This ultimately increases the level of engagement within the organisation (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018). The following are the views of the participants regarding the lack of resources within the organisation:

*RP-7 “Resources are scarce at Social Development; it is difficult to deliver on the objectives of the organisation.”*

*RP-10 “In our organisation, there is lack of resources in human resources and furniture. This affects engagement and is a major problem within the organisation.”*

*RP-7 “There is little resources within the organisation, and it affects our engagement.”*

*RP-13 “There is a major factor, which is the lack of vehicles. It affects work engagement. People are discouraged to make plans for work. The Department does not understand that the unavailability of resources hinders work progress.”*

*RP-12 “Availability of resources is key factor. It is very unfortunate it has been over three to four years since we have been struggling without resources, especially vehicles. Plans are modified every quarter due to lack of resources, but situation stays the same for the whole year; whole annual performance gets destructed. It is very frustrating.”*

#### **4.4.6 Theme Five: Workplace Aggression**

Workplace aggression is one of the themes derived from the data. It explains the impact of workplace violence on employee engagement within the department. The following question was asked to find out about workplace violence within the organisation:

*Tell me about workplace aggression (desire to either physically or psychologically harm others) and its impact on employee engagement.*

Participants were asked this question to investigate any workplace aggression that influence employee engagement within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Most of the employees reported that they directly or indirectly experienced a certain level of psychological harm at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Participants expressed that that they felt like there was artificial harmony among colleagues. Employees reportedly enjoyed other people's suffering in the work environment. In addition, people expressed themselves aggressively during debates and majority of the leaders verbally abused employees.

The literature states that failure to manage workplace aggression often leads to insecurities among employees, which affect overall productivity and reduce engagement (Saleem et al., 2020). Employees who experience a certain level of harassment are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and stress. They will also spread negativity among other employees and negatively influence employee engagement within the organisation (Rasool et al., 2021). The next section discusses what the participants said about the level of aggression that influence engagement within the organisation.

#### 4.4.6.1 Aggressive Responses by Majority of the Leadership

Participants shared their thoughts on aggressive leaders and their influence on engagement levels within the organisation. They also reiterated how it created frustration within the work environment. The literature argues that failure to manage workplace violence may lead to insecurities and threaten employee well-being. This, in turn, affects the level of engagement within the organisation (Saleem et al., 2020). Here are the responses from participants with regard to the violence they experienced within the organisation:

*RP- 9 "There is psychological harm within the department. To a certain extent, you realise leaders do it as a defence mechanism to fend off their subordinates. They respond aggressively, or belittle the employees to shut them up, thereby automatically disengaging them."*

*RP-7 “There is psychological harm within the organisation as a result of frustration. It creates tension at the office. When the leader is always angry, it affects relations on a personal level.”*

*RP-5 “People are so frustrated; managers are aggressive. They push and stumble on their juniors.”*

*RP-8 “There is a lot of psychological harm within the organisation. Other employees are dealing with their colleagues personally within the organisation and not the work itself. They are attacking others individually and not work-related issues. They focus on individuals.”*

#### 4.4.6.2 Artificial Harmony Between Members of the Organisation

Many participants shared the view that there was artificial harmony among team members in the organisation. Many of the employees were not in support of each other and some mostly engaged in aggressive misunderstandings. Chakraborty and Ray (2018) argue that it is the responsibility of the organisation to enhance the team’s effectiveness and improve engagement level within the organisation. The participants share the following views about violence within the organisation:

*RP-2 “Many employees enjoy other colleagues’ suffering, which does not create a good working environment within the organisation.”*

*RP-6 “No one is willing to tell the truth and when objectives fail, that becomes the sole fault of the officer responsible for implementing the task. These events stress the minds and emotions of responsible officers, and since it is not easy to resign due to economic conditions, I would rather disengage from my work.”*

*RP-3 “We fight internal wars, and now it has exploded. Other employees could sense it. The climate affects the engagement of employees.”*

*RP-10 “Sometimes you could tell that people are going to physically harm each other during quarrels. There is a lot of infighting, but it has not been physical.”*

### 4.5 Interconnection of Themes

The poor development of organisational strategic plans creates unclear direction, which may result in an unsupportive work environment within the organisation.

Unclear strategic directions of the department create confusion among many employees. Strategy informs the creation of new roles within the department and designation of new jobs and processes necessary to achieve the organisation's strategic goals and objectives. However, poor work designs, processes, teamwork culture, organisational values and overlapping roles of the different sections within the department create an unhealthy working environment and leads to disengagement within the organisation. The majority of the employees experience work overload due to lack of resources and poor job designs. In some cases, employees have also given up on trying to achieve the objectives of the organisation due to lack of physical and psychological resources required to achieve the objectives of the organisation.

Employees feel the organisation's lack of resources negatively affects their psychological commitment to engage in organisational activities. When employees feel they have to achieve organisation objectives with no resources, they dread to take initiatives towards engaging in the organisation activities. A highly disengaged environment also hinders production and service delivery of the department. At the same time, when leaders forcefully push their efforts through using an extreme autocratic style of leadership, employee engagement is further hampered within the department.

An autocratic style of leadership makes employees feel commanded and excluded in decision-making processes that influence their roles. Extreme autocratic styles employed by leaders create an unbearable work environment, which, in turn, leads to an unhealthy work environment and low engagement levels among employees within the organisation.

#### **4.6 Summaries of Findings**

The data analysis revealed critical factors that influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. There is disengagement within the organisation, influenced by factors such as extreme autocratic style of leadership, unsupportive work-life environment, poor development of the organisational strategic plan, psychological despair to engage in the organisational activities and behavioural aggression between most of the employees.

These are the main issues that plague engagement within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. These issues have an effect on productivity, service delivery and the level of employee engagement in the organisation.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The chapter provided the detailed analysis of the research. The data analysis investigated the factors that influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Findings indicated that leadership behaviour plays a critical role in influencing employee engagement within the organisation. It is important to have clearly defined strategic goals and objectives. Leaders who are authentic use relevant leadership style and communicate well with their employees.

Poor strategic development and implementation, on the other hand, becomes a barrier to engagement. Overlapping roles and lack of organisational direction guided by the strategic vision, mission and objectives of the organisation are key elements that hinder employee engagement within the organisation. There is also a link between employee engagement and provision of physical and psychological resources.

When employees feel these resources are not provided, it creates psychological despair, which leads to disengagement amongst employees. The study also uncovered that the generational gap between older and younger employees has an effect on employee engagement within the organisation. As such, it is important to have the right mix of employees across all levels in the organisational structure. The Department of Social Development Head Office employs many older employees in the executive level than younger employees. As such, the majority of the disengaged employees at the top level influence the engagement of younger employees at the middle to lower level of the organisational structure. Consequently, it compromises the communication between top management and the rest of the employees in the organisation.

It is important for the organisation to manage and control the communication strategy in the work environment. Leaders must be aware and manage any psychological aggression between themselves and implementing staff members of the

organisation. After all, it is the responsibility of the leadership of the organisation to create a supportive work environment that enables employee engagement.

Findings from the study indicate that a supportive work environment where jobs have clearly defined roles, teamwork culture and a balanced workload enhance employee engagement within the organisation. Participants lamented that there was no teamwork within the organisation, while roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined, and majority of the employees felt overwhelmed. This posed a significant effect on employee engagement.

The next chapter will provide the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

## **5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The factors influencing employee engagement in the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho were the focus of the study. The penultimate chapter was on data interpretation and analysis. This final chapter includes a summary of the research study and recommendations to the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. The conclusions drawn from the study will also be covered in this chapter.

### **5.2 Summary of the Research Study**

The research aimed to analyse the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. The study's data collection methodology was qualitative, and semi-structured interviews were used. Interviews were conducted with 13 employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

The critical research questions that the study attempted to answer were the following:

- What does the literature indicate about employee engagement?
- What are the barriers to employee engagement at the head office of Lesotho's Department of Social Development?
- What are the enablers of employee engagement?
- What major factors influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho?

The secondary objectives that developed from the research questions were as follows:

- To provide an overview of factors influencing employee engagement.
- To provide an overview of enablers of employee engagement.
- To provide an overview of barriers to employee engagement.
- To determine the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

### **5.3 Addressing the Research Problem**

The research problem statement is that there are signs of disengagement by employees at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Failure to address these issues lead to lack of service delivery, dysfunctional technological systems, lack of accountability and negative publicity for the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Results indicate that there are numerous factors that influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Addressing these factors will enhance the performance of the organisation.

### **5.4 Research Questions**

The critical research questions the study attempted to answer were:

- What are the barriers to employee engagement at the head office of Lesotho's Department of Social Development?
- What are the enablers of employee engagement?
- What major factors influence employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho?

The primary aim of the study was to analyse factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Engaged employees are willing to stay with the organisation, increase productivity and have a greater commitment towards achieving organisational goals and objectives. It also improves collaboration when working with their team members within the organisation. The findings indicate that leadership practices have influences on employee engagement within the organisation.

There are numerous factors that the leadership of the organisation need to improve to enhance engagement within the organisation. Most of the leadership at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho prefer extreme autocratic style of leadership. However, this does not allow for collaborative decisions, authentic leadership practices and proper communication between junior employees and their supervisors, which becomes a barrier to engagement.

Organisational leadership is responsible for the development of the organisational strategy. Results show that the organisational strategy expired and many of the roles

that were designed from the expired strategic plan were overlapping. The current environment in the Lesotho government where there has been merging of different departments has created a demand for change of strategic direction. There is confusion amongst members of the organisation due to lack of direction, conflicting roles and objectives, which affect engagement within the organisation. Harmonisation of the work-life environment positively affects engagement within the department.

Every organisation is responsible for designing and creating supportive work-life environment that promotes teamwork culture that is conducive for engagement. Majority of employees share the view that there is no teamwork, nor any clearly defined roles, which means some are overloaded with work. These overburdened employees highlighted a significant drop in engagement within the organisation. They also mentioned that they experience psychological despair when they have to engage in the organisational activities due to the unavailability of resources.

Many employees have decided to disengage at work due to a serious lack of required resources to implement the objectives of the organisation. The organisation needs to invest in acquiring enough resources for the job and design work environments that allow for growth and development of employees to boost engagement within the organisation.

## **5.5 Addressing the Secondary Objectives of the Study**

The secondary objectives that support the primary research questions were addressed:

### ***5.5.1 Providing an Overview of Factors Influencing Employee Engagement***

Organisations depends on their employees to perform. Their feelings and behaviour directly or indirectly influence the overall performance of the organisation. Thus, it is important for organisation to consider employee engagement as part of the critical agenda in the organisation. Enablers and barriers as factors influencing employee engagement were discussed in the literature review.

## **5.5.2 Provide an Overview of Enablers of Employee Engagement**

### 5.5.2.1 Leadership Factors

Many leadership factors influence employee engagement. These factors include empowering leadership that has integrity and engages with managers, while involving junior employees. Authentic leaders that are fair, honest, respectful, transparent and are aware of their influence on their followers within the organisation. This enhances engagement within the organisation. These qualities are lacking in the majority of leaders at the Department of Social Development Head Office.

### 5.5.2.2 Communication Factors

Communication is also a key contributor to employee engagement within an organisation. Robust communication strategies influence engagement within the organisation. When employees are aware of circumstances within the organisation, they are engaged. Positive communication and leadership that listens to employees' concerns will motivate, unite, and inspire engagement levels within the organisation. However, when leaders seldom listen to employee concerns and are quick to propose solutions, it creates discontentment. When the employees are not heard, they disengage. This enabler of engagement is lacking within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

### 5.5.2.3 Work-Life Factors

Employees are deployed in various roles to perform roles that enable proper functioning of the whole organisation with job characteristics that have autonomy, skill variety and wider understanding of the role. This will increase the level of engagement within the organisation. Interdependence during work is critical in team-oriented environment enhances the opportunity for employee engagement. However, if there is no teamwork culture within the organisation and minimal understanding of roles and responsibilities within the department, engagement wanes.

## **5.5.3 Providing an Overview of Barriers to Employee Engagement**

Employees experience fluctuating levels of engagement during the performance of their job. As a result, it is the leaders' responsibility to investigate levels of employee

engagement within the organisation. The following barriers contribute to disengagement within the organisation.

#### 5.5.3.1 Organisational Strategy

Employee misalignment with corporate values is a significant barrier to engagement. The mission and values of the organisation are critical factors that create a barriers or opportunities to engagement within the organisation. The lack of engagement strategy hinders engagement because it creates difficulties in removing barriers to engagement within the organisation. The strategic plan at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho expired, and since then, the organisation lacks a robust strategy that can revive employee engagement.

#### 5.5.3.2 Leadership Style

Extreme autocratic style of leadership leads employees to refrain from participating in organisational activities. It inhibits creativity in situations that require problem solving. Autocratic leaders generally rely on brute force and threatening employees as their main source of influence. They lack trust in their employees and do not allow inputs in any decision-making process. This is another barrier to engagement at Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

#### 5.5.3.3 Workplace Violence

Psychological violence devastates employee well-being, team member relation and the overall performance of the organisation. There is widespread workplace aggression among the employees at the department. This problem requires attention from the leadership of the organisation. Leaders need to manage and control proceedings at work, from senior to junior level. Employees at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho lamented at the widespread internal fights between employees.

### **5.5.4 *Determining the Factors Influencing Employee Engagement***

#### 5.5.4.1 Extreme Autocratic Style of Leadership

A leaders' role in an organisation is to lead employees towards achievement of goals and objectives. The study revealed that leadership at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho preferred to use an extreme autocratic style of leadership on employees. This discourages engagement, and employees refrain

from improving performance to achieve organisational goals and objectives. It discourages employees to participate in the decision-making process of the organisational plans and as a result affect the entire organisational performance.

#### 5.5.4.2 Poor Development of Organisational Strategic Plan

Poor development of organisational strategy negatively affects engagement within the organisation. When employees fail to find alignment with the organisation's mission and values, they disengage. The lack of a robust engagement strategy makes it difficult for to remove the barriers to engagement at the Department of Social Development.

#### 5.5.4.3 Psychological Despair to Engage in Organisational Activities

When the organisation deploys both psychological and physical resources to the employees, it enhances the level of engagement within the organisation. If the employees receive the psychological and physical support, they, in turn, commit their collective minds, emotions and efforts towards achievement of organisational goals and objectives. However, there is lack of resources that enable employees to fulfil their objectives at the department. Many employees feel that it is discouraging to engage in activities while they are aware that the department will not provide them resources to implement them.

#### 5.5.4.4 Unsupportive Work-Life Environment

Organisation are responsible for creating a conducive workplace culture that promotes employee engagement. Teamwork creates interpersonal relationships that are crucial for the overall performance of the organisation. Evidence from the research indicates that there is no teamwork culture between the employees of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. This discourages engagement within the organisation.

#### 5.5.4.5 Workplace Aggression

Workplace violence affects an employee's well-being and relationships with their team members. The results from the study indicate that there is psychological aggression towards employees at the organisation. Many of the junior employees feel insecure when they interact with their leaders at the Department of Social

Development Head Office in Lesotho. Aggression discourages engagement and impact on the overall performance of the organisation.

## **5.6 Conclusions on the Findings**

The researcher's conclusions indicate that the interviewed members of the organisation understood employee engagement. Many employees wish to contribute towards the success of the organisation but find it hard to engage due several factors that impact negatively on engagement.

The following factors were identified from the interviews held at the department: (i) extreme autocratic leadership style, (ii) discouragement to engage in organisational activities, (iii) workplace aggression, (iv) poor development of organisational strategic plan, (v) unsupportive work-life environment. The following section explains each factor in more details.

### **5.6.1 *Extreme Autocratic Leadership Style***

Findings from the participants indicate that most leaders from the organisation do not engage their junior employees during decision-making processes that concern their inputs to be successful. They do this by commanding and forcing employees to perform the tasks without further discussing issues. Leaders only start engaging their employees when the outcomes are negative. Participants feel that junior employees are not accorded the opportunity to get involved and contribute to the objectives of the organisation, especially in matters that require their inputs. This approach from leadership discourages employee engagement within the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

### **5.6.2 *Discouragement to Engage in Organisational Objectives***

Evidence from the research suggests that the organisation does not provide enough opportunity for growth and development. In addition, there is no support from leadership of during the performance of the job. Employees are not supervised enough to successfully implement the objectives of the organisation.

The organisation does not provide enough resources to address human resource problems. Here, resources are not available when the employees require them for

implementation of the objectives of the organisation. This results in psychological despair as employees are stifled when engaging in the activities of the organisation.

### **5.6.3 Workplace Aggression**

The study evidence indicated that leaders at the department responded aggressively to their subordinates. The leaders' aggressive emotions affected employees at a personal level. Some employees experienced verbal abuse from their leaders, which discouraged engagement within the organisation. Participants also indicated that most of the leaders forced decisions on their juniors. Some of the participants believe that their colleagues enjoy their subordinates' suffering in the work environment. Participants also stated that some employee's conflicts came close to descending into physical harm. This indicates a severely hostile work environment. This results in an unsafe environment which discourages employee engagement.

### **5.6.4 Poor Development of Organisational Strategic Plan**

Participants indicated that the organisation's strategic plan had expired, and many people did not use the strategic plan to effect the direction of the organisation. The plan was partially used to create positions within the organisation. It was prepared by senior management team and shelved. Interviewees also revealed the confusion between employees concerning roles within the organisation as a result of conflicting roles within the strategic plan.

As such, it is crucial for the organisation to continuously review its strategic plan and clarify the roles of the different position. Employees who do not fully understand their roles are likely to disengage from their job.

### **5.6.5 Unsupportive Work-Life Environment**

Participants revealed that majority of the employees work various roles within the organisation and are not rewarded for their efforts. This created work overload, also perpetuated by a lack of staff. Participants also noted there was a high expectation from organisational leadership to achieve results even with limited resources.

Consequently, the push to achieve the results under difficult circumstances created widespread frustration and disengagement within the organisation. As such, it is the

responsibility of the leadership to develop a supportive work environment within the department.

## **5.7 Recommendations**

This section outlines the proposed recommendations to address the factors hindering employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. These recommendations are based on the research objectives and the study's main findings.

### **5.7.1 Training of Leaders**

Senior management team needs to be encouraged to take leadership programmes to enhance their personal, team and organisational leadership skills as part of career development plans. They need to be educated on how their preferred leadership philosophies influence employee engagement and the performance of the organisation.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence training should be given to all executives and senior employees to improve communication and conduct, as well as minimise the level of aggression between employees and their leaders within the organisation.

Leaders also need to be trained on developing a teamwork culture within the organisation. This will enable the organisation to create a supportive work environment and improve the level of engagement. It is also critical for the organisation to develop a strategic plan and engagement strategy.

### **5.7.2 Development of an Organisational Strategic Plan**

Because of the significance of organisational strategic plan on engagement, the department needs to engage a team of experts to assist in developing a guide on the proper implementation of the plan. The organisational strategic plan informs stakeholders in various key strategic areas about the key positions and responsibilities required to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

It also critical to develop organisational engagement strategy. The engagement strategy must form part of the agenda that is aligned with the organisation's strategic

vision, mission and objectives. The department should also provide resources necessary to meet the strategic objectives of the organisation.

### **5.7.3 Availability of Resources**

#### 5.7.3.1 Human Resources

The organisation needs to provide adequate resources that enable proper implementation of programmes. There should be quick recruitment of human capital and acquisition of assets to enable complete functioning of the organisation. The organisation must prioritise recruitment of talented human capital to assume the vacant positions. This will minimise the workload and avoid the deployment of employees onto roles that do not fit their capacity and skill. Furthermore, the organisation must review the recruitment practices and policies to enable an appropriate mix of skilled young employees and older experienced employees in the executive structures of the organisation. This will minimise the generational gap at strategic levels of the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

#### 5.7.3.2 Investment in Assets

The organisation must invest in assets to enable implementation of objectives. The lack of key assets creates psychological despair amongst employees during the performance of their roles. When the organisation provides input resources, employees increase their level of desire to take initiatives and risks to achieve the organisational goals and objectives. The organisation also needs review the designs of the work roles and operations.

### **5.7.4 Enhancement of Job Designs**

Properly designed jobs avoid overlaps in objectives and job roles. Well-designed jobs enable understanding of the roles and responsibilities. All this will enhance employee engagement within the organisation because employees understand what is expected of them and are responsible for the outcomes.

## **5.8 Limitations of the Study**

The Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho was the subject of the study. This may have limited the applicability of results if the entire department

had been examined. The study also concentrated on directors, managers and senior officers of the organisation which was another limitation to the study.

The study reached saturation due to purposive sampling. The study might also be subject to biased sampling as a result of a predetermined sampling strategy.

## **5.9 Further Study**

The research study indicated several limitations and therefore additional investigations would be beneficial. These include:

- Findings that concentrated on the head office and all district departments such as Departments of Youth and Gender would be beneficial to create applicability of the findings.
- The sample size that is bigger and provided everybody with equal chance of being selected would also be beneficial in the study.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

The researcher analysed factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho. Throughout the interviews, employees understood the factors that influenced employee engagement. The findings from the interviews indicate that main factors influencing employee engagement within the department are workplace aggression, extreme autocratic style of leadership, unsupportive work-life environment, poor strategic plan development and employee despair to engage in organisational activities.

Leadership plays a critical role in influencing engagement within the organisation. Leadership influences the direction of the organisation. It is vital for the organisation to recruit skilled and experienced leaders with the capacity to develop and implement the right strategies to positively influence the direction of the organisation. Leadership is responsible for setting the right policies, allocating resources, creating supportive work-life environment and inspiring the employees to achieve organisational goals and objectives. The current leadership at the department needs to make improvements in skills that enhance engagement, communication strategies and emotional intelligence. These skills will aid better engagement within the organisation.

The Department of Social Development is one of the critical departments with equally significant influence in the total government expenditure. Its beneficiaries are the vulnerable community in the Kingdom of Lesotho; its performance is critical whether it is the implementation of the high-risk operations, or the reputation of the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho. In order to enhance performance, the organisation must include engagement strategies in key decision positions within the organisation.

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## ANNEXURE A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I am Toli Lejalla, a student at the University of the Free State Business School. The objective of this research is to gain an understanding of employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

Kindly note that all the information recorded in this interview will be treated as confidential.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse answering any question. Please answer questions as honestly as possible. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on understanding the factors influencing employee engagement at the Department of Social Development Head Office in Lesotho.

**Interviewer: Toli Lejalla**

**Date of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant number:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Alignment with the literature</b>
1. What is your understanding of employee engagement?	2.2
2. Tell me about the main leadership factors that influence engagement within the organisation.	2.3.1.1
3. Explain the impact of gender on engagement in the workplace.	2.3.1.3
4. Tell me about the influence of age on engagement within the organisation.	2.3.1.3
5. What influence does work life have on engagement within the organisation?	2.3.1.4
6. Tell me about personal factors that impact engagement within the organisation.	2.3.1.5

7. Explain how individual career development plans influence engagement within the organisation.	2.3.1.5
8. What psychological factors might influence engagement within the organisation.	2.3.1.5.1
9. How does the organisation strategy influence work engagement within the organisation?	2.3.2.1
10. Tell me about the organisation's engagement strategy.	2.3.2.1
11. What role does technology play in employee engagement within the organisation?	2.3.2.2
12. Explain the impact that was created by COVID-19 pandemic on work engagement.	2.3.2.3
13. How does the style of leadership impact engagement within the organisation?	2.3.2.4
14. Tell me about workplace aggression (desire to either physically or psychologically harm others) and its impact on engagement within the organisation.	2.3.2.5

## ANNEXURE B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, the undersigned,

\_\_\_\_\_ (*participant's full names to be included*), (the "**Participant**")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

\_\_\_\_\_ (the "**Study**") in relation to

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

and which Study is being conducted by

\_\_\_\_\_  
(*Insert the name of the researcher*), (the "**Researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that:

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study.
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet.
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study.
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto.

6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein.
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage.
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the *Interview*

Full Name of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_


Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## ANNEXURE C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



**UFS** BUSINESS SCHOOL  
BE WORTH MORE

Dear Deputy Principal Secretary, Mahlapane Makakole-Bodiba (Mrs)

**RE: Preliminary permission to conduct research at your organization**

I am doing research and would like to request permission to conduct my research at the Department of Social Development head office in Lesotho.

**DATE**  
14/09/2023

**PRELIMINARY TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT\***  
Employee engagement at the Department of Social Development head office in Lesotho.

**PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR**  
Toli Lejalla                      2017348026                      +266 58097430

**FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT**  
Master of Business Administration (MBA)  
Economic and Management Sciences Faculty  
Business School

**STUDY LEADER NAME AND CONTACT**  
Dr. Du Toit  
+27 827437818

**APPROVAL NEEDED**  
This study still needs ethical approval from the General Human Research Ethics (GHREC) committee at the University of the Free State. As part of the application for ethical clearance I need temporary approval from you to conduct the research in your organization. Once the Ethical Clearance certificate has been issued by the GHREC, the formal and final permission document and the data collection instruments will be provided to you for final consideration and approval.

Therefore, in order for me to complete my research, I need your permission to:

	Permission Requested (YES,NO, N/A)	Request Approved (YES, NO)
Collect data from Employees at the Department of Social Development head office in Lesotho.	Yes	Yes

\* The Title and objective of the study may change, based on the reviews performed by the supervisor and scientific committee and the UFS. If the changes made has a significant impact on the permission requested, you will be informed as soon as possible.

Access to internal data such as contact numbers and emails of participants.	Yes	Yes
Access to internal documentation such as minutes of the meetings and presentations.	Yes	Yes
Including your organization's name in the study and the title of the study. If the answer is no, please also indicate whether I can still get access to the above if the study results are anonymized.	Yes	Yes
Using the data collected for future conference proceedings and or article publication.	Yes	Yes

**ADDITIONAL STIPULATIONS**


If you have any additional stipulations about the temporary request for permission to conduct research in your organization, please include those stipulations in the space provided.

None

Yours sincerely

  
Toli Lejalla

Approval Granted by:

  
Mphahlele Mphahlele-Bodvra

Name, surname and signature of individual granting the permission

7266 63988944  
Contact number

## ANNEXURE D: LETTER OF PERMISSION



LESOTHO  
Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social  
Development  
Pr/Bag A222  
Maseru 100  
Lesotho  
Tel. (+266) 22314099

12 June 2024

Dear Mr Toli Lejale

**RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

This is an acknowledgement of the receipt of your request to conduct academic research at the Department of Social Development. Your request has been approved and we are looking forward to granting you the necessary support during your research.

Looking forward to your usual cooperation.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Makakole-Bodiba', written over a horizontal line.

Mahlapane Makakole-Bodiba (Mrs)

Principal Secretary, Gender, Youth and Social Development