

# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT FREE STATE PROVINCIAL TREASURY (FSPT)

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**Declaration**

“I declare that the field study handed in to fulfil the requirement of qualification for a Master’s Degree in Business Administration at the University of the Free State’s Business School is my independent work and that I have not submitted the same work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.

I also give the copy right of this work to the University of Free State”.

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## **Abstract**

The primary objective of this research was to determine employee engagement at Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT). Employee engagement is important and should be a human resource priority in all organisations as engaged employees boost retention and enhance productivity. Literature has confirmed that there is minimal empirical research about employees in the public sector. Additionally, FSPT as a public sector organisation has never conducted employee engagement surveys in the past twelve years. A sample of 372 was chosen for this study and data was collected electronically from employees at FSPT using the UWES-17 questionnaire. Schaufeli and Bakker's theory on employee engagement forms the basis of this study as the variables for the UWES-17 directly link with engagement dimensions such as emotional, cognitive, and physical elements. The quantitative data was then analysed using statistical methods.

The results of the study revealed that employee engagement at FSPT is at an average level. Furthermore, the results also found a significant link between employees' age, years of service, marital status, occupational level, and gender. The recommendations of the study are that the engagement efforts should have a specific focus on millennials as they now make up more than half of the workforce and are less loyal to the organisation. Training and development should be a continuous service from the department to employees because it improves employee performance which will be beneficial to the department, as the government is under immense financial strain and that affects the employee performance rewards. The department should introduce non-monetary rewards that will ensure that employees feel valued and that their contribution towards the departmental goals is recognised. These findings can assist to increase the number of empirical studies on employee engagement in the public sector.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement, public sector, vigour, dedication, absorption, discretionary effort, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17)

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT) is one of thirteen provincial government departments in the province. The department does not provide services directly to the public but renders services to provincial departments, public entities, and municipalities. FSPT is responsible for allocating a budget to all provincial departments and entities, and to oversee the preparation of municipal budgets. The department further plays an oversight role in the implementation of the budget by enforcing transparency in the effective management of revenue, expenditure, assets, and liabilities of provincial departments and public entities.

FSPT was once a department that took pride in its work with employees in other provincial departments wanting to be a part of. It was a department where employees worked beyond the official working hours and even on weekends during peak periods, for example when preparing for the tabling of the provincial budget. The behaviour has since changed as employees come up with all sorts of excuses not to work overtime. Some employees have even embarked on a personal development journey by registering for courses at universities just to keep themselves busy with something more fulfilling besides work.

The department received clean audit reports for six consecutive years from 2009/10 to 2014/15. Between 2015/16 and 2018/19, the department had different audit opinions, namely qualified, and unqualified. Non-adherence to internal controls such as non-compliance with Supply Chain Management (SCM) requirements is among the reasons that led to the regression of audit outcomes. The issues raised in the audit report may be the result of human errors by accident or purposefully not following the policies and procedures. Additionally, FSPT has never conducted an Employee Engagement Survey in the past twelve years.

Current research on engagement in South Africa mostly focuses on engagement in the private sector; minimal research on this topic is conducted in government institutions (Martins & Ledimo, 2016). Employee engagement in the public sector is just as important because it drives the outcomes that matter to the sector such as

achievement of strategic goals, customer service, employee retention, innovation, and safety at the workplace.

According to Meyer (2012), public sector organisations should focus on attending to the job resources of the employees to improve their levels of work engagement. Meyer (2012) suggests that employees should be given increased access to information and growth opportunities to increase variety in their work tasks, to create learning opportunities, and to foster independence. Even though the public sector is not profit-driven, it is still mandated to provide the best services and that requires employees to be emotionally connected to their work. The Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT) is also no different from other public sector departments as it is required according to its mission statement to “...instil prudent financial management and good governance” (FSPT, 2020).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the value chain of employee engagement in government.

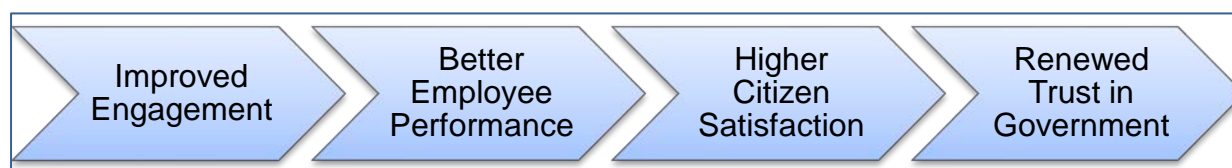


Figure 1.1: The Engagement Value Chain.

Source: Lavigna (2019)

The illustration above indicates that employee engagement does not only drive performance but that it can also help to remove the negative public opinion about government. Government employees have been stigmatised as underworked and overpaid, yet they are tasked to solve some of the biggest issues related to poverty, unemployment, security, and education (Lavigna, 2013). Achieving a high level of employee engagement in the public sector may be an overwhelming challenge with the ever-shrinking public purse and economic struggles which are among the reasons the workplace has become stressful for government employees.

There has never been an Employee Engagement Survey conducted at FSPT in the past twelve years; it is worth an effort to research and determine the level of employee engagement in the department. If employee engagement is not at the desirable level and not addressed urgently, the department may find itself in an even more difficult

situation in the future. According to Allen (2014), employee engagement has three levels; engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged. The desire for any organisation is to have employees that are all engaged.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The problem is that employee engagement surveys have never been conducted at FSPT, therefore the department does not have any employee engagement measurement nor any employee engagement programs in place. Furthermore, despite the popularity of employee engagement as a subject of research, there are only a few studies on the concept concerning the South African public sector.

The problem statement further prompted the following research questions:

- What is the level of employee engagement at FSPT?
- How do employees feel about the workplace?

After evaluating the level of engagement in the department, cost-effective recommendations will be suggested to the management of the Department.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The **primary objective** of this study is:

- To determine employee engagement at FSPT.

The **secondary objectives** of the study include the following:

- To analyse the current factors affecting employee engagement;
- To determine the level of employee engagement at FSPT; and
- To evaluate strategies that can enhance employee engagement at FSPT.

## **1.4 Research Methodology**

This study aims to determine the level of employee engagement at FSPT and seek to find answers to the research objectives listed above. According to Ragab and Arisha (2018), a basic requisite of successful research depends on the proper selection of the research methodology applied to achieve research objectives using the available resources. The research methodology is therefore an outline of a work plan for the

research that familiarises the researcher with different designs, scientific tools, and techniques that are relevant for a solution to the problem.

## **1.5 Research Design**

The quantitative research design was used in this study due to the size of the population. Cooper and Schindler (2014) refer to research design as the blueprint fulfilling objectives and answering research questions. According to Bryman and Bell (2014), quantitative research is a distinctive research approach that entails the collection of numerical data, regards the relationship between theory and research as deductive, prefers the natural science approach in general (and positivism in particular), and adopts an objectivist conception of social reality.

Bryman and Bell (2014) further state that quantitative research design aims to generalise the findings beyond the boundaries of the particular context where the research was conducted. Results from the respondents will, therefore, be generalised to the whole population of FSPT.

## **1.6 Sampling**

To select a sample, a researcher must identify a population that the research aims to investigate. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define a population as the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate and make inferences for. The population size of FSPT is 404, according to the monthly employment report as of 31 December 2019 (FSPT, 2019). A sample is a subset of a population and according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), it comprises some members selected from a population. From the population of 404 employees, 372 employees from salary level 3 to 12 representing deputy directors and the rest of lower-level employees formed the sample for this study. The senior management employees amounting to 32 were excluded from the sample as they are responsible for the strategic direction of the department and all other employees are at an operational level. The exclusion of senior managers is motivated by the need to get reliable information from employees performing daily tasks that ultimately lead to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the department. The sample size is big enough to get cross-reference from the sampled employees and boost the response rate where a generalisation will be made.

The sampling method used in this study was non-probability, convenience sampling. The non-probability sampling method has limitations as it does not represent the whole population, therefore generalising the results to the population should always be kept in mind (Maree, 2016). The sample was limited to employees from the deputy director level and below at FSPT in an attempt to get comprehensive data from employees performing the work on ground level.

### **1.7 Data Collection Method**

Data collection is the process of gathering information on variables of interest to measure it in a systematic way that provides answers to research questions. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) state that data can be obtained from primary or secondary sources. Primary data refers to information obtained first-hand by the researcher on the variables of interest for the specific purpose of the study (individuals, focus groups, and panels of respondents), while secondary data refer to information gathered from sources that already exist (company records or archives, government publications, industry analyses offered by media, website, internet and so on).

The data collection instrument used in this study is a self-administered structured questionnaire which consists of two sections. Section A will measured the participant's biographical details which include race, age group, gender, marital status, educational level, population group, language, and level of management. Section B is an existing data collection instrument called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). It is an instrument that was developed in the Netherlands by Schaufeli and Barker (2003) to increase the generalisability of the findings beyond the country in which the UWES was developed (Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, Salanova, & De Witte, 2017). Farndale, Beijer, Van Veldhoven, Kelliher, and Hope-Hailey (2014) argue that UWES is the most widely used operationalisation of engagement in academic studies.

In the South African context, UWES has been used and validated in several studies involving public sector organisations. Storm and Rothmann (2003) validated UWES in the South African Police Service. Storm and Rothmann (2003) investigated the internal consistencies of the three engagement scales of the UWES as well as the construct equivalence and bias for different race groups in their sample and found the scales had acceptable levels of internal consistency.

The population size for this research is 402 employees of the department and a sample of 372 employees will be selected as a sample. The sample size for this study is fairly big and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) applies to the population as the scale has a limited number of short questions that employees can respond to with ease. The questionnaire was administered electronically, therefore, there was no printing and physical distribution required considering the risk of COVID-19. The researcher did not send out the questionnaires or received them directly from the respondents. The ICT unit at FSPT will electronically send and receive the questionnaires before forwarding them to the researcher. The circulation of the questionnaire will be in a manner that ensures confidentiality is maintained and no identification of respondents will be made. The respondents completed the online questionnaires at their convenience.

### **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are one of the most important parts of the research as it ensures that participants are not exposed to any sort of harm and that their dignity is respected. It further ensures that full consent is obtained from participants before the commencement of the study. Maree (2016) states that an essential ethical aspect in research is the issue of protection of the participant's identities.

The following ethical concerns were taken into consideration in light of the above:

- *Permission obtained:* Permission to conduct research at FSPT was obtained from the HOD of the department before the commencement of data collection. A consent letter needs to be accompanied by a letter in which the organisations also give consent to use their sites and name (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004).
- *Ethical clearance:* Before the collection of data the researcher must receive approval from the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC). This committee exists to protect research participants and is also involved in protecting the researchers and institution from the possibility of adverse publicity or legal actions being taken against them (Bryman & Bell, 2014).
- *Voluntary participation:* Participation in the study is voluntary and participants at FSPT are under no obligation to give consent to participate. Even though organisational permission may have been granted to conduct the research, it does not mean that employees are required to participate. Participation should be

entirely voluntary and if there is the slightest sign of coercion, then the research should not proceed (Gray, 2019).

- *Informed consent:* An informed consent to participate was completed by participants who have agreed to participate. The results of the study will be made available to the participants if the management of FSPT permits. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014) securing informed consent from participants is a matter of fully disclosing the procedures of the proposed survey or other research design before requesting permission to proceed with the study.
- *Confidentiality and anonymity:* Participant responses to the questionnaire at FSPT were kept confidential and anonymous. All individuals have the right to privacy, and researchers are compelled to respect that right. Once the guarantee of confidentiality is given, protecting that confidentiality is essential (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).
- *Potential harm:* Except for the risk of time inconvenience where some employees may complete the questionnaire during office hours, the completion of the questionnaire posed no other inconvenience, risk, physical or emotional harm to respondents as the participants will be strictly anonymous. Gray (2019) is of the view that workplace research often requires respondents to express their views and opinions on work-related issues, some of which might include criticism of the organisation and its management. If individuals can be identified, in extreme cases it could not just cause embarrassment, but even disciplinary action or dismissal hence the adherence to confidentiality is crucial.

## **1.9 Demarcation of the Study**

The study is aimed at determining the level of employee engagement at the Free State Provincial Treasury. Upon identification of engagement levels and factors affecting employee engagement at FSPT, recommendations that will influence departmental human resource policies will be presented for consideration to the top management of the department.

The field of the study is in Human Resource Management as it deals with one aspect of employee well-being. The study will be conducted at Free State Provincial Treasury in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

## **1.10 Chapter Layout**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

The reader will be provided with an overview of the study as well as an outline of the problem statement of the research and objectives thereof.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter will provide the reader with an idea of what has been written in the literature, and the gap that currently exists on the topic which has prompted the researcher for further study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

The procedure and techniques used to collect data or information for this study will be outlined in this chapter. The reader will have an idea of why a certain research design was chosen, population, and sample size as well as the data collection method.

### **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This is the process of reviewing data to reach an informed conclusion on the research topic. In quantitative research data and, analysis and interpretation involves the use of numerical techniques to obtain useful information that will contribute to the conclusion and recommendations.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the reader will be reminded of the strengths of the researcher's arguments and the important evidence in support of those arguments. The researcher will further recommend or suggest the best cause of action to the research problem.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

According to literature, employee engagement is at or near the top of most surveys that cover the concerns of human resource leaders. There is much enthusiasm about the concept as it is believed to be better than employee satisfaction. So much focus on the concept has been directed towards profit-driven organisations as the literature has proven that a direct link exists between engaged employees and profitability.

On the opposite side of profit-driven organisations are public sector institutions that are mandated to provide a high quality of service to the public and there is not much research on the importance of employee engagement for government employees.

This study will seek to emphasise that employee engagement is just as crucial for government employees to achieve strategic goals that will see an improvement in service delivery.

Chapter 2 will explore and elaborate on the theoretical analysis of employee engagement by explaining its definition, dimensions, and models. This chapter will further give clarity on different drivers of employee engagement and finally explain the strategies available to enhance employee engagement.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Employee Engagement has been a focus point of much attention in recent years by both employers and academics, largely due to the promise it has offered of higher-performing employees (O'Brien, 2015). While at a global level, employee engagement is at an all-time high, the broader experience points to growing pains for employees trying to get comfortable with new ways of working (Oehler & Adair, 2019). According to Oehler and Adair (2019), the global trends depict Sub-Saharan Africa as lagging in terms of organisational agility, engaged leadership, and talent focus.

A study by Besnault and Córdova (2013) confirms the influence of the manager in promoting adequate conditions at the workplace to achieve a positive work atmosphere that generates motivation, satisfaction, and consequently, employee engagement. Employees are looking for leaders that create an environment that is exciting, inspiring, and prioritises employee development that ultimately aligns with cultural priorities. According to Hejase, Hejase, Mikdashi, and Bazeih (2016) competition and the lack of available, highly talented and skilled employees make finding and retaining talented people a major priority for organisations. Mohammed (2015) found that talent management enables the organisation to improve employee engagement, commitment, retention, and value addition that leads to improved organisational performance.

It is also important for organisations, as they formulate or enhance engagement strategies, to consider the younger generation that is slowly joining the workforce. In the 2016 Global Human Capital Trends publication, Deloitte (2016) states that millennials now make up more than half of the workforce and are less loyal to the organisation. They will leave the organisation if they feel that their expectations for rewarding, purposeful work experience, constant learning and development opportunities, and dynamic career progression are not met.

In addition to the fact that the level of employee engagement affects the individual's work environment, it can also harm the productivity of the organisation if the engagement level is low. Studies have revealed a positive relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance outcomes such as employee

retention, productivity, profitability, customer loyalty, and safety (Simha & Vardhan, 2015) . Simon (2011) adds that engagement is linked to three essential forces in the organisation namely; attrition, productivity, and profitability. Engaged employees are productive and capable of working beyond expectation which will ultimately lead to a profitable organisation. According to Simon (2011), an engaged employee carries out expectations of the organisation, with a clear focus on the goal to ultimately bring success to the organisation.

It is therefore important to engage employees to ensure an organisational longevity, productivity, and profitability. Organisations should first determine the levels of employee engagement to find possible solutions to minimise its negative effects. Secondly, organisations must identify the factors affecting employee engagement and implement possible solutions to avoid the snowball effect thereof. The organisations should have a clear plan for career growth and promotion of each employee so that the committed and talented employees know the prospects for their personal and professional growth (Das, Byadwal, & Singh, 2017). Thirdly, there are different strategies that organisations can implement to enhance employee engagement.

Chapter 2 will commence by defining and reviewing employee engagement. It will further clarify the concept in terms of its dimensions which are cognitive, emotional, and physical. Many employee engagement models have been developed by different experts as the concept gains popularity. Furthermore, employees do not just become fully engaged; in many instances there are drivers behind employee engagement. Joseph, Guhanandan and Panchanathan (2018) learned that employee engagement drivers such as leadership style, rewards and recognition, and training and development can influence the innovative behaviour in employees. This chapter will also investigate what employee engagement means in the public sector.

There are many definitions of employee engagement that have been developed by different scholars and human resource practitioners. The following section explores those definitions.

## **2.2 Definition of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has no single definition as many theories and models try to answer what is meant by the concept (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Khan (1990) defines

it as the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work role. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Employee engagement is an emotional state where an employee feels passionate, enthusiastic, energetic, committed towards work, and show concern about the sustainability of the organisation. Bakker (2011) summed the engagement as a positive, highly awakened emotional state with two features: energy, and involvement.

Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) state that engagement is an energy, participation, and effectiveness parallel with three features of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional effectiveness, and that engagement and burnout are the two ends of the scale. Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) refer to employee engagement as the relationship an employee has with his or her work and that the relationship also extends to the attachment of the employee with the organisation.

Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) define engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. According to Robbins, Judge, Odendaal, and Roodt (2013) employee engagement is an individual's involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for the work that he or she does. While Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) also define it as an individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for work.

Saks (2006) defines employee engagement as a "unique and different" concept that is composed of knowledge, emotion, and behaviour. Simha and Vardhan (2015) concur with the emotional aspect of employee engagement as they define it as an emotional commitment the employee has to the organisation and its goals.

According to Allen (2014) employee engagement is an emotional commitment employees feel towards their organisation and the actions they take to ensure the organisation's success; engaged employees demonstrate care, dedication, enthusiasm accountability, and are results focused.

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Bakker Schaufeli (2002) define engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption, and a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state that is not focused on any specific object, event, individual, or behaviour.

Allen (2014) further categorises employee engagement into three levels, defined as follows:

**Engaged** employees work with passion and feel an emotional connection to their organisation. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward. They are characterised as being loyal, committed, productive, and deliver results.

**Not Engaged** employees come to work and do what is asked of them but have little energy or passion for their work. They have no meaningful attachment to their job or organisation. They can easily be tempted by job vacancies elsewhere.

**Actively Disengaged** employees are not just unhappy at work; they actively show their unhappiness by demonstrating negative, uncooperative, and sometimes hostile behaviour and attitudes. They undermine their teams and their business.

It is clear from the above definitions that there is no single definition of employee engagement. Some scholars view it as a multi-faceted construct while others think of it as a dedicated willingness, a positive state of mind, or the opposite of burnout. This study will follow the definition of Schaufeli et al., (2002) since the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) created by Schaufeli will be used as an instrument of measure for employee engagement.

The following section will elaborate more on the dimensions of employee engagement.

### **2.3 Dimensions of Employee Engagement**

Khan (1990), as the founding expert of employee engagement regard it as harnessing the organisation's employees in the way they express cognitively, emotionally, and physically while performing roles. Many other researchers have come up with different dimensions but Khan's still has the fundamental aspects relating to the dimensions.

### **2.3.1 Emotional Dimension**

The emotional dimension focuses more on the safety, connection and the employee's feeling of security in expressing one's self within the organisation. The emotional aspect of employee engagement is the most important as it has been mentioned quite often even in the preceding sections of this paper. Lax (2017) affirms that employee engagement is all about the emotional affinity employees feel for a company and that everything else is important if it translates to an emotional connection. Lax (2017) further explains that an engaged employee feels a sense of involvement in the organisation, that they do not just work for the organisation but are part of the greater organisation's vision; the organisation is an important part of how they feel about themselves. Miller (2017) agrees that employee engagement primarily represents a measure of the worker's emotional commitment to their organisation's values and vision.

### **2.3.2 Cognitive Dimension**

Engaged employees experience meaningfulness of their work roles and the cognitive dimension is based on the logic of effectiveness. Employees can achieve such meaningfulness by being highly aware of and aligned with the organisational strategy and know what they need to deliver the best return on their work efforts. Kuok and Taormina (2017) define cognitive employee engagement dimensions as the intentional and actively focused awareness of one's tasks, objectives, or organizational activities that are characterized by willingly calling one's attention to and having positive thoughts about one's work, to improve one's effectiveness at those tasks, objectives, or activities.

### **2.3.3 Physical Dimension**

The availability of personal resources is essential for engagement where employees apply their physical and mental energies to fully perform their job. It is based on bodily participation in any kind of job. According to Jevé, Oppenheimer and Konje (2015) physical dimension is characterized by energy, mental resilience, the willingness to invest one's effort, and persistence. While Kumar and Harisha (2017) refer to it as the level to which an employee works with full intensity, devote a lot of energy, and strive as hard as they can to complete their job.

## 2.4 Linking Dimensions to Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) developed a self-report questionnaire called UWES and includes three aspects of work engagement, vigour, dedication, and absorption.

<b>Cognitive Dimension</b>	<b>Absorption</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refers being involved in one's work, finding meaning in one's work, being challenged, and experiencing sense of enthusiasm, inspiration and pride</li></ul>
<b>Physical Dimension</b>	<b>Vigour</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physical presence at work with high level of energy and mental resilience, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties</li></ul>
<b>Emotional Dimension</b>	<b>Dedication</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employee is fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from work</li></ul>

Figure 2.1: Link Between Engagement Dimensions and UWES.

Source: (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003)

**Absorption** refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). It is measured by the following six items:

- Time flies when I'm working
- When I am working, I forget everything else around me
- I feel happy when I am working intensely
- I am immersed in my work
- I get carried away when I'm working
- It is difficult to detach myself from my job

Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) reckon that employees who score high on absorption feel that they are usually happily engrossed in their work, they feel immersed by their work and have difficulties detaching from it because it carries them away. As a consequence, everything else around them is forgotten and time seems to fly. Those who score low on absorption do not feel engrossed or immersed in their work, they do not have difficulties detaching from it and therefore they do not forget everything around them, including time. According to Bakar (2014) absorption describes the

feeling of contentment while performing work and states that for a person to be engaged, he or she should enjoy the work and find pleasure in performing it. This domain of employee engagement concerns the devotion aspect of work thus Bakar (2014) concludes that a happy and focused employee embodies an engaged employee.

**Vigour** refers to a high level of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Vigour is assessed by the following six items:

- At my work, I feel bursting with energy
- At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
- When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
- I can continue working for very long periods at a time
- At my job, I am very resilient, mentally
- At my work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) employees who score high on vigour usually have a lot of energy, zest, and stamina when working, whereas those who score low on vigour have less energy, zest, and stamina as far as their work is concerned. Bakar (2014) refers to vigour as an affective state that individuals attribute to their job and workplace. It simply focuses on the notion of having "energy" at work and does not capture the holistic concept of engagement.

**Dedication** refers to being involved in one's work, finding meaning in one's work, being challenged, and experiencing a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride. Dedication is assessed by the following five items:

- I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose
- I am enthusiastic about my job
- My job inspires me
- I am proud of the work that I do
- To me, my job is challenging

Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) argue that employees who score high on dedication strongly identify with their work because it is experienced as meaningful, inspiring, and challenging hence they usually feel enthusiastic and proud of their work. Those who

score low do not identify with their work because they do not experience it to be meaningful, inspiring, or challenging; moreover, they feel neither enthusiastic nor proud of their work. To Bakar (2014) being dedicated to one's job includes motivated acts such as working hard and giving the best that one can at work. Work not only seems to be important but also requires self-disciplined behaviour, as demonstrated by following rules, taking the initiative to solve a problem at work, and exceeding one's job requirements. According to Bakar (2014), a person who is dedicated to working is genuinely engaged in his or her job.

The next section introduces some of the models of employee engagement to gain insight into how employee engagement has been studied and conceptualised.

## **2.5 Models of Employee Engagement**

There have been many engagement models developed by different scholars or experts in the human capital optimisation field. Massyn and Jensen (2017) discovered that countless human resource practitioners regard their methodologies as vital to unlocking business success. Massyn and Jensen (2017) further stated that the human resource practitioners formulate the models in which they designate the factors that are combined to produce a more engaged workforce, replete with questionnaires that produce quantifiable measures of the designated factors. For this study, some prominent and world-wide adopted models are discussed below:

### **2.5.1 Khan's Model of Employee Engagement**

Khan's model (1990) of employee engagement is regarded as the oldest model of employee engagement that considers three psychological conditions that are associated with personal engagement and disengagement of work (Padhi & Panda, 2015). These psychological conditions are meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In his study, Khan interviewed summer camp counsellors and organisational members of an architectural firm about their moments of engagement and disengagement at work as cited by Padhi and Panda (2015).

Figure 2.2 presents the psychological conditions from Khan's model of employee engagement.



Figure 2.2: Khan's Model of Employee Engagement.

Source: (Khan, 1990)

Khan found that workers were more engaged in work situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were psychologically available. The next model to be discussed is the Deloitte Model of Employee Engagement developed by Josh Bersin.

### 2.5.2 Deloitte Model of Employee Engagement

Bersin (2015), the founder of the Deloitte Model of Employee Engagement, discovered five main indices and underlying attributes that work together to drive engagement and make organisations irresistible to the workforce, for both prospective and current employees.

Table 2.1: The Simply Irresistible Organisation.

Meaningful work	Supportive Management	Positive Work Environment	Growth Opportunity	Trust in leadership
Autonomy	Clear and transparent goals	Flexible work environment	Training and support on the job	Mission and purpose
Select-to-fit	Coaching	Humanistic workplace	Facilitated talent mobility	Continuous investment
Small, empowered teams	Investment in the development of managers	Culture of recognition	Self-directed, dynamic learning	Transparency and honesty
Time for slack	Agile performance management	Fair, inclusive, diverse work environment	High-impact learning culture	Inspiration
<b>Cross-organization collaboration and communication</b>				

Source: (Bersin, 2015)

The information in Table 2.1 encourages organisations to be simply irresistible not by only attracting great people but also by creating an environment where people can reach their full potential and thrive. Such an environment has to provide meaningful work, supportive management, a positive work environment, growth opportunities, and leadership that can be trusted.

Bersin (2015) gives details for each element of the Deloitte Model of engagement as follows:

**Meaningful Work:** Organisations need to recruit the right people for the right job thus work will align employees to their strengths that give them a sense of purpose. Employees should have the tools and freedom (autonomy) to make decisions that will contribute to their success.

**Supportive Management:** This element of the model uses ‘management’ and not ‘leadership’ to refer to day-to-day activities the manager performs to guide, support, and align employees. Supportive managers empower employees by setting clear goals, coaching for high performance, developing future leaders, and providing continuous feedback.

**Positive Work Environment:** The changing nature of work compel organisations to build a flexible, humane, and inclusive workplace. This is in addition to the benefits and wellness programs that allow workers to fit into the employees' lifestyles with emphasis on maintaining a culture of recognition.

**Growth Opportunity:** Organisations must design formal and informal developmental opportunities to afford employees to grow and become better at their job. Support and facilitation of internal mobility drive continuous learning, professional development, and career progression.

**Trust in Leadership:** An important element of this model is leadership and leaders are expected to establish vision, purpose, and transparency. Trust in leadership is developed when leaders inspire and invest in employees, and communicate honestly to fulfil the organization's mission, vision, and purpose.

The Deloitte Model of Employee Engagement is a model that can assist organisations to build an amazing workplace with an environment where people will line up to apply for jobs. The next model introduces the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement by Alan Saks.

### **2.5.3 Saks' Model of Employee Engagement**

Saks (2006) developed a conceptual model that focuses on three basic aspects of employee engagement: (i) the employees and their psychological makeup and experience (ii) the ability of the employer to create a conducive environment that promotes employee engagement, and (iii) the interaction between employees at all levels (Padhi & Panda, 2015). Figure 2.3 illustrates Saks' model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement.

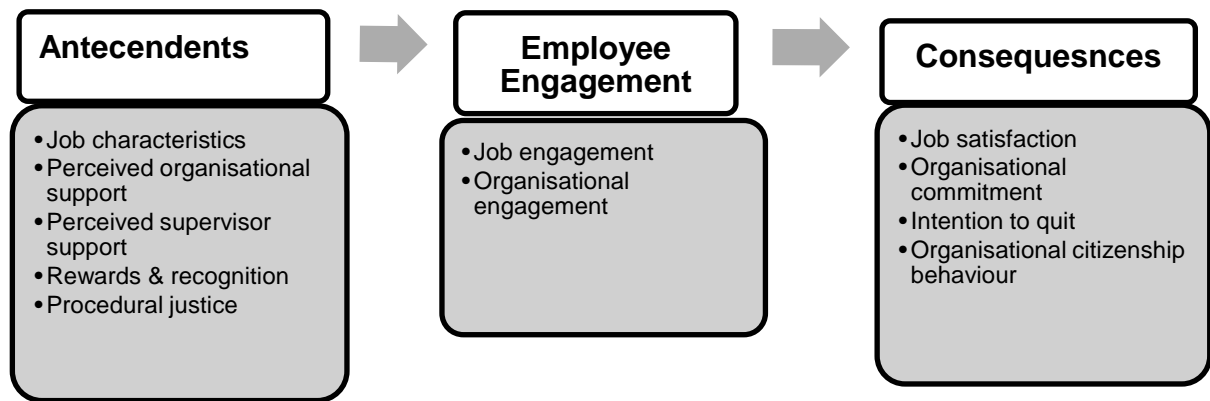


Figure 2.3: Sak's Model of Employee Engagement.

Source: (Saks, 2006)

According to Saks (2006), the antecedents are expected to predict the engagement and the engagement predicts the outcomes; engagement may mediate the relationship between the antecedents and the consequences. Padhi and Panda (2015) believe that factors like job satisfaction, training and development, reward and recognition, and an assertive relationship with peers and supervisors have been taken as antecedents. These factors directly impact the state of engagement of employees that can be attributed to factors like commitment, ownership, satisfaction, participation, etc. Padhi and Panda (2015) conclude that the “consequences” are the result of the evaluation process that can be evaluated with customer satisfaction and enhanced performance measures.

The next model was developed by Robinson and others and they illustrate employee engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and employees.

#### 2.5.4 Robinson, Perryman and Hayday Model of Employee Engagement

The model developed by Robinson et al., (2004) describes employee engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and employees (Padhi & Panda, 2015). The model further identified that an engaged employee is one who is aware of the business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job to add value to the organization. The model emphasises that the commitment of employees is possible when the organization continues to focus on developing and nurturing the employees (Padhi & Panda, 2015). Figure 2.4 presents the model with ‘feeling valued’ as a key driver of employee engagement.

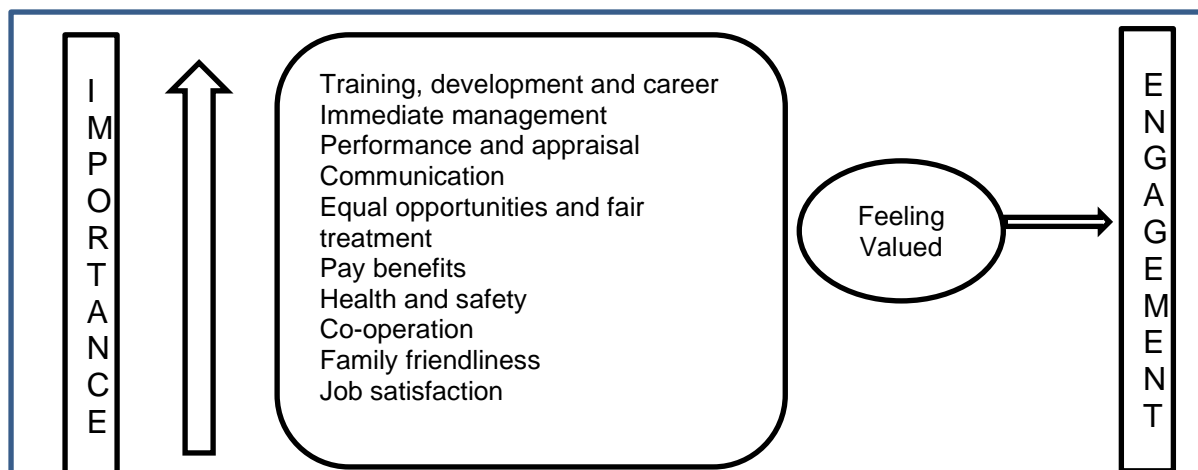


Figure 2.4: Robinson Model of Employee Engagement.

Source: (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004)

According to Robinson et al., (2004), there is a clear link between employees' experiences and general perceptions of working life and their sense of being valued and involved. Therefore, this link translates to their engagement levels, as engagement is closely linked to feeling valued and involved. The next model is an integrative model of work motivation and engagement developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2010).

### 2.5.5 Schaufeli and Bakker Model of Employee Engagement

Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) developed a model with eight concepts that either refer to behaviours (extra-role behaviour, personal initiative), beliefs (organisational commitment, job involvement), or affect (job satisfaction, positive affectivity) that are considered prototypical for work engagement.

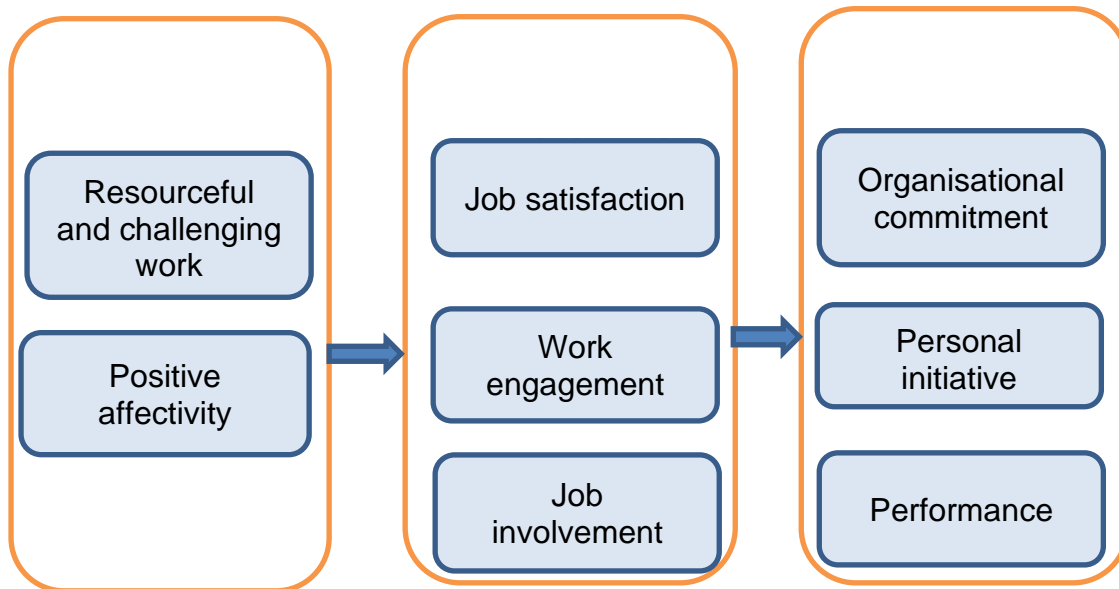


Figure 2.5: Schaufeli and Bakker Model of Employee Engagement.

Source: (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010)

According to Hänninen (2017), the model proposes that job resources have motivational elements that lead to work engagement and high performance. In this model as stated by Hänninen (2017), work engagement plays a key role in job satisfaction and involvement. It is also regarded as a psychological state that mediates personal and job resources and the outcomes. This model emphasises the importance of job resources such as meaningful and challenging work as a contributor to employee engagement. The next and final model explored in this study is about managing engagement.

### 2.5.6 The Engagement Management Model

According to Gruman and Saks (2011), a vital part of this model is that the performance management practices that lead to Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions that produce engagement, can be organised according to the job demands-resources. Gruman and Saks (2011) further argue that performance management processes should provide resources to employees that lead to Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions that are associated with higher levels of engagement. Figure 2.6 illustrates the engagement management model.

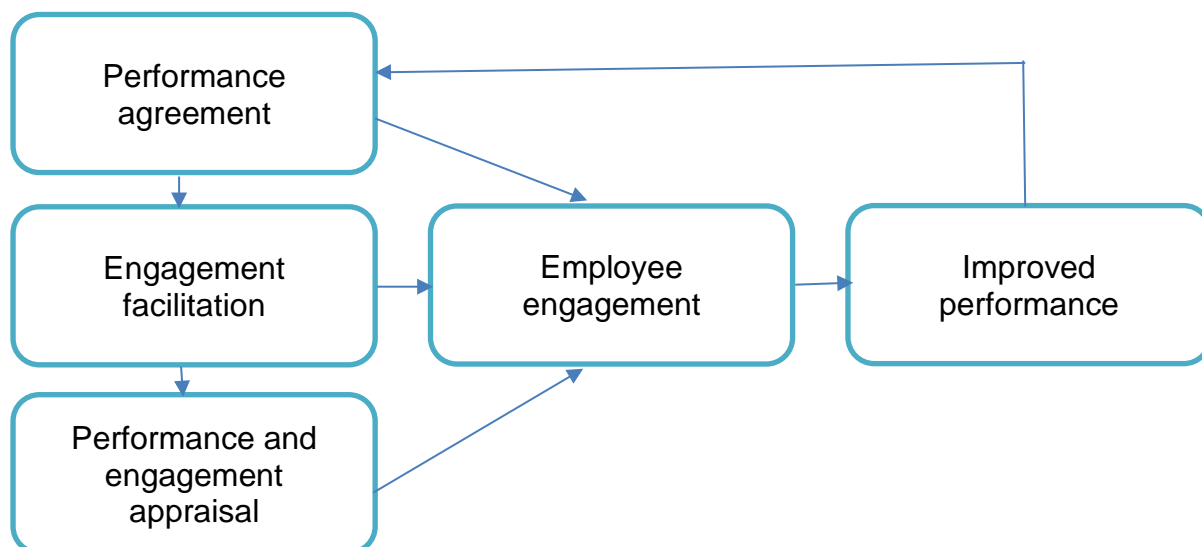


Figure 2.6: The Engagement Management Model.

Source: (Gruman & Saks, 2011)

Hänninen (2017) states that the model starts with a performance agreement which emphasises negotiations and a mutual understanding to foster engagement. It proceeds to engagement facilitation that has its focus on the job (re) design, leadership, and supervisory support, coaching, and training to facilitate the development of engagement in the employees. The last component of this model focuses on the perceptions of justice and trust as the key drivers of engagement compared to the traditional view of performance appraisals on rating accuracy. Hänninen (2017) concludes that the three preceding components contribute to employee engagement and thus, to improved performance.

The following section discusses the different drivers of employee engagement suggested by some researchers.

## 2.6 Drivers of Employee Engagement

Many drivers of employee engagement have been found by different scholars, but Anitha (2014) discovered that among others, leadership, team and co-worker relationship, training and career development, a compensation programme, organisational policies and procedures, and workplace well-being were determinants of employee engagement.

### **2.6.1 Leadership Style**

The concept of leadership in employee engagement is of utmost importance and it is constantly referred to by different scholars. Leaders are responsible for formulating an organisation's vision and strategies to which employees must align themselves. Leaders are also required to positively influence the thoughts, behaviour, and attitude of others. According to De Swardt (2018), employees do not leave their organisations, they leave their managers hence organisations need to invest in leadership skills that enhance employee engagement to build a thriving organisation.

The transformational leadership style has emerged as a style that promotes the development of employee engagement (Devi & Narayanamma, 2016). It is a style of leadership that places more focus on the development of followers and their needs. Datche and Mukulu (2015) also found transformational leadership to be positively related to employee engagement. In employee engagement, transformational leadership is closely related to individualised consideration which focuses on the follower by determining and acknowledging the followers' request, taking into consideration the individual differences and needs for achievement and growth (Handayani, 2018). A transformational leader is characterised by continuous efforts to create a positive change in those that follow.

### **2.6.2 Rewards and Recognition**

According to Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield (2015) a reward and recognition system establishes a structure for equitable compensation of employees, depending on their jobs and their level of performance in their job. To employees, recognition of their exceptional work is an indication that their work and efforts are valued by the organisation.

Anku, Amewugah and Glover, (2018) define reward as the total amount of financial and non-financial compensation or total remuneration provided to an employee in return for labour or service rendered at work. In the view of Saunderson (2015) rewards are tangible, monetary, or experiential items given to a person in return for reaching pre-set goals, a significant achievement or service performed. Recognition on the other hand is mostly an intangible expression of acknowledgment of an individual for their positive behaviours, their effort or contributions they have made for the success of an organisation (Saunderson, 2015).

There are different types of employee recognition methods that are practiced by many organisations which includes monetary bonus, written, and verbal recognition. Additionally, making an employee feel valued is the recognition of special events such as the employee's first day, birthdays, project completion, quarterly reviews, and year-end. Hoole and Hotz (2016) advise that if an organisation wants to include rewards as part of their engagement strategies, it is important to understand the complex nature of the reward-engagement relationship and how best to use a reward systems to meet the needs and goals of both the organisation and employees. Some rewards are better indicators of employee engagement than others, therefore organisations should move away from a one size fits all approach to reward strategies.

### **2.6.3 Training and Development**

Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani, and Abbas (2015) suggest that employee training can be a potential component to enhance the psychological wellbeing of employees at work by fostering employee engagement. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is compelling organisations to keep the employee skills up to date considering that certain skills and professions are becoming redundant (Schwab, 2016). Furthermore, Schwab (2016) warns that innovation and other disruptive technologies are likely to increase productivity by replacing existing workers.

Through training and development, the thinking of employees is improved and leads to quality performance, thereby contributing to the success of the organisation. Lai, Lee, Lim, Yeoh, and Mohsin (2015) found a significant and positive relationship between employee engagement and training and development and further advises that employees need more training and development to strengthen and promote engagement. This will require the creation of an effective training and development system by managers and human resource practitioners.

### **2.6.4 Communication**

Communication in an organisation acts as the glue that binds various elements, coordinate activities, allow people to work together and produce results (Warnich et al., 2015). Nowadays, it is even more important because companies are growing due to mergers, acquisitions, decentralisation, and the creation of virtual teams (Poux-Berthe, 2017). In employee engagement, according to Krishnan and Wesley (2013),

employee communication plays the most vital role to ensure a good relationship among the working population and consistent and honest communication is an important management tool for employee engagement. Bucăța and Rizescu (2017) agree that communication is an essential management tool to facilitate relationships between people, and to establish an environment beneficial to the internal development of an organisation.

A study by Krishnan and Wesley (2013) further revealed that employee communication has a significant relationship with the employee engagement level, that it can predict the employee engagement level in the organisations. The organisations and top management must pay attention to the communication strategies and tactics to ensure that it is improved thus leading to high employee engagement levels in organisations.

### **2.6.5 Team and Co-worker Relationships**

Makera, Nasidi, Kamaruddeen, and Jemaku (2019) describe the team and co-worker relationship as the relatedness needs individuals possess and having rewarding interpersonal interactions with their co-workers. An organisation that has pleasant relationships among employees is set for success as such relationships manifest themselves in the work of employees. Such a relationship is useful during busy times as teams will voluntarily assist each other to achieve organisational goals. An effective work relationship is built on trust, teamwork, communication, and respect.

Ahmed, Ahmad, and Jaaffar (2017) found that employee relations have a big effect on the employee engagement level in the organization. It is important for organisations to maintain a healthy supervisor and co-worker relationship as there is a positive relationship between work environment, an image of the organisation, supervisor and co-worker relationship, training and development, and employee engagement (Nagesh, Kulenur, & Shetty, 2019). Employees spend the largest part of their time at work, it is vital that the work environment culture and practices do not badly affect their attitude and ultimately performance.

The next section will discuss the employee engagement concept in the public sector.

## 2.7 Employee Engagement in the Public Sector

The South African public sector is characterised by increasing inefficiencies and low levels of productivity (Ferreira & Van Antwerpen, 2011). These inefficiencies are caused by various factors; Ferreira and Van Antwerpen (2011) point to personnel who are not in all instances hired for their skills. Knies, Boselie, Gould-Williams, and Vandenabeele (2018) are of the view that in many countries the public sector tends to be the largest employer and the performance of public sector employees is critical to the delivery of services. To a large extent, the welfare state and health and well-being of the nation depend on the performance of public sector employees. Khan and Khandaker (2016) state that public organisations are not in the business of making a profit nor operate in a competitive market like private organisations and are largely chained by legal, economic, and political bindings. Khan and Khandaker (2016) further argue that due to internal and external pressures, public organisations have been forced to undergo structural and procedural changes and have undertaken many practices used by private organisations. These structural changes are due to the changing nature of work amid the economic recession and many public sector organisations are experiencing a shortfall in terms of financial resources to meet the increasing demand for public services (Knies et al., 2018).

According to Gallup (2019), an organisation that conducted a survey on employee engagement in South Africa, only 9 percent of employees were actively engaged, 91 percent were disengaged and 45 percent were actively disengaged. Actively disengaged employees are very negative about their job and work environment and are likely to spread negativity to co-workers. Leadership shortcomings such as a lack of effective communication were highlighted as areas that need urgent attention (Gallup, 2019).

According to Levitats, Vigoda-Gadot, and Vashdi (2019), public administration literature has demonstrated the valuable impact of employees' engagement on public service. Levitats et al., (2019) also propose Public Sector Engagement (PSE) as a multidimensional construct, comprising social responsibility, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behaviours at individual level. Public sector organisations' survival is mostly dependent on the commitment and dedication of its employees showing a heightened emotional connection to their work and are expected to make

decisions based on rational thinking in line with laws and regulations (Carmona, Hunter, Dizon, Napoles, & Rubalcava, 2020).

However, Martins and Ledimo (2016) discovered that the current research on employee engagement in South Africa mainly focuses on the private sector and there is minimal research on this topic concerning the public sector. This disparity might be related to cost, as it is expensive to conduct employee engagement surveys. Moreover, government officials might not yet see the value of engaged employees and there might be a lack of specific measuring instruments to measure the construct in government institutions.

Lavigna (2019) suggests that engagement also drives important outcomes in government which include achieving strategic goals, delivering responsive customer service, promoting innovation, retaining good employees, improving attendance, and even keeping workplaces safe. A study by Mansor, Jaharudin, and Nata (2018) acknowledges that career development, supervisor, and subordinate relationship and work-life balance can influence employee engagement amongst the employees in public organizations. Sanneh and Taj (2015) found that a significant relationship exists between the various factors that affect employee engagement and the performance of employees even in the public sector and that senior managers must think about engaging their workforce despite having job contracts of permanent nature and other facilities that are normally associated with the public sector employment. Sanneh and Taj (2015) further caution that if the public sector keeps on ignoring the importance of employee engagement, it will remain under-performed in comparison to the private sector. The last section of this chapter presents different strategies that are determined by literature to enhance employee engagement.

## **2.8 Strategies to Enhance Employee Engagement**

### **2.8.1 Increase Employee Engagement and Work Performance**

According to Ulfing (2019) leaders can implement the following strategies to enhance employee engagement and increase work performance in organisations:

- Leaders must offer attractive employee benefits, including flexible work arrangements which will motivate employees to remain engaged and work hard each day.
- Leaders must empower and motivate employees as employees are more motivated when leaders trust and appreciate them.
- Leaders must provide professional development opportunities because employees have a greater desire to invest their time and energy at a company if they know that the company leaders are willing to invest in the employees' development.
- Leaders must foster unity through open communication and team building as employees have higher engagement and performance when teams are united.

### **2.8.2 Increase Productivity through Engaging Employees**

Benham (2017) suggest the following strategies to enhance employee engagement:

- Develop positive relationships which include (a) building a positive relationship between the employee and supervisor, (b) building positive relationships among employees, and (c) demonstrating trust through delegation and shared decision making.
- Provide empowerment with support including (a) delegating ownership of projects to employees, (b) providing resources and opportunities for professional learning, (c) providing resources and opportunities for planning, (d) providing physical comfort in the work environment, and (e) allowing for uninterrupted work time
- Connect work with meaningful purpose which include (a) connecting the work of each employee to meaningful organizational goals, (b) aligning work assignments with individual interests and strengths, and (c) demonstrating appreciation.

The Gallup Organisation has also received considerable credit for continually widening the understanding of the concept and suggest the following strategies to enhance employee engagement (Gallup, 2014):

### **2.8.3 Use the Correct Employee Engagement Survey**

Organisations should use a survey data tool that is specific, relevant, and actionable for any team at any organisational level. Data should also be proven to influence key performance metrics (Gallup, 2014). According to Hänninen (2017), an appropriate

engagement survey will shed light on employee engagement in an organisation, thus it will be an important source of information.

#### **2.8.4 Focus on Engagement at the local and organisational Levels**

Real change occurs at the local workgroup level, but it happens only when organisational leaders set the tone from the top. Organisations reap the most benefit from engagement initiatives when leaders weave employee engagement into performance expectations for managers and enable them to execute on those expectations. Managers and employees must feel empowered to make a significant difference in their immediate environment (Gallup, 2014). The positive outcomes of employee engagement can be divided into personal-level and organisational-level outcomes (Hänninen, 2017).

#### **2.8.5 Select the Appropriate Managers**

It takes talent to be a great manager and selecting people with the same talent is important. The best managers understand that their success and that of the organization relies on the employees' achievements. Although not everyone can be a great manager, great managers care about their people's success. They seek to understand each person's strengths and provide employees with every opportunity to use their strengths in their different roles. Great managers empower their employees, recognize and value their contributions, and actively seek their ideas and opinions (Gallup, 2014).

According to Bersin (2014), creating a high-performance work environment is a complex problem. Organisations have to communicate a mission and values, train managers and leaders to live these values, and then carefully select the correct people who fit the positions best.

#### **2.8.6 Coach Managers and Hold Them Accountable for Their Employees'**

##### **Engagement**

Gallup's research has found that managers are primarily responsible for their employees' engagement levels. Organisations should coach managers to take an active role in building engagement plans with their employees, hold managers accountable, track their progress, and ensure that they continuously focus on emotionally engaging their employees (Gallup, 2014). Ali, Lodhi, Orangzab, Raza,

and Ali (2018) found that managerial coaching positively predicted employee work engagement as work engagement is a very important and desired attitude in the workplace for improved employee outcomes.

### **2.8.7 Define Engagement Goals in Realistic, Everyday Terms**

To bring engagement to life, leaders must make engagement goals meaningful to the employees' day-to-day experiences. Describing what success looks like using powerful descriptions and emotive language helps to give meaning to goals and builds commitment within a team. Leaders should ensure that managers discuss employee engagement at weekly meetings, in action-planning sessions, and in one-on-one meetings with employees to weave engagement into daily interactions and activities and to make it part of the workplace's DNA (Gallup, 2014). Organisations need to clarify the definition of employee engagement in their context and desired relevant levels, and what they seek to achieve by enhancing employee engagement (Jeske, Sheehan, Linehan, & Moran, 2017).

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The concept of employee engagement is continuously gaining popularity, especially in the last two decades, with employers showing interest in moving away from creating conditions that make an employee just satisfied with the compensation, benefits, and other working conditions, to employees who are committed to the success of the organisation. Although there has been and still is a debate about what is meant by the concept of employee engagement, there is a mutual understanding that it offers benefits to both the organisation and employees. The literature has strongly emphasised the emotional connection an employee has with the organisation, as defined by different scholars, specifically (Khan, 1990) and (Saks, 2006).

The dimensions that came out strongly in the literature review are those of Khan (1990), where there is an emphasis on harnessing the organisation's employees in the way they express cognitively, emotionally, and physically while performing roles. A direct link between these dimensions and the UWES instrument by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) has been found. UWES has three aspects relating to work engagement which are vigour, dedication, and absorption. The cognitive dimension and absorption are about being involved and finding meaning in one's work. The Physical dimension and vigour focus on being physically present at work with a high level of energy and

mental resilience, while the emotional dimension and dedication are about employees who are fully concentrated, engrossed, and find it difficult to detach from their work.

Employee engagement has different models that have been developed by different scholars and each regards their own as important. These models in essence highlights that employee engagement is about the psychological and emotional availability of employees and the pleasant relationship of employees with co-workers and the supervisor. Among the drivers of employee engagement, leadership, team and co-worker relationship, rewards and recognition, training, and development, as well as communication have been identified as the main determinants of employee engagement.

It further became clear from the literature that there is minimal research available on employee engagement concerning the public sector. Jones and Sambrook (2016) suggest that the public sector needs research-informed employee engagement results that will help organisations demonstrate the evidence they need to deliver realistic and sustainable improvements in employee engagement. It is also important for organisations to determine strategies to enhance employee engagement and continuously evaluate them.

The next chapter introduces the choice of the methodology used to conduct this study. It gives details on how the data was collected to achieve the objectives of the research.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter clarifies the research methodology used in this study. A basic requirement of successful research depends on the proper selection of the research methodology applied to achieve the research objectives using the available resources (Ragab & Arisha, 2018). In addition to acquiring sufficient knowledge of their specific research topic, Ragab and Arisha (2018) also advise researchers to develop a good understanding of alternative research methodologies at their disposal to be able to identify the best-suited methods to address the research question.

According to Rajasekar, Philominathan, and Chinnathambi (2013) a researcher should not only know the basic statistical knowledge, but also need to know the following:

- A suitable method for the chosen problem
- The order of accuracy of the result of a method
- The efficiency of the method

The research methodology therefore aims to outline a work plan for the research and familiarise the researcher with different designs, scientific tools, and techniques that are relevant for a solution to the problem.

The research methodology chapter commences with an explanation of the research design and why the chosen design is the best for this study. This is followed by the sampling techniques and data collection strategy. The chapter further elaborates on the ethical concerns that were taken into account to ensure the safety of the participants. A detailed explanation of the research design used in this study is provided in the following section.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The research design is the blueprint for fulfilling objectives and answering questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The research design used in this study was quantitative to “generalise the findings beyond the boundaries of the particular context where the research was conducted” (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

Quantitative research design uses large samples and, as such, the findings of well-conducted studies can often be generalised to larger populations (Price & Lovell, 2018). The research paradigm used in this study is positivism. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), in a positivist view of the world, science and scientific research is seen as a way to get to the truth. Positivists want to understand the world better to be able to predict and control it. Sekaran and Bougie (2013), further argue that positivists are concerned with the rigor and replicability of their research, the reliability of observations, and generalisability of findings.

In this study, the employee engagement level at FSPT was determined using quantitative research design and the generalisation of findings was made for the entire population of the organisation. The next section will deal in detail with the sampling method used in this study.

### **3.3 Sampling**

The population size of FSPT is 404 according to the monthly employment report as of 31 December 2019 (FSPT, 2019). This population included the department's political head, MEC for Finance, Head of Department, DDG's, Chief Directors, Directors, and the rest of employees from salary levels 3 to 12. A sample size of 372 respondents on salary levels 3 to 12 were selected representing deputy directors and the rest of the lower levels. The senior management employees amounting to 32 were excluded from the sample as they are responsible for ensuring employees are engaged at all times. The sample size may have changed at the time of data collection due to resignations, retirements, deaths, and new appointments.

The sampling method used in this study was non-probability, convenience sampling. The sample was limited to employees from the deputy director level and below at FSPT in an attempt to get reliable data from the real soldiers of the organisation.

Each aspect of the sampling method is further elaborated below: Non-probability sampling is based on the researcher's choice, a population that is accessible and available (Setia, 2016). Non-probability sampling has a lot of limitations due to the subjective nature in choosing the sample thus it is not a good representation of the population, but it is useful especially when randomisation is impossible like when the population is very large (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Therefore, the major

advantage of non-probability sampling compared to the probability sampling is that it is cost and time effective as well as easy to implement. The type of non-probability sampling used in this study was convenience sampling. Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016) also describe convenience sampling as a sampling technique where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. For this study, all employees at FSPT except for senior managers were included in the study as a sample to be able to wholly determine the level of employee engagement in the department.

Although the questionnaire was sent to all employees chosen as a sample, only responses from respondents who were willing to participate were used for this study. From a selected sample of 372 at FSPT, a conclusion was drawn for the entire population of research. The following section elaborates further on the data collection method used in this study.

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

Data was collected from the respondents chosen as a sample within FSPT. The respondents are stationed in three different buildings; the departmental ICT unit assisted in circulating the questionnaire. The management of the department was aware of what is required and the purpose of the study.

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define a questionnaire as a pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within closely defined alternatives. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire since it is cheap and quick to administer, it covers a large number of respondents and it is convenient for the respondents as they can complete the questionnaire in and at their own time and pace (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Although self-administered questionnaires may have its advantages Sekaran and Bougie (2013) highlights that such a questionnaire requires respondents to be computer literate, have access to a computer, and be willing to complete the survey.

The self-administered questionnaire used in this study is called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Shaufeli and Bakker (2003). UWES is a seventeen item scale subdivided into three sections vigour, dedication, and absorption

to determine the level of work engagement. Shaufeli and Bakker (2003) explain the three sections as follows:

- *Vigour* refers to a high level of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence in the face of difficulties.
- *Dedication* refers to being involved in one’s work, finding meaning in one’s work, being challenged, and experiencing a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride.
- *Absorption* refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from work.

Table 3.1 further allocates the seventeen items of the questionnaire into the above 3 sections. It includes response options where a scale is 0 = never to 6 = always.

**Table 3.1: The UWES-17 Questionnaire Variables**

<b>Vigour</b>	<b>Dedication</b>	<b>Absorption</b>
1. At my work, I feel like bursting with energy.	1. I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful.	1. Time flies when I am at work.
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	2. I am enthusiastic about my job.	2. When I work, I forget everything else around me.
3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	3. My job inspires me.	3. I feel happy when I work intensively.
4. I can continue to work for long periods.	4. I am proud of the work that I do.	4. I am immersed in my work.
5. At my job, I am mentally resilient.	5. My job is challenging enough.	5. I get carried away when I work.
6. At my job, I always persevere, even when things do not go well		6. It is difficult to detach myself from my job.

Source: (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003)

Managers of the department will then be able to make well-informed decisions concerning employee engagement based on work engagement data. Once the data collection method was identified, ethical concerns were taken into account before respondents took part in the study. The next section provides details on ethical considerations for this study.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Cooper and Schindler (2014) suggest that research must be designed so that a participant does not suffer physical harm, discomfort, pain, embarrassment, or loss of privacy. It is against this background that the following ethical requirements were taken into consideration for this study:

- *Permission obtained:* Permission to research FSPT was obtained from the HOD of the department before the questionnaire was circulated. The letter is attached as Appendix A. A consent letter needs to be accompanied by a letter in which organisations also consent to the use of their sites and name (Henning et al., 2004).
- *Ethical clearance:* No data was collected before approval was received from the UFS Ethical Clearance Committee. Approval was granted with the following ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2020/0600/2506 and the letter is attached as Appendix B. This committee exists to protect research participants and is also involved in protecting the researchers and institution from the possibility of adverse publicity or legal actions being taken against them (Bryman & Bell, 2014).
- *Voluntary participation:* Participation in the study was voluntary and participants at FSPT were under no obligation to consent to participate. Even though organisational permission may have been granted to conduct research, it does not mean that employees are required to participate. Participation should be entirely voluntary and if there is the slightest sign of coercion, then the research should not proceed (Gray, 2019).
- *Informed consent:* An informed consent to participate was completed by participants who agreed to participate. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014) securing informed consent from participants is a matter of fully disclosing the procedures of the proposed survey or other research design before requesting permission to proceed with the study. The consent form is attached as Appendix C.
- *Confidentiality and anonymity:* Participant responses to the questionnaire at FSPT was kept confidential and anonymous. All individuals have a right to privacy, and researchers are compelled to respect that right. Once the guarantee of confidentiality is given, protecting that confidentiality is essential (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).
- *Potential harm:* Except for the time inconvenience, the completion of the questionnaire posed no other inconvenience, risk, physical or emotional harm to

participants as the participants were strictly anonymous. Gray (2019) is of the view that workplace research often requires respondents to express their views and opinions on work-related issues, some of which might include criticism of the organisation and its management. If individuals can be identified, in extreme cases it could not just cause embarrassment, but even disciplinary action or dismissal hence the adherence to confidentiality is crucial.

All participants remained anonymous and no attempts of identification were made available to any person for the duration of the study. The management of FSPT received a copy of the findings when the study was completed.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter, it is stated that a research design is an outline for fulfilling research objectives and answering questions. This plan includes data collection, measurement, and analysis of the study. Subsequently, this chapter outlines the methodology which entails the research design, sampling techniques, and data collection methods with the intention to answer the questions posed in Chapter 1. Since data is collected from participants, the researcher must protect the participants against any harm, thus the ethical considerations are also detailed in this chapter.

The research design used in this study is a quantitative research design with a positivist research paradigm. The size of the population compelled the researcher to use quantitative research design to also generalise the findings to the rest of the population of FSPT. The use of a positivist research paradigm will help the researcher to get to the truth about the level of employee engagement at FSPT. The non-probability sampling method was used with a convenience sampling type. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire to cover the whole sample and to extract reliable information from all the participants.

The next chapter will focus on analysing and presenting the findings of the study.

## **4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The research problem was discussed in Chapter 1 while a comprehensive literature review was presented in Chapter 2 where aspects relating specifically to employee engagement were discussed. The chapter also focused on the three dimensions (emotional, cognitive, and physical) of employee engagement which has a direct linkage to the data collection instrument, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) in terms of employees being absorbed in their work, vigorous while doing it and showing dedication. Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology for the study.

The research was conducted at Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT) and data was collected from the officials employed in the department. Quantitative data was sourced from the respondents using a pre-existing UWES questionnaire to address the problems mentioned in Chapter 1. Responses were collected using a six-point Likert Scale ranging from “never” (0) to “always” (6). The data was collected electronically for three weeks during July 2020. The first part of the questionnaire gave a brief background of the study followed by a consent form where respondents were required voluntarily agree to participate in the study. The respondents were also assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of all responses.

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, the sample size was 372 and at the time the data was collected, the sample size was down to 369 which could be attributed to retirement, resignation, or death. The data was analysed and the results indicate a link with some of the theories presented in the literature review.

The response rate will be discussed in the following section.

### **4.2 Response Rate**

A sample size of 369 was drawn from the population and only 54 participants responded to the questionnaire. From the 54 responses, 10 had missing values so the analysis was based on 44 responses which translates to 11.9 percent. The response rate remained low even when two reminders were sent each week following the initial distribution. This study was conducted during the challenging time of the

COVID-19 pandemic which possibly affected the response rate negatively. Most officials may have been at home without access to a computer at the time of the distribution of the questionnaires. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that participation was voluntary and respondents were not in any way compelled to respond.

From the literature, there is no value given for an acceptable response rate although a high response rate is better; Baruch and Holtom (2008) argue that the response rate is just one element to consider in evaluating the quality of empirical studies. Baruch and Holtom (2008) further state that a factor that is more important than the response rate, is that the respondents must be representative of the population being studied. Respondents should not be systematically different in any meaningful way from the population of interest. The main goal should not be the response rate but the representativeness of the overall population and non-response bias. Non-response bias is analysed by a t-test where a comparison is made between early respondents and late respondents with the assumption that late respondents behave the same way as the non-respondents. According to Radics, Dasmohapatra, and Kelley (2016), early respondents are those who responded before the reminder was sent and late respondents are those who answered the questionnaire after the reminder.

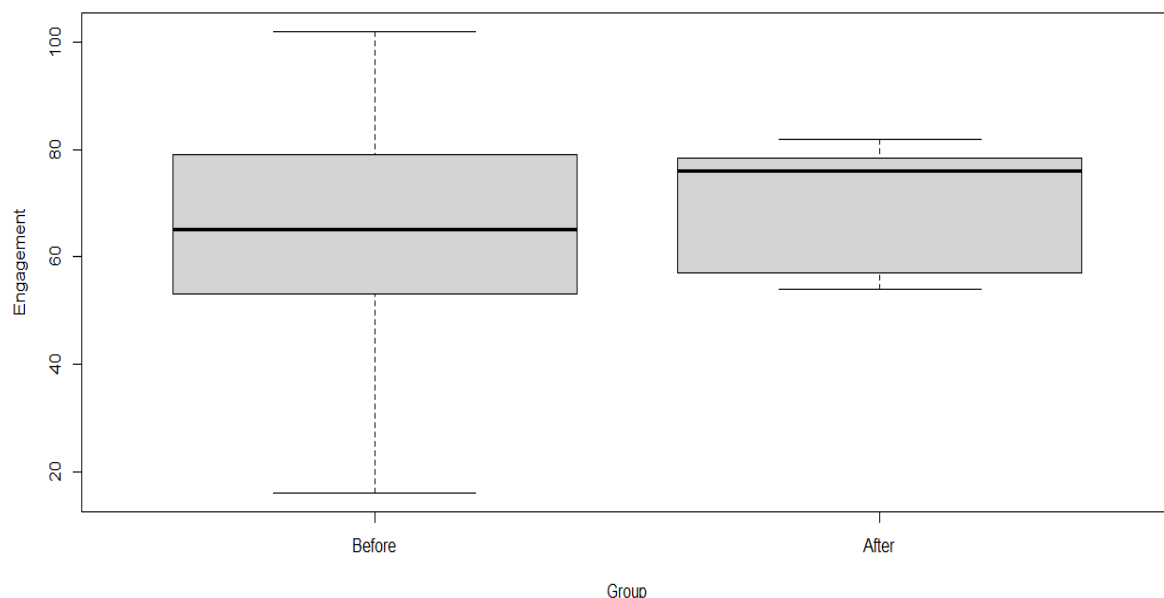


Figure 4. 7: Illustration of the results of the Welch's t-test.

The results of the Welch's *t*-test in Figure 4.1 revealed a mean of 65.51515 for employees who responded before the reminder and 69.27273 for those who responded after being reminded. The two boxplots are not badly asymmetric, thus there is no evidence that the two groups differ significantly ( $t = -0.72491$ ,  $df = 33.406$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.4736$ ). It is, therefore, concluded that the respondents are representative of the population of interest and there is no response bias.

The biographical information of the 44 respondents is listed and summarised below.

### 4.3 Analysis and Interpretation of Biographical Data

The biographical information consisted of eight items including years of service, age, marital status, gender, educational level, language, occupational level, and population group. The results of all items will be discussed below except for language and population groups. The department is dominated by African employees which translates to having a higher number of SeSotho speaking employees due to geographical location, therefore language and population groups have no significant link with the level of employee engagement.

#### 4.3.1 Representation of Respondents by Years of Service

Table 4.1 indicates the representation of respondents by years of service at FSPT.

Table 4.2: Representation of respondents by years of service.

Years of Service	No	%
1 - 5 years	6	13.6%
6 - 10 years	10	22.7%
10 - 15 years	14	31.8%
More than 15 years	14	31.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

The number of years in service varied among the respondents with the majority of respondents in the 10 to 15 years and over 15 years' groups sharing a 31.8 percent representation. The department has not been appointing new employees lately in response to a call to reduce the wage bill, thus the 1-5 years in service group only accounts for 13.6 percent of the sample. Figure 4.2 illustrates the average employee engagement according to years of service at FSPT.

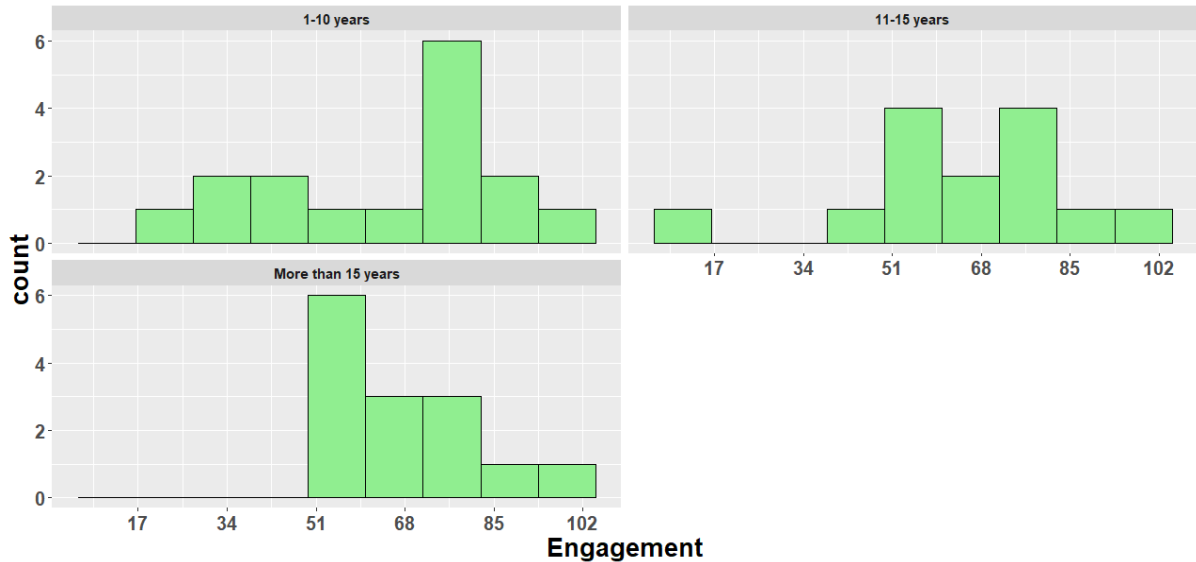


Figure 4.8: Average employee engagement by years of service.

Service years' groups "11-15" and "more than 15" have similar results, if the outlier in the "11-15" group is ignored. However, these results look different from those in the service years "1-10" group as this group's minimum engagement score of 23 is far lower than that of the "more than 10" groups. So a person in the "1-10" group is more likely to have a lesser feeling of engagement than a person in the "more than 10" groups. General perception might infer that the longer an individual is employed by an organisation, the more engaged they will but a study by Hinzmann, Rašticová, and Šácha (2019) found that engagement for recently hired employees was 27 percent higher than that of employees who have been with the organisation for more than two years. Figure 4.2, therefore, shows that there is a link between service years and employee engagement at work.

### 4.3.2 Representation of Respondents by Age

Figure 4.3 illustrates a graphical representation of respondents by age, while Figure 4.4 shows the average employee engagement by age. Employees in the group of "31-40" years are the majority in the sample, while employees below the age of 30 years (often referred to as millennials) show the least representation.

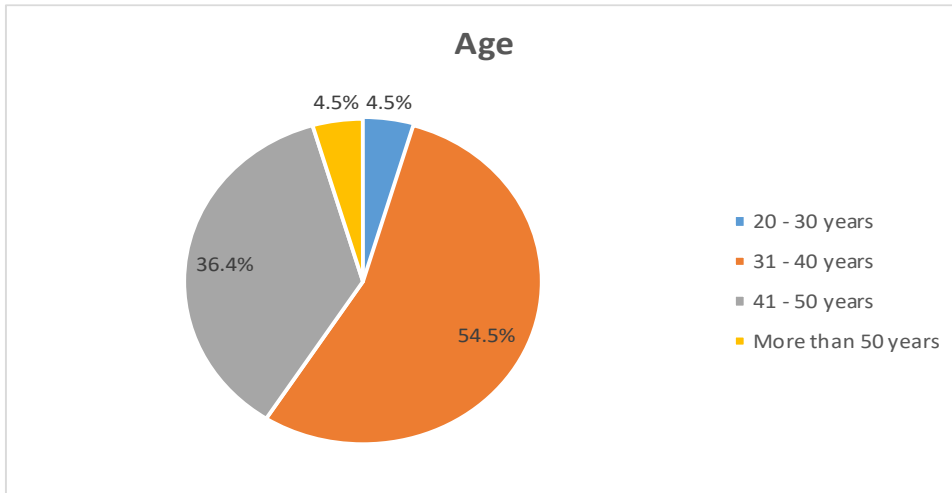


Figure 4.9: Representation of respondents by age.

A link between age and employee engagement has been found and Figure 4.4 illustrates the average employee engagement at FSPT by age.

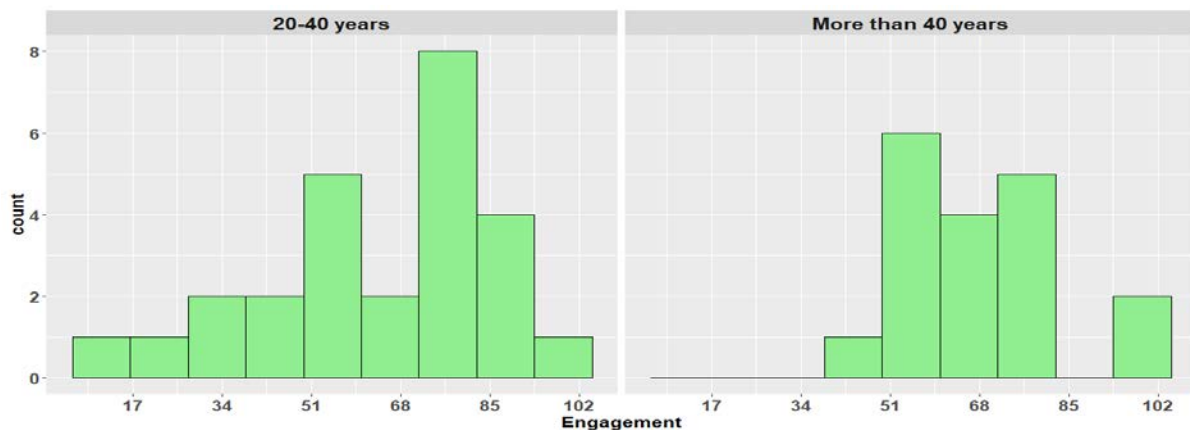


Figure 4.10: Average employee engagement by age.

There are notable differences in terms of engagement by age as depicted in Figure 4.4. The “20-40 years” group’s minimum engagement score is 16 which is much lower compared to the “more than 40 years” group with a minimum of 45. The former group represents the younger generation commonly known as Generation X and millennials. These groups are individualistic, have technology savvy, value freedom and have a greater work-life balance. The older generation, on the other hand, is submissive, hard-working and some are resistant to change and technologically challenged. The department has stagnant career development initiatives and a lack of promotional opportunities thus the younger workforce is less engaged. The results show that there is a significant link between age and employee engagement with older employees showing more engagement.

### 4.3.3 Representation of Respondents by Marital Status

The representation of respondents by marital status is depicted in Figure 4.5 showing that 71 percent of the employees are married.

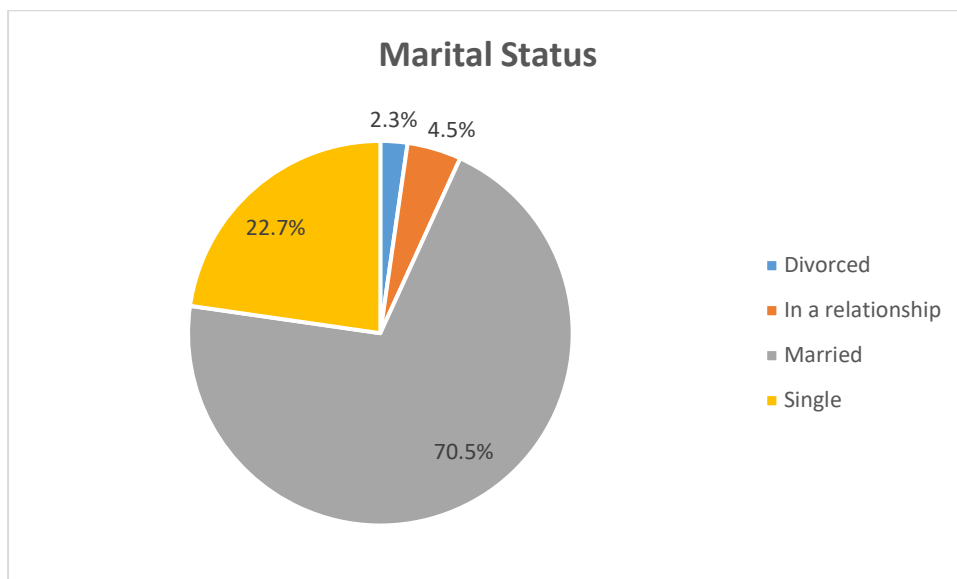


Figure 4.11: Representation of respondents by marital status.

The average employee engagement by marital status at FSPT is provided in Figure 4.6.

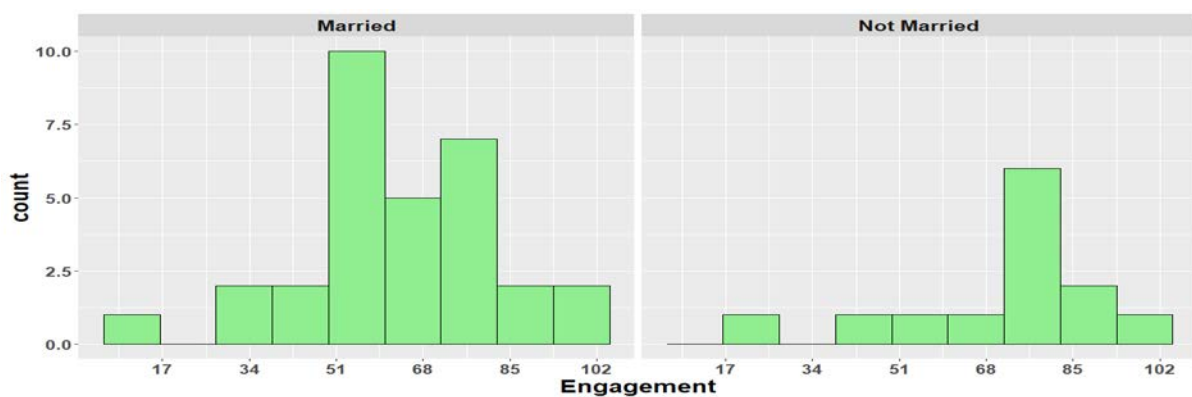


Figure 4.12: Average employee engagement by marital status.

Figure 4.6 shows that there is a link between marital status and employee engagement. There are significant differences in the mean values of the “married” and “not married” groups. The mean value of the “married” group is 64 while the “not married” group has a mean value of 73. The minimum engagement score for the “married” group is 16 compared to 23 of the “not married” group and this further confirms there are significant differences found in both groups for this study. The

results show that “married” employees are less engaged compared to the “not married” employees. In their study, Sharma and Gangwani (2017) found that married employees are more engaged and this can be because married people have more responsibilities towards their families so they are serious about their job. The results of FSPT are contradictory revealing that “single” or “not married” employees as more engaged.

#### 4.3.4 Representation of Respondents by Gender

Figure 4.7 illustrates the representation of respondents by gender. Female respondents represent 61.4 percent of the sample compared to the 38.6 percent male respondents and this can be attributed to the general observation that there are more female employees than male employees at FSPT.

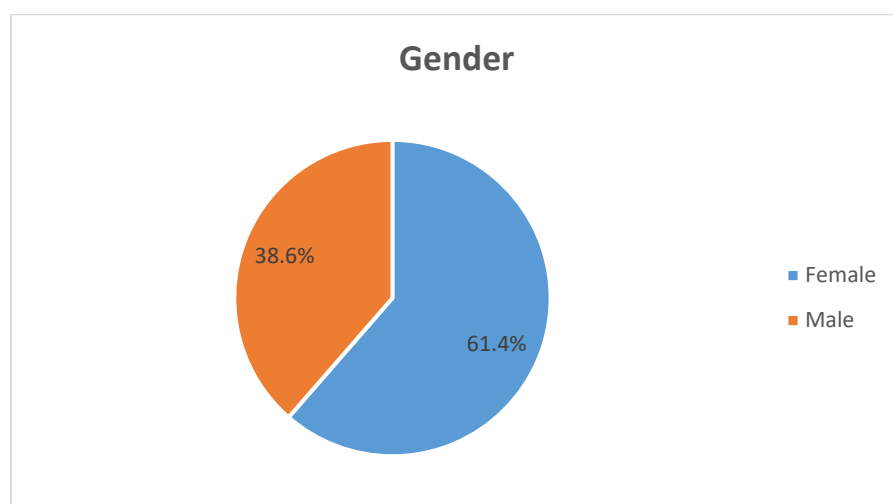


Figure 4.13: Representation of respondents by gender.

A significant link between gender and employee engagement has been found and Figure 4.8 provides the illustration thereof.

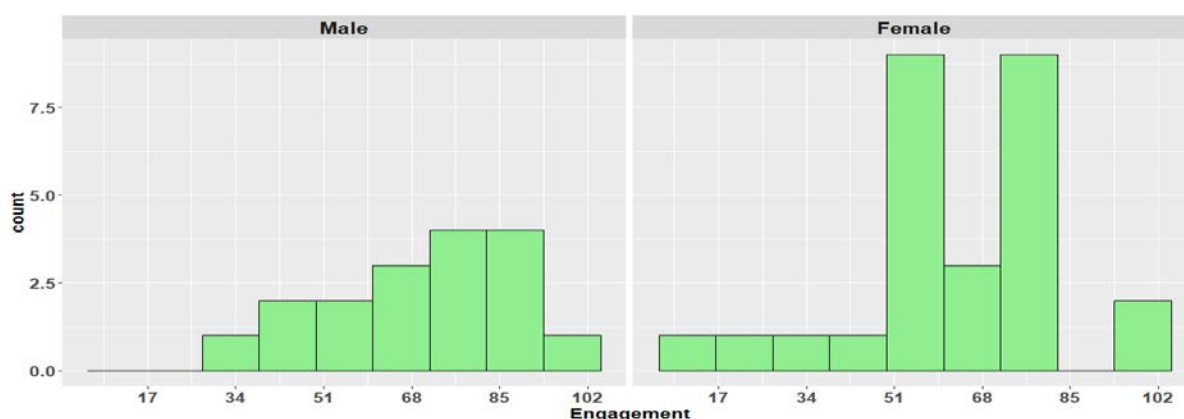


Figure 4.14: Average employee engagement by gender.

According to Figure 4.8, male employees experience greater engagement at work than their female counterparts. Although the scale of the “male” group is slightly skewed to the left and does not reach the end of the tail, it somehow depicts a normal distribution. There is also a notable difference in the mean values of the groups with a value of 71 for the “male” group and 63 for the “female” group. Men are aggressive in pushing their careers and the aggression puts male employees in comfortable and fulfilling positions. Although some studies have found no significant differences in engagement between males and females, in this study a conclusion can be made that male employees are often more engaged than female employees.

#### 4.3.5 Representation of Respondents by Occupational Level

Figure 4.9 is a graphical representation of the respondents by occupational level. Most respondents are at the middle management level, followed by employees and those that are at the supervisory level. Managers are provided with tools of the trade such as laptops and data bundles to work remotely. This could be the reason why more managers were able to complete the questionnaire amid national lockdown due to COVID-19.

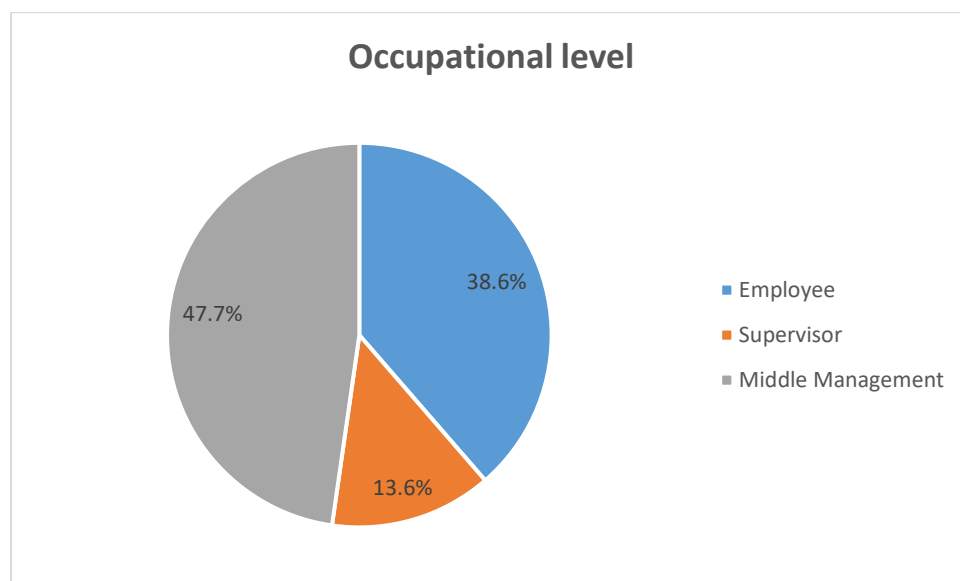


Figure 4.15: Representation of respondents by occupational level.

Occupational level is an important determinant of employee engagement as discovered in literature. Figure 4.10 illustrates the average employee engagement at FSPT by occupational level.

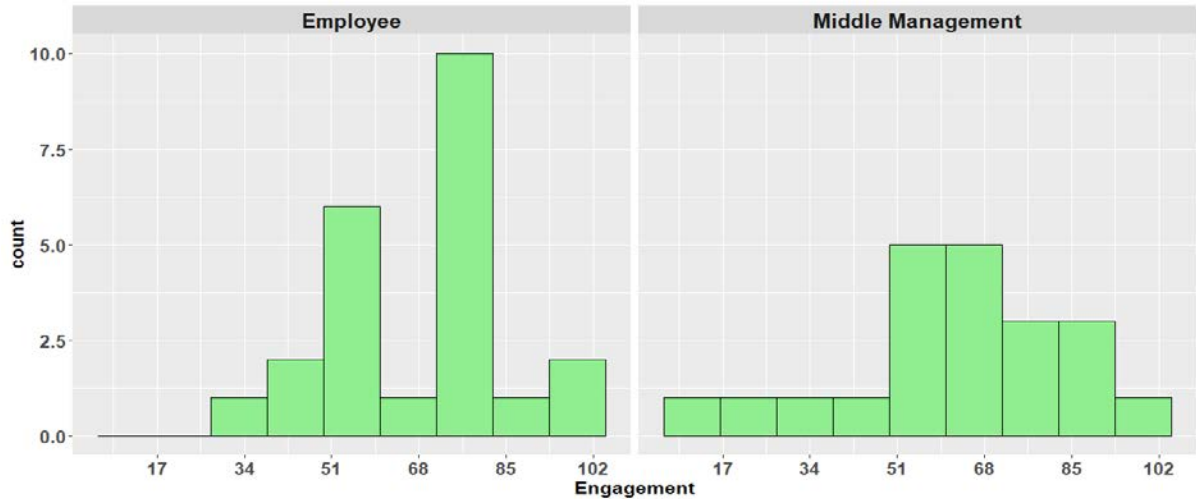


Figure 4.16: Average employee engagement by occupational level.

Literature suggests that employee engagement levels should change or improve depending on the position/level of an employee but, the results of this study indicate the opposite according to Figure 4.10. The results obtained prove that the issue of employee engagement and occupational level is complex. “Employees” have a minimum engagement score of 28 compared to “middle management” with a score of 16. Furthermore, the mean for “employees” is 70 while “middle management” has a mean of 63. From the results of this study, we can conclude that “employees” are often more engaged than the “managers”. These results are in contradiction with findings by Sharma and Gangwani (2017) which states that senior-level employees are more engaged as they feel responsible and committed to their organisation.

#### 4.3.6 Representation of Respondents by Educational Level

Table 4.2: shows the representation of respondents by educational level. As can be seen in the chart, most respondents have a degree qualification.

Table 4.3: Representation of respondents by educational level.

Educational Level	No	%
Less than matric/senior certificate	1	2.3%
Certificate after matric/senior certificate	2	4.5%
Diploma after matric/senior certificate	7	15.9%
Degree	23	52.3%
Honors	7	15.9%
Masters	3	6.8%
PhD	1	2.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>

Only a small number of respondents has an educational level of “less than matric (senior certificate)”, “certificate after matric”, and “Ph.D”. The minimum requirement for most positions in the department is a degree and that explains the high number of employees with a degree in this sample.

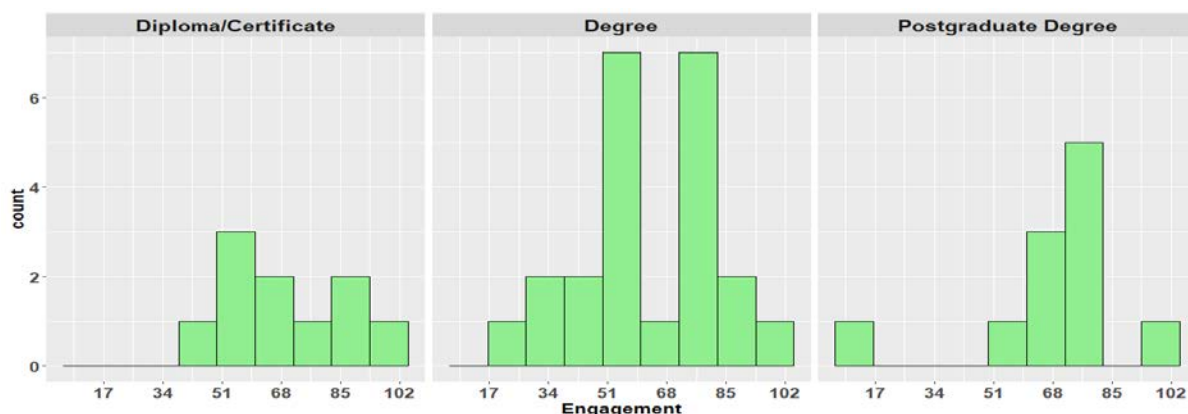


Figure 4.17: Average employee engagement by educational level.

According to Figure 4.11, the mean for the employees with a “certificate” or “diploma” is 70 compared to those in possession of a “degree” and “postgraduate degree” with a mean of 64 and 69 respectively. It should be noted that employees with a degree are somehow engaged. This can be attributed to the fact that the more knowledgeable an employee is, the more comfortable they will be in performing their job with enthusiasm and vigour. But the results show no significant link between educational level and the level of employee engagement.

The following section will focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data on employee engagement derived from the questionnaire responses.

#### 4.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Data on Employee Engagement at FSPT

The concept of employee engagement is still in its transitional phase and not much rigorous research has been done on the subject, especially in government institutions. Given the steady rise in employee attrition levels coupled with the strong competition for talent at the local and global horizon, talented job seekers are losing interest in government jobs; thus there is no better time to conduct this study at a government institution.

The raw data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Section B of the questionnaire which seeks to determine the level of engagement by employees at work was developed in the form of a Likert-type scale. On each item, respondents had to indicate their feeling about the workplace and work itself, and the options were “never”, “almost never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, “often”, “very often” and “always”. Numerical values ranging from zero (never) to six (always) were used to assist with the quantitative analysis of the data. Section B of the questionnaire has three main dimensions, namely; vigour, dedication, and absorption which seek to determine the engagement among employees.

The outcome of the investigation produced a clear overview of employee engagement at FSPT. The results captured the engagement level of employees and their emotional attachment to their work. Employee engagement is simply defined as a state of being fully committed to the organisation’s goals and values, always motivated to contribute to the success of the organisation. This also means that individuals are physically, psychologically, and emotionally present when occupying and performing an organisational role.

#### 4.4.1 Reliability of UWES

The validity of UWES-17 has been established by numerous studies and the reliability of its Cronbach’s Alpha (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). In order to determine the reliability, the Cronbach’s Alpha was determined as indicated in Table 4.3. The UWES shows an excellent internal consistency and has a very high Cronbach Alpha of 0.95 as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.4: Cronbach's alpha

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Items</b>
Vigour	0.86	6
Dedication	0.93	5
Absorption	0.87	6
Engagement	0.95	17

#### 4.4.2 Engagement

Table 4.4 shows the results and the level of employee engagement at FSPT.

Table 4.5: Employee engagement results of FSPT

	<b>Vigor</b>	<b>Dedication</b>	<b>Absorption</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
<b>n</b>	44	44	44	44
<b>Mean</b>	3.99	3.96	3.78	3.91
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	1.11	1.38	1.25	1.17
<b>Standard Error</b>	0.17	0.21	0.19	0.18

A mean was used to interpret the level of employee engagement at FSPT with the scoring categories for each variable of the UWES instrument. The mean provides an average measure of each UWES variable and ultimately, the overall engagement.

Table 4.6: UWES-17 Mean percentage norms.

	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Total score
Very low	≤ 2.17	≤ 1.60	≤ 1.60	≤ 1.93
Low	2.18 – 3.20	1.61 – 3.00	1.61 – 2.75	1.94 – 3.06
Average	3.21 – 4.80	3.01 – 4.90	2.76 – 4.40	3.07 – 4.66
High	4.81 – 5.60	4.91 – 5.79	4.41 – 5.35	4.67 – 5.53
Very high	≥ 5.61	≥ 5.80	≥ 5.36	≥ 5.54
M	3.99	3.81	3.56	3.82
SD	1.08	1.31	1.10	1.10
SE	.01	.01	.01	.01
Range	.00 – 6.00	.00 – 6.00	.00 – 6.00	.00 – 6.00

Table 4.4 can be interpreted using the norm table that accompanies the UWES. According to Table 4.4, an overall score of 3.91 lies in the average range. Therefore, a conclusion can be made that the employee engagement at FSPT is at an average level as indicated by the mean score of 3.91.

The results indicate that the overall engagement as shown in Table 4.4 and according to the norm in Table 4.5, FSPT has an average level of engagement. The three employee engagement variables (vigour, dedication, and absorption) are closely linked to the three employee engagement dimensions (cognitive, physical, and emotional) discussed in Chapter 2. The interpretation of the results for each employee engagement variable is dealt with below.

## **Vigour**

In Table 4.4 vigour has a mean score of 3.99 which is an average level when compared with the norm Table 4.5. The results show that just about 50 percent of the employees at FSPT are physically present at work with high levels of energy and mental resilience. These employees are willing to invest effort in their work and persist even under difficult situations at FSPT. Thus, FSPT has some employees who work with full intensity and with a lot of energy devoted to the completion of tasks.

## **Dedication**

As shown in Table 4.4, an average level has been determined with a mean score of 3.96. At FSPT some employees find meaning and are emotionally attached to their work. The results show that these employees identify with their work and experience it to be inspiring and challenging. Furthermore, they feel enthusiastic and have pride in what they do. These dedicated employees have a sense of involvement in the organisation as they also feel that they are part of the department's greater vision. FSPT plays an important part in how these employees feel about themselves, as their contribution to the department's vision is somehow part of their identity. In essence, the department has an average number of employees who are willing to do their best to achieve its objectives.

## **Absorption**

Absorption is also at an average level and according to Table 4.4 a mean score of 3.78 means that an acceptable number of employees at FSPT are always fully engrossed in their work with a high level of concentration. For these employees, time passes quickly and they find it difficult to detach from work. They have intentional and active focus on their tasks with a willingness to have positive thoughts that will improve effectiveness of those tasks. A conclusion can be reached that half of the departmental employees are content with their work and find pleasure in performing it.

It is noted that all the UWES variables are also at an average level although absorption is lower with a mean score of 3.78 when compared with the other two variables. Additionally, a standard error of 0.18 on the overall engagement at FSPT indicates that the sample is representative of the population.

Furthermore, if figures are read with the norms in Table 4.5, it can be noted that the mean score for the absorption variable is always lower than the other two variables (Massyn & Jensen, 2017).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The chapter began with an overview of data analysis procedures, a description of the demographic characteristics of the 44 respondents, and a description of the reliability of the UWES-17 instrument using Cronbach's Alpha. The responses to each question contained within the three main variables were analysed using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and standard error.

The level of employee engagement has been determined to be at an average level, which is good but, any organisation should have the desire to be at a higher employee engagement level. According to the "engagement" scales, the results empirically show that years of service, position, age, and gender have a positive relationship with the level of employee engagement. Both research questions have been answered as the level of employee engagement has been determined by sourcing opinions and attitudes of employees on how they feel about the workplace and work itself using the questions in the UWES questionnaire.

The insights gained from this study will contribute to the lack of quantitative data currently available regarding employee engagement in the public sector. It will further assist the organisational leaders with an understanding of the concept and its contribution to an organisation as a whole. The Welch's t-test allows for generalisation of sample results to the whole population as the t-test found no significant difference between the group that responded before the reminder and those who responded after, thereby eliminating non-response bias.

The literature suggests that many factors affect employee engagement and in this study are referred to as "drivers of employee engagement". Chapter 5 will focus on highlighting these factors as well as suggesting different strategies that will enhance employee engagement.

## **5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The primary objective of this study was to determine employee engagement at the Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT), which was successfully determined from the data collected. In essence, the purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the research effort and to summarise the research project by closing the loop between the main objective and the findings. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations to the department that will enhance employee engagement, and with the limitations of the study.

### **5.2 Conclusions**

Employee engagement is currently prioritised by most organisations as it helps to increase performance, encourage innovations, provide employee stability, and thus a reduction in staff turnover. At FSPT, no employee engagement related surveys were ever conducted in the past, hence the main objective of the study was to determine the level of employee engagement. The objectives are reiterated in this section to show how efforts employed during this study assisted to achieve these objectives as discussed individually below.

The primary research objective of this study is:

- To determine employee engagement at FSPT.

The secondary research objectives of this study are:

- To analyse the current factors affecting employee engagement;
- To determine the level of employee engagement at FSPT; and
- To evaluate strategies that can enhance employee engagement at FSPT.

#### **5.2.1 Current Factors Affecting Employee Engagement**

The theoretical framework that was developed through the literature review presents the main employee engagement dimensions which are emotional, physical, and cognitive aspects of work, and how employees thrive with the combination of these

factors. Chapter 2 outlined various drivers or factors that affect employee engagement.

The concept of employee engagement is gaining momentum and should not be regarded as just another human resource initiative. However, it should be noted that fostering employee engagement is a long term process and its success is linked to the core aspects of the organisation such as values, culture, and management styles and philosophy. To change the core aspects of the organisation requires time, effort and commitment, so does employee engagement.

Employees need to be fully occupied and enjoy what they do at work so that they put the discretionary effort that the organisation is seeking. Therefore, due to the fact that employee engagement is a multi-functional concept comprising of the three dimensions, a manager cannot force an employee to be engaged. An organisation that wants to increase employee engagement levels will most likely attempt to foster the factors that have a positive effect on engagement through every business activity.

### **5.2.2 Level of Employee Engagement at FSPT**

The researcher was granted permission to collect data electronically from the employees of the department using the UWES-17 data collection instrument. In Chapter 2 employee engagement dimensions were explained and found to be directly linked to the UWES-17 scale variables which were used to determine the level of employee engagement at FSPT. As this research is about employee engagement, it also examined factors or drivers of employee engagement.

In Chapter 4, the level of employee engagement has been determined based on the questionnaire responses which subsequently answered the research questions. According to the research results, employee engagement at FSPT is at an average level. It is also important to mention that this figure needs to be evaluated with a critical mind taking into account the response rate. Since the Welch's t-test proved that the results were non-response bias and that the respondents were representative of the population, the department should note that half of the employees need to be won over. The department already has some tools for developing employee engagement but the practices need to be clearly defined. Employee engagement actions need to

be taken closer to employees and should focus on aspects that are relevant to the daily lives of employees.

### **5.2.3 Strategies to Enhance Employee Engagement at FSPT**

There are many strategies that different scholars found to be effective in enhancing employee engagement. In Chapter 2, some of these strategies were explained in detail. Further strategies will also be highlighted in the recommendations section below.

Employee engagement is very important for improving productivity in the workplace. A disengaged employee will be underperforming while an engaged employee is capable of exceptional performance. Leaders should not be satisfied with anything other than a high level of engagement and performance, therefore they should aspire to improve employee engagement continuously. However, inspiring employee engagement is not easy, hence it requires a clear strategy to succeed just like any other element of a business. The strategies outlined in Chapter 2 give guidance on how to enhance employee engagement and how to create an environment where employees want to engage more. The next section will focus on recommendations that FSPT should consider to enhance employee engagement in the department.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this research study. This survey was limited to employees at salary levels 1-12, perhaps increasing the sample to comprise all employees including senior executives could provide a better collection of data across the department. Employees within salary levels 1-12 are at an operational level dealing with daily activities of the department, while levels 13-16 are responsible for strategic aspects of the department. In Chapter 3, the rationale behind selecting salary levels 1-12 as a sample is explained in detail.

### **5.3.1 Engagement Efforts to Entice Millennials**

The results of this study revealed that at FSPT, older employees in terms of age are more engaged than their younger counter-parts. This should be a cause for concern as the older employees are closer to retirement and the younger generation is expected to take the baton and continue with the mandate of the department. As a top priority, millennials appreciate a flexible working environment and the department

should capitalise on this to give the younger employees a reason to stay. The world is increasingly moving towards remote working and flexibility, as far as millennials are concerned, cannot be emphasised enough. Therefore, FSPT should ensure that the employees have the tools of the trade required to work anywhere and not just being physically in the office.

The department should also cultivate an organisational culture where employees of all generations feel their input to the department matters. Managers and supervisors should not constantly scrutinise the attendance of millennials and micromanage them, as it can be detrimental to the trust and work relationships. Qualified employees will perform at their optimum level if they are given the freedom to do so. Another key focus for millennials is training and development. Managers should be able to recognise the individual strengths of these younger employees and train them to develop their skills where they will thrive.

### **5.3.2 Management Training to Improve Communication**

Organisational leaders and managers can effectively foster employee engagement when they are engaged themselves. Leaders and managers of the department should have open lines of communication with employees to improve engagement. Effective communication between the leaders and the employees afford leaders a chance to assess employee perceptions and it provides an opportunity for employees to be heard. The departmental managers should develop communication strategies to build trust and engagement with employees so they feel valued and part of the organisational goals. Managers should establish a safe place where the employees can voice their opinions without fear of being victimised in the workplace.

### **5.3.3 Initiate Non-monetary Rewards and Recognition Programs**

The results of this research project showed that there is a link between employee engagement and the number of years an employee worked at the department. Employees with less than 10 years' tenure are less engaged than the other groups. Efforts to engage employees are critical in an employee's early years of service. It is noted that the government is under financial strain which may see some departments doing away with monetary rewards. However, the department should start to introduce intangible or non-monetary programmes that will ensure that employees know that they are valued and their contribution to the departmental goals is appreciated.

Employees who can perceive a forward momentum will remain engaged because they see prospects for growth and expansion. Employees at FSPT are battling with a lack of career progression and the department should prioritise internal employees when there is a vacancy. The flexibility of the manager can also assist with keeping employees engaged. It should not be an issue when an employee requests an afternoon off to attend to personal matters, provided that they do not abuse this privilege.

#### **5.3.4 Improve Training and Development Opportunities for Employees**

Employees prosper in an environment that focuses on making the employees valuable assets. Staff training is the most critical aspect of improving employee engagement as employees feel valued through career enhancement and development; therefore it will increase the motivation to achieve the objectives of FSPT. Currently, the department has an employee bursary programme in place but it should increase the number of bursary recipients. Furthermore, it will be futile for the department to grant an employee financial resources to improve their qualifications, only to move to greener pastures after qualifying. It is therefore recommended that the department should ensure that employees who have improved their qualifications are placed in positions where they will effectively practice what they have learned.

#### **5.3.5 Foster Team and Co-worker Relationships**

An employee with supportive team members has the confidence to explore new things knowing that the team members will offer their full support even in hard and difficult conditions. Krishnaveni and Monica (2017) state that a healthy environment that fosters harmony among peers, supervisors, and co-workers is vital for employee engagement. Pandita and Bedarkar (2015) also found that relationships within the workplace have an impact on “meaningfulness” which relates to engagement. The department should have frequent team building activities and programmes to build trust among the employees. Work alliances with good intentions will help the employees to achieve the most important goals for the department. The next section highlights the limitations that the researcher was confronted with while conducting the research.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the Study**

Since the study was limited to employees at salary level 1-12, caution should be used when making a generalisation based on the research findings alone. Another limitation that should be noted is that the data was collected when some employees were working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the data was collected using an electronic questionnaire, some employees may not have had the resources to complete the questionnaire while at home, thus the response was negatively affected.

Additionally, there is a growing number of studies on employee engagement but there are limited empirical studies concerning the public sector organisations in South Africa. Therefore, this research will be useful to the FSPT and other governmental institutions to effectively use employee engagement as a tool to determine how employees feel about the workplace and the work itself. Furthermore, these results can be used to evaluate how the development efforts are perceived by the employees at FSPT.

The following section summarises the research and emphasise the benefits of the findings for the public sector organisations.

#### **5.5 Conclusion**

The literature review that was done for this study served as a conceptual framework, which assisted with the empirical investigation and supported the recommendations. The study was conducted at FSPT, but there is an inclination that the situation might be the same in other governmental departments as they are governed by the same policies and prescripts. Therefore, future research could increase the scope and research to be conducted in other governmental departments thereby increasing the number of empirical studies on employee engagement in the public sector.

The recommendations emphasise the importance of leadership, communication and team and co-worker relationships. Taking into account the fiscal strain that the department is operating under, there is only one recommendation that involves the spending of money and that would be training and development. Other recommendations require only a small change in the manager's behaviour such as better communication, to recognise an employees' exceptional performance, and to

foster harmonious employee relationships. These small changes could have a positive influence on employee engagement.

The primary objective of the study was to determine employee engagement at FSPT. The primary objective was achieved through the secondary objectives of the study. The study found that employee engagement at FSPT is at a level that is just above average. These findings could be beneficial to the developing interest in the concept of employee engagement in the public sector. The study can also be valuable to the department in streamlining its engagement efforts towards certain areas that need more attention according to the recommendations.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Permission letter to conduct research at FSPT



Enquiries: Mr. S. Boel  
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Reference: Research Project - 2020

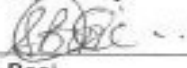




Mr. M.N.G. Mahlatsi  
Head of Department  
Free State Provincial Treasury  
**BLOEMFONTEIN**  
9300

**Dear Mr. Mahlatsi**

#### **REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN FREE STATE PROVINCIAL TREASURY (FSPT) DURING 2020 ACADEMIC YEAR**

1. I am currently a bursary holder of Free State Provincial Treasury and enrolled for a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Free State.
2. As part of the requirement to complete the qualification I am required to conduct a research on business administration related topic which is "**Employee Engagement at Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT)**".
3. Employee engagement is shortly defined as the emotional attachment that employees have for their organisation. It seeks to understand if employees have a clear state of mind when they report for duty, are 100 percent busy with work, show concern for the success of the organisation as well as if they perform above and beyond expectation.
4. It is my view that employee engagement in FSPT has not been adequately measured as there has never been any engagement surveys conducted in the department and understanding employee engagement levels is crucial for the success of the organisation.

5. It is against the above background that approval is sought to conduct research on **"Employee Engagement at Free State Provincial Treasury"** within FSPT. Data will be collected in a form of a questionnaire of which participation will be voluntary, pose no risk to officials and responses will be kept confidential. All officials from deputy director level and below are the targeted sample for this study.

<b>Compiled by:</b>  S. Bool Budget Practitioner: Budget Management <b>Date:</b> 10.02.2020	<b>Checked by:</b>  M. Kesonk Deputy Director: Budget Management <b>Date:</b> 2020.02.10
<b>Supported by:</b>  S. Mngoma Director: Budget Management <b>Date:</b> 11/02/2020	<b>Recommended by:</b>  P.E. Lebone Chief Director: SRM <b>Date:</b> 12.02.2020
<b>Approved by:</b>  M.N.G. Mahlatsi Head of Department Free State Provincial Treasury <b>Date:</b> 14/02/2020	



**GENERAL HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)**

30-Jun-2020

Dear Ms Siphumle Boozi

**Application Approved**

Research Project Title:

**Employee Engagement at Free State Provincial Treasury (FSPT)**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2020/0600/2506**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

*Adri Plessis*  
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**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to complete the questionnaire.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Signature of the respondent\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Researcher: Siphumle Boozi

Signature of Researcher

Date:

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FREE STATE PROVINCIAL  
TREASURY**

**SECTION A**

**BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS**

*Please answer the following questions and mark them with 'x' in the block next to the option relevant to you.*

**1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH THE COMPANY?**

1-5 Years	
6 – 10 Years	
11-15 Years	
More than 15 years	

**2. AGE:**

20 – 30 Years	
31 - 40 Years	
41 - 50 Years	
More than 50 years	

**3. GENDER:**

Male	
Female	
Gender nonconforming	

**4. MARITAL STATUS**

Single	
In a relationship	
Married	
Divorced	
Separated	
Remarried	

**5. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:**

Less than matric/Senior certificate	
Short courses less than one year	
Certificate after matric/senior certificate	
Diploma after matric/senior certificate	
Degree	
Honors	
Masters	
PhD	

**6. LANGUAGE**

Afrikaans	
English	
Sepedi	
SeSotho	
SeTswana	
TshiVenda	
IsiZulu	
IsiXhosa	
Other	

**7. LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT**

Top management	
Middle management	
Supervisor	
Employee	

**8. CULTURE**

ASIAN	
AFRICAN	
WHITE	
COLORED	
INDIAN	

## SECTION B

### Work & Well-being Survey (UWES) ©

*The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, type the '0' (zero) in the space before the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by typing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.*

0	Almost never 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very often 5	Always 6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Everyday

1. \_\_\_\_\_ At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Time flies when I'm working
4. \_\_\_\_\_ At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I am enthusiastic about my job
6. \_\_\_\_\_ When I am working, I forget everything else around me
7. \_\_\_\_\_ My job inspires me
8. \_\_\_\_\_ When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel happy when I am working intensely
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I am proud of the work that I do
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I am immersed in my work
12. \_\_\_\_\_ I can continue working for very long periods at a time
13. \_\_\_\_\_ To me, my job is challenging
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I get carried away when I'm working
15. \_\_\_\_\_ At my job, I am very resilient, mentally
16. \_\_\_\_\_ It is difficult to detach myself from my job
17. \_\_\_\_\_ At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well

\* Shortened version (UWES-9); VI= Vigor; DE = Dedication; AB = Absorption  
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