

**Exploring leadership capabilities that strengthen employee engagement in the
context of reorganisations.**

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Change Leadership.

11 March 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Change Leadership at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is a crucial factor for organisational performance, yet despite numerous strategies and studies on the subject, many leaders still struggle to positively influence engagement levels. The need to study employee engagement phenomena in diverse contexts therefore emerged.

This paper aimed to explore which leadership capabilities strengthen employee engagement in the context of reorganisations. The study utilised a qualitative approach, in which 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted in a Namibian public enterprise. The sample consisted of employees at general, supervisory and managerial levels, in order to access diversity of thought with regards to the phenomenon under study. This included employees who had experienced departmental mergers, divisional transfers and changes in job roles. The data collected were analysed through a phenomenological analytical approach, deriving relevant themes and sub-themes.

The study found that proactive communication, employee preparation, leadership direction, resource allocation, leader authenticity, balanced autonomy, psychological safety, leading through values, wellness support, regular check-ins and trial periods are leadership capabilities that need to be strengthened in reorganisations. Further findings indicated industrial action as a survivor syndrome outcome that is associated with non-retrenchment related reorganisations. As one of the first employee engagement studies in the reorganisation context, these findings serve as a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. The study also offers practical recommendations for leaders and human resource practitioners.

The research limitations were inherent in the cross-sectional design and the sample size, limiting the generalisability of the findings. Finally, the researcher's inexperience may have influenced the data analytical process and the conclusions reached.

Key Words: employee engagement, reorganisations, leadership capabilities

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
SET	Social Exchange Theory

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Organisational success depends on an employee performance as enabled by their engagement and involvement levels (Ismail et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020; Bashir et al., 2023). When this performance is enhanced by supportive and good organisational leadership, results in a workplace in which employees are engaged through psychological commitment (Ariussanto et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). By examining the integration of leadership and employee engagement, this study explored leadership capabilities that strengthen employee engagement in the context of reorganisations. This chapter provides background to the research problem, defines the research problem, outlines the research purpose, scope and contribution.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Organisations often implement processes of restructuring and reorganisation in order to adjust to the continuously shifting and dynamic market environment (Abbas, 2023). Although the terms are used interchangeably, Girod and Karim (2017) presents restructuring as rather a reorganisation type, in which the fundamental structure of an organisation's operations and resource allocation is altered. Conversely, Kenton (2020) described reorganisation as the substantial and transformative restructuring of a financially challenged enterprise, with the aim of reinstating its financial health. Abbas (2023), however, argued that reorganisation only involves adjusting a company's functional set up, organisational structure and operational procedures, whereas restructuring involves the substantial modification of an organisation to drive profitability and strategic positioning through actions such as workforce reduction, divestiture and consolidations. Restructuring may further entail integrating functions, altering processes and hierarchical structures (Abbas, 2022). This study aligns with the definition of Girod and Karim (2017), who identified reorganisation as the umbrella concept that includes restructuring as an associated sub-process.

Whilst reorganisations may be essential for operational efficiency and financial viability, they affect employee engagement levels, requiring organisations to build an integrated approach that improves engagement throughout and after the process has been completed (Wilkin, 2023). However, this remains a challenge amongst leaders, as according to Stein et al. (2021), they tend to lack an understanding of the factors and attributes that are most critical to fostering employee engagement. What are often perceived to be the most critical drivers for engagement are often not aligned to reality, thus creating a need for leaders to seek direction

on what will work most to successfully engage their teams. This is especially challenging given the numerous transformational changes that employees often need to absorb.

In their study during the Covid-19 pandemic, Kaiser (2023) found that executives with inadequate skills failed to lead employees through this unforeseen and extraordinary transformation. However, more adaptable and talented leaders were found to have been able to enable their teams to recover and remain productive, despite the disruption. This notion is aligned with Gaskell's (2020) research that found a reduction in engagement levels during the pandemic, which only elevated in instances where leadership actions relating to emotional support and serving employees' needs were experienced. Additionally, Sonnenberg (2023) highlighted that employees' engagement levels were influenced when they felt that their leaders showed genuine empathy, care, and a sense of direction. However, the author added that about 50% of employees surveyed indicated that leadership efforts towards care and empathy are often perceived as pretence. These findings thus highlighted the need for an in-depth understanding of leadership capabilities.

Tenney (2022) asserted that leadership is crucial in defining employee experiences in the organisational culture they create, which in turn serve as drivers of employee engagement. Similarly, Harter (2018) found that leadership approaches to employee recognition and coaching were instrumental in causing the slight increase in engagement observed in some American organisations over the years. Yet despite their awareness of various engagement drivers, organisations cannot seem to gain momentum, as global engagement rates have remained low over the years (Marone, 2020). The above views therefore affirm that, although leadership plays a critical role in employee engagement, a knowledge gap exists amongst leaders in terms of strengthening their contributions towards engagement.

1.3 DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In their work on employee engagement literature, Bailey et al. (2017) and Ismail et al. (2019) alluded to the need for more studies that expand and deepen existing concepts and engagement theory. These should be through inquiries that seeks to offer more consideration to various contexts and organisational settings, where engagement takes place and is experienced. Vermeulen and Scheepers (2020) also highlighted the significance of organisational context when it comes to understanding how employees can be supported, especially during periods of vagueness. A reorganisation context is characterised by uncertainty; thus, this study is aligned to the above literature. Bailey et al. (2017) further asserted that while there could be major disparities between different fields of business, kinds

of jobs or cultural contexts, all of which are crucial to understanding engagement, most of the published research has concentrated on validating psychological models, with limited in-depth exploratory studies conducted on specific contextual factors. This necessitated the current study to focus on exploring leadership capabilities that strengthen employee engagement in the context of reorganisation.

Underpinned by the workplace resource theory, Cooper-Thomas et al. (2018) proposed that studies be conducted to determine other means by which leaders might display warmth and compassion so as to boost employee participation, and how that, in turn, could contribute to driving employee engagement. Further alluding to the resource aspect, they added that an extended focus should be placed on understanding the influence that leader-enabled resources, such as team support as well as other job features, have on engagement (Mäkikangas, et al., 2022). An employee's feeling of trust towards their supervisor, the organisation and colleagues were further identified as resources that are exchanged for high engagement levels (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2020). Therefore, the leadership approach adopted influences employee enthusiasm and engagement degrees, that drives their performance in turn (Ariussanto et al., 2020). These authors further prompted a need to explore conditions outside of an employee's control that could facilitate a change in levels of engagement. This suggestion thus presents an opportunity to explore aspects of an organisation and its leadership that are not necessarily driven by employees.

Leaders are often well positioned to align and facilitate organisational resources, which leads employees to perceive that they are being supported at work (Vermeulen & Scheepers, 2020). That perception is believed to positively influence engagement levels. Interestingly, however, global studies indicate that only 15% of employees are engaged (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020, p.1), despite emphasis being placed on engagement as a key driver for maximising business performance. Vandana and Murthy (2021) further asserted that although numerous studies exist to improve engagement there is a great deal of ambiguity owing to a variety of factors, including shifting business contexts and distinct hurdles. What is not known are the reasons why leaders in organisations have been unable to respond accordingly based on this understanding. This presents an opportunity to further explore and obtain in-depth insights regarding how leadership can be developed and the obstacles that need to be cleared in order to drive engagement (Meng & Berger, 2019).

In light of the practical and theoretical problems explored, how should leaders behave and what should they equip themselves with to drive employee engagement during reorganisation initiatives?

1.4 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND AIM

The purpose of this study was to add to the employee engagement literature by exploring leadership capabilities that strengthen employee engagement during a business reorganisation. The aim was to determine which capabilities leaders must have to serve as drivers and enablers of employee engagement during a business reorganisation. The study therefore sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the leadership behaviours expected by employees during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement?
- How do employees experience leadership during a reorganisation?
- How does the leadership experience affect employee engagement?
- What leadership capabilities should be developed to drive engagement during and post reorganisation?

1.5 RESEARCH SCOPE

The study focused on which leader capabilities are essential to strengthen employee engagement during a reorganisation. The scope was limited to individual perspectives and the experiences of employees who had been exposed to reorganisation initiatives in a Namibian public enterprise.

1.6 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Building from the theories of leadership, this study sought to contribute to and extend the employee engagement body of literature in two ways. The first was by determining the capabilities that leaders should demonstrate (Merger & Burger, 2019) and which leader-enabled resources (Mäkikangas et al., 2022) serve as drivers and enablers of employee engagement. Secondly, the researcher recognised the diverse scope of employee engagement and organisational change, thus the study also narrowed its focus to provide employee engagement insights in the context of reorganisation, given that varied settings and contexts were areas with limited research (Bailey et al., 2017).

The study's implication for change leaders and practitioners is that it collates a variety of relevant workplace strategies and leadership competencies that can be integrated into leadership development programmes, to empower leaders in their role of employee engagement during reorganisation initiatives. The study further serves as guidance for future research.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the study by providing a background to, and definition of, the research problem, purpose, and potential contributions. The chapter also described the complexity of organisational changes such as reorganisations, which pose various challenges to employee engagement. The researcher sought to understand why leaders struggle to act appropriately to drive employee engagement during reorganisation initiatives, and identified the leadership capabilities that are required to do so. The findings therefore contribute to the employee engagement literature in the context of leadership capabilities during reorganisations.

The next chapter reviews the literature related to the study topic and research problem.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the introduction to the study presented in Chapter 1, this chapter provides a thorough review of the literature on the study's key constructs, namely employee engagement, leadership, and the reorganisation context. The review commences with various authors' definitions of employee engagement, including how it differs from work engagement. This is followed by a description of the antecedents and drivers of employee engagement, the role of leadership on employee engagement, and an exploration of the reorganisation context. The chapter further discusses the associated theoretical framework that supports the current study, before concluding with a synthesis. The chapter's structure is summarised in Figure 1 below:

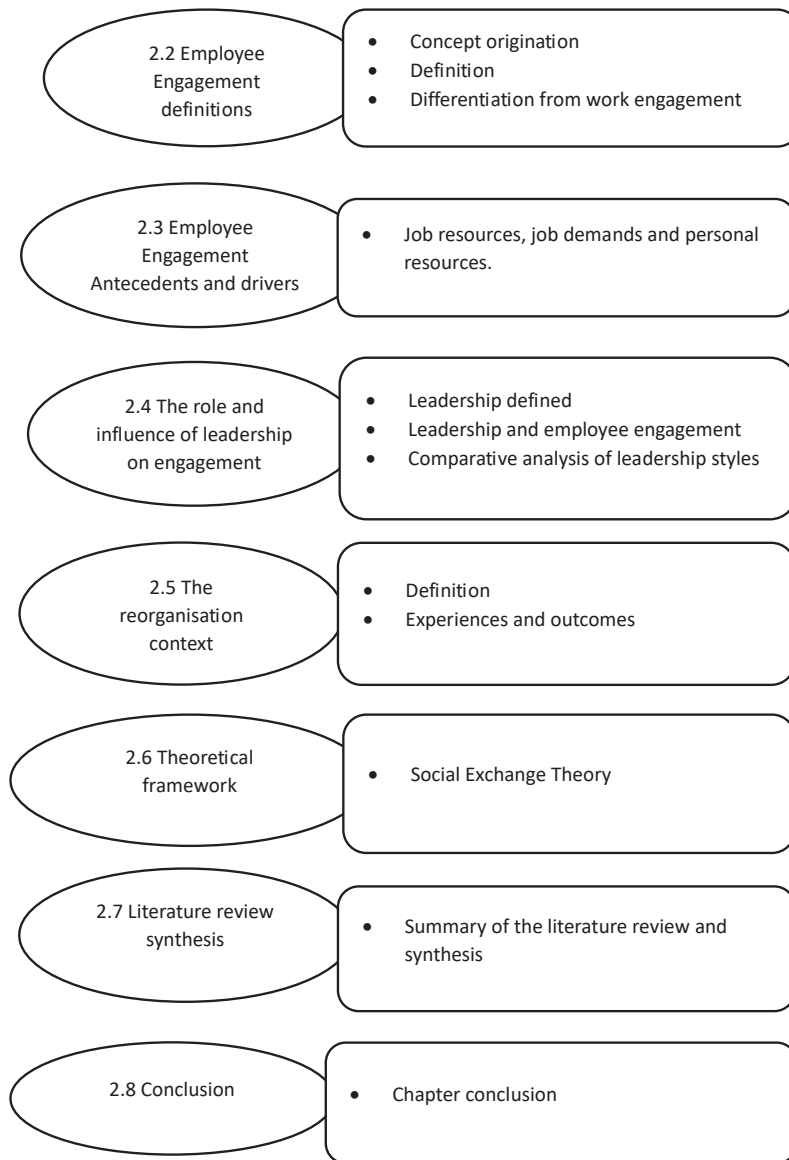


Figure 1: Literature review structure

2.2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DEFINITION

The term employee engagement originated from Kahn's (1990) concept of personal engagement, where individuals express preferences in job actions, fostering work-life relationships, mental presence, and energetic execution of duties. The author positioned “three psychological conditions necessary for achieving personal engagement, which are meaningfulness, psychological safety and availability” (Boccolli et al., 2022, p.78). As a pioneer in introducing the first definition in academic literature, Kahn described engagement

as the process of individuals incorporating their selves into their work roles. Various definitions of employee engagement have since been put forward, with a lack of consensus regarding the precise meaning of employee engagement (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2016) sought to simplify the definition of engagement as a lively, meaningful, and job-related outlook, that involves a deepened relationship with one's place of employment and expressiveness. This involves investing physical, emotional and intellectual aspects during role performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The authors described the emotional facet as revolving around employees' feelings, which determine their reactions and perception of their leaders and employers. The physical facet of employee engagement pertains to actual bodily efforts employed by individuals to fulfil their job responsibilities. These sentiments are aligned to personal engagement condition of availability (Boccoli et al., 2022). In line with Kahn's (1990) definition, engagement therefore entails being both psychologically and physically present, while occupying and executing an organisational role.

Expanding on the above, Osborne and Hammoud (2017) provided a contemporary definition of employee engagement, describing it as a mental association to one's organisation, their willingness to prolong their association due to this commitment, and their dedication to their work. The central emphasis of employee engagement lies in aligning employees with organisational goals and surpassing standard expectations. It comprises two vital components: a readiness to contribute to organisational success and a positively energised employee in a motivational state (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). Kwon and Kim (2020) further proposed that individuals with a heightened sense of complete self are better equipped to generate innovative ideas and effectively utilise job-related or personal resources. This suggests that employees who possess a strong sense of complete self may be more resilient in the face of challenges, resulting in positive job satisfaction and performance outcomes. Thus, it can be deduced that fostering an employee's 'fullness' may contribute to an adaptive and resourceful workforce, benefiting both individuals and the organisations they are part of.

Building on the fullness perspective, Kossyva et al. (2023) suggested that employee engagement encompasses an employee's all-round experience at work, including their relationship with their job, colleagues, and workplace. In essence, they see employee engagement as a dynamic and evolving construct that interconnects with various psychological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. This reflects a view of employees in the workplace, encompassing both positive and potentially negative aspects of their engagement with their work and organisations. The definitions explored thus establish an understanding of the term employee engagement to include a positive mental attachment, reflecting in one's actions, work and relationship to an organisation, which was the meaning adopted for the current study.

On the other hand, work engagement, which is often used interchangeably with employee engagement, centres on an employee's connection to their tasks rather than their connection to the workplace or employer. Du Plessis and Boshoff (2018) expressed work engagement as a fulfilling mental phenomenon characterised by drive, perseverance, high participation, passion, responsibility, focus, and cheerful enthusiasm in one's work. Ancarani et al. (2021) similarly described work engagement as an employee's active and focused participation in work activities, contributing to performance improvement. Unlike employee engagement, work engagement is limited to an employee's relationship with their job and does not consider their broader connection with the organisation. Similar to work engagement, employee engagement also signifies a display of outcomes often associated with an individual's well-being and internal motivation (Montani et al., 2020). This view is thus aligned with Chanana and Sangeeta (2020) research, which found that employee engagement represents a state where an employee has a positive psychological attachment to both their role and the organisation.

Moreover, Lemon (2019) highlighted that most academic definitions describe employee engagement as a driving force behind one performance in one's role. Hence, it concurs with the view that the attainment of organisational goals relies on the employees' abilities to perform their activities effectively, which is often driven by their engagement levels (Khusanova et al., 2021). An employee's engagement to perform however depends on the sense of psychological safety they experience in the workplace. This represents the ability for employees to execute their duties without fear "to make mistakes, the social norms and dynamics between persons and groups; interpersonal relationships, management style and processes, and the prevailing organizational norms" (Boccoli et al., 2022, p.78). According to Maximo et al. 2019, employees should feel a sense of leadership openness and exposure in the workplace, in order to feel psychologically safe to perform.

The emphasis of employee engagement therefore lies on the perceived ability to improve performance, based on the premise that those engaged exert great effort in their responsibilities and are likely to support their co-workers, so they jointly achieve organisational objectives (Bashir et al., 2023). An engaged employee therefore potentially influences various business outcomes, including service satisfaction and profitability (Popli & Rizvi, 2017; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Based on that understanding, employee engagement can thus be perceived as a key facilitator and enabler for organisational performance and success. In conclusion, while both concepts share positive psychological outcomes and motivation, employee engagement encompasses a broader scope, including an individual's relationship with their job, colleagues, and workplace, whereas work engagement is specifically tied to an employee's connection with their tasks.

2.3 ANTECEDENTS AND DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement has mainly been explored through the resource, social exchange and job-demand resource theories, whose assumptions have commonly been that resources provided by an organisation are considered to be primary factors in driving the levels of engagement among employees (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021). Some authors have specified certain organisational resources that enhance or predict engagement. These include an organisation's purpose, goal, and values; prospects for advancement; leadership that is enabling; interactions; skills development; teamwork; job resources; and staff appreciation (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). Job resources specifically include aspects such as coaching, feedback, autonomy and job control (Bakker et al., 2011). In contrast, there is a negative correlation between engagement levels and factors such as physical demands and poor work circumstances (Christian et al., 2011). The resources that serve as drivers for employee engagement have thus been established but need to be studied further in the context of reorganisations.

The job-demand resource theory (JD-R) perspective has explored the resources further. It classified workplace factors into job resources and job demands, which serve as determinants of engagement (Peretz, 2020). Job resources are tangible and mental elements that facilitate employees' development and advancement, often satisfying employees' need for independence and capabilities, resulting in improved performance and a sense of belonging in an organisation (Ancarani et al., 2021). To practically drive engagement, it is a combination of job resources such as autonomy and freedom, diversity in tasks, avenues for professional growth and support from one's manager that enable other workplace resources to have an impact on an employee's drive, satisfaction and achievement on the job (Albrecht et al., 2020). Therefore, when employees experience an absence of such resources to meet their psychological needs, they tend to disengage (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). It is mainly leadership-related resources that play a crucial role in enabling a shift in engagement levels.

Although jobs may differ in their nature, Harney et al. (2018, p.239) postulated that they all have a "particular set of job demands and facets that require physiological, cognitive, or emotional effort such as work pressure, demanding tasks, or emotional labour, and job resources that enable goal achievement, help to cope with demands, or contribute to one's development". These demands therefore affect the extent to which job resources influence engagement (Fernandes & Martins, 2023). On that basis, the JD-R theory emphasises the need to observe an appropriate ratio between job demands and resources (Giallourous et al., 2023) to drive beneficial work outcomes and psychological satisfaction among employees.

This view is significant, as it places perceived outcomes and satisfaction among the antecedents of employee engagement.

Contrary to the above perspective, Jenny et al. (2020) cautioned that achieving an increase in the desired outcomes from a balanced demand-resources ratio is dependent on the factors being considered under each dimension of the ratio, as depicted in Figure 2. Specifically, in instances where the job demands are relatively harsh and severe, engagement can be significantly impacted using suitable job resources. In addition to neutralising the job demands, these resources further facilitate one's sense of individual accomplishments, through enhanced developmental opportunities (Boccoli et al., 2022). Therefore, Crawford et al. (2010) emphasised that although some job demands may predict engagement, they are rather seen as predictors of burnout. The authors further indicated that various studies hence show mixed results, regarding job demands' association to engagement.

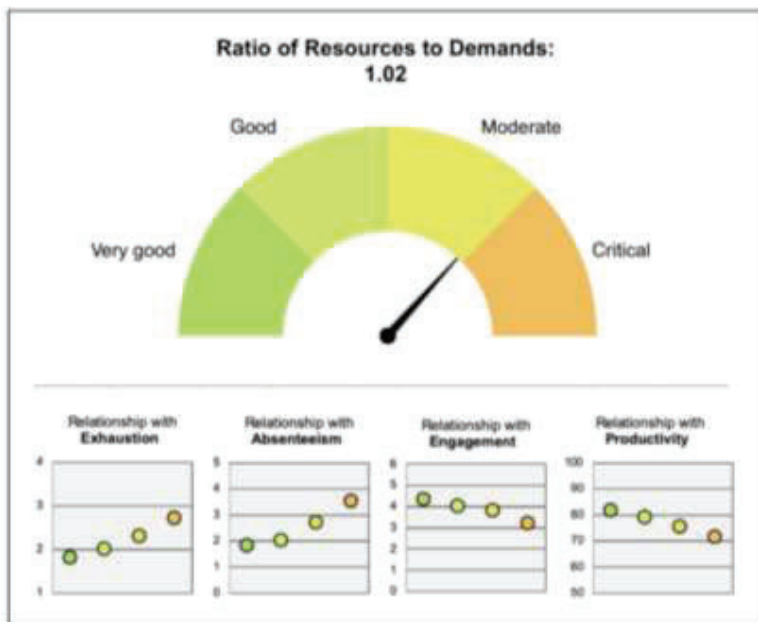


Figure 2: Resources-Demand Ratio

Note. Adapted from Jenny et al., 2020, p.9.

Moreover, Chen and Fellenz (2020) extended the argument to a personal level, highlighting an excess in personal resources or a reduction in demands at home as potentially boosting an employee's ability to meet demands in the workplace, thereby improving their engagement levels. Such resources, specifically for service employees, often represent an intrinsic drive, which is influenced by the motivation, meaning and perceived impact associated with their role (Peretz, 2020). It is about meaning that an employee derives from the various elements of his

responsibilities, the job characteristics and exchanges involved in the execution (Boccoli et al., 2022). This represents an individual's psychological attachment to their work, thus igniting an internal push to exert efforts equating to the demands at hand.

Notably however, the allied sense of negative effects and energy drain that job demands have on an employee's self-efficacy as a personal resource (Da Silva Júnior et al., 2021) can affect his or her discernment of the organisational demands and resources, consequently impacting their engagement in the workplace (Grover et al., 2018). Self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are thus essential personal resources, that help neutralise the effect of job demands on an employee's engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020; Fernandes & Martins, 2023). Supporting the JD-R outlook, when job demands have increased or resources have reduced, conservative theory suggests that employees seek to preserve available resources in order to guard their well-being, in turn stimulating their engagement levels (Boccoli et al., 2022). Whilst styles such as participative leadership may facilitate an increase in resources through employees' sense of self-worth, caution should be exercised as it can equally diminish resources through increased responsibilities (Wang et al., 2022). The perspectives discussed thus inspired the researcher to further explore the levers, including the variety of resource types and their application in a reorganisation, that leaders can capitalise on to drive engagement.

Expressed in the context of organisational changes brought by the pandemic, leadership-related job resources such as timeous guidance from supervisors, provision of specific details about the circumstances at hand, required working conditions guidelines, efficient tools, and support on their utilisation have been found to be critical for remote employees' engagement (Mäkikangas et al., 2022). Perceptions of line management support not only lessen the pressure associated with an employee's responsibilities, but they further boost their engagement in the workplace (Giallouros et al., 2023). Specifically for immediate supervisors, support is about the extent to which employee perceive them to provide assistance and show concern for their overall welfare (Bonaiuto et al., 2022). These leadership-related resources are similar to change-related job resources, which Albrecht et al. (2020, p.6) posited are: "psychological, physical, technological, informational, financial, and social supports; arrangements; and supplies perceived by employees as available to aid in successfully a to organizational changes impacting their job role". Their later study encouraged organisations to invest in and align both job and organisation-wide resources, and to facilitate the required engagement associated with changes (Albrecht, 2022). The JD-R perspective also emphasises organisation-wide resources, as they are often within the leadership influence and control (Boccoli et al., 2022). These resources should therefore be implemented bearing in mind that, the relationship between job demands and resources may vary across settings

and circumstances (Jenny et al., 2020). The aspect of leadership-related resources as it extends to employee engagement during reorganisations has, however, not been thoroughly expanded on in the literature, except some aspects in studies by Scheepers and Elstob (2016) as well as Vermeulen and Scheepers (2020), which presented an opportunity for the current study.

2.4 THE INFLUENCE AND ROLE OF LEADERSHIP ON ENGAGEMENT

2.4.1 What is leadership?

Leadership is described as a process that entails a varied set of behaviours, competencies and acts of influencing others in a shared direction to get work done in a non-coercive manner (Mbwalya, 2023). With respect to influence, Ariussanto, et al. (2020) described leadership as the process of inducing individual or group activities in an effort to attain goals, where the source of influence can be formal or informal. Literature has often positioned the formal influence of leadership through an authoritative and hierarchical approach to work, where leaders exercise control over employees to drive performance, however, with informal leadership gaining traction, a leader may emerge from within a group who leads horizontally (Hanna et al., 2021). Stemming from the above descriptions, the definition of leadership in the current study includes both the formal and informal approaches, as may be experienced by employees in various circumstances.

Having established the definition of leadership, it is essential to explore its significance in organisations. Emerging from the evolution of various theories, leadership is assumed to create an enabling organisational culture that eases working relationships and inspires followers to execute their responsibilities (Khan et al., 2021). Leadership is further required to play an empowering role in organisations, including the facilitation of resources, as well as enhance collaboration across management and other teams towards organisational performance (Al Amiri et al., 2020). Cementing this view, Schaedler et al. (2022) affirmed that leaders are depended on for the provision of a variety of resources and characteristics during uncertain times. When faced with dire situations and unpleasant circumstances such as a reorganisation, a leader is often expected to steer the organisation successfully (Bowers et al., 2017), reaffirming the importance of leadership roles. These roles manifest and take effect through multiple leadership styles, which are bound to impact followers and their engagement levels differently.

2.4.2 Leadership and employee engagement

Leadership and employee engagement are integral components within an organisation; their symbiotic relationship is pivotal for cultivating heightened levels of commitment among

employees (Shemueli et al., 2020). Leader behaviours are known to have a substantial influence on the actions, job execution, satisfaction and wellness of subordinates (Inceoglu, 2018), therefore the effectiveness of a leader is dependent on the leadership style adopted in the prevailing circumstances, as no single approach caters for all eventualities (Bafaneli & Setibi, 2016).

The above studies have indicated that the behaviours and actions of leaders and supervisors are central to the concept of engagement. Arriusanto et al. (2020) postulates that certain leadership styles can enhance an enabling and a favourable workplace for employees, thus improving their connection to the organisation, and ultimately their engagement levels. Specifically, styles that are associated with motivation and expressions of concern towards employees' needs contribute to, and predict, engagement levels (Cooper-Thomas, 2018). Additionally, leaders with visionary capabilities articulate compelling goals that inspire and guide the organisation, such that through strategic decision-making, they steer their teams towards the achievement of objectives (Mahmood et al., 2019). These are seemingly traits that represent important factors in the exchange relationship alluded to earlier, which is necessary to influence engagement.

Since engagement is expected to result in performance, Muddle (2020) affirmed leaders' involvement in propelling engagement, as they play a significant role in directing and convincing personnel toward the realisation of organisational objectives. Leaders are expected to balance the workplace resources and the demands that employees are facing in their roles, in order to stimulate engagement (Giallouros et al., 2023). It can thus be construed that leadership approaches present unique behaviours, which are bound to affect engagement outcomes uniquely. Towards understanding the role of and the relationship between engagement and low employee morale outcomes, Bailey et al. (2015) compared numerous studies which uncovered various outcomes that are associated with engagement levels. These outcomes include job satisfaction, organisational loyalty, staff turnover intents, burnout and employee wellbeing.

Contrasting this view, other studies such as Taris et al. (2017) and Leiter and Maslach (2017) argued burnout to be a near opposite and rather overlapping with the engagement construct and not an outcome, which neither state should be perceived as an absence of the other. Burnout refers to the state of feeling overwhelmed and drained of one's emotional energy, having an apathetic attitude towards their customers or stakeholders and a decrease in one's abilities and work success (Taris et al., 2017). Although the majority of outcomes and burnout related aspects are mostly associated with work engagement, they are significant for leadership to incorporate in their efforts to drive suitable job resources essential for employee

engagement. Khumalo (2021, p.64) further unpacked organisational and leadership aspects, whose absence drives low morale. These include “management support and feedback, conditions of work, remuneration packages, benefits, promotion processes and recognition, communication and understanding of policies as well as treatment and workload”. These are aligned with leader-related resources that can be capitalised on to influence engagement positively.

The nexus between leadership and employee engagement is multifaceted. In a study to determine the effects that various leadership behaviours have on employee engagement, Li et al. (2021) found that leaders who possess good abilities in change-oriented behaviour are able to bring about significantly greater employee engagement. Muddle (2020) proposed that transformational leadership is needed to advance the development of solutions for various challenges that impede performance, including improving the effectiveness of communication. Finding such solutions thus helps enhance levels of engagement, which in turn leads to improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction through improved performance (Giallouros et al., 2023). This supports the assertion that employers who are perceived to be good at supporting their employees and advancing growth possibilities enhance the likelihood of engagement (Bui et al., 2017). One can therefore infer that certain leadership behaviours and capabilities influence an employee’s drive and enthusiasm for their work, as well as satisfaction with the organisation, representing a state of engagement.

When compared to transactional styles of leadership, transformational leadership style showed a significant and positive influence on employee engagement and serves as an enabler for a changing climate (Ancarani et al., 2021). Transactional leaders mainly employ inducement and reprimand exchanges as means for followers to perform their responsibilities, thus serving as a source of influence and control (Khan et al., 2021). Transformational leaders, on the other hand, tend to develop their followers and inspire them towards a goal, thus energising them to perform (Thanh & Quang, 2022). In a further contrast, transactional leadership is centred on the concept of misaligned supervision, in which leaders only become engaged in the management of employees if an anomaly has occurred, as it positions rewards as recognition for good performance and efforts (Thanh & Quang, 2022). Employees are thus driven to fulfil the goals that have been set for them through the use of a contingency compensation approach.

Considering that this scheme guarantees rewards for expected performance and penalties for the opposite, attaching such incentives is thus believed by some to facilitate improved engagement among the workforce (Muddle, 2020). Challenging this view, Ancarani et al. (2021) countered that incentives and rewards can only influence engagement positively if the

job resources accompanying the reward surpass an absence of determination, enthusiasm, and imagination among employees. Clearly, a debate on the appreciation of the different styles exists in literature, thus the table below summarises the differences between transformational and transactional styles.

Table 1: Differences between transformational and transactional styles

Leadership style	Description
Transactional	Leaders drive performance through the provision of incentives and punitive measures. Leaders are interested in employee management, conformity to rules and remuneration systems.
Transformational	Leader actions stimulate and motivate followers to perform and excel, without the use of command-and-control approaches. Leaders are interested in employee growth, contentment and managing expectations. Leaders stimulate performance through innovation opportunities and employee recognition.

Note. The comparison summary is adapted from Khan et al., 2021; Al Amiri et al., 2020 and Ariussanto et al., 2020.

Ultimately, whether to use a transformational or transactional style is dependent on the circumstances that the leader is presented with and the extent to which either of the styles may be suitable (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). This argument aligns with the earlier view that an employee's engagement level can be affected by a combination of leadership styles and the practices and resources that a given leader employs, in each context. It was, however, not clear the extent to which these are applicable in a reorganisation context.

Transformational leadership is differentiated from passive avoidant leadership as the former predicts a higher level of engagement between a leader and their followers (Muddle, 2020). Particularly, passive avoidant leadership results in a lack of visible participation from employees and management. The state of neglect and absence of guidance and emotional support experienced by employees thus influences passivity and limits their drive to perform (Chaman et al., 2021). This naturally represents a leader who evades leadership

responsibilities (Popli & Rizvi, 2017), negatively affecting engagement and consequently hindering the attainment of organisational goals (Lundmark et al., 2020).

Similarly, laissez-faire leadership, which is characterised by a leader's disregard for employees, abandonment of accountability, and a failure to oversee employee performance; has also been found to negatively influence engagement (Ancarani et al., 2021; Thanh & Quang, 2022). The literature considers both passive avoidant and laissez-faire styles to equate to passive leadership, and inherently would thus not enhance engagement. However, though the team or followers of a perceived passive leader may carry the load due to a lack of accountability, employees who thrive through a degree of independence in their work are likely to stay engaged, as the onus of engagement lies on the follower's expectations (Wong & Giessner, 2018). These sentiments therefore prompt an urge to understand the type of behaviours followers are expecting to see and experience, to drive their engagement.

A further positive leadership style that is aligned with follower expectations notion and its impact on employee engagement is authentic leadership. Iszatt-White and Kempster (2019) positioned authentic leadership to represent an approach where a leader displays themselves in ways that are aligned with their deepest thoughts and emotions, appearing to be true and sincere to their followers. It promotes the notions of "self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalised moral perspective" (Lorenzo & Aurora, 2022, p.1) in a leader. Emerging from a transparent and honest moral view, an authentic leader emulates good behaviour and is admired for open approaches towards decisions and solutions in the workplace (Maximo et al., 2019). Such leader is thus likely to garner trust and functional relationships through supportive and motivational conduct (Chen & Sriphon, 2022), specifically during organisational changes such as reorganisation. However, Koon & Ho (2021) cautions that for authenticity to cause a shift in an organisation's employee engagement levels, it is dependent on whether that specific leader's behaviour and conduct was seen as genuine by employees. That perspective echoes the ethical leadership foundations, where followers' trust to engage in the workplace is dependent on the leader's practice of and sincerity towards ethical conduct (Chaman et al., 2021). Employees are likely to trust their managers, when they believe that management's motives and conduct are authentic (Maximo et al., 2019). Both views are therefore consistent with Wong and Gessner (2018) on follower expectations of leadership, as key determinants for engagement to occur.

Moreover, when authentic leadership was compared to servant leadership, to validate which style better-influenced engagement outcomes, servant leadership was confirmed (Kaya & Karatepe, 2019). Servant leaders are known to prioritise employees' needs and interests, providing guidance and support as well as leading with integrity. In a changing environment

like a reorganisation where there are alterations to job structures and expectations, directive leadership may aid in clarifying roles as well as in providing direction and guidance (Fabac et al., 2022). Similarly, adaptive leadership is an additional style with a focus on addressing the changing needs of employees. It encompasses an approach in which the leader and subordinates collaborate to meet the difficulties of an ever-changing environment and emphasises an evolutionary process which allows for greater adaptability in the face of adversity (Boyar et al., 2022). Adaptive leaders often establish relevant connections across the organisation to facilitate the required collaboration for change, are good communicators and direct efforts towards a common purpose (Santra & Alat, 2022). It is however not clear how servant and adaptive leadership traits are experienced to drive engagement, considering the potential distress associated with reorganisations.

Although there are immense differences and commonalities across the leadership styles explored, a conclusion has not been reached regarding the most suitable one to effectively drive the desired engagement levels (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021). Literature has however reiterated that “when leaders are inspiring, are self-aware, transparent, internalise moral standards and exhibit transformational” traits (Barreiro & Treglown, p.2, 2020), engagement is likely to occur. Hence, the role that leadership approaches have on employee engagement has been researched significantly, yet it remains a key interest to continuously determine their application and improvement in various contexts (Thanh & Quang, 2022). It therefore becomes essential, to further explore the behavioural traits and practices that can be strengthened, to gain engagement traction, in the context of reorganisations. Such context is therefore discussed in the next section.

2.5 THE CONTEXT OF REORGANISATIONS

Organisational changes such as reorganisation and restructuring are often influenced by the company’s strategic vision, the state of effectiveness, the extent of political volatility in the country, technological advancements, the economic state, and changes in the sector (Cascio et al., 2021). Change efforts such as technological advancements and reorganisation interfere with employees’ known practices and patterns of work, cultivating a sense of skill deficiency and a shift in authority perceptions and relationships (Potosky & Azan, 2023). Considering that these intricate processes make substantial changes in the organisation to address the external and internal demands, it requires leadership to manage employee expectations and minimize hostile effects emerging from the changes (Hakmani, 2023). These changes often ignite feelings of loss and psychological discomfort amongst the impacted employees and potentially affects employee engagement levels.

Whilst reorganisation initiatives are implemented to bring about effectiveness and efficiency, they are accompanied by a degree of unpleasant employee experiences that organisations are confronted with (Harney et al., 2018). Such experiences differ from one reorganisation type to another. Mergers and acquisitions, which are frequently introduced abruptly, extend to impacting employees' professional aspirations and career paths, in turn affecting their job-related conduct towards the change and its overall success (Sung et al., 2017). Similarly, a reorganisation that includes downsizing (job losses) or upsizing (added jobs or employees) affects employees and organisational post-implementation performance differently (Cascio et al., 2021). Dependent on the magnitude of the change, all the above possibilities can therefore manifest as an organisational crisis for both leaders and affected employees. Schaedler et al. (2021) described a crisis as a challenging and inadvertent occurrence that potentially disrupts the status quo over a time period. This requires the prevailing leader(s) to apply a suitable leadership style and handle the process effectively (Bowers et al., 2017). The various scenarios discussed all necessitated the context which the present study focused on.

Furxhi (2021) emphasised that organisational changes that result in downsizing to address prevailing business circumstances affect employee productivity due to feelings of uncertainty about potential outcomes, job inability to keep up, and doubts about the change vision communicated. The employees' anxiety and worries are often centred around potential consequences that the change will have on them (Hakmani, 2023). Such uncertainties and worry affect business continuity and employee's enthusiasm and confidence in the organisation, leaving post-implementation employee morale difficulties (Khumalo, 2021). The downsizing effect often result in "survivor syndrome defined as demotivation, cynicism, anxiety, low morale, and reduction in dedication to the organisation" (Jung et al., 2018, p.2). Some of the difficulties and syndrome components include insecurities over one's career, intention to leave the organisation, organisational loyalty, work related fatigue, reduced engagement, and other well-being related effects (Frone & Blais, 2020; Edwards & Clinton, 2022). Therefore, considerable efforts should be made to provide developmental opportunities to strengthen employee abilities to perform in the new set up, thus alleviating some of the said insecurities (Dlouhy & Casper, 2020).

Reorganisation effects may last differently across impacted employees. Even in initiatives where no jobs are lost, these may still result in lowered job fulfilment and distress, making it essential to have leadership tactics to minimize potential workplace and health related effects (Jung et al., 2018). When changes in an employee's role and relationship to others in the workplace are not managed, it can negatively influence them in the different ways. Primarily, their ability to perform effectively is impacted, consequently influencing their attitudes and impression towards leadership efforts, organisational aspirations and distribution of resources,

eventually creating resistance to the changes being introduced (Daniel, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). These shifts in attitudes and perceptions not only affect levels of engagement, but they further influence the organisation's business continuity and service to its customers and stakeholders (Aalbers et al., 2014), hence the need to consider employees' needs and strategies to strengthen leadership capabilities.

Although in rare instances employees may be certain of their continued employment after the reorganisation experience, they are often involved in tensions regarding how else they might be affected by such initiatives (Sung et al., 2017). It is however common that employees are bound to react differently to the changes at hand, dependent on their individual personalities (Edwards & Clinton, 2022). Therefore, Harney et al. (2018) offered that the negative experiences and tensions of a reorganisation can be neutralised through a range of resources, such as consultation with, and participation of, employees in the initiative, based on the JD-R perspective. The use of training interventions is also a further resource that leadership can employ to manage employee's psychological and personal aspects related to the changes being introduced (Lewis & Kulhanek, 2022). Stemming from the affective events theory, it is thus crucial to manage these experiences, as employee emotions can influence their engagement state (Boccoli et al., 2022).

Further aligned with the notion of minimising negative experiences, participation of employees in the reorganisation planning process is crucial (Hakmani, 2023). It boosts teamwork and optimism among the employees, which is an essential enabler for the success of the initiative. Considering that leaders are growing reliant on enthusiastic employees to address the continuously evolving business environment, they are adopting participative leadership (Wang et al., 2022). This leadership style advocates for inclusion in making decisions and resolving challenges, through an immersive and collaborative approach. It is through participative efforts that the anticipated reorganisation tensions can be reduced. Therefore, Abildgaard et al. (2018) further confirmed the effectiveness of using participative-approach interventions at the organisational level to deal with the psychological and social repercussions of job insecurities. This is vital, as insecurities related to one's job further impacts enthusiasm at work, well-being, and the overall perception of the organisation (Sverke et al., 2002), consequently influencing the desired engagement levels.

There are differences between employee experiences and the associated outcomes of reorganisation initiatives, which affects employee engagement in a variety of ways, thus the need for multiple interventions and strategies. Literature is, however, limited on the role of leadership in enhancing engagement and minimising differences and tensions in reorganisations, hence the focus of this study.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework provides a structure through which existing theories serve as a foundation upon which a research study and topic are constructed (Kivunja, 2018). The study used the social exchange theory as a theoretical framework, to explore the interchange between leadership, employee engagement and reorganisations.

2.6.1 Social exchange theory

To explore the underlying drivers and antecedents of employee engagement in a reorganisation, the social exchange theory (SET) was used. The theory argues that there is a psychological exchange between employees and their leadership, where work efforts exerted are a reciprocal effect from the benefits and organisational support that employees experience (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Dating back to the 1960s, it emphasises reciprocal interdependence, beneficial resources and an exchange relationship, which positively influence work behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Based on that premise, engagement is therefore believed to result from, or be facilitated through, a relationship where employees positively perceive what their organisation offers them.

Ahmad et al. (2023) further described SET as a theoretical concept that extends over multiple social and psychology domains. The theory is often explored through a combination of disciplines (Cropanzano et al., 2017). SET thus positions the grounds of exchange, an interchange process of resources, and transactional relationships (Ahmad et al., 2023). It can therefore be concluded that the reciprocal interdependence and beneficial resources in an exchange relationship are factors that may positively stimulate work behaviour and engagement. The desired state and success of such a relationship is where “one party to an exchange helps or benefits the other, and the receiver initiates a reciprocal chain of similar support or benefits” (Kalra et al., 2023, p.2). Specifically, when employees believe that their employer and line management are considerate of their needs, they will exchange it with greater engagement (Boccoli et al., 2022). Employees are therefore likely to exhibit engagement traits when they construe their organisation to be caring and offering desired resources, inspiring them to devote their efforts to productivity in return.

Deepening the social exchange theory, Karla et al. (2023) further emphasised that when a participant in a transaction, it aids or confers advantages upon another, the recipient is inclined to respond with comparable assistance. In an employment relationship, this implies that when either the employee or employer is perceived to be meeting the expectations of the other, their response will be aligned to that perception, in turn affecting the engagement levels. Aligned to this perspective, some scholars have proposed that employee experience is an engagement

antecedent, as employees are considerably more likely to be engaged if they have a positive experience at work as a result of the organisational practices and technological and physical environments (Malik, et al., 2023). Effective communication was found to be one of the practices that positively influences an employee's perception of the overall connection with their organisation (Verčič & Men, 2023). This necessitates to further explore communication among other practices, during uncertain and periods of change such as the reorganisation.

In the Covid-19 pandemic context, employees specifically desired to be involved in their leadership's timeous and guiding communication in order to remain engaged and productive (Einwiller et al., 2021). This sentiment is aligned with Lemon's (2019) view, which emphasises that expanding on internal communication approaches is one of the organisational practices that enable engagement. The author described the importance of having open dialogues with employees as well as various forms of internal communication in order to encourage staff to be contributors in nurturing a mutual exchange, thereby enhancing employee engagement. Specifically, during organisational changes, Neill et al. (2019) asserted that an environment that promotes transparent communication and employee active involvement, enhances their sense of organisational connection towards supporting such changes in exchange. Active involvement and inclusion are especially expected reciprocated by participative leaders, who prefer interacting with employees prior to making decisions (Wang et al., 2022). These direct and honest interactions thus foster employee confidence towards leadership and cultivates a positive work environment (Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022). This therefore facilitate improved engagement levels and ultimately employee retention, as dissatisfaction with leadership lessens.

However, Simonsson and Heide (2018) took a different view and proposed that communication should therefore not be seen as a psychological concept and a bare catalyst for engagement, but rather as a fundamental component of employee engagement. Based on that understanding, SET was therefore foundational to this study's pursuit of understanding the leadership capabilities that are exchanged for engagement, in the employer-employee relationship during reorganisations.

2.7 LITERATURE REVIEW SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Employee engagement has been studied extensively (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019), and organisations have recognised and prioritised boosting employee inspiration through techniques that are related to leadership behaviours (Koon & Ho, 2021). Specific leadership behaviour and its unique qualities do not represent incompatibility with another behavioural category or approach to bring about engagement. Thus, a leader who does well in one kind of leadership behaviour may also exhibit specific traits inherent to other categories of

leadership behaviour (Li et al., 2021), which can jointly influence engagement. An excessive display of behaviour believed to be effective may also be perceived as the opposite by followers and may negatively affect engagement (Ancarani et al., 2021). This implies that a combination of leadership styles and behaviours could influence employee engagement distinctively, in different contexts, although it is not known to what extent or balance.

Although the concept of employee engagement has been studied extensively, various authors have advocated for a deeper dive into different contexts to appreciate varied workplace circumstances and the variables affecting them (Bailey et al., 2017; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019; Ismail et al., 2019; Oluwatayo & Adetoro, 2020). The literature reviewed has emphasised the successes and failures of these styles in various organisational settings, however, has not thoroughly explored their effectiveness in the context of a reorganisation. Moreover, in consideration of followers who tend to hold expectations of the kind of leadership they desire to see and the influence it has on their engagement (Wong & Giessner, 2018), it is imperative to explore the experiences of employees who have undergone a reorganisation initiative, and what capabilities are aligned to those expectations.

This literature review has examined various dimensions of employee engagement, beginning with its definitions and differentiating it from work engagement. The concept of employee engagement, rooted in Kahn's (1990) work, has evolved to encompass a dynamic interplay of psychological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects in the workplace. The synthesis reveals that employee engagement is a comprehensive experience, reflecting positive psychological attachment to one's job, colleagues, and the organisation as a whole. In contrast, while sharing positive outcomes, work engagement is more narrowly focused on an employee's connection to their tasks.

An exploration of the SET has provided a theoretical framework that emphasises reciprocal interdependence and fair social exchanges as drivers of engagement. The literature aligns with SET, establishing connections between social exchange, perceived organisational support, affective commitment, and employee engagement. The reciprocal dynamic of exchanging engagement for resources was highlighted as fundamental to foster strong relationships and engagement in the workplace.

Antecedents and drivers of employee engagement were further examined through the resource theory and job-demand resource theory. Leadership-related resources, such as transformational leadership and empowering leadership, emerged as critical factors influencing engagement. The need for a balanced ratio between job demands and resources, especially in the context of organisational changes, was emphasised, with leadership-related resources playing a pivotal role. This underscores the leadership role in shaping the

engagement climate. Various leadership styles, including transformational, empowering, and adaptive leadership, were identified as positive influences, while passive and laissez-faire leadership negatively impact engagement. Specific behavioural traits and practices were also highlighted as essential elements for enhancing engagement.

The literature review further delved into the context of organisational changes, particularly reorganisations, exploring their potential impact on employee engagement. The limited research in this area emphasised the importance of participative approaches to managing psychological and social repercussions during organisational changes. In conclusion, the literature review provided an understanding of employee engagement, emphasising its multifaceted nature and the intricate role of leadership. The identified gaps, especially in exploring the impact of reorganisation on engagement, set the stage for the current study to contribute novel insights and advance the existing literature on employee engagement in diverse organisational contexts.

2.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the research problem regarding leadership capabilities for strengthening employee engagement in the context of reorganisation. The literature reviewed covered definitions of employee engagement, the antecedents and drivers of employee engagement, the role of leadership in employee engagement, the reorganisation context, and the relevant theoretical frameworks. The literature also showed the role of leadership in influencing employees to be committed and psychologically engaged with an organisation, thus driving engagement. It further highlighted organisational and leadership-related resources to be among the key antecedents and drivers of engagement. In the context of reorganisation, it was revealed that organisational changes demand a variety of leadership skills and capabilities, so as to exert the requisite influence on employee engagement.

The next chapter presents the research questions that link the literature reviewed to the research problem established in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the following research questions and sub-questions were formulated:

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.2.1 Research Question 1: What leadership behaviours do employees expect during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement?

This question aimed to explore the leadership practices and styles that employees hope to see or experience during a period of reorganisation, which positively influence their engagement levels. This question was split into two sub-questions.

3.2.2 Research Question 1a: How did employees experience leadership during and post a reorganisation?

Literature has established the necessity to study employee engagement in different contexts, so to explore the drivers and outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2019). Organisational contexts such as reorganisations are bound to alter the work environment, affecting employees differently thus influencing employee perceptions of leadership (Potosky & Aza, 2023; Sung et al., 2017). Although reorganisation experiences are often unpleasant, these may vary across initiatives, requiring suitable organisational resources to aid the desired engagement (Harney et al., 2018; Albrecht, 2022). As a sub-question, this was thus intended to explore the specific context of employees' experiences during and post a reorganisation initiative.

3.2.3 Research Question 1b: How did this experience affect their engagement?

Various leadership styles, practices, job resources and demands can influence employee engagement positively or negatively (Li et al., 2021; Ancarani et al., 2021; Wong & Gressner, 2018; Koon & Ho, 2021; Edwards & Clinton, 2022). This question was designed to uncover how the employees' leadership experiences in 1a, influenced the employee engagement construct.

3.2.4 Research Question 2: What leadership capabilities should be developed to drive engagement during and post reorganisation?

The leadership role is crucial in managing organisational changes and follower expectations towards facilitating positive engagement levels, however the effectiveness of varied leadership facets in diverse settings remain a challenge (Bowers et al., 2017; Wong & Gressner, 2018; Thanh & Quang, 2022; Santra & Alat, 2022; Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021; Boccoli et al., 2022). This question was aimed at identifying the expected practices, styles and behaviours that leaders should develop in order to enhance engagement in the reorganisation context.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology that the researcher utilised to answer the questions set out in Chapter 3. The methodology selected was influenced by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter commences with a description of the research design that was adopted, the population and sampling procedure used, and the measurement instrument. It further describes the data collection and analysis processes followed, as well as the data quality control measures implemented, and finally the study's methodology limitations.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.2.1 *Research philosophy*

Understanding the application and relevance of leadership theories is often understood through the experiences of those who have lived such, therefore as a first step, an interpretivism philosophy was adopted for this study. Literature positions the interpretivist approach as one that facilitates "researchers to gain further depth through seeking experiences and perceptions of a particular social context" (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p.39). The approach emphasises the appreciation of individual differences to provide diverse interpretations of a phenomenon and the context being studied. Through the perceptions and interpretations of employees who have gone through organisational change, new contributions to existing literature emerge (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, from an epistemology perspective, the perceptions and insights obtained from this study's participants were considered acceptable for the purpose of contributing to the current knowledge.

Aligned to the interpretivist paradigm, the study further adopted an exploratory research approach. This was used to facilitate in-depth means to gather the insights and perceptions of the participants, towards understanding the identified phenomenon and answering the research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). The approach enabled the researcher to deepen the knowledge in an unclear area of interest, through exploring views and experiences that participants posed. This led to the next step of determining whether a qualitative or quantitative type of research method was most suitable.

Given the study's exploratory nature, the researcher chose a qualitative approach. Cassell et al. (2019) described qualitative research as a multi-step process that creates narratives from oral and written communication, in order to understand ideas, theories and realities. Unlike

quantitative research, which quantifies data collection and analysis, qualitative methods seek to expand the comprehension of a specific situation by way of individual accounts and recollections (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Adopting a qualitative research methodology thus extends beyond data gathering to encompass everything from research design to data analysis (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Based on this understanding, the study's design elements are described in the sections that follow.

4.2.2 Approach to theory development

Although leadership styles and employee engagement are well-researched phenomena, there is limited information on the context of reorganisation. An inductive approach was therefore considered suitable for this study, which used data to explore the phenomenon in relation to the identified gaps and generate new contributions to the relevant theories (Saunders et al., 2019). The approach enabled the researcher to adopt a systematic way of linking the data collected with the study's objectives, towards conclusions that contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Jebreen, 2012). The study thus derived insights from the data and contributes to the leadership and employee engagement theories reviewed, as explored in the context of reorganisation.

4.2.3 Research strategy

This study adopted a phenomenological research strategy, as influenced by the researcher's philosophical assumptions and the notion of the importance of individuals' perceptions. A phenomenological study emphasises the participants' real-life experiences, as well as their memories of those events, to create meaning (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, a phenomenon in this context is any aspect that is capable of being sensed in human consciousness (Gill, 2014). This approach is often applied when there is an interest in investigating the significance, nature, and the experienced encounter of a subject and context (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2019). The intention to deduce meanings from the participants' remarks and insights (Creswell et al., 2007) thus served as a basis for which the phenomenology strategy was selected.

4.2.4 Time horizon

Considering the constrained timeframe within which this study was conducted, a cross-sectional approach was implemented, which focused on participants' perceptions at the time of the study. It is an approach that is suitable for a study with limited resources and data collected through in-depth interviews, as it enables participants to reflect on a phenomenon at a given time (Spector, 2019).

4.2.5 Methodology design

Given the use of the inductive approach, an exploratory style and a phenomenological strategy, the study followed a single method design, i.e., a mono-qualitative method. As it is aligned to the interpretivist philosophy, a qualitative method was relevant to gain an understanding within the given setting (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), i.e., a reorganisation.

4.3 POPULATION

According to Saunders et al. (2019), a population refers to all elements applicable to a study's research topic and objectives, from which a sample (target group) can be drawn for data collection purposes. The population of this study were all employees who had experienced reorganisation initiatives in a Namibian public enterprise. This population was inclusive of employees at different levels of the organisation, who described their own individual experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the reorganisations they underwent.

4.4 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

A study's unit of analysis represents the sampled individuals drawn from the population to participate in the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2019; Grünbaum, 2007). For this study, the sampled individual employees who were interviewed about their reorganisation experiences were the unit of analysis. These individuals had gone through at least one reorganisation process, which facilitated a linkage between the data collected and the research question.

4.5 SAMPLING METHOD AND SIZE

Considering that the study focused on the experiences of a specific phenomenon in an organisation, a non-probability, purposive sampling method was adopted. Commonly used for qualitative studies, the method refers to "selecting participants who serve a specific purpose consistent with a study's main objective" (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019, p.441). This method was chosen due its suitability to ensure that only relevant participants made up the study sample and the data collected were appropriate (Campbell et al., 2020). It thus enabled the identification of participants who met the reorganisation criteria, with a degree of variation ensuring a combination of representation from different management and non-management levels of employee categories, to achieve the study objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). In this way, the participants were people who had encountered the phenomenon in question and were prepared to discuss their own experiences (Santra & Alat, 2022).

Using the identified sampling technique, the next step was to derive the sample. From a total of 80 employees who were directly involved in reorganisation initiatives between 2018 and

2022, 16-18 employees were considered sufficient to manage any possible saturation. Saturation in qualitative data is achieved at a stage where no additional classifications or themes are emerging, with an extent of duplication in that there is an absence of additional meanings or contributions to the phenomenon being studied (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

4.6 RESEARCH MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

The study utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews, to collect data. Interviews are appropriate methods through which one can examine an individual's understanding and interpretation of their lived reality (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Through the conversations held in qualitative interviews, a researcher obtains information they would not have access to in a quantitative study survey (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013), supporting the exploratory approach. An interview guide was developed from the research questions, which covered the study's constructs. The guide was aimed at focusing the interview questions, whilst providing flexibility for the researcher to integrate follow-up questions based on the participants' answers. Due bracketing considerations were made to ensure that the researcher's knowledge of, and involvement in, the phenomenon did not influence the questions asked or the data collection process (Chan et al., 2013). Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to obtain rich explanations and meanings from the participants through probing, towards gaining sufficient insights to address the research questions at hand (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

4.7.1 Pre-data collection

Prior to collecting the data, the researcher obtained approval from the public enterprise. Once approval was granted, the interview guide and the entire methodology proposal was submitted to the University for ethical clearance. Following their sign-off, the researcher contacted the identified sample to seek their participation consent in the study. Of the 18-person sample group, 17 consented to participate and signed informed consent forms. The researcher then scheduled their semi-structured interviews.

4.7.2 Data collection

Out of the 17 participants who initially agreed to be involved, one could no longer participate due to taking extended family leave, therefore 16 in-depth interviews were conducted. One participant was interviewed at a time, with the interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes each. The interviews commenced with the participants being assured of the research objectives and intent, as well as their data being treated confidentially and anonymously (Qu

& Dumay, 2011), so as to encourage open conversations.

The researcher then directed the interviews based on the interview guide, however they allowed a flow in questioning based on the participants' answers. This included further probing to obtain a deeper understanding of the perspectives shared. Where required, the researcher made use of prompts to redirect the dialogue towards obtaining further information relevant to the research questions. These prompts enabled the researcher to facilitate the flow of the interview dialogue and seek additional explanations on the subject matter from the participants (Rowley, 2012). Despite the use of prompts, the variety of participant personalities and perhaps unknown circumstances to the researcher meant that some conversations were not as expansive as others. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher verified with the participants to determine any additional views they wanted to share, before thanking them for their participation.

4.7.3 After data collection

All the interviews were recorded on the researcher's phone and laptop recorder, and were further labelled according to the order in which they were held. The researcher obtained non-disclosure agreements from two professional transcription services in order to manage the project timelines. Upon signing the agreements, the recordings were submitted to the transcribers. Whilst waiting for the transcriptions, the researcher listened to the recordings and made notes as a means to create an understanding of the various participant insights (Rowley, 2012), which aided the data analysis process. The recordings and associate transcriptions were stored in both a protected cloud storage space and on a physical drive to ensure security and accessibility.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

4.8.1 Analysis philosophy

The data were analysed through the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach in order to obtain meaning from the individuals' experiences (Gill, 2014). The researcher adopted a thematic analysis method, which entailed analysing the data to determine patterns, before formulating themes and codes towards interpreting meaning from the data collected towards answering the research questions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

4.8.2 Analysis method and tool

There have been significant developments in software tools to analyse data (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013), especially for identifying patterns and themes. The data collected from this

study were analysed with the assistance of Atlas.ti analytical software, as computer-aided analysis enhances a study's trustworthiness through the visual presentation of aspects such as theme generation and data relationships (O'Kane et al., 2021). Upon receipt of the transcripts, these were loaded onto Atlas.ti and saved in the order of the participant list in chapter 5. In utilising the thematic analysis method, the researcher followed its associated steps, i.e., they reviewed the first interview transcript to become familiar with the data at hand; made notes regarding the interviewee's experiences; allocated codes as a basis to analyse the remainder of the transcripts; and created new codes and sub codes. Whilst coding, comments were attached to the associated participant quotes to ease the interpretation process.

Next, the researcher engaged in a reiterative process of searching and converting all similar codes into main themes and sub themes, adding and removing relevant codes accordingly. An identification of connections and relationships between the themes was then performed, with the researcher reviewing the themes' suitability before renaming them to align to the research questions.

Finally, the researcher organised the themes' descriptions in preparation to write up the findings, which are detailed in chapter 5. The researcher was therefore "an active interpreter of the text, assigning meanings to the given content" (Morgan, 2021, p.658) throughout the data analysis process.

4.9 DATA QUALITY

Data quality, which refers to their validity and reliability in qualitative studies, is mainly enhanced through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Anney, 2014). The researcher considered three of these aspects in order to enhance the study's data quality, which are discussed below.

4.9.1 Credibility

To facilitate the credibility of data collection and analysis, it is imperative to verify that the depictions of the study participants' conclusions correspond to their intentions behind what they shared (Saunders et al., 2019). To facilitate credibility, the researcher first ensured that they spent sufficient time establishing a rapport, which led to openness with the participants, so they felt comfortable providing rich, detailed information. Secondly, the interview guide created a common basis for the participants' responses. Thirdly, by probing and seeking clarification, the researcher ensured that the correct meanings and clarifications were

recorded. Finally, the researcher challenged any preconceived assumptions of the phenomenon under study so as not to put their own interpretations on the data collected.

Considering that the researcher was also an employee of the organisation being studied, bracketing enabled them to limit their own perceptions of the participants' experiences and allow new perspectives to emerge from the data collected (Fischer, 2009). As a novice researcher, utilising a step-by-step thematic analysis method simplified the interpretation of large data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), thus enhancing the suitability of the meanings derived. It is important to note that credibility does not infer that data are necessarily correct, but in the absence of participants verifying its accuracy, credibility is reflected by the approach the study follows (Bailey, 2018). The researcher therefore detailed the methodology adopted to arrive at the study's conclusions, and their findings were further peer-reviewed by the study's academic supervisor.

4.9.2 Dependability

A study's dependability rests on the ability of the researcher to document all the procedures followed, indicative of some logic for the reader to understand (Bailey, 2018). The nature of the interpretivist approach is that it enables flexibility in the study's methodology as it progresses (Saunders et al., 2019), which is why the researcher detailed the steps followed throughout the study in the preceding sections.

4.9.3 Transferability

Transferability is focused on the extent to which the findings of a study may be applicable to a similar context (Saunders et al., 2019). Having drawn conclusions from the data, the researcher details the implications for practice and sets out recommendations for future research in Chapter 7. This includes information on the findings' relevance beyond the study's context and the participants (Bailey, 2018).

The above thus contributed towards ensuring the quality of the data collected and analysed.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative research ethics are concerned with obtaining the informed consent of participants and ensuring their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data collected (Atkinson & Delamont, 2011). Prior to formulating the research proposal, the researcher obtained authorisation from the Chief Executive Officer of the identified Namibian public enterprise, to conduct the study. Following that, the research proposal's methodology chapter, interview

guide, participant consent letter sample and transcriber non-disclosure agreement sample were submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science's ethics committee for approval.

Once the university's ethical clearance process had concluded, the researcher's third step involved seeking the consent of the sample group to participate, before they scheduled interviews to start the data collection process. Fourth, during the data analysis process, labels were assigned to the participants in order to conceal their identities and ensure their anonymity. Apart from the services of the transcribers who worked with the interview recordings to produce the data transcripts, access to the data is limited to the researcher and stored in a protected file.

4.11 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of a study refer to the factors that are often related to its methodology that are beyond the researcher's control, which may impact the results and/or conclusions (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Several limitations for this study were identified and are disclosed below:

- a) The researcher who conducted the interviews is not necessarily experienced in the method, which may have impacted the degree to which insights were obtained.
- b) Due to factors beyond the researcher's control, the initial desired number of participants was not reached, however the 16 in-depth interviews conducted were still representative of the population.
- c) The use of a cross-sectional study limited the researcher from obtaining insights from the participants over time, which would have been ideal to determine differences and similarities in experiences and enrich the data.
- d) The research adopted a qualitative approach, thus the findings are based on individuals' experiences. Quantitative methods could be considered for future studies to test the constructs explored.
- e) The chosen sample was limited to the Namibian public enterprise employees, who had experienced reorganisation initiatives during the period 2018-2022. It would be valuable to include participants in other organisations in the same sector and compare the findings.
- f) The researcher ensured that, where possible, relevant steps were taken throughout the study to minimise the potential influence that these limitations could have had on the data quality.

4.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the methodology that the study adopted, as well as the philosophical assumptions, research strategy, data collection and analysis process, quality control factors, ethical considerations and limitations. The next chapter will detail the research findings based on the data collected.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of this study based on the methodology described in Chapter 4. In order to answer the research questions detailed in Chapter 3, an inductive approach and thematic analysis method was used. The chapter commences with a description of the participants' characteristics, followed by a data analysis summary (including saturation), a list of the identified themes and associated codes, an interpretation of the themes per research question, and a summary. To support the findings discussed, select participant comments have been included.

5.2 PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

The researcher conducted 16 interviews with employees who had direct experience of reorganisation initiatives in a Namibian public enterprise. To enhance the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their department names are concealed. The reorganisation initiatives included a transfer of employees from different regulatory departments to establish department A; a redesign of a department to establish department B; merging departments D and E; and a further transfer of the department A team to another division (three years post the initial transfer). In the context of this study, a department is a unit within a division. The study participants represented different employee levels in order to ensure diversity in the data and perspectives towards answering the research questions. These levels ranged across the general, supervisory, and managerial categories, and are described below in Table 2.

Table 2: Employee level descriptions

Employee level	Category description
General	All employees who are not responsible for supervising or overseeing the work of others.
Supervisory	Employees in supervisory roles, who are responsible for one or more employees, but not at management levels.
Managerial	Employees in middle and executive management roles, who are often responsible for a department or division.

To further provide insights into the study's participants, their demographics and characteristics are detailed in Table 3 and Figures 3 to 5 below:

Table 3: Participant details and characteristics

Participant number	Employee level	Gender	Race	Interview duration (minutes)	Type of initiatives experienced
Participant 1	Supervisory	Male	Black	31.01	Transferred to a new department and role; transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 2	General	Female	Black	30.00	Transferred to a new department and role.
Participant 3	Managerial	Female	Coloured	41.21	Merging of departments and expanded role.
Participant 4	General	Female	Black	42.41	Transferred to a new department and role; transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 5	General	Female	Black	26.16	Transferred to a new department and role; transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 6	Managerial	Female	Black	22.33	Transferred to a new department and role.
Participant 7	Supervisory	Female	Black	32.00	Merging of departments and expanded role.
Participant 8	General	Female	Black	40.00	Merging of departments and expanded role
Participant 9	Supervisory	Female	Black	36.49	Transferred to a new department and role.
Participant 10	Managerial/ Executive	Female	Black	52.00	Received the transferred employees into the new department and roles; transferred them to a new division.
Participant 11	General	Female	Black	36.50	Transferred to a new department and role;

					transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 12	Supervisory	Male	Black	51.00	Transferred to a new department and role; transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 13	Supervisory	Female	Black	30.00	Merging of departments and expanded role.
Participant 14	General	Male	Black	22.02	Merging of departments and expanded role.
Participant 15	General	Male	Black	40.00	Joined the new department post-transfer; transferred to a new division with same role.
Participant 16	Managerial	Male	Black	45.50	Transferred to a new department and role; transferred to a new division with same role.

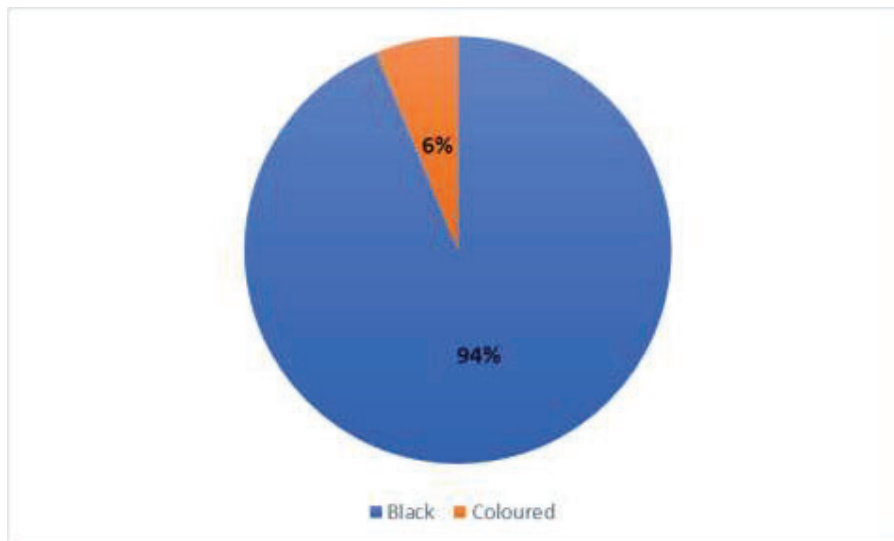


Figure 3: Participant racial distribution

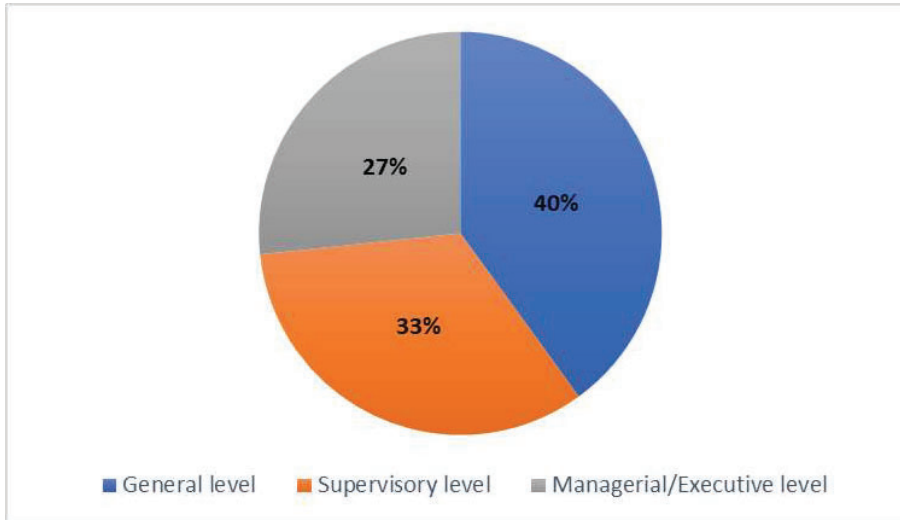


Figure 4: Participant employee levels

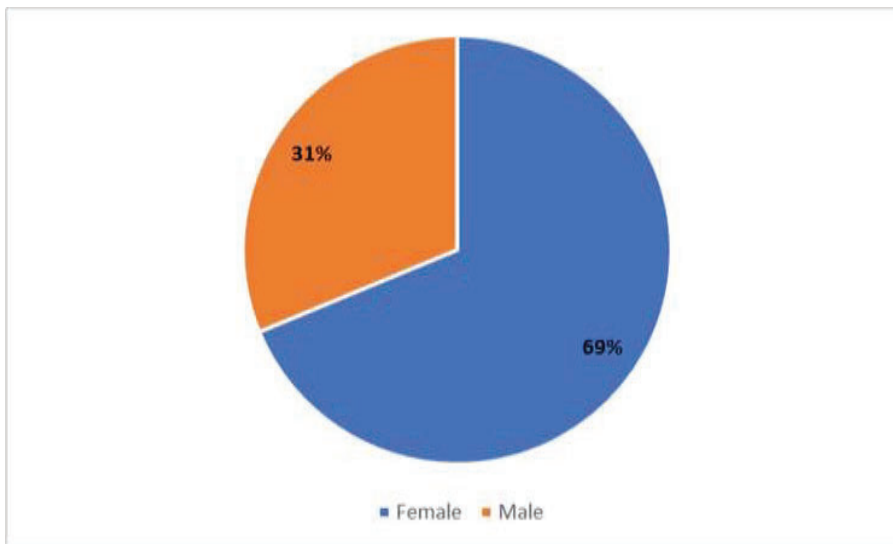


Figure 5: Participant gender distribution

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS SUMMARY

During the analysis process described in Chapter 4, the researcher noted the emerging codes and themes from the data until saturation was reached. Saturation in theme generation and data is often determined through the code frequency approach, which occurs during the review of interview transcripts whilst tallying emerging codes or themes, until these reduce or no new ones are identified (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation (see Figure 6) began at participant 13, with only one additional code showing up in the 14th interview. Saturation was completely reached at participant 15, as no further new themes or codes emerged.

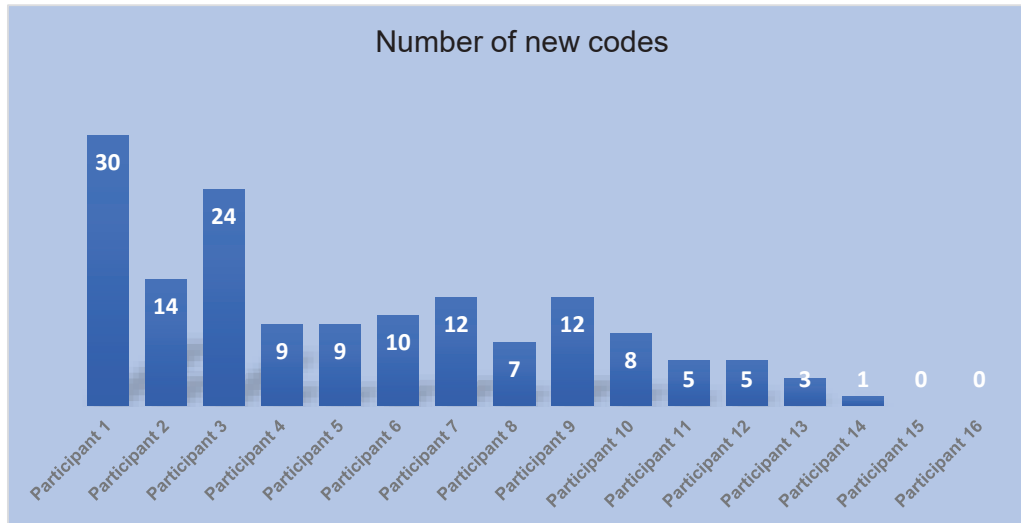


Figure 6: Saturation graph and number of codes per interview

5.4 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND THEMES DESCRIPTION

The table below presents all the main themes and associated codes per research question.

Table 4: Themes and codes

Research question	Theme	Sub-category	Code
1) What leadership behaviours do employees expect during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement? 1a) How did employees experience leadership during the reorganisation?	Communication and consultation approach	a) Communication mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emails/memos ▪ One-on-one meetings ▪ Staff meetings ▪ Corridors talks/ grapevine ▪ Telephone calls
		b) Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well in advance ▪ Abrupt, unexpected ▪ Last minute
		c) Messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explained reasons for the move ▪ Limited options/choices ▪ Solicited employee

			views <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selection criteria
Planning and functional set up	a) Resource allocation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical skills imbalance ▪ Headcount vs. workload
	b) Role clarity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expected responsibilities and targets ▪ Undefined processes ▪ Thorough analysis and functional alignment
	c) Implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning support ▪ Employee involvement in design
Leadership approach	a) Styles		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sense of being considerate/paying attention ▪ Accountable ▪ Authoritarian
	b) Behaviour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vulnerability ▪ Care and support ▪ Not living organisational values
Psychological and wellness impact	a) Openness and trust		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of approaching leadership ▪ Sense of victimisation/bullying

		b) Wellness challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HR support ▪ Overtime ▪ Employees booked off ▪ Hurting each other
		c) Employee reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Worry and uncertainty ▪ Unhappiness ▪ Excitement
	Professional development and growth	a) Growth opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased knowledge base ▪ Capacity building timing and approach ▪ No job/financial losses
		b) Career concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited roles to grow into ▪ Career background vs. new roles
	Impact on performance	a) Performance reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning curve not considered ▪ Honest reviews ▪ Perceived non-performance ▪ Overworked
		b) Co-worker relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team and peer support ▪ Co-creation of solutions
1b) How did the employees' experience affect their engagement?	Employee feelings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivated to perform ▪ Personal growth ▪ Sense of belonging ▪ Low morale ▪ Not healed

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not valued
	Post-reorganisation outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Withdrawal ▪ Resignations ▪ Intention to leave ▪ Sense of “work for self”- closed off ▪ Disconnected ▪ Strike
2) What leadership capabilities should be developed to drive engagement, during and post reorganisations?	Leadership role and style		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource assessment ▪ Sense of direction ▪ Open communication and preparation ▪ Psychological safety ▪ Authenticity ▪ Balanced autonomy ▪ Lead by example (culture and values)
	Work environment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dedicated wellness programme ▪ Coping and progress check-ins ▪ Equal capacity-building opportunities ▪ Testing/trial period

5.5 FINDINGS PRESENTATION: RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Research question 1: What leadership behaviours do employees expect during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement?

This question was aimed at understanding the leadership practices and styles that employees have experienced or desired to experience, which in turn influence or affect their levels of engagement. This subsection describes the various themes and accompanying narratives

aligned to research question 1 and its sub-questions, a and b.

5.5.1 Research question 1a: How did employees experience leadership during the reorganisation?

This sub-question was aimed at exploring the employees' experiences of leadership during the reorganisations they underwent, including what was done and the expectations they had.

5.5.1.1 Theme 1: Communication and employee consultation approach

In order to understand the employees' experiences, it was important to first explore the process that was followed to introduce the reorganisation initiatives to them. This involved communicating the need to reorganise, the identification and consultation of employees to be moved, and setting up the new departments and divisions. There were differences experienced between the initiatives that involved the organisation-wide transfer of employees to new departments, as opposed to those that merged existing departments.

Specifically, the transfer that led to the creation of departments A and B was perceived to have been poorly communicated, potentially affecting the employees' reactions to the initiative and their engagement levels during the reorganisation process. Participants 1, 4, 5, and 6 recalled that the communication initially came mainly informally on the grapevine, before formal one-on-one sessions and staff/departmental meetings, which created confusion and uncertainty:

“People started to talk about the reorganisation in corridors and when we started to hear in corridors and we were a bit uncertain, what is happening, what is going to happen to us.” Participant 1

“Well, the talks obviously started through the corridors; we heard something in the corridors around the whole reorganisation, but then obviously at some point we were engaged through our GM's office and also through the HR office that there will be a reorganisation.” Participant 5

Participant 10 shared the same sentiments, however she was at a managerial level and ought to have at least heard directly from senior leadership.

“I think it started when I was still a manager. I think initially, I just heard about it in the grapevine. I think by the time I formally heard it, it was communicated organisation-wide at a staff meeting, and there was already a lot of

information going around about who was going to be impacted, thus people also just heard in the grapevine that they will be moved". Participant 10

Communication and stakeholder consultations are among the most critical factors for a successful transformation, however in the transfer's communication process, participants 1, 4 and 5 experienced that there was lack of consultation and preparation for them.

"We were just told, 'You are going to a new division', and we were like, 'No, why would our leaders not prepare us earlier?" It was really not a good moment." Participant 4

"So, the whys and the how were only explained to us after the decision; there was no opportunity to consider whether or not it is something that will work for you, at least for you to voice that as early as possible." Participant 5

"So, I just received a telephone call that day saying that you know what, you are one of the lucky ones, you are remaining in the department." Participant 2

Participant 14, who was not transferred but observed the department A initiative, indicated that there was no consultation conducted to determine whether the targeted group was willing to move; it was rather a decision imposed on them. These views indicate that there was no opportunity granted to the affected employees to exercise choice and have an appreciation of the available options as well as the prevailing selection criteria.

On the other hand, Participant 6 indicated their appreciation of the General Manager who led the dissolved department at the time, who at least discussed with them the limited options and asked where their interests lay.

"So, she gave us kind of preference, but then of course she said that department C can only take two bodies. Although she had a final say on that when I explained to her that I will be interested in department C, she moved me there." Participant 6

Whilst this approach might have been commendable, employees such as participants 2 and 16 indicated that they did not have an opportunity to specify their preferences,

highlighting the unfairness of the process.

“I felt that no, but I did not get a choice. You know I did not get time also to process this, to say that ‘do I really want to be in this department or maybe I want to shift to department C; maybe I want to do something new and not really be in microlending’. See, I was not really given that option to say that you could stay, you could go. So, it felt like you were just, it was decided and that was it at that point in time.” Participant 2

“And then at the time I was informed to say so, in terms of the new structure, so this is where you are being moved. At the time I think everything was already done so it was, I don’t think it was a platform to say, ‘No I don’t think I’m best suited for this role or the department that I’ve been identified to move to’. So, it was merely a thing to say the decision has been made and you are being moved here and so on; that’s how it happened”. Participant 16

It thus appears that most employees were not involved in the decisions that had a direct impact on them, with participant 2 claiming that there was some sort of “shopping list criteria” that were only known to leadership. This approach affected their perceptions about their work, the leadership, and the organisation at large. These sentiments were shared across the employee levels, considering that both participants 10 and 16 were at managerial levels. The timing of the communication was also highlighted as a challenge, with participants stating it only came just days or weeks ahead of the intended transfer.

Contrary to the communication approach used in the department A transfer, the reorganisation to merge departments D and E was done differently. Participants 3, 7, 8 and 13 appreciated their General Manager for conducting team and one-on-one sessions, at which they sought their views on the idea to reorganise:

“She [the General Manager] basically asked us how we would feel about integrating the two departments. She asked us at a meeting seeking our views about how we would feel about it; explained the reasons – thus I understood why she wanted to introduce the reorganisation.” Participant 3

“They [leadership] first shared their thoughts – this is what we are thinking of doing, then asked us what our views were as staff and then we had to communicate what we thought of it, before they decided to go ahead with the

change.” Participant 7

Unlike with the department A transfer, where the communication was only received a few weeks before the roll-out, the participants noted that the timing of the communication regarding the merger of departments D and E took place well in advance, giving the participants ample time to prepare for the adjustment. Participant 3 specifically indicated that, *“We got forewarning, as we were told way in advance. We had six months before it was implemented, and we made use of that period to fill our knowledge wells.”*

5.5.1.2 Theme 2: Planning and functional set up

The initiative to transfer employees to the newly established department A, as well as the redesigned department B, was met with several challenges associated with its planning and set up. Various participants indicated concerns around role clarity, functional alignment, resource allocation and implementation approach.

“It felt like somebody just decided there must be a licencing department in place, without giving details what is it for, how are we going to drive it? There must be pros and cons in terms of that. It was supposed to be a proper study looking at capacity, resources, those type of things. After looking at all those factors then you could determine, can we try it or not.” Participant 11

“There was no alignment in the process to bring all the functional activities together. That was the main challenge and something that the management was supposed to look at before even deciding on who is going to move where.” Participant 1

Further to the lack of alignment around the functions being reorganised, the criteria for determining the skills required for the new roles were also not clearly established. At the onset, this caused an imbalance in resource allocation and insufficient expertise to licence the different sectors in that department. Participant 1 suggested that, *“We needed to assess where the required resources [people/skills] were located across departments and divisions, and then reassign the resources to where we want to reorganise”*, so as to create an effective and positive experience for those involved. Additionally, participants 2 and 10, who were on different employee levels, concurred that departments A and B have since struggled with the number of employees transferred versus the allocated work responsibilities.

“It was a challenge in terms of the workload and also the resources because having a team move from seven and downscaling it only to two people (at the general level), that put us immensely under pressure.” Participant 2

“The resources that are there, for instance, are already struggling to deal with the load of work that is already there, thus even with trying to employ a risk-based approach, it is still a struggle. The number of people you have there will never be enough to deal with all the sectors.” Participant 10

These views highlight the pressure that employees experienced due to the misaligned allocation of resources during the reorganisation initiative. This pressure impacted their views towards their jobs and lowered performance standards. There was a different outlook from participant 16, however, who indicated that a few positions have been created over the years to alleviate the workload. Detailed findings relating to workload and performance matters are discussed under in subsection 5.5.2.6.

Misalignments were also noted around the expected responsibilities and the departmental processes used to execute the work. Participants 1 and 4 mentioned that there was a lack of clarity regarding who needed to perform which activity and the process to guide the team in their daily work. Participant 6 had a different experience in department C, however, where the responsibilities and processes were defined but there was no leadership support in terms of directions and learning.

“So, it was also a thing of when I came there, there was no file or something given to say, okay, this is what you do, so it was just me going in there and then touch and go, you know. You do not know where to hold.” Participant 6

This experience created frustration and pressure to perform, which only later reduced for some team members as the transition period progressed. In contrast, the planning of merging departments D and E was considered to have been thorough. Employees were involved and, in some cases, were responsible for developing the implementation plan as well as the capacity-building programme. Participants perceived the initiative to have been better planned by leadership and hence facilitated a much better buy-in from the employees.

“I was tasked to develop the IMF in-house capacity training framework, which was approved by the training committee, I am very proud of myself.”
Participant 8

“I had to come up with the work plan in terms of how we are going to restructure, how to split the portfolios, who is going to be doing what, she [the General Manager] really made me an integral part of that decision. I felt I formed part of the team that decided to reorganise as she made me a focal point in the whole re-engineering process.” Participant 3

The above statements indicate consistency in approach from the leader’s part and how it was generally experienced by the employees, considering that participants 8 and 3 were at different employee levels.

5.5.1.3 Theme 3: Leadership Approach

The style and behaviours that leaders employ to direct a reorganisation often have an impact lasting beyond implementation. In this context, these were distinctively different across the initiatives, perhaps owing to individual personalities and workplace dynamics. The majority of the participants who were transferred to department A highlighted that the leadership style experienced at the beginning of the transition process was less considerate of their feelings, as they were not given the necessary attention. One of the supervisory participants highlighted that leadership did not make the team feel important and did not provide the promised attention after joining the department. Additionally, leadership came across as authoritative, considering that their approach was more directive rather than consultative and caring. Interestingly, one of the managerial participants acknowledged this perspective.

“Very often people are not resistant because they do not like the idea, it is based on how that idea is sold. We [management] didn’t sell the idea appropriately to the employees, we didn’t involve them, we didn’t genuinely demonstrate that we care about them in the process we were putting the through. I think we often just have this thing of we are the leaders, we can take decisions whether you like them or not.” Participant 10

Participants did, however, recognise leadership for the sense of accountability they displayed when faced with the transition challenges. Participants 4 and 12 highlighted that leadership took accountability at stages when they realised that communication to the affected employees was not done correctly, and that department A was perhaps not suitably placed.

“The CEO finally scheduled a meeting with us to explain that this is not how

the memo was supposed to also have been shared, so yes, accountability really happened.” Participant 4

“I feel there was also a sense of accountability from leadership to say, ‘Maybe it was not the best decision to move people and place them under division X. Let’s move them to division Y, where things can move faster’.” Participant 12

There were, however, divergent views expressed by four of the general employee level participants, who noted that middle management specifically did not show accountability relating to performance management issues as well as suggested solutions to bring about improvement. This was a combination of participants who went through the department A transfer and one from the departments D and E merger. These experiences were said to have further fuelled frustrations among the team. One of the middle managers (participant 3) did display accountability by acknowledging what she ought to have done differently with her team during the transition process.

Considering that accountability was among the organisational values that some of the participants emphasised leadership did not live, the above views are thus aligned to the perspectives shared below. Participants commented that the organisational values that would have facilitated the transition better were not lived.

“We as the employees feel that the leadership is using the values to bully us, but they are not living the values of the company. So, why should the values just be for us the employees, but not be applicable to the leadership? The leadership must be the one that is living it out and us following them.” Participant 9

“On paper we have the values and culture change, but we are not living towards them.” Participant 8

The said organisational values and the leadership creed include care and integrity, however the participants found that these were not practiced. Specifically, regarding the integrity space, one of the managerial participants emphasised that if there is no integrity aspect in an organisation’s culture, it is difficult for employees to feel connected to the company, which causes a state of disengagement.

“Unfortunately, I feel the leadership is not caring about its employees and that

is still a believe that I held, or that I have up to today, yes. Clearly, I did not have any support at that point in time. I was asked to be the acting manager within that period and there was no support – there was no nothing.”

Participant 9

“At that point in time, I would say that when we talk about the values of ‘we care’, we do not really see the care in there [reorganisation process].”

Participant 2

Surprisingly, similar sentiments were shared at the managerial level, with participant 10 indicating a lack of support from senior management in comparison to how other management members were supported with other initiatives. This highlights inconsistency in the leadership approach, causing a degree of difficulty to further support those at the lower levels to fulfil their duties.

“At some point, I felt like okay, maybe I am being set up to fail, because you are not getting the necessary support. This had a bad impact on the people [the team] because they also felt that they were not being supported, they also look up to you and they think you are also the one failing them. It is difficult where the expectations from you as a leader is at a certain level. But the support that you require is just not there.” Participant 10

However, there were a few others from the same initiative who were satisfied with the support given throughout the transition process, who acknowledged that leadership was still supporting them in their latest transfer into another division. Interestingly, those satisfied with the support also included participant 16, a direct report to participant 10, who felt that she did not support her team sufficiently.

Conversely, most of the participants from the merger initiative experienced leadership care and support differently. They appreciated that they could transition together with management as all employees had new areas of expertise to learn. Management was vulnerable enough to share their skills gaps and learns from their team members, thus enhancing team support.

“They communicated their vulnerabilities and their shortcomings and in terms of those areas we would research all those areas across the division together and so, such that in some areas we grew together.” Participant 7

“She [the General Manager] was always willing to engage you on things that were not a hundred percent clear, but again, because of her leadership style, you knew that you needed to at least do your part. So, there was great support from her; she understood where our shortcomings were, and she gave us the easier entities.” Participant 3

5.5.1.4 Theme 4: Psychological and wellness impact

When asked about how they felt upon receiving communication regarding the reorganisation initiatives, the participants had varied reactions. Most of the participants, especially those associated with the department A initiative, had initial feelings of fear, worry and an associated level of uncertainty. This was worsened by the communication and planning approaches as discussed in Themes 1 and 2, as clarity was only obtained later on in the process.

“We were a bit worried, in terms of where we should start to learn and establish the department and so forth.” Participant 5

“So, I was a bit scared and then of course I had subordinates that were reporting to me when I moved. And then I always had that pressure of like, what do they think about me, do they think I will be good.” Participant 6

“My worry was just where are they going to place me.” Participant 8

The uncertainty expressed by the participants was mainly due to not knowing who was being transferred and to which department, the reasons for the reorganisation, and not knowing what to expect on the other side of the transfer. However, as more discussions happened and clarity was gained, some participants experienced a sense of excitement towards a new experience, with participants 3, 4 and 7 who were at different employee levels citing opportunities to learn.

“I was excited because I think I was a bit bored at my current role. I wanted to go and, you know, I was looking forward to doing different things. I was looking towards wanting to learn more things because where I was, I was just doing same things over and over. I was going to do different applications, I felt I was going to learn different things.” Participant 4

“It was very exciting to know that you are going to learn something new.”
Participant 7

In the process of adjusting to the transfers, some participants, especially at the supervisory levels, expressed that they felt scared to approach leadership about the challenges they were experiencing as they did not want to be perceived as incompetent. This fear was aligned with other participants who indicated a fear of victimisation and a witch-hunt from leadership.

“You will see within the CEO’s meetings that people do not want to ask questions any more. When it started out, it was a good thing and then you could ask your questions, you could pose your questions, but then we realised that whoever is bring up a controversial issue, then that person is being manhandled, or witch-hunted, or whatever.” Participant 9

“I feel like I can’t approach leadership or HR and not be a victim of something. We feel like I will be victimised, that If I go and tell someone this at the end you will be victimised.” Participant 11

These scenarios have created an environment where employees do not feel free to speak up, despite the challenges regarding workload or personal matters. Participants indicated that as the workload worsened, they worked overtime hours during the week and on weekends for two consecutive years, affecting their work/life balance.

As a result, participants 1, 9, 11 and 15 highlighted that most employees in department A were not doing well and were often booked off sick, while others were verbally hurting each other due to workload frustrations, and losing the team spirit they once shared. They described a lack of relevant wellness support from Human Resources during and post the transition process, which could have addressed or prevented the above issues.

5.5.1.5 Theme 5: Professional development and growth

Amidst the uncertainty that the reorganisation initiatives brought, the department A team mainly had concerns regarding the impact on their career paths. This was primarily expressed by the supervisory level participants, who emphasised their accounting or financial background. By moving into a licencing function where less financial analysis was performed, they became worried. Additionally, further concerns were noted around growth within the departmental structure at that time, which appeared to be limiting from an advancement perspective due to a limited number of promotional positions.

“I joined as a financial analyst and my background is in finance. So, for me it was a surprise to be identified to move because I am not an admin person. The thought of not going to deal with financial analysis that I have studied for and how is it going to affect my career, was a challenge.” Participant 1

“I had a concern or a worry in terms of now career wise that may would affect me.” Participant 12

Participant 1 further elaborated that to date, the transferred team felt disadvantaged in terms of growth as there were no other opportunities to grow into other than when a vacancy arose, which was a rare occurrence. Given the shared view that no financial analysis was performed in department A, it has further limited the team to qualify for other finance-related roles elsewhere in the organisation, causing a sense of stagnation and unhappiness. In contrast, Participant 10 confirmed that there has been growth across the different levels in the department.

“There are people there that grew, you understand. People grew, myself included [became a General Manager] a senior analyst became the current manager, some analysts became senior analysts and so forth.” Participant 10

The reorganisation initiatives demanded intensive capacity-building and skills enhancement, which participants indicated was provided through in-house training or self-learning platforms for all the impacted employees. Supervisory level participants 6 and 12 expressed dissatisfaction with the timing of the training, which they argued did not take place when it was needed the most. This challenge made it difficult for them to effectively support their subordinates.

“I think the timing of the training for me wasn’t right. The training as an intervention was the right thing to do although it didn’t come at the right time.”
Participant 12

Regarding the effectiveness of these training interventions, there was only one participant from the merged team who challenged the approach as not suitable for learning. As it involved internal colleagues from either side of the industry doing presentations to each other, he suggested that formal classroom training would have laid a better foundation for learning.

“We were just called up into a 2-hour or for a 2-day training in the boardroom

– you will not be able to grasp new information, knowledge in a short period space of time.” Participant 14

Notwithstanding the concerns held in the earlier stages of the transition as the implementation progressed, the participants acknowledged a degree of increased knowledge, additional confidence in skills, and promotions into other roles. Participants 1, 5, 12, 13 further indicated that they had possible future career prospects due to the experience and skills gained from the reorganisation initiatives. Most participants also applauded leadership for ensuring job security for all employees, such that there were no jobs lost nor a negative impact on remuneration.

5.5.1.6 Theme 6: Impact on performance

Considering the various factors discussed in the preceding themes, the reorganisation initiatives had varied effects on employees' performance. Participants alluded to challenges of being overworked whilst learning new skills, misaligned performance targets and unfair reviews, which affected their performance outcomes and motivation levels. Despite the capacity building and learning time allowed throughout the year, general level participants from the merged team pointed out that in some instances the learning curve was not considered during the performance review process.

“I think all the levels have their own challenges; the motivation to perform is not there. You do your work throughout the year however only at the performance review time, your supervisor tells you what you did and did not do.” Participant 8

“The only challenge is the performance review time. There is really no appreciation of your learning curve, it's for you to ensure your work meets quality or not. I think it's only at the review time that you discuss that you were given additional work and had to learn this, however there is no appreciation of that. You are just told just no you did not submit this on time etc., and your performance rating is this.” Participant 14

Challenging the approach expressed, a managerial level participant from the same team indicated the need to have honest performance reviews. Participant 3 explained that honest reviews meant letting the team know their areas of improvements across the board, considering that the merge resulted in employees learning new skills, thus expediting the

development process. Despite the performance challenges at hand, the majority of the participants across all levels applauded the co-worker support and collaboration in devising solutions that facilitated the required functional improvements. The participants believed these gestures created a sense of belonging and togetherness that eased the transition process.

“The support from the rest of the team from my co-managers, the rest of the subordinates, everyone was always willing and able to explain concepts and work and basically hold our hands within that first year. They would tell me today and I will come back again tomorrow, and they will explain it again and never at any point did they get impatient or tired.” Participant 3

“They give you the necessary support, so I appreciate that, and I would say, we have actually also built a friendship type of relationship.” Participant 5

“All managers and employees were allocated topics to present and share with others, so it was a shared capacity building process.” Participant 8

Although they experienced different initiatives, participants 6, 7 and 12 also alluded to their significant reliance on others who supported them during the transition process.

5.5.2 Research question 1b: How did the employees' experience affect their engagement?

5.5.2.1 Theme 7: Employee feelings

Reflecting on the employee experiences alluded to in question 1(a), the participants indicated positive and negative feelings resulting from the reorganisation initiatives. Participants 3, 5 and 6 indicated that the experience gave them motivation to learn and further develop themselves, and to excel in their work. Others experienced personal development in terms of reasoning in different ways and creative thinking, while other further ignited a connection to their role and the organisation, finding value in their contributions to the department and the stakeholders that the organisation exists to serve.

“I think naturally I am someone that complains a lot, but through this, it personally taught me quite a lot of patience to not complain. The experience taught me to, it opened my mind to clear ways of thinking more, you know trying to find solutions to things rather than on what is there.” Participant 4

“So, at least being in a place where I know, this is what is required and how I contribute to the department and this is how I further contribute to the organisation’s goals, that really gives me that motivation to come in every day and do my work. It also just allows me to have that sense of belonging, just to feel that whatever I contribute, it is for a good purpose.” Participant 5

“Because I like working with people and the space where I am, I can at least add value to the service I am rendering to the industry.” Participant 9

Conversely, some participants had negative feelings about their initiative experience. Participants 9, 10, 13 and 16 in the transferred departments mentioned low morale among the team, especially at the beginning of the transition process. They attributed this to employees being moved to departments they were not interested in, the communication approach taken, as well as feeling unappreciated and undervalued. They further voiced disappointment that there was no effort from management to address the situation. Considering that these participants were at supervisory and managerial levels, they described motivation and performance challenges due to a demoralised team, i.e., the team lacked the drive to perform and participate in other organisational activities.

“So, the morale was and is low and it is actually difficult to also motivate people like that.” Participant 9

“Because one of the biggest things with the reorganisation that happened, the morale was very, very low, and obviously, if the morale is low, people will not perform.” Participant 10

Participant 9 further stressed that despite having acted in a managerial position from the onset of the initiative, she was excluded from the recruitment process, which served as a key source for her low morale. Interestingly, even participants who were not transferred in that process and experienced a successful merger highlighted the poor morale, with participant 13 stating that, *“The morale was so bad that I don’t think we ever really recovered from that”*. The managerial participants noted how challenging it was to maintain the morale of those motivated to perform, considering that they needed to re-energise those whose morale was affected.

These sentiments further highlight the differences between the implementation approaches of the departments D and E merger compared to the departments A and B transfers, and the

overall effect they had across the organisation.

5.5.2.2 Theme 8: Post-reorganisation actions

Aligned to the employees' feelings discussed in the preceding theme, intention to leave the organisation, staff turnover, striking, and disconnection from the rest of the organisation were some of the outcomes. Despite the views shared on the appreciated implementation approach used for the merger initiative, one of the participants is experiencing the post-reorganisation era differently and expressed a state of disconnect from the employer.

“As I said earlier, it is just how things are done that is not right. I do not really interact with management, and I do not know much what is happening. I am closed off. I just to come and work for myself, work for the man in the street, maybe one can be called a salary collector.” Participant 8

Another participant who experienced the department A initiative indicated that their love for coming to work remained, however there were still problems that leadership was not addressing.

In contrast, participant 13 suggested that due to their former General Manager and her admired leadership style, the entire merged department appears not to have a connection with the rest of the organisation.

“I feel a bit disconnected from the rest of the organisation but there was that connection with our department. Our thinking is not informed by the organisation. I don't know now if it's still the same, I don't think it's still there now that the GM left but ja.” Participant 13

The participant further explained that the manner in which their merger initiative was handled was not informed by the rest of the organisational dynamics but by the leader at that stage, hence the differences in perceptions held towards the rest of leadership. Therefore, ever since the concerned General Manager's departure, Participant 8 pointed out that, *“Staff turnover at our department was high”*.

Similarly, the state of unhappiness with the transfers to departments A and B due to unresolved challenges contributed to participants indicating their intentions to leave the organisation should they have an opportunity to do so, following others who have already left.

“I know of my colleagues that were not happy and one of them resigned because he said he just did not want to be where he was, and I understood.”

Participant 2

“Should I have gotten something else right there and then, I would have left. I would have left in a sense that I felt like, ‘Why is it that this department must get all the junk?’” Participant 4

“Luckily for me I love the job that I am doing and also because of my personality and personal belief within myself with all the positivity that I am having, because I will have already left the organisation long time ago.”

Participant 9

Additionally, one participant outside of the licencing transfer described an employee strike (labour action) that employees held in 2019. The participant asserted that the strike was not entirely about salary increases, but also a result of not being heard during the reorganisation process in the preceding years.

“I think that’s what led to the strike. Because per my understanding, it wasn’t so much about the money that people wanted to go to the, or that they went to the strike, it is more because they felt there were not heard. Like employee grievances or issues work related issues outside of the salary matters, was not being attended to, I think.” Participant 13

The participants thus affirmed that the reorganisation challenges resulted in unintended consequences and outcomes for both the employees and leadership.

5.6 FINDINGS PRESENTATION: RESEARCH QUESTION 2

This subsection describes and expands on the various themes and narratives aligned to research question 2.

5.6.1 What leadership capabilities should be developed to drive engagement during and post a reorganisation?

5.6.1.1 Theme 1: Leadership role and style

When prompted regarding the capabilities required to facilitate engagement, the respondents alluded to thorough resource allocation, leadership readiness and direction, proactive communication, preparation of the impacted employees, psychological safety, authenticity, balanced autonomy, as well as leading by example through organisational values.

5.6.1.1.1 Resource allocation and capacity

Most of the participants expressed a lack of clarity regarding the selection of employees to be transferred, which resulted in an unbalanced skills representation and headcount in departments A and B. Considering that everyone needed to learn, it was deemed important to have a combination of the requisite skills in order to enhance capacity building and departmental performance.

“When you do a reorganisation where roles are going to change or involves coming up with new roles, it’s critical that you identify the people that are best suited or based on people’s skills, experience, competencies, identify the people that really are best suited to perform those roles.” Participant 16

“It is almost like we created the function but with constrained resources and thus cannot fulfil what needs to be carried out.” Participant 10

“Because now we were coming from different departments but now, we didn’t receive the skills from all those departments. So, there were certain functions that moved, but the skill didn’t move with it so, but we then had to tap into the colleagues giving us now the training for us to be able now to understand.”
Participant 12

Participants who were not in the above departments also alluded to the skills constraint. They shared that employees who were moved to establish the department did not have the right capacity to function optimally and relied on other people outside the department for guidance:

“I don’t even think there was any capacity building done for them. To a point that we still have to do the functions that we’ve given over to them. They were

just one of us and then they were shifted and not capacitated on how to deal with an insurance registration or whatever. Thus, the other thing that leadership should improve is capacity building. You don't just throw people into the deep sea and expect them to swim." Participant 13

When resource allocation and capacity matters are addressed efficiently, it may reduce aspects of low morale and demotivation to perform.

In order to minimise uncertainties and enhance buy-in a reorganisation initiative, the participants emphasised the need for leadership to communicate in advance and prepare employees timeously.

"Since leadership knows already what will happen from the start, involve the staff members and communicate over and over until we get used to that."
Participant 9

"You need to prepare people." Participant 11

"I think that what was common in both reorganisations is communication to the affected parties. I'm not speaking about when a decision is already made but prior communication so that the people know what is expected of them."
Participant 16

Participants further expanded that communication should include the objective for the changes being planned, whilst soliciting employees' voices and feelings about it. Another participant at a supervisory level suggested that better acceptance of the changes can be facilitated by requesting volunteers to move, as those employees would feel that they were part of the transfer decision.

"I think one they should maybe ask people to volunteer those that would want to move. Because I think you get more acceptance and buy-in when people have sort of like they felt they were part of the decision. So maybe even they don't volunteer they will sort of still buy-in where the organisation would come and say, 'It's because you possess A, B, and C'." Participant 12

5.6.1.1.2 *Create psychological safety and openness*

Most of the participants at the general employee level mentioned the importance of having platforms and opportunities for employees to engage with leadership on various matters. They cautioned the need for leadership to be approachable, so as to establish the trust required during and post a transition process.

“Have that open platform and then it is easy for us to engage like that because you see once you have that you create trust. Once you have created that trust, you create openness among employees.” Participant 2

“Leadership is not approachable.” Participant 8

A managerial level participant from the merger initiative reflected that perhaps as managers they did not create space for the team to express their unhappiness during the process, and thus recommended open communication. This approach would ease the transition process and maintain positive engagement levels.

5.6.1.1.3 *Leadership readiness and direction*

Participants indicated a lack of readiness and understanding from leadership in terms of what needed to be done, especially at the early stages of the transfers. This made it difficult for the team who needed guidance in the newly established department, thus causing frustration.

“I do not even think the leadership themselves were literally ready to implement, they probably just went somewhere and wanted to try it out. Because when we started with the whole process, they did not understand and hence it took really a lot of work to get us to where we are coming from then. Because for me I feel a leader should know this is the direction we want to go.” Participant 4

“We were just doing things for the sake of getting things done, without clear directions and so forth. Now we are at a much happier place in the sense that we understand what is expected.” Participant 5

The participants further highlighted the need for leadership to determine the desired result and the means to achieve such results, in order to allocate resources and clarify the expectations with the impacted employees. A sense of direction from leadership can further alleviate the

uncertainties that the participants experienced and facilitate an effective resource allocation.

5.6.1.1.4 *Leader Authenticity*

The participants who were involved in the merger initiative appreciated the vulnerability and authenticity of their former General Manager. They indicated that it facilitated open communication regarding career growth and collaborative learning across the team. This approach eased the change adoption process and enabled a conducive work environment.

“Leaders need to be authentic and relatable, be themselves and open.”

Participant 13

Such authenticity from leadership may further contribute to the psychological safety discussed above.

5.6.1.1.5 *Balanced Autonomy*

One of the supervisory level participants experienced differences in the degree of autonomy that the various leaders exercised. She mentioned that moving into a new department where there was intensive learning required, she did not appreciate the leadership who left her too long to perform without guidance or progress discussions. The participant suggested that leaders need to understand their followers, so as to determine which one requires what level of autonomy.

“I do not appreciate leaving the person for too long, because there is that need to find the balance, especially if someone is new in the role. You need to find the balance of, how far do I just leave this person and when do I interact with this person?” Participant 6

The participant further indicated that during periods of extensive autonomy, subordinates supported her learning journey.

5.6.1.1.6 *Leading by example through values*

Some participants indicated gaps in the expected leadership role, mainly at the general employee level. They noted that management were not a positive example and did not filter down clear decisions for employees to follow. According to participants 2 and 8, this was observed during and post the transition phase in both the transfer as well as the merger initiatives.

“But one of the managers was like no, me, if they [leaders] are not communicating anything, I will pack and work from home, I will take it upon myself, because we will just hear that top floor people are gone, while you are here. Communication needs to be coming from top down, otherwise let’s just take down the leadership creed and values displayed on the wall about leading by example, as it does not serve the purpose anymore.” Participant 8

The participant added that she felt concerned with the way middle management was acting, based on how poorly they viewed senior management and not considering the impact this had on the employees reporting to them. This can negatively affect engagement and the organisational culture at large, and may potentially be a reason for this participant’s earlier sentiments around being disconnected from the organisation and just “working for self”. These opinions are further aligned to the initial findings regarding leaders not living the organisational values and culture. Organisational culture plays a critical role in the employees’ perceptions of the organisation and ultimately their engagement level, thus the participants emphasised that it should be steered from the top.

“I mean for me culture should filter from the top you know. That’s very key in terms of how they do decisions, how they communicate, that serves as one culture for the organisation. I just feel like that it was very key and critical as so many of us were affected by the way things were done.” Participant 15

5.6.1.2 Theme 2: Work environment

The participants highlighted other important workplace factors that leadership should facilitate during reorganisations to enhance employee engagement, including a wellness programme, provision for coping, progress check-ins, and allowing for a testing or trial period to ease the transition process.

5.6.1.2.1 Wellness Support

Considering the sentiments shared regarding the lack of wellness support, participants 1, 2, 6 and 15 suggested the need to have wellness programmes in place and professionals come in before, during and after a reorganisation to speak to the employees regarding their feelings. They asserted that this would facilitate the employees’ mental health, transitioning them through that intense experience and improving the work environment.

“They [leadership] could have even hired HR wellness therapists just for us to declutter our minds from work in that process. Just call someone in once a month and alleviate the stresses that are there.” Participant 2

“I think that maybe we were supposed to have therapy sessions or something, because now you are doing something that you did not apply for in the first place, and you do not know where you are going. Mental health checking with an external person will help as the internal person maybe will not feel as they are not impacted.” Participant 6

Wellness support would potentially have minimised the frequency of absenteeism and lessen the pressure that caused the team to hurt each other. These views were only expressed from the participants who were transferred to other departments, indicating the degree of support that those types of reorganisations require. There were no mention of wellness concerns relating to the departmental merging initiative.

5.6.1.2.2 Coping and progress check-in

In addition to the approach proposed above, participants suggested the need for progress discussions throughout the transition. Participants 2, 6, 7 and 15 mentioned that such discussions would indicated that leadership cares and be a means to timeously address challenges:

“It would have been nice if they [leadership] would have come in the first week and asked how things were going, how we were coping. It would have been good if they would have come back after a month and said how are you guys handling the department, the workload, how are you guys coping and stuff like that.” Participant 2

“When you implement something, you come back and review, you understand. Check how far you are, so to pick up lots of frustration that were on the ground. They [leadership] were not looking at what is going on down here and how we were surviving down here.” Participant 15

The leadership absence in this regard was primarily felt at the general and supervisory employee levels. These participants emphasised that the proposed approach would enable management to show compassion, understand the transition progress, verify the capacity, and

in turn devise appropriate strategies to keep employees engaged.

5.6.1.2.3 Trial period

Several participants mentioned the value associated with allowing for a testing and trial period for a reorganisation, specifically before the actual transfer of employees to establish new departments. They proposed a gradual implementation to help the affected employees mentally process the changes awaiting them, allowing ample time to determine the training and other resources required.

“It’s affecting me very much; they were supposed to test it and see. You give it like a project, like, okay we start here, at this we test and see whether it’s working and then from here we test until they are assured.” Participant 11

“After people have been identified have a transition period. So, we are not officially moved but we are sort like having a trial to see. By the time we fully operate, we know how exactly it is going to function. So that maybe you already certain stuff that are already avoided, and certain things are dealt with beforehand.” Participant 12

These sentiments were expressed by participants at both the general and supervisory levels, specifically those who experienced the licencing department transfer. In the absence of a trial and adjustment period, participants voiced that there was pressure to perform the new responsibilities immediately, without the relevant skills and processes in place. This led to the frustrations and unhappiness that the team experienced and still felt. Compared to the transfer, the merger initiative participants at similar levels appreciated management for facilitating a transition period.

“They allowed you ample time to settle in and time to equate yourself with the new industry and so forth, and that is one thing that I love about this organisation, it offers learning opportunities.” Participant 14

5.7 CONCLUSION

The findings indicate the varied experiences that employees went through across the different reorganisation initiatives. The transfer participants highlighted the poor communication and ineffective planning, as well as the inappropriate leadership styles and behaviours exhibited.

Moreover, the absence of leadership support, wellness care and organisational value implementation were stressed.

There was, however, some professional, personal and career growth experienced, as well as collaborative capacity building, which strengthened some co-worker and team relationships and the sense of belonging within the organisation. These sentiments were shared by participants across the various initiatives.

Participants further applauded leadership for ensuring job security for all the employees impacted by the reorganisation process. Recognising the diverse leadership styles employed, the above factors certainly had varying impacts on employee performance and engagement levels. As a result, the experiences spilled into some unintended engagement-related consequences, such as staff turnover, disconnection and withdrawal, low morale, demotivation to perform, and labour action.

The participants made recommendations regarding the capabilities that leadership need to develop in order to enhance employee engagement during and after a reorganisation, such as efficient resource allocation, proactive communication, and employee preparation. They further suggested that individual leaders need to be authentic, develop an ability to create safe spaces, and understand their subordinates, so as to balance the degree of autonomy granted.

To facilitate an enabling work environment, participants further proposed that leadership should hold progress discussions at different intervals to proactively manage emerging challenges. They also advocated for the use of wellness professionals to support employees' mental health, as well as the use of trial periods to determine the effectiveness of an initiative prior to formalising a reorganisation.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the findings from the 16 semi-structured interviews held with employees at various organisational levels, who had experienced reorganisation initiatives. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter layout is based on each research question.

6.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first research question sought to determine what leadership behaviours employees expect during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement. The question was aimed at exploring leadership practices and styles that employees desire to see or experience that influence their engagement levels and is split into two sub questions.

Research question 1a): The first sub question assessed how employees experienced leadership during a reorganisation. The findings are discussed in themes for ease of understanding.

6.2.1 Theme 1 and 2: Communication, employee consultation and planning

Aligned to the JD-R assertions, the literature reviewed emphasised the signification of consultations and employee input in the planning of reorganisation initiatives, in order to minimise uncertainties and associated tensions (Harney et al., 2018; Abilgaard et al., 2018). The literature further asserted that an inclusive approach neutralises employees' insecurities, which often affect their organisational perceptions and enthusiasm towards work (Sverke et al., 2002), potentially affecting their engagement levels.

The findings highlighted that the participants experienced major differences between the initiatives that involved the organisation-wide transfer of employees to new departments compared to the initiative that merged existing departments. Notably, the transfers that led to the creation of departments A and B was perceived to have been poorly communicated and planned, which affect the employees' initial reactions to the initiative and their engagement levels throughout the reorganisation process. At least ten of the 16 participants indicated that the intention to reorganise was initially learnt about through informal channels prior to any official communication, which created uncertainty.

The researcher found it interesting that one of the managerial participants was also not included in the initiative planning, although it was their responsibility to receive and manage

the transferred employees. This finding indicated a lack of alignment across the various leadership levels and their communication approach. Although official communication to the impacted employees later took many forms, such as one-on-one sessions, staff meetings and emails, it was not well received as it came later than expected. The communication was also perceived as being an imposed directive instead of a consultative effort, as participants felt they were not afforded an opportunity to express their choice and views on a matter affecting them. One participant described having received a telephone call whilst on leave, communicating leadership's decision. These actions therefore created uncertainties, unhappiness, and fear among employees.

This lack of employee consultation and participation in the planning stages was therefore not consistent with the recommendations of literature (Harney et al., 2018; Abilgaard et al., 2018). These findings are, however, aligned with the need for leadership to view communication as a critical element of employee engagement, as it is facilitated through open conversations and exchanges between parties (Lemon, 2019; Heide & Simonsson, 2018). The authors further urged the usage of multiple communication methods as mechanisms to strengthen the employee-employer exchange, thereby enhancing employee engagement. Without consultations and a clear selection criterion as a basis for transferring employees, the participants called it a leadership shopping list.

In contrast, a few employees were consulted on the transfer options as well as the merger, and thus sensed a level of leadership consideration and felt well prepared ahead of implementation. These participants complimented the leadership, as their involvement and the communication timing enabled them to prepare from a skills development perspective as well as from a mental perspective. This finding is consistent with Einwiller et al.'s (2021) research regarding the significance of timing and the need to include employees to drive engagement and productivity.

To further emphasise their inclusion, some participants appreciated their involvement in the capacity-building plan and rollout strategy development. The participants applauded being a part of the decision-making experience. Ultimately, they felt a sense of direction, enthusiasm, and motivation to execute their new responsibilities. These findings mirror existing literature regarding leadership styles that motivate and inspire employee towards goals (Cooper-Thomas, 2018; Mahmood et al., 2019), as employee participation in reorganisation preparations enhances their optimism (Hakmani, 2023). The researcher did find it interesting, however, that some leaders chose not to consult their employees, highlighting the differences in leadership styles across the organisation. The findings do not reveal the reasons for this approach, however they contributed to uncertainties and tension. Literature emphasises the

use of participative leadership to encourage employee consultation, whilst retaining the ultimate decision-making power (Wang et al., 2022).

Finally, the findings affirmed that having transparent discussions with employees is an effective means of communication that can influence their organisational connection, and in turn improves their support for prevailing changes, consequently enhancing their engagement (Verčič & Men, 2023; Lemon, 2019; Neill et al., 2019).

6.2.2 Theme 3: Leadership accountability and support

Literature has highlighted different leadership styles that are likely to predict employee engagement (Arriusanto et al., 2020; Cooper-Thomas, 2018). Depending on followers' expectations, leadership styles that lack accountability, guidance, care and emotional support typically negatively affect engagement (Ancarani et al., 2021; Thanh & Quang, 2022; Wong & Giessner, 2018).

The findings presented diverse viewpoints at the general employee levels regarding the lack of accountability displayed by leaders in middle management in relation to performance management concerns and the process for facilitating improvements during the reorganisation process. This was experienced across the initiatives, as the participants who narrated these concerns included four individuals who went through the departments A and B transfer process, as well as one participant from the merger initiative. Given that accountability was listed by the participants as an organisational value they expected leadership to live, these experiences caused dissatisfaction and withdrawal signs within the two teams. Moreover, the participants described a lack of accountability in the way leadership handled performance management, which was below their expectations. This related specifically to a lack of timely performance feedback, as well as not considering the employees' learning processes when conducting reviews. The participants also did not experience accountability from leadership when it came to finding solutions for the continued challenges that they endured. The findings are therefore partially consistent with the literature on laissez-faire leadership and follower expectations (Ancarani et al., 2021; Thanh & Quang, 2022; Wong & Giessner, 2018).

There were, however, two participants who acknowledged that a level of accountability was evident in other spheres. They pointed out instances where firstly, leadership realised that their initial communication was not effective, thus the Chief Executive Officer eventually met with department A to discuss and seek to resolve their concerns. Secondly, two years later, leadership acknowledged that department A was misplaced, and a decision was taken to transfer the team to division Y, which brought a sense of satisfaction and relief to the participants. This confirms that accountability and follower expectations are potential

employee engagement determinants (Wong & Giessner, 2018). The findings also affirm that organisational values are among the organisational resources that predict engagement (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

In the context of leadership support and care, the findings uncovered disparities in the participants' experiences. The majority of the participants from the departments A and B initiative experienced a lack of care and support during the process, which some noted extended well beyond the reorganisation. Specifically, the managerial level participants did not get the support they expected from leadership, which was essential to strengthen their roles, steer new teams and manage performance amidst capacity building and insufficient resources. One of the participants expressed that this challenge hindered them from effectively supporting their subordinates to execute their responsibilities, in turn reducing the employees' drive to perform. These findings are aligned the literature that states that a manager's support and care are key facilitators for workplace resources, which influence employees' drive and satisfaction (Ancarani et al., 2021; Bonaiuto et al., 2022). The findings also indicate differences across the various leadership levels in the case organisation regarding their willingness to support their teams, causing disparities in engagement levels.

In contrast, the researcher observed that participants who had gone through the merger initiative had different experiences regarding the leadership care and support sphere. They expressed gratitude for the fact that they were able to transition along with management, considering that all the employees had new areas of expertise to learn. It was found that management was willing to be vulnerable enough to expose their skill gaps and learn from their team members, which created a sense of trust and allowed the team to support one another more effectively. They specifically highlighted that a sense of care and support was received from their General Manager through check-ins with the team and availing them of the required resources. The leadership vulnerability aspect of the findings is associated with authenticity literature, as the participants experienced vulnerability and sincerity due to their leader's supportive conduct (Chen & Sriphon, 2022). This finding is aligned with the servant leadership trait of addressing followers' needs (Karatepe, 2019). The sense of sincerity experienced improves an employee's relationship with their employer, thereby causing a possible shift in engagement levels.

The above findings show that the extent to which guidance and support is experienced affects the engagement that drives performance (Chaman et al., 2021). Management support in the transfer initiative would not only have lessened the pressure associated with the employees' new responsibilities, but it could also have boosted their engagement during and beyond the reorganisation process (Giallourous et al., 2023). The findings also confirm that the styles that

demonstrate concern for employees' needs are the ones that are likely to contribute to, and predict levels of, employee engagement (Cooper-Thomas, 2018).

6.2.3 Theme 4: Psychological and wellness impact

Based on the findings expressed in section 6.2.1 regarding the communication approach used in the departments A and B transfer, the majority of the participants experienced uncertainty, worry and fear. The participants identified five important causes of this: 1) not knowing who would be transferred; 2) not knowing the specific department they would be transferred to; 3) not understanding the reasons behind the reorganisation; 4) not knowing the circumstances they would encounter after the transfer; and 5) supervisory participants, expected their subordinates to view them as incompetent. According to literature, reorganisations are known to be associated with uncertainties around their vision, eventual outcomes and personal impact, potentially shifting an employee's perception about their ability to perform and their leaders (Furxhi, 2021; Daniel, 2019).

The findings further revealed that the fear created discomfort for the supervisory level participants, who did not want to approach leadership regarding the challenges they were facing, due to possible victimisation and competency-linked judgements. Notwithstanding the lack of support expressed earlier, had the supervisors communicated some of these challenges, it is likely that senior management would have stepped in and provided the necessary support. This discomfort extended to the general level employees as well, as one participant at that level expressed their inability to approach the Human Resources department or leadership due to a fear of being victimised. Although the participants did not explicitly state the sources of this fear, the findings are linked to literature on a lack of psychological safety. The findings are also consistent with the view that an employee's ability to perform is dependent on an environment where they can execute their responsibilities without fear of being judged and other interpersonal relationships affected (Boccoli et al., 2022). It is the sense of psychological safety that in turn influences engagement.

On the other hand, the findings showed that for some participants, the uncertainty and fear changed to excitement and anticipation for new opportunities as more communication was received. The participants, who were at both general and supervisory levels, highlighted that they were excited about the possibility of acquiring new skills and knowledge, as well as opportunities for exposure to new avenues, which ignited a sense of enthusiasm to support and accept the reorganisation with vigour. This finding emphasises the importance of communication as an antecedent for employee engagement, especially during ambiguous periods like the study's reorganisation context (Lemon, 2019; Einwiller et al., 2021). From a

JD-R perspective, developmental opportunities are among the job resources that can facilitate an employee's sense of success, in turn minimising the effect of job demands and enhancing their engagement (Boccoli et al., 2022).

Another revelation from the findings is related to the impacted employees' well-being. As per the literature on psychological safety, many employees bottled up a lot of unresolved challenges such as workload and other job demands, with some becoming physically ill. One participant noted that there was at least one or two employees booked off per week. Illnesses and distress are consistent with listed common effects that emanate from reorganisations (Jung et al., 2018). Another participant commented that the circumstances led to frustration, which further led to verbal mistreatment and hurtful words amongst the team, impacting the team's effort and the calming atmosphere they once shared. The participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the Human Resources department for not providing essential wellness support to remedy the situation. These findings thus echo the literature that highlights the significance of applying relevant job resources to balance out job demands, in order to stimulate employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace (Giallourous et al., 2023; Jenny et al., 2019). The prolonged absence of the relevant job resources, such as additional employees to lessen the workload, clarity regarding roles and wellness support, resulted in the above-mentioned consequences, thus affecting employee engagement. The findings are further aligned to the leadership role related to influencing employee well-being and actions (Inceoglu, 2018).

6.2.4 Theme 5: Professional development and growth

Emanating from the resources and job demand resource theories, literature has positioned development opportunities and skills development to be among the resources that affect employee engagement levels (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2020; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). Experiences of these resources were revealed in this study. The findings indicate that upon being informed of their planned transfer to department A, the general employee level participants were primarily concerned about their careers. This was largely due to their professional accounting and financial backgrounds, as the functions in department A were seen to be more an administrative and compliance function. The transferred team therefore felt deprived of growth, as they anticipated that the move would limit their access to financial related roles elsewhere in the organisation, posing some degree of stagnation and thus unhappiness. This unhappiness was linked to the employees' perceptions that leadership was not supporting and advancing their career growth prospects (Bui et al., 2017).

In contrast, the supervisory and managerial level participants argued that there had been visible growth across the different levels in department A. They highlighted promotions of analysts to senior analysts and senior analysts to managerial roles during and post the reorganisation, describing them as some of the more positive aspects of their experience. They attributed some of the growth to intense capacity building and training interventions, which served as crucial adjustment enablers for those moving into new responsibilities. Although some participants expressed the timing of these interventions to have been unsuitable, the newly acquired skills boosted their drive to excel resulting in promotions, for which they appreciated leadership. Others expressed satisfaction with the acquired knowledge and experience, saying that it could enhance their future career prospects. These findings assert literature's view that leadership investment in the professional development of employees demonstrates a commitment to growth, as development serves as neutraliser for job demands and is thus likely to drive positive engagement (Blattner et al., 2021; Harney et al., 2018; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018; Harney et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the above findings, the researcher observed that one of the participants from the merger initiative disputed the effectiveness of the capacity-building and training interventions. As a general level employee, the participant expressed dissatisfaction with the training approach, which took the form of daily, brief, high-level boardroom presentations by team members, arguing that there was no knowledge imparted in the process. As a result, they had to find their own way to learn the new industry skills without a proper foundation, which led to a negative impact on their performance. This experience shows an absence of a thorough needs analysis process, which is necessary to understand the different skill levels needed prior to determining the suitable content and delivery mode to facilitate the desired reorganisation adjustment. The findings therefore emphasise the importance of using suitable job resources to enable performance and enhance a sense of organisational belonging (Ancarani et al., 2021, Jenny et al., 2019). Training is another crucial resource for managing various employee aspects in relation to the organisational changes they are undergoing (Lewis & Kulhanek, 2022).

6.2.5 Theme 6: Impact on Performance

As discussed, the reorganisations had diverse impacts on employees' performances. Some participants mentioned the difficulties of being excessively burdened with work while trying to acquire new skills, having performance targets that did not match their set goals, and receiving unjust performance evaluations. These concerns had a negative impact on their performance results and enthusiasm to perform. These findings are consistent with the experiences expected from reorganisations and the impact they have on employee performance during

and after implementation (Harnet et al., 2018; Cascio et al., 2021). Although there were opportunities for capacity building and learning throughout the process, participants in the merged team noted that the performance review process did not always consider the learning trajectory. Two participants highlighted that management only advised them of their progress and focused on underperformed areas during their reviews, without appreciating their efforts on other deliverables. They added that this reduced their motivation to perform.

Considering that an employee's ability to perform is key for organisational success, the above findings signal a potential challenge (Khusanova et al., 2021). The findings are consistent with the literature on job resources, i.e., a lack of employee appreciation and recognition can affect their engagement levels (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Although the findings indicated performance challenges, most of the participants across all levels expressed their appreciation for the assistance and cooperation of their colleagues in developing solutions to improve functional effectiveness. According to the participants, these co-worker and peer actions fostered a feeling of unity and inclusion, which eased the transition. That employees were able to support each other towards improving performance and their functional objectives indicates potential employee engagement (Bashir et al., 2023). Overall, the experiences of leadership echo the emphasis on the leadership role in inspiring employees towards organisational performance (Muddle, 2020).

6.2.6 Conclusion

The findings highlighted varied experiences across the different participant levels during the reorganisation process. The majority revealed poor communication and a lack of consultation in the planning process, which elevated uncertainty and fear of the unknown. However, those who experienced involvement and consultation reported a sense of enthusiasm and drive to perform. This experience was consistent with literature on the importance of employee consultation and involvement in the planning process of reorganisation initiatives to lessen employees' concerns. The findings also align with literature on the importance of formal communication channels and the timing of such communication to employees, in order to facilitate mutual exchanges that are essential for engagement.

The findings further indicated differences regarding leadership's display of care, support and accountability, highlighting the absence of wellness support and psychological safety. Additionally, the findings highlighted the professional and career growth that participants were concerned about versus the actual development experienced, with increased knowledge base and promotions into senior roles in some instances. There were, however, elements of disappointment with regards to the format and content that some of the developmental

interventions adopted. All the above factors culminated in performance challenges and lack of employee recognition, leaving most participants unhappy and demotivated to perform.

This section's findings were thus largely aligned with the literature reviewed. Aspects of psychological safety limitations and the consequence of unaddressed job demands could be explored further in future studies. The next section discusses how the above experiences affected employee engagement.

Research Question 1b) The second sub question sought to uncover how experiences in 1a) contributed to the engagement construct.

6.2.7 Theme 8: Employee feelings

The findings from the interviews conducted revealed both positive and negative feelings amongst participants, which influenced their engagement in two ways. These diverse feelings expressed are expected in any organisational change, as they are dependent on personal variances (Edwards & Clinton, 2022). Firstly, participants who experienced positive feelings were primarily those who were excited at the opportunity to learn in their new roles. There were specifically three participants who mentioned that the experience motivated them to develop themselves and to perform better, which represents a state of engagement. This finding is consistent with the literature that describes employee engagement as a state where an employee's resilience, motivation and efforts to capitalise on job resources improve their performance (Kwon & Kim, 2020; Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). Their experience thus enhances their engagement positively.

Secondly, other participants who were eager to be reorganised were those who felt meaning and a sense of purpose and connection to their new roles and the organisation. One participant specifically expressed how fulfilling and motivating it felt contributing to the organisation's goals through their new role. They felt a strong sense of belonging and a societal mandate that highlighted their contribution towards a good purpose. These findings show that employee engagement is influenced by the seeming impact one has due to one's responsibilities (Peretz, 2020). These participants' experiences therefore influenced their engagement levels positively.

On the other hand, some participants had negative feelings about their experience. At least four participants at the supervisory and managerial levels who were transferred to new departments expressed feelings of low morale amongst themselves and their subordinates, both during and after the reorganisation. The participants attributed this primarily to four factors: 1) they felt unvalued by leadership as they were not consulted on their choice of

departments to be transferred to; 2) the communication process was more directive than participative; 3) a supervisor acted in a managerial role during the transfer process but was not shortlisted in the recruitment process; and 4) they felt unheard as despite them airing their concerns and challenges to leadership, there was no visible support or sense of urgency from leadership to resolve them.

As alluded to in section 6.2.3, many of the unresolved challenges led to a high workload, burnout and low morale. This is consistent with Khumalo's (2021) study that identified communication aspects, leadership support and workload-related challenges to be among the key factors that lead to low employee morale. Although the present study's reorganisation initiatives were not accompanied by job losses, low morale is among the retrenchment survivor syndrome effects (Jung et al., 2018). This therefore serves as a new contribution to the existing literature.

The managerial participants pointed out that the low morale was evident in the employees' reduced performance, such that they wondered how they could motivate and re-energise them to excel in the workplace. The researcher found it interesting that these sentiments were also shared by participants who were not directly transferred, indicating that the poor morale was such that they believed the employees generally did not recover from it. The employees lack of motivation and energy is consistent with the disengagement literature (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021), thus it can be concluded that their experience negatively affected their engagement levels (Bailey et al., 2015).

The findings are also aligned with aspects of burnout literature, which speaks to emotional fatigue and pessimism as signs of disengaged employees (Taris et al., 2017). Overall, the findings thus affirm that employees' experiences of certain leadership styles can improve or reduce their connection to the organisation (Arriusanto et al., 2020).

6.2.8 Theme 9: Post-reorganisation actions

The various experiences and resultant feelings described in the preceding section led to some unpleasant actions and outcomes. The participants listed labour turnover, industrial action (strike), employees' disconnection from their employer and their intention to leave the organisation as outcomes. The findings are discussed below:

Disconnection from employer

At least two participants at general and supervisory levels stressed a state of disconnect from the organisation. One indicated a lack of interest in the affairs of management and the organisation at large, claiming that they concentrate on their work and getting remunerated for

it, citing it as sense of self-employment. The second participant indicated that they were connected to their department but not to the rest of the organisation. They further asserted that compared to the rest of the leadership team, the success of their reorganisation initiative was due to their leader, which created the disconnect. These findings concur with the definition of work engagement, where the connection is focused on one's tasks instead of the organisation (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018; Ancarani et al., 2021). Employee engagement, on the other hand, is centred around a full experience with one's colleagues, job and organisation (Kossyva et al., 2023). Additionally, the lack of interest and reduced commitment to the employer is akin to survivor syndrome symptoms (Jung et al., 2018). The findings therefore reveals that the participants' (employee) engagement was affected negatively.

Labour/staff turnover and intention to leave

Participants from both the transfer initiatives and the merged team reported a spike in staff turnover soon after the reorganisation settled. An additional two participants at supervisory and general levels indicated their plans to exit the organisation should market opportunities arise. They attributed their intentions and former colleagues' resignations to unhappiness around unaddressed departmental challenges. Additionally, a high staff turnover was revealed in the insurance department following the departure of their leader. This was associated with the leadership style they adopted to support the reorganisation, which the participants indicated was applauded by the team. Overall, the findings are therefore consistent with employees' intention to leave their employment (Frone & Blais, 2020), and further aligned with reduced engagements levels (Edwards & Clinton, 2022) following a reorganisation process. The findings therefore indicate that employee engagement was affected negatively.

Industrial action(strike)

One participant revealed that the employees feeling unheard and the prolonged reorganisation challenges resulted in a strike. They emphasised that although the strike participants aligned the action to salary increases, the reorganisation was the underlying cause. This finding was not consistent with being an outcome of reorganisation initiatives where no jobs were lost, and nor was industrial action listed under survivor sickness in the literature reviewed (Jung et al., 2018). This therefore represents a new addition to the engagement literature in the context of reorganisation outcomes.

6.2.9 Conclusion

The findings indicated that the participants experienced positive and negative feelings, which resulted in varied experiences and affected engagement differently. Participants who were

excited about the opportunity to be developed were enthusiastic about the reorganisation and geared up themselves to strengthen their performance. This indicates positive engagement, as per the literature definition of employee engagement. In contrast, participants with negative feelings described low morale, which led to decreased performance during and after the reorganisation period. This lack of willingness to perform thus indicates that engagement levels were negatively affected by the reorganisation.

The findings also highlighted post-reorganisation actions and outcomes, including an increase in staff turnover and participants' intentions to leave the organisation as a result of their experiences. These outcomes are associated with low employee engagement levels. Of note, the findings revealed labour unrest (strike) as an additional survivor sickness outcome of the reorganisation experience.

The next section discusses findings from research question 2.

6.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Research question 2 aimed to determine what leadership capabilities should be developed to drive engagement during and post reorganisation. It was intended to identify the employee-desired practices and behaviours that leaders should develop, in order to enhance engagement across the workforce.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Leadership role and style

The findings revealed seven attributes of leadership style and role that should be developed: resource allocation and capacity building, leadership readiness and direction for the envisioned change, proactive communication and preparation of the impacted employees, psychological safety, authenticity, balanced autonomy, as well as leading by example through organisational values. These are discussed below in relation to the literature reviewed.

Resource allocation and capacity building

In order to enable the optimal performance of employees in their new responsibilities, the participants emphasised the need for leadership to allocate suitable resources, i.e., appropriate skill sets in line with expected functions. In this context, the transfer to department A specifically required a team of employees who had registration skills from across the various industries, however that was missing. The findings further indicate that there were no capacity-building interventions conducted in the initial stages, and neither were relevant competencies transferred. Therefore, the team had to rely on other departments that were carrying out these functions prior to the transfer to support them through the transition. This finding was asserted

both by participants who were transferred and those who had provided the said support. The literature also emphasises that interventions such as training are among the resources that leadership can employ to counter the job demands associated with changes (Lewis & Kulhanek, 2022). Job resources that boost employee development and help them to manage their workload further facilitates the capabilities they need to perform and ultimately their connection to the organisation (Ancarani et al., 2021; Harney et al., 2018). Skills development is therefore among the job resources that improve or predict employee engagement (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Proactive communication and employee preparation

Aligned to the communication challenges discussed under question 1, the findings emphasised communication aspects in three ways. Firstly, the participants highlighted the need to communicate with employees well in advance of a reorganisation plan as this facilitates a mental preparatory process. Secondly, the communication should include clarification of the envisioned change objectives and how the various parties will be affected. Thirdly, the affected employees should be involved in the determination of the transfer criteria, so as to air their voices and exercise choice on the available options. The findings pointed out the need for leadership to first consider employees who would volunteer to be transferred, so as to drive better adoption of the reorganisation and enthusiasm to support it. Without having consulted extensively before choosing the select few employees, it might have excluded those who would have wanted to be transferred to another department.

The findings echoed the literature's call for the need for timely communication, which provides direction during an organisational change and facilitates employee engagement (Einwiller et al., 2021). From a participative leadership approach, transparent communication that involves employee in matters affecting them, facilitate a positive view of leadership, thus improving their engagement levels (Wang et al., 2022; Neill et al., 2022; Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022). Employee consultation and inclusion in the preparatory process of reorganisation initiatives is therefore critical for countering hostile experiences that often lead to disengagement (Harnet et al., 2018; Hakmani, 2023). The additional finding that specified the importance of soliciting volunteers to be moved was, however, not clear in the literature reviewed.

Create psychological safety and openness

Participants highlighted the absence of an open environment during the reorganisation process. They urged leaders to be more approachable so as to create workplace trust and enhance openness so employees can discuss their challenges with them. This is especially

important considering that there were various challenges that employees did not discuss due to fear of victimisation, which led to frustrations, stress and illnesses. Interestingly, one of the managerial participants confirmed that they did not necessarily create opportunities for the subordinates to discuss their concerns during the reorganisation, suggesting that this be implemented in future initiatives.

Leaders must demonstrate openness, foster a climate of trust, and take steps to integrate employees in conversations. They should further exert measures that strengthen employee connection with the organisation, particularly during transitions (Neill et al., 2019). The desired trust and openness to engage that the participants described speaks to the need for psychological safety, which is a fundamental requirement if an employee is to experience personal engagement (Boccolli et al., 2022). When employees feel psychologically safe with their managers, performance naturally follows (Maximo et al., 2019). The findings therefore cement the importance of open discussions as a key leadership resource exchanged for employee engagement (Lemon, 2019).

Leadership readiness and direction

The findings alluded to a lack of readiness and direction among the leadership team to implement department A and B transfers. The participants felt that leadership was not sure about how to go about the implementation process or the specific functions that the new departments were going to manage, and there was no clear direction and alignment on what ought to happen. Given that challenge, leadership did not allocate sufficient human resources and there were no established processes, such that employees had to find their own ways to make it work. These circumstances heightened uncertainties and work pressure.

These findings were not consistent with the understanding of what leadership should be from the literature, i.e., leaders should primarily steer employees' collective efforts towards a common direction (Mbwalya, 2023). To alleviate uncertainties and ambiguity regarding responsibilities during a reorganisation, directive leadership can be applied to build optimism and structure (Fabac et al., 2022). Indeed, leadership guidance increases employees' ability to perform and in turn boosts their engagement levels (Chaman et al., 2021; Lundmark et al., 2020).

Leader Authenticity

A supervisory level participant from the departments D and E merger emphasised the importance of leadership authenticity during a reorganisation. Specifically, they appreciated their leader who displayed authenticity by being vulnerable about the learning process, being

herself, and being open to discussions with the team. These discussions revolved around career growth opportunities, sharing own experiences (relatable) and teamwork. This finding echo the authentic leadership literature, i.e., when a leader's conduct is perceived to be sincere, honest and supportive of followers' needs, they create a sense of confidence and are more likely to increase their engagement levels (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019; Chen & Sriphon, 2022). The leader who was open and shared her own experiences and learning journey represents the relational transparency and self-awareness components of authentic leadership (Lorenzo & Aurora, 2022). To further signify authenticity, the findings pointed out the need for leaders to be relatable, as it shows a sense of being genuine to their followers. When followers believe their leader is authentic, it positively affects their engagement levels (Koon & Ho, 2021).

Balanced Autonomy

The research highlighted one interesting finding that was only shared by a supervisory level participant who was transferred to department C, i.e., they were concerned about the degree of autonomy they experienced during their adjustment into the department. While becoming acquainted with a new environment and learning the technical aspects of the new role, the participant did not appreciate being left alone for too long without the leader's support and indicated a need for balance. Literature posits that autonomy and managerial support are among the job resources that serve as engagement antecedents (Albrecht et al., 2020). Although some emphasise a need to drive employee engagement through the delegation of duties (Prastio et al., 2020), balance and its relationship to engagement was not thoroughly established in the literature reviewed.

Leading by example through values

Participants at the general employee level expressed their dissatisfaction with leadership not leading by example in terms of communication, decision making and overall organisational culture. They highlighted the need for communication about organisational decisions and for management to be an example to the rest of the employees in terms of organisational values and leadership creed. They expressed that their immediate managers' behaviours were being influenced by senior management and negatively affecting their subordinates. These findings are aligned to the challenges described in the literature associated with living organisational values, which affect engagement and lead to signs of employee withdrawal. Organisational values are among those resources that contribute to employee engagement (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). Leaders who emulate set organisational values influence employees towards a common drive and purpose, thereby improving their engagement.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Work Environment

The findings revealed three workplace factors that the participants asserted would facilitate their engagement during reorganisations, i.e., the provision of wellness programmes, progress check-ins and trial periods.

Wellness support

Four participants stressed the need for leadership to provide access to therapists and other wellness professionals to support them through the transition process. They emphasised that these professionals would support them with mental health-related matters caused by worry, fear and uncertainties associated with their new roles and responsibilities. The participants perceived that an external person would have understood their circumstances better than their fellow colleagues did. Literature has similarly cautioned that employees are likely to disengage when their mental and emotional needs are not satisfied (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Considering that all jobs have components that exert mental pressure, these findings confirm the importance of workplace resources such as wellness support (Harney et al., 2018). In the context of organisational changes, psychological support is among the expected resources that employees require, so as to meet the prevailing role changes (Albrecht et al., 2022). When management is perceived to be supportive, it reduces the aforementioned job pressure and enhances engagement (Giallouros et al., 2023).

Coping and progress check-in

To further support the employees in their transition journey, participants alluded that they expected leaders to come to them and check in on how they were during at the different stages of the reorganisation. At least four participants from the transfer initiative expressed that leadership needed to engage the team, understand how they were coping, the workload issues, staff capacity challenges and resolve accordingly. They further highlighted that those acts would have shown leadership compassion and care, and in turn improving engagement. The findings cement literature assertions that employee engagement is influenced by the extent to which they believe leadership cares for their well-being (Bonaiuto et al., 2022). As leadership checks in and seeks to provide solutions to the team's challenges, it improves their engagement levels (Giallouros et al., 2023).

The researcher found it interesting that wellness support and check-in concerns were not expressed by participants from the merger initiative. This finding therefore confirms the leadership support that was discussed in section 6.2.2.

Trial Period

The findings revealed two key insights regarding the importance of a reorganisation adjustment period. Firstly, the participants who experienced the transfer expressed their dissatisfaction with the process, specifically with regards to having been expected to perform their new responsibilities without sufficient guidance and suitable resources, whilst learning concurrently. They further expressed that there ought to have been a trial or testing phase to determine whether the envisioned transfers would work out effectively prior to the permanent arrangement. Astoundingly, the experience was still negatively affecting some of the participants five years later. Organisational change management literature encourages the use of pilots as a means to include employees in determining the effectiveness of a proposed change, which in turn enhances their adoption and organisational association (Kempster et al., 2014; Goff et al., 2021).

In contrast, the merger participants appreciated leadership for affording them an adjustment period to learn about the new industry and get acquainted with their new responsibilities.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The discussions in this chapter touched on the participants' variety of reorganisation experiences and leader-related resources from employee engagement theories. With specific reference to the social exchange theory, there are number of factors (resources) that employees expect from leaders in exchange for their engagement, however these were not supplied during the new departmental transfer reorganisation. On the contrary, the majority of the findings regarding the merger highlighted those participants' satisfaction around communication and inclusion, professional growth, and leadership support. Based on this understanding, the findings confirmed the roles that different leadership styles play.

The experiences affected participant engagement in two different ways. Firstly, for some there were feelings of excitement and eagerness to learn, which motivated them to develop themselves and excel in the performance of their new roles. Secondly, those who experienced fear, distress and unhappiness became disconnected from their employer, leading to an increase in turnover and industrial action (strike).

The findings also outlined various leadership capabilities that facilitate improved employee engagement during and post a reorganisation. These include sufficient resource allocation and capacity, the cultivation of psychological safety, and open conversations with employees. The findings further pointed to the importance of leadership authenticity and relatability, the provision of direction and ensuring balanced autonomy to facilitate a smoother transition for

employees. The findings also emphasised the significance of wellness support, checking in with employees, leading by example, and incorporating a trial period to facilitate employee adjustment. The majority of the findings were consistent with the literature reviewed, with the exception of industrial action associated to non-retrenchment reorganisations and balanced autonomy in managing performance. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 7 below.

The next chapter presents the study's conclusions and recommendations.

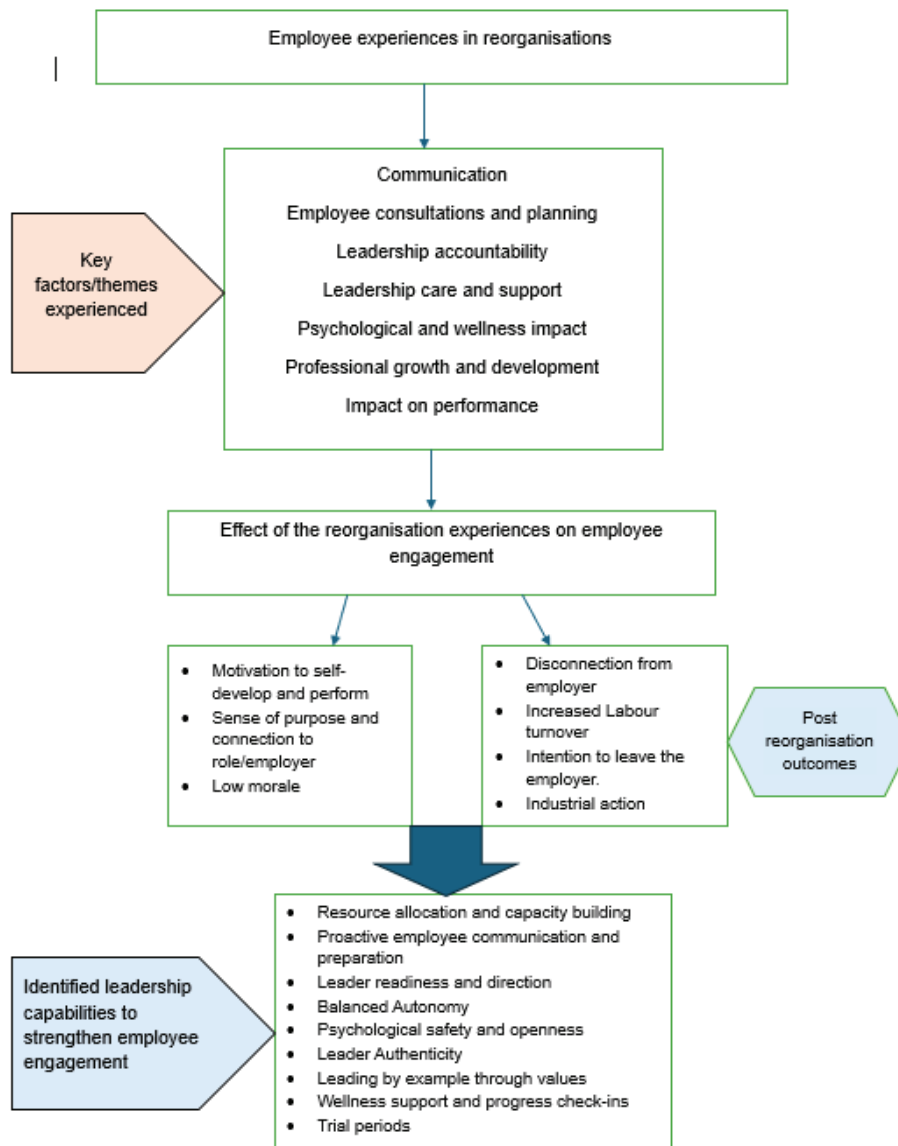


Figure 7: Illustrative findings summary

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a critical contributor to organisational performance, which is why it is essential to recognise the role that leadership plays in stimulating said engagement (Ariussanto et al., 2020). However, leaders are continuously faced with challenges relating to the most suitable attributes and strategies through which they can positively influence engagement (Stein et al., 2021; Marone, 2020). To deepen the understanding of how to enhance engagement in a variety of contexts, which was identified as a literature gap in Chapter 1 (Bailey et al., 2017), this study explored leadership capabilities that strengthen employee engagement during and post reorganisations.

The study adopted a qualitative approach through the use of semi-structured interviews, during which employees shared their leadership experiences of reorganisation initiatives in a Namibian public enterprise. The study established that the participants had varied experiences, which affected their engagement. Further, the study highlighted numerous leadership capabilities that can enhance employee engagement in reorganisations. The study's findings are thus of interest to leaders and human resources professionals.

This chapter summarises the research findings, provides recommendations, describes the study's limitations, and offers suggestions for future studies.

7.2 THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

7.2.1 What leadership behaviours do employees expect during a reorganisation to facilitate engagement?

This question explored how employees experienced leadership during reorganisation initiatives and how those experiences affected their engagement.

The study revealed the varied approaches that leadership employed during the reorganisations. There were more inclusive and participatory tactics in the merging of two departments into an existing division, which contributed to excitement towards learning opportunities. When it came to the transfer of employees into new departments, although a few leaders consulted their teams ahead of the transfer, most employees learnt about the intention through informal channels. Compared to the merger, there was thus a consensus that the approach and timing of the transfer's formal communication was misplaced, inhibiting employee preparation. This created fear, anxiety and change-associated uncertainties. The

study therefore confirmed the theoretical perspective regarding the importance of appropriate communication methods and their timing, as well as employee involvement in planning reorganisations, in order to facilitate engagement (Einwiller et al., 2021).

The study highlighted dissatisfaction with leadership support and care by the transferred employees at managerial levels, as this affected their ability to support their subordinates. This affected engagement at both levels. The study therefore confirmed the findings of the literature reviewed regarding management support and follower expectations as engagement drivers, regardless of employee level (Giallourous et al., 2023; Wong & Giessner, 2018). This was especially demonstrated in the merger initiative, where the findings indicated an appreciation of those leaders who demonstrated accountability and support. The present study thus confirmed accountability in decision-making and performance management as behaviours that facilitate engagement (Ancarani et al., 2021; Thanh & Quang, 2022). This was evident in employees' reduced drive to perform when the said accountability and support was missing. Furthermore, as it relates to performance management, the study affirmed the importance of performance recognition and employee appreciation as engagement enablers (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). The study did reveal, however, the need for employees' learning curve to be considered in evaluating their performance during reorganisations, so as to enhance their enthusiasm for continued performance. The enhanced drive to perform represents a state of employee engagement (Lemon, 2019; Bushir et al., 2023).

Additionally, stemming from the perceived absence of leadership support, this study established that fear and uncertainty influence two emotional states. The first is an absence of psychological safety for employees to discuss their challenges with, and solicit support from, leadership and the human resources department. The study found that employees feared being judged about their competencies and being victimised, which are primary indicators of psychological safety deficiency (Boccoli et al., 2022). This state negatively affected employee well-being and team dynamics, due to extended unresolved challenges and a lack of wellness support. Therefore the study found that psychological safety is a facilitator for engagement.

On the contrary, the uncertainty ignited an excitement towards development opportunities among some employees. This state was among the key highlights of the merger initiative when employees were afforded capacity-building interventions, thereby creating a learning and performance drive. These findings confirmed that the provision of development and growth opportunities in reorganisations harmonises job demands and thus enables engagement (Blattner et al., 2021; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018; Harnet et al., 2018). However, for the development opportunities to enhance employee engagement, the study found that it was dependent on the perceived effectiveness of the training interventions provided.

Moreover, the study identified a lack of employee choice and consultation during the transfers, as well as leadership's lack of visible support and urgency to resolve challenges, as contributors to low morale. As a survivor sickness outcome often associated with retrenchments and reorganisations (Khumalo, 2021; Jung et al., 2018), low morale may contribute to a reduction in employee engagement levels. Additionally, the study further established outcomes such as employee disconnection from the employer, increased staff turnover and present employees' intentions to leave the organisation. These are all post-reorganisation outcomes associated with survivor syndrome and are indicative of reduced engagement levels (Jung et al., 2018; Frone & Blais, 2020; Edwards & Clinton, 2022). Although the reorganisation initiatives explored in this study did not result in retrenchments, the study revealed industrial action as post-reorganisation outcome, which is often associated with job loss-related reorganisations (Jung et al., 2018). This thus represented an additional contribution to the existing survivor syndrome literature.

7.2.2 What leadership capabilities should be developed to drive employee engagement during and post reorganisations?

The study revealed nine capabilities that should be developed in terms of leadership style, practices, conduct and role in the workplace.

Resource allocation and capacity building

The study highlighted the need for leadership to allocate sufficient human resources and describe the skills and competencies required to fulfill the responsibilities of the new roles and functions. Moreover, this should be accompanied by targeted developmental interventions at the inception of the transfer, so as to support employee transitions. The study therefore confirmed development as a job- and leader-related resource that aids in minimising work pressure, in turn improving the employee-employer connection and enhancing employee engagement (Ancarani et al., 2021, Harney et al., 2018; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Proactive communication and employee preparation

To facilitate employee preparation, support and enthusiasm, the study revealed four aspects that are linked to this capability. Leadership should endeavour to discuss the reorganisation intentions with the employees well in advance of implementation, clarifying the vision and impact it would potentially have on them, by consulting all impacted employees and soliciting volunteers to be transferred. The findings confirmed literature's emphasis on consultative approaches during a reorganisation's preparatory phases, which enhance employee engagement by minimising associated unpleasant encounters (Harnet et al., 2018; Hakmani, 2023).

Create psychological safety and openness

The study highlighted a need for leaders to foster psychological safety through trusting interactions and openness, so employees can amenably discuss their concerns, challenges, and uncertainties associated with a reorganisation without fear. Psychological safety is not only a determinant of an employee's personal engagement (Boccolli et al., 2022), however through the leader-enabled environment of open conversations, employee engagement is facilitated (Lemon, 2019).

Leadership direction and guidance

To minimise the uncertainties and tensions experienced during a reorganisation, the study established the importance of leaders providing guidance and steering the impacted employees towards a common direction. This direction clarifies roles and responsibilities and associated functional processes, so as to enable performance and a smooth transition. Employees build optimism if there is no role ambiguity in a reorganisation (Fabac et al., 2022), thus leadership guidance strengthens their performance capacities and enhances their engagement (Chaman et al., 2021; Lundmark et al., 2020).

Balanced Autonomy

Considering the learning intricacies associated with new roles and responsibilities, the study established the need for leaders to provide balanced autonomy. This translates to a leader managing when to allow space for an employee to perform, and when to step in and support them to transition. Despite the emphasis in the literature about driving employee engagement through a mix of autonomy and delegation (Albrecht et al, 2020; Prastio et al., 2020), the study highlighted a leader's exercise of balanced autonomy as an additional capability and resource.

Leader authenticity

The study highlighted authentic leadership as a capability to be developed. It was found that where leaders were relatable and genuine through sharing their own challenges and experiences during the reorganisations, they were perceived as authentic. The literature has positioned authenticity as an employee engagement driver, subject to the followers trusting that leader's sincerity (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019; Chen & Sriporn, 2022; Koon & Ho, 2021).

Lead by example

The study established the value that employees place on leaders living the organisational values. Employees expect leaders to lead through the values in their communication, decision making and setting the tone for organisational conduct across employee levels. By illuminating the right examples, they enhance trust, create enthusiasm, and inspire employees to perform. The findings therefore affirm the literature's perspective that places organisational values amongst employee engagement antecedents (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018).

Regular check-ins and wellness support

To facilitate employee well-being and demonstrate leadership support, the study revealed the need for leaders to check-in on how the impacted teams were coping at various stages of the reorganisation. This would demonstrate a willingness to support them through their challenges on the transition journey, thus enhancing their engagement levels (Bonaiuto et al., 2022). Additionally, there was a need to supplement that support with professional wellness services, which would have enabled employees to manage their emotional needs associated with the reorganisation pressures. The findings therefore cement psychological support as critical resource to help employees cope with work variations and lessening job tension, subsequently affecting employee engagement positively (Albrecht et al., 2022; Giallourous et al., 2023).

Trial periods

The study highlighted participants' desire for a reorganisation trial period. This was essential to test the potential success of the intended changes and for their adjustment to new roles and responsibilities. This practice was critical in order to minimize some of the experienced challenges and negative experiences encountered. These findings echo the change management literature's emphasis for initiative pilots, as an inclusive process that promotes employee change adoption and connection to their employer (Kempester et al., 2014; Goff et al., 2021). The said connection would thus indicate positive employee engagement.

7.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge in five ways:

- a) The research contributes to the JD-R theory by confirming which job- and leader-related resources may be employed to minimise the effects of job demands during reorganisations.
- b) In the social exchange theory context, the identified leadership capabilities were aligned with the various factors and leadership styles described in the existing literature

that must be exchanged in an employee-employer relationship, which serve as employee engagement antecedents.

- c) Current literature places a focus on generic autonomy as an engagement driver, however the present study further specified balanced autonomy as an additional leader-enabled driver in a reorganisation context.
- d) Emanating from the post-reorganisation experiences, the study identified industrial action as an additional survivor syndrome outcome that is not associated with job loss-related initiatives.

Overall, this study contributes to the engagement literature by clarifying the role of leadership amidst reorganisation dynamics.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Developing leadership capabilities should be a collaborative effort across various stakeholders. This study offers practical recommendations to leaders and human resources practitioners who are planning or undergoing a reorganisation:

7.4.1 Leaders

- a) Institute an organisational change management strategy that will guide leaders in the implementation of changes. This should include communication and employee involvement related strategies that enhance engagement.
- b) Provide team guidance and direction towards the established vision for the planned initiative, clarifying impact on employees, so as to minimise uncertainties.
- c) Cultivate a climate of openness and direct conversations, whilst being authentic and relatable with their subordinates. This will enhance trust and psychological safety.
- d) Intentionally seek to live the organisational values and through that lead by example, igniting employee connection with the organisation.
- e) Timeously solicit employee feedback and address emerging challenges, so as to strengthen the transition process and lessen negative post-reorganisation outcomes.
- f) Invest in the provision of wellness services to support both employees and leaders throughout the transition process.

7.4.2 Human resources practitioners

- a) Provide change management training to all supervisors and managers to create alignment on effective strategies for handling organisational change.

- b) Create leadership coaching programmes that facilitate the development and behavioural shifts that are essential for positive employee engagement.
- c) Encourage and facilitate an environment of open conversations, whilst maintaining confidentiality on employee matters. This will foster a sense of safety amongst employees to approach human resources without fear.

7.5 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The limitations for this study are primarily centred around its qualitative nature, which saw the use of a relatively small sample size in a specific context. The study was limited to employees of one organisation, therefore the conclusions from the explored phenomenon may not be generalised, requiring a further investigation across a larger population. Considering the lengthy phases that reorganisation initiatives commonly undertake, the study's cross-sectional method further served as another limitation, as a longitudinal approach would have been applicable to explore employee experiences at various phases. Reorganisations are complex processes that affect employees differently throughout its stages, thus leadership influence may differ over time.

The self-reporting of participant experiences and perspectives amounted to a limitation, as certain experiences might have been emphasised more than others. Nevertheless, the researcher sought to minimise the response bias impact through open-ended questions and probing techniques. Finally, including insights from the organisational engagement surveys and post-implementation assessments would have enabled the researcher to triangulate the data collected and provide additional valuable contributions.

7.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Considering the cross-sectional study limitations alluded to above, the researcher recommends that future studies be conducted from a longitudinal approach to assess the role of leadership on employee engagement at various stages of the reorganisation process. Additionally, since some respondents pointed out various leadership traits and capabilities they admired during the reorganisations, future studies should quantitatively test the effect of these variables on employee engagement.

Finally, nearly 70% of the study sample were females, thus presenting an opportunity to examine whether gender differences exist regarding leadership experiences in reorganisations.

7.7 CONCLUSION

The present study offers insights into how leadership can strengthen employee engagement during and post a reorganisation. Overall, the findings revealed varied employee experiences across the reorganisations studied, highlighting the diverse approaches that individual leaders adopted. The study therefore concluded on leadership capabilities that enhance employee engagement, and an absence of those should further be developed for future reorganisations. These capabilities are a) proactive employee communication and preparation, b) leadership readiness and direction, c) leader authenticity, d) balanced autonomy in managing performance, e) employee wellness support and check ins, f) trial periods g) leading by example through values h) psychological safety, and i) adequate resource allocation. The findings contribute to the relevant employee engagement theories by confirming and adding antecedents to the reorganisation context, whilst highlighting post-reorganisation outcomes.

Leaders across various organisational levels and human resources practitioners are challenged to shift their conduct and mindsets, in order to enable the identified capabilities and better facilitate employee engagement in reorganisations.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT**Interview Candidate's Consent Form**

I am conducting a study regarding employee engagement during reorganisations and using an interview to collect data. Our interview is expected to last about 40 minutes and will help us understand “*which leadership capabilities can strengthen employee engagement in the context of reorganisations*”. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

By signing this form, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- the interview to be recorded;
- the recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- all verbatim quotations from the interview will be anonymised;
- the data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and all data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Student:

Supervisor:

Signature of participant:

Date:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction – setting the scene

- Greetings, a few check-in questions to establish rapport
- Explain the purpose of the interview, assurance of anonymity of and confidentiality with which the information they share will be treated and usage of data being collected.
- Emphasize the voluntary participation as well as reasons for recording the interview.

Main Questions

1. I would like to reflect us on the reorganisation/restructuring that you went through – how was it communicated to you / how did you learn about it?
2. What was your understanding of what was going to happen?
3. How did that make you feel?
4. What are some factors you consider important for you in the workplace, to be able to be interested in and fulfil your duties?
5. What are some factors you consider important for you in the workplace that connects you to the organisation?
6. How do those factors affect your relationship with colleagues?
7. How do those factors affect your connection with the organisation?
8. Describe your leaders to me, what qualities do you value in relation to the above factors?
9. What did these leaders do well that helped you with the reorganisation transition phase?
10. What did they not do well that created or would have created an obstacle?
11. How did the above affect the factors that you consider important in the workplace?
12. How did that impact the execution of your job?
13. How did that influence your feelings about the organisation?
14. What would have been done differently to counter the factors affected?
15. What should leaders do for similar initiatives in the future?
16. How do you feel now recollecting that experience now, since the reorganisation took place?
17. Those were the questions I had for this discussion. Is there anything additional you would like to share, related to your experience of the reorganisation?

Closing

I appreciate you having taken time from your responsibilities, to participate in this study and sharing your experiences with me. Once again, I reiterate that your identity will be kept anonymous, and data shall solely be used for the purposes of the research project.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF CODES

The screenshot displays a software interface with a top navigation bar and a main content area. The navigation bar includes tabs for File, Home, Search & Code, Analyze, Import & Export, Tools, and Help. Below the navigation bar is a toolbar with icons for Add, New, Project Comment, Navigator, Documents, Quotations, Codes, Memos, Networks, and Links. The main content area is titled 'Explore' and contains a search bar. Below the search bar, a tree view shows the following structure:

- Mphil Reorganisations V2
 - Documents (16)
 - Codes (148)
 - Accountability (8-0)
 - Acknowledgement and Recognition (2-0)
 - Acknowledgement of skills gap (1-0)
 - Adjustment/settling in period (4-0)
 - Adoption differences (7-0)
 - Attitude towards change (4-0)
 - Authentic and relatable (2-0)
 - Awareness (2-0)
 - Balanced autonomy (2-0)
 - Capacity and Resource Constraints (3-0)
 - Career development (5-0)
 - Career Growth /Advancement (1-0)
 - Career Growth Concerns (7-0)
 - Challenges (46-0)
 - Change advocacy (1-0)
 - Change management skills (2-0)
 - Change necessity - "fixing whats not broken" (2-0)
 - Change not thought through (3-0)
 - Changes in management (3-0)
 - Chaotic (1-0)
 - Clear direction and targets (4-0)~
 - Closed off (1-0)

- ◇ ○ Communicate to and prepare employees (15-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Corridors / Grapevine (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Informal discussion (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Letters (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Memo (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Staff meetings (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Team sessions (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication : Telephone Call (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication tone /style (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication: One on one sessions (7-0)
- ◇ ○ Communication: Timing (8-0)
- ◇ ○ Concerns on selection criteria (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Confidence in skills (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Confusion (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Connection to /love for role (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Conselling sessions timing (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Continuous changes (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Coping progress and check ins (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Cross departmental training (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Culture/ Values not lived (5-0)
- ◇ ○ Decision-making approach (9-0)
- ◇ ○ Demanded skills enhancement (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Demoralised (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Department placement (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Departmental associated perceptions (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Disconnected from organisation / isolation (2-0)

- ◇ ○ Disengaged employees (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Effective decisions (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Employee involvement in planning (7-0)
- ◇ ○ Employee motivation (9-0)
- ◇ ○ Excitement (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Expected Consultation approach (13-0)
- ◇ ○ Experience-based improvements (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Fear to approach leadership (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling bullied /witch hunted /victimised (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling of being failed (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling of being heard /understood (10-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling of being trusted to perform (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling of ill-treatment / unfairness (5-0)
- ◇ ○ Feeling of importance/attention/considered/valued (10-0)
- ◇ ○ Feelings of worry and fear (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Financial/Remuneration losses (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Finding solutions /Improvements (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Focused engagements with the impacted (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Focused on work only - "Salary collector" (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Frustration (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Gradual transition (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Happiness and satisfaction (6-0)
- ◇ ○ Hoping for new experience (1-0)
- ◇ ○ HR Assistance/support (3-0)
- ◇ ○ HR non-independent (1-0)

- ◇ ○ Hurting each other (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Impact on leaders (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Increased knowledge and skills base (7-0)
- ◇ ○ Individual personalities (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Inequitable access to training /exposure (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Influence on stakeholder engagement (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Intention to leave /staff turnover (7-0)
- ◇ ○ Job losses/retrenchment (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership / Management support (15-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership Care (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership presence (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership readiness and direction (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership skills developed (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership style (7-0)
- ◇ ○ Leadership/management vulnerability and honesty (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Leading and learning with a new team (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Leading by example (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Learning curve (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Learning support (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Limited options / choices (12-0)
- ◇ ○ Low Morale (4-0)
- ◇ ○ Loyalty (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Management understanding of challenges (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Mapped process /alignment (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Micro management (2-0)

- ◇ ○ Shared sympathy for the affected (1-0)
- ▷ ◇ ○ Shock (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Skills Imbalance (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Solicited employee views/thoughts (5-0)
- ◇ ○ Source of frustration (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Staff coaching difficulties (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Stressful experience (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Successful initiative (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Team Support (8-0)
- ◇ ○ Time off to rest (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Tolerance levels (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Top-down leadership (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Training approach (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Training Timing (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Transition experiences (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Transparency (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Trust and Openness (12-0)
- ◇ ○ Uncertainty and Concerns (8-0)
- ◇ ○ Understanding of the changes (9-0)
- ◇ ○ Unfulfilled Promises (2-0)
- ◇ ○ Unhappy (3-0)
- ◇ ○ Varied leadership strength (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Withdrawn (1-0)
- ◇ ○ Work for self (1-0)
- ▷ ◇ ○ Work-related factors (25-0)

Note. Extracted from Atlas Ti