Storytelling as a mechanism for driving the employee engagement of knowledge workers in a VUCA environment

Herman Redelinghuis

04373863

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ABSTRACT

In the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous operating environments which organisations are forced to navigate through, the focus remains on ensuring employees are engaged at work. Increased levels of employee engagement have many benefits to organisations, including better productivity and increased amounts of discretionary effort. As a driver of employee engagement, the mechanism of storytelling in a corporate environment is used as a tool for communicating a clear understanding of the direction of the organisation. Storytelling needs to be done in a structured format and with a clear understanding of the qualities of the audience receiving the message, to optimise the effectiveness of the process. In this qualitative research study through the use of storytelling the employees are able to relate to and buy into the goals of the organisation, resulting in increased levels of employee engagement, which result in increased productivity, which leads to profitability for the organisation.

KEYWORDS

Storytelling, Employee engagement, Knowledge workers, South Africa, VUCA.

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 Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Herman Redelinghuis

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1   Introduction

The ever-changing business operating environment in South Africa is cause for organisations continuously having to change and adapt their direction and strategy to stay competitive in the market (Girod & Whittington, 2017). They are forced to lead their knowledge workers through volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) business environments, and if they do not do this well, the organisation risks being unsuccessful (Saleh & Watson, 2017). According to the Gallop global survey, a mere 13% of employees have been found to be fully engaged in their work (Gallup, 2012). Employee engagement have been seen to have a positive influence on an organisation's performance (Lu, Xie & Guo, 2018; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). When employees are engaged at work their organisational commitment and productivity are increased (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010).

1.2   Background to the Research Problem

Research has established that the implementation or execution of a chosen strategy is a key attribute that assists organisations with their future direction and growth as well as to gain or enhance competitive advantage (Neilson, Martin & Powers, 2008; Shah, 2005; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). Organisations in South Africa and around the world constantly experience barriers to delivering on what they set out to achieve, for many reasons, including the mismanagement of those whom they are meant to lead, guide and influence. Between 60% and 90% of well-formulated strategies fail at the implementation phase due to a failure of the translation of organisational strategy into action (Gębczyńska, 2016).

Engagement at work has been found to have a positive impact on many aspects of an employee's performance and attitudes, including the employee's performance of tasks, the extent to which his/her behaviour is proactive, his/her job satisfaction and even his/her well-being (Lu et al., 2018). Social learning theory suggests that employees are very likely to learn behaviour from the leaders who influence them, and that it is a top-down approach to learning that has an impact on the employee's engagement with his/her work and other employees, as is evident in figure 1 below (Lu et al., 2018).
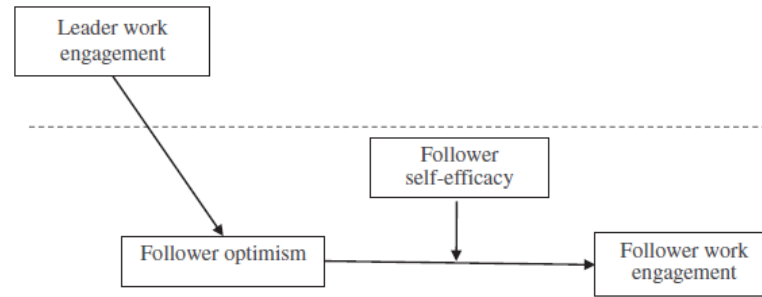
Figure 1: Employee engagement model (Lu, Xie & Guo, 2018)

Organisations comprise of individuals who identify with psychological meaningfulness and availability which has a positive link with engagement in the workplace (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Therefore, if the individual employee's ability to navigate through a VUCA operating environment is understood to be vitally important for the success of the organisation, what is preventing organisations from addressing this issue? Research has indicated that a lack of understanding of the direction an organisation is taking may be traced back to poor communication, which leads to low levels of commitment by employees (Shah, 2005). This is evident in a worldwide statistic which indicates that only 13% of employees are emotionally engaged at work (Gallup, 2012). According to Kumar and Pansari (2016), another recent Gallup study indicated that only 31% of disengaged employees believe they can have a positive impact on the delivery of the products of an organisation, and only 27% of the same group believe they can have a positive impact on customer service.

These numbers are frightingly low, considering that employees are the driving force in any organisation and that there is a vital connection in people orientation between communication and commitment. According to a report by Deloitte (2016), a study was conducted in South Africa in which 89% of the participants indicated that employee engagement is extremely important in the workplace, but 29% of the organisations reported that no employee engagement programmes are created for a number of employee groups.

A lack of employee engagement affects organisations in South Africa, which continue to operate in a VUCA business context (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). In VUCA environments, when employees do not feel engaged in their work the business could fail to execute on its set strategies, and where no mechanism such as storytelling is in place to convey the organisation's strategy to the employees, the business is unlikely to succeed. The commitment of employees is necessary if businesses are to succeed (Shah, 2005). In

complex and uncertain environments, people leaders need certain skills to assist in driving the correct employee behaviour through engagement. According to a report by Deloitte (2018), the prevailing trend in human capital is towards the hyper-connected workplace in order to maintain productivity. In the same report it is found that 56% of the participants claimed that their organisations are not ready to handle the hyper-connected workplace and the problems of productivity that come with it.

Employees are important stakeholders in business, as they can add significant value which could lead to the achievement of the goals of the business if they are committed. Many employees interface with their customers, which ideally should mean that they need to engage customers efficiently (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Firms have a competitive advantage when their employees are engaged and demonstrate a positive attitude towards customers (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

The mechanism of storytelling has been claimed to assist in internal organisational communication and could possibly lead to increased employee engagement in the workplace (Spear & Roper, 2016). The complex leadership skill that assists in storytelling is that of manipulation, which according to empirical evidence is seen as a positive driver of motivation (Auvinen, Lamsa, Sintonen & Takala, 2013). The narrative is important to relay the historic past of where the organisation has come from, the present situation, and where the organisation wants to be in the future (Vaara, Sonenshein & Boje, 2016).

Research indicates that storytelling has been a human activity for many years, that it is a social tool for reconstructing and reframing events from past experience and transferring the information or knowledge in the present, and that it is still relevant in the current environment (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Scheerder, Karreman & de Jong, 2017). The effect that storytelling can have on business is indicative of a number of factors which include elements such as improved communication (Chen, 2012; Petrick, 2014; Mazzei, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016), which may possibly assist with employee engagement (Lu et al., 2018). It is therefore crucial to understand the role which storytelling could play, leading to an understanding of the complex concepts that inform business today and making it possible for employees to navigate the VUCA environment, determining the direction of organisations, and ensuring that employees are engaged in driving change. This study therefore aims to address the issue of the use of narratives as a mechanism for employee engagement.

Such storytelling will be investigated in order to determine whether the tool could be used to influence employee engagement in South African organisations. The changing business operating environment in South Africa is a cause for organisations continuously having to change and adapt their strategies to stay competitive in the market (Girod & Whittington, 2017). The ability to keep employees engaged and to assist them in navigating this VUCA environment is vitally important to remaining sustainable as an organisation. Storytelling as a technique could possibly assist business in achieving its objective of improving employee engagement. This research will be conducted to investigate the premise that this may indeed be the case.

1.3   Definition of the Research Problem and Purpose

Existing literature has established a clear link between employee engagement and the performance of a company, as well as the more proactive behaviour and discretionary effort of the employees (Kahn, 1990; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010; Baker, 2014; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Lu et al., 2018). Even though the uses of strorytelling have been noted in the literature in many fields such as marketing, health, culture, technology and communication (Pera, Viglia & Furlan, 2016; De Vecchi, Kenny, Dickson-Swift & Kidd, 2016; Sarıca & Usluel, 2016; Spear & Roper, 2016), there is limited understanding of the effect on employee engagement in a business organisation.

The aim of this research study is to add to the existing knowledge about employee engagement and the concept of storytelling in an organisational setting. An attempt will be made to verify the existing knowledge on employee engagement and the importance of engagement in the organisation as well as to explore the measuring of employee engagement. The efficacy of storytelling as a mechanism to increase the sense of knowledge workers' engagement in their work will be investigated. Constructs such as the make-up of a story as well as the media through which it may be effectively communicated will be considered.

The study is aimed at gathering, investigating and providing insights which may be valuable for people managers who are leading knowledge workers and have to engage with their employees and facilitate delivery through more effective storytelling. In addition, the research aims to benefit not only existing leaders but also potential and aspiring leaders in the form of current employees.

It is hypothesised for the purposes of this research study that if storytelling is not effectively done, this could influence the delivery of the message and the communication

of the outcomes, which may lead to a lack of engagement on the part of employees, which would have an impact on the organisation's productivity and delivery, and ultimately its performance (Gallup, 2012).

1.4   Core Research Problem

The purpose of the research is to explore storytelling as a tool to increase employee engagement among knowledge workers in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment. The research study is titled "Storytelling as a mechanism for driving employee engagement".

1.5   Research Objectives

In order to address the gap in existing knowledge, the research objectives include:

1. Exploring the benefits for and the challenges to, as well as the possible causes of the challenges of employee engagement that are experienced by knowledge workers who operate in a VUCA environment.
2. Exploring and understanding the practices of storytelling by the leaders of knowledge workers.
3. Exploring and investigating the use of storytelling as a tool or mechanism to drive employee engagement among knowledge workers.

To understand the relationship between the elements of the construct investigated, a model of a relationship matrix is proposed:
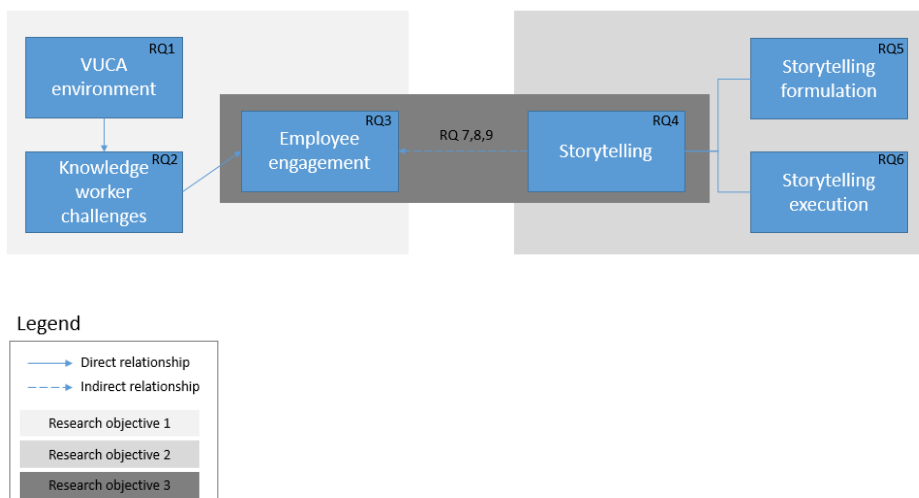
Figure 2: Relationship matrix of storytelling to enhance employee engagement

1.6   Research Questions

The research questions in this study are aligned with the objectives of understanding the two main constructs, and further whether a connection could exist between them. The research questions are the following:

1. What are the challenges to engaging knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?
2. What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?
3. How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?

1.7   Significance of the Research Study

The significance of the research study includes the possibility that it may benefit the organisations that are operating in a VUCA environment where the markets, competitors and consumer trends are volatile and may change rapidly without warning. The environment is such that it is uncertain what the changes may bring and what the outcomes of the implementation of change in any format will deliver. Organisations operate in complexity up to a point of possible chaos, and need to navigate between different organisational structures, managing a diversity of employees and ensuring the best possible productivity and engagement, while the constant advent of new trends and new technology is continuously disrupting them.

This study made use of a qualitative research approach to allow for the exploration of the elements of the topic. As different industries and organisations drive employee engagement differently, the exploratory approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the issues and the formulation of questions to be asked that led to greater understanding. The research was conducted using the data collection technique of semi-structured interviews in a one-on-one setting. This made it possible to focus on the research questions and objectives while also uncovering further, fresh insights. The research population was all the people managers of knowledge workers in South African firms, and the sample drawn was twelve to fifteen (in effect, twelve) middle to senior managers in four industries in South Africa. The interviews were concluded upon the achievement of data saturation. The sampling techniques included non-probability judgemental sampling and purposive sampling. Further snowball sampling was used to identify possible participants who qualified as members of the research population and whose interviews could contribute to the richness of the research findings.

1.8   Delimiting the Research

The research was conducted in and focussed on multiple industries and different types of organisations to ensure the relevance of the insights gathered across industries. This study focussed on the telecommunication, banking and internet technology industries in South Africa.

The delimitations of the study further included conducting the research and collecting the data in the geographical location of the Gauteng Province, which is convenient for the researcher. The sampling methods allowed for easier access to participants appropriate to the study. The industries were selected on the grounds that their employees are knowledge workers.

1.9   Research Limitations

The limitations of the study included the limited time to complete the study as well as the possible limited access to data from available and willing managers of knowledge workers. The sample consisted of twelve participants and, due to the limitations, additional possible participants to the research were excluded. As a result, the sample in the study is not representative of the population.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, and a further limitation included the lack of formal training in conducting interviews on the researcher's part, which could have led to possible skewing of the findings. Further, the participants were aware that the researcher was an employee of a certain telecommunications company and could have refrained from sharing with him honest or confidential information or experiences. The study was also conducted at a particular point in time and will therefore not be longitudinally representative.

1.10   Research Assumptions

A number of assumptions were taken into consideration, including that there is a need for employee engagement among knowledge workers. The organisations operate and will continue to operate in a VUCA environment, and it is therefore possible to assume that there will be constant changes and adaptations of direction. The participants interviewed were people leaders in the organisations investigated, and it was assumed that they would understand the terminology of the research study. Another assumption made was that this study would be relevant across different knowledge industries.

1.11   Roadmap of the Research Study

Chapter one is the introduction to the research study and provides insights into the background of the research problem as well as the significance of the research. The limitations and the assumptions are highlighted.

Chapter two is a literature review. It discusses published research in the fields of the operating environment, employee engagement and storytelling. The VUCA environment is unpacked in terms of each of the elements of the acronym VUCA, and the chapter looks at the challenges knowledge workers are facing and how to navigate through them in this operating environment. Employee engagement is defined as a term, and the different types of engagement are identified as well as the challenges involved in attempting to induce engagement in employees. The construct of storytelling is investigated through examining what the term means and exploring the narrative paradigm theory and the challenges in storytelling.

Chapter three presents the research objectives and the research questions.

Chapter four focusses on the research methodology and how the research was approached, from the reason for the selection of a qualitative methodology to the identification of the population and sample size. The research tool is explained, and the reasons for using it.

Chapter five presents the results of the data collection. The findings are presented in terms of themes culled from the data and accompanied by quotations of the participants' words.

Chapter six discusses the results found in the previous chapter, and analyses and interprets the insights arrived at according to the research objectives and questions.

Chapter seven concludes the study and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

Businesses operate in changing environments, and it is becoming more difficult to lead teams and improve their engagement (Girod & Whittington, 2017). The operating environment from an internal and external perspective brings many challenges that need to be faced. These include the volatility of the economy, the uncertainty that is evident in the choices of the direction of change, the complexity of operating and navigating through a constant set of surprises, and the ambiguity of the operating environment (Gandhi, 2017). According to Bennett and Lemoine (2014) the VUCA construct should not be seen as a crutch but rather be used to navigate the organisation through difficult times. Structures could be adapted and models like design thinking could be used to ensure a stable amount of organisational learning (Cousins, 2018).

From the perspective of management disciplines, the term "employee engagement" has been used in many fields of study. The term "engagement" here focusses on an organisational behaviour element of connectedness. Many benefits are evident when knowledge workers are engaged, but when engagement is in jeopardy the organisation faces the risk of losing competitive advantage or even worse (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Stories have been told for many years as a way of communicating and a way of transferring information and knowledge. The use of a story assists in breaking up complex concepts and simplifying them for better understanding and for implanting them in the memory. Storytelling was transplanted into the business world many years ago, and has had great benefits for businesses (Scheerder, Karreman & de Jong, 2017).

In this chapter a review of existing critical literature on this topic will be conducted in order to enrich the understanding of the elements of what makes it difficult for knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA environment, as well as what the concept of storytelling can offer. The outcome of the literature review would be to understand whether there could be a link between storytelling and improved employee engagement among knowledge workers.

2.2 The business Operating Environment

2.2.1 The VUCA environment

The business operating environment has changed and will continue to change with new threats being made by factors like new markets, competition and technology advancements. The acronym VUCA is defined as "a term used to describe the challenges that are surrounding the business environment in terms of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity" (Saleh & Watson, 2017, p. 711).

The acronym VUCA was initially used by the United States war college to prepare army leaders for what to expect on the battlefield, and customised various drills to simulate conditions in times of war (Cousins, 2018). The concept was then later used to describe the business operating environment with a focus on the digital economy and the competitive nature of the landscape (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

A number of factors critical to successful operating in the VUCA environment have been identified, such as leadership agility, stakeholder management, team resilience and dynamic planning, all of which require in-depth connection with the employees to enable them to deliver on these terms (Saleh & Watson, 2017).

The four elements of VUCA, according to Saleh and Watson (2017), work simultaneously and cause the navigation of the business environment to be truly challenging.

Volatility in the business environment is seen as the rate, size and degree of turbulence of change. The change and the challenge associated with it are unexpected and could be sufficiently unstable to lead to further change again. The duration of the phases of this volatility is unknown, which impacts on the possibility of the accurate planning of counter measures.

The uncertainty element is not knowing what needs to be known to make informed decisions, as the outcome of any decision is uncertain in advance. In most situations the reasons for the change and a possible outcome can be assumed, but change is not always going to happen for sure, and this is where the uncertainty lies (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

The term "complexity" in VUCA refers to the different elements of the business internally and externally, which are all interconnected or hyper connected, as per the top trend in human capital (Deloitte, 2016). This complexity may result in the management being

overwhelmed due to the nature of the complexity or the volume of the interconnected parts.

The last term of VUCA, "ambiguity", suggests all the options which are available when making decisions. The outcomes of any decision are very uncertain and could be multiple (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Gandhi, 2017; Saleh & Watson, 2017).

These terms are integrated and connected, as the complexity causes difficulty in navigating the environment, the uncertainty is linked with the ambiguity of multiple outcomes, and the direction of the choices to make could change rapidly due to the volatility.

2.2.2 The challenges for knowledge workers in the VUCA environment

The knowledge workers in business are continuously being challenged by various elements of the VUCA environment. These elements, according to Gandhi (2017), include communication, constant learning, flexible plans, reinventing the wheel, and digitisation.

Communication is a vital challenge due to the rate of change in the volatility of the environment, which creates a gap which makes it difficult for leadership to communicate to their workers the need to change direction or to stay on the existing path (Cousins, 2018). The effect is that business units in the organisation may not be aligned, which would create disengagement. Constant learning is a further necessity which is a challenge, as information and knowledge need to be acquired continuously about the changing environment and how to be able to adapt to the change (Bartscht, 2015). When organisational learning is not done in a continuous fashion, the organisation will be left behind (Cousins, 2018). The flexibility of plans is aligned to continuous learning, because as the continuous learning feeds information and knowledge to the relevant decision makers, the plans can be changed to ensure relevancy (Cousins, 2018). Reinventing the wheel is a continuous challenge for organisations, as the element of change is constant. Adapting to that change is then also continuous and is seen as a challenge. New technologies are shaping the way business is conducted, and digitisation is difficult to adopt in businesses due to its cost and the existence of legacy systems (Gandhi, 2017; Reddy & Reinartz, 2017).

2.2.3 Navigating through the VUCA environment

Acknowledging the impact of the VUCA elements has possibly been used as a crutch to excuse avoiding the hard work of continuously and proactively putting in the effort of

changing the planning and direction (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Each of the elements can be addressed by a business having the agility to combat the volatility of the environment (Saleh & Watson, 2017). It would also need to build in extra capacity in its teams to ensure they are prepared and have the resources to change appropriately.

Uncertainty can be combatted by developing a clear understanding of who the stakeholders are and what they need, as well as by understanding the planning, and furthermore that the planning may need to change due to the volatility. The uncertainty can further be addressed by ensuring continuous organisational learning to generate information about the environment internally and externally (Bartscht, 2015). The learning, according to Cousins (2018), is cumulative and also incremental, which means that it needs to be continuous to reach its maximum effect. Together with the possible extra resource capacity, a team could be structurally optimised to expand its operations to information analysis and environmental scanning (Saleh & Watson, 2017; Cousins, 2018). The structures are created to obtain and analyse the latest information possible, where in the past with stable operating environments successful reactions to change came through the use of expertise and routine, and then scaling up or down to meet the requirement or be competitive in the market (Felin & Powell, 2016).

This capability may be internal or outsourced for a dedicated organisation that specialises in generating environmental insights. This major capability of information generation includes the very important aspect of communicating the information to the key decision makers in a timely and clear manner so that they can draw insights from it to influence their decision making (Cousins, 2018). Complexity is then managed by managing the knowledge and structuring it in order to produce clarity. The structure could be interlinked with the extra resources, and the leadership would do well to optimise the building of capabilities in the organisation (Felin & Powell, 2016; Saleh & Watson, 2017; Cousins, 2018).

Lastly the ambiguity will be managed by developing a vision that includes elements of the organisation's culture and values, by understanding the unknown and generating more certainty on the multiple outcomes possible arising from the multiple possible decisions that could be taken. The best tool to make use of is experimentation with the different options. Experimentation may take many shapes and forms, including prototyping and small-scale experiments that are low-risk. The lessons learnt should be broad enough to lead to an understanding of multiple possible outcomes.

2.3   Employee Engagement

2.3.1 What is employee engagement

Employee engagement is a construct which has been found in many fields of study and dates back more than two decades, when Kahn (1990) released an article based on personal engagement in the field of management. Kahn (1990) created the initial definition of engagement as: "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694).

From a physical perspective, Khan's definition suggests that there is a level of commitment and an expected contribution that the employee makes towards his/her organisation. The term "engagement" represents many physical aspects including "cocreation, interaction, solution development, and so on" (Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 498). In the current VUCA environment it is vital that knowledge workers are engaged for the survival and sustainability of their organisations. Cognitively, employee engagement is a mind-set of the individual that drives the person's behaviour, and not a characteristic which an individual either owns or does not own (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). It is dependent on the attitude of the employee, which drives the employee's behaviour in the organisation.

According to Kumar and Pansari (2016) employee engagement is made up of a number of dimensions including: "employee satisfaction, employee identification, employee commitment, employee loyalty, and employee performance" (p. 500). Employee engagement has been investigated through using empirical research to establish what influences it positively (Lu et al., 2018; Kumar & Pansari, 2016) as well as why it is that when employees are engaged at work their organisational commitment and productivity is increased (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010; Lu et al., 2018). Employees who are committed and engage with their organisation are those that understand the goals of the organisation and have clarity on what their roles and responsibilities are that will contribute towards the organisational goals (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). This leads back to ensuring clarity when considering the VUCA environment and having the agility and sufficiently good communication to create engagement in knowledge workers (Saleh & Watson, 2017). According to Mani (2011) an employee who is considered engaged is constantly making sense of the business environment, and works as a team member to improve organisational performance. For an organisation to successfully navigate through the VUCA environment, it is clear that it needs employees whose engagement

leads to an increase of commitment and productivity that would assist the organisation to succeed (Rich et al*.,* 2010; Saleh & Watson, 2017; Lu et al., 2018).

According to Han, Han and Brass (2014), the formation of strong networks between individuals in a working environment will encourage innovative thinking and creativity, possibly due to their trust, open communication and alignment. Employees are driven by teams which have good social capital, including elements such as the communicating and sharing of information, and psychological and emotional support. According to Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013) the concept of employee engagement was created in a business setting as an approach to fostering employees' commitment to the business, which leads to job satisfaction and therefore to the wellbeing of the employees (Warr & Inceoglu, 2015) while simultaneously driving business goals (Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013). They note that employee engagement and job satisfaction together raise the morale of the teams of knowledge workers while driving the business goals.

It is important, then, for people leaders in VUCA environments to ensure individual employee engagement among knowledge workers, as well as in the teams, to form strong networks and develop trust among the members of the team through communication. The outcome of good employee engagement is the attainment of the goals of the organisation's strategy and of a competitive advantage for the organisation (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

2.3.2 Leadership influences on employee engagement

In a work environment there is a clear difference between a manager and a leader. The managers simply organise the functions of the employees and the leader goes above and beyond to engage with the employees. The missing piece is the connection between the individuals (Stallard, 2015).

A one-on-one interaction or mentoring session may be used to further the interaction between managers and employees. Employees are motivated by their managers, and their behaviour is aligned to performance (Kim, Egan, Kim & Kim, 2013). When managers provide good communication in an environment for active listening and provide feedback which the employee can utilise for positive outcomes, this drives empowerment, engages employees, and drives performance (Ho, 2014).

2.3.3 Types of employee engagement

According to the Gallup (2012) state of the global workplace report, there are three types of employee engagement. They are different in the way in which the employees behave towards their organisations.

The first type of employee engagement is known as engaged employees. These employees are the main driving force of the organisation and perform their tasks with a great amount of passion for the organisation. Engaged employees have a deep connection with their organisation and team members, and live for the organisation's values and goals. They are inspired to drive innovation and creative thinking through the solution identification processes (Han, Han & Brass, 2014). They engage in the mission of building the organisation through the exercise of values like cooperation with others, passion, enthusiasm and commitment. They understand what their jobs require of them and mostly perform beyond expectations with the motivation of improving the organisation.

The second type of employee is one that is not engaged. Those who are not engaged are present at work but their contribution is limited and there is a lack of connection to the organisation and what it is trying to achieve. These employees have no passion for what they should be doing in the work setting and have no enthusiasm to perform their tasks well or even to go beyond what their tasks require of them in the interest of the organisation. The focus of these unengaged employees is to simply do their job and no more, which may impact on team effectiveness and dynamics. They have no concern for productivity or output. They do not consider the purpose of their jobs or the role of their teams, and they may possibly not even care for the customers they are serving. They are difficult to identify as their nature and work is not disruptive, but they have little if any impact on the organisation's goals.

The third and last type of employee is one that is actively disengaged. These employees are unhappy and dissatisfied with their work situation, as is evident in their behaviour. Sometimes actively disengaged employees consciously make efforts to damage their organisations. All aspects of their performance are affected, including their wellbeing, as they may take more sick leave, are absent more often, and are the reason for a dip in the quality of the organisation's products and services. These employees are the total opposite of engaged employees and, to the detriment of the engaged employees, these employees actively attempt to influence or undo the value contributed by the engaged employees (Gallup, 2012).

2.3.4 Challenges in employee engagement

When employees are engaged, a number of benefits to the business are identifiable, but when employees are disengaged the implication for the organisation could be detrimental. According to Clifford (2015) disengaged workers in the United States caused the country a loss of up to $550 billion in one year. In South Africa, according to Business Essentials (2017), a total of 45% of employees are disengaged to the point of actively indicating that they are dissatisfied as employees. This figure has been constant at 45% since 2013 (Gavett & Berinato, 2013). A further 46% of employees in South Africa are not engaged, which means that they lack the passion and energy to perform their tasks, and only 9% of employees are engaged (Business Essentials, 2017), which is less than the 13% of employees who are engaged globally (Gallup, 2012) .

According to Saks and Gruman (2014) two main themes have emerged from the management-focussed literature on employee engagement in the last few years. The first of these is that the concept of employee engagement is the key reason for success and competitive advantage in organisations and that employee engagement will indicate a number of benefits like productivity and profitability. The second is that employee engagement is in decline and that employees are becoming more disengaged at work. This has led to the thinking that there is an employee engagement gap which is having dramatic impacts on the organisations which these employees serve (Saks & Gruman, 2014). According to Khan (1990) disengagement was initially defined as: "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (p. 694).

Two different issues are identified with employee engagement throughout the literature, indicating that there is a lack of consensus as to what the term means (Cole, Walter, Bedeian & O'Boyle, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as having a number of parts: the "harnessing of organisation members'" selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances (p. 694). But according to Truss, employee engagement can simply be defined as the passion for work (Truss, 2008). Many have considered different constructs and definitions for the term "employee engagement", including "job engagement" (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010) or "work engagement" (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

Different methods and instruments have been created to measure employee engagement and a standardised method has not been defined or agreed upon (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Many problems have arisen due to this constraint, including ongoing concerns about the validity of historic metrics taken by previous measuring tools as new tools and methods are replacing obsolete methods. The result is that there is no accurate correlation or planning from past history. Further to these two issues, according to Saks and Gruman (2014) no theory of employee engagement has been formally developed. The different naming conventions for the term "employee engagement" and the complex nature of the concept have been influenced by many different factors, one of which is social learning theory.

2.3.5 Attributes of engaged employees

According to Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) a number of attributes or characteristics become evident in the behaviour of engaged employees. These include the following:

- Engaged employees have a positive attitude towards their work as well as towards their organisation.
- The employee agrees with and aligns with the values of the organisation and believes in the purpose of the organisation.
- The work ethic of the employee is that of always striving to actively improve the state and condition of the organisation.
- The employee lives out the values of the organisation as well as his/her own personal values of respect for all individuals, and assists colleagues to continuously improve their performance.
- Engaged employees have trust and are reliable. They take responsibility and ownership of their tasks and decisions. Where employees who are not engaged do only what is asked of them, engaged employees go above and beyond what is required of them for the greater good of the organisation.
- Engaged employees always do what is in the best interests of the organisation rather than their own interests.
- They identify with the values, purpose and goals of the organisation and are aligned with its direction.
- Engaged employees are continually investigating and discovering what the latest trends are as well as the newest developments in their field of work. They scan the operating environment for opportunities.
- These employees are continuously finding opportunities to improve the productivity and performance of the organisation.

2.3.6 Importance of employee engagement in a VUCA environment

Organisations are led by their leaders and driven by their employees, so it is imperative to ensure that the employees are engaged. According to the Gallup (2012) report, employee engagement is a very important forecaster of performance in an organisation.

According to the research done by Gallup (2012) there are a number of measurements of employee engagement:

- **Absenteeism**: There is a relatively large difference of up to 37% less absenteeism in organisations with engaged employees, compared with organisations with employees who are not engaged or are disengaged. The increase is understood to have an impact on productivity and to lead to output by the employee, which affects the performance indicators. More time may be spent by the employee at work, passionately driving actions that influence the organisation.

- **Safety incidents**: Organisations with engaged employees have 48% less safety incidents. Engaged employees care about the environment and are careful to follow policies and procedures and avoid unnecessary incidents.

- **Quality**: With employees who are engaged at work, 41% fewer defects in quality are identified. The engaged employee workforce is more productive and more efficient with fewer defects in their output.

- **Customer ratings**: With an engaged workforce, customer ratings are 10% higher than with organisations with low levels of employee engagement.

- **Productivity**: Organisations with highly engaged employees can be up to 21% more productive than organisations with low levels of engagement. Productivity increases output and delivery timelines and drives innovation through solution design.

- **Profitability**: The reason for the existence of organisations is to influence and drive the bottom line and create value. Organisations that have engaged employees perform 22% better than organisations without engaged employees.

2.4   Storytelling

2.4.1 What is storytelling?

Stories have been told since time immemorial, and many of them have involved sharing knowledge, influencing and persuading (Scheerder, Karreman & de Jong, 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018). Individuals and social groups have told stories in different ways, through different media, from pictures painted on a cave wall to writing in a book, a blog

post, or merely whispers round a fireside (Küpers, Mantere & Statler, 2013; Barter & Tregidga, 2014; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Conrad, 2016; Spear & Roper, 2016).

According to Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs and Saylors (2013), storytelling is defined as: "the intraplay of grand (master) narratives (epistemic or empiric) with living stories (their ontological webs of relations)" (p. 558). This indicates that stories are connected and linked with real life experiences to make the story more relatable to the audience. Stories are narratives that allow for communication through a distinct "story format", guiding the interpreter to an underlying or specifically stated action outcome or goal to be achieved (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack, Kraiczy, von Schlippe & Hack, 2016). They are a memorable means of transferring and retaining information in a clear and easy-to-understand format (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Martin, 2016). Furthermore, stories can give the listeners a sense of meaning and a shared sense of inclusion with a common direction and understanding (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al., 2016).

According to Dailey and Browning (2014) one element of a good story is the inclusion of a sense of time and place. Listeners will want to know where and when the story played out. This suggests that stories have meaning in context, and the meaning may change, based on the context (Tesler, Mohammed, Hamilton, Mancuso & McNeese, 2017). Due to the personal nature of the sharing of stories, they need to be emotionally charged and need to shape a new reality for the listener. They are constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end, and incorporate a climax and possibly conflict, which would be experienced by listeners who connect with the narrative emotionally and experience empathy with the characters and events (Tesler et al., 2017).

Narratives have four main features: they "(1) foreshadow a problem, (2) provide a sequential rendering of actions in the face of complications leading toward resolution, (3) achieve closure, [and] (4) invite or pronounce moral implications" (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 32). Stories further need to be believed and related to the audience, or they stand the chance to become untold stories which gets forgotten and loses their impact to the audience (Näslund & Pemer, 2012).

2.4.2 Narrative paradigm theory
Narrative paradigm theory is part of communication theory and adopted from some of the earliest ways in history of communicating through telling stories which represent reality (Rosile et al., 2013; Zwack et al., 2016). The theory claims that people are born storytellers, that meaningful communication through stories is influenced by past

experiences (Rosile et al., 2013), and that stories can influence behaviour through formulating a symbolic goal or action that the listeners relate to (Zwack et al., 2016). A narrative is defined as a "discursive way in which we organize, account for, give meaning to, and understand, that is, give structure and coherence to, the circumstances and the events in our lives" (Tesler et al., 2017, p. 8). From there, the two main principles of narrative paradigm theory are coherence, indicating the effectiveness of communicating the message, and fidelity, indicating the credibility of a story (Rosile et al., 2013).

According to Tesler et al. (2017) the narrative paradigm theory assists teams and organisations to create a sense of trust, good communication and collaboration through the tool of storytelling. The aim is to create the effective performance of the team or organisation, and according to the theory more rapid development will occur. The nature of stories is that they are memorable, easy to understand, and have commonality with other stories, which lends them a feeling of credibility (Zwack et al., 2016).

2.4.3 Organisational storytelling

Organisations experience continuous change and continuous efforts are required to assist in creating stability and a level of constancy in response to this, which can be achieved through storytelling (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Tesler et al., 2017). Organisational storytelling has been understood to: "capture organizational life in a way that no compilation of facts ever can … because they are carriers of life itself, not just 'reports' on it" (Küpers et al., 2013, p. 84).

Storytelling is a powerful tool for communication in business and can be effectively used to communicate the future direction of the organisation to individuals inside the organisation (Chen, 2012; Petrick, 2014; Mazzei, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016). The employees are the senders and receivers of the internal messages (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016) of the organisation, and the technique of storytelling has proved to be an effective method of deconstructing complex ideas into understandable elements of a vision (Küpers et al., 2013; Conrad, 2016; Scheerder, Karreman & de Jong, 2017; Strategic Direction, 2017; Tesler et al., 2017), making it possible for the listeners to relay the essence of the message.

The communication of a well formulated story enables social learning by improving the sense-making of individuals in the organisation, reframing their understanding and decreasing their levels of uncertainty, thus generating clarity about the context of the organisation (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Tesler et al., 2017). Further, storytelling inspires

creativity by identifying innovative means of communicating, which could extend to building a corporate culture (Barter & Tregidga, 2014).

The repetition of the organisational story that is being told and retold is vitally important to making the story memorable (Martin, 2016) and easy to retell and circulate accurately (Dailey & Browning, 2014). The retelling of the organisational story creates a better understanding of the organisation by the storyteller too, and the repetition allows for easier recall of the essence of the story (Mushin, 2000; Dailey & Browning, 2014). According to Näslund and Pemer (2012), storytelling creates an environment for the retelling of the dominant stories being told in the organisation, to ensure an understanding of the organisation and to make sense of the relation between organisational change and stability. What storytelling is aimed at achieving is to communicate change (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Spear & Roper, 2016), but more than communicating it, it needs to alter the listener's beliefs and association with current reality. Therefore stories are understood to have a certain amount of power over the future direction of the organisation, because the storytellers have control over their expression of meanings, values and emotions (Küpers et al., 2013).

2.4.4 Challenges of storytelling

The negative side of storytelling is the possibility of unofficial stories being told to negatively influence the power structures of the organisation with possible undesirable effects on the employees' behaviours. This can be cross-linked to their understanding of the organisational values (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Schneider, Ehrhart & Macey, 2013; Spear & Roper, 2016). Stories are usually told from one perspective, and the silent voices, indicating the audience and the executors of the vision, need to be heard in context and a sense of collaboration to execution is needed for success of the story (Barter & Tregidga, 2014). In social settings, individuals regularly share negative information between themselves, yet this negative storytelling has given rise to a limited amount of study (Martin, 2016). The challenge when stories are retold is that the message which is being transferred is that of the storyteller's understanding of the original story and it could be distorted, or the same story told over could lead to boredom (Dailey & Browning, 2014).

2.5   Storytelling effecting employee engagement

2.5.1 What is known about storytelling and employee engagement

The telling of established stories about the organisation and its goals will theoretically assist in shaping increased levels of cohesion and trust, leading to engagement in

employees, because of their social interaction and shared experiences (Tesler et al., 2017). As a result, having more engaged employees could translate into positive internal and external organisational communication, with the possibility of influencing the reputation of the organisation and building the brand (Baker, 2014; Scheerder, Karreman & de Jong, 2017).

2.5.2 The gaps in the literature

Narrative paradigm theory suggests but does not empirically indicate that using storytelling could be a mechanism to drive the communication of organisational goals to various stakeholders and also allow for the easier understanding and sense-making of the goals to construct their possible impact (Mushin, 2000; Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al., 2016; Tesler et al., 2017).

Storytelling is a great tool for sharing information but as the tool is perceived to be informal, an assumption that team members share knowledge through stories proactively cannot be made (Tesler et al., 2017). In an empirical study by Küpers et al. (2013), the term "storytelling" is found to have different meanings and associations from one individual to the next which makes the implementation of the construct context specific and difficult to implement through a single framework.

2.6   Conclusion

The literature indicates that employee engagement is important for organisations when considering performance. The concept of storytelling has been considered in the areas of improving communication and making sense of complex concepts. The literature also suggests elements of storytelling which could assist in driving employee engagement, but no empirical evidence has proven that they are effective for that purpose. Very limited sources have uncovered a clear link between storytelling and employee engagement among knowledge workers. This study therefore takes advantage of this indeterminacy to investigate this issue for academic as well as for business purposes.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature through the literature review illustrated that the research study is focused on three main questions, which are used to develop insights about the elements addressed in the questions, through the collection of primary data from semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Research Questions

Research Question One:

<u>What are the challenges to engaging knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?</u>

This question looks at the operating environment in which knowledge workers operate. The operating environment specifically focused on is the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguity) environment, and it is asked how knowledge workers navigate around that environment. This leads to a contextual understanding of what employee engagement means and determines whether the concept is important for organisations. Further investigation is conducted into what occurs when employees are not engaged, or disengaged, and an understanding of the depth of the concept is attained through a consideration of whether or not employee engagement is measured in any form in the organisation and whether the measurement tool is accurate and valuable.

Research Question Two:

<u>What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?</u>

The aim of this research question is to establish a baseline as to whether storytelling was understood as a concept in the organisation. An investigation is conducted into the understanding of storytelling as well as the contextual uses of the term and the media through which storytelling can be communicated most effectively. The different sections of a story are explored as well as whether a negative angle to storytelling exists.

Research Question Three:

<u>How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?</u>

This question builds on the previous two questions with the objective of exploring the outcomes of having employee engagement even in a VUCA environment. This is followed by the exploration of what is believed to be the outcome of delivering a successful and effective story through storytelling in an organisational setting. The two constructs are then finally considered in parallel to understand if storytelling, if done effectively, could drive enhanced employee engagement among knowledge workers.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This section discusses the research methodology used in this study as well as the research design that will assist in answering the research questions. The literature review in Chapter 2 suggested that storytelling as a mechanism to drive employee engagement have not been fully explored. The research questions in Chapter 3 were created in an exploratory nature as a result of the literature review and to uncover insights on the topic. This study makes use of a qualitative research design which is exploratory in nature to understand and gather insights into whether storytelling assists in driving employee engagement among knowledge workers. The methodology and design, sampling methods, data collection and the techniques used for analysis of the data, were chosen and utilised to support the qualitative nature of the study. The researcher needed to take cognisance of the limitations of the research and other potential issues such as reliability and validity.

4.2 Research Methodology and Design

There are various data collection methods, and the choice of a research design is based on the type of research outcome which is intended. The quantitative approach is more objective in nature due to the structured element of collecting data, and more often than not it is used to test a theory (Park & Park, 2016). The data collected is quantifiable and can be used to infer a generalisation to the population the sample is associated with.

A mixed method approach is used when researchers "collect, analyze, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data within a study or program of inquiry to generate conclusions that are more credible or convincing" (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018, p. 980).

The use of the qualitative research approach is well suited for exploratory purposes whereby the researcher may uncover new insights about a topic that is yet to be understood and generate meaning from it (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Flick, 2018). Exploratory research is further useful when there are limitations and gaps in the existing body of knowledge and the approach is used to listen to participants and understand the way they think as well as their perceptions and experiences to generate insights and meaning (Park & Park, 2016; Flick, 2018).

The qualitative approach seeks to understand "how people construct the world around them, what they are doing, how they are doing it or what is happening to them in terms

that are meaningful and that offer rich insights" (Flick, 2018, p. 3). The qualitative research approach strives to find insights by making sense of people's perceptions, beliefs and understanding. For this research study a qualitative research approach was followed to explore more deeply the motivations behind employee engagement and to discover insights into the participants' thoughts and feelings in relation to storytelling in an organisation (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

The purpose of the research was to explore the beliefs, perceptions and understanding from participants of their operating environment, employee engagement and the mechanism of storytelling. The aim is to uncover insights of the attributes of employee engagement and storytelling to find insights on the understanding between the constructs and whether storytelling could drive employee engagement in a VUCA operating environment. The purpose of the research was not to make statistical inferences between these concepts among different environments, but rather for investigation of insights to gain an understanding through experiences and beliefs (Mills & Birks, 2014).

The data of the research study was collected from middle to senior managers of knowledge workers in various South African organisations who are operating in a VUCA environment. The data was collected through the study that took place in a short period and at a particular point which is indicative of cross-sectional in nature as opposed to longitudinal (Turner, 2010; Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

The interpretivist philosophy was adopted, as this was an attempt to reach a subjective understanding of an issue (Mills & Birks, 2014), having to do in particular with the motivations and challenges of what employee engagement means for the social actors in a complex business context, as well as what shapes their reality through their social interactions, to discover if storytelling as a mechanism could drive engagement. The ontology and epistemology is thus subjective, as this was an exploration of perceptions and the realities behind the perceptions in relation to the topic of the research.

Explorative research lends itself to the adoption of an inductive approach to gaining understanding (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Mills & Birks, 2014), the purpose of which in this case is to gain new insights into using storytelling as a mechanism for fostering engagement. The process allows for understanding unquantifiable data through an interpretation of the knowledge shared by social actors on the topic of storytelling and engagement. This means that the knowledge shared consists of opinions, which are

subjective (Lichtman, 2014). The approach is flexible in that the direction the research takes is provided and guided by the insights gained. As limited research has been done on storytelling as a mechanism for driving engagement, this approach allowed for deeper understanding and the unveiling of new insights.

4.3   Population

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) a population is the complete set of members from which a sample is derived. The research population consisted of middle to senior managers of knowledge workers in various South African organisations, specifically those who have to engage with employees in the organisation. The population spans across a number of industries to gather insights across industries in the same population with a focus on telecommunications, internet technology and fixed line communications, banking and insurance industries across multinationals and consultancy firms.

4.4   Sampling

4.4.1 Sampling method

The sampling technique that was used included non-probability sampling which was judgemental rather than random sampling. This allowed the researcher to use his own judgement to select the participants that would provide the relevant insights for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique that is deliberate in selecting the participants based on specific qualities or characteristics that the individuals have (Etikan, Musa & Sunu, 2016), which in this study is that they are middle to senior managers of knowledge workers in the selected industries that operate in a VUCA environment. In addition, snowball sampling was also used as participants who were interviewed suggested the selection of other individuals in the population to take part in the study that assisted in gaining access to more senior managers for this study. Snowball sampling is useful for a researcher who has a limited number of direct contacts in the targeted organisations. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

An agreement was made with the participants to keep the information shared through the data collection process anonymous as well as their personal details and the names of the organisations that employee the participants. In this research study the participants have been referred to numerically, for example, Participant 1 and the organisations have been identified merely by their industry.

4.4.2 Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis assists in defining the objects of what is researched as well as the level at which the research is conducted (Dolma, 2010). For this research study, which involved middle to senior managers of knowledge workers, the unit of analysis was the perceptions of the people leaders and knowledge workers about the mechanism of storytelling for employee engagement. Throughout the interview and uncovering insights from the participants, the researcher could gain an understanding and insights about the VUCA environment the participants are operating in as well as the importance of employee engagement in their organisations and finally the mechanism of storytelling and whether it could drive employee engagement according to the participants' perceptions and beliefs.

4.4.3 Sample size

The qualitative research approach adopted in this study required a small sample size of twelve managers of knowledge workers, or that sampling continue until saturation was reached. Sampling was conducted in this study because it would have been impractical to survey the whole population, the results would have become saturated after a while, and every research project is subject to time constraints (Flick, 2018). This too means that the sample was not representative of the population. Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to the official interviews to ensure quality of questions in the interview. These two pilot interviews were not included due to the interviews being too short in timeframe which restricted insights.

4.4.4 Sample consideration

The sample consisted of twelve middle to senior managers of knowledge workers that operate in a VUCA environment which was initially derived from the industry and confirmed in the interviews. To ensure a spread across the different industries, four middle to senior managers were from the telecommunications industry, two managers were from the banking industry, three managers were from the internet technology industry, two managers were from the fixed communications industry which one was in a chief executive position, and one manager from the insurance industry. The interviews were conducted in the Gauteng province of South Africa mostly in the Johannesburg, Midrand and Pretoria regions.

Table 1: Participants in sample

Participant	Industry	Position	Location
Participant 1	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	Midrand
Participant 2	Banking	Manager	Johannesburg
Participant 3	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	Johannesburg
Participant 4	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	Midrand
Participant 5	Telecommunications	Senior Specialist	Midrand
Participant 6	Internet Technology	Programme Manager	Johannesburg
Participant 7	Telecommunications	Executive Head of Department	Midrand
Participant 8	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	Midrand
Participant 9	Insurance	Broker	Pretoria
Participant 10	Fixed line communications	Programme Specialist	Johannesburg
Participant 11	Banking	Senior Manager	Johannesburg
Participant 12	Fixed line communications	Chief Commercial Officer	Johannesburg

In an organisation the managers that lead the employees are crucially important to driving engagement in the team and this research was focussed on middle to senior managers due to their influence on employee engagement (Reina, Rogers, Peterson, Byron & Hom, 2018). For this research study the managers were identified as managers in a VUCA environment that have constant engagement with their employees to the extent of influencing them on future direction of the department or the organisation. Due to the nature of storytelling mostly being practiced by management, the perceptions of employees have been noted as possibly future studies to gather their observation around the drive to employee engagement.

There is a shortage in the literature that empirically contains evidence of the possibility that storytelling is a mechanism to drive employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

4.5   Data collection Instrument

The researcher made use of an interview guideline as part of the qualitative study to be used as a tool to guide the interview through ensuring coverage of the research questions set out for the study, and still keeping to a semi-structured approach for exploration of insights, thus the data collection instrument was the interview guideline

(Azorín & Cameron, 2010; Flick, 2018). It needs to be stated up front, though, that the data generated here would be difficult to replicate due to the dynamic and complex nature of the research and that the research was conducted at a point in time, cross-sectional in nature (Turner, 2010). In accordance with the dicta of Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009), clear notes about the research design, the strategy and the methods utilised in the study were kept, so that other researchers might understand the assumptions and choices made and thus attempt to get similar outcomes.

The data collection process utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which had three main sections aligned to the research objectives and research questions, including discussions around the operating environment, employee engagement and storytelling. The nine interview questions guided the conversation through a list of themes identified through the literature review in an open-ended nature due to the complexity of the topics and to uncover insights from the participants (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

The interview guideline was used to ensure alignment between the literature which was reviewed together with the research objectives and questions stipulated and then placed according to the interview questions. The alignment can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Research questions aligned to interview questions

Research questions (RQ)		Interview questions (Q)	
RQ 1	What are the challenges to engaging knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?	Q 1	With the rapid change of business due to new technologies, business models, competitors and markets, what does it mean for you and your knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environment?
		Q 2	What are some of the challenges for you and your knowledge workers to navigate in and around the VUCA environment?
		Q 3	What does employee engagement mean for you? a) Why is employee engagement in knowledge workers

			important or not so important to you?
			b) If so, how do you measure employee engagement in your organisation?
RQ 2	What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?	Q 4	Have you heard of a technique called storytelling in your organisation or through your experiences? If so, What is your understanding of storytelling in a corporate setting?
		Q 5	How do you think an effective story should be formulated (what are the different parts to the story)?
		Q 6	How do you think you can execute an effective story to knowledge workers?
RQ 3	How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?	Q 7	What do you think is the outcome of effective storytelling in your organisation?
		Q 8	What is the result of increased employee engagement in knowledge workers?
		Q 9	If so, how do you think storytelling serves as a mechanism for enhancing employee engagement in knowledge workers?

The level of responsibility for preparation was deemed important for the researcher to ensure the interviews would be conducted in an orderly fashion by planning the interviews in the correct locations, be prepared for the interview and ensure reliability (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Flick, 2018). To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher needed to have a high level of knowledge of his topic and definitions and to be well prepared. The researcher was able to supply the interviewee with the right level of information to form a good basis of understanding when answering the questions in context. The researcher was appropriately dressed in order to convey an appearance of reliability. The nine interview questions were open-ended and not leading, and were

based on a list of themes. The researcher then applied active listening techniques to show interest and gain an in-depth understanding of the answers provided. The location was situated in a one-on-one boardroom setting and was used to collect primary data and further to ensure privacy and clarity without distractions whilst the interview is taking place (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The choice of location was important to ensure the quality of the audio recordings made.

Before the actual interviews took place, two pilot interviews were conducted to validate the clarity of the research questions for the interviewer and to ensure that the participants understood the terminology, as well as to confirm the estimated duration. The interviews took approximately 45 minutes to complete, and all interviews were completed over a period of a month. The interviews were recorded by taking handwritten notes and were also recorded using a voice recorder after prior permission had been granted by the interviewees through a consent letter prior to the interview and a printed version signed at the interview. The voice recordings assisted with clarity when the captured data were transposed, and also assisted the researcher to focus on the conversation instead of focussing on record keeping (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

During the interview process, the researcher had ensured to establish rapport by introducing himself and explaining the purpose of conducting the research study. This was done to create a sharing atmosphere and an environment for safely sharing experiences (Mills & Birks, 2014). The researcher explained the motivation of the study to be using the information shared by the participant to gain understanding and insights about the participant's experiences and perceptions about their operating environment, employee engagement and understanding of storytelling. The research was conducted and concluded with maintaining rapport and requesting and additional comments to add before concluding the interview and closing with thanking the participant for their time.

4.6   Analysis Approach

4.6.1 Data analysis tool

The data that was collected from the interviews were transcribed and inserted into a qualitative data analysis computer software program, ATLAS.ti, to assist with the analysing of the data from the participants.

4.6.2 Interview transcript preparation

The interviews that were conducted was recorded in an audio format and the researcher transcribed the twelve interviews digitally in Microsoft Word. The manual notes taken by

the researcher were digitised and added to the transcribed data to elaborate on the insights where necessary. The researcher verified the content and backed up the recordings and the data to a cloud storage location.

4.6.3 Method of analysis

A thematic analysis process was followed which involves searching for common themes in the responses of the interviewees. The transcribed data were coded in ATLAS.ti based on a thematic analysis categorised according to the operating environment, employee engagement and storytelling. The themes having been suggested by the literature review, research questions as well as the interviews. According to Denscombe (2010), qualitative data needs to be analysed through an iterative process firstly by coding the data systematically, and then categorising them into general groups, after which the main themes are identified to uncover patterns. This was done using ATLAS.ti. Lastly the patterns were used to draw conclusions about the data and new concepts which had emerged through the insights drawn in the context of the research objectives and questions.

4.7   Data Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research studies the trustworthiness of the research is based on the validity and the reliability of the research due to the nature of qualitative studies that do not have measurable instruments with established metric, it is important to indicate reliability and validity of the study (Shenton, 2004). The research findings of the study need to be deemed trustworthy based on four elements namely credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Shenton, 2004; Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.7.1 Credibility

The credibility element considers whether that which the research study sets out to measure is what was originally intended to test by the researcher and seen as internal validity (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of research is one of the most important factors of the trustworthiness of a research study and provisions could be made by the researcher to ensure correct and well established research methods are utilised. In this research study the data collection instrument was reviewed by an ethical board and the methods during the data collection process as well as the analysis process was followed according to established methods. Qualitative research studies could further make use of triangulation to indicate the credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004). An aspect of triangulation is to utilise a wide range of various participants to triangulate by the different data sources. In this research study there were five different industries part of the

research study to ensure credibility of the findings from twelve different participants that allowed the measuring of different views and range of experiences.

4.7.2 Transferability

The research study should be able to be externally validated through being applied and extended to other environments or situations including different contexts (Shenton, 2004). The sample of qualitative research is usually small at an average of 20 participants and the sample is not representative to generalise the findings to the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Flick, 2018). Nevertheless Denscombe (2010) is of the opinion that even the unique research studies may indicate an example of the population and thus could be cautiously transferred to other situations and contexts. To ensure transferability is possibly the researcher of this research study have followed the transferability guidelines according to Shenton (2004) and indicated the different industries in which the study was conducted as well as the geographical locations in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Further the researcher indicated the data collection methods that was used as well as the amount of interviews and the duration of the interviews with an interview guideline and schedule.

4.7.3 Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004) confirmability is the level of neutrality of the findings of the research study and that the researcher was not bias when conducting the research and gathering the findings to adjust the interpretation to the researcher's desired and preconceived outcomes. The use of triangulation is used to ensure confirmability and steer away from investigators bias (Shenton, 2004). The researcher have followed the guidelines of ensuring an audit trail of the research findings in the form of stored audio recordings of the interviews conducted as well as the transcriptions together with the ATLAS.ti coded software files. The methodology of the research have also been stipulated to allow for recreation of the process.

4.7.4 Dependability

Considering this element of reliability of the research findings, dependability concerns itself with the view that if the research is repeated in the same conditions and context that the findings should be similar (Shenton, 2014). The researcher ensured dependability through the identification of the research design and explained the process followed to the implementation of the research study. As part of the research conducted, the researcher made use of an interview guideline and explained the execution thereof in operational detail. An audit trail have been kept to ensure the study can be repeated.

4.8   Limitations

The research study of storytelling as a mechanism for employee engagement in a VUCA environment includes the perceptions, believes and insights of knowledge workers. There are a number of limitations encountered in the methodology due to the qualitative nature of the research, including:

- The researcher does not possess any formal training in conducting in-depth interviews and interviewer bias may have affected the interviewees' responses. The researcher had preconceived ideas of what the outcomes and answers would be, and this may have led the interviewees to respond accordingly (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

- Response bias could have occurred where the interviewee was uncomfortable in sharing information or personal experiences on topics such as dealing with engagement or storytelling due to a perception of its being sensitive in nature and out of a desire to avoid creating a negative impression (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This study assumed that there would be honest and candid responses from the interviewees, which is a limitation, as the information given was subjective perception and it would not be possible to validate it quantitatively.

- The small sample size of twelve participants and the non-probability judgemental sampling techniques together with the selected number of industries represented and the limitation of geographical locations in the region of the Gauteng province made the sample to not be representative of the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The population was further limited to middle to senior managers of employees and not extended to consider the view and perceptions of the employees whether storytelling could drive employee engagement.

- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, the effect of storytelling as a mechanism to drive engagement in a VUCA operating environment cannot be measured to the real effect storytelling has on employee engagement (Turner, 2010). In future a longitudinal study could be conducted to take into consideration the changing landscape of the operating environment as well as a quantitative research study to measure the effect.

4.9   Ethics of the study

This research study was conducted in an ethical manner and a number of steps have been followed to ensure this. The research methodology was created and a proposal document was sent to an ethical clearance committee and approval was received as

evident in Appendix A of this research study. The participants have signed an informed consent form prior to conducting of the interviews. The informed consent for was aligned to the ethical clearance submission and indicated to the participant that their personal details nor that of their employer organisation, will be referred to in the research study. During the research interview before the interview commenced, the researcher ensured the participant is aware that an audio recording was made of the interview which they provided consent for. Further on the audio recording as part of the introduction to the purpose of the research study, the researcher ensured the participant that their details are kept confidential on the research report and copies of the audio recordings as well as the informed consent forms will be kept for record purposes. During the introduction the researcher also stipulated that participation is voluntary and that the participant is willing to withdraw with no penalties if they wish. All participants were comfortable with the ethical approach. In the research study the names of the individuals were indicated as participants in numerical format from one to twelve. The organisations were only referred to as per the industry in which they belong and no organisational name have been disclosed in the study.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five presents the results and the key findings of the research study, which were obtained from twelve interviews with knowledge workers. The knowledge workers were chosen from a variety of organisations. The data collected through the process described in Chapter four were used to obtain the results in this chapter. The results were derived from the findings aligned to the research questions proposed in Chapter three:

Research Question One: What are the challenges to engaged knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?

Research Question Two: What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?

Research Question Three: How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?

As outlined in Chapter four, the results were derived from semi-structured interviews which were conducted face-to-face with knowledge workers in South Africa.

5.2 Sample Description

The members of the selected sample were knowledge workers variously representative of their industries, as reported in Chapter four. They included telecommunications, banking, internet technology, insurance, and fixed-line communications industries. All the organisations were in the Gauteng province in South Africa, spanning Johannesburg, Midrand and Pretoria, to ensure ease of access to the participants for data collection.

The participants held various positions in their organisations, from senior specialist managerial positions ranging to portfolio managers up to a chief executive officer. Their ages ranged from 28 to 46 and the average age of 37. All the participants in the sample met the criteria for being part of the research study, including operating in a VUCA environment and the characteristic of being classified as a knowledge worker and interacting with employees, as well as being managers on a regular basis.

Table 3 indicates the industry the participants operated in, as well as their positions, age, location and the duration of the interviews conducted.

Table 3: Participant details

Participant	Industry	Position	Age	Location	Duration of the interview
Participant 1	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	38	Midrand	22m47s
Participant 2	Banking	Manager	32	Johannesburg	20m13s
Participant 3	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	44	Johannesburg	30m40s
Participant 4	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	46	Midrand	32m38s
Participant 5	Telecommunications	Senior Specialist	28	Midrand	33m22s
Participant 6	Internet Technology	Programme Manager	36	Johannesburg	31m36s
Participant 7	Telecommunications	Executive Head of Department	36	Midrand	38m01s
Participant 8	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	37	Midrand	22m06s
Participant 9	Insurance	Broker	36	Pretoria	35m29s
Participant 10	Fixed line communications	Programme Specialist	42	Johannesburg	22m41s
Participant 11	Banking	Senior Manager	32	Johannesburg	39m05s
Participant 12	Fixed line communications	Chief Commercial Officer	38	Johannesburg	19m49s

5.3   Results

The results are categorised as per the research questions in Chapter three, expanding on the elements broken down in each research question that was put to the participants in the interviews.

5.3.1 Research question 1

What are the challenges to engaged knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?

The aim of this question was to understand whether the participants operate within a VUCA environment and the challenges according to them that are being faced in their organisations. Further exploration was undertaken to uncover themes relating to how they navigated around the challenges. This was coupled with the element of what employee engagement meant to them and whether it was important in their experience. The element of measuring employee engagement was then explored.

5.3.1.1 *The VUCA environment*

Interview question 1: "*With the rapid change of business due to new technologies, business models, competitors and markets, what does it mean for you and your knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environment?*"

The participants were asked to provide insights around whether they believed that they were operating in a VUCA environment and the challenges that were being faced in this environment. All twelve participants agreed and stated that they operated in a VUCA type of environment.

A number of characteristics were identified by the participants with regards to the elements of VUCA and represented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Drivers of VUCA

VUCA elements	Drivers impacting the VUCA elements
Volatility	Continuous change, Adapting to change, Change in market trends, Regulatory changes, Competition
Uncertainty	Lack of leadership, Lack of direction and transparency, Lack of good communication,
Complexity	Rate of change, Nontraditional competitors, New technological advances, Regulatory changes
Ambiguity	Multiple strategies, Uncertain outcomes

From a volatility perspective a number of elements of what influences their environment and made it volatile became evident. The most important element according to the participants was the element of change, and adapting to change was the biggest driver of volatility internally as well as in the external environment. Adaptability and the adoption of more efficient methods of delivery of products to the market were key initiatives. The rate of change was noted as being continuous and regular. Due to the amount of change that was happening so continuously, it was difficult for companies to have only one strategy that they were working towards. The strategy was continuously changing to ensure relevance in the market.

> Participant 1: *"If you are operating in an environment, you know there's always opportunities, you need to be quick to adapt to change."*
>
> Participant 2: *"What I've noticed over the past few years I've been working for them is traditionally they were running change as a waterfall approach. Typically, a project of change would run about 18 months and they've realised that this is too long because by the time you change, that the market has already moved and you're already irrelevant again. So they've… there's been a focus on agile, between projects and agile form to try and get, you know, things out quicker."*
>
> Participant 5: *"Almost every day things are changing and so on…It does make it very hard to stick to specific road maps and that kind of stuff because things are changing on a regular basis."*

Some of the changes were due to changes in trends in the market, which were indicated as new technologies that had been created, which changed the landscapes of the industry and possibly brought in new players. With the new technologies a shift to acquire the new skills to operate the technologies was in demand. The problem which had been created was that organisations were struggling to adapt quickly enough to respond to the changes happening in the market. According to participant 8, the driver was to increase efficiencies in the business and respond more quickly to change through implementing digitisation as a business operating model. Participants 6 and 8 noted that technology such as artificial intelligence was not a future technology, it was already present, and it needed to be adopted as soon as possible. Organisations that had not already planned to incorporate these technologies would be left behind, as participant 2 mentioned.

> Participant 2: *"So, we operate in the banking industry and the thing about the banking industry, is that it's under a lot of pressure to keep up with the latest trends and to stay relevant. They obviously feel very threatened because, you know there's Fintechs that's coming up, there's new technology, you know, and*

traditionally banks, especially the one I work for, they have a lot of legacy systems. And, you know, change, or being able to change rapidly is important for them."

Participant 6: "*And there's been a big shift to lots of new technology, more rapid things. As a company that we've had to completely change the way we…This creates, so that the whole industry as a whole, it's creating lots of volatility, lots of move to different technologies, new skills that are required, for instance if some of the skills that were hot skills two years ago, just, we don't use them anymore.*"
"*What we now do is we put a robotics programme in place to just take the people out doing menial jobs and replace that with robots doing menial things and get people to do the value-adding services around it.*"

Participant 7: "*And the frustration that we are seeing is that the organisation doesn't shift as easily as with what's happening in the market.*"

Participant 8: "*So challenges that we encounter is around efficiency and digitalisation and becoming a more stream-lined organisation.*" "*I mean, five years ago artificial intelligence and robotics wasn't on the cards. It was a, it was a pipe dream and now it's reality and it's also a big drive. So yes it does change. It makes us change our direction quite significantly.*"

Another large driver which four out of the twelve participants mentioned as being a difficult element to navigate around was that of regulation and the regulatory changes which affect their organisations and their operating models. The regulation and changes in regulation increased the complexity of their products, services and operations. According to participants 9 and 11, regulation changes gave rise to opportunities for innovation to combat or take advantage of the changes.

Participant 8: "*We also operate in a very regulated environment. So, so it is complex. Spectrum is obviously a big issue, so it creates a series of challenges that we need to abide by certain regulations while still making a profit.*"

Participant 9: "*Okay, so it's highly regulated. So and as much as there may be various technological advances and the like that are quite disruptive those very regulations sort of stem the flow of coming into the space, because while there may be someone who comes up with something fantastical, unless the regulator agrees with it, nothing can happen.*"

Participant 11: "*So not only is the market and the competitors volatile, but also the regulation changes on a six-monthly basis… Regulation is the name of our game and we must see within the regulation how we can, we can maximise our*

effort to try and pre-empt what uncertainties is going to come up and do we combat that… It's really we need to find ways to get around the regulation."

Another element that affected the volatility of the environment was external players or competitors in the industry. There was a clear indication that there are not only the traditional competitors in the same industry with similar processes and products, but that there are non-traditional competitors who are threats to the organisation. The barriers preventing customers from switching to competitors are mostly easily overcome and the organisations are under threat of losing their customers to their competitors.

Participant 1: "*I do think in the telecom space it's very volatile in that a lot of the over-the-top players are coming in and that. And both traditional and non-traditional competitors and that.*"

Participant 5: "*I think the fact that we got competitors that are doing what we're doing, similar and so on, keeps us on our toes, keeps us motivated to achieve a bit more, and our competitors are not necessarily telcos, they could also be banks and financial institutions and so on.*"

Participant 6: "*I guess, one other thing that is quite important is, we are seeing that companies that traditionally weren't competitors now become competitors and that creates a lot of volatility in the market. So, you get a telco competing with a media company and you get a bank competing with a telco, and all of that forces or creates volatility in the whole business environment as well.*"

Participant 7: "*…because we experience that volatility from customers moving from one network to the other very easily.*"

Interestingly a number of participants indicated that there were internal and external environments that had elements of VUCA. The internal way of work was the main threat, as legacy systems created long lead times and obstructed the ability to adapt to change.

Participant 1: "*We are also going through transition, internally, you know, so there's a lot of volatility, you know, with us moving towards an agile way of work to make sure that we can be better suited to adapting to change a lot quicker and that.*"

Participant 5: "*I think there's external factors that have a big impact. But a lot of it might still come from internal stakeholders.*"

Participant 7: "*So we have change from two different sides, right. We have the external change and then we have the internal change. So, external change, obviously in a telco environment, there's a lot of regulatory influence, there's*

political influence, there's customer demands that are being placed on you. Internal change is something we should have better control over."

In regard to volatility, there was a large amount of uncertainty which contributed to the environment and mostly affected the employees. The volatility created a level of uncertainty in employees and created a lack of direction, especially if there was a lack of leadership to provide direction and ensure transparency in the direction to be taken. The uncertainty about the direction caused downstream issues where delivery teams were forced to respond to changing requirements, and as participant 4 noted, the work was very reactive. The problem was identified as a lack of good communication to create visibility and transparency, to the point of employees being unclear about expectations.

Participant 1: "*Right now, definitely a lot of uncertainty. As you know, we lost our executive last week – here one day and gone the next…Then people evaluate, you know, whether they need to just continue the old way of doing things or change for a new way of working. So, I don't know whether we'll still have a ME in the future and that.*"

Participant 2: "*Now with that, that has contributed a lot to the VUCA environment that we find ourselves in, because with this change, there's restructuring, so there's a lot of volatility, employees are uncertain what's going to happen, a lot of our projects are hanging in the air and we don't know if they're going to be canned, or if there's new projects, so there's a lot of uncertainty going on because there's a change of leadership at the moment.*"

Participant 4: "*We don't wake up every morning and know exactly what's going to hit us during the course of the day or the week. So a lot of the work that we do is very reactive.*"

The problem was identified as a lack of good communication that could create visibility and transparency to the point of being unclear of what is expected from the employees and what outcomes they need to be driving.

Participant 2: "*I find the process to be very slow and lacking transparency. So, yes, we know there's change coming, but we're getting fed information in drips and drabs. So it's not very clear, and obviously, you know, you're working on projects and other projects get canned, so there's a lot of uncertainty*"

Participant 8: "*But it's all around cascading the message and the strategy and the KPIs clearly to everyone that's involved. And, yeah, like I said earlier, employees*

don't like wondering what's next. So it's around providing clarity and providing clear leadership."

Because of the ambiguity in the VUCA environment and the complex nature of the competitive landscape, there were many directions and options to take, and the way to combat the complexity was simply by experimenting in the market. As participant 11 indicated, because of the many requirements that need to be addressed, a level of difficulty and complexity was introduced when all the possibilities seemed to be available to everyone.

Participant 8: "*In terms of ambiguity and clear direction, I mean, being an industry leader, you've got to experiment a lot of times with new products and services and some of them fail and some of them succeed. And I think that adds to, to the complexity of our environment as well.*"

Participant 11: "*I think. Ja, ambiguity is something I think that everyone suffers from in the banking space. We always feel we want to deliver everything all the time and for everyone, but unfortunately we can't.*"

5.3.1.2 *Navigating around the VUCA environment*
Interview question 2: *"What are some of the challenges for you and your knowledge workers to navigate in and around the VUCA environment?"*

Many challenges are being faced by organisations which operate in the VUCA environment. Participant 10 said that change was also exciting because it changed the scope of business and brought new opportunities with it, but the organisations needed to be ready for the change. The participants indicated a number of ways to navigate around the VUCA environment in their organisations. Firstly they needed to get products delivered into the market quicker through adopting new ways that made it possible for them to respond quicker. Secondly, they needed to have dedicated teams to do environmental scanning and understand the changes that were happening in the market. Participant 4 thought that the way to combat the ever-changing nature of the landscape was to ensure good planning of additional capacity to deal with the changes.

Participant 4: "*I guess, at any time, I have to plan to have capacity available to accommodate abnormal situations; last minute requests to be able to push through.*"

Participant 5: "*We are working in an agile fashion. Not necessarily the full agile fashion, but ja, we are and that helps us in this environment to mitigate all of these uncertainties and volatility that happens.*"

Participant 6: "*We've completely changed from doing waterfall-based projects to almost all projects being, to some respect, agile.*"

Participant 10: "*I suppose a quite stressful environment. But it's also quite exciting. Because, what you're going to be working on in a year's time probably is going to be different to what you are working on now. So, lots of change. Lots of opportunity for new things.*"

Participant 11: "*If we look at the VUCA environment, there's endless meetings going on, on how do we combat this? And I think we've got two teams currently within the bank, situated centrally, just dealing with these issues every day. Trying to spot what's coming. Trying to spot what, how is the market reacting to certain trends.*"

Participant 12: "*…we've got to be in the mill, we've got to be really quick, we've got to be adaptable, flexible, hear feedback from the market, rapidly build new product to respond to it, and, and kind of capture the opportunities as they come about.*"

5.3.1.3 *Employee engagement and its measurement*

Interview question 3: *"What does employee engagement mean for you? A) Why is employee engagement in knowledge workers important or not so important to you? B) If so, how do you measure employee engagement in your organisation?"*

All twelve participants indicated that they firmly believed that having engaged employees is very important to their organisations. Two of the participants (participant 7 and participant 8) quoted Richard Branson and expressed the opinion that employees are more important than customers because the employees will ensure the delivery of good customer experience through their products and services:

Participant 7: "*I think it was Richard Branson who says, you know, 'Take care of your employees and they'll take care of your customers.' That's exactly how it works.*"

Participant 8: "*I mean, Richard Branson has that quote that says 'Employee first, not customer first'. So, I do think employee engagement is critical to the success of an organisation.*"

A number of characteristics of what it means to be an engaged employee became apparent across the twelve participants, as is indicated in the following frequency table of employee engagement characteristics.

Table 5: Employee engagement characteristics

Participants	Frequency	Characteristics
1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	9	More productive and delivers
1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12	8	Discretionary effort (Willingness and going the extra mile)
1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12	8	Aligned, connected or bought into the vision and/or strategy
1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12	7	Motivated
1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11	7	Happier
1, 7, 8, 11	4	Passion for their work
1, 3, 6, 10	4	Better quality work
1, 10, 11, 12	4	Positive
3, 4, 10, 11	4	Good communication skills
2, 9, 11	3	Sense of purpose
8, 10	2	Innovative and creative
9	1	Healthier

The most frequently mentioned characteristic (by nine of the twelve participants) was that employees that are engaged are more productive and so deliver a higher output for the organisation.

> Participant 1: "*You know, you want high level employee engagement because the higher the level of engagement is, the more productive people are, the happier they are, the better quality products and services they'll produce. So, definitely, I think it's important.*"

The second most important characteristics, which are of similar importance, are discretionary effort and alignment to the direction of the organisation. Upon understanding and being connected to the vision and direction of the organisation, employees that are engaged buy into the vision with the notion of going above and beyond what is required of them to make it a success. According to participant 12, with discretionary effort from its employees an organisation has a better chance of success because of their willingness and buy-in.

> Participant 1: "*Do they feel an affinity and a passion for their day-to-day work and that and the vision and the strategy for the organisation.*"
>
> Participant 12: "*So, so, at a conceptual level, employee engagement really measures how, I guess, how bought in your employees are into the corporate*

vision and business. I think the net effect, either positively or negatively, comes back to what you call discretionary effort. So, highly engaged employees, you know, exhibit a high level of discretionary effort which is kind of going beyond the, just the JD or kind of change the mind set from 'I'm here to just kind of work the system' to 'I really want to be here' valuable contributive member of society."

Participant 12: "*More discretionary effort gives you a greater chance of success as an organisation.*"

The next most valued characteristic was that engaged employees are motivated in their work and in what they feel they need to deliver in their organisations. Their motivation is connected with being enthusiastic and having a drive to complete tasks and deliver them.

Participant 4: "*…people can wake up in the morning and think 'Yeah, I'm going to go on work today and I'm going to work on some cool stuff'.*"

Participant 10: "*Because if your employees are engaged and they're enthusiastic and they are motivated, you're going to get so much out of it.*"

Seven out of the twelve participants said that engaged employees are happier employees, being happy about their work environment as well as about the individuals that work with them. There is a sense of satisfaction with the work that they do, aligned with their motivation and desire to deliver.

Participant 1: "*You know, you want high level employee engagement because the higher the level of engagement is, the more productive people are, the happier they are, the better quality products and services they'll produce*".

Participant 4: "*Well, you'd have people that want to come to work every day. You would have people that would enjoy working*". "*So, I think, making sure that people, within the organisation, are happy is absolutely paramount.*"

Passion is seen as a characteristic that four of the twelve participants deemed to be a characteristic of engaged employees - passion for the work that they are involved in, to motivate them to show up daily and deliver quality work.

Participant 7: "*You obviously have like a very detailed explanation for employee engagement right. So, I kind of want to simplify it. So, when I show up for work, am I showing up with as much passion for the work on day 15 as I did on day 1, and day 30 and day 60 and three years down the line… I think, for me, passion drives delivery. And if you're not passionate about what you're doing you're never going to be able to deliver anything.*"

Four participants highlighted that an engaged employee is someone who is already aiming for delivery but with a focus on delivering with quality.

> Participant 6: "*But I guess in a corporate set-up an engaged employee is someone who's going to work harder, he's going to deliver, she's going to deliver a good, better quality, most probably at a lower price.*"

It was noted by four participants that engaged employees have a positive outlook on their work, even and especially in the difficult times when it is hard to stay positive and simply move forward. As participant 11 indicated, the positive frame of mind in which you yourself approach change could be influential for others.

> Participant 11: "*If I'm engaged, the bad things, all of a sudden, is not so bad. The good things is better. And it's, it's a lens you put over people. You've got a different lens if you're engaged in a company, you will give anything to be part of that cause or that purpose.*"

Engaged employees have the characteristic of being good and open communicators who report back not only when it is going well, but also communicate effectively when there are challenges. They have the freedom to challenge decisions in a constructive way, to find better alternative solutions for potential issues.

> Participant 3: "*Especially if they're engaged at the level you want them to be engaged, if they have the freedom, they know they have the freedom to ask questions, they have the freedom to say, look, I'm a little bit worried in embarking on this project.*"

Three participants indicated that engaged employees have a sense of purpose and that they are connected to the direction of the organisation, which in turn assists with increased levels of motivation.

> Participant 2: "*So, I mean, you need a sense of purpose and that's very important… Connecting to the purpose is key for engagement, employee engagement, because I tend to find, especially with the millennials, is that, if they don't have a sense of purpose, they're not motivated.*"

Participant 2 and participant 8 thought that engaged employees tend to be more inclined to be innovative and more creative in their thinking. This assists with problem solving, according to participant 2, because they are more willing to be open-minded.

> Participant 2: "*But they also tend to be more innovative and creative because they're willing to be open-minded.*"

Participant 8: "*So an engaged employee will be more innovative, will be more creative, will be more self-organising, be more independent, be more passionate.*"

One of the twelve participants indicated that employees that are engaged are a lot healthier than other employees. They tend to take less sick leave and contribute more to delivery in the organisation.

Participant 9: *"If there's a match between the individual purpose and the corporate purpose, all that speaks together in a much, much, much more productive, happier, healthier and contributing employee."*

Most of the participants in the research study measure employee engagement through some form of survey tool to capture the information. As per Table 6 below, four participants stated that their organisations do not measure employee engagement at all.

Table 6: Measuring employee engagement

Participants	Measuring employee engagement (Y/N)	Method of the measure
1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12	Yes	Employee Net Promotor Score Survey
3, 4, 6, 9	No	None

Of the participants who do measure employee engagement on a regular basis, only four of the eight participants (participants 1, 5, 11 and 12) indicated that it is a useful tool. Participants 7, 8 and 10 indicated that it could be a useful tool if used properly but that it only indicates trends and is not a true reflection of the level of employee engagement. One of the issues raised was that the survey is done on an annual basis, which may be too infrequent, as individuals struggle to recall all their experiences throughout the year. Secondly, in some organisations the survey is done after bonus time to influence the metrics. The next problem is that there is a perception that the survey is not truly anonymous (participants 1, 5, 7 and 10), as participant 1 said that to access the survey the employees need to inscribe their employee identification numbers. Participants 2, 5 and 8 indicated that the survey would be useful only if proper feedback were provided, and the identified actions were carried out with communication the issues identified with the corresponding actions that have been carried out. For this reason participant 2 indicated that the survey was not useful.

The participants who, according to Table 3, indicated that they do not measure employee engagement, thought that it might be useful to do so (participants 3, 6 and 9). Participant 4 said that their organisational culture of an open door policy and flat structure does not require them to measure employee engagement but only to judge it on the basis of the happiness of the clients.

> Participant 4: "*I guess we have a measure of success by the happiness of our clients. That's how we work. If a client's happy, then we're happy and that just feeds back through the organisation.*"

The participants provided rich and valuable perceptions, beliefs and insights into their respective organisation's operating environment and employee engagement. The key themes of the first research question have been identified in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Research question 1 key themes

Research question 1: *What are the challenges to engaged knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?*	
Interview questions (Q)	**Key themes**
Q 1: With the rapid change of business due to new technologies, business models, competitors and markets, what does it mean for you and your knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA environment?	• All participants operate in a VUCA environment • Challenges with VUCA is continuous change (market trends, regulatory and competition) and continuously adapting to the change to remain relevant
Q 2: What are some of the challenges for you and your knowledge workers to navigate in and around the VUCA environment?	• Adapt the organisation to respond to change quicker • Gather better insights about the changes to understand the change and how to better respond
Q 3: What does employee engagement mean for you? Why is employee engagement in knowledge workers important or not so important to you?	• To have engaged employees are crucial to organisations as they are more productive, express high levels of discretionary effort and are aligned with the vision and strategy • Measuring employee engagement is found to be useful if conducted correctly

If so, how do you measure employee engagement in your organisation?	

5.3.2 Research question 2

What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?

The aim of this research question was to uncover whether the participants understood the term storytelling and whether they had heard of or used the term throughout their experiences. The following questions probed the understanding of the participants of the different parts of a story and the media through which stories are most effectively communicated. The last part of this question had to do with understanding how to effectively deliver a story through a storytelling technique and to uncover any negative aspects of the technique.

5.3.2.1 *Storytelling as a concept*

Interview question 4: "*Have you heard of a technique called storytelling in your organisation or through your experiences? What is your understanding of storytelling in a corporate setting?*"

According to Table 4, most of the participants had heard about the term storytelling and related to the term according to their experiences. The five participants that had not heard of the term could determine what the term could possibly mean in context. Participants 4 and 6 noted that the term was unfamiliar to them, but after thinking about the term "storytelling" soon realised that it is a tool they have used for many years but never labelled as such.

> Participant 4: "*I think it's one of those things where, when someone raises it as a concept, you suddenly might realise that the concept of storytelling isn't something you have thought about as something that you would need to bring into your business but you might have that realisation that it's something that you have actually been doing through a period of years and haven't really known that there was such a thing, that it existed as a concept within business. So, ja, I haven't heard of it, but I fear it could possibly have been something that we have been adopting over the years.*"
>
> Participant 6: "*Well, every single presentation I build, I think about the story line. So I think about how I'm going to engage who I'm talking to, where we are going*

to get stuck, what is the background I need to know before we get to the next part, what I need to get to the conclusion, who my audience is, should I get to the point quickly or should I be more verbose, so there definitely is."

Table 8: Participants' response to storytelling

Participant	Heard of the term storytelling
1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12	Yes
3, 4, 6, 8, 9,	No

A number of attributes were identified by the various participants. The most common attribute of storytelling, which nine participants identified, was that the tool is used to encourage and motivate employees and to an extent influence them towards buying into a process, vision or strategy. Secondly, storytelling is used as a communication tool to provide a channel for sharing information that is pertinent to the audience. The tool is then further used to provide clarity on the direction that the organisation is going in, and to create a shared vision and strategy.

According to seven of the participants, the story that is being told needs to be one which the employees and the audience can relate to and which will be relevant to them. Half of the participants indicated that the method of ensuring relatability through the story is to create an emotional connection with the audience and ensure they find relevance in the story on an emotional level. The story needs to take the audience on a journey, paint a picture and allow collaboration, building up to the shared intended outcome, to the point that the story is remembered and then can be retold to others in order to spread the word. This creates a sense of inclusion for the audience and make them feel part of a bigger picture.

Five participants indicated that to make a story effective the storyteller should use real world examples during the story to make the story more real and to make the story relatable.

> Participant 1: "*So it's more than just giving someone a message but like painting a picture and a scene and, like, drawing on their emotions and that. Like I said to you earlier, people forget what you say, but they'll never forget how you make them feel.*"

Table 9: Attributes of storytelling

Participant	Attribute	Frequency
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11	Encouraging, influencing and motivating	9
4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	Communication tool	8
2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12	Creates clarity & direction (on metrics like KPIs, vision, strategy)	7
1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	Relatability & relevance to them	7
1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10	Creating an emotional connection	6
1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11	Collaboration (journey)	6
2, 6, 8, 10, 11	Use examples to strengthen understanding	5
1, 4, 9, 10, 11	Remember and recall	5
1, 2, 10, 11	Painting a picture	4
1, 3, 6, 11	Setting the scene	4
3, 6, 7, 11	Creates inclusion	4
1, 8, 12	It is a powerful tool	3
2, 5	Visually represents the vision or strategy	2

5.3.2.2 *Format of a story*

Interview question 5: *"How do you think an effective story should be formulated?"*

Stories are formulated in a number of ways, and according to most of the participants there is a beginning, a middle and an end to a story. Firstly, the story needs to have an introduction, which is made up of the past, considering the historical context of the journey that led the organisation to that point in time. The beginning could be motivational in context and make use of inspirational examples of what the possibilities are that can be realised.

> Participant 10: "*I also think talking about the hey-days of the, of the company. People always love those stories of when you first started out and you didn't have… You did crazy things to make it work and you've got some legends in the business that, you know, I don't know, fly somewhere to get a customer sorted or, you know, those kind of things. I think that really does really help people understand it from the customer's side and also understand a lot better what they have to achieve.*"

The middle part of the story, also referred to as the body of the story, is the motivational part, where a picture is being painted of the journey which needs to be taken to reach the end goal. Four participants suggested that the middle of the story is where the collaboration needs to take place to work towards forming solutions, but the solution is not provided - only a picture of what the possibilities are.

Participant 11: "*I think the body is where I leave it open-ended and I paint a picture where you can see what's happening in the story.*"

Half of the participants indicated that an ending is very important. The ending tells what the end goal looks like and where the organisation wants to go. It is the vision coupled with the thinking and the reasoning behind why this journey is worth taking. The ending should define a shared goal to which the audience can relate and which they can buy into as a concept. It should be an aspirational target which they want to be part of and other individuals can aspire to be part of.

Participant 11: *"The ending is maybe the most crucial part. I think, the end is quite clear."*

Table 10: Story formulation

Participant	Attribute
2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11	Introduction (the past, historical context, relatability)
3, 5, 7, 11	The body (collaborate to create the solution and a journey)
3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11	The end (direction, vision and why this is being done)

All but two of the participants (participants 5 and 8) made mention of the fact that it is crucially important to know who the audience is that will be receiving the story. That will depend on the medium used to communicate the story and whether the audience will be small enough in numbers to be able to assist in the middle of the story to collaborate in finding ways to the shared vision. The alternative options are to share the story through mass communication, like sending out a video and having the audience create the solution for themselves. The story could also be told continuously and in various ways to ensure that the audience is reached in various ways and experiences continuous reminders of the story and the vision.

Participant 6: "*Yes, it's very much about what the audience needs to know. So it's the same, the same solution, problem, thing, can be explained in different ways for different groups and it's absolutely important". "Well so I guess a story doesn't need to be something that's told in one setting."*

Participant 7: *"I found that smaller groups, so I wouldn't expect like a person to stand up, like the CEO roadshow, right, I think there's value in telling a story there, but I think you would struggle to engage with the audience, being a group of 300 to 400 people."*

In Table 11 the participants indicated the different mediums that can be used for communicating a story to the audience. Some media were thought to be poor to use, not being as effective as other tools. The media that are deemed effective capture the attention of the audience and are powerful communication tools. The media to avoid include slide deck presentations and email. The general consensus is that these media are outdated and not as visually constructive as a video, for example. The media that were identified as effective tools involve sharing a personal connection with the audience. The best medium is face-to-face, and it could be accompanied with elements such as videos or demos that make the experience interactive and more real for the audience. With face-to-face storytelling the audience can experience the authenticity of the storyteller and relate to the story on a deeper level.

Participant 7: "*You can't reach your audience as well as you'd be able to if you were face-to-face.*"

Participant 11: "*So I think the informal chat, because it allows for vulnerability. The realness behind it.*"

Table 11: Mediums to deliver a story

Participant	Mediums to use	Good or poor tool
2, 5, 8, 10	Slide presentations	Poor
5, 7, 8,	Email	Poor
2, 8, 10, 12	Visuals (Videos, demos, apps)	Good
7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	Speech or face-to-face	Good

5.3.2.3 *Effective storytelling technique*

Interview question 6: *"How do you think you can execute an effective story to knowledge workers?"*

The effectiveness of a story is dependent on a combination of elements and not on only one. The storyteller needs to know who the audience is that will receive the story. The correct medium should be used to communicate the story to the audience. The story should be purposive, with a planned format and a clear end-goal to get the audience to

buy into the shared vision. The story needs to be retold and continuously communicated in various ways to continue reminding the audience of what the vision and the end-goal are that need to be achieved.

> Participant 3: "*Setting the scene for a specific story, knowing what the pre-determined outcome needs to be, but allowing your audience to get there in their own way*".

> Participant 12: "*I think, particularly at a corporate level, it has to become embedded into the DNA of the place. Which means that it can't just be a once-off*".

The historical context is crucially important to understanding the reason behind the goal, as well as knowing what the trials and tribulations of the organisation have been, and therefore what is possible and what to avoid.

> Participant 4: "*I think it's important to communicate things like this back to staff because they need to know where you came from. They need to know what the roots of the business were. They need to know where the business is going and what experiences, what challenges, what trials and what successes our company has had over, over its existence.*"

The story should be told from the angle of making it relatable to the audience, and this can be done by framing it so that the employees can see the problem from a different point of view, from the point of view of the customer. This allows the audience to really get to understand what the problem is and not just assume they know the problem.

> Participant 10: "*It helps you get to the solution. Because you understand the problem or the challenge so much better. My belief has always been: If you truly understand what the problem is, the solution's almost obvious.*"

> Participant 11: "*Because you ask them to imagine themselves in that story with you. Imagine this was you.*"

> Participant 11: "*From a structure point of view, a loose structure is good, because it comes across as more authentic.*"

The use of examples was noted by many participants to be a good technique to ensure the audience can relate to the story. The examples bring the story to life and make the story real to the audience. They create an easy way for the audience to buy into the story and believe in it. The examples create the platform for the audience to emotionally connect with the story and relate to it.

Participant 10: "*You kind of just make it a little bit real for them. I've always found that's been a lot more effective than putting up slides with numbers and reports.*"

Participant 11: "*And I think you'll have a much better result, because you made it a little bit real and I think that's the magic in story-telling. It makes it so so real and doable.*"

Participant 8 "*I strongly believe that story-telling using a tangible example is very powerful.*"

The participants shared valuable insights about storytelling as a concept and the different parts to a story as well as techniques to make a story effective when communicating it. The key themes of the second research question is captured in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Research question 2 key themes

Research question 2: *What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?*	
Interview questions (Q)	**Key themes**
Q 4: Have you heard of a technique called storytelling in your organisation or through your experiences? What is your understanding of storytelling in a corporate setting?	• Majority of the participants are familiar with storytelling • Storytelling is mainly used to encourage and influence, and is understood as a communication tool that creates clarity and direction about the vision and the strategy of the department or organisation

Q 5: How do you think an effective story should be formulated?	• A story contains three main parts:
	   ○ An introduction that provides historical context and sets the scene by being relatable
	   ○ A body that paints the picture of a joint collaborative journey that needs to be taken
	   ○ The end which provides the direction and the vision through giving context of reasons to take the journey
	• There are good and poor mediums to use when communicating a story. The poor mediums are slide presentations and email communication where the

	good mediums include visuals and simply authentically speaking to the audience.
Q 6: How do you think you can execute an effective story to knowledge workers?	• Know the audience that will be addressed • Choose appropriate medium to communicate the story • Continuously communicate the story that it can be retold • Use examples relating to real life experiences to make the story relatable and real to the audience • Frame the story from a different point of view to gain understanding

5.3.3 Research question 3

How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?

The third research question was intended to combine the elements of employee engagement and that of storytelling in uncovering the outcomes that could be expected when these are delivered successfully. The purpose of the first part to the question was to understand the reasons for telling a story and to understand what the desired outcome would be for using the technique. The questions that followed attempted to establish the nature of the outcomes of having engaged employees and the reasons why the concept is important to knowledge workers. The final question was created to uncover any links between the two concepts and whether the technique of storytelling could be used to enhance employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

5.3.3.1 *The outcome of an effective story*

Interview question 7: *"What do you think is the outcome of effective storytelling in your organisation?"*

As is evident in the results of research question two, the storytelling technique is used to motivate and influence an audience by using the correct media continuously. Most of the participants indicated that the main reasons for delivering a story and using the storytelling technique were to create understanding and to get buy-in from the audience to a shared goal.

Table 13: Outcomes of effective storytelling

Participant	Outcome
2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12	Understanding
1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11	Buy-in

The understanding to be created is of the end goal and the shared vision, which is really what the organisation wants to achieve. The understanding provides the audience with clarity on the direction of the organisation and also how it can influence the end goal. As participant 10 indicated, it is much easier to understand a story than to try to understand a document with many pages.

Participant 9: "*I feel that it's better if you have got an understanding of what you do and what value that brings and how it connects to the rest of the business*."

The audience needs to believe in the story and what the story indicates as to what the end goal is. The audience needs to relate to and aspire to achieve the end goal.

Participant 3: "*Buy-in. I think that has to be the ultimate objective. Ja. Buy-in to, maybe, a new process, a new methodology, to get people excited about a client, a new opportunity, a new way that we are going to market ourselves, but it's all buy-in, essentially*".

5.3.3.2 *The outcome of increased employee engagement*

Interview question 8: *"What is the result of increased employee engagement in knowledge workers?"*

The participants indicated that the benefit of having increasingly engaged employees is that engaged employees are more productive and make better deliveries for the organisation. This is related to what is described as the discretionary effort of employees, which is more prevalent in engaged employees. The term "discretionary effort" means that the employees will be more willing to get the work done and go out of their way to ensure it gets done.

Table 14: Outcomes of engaged employees

Participants	Characteristics
1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	More productive and delivers
1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12	Discretionary effort (Willingness and going the extra mile)

5.3.3.3 *The connection between storytelling and employee engagement*

Interview question 9: *"If so, how do you think storytelling serves as a mechanism for enhancing employee engagement in knowledge workers?"*

The last question that was posed to the participants was designed to explore whether they believed that the mechanism of storytelling could drive employee engagement among knowledge workers. All twelve of the participants clearly indicated that the storytelling mechanism was definitely a good tool to use to drive employee engagement.

> Participant 4: "*Well sure, definitely, I think it does. I think everything that we've discussed would lead us to this conclusion, that, if you are open with your employees, if you engage with them around things that are happening in the company, either historically, if there's experience-based stories that need to be relayed to them that could give them confidence that they might see the company hitting a small bump in the road, but you can give them the confidence that you've had things in your path previously and have been able to successfully navigate them. If you're able to communicate the strength of the business going forward and the strength of the relationship between a business and its customers, that's… story-telling becomes invaluable, because all that people want in volatile and uncertain environments is just that foundation that… that they can work from and story-telling could well be the most effective mechanism of giving employees a stable foundation on which they can have the peace of mind and comfort the organisation that they're working for them and cares for them and has their best interests at heart.*"

Table 15: Research question 3 key themes

Research question 3: *How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?*	
Interview questions (Q)	**Key themes**
Q 7: What do you think is the outcome of effective storytelling in your organisation?	• Greater understanding of the strategy and vision • Buy-in of the strategy and vision
Q 8: What is the result of increased employee engagement in knowledge workers?	• Employees that are more productive and deliver on expectations • Increased levels of discretionary effort

Q 9: If so, how do you think storytelling serves as a mechanism for enhancing employee engagement in knowledge workers?	• Storytelling is seen by all participants as a good mechanism to drive employee engagement due to better communication that leads to understanding and buy-in of the strategy and the vision that leads to more productivity and increased levels of discretionary effort

5.4   Conclusion

The responses of twelve participants have been presented in this chapter with the outline of the three research questions identified in Chapter 3. They indicated that the knowledge workers in these industries do in fact operate in a VUCA environment which has its challenges that need to be addressed, and that it is difficult to keep employees engaged in a VUCA environment. The different elements of employee engagement have been identified with important elements such as employees being more productive and an output of discretionary effort. Employee engagement was then identified as an important quality which should be measured but is not effectively measured.

In research question two the mechanisms of storytelling were explored, with most participants having heard of the term in context. Those who did not know the term could figure out its meaning during the interviews. Stories are important tools to motivate and inspire an audience if the correct medium is used effectively.

Research question three summarised the understanding of what increased employee engagement and the mechanism of storytelling aims to achieve. A unanimous understanding was reached, that storytelling is a good mechanism to drive the employee engagement of knowledge workers in a VUCA environment.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter contains detailed discussion of the results of the interviews as indicated in Chapter 5 and in the context of the literature review in Chapter 2 with the purpose of distilling key insights from the research, thus answering the research questions posed in Chapter 3. The research findings will contribute to the understanding of storytelling as a mechanism for employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

6.2 Discussion of Results for Research Question 1

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: *What are the challenges to engaged knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?*

Research Question 1 aimed to identify what it means for knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA environment. The construct of the VUCA environment was broken down into various parts: volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. These individual constructs were further discussed to gain in-depth understanding of the operating environment of the knowledge workers. The challenges of the environment were identified through the research interviews conducted and will be measured against the findings from the literature review. The way to navigate through the VUCA environment was investigated, to understand the different methods of doing so. The understanding of what it means to have engaged employees was then investigated and whether the concepts could be measured accurately.

6.2.1 Understanding the concept of the VUCA environment

All of the participants agreed that they operate in a VUCA environment and that the biggest driver of the volatility internally as well as externally is the constant and rapid change, which they need to be able to adapt to very quickly.

> Participant 5: "*Almost every day things are changing and so on… It does make it very hard to stick to specific road maps and that kind of stuff because things are changing on a regular basis.*"

According to Saleh and Watson (2017), the VUCA environment is the set of challenges in and around the business environment that are focused on volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The term VUCA is used to describe the business operating environment with a focus on the competitive nature of the landscape (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The volatility of the business operating environment has been identified as the rate and size of the turbulence that accompanies change (Saleh & Watson, 2017). The opinions of the participants support the suggestion in the literature that change is

the driver of volatility in the operating environment, and that change occurs on a regular, continuous basis.

The opinions of participants 1, 2 and 5 that there is a great deal of change that it occurs regularly is aligned with the writings of Saleh and Watson (2017) as well as Bennett and Lemoine (2014), which indicate that the volatility of the VUCA construct is related to change and the rate of change. And according to participant 1 the organisation needs to adapt to change quickly to stay relevant in the environment by continuously realigning its strategy and direction. This concurs with Bartscht (2015), who claims that continuous learning is crucial to gaining information and knowledge about the operating environment and adapting to the change. And according to Cousins (2018), when continuous learning does not occur the organisation will be left behind. Change is bound to happen. The participants indicated this to be a reality and said that organisations need to constantly be adapting to the change to stay relevant. The statements by the participants on the necessity to adapt to change quickly support those made in the literature, as Cousins (2018) states that if an organisation adapts quickly and utilises the information and knowledge at its disposal, it will remain relevant and be able to compete in the market.

Among the changes in the environment, the participants identified that market trends change constantly. The adoption of these changes is what changes the landscape of the industry, as there might be new entrants into the market. According to participant 8, the rate of adapting to the change needs to increase, and a possible solution to this would be digitisation as a business model.

> Participant 8: "*So challenges that we encounter is around efficiency and digitisation and becoming a more stream-lined organisation.*"

According to Gandhi (2017) and Reddy and Reinartz (2017), one of the challenges to adapting to change is that organisations are constantly attempting to reinvent the wheel. They mention that change is constant and that adapting to change is the challenge to overcome. When considering the trends identified in the market, technology is shaping the business landscape and digitisation is still difficult to adopt in organisations because of its cost implications. Old legacy systems are not providing the value that is needed (Gandhi, 2017; Reddy & Reinartz, 2017; Cousins, 2018).

The participants in the research study indicated that the volatility in the external operating environment aligned with the changing market trends and the competition from new entrants into the market increases the amount and rate of change. The new entrants are

not only the traditional competitors in the market but also non-traditional players. According to participant 1, the non-traditional players in the telecommunication industry are the over-the-top (OTT) players that typically include competitors such as the application WhatsApp. This competitor is very clearly not a traditional telecommunication competitor but an application that utilises the telecommunication organisation's network to function, and so cannibalises on the traditional voice revenue element of the operator. Participants 5 and 6 expressed a similar sentiment, that banks and telecommunication organisations are becoming competitors that offer similar products and services, which was not the case a number of years ago. The telecommunication organisations are acting like banks by allowing their customers to make purchases from their airtime accounts, and the banks are selling mobile phones and acting as mobile virtual network operators.

> Participant 6: "*So, you get a telco competing with a media company and you get a bank competing with a telco, and all that forces, or creates volatility in the whole business environment*".

According to Saleh and Watson (2017) the change that volatility brings is related to an increase in factors such as new markets, competition and technology advancements. A similar sentiment is expressed by Bennett and Lemoine (2014), who indicate that the operating environment is influenced by the competitive nature of the landscape. The competition aspect which Saleh and Watson (2017) note has to do mainly with an increased volume of competition. The volatility will increase due to the discovery of more efficient solutions from a product and a process perspective. There is definitely an element of continuous learning that needs to take place if an organisation is to understand the competition and continuously keep up with developments for decision-making purposes (Bartscht, 2015; Cousins, 2018). The results of the interviews support the literature, but the literature has limited information about the type of competitors, whether they are traditional or non-traditional competitors, and further how the ramification of the nature of the competition increases the amount of change and volatility.

A number of participants indicated that the volatility of the environment is not only in the external environment but is also evident in the internal operating environment. Participant 1 indicated elements of team restructuring which are internal to the organisation and create volatility in the way of work which is uncertain and creates levels of complexity. Participant 7 echoed the view of participant 1, as did participant 5, in that volatility can come from internal stakeholders in the way teams are structured and aligned to the way

of work in an agile process. If there is uncertainty about the structure and the way of work, the increased lead times will reduce the ability to adapt to change.

A number of authors indicate that team structure and stakeholder management are important to ensuring understanding and dynamic planning in an organisation (Gandhi, 2017; Saleh & Watson, 2017; Cousins, 2018). The complexity of the environment has been noted by Deloitte (2016) as having internal and external aspects and as affecting human capital. The internal elements are all interconnected or hyper connected and the moment change is introduced to the environment, the levels of complexity and uncertainty are heightened. According to Felin and Powell (2016), the structure needs to be optimised to ensure that internal developments take place to build the correct capabilities to combat volatility. The participants identified volatility as being internal as well as external, an opinion which is aligned with the literature, which indicates that businesses have internal as well as external complexities to manage. The literature has limited information about optimising internal structures. The findings of this research can extend the literature in this context by noting that the agile methodology of the way of work is an internal attribute that assists an organisation with adapting to change more quickly.

Further, uncertainty is connected with changes happening in an internal environment. Thus participant 1 noted that their executive left their organisation very suddenly, and that caused increased levels of uncertainty in their environment. The uncertainty creates a lack of direction for employees that has a direct effect on the delivery teams downstream, who are responsible for the delivery of products and services.

According to Saleh and Watson (2017), the uncertainty is due to a lack of understanding, which impacts on the planning and the direction of the organisation. The uncertainty can be exacerbated by a lack of communication (Gandhi, 2017), and this is due to a lack leadership, as in the case of participant 1. The moment there is uncertainty and a lack of understanding, the organisation is not able to adapt to the changes in the market and could be left behind (Cousins, 2018). The findings of the research and the opinions expressed in the literature concur that uncertainty could be a large driver of internal inefficiencies and affect the ability to respond to change. Participants 2 and 8 indicated that the employees are aware of the change that will be coming, but because of a lack of information and a lack of communication to the employees the direction of what is expected and what to focus on is unclear, which causes uncertainty. This further causes ambiguity, because of the many possible decisions that could be taken in many different

ways, which could produce many different outcomes, which increases the amount of complexity and uncertainty (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Gandhi, 2017; Saleh & Watson, 2017).

6.2.2 Understanding and navigating around the VUCA environment

Even though organisations are having to rise to many challenges in the VUCA operating environment internally and externally, the participants indicated that there are ways in which organisations can navigate around the challenges. Participant 10 indicated that change which is brought about through the volatility creates challenges, but they could translate into new opportunities for organisations, and could be exciting.

> Participant 10: "*So, lots of change, lots of opportunities for new things.*"

The participants noted that to navigate through the VUCA environment there should be a way to improve the way of work and to structure a team able to respond quickly to the changes. Teams could possibly be constructed in such a way as to have additional capacity to accommodate the changes. To get the information and the knowledge of what is emerging in terms of market trends, the organisation could have dedicated teams that do environmental scanning and inform the decision makers as to what changes they need to respond to. Participant 12 highlighted that it is crucial for the organisation to be informed and to get feedback from the market in order to be able to rapidly change and respond to changing demands.

From the literature about navigating around the VUCA environment, Saleh and Watson (2017) indicate that teams need to build in extra capacity to ensure that capacity is readily available to respond to changes in the market. According to Felin and Powell (2016) the capacity of such a team needs to be scalable to combat the size of the change. From a planning perspective the organisation needs to be aware of the changes and to have a very clear understanding of the changes needed to combat uncertainty (Saleh & Watson, 2017). Bartscht (2015) suggests that to gather information about the internal and external environment and understand the environmental changes taking place, continuous learning should be a focus. Cousins (2018) is in agreement with Bartscht (2015) that this should be a continuous process to ensure maximum understanding and the ability to optimise planning. Complexity in the business environment is combatted by accumulating information, gaining understanding, and expanding on the knowledge of the change and the situation (Felin & Powell, 2016; Saleh & Watson, 2017; Cousins, 2018).

The participants' views support the literature that indicates that the VUCA environment can be navigated, and then go beyond the literature to suggest that change unlocks new opportunities and possibilities for an organisation. The changes in the operating environment in many situations are seen in a negative frame, and human beings find change difficult, but it is evident in the opinions of the participants that change could be positive for an organisation. The main attributes of being equipped to navigate the changes include having a knowledge of the trends in the market and clearly understanding the changes, thus being able to combat uncertainty and complexity, plan for the changes, and continuously learn from them.

6.2.3 Employee engagement and its measurement
Productivity and commitment to deliver

It was noted by all the participants in the research study that to have engaged employees is very important to organisations. Two of the participants indicated that if an organisation looks after its employees then the employees will look after its customers. The most frequently noted characteristic of an engaged employee was reported to be that this type of employee is more productive and delivers on his/her commitments. An aspect of productivity is the element of delivering quality work:

> Participant 1: "*The higher the level of engagement is, the more productive people are*".

This sentiment accords with Kahn's (1990) suggestion that an engaged employee shows a high level of commitment and contributes to the organisation. Ho (2014), Kumar and Pansari (2016) and Lu et al. (2018) indicate that engagement has a positive influence on employee commitment and employee performance. According to Rich et al. (2010) and Mani (2011) the commitment and the performance of the employee are associated with increased productivity. According to Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013) the commitment of the employee is to the performance of the organisation. A number of participants noted that employee engagement is critical to the success of an organisation. One of the outcomes which was indicated in the literature but not clearly articulated by the participants in the research study is that the ultimate outcome of having an engaged employee is to drive the profitability of the organisation (Saks & Gruman, 2014). When an organisation has engaged employees, many benefits accrue to it, including greater productivity and commitment from the employees, which lead to profitability for the organisation (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Employees could be productive at work and deliver on their commitments, but the characteristic of quality of work is similarly important. If an employee is productive but the quality of the output is poor, the performance and profitability of the organisation is in jeopardy. According to

Gallup (2012), one of the indicators of employee engagement is quality. Engaged employees are more productive and more efficient, and fewer defects are identified in their output.

Discretionary effort

The second most frequently noted characteristic by the participants is that of discretionary effort. Engaged employees are not only willing to get the work done, but are prepared to go above and beyond their job description. Another quality was mentioned a similar number of times, and that is the characteristic of being connected and aligned to the direction, vision or strategy of the organisation. A number of participants associated the connectedness to an understanding of the direction and what is required of the employees as individuals.

The statements of the participants in the research study were in agreement with those made in the literature, in that they thought that engaged employees go above and beyond what is required of them for the greater good of the organisation and its goals (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). These employees are continuously searching for opportunities that could improve the productivity and performance of the organisation (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Participant 12 identified a mindset in engaged employees that makes them want to contribute and want to do more than their job description requires of them.

> Participant 12: "*So, highly engaged employees, you know exhibit a high level of discretionary effort which is kind of going beyond the, just the JD (job description) or kind of change the mind set from 'I'm here to just kind of work the system' to 'I really want to be here' valuable contributive member of society.*"

The same characteristic was noted by Kahn (1990) and Saks and Gruman (2014) - that engaged employees have a particular mind-set that drives their behaviour. It is not a previously existing characteristic of the individual.

Alignment to the vision and communication

The participants' views on the characteristic of being aligned to the strategy support the views expressed in the literature, where according to Kumar and Pansari (2016) engaged employees are those who understand the goals of the organisation and have clarity on what is expected of them in terms of their roles and responsibilities. Similar views are conveyed by Gallup (2012), who considers that employees that are engaged have a good understanding of what their jobs require of them, as against employees who are not engaged, who lack a connection with what the organisation is trying to achieve. Khan

(1990) defines disengagement as: "the uncoupling of selves from work roles", and states that it is evident that engaged employees ensure a connection with what is required of them (p. 694). Employees who are engaged are aligned with the direction, purpose, values and goals of an organisation and do what is in its best interest (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

Understanding a number of elements, including what the business objectives are as well as what is expected by the organisation of its employees, creates a connectedness to the vision, as the direction the organisation is taking is clear to the employee. Communication of this vision and direction is needed to create such understanding (Han, et al., 2014; Saleh & Watson, 2017). Like the literature, the participants had little to say about whether engaged employees are good communicators in themselves. According to a number of participants, communication needs to be a two-way process through which management can communicate the direction of the organisation to employees so that they will understand it, but also so that the employees can effectively communicate back to management to challenge the strategy and describe any difficulties being experienced.

> Participant 3: "*Especially if they're engaged at the level you want them to be engaged, if they have the freedom, they know they have the freedom to ask questions, they have the freedom to say, look, I'm a little bit worried in embarking on this project.*"

Motivation and positivity
The participants also said that engaged employees are motivated and enthusiastic about their work. They want to get up in the mornings and go to work. They enjoy performing interesting work-related tasks and are enthusiastic when doing so. As the employees are aligned with what is expected from them and understand their roles and responsibilities, as part of the drive of their motivation they feel they have a sense of purpose. Engaged employees also have positive attitudes and a positive view of their work. Their mentality is motivated by positivity and a positive attitude in the work place.

> Participant 11: "*If I'm engaged, the bad things all of a sudden is not so bad. The good things is better.*"

The participants' opinions on motivation are supported by the literature, which claims that engaged employees are inspired by finding solutions to problems in the work place (Han et al*.,* 2014). These employees want to build the organisation, and do so with enthusiasm and through finding innovative ways of improving the organisation (Gallup, 2012; Han et al*.,* 2014). According to Gallup (2012), part of the definition of an employee

that is not engaged is one that has no enthusiasm to perform the tasks of their work, whereas an engaged employee is motivated. The participants had strong views about motivation as a characteristic of engaged employees, but the literature made only limited mention of motivation as a characteristic of an engaged employee. The reasons for this could be that motivation was implied as a characteristic with the increase of productivity in engaged employees. This could be taken to imply that they are motivated to deliver (Mani, 2011; Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013; Ho, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Lu et al., 2018).

The research results support the literature in terms of engaged employees that have positive attitudes at and about work. As Stoyanova and Iliev (2017) say, one of the characteristics of engaged employees is that they have a positive attitude towards their work as well as towards their organisation.

Happier and healthier employees
Seven of the twelve participants noted that engaged employees are happier individuals and that they feel happy about their work environment. These employees enjoy being at work and the type of work that they are doing. Engaged employees have been noted as being healthier than disengaged employees.

> Participant 9: "…*all that speaks together in a much, much, much more productive, happier, healthier and contributing employee*".

The results are in support of the literature but there is limited identification in the literature of happiness as a characteristic of an engaged employee being happy as a characteristic. In Kahn's (1990) definition of what employee engagement is, there is an element of being emotionally engaged at work. Kumar and Pansari (2016) identified a dimension of employee engagement as employee satisfaction. Job satisfaction is then further connected with the wellbeing of employees, and identified as increasing morale (Warr & Inceoglu, 2015). According to Gallup (2012), the definition of actively disengaged employees includes the fact that they are unhappy and unsatisfied. The description of engaged employees includes only elements such as passion for work but does not explicitly state that engaged employees are happy or happier by nature (Gallup, 2012). Further to the quality of happiness, Gallup (2012) indicates that employees that are actively disengaged are absent from work more often and take more sick leave than engaged employees.

Passion

Engaged employees have been noted by the participants as having the characteristic of being passionate about their work. This passion drives them to perform and is linked to a sense of purpose which drives their motivation.

The result support the literature as according to Gallup (2012) engaged employees are the driving force of the organisation. They assist with performance and they do this through passion for their work and for the organisation. According to Han et al. (2014) engaged employees possess this characteristic of passion but it is more than a characteristic; it becomes part of the employee's values. This is aligned with Gallup (2012), who suggests that employees who are not engaged have no passion for the work they do and don't carry it out with any enthusiasm. According to Truss (2008), employee engagement is simply defined as passion for one's work.

Innovative and creative
The participants indicated that engaged employees are more inclined to be innovative and creative in their thinking and problem solving due to their willingness to be open-minded, and this means they will be more innovative and creative.

The findings support the indication in the literature that engaged employees are inspired and motivated to drive innovation and creative thinking throughout the process of problem solving (Han et al*.,* 2014). According to Gallup (2012) engaged employees are driven and motivated to create solutions that improve the organisation, and these processes are innovative and creative in nature. This view is further supported by Stoyanova and Iliev (2017), who identify one of the characteristics of an engaged employee as continuously striving to find opportunities to improve the productivity and performance of the organisation.

Measuring employee engagement
On the topic of measuring employee engagement, it was evident to the participants that such measurement is important if it is done properly at regular intervals and in relation to clear deliverables. Most of the participants indicated that their organisations do measure employee engagement, but a few participants noted that it was not done well and the value of it was not being realised or properly communicated throughout the organisation. It was noted that there was a lack of feedback on whether the previous cycle of measuring employee engagement had returned positive input into the organisation as well as on whether the action points had been delivered on. The metric most frequently used was the Employee Net Promoter Score (ENPS), which was thought

to be the most accurate to date and measurable merely through trends from previous measurement cycles of ENPS. A participant also mentioned that the way to measure engagement is to consider the amount of absenteeism in the organisation during various time periods. Participant 4 indicated that his organisation does not measure employee engagement as such but measures whether its customers are happy, in which case the employees will be happy and engaged.

The findings support the literature, in that according to Saks and Gruman (2014) one of the problems identified with employee engagement is the difficulty of measuring it. Further, according to Saks and Gruman (2014) the difficulty lies in the fact that there are multiple ways of measuring employee engagement and there is limited knowledge of a standardised method to measure employee engagement. According to Gallup (2012) the various numbers of ways to measure employee engagement include measuring absenteeism in the organisation. One of the participants said that if absenteeism in an organisation increases, the employees may not be engaged or may be actively disengaged. Another metric, according to Gallup (2012), is that customer ratings could be an indication of whether the workforce is engaged or not and customer ratings are considerably higher with organisations that have engaged employees. Participant 4 concurred with Gallup (2012) that customer ratings are an indicator of engaged employees.

6.2.4 Summary of research question 1

The results have been aligned with the literature review as evident in Table 16 and in most instances the findings support the literature even through there are elements indicated by participants that could be used to extend the literature as indicated in Table 17 below.

Table 16: Research question 1 findings that support the literature

Key findings aligned to the literature review		
Findings by participants	**Literature**	**Findings support the literature**
Interview question 1: The VUCA operating environment		

1.1	Volatility is due to change and rapid rate of change with factors including market trends, competition and technology advancements	Saleh and Watson (2017); Bennett and Lemoine (2014)	Yes, but literature extension needed
1.2	The organisation must adapt to change quickly to stay relevant	Cousins (2018); Gandhi (2017); Reddy and Reinartz (2017); Bartscht (2015)	Yes
1.3	Internal volatility is created by team restructuring that increases uncertainty	Cousins (2018); Gandhi (2017); Felin and Powell (2016)	Yes, but literature extension needed
1.4	Lack of good communication creates uncertainty which may lead to cause ambiguity with multiple decisions and direction	Saleh and Watson (2017); Bennett and Lemoine (2014)	Yes
Interview question 2: Navigating around the VUCA environment			
2.1	Additional capacity in the organisation is required to respond continuous change	Saleh and Watson (2017); Felin and Powell (2016)	Yes
2.2	Environmental scanning is required to continuous learn about the environment and is required for understanding change	Cousins (2018); Felin and Powell (2016); Saleh and Watson (2017)	Yes
Interview question 3: Employee engagement and its measurement			
3.1	Productivity and commitment to deliver	Lu et al. (2018); Kumar and Pansari (2016); Ho (2014); Mani (2011); Rich et al. (2010); Kahn (1990)	Yes
3.2	Discretionary effort	Stoyanova and Iliev (2017); Han et al. (2014); Gallup (2012); Mani (2011)	Yes

3.3	Alignment to the vision and communication	Stoyanova and Iliev (2017); Gallup (2012);	Yes, but literature extension needed
3.4	Measuring employee engagement is perceived to be a good idea but is not done well due to lack of guidelines as well as good feedback about actions taken from the measurement.	Saks and Gruman (2014); Gallup (2012);	Yes

A number of participants have indicated in the results of a number of elements which there are limited research found in the literature review and could be used to extend the literature. The literature gaps according to research question 1 are evident Table 17 below.

Table 17: Research question 1 literature gaps

Limited literature that can be extended		
Interview question (Q)	**Statement**	**Literature gap**
Q1: VUCA environment	Competition and new entrants increase volatility and the rate of change.	The type of competitors have been indicated by the participants as traditional as well as nontraditional competitors which have not been identified in the literature.
Q1: VUCA environment	Internal structures need to be optimised to allow for rapid response and adaptability to change	The literature is limited in identifying the details around optimising the internal structures and what that optimisation would be. The literature should be extended.
Q3: Employee engagement	Engaged employees are aligned with the vision that is well communicated	There is limited literature that indicates that engaged employees themselves are good communicators.
Q3: Employee engagement	Majority of the participants indicated that engaged employees are happier employees	The literature indicates that engaged employees are emotionally engaged (Kahn, 1990) but limited literature have

		been identified that mentions engaged employees are happier employees.

6.3 Discussion of Results for Research Question 2

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: *What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?*

Research Question 2 was aimed at identifying what is understood by the concept of storytelling in the context of the utilisation of stories in a corporate setting by organisations. An effective story is made up of different parts and the discussion will include the various parts of a story identified by the participants and in the literature. The object of the last part of this research question was to understand ways of delivering effective stories.

6.3.1 Understanding the concept of storytelling

It was clear that some of the participants had previously heard of the concept of storytelling, but a number of the participants had not heard of utilising stories in a corporate setting. Those that had not heard of the concept easily understood it and realised that they had been using storytelling in their organisations and had been unaware of it. Aspects of the application of storytelling by participants who were unaware that they were using storytelling included the use of slide deck presentations, where they noted that each presentation has a storyline. The presenter of the slides would have to know who the audience was in order understand how to frame the information in context and to include aspects of future direction, pitfalls and the background of the project. There is limited reference in the literature to the use of storytelling by individuals who are unaware of the fact that they are indeed utilising the concept, as noted by participant 4. The literature could be extended with the notion of individuals utilising the concept without knowing it.

> Participant 4: "*It was something that was totally new to me. But I think it's one of those things where, when someone raises it as a concept, you suddenly might realise that the concept of story-telling isn't something you have thought about as something that you would need to bring into your business but you might have that realisation that it's something that you have actually been doing through a period of years and haven't really known that there was such a thing, that it existed as a concept within business.*"

Encouraging, influencing and motivating

The participants mostly noted that the purpose of storytelling is to encourage, influence and motivate employees to get them to buy into a process, vision or strategy.

The opinions of the participants support the thought in the literature that storytelling influences and persuades the audience listening to the story (Scheerder et al*.,* 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018). According to Dailey and Browning (2014) and Zwack et al. (2016), the story is told to guide the audience in a specific direction to a deliberate action outcome or goal that the organisation is aiming to achieve. In order to be influential, the story and the message that is being conveyed should be something that the audience needs to believe in (Näslund & Pemer, 2012).

Communication tool

Many of the participants indicated that storytelling is a very good communication tool. The communication aspect according to the participants is to be used to share information. The information that is shared should be relevant in context for the audience that it is being communicated to. The information that is shared through the communication tool is to create clarity on the direction of the organisation. The way the story is being communicated will have an effect, good or bad, which could impact on the message that is being communicated.

The findings about storytelling being a communication tool support the opinions expressed in the literature, which advocates that information should be shared through telling stories (Scheerder et al*.,* 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018). Stories are also known as narratives that are used for the communication of the direction of the organisation and the goals that it wants to achieve (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al*.,* 2016). According to Rosile et al. (2013) and Zwack et al. (2016), the narrative paradigm theory is part of communication theory where stories are utilised as a tool for communicating. One of the main principles of narrative paradigm theory is the effectiveness of communicating a message, which is seen as coherence (Rosile et al*.,* 2013). The second principle given by Rosile et al. (2013) and supported by Zwack et al. (2016) is that there is an element of credibility to a story, and if it is not executed well it could lose credibility. Aligned with this are Tesler et al. (2017), who say that story telling assists organisations with good communication, leading to effective performance. Storytelling is thus an effective tool for communication in an organisation and can be used to communicate the future direction of the organisation (Chen, 2012; Petrick, 2014;

Mazzei, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016). Adding to this, storytelling inspires creativity, in that the storytellers have to find innovative ways of using the tool to communicate the story (Barter & Tregidga, 2014).

Clarity and understanding

The participants in the research study said that storytelling is a technique that provides clarity to the employees when used well. The clarity is about their work roles and what is expected from them, as well as the future direction of the organisation. With the clarity comes understanding. It was noted that storytelling brings a level of understanding to the audience that clarifies the direction of the organisation. Communication through storytelling is understood by many participants to be a way of painting a picture using various elements such as the background to the story to set the scene and the future direction as the vision to be achieved.

The participants' suggestion that storytelling provides clarity and understanding is echoed in the literature. According to Dailey and Browning (2014) and Martin (2016), stories are used to frame information or knowledge in a way that is clear and easy to understand. The understanding that is created is related to the direction of the organisation and relates to how the employees have a part to play in the outcome of what the organisation is aiming to achieve (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al., 2016). It is important for the audience to understand the story that is being told because the story creates and shapes a new reality for the audience, which is crucial for them to understand (Spear & Roper, 2016; Tesler et al., 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018). This view is supported by Zwack et al. (2016), who indicate that if the story is easy to understand it will be simpler and then be more memorable, as opposed to a complex construct. In line with this view of Zwack et al. (2016) is the view that storytelling is an effective method of deconstructing complex ideas into elements that the audience can understand, so that they get the message clearly (Küpers et al., 2013; Conrad, 2016; Scheender et al., 2017; Strategic Direction, 2017; Tesler et al., 2017). In order to paint a picture for the audience, the information that is communicated needs to be framed in a story plot to provide insights on the context through the beginning, middle and end of the story (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Martin, 2016; Tesler et al., 2017). According to the participants the audience needs to be taken on a journey through the story and a picture needs to be painted to ensure understanding.

Relatability, relevance and emotional connection

The participants noted that when a story is told the members of the audience need to be able to relate to the story. If they can relate to the story they will be able to believe the story and then it is relevant to them. The story needs to be relevant for them so that they can understand that they have a part to play in the story and can possibly influence the outcome, which is related to the goals of the organisation. A number of participants noted that for the story to relate to the audience there should be an emotional connection.

The findings support the statements made in the literature, which are that the stories need to be relatable to the audience (Zwack et al., 2016; Tesler et al., 2017). According to Näslund and Pemer (2012) the stories need to be believable and relatable to be effective, or else they could become untold stories. The participants indicate that an important aspect is that the story must be relevant to the audience. According to Tesler et al. (2017) and Dailey and Browning (2014) there is context to stories and changing the context could change the meaning of the story. The storyteller needs to ensure that the story is framed according to the audience to ensure its relevance to the audience. The finding that the story needs to have an emotional connection with the audience supports the notion in the literature in that the mere nature of sharing stories contains a personal element, and to ensure that the audience can relate to the story there needs to be an emotional connection (Tesler et al., 2017). According to Küpers et al., (2013), stories have a power that is used to guide the audience in the future direction of the organisation, and they need to use emotion to connect to the audience. Participant 1 noted that people tend to forget what was said but they will remember the feelings and the emotions that were felt during the telling of a story.

Collaboration and inclusion

The participants in the research study indicated that storytelling is a way to include individuals into something greater than themselves that needs to be achieved, and through storytelling they can feel part of the effort to achieve it. A number of participants said that a scene is set through storytelling and a problem is communicated, but the middle part of the story is the solution element, which demands collaboration from the audience if the desired outcome is to be attained. The collaboration is created through the telling of a story that paints a picture of a shared vision with clarity and understanding about the direction taken, and how each individual is important to the organisation's reaching its goal.

The findings support the literature, which indicates that storytelling is performed to generate a sense of meaning and a shared sense of inclusion in a common task (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al*., 2016). Similar views are expressed by Tesler et al. (2017), who indicate that the narrative paradigm theory assists organisations to create collaboration through storytelling. According to Zwack et al. (2016), the nature of stories is to create commonality, which in this case could be a shared vision of the organisation.

Utilising examples

The use of examples in storytelling was deemed very important by a number of participants. The examples in a story allow the audience to relate to the story better and develop a sense of understanding. As a participant indicated, the use of examples makes the story more real as opposed to fictional and abstract, so that the audience can connect and relate to the story on an emotional level.

These findings are echoed by Rosile et al. (2013), who mention that the art of storytelling consists of telling a master story with smaller narratives included in the master story, and the smaller narratives should include living stories. Similar views are expressed by Zwack *et al.* (2016), that the narrative paradigm theory pronounces the communication of stories that represent reality.

6.3.2 Understanding the format of a story

There are different ways in which stories are formulated. The participants indicated that stories have a beginning, middle and an end. These findings support the opinions of Dailey and Browning (2014) and Zwack et al. (2016), who say that stories create memorable ways of sharing and understanding information and knowledge. Tesler et al. (2017) agree that stories are constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end.

The introduction

The beginning of the story is the introduction to the story, which focusses on references to the past, to paint a picture of the organisation's journey to that point in time. The stories from the past are seen as motivational in nature, whether good or bad, in that the audience could aspire to the past achievements or aspire to better achievement than the poor performance in the past. The introduction also highlights a problem or set of problems that need to be overcome.

These findings about the beginning of the story support the opinion of Browning and Morris (2012), who describe the first feature of a narrative as including the introduction of a problem. According to Rosile et al. (2013), a story is influenced by past experiences, and these past experiences set the scene in the introduction to the story that is being told. The audience needs to be able to relate to the past in the historical context and to connect emotionally to the story and even experience empathy (Tesler et al*.,* 2017).

The middle

The body of the story is seen as the middle of the story. The collaboration and the co-creation of the possible solutions need to take place in the body. The introduction painted the picture of how the organisation arrived at the current position and the middle creates the motivation and the urgency of taking action to solve the problems and proceed to the desired outcome.

The findings support Browning and Morris (2012), who indicate that the second part of the narrative provides a number of possible actions to take in the context. It suggests that it is not going to be an easy task to get to the set goal, as there will be complications that will have to be overcome to reach it. Limited mention was made by the participants of the likelihood that it was going to be difficult to achieve the desired outcome. According to Dailey and Browning (2014) and Zwack et al*.* (2016) the body of the story is the guide between the past and the goal to be achieved. The story is formulated in such a way as to create a shared sense of understanding and inclusion so that the audience can relate to being part of something (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack e*t al.,* 2016).

The end

The last part of the story is the point of the story. It provides clarity and an understanding of the direction, strategy, vision and end goal. The ending clarifies the reasons why the organisation is on this journey and re-emphasises the motivation to achieve the end goal. The ending creates a sense of shared commitment and shared vision, making it possible for the audience to relate to the reasons for the journey, and to buy into the vision. The audience needs to experience a sense of inclusion in the aspirational target. The ending needs to bring together the parts of the introduction and the body of the story to ensure that the audience believes the outcome is achievable.

The opinions of the participants are echoed by Browning and Morris (2012), who indicate that the last steps of a narrative are to achieve closure and to align the story to the implications it has for the audience. The ending should ensure clarity and understanding

of what the vision, strategy and outcome are that need to be achieved (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al., 2016). The ending should also have changed the existing reality of the audience and have shaped a new reality for them in the light of a new shared vision and direction (Tesler et al., 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018).

The mediums of delivery

The participants indicated that there are a number of mediums available that could be used to deliver a story. Not all of them are equally effective, but the choice of delivery medium is highly dependent on the audience that the story is delivered to. Mediums such as slide deck presentations and email were noted to be less effective due to the impersonal nature of the medium and because newer and better ways are available to communicate a message. The mediums which were thought to be effective for storytelling included audiovisual mediums such as the video format. Another medium that was deemed effective was that of a demonstration of a new product or service to experience the product or service as part of the storytelling. Many participants agreed that while audiovisual formats are good for visually engaging the audience, the preferred format is a face-to-face conversation. Such conversations are more effective in smaller groups. It was also noted that different formats could be used to complement the story. One participant mentioned that if the storyteller could showcase a video of actual customers of the organisation and their experiences interacting with the organisation's products and services, this would be a much more powerful tool to convey the message than to tell the story through speech or text alone. When a story is being told in a face-to-face setting the audience can see and experience the emotions of the storyteller and, according to a number of the participants, the story then seems to be more authentic and the audience can relate to it more easily and believe the story.

The findings support the statement in the literature that there are many ways of communicating a story, including writing a book or delivering the story orally (Küpers et al., 2013; Barter & Tregidga, 2014; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016). There is limited literature about the delivery mediums of storytelling, and the literature could be extended with the notion that the choice of medium should be dependent on the audience that is to be reached. Again, the two mediums that were identified as being less popular were slide presentations and emails due to their impersonal nature and because other audiovisual mediums are now more widely preferred. In regard to the video format, there is a wide range of benefits including that a video could summarise the essence of a story in less time than it would take to read through a document containing the same information. In addition, a video can reach a wide audience and be

shared many times. Videos connect with the human visual and audio senses, which enhances the possibility of making an emotional connection of the audience. With demonstrations of products, the product could be conceptual and in a prototype phase, but the demonstration could bring the story to life and there could be possibilities for interaction depending on the demonstration and the product. The face-to-face delivery medium is still the preferred medium for storytelling as the story is projected with authenticity and the audience can relate to the story more easily.

6.3.3 Effective storytelling techniques

The audience and the format

There are various ways in which stories can be delivered to an audience. The participants suggested that there are a number of elements that need to be considered to ensure the effectiveness of storytelling. The storyteller needs to ensure an understanding of the context in which the story is being told. This is dependent on understanding the audience that will be receiving the story. It is necessary to know the size of the audience in terms of numbers. This will determine the type of medium used to present the story. The type of employees that form the audience is also important for the type of stories and examples that will be used. The story should have a purpose and a planned format. For example, the introduction should contain a historical context to convey a sense of the reasons behind the setting of the goal that is to be achieved.

The findings support the statements made in the literature by Tesler et al. (2017) and Dailey and Browning (2014), that there is context to any story, and changing the context could change the meaning. A crucial part of the success of such storytelling is to understand and know the audience, and then to frame the story to their experiences and to what they would relate to. There is limited literature about the importance of knowing the audience, and the literature could be extended to include the topic of framing stories around the audience to make the maximum impact. The participants' observations that the story must have a structure and reference the historical context of the organisation are reflected in the writings of Rosile et al. (2013), who say that a story is influenced by past experiences referring to real life experiences that have been experienced by the storyteller or the wider audience. Similar views are expressed by Tesler et al. (2017) of understanding the background and previous experiences.

Reshape reality

According to the participants, a story should be able to frame the context of understanding in a new way for the audience. The problem that has been identified to

be solved should be viewed from the angle of the customers that are experiencing the problem. As a participant indicated, using a video of a customer experiencing a problem frames the issue in a different way and lends empathy to the context.

The idea of reframing the problem finds support in the studies of Tesler et al. (2017) and Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018), that find a story needs to be emotionally charged so that the audience can relate to it easily, the reason being that the story needs to shape a new reality for the audience by having them understand the issue in a different way.

Using examples
The results indicated that the use of real life examples allows the audience to relate to the story much more. The examples create the feeling of reality and bring the story to life. The audience can buy into the story with greater ease, and believe it.

Rosile et al. (2013) mention that storytelling is made up of narratives and these narratives should be based on living stories. These stories should represent reality, according to Zwack et al. (2016).

Continuous story retelling
One of the most crucial aspects of effective storytelling is that the story should be clearly understood, and that the audience should believe in it, as it gets retold. Many participants indicated that the telling of a story cannot simply be a once-off occurrence. It needs to be continuously communicated, over and over again.

Dailey and Browning (2014) and Martin (2016) believe that telling such a story could be useful for two reasons: firstly, so that the information about the story is retained, and secondly so that the information is transferred from the story. Similar views are expressed by Zwack et al. (2016), who note that stories by their nature are designed to be memorable. According Martin (2016) the way to get stories to be memorable is simply through the repetition of the story - by retelling the same story. The story should be understood to the point where it is easy to retell accurately (Dailey & Browning, 2014). The retelling of the story creates an even better understanding of the story by the storyteller, and the repetition makes it easy for the storyteller to recall (Mushin, 2000).

6.3.4 Summary of research question 2
The concept of storytelling is understood in many aspects and the findings support the literature as seen in Table 18, even though there are a number of elements that the

participants indicated which could be used to extend the literature as evident in Table 19 below.

Table 18: Research question 2 findings that support the literature

Key findings aligned to the literature review		Literature	Findings support the literature
Findings by participants		**Literature**	**Findings support the literature**
Interview question 4: Understanding the concept of storytelling			
4.1	Storytelling is used to encourage, influence and motivate.	Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018); Scheerder et al. (2017); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014); Näslund and Pemer (2012)	Yes
4.2	Storytelling is used as a communications tool for communicating the direction, vision, strategy or goals that lead to effective performance.	Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018); Scheerder et al. (2017); Tesler et al. (2017); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014); Rosile et al. (2013)	Yes
4.3	Storytelling creates clarity and understanding by simplifying complex concepts that they become more memorable.	Martin (2016); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014); Näslund and Pemer (2012)	Yes
4.4	Relatability, relevance and emotional connection that is gained through storytelling.	Tesler et al. (2017); Zwack et al. (2016); Küpers et al. (2013); Näslund and Pemer (2012)	Yes

4.5	Collaboration and inclusion is the effects that storytelling brings about.	Martin (2016); Rosile et al. (2013); Näslund and Pemer (2012)	Yes
4.6	Utilising examples throughout storytelling increases the relatability to the audience.	Zwack et al. (2016); Rosile et al. (2013)	Yes
Interview question 5: Understanding the format of a story			
5.1	Stories are constructed with a beginning, middle and ending.	Tesler et al. (2017); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014); Rosile et al. (2013); Browning and Morris (2012)	Yes, but the literature may be extended
5.2	The mediums through which stories are communicated have been noted as multiple.	Spear and Roper (2016); Barter and Tregidga (2014); Dailey and Browning (2014); Küpers et al. (2013).	Yes, but the literature may be extended
Interview question 6: Effective storytelling techniques			
6.1	Knowing the audience that is receiving the story is important.	Tesler et al. (2017); Dailey and Browning (2014).	Yes, but the literature may be extended
6.2	Reshaping the reality of the audience through storytelling to see the issues from a different point of view.	Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018); Tesler et al. (2017).	Yes
6.3	Continuously retelling stories creates the opportunities for better understanding as well as making the importance of the message memorable for recall.	Martin (2016); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014).	Yes

The results of the participants in the research study have indicated a number of possibilities where literature could be extended in Table 19 below. The common themes for extension of the literature includes honesty in the process of storytelling and

expectations from the storyteller as well as the storyteller that should have a good understanding of who the audience is to deliver an influential story.

Table 19: Research question 2 literature gaps

Limited literature that can be extended		
Interview question (Q)	**Statement**	**Literature gap**
Q5: Understanding the format of a story	Storytelling consists of a format of beginning, middle and end. The honesty of the difficulty of the journey was mentioned by participants in the results.	The literature is in agreement that the format of a story consists of three parts but there is limited literature which stipulates the honestly of the collaborative journey in the middle part that will be difficult to reach. Literature can be extended to the authenticity of the story.
Q5: Understanding the format of a story	Storytelling is communicated in various ways.	According to the literature there are various ways in which stories can be communicated but limited literature delves into the details as identified by the participants of which mediums are more effective like visuals and authentic speeches and which to stay clear of like emails and slide presentations. Further the literature could be extended to note that the medium should be dependent on the audience that is being addressed.
Q6: Effective storytelling techniques	It is important to know the audience to which the story is being communicated to reach maximum impact.	There is limited literature that indicates that there is context to a story and if the context changes the meaning could change (Tesler et al., 2017). The literature could be extended to the importance of knowing the audience to frame the story to relate to the audience as well as use relevant examples that would influence the

		audience and emotionally connect with them.

6.4 Discussion of the Results for Research Question 3

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: *How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?*

The aim of the discussion of Research Question 3 was to understand the desired outcomes of storytelling. The second aim of this research question is to gain an understanding of the outcomes of having increased engagement levels in employees. These two constructs are considered together to establish whether storytelling could be used to increase engagement in employees. There will be alignment of the findings from the results in Chapter 5 with the literature review in Chapter 2.

6.4.1 Understanding the outcome of effective storytelling

From the statements by the participants it is evident that storytelling is a communication tool and that the tool is used to motivate and influence the audience that the story is told to. Many aspects are included in storytelling, like the mediums that are used to communicate the story and the different parts to the story. Two main themes were raised in the interviews as the reasons for using storytelling. The first was that storytelling is used to create understanding. The second reason was to get buy-in from the audience on the communicated outcome of the story.

The finding that the desired outcomes of story-telling in an organisational context are to enhance understanding and induce buy-in is supported in the literature, which notes that storytelling is used to guide the audience to the goal that needs to be achieved through understanding (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al*.,* 2016). The information or knowledge that is shared through the telling of the story is framed and formulated so that it may be easily understood (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016). In addition to how a story is formulated, constructing a story is an effective method of deconstructing complex ideas into smaller and more understandable pieces (Küpers et al*.,* 2013; Conrad, 2016; Scheerder et al*.,* 2017; Tesler et al*.,* 2017). To further the understanding of the message that is shared, the storyteller could use tools such as examples and stories that represent reality (Rosile et al., 2013; Zwack et al*.,* 2016).

If the purpose of the story is grasped, the constructs have been fully understood, and as participant 10 said, if the problem is fully understood, the solution to the problem is almost obvious. The strategy or the vision of an organisation is often not fully understood by its employees, but with storytelling and breaking the construct of the vision into smaller pieces that are easier to understand, the next step of getting buy-in to the vision is much easier. The second desired outcome of storytelling is to get buy-in into the goal that the story is aiming to achieve. Understanding is linked to getting buy-in due to the true understanding of the vision of what needs to be achieved. The reasons for directing the audience to the goal become clear, and the audience feels that it could contribute to achieving the goal.

The findings on buying into the vision support the statements in the literature that a story is a way to guide the audience in a specific direction, and that the storyteller has an intentional goal that needs to be achieved (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack, et al., 2016). Similar views are seen from Küpers et al. (2013) that stories have the power to influence the future direction of the organisation through the storytellers that create understanding of and clarity about what the future looks like, and that the audience is emotionally drawn into the vision. The vision is then not only that of the person who sets the direction but is shared among the audience of employees, who want to make the vision a reality and combat the challenges in the journey to reach the goal (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al., 2016; Tesler et al., 2017). There is a mind-shift that occurs when there is understanding and buy-in into what the story is aiming to achieve, and that mind-shift is an understanding of the past as well as of the future. A new reality is created in the minds of the audience (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018).

6.4.2 Understanding the outcome of increased employee engagement

Engaged employees bring many benefits to an organisation. The participants indicated that there are two noteworthy outcomes of having engaged employees. The first of them is that engaged employees are more productive in their work and the productivity leads to better performance for the organisation, and that leads to increased profitability. The second output of having engaged employees is increased levels of discretionary effort as indicated by eight of the twelve participants in the results. This is the willingness of the employees to go above and beyond what their job description demands of them, to get the work done as well as possible. The employees go the extra mile in the best interests of the organisation and not in their own interest. These employees are invested in the success of the organisation.

The literature also claims that engaged employees have an enhanced level of commitment and that they understand the contribution they are expected to make to the achievement of organisational goals through their productivity (Kahn, 1990; Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013; Ho, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Lu et al., 2018). Engaged employees understand what is required of them and through this understanding they are productive in executing on their deliveries (Gallup, 2012; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). As part of their resolve to be productive, they need to be willing to do more than execute on their commitments. These employees believe in what the organisation is aiming to achieve, and want to be part of it (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Engaged employees have a mindset of wanting to contribute and want to make a difference. The mindset drives the employees' behavior. They aim for the organisation to succeed, and they want to be part of that success (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014).

6.4.3 The connection between storytelling and employee engagement

All the participants indicated that they all believe that the mechanism of storytelling could be used to drive the employee engagement of knowledge workers in a VUCA environment. When storytelling is used authentically to communicate the background and the historical context of a problem, and the story includes possible options for achieving the goal that the story sets out to achieve, this will increase engagement in employees. The storytelling mechanism is used to paint a picture of what success for the organisation could look like in the future, and the story takes the employees on a journey of understanding (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al., 2016) They can retell the story and gain further understanding (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Martin, 2016; Zwack et al., 2016; Tesler et al., 2017), and this will increase engagement in the employees.

There is limited literature that directly associates the mechanism of storytelling with employee engagement. It could be extended by the inclusion of the findings this study, that the mechanism of storytelling will increase employee engagement. Storytelling is a great tool for communication and keeping employees informed about the direction in which the organisation is going, by allowing complex constructs in the vision to be broken down so that they are fully understood by the employees (Küpers, et al., 2013; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al., 2016; Tesler et al., 2017). Understanding these elements of the whole is used to shift their mindsets towards the new reality of what the goal of the organisation is (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018), which will drive their productivity. Through

the motivation they derive from the story they will be willing to go beyond what their job description requires, be more productive, and deliver on the desired outcome (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han, et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

6.4.4 Summary of research question 3

Research question 3 explored the outcomes that would be expected when storytelling was conducted effectively which as indicated in Table 20 below is that of understanding and buy-in to the direction, vision or goal set out. The expected outcome of having engaged employees have been noted as improved productivity and performance of employees as well as increased levels of discretionary effort. The findings of these outcomes support the literature but the connection between the concepts is indicated to have limited literature indicating that storytelling is a mechanism to drive employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

Table 20: Research question 3 findings that support the literature

Key findings aligned to the literature review		
Findings by participants	**Literature**	**Findings support the literature**
Interview question 7: The outcome of effective storytelling		
7.1	The outcome of effective storytelling is to reach understanding and buy-in of a vision, direction or goal.	Tesler et al. (2017); Scheerder et al. (2017); Conrad (2016); Zwack et al. (2016); Dailey and Browning (2014); Küpers, et al. (2013); Näslund and Pemer (2012)	Yes
Interview question 8: The outcome of increased employee engagement		
8.1	The outcome of having increased employee engagement relates to more productivity and better performance by employees as well as increased levels of discretionary effort.	Lu et al. (2018); Kumar and Pansari (2016); Ho (2014); Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013); Kahn (1990).	Yes

Interview question 9: The connection between storytelling and employee engagement			
9.1	The participants in the research study have all indicated that storytelling is a good mechanism to drive employee engagement.		No

Table 21: Research question 3 literature gaps

Limited literature that can be extended		
Interview question (Q)	**Statement**	**Literature gap**
Q9: The connection between storytelling and employee engagement	The participants in the research study have all mentioned that storytelling have multiple elements that would assist in driving employee engagement.	There is limited literature that directly associate storytelling with increased levels of employee engagement. This research study have indicated that the literature needs to be extended to indicate from a qualitative research approach that storytelling is a good mechanism to drive employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

6.5   Conclusion

This chapter have discussed in depth the findings of the results from the research study that was conducted with the participants and analysed whether the findings support the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Majority of the findings have been found to support the literature with a number of possible extensions to the existing literature as limited literature have been identified about a number of elements raised by the participants. Storytelling have been validated to have many benefits including creating understanding of complex concepts as well as buy-in to the vision, strategy or direction of the organisation or department. Engaged employees have been identified as being more productive with better performance and increased levels of discretionary effort. Even though limited literature have been identified, the findings have showed that storytelling is a mechanism to drive employee engagement in a VUCA environment.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, storytelling as a mechanism for employee engagement in a VUCA environment is discussed by considering the problem identification from Chapter 1 and investigation of the existing body of knowledge through the literature review in Chapter 2. The research questions from Chapter 3 have been considered in all chapters. The research methodology from Chapter 4 was used to conduct in depth interviews with the results displayed in Chapter 5. The results and the literature review was discussed in Chapter 6 using the literature review from Chapter 2 and the results from Chapter 5 based on the research questions from Chapter 3.

The aim of this chapter is to use the findings of the investigation detailed in Chapters 1 to 6 of this research report to present a number of recommendations to businesses in VUCA environments. The limitations of the study will also be pointed out, and suggestions will be made for future research.

7.2 Research findings

Organisations are regularly changing their strategic direction (Girod & Whittington, 2017) to stay relevant in the market by navigating through difficult and ever-changing operating environments (Saleh & Watson, 2017). They need to ensure an engaged workforce in order to stay relevant and to ensure a high level of productivity (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010; Rich et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2018). The mechanism of storytelling has been identified as a way of increasing communication and engagement in the workplace (Spear & Roper, 2016).

The motivation for this research project was to understand the existing body of knowledge on the concepts of storytelling, employee engagement and the VUCA environment. The aim of the research study was to enhance or add to the existing knowledge about these concepts. Twelve knowledge workers were selected for study, from among a number of appropriate industries, including telecommunications, banking, insurance, and internet technology and fixed line communications. These people were assumed to have the necessary attributes to participate in the research, including being knowledge workers and operating in a VUCA operating environment and therefore likely to having been exposed to storytelling and employee engagement.

The key findings are indicated, based on and structured according to the research questions identified in Chapter 3.

7.2.1 Research question 1

What are the challenges to engaged knowledge workers in a VUCA environment?

There was a clear understanding among the participants in the sample of what their operating environment is and that the environment is indeed volatile, uncertain and complex, with a level of ambiguity. The biggest driver of the VUCA construct was regular change (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Saleh & Watson, 2017). The changes affecting the participants were evident in the internal as well as the external operating environment (Gandhi, 2017; Saleh & Watson, 2017; Cousins, 2018). The internal changes were identified as the restructuring of resources, continuous changes of direction and strategy, and the internal complexities of structures and ways of work as well as interconnected systems. The external changes included changes in regulations, traditional and non-traditional competition, and new trends that appear in the market, such as technological advancements. A key finding was that there is limited existing literature about the mix of traditional and non-traditional competitors in the market.

The problem identified with the change is the immense rate at which change occurs, and how organisations need to be able to adapt to the changes rapidly (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Saleh & Watson, 2017). Another key finding was that when the internal changes are not communicated clearly, there is a lack of understanding of the impact of the changes and what is required by the employees (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Gandhi, 2017; Saleh & Watson, 2017). The result is uncertainty among the employees, which increases the severity of the problem.

The way in which change can be combatted is to be able to adapt to it constantly and quickly, to stay relevant in the operating environment (Gandhi, 2017; Reddy & Reinartz, 2017). A key finding on a way to adapt to change is to ensure that teams are structured optimally and in an agile way with spare capacity to be able to respond to unforeseen changes (Felin & Powell, 2016). A key finding in the optimal structure to respond quickly to changes had limited literature about what the optimal structure should be. The literature goes no further than to recommend that additional capacity should be available (Felin & Powell, 2016), but according to the participants an agile methodology can be applied. Another finding was that it is necessary to create a high level of understanding about the direction the organisation is to take and about the changes which are coming and could possibly be coming (Saleh & Watson, 2017). This aligns with the notion of environmental scanning to identify trends and changes in the market through continuous learning of the environment, both internally and externally, to maximise understanding

(Bartscht, 2015). This places an extended responsibility on the employees in the organisation for continuous learning and gathering information about the environment.

Engaged employees have been found to be vital to an organisation's success in terms of increased levels of productivity, the making of discretionary effort, and alignment to the organisation's vision and strategy (Kahn, 1990; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Lu et al., 2018). The key findings include the notion that engaged employees are committed to doing more than is required of them, which positively influences the performance of the employee which have an impact on the performance of the organisation (Rich et al., 2010; Mani, 2011; Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013). The point was made that the productivity needs to be of a high quality for the performance to be positively influenced (Gallup, 2012). The second outcome of having engaged employees (after productivity) was found to be that these employees make higher levels of discretionary effort. The benefit an organisation derives from discretionary effort is that the employees are willing to do more than is expected of them, resulting in their continuously finding better ways of performing both in themselves and in terms of the performance of the organisation (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). An interesting key finding associated with discretionary effort is that to be an engaged employee is not a characteristic but rather a mind-set that the employee needs to adopt (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The next key finding on engaged employees is that these employees are aligned to the direction of the organisation. They have clarity on the direction and understand the goals of the organisation to the point where they know what is expected of them as well as understanding how they are going to deliver on their goals (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). The level of understanding needed is achieved by good communication of the direction and strategy (Han et al., 2014; Saleh & Watson, 2017). A key finding was that there is limited literature that claims that engaged employees themselves are good communicators as a characteristic. This was articulated by the participants, who noted that engaged employees need to be able to communicate the positive as well as the negative elements to ensure accurate feedback and progress.

There was consensus among the participants that measuring employee engagement could be good for the organisation, but engagement is very difficult to measure (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The problems identified with the measure of employee engagement include the fact that in organisations that do measure employee engagement regularly, there is a lack of feedback about the actions taken and those to be implemented.

7.2.2 Research question 2

What are the arts and practices of effective storytelling?

Many of the participants had heard of storytelling in a corporate environment and understood the term to be sharing a story to reach a goal in the organisation. One of the key findings was the fact that the participants that had not heard of the term previously came to the realisation that they had been using the technique throughout their careers but had been unaware of the term. Another key finding was that the tool was understood to be used to influence people, to be used as a communication tool, and to be used to gain and convey clarity and understanding. The participants and the literature indicated that storytelling is used to influence and persuade an audience (Scheerder et al*.,* 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018), to guide them to achieve a goal, and to induce them to believe in the vision of the organisation (Näslund & Pemer, 2012). Storytelling is further seen as a communication tool to share information and create clarity about the direction of the goal by breaking complex concepts down into understandable and relatable pieces (Küpers et al*.,* 2013; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al*.,* 2016). When the story is understood and the direction is clearly communicated this results in the story's being more memorable. It can be recalled and retold (Küpers et al*.,* 2013; Conrad, 2016; Scheender et al*.,* 2017; Strategic Direction, 2017; Tesler et al*.,* 2017).

The format of a story was considered. It was found to have three main parts: a beginning, a middle and an end (Tesler et al*.,* 2017). The introduction is focused on setting the scene and painting a picture of the organisation's journey to that point, with a focus on the historical context (Rosile et al*.,* 2013). The middle of the story is where collaboration is needed to join the historical past with the vision of the end through a series of actions that will be needed to complete the journey to reach the goal (Browning & Morris, 2012). The end breaks up the complexity of the vision into understandable parts and motivates the audience about the achievability of the goal and the outcome that it will have for the organisation (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al*.,* 2016). The end should create and shape a new reality in the minds of the audience (Tesler et al*.,* 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018).

A key finding pertained to the best media to utilise to deliver a successful story to an audience. The literature was not particularly helpful in this respect. The first aspect is that the storyteller needs to know who the audience is so as to be able to choose an appropriate delivery medium. The mediums to avoid include email communication and slide presentations because of their impersonal nature and the fact that the technology is dated and being superseded with newer technology. A key finding in this regard is that

audiences would benefit from authentic communication in a face-to-face interaction session. The session may be enhanced with audio-visual technology such as videos and made real with demonstrations of prototypes or the real-life experiences of customers. Another key finding was that the success of a story will depend on the continuous retelling of the story to enhance the memorability of the message for the purposes of retention and sharing (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Martin, 2016).

7.2.3 Research question 3
How does storytelling impact on employee engagement among knowledge workers?
To understand the possible impacts that storytelling may have on employee engagement, the investigation attempted to understand the desired outcomes of storytelling, as well as those of having engaged employees.

The two key findings of desired outcomes of storytelling are to create understanding and secondly to induce buy-in from the story on achieving the set goal. The creation of understanding required is that of the direction that the organisation is taking, for which purpose the vision needs to be fractured into easily assimilable portions (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Küpers et al.*,* 2013; Martin, 2016; Scheerder et al.*,* 2017; Tesler et al.*,* 2017). The understanding involves knowing not only the goal and the direction being taken to get there but also the actions to be taken by the employees to make this possible. A key finding in the understanding aspect is that participant 10 indicated that if the problem is truly understood, then the solution to the problem is almost obvious, and that this is the level of understanding that storytelling is capable of. The buy-in into the goal that the story is advocating is associated with the understanding of what the goal and the aim truly are. The understanding of the goal is simplified and made relatable to the audience through the story, which creates a new reality for the audience (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018). The audience buys into the vision emotionally and feels it can contribute.

The two key findings of having engaged employees in an organisation are that the employees will be more productive in their work, which leads to better performance of the individual and to the greater profitability of the organisation (Kahn, 1990; Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013; Ho, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Lu et al.*,* 2018). The second key finding is that of the increased levels of discretionary effort that are evident in engaged employees (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). The discretionary effort will influence the productivity of the employees and ultimately improve performance and profitability due to them going above and beyond.
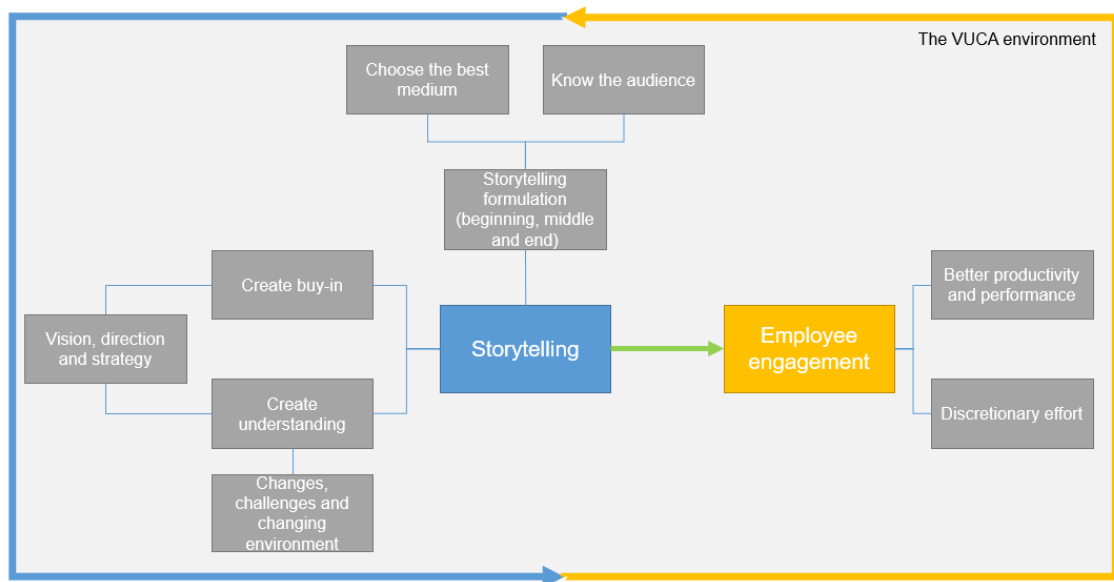
Figure 3: Model for storytelling as a mechanism for employee engagement

The main finding as per the model constructed from this research study and indicated in Figure 3 was that of the use of the mechanism of storytelling was deemed by all the participants in the study to be a way of increasing engagement among knowledge workers in a VUCA environment, where the key to combatting complexity and uncertainty is to improve one's level of understanding of the challenges (Saleh & Watson, 2017). The storytelling mechanism is used for communication and to create an understanding of the strategic direction of the organisation (Küpers et al*.,* 2013; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Zwack et al*.,* 2016). To increase the level of engagement of employees is to enhance their understanding of the direction of the organisation as well as the expectation of what they should deliver and work towards achieving (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al*.,* 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Once the direction and expectation are clear, the employees' discretionary effort levels are increased by them understanding the direction and expectations and they become more committed to delivering on the vision and so being more productive (Rich et al*.,* 2010; Mani, 2011; Swarnalatha & Sureshkrishna, 2013). If one is to be able to navigate around the challenges in a VUCA environment and adapt quickly (Gandhi, 2017; Reddy & Reinartz, 2017), the changes need to be understood by the employees, and engaged employees that have increased levels of discretionary effort continuously and actively scan the environment to gather information and knowledge about the changes (Mani, 2011; Gallup, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Through storytelling the level of understanding of the changes is improved, as complex concepts are broken down (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018) and can be communicated to ensure information sharing and clarity for employees to understand and execute more productively (Küpers et al*.,* 2013; Dailey & Browning,

2014; Zwack et al., 2016). Through storytelling the goal will be communicated, understanding will be gained, and a new reality will be shaped towards the goal that has been set, and the employees can buy into the vision (Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Küpers et al., 2013; Martin, 2016; Scheerder et al., 2017; Tesler et al., 2017).

It is clear that storytelling as a mechanism contains the correct characteristics to create the desired outcomes of a good communication tool. It creates a clear understanding of the strategic direction of an organisation, making it possible to navigate through the VUCA environment and increase the engagement levels of knowledge workers.

7.3   Recommendations: Implications for Stakeholders

The insights that have been gained here should be valuable for stakeholders and managers who are leading knowledge workers, and for other people leaders who have to engage with their employees, if they wish to facilitate delivery by utilising effective storytelling to create understanding and get buy-in. In an organisation it is the management that, having scanned the environment, has first sight of the strategy of the organisation. There is a responsibility to ensure that the strategic direction gets filtered through the organisation to all the employees, especially in a VUCA environment, as the direction may change rapidly. The operating environments, both internal and external, cannot be ignored, and emphasis should be placed on assisting employees to navigate around the VUCA environments. As a number of participants indicated, if an organisation looks after its employees, the employees will in turn look after the customers of the organisation. It is evidently crucial for management to have engaged employees to ensure increased levels of productivity and performance. Engaged employees assist the organisation to gain an understanding of the environment.

Management should use storytelling as a mechanism to align all employees with the common strategic direction of the organisation aligned with the challenges faced in the internal as well as the external operating environments. To ensure effectiveness of storytelling, management should be educated and trained on using storytelling as well as the importance of employee engagement. Utilising storytelling as a communication tool will increase the understanding of complex concepts and generate clarity on expectations from the employees to create a shared direction. The management should attempt through this technique to induce the employees to collaborate on finding ways to achieve the goal set out in the story. This should be done continuously and in the long term will result in a culture of storytelling throughout the organisation.

A crucial element that management should remember is that the story should be specifically tailored for the audience that will be receiving it. This places a responsibility on the storyteller to truly understand the audience. The storyteller needs to carefully choose the best medium to deliver the message and should be authentic when doing so. Further to delivering the story, management needs to understand that to induce buy-in and ensure that the audience understands the message, can remember it and relay it, the story needs to be retold continuously. The organisation should revisit the way in which employee engagement is measured and if it is not measured a standardised way of measuring should be implemented. The measuring of employee engagement should be done regularly on an annual basis and actions must be generated from the feedback with transparency and implementation of the actions reported back to the employees.

The stakeholders who are receiving the story should be receptive of the story and engage to collaborate on producing relevant methods for executing and demonstrating involvement, as employee engagement have been found to be a mind-set of the employee. Management should learn that different employees respond and relate to various ways and mediums of receiving a message and the storytellers should know their audience to deliver the most impactful message. Management should use effective approaches to make the story real and focus on delivering the story from a different point of view that a new reality is shaped and a deeper understanding gained by the employee.

The message for management is that, as is evident in the findings of this research study, the mechanism of storytelling results in better communication and clarity of understanding that leads to the development of engaged employees who drive productivity and performance.

7.4   Limitations of the Research

This researcher adopted a qualitative approach to exploring the concepts of a VUCA environment, employee engagement and storytelling, to gain an understanding of these concepts. The results of the research are the opinions of the sample that assisted in data gathering, and the sample of twelve participants was not large enough to represent the population.

Furthermore the interviewer is not expertly trained in conducting interviews, which lack might have given rise to personal bias and the researcher's presupposing what the outcome of the study ought to be.

The sample that was interviewed came from various industries including telecommunication, banking, insurance and internet technology and fixed line technology. Knowledge workers are present in many other industries that the research study excluded. The geographic location of the study was limited to Gauteng in South Africa only, and the geographic perspective was limited.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research are made in the hope that research into the topic of storytelling as a mechanism to drive employee engagement in a VUCA environment will be taken further and will add to the existing body of knowledge.

- It is important that additional capacity should be created so that an organisation can respond to rapid changes in the market. Future research needs to address the optimal structure of internal teams to ensure that they are capable of rapid responses and the execution of the changes needed for organisations to stay competitive in the market.

- There are many characteristics of engaged employees, but one in particular, the characteristic of being a good communicator, needs to be considered for future research. The participants in the research study indicated that engaged employees need to be able to be good communicators themselves.

- Storytelling has been noted throughout this research study to be a good mechanism to communicate the direction of an organisation. Even though the question of the best media to use to deliver a story has been explored here, future research should be conducted in terms of an empirical paradigm.

- To extend the literature based on storytelling as a mechanism for driving employee engagement, future research studies should be conducted to explore the importance of understanding the audience that will receive the story.

- Future research will be needed to expand the project beyond the limitations of the geographic location and the small sample of participants in this project. The expansion should focus on different geographic locations as well as a wider variety of participants. Future studies should consider adopting a quantitative research approach to create empirical evidence to enable an assessment of the accuracy of findings in different locations.

7.6 Conclusion

The objective of this research study was to explore the VUCA operating environments of knowledge workers in four different industries and the importance of having engaged

employees in those industries. The understanding of the concept by knowledge workers who operate in VUCA environments was investigated.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 clearly shows that engaged employees have a number of good characteristics, the most important of which is being more productive and exerting increased levels of discretionary effort. The findings indicate that the mechanism of storytelling may be used to create understanding and clarity on expected delivery goals and to drive engagement in employees that operate in a VUCA environment. Storytelling has been proved to create understanding about the historical past of the organisation and to simplify the complex concepts of the goal to be achieved by the organisation. Furthermore, storytelling creates an opportunity for collaboration in the solving of organisational problems so that the goal set out in the story may be reached.

This research study has contributed to the understanding and insights in the existing literature, and concludes that storytelling is a good mechanism to drive employee engagement among knowledge workers in a VUCA environment.

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ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL

19 July 2018

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Redelinghuis Herman

Dear Herman

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONCENT

Informed consent form

I am conducting research on storytelling, employee engagement and strategy execution, and am trying to find out more about how companies perceive storytelling as a tool for engagement and the effect on strategy execution. Our interview is expected to last 45 minutes up to one hour and will help us understand how companies engage their employees and drive execution. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be recorded anonymously, with identifiers instead of names of individuals or companies. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are as follows:

Researcher: Herman Redelinghuis   Research supervisor: Andre Vermaak

Email: hermanredelinghuis@gmail.com   Email: andrepv@mweb.co.za

Phone: 0820599558   Phone: 0833080235

Participant name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Researcher name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

Interview Guideline

1. **Opening:**
   A. **Establish rapport** [shake hands]: My name is Herman Redelinghuis and as a student at GIBS I thought it would be a good idea to interview you, so that I can learn from your experiences in your organisation.
   B. **Purpose**: I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences in your organisation focused on the operating environment, how you keep your employees engaged and the concept of storytelling.
   C. **Motivation**: I hope to use this information to better understand and gather insights about storytelling and employee engagement for my research dissertation.
   D. **Time line**: The interview should take about 45 minutes to an hour. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be recorded anonymously, with identifiers instead of names of individuals or companies.

*(**Transition**: Let me start by asking you a few questions about the operating environment and employee engagement)*

2. **Topics:**

2.1 Topic 1: **To explore employee engagement for knowledge workers in a VUCA environment.**

Question 1: With the rapid change of business due to new technologies, business models, competitors and markets, what does it mean for you and your knowledge workers to operate in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environment?

Question 2: What are some of the challenges for you and your knowledge workers to navigate in and around the VUCA environment?

Question 3: What does employee engagement mean for you?

   a) Why is employee engagement in knowledge workers important or not so important to you?

b) If so, how do you measure employee engagement in your organisation?

*(**Transition**: Let's move on to effective storytelling)*

2.2 Topic 2: **To understand the art of effective storytelling**.

Question 4:   Have you heard of a technique called storytelling in your organisation or through your experiences?

        1.   What is your understanding of storytelling in a corporate setting?

Question 5:   How do you think an effective story should be formulated (what are the different parts to the story)?

Question 6:   How do you think you can execute an effective story to knowledge workers?

*(**Transition**: Let's move on to storytelling and engagement)*

2.3 Topic 3: **To explore storytelling leading to employee engagement in knowledge workers.**

Question 7:   What do you think is the outcome of effective storytelling in your organisation (could it assist with communication or breaking down complex concepts)?

Question 8:   What is the result of increased employee engagement in knowledge workers?

Question 9:   If so, how do you think storytelling serves as a mechanism for enhancing employee engagement in knowledge workers?

*(**Transition**: It has been a pleasure understanding your organisation. Thank you for sharing your insights and allowing me to ask the questions which I had.)*

3. **Closing:**
   A. **Maintain rapport**: I truly appreciate the time you have taken to share your insights with me. Are there any last comments you wish to make or topics you wish to discuss?
   B. **End comments:** I should have all the information which I need, thank you again for your insights. The information will be kept anonymous and will be used as findings in my report. Thanks again [Shake hands].

ANNEXURE D: LIST OF CODES USED

<u>Individual codes:</u>

Accountability issues

Adapt

Agile

Ambiguity

Anonymous

Art of Story telling

Aspire

Attitude

Audience

Authentic

Background

Believe

Buy-in

Care

Change

Clarity

Co-create/Collaborate

Communication

Competition

Complexity

Connection

Context matters

Contribution

Culture

Delivery

Digital

Direction

Discretionary effort

Disengaged

Emotions

Empower

Engagement

Examples

Feedback

Follow

Future

Go the extra mile

Happy

Have heard of Storytelling

Have NOT heard of Storytelling

Improvement

Industry

Influence

Innovation & Creativity

Involvement

Journey

KPIs

Lead times

Leadership

Legacy systems

Listening

Market change

Measure

Mediums

Message

Millenials

Motivation

Negative

NPS

Operating environment

OTT

Painting a picture

Passion

Past

Performance

Positive

Powerful

Present

Pressure

Proactive

Productive

Progress

Purpose

Quality

Quicker

Quote to use

React

Recognition

Regulation

Reiterate

Relate

Relationships

Remember & Recall

Resignations

Restructure

Scene

Setting

Skill

Speaking

Stay relevant

Story telling

Strategy

Structure

Suggestion box

Support from leadership

Survey

sustainability

Traditionally

Training

Transform

Transparency

Trends

Trust

Uncertainty

Unclear

Understanding

Videos

Vision

Visuals

Volitility

Waterfall

Wellbeing/healthier

Written

Code families:

Code Family: Employee Engagement

Codes:[Accountability issues] [Ambiguity] [Anonymous] [Aspire] [Attitude] [Care] [Clarity] [Co-create/Collaborate] [Connection] [Contribution] [Culture] [Delivery] [Direction] [discretionary effort.] [Disengaged] [Emotions] [Engagement] [Feedback] [Go the extra mile] [Happy] [Involvement] [KPIs] [Measure] [Negative] [NPS] [Performance] [Positive] [Pressure] [Proactive] [Productive] [Progress] [Purpose] [Quality] [React] [Recognition] [Reiterate] [Relate] [Relationships] [Resignations] [Skill] [Stay relevant] [Support from leadership] [Traditionally] [Training] [Transform] [Videos] [Visuals] [Wellbeing/healthier]

Code Family: Storytelling

Codes:[Art of Story telling] [Audience] [Authentic] [Background] [Believe] [Buy-in] [Clarity] [Co-create/Collaborate] [Communication] [Connection] [Context matters] [Direction] [Emotions] [Examples] [Feedback] [Follow] [Future] [Go the extra mile] [Have heard of Storytelling] [Have NOT heard of Storytelling] [Influence] [Innovation & Creativity] [Involvement] [Journey] [Leadership] [Listening] [Mediums] [Message] [Motivation] [Painting a picture] [Passion] [Past] [Performance] [Positive] [Powerful]

[Present] [Progress] [Purpose] [Quality] [Quote to use] [Relate] [Relationships] [Remember & Recall] [Scene] [Setting] [Speaking] [Stay relevant] [Story telling] [Strategy] [Trust] [Understanding] [Vision]

Code Family: VUCA

Codes: [Accountability issues] [Adapt] [Agile] [Ambiguity] [Anonymous] [Change] [Clarity] [Competition] [Complexity] [Feedback] [Industry] [Lead times] [Legacy systems] [Market change] [Negative] [Operating environment] [Regulation] [Resignations] [Restructure] [Trends] [Uncertainty] [Unclear] [Volitility]

ANNEXURE E: LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Table 22: List of respondents

Participant	Industry	Position	Age	Location	Duration of the interview
Participant 1	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	38	Midrand	22m47s
Participant 2	Banking	Manager	32	Johannesburg	20m13s
Participant 3	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	44	Johannesburg	30m40s
Participant 4	Internet Technology	Senior Manager	46	Midrand	32m38s
Participant 5	Telecommunications	Senior Specialist	28	Midrand	33m22s
Participant 6	Internet Technology	Programme Manager	36	Johannesburg	31m36s
Participant 7	Telecommunications	Executive Head of Department	36	Midrand	38m01s
Participant 8	Telecommunications	Portfolio Manager	37	Midrand	22m06s
Participant 9	Insurance	Broker	36	Pretoria	35m29s
Participant 10	Fixed line communications	Programme Specialist	42	Johannesburg	22m41s
Participant 11	Banking	Senior Manager	32	Johannesburg	39m05s
Participant 12	Fixed line communications	Chief Commercial Officer	38	Johannesburg	19m49s