Creating customer service improvement in retail: building frontline employee engagement

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ABSTRACT

In economically challenging times business needs to focus on all elements of operations to improve profitability. Engagement is an emerging theme that successfully increases profitability by creating a more dedicated and actively present workforce. Within the service and retail industries engagement levers can be used as a profitability mechanism through enhancing customer service, their primary communication channel to customers. Maximising engagement within this core frontline, often semi-skilled workforce is crucial and cannot necessarily be approached in the same way as a white collar, highly educated environment.

A qualitative, inductive, exploratory approach was used to understand impacts and influencers in this setting. Nominal Group interviews were held within a South African retail environment with 54 total participants; qualitative and quantitative metrics were extrapolated and analysed.

Key findings revealed that the "Role the Customer" plays in creating staff engagement is not only a new lever, but the most impactful in a frontline environment. This creates a link not made by existing engagement literature. The qualitative nature of the study also develops a deeper understanding of the complexity of the influences that contribute to the established engagement levers allowing more focused business action. The emergent "Frontline Engagement Model" combines these findings and gives management insight into the complexities of engagement, helping to understand the difference in approach from the international literature base.

The context of a country in recession and industry facing resource cuts is also seen to be an important influencer of the model and the study. The findings are therefore especially relevant in other struggling developing nations. Ultimately, this research develops an engagement strategy to increase profitability that has been adapted to equip managers for success.

KEYWORDS

Engagement, Customer, Semi-skilled, Frontline, Retail

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 in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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CHAPTER 1:   RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINITION

1.1.   Introduction to Research Problem

The creation of employee engagement is seen by many as the gold medal of organisational design, due to its link to increased profitability. In tandem engagement is seen to help build a workforce that is more committed, positive and involved (Anitha, 2014; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Understanding how semi-skilled, frontline (customer-facing) employees think and are engaged is the key focus of this study.

Engagement first emerged in 1990 from Kahn's seminal work, he defines engagement as "being psychologically present in particular moments" (1990, p. 693). Classic motivational and organisational design theories focus more on extrinsic rewards, policies and leadership. Although these factors overlap considerably, they are almost exclusively measured on the individual's perception and attitude (Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Soane et al., 2012). Although literature has contributed significantly to the challenge of measuring engagement, a deeper understanding of its use as a tool for business effectiveness across different situations is required by both academia and business (Anitha, 2014; Bakker, Albrecht, Leiter, & Michael, 2011; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Menguc, Auh, Yeniaras, & Katsikeas, 2017; Soane et al., 2012).

A developing country in recession sets the context for the study and creates the need for a contextual finding that allows recommended actions to increase profitability without significant financial resource. Within South Africa, the amount of semi-skilled workers increased by 66% since 2004 and service workers represent 16% of the current employed population (Stats SA, 2014, 2016). These employees have monotonous roles and are used by business for their low cost and the perception that they have limited career aspirations. The improvement of engagement within this subset, through its link to increased profitability, is therefore seen as significant to the local economy.

Currently 7% of South African Service Industry employees are engaged (including retail), which is worrying for those who rely on these same frontline staff to be the primary interface customers have with their brand (Gallup Consulting, 2013). Within the retail environment an employee's ability to listen to customers, their product knowledge and problem-solving capabilities are key to business success, especially with the recent advent of social media and revolutionary technology changes (Albrecht, Walsh, Brach, Gremler, & van Herpen, 2016; Jacobs, Renard, & Snelgar, 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patrício, & Voss, 2015; Potter, 2014; So, King, Sparks,

& Wang, 2016). The findings can be utilised across both the retail and service sectors but are rooted in the retail industry and physical customer interaction.

As the research into engagement strengthens, a link between engagement and its effect on customer service has started to emerge (Gallup Consulting, 2013; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Karatepe, 2013; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013; Menguc et al., 2017; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). Literature has established the validity of the levers required for engagement, however there have been limited recommendations on how to influence these within an employee subset that has limited scope for role change or innovation.

The industry subtext of the business and its perception of engagement is also key. It is likely that individuals occupying different roles in a business hierarchy have different levers of personal engagement (Louw, Sutherland, & Hofmeyr, 2012). If those making decisions on how to enable staff do not perceive their needs correctly, a misalignment in focus and policy can occur, which is shown through staff productivity, which in turn directly links to profitability (Anitha, 2014; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Saks, 2006).

Employee engagement is a phenomenon with geographical impact. In South Africa actively disengaged employees represent 45% of those employed (one of the highest globally), with their engaged counterparts sitting at 9% (Gallup Consulting, 2013). This study used frontline employees in a leading South African retailer where a recent staff engagement survey has mirrored the Gallup national findings across this subset of employees. It is also a country in recession with retracting growth (Stats SA, 2017) and the impact of this on an employer's ability to manoeuvre and engage is discussed (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). This exploratory qualitative study, using the Nominal Group Technique, provides deeper insight, given the accepted challenges, and proposes how a retail or customer service-focused business can adjust to practically increase engagement.

1.2. Problem selection

A clear link has been established between engagement and increased organisational performance (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Soane et al., 2012). This organisational performance in retail and service-focused sectors is governed increasingly by frontline employees and their level of service to customers (Albrecht et al., 2016; Menguc et al., 2013; Salanova et al., 2005). The advent of social media, increased competition and reduced consumer spending power has caused companies to look at alternative ways of improving their proposition to the market beyond simply

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reducing prices and pulling marketing and operational efficiency levers (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994).

Employee engagement as an academic construct is proving increasingly popular in understanding how to create a staff complement that is vigorous, dedicated and absorbed in their work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). Although some studies have shown that a link exists between various engagement levers and first-class service (Menguc et al., 2013), research needs to go further to understand the universality of this challenge, something that was recommended by some of the seminal authors in the field (May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). Exploring recommendations that can be used to impact engagement with the aim of subsequently improving customer service is a logical next step in the research (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2014; Ostrom et al., 2015).

In South Africa, this is shown to be a relevant challenge (Gallup Consulting, 2013). The skills shortage, polarised market, high unemployment rates and economic uncertainty require stable businesses with low turnover; this has also been positively linked to engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Jacobs et al., 2014; Soane et al., 2012). Within the service industry, only 7% of South Africans are engaged, which is below the national 9% figure. If employees are not satisfied at work, their only viable option in a role where job characteristic changes are limited is to either increase absences, become non-performing or move to another employer (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2015).

1.3. Evidence of the problem

The landscape for service delivery has shifted dramatically in recent years, requiring a similar shift in the values and actions of those on the frontline of this delivery (Ostrom et al., 2015). Business cannot afford to stand still in the face of these technological and attitudinal changes. Transformative service experience is seen as an essential part of customer service of the future (Ostrom et al., 2015).

The link between high staff engagement and positive customer service was shown by Menguc et al., (2013) in the Canadian retail environment. Their well-recognised study evidenced that supervisory feedback and autonomy were directly linked to service employee engagement but they only tested three variables. Anitha (2014) and Jacobs et al. (2014) have more recently completed studies in different service-focused contexts and recommend that a study within a large scale business at different operational levels would add value to the body of literature.

Albrecht et al. (2016) linked happy employees to friendly customers and in turn increased profitability and customer retention. The complexity of the interaction between an employee and customer is an area they subsequently recommend for further research. A qualitative study will allow for this level of understanding and depth. Employees who interface with customers in a retail environment are often poorly educated. Maslach et al. (2001) show that there is a gap around understanding whether education levels affect employee burnout or disengagement, which is usually associated with more responsibility and higher expectations.

In South Africa the international theory around measuring engagement has started to be tested in the works of Jacobs et al. (2014) and Rothmann and Rothmann Jr (2010). These quantitative studies tested different specific metrics to understand the relevancy of the two main engagement measures: the Ultrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and Work Engagement Profile (WEP). These are shown to have limited impact when transferred, without variation, cross culturally (Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas, & Saks, 2012), showing a need for local studies. Jacobs's (2014) study looked across all aspects of the retail environment using a local South African retailer and the impact of demographic variables on work engagement, but was limited in scope and the focus was not just on frontline staff. Snelgar and Renard (2016) also found a lack of local empirical studies in looking at one of the key engagement levers, intrinsic rewards.

1.4.   Relevance of the problem

Employee engagement is a construct that has been pushed into academic interest over the last thirty years and is still relatively new to the corporate environment (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010). Various academics have continued to build on Kahn's initial model and the advent of positive associations around psychological wellness together with its clear link to organisational outcome have created further interest in the topic (Anitha, 2014).

The stresses of modern day employment in turbulent economic times has also created an increased need for loyal and energised employees who understand dramatic organisational shifts and transformation (Glicken & Robinson, 2013). Engagement techniques have been shown to often weather recessions and therefore understanding the impact of actions in this environment when other options are limited is key (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). While repetitive jobs have historically always been motivated by extrinsic often financial reward alone, social developments have started to shift this trend to a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic elements (Jacobs et al., 2014).

Research shows the retail sector in South Africa is expected to grow 14% in the next two years (Euromonitor, 2017). While globally jobs at this level are becoming more mechanised, the unemployment and education challenges in South Africa make the need for the mass employment of semi-skilled labour a relevant and pervasive requirement. In a tough economic climate, the need to retain customers also becomes even more relevant to business survival.

Attributes in the level of roles identified by this study are similar; monotonous, limited task significance. Roles that measure highly against these characteristics are generally low in engagement and staff turnover and absenteeism is expected to be high (Grandey et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). With onerous South African labour laws making firing staff expensive and time consuming, changing the employee is not a solution, despite the perception that it is cheaper than changing the organisation (Maslach et al., 2001). Increasing engagement is a more sustainable and pervasive solution.

1.5. The business need for the study

Businesses that rely on customer service for profitability will see value in understanding what drives their frontline employees, who are often the sole representation of their brand and likely one of the least well paid (Karatepe, 2013). This customer service has a secondary role in increasing brand loyalty especially within retail, something that in a challenging economic environment is key to success (So et al., 2016). It has also been found that even if a luxurious tangible experience is provided to customers without heightened staff behaviour limited value will ever be created for customers (Chang, 2016).

The consequences of a non-engaged workforce include many of the classic organisational behaviour constructs such as lack of job satisfaction, intention to quit and limited commitment (Saks, 2006). The relationship between these factors and increased organisational performance is well recognised, as discussed, although still developing (Soane et al., 2012). Engagement is also considered an individual level construct and some studies have found it more challenging to directly link it to business results (Saks, 2006).

Employees often quit their roles due to a lack of organisational commitment (Bussin & Nel, 2015) and engagement (Saks, 2006). This high staff turnover is expensive for business recruitment, legal and training costs. The complexity of influencing all levels of employees to shift financial performance is one that business often ignores for more sweeping organisational transformational tactics. These 'softer' interventions are not easy, complex and expensive to get wrong (Maslach et al., 2001).

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1.6.   The theoretical need for the study

Engagement is, by academic standards, a new construct, having been conceived in 1990 and really only becoming the subject of significant studies in the last ten years (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Although arguments around it being a 'fad' are numerous, many authors see engagement as a meaningful addition to literature around organisational transformation (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Saks, 2006). Within the retail and service sectors there are fewer studies focusing on engagement as a lever for improved frontline customer service although those that have proved this link are credible (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Karatepe, 2013; Menguc et al., 2013). Boichuk and Menguc (2013) and Menguc et al. (2013) show that further research into a more comprehensive list of engagement conditions in different contexts would be useful to the field of research. Drilling one step further, the research against a South African backdrop has started to show the mixed relevance of international models in a local context (Jacobs et al., 2014; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010).

Saks (2006) in his pivotal study found that most of the literature on engagement came from consultants and practitioners, not from academia. Saks's addition to Kahn's work increased the academic focus on the concept of engagement and recommended various future research directions including looking at Human Resources (HR) or training practices in relation to engagement (Anitha, 2014; Saks, 2006). While this has shifted in the last ten years the heritage of the challenge and subject is not as rich as other surrounding organisational development issues and is really still in its infancy (Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010; Saks & Gruman, 2014). In a follow-up study Saks and Gruman (2014) found that although the construct remains relevant and topical, a valid and transferable academic measure of engagement is still undiscovered (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Viljevac et al., 2012). They build on the recommendation of Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O'Boyle (2012) that future studies should build on the initial theory from Kahn (1990) and continue to refine the construct of engagement as a unique feature and not in conjunction with burnout.

Renard and Snelgar (2016) who recently completed one of only a few qualitative studies on the topic also reached a similar conclusion, in that the literature on engagement did not allow for in-depth analysis given its predominately quantitative nature.
In summary, this research builds on the problem statement developed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Problem Statement
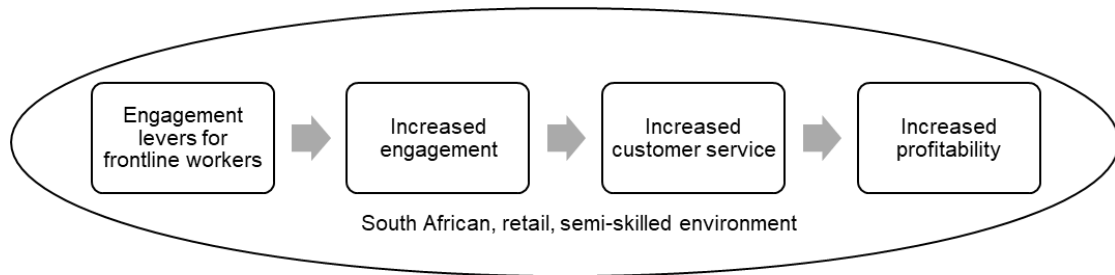
- Identify the engagement levers relevant for a semi-skilled, frontline workforce.
- Understand the impact of each of these levers in a customer-focused, retail environment and why this is the case.
- Provide a model for increasing engagement in frontline staff.

This study addresses the issue of how a retailer with a large workforce of semi-skilled, frontline individuals can be successfully engaged. A thorough literature review looks at the potential research gaps by identifying the existing levers and their transferability into the stated context. Qualitative Nominal Group interviews within a large South African retailer give context to the challenge of how frontline employees can be engaged to positively impact profitability.

CHAPTER 2:   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature associated with the topic of employee engagement. A literature review is an argument formed from an in-depth critical analysis of the academic work completed in the specified field. Employee engagement is discussed followed by the levers for its creation, and finally, the influence of the proposed environment and how these levers can positively affect the additional construct of customer service. This leads to the creation of three research questions addressing the gaps in the literature, a relevant methodology and a foundation for result analysis and discussion.

2.2.   Employee Engagement

The foundation of engagement literature is Kahn's seminal 1990 study. His grounded theory approach created a framework to measure engagement that consists of three questions, which employees should ask themselves in any situation. 1) How meaningful is it to do this role? This establishes how much an individual feels the amount they put into their role is balanced with the amount they get out of it. 2) How safe am I in this role? The psychological safety factor allows actions to be completed without fear of consequence, which has a primary focus on relationships at work. 3) How available am I within this environment? This final psychological construct relates to the resources available to create engagement both physically and mentally. Kahn's work shifted the focus from organisational inputs to emotional, cognitive and physical factors that create an overall psychological and continuous state of mind. The construct of engagement has since attracted attention from a variety of angles although there remains limited clarity on a universal meaning or attributes of engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013; Viljevac et al., 2012).

Several studies have built on the concept that engagement is a state of mind rather than a set of behaviours, however most of the measurement tools use the latter (Bakker et al., 2011; Christian et al., 2011; Soane et al., 2012). It is not seen as an attitude towards work but a persistent sense of fulfilment that creates dedication in an employee and subsequently heightens their performance (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010; Saks, 2006; Soane et al., 2012). In the extreme, an engaged employee would have complete control over their working situation, be energised by their work and believe fully in the value they are creating, not just for the business but for themselves (Anitha, 2014). Time at work would pass quickly and concentration on any

task would be easily achieved, there would be absolute support from both the business and direct managers and they would have all the resources at their disposal to excel in their task (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006). There is also an argument that "engagement may not always be uniformly beneficial to employees" (Truss et al., 2013, p. 2660). Increasing productivity and ambition within a team without the necessary resources to reward or promote those individuals per their needs and efforts will leave an engaged workforce ultimately more frustrated, especially if they have foregone a work/life balance to commit to being more dedicated and absorbed. This is a potential challenge in monotonous hierarchical organisations like retailers where margins are tight and there are few management positions on offer.

Developments in the literature pose a variety of constructs in assessing engagement including its founding in motivational theory (Meyer & Gagn, 2008). A popular school of thought is that engagement is the antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Bakker and Schaufeli (2004) however challenged Maslach et al.'s (2001) notion by proving that instead, the two constructs sit on a continuously adjusting continuum thus rendering this initial conclusion less effective. Two further subsets of engagement followed: the engagement an employee has with their job versus their organisation. Saks's (2006) pivotal study found they are related but draw on different factors. Employees can be engaged with their role and not necessarily with the organisation and vice versa; they found that organisational engagement is more influential in performance than role. Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot (2016) also found that the engagement is equally important to both the employee and the employer and the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Kahn's model of personal engagement has also sparked a number of now commonly used predicting scales (Saks, 2006). Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) developed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which is the most frequently used measurement scale (Viljevac et al., 2012). Limitations of this in current studies are however valid. Its use as a primary measure of engagement given the overlap of its constructs are questioned by current academics (Cole et al., 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014). May et al. (2004) were the first to test Kahn's model and their identified antecedents to his three original constructs are shown in Table 1. Their 'May' model is especially relevant to this study given their research tested those in repetitive administration and claim roles. Viljevac et al. (2012) in their critique of the two measurement techniques found that if used in isolation they limit generalisability for studies and recommended an urgent need for further research of an applicable measure.

Olivier and Rothmann (2007) then tested these measures in South Africa as did Jacobs in 2014. They agreed that meaningfulness was the strongest predictor of engagement in

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the local context. The development of a local version of the internationally acclaimed measurement instruments however was found to be required given the limited transferability of the language and meaning of the questions.

Engagement is often seen as a problem that can be tackled in one go, where a business simply needs to conduct a survey or tweak employee benefits. The real power of engagement as outlined by Ready and Truelove (2011) is creating an honest and persuasive process on how the business is going to become sustainably engaging. This 'story' around the brand and the organisation's desire to live core values will assist in pulling the team around a vision that inspires loyalty despite the tough economic conditions present in today's society (Ready & Truelove, 2011). If this is successful and businesses can create a feeling in employees that they are associated with something that is larger than themselves, engagement will follow (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b).

There are significant overlaps in engagement definitions and the classical organisational behaviour constructs of satisfaction, involvement and commitment (Christian et al., 2011). Maslach et al. (2001) and (Saks, 2006) show that engagement theory steps away from these. Job satisfaction measures how work fills a particular requirement for that individual and not what their relationship is with their organisation, measured by engagement. Job involvement also differs in that it is tied to a cognitive opinion of self-image and not how individuals see themselves perform at work. Organisational commitment is defined as attachment towards an organisation whereas engagement specifies their absorption in a role. Using these terms interchangeably can be risky in identifying what an employee's relationship is to the organisation, to their job and how such relationships are constructed.

The concept of engagement has also been questioned by the literature as a 'fad' or a construct that lacks real validity and weight in the Human Resource field (Saks, 2006; Truss et al., 2013). Engagement is a term that has the potential to be used in a variety of ways given its broad definition and application, this could have the effect of softening its power as a real instrument for change. Wollard and Shuck (2011) suggested that the concept of engagement with recent interest and economic circumstance had moved away from being a fad towards an integral part of an HR department's toolkit.

Drawing on all the predominant engagement theory Table 1 has been constructed from the literature to determine how it has developed since Kahn's (1990) initial study. Although additional studies have contributed in specific focus areas, this general summary will assist in correlating the numerous levers and variables into the main threads shown in section 2.3.

Table 1: Comparison of Theoretical Engagement Levers

	Psychological Meaningfulness	**Safety**	**Availability**
Kahn (1990)	Work incentives to engage • Task characteristics, • Role characteristics • Work interactions	Being who you are without negative consequence • Interpersonal relationships • Group and intergroup dynamics • Management style and process • Organisational norms	Individual distractions that impact resources available to engage • Depletion of physical energy • Depletion of emotional energy • Individual insecurity • Outside lives
May et al. (2004)	• Work Role Fit	• Self-Consciousness • Supervisor Relations • Co-worker Relations • Co-worker Norms	• Outside Activities • Resources Available
Maslach, et al. (2001)	• Workload • Control over work	• Reward and Recognition • Community and Social Support • Perceived Fairness	• Values
UWES: Schaufeli, et al. (2002)	• Vigour		• Dedication • Absorption
Saks (2006)	• Job characteristics	• Perceived Organisational support • Perceived Supervisor Support • Rewards and Recognition • Procedural Justice	
JES: Rich et al. (2010)	• Value congruence	• Perceived organisational support	• Core self-evaluations
Soane et al. (2012)		• Affective Engagement • Social Engagement	• Intellectual Engagement
Anitha (2014)	• Work Environment • Organisational Policies	• Leadership • Training and Career Development • Compensation • Team and co-workers	• Workplace well-being

2.3. Engagement Levers

It is almost impossible to act on any one engagement lever without affecting the others (Maslach et al., 2001). As shown the interlinking nature of the constructs makes their separation academically and practically difficult. To create a shift in engagement the correct integration of the levers must occur and prioritisation within a specific workforce must be established (Maslach et al., 2001). The literature also doesn't align on the order of impact of the levers discussed (Anitha, 2014; Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). Although quantitative studies have assigned statistical significance to some over others a definitive list of importance is a gap in previous studies, including in-depth literature reviews on the subject (Attridge, 2009; Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Simpson, 2009). Contextual differences are likely to have played a role in the lack of direction of this finding, which creates difficulties in interpretation of the levers given the likelihood that any individual business can only focus on a couple of areas at any given time. The connectedness of the levers will also aid in this decision-making. Figure 2 shows consolidated levers drawn from the most common models of engagement in Table 1. Each lever is subsequently analysed for its causes and potential solutions as observed by the literature.

Figure 2: Consolidated Engagement Levers
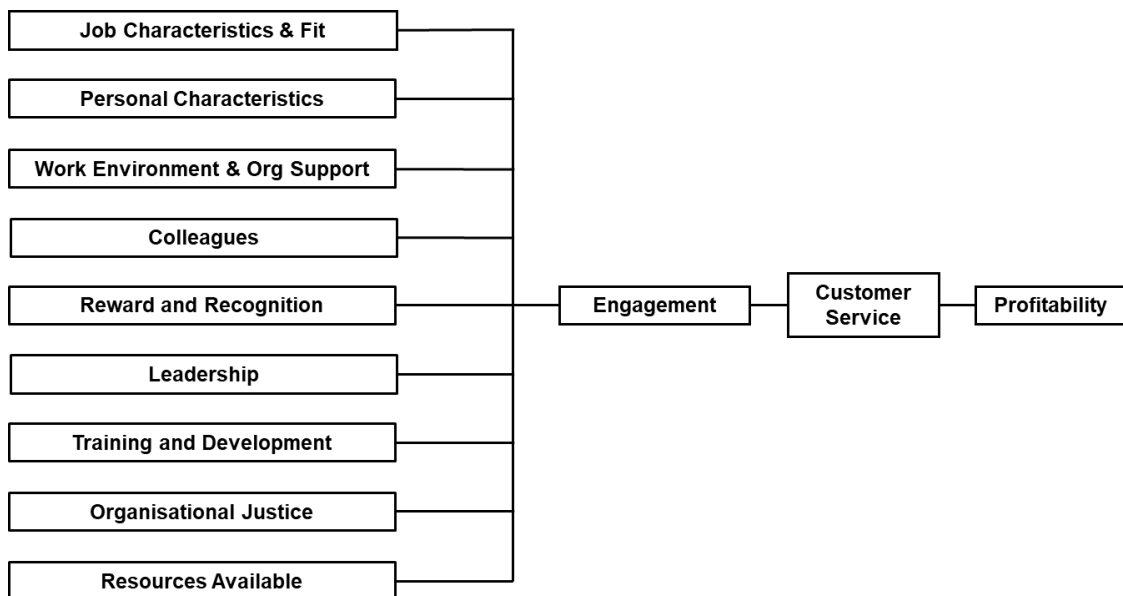
2.3.1. *Job Characteristics and Fit*

Job characteristics are one of May et al.'s (2004) central recommendations for the creation of engagement and a key, statistically significant antecedent identified by Saks (2006). May et al. (2004) found, in a similar monotonous workforce environment to that

proposed for this study, selecting the right employees for roles was a key link to increased engagement; in essence the demands on that person cannot be greater than their physical ability (Maslach et al., 2001). The construction of a role and the variety of the work need to be carefully matched to the personal desires and competencies of the individual to create true engagement. Employees should be set a variety of tasks that aren't constantly repetitive and have constant stimulation. This is a challenge for those in a repetitive retail environment. These constructs have been linked to heightened motivation and a sense of learning and progression (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b) and are based on Hackman and Oldham's (1980) formative job characteristics model. They identified five key characteristics for any role, which are held to be true for the measurement of engagement: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback (Saks, 2006).

Maslach et al. (2001) noted two additional antecedents contributing to engagement through job design. Firstly, that of workload: if a role is exhausting and leaves an individual feeling drained then a lack of engagement or burnout may occur. Secondly, the control that an employee has over their environment: if they are not able to control their level of responsibility and decisions exceed their current level of authority, they will never expect to reach set goals.

The meaningfulness of a job is one of the fundamental pillars of engagement and shown by subsequent studies to have the most impact in a variety of contexts including South Africa (Jacobs et al., 2014; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). If individuals can relate to their role, and the characteristics of that job provide enrichment and fulfilment they are more likely to be engaged (May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). May et al.'s (2004) study goes one step further to advise that if managers can design roles that require limited physical, cogitative and emotional labour, and subsequently less stress, they will be more available for greater role responsibilities. Role fit was also positively related to meaningfulness and as a mediator of engagement by Olivier and Rothmann (2007) in a South African context, linking the results of May et al.'s (2004) study to a developing market. Zablah et al. (2012) added a new paradigm to this outcome by finding that workers who feel that they can succeed in a more challenging or stressful environment are more likely to be engaged. Role conflict therefore depends on the individual perspective, nature of the challenge faced and feeling of autonomy.

At a basic level, employees must enjoy their work to be engaged. This idea of motivation through the fulfilling of psychological needs is one common in organisational development, starting with the theories proposed by Maslow (1943) and built on by the engagement literature. This element links to the resource and personal characteristics

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levers but can also be seen separately. Renard and Snelgar (2016b) found that lower level employees should not be forgotten in designing roles that allow a contribution towards interesting work or a defined aim. Creating happiness in a commercial environment is likely to be a challenge for business given that the link to a higher purpose is less explicit than in an NGO or even in the Healthcare environment, which is the focus of most of the local and international studies.

Recommendations to address these challenges include: creating role freedom, allowing autonomy in working environments and setting realistic performance-related intrinsic goals that create responsibility and satisfaction (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Renard & Snelgar, 2016b). May et al. (2004) also suggests that designing meaningful jobs that match the personal aspirations of each employee but don't overload their cognitive abilities will link to increased engagement. Community programmes and staff recognition awards are currently used in businesses to create pride and meaningfulness but the impact on staff is yet to be proven. Training sessions on how to handle aggressive customers are also recommended as well as granting employees a short break after an aggressive customer incident (Grandey et al., 2004).

2.3.2. *Personal Characteristics*

Given that engagements foundation as a construct is based on emotions and behaviours, the natural state of an individual before coming to work is likely to have an impact on the way they approach their role and the energy they put into their work (May et al., 2004). The link between personality, demographic variables and engagement is harder to establish as many employees have personal lives, separate from the organisation, that are hard to evaluate and interrogate (Kahn, 1990; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). When firstly looking at personality, these outside lives are an important element of Kahn's initial research, finding that a preoccupation with something that is happening outside of work can divert attention from their available energy for engagement at work. Natural happiness and energy are also difficult to measure although Bakker and Schaufeli (2004) base their definition of engagement on "a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (p. 295). These three constructs are the source of many further studies on engagement and measure high levels of energy or mental resilience (vigour), identification and involvement with one's work (dedication) and full engrossment in the role (absorption). Shuck (2011) also agrees engagement is reflective of a positive mindset that is easily influenced by interpersonal factors and an individual's external context (Truss et al., 2013).

Saks (2006) suggests that personality traits like hardiness, self-esteem and locus of control have been linked to engagement although investigation into these fell outside the scope of the study. Judge, Heller and Mount (2002) also linked extraversion and conscientious traits to job satisfaction but find significant gaps in the research. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) go further to suggest that social exchange theory may play a part in engagement through the motivation of individuals to reciprocate employer benefits if their personality aligns with a strong exchange ideology or level of perceived obligation.

An employee's self-efficacy is looked at by Menguc et al. (2017) who found that the various engagement levers won't have an impact if the employee is already competent in their role, they will already be engaged. May et al. (2004) also found that self-consciousness had a significant impact on engagement, which may be reduced by a higher level of self-efficacy. Goussinsky (2012) linked self-efficacy and disposition to a service environment, finding that low self-efficacious employees had less ability to handle aggressive customers and thus disengaged from their environment. Engagement in those who are less efficacious should therefore be sought through the various levers described in this study. This should include training in skills to increase competency, autonomy and confidence in handling negative customers and creating a management culture where emotional support is provided (Goussinsky, 2012). Those who are specifically affected by stress may also consider shifts that allow time off between interfaces with customers as this is shown to restore energy and reduce stress-based absences (Grandey et al., 2004). This contrasts with previous literature that views increased resources/leadership etc almost uniformly effective no matter the personality of the individual.

May et al. (2004) also looked at personal circumstances and the link that family life and outside activities had on engagement and found that it was negatively related to employee availability and engagement. There are other demographic factors that have also been suggested in the link to engagement and burnout for example disability (personality disorders for instance), age, gender or ethnicity (Maslach et al., 2001; Truss et al., 2013). Historically the literature has shown many inconsistencies in conclusions on this topic and failed to explicitly find a link given that the challenge is considered more social than individual (Shuck et al., 2011). Jacobs et al. (2014) did find significant differences in the type of engagement required across different genders and age profiles and Shuck et al. (2011) also found those who had been with the organisation longer and were older were less engaged unless they were in an incredibly supportive environment. The questions of race and education are specifically valid within a South African context

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alongside income distribution and standard of living. These have not been fully covered by the engagement literature although Shuck et al. (2011) found a link between increased engagement where supervisors were of the same race as the employees. Grandey et al. (2004) found from a customer perspective that hostility towards employees was more common when the employee was of a different racial group and stereotyped as a 'minority'. What is clear from a South African perspective, is the unique challenges that weigh on the labour force in a post-apartheid country. The inequality within the country is rising as unemployment hit a twelve-year high in 2016 and the Gini coefficient, considered an acceptable measure of inequality, puts South Africa as one of the lowest countries globally, which signifies significant stress on the working population. This may play a larger factor in engagement than in other countries and shows no sign of changing (World Bank, 2017). The level of education, again one of the lowest globally, may also play a role here. Maslach et al. (2001) links higher levels of burnout with higher levels of education although it is felt that this may be role and responsibility specific rather than being directly linked to education.

It is clear from the literature that a "one size fits all approach to employee engagement might not be the most effective" (Saks, 2006, p. 614). The personal characteristics and requirements of each employee and within each environment will need a specific approach by management to create higher levels of engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Menguc et al., 2017; Saks, 2006).

2.3.3. *Work Environment and Organisational Support*

There are many elements of a working environment that have been shown to directly impact engagement including structure, culture and communication. Anitha (2014) found this to be one of two lead antecedents of engagement representing 53% of engagement in her participants and building on the studies from both Crawford, Lepine and Rich (2010) and May et al. (2004). Her study linked both physical and emotional environmental factors explicitly with better customer service thus creating the overlap with working environment and organisational support. Saks (2006) also found organisational support to be one of only two statistically significant antecedents of engagement. Working Environment can include everything inside the workplace including the health and overall wellbeing of employees while they are at work. If the employer actively contributes, not only with effective health and safety policies but ensures staff are physically and emotionally comfortable it has been shown this can alleviate burnout (Anitha, 2014; Maslach et al., 2001).

Communication can be analysed as a key part of work environment as engagement requires "consistent, continuous and clear communications" (Anitha, 2014, p. 615). The lack of connection between frontline employees and senior managers has been shown to be a factor of engagement (Bazigos & Caruso, 2016). Communication can be shown to increase engagement (Truss et al., 2013) and internal communication specifically is shown as very important in any job especially if it is used by both leaders and employees (Bakker et al., 2011; Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008).

Menguc et al. (2017) look at the climate of an organisation and its effect on engagement through a critical examination of the Job-Demands Resources Model. The demands that an environment places on an individual will have an effect on that employee's engagement and if an environment is supportive with enough training, resources and control then the climate is seen as conducive to continued customer service improvements (Zablah et al., 2012).

It is important to define the difference between organisational and supervisor support for the purposes of this review as the literature often links the two concepts (Saks, 2006). Organisational support is linked to support in terms of policies and structures that the organisation provides. In a national retailer, policies are primarily set centrally by Head Office within the Human Resource or Operations functions. They govern the procedures and processes employees should follow, for example their working hours, although the environment within each store often varies depending on the location and leadership. Supervisory support is the personal impact or role of the leader in the employee's engagement and is covered below.

There are clear overlaps between the constructs considering that the supervisor is often the one ensuring the implementation of the overall policy. For example Deci and Ryan (1987) include both factors in their original link between a supportive versus controlling environment and increased employee performance. They surmised that the facilitation of an autonomous and engaged working environment is created by the type of leader in each situation and the overarching organisational structure.

It has long been the responsibility of Human Resources through frameworks of performance, motivation and reward to establish employee engagement. Saks (2006) found that organisational support is the most influential antecedent for job and organisational engagement. He also looked at how Human Resource practices present in a business could have an impact on engagement although the study stopped short of investigating these further. Karatepe (2013) went on to find that the link between the two constructs of environment and engagement is especially explicit in labour-intensive

organisations. Salanova et al. (2005) noted that studies to date had focused too much on these organisational policies and although they are a key part of any service environment the psychological predictors are often overlooked and just as influential to engagement.

Further recommendations for improving engagement through organisational environment and Human Resources come from Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) who found that Human Resources need to be committed to the development of engagement in order to successfully implement policies to do so. The structure and flexibility of the Human Resource department is also key and should work with each unit to understand how to partner with the business. This links into the other antecedents of engagement, many of which would fall under the remit of the organisational Human Resource policy.

2.3.4. *Colleagues*

A relationship with co-workers and a supportive team of peers is a key lever throughout the literature. This again originates with Kahn (1990) who found that a supportive team adds to the psychological safety required for engagement. He also found that an environment where colleagues are seen as supportive fosters a more experimental environment with greater levels of trust. May et al. (2004) differed from Kahn in finding the metric of interpersonal co-worker relationships not significant in the creation of meaningful work and hence engagement in the environment studied, which was fairly independent in nature. May et al. (2004) found that having to adhere to set co-worker norms within the workplace was a negative predictor of engagement, which could have an impact in diverse working environments where there are strong and sometimes conflicting cultural persuasions within a team.

Anitha (2014) found that co-worker relationships were the second most significant cause of increased employee engagement, representing 36% of participant engagement. "Higher order needs, such as achievement and collaborative decision-making, that reflects team and co-worker relationship, leads employees to take on greater responsibility to achieve shared goals and visions" (Anitha, 2014, p. 319). The creation of a high performance team is therefore shown to be a key focus of the engagement challenge and the employer should aim to lever programmes that enhance peer relationships and collegiality (Anitha, 2014).

Social support is also an area that has been included under a variety of different levers including the role of colleagues as a form of job resource that assists in achieving work goals (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Saks, 2006). A lack of this social support was linked to burnout by Saks (2006) and the contrary linked to engagement.

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2.3.5. *Reward and Recognition*

Reward can take many forms and has always been a key measure in recruiting and retaining employees (Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013). If rewards are seen as valuable and generous the employee will see greater value in the work they are doing and be positively engaged (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001). It is therefore more important to understand the value and impact of reward for different employee groups than develop a standard approach (Snelgar, Renard, & Venter, 2013). The balance between extrinsic (tangible, often financial) and intrinsic (intangible, psychological) motivators is therefore an important topic of discussion in the literature (Jacobs et al., 2014; Renard & Snelgar, 2016a). Each has a different outcome in terms of engagement and should be analysed separately. Roles that are intrinsically rewarding create an attitude of positivity and pride (Maslach et al., 2001). There is a perceived level of respect shown for an employee who in turn gives heightened commitment to the organisation through the provision of education or club membership. Extrinsic reward although essential is seen to be less impactful in creating overall behavioural satisfaction and creating a job that employees enjoy. Extrinsic rewards have also been shown to damage motivation if not correctly linked to performance (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b).

In their South African retail study Jacobs et al. (2014) saw repetitive, highly prescribed tasks as historically needing extrinsic motivation but that a shift in context and requirement of service staff to put in more discretionary effort even in a repetitive role requires a mixed approach. Their study built on the general South African study from Rothmann and Rothmann Jr (2010) and found a similar, significant positive link between intrinsic reward and engagement within the retail landscape in South Africa, although they tested all levels of employment. The recession also plays a part here and a lack of wage increase in recent years due to economic uncertainty may mean more emphasis on more intrinsic rewards (Snelgar et al., 2013). For employees in low level roles the pay they receive is likely to be of high importance in their overall standard of living although the adaption of the theory at this level remains to be solidly proven. It could be argued that in a retail environment the possibility of creating meaningful and fulfilling jobs is not as likely as in the social fields where most of the engagement studies have been conducted. This does not mean that meaningfulness is not important to employees within less socially rewarding sectors. Although in South Africa extrinsic rewards have always been seen as preferential (Snelgar et al., 2013), Jacobs et al. (2014) also observed a younger generation requiring more meaning and a reliance more on intrinsic rewards and value creation, which is a factor for consideration, again linking to the needs of different types of employees.

The consequences of increased reward also stretch beyond simple engagement with studies linking specifically intrinsic rewards to improved innovation, ability to retain knowledge, wellbeing and reduced stress at work (Jacobs et al., 2014). A holistic approach to reward is the key lever for engagement. Firms must create a balance between the two to create a productive and engaged workforce (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b). Although studies have shown links to pay structures and company financial success this is seen as more relevant in the short term at the CEO and Director level where the main investment decisions of a company are made (Bussin & Nel, 2015). Creating increased company financial performance through engagement of lower level staff is a longer and harder to measure construct.

In contrast to this research Saks (2006), Anitha (2014) and Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot (2016) also studied reward as a key antecedent, although all found that it wasn't significant against either job or organisational engagement. This contrasted with their own assumptions and a gap is shown in understanding why this lever fell away, something not probed by their quantitative studies. Truss et al., (2013) reflects that an engaged workforce may not be universally beneficial. The desire to work and be engaged can be negatively utilised by employers who do not subsequently reward those employees and this can lead to levels of income inequality.

Jacobs et al. (2014) also made recommendations on how to start improving intrinsic reward levels within organisations, which link to some of the other levers discussed. Given the intangibility of this type of reward it is more difficult to action through simple Human Resource remuneration policy. The meaning of an organisation and role should be clearly established in the mind of the employee, learning and development programmes should be offered, performance appraisals should be accurate and regularly implemented. Recognition programmes, flexible working, subscriptions and sports tickets will also all contribute to creating a more balanced reward programme. From an extrinsic reward perspective Snelgar et al. (2013) recommended ensuring that employees are retained through adequate cash awards as they found most employees were more dissatisfied with this type of reward. Using competitor analysis and understanding the minimum pay requirements will ensure a business remains competitive in its pay schemes.

2.3.6. *Leadership*

Strong leadership or supervisor support creates psychological safety, which has been shown to increase engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Leadership in this instance is defined as the direct supervision

of employees on a day to day basis rather than the overall leadership of a specific organisation. A positive link is created through an environment that does not have negative consequences but instead has managers who set realistic expectations and react accordingly when mistakes are made (Crawford et al., 2010). May et al. (2004) found a more trusting and respectful relationship between employee and manager led to higher engagement because employees have a more positive attitude towards their work. They also found this to be the case outside of any contextual nuances. This attitude and intention to do a good job also translates into reducing wastage and stealing. If an employee thinks an employer cares about their welfare they may be seen to be more aligned to achieving the objectives of the business (Renard & Snelgar, 2016a; Rich et al., 2010). Saks (2006) found limited statistical significance between engagement and supervisor support despite the literature to the contrary but gave no further insight into this finding.

The literature on types of leadership is extensive but fewer studies have linked it expressly to engagement. Anitha (2014) linked a leader who elicits engagement as one who has "self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and internalised moral standards" (p. 311). Her study found leadership as a leading antecedent of engagement and suggests inspiring and authentic leadership elicit natural engagement. Transformational leadership has also been linked to increased employee engagement. This is classically an inspiring style that energises a team and facilitates a positive working climate (Bakker et al., 2011; Hoon Song, Kolb, Hee Lee, & Kyoung Kim, 2012). Transformational leadership is also seen to be more effective in a changing economic climate as it creates a positive attitude and is flexible (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

If leadership is weak and unstructured employees cannot always anticipate what the response to a challenge or mistake could be, creating withdrawal and a lack of innovation (Crawford et al., 2010; Rich et al., 2010). The leader's role in itself may also be a factor. In their review of Social Exchange Theory Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) found that the higher the status of the supervisor the better the relationship and the lower the staff turnover. Power is also a potential consideration. Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) found that servant leadership can be an effective engagement tool if the aspects of humility and empowerment are accentuated. This implies an importance of hierarchy but that power should not be literally imposed, especially in the lower ranks; rather an action-orientated involved leadership style is more successful in creating engagement. Bazigos and Caruso (2016) looked at leadership within the frontline setting and found that this hierarchy can also be detrimental to engagement by creating managers who perceive

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they are visible to employees but are actually too far removed from those on the ground. The communication of messages by the leader has also been linked positively to engagement and the importance of a leader who can translate process in a transparent and trusted way is key (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

Maslach et al's (2001) study in a semi-skilled repetitive environment found a large dependence on direct supervision. Supervisor support was seen to directly correlate to burnout and those without decision-making roles were at even higher risk. Menguc et al. (2013) found employees need more feedback (not support) where the role is not autonomous and they showed that when feedback and support are given simultaneously there is no impact on engagement. Business should therefore partake in leadership training in order to create a transparent feedback system as this investment in employees' welfare has been shown to encourage engagement (Rich et al., 2010).

The role of the leader in influencing engagement versus that of the organisation, as discussed, overlaps considerably in the literature. The overall culture of the organisation is defined by a mix of individual leaders and overall policy.

2.3.7. *Training and Development*

Anitha (2014) found training and development to be a key antecedent for engagement. It is considered as an element of organisational support but is not always explicitly mentioned as a separate lever in earlier studies. Given the link to service accuracy and performance it is particularly relevant for this research (Anitha, 2014; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). Training is seen to create engagement through a boost in confidence and creates a reward seen as equivalent to increased pay. Soane et al.'s (2012) study also found that training was directly linked with engagement and recommends that a positive learning cycle be created to understand how to create a continuous environment for learning. Management needs to show the value of training in an employee's progression through the business to maximise engagement (Anitha, 2014).

2.3.8. *Organisational Justice*

There are two types of organisational justice identified by Saks (2006): one, distributive, the fairness of the employer's decision itself and secondly, procedural justice, the fairness of the decision-making process. The link to reward and the distribution of organisational resources are especially key in terms of allocation as they both create citizenship behaviour, which is linked to trust and engagement (Biswas, Varma, & Ramaswami, 2013). Maslach et al. (2001) also saw the overall fairness perception as a key characteristic needed for engagement. This can also apply to the fairness of

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stakeholders including how customers treat staff. They often act from a position of power as they know staff cannot respond to an aggressive customer even though it is often not the staff member's fault (Grandey et al., 2004).

Organisational justice also links to Kahn's original construct of psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). Safety within an organisation will be heightened by a sense of organisational fairness. Individuals who are self-conscious may be most affected by this challenge. May et al., (2004) link this explicitly with those who are in high interaction roles for example, customer service.

Saks (2006) found mixed results against procedural and distributive justice as predictors of engagement. Only procedural justice showed to be approaching statistical significance and this only on the engagement an employee has with the organisation, not the role itself. This demonstrates that only if a procedure is perceived unfair is engagement influenced, with the actual outcome itself having no real impact.

Recommendations include creating group sessions to address inequality in work situations and creating transparent processes (Maslach et al., 2001). A sense of fairness could also be achieved through linking achievement of supervisor and subordinate. This shows a shared responsibility that will be perceived positively and translate into engagement (Biswas et al., 2013).

2.3.9. *Resources Available*

Any employee faces two factors when working: the demands of their job and the resources given to complete that job (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004). Salanova et al. link this to engagement; "basic human motivation is directed toward the creation, maintenance and accumulation of resources" (2005, p. 1218). Resources can be defined as not just the physical tools and infrastructure, but adequate training on how to use that tool and support. Feedback from supervisors can contribute just as equally and a strong link is demonstrated between these needs and engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Saks, 2006).

Kahn (1990) defines resources from a psychological perspective or people's ability to engage at any one moment. Individuals require the mental capacity to meet the demands of their role and if this capacity and availability exist engagement follows. Kahn breaks availability down into four distractions from being fully available at work: an employee's physical energy and suitability for the work, emotional energy for the interactions of their work, insecurity in work and status, and the influences of their outside life. These are covered in other areas of this literature review but in essence an employee must be able

to draw on a full range of psychological resources with no barriers to perform their role in an engaged way (Kahn, 1990; Salanova et al., 2005). Menguc et al. (2017) found that resources play a key part in the engagement of service staff. Their study found the type of resources an employee possesses, both psychological and physical, can change an organisational environment from negative or positive.

The physical element of resources also "enable frontline employees to achieve work goals…help in reducing or coping with job demands" (Zablah et al., 2012, p. 24). If individuals are engaged they are more able to deal with the demanding elements of their roles. If the actual physical resources to do this role are not present, like no stock on the shelves or faulty systems, any engagement created through other levers will not be harnessed and passed on to the customers (James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011; Kahn, 1990). Again there is a strong link here to the physical attributes of the work environment and policies in place to overcome challenges, often a lack of physical equipment or technology, is due to the operational division and out of the hands of the employee it actually affects (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). The literature also links the physical experience of a customer through the quality of their service experience (queuing etc) to an increased level of customer service, which links this element of engagement back to the overall goal of a service business in order to improve profitability (Chang, 2016).

May et al. (2004) found that to create increased engagement employees should be able to invest in their own skills and have control over the resources available to do their roles. They also endorse Kahn's research adding cognitive ability to the initial distractions. Bakker and Schaufeli (2004) also recommended that increasing social support, participative management and team building will create more job resources and hence engagement.

2.4. Customer Service and Profitability Outcomes

The ability for a business to add value to its customers through the interaction between customer and seller is a core academic and business concept and the trend shows increasing importance in this interaction (Albrecht et al., 2016; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Research has indicated however that increasing these levels of interaction can have mixed impacts on staff well-being (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). The work of Heskett and Schlesinger (1994) showed an explicit link between profit and customer satisfaction within a service environment and this is a concept tested in a variety of studies (Salanova et al., 2005). Their Service-Profit Chain model is founded on the importance of focus not just on customer but on employees and commences with

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‘internal service quality’, which as Figure 3 shows matches closely to the engagement levers described earlier.

Figure 3: Service Profit Chain
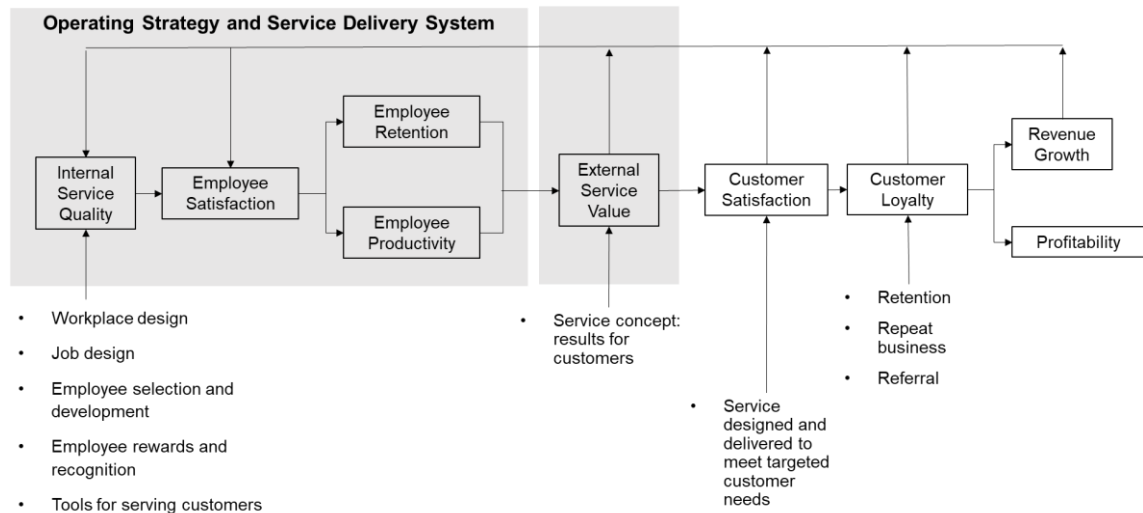
(Source: Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994 pg:166)

Salanova et al. (2005) also reversed the model to show that customer loyalty itself creates a positive service environment because customers are shown to constructively influence morale over time. This would imply that service institutions with higher repeat business may be more successful in utilising this effect and engaging their staff to perform better for customers (Salanova et al., 2005). One of the challenges for large stores in a retail frontline environment as opposed to a more bespoke hotel or restaurant setting is that the customer is less likely to interact with the same employee regularly, making relationships harder to foster. Heskett & Schlesinger (1994) looked into comparable service environments (fast-food restaurants and call centres). They found success in policies that linked pay to customer ratings in stores and an employee satisfaction programme that features self-examination and constant communication with what the workforce needs.

There are many contributing factors to successful customer service that are critical in the frontline services industry including training, empowerment, promotion, security and performance-linked rewards (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Karatepe, 2013). Karatepe's (2013) study found that these factors, when enlisted correctly and in synchronisation, can be levers for overall employee engagement and retention. He therefore found that customer service is a critical outcome of increased engagement and this demonstrates overlaps with the original engagement literature as discussed above. His finding built on the original work from Salanova et al. (2005) that

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engaged employees are more likely to go one step above in their service to customers and this engagement stems from either Human Resource practices or employee motivation. If a retailer can create an environment that is conducive to allowing staff to give good customer service that service will improve (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). This supports the basis of this study and the link between the two constructs.

The challenges of creating a purposeful and successful customer service model through engagement is also demonstrated. Training is shown to be required in exactly the right amount, empowerment must be moderated to not create too much stress in a workforce not used to such autonomy and reward programmes must be perceived as fair (Karatepe, 2013). Salanova et al. (2005) built on previous studies to substantiate the link between organisational resources; training, autonomy and technology contribute to engagement, which in turn contributes to a positive service climate and employee performance. A further key finding was that collective feeling and motivations within the workplace were important for customer service (Zablah et al., 2012). Employers need to ensure the entire work unit is proactively engaged.

2.5.   Environmental Context

The fast-paced, KPI-driven, low-margin and cost-reduction environment of retail is also an important factor for analysis as it will have an influencing factor on any proposed engagement framework. The consensus drawn from the literature is clear: the climate of the organisation is key to the impact that engagement has on profitability, customer loyalty and customer service and therefore studies in distinct environmental settings will contribute to a wider understanding of the subject (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Menguc et al., 2017; Saks, 2006; So et al., 2016).

"Management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors which shape…those practices" (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010, p. 801). The nuanced environment of South Africa is also pertinent to the study. The diversity of language, culture and influence of political environment while not unique are unlike most of the developed nations featured in the literature. Engagement is shown to have varied influence and interpretation across a variety of cultures and the literature has established this influence in a South African context (Jacobs et al., 2014; Renard & Snelgar, 2016b; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010). Truss et al. (2013) suggests that these diversity nuances should be explored in future research through more psychological, qualitative studies and this will allow a more generalisable engagement framework.

A recent study in South Africa shows that 40% of South Africans are worried about unemployment, 15% crime, 18% inadequate housing and 15% education (Institute of Race Relations, 2017). These statistics are reflected in global reports and of additional relevance is the poor work ethic in the national labour force shown as a significant problematic factor in conducting business (World Economic Forum, 2015). It is these factors in South Africa that permeate the thoughts of the workforce and the influence of these when considering engagement should be considered.

While there are various factors that can lead to turnover: lack of pay, leadership, challenges and empowerment (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b), engagement has also been linked to this consequence (Bussin & Nel, 2015; Saks, 2006). Companies make an effort to retain those who add value (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b) so those with low skill bases are often overlooked and leave due to dissatisfaction. There is also an abundance of labour in South Africa and although the process of hiring and firing is expensive there is an oversupply of potential employees, making engagement a costlier exercise.

The context of recession is also important. At the time of this study South Africa was in a formal recession with cost-cutting measures infiltrating most corporates including the retailer studied. It has been shown that reducing levels of customer service as a method of reducing costs is not effective but one that is likely to occur in times of real economic uncertainty (Zablah et al., 2012).

2.6.   Conclusion from Literature

In this chapter the literature on engagement has shown a variety of levers that have been proven by various studies to impact an employee's propensity to be engaged. There are limited qualitative studies looking into this problem. The link between customer service, engagement and a semi-skilled workforce has started to be established however the detail behind this link needs further strengthening to make it globally effective. Chapter Three covers the research questions relating to these factors.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature has shown various key elements that focus this study on three questions. These questions create the boundaries for the study and the prescribed research approach required (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). These questions are then probed through primary research and answered by the subsequent analysis.

3.1. Research Questions

Research Question One

<u>What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa, and why?</u>

This question looked at the different levers of engagement that were recommended by the literature and serves to confirm whether they are relevant in the context discussed by the study. The differences are analysed and any new influencers discussed. This will allow for more relevant applications of the international literature to a developing market context within the retail environment. Understanding why gives context to the study and provides greater insight into how issues around engagement can be addressed. Common themes are likely to emerge through the research and these were analysed in relation to the literature to create a meaningful model for engagement.

Research Question Two

<u>Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?</u>

Literature has shown that the factor most impactful in engagement varies within different contexts. In a business environment, it is important to understand which factor of engagement has the most impact on engagement as this allows greater focus for management in acting to improve and understand engagement.

Research Question Three

<u>What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?</u>

Building on Research Question Two, the answer to Question Three gives recommendations for those operating in the prescribed environment and builds on the recommendations made in the literature. This adds true value to the existing work on the subject and provides tools relevant for managing engagement within a retail, frontline environment. The challenges were also addressed here and an integrated and realistic approach suggested.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

There is no one correct method when collecting and analysing data. A methodology that matches the challenge set out by the study and answers the questions posed by a thorough review of the literature is the method that will prove successful (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The questions posed by this study involve complex theories and business challenges across a variety of organisational and social constructs within the realm of employee engagement.

4.2. Research Design

Literature has revealed a variety of levers that can be used to predict engagement and tools to measure the success and importance of these constructs. The challenge in transferring the results of these studies into different contextual situations is also clear. Truss et al. (2013) found much of the work completed in this area of study is based on quantitative research (Albrecht et al., 2016; Anitha, 2014; Crawford et al., 2010; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Saks, 2006; So et al., 2016). Jacobs et al. (2014) found that the language in the international measurement indexes caused mixed understanding in participants in South Africa and that their results were skewed as a result. This combined with the limited degree of existing investigation into a frontline semi-skilled workforce in a developing context means that a qualitative, inductive and exploratory approach was required to build a general theoretical base. This probed into why employees are engaged and allowed the piecing together of an action plan based on conversations with those directly affected. Taken one step further than the quantitative studies, in-depth research through Nominal Focus Groups allowed for consensus built on discussion and true participant understanding of the constructs proposed. The literature points to various areas where engagement can be influenced and the exploratory approach allowed the narrowing of these factors into a more focused set of parameters within a specific frontline, semi-skilled environment (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Qualitative methods allow flexibility and complex exploration into a subject, allowing understanding of how engagement levers can truly be maximised in the specified environment (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). As Collis and Hussey (2013) describe, a qualitative approach allows focus on subjective human nature and seeks to understand meaning rather than simply measuring the result. This played directly back into the literature gaps created by purely quantitative studies. It is also more appropriate to use

qualitative techniques in relatively under-researched areas, which is the case here, as it produced more in-depth reasoning behind certain phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Mason, 2002; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Zikmund et al. (2013) also refers to the findings of qualitative studies allowing for more rigorous process and understanding, again in line with the literature gaps.

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was initially designed by Delbecq & Van de Ven in 1974 and has been used globally to create a purposive learning channel for organisations. It allows understanding, in detail, of various aspects of organisational culture, including within the service industry (Chiu, 2002; Ipe, 2003; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). NGT has been shown as a complex and effective way of generating greater expression of ideas and consensus behind decisions (Boddy, 2012; Lunenburg, 2011) through the connection of large numbers of individuals. The approach is a hybrid of independent survey and focus group discussion as it allows for the merits of both. This has been shown to lead to higher levels of idea generation (Girotra, Terwiesch, & Ulrich, 2010).

As a collaborative technique, it is most suitable in environments where real outcomes are required through suggestions, providing the richness of qualitative insight required by this study. It also allows for prioritisation of responses, which answers Research Question Two, thus making the recommendations for business more relevant and actionable. Given the relatively limited educational levels of the group, the simplicity of the questions and control of the facilitator in comparison to a full focus group made conversations directive, transparent and most importantly ensured full understanding of the issues (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The pre-existing failure in the business of a questionnaire approach also feeds the decision to use NGT as it ensured compliance and representation of the workforce. To allow this respondents were asked to speak one at a time and build up a steady dialogue of responses to set questions. Given the sensitivity of the conversation and personal nature of the engagement construct the NGT allowed equal voices to those in the group who otherwise may be overpowered by dominant opinions or nervous to share their thoughts without being asked directly (Boddy, 2012; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Although a classic NGT involves only two questions Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) suggest that combining this approach with a few non-directive questions, typical of a focus group, is the most successful strategy, as followed in this study.

This study is based on respondents in a variety of frontline environments and based on their current opinions and experiences. It is therefore classified as a cross-sectional study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

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4.3. Population

The population of the study forms the complete universe of members that could possibly be selected (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The population for this study was individuals in Band D positions (see Figure 4) within a retail business who have contact with customers within a store environment.

Figure 4: Retail Company Hierarchy
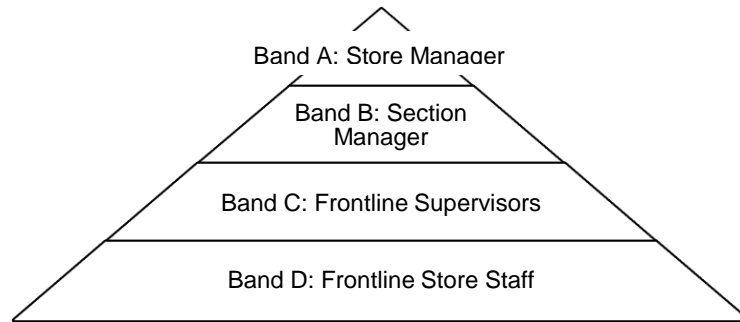
This study focused on one specific listed retailer in South Africa with a national presence. Within this retailer there are three roles that interact with customers and fit within the specialised population including cashier, shelf packer and service worker (bakery/deli assistants).

4.4. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the perceptions of the semi-skilled frontline workers in the retail industry.

4.5. Sampling Method and Size

The overall population was focused by the factors mentioned above, however the retailer has over 890 wholly owned stores (in South Africa) and 32 000 employees. A sample or sub-group is therefore required in order to realistically complete the study. The ideal group size was thought to be eight based on the literature (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014), however the number varied per group between six and twelve depending on the availability and scheduling of staff (Appendix 1 shows the full breakdown). Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggest that for focus groups, ten groups is the average needed for success. Other NGT studies have found that issues become too disparate as the size and number of groups increases past ten. It was however observed after six groups that due to the homogeneity of the sample, that saturation occurred, that all of the theoretical themes were covers and no new themes emerged (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Morse, 1995). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) also found that within one cultural

context a smaller sample can be sufficient if the participants have expertise in the field they are questioned in. They went on to state that the narrowness of the questions and high structure of interviews also lead to a smaller requirement. No further groups were therefore needed to validate the study. The total number of participants was 54 but 809 answers were noted by the participants across the three questions posed. Given the detailed conversations and the basic similarities between retail stores and other frontline service environments, results are considered representative and transferable. One Nominal Group was proposed in each of the selected stores.

To create a small but representative sample different sampling methods were proposed. First, the stores were selected. Gauteng is a region at the heart of South Africa, it holds 31% of the employed population and is considered demographically diverse (Stats SA, 2016). All the selected stores were within the Gauteng region, which in total consists of 131 stores, over 11% of the full store portfolio and the greatest concentration of stores within one region. Given that a full list of the population could be acquired, a sampling frame was proposed and the sub-group selected through probability sampling. Stratified random sampling was originally used to select ten stores. To get a representative sample from both rural and urban areas the sampling frame was divided into two strata. The province of Gauteng is roughly 200km in diameter with the city of Johannesburg at the centre. The first stratum included five stores randomly selected within the first 100km from the centre with the second five stores from the second 100km. This type of sampling is random but the chance of each person being selected is known and the sample statistically represented the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Sampling was also used by each store to select the invited employees. Each store was asked to provide a list of frontline staff who were working on the day arranged. Each employee was assigned a number and anonymously selected from a list. Again, this random probability sample provided a more accurate representation of the population and ensured no bias from the store manager in putting forward those who are perceived as particularly engaged or non-engaged.

4.6.   Pilot Nominal Group Interview

The relevance of the methodology was tested using a pilot Nominal Group Interview. This tested, in an identical setting, whether the research questions are fully addressed (Zikmund et al., 2013) and ensured the researcher is fully capable of conducting the session without a need for translation or additional support (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). For this study two pilots were conducted. The first pilot altered the proposed sampling

method and the second confirmed the questions. The adaptations following both pilots are outlined below.

The first pilot was conducted in a store selected through the initial sampling method. Stores within the retailer have different levels of union influence, which was not initially anticipated as a challenge. The pilot groups when assembled were disbanded by the union, which didn't want their members involved in any group engagement despite the shop steward's invitation and transparency of the agenda. The suggested recording of the session was also met with hostility.

Following this, a different approach was selected to improve the quality of the sessions and ensure no union involvement. Within the Gauteng region there are two regional offices that are considered neutral ground (Johannesburg and Pretoria). The original sampling methods were used to select two employees from each of the stores. The sampling frame was adjusted to include only those stores geographically close to the two offices. Both offices were in urban areas but did represent quite different geographical populations to ensure diversity. Employees were invited to attend the sessions by their store manager and transport was provided to and from their store. This stopped any union interference and allowed a greater level of trust in the conversations, employees didn't know each other and felt more empowered to discuss their issues. Although fewer employees from each store were represented this method meant 27 instead of 10 stores overall were included, expanding the overall coverage of the sample. There was still a disadvantage in this method of only enabling stores in geographical proximity to those offices to participate, as given the available travel time of employees this reduced the population and potential urban/rural diversity of the sample. Given the sensitivity around recording a decision was made not to record any of the group sessions and for the facilitator to note the key discussion points for analysis. Given the nature of the technique the literature suggests a full transcript is not necessary therefore the study proceeded without the recordings (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

This sample selection method was followed for all focus groups following the initial pilot. A second pilot was conducted following the revised format and the questions were found to be appropriate and relevant for the study. The second pilot was therefore included in the final sample.

4.7. Measurement and Data Gathering

Nominal Group interviews were held over a two-week period but considered within a single time frame. Each slot was requested for 120 minutes and most took between 90 and 120 minutes depending on the size of the group and the passion for the topic, which

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was evident in most of the sessions conducted. Given that the interviewer was of a different culture from the participants trust was built through their individual Human Resource Business Partner who introduced the exercise and ensured all participants knew they could opt out if requested (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Each question asked was carefully mapped against the Research Questions in Chapter Three to ensure alignment of the results with the study's expectation, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Research Questions and Nominal Group Questions

Research Question (Chapter Three)	Nominal Group Question (Chapter Four)
Research Question One: What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa, and why?	A. What things do you like about your job that help you serve customers better? B. What things about your job stop you helping customers?
Research Question Two: Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?	Ranking of Question A and B on the voting form
Research Question Three: What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?	C. What could the business do to improve your desire to come to work?

The NGT process has five main phases (Boddy, 2012; Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1974) which are outlined in detail below. Figure 5 shows an overview of the customised process flow used in this study and the respective responsibilities at each phase.

Figure 5: NGT Customised Process Flow
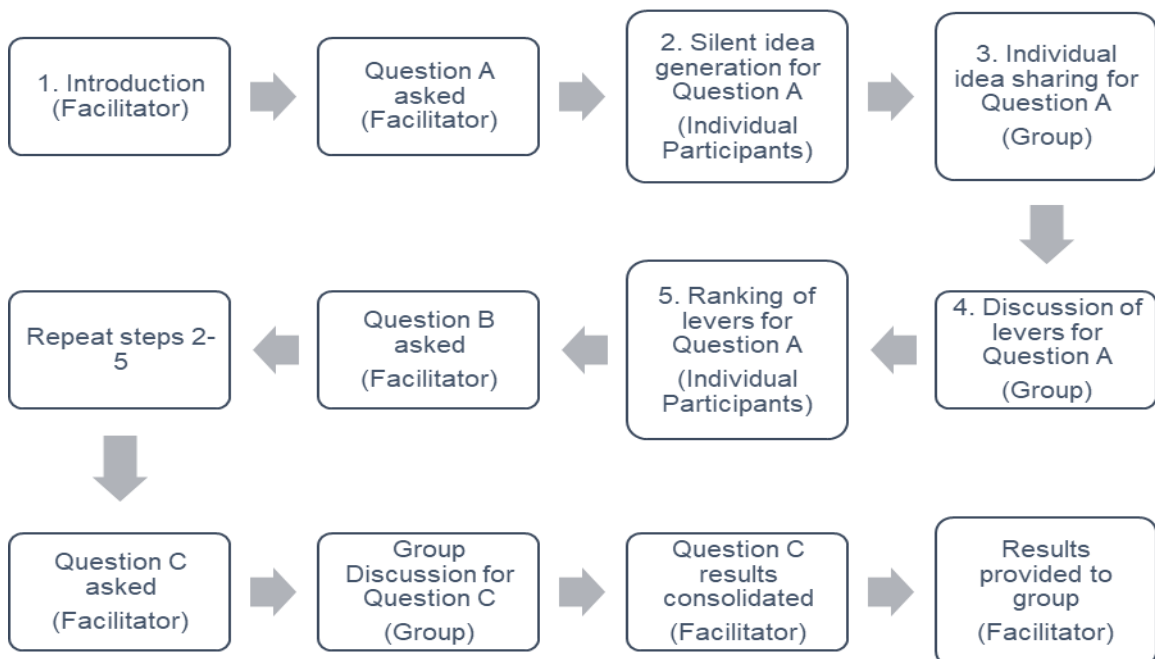
Phase 1: Introduction

All participants were welcomed, and a short introduction on the reason for the meeting given. Consent was discussed and participants were informed that their presence is voluntary. Each participant was given a voting form (Appendix 2), which reinforced the verbal consent and study information. Generic demographic questions included length of service but no personal details were included. This was then analysed to collaborate the literature around demographic variables on engagement levels (Jacobs et al., 2014). Happiness is seen as one way of describing engagement, although the meaning of engagement is more complex this explanation was considered adequate for the level of the study and a fair match to assessing engagement in the sample (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Graber, 2015).

Phase 2: Silent Idea Generation

Each question was explained (in turn) and participants were given post-it notes to write down their initial ideas in silence. Purposefully neither question includes the word 'engagement' and the concepts are simplified to be understood by the respondents. The word 'things' was used to not bias the participants either towards resource or psychological issues and elicit their genuine and broad opinions. The researcher ensured all participants understood the context and meaning of the questions using different phrases to explain what was required. This was done without giving direct examples that could be considered as leading to participants.

The two questions asked by the facilitator were:

    A. What things do you like about your job that help you serve customers better?
    B. What things about your job stop you helping customers?

Phase 3: Sharing Ideas

Each participant was asked to share their ideas in turn (in round-robin fashion). The facilitator noted all ideas on flip chart pages using the exact language of the participant. There is no discussion at this stage.

Phase 4: Group Discussion

Any areas of concern or clarity were discussed. Each factor was discussed until consensus on the meaning was reached. The facilitator kept the conversation flowing and ensured equal participation. Similar items were combined with the agreement of the group but none rejected. Items that seemed similar may have different causes or inferences and therefore these were kept separate and the differences noted for further analysis. The group discussion was passionate and generally emotional for the

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participants, although some were initially shy. The sense was given that they enjoyed being able to voice their concerns and took the opportunity to do so seriously.

Phase 5: Voting and Ranking

Everyone was then asked to prioritise the ideas per their own preference and write them down in the tables provided on the voting form. Any ideas that individuals were not comfortable to share with the group could also be added to the personal lists. The length of individual list therefore varied considerably both across group and individual depending on which factors each participant felt were relevant to them.

Once the voting for question one and two had been completed one further question was asked, which led to around a 15-minute general discussion.

C. What could the business do to improve your desire to come to work?

The facilitator noted the agreed results of the conversation and respondents were encouraged to use their voting form to include anything they were not comfortable sharing with the group.

Results were made immediately available to the group to show a purpose and conclusion for the participants. The session then concluded with all participants being thanked for their time.

4.8. Analysis Approach

"If we do not know how people went about analysing their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, it is difficult to evaluate their research" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7). It is therefore vital to clarify process and produce analysis based on systematic patterns. Focus groups historically have mixed methods of analysis and "there is no best approach" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014, p. 139). Alignment with the overall purpose and goal of the study is therefore vital and the analysis below has been selected to accommodate this.

This study required a mix of thematic and content analysis. Thematic analysis is a foundational method of analysis for qualitative data and was used in this study to understand, analyse and report on the themes that came up through the conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the inductive nature of the study the responses were coded using thematic analysis to reflect reality and capture information that assists in answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the themes were developed content analysis then allows a quantifiable measure not provided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Content analysis sits in the quantitative field and "has

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as its goal a numerically based summary of a chosen message set" (Neuendorf, 2016, p. 21). Content analysis looks at the systematic qualities of message characteristics and can be applied across both qualitative and quantitative research. It therefore allowed for qualitative data to be predominately analysed through qualitative techniques, something common amongst focus group analysis (Neuendorf, 2016).

4.8.1. *Data Editing*

Initial editing of the data observes omissions, legibility and consistency (Zikmund et al., 2013). Omissions were observed in some of the demographic data and this was assumed to have been due to either understanding or a weariness of anonymity. The question around language was not accurately answered with most noting only their primary language. This was therefore excluded from the results. Only one participant actively didn't answer Nominal Group Question One but this was due to him finding nothing that engaged him.

There were some disparities between response formats for the two questions with some writing paragraphs rather than lists. General rules were applied to the results to ensure consistency. For example, participants who repeated identical items at different places on their list, in this case the higher ranked answer was selected. Participants also wrote two concepts together for example manager and customer respect. In this instance, both were included as separate constructs in the order of writing. The writing of the participants was legible and clear to read.

4.8.2. *Data Coding*

Braun & Clarke (2006) recommend that a key step of thematic analysis is searching for themes in the data. After the editing of the data and an initial list of codes were developed the themes start to appear linking the codes together. Codes were then combined to fit into the general themes for example, pay day as a code fitted under reward and recognition as a theme (see Appendix 3 for a full list of codes and themes). To add to the richness of the data individual variations on the main themes (levers) were noted separately as sub-levers although obvious overlaps in meaning were combined. Levers were analysed in this way for their face value and not the underlying causes which was noted as part of the qualitative discussion. All data collected was electronically captured following each group session to monitor when saturation point was reached. Saturation was reached when codes became repetitive within the focus groups with the main themes not altering (Morse, 1995).

The method of data gathering through the NGT meant there were three elements to consider in answering the three posed research questions. Figure 6 shows in grey the main areas of the process flow where data was captured.

Figure 6: NGT Customised steps with result areas
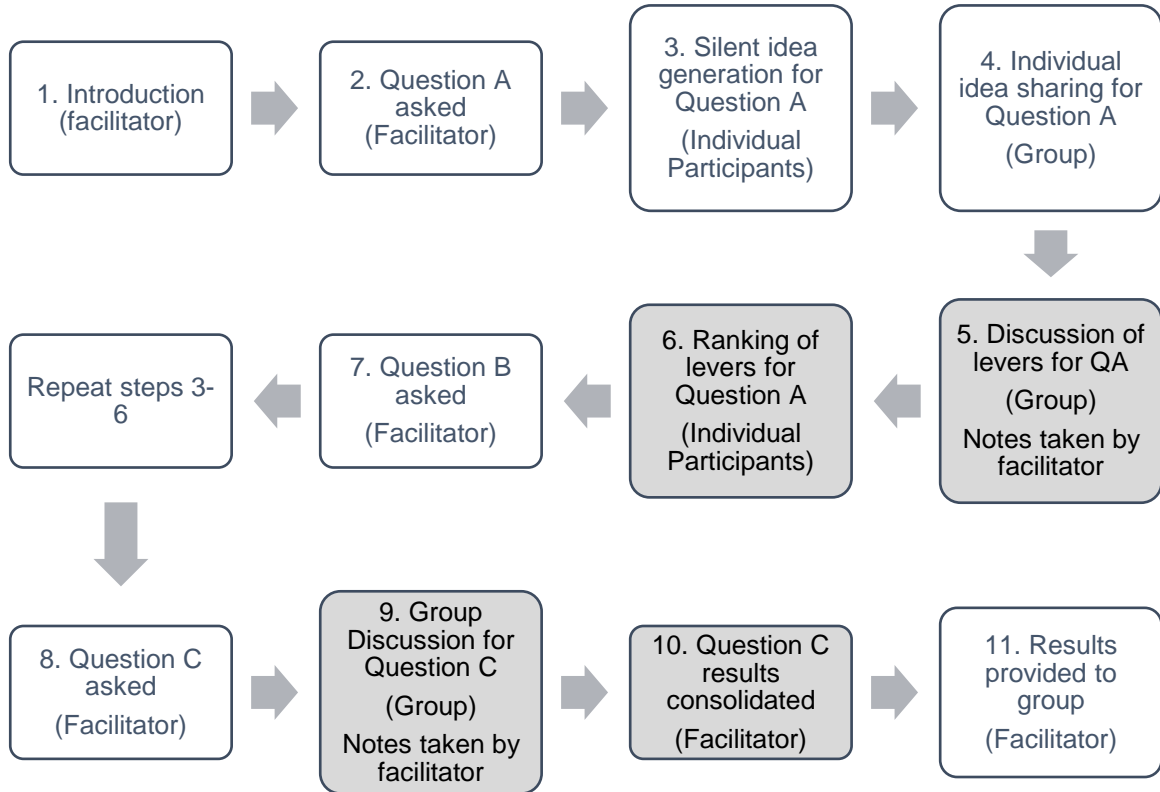
1. During Step 5 and 9 the facilitator took notes of the discussion, definition of the meanings and any 'why' factors behind the levers themselves.
2. The first element analysed came from Step 6. Each participant, following the group conversation, was asked to rank their chosen influencers on the voting sheet provided. This rank of importance against each of the sub-levers was considered as the first element.
3. The frequency with which it was mentioned by participants across the sample is the second element for analysis.
4. The third element created by Step 10 is purely analysed through qualitative analysis.

The first element gave weight to the conversation and was used to create the qualitative results behind the ranked levers.

The second and third elements were analysed through descriptive statistical analysis. It is generally seen as unnecessary in the NGT technique and wider focus group research to conduct a full statistical multivariate analysis (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

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The fourth element required understanding of the impact of each ranking and this was done by giving each rank a score. The greatest list of factors by any one respondent was 14 therefore a response ranked 1st on a participant's list was assigned 14 points, a response ranked 2nd given 13 points and so on until a response ranked 14th was assigned one point. Since each participant wasn't prescribed to writing down a set number of factors the length of list varied considerably. In order to create meaningful analysis each participant's response therefore needed to be weighted equally. Therefore, for each sub-lever the points allocated were divided by the total points for that participant. This created a percentage weighting per sub-lever amounting to 100% for each participant. Each sub-lever ranking was therefore preserved to contribute to the overall analysis.

Example for Participant A

	Training	Reward	Customer	
Sub-Lever Engagement Ranking	1	2	3	
Points Allocated	14	13	12	Total = 39
Participant % Weighting	14/39 = 35%	13/39 = 33%	12/39 = 32%	Total = 100%

These weighted rankings were then totalled for all sub-levers to incorporate the frequency of mention by participants. This combination as shown in the example below then established the most impactful sub-lever for each of the first two Nominal Group questions, answering Research Question Two.

Example for Nominal Group Question A

	Training	Reward	Customer	
% Weighting Person A	35%	33%	32%	
% Weighting Person B		52%	48%	
% Weighting Person C	100%			Only mentioned training
Total	135	85	80	300
Overall % Weighting	135/300 = 45%	85/300 = 28%	80/300 = 27%	Total = 100%

Themes and codes were identified at a semantic level within the thematic analysis technique, which means the face value of comments was accepted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latent level of analysis was also accessed in the result presentation through the analysis of the qualitative discussion that created the overall codes. This allowed both levels to be utilised and results to be interpretative and not just descriptive (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To add depth to the analysis and ensure qualitative outputs are also measured narrative around the group's meaning of concepts and quotes from individuals are also included collected during Step 5 and 9 (see Appendix 4 for full list). Stewart & Shamdasani (2014) recommend that within exploratory focus group studies a simple descriptive narrative describing the crux of the conversation is appropriate and a full transcript is unnecessary. Given the additional output achieved through the voting form and inability to record the interview this was found to be sufficient for this study. The facilitator also noted observational data like emotions and conversation patterns within the groups, which doesn't reflect in the written notes. These are important for an understanding of the state of mind of participants during the study and add significant value (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014)

The results from question three and the final discussion were analysed using thematic analysis which recorded any patterns and themes created by the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Each response was manually coded based on the initial literature. Saldaña (2015) recommends for initial studies manual coding is more effective in controlling the work done to avoid the additional challenge of simultaneously learning a new complex software programme.

4.8.3. *Data Representation*

Descriptive statistics through graphs and tables was used for the resulting information. Data was presented based on an appropriate measure that allowed clear understanding of the conclusions and results discussed in Chapter Five. An illustrated and applicable Frontline Engagement model building on the amalgamated model for engagement in Figure 2 is the main result of the study.

4.9. Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are derived from the structure of the research or the delimitation by the researcher based on availability or access (Collis & Hussey, 2013). These limitations, following on from the validity of the research include:

- This study only uses one company in its sample. Retail practices can never be fully generic and therefore the context of each business must be taken into account in application of any model (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).
- The Nominal Group participants are reporting on measures affecting themselves and this is subject to opinion. The study does not delve into the personal characteristics/situation of each participant and this may have an independent impact on their engagement.

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- The directive nature of the NGT can reduce spontaneity in responses and some richness may be lost (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The NGT as a consensus method rarely reaches a conclusion and is a stepping block to test the validity of outcomes further. A longitudinal study would allow this action. This research is limited by its cross-sectional nature and the difficulty in proving real causality (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

- The culture of the sample frame may also be influenced by the national demographic and geographical selection of participants. This limitation must be considered in devising any overall international generalities (Mason, 2002).

- Although employees were selected at random a sampling bias may still be present as their availability was determined by each store manager who potentially had sway over the initial selection of participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

- The facilitator is an employee of the company sampled which has the advantage of familiarity but the limitation of ethical and political dilemmas and researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

- Given the nature of the conversation, initial union interference and the group dynamic confidentiality of opinion would not have been guaranteed should the Nominal Groups be recorded and it was decided this would be detrimental to the study. The transcription of final conversation therefore is limited to note form given the ability of the facilitator to guide the conversation and transcribe.

- The limited education of the participants may have resulted in a misunderstanding of the ranking system in some instances. Although rules were put in place in analysing the data to ensure consistency across the sample the participants' original intentions may have been slightly altered during this process.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter presents the methodology followed by the study to answer the three research questions posed in Chapter Three. The reasons for the methodology, detailed explanation of both collection and analysis are covered alongside any limitations and the reliability of the information collected. This is considered in Chapter Five which describes the results of the primary research.

CHAPTER 5:   RESULTS

5.1.   Introduction

Chapter Five presents the results of the study addressing the findings against each of the three research questions proposed in Chapter Three:

Research Question One: What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa, and why?

Research Question Two: Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?

Research Question Three: What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?

As outlined in Chapter Four these results were collated through Nominal Group Interviews held over a two-week period within a leading national retailer in South Africa. These Nominal Groups were facilitated and answered three questions as part of this inductive, bottom-up study. The discussion produced both qualitative and quantitative outputs and thematic and content analysis was elicited to analyse the data given the mix of input and the large quantity of responses (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The mapping of the questions posed in the Nominal Group against the Research Questions is shown in Table 2.

The results below therefore show analysis in both techniques starting with sample size and demographic analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the ranked responses. The quantitative outputs were a result of in-depth conversation around the issues covered by the research questions, which in themselves were derived from the literature review. A consistency matrix was used to ensure alignment between these elements of the study. Qualitative input and richness was also achieved and recorded through quotations noted during the group sessions as well as excerpts from the written submissions (Appendix 4). The researcher acted as the facilitator in all sessions and ensured that each topic was fully explored and that enough time was spent on each issue, both aspects considered vital for successful focus group facilitation (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The limitation of most focus groups, that participants believe and say different things, was managed with the anonymous voting element of the NGT. In analysis of both the conversation and voting outputs therefore more weight is put behind the confidential voting rather than the group conversation itself.

## 5.2.	Sample Description

A national retailer within the developing country of South Africa was used for this study. Six Nominal Groups were conducted with individuals being selected randomly from stores across the largest region of operation, Gauteng. The Nominal Groups were held in regional offices to avoid Trade Union interference and to mix employees from different stores. Two employees from different stores were included in each group. Numbers in attendance varied on the day, attributed to the unpredictable nature of the retail industry and unknown challenges in certain stores (see Appendix 1). All participants were permanent employees, not contractors, but were on a variety of different contracts: variable hours/full-time. Everyone met the criteria of being in customer facing roles (either on the till, shelf packers or service area assistants) and not being in supervisory or manager level positions. Across the six groups 54 individuals were involved in the study and given the homogeneity of employees and lack of new emerging themes, saturation was reached at this point. All the stores that were invited participated, however if full attendance had been generated in each group 72 individuals would have been involved. This gives a response rate of 75%. Three questions were asked of the participants; the first question had in total 315 individual responses, question two had 455 and 39 constructs were recorded for the third question. All the responses for questions one and two were ranked in order of importance.

## 5.3.	Validity and Reliability of Data

It is important that data is both consistent and accurate in order to create reliability in the conclusions drawn (Zikmund et al., 2013). Saunders & Lewis (2012) define reliability as present when three conditions are met; results would be comparable on another occasion; other researchers would have similar findings and the presentation of the data is clear to the reader.

This study is subject to similar bias to most qualitative projects given the known subjective nature of these techniques. The collection and analysis of data could potentially be influenced by interviewer and response bias respectively (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Zikmund et al., 2013). The researcher has a certain set of assumptions on entering the project, to limit the impact of these no new concepts were introduced by the facilitator whose role was limited to expanding themes already presented by the group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

To reduce the threat of unreliable data the same facilitator was used in every Nominal Group, each was carried out in a similar boardroom setting with identical equipment and

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facilities offered (tea/coffee/water). The structure of the Nominal Group was followed rigidly with each group experiencing the same overall inputs from the facilitator. Although freedom of conversation was granted as an essential part of the study the facilitator was aware of the potential for bias and ensured all opinions were explained fully by the participants. The results were analysed by the same facilitator to ensure the understanding of concepts discussed was pulled into the results, this mitigated the risk of misunderstanding and created familiarity with the data through the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to create a confidential environment and increase the openness of the session no recording of the conversations was permitted. Although this was successful in creating open dialogue it limited full transcription of the discussion. Given increased weighting of opinion was placed on the confidential voting this was found to be an acceptable limitation.

5.4. Demographic and Personal Characteristics

It is important to understand the context of the study given the nature of the constructs proposed by the literature. This study also aims to differentiate the international literature in a developing market retail setting and therefore it is vital to establish the nature of the sample in fitting the environmental framework. The impact of circumstance and personal characteristics has been shown to be a factor in numerous engagement levers and this section outlines the demography of the sample to enhance the overall analysis. It also sets the context through wider exploratory questions regarding state of mind and overall personal circumstance. The environment that the employee finds themselves in at work is also considered.

If the sample is considered more demographically homogenous this also allows for more generalisation of the findings across the focus groups. As this is generally the case for this study terms like 'most' and 'the majority' are seen as appropriate in discussing the overall findings (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

5.4.1. *Overall Demographics*

Gender, race and age analysis show that employees were predominately from one racial group (black) and an equal distribution of gender was included in the study. Over half of the individuals included were 26-35 and only 9% were younger than this.

Figure 7: Gender Breakdown of Participants
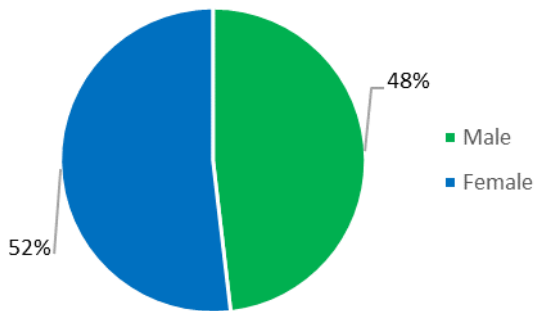
Figure 8: Race Breakdown of Participants
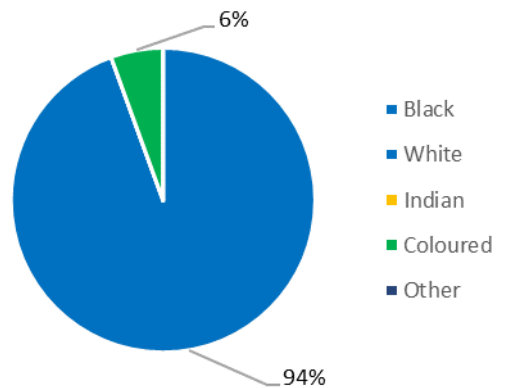
Figure 9: Age Breakdown of Participants
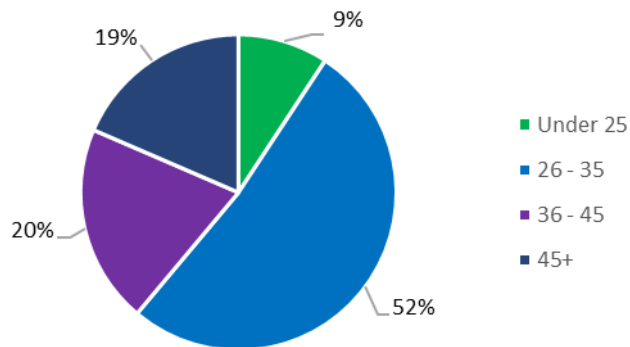
5.4.2. *Education*

79% of individuals in the study have a matric qualification, which is equivalent to NQF Level 4 internationally. Only 4% of the workforce studied had no formal education.

Figure 10: Level of Education of Participants
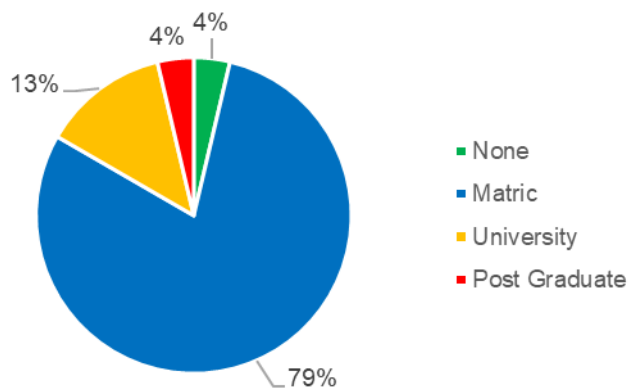
5.4.3. *Employment Environment*

A few characteristics of the employees' situation when they are at work are shown below. Most employees (87%) have worked for the retailer for over a year with 58% of those having over five years' service. These employees are all at the most junior level within the company and therefore it is inferred that all individuals have been in a similar role at the same level for their entire tenure within the business with no progression. 57% of employees in the sample have travelled one to two hours every morning to arrive at work, likely on public transport. 17% have travelled over two hours. 57% of those sampled work over 36 hours a week. The legal limit in South Africa is 45 hours, which means most are working near this limit and getting paid the maximum wage each month. 43% of employees are working less than the legal maximum and are either on flexible or smaller permanent contracts. This may be a consideration in their pay and engagement factors given the low wage offered at this level of employment.

Figure 11: Years of Service
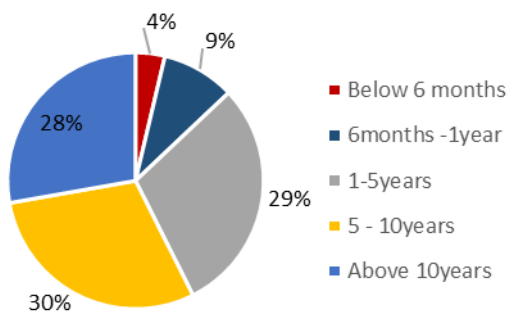
Figure 12: Time Travelled to Work
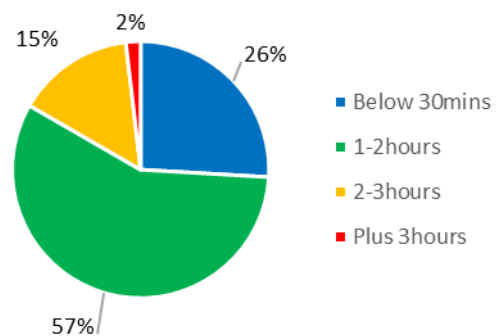
Figure 13: Hours Worked per Week
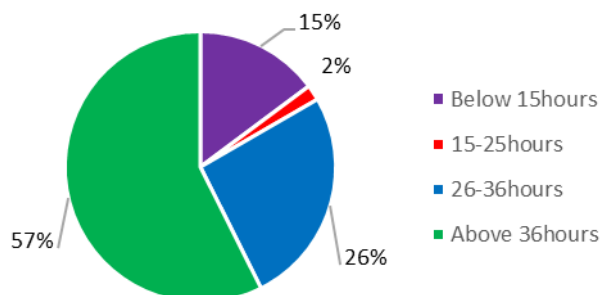
5.4.4. *Happiness at Work*

All the participants were asked if they are happy at work and the below results show that the majority were happy in their work environments.

Figure 14: Happiness at Work
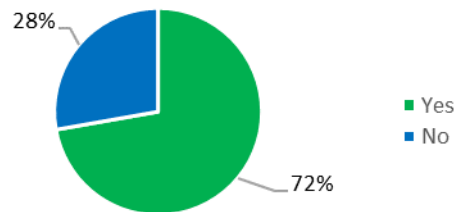
5.5.   Results for Research Question One

Research Question One: What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa, and why?

The aim of this question was to confirm whether the engagement levers outlined by the predominately international literature are relevant in a semi-skilled, retail environment amongst staff on the frontline. Questions A and B from the Nominal Focus Group were designed to create discussion around what the participants felt respectively engaged and disengaged them at work. As the items were discussed each was grouped under relevant headings and these approved by the group. The discussion allowed all members of the group and the facilitator to fully explore the meaning of each item, confident that the participants were also clear on what was described. The output of the group to answer this question was a list of those items that they agreed with from the group discussion. This list varied in length from each participant.

The results, which for the purpose of this analysis were coded and named 'sub-levers', were then collated by the researcher and grouped into themes or 'main levers' to enable easier scrutiny against the literature. In order to preserve the richness of the conversation and improve the understanding of the data virtually all sub-levers were maintained as per the participant input. This was done despite some being only mentioned by small numbers of individuals and being considered similar in concept. Many of the levers explain one output but have a root cause in a different place. To keep the data clean each one was taken at a semantic level and any more latent causes that feed into that lever described in the conversational analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The frequency of responses is also stated to show how many individuals noted each sub-lever under each main lever in total. This frequency is considered as part of the content analysis. The ranking will be applied to give a holistic overview of importance in answering Research

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Question Two. The sub-levers were grouped into the main levers using the concepts in Chapter Two as a guideline and this order of analysis reinforced the inductive approach suggested for the exploratory study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

5.5.1. *Overall analysis of engagement lever relevance*

Each nominal group commenced with an introduction from the facilitator setting the scene for the study. This was an opportunity for a definition of engagement to be given to the audience although the word itself was avoided in order to limit confusion. All members were then asked if they understood the concept and purpose of the study. This was taken as confirmation that the concept was clear across all individuals.

Two questions were asked to establish the results for Research Question One, the first to establish the enablers of engagement, the second the factors that block engagement.

The first question (Question A) asked of the Nominal Group participants was:
What things do you like about your job that help you serve customers better?

The second question (Question B) asked of the Nominal Group participants was:
What things about your job stop you helping customers?

It was clear from the conversation around Nominal Group Question A that participants were less forthcoming with responses than with Question B, demonstrated in the overall frequency difference between the two questions (315 vs 455). Time spent on Question A was shorter, which gives insight into the desire for participants to spend more time on the negative rather than the positive (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Question A was specifically asked first as it is less controversial than starting with negative factors and broke the ice within the groups to encourage open and active dialogue.

The conversation around Question B flowed much more easily than Question A. Participants were relieved and eager to explain the challenges they faced and it was explored that they have never really formally been asked to have an open discussion with no perceived ramifications. The ability to assure confidentiality and not record the conversations was important in building trust. No issue was avoided and participants on the whole were very comfortable constructively discussing their situations with the group.

Table 3 shows the results of both Nominal Group Questions A and B. Where levers are the same in answer to both questions these have been combined to show the overall frequency of the lever and the sub-levers that influence the main lever. The table is ordered by the greatest overall frequency to the least. The frequency of each response is also shown.

Table 3: Results of Nominal Group Question A and Question B, levers that increase and block engagement

Main Lever	Nominal Group Question	Total Frequency	Sub-lever	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency
Role of the Customer	**A**	**100**	When customers appreciate you	15	Challenged by customers	8	Diversity of customers	13
			Smile/nice customers	29	Learning about customers	10	Older customers	2
			Encouragement of customers	6	Learning things from customers	3	Customers get attached	7
			Respect	6	Speak language of customers	1		
	B	**54**	Rude customers	20	Customer sabotage	4	Discrimination	6
			Disrespectful customers	16	Customer is not always right	8		
	Total	**154**						
Resources Available	**A**	**16**	New equipment	3	Name badge	2	Shelf standards/enough stock	11
	B	**109**	Not enough staff/long queues	36	No stock	28	Old uniforms	4
			Faulty machinery	7	Quality of stock	12	Wrong prices	16
			Offline systems	6				
	Total	**125**						

Table 3 (continued): Results of Nominal Group Question A and Question B, Levers that increase and block engagement

Main Lever	Nominal Group Question	Total Frequency	Sub-lever	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency
Job Characteristics and Fit	**A**	**92**	Being empowered to help	12	Customer Service	30	Varied roles	3
			Every day is different	5	Job keeps you busy	9		
			Allows the gaining of knowledge/technology	17	Job allows you to go extra mile	4	Challenging role	12
	B	**32**	Language barriers	1	Stressed/pressure	20	Not empowered	5
			Doing double jobs	6				
	Total	**124**						
Work Environment and Organisational Support	**A**	**18**	Free drinks and meals	5	Good internal communication	6	Coming early to work (hours)	1
			Free transport	7				
	B	**96**	Space in canteen	2	Work conditions	8	Scheduling	20
			Cutting hours	29	Forced labour	10	Communication	21
			Outsourcing	6				
	Total	**114**						
Leadership	**A**	**11**	Always there to assist	1	Challenged by managers	3	Encouragement	3
			Manager quality	3	Not mixing business with pleasure	1		
	B	**79**	No accountability	12	Poor behaviour and attitude	23	Lack of support	8
			Supervisor delay	6	Managers not being prepared	4	Management not helping customers	9
			Lack of respect	17				
	Total	**90**						

Main Lever	Nominal Group Question	Total Frequency	Sub-lever	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency	Sub-lever (continued)	Frequency
Reward and Recognition	A	17	Living wage for family	5	Pay day	11	Recognition	1
	B	30	No performance management	5	Less payments	4	No positive feedback	3
			Incorrect (short) payments calculated	8	Pay	10		
	Total	47						
Colleagues	A	35	Collaboration with colleagues	10	Happy colleagues	9	Unity amongst staff	1
			Support	7	Like family	8		
	B	5	Ignorant staff	5				
	Total	40						
Training and Development	A	8	Learning and growth	8				
	B	21	Training and Development	21				
	Total	29						
Organisational Justice	A	28	Fairness	11	Unequal promotion of staff	8	Promise of uniforms	4
			Unpredictability	5				
Personal Characteristics	B	19	Alignment with vision and mission	1	Pride/making miracles	18		

5.5.2. *Individual Lever Analysis*

Each main lever is now displayed in detail with both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study presented. The two nominal group question results have been combined and ordered in the analysis to reflect the results shown in Table 3.

5.5.2.1. *Role of the Customer*

During the discussion, the role of the customer was clearly the most influential factor raised, there was a large amount of passion used to unpack each element of the customer role, which reflected in this overall concept having the highest frequency (154) and the most sub-levers. This passion can be seen as additional weighting behind the issue discussed (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Customer service although similar in concept was grouped under job characteristics rather than the role of the customer. The differential here was that customer service was used to describe the aspect of the employee's role that allowed them to serve customers rather than the impact that individual customers had on them, which was considered as the role the customer played.

Figure 15 shows the results of Nominal Group Question A in relation to the role of the customer and reveals the factors that employees felt increased their engagement within this construct.

Figure 15: Role of the Customer Lever Breakdown, Nominal Group Question A
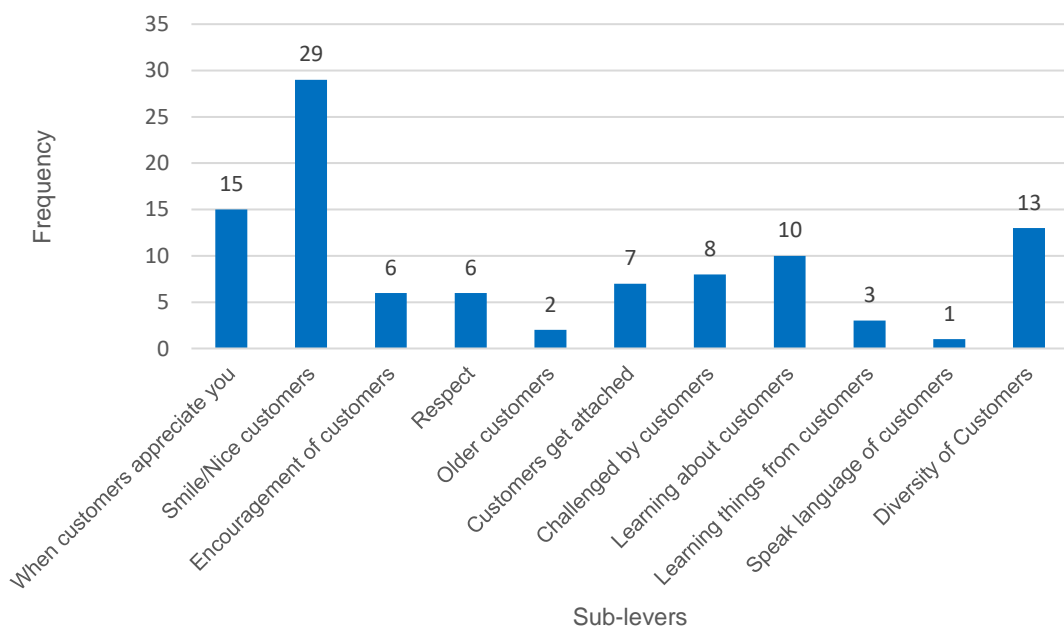
One participant explained his interaction with customers: "My work is very challenging, dealing with customers isn't easy and only the loyal customers are friendly. The more I interact with different customers the more I learn how to handle customers" (Group 4). The strength of conversation around the concept of the customer led to the decision to pull this into a separate lever to be analysed rather than including it in the other levers as driven by the literature. Other participants showed the strength of this emotional draw to the customers: "Our customers are kings and queens; we should serve them better and with pride" (Group 4) and "I love making miracles for customers; it makes me proud when they see my section" (Group 5). The interaction with the customer and mutual learning was also discussed in depth: "Customers also learn a lot from me and I like helping them" (Group 3).

Participants also linked the happiness of a customer with the success of their store. They understood that the store needs to be successful for their jobs to be secure and that happy customers and no queues were key to customers returning to the retailer rather than a competitor. The attachment of customers was also discussed with one participant explaining that "some of our customers come every day, they even greet us when they see us outside the mall" (Group 2).

The role of the customer is also considered to block engagement (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Role of the Customer Lever Breakdown, Nominal Group Question B
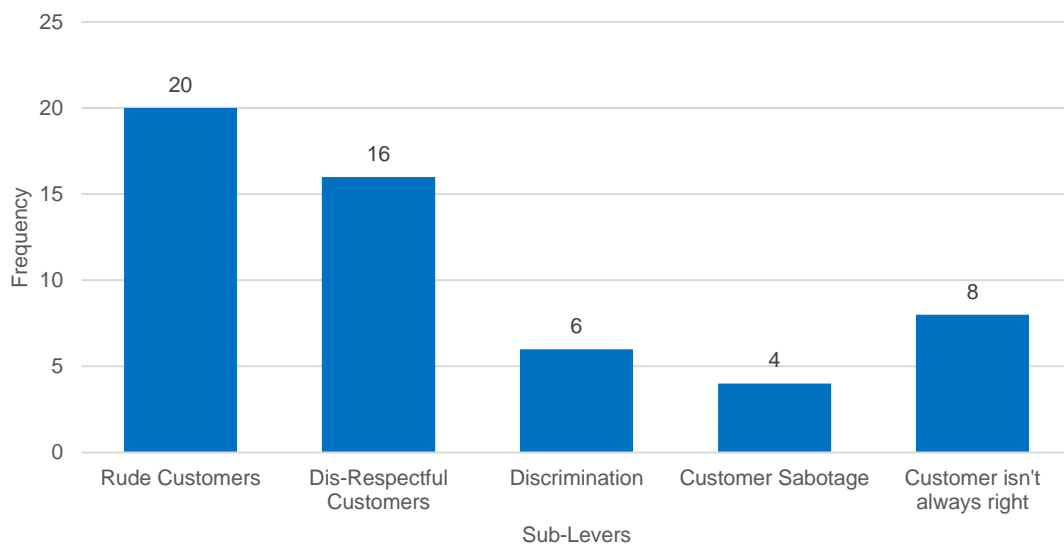
One participant commented that they "get more complaints than compliments" (Group 6), which shows that both positive and negative customer experiences are impactful. All the sub-levers reveal a similar trait that customers who are rude or disrespectful are actively disengaging to employees especially, as already discussed, the cause is outside

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of that employee's control and sits within the resources they are provided with. This was described by one participant as follows: "Customers are impatient when we don't have the answer or the stock… when customers are being rude it just creates stress" (Group 6). This rudeness can often manifest into "proper abuse and discriminatory language" (Group 5). The participants agreed that this is often dependent on a customer's attitude and circumstances and isn't necessarily normal practice. However, it is still hard for them not to take these actions personally especially when the manager takes the customer's side and it seems like that customer is going out of their way to sabotage an employee. To deal with this one participant simply stated, "You have to have a thick skin and get on with it" (Group 6).

A construct that was mentioned across the groups is the idea that: "The customer is not always right" (Group 5). On probing further as to the cause of the comment the following response represents the general conversation: "We understand the manager has to take a customer's side in public but they stand by and blame us even after" (Group 6). When a customer is clearly being unnecessarily aggressive the manager should respect and trust his staff more. This therefore links to quality and training of managers and communication to staff.

5.5.2.2. Resources Available

The resources available to employees in their roles was mentioned 125 times by participants with the greatest number shown as blockers to engagement. The breakdown of this can be shown in Figure 17.

The resources available to staff came through as a positive engagement factor in three areas. The most frequent was the impact of new equipment especially in the service areas like the Deli and Bakery (three citations). It was felt that this allows not only for efficiency of operation but also links to pride of employees in their store. The name badge also has an impact on employee pride (two citations) as quoted by one participant: "It makes a huge difference when customers use my name to say hello. It's a sign of respect and the name badge allows that" (Group 2). The last resource sub-lever is shelf standards (11 citations), which is again linked to the pride of the employee in the area that they manage and their ability to serve customers well when they have enough stock.

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Figure 17: Resources Available Lever Breakdown, Question B
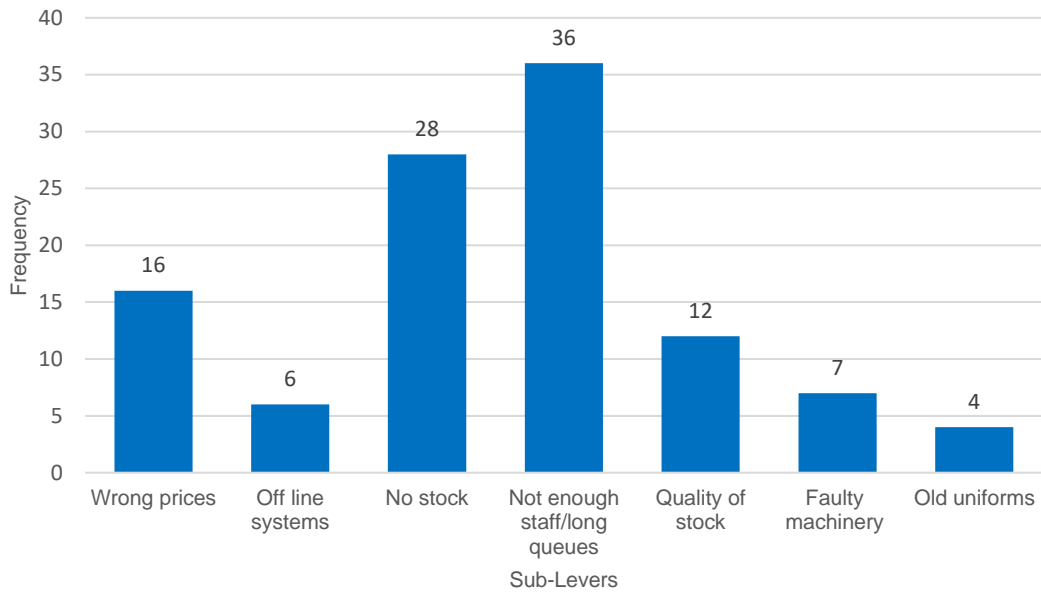
The lack of physical resources available to employees was seen to prevent them from being fully engaged in their work. The predominate sub-lever within this category is not enough staff. This was discussed as a major concern of the workforce and has been a challenge in the current economic climate facing the country and the sector. The reality of not having enough staff is felt across the other levers and directly impacts the service offered to customers. One participant explained: "If there are no staff, there is pressure; it means we are very tired and have lower performance" another simply stated, "We have to work two jobs as short staff" (Group 2). There was also a comparison to competitors made by one participant: "Our competitors have eight staff in the mornings every day, we have two. Is it surprising customers go elsewhere when our queues are so long? And the customers blame us" (Group 4). Again the link to customer service and profitability was made by the groups:

The second biggest sub-lever in this area was lack of stock as explained by one participant: "Stock arrives after promotions end so the customer goes away unhappy. This affects us because they blame us and we can't blame anyone else so just take it" (Group 5). The quality of stock affects individuals in a similar way with customers requesting merchandise that is not being sold in the retailer.

Wrong prices on products, when systems go offline, when machines break down and when uniforms are old all create negative feelings within the business. This was predominately linked again to customer stress and aggression. Staff cannot operate effectively and it damages the pride they have in their store when they look shabby and cannot deal with customers in the correct way purely because of resources.

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5.5.2.3. *Job Characteristics and Fit*

The characteristics of the role played by employees within the organisation and their fit against that role is shown to have the second highest frequency of responses (Table 3). Figure 18 shows the distribution of the sub-levers within this overall construct.

Figure 18: Job Characteristics and Fit Lever Breakdown, Question A
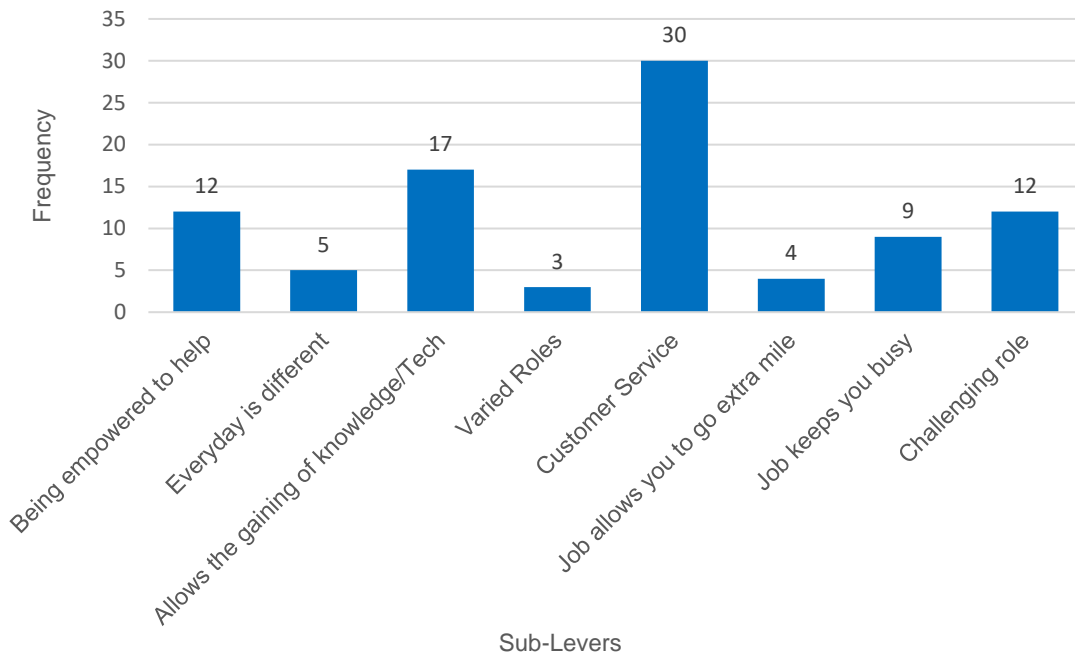
Participants were positive around their roles and generally felt they were in positions that suited their skills, although higher aspirations were also voiced especially by those younger in the groups. Customer service as already discussed was by far the most influential sub-lever in this category. From 54 participants 30 included this in their list of engagement factors. Participants simply enjoy this element of their jobs and generally described why: "We enjoy interacting with people and making them happy" (Group 6).

The challenges of the roles were also outlined as a positive factor: "We work in challenging roles that are always changing, given the customers we speak to" (Group 2). The variety of the role and difference in interactions with customers were also observed by the groups. Individuals like to keep busy and really go the extra mile for their customers. The staff generally enjoyed having autonomy over their departments, being empowered to help their customers and liked having knowledge on products as it gave them control over their circumstances. One participant commented: "I like angry customers as I have the power to calm them down" (Group 4). The ability to gain this knowledge was also seen as a positive factor. This came both from customers but also from new systems and processes implemented by the business.

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Figure 19: Job Characteristics and Fit Lever Breakdown, Question B
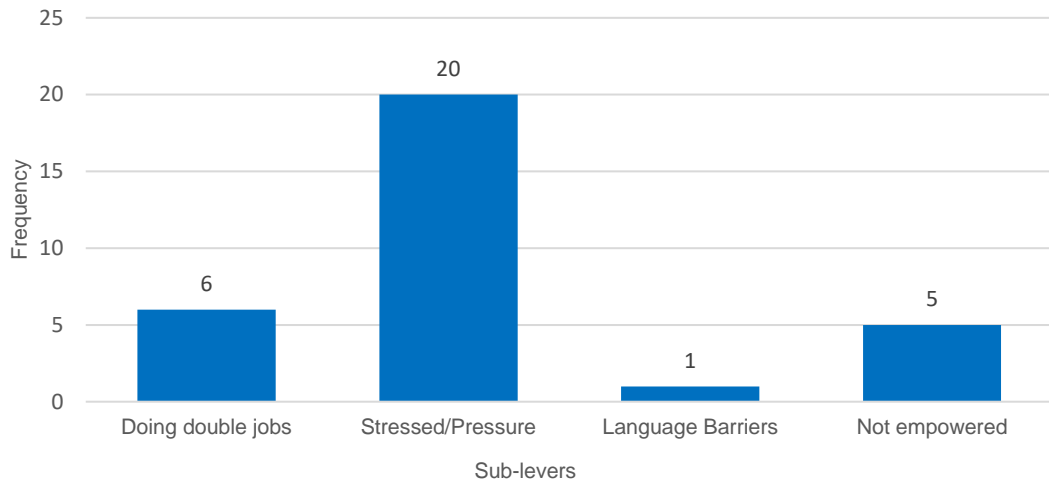
Figure 19 indicates what it is about participants' job characteristics that are shown to be blocks to engagement. Stress and pressure as part of the role is a major factor and caused by many of the other challenges. One of the main challenges is that individuals in these roles did not expect this type of pressure and where others may relish the opportunity to work under pressure the discussion revealed that it was something that participants did not want at all in their roles. It was also discussed that if staff are too stressed then they cannot serve customers well and that was seen as a vital part of retail. Individuals want to see that the job they are doing affects customers positively and that gives them meaning in their roles. Doing double jobs also stems from lack of resources and staff shortages as individuals are asked to cover a variety of different tasks at once, deviating from their standard job description. The recent re-structuring and tough economic climate were seen as responsible for this additional pressure. Empowerment features twice in the results also sitting under Leadership, in this instance it is the understanding that the roles are not given the authority to make real decisions.

5.5.2.4. Work Environment and Organisational Support

The employees' work environment and level of organisational support had an overall frequency of 114, the breakdown of the sub-levers are shown in Figure 20 and 21.

Figure 20: Work Environment & Organisational Support Lever Breakdown, Question A
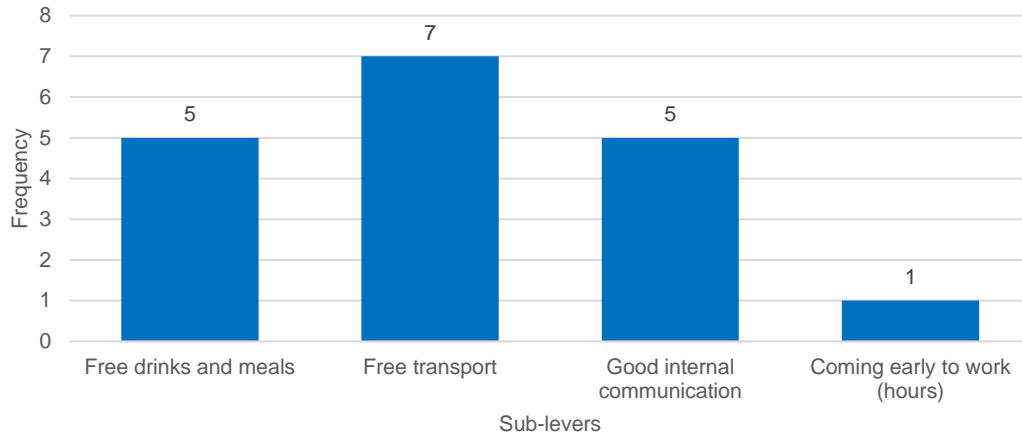
Specific topics of discussion in this area were around the provision of a positive working environment. The retailer provides breakfast and snacks for staff for free during the day as well as free transport home if they work later shifts and miss the public transport services. Two participants passionately articulated the role of these services in their day-to-day lives: "The company gives us food so we can serve customers with a full stomach" (Group 4) and "I normally leave home without breakfast so the bread provided helps a lot" (Group 6). This speaks to the level of income and economic situation of employees.

Figure 21: Work Environment & Organisational Support Lever Breakdown, Question B
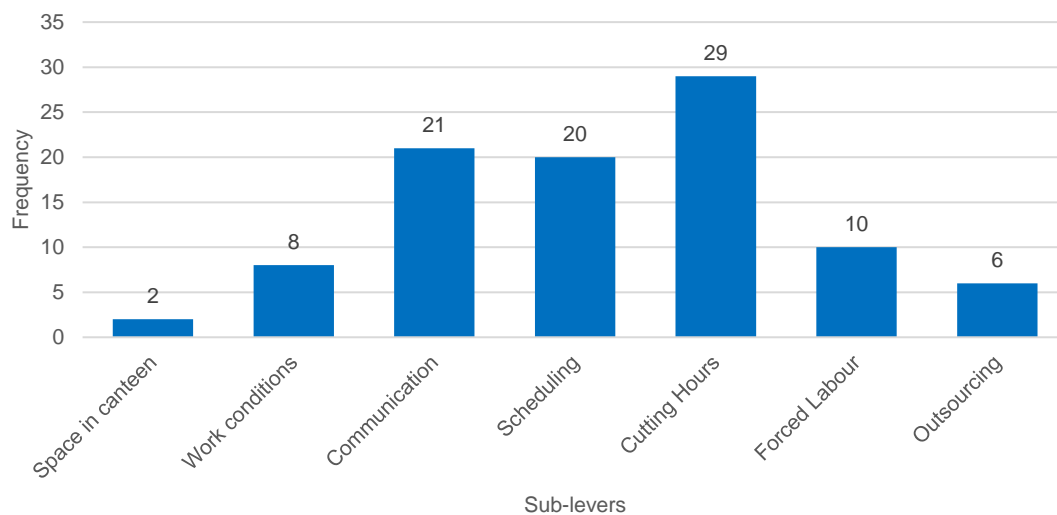
The work environment of participants had the second highest frequency of responses for Question B with cutting hours being the main sub-lever creating disengagement. This was discussed as applying predominately to the variable time employees. They suffer when stores put cost savings first and seemingly run the store on an impossibly low staff

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contingent. When this issue was analysed further it was linked closely to communication and scheduling, both of which were also mentioned as significant sub-levers in their own right. Staff are conscious their hours may not always be the same but feel that communication further in advance and better scheduling of shifts would create more certainty, transparency and allow them to potentially even take on additional employment elsewhere to compensate month to month. One participant summed up the issue: "We only hear negative messages… there is no communication" (Group 1).

Forced labour was a concept discussed by one group as the policy that forces individuals to work specific hours and is therefore also linked to scheduling. Outsourcing was a contentious issue amongst the staff especially in the context of reduced hours and lack of staff. Each store sometimes outsources some of the roles to external companies. The staff were confused as to why this happens as their hours are still being cut. The only suggestion made for the reason to this was regarding further cost as permanent staff receive numerous benefits not provided to outsourced contractors.

5.5.2.5. Leadership

Leadership was mentioned as a factor of engagement 90 times during the study with the majority being in relation to their impact as a blocker of engagement. Figure 22 and Figure 23 show the breakdown of the sub-levers under this main lever, describing the role of the leader in the engagement and disengagement of employees.

Figure 22: Leadership Lever Breakdown, Question A
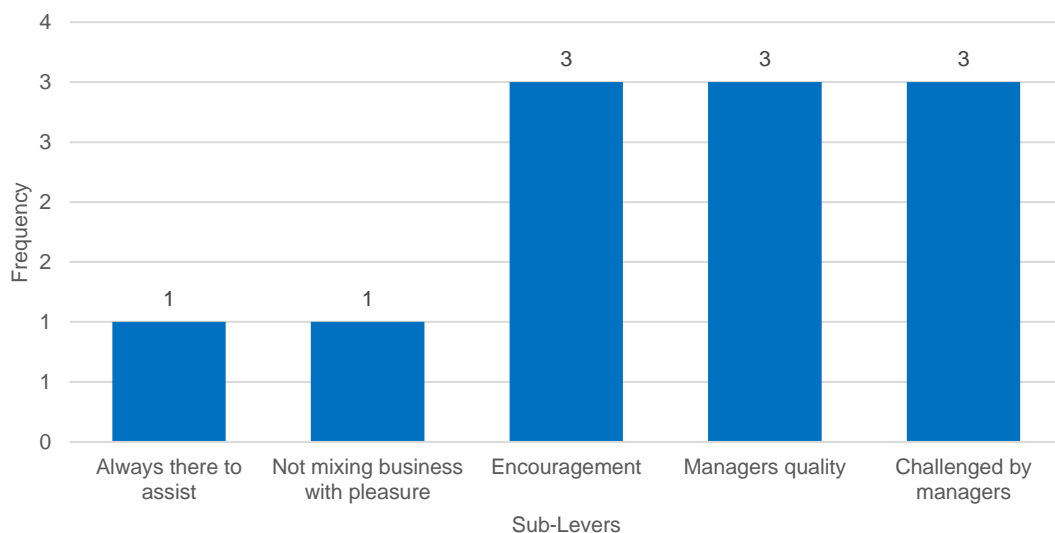
Managers or leaders were only mentioned as a positive factor by 11 people overall but there did seem to be a mix of opinion across the groups as to the effectiveness of management. Conversation here focused on managers who were willing to roll up their

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sleeves and help when the store was busy and were encouraging in their interactions with staff.

Figure 23: Leadership Lever Breakdown, Question B
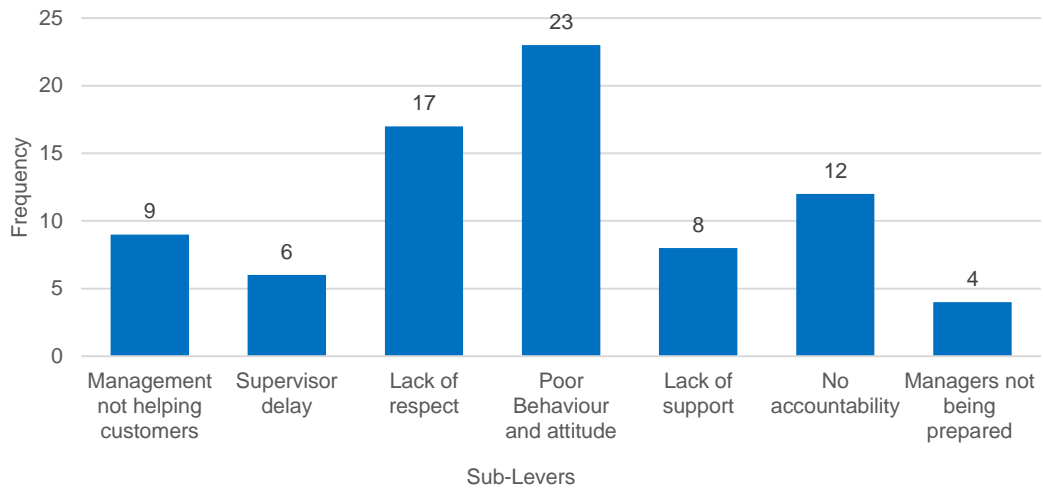
The leadership lever was discussed openly and passionately by the staff and from the length of discussion on the topic it is surprisingly low on the overall frequency. Participants became quite emotional in response to this discussion and have clearly suffered at the hands of ill-equipped and seemingly lazy managers: "Managers don't talk to us like adults. They have no respect" (Group 2), "Poor management is what kills us as a company" (Group 4). Although some constructs here overlap the differences between them were felt to add value to the overall interpretation of the lever. The time taken to discuss this issue across groups and the emotion portrayed also adds to its impact. Body language in many of the groups changed during this discussion with arms being crossed and with one participant even pumping his fist on the table describing his manager's conduct.

One participant added in relation to the overall construct of management quality: "They just sit in their office all day and we don't know what they are doing. All we know is they aren't helping us" (Group 4). It would appear from the discussion that the transparency and communication of what managers do all day has created significant tension: "These managers aren't leading they just sit and chill" (Group 1). This fed into the supervisor delay sub-lever as managers seldom like leaving their offices to help on the shop floor. They also do not support staff in situations where it is clear that a situation was outside the scope of control of the employee. Other comments included: "Managers don't listen to our views" (Group 3) and "We have lots of ideas and we are scolded for having them, we can't be empowered to change our circumstances" (Group 6).

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The leadership skills of managers were also called into question: "The managers have no training they don't know how to manage people" (Group 1). Another participant provided context for this when probed as to what they thought the reason for this was: "They are mainly from the shop floor but the power then goes to their heads and they forget what our challenges are" (Group 3). The general feeling is that the generation of young managers that the company is trying to encourage are perhaps being moved too quickly into responsibilities and not given the skills and support to lead a team. The fact that the wrong people are promoted through favouritism was also discussed: "They don't create one culture, there is favouritism" (Group 3). This not only creates a manager who does not necessarily have the people skills to be there but also creates unrest in other areas of the store.

In one of the nominal groups the issue of race was discussed openly and constructively, and although there was some initial disagreement a full picture of the issue emerged through a lengthy conversation moderated quite heavily by the facilitator. The group of entirely black participants eventually agreed that they preferred the old school white managers who used to manage the stores as they were treated with respect and nobody was trying to prove anything to anyone. The new generation of predominately black managers are the ones who act like they have something to prove by making unrealistic demands of an employee group they used to be part of. This contributed to the sub-lever of accountability of mangers alongside lack of respect. Although it was only an issue discussed in one group multiple stores were represented and there was agreement throughout.

5.5.2.6. Reward and Recognition

There was scepticism by participants to mention or discuss the reward aspects of their role although it was mentioned 47 times during the study. Figure 24 shows the breakdown of the blocks in this lever.

Pay day was mentioned by the anonymous results (11 citations) but very little was said in an open forum and an even lower number would have been expected based on this observation. The facilitator did try to probe this issue but it was clear it was a socially unacceptable topic rather than one that was not important (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). One reason for this expressed by one participant was an embarrassment to talk about money as it reflected a degree of greediness and the stigma attached to just working for cash rather than enjoying your role. Only one person mentioned intangible rewards in terms of recognition as a positive factor experienced in their environment.

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Figure 24: Reward and Recognition Lever Breakdown, Question B
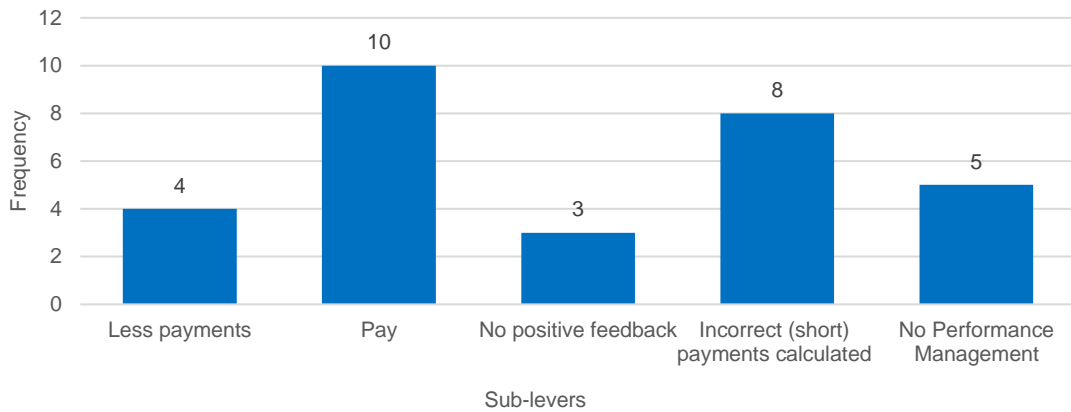
Frustration around short payments being made was agreed on within a few different groups as a factor for disengagement. Wages itself as a construct was centred around an issue with the hourly rate rather than the number of hours offered; this is covered by the work environment. The two non-financial metrics were not really discussed and most of the participants had never heard of a performance management system so this may have something to do with the lack of focus here. Positive feedback is linked again to management behaviour but included as a separate sub-lever as this specific group used it as a way of describing a manner in which they would be happy to be rewarded if they could not receive higher pay.

Table 4: Intrinsic vs Extrinsic rewards by Age

	Frequency		Percentage	
	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Below 25	0	1	15%	45%
26 – 35	5	14		
36 – 45	3	3	9%	31%
46+	0	7		
Total	8	25	24%	76%

Combining this lever with the demographic information it is also possible to present the different age groups that mentioned engagement across both Question One and Two split between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Table 5). Intrinsic rewards would be considered as: no positive feedback, no performance management and recognition. Extrinsic rewards would be considered as: less payments, pay, incorrect payments, living wage and pay day. No individual cited both.

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5.5.2.7. Colleagues

Colleagues were another factor discussed extensively in the group sessions although it only had an overall frequency of 40. The retailer is seen to have a family culture created by colleagues although this does not generally include managers. Figure 25 shows the sub-lever breakdown for Question A.

Figure 25: Colleagues Lever Breakdown, Question A
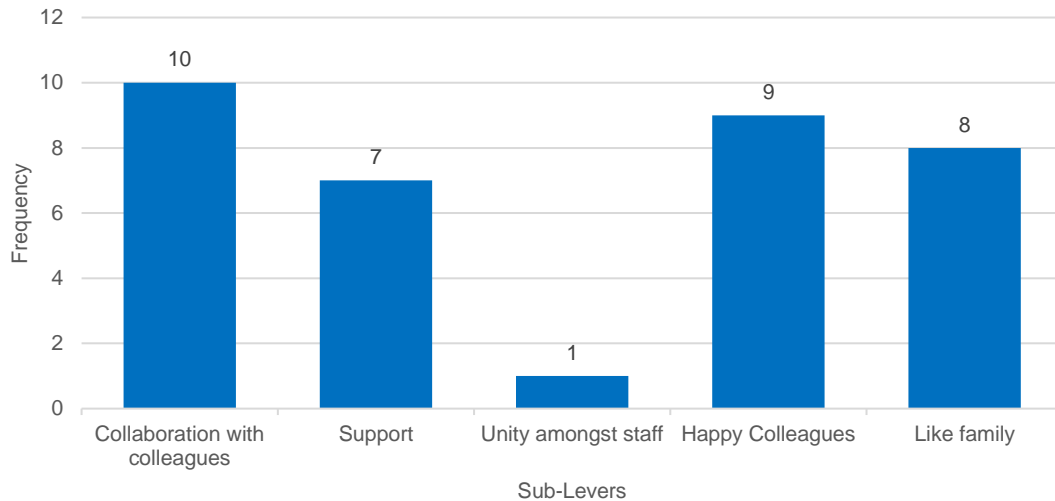
Participants explained why colleagues were influential: "If colleagues are happy then it's much easier to keep customers happy as we all have more energy for customers" (Group 4). Colleagues were seen as family and people to collaborate with when management are being difficult. "I really like happy customers and happy colleagues they make my day to be perfect" (Group 4). Individuals also strive for the respect of their colleagues although there was some tension between those full-time and part-time staff who come and go from the store.

The Colleagues main lever only had one sub-lever within Question B: Ignorant Staff, which had five overall responses. This was only mentioned in one group, likely because colleagues were in the same room and overall the groups were respectful to those around them.

5.5.2.8. Training and Development

Training and Development was the least frequently mentioned positive factor and only had one sub-lever that was mentioned on eight occasions. The discussion behind this lever focused on formal learning and development, which differentiated it from the learning that happens as part of the job characteristics discussed earlier.

As a block to engagement Training and Development had no sub-levers but the overall response against the main lever sat at 21 participants. There was little discussion on this topic as it was seen as fairly simple: "There is simply no development" (Group 5).

5.5.2.9. Organisational Justice

Organisational Justice was not mentioned during the Question A discussion. The unfair treatment of workers as a factor for blocking engagement is shown in Figure 26.

Figure 26: Organisational Justice Lever Breakdown, Question B
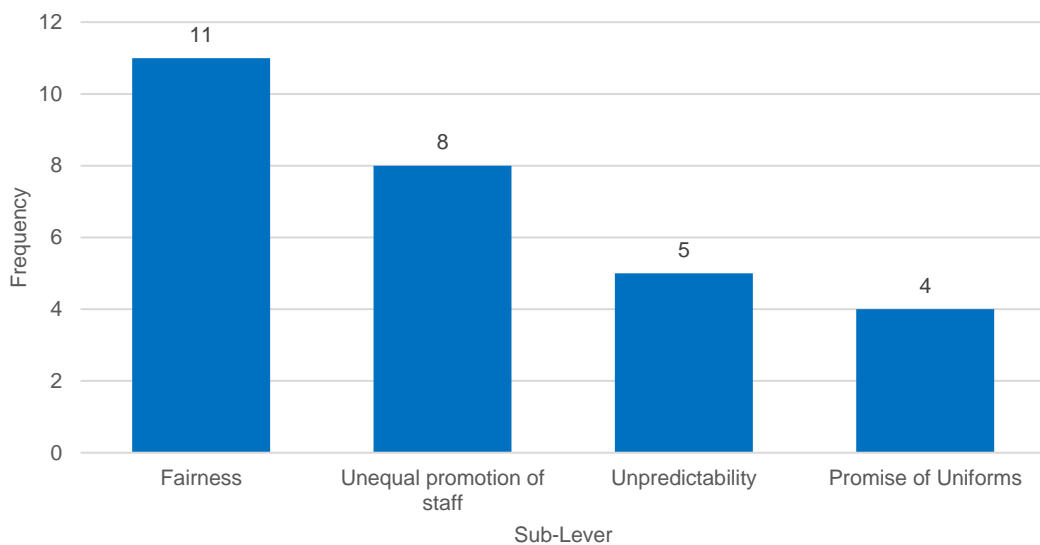
Fairness is a concern for staff predominately around the treatment of individuals across their teams as summed up by one participant: "We simply aren't treated equally" (Group 2). The issue of promotion contributes to this but was also considered as a separate sub-lever. There is an overall feeling as discussed in section 5.5.2.5 (Leadership) that: "The levels of promotion are completely inconsistent" (Group 4) and this is seen as a challenge for those looking to move through their careers. Again, the issue of old uniforms has been covered but the promises not being kept around this issue was also identified as a distinct factor that participants were concerned about: "We were promised new uniforms every three years and they never come, it's a huge let down" (Group 4).

5.5.2.10. Personal Characteristics

Participants did not highlight their own personal characteristics extensively in the conversations. Pride was mentioned consistently (18 citations) but also linked to other factors that have been described elsewhere. The personal alignment with the mission of the company is an individual construct but it only engaged one individual as shown in Table 3.

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5.5.3. *Conclusion of Results for Research Question One*

Research Question One aimed to identify the levers that can influence engagement within a semi-skilled, frontline workforce within a developing environment. The results from the Nominal Group Interviews created a large variety of concepts, which correlated to a large extent with the literature discussed in Chapter Two. These concepts have been analysed using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques to allow for a detailed understanding of why each is important and the motivations behind the suggestion by participants. Ten main levers have emerged through this analysis, which have been described above. For this question, the frequency of each of the sub-levers mentioned was used to establish their inclusion in the results and given the qualitative nature of the study and conversation this was found to provide insight into which areas of the literature are represented and why within the context studied. The addition of one main lever, the Role of the Customer, extrapolated from the others is the main result presented.

5.6.   Results for Research Question Two

Research Question Two: Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?

Literature has shown that the factor most impactful in engagement varies within different contexts. In a business environment, it is important to understand which factor of engagement has the most impact on engagement as this allows greater focus. Understanding why gives context to the study and provides greater insight into how issues around engagement can be addressed.

To assess the overall impact and importance of each lever the participants were asked to rank their choices on the voting sheet (Appendix 2). This ranking was then used alongside the frequency of response to calibrate an overall score for each main and sub-lever. These were converted into percentage contributions for ease of analysis. The two Nominal Group questions were also combined to create an overall weighting for each lever as an influencer of engagement whether positive or negative.

The results of this are shown in the following two sections and a full breakdown of the weighting of the sub-levers is provided. This is shown in Figure 27 and represented by the 'Overall Engagement Impact' bar. The order of impact is shown from highest to lowest filtered by this combined result.

5.6.1. *Overall analysis of the impact of engagement levers*

Figure 27: Ranked results of Nominal Group Question A, B and overall levers that impact engagement

Main Lever	Role of the Customer	Job Characteristics	Resources Available	Work Environment	Leadership	Colleagues	Reward & Recognition	Training & Development	Organisational Justice	Personal Characteristics
■ Question A	31.6%	30.1%	4.6%	5.8%	4.3%	10.8%	5.0%	2.6%		5.2%
■ Question B	11.2%	7.6%	26.4%	20.0%	18.2%	1.0%	6.0%	4.0%	6.0%	
■ Overall Engagement Impact	19.6%	17.3%	14.4%	12.0%	10.4%	10.2%	5.0%	3.3%	2.6%	2.4%
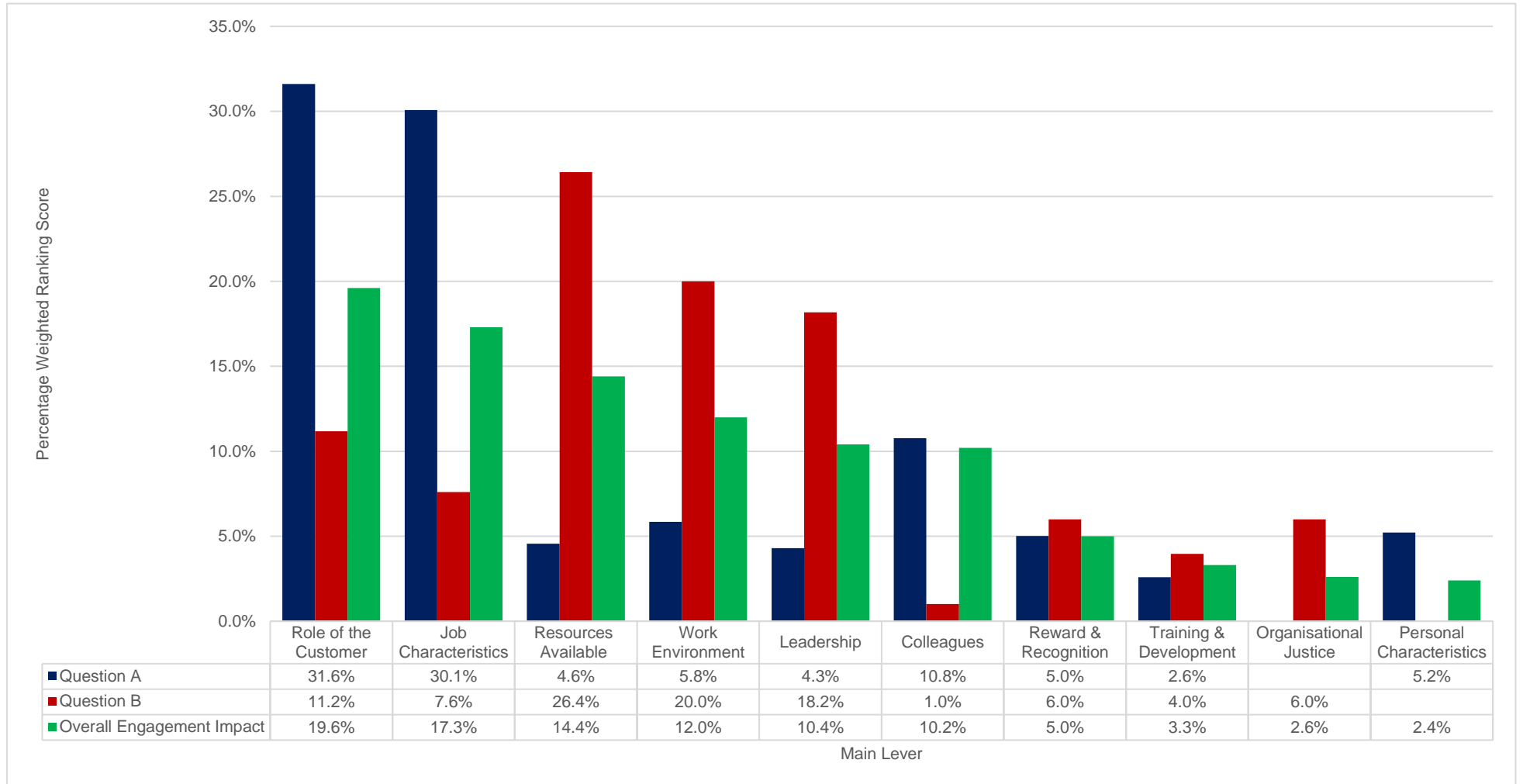
5.6.2. *Individual lever analysis by impact*

As discussed, the impact of the engagement levers was created through the ranking system element of the Nominal Group process described in section 4.8.2.

To understand the impact of each main lever and allow discussion on the sub-levers a variety of metrics were applied to each result and presented in Table 5. The following elements were analysed to ensure the relevant angles of the data could be discussed:

- **Overall Question Contribution:**
  This shows the contribution each question makes to the study.
  e.g. The Role of the Customer has a 14.4% contribution to the overall study as a positive influence and 5.2% as a negative influence.

- **Sub-lever ranking:**
  This is the order of impact of the sub-levers within each main lever. This allows prioritisation of the sub-levers for analysis.
  e.g. Smile/Nice customers is the highest-ranked sub-lever within the Role of the Customer and therefore has the greatest impact.

- **Overall study percentage contribution:**
  This shows the percentage contribution to the study as a whole and the overall impact of the lever. This is applied both to the main lever to show its contribution and each sub-lever to gain a full breakdown of the individual impacts of each concept.
  e.g. Role of the Customer contributes 19.6% to the overall study and the sub-lever of Smile/Nice customers contributes 4.4% of that total.

Table 5: Ranked Breakdown of Main Levers

Role of the Customer: Overall contribution to study 19.6%

Sub-lever	Question A: Overall contribution, 14.4%											Question B: Overall contribution, 5.2%				
	Smile/Nice customers	When customers appreciate you	Diversity of Customers	Learning about customers	Respect	Encouragement of customers	Challenged by customers	Customers get attached	Learning things from customers	Older customers	Speak language of customers	Rude Customers	Disrespectful Customers	Customer is not always right	Discrimination	Customer Sabotage
Ranking	1	2	4	6	7	8	9	10	12	15	16	3	5	11	13	14
Overall study % contribution	4.4%	2.5%	1.7%	1.3%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.5%	0.3%	0.1%	2.1%	1.5%	0.7%	0.4%	0.4%

Job Characteristics and Fit: Overall contribution to study 17.3%

Sub-lever	Question A: Overall contribution, 13.7%								Question B: Overall contribution, 3.5%			
	Customer Service	Allows the gaining of knowledge/Technology	Challenging role	Being empowered to help	Job keeps you busy	Every day is different	Job allows you to go extra mile	Varied Roles	Stressed/ Pressure	Doing double jobs	Not empowered	Language Barriers
Ranking	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	2	7	11	12
Overall study % contribution	5.5%	2.2%	1.8%	1.7%	1.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	2.5%	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%

Table 5 (continued): Ranked Breakdown of Main Levers

Resources Available: Overall contribution to study 14.4%										
Sub-lever	**Question A:** Overall contribution, 2.1%			**Question B:** Overall contribution, 12.3%						
Sub-lever	**Shelf Standards/ Enough Stock**	**New Equipment**	**Name Badge**	**Not enough staff/ long queues**	**No stock**	**Wrong prices**	**Quality of stock**	**Faulty machinery**	**Offline systems**	**Old uniforms**
Ranking	4	9	10	1	2	3	5	6	7	8
Overall study % contribution	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%	4.5%	3.1%	1.6%	1.1%	0.8%	0.7%	0.5%

Work Environment and Organisational Support: Overall contribution to study 12.0%										
Sub-lever	**Question A:** Overall contribution, 2.7%				**Question B:** Overall contribution, 3.4%						
Sub-lever	Good internal communication	Free transport	Free drinks and meals	Coming early to work (hours)	Cutting Hours	Scheduling	Communication	Forced Labour	Work conditions	Outsourcing	Space in canteen
Ranking	4	6*	6*	10	1	2	3	5	8	9	11
Overall study % contribution	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	3.7%	1.8%	1.8%	0.8%	0.6%	0.5%	0.2%

Table 5 (continued): Ranked Breakdown of Main Levers

Leadership: Overall contribution to study 10.4%

Sub-lever	Question A: Overall contribution, 2.0%					Question B: Overall contribution, 8.5%						
	Encouragement	Always there to assist	Manager quality	Not mixing business with pleasure	Challenged by managers	Poor Behaviour and attitude	Lack of respect	Management not helping customers	No accountability	Supervisor delay	Lack of support	Managers not being prepared
Ranking	7	8	9	10*	10*	1	2	3	4	5	6	12
Overall study % contribution	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	2.5%	1.6%	1.5%	1.1%	0.8%	0.7%	0.4%

Colleagues: Overall contribution to study 10.2%

Sub-lever	Question A: Overall contribution, 9.2%					Question B: Overall contribution, 1.0%
	Collaboration with colleagues	Like family	Happy Colleagues	Support	Unity amongst staff	Ignorant Staff
Ranking	1	2	3	4	6	5
Overall study % contribution	3.0%	2.4%	2.2%	1.4%	0.2%	1.0%

Reward and Recognition: Overall contribution to study 5.0%

Sub-lever	Question A: Overall contribution, 2.3%			Question B: Overall contribution, 2.8%				
	Pay day	Living wage for family	Recognition	Incorrect (short) payments calculated	Pay	Less payments	No Performance Management	No positive feedback
Ranking	1	4	8	2	3	5	6	7
Overall study % contribution	1.6%	0.6%	0.1%	1.0%	0.9%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%

Table 5 (continued): Ranked Breakdown of Main Levers

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Training & Development: Overall contribution to study 3.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Sub-lever</td><td colspan="2">Question A: Overall contribution, 1.2%</td><td colspan="2">Question B: Overall contribution, 1.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Learning and Growth</td><td colspan="2">Training and Development</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ranking</td><td colspan="2">2</td><td colspan="2">1</td></tr>
<tr><td>Overall study % contribution</td><td colspan="2">1.2%</td><td colspan="2">1.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Organisational Justice: Overall contribution to study 2.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Sub-lever</td><td colspan="4">Question B</td></tr>
<tr><td>Fairness</td><td>Unequal promotion of staff</td><td>Promise of Uniforms</td><td>Unpredictability</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ranking</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td></tr>
<tr><td>Overall Study % contribution</td><td>1.2%</td><td>0.6%</td><td>0.5%</td><td>0.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Personal Characteristics: Overall contribution to study 2.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Sub-lever</td><td colspan="4">Question A</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Pride/Making Miracles</td><td colspan="2">Alignment with vision and mission</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ranking</td><td colspan="2">1</td><td colspan="2">2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Overall study % contribution</td><td colspan="2">2.2%</td><td colspan="2">0.2%</td></tr>
</table>

5.6.3. *Conclusion of Results for Research Question Two*

Research Question Two builds on the results and allocation of the sub-levers made for Question One and adds additional weight to the study by creating a ranking system for these levers. Through this it is possible to derive not just which levers exist within the context studied but which have the most impact and where business can focus to achieve maximum success. The results for this question show that the most impactful lever is the Role of the Customer with Job Characteristics and Fit the second most impactful. The order of levers varies slightly from that concluded by simply using frequency of mention and adds additional weight and value to the results.

5.7. Results for Research Question Three

Research Question Three: What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?

Building on Research Question Two, Question Three created recommendations for those operating in the prescribed environment and built on the recommendations made in the literature. This adds true value to the existing work on the subject and allowed for the production of tools relevant for managing engagement within a service, frontline environment. The challenges were also addressed here and an integrated and realistic approach suggested.

No ranking or quantitative measure was applied here and the responses in Table 15 were noted by the facilitator during the discussion of Question Three. Responses were collated to reduce duplication across focus groups, however similar comments with potentially different interpretations were included to provide a better sense of understanding. Each group came up with a number of suggestions, the facilitator summed up each concept in the session repeating the summary back to the group for confirmation before moving onto the next idea.

Table 6: Results of Nominal Group Question C, recommended actions to increase engagement

Grouping against levers	Recommended action
Job Characteristics and Fit	• Keep us rotating roles as you get more experience • Let people show their potential by moving them around in the store • More hours
Resources Available	• Ensure enough stock of promotional lines, plan it better so we do not have to tell the customer it is the DC's fault • Make the process of ordering new equipment/fixing equipment better and quicker • Hire more staff or create better balance between outsourced labour • Better awareness of peak times in each store to avoid queues • Better stock management system to avoid out of stocks
Work Environment and Organisational Support	• Communicate any changes in scheduling in advance • Communicate why hours are being cut/why outsourcing • Be transparent about communication, if economy is so bad why can they not cut costs everywhere • Better scheduling of staff so less stress and pressure • Increase speed of stock system • Look at decentralisation of deliveries for stock shortages • Better recruitment to reduce incompetence • Don't have two cashiers on the till when competitors have eight at the same time • Schedule ahead to increase planning if hours cut
Leadership	• Supervisors are young, need more agile talent • Managers should lead by example, work the same hours and not just sit in their office • Provide training to managers on how to respect us and not abuse their power • Transparency of managers' work, so less scepticism of what they are doing in their offices all day • Make it a policy that managers help on the shop floor when busy/short staffed. Some do and some do not • Discipline managers for personal calls/reading newspaper/on internet etc.
Colleagues	• Utilise younger rather than older supervisors • Create better teamwork, everyone gets their hands dirty

Reward and Recognition	• Staff discounts to show loyalty
	• Money is motivating, stop cutting hours and outsourcing work
	• Increase pay per hour to compensate for less hours so can still put food on the table
Training and Development	• Ensure training is provided to all staff and outsourced labour
	• Provide training to outsourced labour so they are at the right standard
	• Offer more training for frontline staff
	• Regular training for both managers and each other
	• Focus on development of people
	• Teach managers to show us respect
	• People management training
	• Skills and development of all staff
Organisational Justice	• Be open when there are promotions available to allow all staff to apply for positions not just those who are liked by the manager
	• Don't use outside agents for managers, they do not understand what it takes to run a store
	• Provide new uniforms when promised

5.8. Conclusion

Results from six Nominal Groups are presented in this chapter. The overall results show that insight has been drawn from the NGT interviews in alignment with the research questions posed by the study. Further understanding of the factors that cause engagement in the identified population has been established.

In conclusion, the following high-level results can be drawn against each question:

Research Question One:

What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa, and why?

The overall results for the study show that nine main levers were identified as increasing engagement: Role of The Customer, Job Characteristics and Fit, Colleagues, Personal Characteristics, Work Environment, Reward and Recognition, Resources Available, Leadership, and Training and Development. These are almost exactly mirrored by the levers that decrease engagement. The only two differences are the removal of Personal Characteristics and the addition of Organisational Justice. Ten levers in total were therefore identified. This Research Question was sufficiently answered by the data.

Research Question Two:

Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?

The highest impacted lever overall between both sets of engagement influences is the Role of the Customer. The highest positively engaging lever is also Role of the Customer with the most negatively affecting lever being Resources employees have available in their roles. This Research Question was sufficiently answered by the data.

Research Question Three:

What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?

A mix of actions were described across all the levers to improve engagement. These predominately focused on training and communication, which were at the heart of many of the challenges presented. This Research Question was sufficiently answered by the data.

Chapter Six builds on these results, providing a detailed discussion of the implications. It explores the link between the literature described in Chapter Two, the Research Questions proposed in Chapter Three and the results in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 6:   DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1.   Introduction

Chapter Six provides discussion of the results presented in Chapter Five in alignment with the Research Questions asked in Chapter Three. In order to create conclusive findings against these questions links are drawn from the literature analysed in Chapter Two and any similarities and contrasts evaluated to enhance the body of literature on the topic of engagement.

The distinct factors that differentiate the study are used as a base for comparison being the context of a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce within a developing country. The literature on engagement is extensive and explores a variety of different facets predominately through a quantitative approach that has previously limited the full scope of understanding why engagement levers are formed (Albrecht et al., 2016; Anitha, 2014; Crawford et al., 2010; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Saks, 2006; So et al., 2016). This qualitative study using Nominal Group interviews goes further towards ensuring that results are fully examined and the motives behind them explored. This will allow a more focused approach by management in creating an engaged workforce within the described setting.

This chapter is structured according to the three research questions posed in Chapter Three. Each question is answered through: a comprehensive model showing the relevant levers (Question One), adding the impact of these levers (Question Two) and finally, making recommendations for improvement based on this analysis (Question Three).

6.2.   Definition of Engagement

Literature gives many definitions of engagement and further clarity on a universal meaning was not the intention or an outcome of this study (Christian et al., 2011; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Truss et al., 2013; Viljevac et al., 2012). One limitation of the Nominal Group Technique is that the concept of "engagement" could not be explicitly explored with each group. The study was presented to participants to understand what makes them better able to serve customers and be happy at work while exploring the blocks to this feeling of engagement. This basic summary distilled from the complex literature was required so as not to confuse participants. Given the overall alignment of the concepts discovered with those found by the engagement literature it can be deduced that the questions were clear enough for the analysis and results to be relevant and transferable across those in frontline positions within retail and service industries.

6.3. Discussion of Results for Research Question One

Research Question One: What engagement levers are relevant for a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in a developing country, and why?

Research Question One looked to explore the levers that are relevant to a frontline, semi-skilled, retail workforce in increasing their level of engagement. The literature posed an established set of levers that within an international context were considered impactful across a variety of industries and levels of employment (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Soane et al., 2012). Their adaptation and the correct integration within different contexts including South Africa was found to be necessary (Jacobs et al., 2014; Maslach et al., 2001; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010)

Nominal Group Questions A and B created a list of factors that are considered representative of those that respectively increase and block engagement in the context outlined by the study. Table 7 is a summary of these levers. This creates an overall perspective of those levers that influence engagement in the lives of semi-skilled, frontline workers. The breakdown of the meaning and justification of each main lever into sub-levers allows for a true alignment with the literature. Analysis will allow the concepts themselves to be interrogated for meaning and not just language similarities. The quantitative outcome from the Nominal Group Technique is useful to simplify the overall impact of the results but the qualitative input provides greater weight in contributing to the literature.

Table 7: Summary of Results, Research Question One

Main Lever	Total Frequency Question A	Total Frequency Question B	Total Frequency
Role of the Customer	100	54	**154**
Resources Available	16	109	**125**
Job Characteristics and Fit	92	32	**124**
Work Environment and Organisational Support	18	96	**114**
Leadership	11	79	**90**
Reward and Recognition	17	30	**47**
Colleagues	35	5	**40**
Training and Development	8	21	**29**
Organisational Justice	0	28	**28**
Personal Characteristics	19	0	**19**

6.3.1. *Engagement Levers*

The engagement literature talks to nine overall constructs that impact engagement either positively or negatively, which were consolidated in Table 1. Nominal Group Questions A and B sought to understand which contextual levers support this body of work and which potentially add to the scope. These were found to be reflective of the overall engagement literature with some deviations and additions, which will always occur in line with a changing context (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The literature also discussed the complexity of the levers cited and the interconnecting nature of the concepts (Maslach et al., 2001). It is considered almost impossible to fully separate one lever from another and this was also found during this study. The root of many of the levers sat outside the main lever itself and each therefore must be carefully evaluated to be addressed in an appropriate manner. (May et al., 2004) went some way to establishing direct and indirect effects of the various levers through their quantitative analysis, however the qualitative results of this study assisted in unpacking these links and the results of the influences are a key point of discussion.

The results once analysed for themes were found to be aligned with the overall engagement literature to an extent, however the findings add one additional lever within the context set. The 'Role of the Customer' is a distinct factor in the mind of the participants. This concept is present in a wide range of literature on customer service and sits predominately in the marketing field (Grandey et al., 2004; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Karatepe, 2013; Salanova et al., 2005). The result of the customer's role is present in a variety of the existing levers and its existence is not novel, for example Salanova et al. (2005) linked customer loyalty and positive attitudes to engagement. However, its inclusion as a separate and valid construct within the body of the established engagement literature is potentially a new finding, which will be unpacked and discussed in the sections below.

The additional influence of the economic environment of the study was also noted as a element for discussion. Although not a direct lever of engagement mentioned explicitly by the participants it adds value to understanding why the context studied differs to that of previous research and is integral to the recommendations for implementation.

Figure 2 built on the overall engagement literature to create a list of consolidated engagement levers, which were then discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Figure 28 is a replication of this with the additional construct of the 'Role of the Customer' built in. The order of the factors presented in this section represents the order of impact by frequency

as shown in Table 7. Research Question Two further develops the order of impact these levers follow based on participants' ranking and is explored in Section 6.5.

Figure 28: Revised Model of Engagement Levers, ordered by frequency
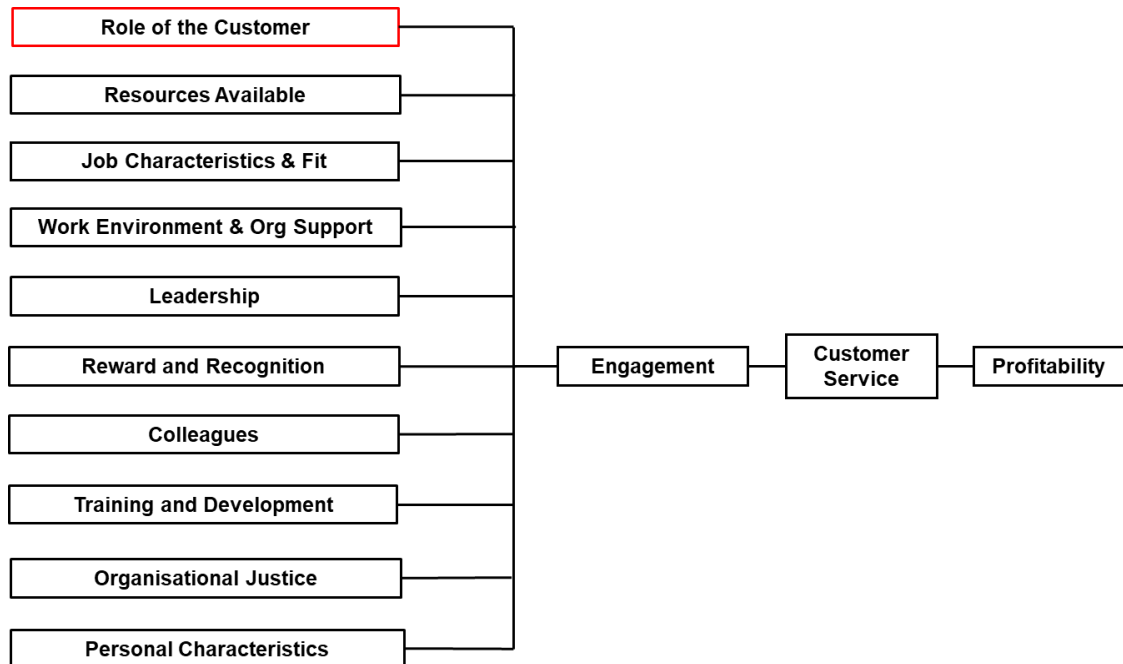
The differences and idiosyncrasies of each individual lever and their constituted parts are now discussed. The nominal group discussion outlined in Chapter Five provided insight into the reasons why participants mentioned each lever and what motivated their inclusion. The analysis of these motivations also created a separate conversation in the discussion around the way the levers influenced each other. For example, a happy customer assisted in engaging the staff because they enjoyed the aspect of their job that created the happy customer. In this example, the lever of 'Role of the Customer' was therefore seen to be influenced by 'Job Characteristics and Fit'.

The literature is used to substantiate these findings and any disparities are discussed. Within the analysis of each lever the reasons for its inclusion are assessed and the origins and complexity of their influences analysed. This relationship is built and represented diagrammatically in each section as a further extension of Figure 28. Within each element the dashed lines show the influencing factors and the solid lines portray the direct impact of each lever.

6.3.2. *Role of the Customer*

The role the customer plays in the life of a frontline employee in terms of engagement is a factor that accumulated 154 citations across the two Nominal Group Questions posed (Table 3 and Table 7). The ability for the customer themselves to change the mood and

temperament of employees is a concept covered by a variety of literature but not explicitly linked to engagement of staff in the classic engagement models (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Soane et al., 2012).

Figure 29 shows the factors that influence the role of the customer, which were drawn from the results in section 5.5.2.1. These are then discussed further below.

Figure 29: Influences on Role of the Customer
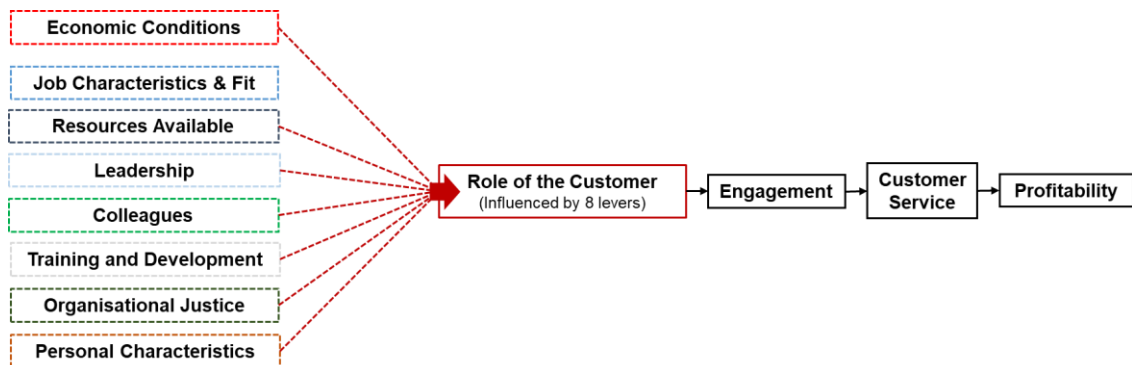
The creation of conversation around what really improves the daily life of staff in frontline roles allowed for the factors normally used in a fixed quantitative study to be unpacked and the question of why discussed. Salanova et al. (2005) is one of the few studies to link staff engagement to customer loyalty within a service environment and little has been developed from this in the last 12 years. This study builds on their quantitative findings, expanding their research past the concept of customer loyalty into other areas of customer interaction and why, in a frontline developing economy context, the customer has the biggest impact on employee engagement.

This lever is underpinned by many of the others, which is perhaps why it has not been specifically drawn out explicitly in previous engagement theory. For example, the results showed a happy customer is created when there are enough staff on the till, their desired items are available and the staff have the energy and fortitude to be helpful and proud in their roles. Separating the cause and effect of this experience is a key finding of this study.

The concept that "The customer is not always right" (Group 5) was one that acted as a factor of disengagement for eight individuals and was discussed at length during the sessions. Literature links this to job characteristics, personal characteristics and the role of management (Goussinsky, 2012; Grandey et al., 2004). Participants felt strongly that they understand that the store should give the customer what they want, within reason, given this is policy. However, as discussed by participants the manager's choice to take

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the side of the customer even after they have left is what is seen to cause the disengagement. This could also be seen as a lack of procedural justice as the manager's decision-making process would be seen as unfair and create a sense of psychological insecurity when it comes to dealing with customers (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006). The customer's blaming of staff for things that are outside of their control was also mentioned and links again to lack of organisational resources and unfair treatment (Grandey et al., 2004; Salanova et al., 2005). A manager having an adequate response to any issue is shown as a factor within the classic engagement literature (Anitha, 2014; Crawford et al., 2010; May et al., 2004). Managers who are engaged themselves and are authentic in their leadership rather than inconsistent in their response to customer challenges will be more engaging (Grandey et al., 2004). This was explicitly shown in the results with participants citing management behaviour in response to customer issues as a key element of disengagement. More authenticity will also help negate some of the challenges felt when experiencing customers.

The diversity of the customers needs and customers themselves was also found as a factor for consideration as they in essence co-produce their own experience with the employee (Bitner, Faranda, Hubbert, & Zeithaml, 1997; Bowen & Schneider, 2014). This was also seen in the study: "The more I interact with different customers the more I learn to handle customers." (Group 4). Customers should already have an idea of normal social behaviour, which dictates being friendly to employees. However, situational influences still play a part in creating a negative experience (Albrecht et al., 2016). In South Africa customers are struggling to make ends meet under significant financial pressures and high unemployment. They are also as shown by the World Bank (2017) as one of the most unhappy and unequally treated populations globally. This may further explain the contextual impact of customer interactions and why, within the sample, being fairly treated by smiling customers is so important.

The negative or positive behaviour of a customer was clearly linked with disengagement and engagement respectively by participants: "Dealing with customers isn't easy and only the loyal customers are friendly" (Group 4). As discussed, there is limited literature linking these concepts, however the work of both Goussinsky (2012) and Grandey et al. (2004) was endorsed by this study. They found that the higher the quantity of aggression from customers towards employees the more likely increased emotional exhaustion and disengagement, although the personal characteristics of the individual are also influential in the significance of this finding (Salanova et al. 2005). Emotionally demanding customer interactions can have an impact on staff by increasing the emotional demand

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for them to stay calm and react positively to often negative feedback (Salanova et al., 2005; Zablah et al., 2012).

The context of the environment studied plays a relevant part in this levers analysis and this may go further to explain its lack of identification historically. Grandey and Goussinskys' studies were conducted in call centre environments, which reduces the role of the physical customer. Many of the engagement studies were also done in other less physical environments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Xu & Thomas, 2011). In a retail frontline environment staff are not able to turn around and pass pressure onto customers despite the pressure often felt by employees. In a face-to-face environment the challenge facing the employee is less scripted and staff are required to be ambassadors for the brand of the company even in the face of disrespect (Zablah et al., 2012). The negatives in a physical environment feel even more personal and intimidating, which was discussed by participants. The physical environment can also be positive as many employees were shown to learn from customers and interact with them so frequently it almost becomes a social discussion. The link between engagement and customer service is therefore heightened as a tool for increased sales in this context (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). These findings are therefore transferable across the retail and service sectors but in a predominately face to face frontline environment.

Zablah et al. (2012) again linked this to the need to fit staff to specific roles. A customer-facing employee must have the ability to represent the company even in the face of adversity and the study showed empowerment and self-efficacy of staff will allow better handling of these situations (Goussinsky, 2012). The staff want to have all the information available to assist the customer and have the support of their manager if required and this can be achieved through the creation of a positive learning cycle by training at all levels (Anitha, 2014; Goussinsky, 2012). Although the results did not rank training and development highly as an independent factor the training of managers was mentioned frequently by respondents, which links again to the role of leadership. The additional link here to organisational resources is key, staff become disengaged witnessing happy customers become frustrated by queues and lack of stock and then they take it out on the employee who generally has no control. Some customers will always be unhappy with their service. However, if these factors are all successfully linked and there can be a reduction in the rude, disrespectful, discriminatory customers described by staff, they will be more engaged as a result.

It is also possible to link the personality traits described by Saks (2006); hardiness and self-esteem, to the feeling in some of the group sessions that expressed the need to just

get on with it and that customers come and go. The desire to be customer-orientated and the ability not to be affected by a negative customer experience is likely to be routed in personality. Zablah et al. (2012) showed that customer orientated behaviours are a result of psychological differences between individuals and that the desire to be in a role that is customer facing comes from an individual attitude and behavioural type. This perspective aligns with this study and indicates a shift in the previous literature, which showed that being customer orientated is more productive because it is believed as the 'right way to run a business'. The alignment rather with individual values is the most important in creating an engaged customer facing workforce. Recruitment therefore should focus on understanding individual value sets of employees alongside skill levels.

Support from both colleagues who are shown to provide camaraderie and the situational reaction of the manager are shown by the results and the literature as key to engagement (Zablah et al., 2012). This finding could also be linked to the original engagement literature on colleague involvement in creating engagement as the development of collegiality allows for individuals to take on greater levels of responsibility and they will be more empowered to deal with customers (Anitha, 2014).

In summary, this lever is not only rated the most influential by frequency but the role the customer plays is also influenced in creating staff engagement by seven of the nine levers plus economic conditions. This concept is familiar in other spheres of literature but the explicit link with the core engagement literature is limited and these results build on this connection. This link to the cause and effect is created through this study and analysis and goes to answering the question of why in a frontline context a different lever was produced.

6.3.3. *Resources Available*

The resources available to employees was the largest negative factor of engagement by frequency with 109 citations of issues in this category (Table 3 and Table 7). Only 16 individuals cited it as a positive factor and these almost directly correlated to the reverse of the negative factors. For example, stock levels when high were positive and when low were negative. This makes this, overall, a highly influencing factor (by frequency) and tied heavily into other areas of engagement, this finding reinforces the literature (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Karatepe, 2013; Saks, 2006).

Figure 30 shows the other levers that influence engagement through resources as found by the study.

Figure 30: Influences on Resources Available
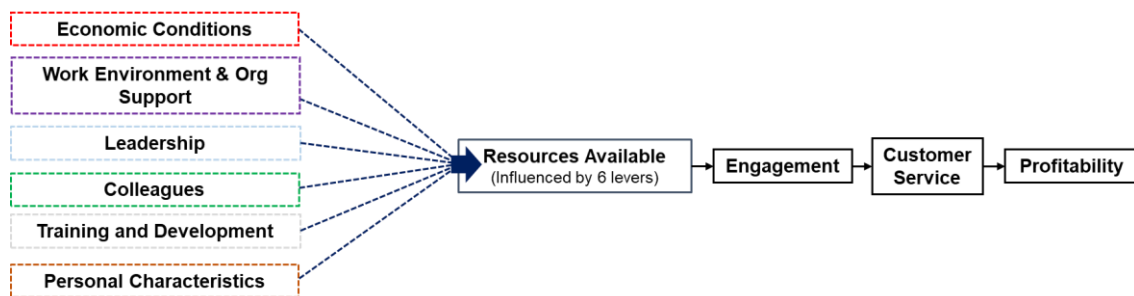
The literature within the field of engagement talks primarily to more emotional resources as a driver of engagement. The ability to create energy and personal resources at work was mapped by the study through the levers of training and development and manager/colleague relationships. These elements in their own way contribute to the psychological happiness and support that create an employee with the resources to operate and subsequently be engaged in their role (Kahn, 1990; Salanova et al., 2005). The energy and pride created by having a name badge for example is very powerful for employees: "It's a sign of respect and the name badge allows that" (Group 2). May et al. (2004) found that resources is a suppressor variable to psychological availability showing that if resources are held constant a heightened level of availability or physical energy creates an increased likelihood of engagement, which again links the findings to the core literature building on Kahn's (1990) original constructs.

Although physical resources are shown to impact engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004), studies link both physical and psychological together as conjoined factors that together have a much larger impact. Resources in the study were mentioned predominately in terms of physical challenges although in exploring below the surface of these citations they were linked to the feelings of either pride or embarrassment. Either employees had or did not have the right tools of trade and this was linked to the influence on the customers' experience in the store. Therefore, the reason that resources were so highly ranked is because when they are lacking, the work environment of staff and their ability to serve customers are affected, which are the next two highest cited levers across the two questions asked. The lack of stock, queues and wrong prices were all shown by the results to make customers frustrated, something they then take out on staff, which in turn reduces their engagement.

In answering why physical resources in this study are accentuated the environment of operation should be considered. The recession in South Africa and lack of investment has created a physical lack of resources, which is directly linked to the environmental context the retailer operates in. Zablah et al. (2012) found that in economic uncertainty,

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reducing costs is likely to impact customer service and this certainly seems to be the case in this South African retail study. The link from customer service to profitability must then be considered as a balance to cost-cutting measures that reduce engagement through limiting resources to frontline staff. It is important to incorporate this finding into the overall model of engagement as the context that a company operates in is shown to be a factor that influences the levers.

This analysis, in summary, assists in answering why resources are considered a key lever for engagement and this study has found they are relevant for the workforce outlined in Research Question One. They are also intricately linked with six other levers including the additional force of economic situation and influence. This creates a contextual platform for the study and links it to the developing market in which it was conducted, which is different from the majority of the core literature (Jacobs et al., 2014; Menguc et al., 2013; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010).

6.3.4. *Job Characteristics and Fit*

The characteristics of an employee's role and their fit within that role were considered an important element of engagement by the literature (May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). Participants also rated this lever as important in their engagement, matching the findings by May et al. (2004) that in a monotonous environment it is key to find individuals who can carry out those duties with a positive attitude. It also supports Olivier and Rothmann's (2007) study that put role fit as a mediator of engagement in a South African setting. The overall construct of Job Characteristics was mentioned 92 times as a factor of increased engagement and 32 times as a block (Table 3 and Table 7).

Figure 31 shows how Job Characteristics and Fit are influenced by other engagement levers.

Figure 31: Influences on Job Characteristics and Fit

Fit against a role was seen through participants enjoying the element of customer service as a key job characteristic because they enjoyed the interaction with customers. This sub-lever had a positive relationship with increased engagement, with 30 people mentioning the construct in Question One. This supports the findings of Jacobs et al. (2014); Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004) that meaningfulness of role is considered fundamental in the study of engagement. The fact that participants "enjoy interacting with people and making them happy" (Group 6) and find this challenge to have real meaning

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to them gives further weight to the overall construct of fit. It takes a certain type of individual to find the customer service element of work interesting (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b). Rich, Lepine, and Crawford's (2010) work on engagement antecedents could also be linked to this finding. They analysed firefighters and found that the more helpful and courteous they were to clients the line between this being a function of engagement and simply a role requirement was found to be less significant than in commission-based sales jobs, indicating that the role itself can create engagement. This also links the construct to that of personal characteristics, as the individual's personality plays a part in creating engagement through the type of role. This could be seen through the passion of individuals when talking about their role. Although personality type was not assessed the results show that people were happy in their roles and were fulfilled to an extent by the opportunity they had to interact with customers.

Hackman and Oldham's (1980) original model of job characteristics was also partially mirrored by the study. Their five characteristics, proven to be influencers of engagement: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback (Saks, 2006), are discussed here. Variety in role was a trait identified by the study. Figure 18 shows that participants enjoy challenging roles and when their days have variety through different tasks. The literature showed that if a business can find ways of creating limited repetition in roles then engagement will be more likely (Renard & Snelgar, 2016b). Variety in the study was demonstrated through employees' interaction with customers and it is this job characteristic that allows variation from the otherwise monotonous characteristics of sitting on the till or stacking shelves. This can be closely linked to the role of the customer as this job characteristic can only be seen as positive if the interactions with customers are also positive. The scope of the role that allows the gaining of knowledge and understanding of technology was also influential as an element of engagement. Although linked with training and development the technological progression of retail and movement towards a more integrated technological service environment means that the fit of individuals against the industry requirement to understand technology is key to progression (So et al., 2016).

Autonomy or control in an environment was mentioned both as a creator and block of engagement. This links clearly with both Hackman and Oldham (1980), and Maslach et al. (2001) who found that increased autonomy and control allowed employees to feel empowered to reach their goals. Participants discussed that being empowered with the ability to assist customers without calling a manager meant they felt more in control at work.

Burnout or stress at work through a role that is too demanding for an individual was also mirrored by the study although the cause here was shortage of staff (resources available) rather than the design of a role that is too exhausting (Maslach et al., 2001). Stress was shown by the results to be the greatest contributor to negative engagement within the job characteristics category with 20 citations. Expectation of stress was therefore a factor as staff believed they had not signed up for roles that required double work for example.

The significance of a task was also mentioned in the study as participants discussed the link they saw between delivering good customer service and the profitability of the store. They truly see themselves as a vital part of the overall retail offering and if they are too stressed to provide good customer service or the resources are not available disengagement occurs as they cannot see meaning in the role they are providing. (Maslach et al., 2001) found the demands of the person must be aligned with their ability to create engagement and this has been reinforced by the participants in this study.

Overall the lever of Job Characteristics and Fit is important within a semi-skilled, retail frontline workforce in South Africa, despite the limited influence from other levers. The role that an employee takes within the business, including an interface with customers and their fit against that role, was discussed and is supported by the literature. Roles that have high autonomy, less stress and significant meaning to the employee will provide higher levels of engagement.

6.3.5. *Work Environment and Organisational Support*

The environment that individuals should be working in to be engaged was shown to be a factor in a developing economy workforce. The negative influence of this far outweighed the positive with 92 people citing this main lever as a factor that blocks engagement as opposed to 18 (Table 3 and Table 7). The sub-levers within these categories reflect parts of the literature, especially the aspects of communication and physical environment, although idiosyncrasies within a South African environment added a different angle to the body of research.

Figure 32 shows the link between the single lever identified as influencing engagement through Work Environment.

Figure 32: Influences on Work Environment

Communication both positive and negative was reflected as an influencing construct by the study: "We only hear negative messages… there is no communication" (Group 1). This was also included in much of the literature (Anitha, 2014; Bazigos & Caruso, 2016; Crawford et al., 2010). Negative communication is shown to be more impactful with 21 citations against only five on the positive side. Communication was also cited as a potential cause of the other sub-levers including scheduling, outsourcing and cutting hours. Overall the concept of open communication was discussed at length with many of the other challenges being avoided if the business was clear in its motives and goals. This links into the constructs of organisational justice and leadership where transparency is seen as a fair and motivational way to lead and communicate with staff (Anitha, 2014; Mishra et al., 2014).

The cutting of hours was a frequent factor in this lever with it being mentioned by 29 participants (Figure 21). The theme of cost constraints caused by a depressed economy came through strongly in the conversation here. The work environment is shown by the literature to be affected by the climate of that organisation (Menguc et al., 2017; Zablah et al., 2012) and this is reinforced by the study. A climate of cost cutting and policies surrounding the reduction of hours and outsourcing labour is clearly linked to Organisational Justice as the complaints around these factors were seen as mainly unfair as well as not properly communicated (Saks, 2006). Employees understand that the context is challenging but want to understand where they stand in a transparent way so they can plan accordingly. This is seen as an important mechanism in creating engagement through better organisational support (Maslach et al., 2001).

The policy and structure that the organisation provides is also seen as impactful in the literature and different from the leadership support provided (Saks, 2006). Within a South African context, the provision from the business includes small things like the availability/cost of food and drink in the workplace; this has increased emphasis in a low-income environment. Although frequency of these items was not the highest, the dialogue around the gratitude of the provision of these items is telling of their impact. The increased travel time to work also plays a part here as they have less time to shop and prepare food in this environment as indicated by one participant: "I normally leave home without breakfast so the bread provided helps a lot" (Group 6). This finding concurs with Salanova et al. (2005) who found that small psychological elements like ensuring employees are not hungry and distracted at work has a larger impact than the research currently suggests. This finding is aligned with most of the engagement literature however, does not support the view of Salanova et al. (2005) who found psychological and physical predictors equal in influence in a service environment.

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Work Environment and the level of Organisational Support provided was found to be a relevant lever in a frontline workforce and especially within a low-income developing environment. This finding goes one step further than the existing literature to elaborate on the small policies that can really influence employee engagement within this context. Any policy or environmental shift must be seen as fair and well communicated in order to be influential and create true engagement.

6.3.6. *Leadership*

Universally across the Nominal Groups leadership was defined as direct managers within the store environment. This links the findings to the definition used in the literature rather than that of overall organisational leadership, which was not discussed in the study.

Figure 33 shows the levers that influence engagement through leadership.

Figure 33: Influences on Leadership

Leadership is considered by the majority of the literature one of the stronger factors influencing engagement and the creation of psychological safety (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). It was surprising in this study that Leadership had a relatively low influence on engagement in comparison to other factors, although Saks (2006), one of the key contributors to the field, also found limited significance between the two. In the context studied therefore the link is less influential. This may be explained by the overall situation of employees in a depressed developing context being more impactful than the leaders' influence. Frontline employees in lean organisations with aggravated customers, long commutes and antiquated resources put these issues ahead of management when pushed. Although, as indicated in the results, the conversation around this topic was incredibly passionate and an easy topic for employees to speak about.

Engaging leaders are seen as having realistic reactions to problems and this study confirms this finding (Crawford et al., 2010). Management also has the ability to offset any stress caused by the customer by managing the interaction and not always siding with the customer (Grandey et al., 2004). This may be challenging when the policy of the organisation is that the customer is always right. Participants were disengaged by managers who did not back them up when it came to dealing with situations that were

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not their fault, predominately with regards to customers. This also links strongly to Organisational Justice as the decision-making of the manager needs to be seen as fair. Similarly, respect, poor behaviour and attitude were the largest limiters of engagement (May et al., 2004). Respect was linked in one nominal group to the race of employees vs that of their leaders, which links this lever to that of Personal Characteristics. The finding that employees felt more respected and empowered when leaders were of a different racial group was surprising given the literature showed the opposite to be true, although the issue is not well researched (Shuck et al., 2011). This may be a finding unique to a more racially charged environment in South Africa or a symptom of reduced management training in a younger generation of black managers who are not empowered themselves with knowledge to be truly transformational leaders, something that is required in a difficult economic climate (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

Anitha (2014) described another key leadership factor as transparency, which was found to be substantial in this study again linking to the trust established through creation of organisational justice. The concept of not understanding what managers are doing and not trusting that they are acting in the best interests of the employee were limiters of engagement. Weak servant leadership was discussed as well as the perceived power of the manager. Power was seen to be influential in either engaging or disengaging depending on the legitimacy of its use (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). The power hierarchy was clearly referred to by participants in the study, and seen as a negative in the hands of managers who did not involve themselves in the team or have an action-orientated style or true visibility, which is seen by the literature as a more successful approach (Bazigos & Caruso, 2016; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). This is elaborated on as a lack of direct supervision and support, which is also supported by the literature (Maslach et al., 2001; Menguc et al., 2013). Employees in non-autonomous roles are seen as requiring more support, and although the homogeneity of the sample precludes this comparison it was seen as a factor that frustrated and disengaged employees who are in this type of role. The complete lack of management training was seen to contribute to the leadership skill void and overall attitude of managers (Rich et al., 2010).

In summary Leadership was seen as a relevant factor in the South African retail context predominately due to the level of work required and the hierarchy common within these environments. Overall the requirements of a successful leader were mirrored by the study and the sub-levers for engagement were similar. Organisational Justice created by transparency and adequate support from managers created through training are key while the link to the personal characteristics and in this case demographics of the

employee in relation to the manager plays a role, which is a factor that can be linked from the literature to the context of this study.

6.3.7. *Reward and Recognition*

Reward is often logically linked to engagement as an indication of value of work (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001). Figure 34 shows how reward and recognition are influenced by the other levers to create engagement.

Figure 34: Influences on Reward and Recognition

Reward and recognition as a positive indicator of engagement was mentioned by 17 people with intrinsic reward only represented by one individual. As a negative lever Reward and Recognition was mentioned 30 times overall with eight of those related to intrinsic feedback and performance management factors (Table 3 and Table 7). Interestingly, intrinsic reward is linked by the literature to a feeling of pride (Maslach et al., 2001) something that was present within the sample and grouped under the lever of Personal Characteristics. This feeling seems to be independent from intrinsic reward given the lack of feedback, respect and managerial communication/praise to employees indicated in other parts of this report.

The employees in this study focused more on their extrinsic reward requirements and were grateful that their job put food on the table and that they got paid at the end of each month. Work has been done in this area within the context of the South African retail sectors and this study goes some way to further substantiating these findings (Jacobs et al., 2014; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010). These local studies showed that increasingly a younger generation of employees requires a mix of reward types and that extrinsic rewards even within a low level, low skill environment are not enough to create true engagement. Of the 60% of participants in the study who were under 35 only 15% cited intrinsic reward as influential with 45% extrinsic. No one individual cited a combination. This is contrary to previous research, however given the focus of this methodology it cannot be considered a definitive finding. The seeming inappropriateness of discussing pay may also have influenced the results and based on the conversation itself extrinsic reward would be a higher factor for consideration.

The lack of experience of any kind of formal performance management would also be a consideration here. Given the tenure of most employees it is likely their current

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environment is their only frame of reference and therefore it is not surprising this was hardly discussed given their complete lack of exposure to the most common form of intrinsic reward. This links to the lever of work environment as it is the responsibility of Human Resources to establish the frameworks for intrinsic reward and if these are lacking in an organisation there is a link to reduced engagement (Saks, 2006).

Reward is certainly a lever for consideration as part of the overall model although the recognition element within the context studied is less apparent which is supported by some of the literature (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). The individual's characteristics and work environment and influencers on this factor as they set expectations according to their circumstances. Extrinsic reward was therefore more influential, which contradicts the previous research completed. Limitations to the methodology against this factor have a role here.

6.3.8. *Colleagues*

The influence of colleagues was found to exist as one of the most established levers of engagement in the literature and the research making it relevant for the context studied(Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990). As a negative influencer, this construct had almost no discussion at all but it was the third highest mentioned positive factor with 35 responses (Table 3 and Table 7). Employees clearly value a supportive relationship with their colleagues and the creation of psychological safety through this level of family like trust (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004).

The homogeneity of the population and workforce may have an impact here. May et al. (2004) found that when there are conflicting cultural groups the influence of co-worker relationships diminishes. Given this study had a 94% similarity in race group this supports this finding although it does not delve into the different sub-cultures of this group. The results also reflect the findings from Anitha (2014) who saw that employees who are close work in a more collaborative way towards a set goal, in this instance that goal was happier customers. Given how important to engagement happier customers are for employees in this industry this sub-lever increases in influence as a contributor towards this lever.

6.3.9. *Training and Development*

Training and Development was seen as a potential solution to an unengaged workforce and incompetent leadership rather than explicitly as a lever in the creation of engagement. Few studies use it as a distinct lever, which reinforces the findings of this study (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). As the lowest

frequency lever in Question A and second to last in Question B it should not be considered as a main factor and although the literature around the impact of training was not directly disproved the absence of conversation around this theme was revealing in itself. The tenure of participants in the lowest level job is again revealing here. Development of individuals is sporadic but this could be attributed to many different factors including individual competency, which is beyond the scope of this study. Another reason for lack of training is lack of investment rather than lack of recognition of the requirement. The economic situation could have created a lack of focus on this lever but this would require further investigation to establish as it was not known by the staff involved in the study.

6.3.10. *Organisational Justice*

Distributive justice rather than procedural justice in this study was described by participants as a negatively engaging factor (Saks, 2006). Unfairness of decisions, predominately around promotions, created a lack of psychological safety in 28 respondents (Table 3 and Table 7). Although this was one of lowest overall impactful factors its lack of inclusion as a positive lever in any form (the only lever not included) indicates it is impactful, linking it to Maslach et al. (2001) who saw fairness as key to engagement.

Figure 35 shows how organisational justice is influenced by the other engagement levers.

Figure 35: Influences on Organisational Justice
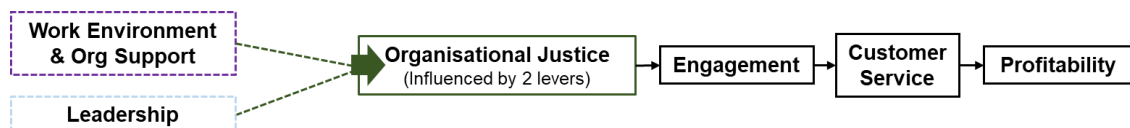
The literature links heightened self-consciousness to those who are most affected by organisational justice and goes further to positively correlate this effect to the amount of customer interaction within a role (May et al., 2004). Its relatively low frequency of response as a driver of engagement is therefore surprising given that all participants are in this situational context. This study therefore may be more aligned to the findings of Saks (2006) who found that only procedural justice has an impact on engagement. Context for this lever is therefore key and this helps define the requirements for engagement within a developing, frontline workforce. While keeping promises and fairness around promotional choices will have a positive impact on engagement they cannot be carried out in isolation and require analysis in conjunction with other factors

like leadership and communication. Participants placed the blame for the unfairness in treatment and breaking of promises firmly in the hands of inexperienced management.

Organisational justice is a relevant engagement lever within a frontline, developing country workforce although the root cause of the lever is clearly leadership and work environment, which may have reduced the impact of this as a stand-alone lever.

6.3.11. *Personal Characteristics*

Personal Characteristics were analysed in two ways by the study. Firstly, the influence of character within the responses of the Nominal Groups themselves, and secondly, in linking the demographic variables that were established by the voting form. As an output of the group sessions the only characteristic mentioned was that of pride. This was mentioned by 18 people (Table 3 and Table 7) and reflects their feelings when customers see a tidy store and give them compliments, as well as pride in wearing the uniform and being part of the retailer itself. There were no negative personal characteristics mentioned during the groups.

Interestingly, although 72% of individuals questioned felt they were 'happy' at work the time spent discussing Question Two and the significantly higher level of responses for this question indicate that there were more negative factors than positive. This more negative mindset is shown to be a counter indicator to engagement (Shuck, 2011).

Menguc et al. (2017) linked engagement and the characteristic of self-efficacy. Although this study did not directly test this characteristic the respondents ranked technical training required as very low and the long tenure of the employees (58% having over five years' experience) while still being at the most junior levels within the business indicate a degree of self-assessed competency. This may be an indication of why a majority of the population questioned felt engaged. This construct has overlaps with the Role of the Customer and the importance of this factor, however it conflicts with parts of the existing literature. Goussinsky (2012) found that if employees are self-efficacious they are less affected by customer aggression, however this was a significant factor in this study despite the apparent self-efficacy of the staff. It is possible there is a saturation point where competency in role leads to boredom and increased stress from repetitive situations that are outside the individual's control.

The personal circumstances of individuals outside the working environment were also considered a contributor to this lever of engagement by the literature (May et al., 2004). The time it takes to travel to work and the fact that 57% of employees work above 36 hours a week leaving little time for their families when combined with such long travel

time may also have an impact on engagement, again linking the study to the specific contextual factors created in a developing environment within the lower levels of employment.

The level of education in the sample was higher than expected and doesn't prove or disprove the literatures assumption that higher levels of burnout correspond to higher levels of education (Maslach et al., 2001).

This lever remains, as found by the literature, one of the hardest to analyse and assess but it remains included as a relevant element to the overall findings. It has no direct influences but influences many of the other levers and builds on the innate qualities that need to exist in employees in this environment to be engaged through other levers for example, self-efficacy and pride.

6.4. Conclusive Findings for Research Question One

Each lever identified in Chapter Five has been analysed for its inclusion in the overall model. No levers were found to be missing in the context studied that were outlined in the literature, therefore one conclusion against this question is that theoretical saturation was reached and the results add to the existing body of literature on engagement. The findings against each lever for Research Question One have been consolidated into the model in Figure 36. As with the individual elements the dashed lines show the influencing factors and the solid lines portray the direct impact of each lever. All of the levers discussed have an influence on engagement in a semi-skilled, frontline environment within the retail industry and a developing country context. Economic conditions in the country studied are seen as an additional influencer on some of the levers. The dependencies and relationship between the elements is shown as a key finding as it will allow companies to understand where to focus to have maximum impact.

Analysis of the data collected against Research Question Two will now look at the importance of the factors according to their rankings, this will complete the model.

Figure 36: Model of Engagement Levers showing impact (frequency) and influences
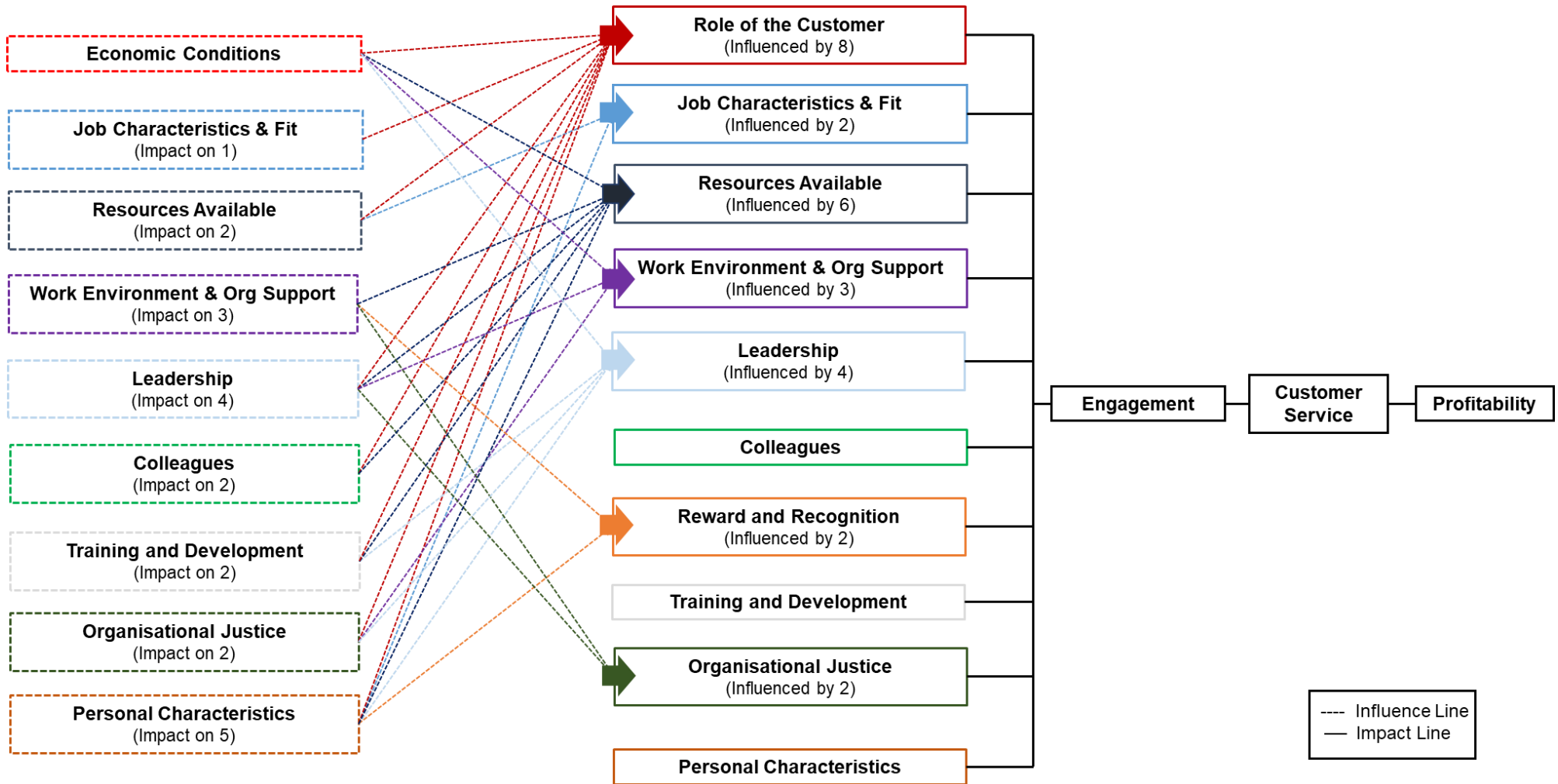
6.5. Discussion of Results for Research Question Two

Research Question Two: Of the identified levers, which are perceived to have the highest levels of impact?

Engagement literature varies in opinion on what is the most impactful lever, each study within different contexts produces a different overall result. Although mainly quantitative many of the studies discuss impact without an overall ranking (Anitha, 2014; Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). The impact of the levers allows for organisations to unpack where to focus especially in a situation of economic constraint and uncertainty where resources are limited. Table 8 summarises the results for this question and shows that within a South African frontline environment the most impactful lever is the Role of the Customer with the least being Personal Characteristics. Research Question Two builds on the significant analysis of each of these levers in section 6.3 to answer Research Question One. The results for Research Question Two include the complex analysis of the ranking completed by all participants and therefore gives a more accurate picture of the true impact of the levers than the frequency of mention used in the discussion thus far.

Table 8: Summary of Results, Research Question Two

Main Lever	Total Ranking Question A	Total Ranking Question B	Total Ranking
Role of the Customer	31.6%	11.2%	**19.6%**
Job Characteristics	30.1%	7.6%	**17.3%**
Resources Available	4.6%	26.4%	**14.4%**
Work Environment	5.8%	20.0%	**12.0%**
Leadership	4.3%	18.2%	**10.4%**
Colleagues	10.8%	1.0%	**10.2%**
Reward & Recognition	5.0%	6.0%	**5.0%**
Training & Development	2.6%	4.0%	**3.3%**
Organisational Justice		6.0%	**2.6%**
Personal Characteristics	5.2%		**2.4%**

Figure 40 is a further refined model of engagement with an updated order of impact. There are a few shifts within the model that should be noted here. Job Characteristics and Fit has become more impactful after applying the ranking with Resources Available shifting down. The role of Colleagues has also overtaken Reward and Recognition to be the seventh most impactful factor.

Figure 37: Model of Engagement Levers, ordered by ranking

Lever	%
Role of the Customer	19.6%
Job Characteristics & Fit	17.3%
Resources Available	14.4%
Work Environment & Org Support	12.0%
Leadership	10.4%
Colleagues	10.2%
Reward and Recognition	5.0%
Training and Development	3.3%
Organisational Justice	2.6%
Personal Characteristics	2.4%

Engagement → Customer Service → Profitability
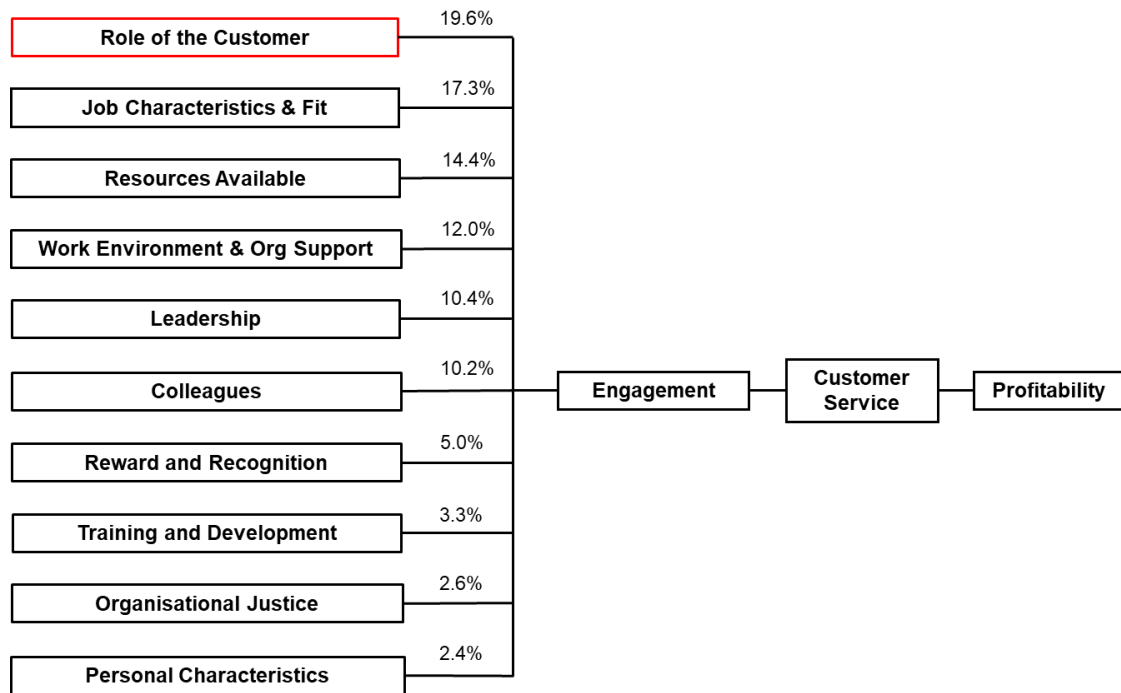
The results in Chapter Five and discussion in section 6.3 have also shown the influence of each lever and sub-lever as a contributor to the overall engagement of the study population. This quantitative outcome combined with the qualitative analysis resulting in the model produced for Research Question One (Figure 36) will provide a fully integrated picture of how a business within the context described can increase engagement. Research Question Three then takes one step further to make recommendations on how to do this.

6.5.1. *Impact Lever Analysis*

The Role of the Customer remains the most impactful lever following the ranking application with a 19.6% contribution to engagement of participants (Table 5 and Table 8). Given this, as discussed, is not an individual factor mentioned explicitly by the engagement literature it is difficult to then compare it to the findings of comparable studies. Literature does point to the dual influence on service environments of both physical resources (stock and so forth) and human interactions (customers). While the

first is covered in the engagement literature by the levers of work environment and resources the second is less explored despite marketing and wider service climate literature seeing this as a vital contributor to staff motivation (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Chang, 2016; Ostrom et al., 2015; So et al., 2016).

Having 'nice customers' is the most impactful sub-lever within this main customer lever demonstrated by the quote: "Happy customers and happy colleagues make my day perfect" (Group 4). It represents a 4.4% contribution to the entire study and the third highest overall with Customer Service having 5.5% (Job Characteristics and Fit, Table 5) and 'Not Enough Staff' having 4.5% (Resources Available, Table 5). The top two factors both also cover two angles of the customer interaction; one the fact that individuals enjoy being in customer-facing roles and second the impact that the customer then has given their attitude and attachment to the employee. The reverse is also true with rude customers having a detrimental effect: "Proper abuse and discriminatory language" (Group 5) and contributing 2.1% overall (Table 5). This consolidates the finding that this area of a frontline environment is contextual, and this should be considered when engaging individuals.

Saks (2006), as one of the significant contributors in this field found two factors statistically significant in the measure of engagement: job characteristics and organisational support. Job Characteristics had the second highest impact in this study with a 17.3% contribution overall. The analysis against Research Question One found that both Resources Available and Personal Characteristics are influencers of this lever. The connection with resources can be seen in the form of doing double jobs, which the results show is due to a lack of staff resource, and this is shown to have a 4% representation. Personal Characteristics within this lever can be seen in most of the remaining sub-levers, focusing on empowerment and challenge. Personality here allows the acceptance and enjoyment of many of the standard role aspects and as a separate lever was the least impactful with an overall impact of only 2.4%. Although aligning with some of the literature that did not find this measure significant this finding conflicts with the findings of May et al. (2004) who found that personality in the form of self-consciousness had a significant impact on engagement. Here the limitations of a focus group as opposed to a quantitative study may have impacted the degree of self-reflection and stifled proactive discussion about personality as a metric.

The resources available to staff as a main lever were the third highest ranked in terms of impact and represent 14.4% of the overall sample. Within this lever the highest ranked sub-lever is 'not enough staff', which leads to long queues (31.1% of the lever). The rest of the sub-levers were also shown to link to the absence of physical resources: "Stock

arrives after promotions end so the customer goes away unhappy" (Group 5). May et al. (2004) also align with these findings. They found that resources had a significant and direct relationship with engagement having built their study on the original three constructs of Kahn's (1990) research. The economic situation in the country will have impacted this lever coming higher in this study than others in the past. Although the requirement to be successful in this context is even more important for retailers, the ability to increase resources and therefore reducing the impact of this lever is difficult (So et al., 2016)

The second lever found to be impactful by Saks (2006) was that of organisational support, which included work environment. This was also found to be the leading factor for engagement in Anitha's impact model representing 53% of engagement (2014). Within the South African context work environment was found to be the fourth impactful lever with only 12% representation. Policy decisions are leading here with cutting hours (30.4%) and scheduling (15%) having the most impact. Saks (2006) analysed these results, finding that the caring nature of the businesses he studied created an obligation within employees to return with heightened engagement towards the organisation. Given the lack of positive engagement around culture and management this may explain why the findings differed from the literature; this adds weight to Saks's (2006) results.

Leadership was found to be the fifth lever within this study and is shown to be statistically significant by elements of the literature (Anitha, 2014; May et al., 2004) although not all of the key studies (Saks, 2006). Chapter Five shows leadership is representative of 10.4% of respondents' engagement and the behaviour of the leader is the overwhelming factor in creating this level of response: "We have lots of ideas and we are scolded for having them, we can't be empowered to change our circumstances" (Group 6). May et al. (2004) found this finding to be transferable across contexts and that supportive, trustworthy leadership creates psychological safety. Within a service environment the role of the manager is also key in managing the customer (Grandey et al., 2004), which links back to the results shown around the Role of the Customer influencing factors. Given that most of the sub-levers under Leadership were connected to behaviour, support and respect, this finding is shown to be transferable into the context studied.

The role of co-workers is often linked to that of leadership and included as part of the overall culture of the business. Anitha (2014) found this to be the third most significant impact in her final model representing 36% of her respondent's engagement where this study found Colleagues to be the sixth most impactful and only represent 10.2%. The disparity between these results may indicate again the context that the employees find themselves in. Anitha (2014) studied small businesses not corporates where it could be

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argued a differing culture exists with different pressures on manager and colleague relationships in a small setting. Given that within a retail environment colleague interactions are generally replaced with customer interactions this may be a further suggested reason for the disparity in these results. May et al. (2004) found limited impact of co-workers, hypothesising that individuals in an independent corporate environment did not gain social identity from their colleagues as their interactions were limited. This study adds to, and supplements the findings of May et al. (2004) who recommended further studies in similar environments to establish the same pattern. This again allows for the replacement of traditional elements of this lever with those included in the Role of the Customer analysis.

Saks (2006) also found that procedural justice approached significance as an impactful factor on engagement although it was not statistically significant. Within this study procedural justice was not seen as impactful at all and the entire lever of Organisational Justice had the second lowest impact (2.4%), and this came from distributive justice sub-levers.

The eighth and ninth levers in order of impact were found to be Reward and Recognition, and Training and Development respectively. Karatepe (2013) found reward to be the most reliable lever as it shows recognition for work done and training and development the second most reliable measure as it shows a leader's commitment to the individual. This study correlates more strongly to the findings of Anitha (2014), May et al. (2004) and Saks (2006) who did not find either of these two levers statistically significant. Although they have a place in the discussion they should not be prioritised by companies looking to increase engagement in the context discussed.

6.6.   Conclusive Findings for Research Question Two

Of the ten levers identified by the study a clear order of impact is identified. These findings build on the discussion for Research Question One by adding a revised and consolidated focus for retail managers looking to address issues of engagement within a frontline workforce. This finding is updated in Figure 38. There is a significant difference between the most impactful lever 'Role of the Customer' and 'Personal Characteristics' with the bottom four levers having markedly less impact than the first six. Where findings differ from the established literature two main reasons were found; given the comparison between quantitative and qualitative studies statistical significance cannot be fairly and unanimously compared. The elements of this qualitative study can be viewed as more or less impactful as a result rather than in complete absolutes as found by quantitative analysis. Secondly the context described has specific idiosyncrasies that vary from the

existing studies adding value to the discussion around a frontline, retail, developing market environment.

It is clear that the levers remain intertwined in their impact on engagement and influence on each other. This research finds that while impact should be noted managers should understand the influencers of each construct alongside how to approach each one for maximum result in the context described. This will be outlined by the analysis of the results in Research Question Three.

Figure 38: Model of Engagement Levers showing ranked impact and influences
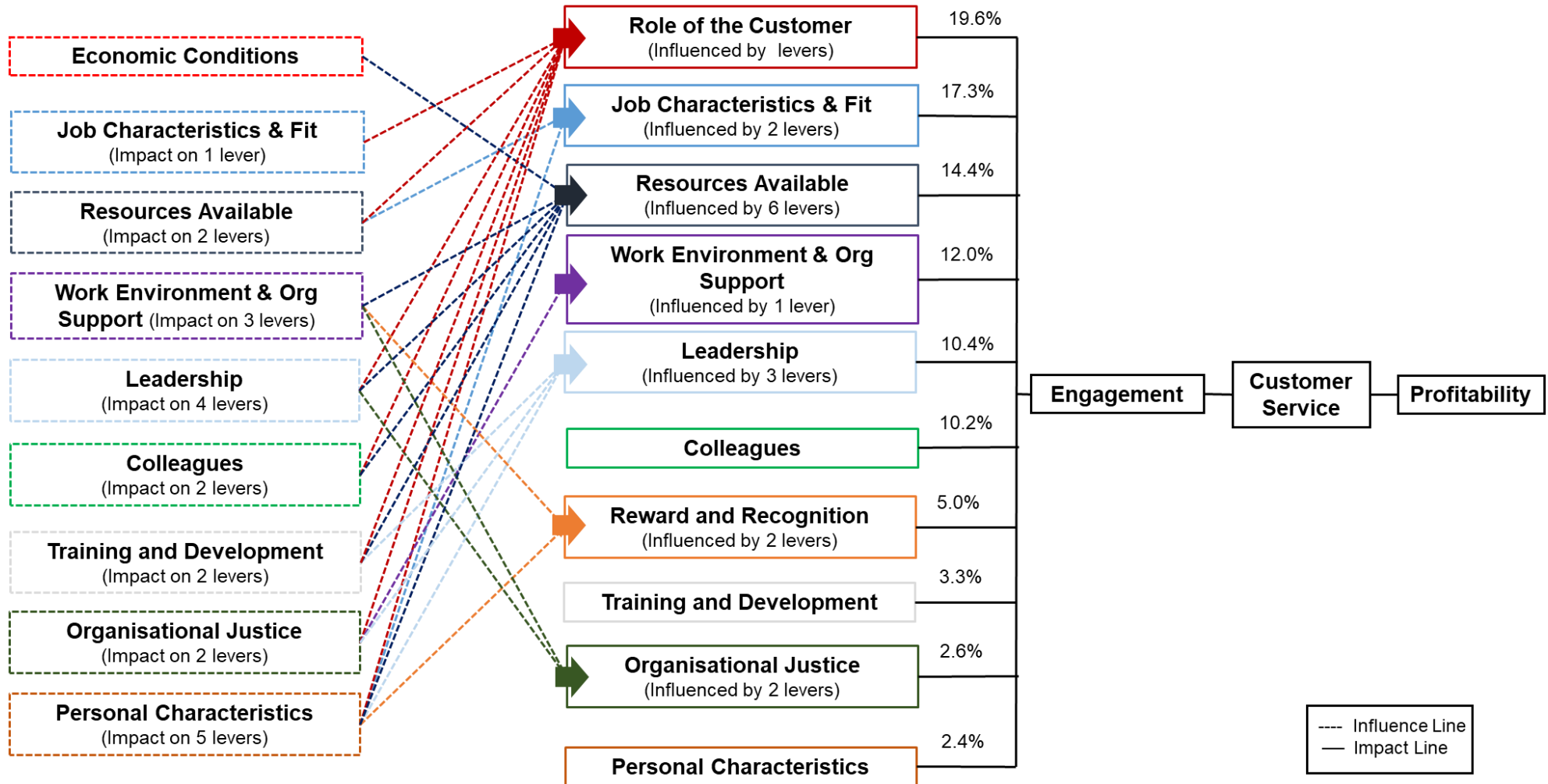
6.7.   Discussion of Results for Research Question Three

Research Question Three: What actions will ultimately improve engagement within a semi-skilled, retail, frontline workforce in South Africa?

While it is important to understand engagement and where it can be influenced, to achieve this business and management require an approach with maximum impact. Literature has made various recommendations as to how to deal with the results of various studies across the world (Albrecht et al., 2016; Anitha, 2014; Biswas et al., 2013; Jacobs et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010; Saks, 2006). The contextual nature of these will now be discussed and tested by aligning the recommendations with those produced by Nominal Group Question C: "What could the business do to improve your desire to come to work?" This question elicited responses within eight of the ten levers proposed by Questions A and B. The influence model shown in Figure 38 is key to unpacking these actions as one action in a certain area is likely to have a ripple effect over many of the main levers. Two of the important areas this Research Question looks to address are where should management focus in a recession-led environment and how can limited resources be utilised?

The results for this section were in some parts specific to the situation of the retailer studied, which is expected given the nature of the questions. The participants as part of the discussion were asked to generalise their thoughts as much as possible, which makes the responses here more transferable within a retail setting.

This section is structured to focus on the few main levers alongside their significant influencers. Given the already established interdependencies this allows the framework to be analysed alongside its influencers rather than in ten separate sections.

6.7.1. *Role of the Customer*

What is interesting to observe within the results is that it is virtually impossible to change the role or perhaps the personality of the customer directly, which was accepted by the participants. All the solutions discussed fell under other headings, reversing the approach in the preceding questions that found the main lever of the Role of the Customer had the greatest number of influencers. This is unsurprising given the nature of the customer lever. The influencers on this behaviour come through staff's own empowerment to deal with challenges and the provision of additional resources, which in turn create shorter queues and fewer complaints around lack of stock. It is therefore important to address the need to create a positive customer role within a service interaction in order to increase frontline staff engagement. The literature makes

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a few recommendations around this link. Albrecht et al. (2016) recommend training individual staff in how to deal with difficult customers who in turn can be dispatched and empowered to take the pressure of affected individuals alongside just the manager. Training in general was one of the largest recommendations of the study despite it only being seen as having a 3.3% impact as a specific lever (Table 5). This accentuates the influencing mechanisms as a key finding as the method to adjust one lever is not necessarily found in that lever itself. The training influence on the main customer lever is therefore a key mechanism for business. The sub-levers discussed in the dialogue around why the Customer Lever is so impactful are also addressed in part by training including that of managers themselves. This training addresses the concept of 'the customer is always right' and how management can deal with that aspect of the confrontation. Advanced training for staff to ensure they understand it is not personal and to continue being polite even in adverse situations, was also recommended by the literature and the respondents: "Offer more training for frontline staff" (Table 6). This is a recommendation that would also address some of the challenges here in addressing the personal characteristic element of the influence. Putting in place hiring policies that ensure employees are capable of handling negative attitudes also links this area to Job Characteristics and Fit.

To address the sub-levers of rudeness and discriminatory behaviour a further recommendation from the literature is to be explicit with customers on the expectations of their behaviour, for example with signage around the tills (Albrecht et al., 2016). This would take some of the influence and pressure away from managers who are not seen by participants as a trusted source of this important communication.

6.7.2. *Resources Available*

The recommendations to improve the level of resources available were again very practical. They covered creating more management understanding about the store and how to effectively staff and stock the environment adequately: "Better stock management system" and "Hire more staff" (Results Table 6). However, both of these are likely to have significant financial investment requirements. The literature's focus more on emotional resources (social support, participative management and team building) makes the recommendations less aligned to the engagement theory (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006). The overall efficiency of the working environment and resources to provide an adequate and comfortable place to work without aggressive customers is therefore a key recommendation for a retailer with a significant frontline contingent of staff.

6.7.3. *Work Environment and Organisational Support*

Building on from Resources Available in the work environment, communication was the main sub-lever recommended for against this lever in the study: "Be transparent about communication" (Table 6). A lot of the challenges faced by staff around logistics and policy (cutting hours and so forth) could be avoided if communicated sufficiently and fairly. The business may be required to look at their Human Resource department to own this shift in approach (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

The recruitment policy is also a recommendation that came through from the study in this case "to reduce incompetence" (Table 6) and can be linked to the recommendations around the role of Human Resources (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Although the policy here is a feature of the work environment the recruitment of individuals whose personalities fit with the required role descriptors also plays a part. Recruiting individuals who are customer orientated and are aligned with the values of the business is a key mechanism for creating a workforce who will be fully engaged (Zablah et al., 2012). Roles must match staff aspirations and it was clear that the aspirations of staff were beyond those of the opportunities offered on the frontline despite the significant tenure of employees in low level roles: "Be open when there are promotions available to allow all staff to apply" (Table 6).

6.7.4. *Leadership*

The issue of leadership is discussed at length in the literature and was found to be a contributor to engagement within this study. Recommendations from staff: "Transparency of managers' work" (Table 6) mirror the literature here in terms of demanding transparent leaders who are held to the same levels of accountability as their staff (Anitha, 2014; Crawford et al., 2010). Leadership training is a recommendation that falls across various levers. The relative inexperience of leaders within this context and understanding how to lead truly in a transformational way from the front is something that can be, arguably, managed with training (Rich et al., 2010). Organisational Justice is a clear overlap here as the primary focus of this lever is through the actions of leaders and their distributive justice. Recommendations to address this include transparency around promotional opportunities and not letting personal bias interfere with decision-making processes, alongside equal discipline for managers and staff when incorrect process is not followed. Literature also found the sharing of responsibility between supervisor and employee ensured consistent outcomes against shared and transparent goals (Biswas et al., 2013).

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The creation of a culture of engagement is not just the responsibility of managers but also colleagues. Social support as a mechanism through having a strong team where everyone gets their hands dirty from co-workers through to managers was also recommended to address engagement: "Create better teamwork, everyone gets their hands dirty" (Table 6).

6.7.5. *Reward and Recognition*

Reward and recognition is influenced by two factors: personal characteristics and work environment and organisational support (Jacobs et al., 2014; Renard & Snelgar, 2016a). There are also direct recommendations that came out of the study to improve this element of engagement. It was again clear from the study that performance management and intrinsic reward is not recognised as a significant factor at this level of operation. Recommendations were around staff discounts, increased pay and basic extrinsic rewards, which are also reinforced by the literature (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001). Snelgar et al. (2013) also found that adequate cash incentives were often a solution to reward dissatisfaction and recommend using competitive pay scales to ensure that pay remains attractive. The market and economic conditions in South Africa mean that although reward is a less impactful lever of engagement the degree to which it is a basic requirement to workforce survival is important in a minimum wage and increasing inflation context.

6.8. Conclusive Findings for Research Question Three

Various recommendations for creating a shift in engagement were created by the study and the literature. Overall it seems that context is less important in the recommendations created as there was significant alignment to the recommendations made in global studies for this context. One of the reasons for this is that the literature has already acknowledged that different environments need different action points and therefore the research on this point is fairly diverse in nature (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Menguc et al., 2017; Saks, 2006). The ranking led implementation priorities provided by the analysis for Research Question Two can now be expanded by these recommendations, which provides the how to engage staff in developing market retailers.

CHAPTER 7:   CONCLUSION

7.1.   Introduction

There is a clear link between the engagement of staff, their level of customer service and the impact of that service on the overall productivity and performance of a business (Anitha, 2014; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005; Soane et al., 2012). This fundamental concept was the basis for this study, which worked to understand how the context of both tough economic conditions and a developing country would shift the existing mechanisms of engagement within a frontline retail environment. This workforce is limited, through their designation, in their ability to create fundamental job innovation and although considered key, brand ambassadors for their business must rely on different levers than a white-collar office environment (Jacobs, Renard, & Snelgar, 2014; Karatepe, 2013). The methodology of the study also allowed for more qualitative analysis of the concepts proposed by existing quantitative literature and this marked a shift in understanding and complexity of analysis.

This Chapter consolidates the literature review in Chapter Two with the results and discussion in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. The conceptual 'Frontline Engagement Model' represents these findings and will be discussed further. This discussion will be used to inform recommendations for managers wishing to engage with a frontline workforce and present ideas for extensions of the study through future research.

7.2.   The Frontline Engagement Model

7.2.1. *Construction of the Model*

The Frontline Engagement Model as shown in Figure 39 was developed through a comprehensive review of the levers shown by the literature to impact engagement, alongside the results found through six Nominal Group Interviews. These qualitative interviews were held within a frontline, retail environment in South Africa amongst semi-skilled employees. Each lever found by the research was carefully analysed to unpack its impact on engagement in the specified context, its link to or detachment from the existing constructs and the influence of that lever on the others identified. The Model of Engagement Levers, Impact and Influences (Figure 38) shows the complex outcomes of this analysis in answer to the first two research questions. It also indicates detail on the weightings and individual influences. The Frontline Engagement Model (Figure 39) is a diagrammatic representation of the key aspects of these findings and aims to present

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the different engagement levers required in a specific context. The model adds to the literature found in Chapter Two and represents the key findings of this study.

Figure 39: Frontline Engagement Model
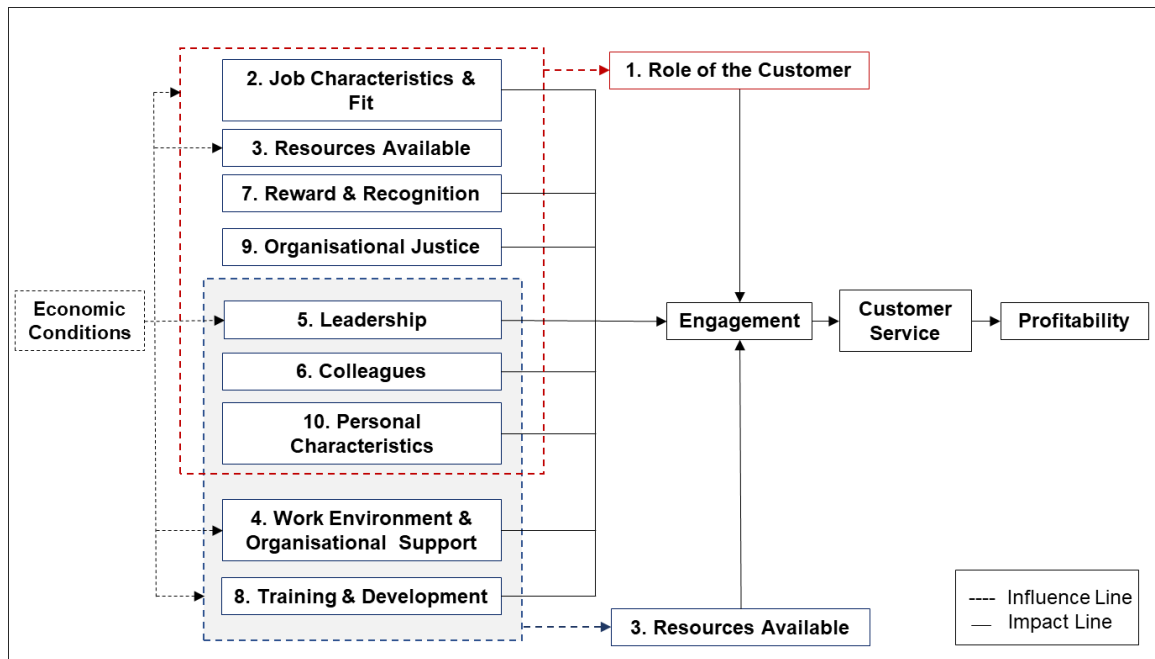
7.2.2. *Explanation of the Model*

The Frontline Engagement Model shows how the levers identified impact engagement and influence each other. These findings were drawn from Research Questions One and Two. The ten levers identified are present in the model and numbered according to their impact level with "1. The Role of the Customer" being the most impactful on engagement. These impacts are shown by the solid arrows flowing into Engagement. The dashed lines represent the interconnected relationship of influence between the factors. Given the number of influencing factors between the top two levers and the rest fell considerably only these two are represented, as supported by the detail in Figure 38. These main two influences are shown by the dashed boxes that represent the influence those inside have on either The Role of the Customer or Resources Available. These levers in turn also have a direct impact on engagement. For example, leadership has a direct impact on engagement through increased transparency as indicated by the solid line, and an influence through the leader empowering the employee to deal with the customer better, creating a happier customer and higher engagement in the employee.

Resources Available is featured twice: once as an influence on engagement through the Role of the Customer and as a separate lever directly impacting engagement. Economic Conditions are also shown to have an influence on four of the levers therefore this has an implicit or explicit influence on both main levers. Training and Development/Work

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Environment and Organisational Support were placed outside the influence of Role of the Customer as there was no influence link found here. The same is shown for those not found to influence the Resources Available.

The final link as established by the literature in Chapter One and Two is from Engagement to Customer Service to Profitability. This is not a new or verified finding of this study.

7.2.3. *Principal Findings of the Model*

The model has three elements: the levers that directly impact engagement, the influence of those levers on each other and the established link, from the literature, between engagement, customer service and profitability.

7.2.3.1. *Factors that Impact Engagement*

Nine levers that impact engagement were developed from the literature base building on the three questions asked in Kahn's seminal study. A key finding of this study is that there are ten levers that impact engagement within the context studied and their impact level varies. These levers correspond to the literature with one exception, The Role of the Customer. The qualitative methodology of this study in a field of predominately quantitative results produced this lever whose elements have, to some extent, previously been broken down into components contained within the others. This methodology however did make comparing the impact of the levers more challenging. Despite this difference in methodologies the weighting of the levers' impact can be seen to vary from previous studies. Therefore, the difference in impact of specific factors can be shown as a more contextual element of engagement.

The customer, alongside being the ultimate recipient of improved service, also plays a key role in the process of creating an employee's engagement. The exploration of the complexity of this relationship with engagement has had limited exposure in the literature to date (Albrecht et al., 2016). The literature points to many of the factors highlighted in this analysis, including training, promotion and reward as direct contributors to increased engagement through customer service (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Karatepe, 2013), however the role of the customer itself is even less explicit (Albrecht et al., 2016; Grandey et al., 2004).

The question of why this lever is so important is also discussed. Contextually the study was conducted within a workforce affected by economic recession and is one of the unhappiest globally. Their interaction with smiling, happy customers is therefore found to be more important than in other settings. The resources available to employees is also

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more impactful given the lean financial climate. The context of physically present frontline workers also differs from the existing literature and adds weighting to the different contextual findings.

The impact weighting can be used to guide decisions and create priorities for managers. However, it is important to note all the levers are shown to play a part in creating engagement, which is reflected by their inclusion in the final model.

7.2.3.2. Influence of Levers

The interconnectedness of engagement levers has long been established but not adequately researched given the idiosyncrasies of different contextual influence (Maslach et al., 2001). This study has shown through qualitative exploration, not previously elicited by the field of research, that there are a considerable amount of influence and interdependencies between the engagement levers. The full complexity of this influence is demonstrated through the analysis of the nominal group interviews.

In developing a final model for engagement in this context, the Role of the Customer was considered as an intermediary lever standing between the classic engagement levers of training, resources etc. and frontline engagement itself. This finding was derived from the degree of influence seen on this lever by the others and its place as the most impactful main lever. Seven of the nine theoretically recognised levers can be used to create a happy customer. That customer in turn will then have a substantial effect on the engagement of the staff member. This engaged staff member will then have greater motivation to serve the customer proficiently, hence increasing customer retention and sales. The eighth influence is the economic conditions of the business operating environment.

The two levers, therefore, that can be impactful not only through their own linked recommendations but also through the influence from others are 'Role of the Customer' and 'Resources Available'. These should be the main priorities for any business alongside Job Characteristics and Fit, which also demonstrated a high individual impact in the context studied.

The need for the model to withstand turbulent economic conditions is one that is vital for managers operating in this environment (Glicken & Robinson, 2013; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). As Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot found, "in a constantly changing environment…organisations must be lean and achieve more with less" (2016, p.19). The influence of this on the resources available to staff, one of the key levers, will play an important part in the realistic implementation of the findings. Although this main lever has

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been shown to have the third biggest impact on engagement overall and significant influence it is important to understand that there are limitations of this recommendation in a budget-led environment. The identification of influences and levers that are less financially demanding than the Resources Available to the business is also therefore an applicable and notable finding.

7.3.   Recommendations for Management

One of the key aims of the problem statement in (Figure 1) was to provide a model for management to improve profitability in their organisations by creating a vigorous, dedicated and absorbed workforce (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This model has been created through addressing Research Questions One and Two alongside the recommendations shown in answer to Research Question Three and can now be applied directly as a set of proposals to management.

The context of the management who will make use of this model is vital for the applicability of its results. The results from the study were found to be generalisable across the retail and service industries and in an economic situation where there are financial constraints on investment within business. Management in this business context will need to carefully prioritise their investments to maximise engagement, reduce the cost of staff turnover and increase profitability (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). Given the third most impactful lever in the study was the level of mainly physical resources available, one with the highest potential financial burden, the influences must be noted by management even more carefully. By adjusting other potentially less expensive elements of the business environment increased engagement can be created even in a budget-focused context. It is possible therefore to create a loop in the initial problem statement model through taking increased profitability and ensuring management action and resources are re-invested to create continued engagement, not simply a once-off intervention (Figure 40).

Figure 40: Management Engagement Cycle

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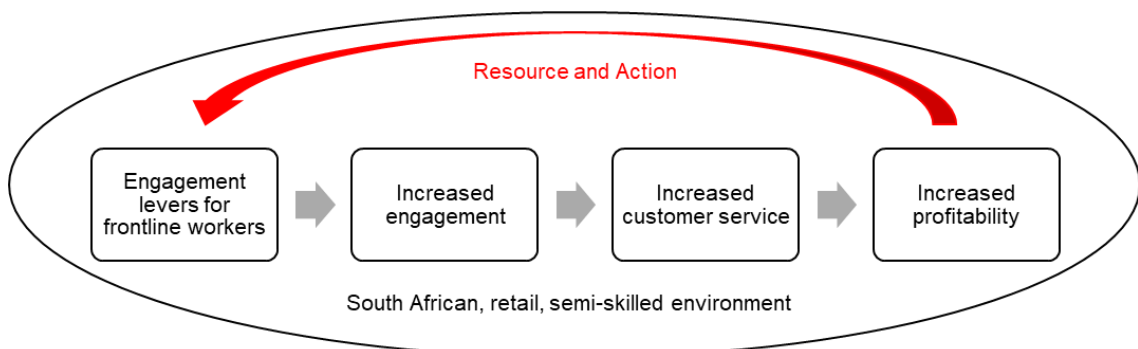
Managers should aim to address the most impactful and influential levers as identified by the research through the following mechanisms:

- The Role of the Customer is the most impactful and most highly influenceable lever and should be addressed as a priority by management looking to increase engagement. Empowering staff to handle customers through training, better management awareness and ensuring those hired enjoy interacting with customers will assist in creating positive relationships between customers and staff. Management must strike a careful balance between supporting their staff in aggravated customer situations while providing first class service to that customer, whether they are right in their complaint or not.

- Given the monotonous nature of the role of a frontline worker it is important to ensure they are challenged and kept busy. The definition of the job and its characteristics must be clear and devised in a way that allows for learning. This does not have to be formal training but enabling a management culture of skill transfer, promotional opportunities and job rotation will increase engagement.

- Resources to improve engagement are again based on the need to make the customer happier through, for example, shorter queues and better stock systems. Innovation around improvements in these areas will assist in customers being more satisfied with their experience in-store and this will reflect in staff engagement. Any service business needs to look at ways within their individual working environment to create efficiency for customers. Again, empowering staff to respond to customers on reasons for any challenges with stock for example will provide short-term relief and reduce the stress for both the customer and employee.

- Improving communication within the store environment is a key recommendation linked closely to the leadership lever. This can be addressed in several ways but the outcome of this study suggests working on transparency of communication with the Human Resource department within the context of frontline workers. Management should be open in discussing their own schedule, day-to-day tasks and projects. A stricter open-door policy, encouraging managers to roll up their sleeves and really get involved is one area of focus. This will also assist in addressing and improving teamwork and a culture of fair accountability and family. Uncertain economic conditions require managers who are more transformative and hands on in approach (Cummings & Worley, 2014). Management training in respect, attitude and accountability might be implemented here; expecting individuals to step up from their peers without support and mentoring can cause

even the best potential leaders to fail. Simple measures can be highly impactful, like delivering uniforms when promised.

- Recruitment and promotions should be focused on individual skill sets that really enjoy and get energy from customer interaction. The fair and open development/promotion of internal talent will show a commitment to progression and reduce the tenure of low-level employees who do aspire to take on more.

- At this level of employment, although pay was not seen as highly impactful, small gestures to ensure a basic level of subsistence are important to creating a workforce that has the physical and mental strength to be present at work.

- The high level of complexity and interdependence of the levers also creates the need for management to be aware of their actions across different areas. Engagement is not a quick fix using one isolated recommendation. Focus or lack of it in one area will likely have an influence on another. An integrated and comprehensive approach to the improvement of engagement is required to enable this as a mechanism for increased profitability.

7.4. Recommendations for Future Research

Given the relative infancy of engagement literature and the overall scarcity of a solid link to customer service further empirical evidence is required to build on this study and develop a broader base of understanding. This study has created a model for understanding both the impact and influence of elements on engagement within the context specified, which is based on a foundation of qualitative research. The following recommendations from this study would allow significant development of this finding:

- The qualitative outcomes of the study have revealed new areas of potential research that should now be tested by a quantitative study. By applying the new levers and influences into this type of research their statistical significance over a larger population of respondents in the broader service industry will give strength to the findings of this study and the wider literature.

- The personal characteristics of respondents who enjoy or do not enjoy interacting with customers and this element of engagement requires further research. Using personality tests on participants in advance of qualitative interviews would allow for more in-depth analysis of this lever and address a substantial gap in the current literature.

- Testing engagement across multiple levels of a business would provide a different perspective on the leadership lever. Understanding how leaders in service industries perceive the challenge of engagement and whether the views were

aligned would add to the engagement literature and allow even more focus in terms of recommendations.

- Including a sample of customers views in a future study would go further in proving causality and understanding their reasons for interacting with staff in certain ways. This would give further insight to managers in empowering staff to deal with customers.

- To truly test the universality of the challenge various retailers in a variety of contexts would need to be examined using the same methodology (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013). Within a developing market context understanding the engagement levers and how they differ within the informal sector may also add to the engagement literature (Hugo et al., 2016).

- This research doesn't look to extend the body of knowledge on the link between service improvement, brand loyalty and profitability increase. A longitudinal study investigating the level of service improvement within a service environment following the implementation of various recommendations would add to the power of the connection.

7.5. Limitations of the Research

As discussed in section 4.9 there are various limitations in the research that need to be considered alongside the findings and recommendations. These primarily orientate around the access and bias of the researcher (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

The principal limitations are:
- Given the location of the sample there was a potential geographical bias. A full spread of rural and urban areas in South Africa could not be reached.

- Generalisability of the sample could not be established as only one retailer was used, some of the individual metrics cited were therefore specific to the circumstances and operating practices of that business. Each recommendation must therefore be applied with careful consideration of business-specific context (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

- The facilitator is a company employee, which may have influenced the conversation and created researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

- The inability to record the Nominal Group interviews meant some richness in data may have been lost.

- As in any longitudinal study there is a limitation in proving causality (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2004; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

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7.6.   Economic Contribution

South Africa is one of many developing nations facing a tough economic climate and an increase in both poverty and unemployment. A key area of growth is that of consumer spending, which is currently restricted by economic uncertainty and tight monetary policy (Hugo et al., 2016). The retail and service industry is a potentially key contributor to this growth and the profitability of the sector not only in contribution to GDP but in the capability to decrease unemployment. Gallup's latest study has seen businesses with high engagement sit with 17% more productivity and 21% higher profitability (Gallup Consulting, 2017). If South African retailers through the levers and model identified in this study can tap into even a small part of these increases there will be an advantage to the economic circumstances they find themselves facing. Therefore, the link of this study to an increase in overall profitability of a sector, through improvement of employee welfare and meeting more demanding consumer needs adds value not only to managers operating in this environment but to a larger scale economic challenge.

7.7.   Concluding Remarks

This study takes one step further in establishing the universality of the link between engagement and customer service and the limitations of contextual transferability of the impact levers (Jacobs et al., 2014; Viljevac et al., 2012). By taking one contextual environment and developing a set of engagement recommendations that both substantiate and adapt those previously applied, it adds value to the current body of engagement literature and can be used as a base for further research (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2014; Ostrom et al., 2015). Given this finding and the conclusions drawn on each Research Question posed this study contributes to the field of engagement and customer service.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Nominal Group Labels

	Number of Participants	Central Location	Time Taken
Group 1	9	Johannesburg	QA: 35 minutes QB: 45 minutes
Group 2	11	Pretoria	QA: 40 minutes QB: 55 minutes
Group 3	13	Pretoria	QA: 40 minutes QB: 50 minutes
Group 4	6	Pretoria	QA: 30 minutes QB: 40 minutes
Group 5	6	Johannesburg	QA: 30 minutes QB: 35 minutes
Group 6	9	Johannesburg	QA: 35 minutes QB: 50 minutes

Appendix 2: Nominal Group Voting Sheet

I am conducting research on engagement, and am trying to find out more about the reasons retail staff are engaged. **Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty**. Of course, all data will be reported anonymously. By completing this form, you give consent for inclusion in the study.

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

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Please cross the correct answer

Gender	Male		Female	
Race	White	Indian	Coloured	Black
Age	Under 25	26 - 35	36 – 45	46+
Level of Education	None	Matric	University	Post Graduate
Spoken Languages	English	Afrikaans	Zulu	Xhosa	Sotho	Tswana	Other
Years of Service	Less than 6months	6 months to 1year	1 year to 5 years	5years to 10years	10 years' plus
Time travelled	Below 30mins	1hr – 2hrs	2hrs – 3hrs	Over 3hrs
Hours worked per week	Below 15 hours	15 – 25 hours	26 – 36 hours	Above 36 hours
Are you happy at work?	Yes		No	

Question A: What things do you like about your job that helps you serve customers better?
(1 being the most important)

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Question B: What things about your job stop you helping customers? (1 being the most important)

Question C: What could the business do to improve your desire to come to work?

Thank you for your participation

Appendix 3: Codes and Themes from Data

Question A - What things do you like about your job that helps you serve customers better?					
Overall Themes (Main Levers)	**Sub-Levers**	**Original Codes**			
Training & Development	Learning and growth	Growth daily	Learning		
Colleagues	Collaboration with colleagues	Communication with colleagues			
	Like family	Family store			
	Support	Colleagues coming early to work			
	Happy colleagues				
	Unity amongst staff				
Role of the Customer	When customers appreciate you				
	Customers Smile	Serve customers with a smile	Nice customers	Customers smile and come back for more	Less angry customers	Happy customers make my day perfect
	Older Customers	Helping the older customers			
	Respect	Giving us the respect we deserve			
	Customers appreciate your effort				
	Encouragement of customers	Interaction and feedback			

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	Diversity of Customers	Customers different	Diverse cultures	Learning about different customers
	Learning from customers	Learning something new from customers	Learning about customers every day	Learn bits of things from them
	Customers get attached	Like having an influence on customers	They get attached even if you don't notice	
	Challenged by customers	Going through challenge with customers		
	Speak language of customers	Learning Afrikaans from customers		
Leadership	Always there to assist			
	Encouragement			
	Challenged by managers			
	Not mixing business with pleasure			
	Managers quality			
Job Characteristics	Every day is different			
	Job allows you to go extra mile			
	Job keeps you busy			
	Being empowered to help	Empowered to help even if on lunch		
	Varied roles	Varied environment		
	Challenging role			

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	Allows the gaining of knowledge	Skills/Systems/Experience	Economic information	Gain skills		
	Customer Service	Helping customers	Communication with customers	Enjoy making customers satisfied	Influence on customers	Working with people	Like serving customers
Resources Available	New Equipment					
	Name Badge	Customers greet me by name				
	Shelf Standards	Stock	Make sure floor is fully packed			
Reward and Recognition	Living wage for family					
	Recognition					
	Pay day					
Personal Characteristics	Making miracles/pride					
	Alignment with vision and mission					
Work Environment	Free drinks and meals					
	Coming early to work (hours)					
	Free transport					
	Good internal communication	Communication				

Overall Themes (Main Levers)	Sub-Levers	Original Codes			
		Question B - What things about your job stop you helping customers?			
Training & Development		Need more training	Development		
Organisational Justice	Fairness				
	Unequal promotion of staff	Unequal treatment			
	Unpredictability	Cutting of hours	Less hours	Less payments	Job security
	Promise of Uniforms				
Colleagues	Ignorant Staff				
Role of the Customer	Rude Customers	Unfriendly customers	Complaining customers	Interaction with customers	Dis-Respectful Customers
	Customer Sabotage				
	Customer isn't always right	Is customer the queen			
	Discrimination	Discriminations cultures			
Leadership	Management not helping customers	Manger choosing customers over staff	Behaviour of manager in front of customer	Supervisor delay	
	Lack of respect				
	Poor Behaviour	Attitude	Ignorance	Fairness	Discrimination

	Lack of support					
	No accountability					
	Managers not being prepared					
Job Characteristics	Doing double jobs	Serving Customers	Stressed/ Pressure	On remaining staff	More work for less people	Weekend pressures
	Language Barriers					
	Not empowered					
Resources Available	Not enough staff	Long queues	Not enough tills open, no packers	Off line systems	Offline and customers get angry	
	No stock	No stock when customers ask	Promotional stock			
	Wrong prices	Prices delay the tills				
	Quality of stock					
	Faulty machinery	Long process to get it fixed				
	Old uniforms	Can't then serve with pride				
Reward and Recognition	Less payments	Incorrect (short) payments calculated	Paying less hours when work more			
	No Performance Management					
	Pay					
	No positive feedback	Nobody tells us if we do a fantastic job				

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Work Environment	Space in canteen	Stock in canteen	Not enough space
	Outsourcing	Outsource labour training	
	Forced Labour		
	Work conditions	Poor upkeep of shop floor	Poor environment
	Communication	Change in hours	Bad communication
	Scheduling		
	Cutting Hours		

Appendix 4: Nominal Group Quotes Table

Group 1	When customers thank us for our help
	Like it when we get new staff, allows us to serve better
	Feels like family at work
	When we hear things it makes a difference
	The managers have no training they don't know how to manage people
	These managers aren't leading they just sit and chill
	We only hear negative messages…there is no communication
	Not enough training – they don't help
Group 2	We work in challenging roles that are always changing, given the customers we speak to
	It makes a huge difference when customer use names to say hello, sign of respect & name badge allows that.
	Proper abuse and discriminatory language
	I like angry customers as I have the power to calm them down
	There is never enough staff
	We have to work two jobs as short staff
	We simply aren't treated equally
	We have no idea when jobs come up, manager just picks someone 'their favourite'
	If there are no staff, there is pressure, it means we are very tired and have lower performance
Group 3	Customers also learn a lot from me and I like helping them
	Managers don't listen to our views
	They are mainly from the shop floor but the power then goes to their heads and they forget what our challenges are
	They don't create one culture, there is favouritism
Group 4	Happy customers and happy colleagues make my day perfect

		If colleagues are happy then it's much easier to keep customers happy as we all have more energy for customers
		Our customers are kings and queens we should serve them with pride
		I love it they see fruit and veg first then they smile
		Competitors have eight staff in the mornings every day, we have two. Is it surprising customers go elsewhere when our queues are so long. And the customers blame us
		We were promised new uniforms every three years and they never come, it's a huge let down
		The levels of promotion are completely inconsistent
		They just sit in their office all day and we don't know what they are doing. All we know is they aren't helping us!
		The company gives us food so we can serve customers with a full stomach
		My work is very challenging, dealing with customers isn't easy & only loyal customers are friendly. The more I interact with different customers the more I learn to handle customers
		Too much pressure makes us very tired
	Group 5	I love making miracles for customers it makes me proud when they see my section
		We enjoy interacting with people and making them happy
		Stock arrives after promotions end so the customer goes away unhappy. This affects us because they blame us and we can't blame anyone else so just take it
		Customers are impatient when we don't have the answer or the stock…when customers are being rude it just creates stress
		The customer isn't always right
		Get more complaints than compliments
		There is simply no development
	Group 6	Stock shortages mean customers get annoyed
		We have lots of ideas and we are scolded for having them, we can't be empowered to change our circumstances

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	You have to have a thick skin and get on with it
	We understand the manager has to take a customer's side in public but they stand by and blame us even after
	I normally leave home without breakfast so the bread provided helps a lot

Appendix 5: Ethical Clearance Letter

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

13 June 2017

Daniella Lynch

Dear Daniella Lynch,

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

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

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

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

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