

Enhancing Employee Engagement for Improved Job Performance at Finceptum Oy

Daniela Untersteiner

Bachelor's Thesis
Degree Programme in
International Business
2020



Author Daniela Untersteiner	
Degree programme International Business	
Thesis title Enhancing Employee Engagement for Improved Job Performance at Finceptum Oy	Number of pages and attachment pages 49 + 3
<p>This Bachelor's thesis examines perceived employee engagement at Finceptum Oy, a Finnish IT solutions and services provider.</p> <p>The case company experienced a decrease in employees' individual job performance as well as in sales outcomes over an extended period of time. Low engagement among employees was suspected to be the cause.</p> <p>The objective of the study was to assess various employee engagement factors, with a focus on identifying improvement areas. The goal was thus to provide recommendations for enhancing employee engagement in the case company.</p> <p>This thesis includes theories and methods to manage employee engagement. The study employs a qualitative approach, as this allows for freer discussion and deeper insight into a phenomenon. First, interview themes were determined based on identified antecedents to employee engagement. These antecedents were extracted from an existing narrative synthesis of more than 200 papers from employee engagement literature.</p> <p>Then, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted in two phases. During the first phase, the members of the management team were interviewed in their roles as managers as well as employees. During the second phase, non-managerial employees were interviewed. The results were then analysed and compared. Finally, and based on the findings, recommendations were given.</p> <p>The interviews revealed particular challenges in relation to communication and information flow, feedback, and onboarding.</p> <p>The results of this study allow Finceptum Oy to recognize the influence of different factors on employee engagement in the organization and to understand differences in perceptions between the management team and employees.</p> <p>To overcome the established challenges in employee engagement and to reach the objective of this study, recommendations for management actions were given. The implementation of these actions is expected to result in enhanced employee engagement, leading to improved individual job performance in the company.</p>	
Keywords Employee engagement, job performance, organizational performance	

Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Research Question.....	2
1.3	Demarcation.....	3
1.4	International Aspect.....	3
1.5	Anticipated Benefits.....	4
1.6	Key Concepts.....	4
1.7	Risks and Risk Management.....	4
1.8	Case Company: Finceptum Oy.....	4
2	Employee Engagement and Performance.....	6
2.1	Performance in Human Resource Management.....	6
2.2	Linking Engagement and Performance.....	7
2.3	Employee Engagement.....	7
2.3.1	Definitions and Models of Engagement.....	7
2.3.2	Antecedents of Engagement.....	10
2.3.3	Methods to Manage Engagement.....	13
3	Research Methods.....	22
3.1	Research Design.....	22
3.2	Population and Sampling.....	23
3.3	Design of Interview Frameworks.....	24
3.4	Data Collection.....	25
3.5	Qualitative Analysis Methods.....	27
3.6	Reliability and Relevance.....	29
3.7	Ethical considerations.....	29
4	Data and Results.....	31
4.1	Management Team Interview Results.....	31
4.2	Employee Interview Results.....	35
5	Discussion.....	41
5.1	Key Findings.....	41
5.2	Recommendations.....	44
5.3	Suggestions for Further Research.....	46
5.4	Reflection on Learning.....	47
	References.....	48
	Attachments.....	51
	Attachment 1. Participant information sheet.....	51
	Attachment 2. Interview Framework 1 (IF1).....	52
	Attachment 3. Interview Framework 2 (IF2).....	53

1 Introduction

This is a Bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business in the major field of Human Resource Management for Global Business. It is a qualitative research of employee engagement at Finceptum Oy, a small-sized Finnish company providing B2B IT solutions and services. The aim is to get an insight into current employee engagement as it is perceived within the organization. Differences between the perceptions of employees and management team, and factors that influence employee engagement in the company are determined. Based on the results, recommendations that can help the case company increase employee engagement are given, with the aim to ultimately increase job performance.

This chapter gives an overview of the background of the research, the research question (RQ) and investigative questions (IQs), demarcation, international aspects, and benefits of this research for different stakeholders. Definitions are offered, to give the reader an understanding of the basic key concepts used in this thesis. Risks and their management are discussed, and the case company introduced.

1.1 Background

Engaged employees are crucial contributors to an organization's success, as they are most likely to display behaviour that can drive innovation and growth, and ultimately lead to higher revenue. Persistently low levels of employee engagement and their negative contribution to economic productivity of companies and organizations continue to be a global problem. (Gallup Inc. 2013, 12.)

A Gallup study (2013, 6) conducted in 142 countries found that merely 13 % of employees are engaged in their jobs, while far more than half (63 %) are not engaged at all. Even more concerningly, almost a quarter (24 %) of employees are actively disengaged. These results illustrate the need for further research on improving employee engagement, not only for individual industries, but also for the global economy.

On the local level, this research aims to benefit the commissioning company Finceptum Oy by giving an insight into how employees and the management team view employee engagement at the company and how the perceptions of employees and the managers differ. Moreover, the results and recommendations aid in battling the initial management problem of low job performance in the organization. A more detailed description of the initial management problem that inspired this research project can be found in chapter 1.8.

1.2 Research Question

This thesis aims to establish the development needs regarding employee engagement at Finceptum Oy to help enhance employee engagement in the organization for improved job performance.

The research question (RQ) is: How can Finceptum Oy's employee engagement be enhanced to increase job performance?

To answer the RQ, five investigative questions (IQs) were formulated:

IQ 1. Which engagement factors do employees perceive to be functioning well at Finceptum Oy?

IQ 2. Which engagement factors do employees perceive to be not functioning well at Finceptum Oy?

IQ 3. How does the management team perceive the current employee engagement at Finceptum Oy?

IQ 4. How does the management team's perception compare to or differ from the employees'?

IQ 5. Based on the findings, which recommendations can be given that could aid with enhancing employee engagement at Finceptum Oy?

Table 1. Overlay matrix

<i>Investigative question</i>	<i>Theoretical framework</i>	<i>Methods</i>	<i>Results (chapter)</i>
IQ 1. Which engagement factors do employees perceive to be functioning well at Finceptum Oy?	Models of engagement Antecedents of engagement Methods to manage engagement	Qualitative employee interviews	4.2, 5.1
IQ 2. Which engagement factors do employees perceive to be not functioning well at Finceptum Oy?	Models of engagement, antecedents of engagement, methods to manage engagement	Qualitative employee interviews	4.2, 5.1
IQ 3. How does the management team perceive the current employee engagement at Finceptum Oy?	Models of engagement, antecedents of engagement,	Qualitative management interviews	4.1, 5.1

	methods to manage engagement		
IQ 4. How does the management team's perception compare to or differ from the employees'?		Qualitative comparative analysis	5.1
IQ 5. Based on the findings, which recommendations can be given that could aid with enhancing employee engagement at Finceptum Oy?	Methods to manage engagement	Qualitative analysis	5.2

1.3 Demarcation

This qualitative research focuses on investigating perceptions and expectations regarding employee engagement at Finceptum Oy. The company is researched from the viewpoint of two groups, management team and employees. Members of the management team were interviewed in both organizational roles, that is, as managers and employees. The responses of the two groups are compared and analysed in this thesis. Based on the results, recommendations for internal management actions, that will help enhance employee engagement and ultimately individual job performance at Finceptum Oy, are provided.

This study does not aim to establish the relationship between engagement and performance, nor the validity of their antecedents. Instead, this study relies on existing research that indicates a positive relationship. The antecedents utilized in this paper are limited to a select number of those suggested in the narrative synthesis by Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher (2017). The antecedents were selected based on the number of times they had been researched in the literature, with the assumption that the bigger the interest in researching them, the higher their relevance.

1.4 International Aspect

The Degree Programme in International Business requires this thesis to be in the major field of the author's studies, which is in this case Human Resource Management, and have an international aspect to qualify. Finceptum Oy has operations in Finland and Norway, which are led by the Finnish management team (Aaltonen 19 April 2018). The management team as well as all employees in both countries were interviewed as part of this research. The results of this research and recommendations given therefore benefit the organization across borders, providing an international aspect for this thesis.

1.5 Anticipated Benefits

With the results of this research, the management team of Finceptum Oy gains a better understanding of the current employee engagement, factors influencing engagement in the organization, and development areas. The recommendations given in this report can help the company enhance employee engagement, which could lead to better work atmosphere and job performance, including improved customer relations, customer service and sales (effort and effective), resulting in more profit overall.

Employee engagement is a rather wide field with many connections to different Human Resources (HR) functions, which makes it an interesting and useful topic for the author to gain additional professional knowledge in. Employee engagement, particularly in connection with performance, is a highly relevant topic for many companies and across industries. This is an important part of the author's professional development as an expert in the field of HR.

1.6 Key Concepts

Antecedent refers to an occurrence which leads to a certain behaviour (Arnold & al. 2010, 693).

Employee engagement is "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck & Wollard 2010, 103).

Job performance is defined by the extent to which an employee contributes to the organizational goals, with physical, cognitive, and emotional effort. This also extends to behaviours that the employee displays while performing their work. (Borman & Motowidlo 1993, 72; Rich, Lepine & Crawford 2010; 619).

1.7 Risks and Risk Management

Risks in this research were connected to reliability and relevance. These concepts are defined in chapter 3.6. Measures taken by the author to increase data quality and manage risks are described in chapters 3.3 to 3.5.

1.8 Case Company: Finceptum Oy

Established in 2009, Finceptum Oy is a Finnish IT company specialized in software distribution, sales and channel management. Finceptum Oy further provides IT-services,

including technology solutions and services for the defence industry, technology consulting, and training services (Aaltonen 24 May 2018).

The company is owned by Pekka Lindqvist (Chairman of the Board), Markku Wallgren (Board Secretary), and Kim Aaltonen (Board Member, Managing Director). The company's management team of six is formed by the three owners, together with Olli Tuominen (Services, IT), Jiri Komaro (Finance, Renewals) and Ivar Lyse (Managing Director Finceptum AS). (Aaltonen 25 May 2018.)

Finceptum Oy is active in three locations, Espoo (Finland, headquarters), Riihimäki (Finland), and Oslo (Norway, subsidiary Finceptum AS). The company has nine employees (non-managerial), six of whom are located in Espoo, two in Riihimäki, and one in Oslo. Functioning as local representation of the brands SUSE and Micro Focus in Finland and Norway, Finceptum Oy is also part of these companies' B2B networks. Within these networks, the employees have access to information in SUSE and Micro Focus databases and most of them have peers, meaning, employees in the same or similar functions, in other organizations and countries. (Aaltonen 24 May 2018; Aaltonen 25 May 2018.)

The need for this research stems from the initial management problem that Finceptum Oy faces. While individual and team-level targets are currently being set by managers together with each employee, they are systematically not met. Particularly the poor performance of sales is a concern. (Aaltonen 19 April 2018.)

A wellbeing at work-survey was done by the Finnish pension insurance company Keskinäinen työeläkevakuutusyhtiö Varma in 2018. The survey results showed generally high average job satisfaction with 7.9 out of 10. (Varma, in Aaltonen 13 April 2018) The management team found these results to be surprising and felt that the survey had not been deep enough for the organizational needs, as no concrete improvement recommendations were given to the company (Aaltonen 19 April 2018).

The high level of job satisfaction combined with the low employee turnover rate did not match the management team's observation of performance in the company, which raised the interest in investigating and improving employee engagement within the organization with the aim to increase performance (Aaltonen 19 April 2018).

2 Employee Engagement and Performance

The case company seeks to increase job performance via enhancement of employee engagement. The following chapters introduce the topic of performance in Human Resource Management and show how performance is linked to employee engagement. Furthermore, the definitions and models, antecedents of and methods to managing employee engagement are explored.

2.1 Performance in Human Resource Management

Different types of performance can be distinguished in Human Resource Management (HRM) on an organizational, team, and individual level.

Richard & al. (2009, 723) define **organizational performance** as the sum of an organization's financial performance, such as, profit; product market performance, such as, sales; and shareholder return, such as, economic value added.

Team performance refers to products and provided services that result from the combined input of individual and shared resources of a group of employees (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Salas, Stagl, Burke, & Goodwin, 2007, in Salas & al. 2008, 906).

Job performance refers to an employee's volitional investment of physical, cognitive, and emotional energy into their work role. It is defined as "the aggregated value to an organization of the set of behaviors that an employee contributes both directly and indirectly to organizational goals" and comprises of task and contextual performance. (Borman & Motowidlo 1993, 72; Rich, Lepine & Crawford 2010, 619.) *Task performance* lies at the core of an employee's job responsibilities. It is the outcome of actions and behaviours that result in or contribute to a company's products or services. This includes also supply of raw material, distribution as well as any support activities for these products and services, as long as they are directly linked to the employee's core job responsibilities in the organization. *Contextual performance* encompasses all actions and behaviours that contribute positively to an organization's working environment, but that are not part of an employee's formal responsibilities. Examples of contextual performance could be proactiveness or collegial support. (Borman & Motowidlo, 72-73.)

2.2 Linking Engagement and Performance

The aim of this thesis is to help the case company to increase their employees' individual job performance via enhanced employee engagement. Research has repeatedly shown a positive relationship between employee engagement and performance and linked it to beneficial outcomes for the organization. (Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2017, 42; Schaufeli 2014, 22). Particularly interesting for this present research and case company is that, according to a Gallup report (2019, 17), engagement accounted for roughly 20 % higher productivity, profitability, and sales in the units that showed the highest levels of employee engagement.

2.3 Employee Engagement

This thesis adapts Shuck and Wollard's (2010, 103) definition of employee engagement, which is "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes". The author chose this definition, because it encompasses not only visible actions and behaviours that can lead to improved work atmosphere and performance, but also an employee's attitude towards, for instance, their job and the organization's vision, mission, and policies. This definition acknowledges also, in the author's opinion, that a positive mindset does not necessarily lead to a positive behaviour, or vice-versa, nor is it certain that a negative mindset exists, when there is undesired behaviour.

2.3.1 Definitions and Models of Engagement

The following discussion on the different theories and definitions of engagement builds heavily on two sources: Shuck's (2011) integrative literature review and the narrative synthesis of employee engagement literature by Bailey & al. (2017). The latter forms the basis for the interview frameworks described in chapter 3.3.

Shuck (2011, 307) in his integrative literature review of 213 articles identifies four main approaches for defining engagement: Kahn's need-satisfying approach; the burnout-antithesis approach by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter; the satisfaction-engagement approach by Harter, Schmidt and Hayes; and Saks' multidimensional approach.

The term *engagement* in a workplace context was first used by **Kahn** (Shuck, 307). Kahn defines engagement as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles" (Kahn 1990, 694). He further specifies that "in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn 1990, 694), which is dependent on the presence of the three psychological

conditions *meaningfulness, availability* and *safety* (Kahn 1990, 703). The feeling of *psychological meaningfulness* arises when a person receives physical, cognitive, or emotional energy in return for an investment of the self which is perceived to be higher than the investment itself (Kahn 1990, 703). The condition of *psychological safety* is reached when there is no fear of negative consequences resulting from the expression of the self (Kahn 1990, 708). *Psychological availability* is achieved when a person feels they have the physical, emotional or psychological resources needed to personally engage (Kahn 1990, 714). While relevant for the theory of engagement, Kahn's approach is only seldom applied in empirical research (Schaufeli 2014,18). Kahn (1990, 694) further describes engagement as a continuum of states a person could be in during role performance, ranging from personal engagement to personal disengagement.

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001, 397-403, 416), on the other hand, define engagement as a positive psychological state and the antithesis to burnout, which is composed of the three dimensions of *exhaustion, cynicism* and *inefficacy*. While all three authors agree with this postulation, they take dissimilar approaches to the core concept of engagement in their paper. For Maslach and Leiter, engagement stands in direct opposition to burnout – much like the flipside of a coin - and it becomes manifest in the dimensions of *energy, involvement* and *efficacy* (Maslach & al. 2001, 416-417). By contrast, Schaufeli, in the very same paper, views engagement as a self-contained concept, which comprises of the elements *vigor, dedication* and *absorption* (Maslach & al. 2001, 417). Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002) further develop Schaufeli's view and defined engagement as “a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour” (Schaufeli & al. 2002, 74). While various sources deem this to be the definition of “work engagement” (Bailey & al. 2017, 35; Schuck 2011, 311), this term does not appear explicitly in the original paper that is cited in these works. It is, however, used in the Manual of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale or UWES, a self-report questionnaire that was developed to measure work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004, 4-5), in reference to the original paper. The difference between this last definition and others discussed before illustrates the sometimes-ambiguous use of terms around engagement in the literature.

In **Harter, Schmidt and Hayes'** satisfaction-engagement approach (2002, 269), employee engagement is defined as an “individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”. Using the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA), the study indicates a positive correlation of employee satisfaction and engagement with desirable

business-unit outcomes like customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee retention, and employee safety (Harter & al. 2002, 269; 274).

Saks sums up definitions of engagement in academic literature by stating that it is a “distinct and unique construct that consists of *cognitive, emotional, and behavioral* components that are associated with individual role performance” (Saks 2006, 602). He distinguishes between job engagement and organizational engagement (Saks 2006, 601).

The following part shows the main relevant findings from the narrative synthesis of publications by Bailey & al. (2017). The interview frameworks used for this thesis are based on these findings (attachment 2, attachment 3).

In their work, Bailey & al. (2017) summarize the different definitions that emerged in their structured search of literature on engagement. The results are grouped under six headings: personal role engagement, work task or job engagement, multidimensional engagement, engagement as a composite attitudinal and behavioural construct, engagement as management practice, and self-engagement with performance (Bailey & al. 2017, 34-35). The publications that are analysed and grouped in this paper overlap of course strongly with those in Shuck’s (2011) literature review. The author, therefore, refers back to the previous chapters.

The first group, *personal role engagement*, refers to Kahn’s definition of engagement, as described earlier in this chapter. *Self-engagement with performance*, the second group, is defined as an individual’s own will and determination to perform (Britt, Castro & Adler 2005, in Bailey & al. 2017, 35). The third group, *multidimensional engagement*, stems from Saks’ (2006) previously presented definition of engagement. In the fourth group of streams of research, engagement is deemed a *combination of attitudes and behaviours*. A more recent approach, the fifth group, views *engagement as management practice*. The last group of streams of research was also found to be the most dominant one. Here, engagement is defined as *work task or job engagement*, as described above. The vast majority of the analysed studies adopted the definition of “work engagement” (Bailey & al. 2017, 35).

Albeit often used interchangeably, the terms “work engagement” and “employee engagement” do differ. Both refer to an employee’s relationship to his or her work, however, employee engagement also considers the relationship with the organization. (Schaufeli 2014, 15.)

Despite the wide variety of definitions for engagement, most recognize that it comprises of a work-related psychological state as well as motivational state (Albrecht 2010, 4). Although there may never be consensus on one definition, employee engagement can be regarded as “positive work-related psychological state characterized by a genuine willingness to contribute to organizational success” (Albrecht 2010, 5).

This overview shows that, despite the already existing big amount of research and debate, much more is needed, to hopefully eventually have a commonly accepted definition and conceptualization of employee engagement, which combines psychologically and business-relevant aspects. Schaufeli (2014, 32), however, calls to attention that a too narrow definition of engagement may lead to a reduced applicability, whereas a too wide definition could result in too large overlaps with other concepts for engagement to remain a valid concept of its own.

This chapter has focussed on definitions and conceptualizations of engagement. The following chapter discusses antecedents of engagement and factors that affect engagement.

2.3.2 Antecedents of Engagement

As this thesis aims to determine the perceived employee engagement amongst Finceptum’s employees as well as establish elements affecting it, it is important to look deeper into individual and organizational characteristics contributing to engagement.

Wollard and Shuck (2011, 432) define antecedents of employee engagement as “constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement”. Antecedents “come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs” (Wollard & Shuck 2011, 432). As the interest in engagement keeps growing, so does the number of suggested antecedents, only few of which have been empirically tested.

In a structured literature review of 265 abstracts, 21 individual and 21 organizational antecedents of employee engagement were identified (table 2). As the authors mention organizational support twice in the group of individual antecedents, it would seem that the real number is 20. Empirical evidence is provided for more than half of each group of antecedents in the reviewed papers (Wollard & Shuck 2011, 432-433). Whilst important and interesting, this model will not be elucidated, as it did not serve as a basis for this empirical research. Relevant listed antecedents will be discussed below in the context of other models.

Table 2. Antecedents of employee engagement identified in literature (Wollard & Shuck 2011, 433).

Individual antecedents to employee engagement	Organizational antecedents to employee engagement
Absorption	Authentic corporate culture
Available to engage	Clear expectations
Coping style	Corporate social responsibility
Curiosity	Encouragement
Core self-evaluation	Feedback
Dedication	Hygiene factors
Emotional fit	Job characteristics
Employee motivation	Job control
Employee / work / family status	Job fit
Feelings of choice and control	Leadership
Higher levels of corporate citizenship	Level of task challenge
Involvement in meaningful work	Manager expectations
Link individual and organizational goals	Manager self-efficacy
Optimism	Mission and vision
Perceived organizational support	Opportunities for learning
Self-esteem, self-efficacy	Perception of workplace safety
Value congruence	Positive workplace climate
Vigor	Rewards
Willingness to direct personal energies	Supportive organizational culture
Work / life balance	Talent management
	Use of strengths

Bailey & al. (2017) identify five groups of antecedents of engagement used in literature: individual psychological states, experienced job-design-related factors, perceived leadership and management, individual perceptions of organizational and team factors, and organizational interventions or activities (figure 1).

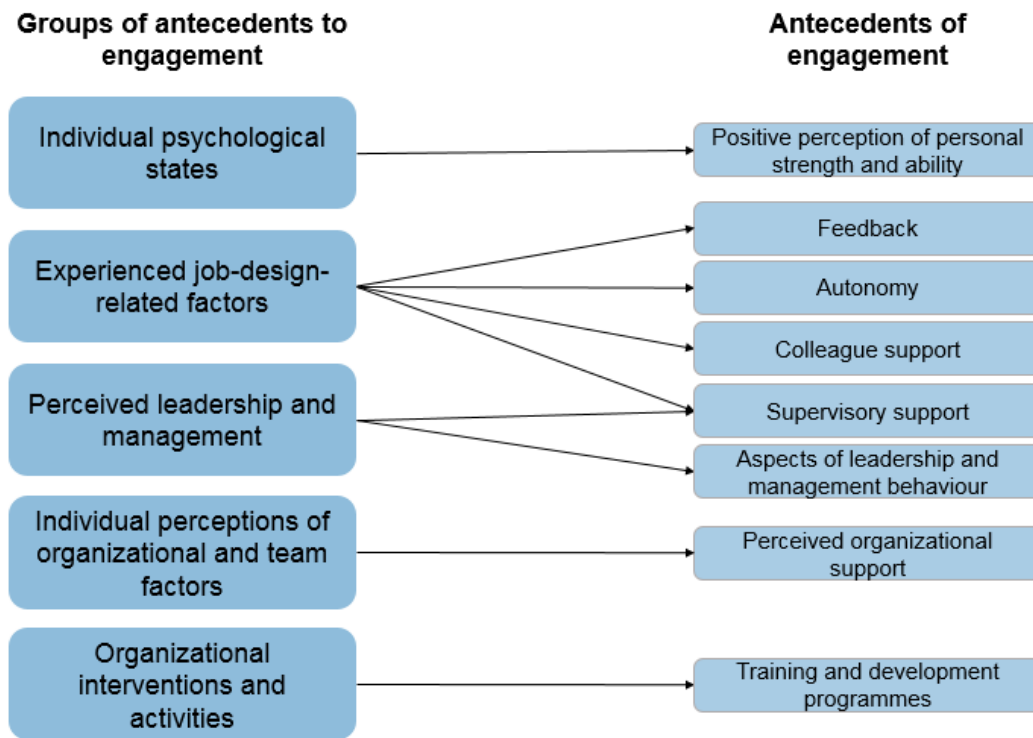


Figure 1. Groups of antecedents of engagement and selected related antecedents used in this research (figure by the author, based on Bailey & al. 2017)

The first group, individual psychological states, includes “positive perceptions that individuals hold of their personal strength and ability” (Bailey & al. 2017, 38). In other words, whether a person feels adapt to deal with adversity and has means to affect the situation. For the purpose of this thesis, the author extends this definition by the willingness and ability of a person to engage with a problem in the first place.

Experienced job-design-related factors, the second group of antecedents, involve, for example, job resources, such as, feedback, autonomy, supervisory and collegial support (referred to as “colleague support”; Bailey & al. 2017, 38). Feedback is defined as the amount and reliability of available information regarding the effectiveness of an employee’s performance. Autonomy is the degree of freedom an employee has over the means of execution of his or her job. (Hackman & Oldham 1976 in Arnold & al. 2010, 263.) For the purposes of this research at hand, supervisory support refers to the support an employee receives from his or her direct supervisor, whereas colleague support (also referred to as collegial support) describes the support that is extended to an individual by employees on the same hierarchical level in the organization. Due to the case company’s operational model as part of a B2B network, employees of other organizations who perform comparable tasks involving the same products as employees of the case company are included in the definition of colleagues.

Supervisory support was also found to be a theme in the papers grouped under the fourth classification of antecedents of employee engagement, perceived leadership and management (Bailey & al. 2017, 39).

Individual perceptions of organizational and team factors, the fifth group of antecedents, included perceived organizational support. Neves and Eisenberger (2014, 202) specified perceived organizational support as the extent to which employees “believe that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being”.

The fifth and final group, organizational interventions or activities, included training and development programmes. While these referred to organizational interventions targeting the increase of engagement (Bailey & al. 2017, 39-40), this present paper includes all available training and development opportunities. This was based on the assumption that any kind of intervention would help increase the perceived organizational support as well as the skills of employees and therefore aid in task performance, as defined in chapter 2.1.

2.3.3 Methods to Manage Engagement

Engagement is not a state, it is rather a scale, ranging from “engaged” to “actively disengaged”. While engaged employees go above and beyond to deliver great results and show a positive attitude towards their work and employer overall, disengaged employees do the bare minimum and simply show up to work. Actively disengaged employees behave in a way that is right out harmful to their organization’s performance. (Carbonara 2013, 10, 12.)

The importance of having engaged employees is indisputable. Not only do engaged employees have a lower turnover than their disengaged counterparts, they are also less often sick and absent, more innovative, more resilient to organizational change, and better brand advocates. Engaged employees make for increased customer retention and they are more productive than disengaged or actively disengaged employees. Essentially, engaged employees can positively affect an organization’s profitability. (Carbonara 2013, 14-15.)

One model used to enhance employee engagement, is the Engagement Bridge™ (figure 2). The Engagement Bridge™ consists of two types of elements: “rocks” or “underpinning elements” and “beams”, so-called “connecting elements”. The rocks are pay and benefits, workspace, and wellbeing. By themselves, these elements will not make or break engagement, but they will provide the Bridge™ with a fundament and stability. The beams

function as connecting points between the organization and its employees. These connecting elements are open and honest communication; purpose, values and mission; leadership; management; job design; learning; and recognition. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 12-13.)

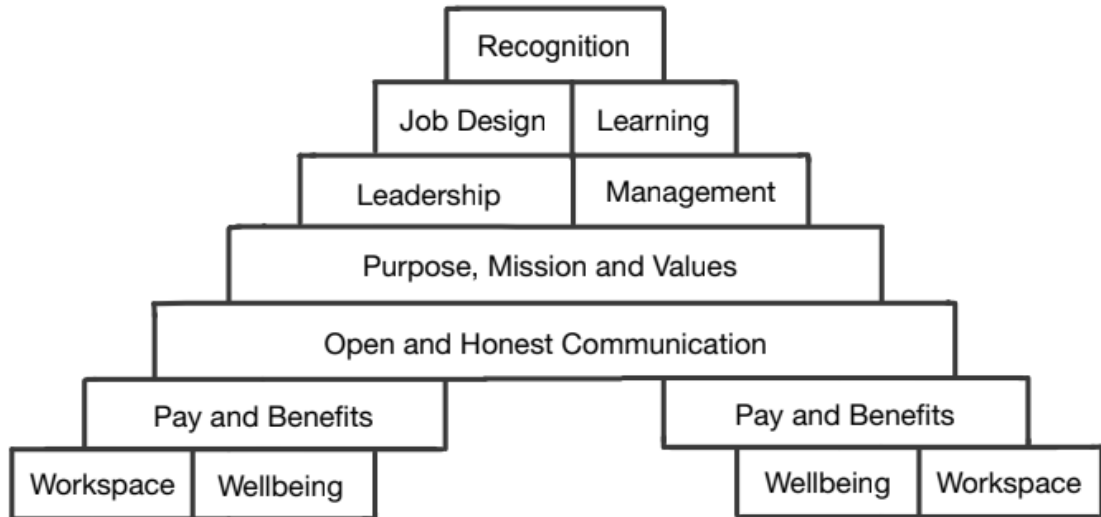


Figure 2. Engagement Bridge™ (figure by author, based on Elliott & Corey 2018, 13)

The exact position of these elements is not essential to the process. What is important, is to start working on the area, in which an impact can be made fastest.

According to Elliott and Corey (2018, 19-28), **open and honest communication** is a crucial component of employee engagement. Cowan (2014, 24-25) lists two main barriers to open, internal communication. The first barrier concerns the structure of the organization. Where decisions are being made, for example, can have a significant effect on whether and how information flows through the organization. The second barrier is leadership behaviour. Good leadership behaviour is on one hand, for example, leading in accordance with the organizational values. Values are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Bad leadership behaviour, on the other hand, is characterized by “obstructive, exploitative, manipulative and secretive” behaviour (Cowan 2014, 25). Leadership is also discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Not unlike any other good relationship, relationships in an organization, be it between employees or employees and their superiors, or even with the organization, require trust. Trust, in turn, is built on truth and transparency. This requires companies to share information in a timely and as complete manner as possible, as under-communication and half-truths are detrimental to trust. Particularly in difficult situations, for example, when business targets have not been met, communication should be transparent. With employees being aware of what is

effectively happening in the organization, rumours and feelings of uncertainty can be lessened, and solutions started to be developed – together with the employees. (Cowan 2014, 24; Elliott & Corey 2018, 23.) Particularly in times of change, as is the case when restructuring an organization, internal communication becomes a major tool to battling uncertainty across functions. The absence of information, especially in times of change, can quickly lead to rumours and speculations. As the access to and availability of information decreases, the need for information and communication increases. (Cowan 2014, 46, 50.)

Communication should be continuous and important messages need to be shared repeatedly and through different channels to reach all members in the organization. A change in information should be pointed out proactively by the employer to avoid mistrust and confusion. In the same way as employers should communicate openly and honestly with their employees, employees should be able and encouraged to do the same, without fear of repercussions (Cowan 2014, 22; Elliott & Corey 2018, 19-28; Kahn 1990, 708). Creating an environment where employees dare to speak up takes a lot of consistent work, but the rewards outweigh the efforts by far. When employees feel heard and that their opinions are appreciated, it leads to increased *perceived organizational support* (Eisenberger & al. 1986, in Rich & al. 2010, 621). Such a work environment can be described as psychologically safe. This psychological safety can be heightened also via the right management style, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics of groups and between groups. (Kahn 1990, 708). This can be related to *supervisory and colleague support*. Both can be enhanced by fostering an environment, where ideas can be shared freely and safely, and any criticism remains constructive (Kahn 708). All of which should be communicated to the employees. When members of an organization dare to speak freely and speak up, managers' decisions will be less risky, as they will be able to trust to have received all relevant information and different viewpoints from other members in the organization, and employees will be able to make more informed decisions in their daily work, as they have an increased sense of belonging, trust in the company and know where it is going. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 23-25.)

Where a company is going, is defined by its **purpose, mission and values**, the next element of the Engagement Bridge™. While a company's mission defines what the company aspires to achieve long-term, the purpose presents the reason why the company aims to do so, and the values guide the behaviours and ways of working. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 41-42). A clearly defined and communicated mission will not only provide all members of the organization with a common goal, inspiration and feeling of meaningfulness to their work, but can also have a positive effect on customer relationship

(Elliott & Corey 2018, 43). Company values should be determined by the highest decision-makers in the company to ensure commitment and the best possible effect of business performance. Values, as mentioned, determine the ways of working and will therefore have a significant impact also on the company brand and overall performance (Elliott & Corey 2018, 44). Living these values by implementing them into all decisions, processes and actions, is therefore essential – on all organizational levels. Clearly defined values and context are crucial. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 49.)

The next level of the Engagement Bridge™ is built with the elements **leadership and management**. Elliott and Corey (2018, 70) suggest that a big part of being a great leader boils down to creating a work environment, where employees are willing and able to bring their best selves to. Leaders, nowadays, are expected to be good role models, who openly admit to and deal with possible mistakes they make at work. Long gone are the days of flawless, strict leaders. Today's leaders are visible, active contributors to their team's success. They are a part of the team, comply to the same rules, and work towards the same goals. Great leaders know how to build trust by putting trust into their people first. They trust that their people will do their work diligently, but also show trust by communicating open and honestly. This starts on top-executive level and it begins with illuminating the company's strategy, mission and raison d'être, and it extends to living the company's values. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 70-74.) In a company, where the leadership creates a sense of "us", rather than "us and them", employees will be more engaged and perform better. With trust being an integral part of the culture, employees will also be more adaptable to change. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 76.) Time and energy will be directed towards achieving the common goal, rather than questioning leadership's motive and truthfulness of communication.

Research (Wigert & Mann 2017) shows that merely one in five employees strongly agrees that they feel motivated to exceed expectations at work based on the way that performance is managed. Given the significant influence that managers have on their teams' engagement and performance, a well-executed performance management needs to include a continuous, tailored **feedback** dialogue between managers and their employees. Wigert and Mann propose additional training and guidance to support managers in developing better skills with regard to feedback. A research conducted by Gallup (in Wigert & Mann 2017) found that 75 % of employees do not receive sufficiently meaningful or useful feedback on their work. Particularly when dealing with a disengaged or underperforming employee, Carbonara (2013, 253) suggests a five-step feedback process. In the first step, sincere empathy is offered to the employee. Then, the manager describes the observed, negative behaviour or problem. Next, the employee is provided

with more desirable alternatives to the current behaviour. The manager describes in a positive way what is expected from the employee going forward. Next, the manager explains how this adjusted behaviour will benefit the employee. This could be, for example, an improved work relationship with the manager and colleagues. In the last feedback step, the manager gives the employee the opportunity to practice and display this new behaviour or attitude.

Management plays an important role in aligning a company's values with its policy and leadership practice (Elliott & Corey 2018, 85, 94). This refers to, for instance, recruitment and performance evaluation processes, talent development measures as well as documents, such as, employment contracts (Elliott & Corey 2018, 86-87). When what the organization pledges to do in their mission statement and related values does not go hand in hand with actions taken, the organization risks possible engagement by loss of employee trust (Elliott & Corey 2018, 87). Management, together with HR, plays a critical role in establishing processes to build or keep this employee trust. Reportedly, team engagement lies to a big extent (about 70 %), in the hands of the manager (Gallup 2019, 20).

Moving up one level on the Engagement Bridge™, we encounter the **job design**. It is important, but often being neglected, to (re-)design jobs from the employees' perspectives and take into consideration factors, such as, emotional response to executing the tasks, role and personal development opportunities, and relation to the company's mission (Elliott & Corey 2018, 109-110). High-engagement jobs are characteristically highly demanding, while also offering a high level of control (Elliott & Corey 2018, 113; figure 3).

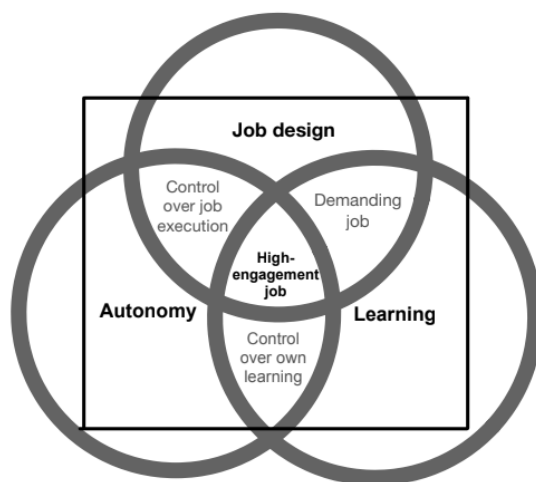


Figure 3. Links between job design, learning, and autonomy, and their role in engagement (figure by the author, based on Elliot & Corey 2018, 113-119, 131)

In a demanding job, an employee will have the opportunity to learn and grow, rather than encounter boredom (Elliott & Corey 2018, 113). This refers to boredom, which could be caused, for instance, by performing repetitive tasks or such that provide no challenge to the employee. When the demands, however, are high and the employee does not have any control over any aspects of the execution of their job tasks, they will feel overwhelmed and not perform well (Elliott & Corey 2018, 113-114). This highlights the relevance of *autonomy* when it comes to enhancing employee engagement, as autonomy gives to the employee the freedom to make certain decisions and consequently a feeling of having control over their work to some extent. Together with ambition and acceptance of failure, autonomy plays also an important role in creating a culture of learning (Elliott & Corey 2018, 131). The author of this thesis proposes these factors be called the “3 A’s of Learning Culture” (figure 4).

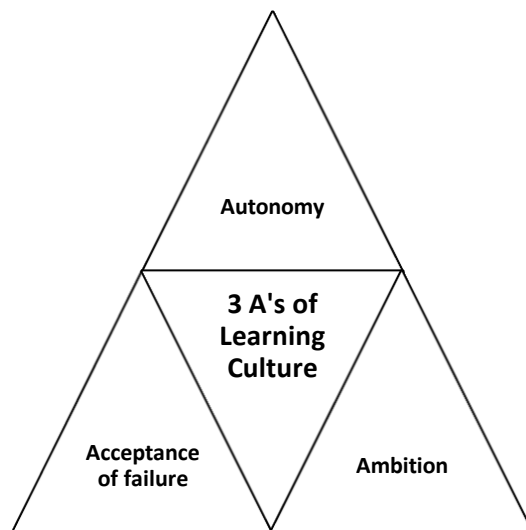


Figure 4. 3 A’s of Learning Culture (figure by the author, based on Elliott & Corey, 131)

Although the willingness to learn needs to come from employee’s side, companies need to facilitate and encourage learning. Here is where, according to Cowan (2014, 26), transparent communication comes into play again. To fully benefit from employees’ potentials, existing knowledge in the organization needs to be captured and shared. Silos of silent knowledge and selective sharing of information need to be avoided.

Nowadays’ technology also places a massive amount of knowledge into the palms of our hands, so it is now easier and more cost-effective than ever to access information and learn. To fully take advantage of these possibilities, the organization’s approach to learning should be based on a growth mindset. This is a term coined by Dr Carol S. Dweck (2006) and it refers to a mindset of perseverance, overcoming challenges and making use of them as learning opportunities. The author sees here a close connection to

what Bailey & al. term “positive perceptions that individuals hold of their personal strength and ability” (Bailey & al. 2017, 38). Dweck further states that this type of mindset can be learned. Although she here refers to the individual’s mindset, the author of this thesis would bring forward the argument that an organization as a whole can adapt this mindset, perhaps in form of a value, and, with the right policies and leadership in place, facilitate its employees’ learning of a growth mindset. With such a mindset, employees will then, out of their own volition, strive to learn, grow, and incorporate what has been learned to their work, which will result in increased innovation and performance (Elliott & Corey 2018, 134-135).

To give employees the opportunity to perform, learning needs to commence right from the beginning of the employment relationship, during the **onboarding**. While learning begins during onboarding, effective onboarding of a new employee commences already during the recruitment phase (Stibitz 2015). The main purposes of onboarding are to help socialize the new employee and to provide professional support (Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer & Erdogan 2017). Two types of onboarding can be differentiated: informal onboarding, often referred to as “learning by doing” and - according to research, the more effective type - formal onboarding, which involves the use of written policies and procedures (Bauer 2010, 2). Ellis & al. suggest that, apart from written instructions and guidelines, onboarding measures should evolve mainly around providing support, for example, by assigning a peer buddy to the new employee and scheduling regular check-in meetings with the manager during the first six months of employment. In these meetings, expectations, roles and responsibilities can be discussed. Research shows that supervisory support strongly affects the new employee’s chances of success in the new job. As onboarding is rarely part of a manager’s official role, time allocation often becomes an issue. Ready plans and checklists can support the manager with this. It is important that the manager makes time to offer support. Equally, the new employee should be encouraged to proactively seek out supervisory support. (Ellis & al. 2017.) However, the responsibilities for successful onboarding should not fall on the new employee and his/her manager alone. Other team members need to be involved in the onboarding process and they should understand their tasks when it comes to helping their new colleague succeed. (Stibitz 2015.)

In today’s business, most **recognition** programmes are outdated and too complex. Many companies spend their entire recognition budget in awards for long tenure. It would, however, pay off to recognize employees for performance, living the company’s values, and creating value for the company and its customers instead. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 151-152.) But in the end, it is the gesture that counts. Elliott & Corey’s research (2018, 150) shows that almost three quarters of employees would reportedly be more motivated by

receiving a simple “thank you” alone. For a recognition programme to be effective, it needs to meet five criteria: continuity, timeliness, fairness, relevance, and it needs to be personal (Elliott & Corey 2018, 149). The programme should first of all be uncomplicated enough, for it to be understood by all members of the organization, but also to allow for spontaneous recognition when needed. Then, the right employees’ work should be seen and recognized. Disconcertingly, in many organizations, 80 % of the employees remain invisible, while the rest receives recognition over and over. This kind of practice can lead to disengagement. Finally, recognition needs to be personal, meaningful, and show that thought has been put into the selection. (Elliot & Corey 2018, 151; 154-155.) And in all of this, one aspect need not be overlooked: communication. After all, the best recognition programme will not have much effect if no one understands or knows about it in the first place.

Just as for recognition, communication, transparency, and fairness are of paramount importance to **pay and benefits**, the next building block of the Engagement Bridge™. Interestingly, a higher pay is not linked to engagement. On the contrary, pay – especially performance-related pay - can have a rather detrimental effect on engagement, particularly when it is perceived as unfair. Transparency and openness are needed to counteract this, for example, by making pay public. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 173-177.) As opposed to pay, benefits can have a positive effect on engagement, and can be divided into four groups: economic benefits, such as health care; benefits that support the company culture; benefits that free employees’ time; and legally required benefits, like retirement plans (Elliott & Corey 2018, 180). For optimal impact on employee engagement, the benefit strategy has to be integrated into the company’s overall strategy and aligned with its values (Elliott & Corey 2018, 182).

While pay can have a negative and benefits a positive effect on engagement, the **workspace** can have either one. *Workspace* refers to the general working environment including ways of working. Having the opportunity to change the physical environment can improve, among others, collaboration, engagement and performance. The design of the workspace has to display and bring across the company values and support the types of work that need to be performed. This is referred to as *agile working*. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 204-205; 209.) But it is not only the physical environment that counts. Tools and technology used for working, equally impact employee engagement. To avoid unnecessary stress and possible frustration, these tools and technology should be up to date and user-friendly (Elliott & Corey 2018, 207).

The final element of the Engagement Bridge™ is **wellbeing**. Preventing stress and burnout in employees, while simultaneously increasing employee engagement, requires an integrated approach that targets three key areas: physical, mental and financial wellbeing (Elliott & Corey 2018, 220-221). Furthermore, today's fusion of work and leisure time calls for a revised approach to flexible working. Many companies have adapted a unilateral approach to flexible working, meaning, employees are flexibly available even outside of working hours, thanks to technology. At the same time, they are often not being trusted and required to ask for permission to work different hours or from different locations. (Elliott & Corey 2018, 224-225.)

3 Research Methods

This chapter describes and discusses the methods used in this research-based study. Research approach and design are examined, and the interview frameworks and data analysis methods introduced.

3.1 Research Design

Looking at the relationship between research and theory, there are two main approaches for conducting a study, deduction and induction. Deduction begins with the examination of existing theory, which is then followed by data collection. This approach is highly structured and often used in scientific research. In induction, data is collected and analysed first. The results form the basis for the development of the theory (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 38, 117-120). The deductive approach was employed for this research, as the author worked toward getting observations with the help of existing theory.

Research designs are commonly grounded on the research purpose as well as the nature of data that is examined. Research may be classified in terms of their purpose into explanatory, descriptive and exploratory studies. Explanatory studies seek to establish causality between variables of quantitative data (Saunders & al. 132, 134). Descriptive studies focus on describing situations, whereas exploratory studies target the finding of new insights (Gummesson 2000, 85; Saunders & al. 133). The aim of this research is to bring about a deeper understanding of how the members of the management team viewed the engagement in the organization compared to the employees, and ultimately provide improvement suggestions.

Two main types of data collection and analysis can be distinguished in business research, quantitative and qualitative methods (Saunders & al. 2007, 145). Quantitative methods are usually applied when a large number of respondents is involved, and the focus is on numeric data. Conversely, qualitative methods are chosen when the number of respondents is smaller, and the collected information is non-numerical, for example, words, and needed in more detail. (Harding 2013, 8; Saunders & al. 2007, 145.) For these reasons, and due to the case company's interest in the broader context of employee engagement, a qualitative approach was adopted for this thesis.

Two interview frameworks (IF1 and IF2; Chapter 3.3; attachment 2; Attachment 3) were utilized in this qualitative research (figure 5). One framework was used to capture the management perspective and the other one for the employee perspective. The semi-

structured interviews were conducted in two phases: during phase one, all members of the management team were interviewed as managers (IF1) as well as employees (IF2). In phase two, all non-managerial employees were interviewed using (IF2). The collected data from each interview framework was separately analysed, employing a qualitative and thematic method. The results of these analyses were then used to answer the IQs.

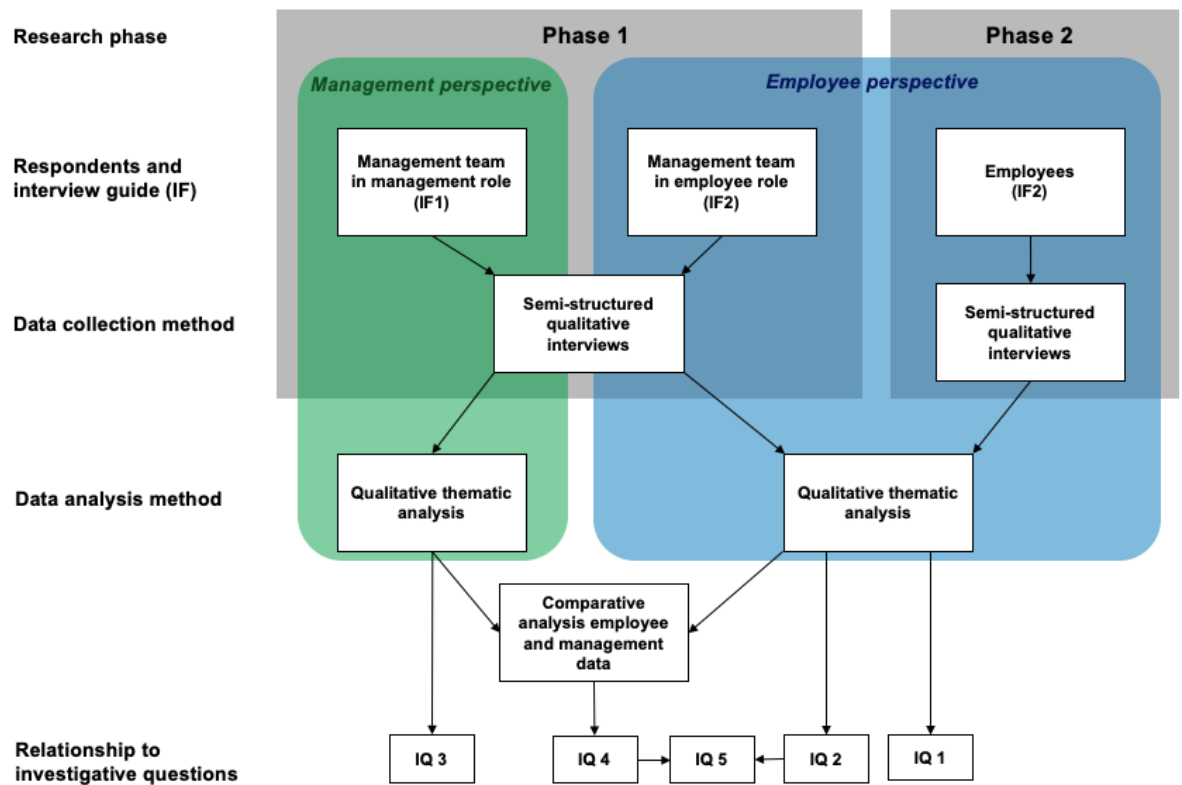


Figure 5. Research design

3.2 Population and Sampling

Population refers to the “full set of cases from which a sample is taken” (Saunders & al. 2007, 205). A sample is a part of the population and can be selected via a probability or non-probability approach. When a sample is selected randomly, it is referred to as probability sample. This type of selection gives each unit of the population a known chance of becoming part of the sample. In non-probability sampling, on the other hand, samples are selected somewhat methodically, and some units of the population are more likely to be selected than others. (Bryman & Bell 2011, 176.)

No sampling was required for this research, as it was possible to interview the whole population. The population for this study were all members of the organization, who were in an ongoing contractual relationship with the case company at the time of the interviews, and consisted of six managers and nine employees, including three contractors. Two

additional employees were in the exit process when this research commenced and did not wish to be interviewed and were therefore excluded.

3.3 Design of Interview Frameworks

The objective of this study, together with the theoretical framework, research and investigative questions, formed the foundation of the interview frameworks. The author developed interview frameworks, as suggested by Harding (2013, 31, 36-37), and included a list of themes, which derived from the theory (Bailey & al. 2017; table 3). A few questions were formulated to provide a backbone for the conversations (attachment 2; attachment 3).

Table 3. Theoretical foundation for design of interview frameworks

(Bailey & al. 2017)			
Groups of factors of antecedents of engagement (number of papers in which they were studied)	Most frequently studied sub-group (number of papers in which they studied)	Attributes	Interview themes derived from theory
Individual psychological states (52)	Positive perceptions that individuals hold of their personal strength and ability (11)	Self-efficacy	Perception of personal strength and ability
		Resilience	
		Personal resources	
Experienced job-design-related factors (65)	Job resources (26)	Supervisory support	Supervisory support*
		Colleague support	Colleague support
		Feedback	Feedback
		Autonomy	Autonomy
Perceived leadership and management (36)	Positive forms of leadership (8)	Supervisory support	Supervisory support*
Individual perception of organizational and team support (53)	Areas at the organizational level (6)	Perceived organizational support	Perceived organizational support
Organizational interventions and activities (9)	Individual responses to organizational interventions (9)	Training and development programmes	Training and development

Themes feedback, and communication and information flow were specifically requested by the case company. A question about onboarding was added after the first interviews as a response to collected data and to get additional data for this potential problem area.

3.4 Data Collection

To allow for better understanding of the business environment and general conditions in the company, the management team was interviewed during the first phase. Each member was interviewed individually and received two sets of questions, one with a focus on management perspective and the other one from employee perspective (attachment 2; attachment 3). As each person of this interview group had managerial responsibilities as well as a function as employee in daily operations, this group was asked both sets of questions. During the second phase, the remaining employees were interviewed individually. These participants were asked only the set of questions about their perspective as employees (attachment 3).

Prior to commencing the study, the Managing Director informed all organizational members about this research in order to ensure that the importance of this research for the company was understood and to obtain as many interviews as possible with responses of as high of a quality as possible. The author then sent a welcoming letter (participant information sheet; attachment 1) to the participants via email, which provided, among other things, information about the objectives of the study, interview process, benefits of participation and confidentiality, as recommended by Saunders & al. (2007, 184-185). As the author had the possibility to get access to everybody in the organization and the number of participants was manageable, no samples needed to be selected for the interviews (Saunders & al. 2007, 206).

Interviews may be classified depending on their level of standardization into structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews, also called quantitative research interviews, are standardized. Each interviewee is asked the same set of pre-determined questions with the exact same wording and tone of voice in every interview. Unstructured interviews are non-standardized, which means there are no pre-defined questions. This allows for general exploration of an area of interest. Semi-structured interviews also fall into the category of non-standardized interviews. (Saunders & al. 2007, 312) This is the type of interview used for examining reasons behind attitudes and opinions (Saunders & al. 2007, 313, 315), which was the reason for the choice of this approach for this study.

Piloting the data collection is considered an important step, allowing the researcher to adjust and refine questions before the actual interviews (Harding 2013, 52). For this reason and to better estimate the duration, the author conducted four test interviews with friends and acquaintances, using the interview frameworks. The author changed the

wording of one question, as three out of four test interviewees either misunderstood the question or asked for clarification.

The semi-structured interviews in the case company were conducted during September and October 2018. All 15 members of the organization were interviewed. This number included six managers, six employees and three contractors. The majority of interviews, namely 11, took place face-to-face and in a quiet meeting room in the company's headquarter. Due to distance, four persons were interviewed remotely via audio web conference software GoToMeeting and a conference speakerphone. One interviewee sent an email with additions to the answers in the interview. This data was included in this research. The duration of the interviews varied between 15 minutes and 1 hour 8 minutes for manager interviews (interview framework 1; attachment 2), and 15 minutes and 1 hour 38 minutes for employee interviews (interview framework 2; attachment 3; table 4). At the time of the interviews, two employees were in the exit process. Although invited to the interview, neither wished to participate. Both persons were therefore excluded from this research.

Table 4. Overview of duration of interviews

Interview number	Interview Framework 1 Management perspective (hh:mm)	Interview Framework 2 Employee perspective (hh:mm)
Interview 1	01:08	00:41
Interview 2	00:44	00:25
Interview 3	00:43	00:42
Interview 4	00:37	00:26
Interview 5	00:26	00:30
Interview 6	-	00:34
Interview 7	-	00:49
Interview 8	-	01:38
Interview 9	00:15	00:20
Interview 10	-	00:24
Interview 11	-	00:59
Interview 12	-	not recorded
Interview 13	-	00:23
Interview 14	-	00:24
Interview 15	-	00:15

Although this research was designed to have two phases in which manager interviews would precede employee interviews, one manager was interviewed after employee interviews had commenced. This was to allow a face-to-face interview with the manager, which would have otherwise not been possible.

To allow the author to fully focus on the conversations and increase data quality further, the interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder. One interviewee did not wish to be recorded due to data security concerns. The author therefore took notes during this interview, which were complemented with additional notes from memory right after the conversation.

Depending on the interviewee's English level, the author adjusted the questions and used, for example simpler, alternative vocabulary or wording, to avoid confusion or misunderstandings. Depending on the answers provided during the interviews, questions were added to or omitted from the interview framework, and their order varied (Saunders & al. 2007, 312). The author's goal was to collect each interviewee's perception of and opinion on each topic.

Eleven interviews were conducted as semi-structured face-to-face interviews, the remaining four took place via audio conference due to distance reasons. At the end of each interview, every participant was given the opportunity to add to their previously given answers. They were also reminded of the possibility to make additions via email later on, which one interviewee made use of.

3.5 Qualitative Analysis Methods

Once the data had been collected, every recorded interview was reheard to be able to reflect on the collected data more accurately and thus enhance data quality. To facilitate further analysis, all recorded interviews were analogously transcribed using Microsoft Word and summarized, as suggested by Harding (2013, 56-57), before commencing the coding process. Codes refer to notes that are made on interview transcripts. They can take different forms, for example, words, phrases or abbreviations. (Harding 2013, 82.)

A four-step approach to coding as means for the thematic analysis of the data, as suggested by Harding (2013), was applied in this study. These steps were: identification of categories; writing codes alongside the transcripts; revising codes and categories; and identification of themes and findings (Harding 2013, 82).

As a first step, the author based the initial categories on the pre-determined interview themes (chapter 3.3), and then engaged repeatedly with the data to identify additional categories. Next, the content of the interviews was coded, using words and short phrases, which were placed in the margins of the transcripts and then transferred to Microsoft Excel in a structured manner (figure 6).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Interview No.	Interview Question	Interviewee	Quote	Location if explicitly mentioned or evident	Theme	Attribute	Importance	Value
1	3	1	MGMT	[...] mean the reorganization. [...] I'm not sure that the process was always driven with enough communication in the management space [...]		Challenge	Reorganization		Not enough communication of its process in management team
103					Leppävaara				

Figure 6. Example of coding

Each relevant statement or quote was captured in an individual data row. Each row included columns for interview number, number of interview question, interview group (management or employee), statement, location that the quote referred to, theme, attribute, importance, and value. Theme, attribute, and value columns were used to assign codes to the statements. Additional columns included notes and context, interpretations, recommendations, future research and own learnings. One challenge for the author here was to ensure that the lines between coding what the interviewees had said would not get blurred by her own interpretations.

Then, the complete lists of codes were revised (“coding trees”; figure 7) with the aim to find connections between them. Certain codes, which were used during the initial coding process were later renamed more descriptively.

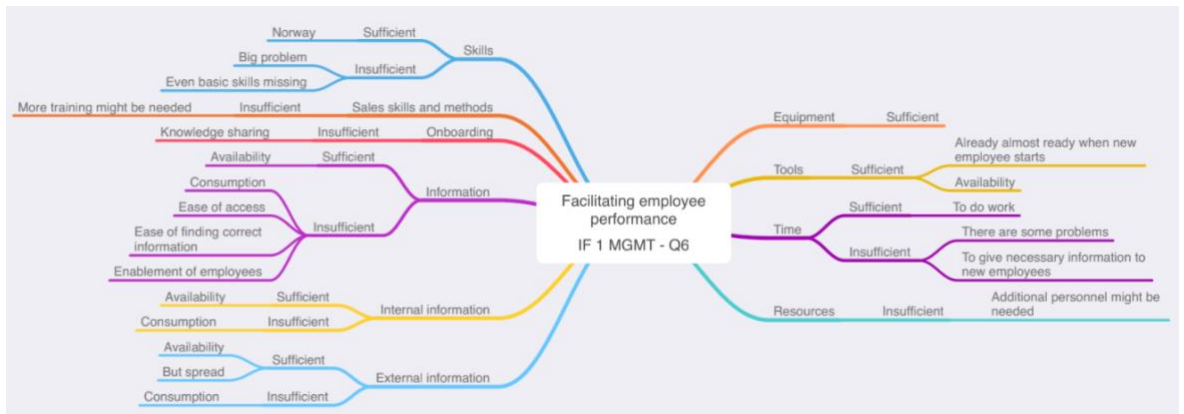


Figure 7. Example of code list

Once this was done, the author looked for findings in the data. During the qualitative analysis, the author had to reconsider her definition of colleague support. She decided to code for “colleague support” where it was clear that the response referred to management-management, manager-manager or employee-employee support. Where it was unclear or when the response referred to support from inside the B2B network, the author coded for “support”. “Supervisory support” was used when the mentioned support came clearly from any manager inside the organization.

The interview question for theme leader's work engagement did not provide relevant responses, meaning, the question did not produce the results that were intended to be researched. The responses were, however, relevant to other themes and included in the analysis. A better way to ask for leader's work engagement would have been, for example: "How does your supervisor perform in their own job (as a leader)?".

3.6 Reliability and Relevance

Reliability refers to the replicability and consistency of research findings, given that the same data collection techniques are used (Saunders & al. 2007, 609). This means, if the same research were conducted in the same way again in the future, the outcome should be the same as that of the previous research. Validity is concerned with how well the applied data collection methods measure what is meant to be measured in the research (Saunders & al. 2007, 614). There is, however, discussion, as to whether validity is a suitable criterion in qualitative research. An alternatively proposed criterion for qualitative research is relevance. Relevance refers to the extent to which a research topic contributes to a field or literature. (Bryman & Bell 2011, 401.)

Potential data quality issues related to semi-structured interviews lie within the areas of reliability, validity, and biases. An interviewee's responses can be affected, for example, by the interviewer's appearance or demeanour. This is referred to as interviewer bias. The interviewee's responses can also be affected by an interviewee bias, also referred to as response bias, in which the interviewee, for example, chooses to withhold information she deems too sensitive. (Saunders & al. 2007, 317-318.)

Concrete measures that were taken to increase reliability and relevance in this research are described in the previous chapters.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Research ethics refers to the moral and responsible decision-making and behaviour of the researcher during the entire research process, starting from the formulation of the research topic, throughout data collection and analysis, to reporting the findings. (Saunders & al. 2007, 178)

Bryman and Bell (2011, 128) describe four main ethical principles: harm to participants, informed consent, privacy and deception. Firstly, harm can be done to participants in different ways during research, in form of physical harm, stress, and harm to self-esteem (Bryman & Bell 2011, 128). An important aspect here is the maintenance of anonymity

and confidentiality (Saunders & al. 2007, 181). All participants were informed about the anonymous and confidential treatment of their responses and that a coded collection thereof would be published in form of a thesis.

This information was shared in the welcoming letter (participant information sheet; attachment 1), which every interviewee had received beforehand via email, and again before the beginning of their individual interview. Potentially harmful consequences for the participants resulting from the use of collected data was also taken into consideration, as recommended by Saunders & al. (2007, 187). In those cases, where the location of the interviewees allowed a face-to-face conversation, the interviews were conducted in a closed, quiet meeting room with comfortable sofa chairs to additionally provide a relaxing environment to the participants.

The second main ethical principle is the lack of informed consent. Myers (2009, 48) notes that research permission should be sought from an appropriate manager. For this purpose, the author contacted the Managing Director of the company, and verbal as well as written agreements were made. Informed consent with the participants was entered verbally before commencing each interview. At this point, an opportunity to refuse to be recorded during the interview was given. One participant chose not to be recorded. Each interviewee was informed about the voluntariness of the interview. This information was also included in the participant information sheet (attachment 1).

Moreover, the author repeatedly advised each participant of the possibility to refuse answering questions to maintain informed consent, but also in order to observe the third main ethical principle, the right for privacy. During the interviews, the author tried to maintain a balance between collecting as much information as possible and respecting the participants' boundaries.

To observe the last main ethical principle, avoiding deception, the participants were asked if they had understood the purpose and procedure of the study, as they had been described in the participant information sheet (attachment 1). Moreover, the participants were informed of the personal connection between the author and the Managing Director. Possible misconceptions about the study were clarified, and further questions encouraged.

4 Data and Results

The interview results of this research are presented in the following chapters. Chapter 4.1 shows management perspective results and chapter 4.2 shows employee interview results.

4.1 Management Team Interview Results

The members of the management team were asked more open questions than the employees for two reasons: firstly, because this offered the opportunity to get a better insight into the current situation of the business from management perspective, which was expected to provide additional context and possibility to understand the employees' answers in depth, and secondly, because all managers were also interviewed in detail as employees.

The findings in this chapter are generally presented as managers felt they were perceived from employee side. However, answers about processes are to the biggest part managers' own descriptions. Due to the limited number of respondents and to ensure anonymity, the results in this chapter are presented in a strictly qualitative manner and, in selected places, without answer samples.

In response to theme **colleague support**, meaning the managers' perceptions of the support between employees, the vast majority of managers responded positively. A common response here was: "Overall, I think it's good." One manager thought there was some segregation between the SUSE and Micro Focus teams. Another one found that the level of support depended on the persons involved. Perceived improvement wishes were increased collaboration in teams and to have an additional internal responsible for order processing, so that employees would have the opportunity to receive support in this area if it was not available from the currently responsible employee.

Asked about the relationship between the managers and their direct subordinates (theme **supervisory support**), half of the managers gave a positive response. One interviewee did not manage any employees directly. Out of the two managers, that gave an overall negative response to this theme, one noted the insufficient role definition within the management team. They said: "(...) the management team is still a quite new concept in our organization... there are still questions from the employees about who is responsible for what, who is responsible here." The manager also remarked that some decisions, which should have been made on board level, were often made by the Managing Director alone. The other manager stated that employees most likely felt they had received

insufficient supervisory support during the recent, challenging times in the organization. The manager furthermore reported an overall distant relationship with his/her employees and felt that support was not expected from him/her (“ (...) they have a certain expectation about me and I try to fulfil that to an extent, but when they have stuff, they go to someone else than me.”). Perceived improvement wishes, which one manager mentioned, were more directions given to the employees and a generally more structured approach to leadership.

The next theme concerned the **communication and information flow** in the organization, as it was imagined by the managers to be or have been perceived from employee side. While the terms information and communication are overlapping at times or used interchangeably, the author coded for them separately wherever possible. *Information* was used when the response referred to information needed for work, such as, instructions, manuals or information about products and services. *Communication* was used, for example, with regard to information about the company’s performance or changes in the organization.

This section will be divided into three categories: the current situation of communication, communication during the times of change, and perceived improvement wishes. Half of the managers commented on the status quo of communication in the organization. Two managers believed the perceived communication in the organization to be overall sufficient, open and honest, while the third manager said that the communication could be perceived from employee side as insufficient across borders. The majority of managers thought that, during the challenging times in the organization, employees might have not been informed enough about what was happening. The issues mentioned here were the lack of depth, timeliness and honesty of information given to the employees. As one manager said: “Also, during this time, I heard some critics about the communication (...) I think not enough information or some information maybe quicker, so there were also some rumours. The open communication would have been better.” Interesting here were also the differences in perceptions of how clearly the challenges had been communicated. For instance, one manager said: “So, what happened was, that there, we made it very clear: there is not enough new sales to sustain this organization, this cannot go on. I think we made it very clear. I did that, Jiri did that, the rest of the management team did that as well.” Another manager, however, pointed out: “So, there was no general meeting where Kim, for example, would have described the situation. It was discussed on person-to-person level.” They then continued: “And before that, the communication was more on a general level that ‘hey, we need to perform’ (...)”. As for perceived improvement wishes, the respondents agreed that employees could generally want for an increased frequency

and quality of information, for example, about progress of internal projects, other teams, also across borders, and organizational performance. One manager speculated: "People always want more information, so I imagine that they want even more information about how the organization is doing."

When managers were asked about their perceptions of how employees felt about the information flow in the organization, all agreed that there was a sufficient amount of information available. Both, internal information, as well as information needed from vendors' side. Two managers noted that employees might not engage with the provided material. One of them said, for example: "A LOT of channels available for information and getting that kind of material. But all those need people to be self-managing, from my perspective. (...) they don't take time for two hours to go through webinars to understand a complex technology, for example, or take a day off reading." Although these were partially the managers' own opinions rather than their ideas of their employees' perceptions, this could indicate missing time for consumption of information on employee side, a too large quantity of information, or not enough structured information that is spread across platforms. This would be supported by another manager's response: "Information we have. A lot. (...) I think the issue is to find that correct information. But we have that, and our vendor have that." This statement can furthermore be interpreted as suboptimal ease of access to information. Although the information might theoretically be available, accessing the right information would take more time and effort than necessary. As one other manager put it: "I think they could find information. Sometimes, it's inside people's heads, so they need to ask questions. (...) They may be hard to find sometimes, but they exist."

The next interview theme was **feedback**. According to the managers, feedback was given to each employee individually, and in two forms: formal, annual and quarterly performance reviews, and informal, spontaneous feedback via different channels. All *performance reviews* were generally conducted by the Managing Director. These reviews included topics, such as, performance against one's targets and comparison of current performance to that from previous years. Performance reviews with members of the sales team specifically were based on sales targets, which the employees receive quarterly and in writing, and they further included the discussion of the performance-based sales compensation. From the author's observations while working with the data for months, it seems that the overall feedback content is rather focused on numbers and results. Before the decision to restructure the organization had been made, performance discussions were initiated with each underperforming employee. Based on the responses in this area, it would seem that the approaches to each of these discussions differed a lot from one

another, and structure might have been missing. Later, during the time of change, performance discussions with the remaining employees had been significantly delayed. This was likely to have been caused by the Managing Director's large amount of responsibilities and lack of time. Concerning *spontaneous feedback*, managers took different stances. One manager said, for instance: "I also keep with my employees a more frequent communication channel, we try to keep that once a week, but it's depends.", while another one said: "(...) otherwise it's pretty much day-to-day work, where I hope I remember to thank them often enough because they really are doing the good work." Almost all managers agreed that it was possible for employees to give feedback to them, either face-to-face or virtually, for example, via Slack or WhatsApp. Only one said: "Well, I don't get any feedback. (...) So, I don't think it's impossible to give that feedback, but there is not a formal process for that. And there is not even an informal process for that." The responses for both, feedback given to and by employees, show inconsistencies with feedback practices in the organization. It can also be an indicator of a disconnection between managers and their direct subordinates, as the overall perception seems to be that the Managing Director is the main responsible and contact person for feedback matters in the organization. As research shows (chapter 2.3.3), feedback should be ideally a continuous and tailored dialogue between a manager and his team members.

The next interview theme concerned **training and development**. The answers here were spread across four topic areas: skills, tools, personnel resources, and workspace. A lack of *skills* in employees was brought up by four managers. Missing skills included understanding of technology, sales and sales methods, and how to write offers for customers. Only one manager commented: "I think he's got the tools and skills and the stuff". Regarding the availability of *tools*, two managers agreed that employees had all the tools needed to perform. The second manager, who agreed, commented: "Equipment and time I think are fine, that all works out." This response regarding availability of *time* was echoed by another manager. These responses may suggest that the managers thought there to be sufficient personnel resources to do the work. Two other managers, however, disagreed and reported that employees in Leppävaara as well as Riihimäki might need additional support. Furthermore, one manager thought that employees in Riihimäki needed an own *workspace*, as they were sharing a small workspace with other companies by the time of the interviews.

The **onboarding** practice described by the managers involved two phases, as understood by the author. During phase one, new employees received a general introduction into the company and market from the Managing Director. Phase two was provided by the new employee's own team manager and team. This function-specific phase covered mainly

information about ways of working and individual information needs. Although this seems to have been the general practice, one manager commented: “I created a plan before he came in. During the interview, I also mentioned what I had planned for him to do. And he thought that that was good. (...) So yeah, I created that, and asked him and he seemed happy with it.” This shows inconsistencies with the approach to onboarding across locations.

Challenges during onboarding seem to appear mainly during phase two. A general challenge here was, according to one manager: “Some is just sales, some is just technical, perhaps marketing. So, there is so different needs.” One other challenge during onboarding was that not all managers knew what information exactly was provided to the new employees by the Managing Director during the first onboarding phase. One manager noted: “(...) of course we have nowadays employee steps when it comes to getting everything information, so where is our information for personnel information and such. So, we have that kind of process list, at least I think so, I haven’t seen that yet... (...) For employees, where they find... so, they have – I think so – a document where is steps, where they can find information.” This means, managers are actively involved in the onboarding of new employees and expected to provide deeper insights into ways of working, however, not all of them seem to have information about what had already been provided to the employees. This raises the issue that new employees might receive some information repeatedly, and some other information not at all. Moreover, one manager pointed out that managers and the teams might not always have time to instruct new team members. Another reported challenge for new employees during onboarding was the lack of access to external tools, namely, the email accounts of SUSE and Micro Focus. Gaining access to these tools was reported to often take a long time. Perceived improvement wishes were a more structured approach to onboarding, timelier access to external information, and additional information about processes and expectations.

4.2 Employee Interview Results

To understand the employees’ **perception of their own personal strengths and abilities**, they were asked how they would react when running into a challenging situation at work. One part of the interviewees said they try to tackle the issue by themselves, for example: “I go to a room to sit down and figure out a solution”. The other group answered that they would seek support, for instance: “Either I ask some help from my colleague or from my boss – simple as that”. All respondents indicated that they engage with a problem in one way or another, regardless whether there was support available or not.

The participants were also asked generally about the **perceived organizational support**. While one participant felt not at all trusted by the company, the prevailing majority (90 %) expressed that they felt valued and heard by the organization. One participant expressed an interesting concern regarding the perceived organizational support: “Probably too much. (...) You should always be challenged, so I think that’s a problem.”

In response to the question regarding the employees’ relationship with their supervisors (theme **supervisory support**), a range of responses was elicited. Most respondents reported that they felt supported by their supervisor. As one respondent stated: “Because you can trust him, you can speak freely, if you need help, he helps.” Although a common view amongst interviewees was that time was a problem. One person, for example, commented: “One problem with my supervisor is that he is quite busy guy. So, we don’t see him much. So maybe, if he could have more time, we could think things together or plan things together.” Another one said: “When you manage people, or when you are leading them, you need to put in some time or effort to do that, also from coaching and mentoring point of view. That’s quite weak, to be honest.” Two employees reported insufficient support by their managers. As one of them put it: “Maybe the support is not the best thing which the guys bring for employees nowadays or been bringing.” Concrete problems that were brought up in this area were the insufficient understanding of the employees’ individual motivators as well as lack of leading by example. Interestingly, both employees commented on the unclear roles and decision-making power within the management team. One respondent said: “In the papers, the roles seems to be kind of clear. But is it really behind that clear? Who is using each other’s power? (...) of course, Kimi is named direct manager – but still... Because I just start thinking about that in a managing way, that this is important to understand in that size of company, that who has really this power to make decisions”.

When asked about **colleague support**, all interviewees commented that they could ask for help and that support was available, but to a varying extent. Six respondents reported sufficient colleague support. As one respondent put it: “I think it’s easy to ask something if I need help. So, I don’t see any problem with that side.” Another five employees indicated that they felt supported, despite the unavailability of knowledge or skills needed to provide help with certain questions inside the organization. One respondent felt that the available support with larger issues was insufficient: “I don’t feel that I get a lot of support or help (...) If I bring a problem there, I end up getting more work.” However, they, too, reported that they could get help with smaller, daily matters.

All employees agreed that they had enough **autonomy** to perform their jobs. More than half of the employees also mentioned autonomy as one of the best aspects of working for Finceptum Oy. As one respondent stated: "I think the best is that I can be independent and do my job as I want to do it. There is nobody telling me how to do it and I get free hands. That's the best." One employee, however, expressed the desire for more guidance at times: "So, that might be that yes, you have that freedom, but it might be that once in a while, it would be good to get more instructive ways to do. (...) I like working with the both way, that you have the freedom, but you also have some kind of direction or instruction of that."

Responses to the theme **communication** provided antipodal results. Upon closer assessment, it became obvious that all managers, who had been interviewed in their employee role, rated the communication in the organization overall positively. All employees without managerial roles, on the other hand, commented negatively. Only one employee found the communication to be sufficient. This employee also stated that this was due to his/her close relationship with the management team. The negative responses applied to both, the overall communication in the organization as well as the communication during the time of change. Change communication was found to have been insufficient by six respondents. Four respondents commented on the insufficient amount or depth of the provided information. Two respondents reported a lack of perceived clarity and another two a lack of perceived truthfulness of communicated information regarding change. One person said: "I think that the information sharing during that period wasn't so efficient, to be honest. (...) I think not clear enough." One interviewee remarked: "Well, there was meetings, but those meetings showing totally opposite direction where we are going. And all things happened after that. There are misleading information coming in. That was that, which was giving feeling that they are lying." Remotely connected to this statement, one interviewee commented on the timeliness of communication: "(...) was it March – we were there in (...) kind of a quarter meeting. (...) afterwards, when this process start happening, were heard that January, they been make decisions that they are doing this – throw the four people out and that's it. I think that's not fair. That's not kind of fair for these persons (...)." Two interviewees reported they had received no information whatsoever about what was concretely happening during the time of change. Those interviewees that commented on the general communication in the organization (apart from one person), interestingly described it as open and that they could get information when they asked for it. The only concern mentioned here by two interviewees, was the communication between teams and brands.

Information was found to be sufficiently available by two employees. Another one thought there was too much information to be consumed. The majority, however, found information flow to be insufficient in one way or another. Internal information was found to be insufficiently accessible by four employees. Here, two remarked that some internal information was not accessible to them due to language barriers: "All the information that is created here, is in Finnish. It doesn't translate. (...) Yeah, there is information, but it's difficult to say what it says." The other two employees expressed concerns regarding the lack of documentation, such as, legacy information and notes from customer meetings, but also templates, such as, presentations for customers. External information was reportedly insufficient with regard to accessibility and organization. Three employees shared this opinion.

During the interviews, nine employees commented on the **feedback** situation in the organization. Just over half of those who answered this question remarked that feedback was sufficiently available. The non-existent feedback process was mentioned by five interviewees. Two said there was no systemized approach to giving and receiving feedback: "There is no process. (...) I haven't noticed." Another two pointed out the desire to have a process for implementing change based on feedback. One said, for instance: "I miss this kind of feedback cycle where I notice something is wrong, I can feed someone information that 'this is what I think needs improving, here is what I'd do' and 'ok, let's get this changed', and then it gets implemented and changed." One interviewee alluded to the notion of introducing a peer-review on board level as well as in the management team. While engaging with the data, the author also observed a big variety with regard to frequency as well as content of feedback discussions in the organization. Two statements that illustrate these differences rather distinctly were: "(...) but I believe that there is no such a regular conversations, which I was mentioning earlier, that things which could improve situation here, in order to understand what the people are really thinking." and: "Anything concerning my work, yes, I'm giving a lot of feedback and it gets fixed also. (...) Yeah, two times a year, we have these bigger conversations with Kimi (...) He just asks if I'm happy with everything and do I think like I get my work through (...)." Furthermore, the author got the impression that there might not be sufficient preparation from management side before feedback discussions and that the given feedback is often rather quantitative.

Asked about **training and development**, all respondents reacted positively and stated that internal or external trainings could be taken or were even encouraged by the company. However, more than half of these respondents also mentioned the lack of time as limiting factor in this area. A typical response here was, for example: "Yeah, I think so and that's also in the past been good that we also got more push from management side

that “here is the course, do you want to go?” (...) I would say that the time is the challenging part.” Missing knowledge was identified pertaining to general areas, such as, market and customer knowledge, and tools in use, but also relating to the company’s offerings, like products, their business benefits for customers and technology used. One interviewee commented that he was also missing procedural knowledge needed for formulating Requests for Proposal (RFPs). Only one interviewee felt their colleagues were lacking skills: “If here is 15, here is only two that know license models, so 13 don’t know how we really sell our products to customers (...)”.

All respondents felt positively about **team activities**. There was agreement between half of the respondents, that the current frequency of two to four team events per year was enough, and one third pointed out a preference towards team events during working hours. Looking at the concrete activities during these events, half of the group said that *avec*-activities would be an option: “I think it would be good if we would have some more team activities. (...) Ok, so... we haven’t had for example nearly any activities that are *avec* activities, that there would be also for example wives and husbands of the people“. One employee suggested: “Maybe we could go drive cars or something like that. But totally different. Not always drinking.” The practice of including excessive alcohol consumption in team activities was mentioned negatively by a third of the respondents.

Onboarding was kept as an own theme due to the case company’s request and includes topics that have already been discussed earlier. The responses to the question about onboarding were mainly focussed on technical aspects of starting a new job. Commenting on the overall onboarding situation at that time, one of the interviewees said: “I got a laptop. [laughs] To be honest, I didn’t have an onboarding in a proper way, as I was expecting to get.” This perceived lack of onboarding process or policy was remarked by one third of the respondents. Internal aspects that were in fact available, were remarked overall positively. These factors included the access to and guidelines for internal systems, time to learn, and possibility to instantly apply what had been learned. One interviewee suggested that a formalized onboarding process could benefit from the involvement of other members in the organization, other than the Managing Director alone. As for external components of the onboarding experience, a significant delay in gaining access to external systems and information was brought up by half of the respondents. A typical statement here was: “This SUSE and Micro Focus side usernames are pending quite long. I had wait three months to get those permissions. I really don’t even now have everything what I need, so it takes quite much of time, and at that time you can’t find information.” Those interviewees, who had already gained access to these

systems, furthermore, pointed out that guidelines were missing and that information there was widespread across platforms.

5 Discussion

The objective of this thesis was to assess employee engagement factors, as they are perceived by managers and employees, to identify differences between the perceptions, and provide recommendations for management actions to improve employee engagement and ultimately job performance. The research question was: How can Finceptum Oy's employee engagement be enhanced to increase job performance? The key findings of investigative questions one to four are discussed in chapter 5.1. The fifth investigative question is answered in form of recommendations in chapter 5.2. Further, this chapter discusses reliability and validity, and ethical considerations. The author also gives suggestions for further research and reflects on her learning during this thesis process.

5.1 Key Findings

Investigative questions one to four are answered based on the interview results and in the light of the theory presented in chapter 2.

With the **first investigative question**, the author set out to uncover the employee engagement factors that function well, as perceived by the employees. These factors are perception of personal strength and ability, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, collegial support, autonomy, and training and development. All employees reported that they would find a way to deal with challenging situations at work (**perception of personal strength and ability**). This shows on one hand a growth mindset on employee side, as defined by Dweck (2006), which is relevant to the organization in the sense that employees can learn from adversity, which fosters development in the organization. It furthermore shows that the employees are willing and feel able to engage with problems, which is an important step to finding solutions, either by themselves or by seeking out support. The support system seems to work well at the company. Employees feel heard by the organization (**perceived organizational support**), which fosters trust in the organization and the management team. As described by Elliot and Corey (2018), trust contributes to employees being more adaptable to change. Employees, who trust their organization and management, use less time and energy to question the motives behind any change measures. Overall, employees feel also greatly supported by their **supervisors and colleagues**, even though factual support may not always be available inside the organization. For one, employees seem to benefit from the provided emotional support that is de facto available, but they also seem to be able to get support in form of information or advice from employees in similar positions within the company's B2B network. Employees furthermore appreciate the **autonomy** and corresponding trust given to them by their managers, another important factors in employee engagement. There are

also enough **training and development** opportunities available for all employees. There seem to be no major perceived knowledge or skill gaps. There also do not seem to be tools missing, which could hinder employees from performing their work, causing stress and frustration, which could disengage them, as also noted by Elliot and Corey (2018).

With the **second investigative question**, the author set out to uncover the employee engagement factors, that do not function well, as perceived by the employees. These factors are communication and information flow, feedback, onboarding, and team activities. Although team activities are not explicitly mentioned in the literature as engagement factor, the author included this theme, as it was requested by the commissioning company. Moreover, team activities can contribute to an employee's wellbeing, in the light of fusion of work and leisure time, as described by Elliott and Corey (2018), and perceptions related to the interpersonal relationship aspect of psychological safety, as described by Kahn (1990). One major area of concern with regard to employee engagement are the challenges with **communication and information flow** in the company. A wide spectrum of issues was reported by the employees. Challenges in communication were related to the amount and depth of content and, particularly during the time of change, perceived clarity, timeliness, and truthfulness. These issues are concerning, as they affect employee engagement negatively from various angles and they can countereffect some of the existing positive aspects that were mentioned earlier, for example, the trust gained from organizational support. Even in itself, poor internal communication is detrimental to employees' trust in the organization and the management team, leading to more mistrust and confusion, as described by Cowan (2014), and Elliott and Corey (2018). As has also been shown by Kahn (1990), and Elliott and Corey (2018), issues with communication negatively affect psychological safety and the employees' feeling to be able to voice their thoughts and opinions, and ultimately increase the risks in managers' decision making, as they may not get to hear crucial information from their employees. Improvements are also required when it comes to the information flow in the organization. While information, such as instructions, manuals, or legacy information, is theoretically available, some of it seems to exist in places with limited or restricted access, or in people's heads. A big part of the information, however, is reportedly unstructured and spread across platforms. This might create frustration and keep employees from wanting to engage with the material, or they may not have the time to look for the information they need.

The **feedback** situation in the company shows the kind shortcomings, that have a negative effect on employee engagement and performance according to Wigert and Mann (2017). There seems to be no common process for giving and receiving feedback in the

organization, and the frequency and content of the feedback given to the employees varies a lot. Managers may not be aware of the importance of good feedback discussions or they may not have the required knowledge or time to prepare and perform them. Another well-defined, standardized process that the company seems to be missing, is one for **onboarding**. All onboarding activities seem to rely heavily on the Managing Director alone, which is not the optimal case and can negatively affect the employee's chances for success in his/her new role. Being responsible for all onboarding, on top of his regular responsibilities, the Managing Director may not have sufficient time to invest into the new employee's development, which can result in a lack of support during this crucial first phase of the employment relationship. (Ellis & al. 2017) Apart from the non-existent onboarding process, employees also seem to take issue with the long time it takes to get access to the (external) SUSE and Micro Focus information bases, and once they can be accessed, information is difficult to find. This shows that the aforementioned challenges with information flow accompany employees from day one of their employment. Regarding **team activities**, employees wish for less excessive alcohol consumption, but more activities where a partner or spouse could participate in.

The aim of the **third investigative question** was to gain a general understanding of the management team's perception of the current employee engagement in the company. The management team believes that the employee engagement factors that function well in the organization overall are colleague support, communication and information flow, and feedback. Employee engagement factors, which the managers think that employees would like to see improved, are supervisory support (clarity of roles), training and development (skill improvement), (change) communication and information flow (ease of access to information, availability of time to engage with provided material), and onboarding (access to external information, structured onboarding process).

With the **fourth investigative question**, the author set out to identify differences between the management team's and employees' perceptions regarding the employee engagement factors. This is a comparison of the results for those engagement factors, that emerged in both interview groups. Managers and employees agree that there is sufficient **collegial support** available in the organization. Both groups also agree that improvements are needed for **onboarding**, namely, that a formalized process is needed and that new employees need faster access to external information. From what was described in the management team interviews, there seems to be the intention of having a two-phased process by some managers, but effectively, this is not visible or obvious to employees and other managers. There is some disagreement between managers and employees with regard to **communication and information flow**. Managers view the

communication in the organization as good overall, whereas employees think that the clarity, timeliness, and (perceived) truthfulness of information provided in communication needs improvement. The groups do, however, agree that change communication is an area that is far from being handled optimally. Especially the amount and depth of communication should be increased. Concerning information flow, that is, the availability of information needed to perform one's work, there also seems to be partial disagreement. Managers view the information flow situation overall positively, while acknowledging limitations in available access to the information. Employees, too, think that better and faster access should be provided. They do, however, attach greater importance to this issue than the management team seems to. Furthermore, employees take issue with the fact that the information, that *is* accessible, is spread widely across locations. The author believes that managers agree, even though they label the issue differently. The managers think employees do not have a sufficient amount of time available to engage with the material. Employees are satisfied with the available **supervisory support**. The managers, on the other hand, believe that employees may wish for more clarity of the role and responsibilities of each member of the management team. The employee interview results show a big variation in frequency and content of provided **feedback**, which, from theory point of view, present a problem for employee engagement (Wigert & Mann, 2017). While the managers think that employees may require a formalized feedback process, they believe that employees feel positively about the overall feedback situation. Looking at the employee engagement factor **training and development**, specifically with regard to employee knowledge and skills, there is absolute disagreement between the groups. Employees feel that they have the required knowledge and skills to perform their work, managers think that this may not be the case.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations for management actions in this chapter answer investigative question 5. These recommendations are given based on the research results to investigative question 2 and 4, and in the light of the theory presented in chapter 2.

To enhance employee engagement in the organization, the author recommends a focus on the main areas of concern from employee side to begin with and expand improvement efforts going forward. The main levers are communication and information flow, feedback, and onboarding.

The management team is advised to enhance **communication** via increased transparency, truthfulness, and improved timeliness. This will foster trust and, especially in difficult situations, reduce uncertainty in employees, and give the opportunity to find

solutions in collaboration with the employees. Important here is also to create a sense of “us”. Rumours develop fastest, when little or no facts are available. (Cowan 2014, Elliott & Corey 2018). The development of communication and change communication plans is recommended, to provide guidance and structure to the management team, and save time in the long run. In addition to the already existing, regular meetings, there could be, for instance, a short, weekly newsletter in form of an email with information, such as, organizational and team performance indicators, updates about previously discussed topics, and other news, like introduction of new employees. When it comes to important information, it is vital that these are repeated often and via different channels. In case of a change in information, and to keep mistrust and confusion at bay, the managers are advised to clearly point out *that* the previously given information has changed (Cowan 2014, Elliott & Corey 2018). The author also recommends that the management team offers additional context and reasons for the change. To complement the more frequent and transparent communication from management side, the employees should explicitly be encouraged to practice the same (Cowan 2014, Elliott & Corey 2018).

Offering recommendations for the improvement of **information flow** proves to be more difficult. The main challenges here concern the access and location of information provided by SUSE and Micro Focus, which the company has no influence on. The author recommends that the management team remains aware that employees are facing these issues, to keep an open ear to the employees’ concerns, offer empathy, and – wherever possible – support. This support could include involving other employees, who may have required answers or material stored locally. Moreover, the managers could reiterate that these problems exist, when communicating with persons responsible at SUSE and Micro Focus.

Regarding **feedback**, the development of a formalized feedback process, including feedback forms for development discussions is recommended. The feedback process should involve dialogues between managers and their employees, that are ongoing and personalized in nature (Wigert & Mann 2017). Moreover, the author recommends the implementation of the five-step feedback process as described by Carbonara (2013), in situations involving disengaged or underperforming employees. To support the efforts in improving the feedback situation in the company, managers could be offered trainings to further develop their feedback-giving and -receiving skills (Wigert & Mann 2017).

The company is also advised to develop a process for **onboarding**. To be effective, this process should begin with relevant activities already during the recruitment phase and focus on assisting the new team member with socialization and providing support (Ellis &

al. 2017; Stibitz 2015). During recruitment, the company could, for instance, already provide task-relevant, non-confidential information, such as, names of systems and programs that are used in the office, user instructions, and more detailed information about the company's products and services. The author further recommends including the suggestions made by Ellis & al. (2017), which are, to assign a peer buddy to the new team member and keep regular meetings to check-in with them and discuss expectations, roles and responsibilities. These check-in meetings should take place between the new employee and their manager. It is, however, important that other employees are also involved in the onboarding and that they understand their role and responsibility in this process (Stibitz 2015). During the meetings between the employee and manager, the manager could ask for feedback and improvement suggestions regarding the onboarding process so far. Looking at the challenges that new hires face with accessing external information, the author recommends that the company plans for a longer timeframe between the signing of an employment contract and the starting date of the new employee. This would provide more time for SUSE and Micro Focus to set up necessary user accounts and logins, and increase the likelihood of the new employee having access to the external information on their first day of work or at least soon thereafter.

The author further recommends that the managers stay aware of differences in their own and employees' perceptions, in general as well as described in chapter 5.1, and offer empathy for and show willingness to understand employees' concerns. Moreover, the managers should discuss the results of this research with the employees, communicate action steps based the recommendations, and follow up on the process and communicate the outcomes regularly. A final recommendation from the author: to reap best results, employee engagement should become part of the regular management discussions, with own set targets.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research could be done with regard to the development and successful implementation of (change) communication, feedback, and onboarding processes, and related checklists and guidelines to support managers with the procedures.

As employee engagement management needs to be an ongoing process, future research could and should examine further the employee engagement factors that showed no major issues in this research. Leader's engagement, which did not yield relevant results in this research, should also be included.

5.4 Reflection on Learning

During the entire thesis process, the author had ample learning opportunities. The author gained understanding of qualitative research and learned how to better evaluate the reliability of sources.

During the design process for this research, the author faced and overcame a noteworthy challenge concerning the visualization of the research process by applying a multi-layered design. During the preparation for and execution of the qualitative employee interviews, the author had the opportunity to practice and improve her professional communication and active listening skills.

Qualitative interviewing and especially coding of qualitative data were essentially new topics that required a significant amount of research. While coding the interview data of the management team, the author learned to cope with high levels of uncertainty. The required switching between different points of view, for example, the managers' perception of the relationship between employees and the managers' experienced relationship between employees, caused concern that information may be misinterpreted by the author. This was solved with the help of clear definitions of concepts and constant visual reminders each question's objective.

The author furthermore learned to better balance the depth of the information available and what would be of relevance to the reader. The use of scholarly language posed a sizeable challenge to the author during the writing process. Even though the author has become more proficient in producing written content, there is enough room for further improvement.

The author identified and became familiar with a new tool, which is designed to be used for creating mind maps. The author used this tool to visualize and structure data from interviews in form of coding trees.

References

- Aaltonen, K. 13 April 2018. Managing Director. Finceptum Oy. E-mail.
- Aaltonen, K. 19 April 2018. Managing Director. Finceptum Oy. Interview. Espoo.
- Aaltonen, K. 24 May 2018. Managing Director. Finceptum Oy. E-mail.
- Aaltonen, K. 25 May 2018. Managing Director. Finceptum Oy. E-mail.
- Albrecht, S. 2010. Employee Engagement: 10 Key Questions for Research and Practice. In Albrecht, S. Handbook of Employee Engagement: Perspectives, Issues, Research and Practice, pp. 3-19. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Arnold, J., Randall, R., Silvester, J., Patterson, F., Robertson I. & Cooper, C. 2010. Work Psychology: Understanding Human Behaviour in the Workplace. Fifth edition. Pearson Education Limited. Harlow.
- Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K. & Fletcher, L. 2017. The Meaning, Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement: A Narrative Synthesis. International Journal of Management Reviews, 19, pp. 31-53.
- Bauer, T. 2010. Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success. SHRM Foundation's Effective Practice Guidelines Series. URL: <https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Onboarding%20New%20Employees.pdf>. Accessed: 14 November 2019.
- Borman, W. & Motowidlo, S. 1993. Expanding the Criterion Domain to Include Elements of Contextual Performance. In Schmitt, N. & Borman, W., Personnel Selection in Organizations, pp. 71-98. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. 2011. Business Research Methods. Third edition. Oxford University Press. New York.
- Carbonara, S. 2013. Manager's Guide to Employee Engagement. McGraw-Hill. Madison.
- Cowan, D. 2014. Strategic Internal Communication: How to Build Employee Engagement and Performance. Kogan Page Limited. London.
- Dweck, C. 2006. Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. Random House. New York. E-book.
- Elliot, G. & Corey, D. 2018. Build it: The Rebel Playbook for World-Class Employee Engagement. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Ellis, A., Nifadkar, S., Bauer, T. & Erdogan, B. Your New Hires Won't Succeed Unless You Onboard Them Properly. Hiring. URL: <https://hbr.org/2017/06/your-new-hires-wont-succeed-unless-you-onboard-them-properly>. Accessed: 19 November 2019.
- Gallup, Inc. 2013. State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide. URL: <http://www.gallup.com/services/178517/state-global-workplace.aspx>. Accessed: 26 May 2018.
- Gallup, Inc. 2019. Gallup's Perspective on: Building a High-Development Culture Through Your Employee Engagement Strategy. URL:

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/267512/development-culture-engagement-paper-2019.aspx?utm_source=Perspective_Paper&utm_medium=Landing_Page&utm_campaign=Employee_Engagement_11_4_2019_Modal_Copy&utm_content=Download_CTA_1## URL##. Accessed: 7 November 2019.

Gummesson, E. 2000. *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. 2nd ed. Sage Publications, Inc. Thousand Oaks.

Harding, J. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish*. SAGE Publications Ltd. London.

Harter, J., Schmidt F. & Hayes, T. 2002. Business-Unit-Level Relationship Between Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, and Business Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 2, pp. 268-279.

Kahn, W. 1990. Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33, 4, pp. 692-724.

Maslach, C. Schaufeli, W. & Leiter, M. 2001. Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, pp. 397-422.

Myers, M. 2009. *Qualitative Research in Business & Management*. SAGE Publications Ltd. London.

Neves, P. & Eisenberger, R. 2014. Perceived organizational support and risk taking. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 29, 2, pp. 187-205.

Rich, B., Lepine, J. & Crawford, E. 2010. Job Engagement: Antecedents and Effects on Job Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53, 3, 617-635.

Richard, P., Devinney, T., Yip, G. & Johnson, G. 2009. Measuring Organizational Performance: Towards Methodological Best Practice. *Journal of Management*, 35, 3, pp. 718-804.

Salas, E. DiazGrandados, D., Klein, C., Burke, S., Stagl, K., Goodwin, G. & Halpin, S. 2008. Does Team Training Improve Team Performance? A Meta-Analysis. *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society*, 50, 6, pp. 903-933.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. 2007. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4th ed. Pearson Education Limited. Prentice Hall. London.

Schaufeli, W. 2014. What is Engagement? In Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. & Soane, E. *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice*, pp. 15-35. Routledge. Oxon.

Schaufeli, W. & Bakker, A. 2004. UWES Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: Preliminary Manual Version 1.1. URL: <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/tests/>. Accessed: 15 October 2018.

Schaufeli, W. Salanova, M., González-Romá, V. & Bakker, A. 2002. The Measurement of Engagement and Burnout: A Two Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, pp. 71-92.

Shuck, B. 2011. Four Emerging Perspectives of Employee Engagement: An Integrative Literature Review. *Human Resource Development Review*, 10, 3, pp. 304-328.

Shuck, B. & Wollard, K. 2010. Employee Engagement and HRD: A Seminal Review of the Foundations. *Human Resources Development Review*, 9, 1, pp. 89-110.

Stibitz, S. 2015. How to Get a New Employee Up to Speed. URL: <https://hbr.org/2015/05/how-to-get-a-new-employee-up-to-speed>. Accessed: 23 May 2020.

Wigert, B. & Mann, A. 2017. How Managers Can Excel by Really Coaching Their Employees. URL: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236237/managers-excel-really-coaching-employees.aspx>. Accessed: 27 April 2020.

Wollard, K. & Shuck, B. 2011. Antecedents to Employee Engagement: A Structured Review of the Literature. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 13, 4, pp. 429-446.

Attachments

Attachment 1. Participant information sheet

Dear participant,

I am a 33-year-old International Business student with a background in B2B project management and recruitment, currently majoring in Human Resource Management for Global Business at Haaga-Helia UAS. As part of my thesis, I will conduct a study on employee engagement at Finceptum Oy.

To give you a general idea of the concept, one definition of employee engagement is “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (Shuck & Wollard 2010, 103).

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of how you perceive the working environment in your organization, and to ultimately provide the management team with improvement suggestions.

Your participation in this study involves – depending on your location - a face-to-face or GoToMeeting interview, which will last for approximately one hour. All employees and members of the management team will be interviewed. The interviews will be conducted by me, audio-taped and later transcribed for the sole purpose of data analysis.

Confidentiality:

I will interview each of you separately and delete the recordings once I have analysed them. You are of course free to choose not to answer questions during the interview. All gathered information will remain confidential and anonymous during the entire process. Only myself and my thesis advisor will have access to the information, however, no names or any identifying details will be connected to this information. The results of this study will be published in form of a thesis. No names and any other identifying details will be revealed in the final results of this study.

Benefits:

The anticipated benefits for you are the opportunity to discuss your perceptions and concerns related to your working environment and contribute to the decision-making related to your workplace.

Topics that will be discussed during the interview include for instance teams, leadership, autonomy, support, communication, feedback, and training and development.

I am looking forward to meeting all of you. In the meanwhile, if you have any questions, please contact me at daniela.untersteiner@myy.haaga-helia.fi.

Kind regards,

Daniela Untersteiner

Attachment 2. Interview Framework 1 (IF1)

Management questions	Anticipated responses
1. What were the biggest organizational challenges in the last year? How did you tackle them?	Background information and possible topics to focus on (e.g., communication)
2. How did you communicate these challenges and their management to the employees?	Communication
3. How do you think your employees feel about working here?	All themes
4. How would you describe your relationship with the employees you are managing directly?	Supervisory support, communication, feedback
5. How would you describe the relationship between the employees?	Supervisory support, colleague support, communication
6. Would you say your employees have everything that is necessary to perform efficiently? For example, tools, time, information, skills, autonomy, feedback?	All themes
7. Which opportunities to give and receive feedback do the employees have? How often do you try to give and receive feedback?	Feedback
8. In your opinion, what might be things your employees would like to see improved/changed at Finceptum? Why/how exactly?	All themes

Attachment 3. Interview Framework 2 (IF2)

Employee questions	Anticipated responses
1. How would you describe your work environment?	Autonomy, colleague support, supervisory support, organizational support
2. When you think of your workplace and work, what has changed for you during the last 6-12 months of working here?	Non-theme specific, opening to following questions; possibly change communication
3. During this time of change, did you notice any particular actions taken by the management to address the matter? How were these changes managed in your opinion? For example, did you get enough information and on time, did you get all answers you would have liked to have?	Communication, supervisory support
4. What are the best aspects of working for this company?	All themes
5. What do you find challenging about working here?	All themes
6. What would you like to see improved or changed at Finceptum? Why and how?	All themes

Themes	Sub- / follow-up questions (to guide towards theme)
Perception of personal strength and ability	When you run into a challenging situation at work, what do you do? (can also lead to theme supervisory/colleague support)
Leader's work engagement	How would you describe your direct supervisor? Would you say s/he is a good example, why/why not? (also theme supervisory support)
Colleague support	How would you describe your colleagues?
Supervisory support	If you could advise your manager on how to manage your team more efficiently – what would you say?
Perceived organizational support	Do you feel that your company values you and your opinions? (Difficulties finding a direct question here. Supervisor support is one of the antecedents of perceived org. support → can I make that link?)
Communication	How do you feel about the communication and information flow in the organization?
Communication Autonomy Feedback Training and development	Do you feel that you have everything you need for doing your work the best way possible? Tools, time, information, skills, autonomy, feedback (Could also lead to answers “missing information” (theme communication) or “have to wait for decision” (themes communication and/or autonomy))