Enhancing Middle Management's Competencies on Employee Engagement in a Diverse Workplace

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Abstract

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This study is based on one of Human Resources functions and that is to focus on employee engagement. The goal is to study specifically on middle management's engagement competencies, strategies and also practices. The hospitality industry is selected, for a big range of number of employees and the international aspect of the studies.

This thesis includes theories, models, practices and elements of employee engagement, skillsets for middle managers and general understanding on diversity in a workplace. Semi-structured interviews are conducted for the data collection. Five individual interviews are conducted in total. The interviews took place via Zoom meetings. The interview framework is based on the theories and also relating back to the investigative question. Based on the collected data, thematic analysis is used to retrieve and categorize similar data chunks.

Honesty and transparency were analysed to be the key elements to successful engagement, which are not only the responsibility of middle managers but should be practiced on all management levels. When being motivated and goal-oriented, creating an appreciating and engaging atmosphere will help the middle management to practice engagement. Excellent communications skills are also essential for a successful engagement strategy, as analysed from the interviews. Therefore, the theory of managerial communication and the need and ways of overcoming it as a barrier are also discussed.

As a result of the study, strong leadership skills based on emotional intelligence and with excellent managerial communication, based on strong interpersonal communication skills and circumventing communication barriers, these skills are a good base for successful employee engagement. Rewarding is one possibility to enhance motivation of employees. Enhanced creativity, innovation, productivity and flexibility are some of the advantages of a diverse workplace. These workplaces may employ people with different attributes, e.g. age or any form of disabilities. An inclusive mindset must exist already when hiring them.

Keywords
middle management, employee engagement, leadership, managerial competencies, managerial communications, emotional intelligence, and diversity.

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1 Introduction

This thesis is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business specialisation in Human Resources Management at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. In this chapter, the author is presenting an overview of the content of the thesis, such as background, research question, demarcation, motivation for developing employee engagement, thesis benefits and key concepts.

In this study, the author is researching the importance of middle management's competencies to enhance or develop engagement with team members at the workplace. Additionally, the author also analyses more skillsets needed for middle management to ensure a healthy working environment by combining managerial communications and leadership as some of the essential factors to effective employee engagement.

The role of middle management is nowadays quite different from what it used to be. Multinational workforce, generational differences, and managerial communications are common afflictions that force middle management to develop new methods or solutions to overcome certain situations. (Gjerde & Alvesson 2020, 125-127). In this research, essential competencies for middle management will be pointed out, which are also recommended for new managers.

1.1 Background

In Deloitte's 2017 Global Human Capital Trends report, organisational culture, employee brand proposition, employee engagement, and employee experience remained top priorities for companies, with eighty per cent of executives rating employee experience as "very important", or "important". However, only twenty-two per cent of executives reported that their companies had differentiated employee experiences that were 'excellent', with fifty-nine per cent reporting that their companies were not ready to address the employee experience challenge. (Deloitte 2017.)

Additionally, according to a Harvard study, organisational culture can tightly predict customer satisfaction and company profitability (Harvard Business Review 2015). The importance of engagement is crucial for achieving a healthy and motivating working environment. At this moment, businesses of all sizes and companies face challenges with the pandemic. It is a needed strategy for management to maintain their team spirit and motivation to have the same productivity as before the pandemic. As times and the needs

of employees and businesses have changed, it needs innovation to tackle the communications that lead to a better engagement.

Many new companies are established now, and many medium-sized companies have grown in the last decades. Companies still actively try to polish their employees' management skills to achieve great results. One of the recent trends for managers is to prioritise work and home balance mindset. (Collamer 2021). **Engagement** is one of the best tools for managers to know and measure if their team needs support in their well-being. Now more than ever, with the pandemic situation, managers need to be creative in their engagement, handling challenges and maintaining good managerial ethics toward their team members. (Krol & Greenwood 2020.)

The crucial role of middle management can be both a direct and indirect link. The role of middle management is vital in implementing and delivering performance appraisals, smoothing the path to training, communicating, and demonstrating the equality of opportunity. A positive feeling of being valued and involved is linked to positive views about many aspects of working life. (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday 2004, 21.) Therefore, being the driver of many policies and having must-have skillsets are crucial.

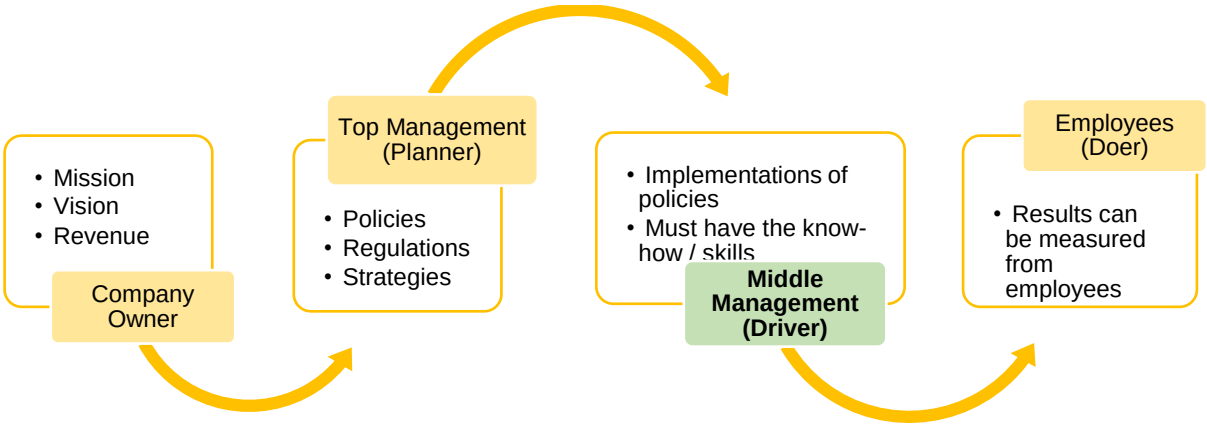

Figure 1. Middle management in a business entity

Further explanations to Figure 1., employee engagement is seen as positive and desirable, with high engagement levels. High scores on an engagement survey are expected to be associated with higher levels of employee well-being, increased proactivity, increased creativity and innovation, higher productivity, and better bottom-line results. (Albrecht 2010, 7). Engaged employees commonly perform well, and the level of productivity will reach its peak when executed adequately. (Baldoni 2013). Because of their essential role as "drivers" in an organisation, as shown in Figure 1, it is crucial to

have competent and qualified middle management and train them in their communications skills to build trust and respect and make the workplace a healthy working environment.

Middle management also plays a vital role in keeping policies and regulations; they can see the effectiveness of said policies. Delegating these processes can be a challenge if the middle management does not have the right skills to perform them. It is also crucial for middle management to have HR Managers' skills, especially engagement. (Jaser 2021). Therefore, this thesis will investigate developing engagement competence and communication in a multicultural working environment for middle management.

1.2 Research question

This thesis aims to understand the skillsets of competencies as in the investigative questions suitable for middle management's communications approach, leading to better employee engagement. The research question for this study is **what are the essential competencies needed among middle managers for inclusive employee engagement**. The thesis investigated the research question through five investigative questions listed below.

IQ 1: What are the factors that influence employee engagement?
IQ 2: What are the managerial communications practices used for employee engagement?
IQ 3: What are middle management's engagement tools and practices in a diverse workplace?
IQ 4: What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?
IQ 5: Recommendations to improve middle management's level of engagement

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	**Theoretical Framework**	**Research methods**	**Results (chapter)**
IQ 1: What are the factors that influence **employee engagement**?	Dimensions of employee engagement and Engagement bridge	Qualitative interviews and thematic analysis.	4.1
IQ 2: What are the **managerial communications** practices	Managerial communications	See above.	4.2

used for employee engagement?			
IQ 3: What are middle management's engagement **tools and practices** in a **diverse** workplace?	AMPLIFY and diversity management	See above.	4.3
IQ 4: What are the essential **leadership competencies** needed for successful engagement?	Leadership, motivations and core skills for middle management	See above.	4.4
IQ 5: Recommendations to improve middle management's level of engagement	Training for middle management towards employee engagement, Skillset needed for middle management	Comparative analysis of literature and interview outcomes.	4.5

1.3 Demarcation

This study focus on theories, models, practices, and evidence on middle management's skillsets for effective employee engagement. Moreover, the next stage is qualitative research, where interviews on the research question will be presented.

The countries where the interviewees are located are Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Brunei, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka. These countries are chosen because the chosen industry for this study is the hospitality industry. There are many international chained hotels in these countries. Big chains such as Hilton, Radisson, Marriot, Ritz-Carlton and Hyatt are most located in these countries. Each hotel property, especially the luxury brand hotels, has a wide range of employees. While a budget property can operate with as little as 0.25 employees per room, and a mid-range hotel requires 0.5 employees per room, large upscale chains often employ 1.5 to 2 people per room (Fleming 2019).

The interviews focus on middle management and elaborating their experience of engaging with their team members and top management. The nature of work in hospitality industry has an extensive range as hotels usually consist of many departments, hence many talents to attract and develop. Opportunities to progress one's career are very much possible, and middle management growth in hotels is most likely encouraged from time to time.

The interview participants are carefully chosen by their years of experience, how diverse the team that the interview participants managed and most importantly, the international experience of the interview participants.

1.4 Benefits

This study gives the possibility to learn to increase the effectiveness of employee engagement in organisations by developing these skills in middle management. Leaders can inspire and motivate employees through their leadership, and these processes can influence the experience of engagement just as they enhance performance. (Soane 2014, 150). The stakeholders who benefit from this thesis will be the middle management, top management, and employees aiming for a management position in their careers, as is presented below in Figure 2.,

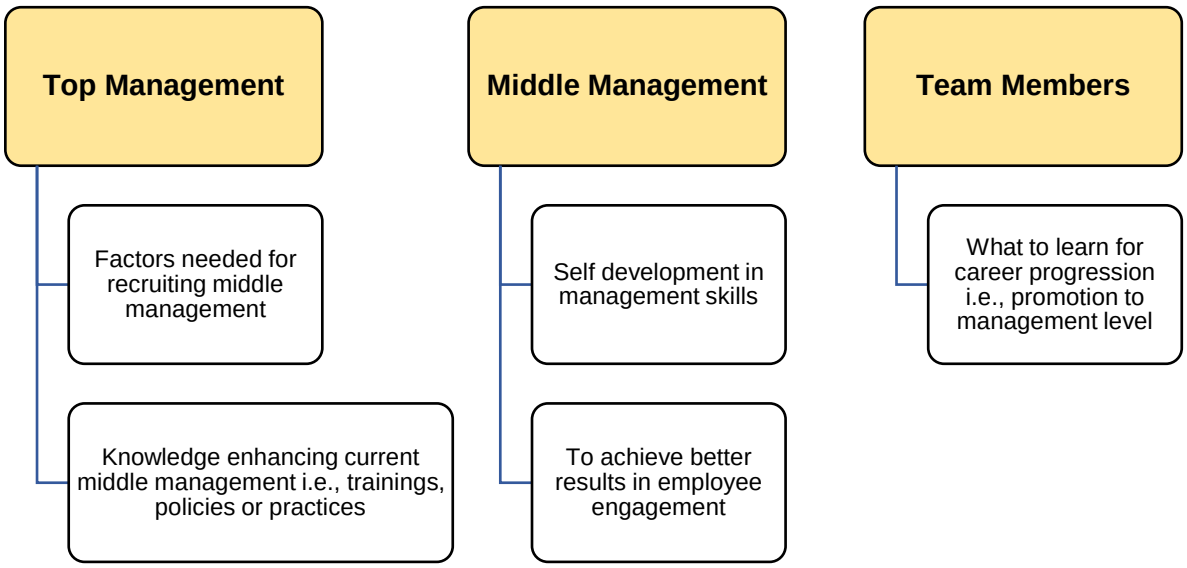

Figure 2. Visualisation of beneficieries

As for middle management, this thesis can be use for self-evaluation on their current skillsets that affect the effectiveness of their employee engagement. Middle management can assess their competencies and realise if they need new ideas or practices to implement with the team members. What has worked before might not work with the new generations or vice versa. Middle management can also gain some insights from the interviews conducted in this thesis for their comparison and discussion.

1.5 Key concepts

Employee engagement is a possible outcome of reward practices. Employee engagement means that the employees are engaged and committed to their work, and hence they want to perform well. Employee engagement can be built by good reward practices and torn apart by bad practices. (Armstrong 2012, 71-73).

Middle Management is the intermediate management level of a hierarchical organisation that is subordinate to the executive management and responsible for 'team leading' line managers or 'specialist' line managers. Middle management is indirectly (through line management) responsible for junior staff performance and productivity. (Dance 2019, 8-14).

Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organised group toward goal achievement. Leadership is a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (Summerfield 2014, 251-253).

Managerial communication is quite different from other types of communication due to the organizational framework in which it is performed. It represents how the manager sends the information to the organisation's members and business partners as well, and in turn, their feedback influences the manager’s decisions. (Alibec & Sirbu 2019).

Emotional intelligence refers to the capability of a person to manage and control their emotions and possess the ability to control the emotions of others as well. In other words, they can influence the emotions of other people also. (The Economic Times 2022).

2 A theoretical view of the key concepts

The idea of this chapter is to invite the reader to understand the thesis in the theoritical views further. The studies focus on employee engagement as the topic, middle management as the driver and overlooking the competencies to make employee engagement successful in the diverse workplace. Figure 3. explains how the author chose the key concepts for this study. Each key concept in Chapter 1.5 is related to the theories in this chapter.

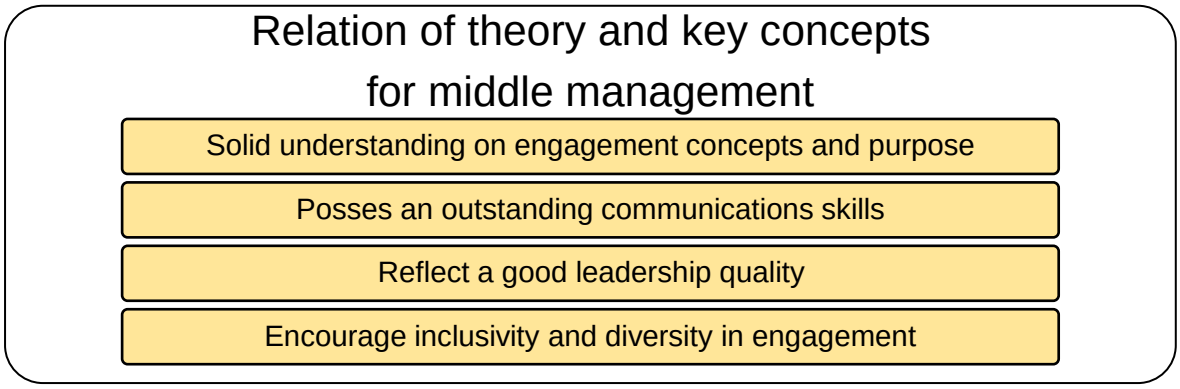

Figure 3. Relation of key concepts and theories

The relation of theory and key concepts for middle management is designed to cover employee engagement and practices, leadership skills that all middle managers must have, excellent managerial communication skills, and collective competencies for inclusivity in the workplace. The theories support the qualitative interviews and help to see a clear path when developing the outcome of the thesis. The approach will also consist of some critical views, and data collection will be from books, articles, journals, qualitative designed questions for the interview and some other legit research documents.

Motivation is usually the seed of setting a goal. Pervin (1989) noted that goal as a motivational construct has several advantages over solely focusing on needs or external reinforcers. When management is motivated, employees are easily inspired to be as well. Also, employees can benefit from this study to enhance/progress in their career, since it will be pointed out how essential communications and leadership skills are for engagement.

2.1 Employee engagement

Employee engagement is now an everyday language within organisations, yet there is still a huge discussion about what it means. (Bridger 2018, 11). The fundamental of company growth has to start from within the company. Some significant problems in employee engagement can be seen as organisations fail to make the changes to the disengaging workplaces practices.

Company culture is a term, which describes how companies treat people and set the conditions they do their work. To improve company culture and allow people to practice engagement, companies do not need fancy initiatives around the edges; what is needed is some fundamental changes in how companies treat the people who work for them. Treating people better leads to better business results. It all starts from the inside of the company. (Elliot & Correy 2018, 6).

According to Elliot and Correy (2018, 6), understanding and believing in the organisation's direction is necessary. Companies must understand their purpose, mission and objectives. When employees are involved in making this goal achievable, employees will feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Companies also need to understand how every employee’s role affects and contributes to the organisation's mission, and lastly, companies genuinely want the organisation to succeed and feel shared success within the whole organisation. As a cnsequence, employees will often put the organisation's needs ahead of their own.

Some studies also focused on health and well-being perceptions and work-related attitudes. According to Bailey & al. (2015, 23), 35 studies relating to the general workforce and 12 concerning health care met the quality. The most consistent finding was a positive association between engagement and life satisfaction; four studies examined this link, and two used complex methods. The engagement was also consistently negatively associated with burnout in five studies.

Thirty-one studies examined the link between engagement and work-related attitude; the most consistent finding was that engagement was positively associated with organisational commitment and job satisfaction in ten studies. Twenty studies found engagement to be negatively associated with turnover intentions.

2.1.1 Dimensions of employee engagements

In his research titled "Psychological COnditions of Personal Engagement and Disangagement" published in 1990, the theorist of employee engagement William Kahn came to the result, that individuals not only can bring varying levels of themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally to their work, but that those levels affected their experiences of work and therefore their performance. Sinclair (2020) suggests that within his work, Kahn identified three principal dimensions of employee engagement - physical, cognitive, and emotional. These are defined as follows:

Physical engagement - This relates to the extent to which employees expend their efforts, both physical and mental, as they go about their jobs. Kahn used examples of employees describing themselves as 'flying around' during their work and experiencing high levels of personal engagement. He linked the ability to expend physical and mental energy at work with increased feelings of confidence.

Cognitive engagement - To be engaged at this level, employees need to know what their employer's vision and strategies are and what performance they need to deliver to contribute to them as much as possible. Kahn also drew attention to the meaning of people being attached to their work, theorising that more knowledge encouraged more creativity and confident decision making.

Emotional engagement is based on employees' dynamic relationship with their employer. A positive relationship will require the organisation to learn how to create a sense of belonging at work, encouraging employees to trust and buy into the values and mission of the company. Kahn cited positive interpersonal relations, group dynamics, and management styles as practices that would make people feel safe and trusted.

In his work, Khan related three psychological conditions (feeling safe, meaningfulness, and having the right energy and resources) to the three dimensions of engagement (physical, cognitive and emotional). In essence, Kahn believed that engaging people across all three dimensions would help them feel secure in their roles, feel that their efforts were worth it, and believe they would be supported in their physical and mental efforts. (Sinclair 2020.)

2.1.2 Engagement bridge and the elements

Elliot & Corey (2018) have developed one way to visualise the elements of successful employee engagement. The engagement bridge, which is the result of their research, is used in this thesis as the basic model for presenting important factors of employee engagement. Figure 4. is the visual representation of the rocks and beams that act as the bridge's pillars

Figure 4. Elliot & Corey's Employee Engagement Bridge (Elliot & Corey 2018, 7).

The Engagement Bridge is a model to help leaders think about how their organisation influences the people who work for them. According to Elliot & Corey (2018, 7), the model took ten years to develop and through their work with more than 2,000 companies worldwide, it can be used to implement an employee engagement plan that works. The goal is to help an organisation to create conditions that will allow its employees to engage with their jobs and organisation.

According to Elliot & Corey (2018, 7), it can be described as follows,

> "Imagine a bridge crossing over a running stream. Leaders need to get their team over the water, and the elements on the bridge are like beams of wood to help leaders do this. Leaders can bridge the stream with anyone beam, but with only one, leaders may not get many people across at once, and it is wobbly and unsafe. Add a second, and things get better; add a third or a fourth and now we are getting somewhere. nevertheless, the stream banks are muddy and slippery, and the foundation needs a decent base, or beams can slide in and be washed away. That is where the underpinning elements come in - by acting as rocks. These rocks give leaders a stable base to build on. Without them, it is hard even to get started. Leaders will fail if they try to build a bridge with rocks alone. Moreover, if leaders

> build a bridge with too few wood beams, it will not last, either. All of the pieces are valuable, and together they create a solid and enduring structure. Each element is essential or urgent depending on each organisation, context, and situation".

The critical factor in understanding how employee engagement works is knowing, that the process is a journey. Organisations must be creative in trying out possibilities that fit into their work environment in their company. The outcome of employee engagement can be seen as a whole in company culture, attitudes towards employee's work-life and keeping in mind that there will be failures in the process. The process will never be perfect; however, when the companies try to implement employee engagement, it is already a road to success, not just for the management but for the whole company.

2.2 Middle management

As hierarchies within companies become more fluid and virtual, middle managers will increasingly become channels for relationships, influence, and connection. For companies to be successful in coming out of the pandemic, they need to recognise the complex and multifaceted roles of middle managers, visionary, inspirational leaders and courageous, engaged followers. Their ability to perform both upward and downward roles effectively require them to develop very sophisticated and humane skills to bring together the layers of the organisation. (Harvard Business Review, 2021).

The middle management consists of the frontline managers in a company. Based on the instructions of the top management levels, they will have to **guide and lead** their employees towards predefined goals and policies, as well as new implementations according to the executives' decisions. They often have to do this without direct support from their superiors. Therefore, the middle management applies and understands the feasibility of immediate leadership actions and analyses and often has to solve on the fly problems when they arise.

When dealing with day-to-day operations, middle managers are also heavily involved in many policies with team members, and one of them will be employee engagement. These engagements focus on the well-being of employees, enhancing a better working environment and normalising active feedback from team members. On the other hand, managers and supervisors also deal with unwanted matters such as conflicts. Therefore, middle management must be equipped with the right skillset to ensure employee engagements are appropriately done and follow up with the right action plans.

2.2.1 Core skills for middle management

Today's middle managers are "leaders in the middle." As such, they must be actively involved in unleashing the diverse talents of individual team members to create, improve, pursue and reach the unifying vision of the organisation. Middle managers are uniquely suited to these responsibilities because they comprise the organisation's chief reservoir of core capability (Flyod & Wooldridge 1994.)

A survey and interviews were made by Scott Mautz, who was named a "CEO Though-Leader" by The Chief Executives and a "Top 50 Leadership Innovator" by Inc. co. The survey and interview targeted 1,000 other-oriented leaders from the middle. As he asked these leaders to look back and describe their job, a clear theme emerged, and the word ***Amplify*** was repeatedly mentioned (Mautz 2021, 49).

> ‘’You're not a mere conduit between everything and everyone up, down, and across. You make things that need to be heard, heard. You make things clearer and more powerful—like an amplifier. You bring the micro to the macro. You bring a quality to what people hear by sharing your perspective and framing it properly. You amplify the strengths of your employees and peers by investing heavily in them, amplify senior leadership's vision, mission, and strategies (making sure they connect to the team's daily work), amplify the team's effectiveness and output, and amplify the entire organisation's capabilities and results. You share and amplify the truth, data, and different perspectives, in all directions’’. (Mautz 2021, 49.)

Table 2. The acronym of AMPLIFY represents the core skills required for middle management (adapted from Mautz 2021, 50)

AMPLIFY	Meaning
Adaptability	Flexibility to attend and rectify the chaos from the top and bottom
Meshing	Foster collaboration, reconcile conflicting and bring opposing forces together
Political savviness	Understanding the underlying context, issues and personalities, not manipulating
Locking in	Alertness to the core "hidden" elements of your environment that require special attention
Influencing	Skills in persuasive communication, influencing in meeting and spotting & breaking patterns

Fostering compromise	Encourage compromise between parties
You setting the tone	The perfect driver to set the tone for the entire organisation

2.2.2 Mirroring AMPLIFY for middle management

Chapter 2.1.5 talks briefly about core skillsets for middle management. We understood what it meant to ***Amplify*** in the daily life of middle management. However, we will be elaborating the theme into understandable attributes for middle management

The dynamic of the work environment for middle managers can be challenging. With the expectation from both directions (top management and team members), middle managers must master the ability to adapt. "Adaptability" as the first character in Amplify simply means flexibility. Flexibility is a skill that may take time to understand because, to be equally honest, flexible and strict at the same time, managers need to know who are the people that they are dealing with in the first place. In this case, it goes both directions. However, three types of flexibility can help managers to master the art of adaptability (Mautz 2021, 50), as shown in Figure 5.

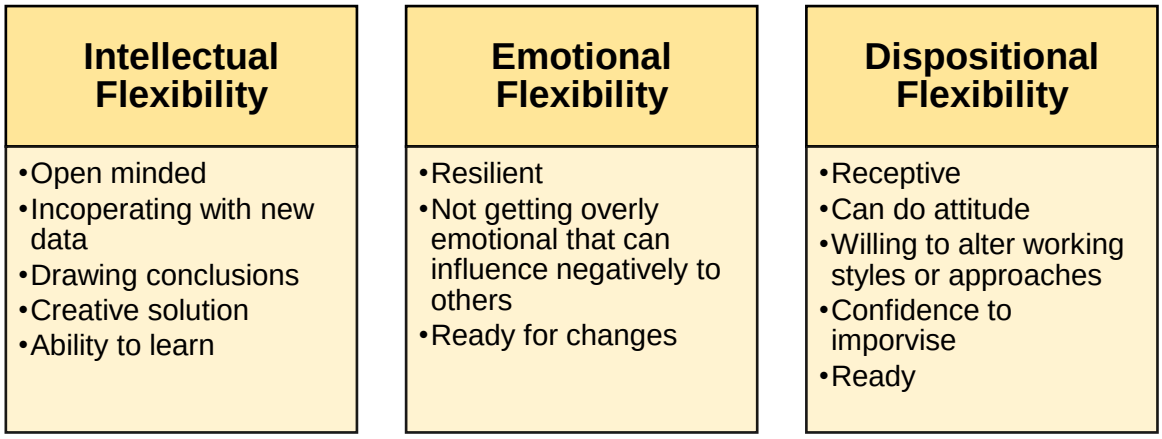

Figure 5. Types of flexibilities from Amplify model (Mautz 2021, 50).

The second characteristic that was mentioned in Amplify was "Meshing". It is a manager's ability to foster a collaborative spirit between peers and team members. It also touches on reconciling **conflicts** and changing priorities and viewpoints to get the opposing forces to come together as one. These specific skills need much prior work to understand how it works. Mautz (2021) suggests that managers must build trust to collaborate in the future.

Managers also must consider collaboration tools in order-making collaboration happen in the company. However, managers also need to assess the **readiness and goals** of the collaboration firsthand. It is also good to encourage innovation from team members and top management during this stage. Involving everyone will make the collaboration easier because everyone understands the "bigger picture". (Mautz 2021, 53.)

The third characteristic of Amplify is "Political Savviness", which means understanding, not manipulation. Understanding the underlying context, issues, and personality traits are crucial. The best part about being in the middle is that middle managers will have an overview of the different levels in the organisation. In this position, managers and supervisors would be the best to understand the work environment, company cultures and the tone set from whichever direction. (Mautz 2021, 55).

The letter L in Amplify refers to "Locking In". Since middle managers have the best overview of an organisation, it is necessary to alert the environment's core "hidden" elements that require special attention. To understand this concept a little bit more in detail, we must understand the 4 C's, which is included in this concept (Mautz 2021, 57-63) shown in Figure 6.,

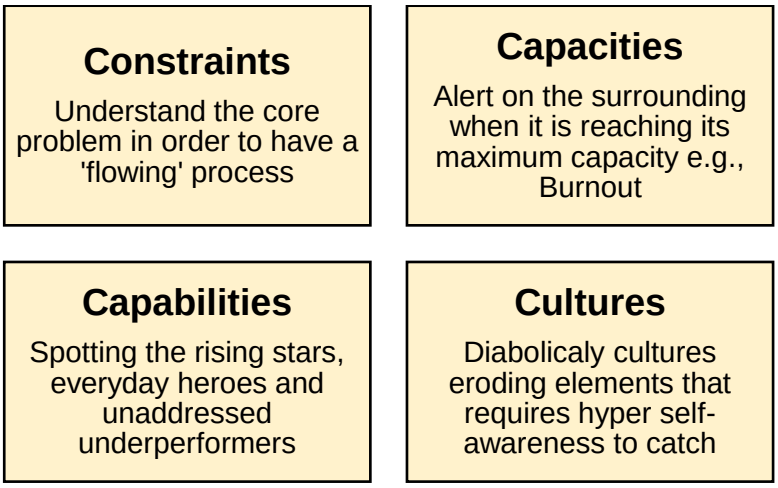

Figure 6. The 4 C's for "Locking In" in AMPLIFY (Mautz 2021, 8)

The next attribute discussed in AMPLIFY is "Influences". Influence covers skills in persuasive communication, influencing in meetings and spotting & breaking patterns. Research from Cornell and Stanford Universities shows that we dramatically underestimate our ability to influence up, down, and across an organisation (Bohns & Flynn 2013). When it comes right down to it, leadership is influence.

To understand this concept, managers need to maximise their influence by focusing on things they can control, e.g., what managers say, how they behave, and make decisions. Managers also need to foster a welcoming attitude for others to promote trust and the desire to connect. Middle management must know when to spell out the cost of not doing something, leveraging social proofs, and using reciprocity—giving something to others first, so they feel compelled to give back. (Mautz 2021, 63-69).

The letter F in AMPLIFY represents "Fostering Compromise". As direct as it sounds, managers must have the skills to deploy the compromise factors between parties. First and foremost, managers must establish common bonds. In a negotiation study between MBA students at two business schools, some groups were told, "Time is money. Get straight down to business." Fifty-five per cent of this group struck an agreement. The other groups were told, "Before you begin negotiating, exchange some personal information with each other and identify a similarity you share in common." Ninety per cent in this group agreed (with outcomes worth on average 18 per cent more to both parties) (Cialdini 2017, min 8:27-8:58.) The study showed the power of two sides establishing common bonds before trying to reach a compromise.

Another vital component to remember when it comes to compromising is to help both sides to understand the law of concessions. Establish this law upfront to ensure that both sides start in good faith. The idea is to create a cooperative framework versus a combative one. In so doing, you're asking all involved to keep an open mind. (Mautz 2021, 69-70).

Lastly, the Y in AMPLIFY is "You set the tone". According to Mautz (2021), no one sets the tone of an entire organisation more than those who lead from the middle, and there are so many ways to set the tone on so many things. As mentioned earlier, the advantage of being in the middle and middle management is having a complete overview of the organisation. By setting the tone from this level, everyone is watching from all sides, and managers need to remember that whatever is conveyed from the middle can stick in the minds of those around for longer than expected.

Having the most important tone of all can be a burden for middle managers; however, trust and transparency must be in place primarily when relying on information and know-how to share it, be transparent about a decision or be open and honest about setbacks. This can help team members and top management to understand the problem and turn it into a solvable challenge (Mautz 2021, 70-71).

2.3 Factors of successful employee engagement

Encouraging middle management to focus on employee engagement can be a big challenge in companies. Understanding the components may take years of experience and mentoring in this particular skill. Nevertheless, middle management will also open up to many possibilities of learning a new way of solving a problem. Opportunities to have better results in employee engagement can be implemented when the driver of the engagement has needed competencies. This subchapter will elaborate on such competencies.

2.3.1 Leadership

Modern leadership studies view leadership as a dynamic, subtle, nuanced process emerging from people's actions – leaders and followers alike – working together to achieve common goals in group and inter-group relationships. Some sources also point out the contrast between 'formal' and 'informal' leadership, with its connotations of authority and participation.

Leaders need **to analyse and read** situations and establish order and clarity in cases of ambiguity. Leadership demands a sense of purpose, and an ability to influence others, interpret situations, negotiate and express views, often in the face of opposition. (Gold et al., 2010, 6).

The reality of leadership is that many first-line managers and supervisors are appointed or promoted to their positions with some idea of their managerial or supervisory duties but less appreciation of leadership skills. Leadership development programmes prepare people for leadership roles and situations beyond their everyday experience.

The effectiveness of engagement takes effort in sharpening skills in communication and setting goals together as a team. From the author’s work experience, this is an opportunity for managers and supervisors to get comfortable with their teams in general. Leaders can learn how to improve their leadership skills while engaging with their team members. Additionally, asking for feedback on what can be improved is always good. However, the other

Emotional intelligence

Additionally to leadership, building emotional intelligence skills can also positively impact. According to Coleman (2015, 11), emotional intelligence is a group of five skills that enable the best leaders to maximise their own and followers’ performance. The five skills

are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Further definition and hallmarks of these components are explained in Table 3. below.

Emotional intelligence can also be identified as blending thinking and feeling to make an excellent innovative decision and build an authentic relationship. In addition to helping one become more aware of feelings, these skills can help build stronger relationships and succeed in social situations. (Cherry 2022.) Individually, we are born with specific emotional intelligence skills; however, these abilities can be strengthened through persistence, practice and feedback from colleagues, peers or coaches. Table 3. below explains the essential components of emotional intelligence at work:

Table 3. The five components of emotional intelligence at work (Coleman 2015, 15).

Components	Definition	Hallmarks
Self-awareness	The ability to recognise and understand your moods, emotions and drives as well as their effect on others	Self-confidence, realistic self-assessment and self-deprecating sense of humour
Self-regulation	The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods. The propensity to suspend judgement - to think before acting	Trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity and openness to change
Motivation	A passion for working for reasons that go beyond money or status. A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence	Strong drive to achieve, optimism even in the face of failure and organisational commitment
Empathy	The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. Skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions	Expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity and service to clients and customers
Social skill	Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. An ability to find common ground and build rapport	Effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness and expertise in building and leading teams

Emotional intelligence emphasises empowerment through the management of emotions, which appears to be a complementary tool to support effective leadership. A recent study by Udod, Hammond-Collins and Jenkins (2020) suggest that an empowering leadership

style aligns with a leader's self-management of emotions, social awareness, and a focus on relationship management. In addition, managers who perceived their top management to be self-aware in the decision-making process and manage interactions felt their work setting provided access to sources of structural empowerment (information, resources and support), which provided them with more autonomy in their work. (Udod & al. 2020, 6)

2.3.2 Managerial communications

Effective communication in management can help the firm to succeed. Communications begin not with the transmission but with understanding. (Barker 2019, 3). Both management and communication go hand in hand in every organisation. The ecosystem of both theories contains so much for managers and supervisors to learn and adopt. Referring to Bell & Martin (2017, 4), managers must know how to control conflict, allow others to express different views, be assertive, analyse situations and exchange information.

Interpersonal communication skills

Interpersonal communication is sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages between two or more people. It usually involves the exchange of simultaneous and mutual messages to share and negotiate to mean between those involved (Cardon 2018, 29.) Understanding interpersonal communication is an essential competence for managers and supervisors.

According to Cordon (2018), the essential components of interpersonal communication are divided into meaning, encoding, and decoding. Meaning refers to thoughts and feelings that people intend to communicate. Encoding refers to converting meaning into messages composed of words and non-verbal signals, and Decoding is interpreting messages from others into meaning. Below is the visual of the process of interpersonal communications (Figure 7.)

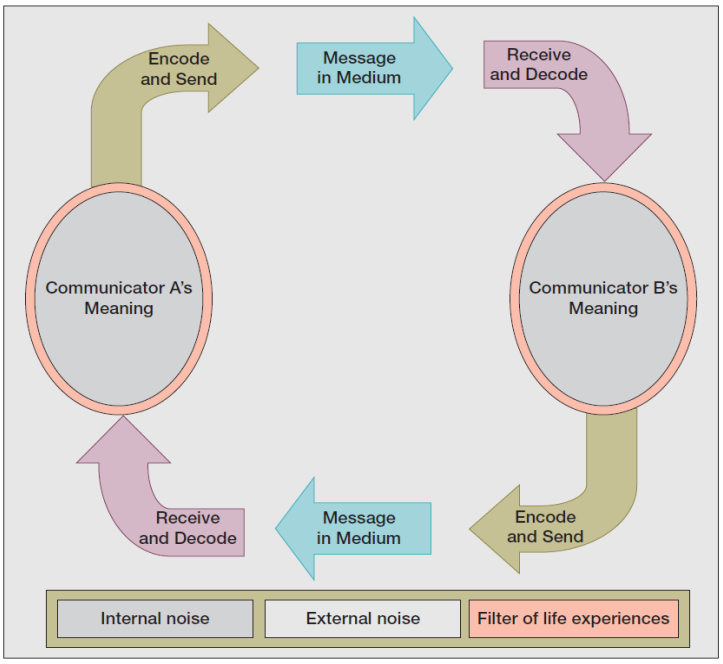

Figure 7. Process of interpersonal communications (Cordon 2018, 29).

From the managerial point of view, interpersonal communication involves creating relationships with stakeholders. Mehra (2017) suggests that interpersonal communication can go be divided into healthy and unhealthy functions.

Table 4. Consequences of interpersonal communications (adapted Mehra 2017, 55)

Healthy interpersonal relations serves	**Repercussions of unhealthy interpersonal relations can lead to**	
Promoting effective coordination between two or more people or groups	Low morale and lack of motivation	High turnover
Facilitating teamwork and collaboration	Unwillingness to put in extra effort	Poor productivity
Motivating individuals to put in extra work	Decreased loyalty	Groupthink
Creating a supportive working climate characterised by loyalty and trust	Increased absenteeism	Silo mentality

Communication barriers

There are times managers and supervisors have to overcome barriers in communication. Referring to Armstrong (2004, 51), words may sound or look precise, but they are not. Dr Radhika Kapur from the University of Delhi wrote an article on “Barriers to Effective Communication” and suggested that all sorts of barriers exist between the communicator and the receiver. However, these barriers can be categorised in seven types:

- Physical barriers
- Perceptual barriers
- Emotional barriers
- Cultural barriers
- Language barriers
- Gender barriers
- Interpersonal barriers

To overcome the communication barriers, managers and supervisors must understand where the problem comes from. The message needs to be tailored to fit the receiver's vocabulary, interests and values. One way to identify that the messdage is received as intended, one need to adjust oneself to the receiver's world by predicting the impact of what is written or said on the receiver's feelings and attitudes. By ensuring that the receiver understands the message, managers and supervisors also need to ask for feedback and see how much of the message is received.

Another effective way of communication is to prefer face-to-face communication. Talking in person rather than writing can have a different effect on certain people. With face-to-face communication, managers and supervisors can adjust or change the delivery of the message according to the reactions. Verbal criticism can also be given more constructive than written, sometimes harsher.

Managers and supervisors need to have the ability to present the message in many ways to get the meaning across: re-emphasise the crucial points and follow-up. Avoid using too much jargon, long words and elaborated sentences. It is easy to misunderstand when the message is too long and has much 'noise', making it hard for the receiver to decode it. Communications also need to be credible to be effective. When a person says they are going to do something, do it. Next time the person is more likely to be believed in their words. Lastly, managers and supervisors must encourage a reasonable degree of informality in communications. This works in both ways, personally and in group communications. Ensuring that activities are grouped to ease communications on mutual concerns. (Armstrong 2004, 34-37).

Furthermore, the skillset of effective listening is the basis of having successful communication between two or more parties. With active listening, managers and supervisors will have the opportunity to practice and experience what works for specific employees. Being said, middle managers must have the capacity to present themselves

according to the level or part of the company, e.g., towards the management team or team members.

2.3.3 Motivation strategies for middle management

Creating a motivating atmosphere at the workplace is vital. Motivation is crucial for team members; however, it is equally important for success as a manager. (Tanner 2021). A motive is a reason for doing something. Motivation is influenced by the strength and direction of behaviour and the factors that influence people to behave in specific ways. The term ‘motivation’ can refer to the goals individuals have, how individuals choose their goals and how others try to change their behaviour. (Armstrong 2012, 162.)

Middle management’s responsibilities in motivation are to enhance the encouragement and stimulate achievements. Managers and supervisors also need to support their team members to reach their goals and improve group performance. (Armstrong 2012, 170-171).

Motivation strategies aim to create a working environment and to develop policies and practices that will provide for higher levels of performance from employees. The methods include developing total reward systems and performance management processes designing intrinsically motivating jobs and leadership development programmes. (Armstrong 2012, 173.)

Summarised by Armstrong (2012), factors affecting motivation strategies can be investigated through the simplicity approaches. Managers and supervisors need to value the work environment and pay attention to recognition's basic needs.

> ‘’Extrinsic motivators such as incentive pay can have an immediate and powerful effect but will not necessarily last long. The intrinsic motivators, which are concerned with the ‘quality of working life (a phrase and movement which emerged from this concept), are likely to have a stronger and longer-term effect because they are inherent in individuals and the work they do and not imposed on outside in such forms as performance-related pay.’’ (Armstrong 2012).

It cannot be assumed that money motivates everyone in the same way. Nevertheless, it is also good to know that each individual's motivation works differently. Some individuals value the need for work that provides people with the means to achieve their goals; their skills and competencies should be recognised. Some may also look at the need to grow and develop their abilities in their careers.

Developing engagement policies through rewards

Rewarding motivation depends on how work or jobs are designed. Three characteristics have been distinguished by Lawler (1969) as being required in jobs if they are to be intrinsically motivating:

- **Feedback**: individuals must receive meaningful feedback about their performance, preferably by evaluating their performance and defining the feedback. This implies that they should ideally work on a complete product/process/service or a significant part of it that can be seen as a whole.
- **Use of abilities**: Individuals must perceive the job as requiring them to use abilities they value to perform the job effectively.
- **Self-control (autonomy)**: individuals must feel that they have a high degree of self-control over setting their own goals and defining the paths to these goals.

The intrinsic motivation strategy should include guidance and advice to those responsible for such developments. Nevertheless, the most significant impact on the design of work systems or jobs is made by ***middle managers*** daily. Therefore, the strategy should include arrangements as part of a leadership development programme to educate them on the importance of good work and job design and what they can do to improve intrinsic motivation. Performance management, emphasising agreement on role expectations, is a valuable means of doing this. (Armstrong 2010, 132.)

Reilly & Brown (2008, 37-49) suggest that there are six ways to enhance engagement through rewards:

- Analyse the existing performance culture of the organisation and develop an engagement model that describes what brings people to work, what keeps them with the organisation and what motivates them to perform whilst there.
- Define the drivers of engagement (and disengagement) for different categories of employees.
- Assess and define the reward elements that affect engagement for the different groups of employees and develop reward programmes to enhance these different aspects of engagement.
- Introduce a total rewards approach that brings together all the reward elements (pay and non-pay) that engage staff.
- Segment total reward to take account of key employee differences.
- Implement the total rewards approach and measure and evaluate its impact and success.

Middle managers also can see the possibilities of progression in their team. The progression can be in the form of efficiency in the day-to-day operations or just individual skills. When the team is making progress, team members must know if the improvement is going in the right direction. Managers and supervisors must have the ability to support

and have regular open feedback. Involving the team in decision-making can also help team members understand their work better and enhance their career development.

Team members who feel respected and appreciated are inherently more productive. Their ability to voice opinions makes them more likely to bounce ideas off each other, increasing creativity. When they feel valued and more like they are making a difference, they are more focused and motivated to accomplish projects (Malcolm 2021). When employees are happy with their work and work environment, productivity will increase

2.4 Diversity management

Diversity is considered a characteristic of groups that refers to demographic differences among members (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow 1995, 22). Similarly, Larkey (1996, 465-466) defines diversity as differences in perspectives resulting in potential behavioural differences among cultural groups and identity differences among group members with other groups. Companies need to focus on diversity and look for ways to become inclusive organisations because diversity can yield greater productivity and competitive advantages. (Mazur 2010, 5).

In 2015, a study from Deloitte University simplified that inclusive company cultures lead to 83% higher work engagement for millennials. One of the survey respondents mentioned that diversity means other's backgrounds based on their work experience, where others are born and raised and any unique factors that contribute to unique personality and behaviour. (Smith 2015, 7). Ethnically diverse companies perform better financially and are 35% more likely to outperform their respective national industry medians' financial returns. (Hunt, Layton & Prince 2015).

Diversity management includes attracting and retaining a diverse workforce and fostering an inclusive environment so that employees can work together toward organisational objectives regardless of their backgrounds. (Triana 2017, 324). Developing an organisational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion requires executives willing to set a vision and managers willing to accept the responsibility for placing initiatives into action. (Byrd & Scott 2018, 53).

2.4.1 What makes a workplace diverse

Diversity is defined as “the distribution of differences among the unit members concerning a common attribute X” (Harrison & Klein, 2007, p. 1200). Others have defined diversity as a group characteristic that reflects the degree to which there are objective or subjective differences among group members (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

Diversity can be natural, or the team members can perceive it. Diversity can be any difference between the group members on any given dimension. Examples of attributes on which teams can be diverse include sex, race, age, personality traits, attitudes, values, religion, skin colour, hair colour, education, sexual orientation, functional area, and organisational tenure, to name a few. (Triana 2017, 3.) It is often when the word ‘diversity’ arises; it links commonly to culture, gender, sexual orientation and nationalities; however, inclusivity at the workplace also includes generational diversity and disabled employees such as disabled employees, wheelchair user employees, and Deaf employees.

Generational diversity

The definition most commonly used for a “generation” is Kupperschmidt (2000, 66): ‘[A]n identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical developmental stages.’ In a nutshell, the idea is that individuals who were born at a similar point in time have shared similar experiences during their formative years and therefore have similar attitudes and preferences.

For the first time in modern history, there are **five generations** in the workforce. Each generation has distinct characteristics defined by birth years, important events, and diverse strengths and weaknesses.

- The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945; loyal but traditional)
- Baby boomers (1946 to 1964; collaborative but averse to change)
- Generation X (1965 to 1980; independent but bleak)
- Millennials (1981 to 2000; driven but entitled)
- Generation Z (2001 to 2020; progressive but disloyal). (Waldman 2021).

Middle management should not assume or judge too quickly based on employees’ age. According to Jain, (2020, 18-23), the problem is that age stereotypes go a step too far in assuming that every person has reacted to the milestones of their generation in the same ways. The best way to see generational differences is that there are values that middle managers can educate themselves on the realities that different generations have faced throughout their careers.

When it comes to communication, middle managers can set an example by helping their team members find ways to communicate clearly. One way to clarify communication barriers for generational differences is to talk openly about preferences, especially methods or means of communication and learning opportunities.

Regardless of the birth year, **job satisfaction** is crucial for all employees. An important factor when dealing with multigenerational employees is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each generation's different traits and personalities allow middle management to tailor their management skills or leadership strategies to fit into the needed frameworks. (Manganello 2021).

Managing employees with disabilities

According to Principle People (2022), disabled people have a lot to offer to employers, but they frequently face discrimination in the job market. However, almost 7 million people in Britain of working age are disabled or have a health condition; ignoring the skills, qualities and capabilities of this group of potential employees can mean missing out on some high-quality and dedicated staff members.

Globally, up to 190 million people over the age of 15 (3.8%) live with a significant disability. (WHO 2021). According to the UN (2021),

> Persons with disabilities are frequently not considered potential members of the workforce. Perception, fear, myth and prejudice continue to limit understanding and acceptance of disability in workplaces everywhere. Myths abound, including that persons with disabilities are unable to work and that accommodating a person with a disability in the workplace is expensive. Contrary to these notions, many companies have found that persons with disabilities are more than capable. This sheet provides anecdotal examples of the reasons given for not employing persons with disabilities, and the benefits to companies that have (UN 2021).

A critical factor to be implemented in the company culture before hiring employees with disabilities is the **inclusive mindset** of the company, precisely the acceptance mindset. Disabilities come in different forms, and middle management needs to conclude or act accordingly when support is required. Management, in general, needs to establish policy and action plans starting from recruitment, satisfaction from the work experience, and when leaving the company. Managers and supervisors must be trained in handling processes and flexibility toward employees with disabilities.

Middle management also needs to establish a respectful working environment. Middle managers need to discourage ableism (disability prejudice) language in any means of communication. It is essential to avoid these harmless yet corrosive labels and adjectives that we throw around every day without thinking, for example;

- Dumb, stupid, moron, idiot, slow, challenged
- Crazy, insane, out of your mind
- Lazy, clumsy, deaf as a post, blind as a bat (Pulrang, 2019).

Managers and supervisors can be role models for setting the tone for respectful and considerate communications. By understanding the ugly effects of ableist language or the forbidden word "retard'', middle management should always be aware of the working environment. The long-term impact of these offensive words will affect the working experience and productivity. (Pulrang, 2019).

When a company hires employees with disabilities, accessibilities have become the number one priority to include everyone. Incorporating accessibilities at the workplace goes further than just a particular parking space; the daily need in the workplace also needs to be taken into account. That also includes when companies are organising formal or informal events. Middle managers must ensure that accessibility also applies. Communicating is exceptionally vital to coordinate and support, such as coordinating the needs for transportation, seating arrangements, washrooms, and other standby aids if required. (Pulrang, 2019).

All parties must understand the readiness of managers and supervisors to offer assistance and support. It can be uncomfortable for employees with special needs to be asked every now and then if they need help; however, middle management must establish open communication, the bond of trust, transparency, and honesty to create a work environment where asking for help is not seen as bad. This also helps middle management develop their leadership skills and styles in handling inclusivity in the workplace. Managers and supervisors can be good role models for team members, which improves the working culture. (Pulrang, 2019).

2.4.2 Advantages of a diverse workplace

Diversity in a company invites new implementations and practices; however, these changes bring many benefits to organisations. Sexena (2014) suggests that an organisation's success and competitiveness depends upon its ability to embrace diversity.

Figure 8. shows some of the collective advantages of a diverse workplace. It is a representation of what benefits can be adapted from diversity.

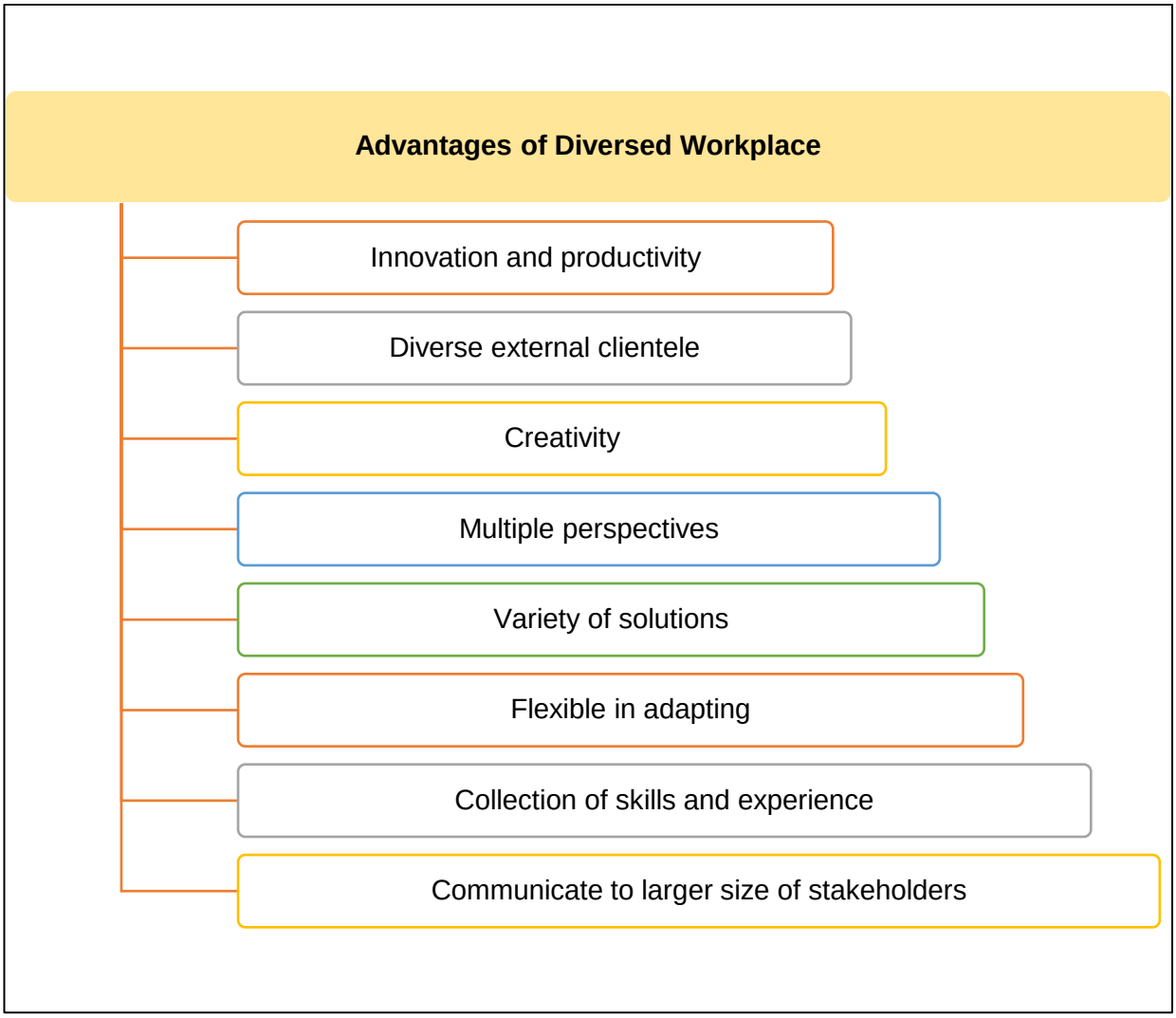

Figure 8. Reported benefits of a diverse workforce (adaptation from Saxena 2014, 83).

Innovation and productivity are positively affected when an organisation is stimulated diversely. The organisational culture will be improved and become a natural competitive advantage. Employees are suited better to the working environment and comfortable being who they are. A multicultural organisation will shape its mindset; therefore, it is natural to engage with diverse external stakeholders. This opportunity will only be available if the company has the right mindset and adapts the in-house implementations. The right mindset will allow the organisation to understand better the political, economic, social, environmental, and legality of foreign cultures.

Creativity in a diverse workplace is common, and it is one of the most valuable assets for an organisation. The broad range of professionals with many different backgrounds, languages, and cultures can be priceless in research-oriented industries. Using creativity as a base, naturally, the organisation will have a better option for problem-solving due to their multiple perspective and interpretations in dealing with complex issues. Diversity can also supply a better solution to problems in service, sourcing and allocating resources due to the pool of ideas.

In a fluctuating market and fast-paced customer demands area, diversity brings flexibility in adapting to the situation. The diversity of team members will increase the experience and skills in languages, cultural understanding, and innovative ideas and make the organisation serve their service globally. (Saxena 2014, 83).

3 Research method

Research method chosen for this study is qualitative research. The data is collected using series of semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. This chapter provides justification for the chosen methods.

3.1 Qualitative research

From the studies of the theoretical frameworks for middle management and engagement research suggest qualitative approach, this is further justified by research literature. Qualitative data are likely to be characterised by their richness and fullness, based on your opportunity to explore a subject in as realistic a manner as possible. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 546). On the other hand, qualitative data refer to all such primary and secondary data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 472), hence the preferred method is rather qualitative, to maximise the impact of the work experience and relation to the theoretical studies.

Additionally, the aim of qualitative research is to understand the social reality of individuals, group, and cultures as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it. Thus, the population are studied in their natural setting. (McLeod 2019.)

3.2 Data collection

For the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews are used as they are more flexible than structured interviews and more focused than unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews the author will have a list of themes and possibly some key question to be covered, although the use may vary from interview to interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 374). Due to the different time zone and availability of interview participants, the interviews were held through Zoom according to their available times.

The research is divided into the desktop study, interviews, and data analysis phases. The structure is designed, so it is easy to follow through and supports the validity and reliability of the research. Below is the visualisation of the research design for this thesis (Figure 9).

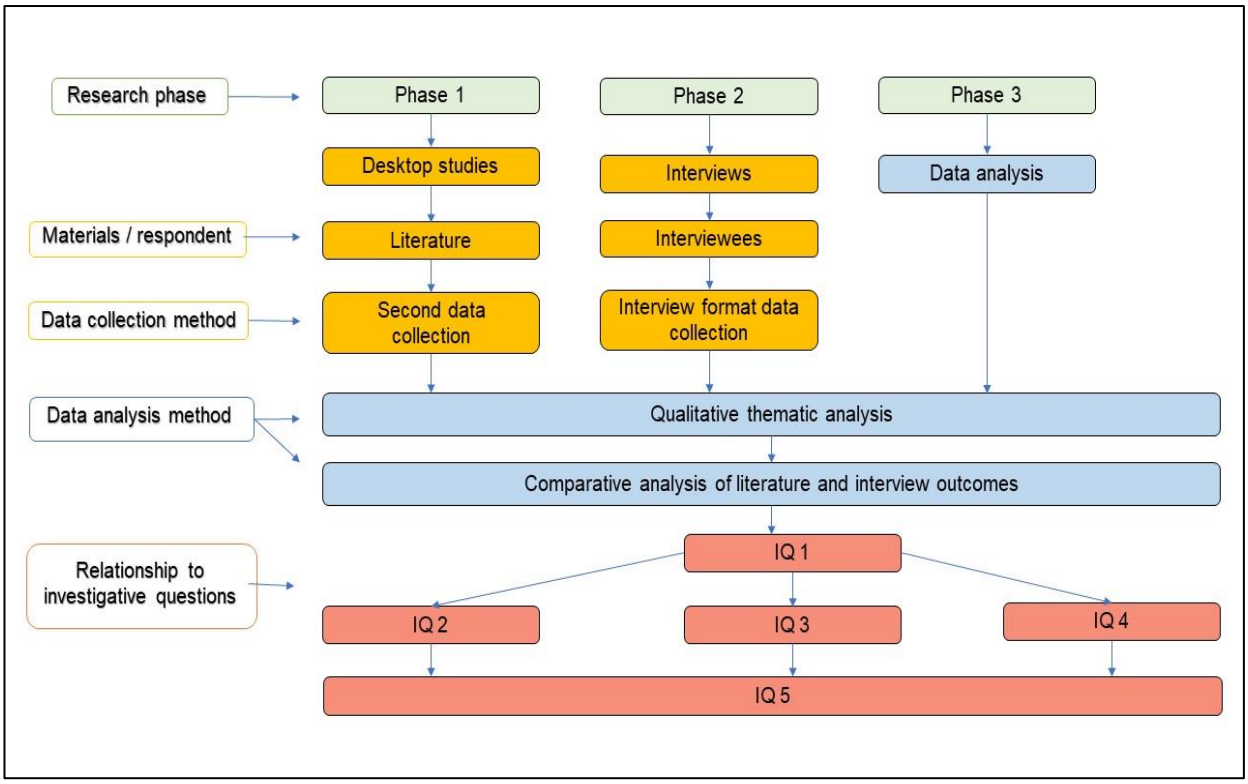

Figure 9. Research design

3.2.1 Process

Arranging the interview can be a tricky process as often those whom the researcher wishes to interview as part of a business and management research project are busy people with full diaries. It is important to specify clearly the time demands of the interview. (Cassell 2015.)

As for the preparation of the interview, a checklist consisting of the criteria mentioned in subchapter 3.2.2 are taken into account. To attract the focus group to participate in the interview, an unofficial approach is made and also to introduce the topic. This is to see if the participants are interested or not in the interview. Later on, an official interview invitation is sent via email to each participant together with the information of the duration of the interview, the recording and confidentiality matters and also the interview questions for the participants to look over before the actual interview session. Lastly, the invitation also includes participants to suggest time and date according to their time zones. With that information, Zoom meeting are set up as the interview session.

The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to understand participants' explanations and meanings. Attentive listening will involve the author attending to and being sensitive to the

participants by spending the time needed to listen to them to build a better understanding. Interviewers need to hold back your own thoughts where these would compete with those of the participants or stray from the theme being explored. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 393.)

3.2.2 Sample

Even if it were possible, it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in a community in order to get valid findings. In qualitative research, only a sample (that is, a subset) of a population is selected for any given study. The study's research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many people to select. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 258-261.)

Looking into the direction of the study, homogenous sampling is the suitable sampling techniques. Homogeneous sampling focuses on one subgroup in which all the sample members are similar, such as a particular occupation or level in an organisation's hierarchy. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 288).

The target group for this qualitative interview consists of individuals who had been in the position of middle management or are currently in middle management. The criteria will be defined more precisely when designing the questions. The interview participants are carefully chosed and the criteria are narrowed down to:

- Experienced as a middle manager for at least five years
- Managing more than 20 team members in their team
- This study aims at five interviews conducted to get variations of results from different working experiences

Other criteria for the interview participants are that the manager or supervisor has managed team members from various generations, backgrounds, and cultures. The hospitality industry and locations of interview candidates is explained in Chapter 1.3 Demarcation.

The interviewees' experience is used to investigate essential competencies needed among middle managers without any external influence from the earlier factors. Although the national working culture may vary, the study aims to find similarities in the answers of interview partners to point out the validity of certain aspects of existing theories. Interview participants' shared experiences and input will be discussed in Chapter 4. Findings.

The interview participants'' information is in Table 5. below describing from which country, they are from, their current position, size of their team and years of experience in the management team.

Table 5. Sample for the research

Interview Participants	Country	Industry	Hotel Property	Position	Team Size / Outlets Managed	Experience in Management
Interviewee A	Qatar	Hospitality	Hilton Salwa Beach & Villas	Resort Director of Culinary Operations	50-70 employees	19 years
Interviewee B	Brunei	Hospitality	The Empire Hotel & Country Club	Assistant F&B Manager	55 employees	13 years
Interviewee C	Indonesia	Hospitality	Platinum Hotel and Convention Hall	Executive Chef	35 employees	15 years
Interviewee D	India	Hospitality	The Oberoi Udaivilas	F&B Service Manager	48 employees	6.5 years
Interviewee E	Sri Lanka	Hospitality	Taj Bentota Resort & Spa	Housekeeping Manager	41 employees	9 years

3.2.3 Interview framework

Prior writing interview questions, it makes sense to revisit the thesis research question, investigative questions and affiliated literature, or any other empirical materials already collected. These sources can serve as a springboard for interviews – suggesting themes of interest to explore. (Tracy 2019.). The interview questions should be compared with the research problem several times, partly to see whether the questions are thorough and precise enough to allow the author find what is investigated (Ghauri, Grønhaug & Strange 2020). Interview framework used in this study is included as Appendix 2.

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis has been described as ‘the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of a qualitative project, and the one that receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature’ (Thorne 2000, 68-70). Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set. Given the flexibility of thematic analysis, researchers using this method must clearly outline their paradigmatic orientations and assumptions to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings and interpretations. (Kiger & Varpio 2020.)

In the early stage of the analysis, the recording of the interviews are reviewed for several times to familiarise and understand deeper on the collected data. The purpose on the familiarisation is to search for patterns as the codes of the thematic analysis matrix. (Brinkmann 2013, 95-109).

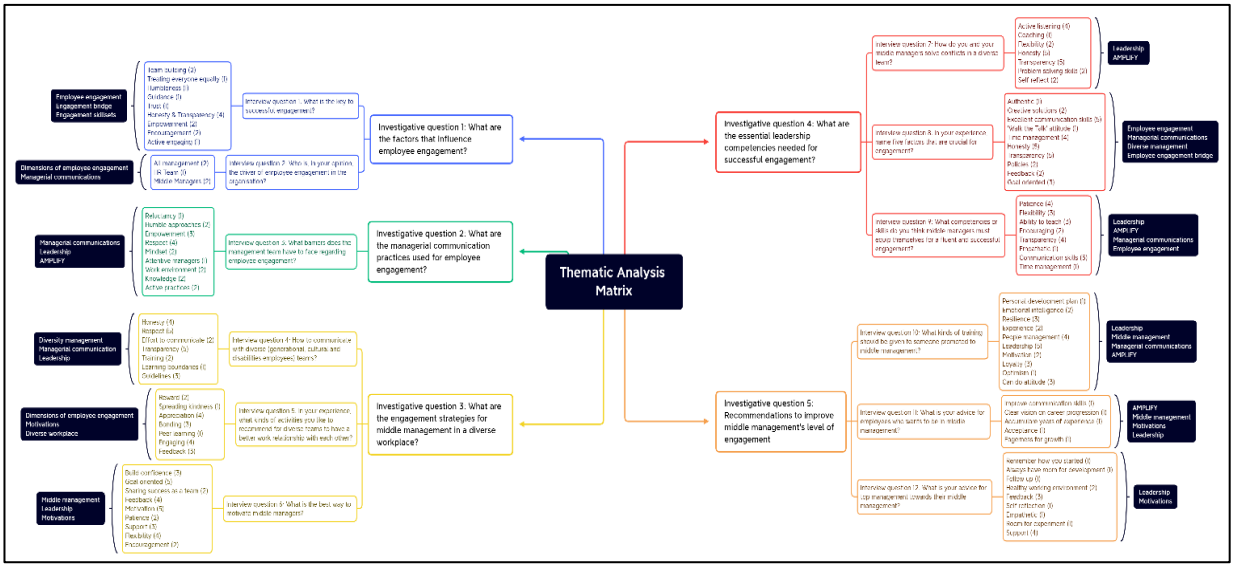

Figure 10. Thematic Analysis Matrix (also attached as attachment)

Codes are primarily, but not exclusively, used to retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so the researcher can quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme. Clustering and the display of condensed chunks then set the stage for further analysis and drawing conclusions. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014, 79.) Once the codes are in place, the whole matrix is reviewed and finalised. The results are presented in the fourth chapter.

3.4 Risks

Several factors can affect the research for this thesis. One of the risks considered is the agreement between the author and interview candidates for the qualitative interview part of the data collection. Although the interviews were scheduled in advance, there is still room for last-minute cancellations due to busy operations, failure in technologies, and allocating the interviewees suitable time to do the interview.

On the other hand, the topic for this thesis focuses on the competency of middle management; therefore, the availability of tools and resources may affect the research quality of this thesis. The materials provided by the school library are sufficient; however, the number of journals and articles to support these theories can be limited.

On a personal risk management analysis, proper time management for this thesis project is essential. The author must have the competence to conduct in-depth research from all the materials gathered. Therefore, motivation is critical to keep the workflow in place.

4 Research findings

The data are collected from the interview sessions held separately from each interview participants. Results are presented here according to the investigative questions. This chapter is concluded with summary of research findings, highlighting the similarities of the theory of AMPLIFY (Mautz 2021), and the interview outcomes.

4.1 Factors that influence employee engagement

The first investigative question is: What are the factors that influence employee engagement? To investigate further the IQ is divided into two interview question that are: “What is the key to successful engagement?” and “ Who is, in your opinion the driver of employee engagement in the organisation?” (Appendix 2.)

4.1.1 Interview result

Interviewee A emphasizes on treating everyone equally and recognising their valuable contribution to the team. Interviewee A also add: “humbleness of the management team will allow the work environment to have a strong foundation of team building; therefore, engaging with everyone will be much easier due to the existence of trust and togetherness”.

Interviewee B respond to these questions and points out that the proper guidance in communication, transparency and most importantly honesty. Interviewee B mentioned “A sense of trust in the workplace are the essential foundation of a strong team and successful employee engagement”. Interviewee C also sees that successful engagement is closely tied to how much you know your team. “Knowing their characteristics and reacting to criticism. This will help managers and supervisors to navigate the approach to engage”.

Interviewee D adds that “Empowerment is powerful tool. By empowering others, middle management are able to build a better working environment and creates possibilities that can benefit themselves in terms of progression in their career or benefit to the company for having more talents in creativity”. Interviewee E stressed the importance of making engagement as a vigorous habit. “A company should make engagement as normal as possible and not make it awkward to engage with peers and team members. It should be as organic as possible, and at the same time, respect and trust are crucial factors that can influence engaging in the organisation.”

4.1.2 Summary of result

Based on the thematic analysis the factors influencing employee engagement can be narrowed down to honesty and transparency. However, some other factors for example team building, empowerment and encouragement are also highlighted in the thematic analysis. Regarding the latter interview question, middle management and management in general are the drivers for employee engagement in the organisation.

4.2 Managerial communication practices used for employee engagement

The second investigative question is: What are the managerial communication practices used for employee engagement? To understand further what those practices are, the interview question is formulated to understand what their experience are handling different situations of engagement. The interview question is: “What barriers does the management team have to face regarding employee engagement?” (Appendix 2.)

4.2.1 Interview result

As for the practices, Interviewee A express that it is essential to have humble approaches when it comes to communication. Moreover, Interviewee A adds: “When you have a new hire, it is important to show that they are empowered to showcase their skills and abilities in their work. By building trust and getting to know your own team, it increases the advantage for having harmonise team and to take down the barriers with each other as well as leading to a can-do attitude in the workplace.” In addition to that, Interviewee B adds, that a sense of respect is crucial, especially when giving out information. “Communicating with respect is one of the vital aspects for middle managers to consider, especially in a diverse workplace.”

Interviewee C sees practices as a matter related to mindset and acknowledging the time to adjust. This shows that middle management attentiveness is crucial. Interviewee C said: “One of the approaches that I always practised is giving a one-to-one session. This method allows team members and middle management to converse about goals, expectations, and it is the best time to ask for feedback on how your own management’s leadership style is. Moreover, it is essential to instil comfort and trust in team members to approach their managers when guidance is needed.”

Interviewees D and E shares the same principles regarding managerial communication practices. Both presents that, that middle managers need to create a safe working environment, where matters can be discussed professionally or casually. However, they also point out, that it would be challenging if middle managers were unfamiliar with the team members. Interviewee E adds: “When you do not know the team members, it is hard even to start a conversation, let alone engage with work. Furthermore, find the middle ground and create small steps. Work your way slowly to earn the team’s trust and, at the same time, be comfortable to start engaging.”

4.2.2 Summary of result

Based on the thematic analysis, it became clear from the interview sessions that having a respectful working environment is the key to having successful engagement. When the workplace is safe, and everyone can reach one another, it makes middle manager’s job to approach their team members easier.

4.3 Engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace

The third investigative question is: “What are the engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace?”. To investigate further into this question, three interview questions are formulated. The interview questions are: “How to communicate with diverse teams?”, “What kinds of activities you like to recommend for diverse teams to have a better work relationship with each other?” and “What is the best way to motivate middle managers?”. (Appendix 2.)

4.3.1 Interview result

Interviewee A highlighted, that middle management needs to be trained to value their talent, rather than focusing differences when discussing engagement strategies. Interview A adds: “with culture, we learned innovations; with generational, we learned from mistakes and disabilities employees, we learned the will to develop. These factors can be shaped to a better solution and efficiency in daily operations. Especially for disabled employees, there are some boundaries that are not to be crossed; therefore, respect is vital to have in the working environment.”

When Interviewee A describe his management journey, he also adds: “It is more important to have certain traditions at work while on duty occasionally, you reward your team for just being who they are, recognise their effort at work, spreading kindness at all levels of the

team, and the most crucial part is, that team members feel that they are valued. Management sees them as valuable talents in their team. Making your team members feel genuinely happy and appreciated are essential.

Interviewee B describe understanding and learning from each other is the focal strategies in engagement. “Understanding the difference can take time, communicating with a diverse team can also elevate middle managers’ professional confidence. It is also best to verbally ask the team what is the best way to discuss a specific matters. Avoiding misunderstanding and the information is received at its best. Transparency is the key.” Furthermore, engaging outside of working hours is also an essential factor to consider. In a place, where families and friends are highly valued, knowing who they are and their families can enhance the working relationship with each other. At the same time, gaining trust and appreciating team members in these activities can easily be achieved.

In addition, Interviewee C emphasises providing training for middle management to engage with their team members. This allows fluency and enhances their communication skills. Interviewee C suggests using the leading by example method. “In our hotel property, the management team often brings their middle managers in contact with day-to-day and trains them for the job on a specific aspect of communications. One example of engagement activities mentioned in the interview was having quizzes related to job knowledge. This allows the management team to find opportunities to share knowledge with their team members and reward them.”

While discussing these questions, Interviewee D agrees that managerial communication training for middle managers is crucial. Interviewee D also adds: “Policy on communication should also be implemented. Even though diversity is the new normal now, it is always good to know when not to step on someone’s toes.” Learning boundaries can be a bit difficult because of generational and disabilities differences. Interviewee D also used the one-on-one method. “Engaging at this level is more personal, and it allows both parties to be vulnerable and learn about each other. Another important thing with this kind of engagement is to ask for feedback on one’s managerial style or approaches. This is a perfect time to learn about oneself from one’s teams.”

Lastly, Interviewee E highlights about cultural differences in a workplace. Similarly, to Interviewee D, Interviewee E have a strong opinion about guidelines and policies on respecting everyone in the organisations. Interviewee E add: “It may be common sense to most, but unfortunately, it cannot be assumed that everyone understands it the same way.

Cultural difference can create tension and friction in the working environment. Therefore, guidelines or policies should exist for appropriate behaviours in a diverse workplace."

4.3.2 Summary of result

Based on the thematic analysis there are several engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace. To summarise it, first and foremost it all starts with a respectful approach. Regardless on any matters, respect and honesty plays a big role in the day-to-day communication. As for activities, the most important attribute is appreciation. Any activities for a purpose of engaging with your own team is good, however the element of appreciating their contribution must be included. As for the motivation for middle managers, top management's role is crucial in giving middle managers the confidence to shape their own leadership style, encouraging feedback, sharing the success and also flexibility for middle managers to grow.

4.4 Essential leadership competencies needed for engagement

The fourth investigative question is: "What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?". To investigate this question, three interview questions are formulated. The first question is: "How do you and your middle managers solve conflicts in a diverse team?". Second question is: "In your experience, name 5 factors that are crucial for engagement?" and the third question is: "What competencies or skills do you think middle managers must equip themselves for a fluent and successful engagement?" (Appendix 2).

4.5 Interview result

Interview participants all agree that everyone can communicate; however, managers and supervisors must understand the two ways of communication to have it on an excellent level. Interviewee A adds: "All dimensions of communications are crucial, especially in engagement. Patience is most often looked over and it is essential in team communications." Interviewee B also adds that: "It is also essential for middle managers to know when and how to react to certain kinds of conflicts. Time management for taking actions and the impact can be different if its not taken at the right time."

Additionally, the ability to listen actively and critical thinking were also discussed heavily in all interview sessions. Interviewee C summarise: "The power of active listening and critical thinking often helps middle managers to draw conclusions easier and become useful too

for problem-solving skills." Combining the three questions together, interview participants also conclude on what they think some other competencies. Table 6. is the summary of the competencies added by the interview participants.

Table 6. Leadership competencies

Interviewee	Competencies			
A	Patience	Flexibility	Active listening	Managerial communication skills
B	Eagerness to learn	Team building skills	Excellent communication skills	Encouraging others
C	Ability to train	Eagerness for progression	Time management	Professionalism
D	Excellent communicatio n skills	Training and development skills	Problem solving skills	Ability to see the bigger picture
E	Focus and goal oriented	Open communication	Empathy	Transparency

4.5.1 Summary of result

Based on the thematic analysis when solving conflicts, it is important to be honest and be transparent with any team members who are involved. Middle managers also should bear in mind that problem solving skills and coaching are also needed when dealing with conflicts. When discussing on other leadership competencies, one interviewee also points out that it is important to "Walk-the-Talk", it matters how middle managers portray themselves to the team members. It is good if the middle managers are the ones who initiate and normalising active feedback, praising and to be empathetic towards others.

4.6 Summary of research findings

Putting the theory of AMPLIFY (as mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1), into the interview outcomes highlight many similarities on many levels. In this subchapter, the author will elaborate on those similarities and combine the theory and qualitative data collection into a summary.

During the interview, participants discuss about flexibility in their daily operations. It is one of the essential skills to master being in a middle management position. **Adapting** to new changes, policies, and practices takes time; therefore, patience was also conversed in some interview sessions. Adapting to pressure is also essential to acknowledge. Being in the middle management allows managers to explore opportunities, and top management must give middle managers space and room to experiment with those opportunities.

When fostering collaboration, reconciling conflict, or bringing opposing forces together, the interview candidates suggest, that transparency, honesty, and trust are essential prerequisites. These components are the essence what the interview participants use in their team building and bonding with each other. Of course, other skills such as active listening and the ability to conclude a solution are also critical. Having said that, **meshing** is also an essential competence to have for middle managers.

While middle managers are having the best seat to become an observer in the organisation, it is essential to understand the workplace's climate. Observe the working culture's condition and assess, if the work environment is good and healthy for your team. Interview participants express the importance of active feedback in their daily operations. Managers can have **political savviness** by having active alertness on what is going on, what can be improved and what can be celebrated in their work environment.

For the aspect of **Locking In**, middle managers also must be alert to the hidden elements in the workplace that require special attention. During the interview sessions, the participants discussed how these hidden elements could be overlooked and the consequences that come with them. These hidden elements can be in a range of many things; however, some examples were shared during the interviews. One example is when dealing with conflicts and discrepancies, managers and supervisors must understand all aspects before drawing a conclusion.

Another example shared during the interview session was, that managers and supervisors also must be alert of their team members' conditions. Without realising it, workplace conditions and workload can be too much for a team member and lead to burnout. Therefore, managers and supervisors must know when to act and make changes.

Another example of hidden element is to understand, that it is the management’s responsibility to address the rising stars and the everyday heroes in the organisation. It is an excellent opportunity for rewarding. However, management also should be offering

training for the underperformers. Sometimes there are toxic behaviours exhibited by middle managers as well. Not providing guidance or resources for team members should be avoided. Also, when giving recognition, middle managers should not just pay attention to the “tall sunflowers”. Giving recognition unevenly is just as toxic as not giving it at all.

During the interview sessions, influences were discussed in a lead to empowerment and respect. In the theory section, Chapter 2.2.2, while elaborating on **Influences** mentioned, that managers need to maximise their impact on the things they cannot control. Interview participants agrees on the matter and adds that it creates awareness for middle managers to think first before doing or saying anything. When leaders in the organisation have a healthy working culture, it is easy to foster trust and connect with each other. At the same time, it can enhance engagement in the organisation.

When working in a team, **fostering compromise** is crucial. Team building, bonding, peer learning, and openness to feedback are solutions discussed in the interview sessions. One interview participant highlighted that having an open mind and an attitude of acceptance makes compromising easier.

During all the interviews, the most talked about topic was, how management must have honesty and transparency as the most common values in the organisations. For the last letter in AMPLIFY, **You set the tone** that holds a high integrity value for middle managers. It starts with bonding, relaying information, respecting boundaries, and many more. It is easier to set the tone and achieve a set goal with honesty and transparency as a team.

Setting the tone also helps managers and supervisors to be solution-driven by focusing on what can be done or adjusted, to fix the problem instead of looking for who to blame. One interview participant discussed that when managers and supervisors set the tone, that tone should be positive, encouraging, leading by example and optimistic. Middle managers must be the ones who initiate creative problem-solving; therefore, a can-do attitude must be practised.

Some feedback shared by the interview participants during the interview session was, that the interview questions were interesting, and interview participants reflected on how they engage with their team members at their workplace. Participants expressed that engagement has become a normal activity in the workplace and that it is easy to overlook its importance. The interview sessions also ignite some interest in the interview participants to rework their leadership style strategies towards engaging skills.

5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research by presenting the study's key findings, answering the research question and also the author's reflection on learning.

5.1 Key findings

The main research question for this study is: **What are the essential competencies needed among middle management for inclusive employee engagement**. To answer the research question, the author refers to Chapter 1.5 (Benefits), where the author writes about the stakeholders who can gain from this research. Although the beneficiaries are divided into three parts, the perspective from each is shown in Figure.10.,

Team Members (**Acquire** - What to learn)	Middle Management (**Develop** - What to enhance)	Top Management (**Nurture** - What to give)
• Leadership can be learned • Earned what you give - Time, knowledge and trust • Acceptance and open-mindedness • Evolve for the better • Active feedback exchange	• Patience and humbleness • Master managerial communication skills • Honesty and transparency • Creative problem solving skills • Focus and goal oriented • Cultivate fairness • Ability to teach and train • Diversity management	• Coaching • Mentoring • Empowerment and support middle management • Share success with middle management • To be flexible with different kinds of leaderships

Figure 10. Acquiring, developing, and nurturing middle management's competencies.

In Figure 11. the first focus is on team members, and the author also refers to the group of fresh university graduates or future managers. From this perspective, leadership can be learned both, theoretically and practically. One of the essential pieces of input received from the interview outcome was that to lead, one must know how to follow. This also comes with effort and hard work. It is no surprise, that earning a managerial position requires much work, learning new skills, and earning back from what you give, especially with time, knowledge, and trust with peers.

Another crucial competency for team members, who wish to elevate themselves to middle management is to have an open-minded attitude and an mindset of acceptance. It is essential to evolve for the better and always have room for improvement. In this matter, team members need to keep themselves updated with new trends with processes, policies, and new technologies. Acquiring these competencies will elevate team members' understanding of the managerial position and engage them better in their workplace.

Middle management needs to develop patience and humility in every approach. Especially when managing in a diverse workplace, managers and supervisors must understand team members' different backgrounds and invite others to respect each other's boundaries. These attributes also come with honesty and transparency in their management style. When resolving conflict, middle management has to develop creative solutions but still be fair to every party.

Moreover, it is also essential for middle managers to normalise asking for feedback on their leadership style. Make no room for assumptions and know when to follow up. Invite team members to be involved in creating solutions, and at the same time, this can foster a good working relationship with each other. By appreciating creativity in their team members, middle managers can enhance the team to be more focused and goal oriented.

When engaging with team members, middle managers must also know, that sometimes, it only takes a few minutes to really appreciate one’s contribution to the team. In this case, actions do speak louder than words. This creates an opportunity to praise and reward. Appreciation, leading by example and trustworthiness can lead to delivering excellence in their daily working operations.

As for the top management, nurturing middle management’s competencies is not only middle management’s responsibility. Top management’s commitment to ensuring the middle management has all the support needed is crucial. This support come in many forms, such as coaching or mentoring these middle managers. Giving enough guidance can help middle management improve their managing style. Top management also must remember that leadership requires growth. By giving middle managers ample room and flexibility for growth, middle management can understand what areas need improvement.

5.2 Recommendations from the interview sessions

The last part of the interview was designed to ask for recommendations and advice from the interview participants. One of the questions was what kinds of training that should be given to someone, who got promoted to middle management. Interview participants shared their view on what was needed in their journey being in middle management and people management and leadership were the topics discussed most.

Interviewees A & C agrees on the same recommendations for enhancing engagement level. Always be authentic to yourself. Interviewee A adds: “Genuity is crucial. Always find

room for improvements through feedback from team members and peers. It is also a must to know, that there are always tailored solutions to different problems. There is no one solution-fits-all to every problem arise."

On the other hand, by having a personal development plan, middle managers will always focus on growing in their careers and seek opportunities to learn from their peers. It will lead to a better acceptance factor, and resilience is the key. Remember what motivates you to begin the management journey the first. Also, understand that emotional intelligence for motivation and mentoring is also essential.

To improve engagement, middle management must also possess decision-making skills. In addition to that, Interviewee B adds that: "The ability to prioritise is crucial and beneficial to both employees and the organisation. Find creative ways to enhance the quality of work relationships, employing motivation and keeping the engagement alive."

Interviewee C recommends that people management training and leadership training are essential for improving employee engagement. "In people management, you can understand communication, sense of motivation, and empathy towards team members. In leadership, you can see the expansion of responsibilities and handle them gracefully. When things get complicated, it does not mean it's impossible to do it. It takes time and training to achieve problem solving skills."

Interviewees D & E simplify the recommendations to enhance their skills from time to time. Most importantly, managers and supervisors need to practice honesty, transparency, optimism, and loyalty in their daily operations. Creatively finding new practices and tools was also recommended during the interviews. As the pandemic changed some working environments, there are many new ways to engage with team members. Interviewee E also mentioned that critical thinking skills and a can-do attitude are highly recommended to have a better level of engagement.

The following interview question was about the advice to be given to team members/employees, who want and wish to be in middle management one day.
All interview participants agree that team members must have a clear vision of their career progression. When they are focused on with their goals, they can motivate themselves. Improve communication skills, accumulate years of experience and eagerness for growth.

When asked for advises for top management advice, the interview participants mentioned that giving support to middle managers is essential. Additionally, interview participants also added that constructive feedback and following up always boosts middle management's confidence in being on the right track. Last but not least, the importance of room for development were also highlighted in the interviews. This is the essence of how top management should mentor or coach their middle management’s growth.

5.3 Reflection of learning

The entire process of writing this thesis has been fun and rewarding at the same time. There are times when it became challenging; however, being in the role of a researcher gives the author opportunities to explore a different level of academic aspects of the topic. Throughout the journey, there were several times, when the author was unsure about aspect like research questions, investigative questions, and the methodology of the thesis. Changes were made accordingly throughout the process and depending on what was suitable with the findings.

Having work experience, prior to studying helps in the critical thinking phase of the thesis. It also allows the author to narrow down what kind of direction in the Human Resources aspect the author wants to write about. It also helped the author to gather interview participants from the networking circle and colleagues, who used to work together in some hotel properties.

Writing the theory part of the thesis was exciting, and the author expanded her knowledge more when combining it with the interviews. There were also moments when the author was unsure what to do next; however, the continuous guidance and support given by the thesis advisor helped a lot to see the bigger picture of this study. Overall, it was a great experience learning more about the topic, discovering more concepts and motivating the author to complete the study during the time frame.

Additionally, this thesis will help the author understand the managerial communications between tiers of employees in an organisation more deeply. Therefore, these studies can help advance the author's career in Human Resources, specifically in the use of effective managerial communication and emotional intelligence and use this thesis as the first step in the academic career working towards doing a masters degree in Human Resources Management in the near future.

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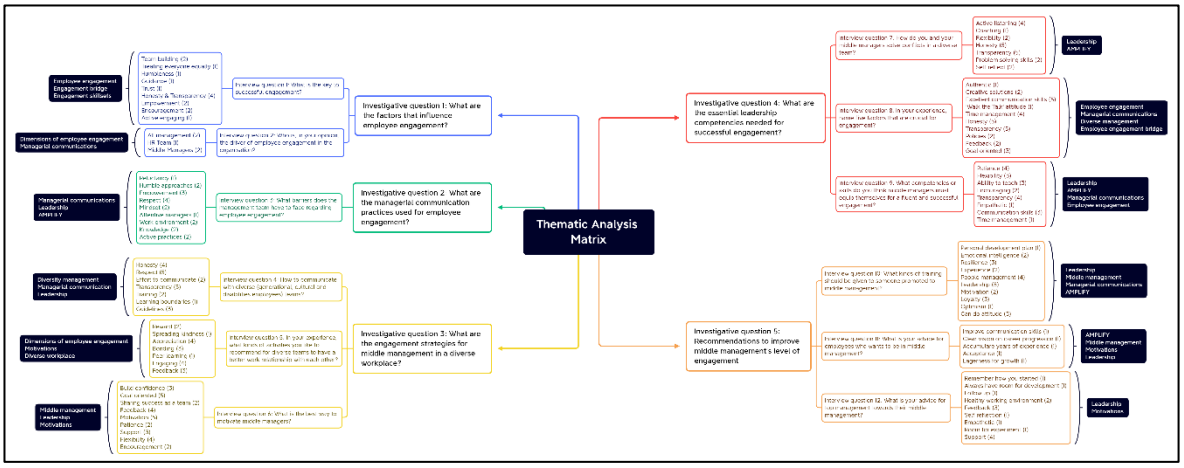
Appendices

Appendix 1. Thematic analysis matrix



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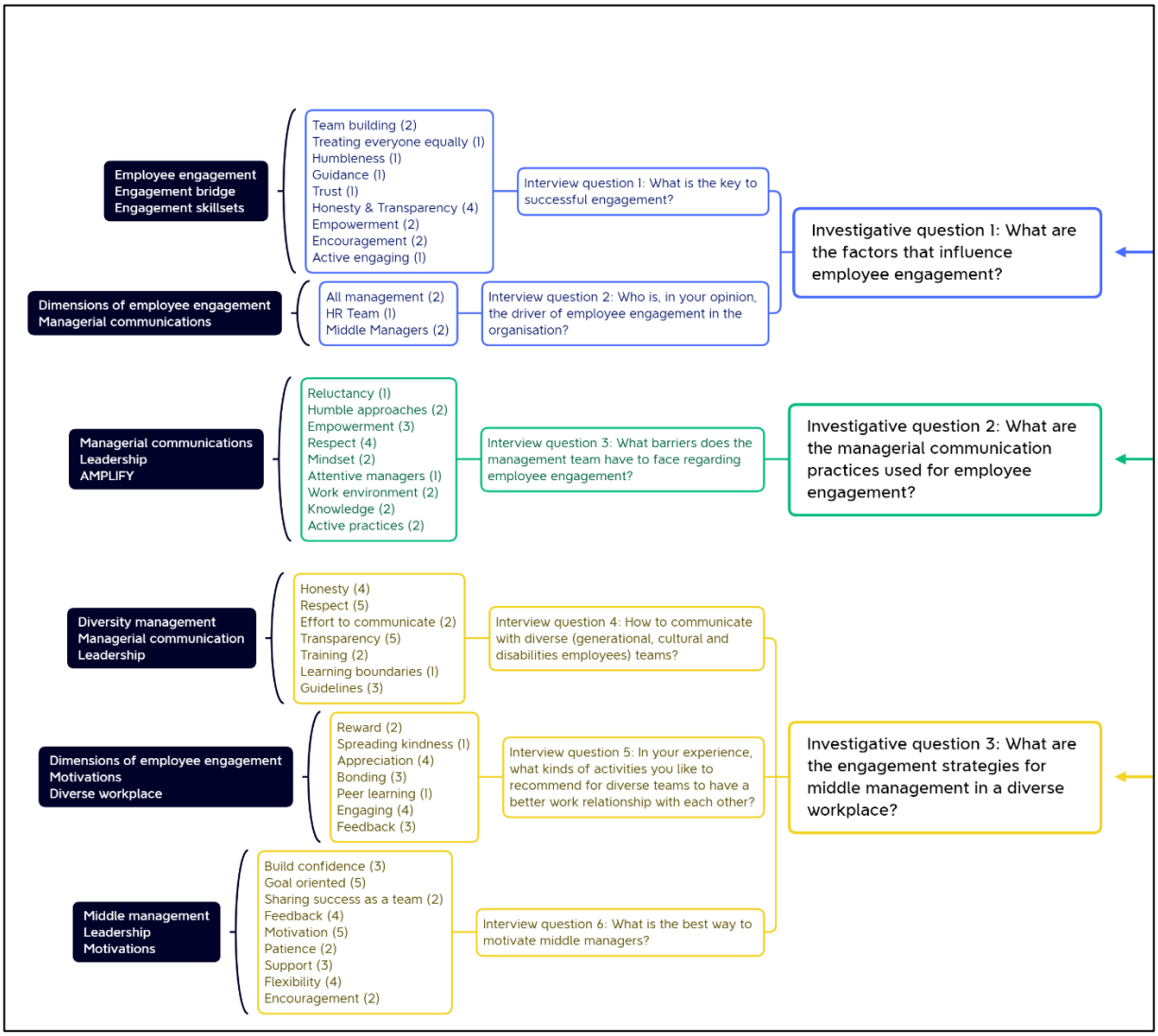

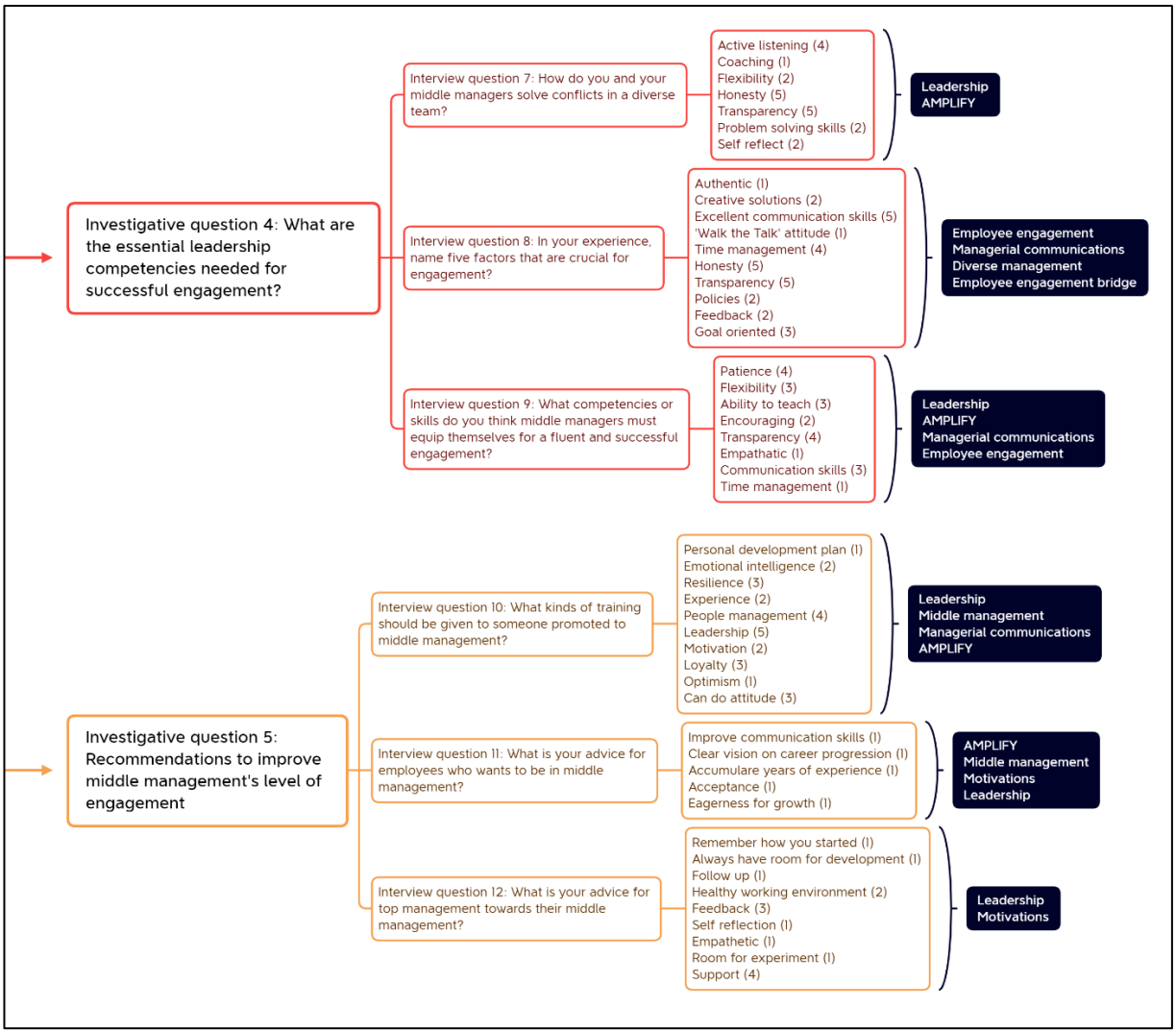
Investigative question 4: What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?
Interview question 7: How do you and your middle managers solve conflicts in a diverse team?
Active listening (4)
Coaching (1)
Flexibility (2)
Honesty (5)
Transparency (5)
Problem solving skills (2)
Self reflect (2)
Leadership
AMPLIFY
Interview question 8: In your experience, name five factors that are crucial for engagement?
Authentic (1)
Creative solutions (2)
Excellent communication skills (5)
'Walk the Talk' attitude (1)
Time management (4)
Honesty (5)
Transparency (5)
Policies (2)
Feedback (2)
Goal oriented (3)
Employee engagement
Managerial communications
Diverse management
Employee engagement bridge
Interview question 9: What competencies or skills do you think middle managers must equip themselves for a fluent and successful engagement?
Patience (4)
Flexibility (3)
Ability to teach (3)
Encouraging (2)
Transparency (4)
Empathatic (1)
Communication skills (3)
Time management (1)
Leadership
AMPLIFY
Managerial communications
Employee engagement
Investigative question 5: Recommendations to improve middle management's level of engagement
Interview question 10: What kinds of training should be given to someone promoted to middle management?
Personal development plan (1)
Emotional intelligence (2)
Resilience (3)
Experience (2)
People management (4)
Leadership (5)
Motivation (2)
Loyalty (3)
Optimism (1)
Can do attitude (3)
Leadership
Middle management
Managerial communications
AMPLIFY
Interview question 11: What is your advice for employees who wants to be in middle management?
Improve communication skills (1)
Clear vision on career progression (1)
Accumulare years of experience (1)
Acceptance (1)
Eagerness for growth (1)
AMPLIFY
Middle management
Motivations
Leadership
Interview question 12: What is your advice for top management towards their middle management?
Remember how you started (1)
Always have room for development (1)
Follow up (1)
Healthy working environment (2)
Feedback (3)
Self reflection (1)
Empathetic (1)
Room for experiment (1)
Support (4)
Leadership
Motivations

Appendix 2. Interview questions

Interview Questions	Investigative Question	Theory
Who is, in your opinion, the driver of employee engagement in the organisation?	IQ 1: What are the factors that influence employee engagement?	2.1 Employee Engagement & 2.2 Middle Management
What is the key to successful engagement?	IQ 1: What are the factors that influence employee engagement? IQ 2: What are the managerial communications practices use for employee engagement?	2.2.2 Mirroring AMPLIFY for Middle Management
What barriers does the management team have to face regarding employee engagement?	IQ 2: What are the managerial communications practices use for employee engagement?	2.3.1 Leadership & 2.3.2 Managerial Communications
How to communicate with diverse (generational, cultural and disabilities employees) teams?	IQ 3: What are the engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace?	2.3.2 Managerial Communications
In your experience, what kinds of activities you like to recommend for diverse teams to have a better work relationship with each other?	IQ 3: What are the engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace?	2.3.1 Leadership & 2.3.3 Motivation Strategies for Middle Management
How do you and your middle managers solve conflicts in a diverse team?	IQ 4: What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?	2.4 Diversity Management
In your experience, name five factors that are crucial for engagement?	IQ 1: What are the factors that influence employee engagement? IQ 4: What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?	2.1 Employee Engagament
What competencies or skills do you think middle managers must equip themselves for a fluent and successful engagement?	IQ 4: What are the essential leadership competencies needed for successful engagement?	2.2.1 Core Skills for Middle Management, 2.3.1 Leadership & 2.3.2 Managerial Communciations
What is the best way to motivate middle managers?	IQ 3: What are the engagement strategies for middle management in a diverse workplace?	2.3.3 Motivation Strategies for Middle Management

What kinds of training should be given to someone promoted to middle management?	IQ 5: Recommendations to improve middle management's level of engagement	2.2.1 Core Skills for Middle Management
What is your advice for employees who wants to be in middle management?	IQ 5: Recommendations to improve middle management's level of engagement	2.3 Factors of Successful Employee Engagement
What is your advice for top management towards their middle management?		