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Employee engagement in a dynamic South African advertising agency

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Employee engagement in a dynamic South African advertising agency

Philile Miya

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

Johannesburg, 2015

ABSTRACT

In the last two decades employee engagement has become a focus area as a talent management strategy for many organisations. This is primarily due to its close links to employee retention as well as employee and organisational performance. However the concept of employee engagement still remains relatively new, with limited academic research conducted on it in sub-Saharan Africa (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). This is particularly true in the South African marketing industry.

The purpose of this research was to examine the elements that contribute to employee engagement in a dynamic advertising agency in South Africa, Quirk. The company was founded in 1999 by the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rob Stokes and specialises in incubation, software development and education.

The research was completed by undertaking a qualitative case study approach. In order to gather data, 12 semi-structured interviews were held between the researcher and employees at Quirk. In addition to the employees, the researcher was also afforded the opportunity to interview the CEO.

A number of employee engagement models and antecedents were studied in the literature review. The findings from this research were comparable to the literature and indicated that there are five major elements that contribute to employee engagement in a South African advertising agency. These are culture, leadership, communication, development and reward.

This study will add to the literature and understanding of employee engagement in the advertising and marketing sector. The research will further assist human resources practitioners and organisational leaders to design effective talent management interventions that will result in engaged employees and consequently, improved performance and profitability.

DECLARATION

I, Philile Miya, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Philile Miya

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 2015

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my parents, my mother Nontuthuzelo Patricia Miya and my late father, Mbulelo Generous Miya.

Thank you for all the sacrifices you made to ensure that I am where I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without God, this research would not have been completed and I would like to sincerely thank Him and praise Him.

I would also like to thank the following people for their contribution towards this research:

- My husband, Lebusa Mabolloane, for his constant support and encouragement during this research.
- I also wish to extend my appreciation to Conrad Viedge for his constant advice and guidance throughout this research.
- To Rob Stokes, CEO of Quirk, and his employees who assisted me in this research, I could not be more grateful. Thank you for allowing me into your family. Without you this research would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research was to examine the elements that contribute to employee engagement in a dynamic advertising agency in South Africa.

The research was completed by undertaking a qualitative case study approach. In order to gather data, 12 semi-structured interviews were held between the researcher and employees at Quirk.

1.2 Context of the study

Lockwood (2007) noted that the 21st century has seen society and business experience extraordinary change and competition for talent as countries move towards globalisation. This global environment has made it challenging for employers to attract, engage, develop and retain talent. The increased demand for work-life balance and the dynamic relationship between employees and their employers are driving human resources professionals and organisations towards better understanding the needs and wants of their employees.

This research focused on the concept of employee engagement in the advertising and marketing sector. The research was conducted in a dynamic advertising agency in South Africa named Quirk. The research was conducted on Quirk because it is an unusual and dynamic advertising agency that has been anecdotally reported in the press and because of this one can assume that there is a high level of engagement. The company was founded in 1999 by the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rob Stokes. Stokes was still at university pursuing his Business Science degree when he founded Quirk as a way to make ends meet. He has now transformed the business into one of the leading online marketing agencies in Africa. Quirk has been in operation for 16 years and has grown to employ almost 300 employees across its agencies, which are located in Durban, Johannesburg, London and Cape Town – the head office.

The Quirk Group is composed of four agencies:

- The start-up incubator – 42 Engines
- The software business – Brands Eye
- The education arm – Quirk Education and The Red and Yellow School

In a recent interview with the researcher, the CEO of Quirk highlighted that the advertising industry has become highly competitive with little differentiation amongst competitors, thus it has become increasingly important for advertising agencies to have insight into their employees' psychological and emotional connections to their work. Furthermore, companies in the advertising industry have had to implement effective strategies to encourage their employees to utilise their full capabilities and perform at optimal levels. Working in advertising, marketing and media agencies can be extremely stressful; in addition to the high demand for creativity and innovation, employees in this sector are required to cope with tough demands from clients and often have to work long hours in order to meet deadlines. As a result of this, achieving a work-life balance may become a challenge for many employees in this sector, leading to them becoming disengaged from their work (Broyles & Grow, 2008). This study aims to highlight the critical elements that contribute to high levels of employee engagement in the advertising sector.

Employee engagement is a developing concept that has received considerable attention from a number of authors in the last two decades (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Kahn (1990) was one of the first academics to hypothesise about employee engagement in the work place. Since then the concept of employee engagement has become increasingly popular with human resources consultants and other companies at large (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Macey and Schneider (2008)also noted the growing interest in the concept amongst the academic community, where employee engagement is

viewed as an important psychological construct in the areas of talent management and human resource management as a whole. The majority of studies to date have focused on determining how various aspects, such as job satisfaction and remuneration, may affect employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004; Shirom, 2003; Wefald & Downey, 2009), with few alluding to the impact of the work environment on the development of employee engagement (Alarcon, Lyons, & Tartaglia, 2010; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). This study largely focused on the work environment as a contributor to levels of employee engagement in an organisation.

Employee engagement continues to be a focus area as a talent management strategy for many organisations, primarily due to its close links to employee retention and organisational performance (Budhwar & Bhatnagar, 2007). The interest in this subject has led to the identification of various antecedents, outcomes and theoretical frameworks.

Various studies have examined the relationship between employee engagement and organisational results and overall performance outcomes, including safety, customer loyalty, employee retention, productivity and profitability (Ellinger, Musgrove, & Ellinger, 2012; Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013; Shuck, Reio Jr, & Rocco, 2011). Research has also shown that the more engaged employees are, the higher the likelihood that an employer will exceed its competitors' revenue growth (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Having engaged employees is thus essential for organisations that want to gain a competitive advantage over their opposition. According to Baumruk (2006), engaged employees demonstrate three behaviours that lead to organisational performance:

- Say: the employee consistently affirms and advocates for the organisation to colleagues, potential employees and external customers.
- Stay: the employee is loyal to the organisation and commits to being a member of the organisation, despite the availability of work opportunities in other companies.

- Strive: the employee goes beyond the call of duty and gives extra effort than mandated to contribute to the success of the company.

Employee engagement leads to long term emotional attachment and is an antecedent to other employee sentiments, such as job satisfaction and employee commitment (Wagner & Harter, 2006). Engaged employees develop a deeper connection to their organisation, are enthusiastic about their work and consistently perform at high levels (Meere, 2005). In his report on employee engagement, Vance (2006) found that engaged employees at a software company, Intuit, were five times less likely to leave the company than less disengaged employees. In addition, it has been found that engaged employees have a positive impact on customers and co-workers (Wagner & Harter, 2006) and are more likely to trust and support decisions taken by management (Payne, Cangemi, Fuqua, & Muhleakamp, 1998).

Along with employee engagement, employee retention has emerged as a great challenge facing organisations competing for talent in the global marketplace. Beyond the challenge of labour and talent shortages, the elements affecting employee retention and engagement are mostly similar (Frank et al., 2004). Frank et al. (2004) suggested that a loss of trust and the consequent erosion of loyalty is the main factor affecting employee engagement and retention, while in his study on talent scouting, Czakan (2005) noted that the motivational variables that were utilised in the past to keep employees engaged are no longer applicable in the 21st century. The old employment contract characterised by a “fair day’s work” for a “fair day’s pay” is no longer applicable. Instead, employees are expected to continuously develop and apply the skills that the organisation requires to succeed, and in turn, the employer is expected to provide a challenging and stimulating workplace.

The relationship between employee engagement and organisational commitment has also been identified as an important paradigm in organisational research, due to its links to employee behaviours that support organisational performance (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Little and Little (2006) defined organisational commitment as the extent to which an employee identifies with an organisation and commits to its objectives. While employee engagement

refers to an employee's commitment to his/her work, organisational commitment speaks to the employee's commitment to the organisation's goals. Organisational commitment is vital for individuals working in modern organisations, as they are required to have greater self-management skills than in the past where organisations relied heavily on employee supervision (Dessler, 1999).

A study by Papalexandris and Galanaki (2009) found that the leadership of an organisation has a great impact on their immediate subordinates' job satisfaction, commitment, motivation and engagement. The ability to articulate a clear vision and be a good manager/mentor were determined to be the most influential leadership dimensions. The authors went on to state that in order to promote the development of an engaged workforce, leaders are expected to create work environments that allow subordinates to develop ideas, take initiatives and make inputs to the company's performance.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 *Main problem*

The problem of this research was to analyse the elements that drive high levels of employee engagement in a South African advertising agency.

1.4 Significance of the study

The concept of employee engagement remains relatively new with limited academic research conducted on it, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). This is particularly true of the South African marketing industry. The significance of this study is that it will enable greater understanding of key elements of employee engagement in the marketing and advertising industry. The information gained from this study can then be used to implement focused and effective employee engagement strategies within advertising agencies.

Furthermore, the employee engagement variables studied in this research can provide support in the development of specific work-related human resource interventions. As an example, employers could focus on implementing interventions that promote a positive organisational culture, open communication and equitable reward systems as a way to encourage employee engagement.

As noted by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), employee engagement is directly correlated to productivity, which in turn affects the profitability of an organisation. As subject matter experts in the area of employee engagement, this study will assist in placing human resources professionals as important stakeholders in the success and profitability of organisations.

It is anticipated that the findings of this study can be extended to other areas beyond the marketing and advertising industry. Knowledge gained from this research can be utilised to inform strategy in other sectors, such as manufacturing, healthcare and public service, where employee engagement has been found to be a challenge (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013).

1.5 Delimitations and limitations of the study

1.5.1 *Delimitations*

The examination of employee engagement in the advertising and marketing sector will be focused and limited to only one advertising agency in South Africa. This may not be a full representation of all advertising agencies in the sector.

1.5.2 *Limitations*

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- The research was conducted in Johannesburg, Gauteng, and therefore the scope was limited to the South Africa-based employees of Quirk.

- The research was conducted in a qualitative manner and therefore the reported results are based on the opinions of the employees at Quirk.

1.6 Definition of terms

Organisational commitment: The extent to which an employee identifies with an organisation and commits to its objectives (Little & Little, 2006).

Employee engagement: The positive work-related state of mind that causes individuals to freely commit themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally to their work (Catlette & Hadden, 2012).

Employee retention: The effort expensed by an employer to keep efficient workers in the employ of the organisation (Frank et al., 2004).

Job satisfaction: The positive emotional state that takes place when an individual's job fulfils important values that are congruent to his/her needs (Mehrotra, 2005).

Organisational culture: The deeply rooted and often subconscious ethics, beliefs and values that are commonly shared by employees of an organisation (Martins & Terblanche, 2003).

1.7 Assumptions

- The individuals selected for interviews will be frank and provide feedback without fear of unauthorised use of their information.
- The responses of the interviewed individuals will be truthful and reflect normal perspectives and experiences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The field of psychology has in the past been criticised for its devotion to studying negative states rather than positive states (Myers, 2000). Myers (2000) found that this was especially true given that the ratio of academic publications that examined positive states versus negative states was 1:14. In the last decade, psychologists have begun focusing on examining human strengths and optimal functions rather than concentrating on negative disorders and weaknesses. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) reaffirmed this view by noting the need for research directed at positive organisational behaviour (POB), which is defined as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002, p. 59). This literature review discusses one such POB construct - employee engagement.

The review begins by providing a working definition of employee engagement, followed by a brief discussion of the theoretical constructs that are related to employee engagement. The review then goes on to discuss the key elements that predict employee engagement.

2.2 Background discussion

2.2.1 *Definition of employee engagement*

As alluded to in the introduction, workplace engagement is a concept that has received much attention in recent years, in part due to the increased focus on the positive aspects of human psychology. The literature provides a number of definitions used by different researchers in the field of employee engagement.

Employee engagement was first conceptualised in 1990 by William Kahn, a researcher and professor at the Boston University School of Management. His

theory of engagement arose from both a qualitative study (Kahn, 1990) as well as a quantitative study (Kahn, 1992). Kahn (1990, p. 700) described the concept of engagement as “personal engagement is the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”.

Limited research was conducted post 1992 after Kahn (1990; 1992) had conceptualised the idea of employee engagement, and it was Maslach and Leiter (1997) research on burnout theory which revived interest in the study. Burnout can be defined as “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by three (3) dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 102). In their attempt to embrace a more positive psychological interpretation of burnout, Leiter and Maslach (1998, p. 351) introduced the concept of job engagement, which they defined as “an energetic experience of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance a staff member’s sense of professional efficacy”.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) agreed with Leiter and Maslach (1998) in that they viewed employee engagement as being opposite to burnout. However, these authors concluded that these two concepts are independent constructs that are obliquely related to each other and must therefore be measured with different instruments. Based on this assertion, they regarded employee engagement as “a positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).

The number of varying definitions of employee engagement has led to much controversy regarding a suitable description of this concept, however, in their quest to define employee engagement, Macey and Schneider (2008) noted that all the definitions are in agreement that employee engagement is desirable, has a purpose in the organisation, and involves energy, enthusiasm and focused effort.

For the purposes of this study, the Towers Perrin’s (2003, p. 1) definition of employee engagement will be used as a working definition. They defined

employee engagement as “the employee’s willingness and ability to contribute to company success, through putting extra time, brainpower and energy to their work”. The Towers Perrin (2003) report further identified emotional and rational elements that contribute to the work environment in an organisation. Emotional elements are those that describe the way in which tasks are to be conducted, while rational elements are those that relate to how an individual understands their role in an organisation.

2.2.2 *Constructs related to employee engagement*

In the academic field, employee engagement is often related to other constructs of organisational behaviour. This section discusses a number of concepts that are related to, but distinct from, employee engagement.

a. Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment is “the degree to which an individual identifies with an organisation and is committed to its goals” (Little & Little, 2006, p. 116). Commitment has been found to have a relationship to employee engagement (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004).

The key difference between organisational commitment and employee engagement is that the former refers to an employee’s loyalty and commitment to his/her organisation, while the latter refers to an employees’ loyalty and commitment to his/her work (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). Saks (2006) made a further distinction by viewing organisational commitment as an attitude, whereas engagement is the degree to which an employee is attentive and absorbed in doing their work.

b. Organisational citizenship behaviours

Organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) are those optional behaviours that go beyond the formal duties that an employee is contractually obligated to perform (Little & Little, 2006). These may include Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Bommer (1996) indicated that these desired behaviours are the outcomes of other constructs such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

In literature, definitions of OCBs are comparable to those of employee engagement in that they both refer to mutual respect amongst employees as well as willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty (Robinson et al., 2004). However, while OCBs involve voluntary and informal behaviours, engagement is more concerned with one's performance of his/her formal role as opposed to extra-role or voluntary behaviours (Saks, 2006).

c. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was defined by Locke and Henne (1986) as a desired and pleasurable emotional state that results from the evaluation of one's job. Job satisfaction has been positively related to organisational commitment, job involvement and OCBs, however it has also been negatively related to intention to turnover, perceived stress and pro-union voting (Little & Little, 2006).

d. Intention to turnover

Intention to turnover, defined by Saks (2006) as an employee's voluntary desire to exit the company, has also been related to employee engagement (Wagner & Harter, 2006). It is understandable when employees exit the company due to reasons outside the control of the organisation, however human resources practitioners become troubled when employees choose to resign from an organisation due to circumstances that could have been avoided (Lockwood, 2007).

2.3 Key drivers of employee engagement

This section of the literature review discusses a number of available models that predict and describe employee engagement.

2.3.1 *Sak's (2006) antecedents and consequences of employee engagement*

Using social exchange theory as a basis, Saks (2006) tested a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and organisational engagement. This model is depicted in Figure 1 below.

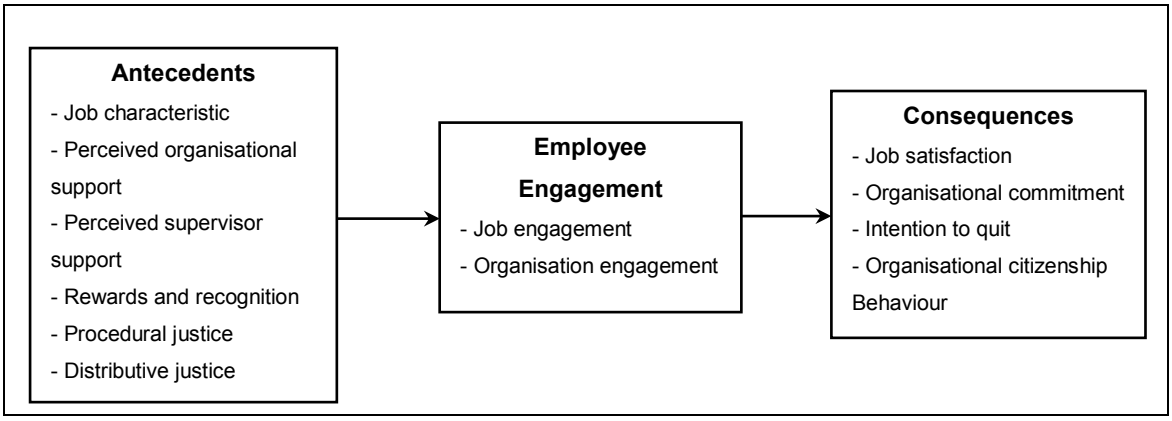


Figure 1: Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks, 2006)

As can be seen from Figure 1, Saks' (2006) model provides potential antecedents that are expected to predict employee engagement, which in turn is expected to predict employee-level outcomes.

The model has job and organisation engagement at its centre. This follows from Kahn (1990) and Rothbard's (2001) view that engagement is related to the extent to which an employee is psychologically present in his/her role. The model explicitly identifies the two most dominant roles for employees, i.e. their work role as well as the role they play as members of the organisation (Saks, 2006).

Saks (2006) model draws from the work of Kahn (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), identifying a number of potential antecedents to job and organisational engagement:

a. Job characteristics

According to Kahn (1990; 1992), psychological meaningfulness can be attained when employees are assigned challenging and varying tasks that allow for the use of different skills, personal decision-making and the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution. In developing his model, Saks (2006) found that these job characteristics were positively related to job and organisational engagement, i.e. employees who are given challenging and enriching tasks are more likely to have higher engagement levels.

b. Perceived organisational and supervisor support

Kahn (1990) found that psychological safety (see section **Error! Reference source not found.**) is promoted by having an organisational culture of supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships. In their empirical assessment, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found support for this conclusion by observing that psychological safety was positively related to supportive manager associations. Similarly, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found that support from colleagues also predicted employee engagement.

In order to capture the essence of social support, Saks (2006) included two other variables in his model, namely perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS). The first variable refers to an employee's belief that their organisation values them and genuinely cares about their wellbeing (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001), while the second variable refers to an employee's belief that his/her supervisor values their contribution (Rhoades et al., 2001). Saks (2006) used the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory to hypothesise that employees who had higher POS and PSS were more likely to engage with their jobs and organisations. His study found support for this hypothesis regarding POS, i.e. high levels of POS led to engagement, however his study did not find support for the relationship between PSS and engagement.

c. Rewards and recognition

An individual's level of engagement is directly related to their perception of the benefits they obtain from their role in the organisation (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, based on social exchange theory, it can be expected that when employees receive appropriate rewards and recognition, they will feel obliged to be more engaged with their role and organisation (Saks, 2006).

d. Distributive and procedural justice

Colquitt (2001) defined distributive justice as an employee's perception of the fairness of decision outcomes. Procedural justice is defined as the fairness of the processes and procedures used to determine the actual value and

distribution of resources. Saks (2006) found that employees who believe that their organisation is just and fair were more likely to respond by also being fair in how they perform their roles in the organisation. Maslach et al. (2001) agreed with this notion and also included fairness and justice as two of the work conditions in their theoretical model of job burnout.

As indicated in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, there is a general belief that high levels of engagement can lead to positive organisational consequences, however engagement takes place at an individual level. Thus, before it can lead to business outcomes, it must first have an impact on individual-level outcomes (Saks, 2006). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) as well as Sonnentag (2003) found that engagement is positively related to organisational commitment, job performance and extra-role behaviour. The authors also noted that engagement was negatively related to turnover and employee intention to exit the company.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) stated that according to social exchange theory, when two parties obey the rules of exchange, the result will be a greater level of trust, loyalty and mutual commitment. It is thus expected that engaged employees will be in high-quality relationships with their colleagues and management and are more likely to have positive attitudes and speak positively about the organisation (Saks, 2006).

2.3.2 *The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model of work engagement*

The JD-R model has been used by a number of different authors to describe the antecedents and outcomes of employee work engagement (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Koyuncu, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2006; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Parker, Jimmieson, & Amiot, 2009; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the JD-R model.

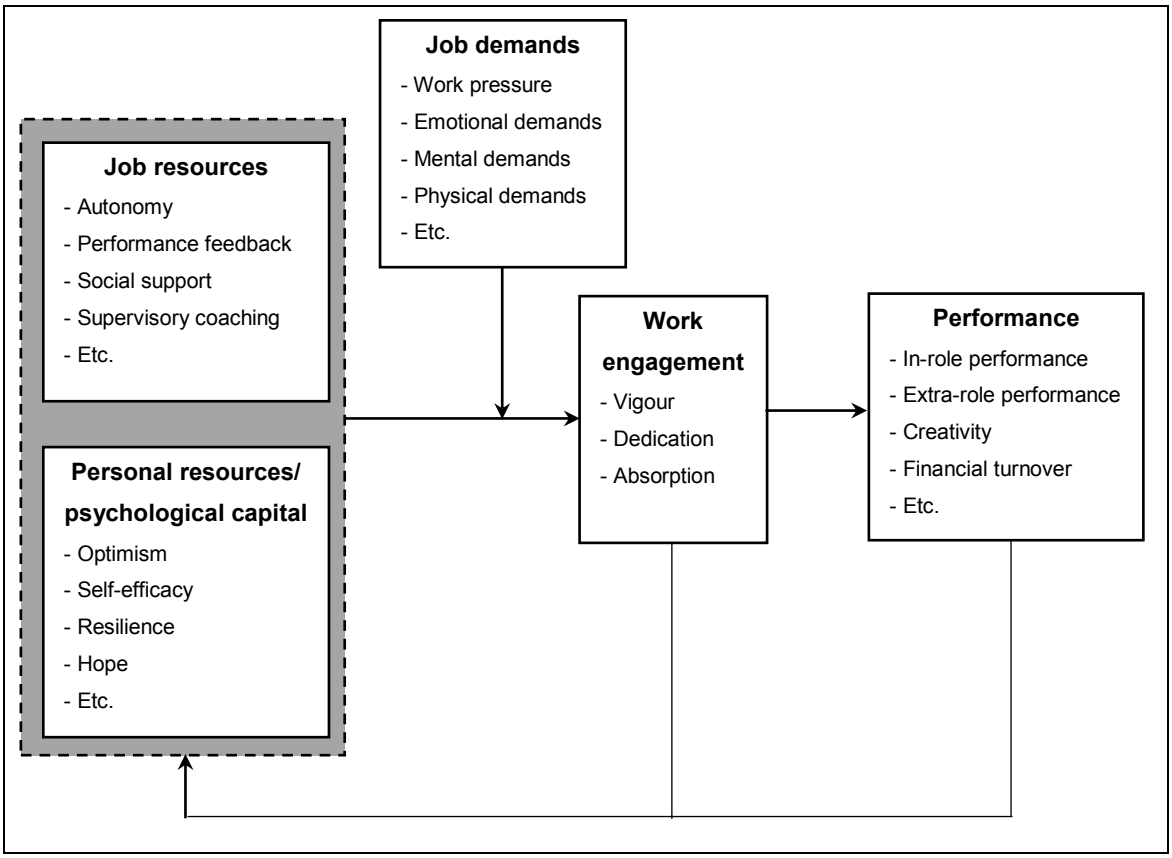


Figure 2: JD-R model of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008)

The main principle of the JD-R model is that regardless of the type of occupation, two sets of variables can be identified in any job role, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands are defined as "the degree to which the environment contains stimuli that peremptorily require attention and response" (Jones & Fletcher, 1996, p. 34). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) further stated that job demands are the physical, psychological, social or organisational characteristics of a role that involve continuous physical and/or psychological (emotional and cognitive) effort. These demands can be associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

Job resources are defined as the psychological, physical, organisational or social aspects of the job that either/or (1) decrease job demands, (2) assist in

the achievement of work goals, and (3) encourage personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

As can be seen from Figure 2 and as per Bakker and Demerouti (2008), the model shows that job resources and personal resources individually or jointly predict work engagement. The authors went on to discuss two other assumptions contained in the model. The first assumption is that job resources (autonomy, performance feedback, social support, supervisory coaching, etc.) trigger a motivational process that promotes work engagement, and consequently higher performance. The model also assumes that job resources become increasingly important when employees are given large or stressful job demands (work pressure, physical demands, mental demands, etc.).

The JD-R model in Figure 2 shows that job and personal resources are related and that personal resources can independently predict work engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007), therefore employees who are optimistic and have high levels of self-efficacy, resilience and hope can easily utilise their job resources and be more engaged in their jobs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Bakker and Demerouti (2008) summarised the JD-R model by stating that job and personal resources can have a positive effect on work engagement, particularly in situations where job demands are high. Consequently, the elevated levels of work engagement can then positively impact job performance. Engaged and performing employees are then able to produce new resources, thereby creating a positive gain spiral.

2.3.3 *Performance management and employee engagement*

The relationship between performance management and employee engagement was explored by Gruman and Saks (2011), who presented a model that links performance management to employee engagement. The intention of their paper was to present a model that incorporated the most

paramount application of processes of performance management, which in turn result in high employee engagement and therefore greater levels of performance, which in turn improve profitability. They also argued that the most important way to improve performance management is to incorporate employee engagement as a driver in an organisation. This was done by looking at literature that speaks to the link between performance management and employee engagement.

Pulakos (2009) stated that performance management is a key process through which work is accomplished. However in employee satisfaction surveys, less than a third of employees believe that this process is able to assist them in improving their performance (Pulakos, 2009). The importance of motivation is emphasised in the definition of performance management given by Verweire and Van den Berghe (2004), who stated that together with commitment, is a drive to achieve objectives.

As mentioned previously, employee engagement is a concept that has only recently received recognition (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Gruman and Saks (2011) alluded to this by stating that in the last five years employee engagement has been discussed more frequently among consulting firms and the popular press. They added that in the performance management process, a focus on employee engagement can result in performance improvement that would not be achievable through a sole focus on performance itself.

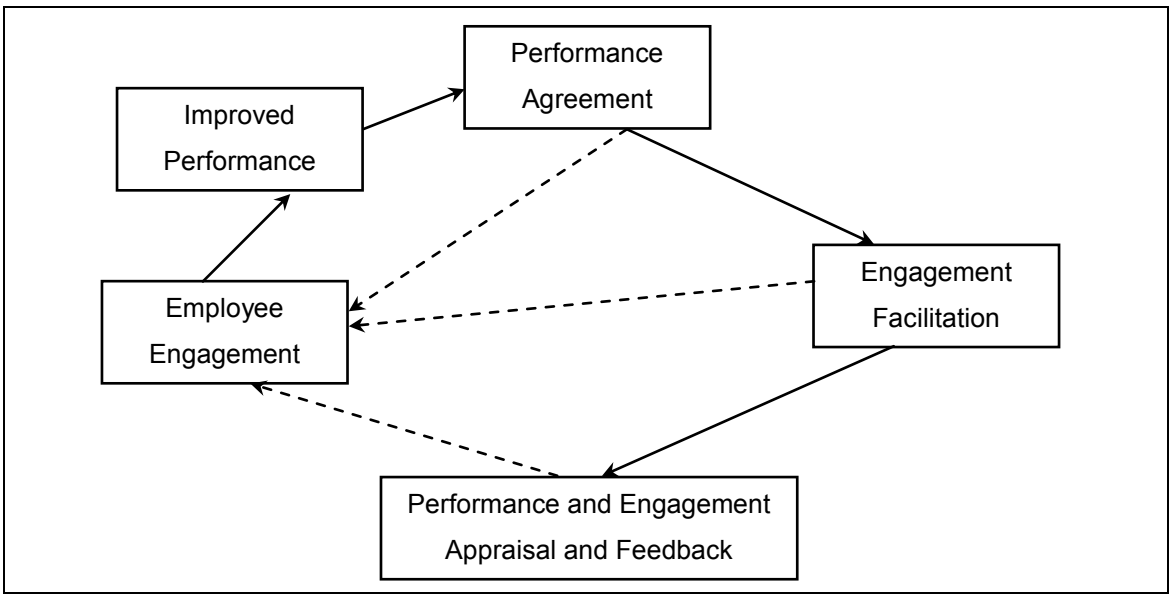


Figure 3: The engagement management model (Gruman & Saks, 2011)

The model shown above presents the model that Gruman and Saks (2011) developed to illustrate a process of performance management that incorporates employee engagement. This model is based on existing models and emphasises the role of employee engagement in high performance. The model is referred to as the engagement management model.

The model initially speaks to the performance agreement which enables the employee to understand the expectations of the employer. Goal setting is regarded as being very important, as goals stimulate engagement by enabling the employee to work towards a purpose or objective (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2011). Gruman and Saks (2011) stated that the goals and performance indicators should be negotiated at this point to foster engagement. The next component of the model incorporates engagement facilitation. Some of the aspects that fall under facilitation include coaching, support and training. These are components that assist the employee to achieve the employer's expectations and develop engagement in the process by fulfilling those needs. Again it is stated that these needs should be provided in order for the employee to perform well while also being engaged. Performance and engagement appraisal and feedback form the next part of the model, which imply measures of trust rather than ratings to foster engagement. It is also imperative that at this stage the engagement behaviour of an employee is assessed, as perceptions are very important. At this stage in the model the three components contribute to employee engagement, which in turn contributes to improved performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

2.3.4 *The 10 C's of employee engagement*

In a study that Seijts and Crim (2006a) conducted, the importance of employee engagement is discussed by emphasising that executives need to be concerned

about the level of engagement of employees. They further indicated that organisations with engaged employees may outperform their competition and set the organisation apart from others.

Seijts and Crim's (2006) 10 C's of employee engagement can be summarised as follows:

a. Connect

Leaders must practically illustrate that they value employees. This can be done by initiatives such as profit sharing, assisting employees to maintain a work/life balance and creating a healthy relationship with their employer or boss. When employers feel that they are valued in an organisation, they tend to reward the organisation or employer with engagement.

b. Career

Leaders must provide employees with challenging work to advance their careers. Examples of this include setting stretch goals for employees, providing job rotation for the top performers and holding employees accountable for their performance (Seijts & Crim, 2006a). Seijts and Crim (2006a) also stated that although an employee must be challenged, confidence must be instilled and the tools necessary to perform must be made available.

c. Clarity

Leaders must be able to communicate a clear vision to the employee; employees need to understand the vision and mission of the company, the department, the business unit and the team. Employees also need to understand what the company stands for, what the goals of the organisation are, and how they can assist in achieving those goals.

d. Convey

Leaders need to make sure they convey the correct information and expectations to their employees and give feedback on their performance. These

expectations need to be clarified and processes and procedures must be put in place to facilitate achievement and prevent dissatisfaction.

e. Congratulate

Leaders need to be able to give positive feedback when it is appropriate to do so. Recognition and praise are appreciated by all employees, and exceptional leaders coach while giving feedback at all times (Seijts & Crim, 2006a).

f. Contribute

Leaders need to give employees the opportunity to contribute to the success of the organisation; employees want to be appreciated and to know that the business recognises their input. Seijts and Crim (2006a) discussed this concept using Sears and Co. as an example; the company implemented a turnaround plan in 1992 that needed input from its employees, customers and investors, which led to interesting findings. The first finding was that the relationship between an employee's understanding of their position in the organisation and how it relates to the success of the organisation had a positive impact on their performance. It was also found that the employees' attitude towards the company and their employer had a huge impact on their loyalty and the service they gave to customers. The third finding was that employees who had better attitude in their work environment were found to provide better customer service.

g. Control

Leaders must give employees the opportunity to vary their pace and jobs, consult with their employees, understand their needs, and provide solutions where necessary (Seijts & Crim, 2006a). Seijts and Crim (2006a) also stated that leaders need to involve employees in decision making and goal setting, particularly when decisions will affect employees, as it gives them a sense of belonging and ownership.

h. Collaborate

Leaders should give employees the opportunity to work in teams and collaborate, as this improves the trust within the team and improves co-operation. Studies have shown that being cared for by colleagues is a contributing factor to employee engagement (Seijts & Crim, 2006a).

i. Credibility

Leaders need to maintain a high standard of ethical abilities to enable employees to be proud of the organisation they work for. Employees should be able to feel proud of their jobs, their organisation and their performance.

j. Confidence

Leaders should be able to initiate the creation of confidence in a company by performing exceptionally well and setting standards. Seijts and Crim (2006a) referred to an incident in a corporation where the behaviour of the CEO made employees too embarrassed to wear their uniform to and from work. Leaders should lead by example, inspiring their employees so that they are proud of the organisation they work for.

To remain competitive leaders should be able to pinpoint engagement opportunities in their organisation, identify the reasons for lack of engagement, and start implementing measures to correct the lack of engagement. (Seijts & Crim, 2006a).

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature review provided a number of theoretical models that can be used as a basis for describing employee engagement, and makes a clear distinction between engagement and other constructs of organisational behaviour. The review also revealed that there is little academic data regarding employee engagement in the marketing and advertising field. The intention of this research is to determine what elements foster employee engagement in this industry in order to obtain and understanding of the following research question:

What are the key elements that foster high levels of employee engagement in a dynamic South African advertising agency?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct this research. The chapter begins by discussing the selected research method as well as the literature that supports its application. This is followed by a review of the research design, the sampling method and the research instruments used. The chapter will also include relevant discussions relating to data collection and analysis, as well as the limitations, validity and reliability of the utilised research methodology.

3.1 Research methodology

A qualitative case study approach was used for this research in order to fully understand what drives the engagement of employees at the case site. The qualitative approach also assisted the researcher to be able to gain a deeper understanding of each respondent's nature and foster a deeper and more trustworthy relationship between the researcher and the respondent.

The respondents may have also found the quantitative nature of questionnaires to be impersonal and insensitive, which could have led to less information being provided for the analysis and conclusion of this research. The researcher understood the sensitivity of the information required from the respondents and therefore a qualitative method was found to be appropriate.

According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research has an advantage over quantitative research as trust is obtained and rapport is built between the researcher and the respondents. The researcher is also able to understand the values and behaviours of the respondents. Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 15) stated that the use of words rather than numbers can be more meaningful and valuable to the reader. When it comes to the number of respondents, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) also argued that sample sizes of fewer than 20 participants increase the likelihood of the researcher becoming closely involved with the participants in interview-based studies.

The disadvantages of qualitative research methods include potential misunderstandings of the respondents' answers to the research questions, leading the respondents, and the minimal representation of the sample size (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Willig (2008) alluded to this by saying that the insights generalised by qualitative research methods cannot be used for a wider population as they are a representative of a small sample for a particular case.

From the literature it is evident that although research on employee engagement is increasing, it is still a relatively new phenomenon. It is for this reason that a case study approach for this research was adopted. This was supported by Leedy and Ormrod (2005), who stated that a case study is appropriate for studies which have not been fully explored and understood.

3.2 Research design

In qualitative research methods interviews can be classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured; this research made use of semi-structured interviews. Only a few questions were asked, making the interview guide to seem simplistic but this was to allow the conversation to be free flowing. Structured interviews involve the researcher asking all respondents the same set of questions, in the same sequence, with a limited set of response categories (Fontana & Frey, 2000), while semi-structured interviews are developed and guided around the research question. Unstructured interviews are simply a conversation between the researcher and the respondent and do not make use of formal interview questions (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008).

3.3 Sample and sampling method

3.3.1 *Research sample*

The research sample consisted of 13 respondents. Twelve respondents were employees of Quirk and one respondent was the Chief Executive Officer and founder of Quirk. For the employee sample the researcher used snowball sampling, which was defined by Noy (2008) as a sampling technique in which

the researcher chooses a small sample of respondents who propose the remaining required respondents based on similar experiences that are related to the research.

3.3.2 *The case site*

The sample was selected from an advertising and marketing agency called Quirk. It is Africa's largest independent marketing agency group and offers a full suite of 'through-the-line' marketing services to local and international clients.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 show pictures of the case site.



Figure 4: On-site recreational area for employees



Figure 5: Internship ladder showing the stages and progression of interns at Quirk



Figure 6: Open plan workstations

3.4 The research instrument

The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

The researcher formally explained the purpose of the research to three employees of Quirk as well as the personal assistant to the CEO. The three employees then referred the researcher to the remaining nine employees based on similar experiences shared in the organisation and their understanding of the research requirements. The PA to the CEO also confirmed a telephonic interview with the CEO. The researcher then finalised the meetings with all the participants of the study and provided them with more in-depth information about the research.

The Quirk employee interviews took place in the respondents' offices. This was done so the researcher could observe the respondents in their work environment in order to obtain more accurate responses. This was also convenient for the respondents and made them feel at ease, as they were in an environment that they were familiar with. Only five out of the 12 respondents allowed partial recordings to be made and detailed observational notes were taken throughout all interviews. The interviews were an average of 20 minutes long.

The CEO interview was telephonic, partially recorded and lasted 20 minutes, with detailed notes being made during the call.

The study also utilised data triangulation, which involves the gathering of the data in different sampling elements. Press releases, webcasts of external interviews with Rob Stokes and articles were used to supplement the interviews and be utilised in the analysis of the data. This method of collection and analysis is called triangulation, which involves the use of more than one research tool to enhance confidence in the analysis and discussion of the research findings (Wilson, 2014). Typical examples of data include documents,

diaries, newspaper articles, photographs and press releases (Harwood & Garry, 2003).

In this instance the use of the employee interviews, the CEO interview, the articles about Quirk and its CEO, as well as the webcasts all contributed towards the collection and analysis of the data.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis used for the purpose of this research was Thematic Content Analysis, which is the most commonly used method of analysis and examines the content of text to establish a common theme (Brandt, Dawes, Africa, & Swartz, 2004). Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) further described this type of analysis as a process which involves several stages. The first step is identifying common themes and categories in the transcripts or notes by searching through the data repeatedly. The researcher then goes through the list of identified themes and identifies categories which are similar or overlap. These are then grouped.

The notes and observations that are made during the interview give descriptive information regarding the study, but it is the job of the researcher to provide explanations. In this research study the analysis of data happened immediately after the first set of data was collected and the process was modified throughout the study. This could imply that interview schedules have to be slightly modified pending any new findings that emerge and where additional clarification might be required.

After the themes were identified, the key findings were then reported under each of the main themes. This report uses quotes to illustrate these findings. A separate chapter will then present a discussion around the existing research and link it to the findings.

3.7 Limitations of the study

The following limitations apply to this study:

- The sample is only from Johannesburg and therefore it is not a national representation.
- The sample is from only one advertising agency and therefore only a single organisational culture will be represented.

3.8 Validity and reliability

The criteria that were used to demonstrate credibility in these findings were validity and reliability. Validity in research refers to the accuracy of the research findings as well as alignment between research details, research evidence and conclusions made from the research, while reliability refers to the consistency of results in determining similar findings when using the same measuring instrument (Kalof, Dan, & Dietz, 2008).

3.8.1 *External validity*

External validity involves the simplification of results obtained from a smaller sample across a larger sample or population (Kalof et al., 2008). In this case study the sample was convenient therefore one cannot generalise, however the findings may be applicable to other like-minded organisations.

3.8.2 *Internal validity*

Kalof et al. (2008) referred to internal validity as appropriate conclusions being drawn based on the data gathered. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) further alluded to this by defining internal validity as answering the question of whether the researchers draw appropriate conclusions from their observations and available data. In addition to this they mentioned that participants may behave in a manner that they believe the researcher wants to see, therefore by interviewing the respondents at their place of work while observing the workplace, this reduced the aspect of them being watched at work. The thematic content

analysis design that was utilised in this research resulted in high internal validity, because the researcher sampled a smaller group which resulted in a higher level of intimacy and trust. In addition, the triangulation method and interviewing the CEO led to high internal validity.

3.8.3 *Reliability*

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measuring instrument in dependably yielding similar results when applying the same research (Kalof et al., 2008). Yin (1994) alluded to this by stating that the ability to replicate certain aspects of the study, such as data collection procedures, will yield the same results. The importance of reliability stems from the minimising of errors in the study, which was done by using the same technique and the same questions. Furthermore, to increase the reliability of the data a consistent approach to surveying the sample was used, as were the same technique and questions.

Internal reliability refers to whether, within a single study, members of the research team will agree about what has been observed (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). As a single researcher conducted this study, internal reliability was not applicable.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the research and data collection process outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter will also provide an interpretation and analysis of the research data based on the literature review that was presented in Chapter 2.

This study was designed to highlight the elements that promote employee engagement in a creativity-driven company such as an advertising agency. The most important aspect of this study was to determine the practices employed by Quirk to foster employee engagement in the organisation. Additionally, this study's intention was to obtain insights that could assist other corporations in similar industries to understand the elements that lead to an engaged workforce.

The reported results are based on a qualitative case study approach that was completed on Quirk. In order to gather data, 12 semi-structured interviews were held between the researcher and employees at Quirk. In addition to the employees, the researcher was also afforded the opportunity to interview Rob Stokes, the chief executive officer of the company. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the interview questions were focused on the key initiatives employed by Quirk to drive employee engagement in the company. A number of the respondents did not permit recordings to be made during the interview sessions, however the researcher took detailed notes of the discussions and took pictures of the case site.

The chapter begins by discussing the key themes that were identified as being the main contributors to employee engagement. These themes were derived from the literature review as well as the interview notes taken by the researcher. This is followed by a discussion of the demographics of the 12 respondents who formed part of the research. A thorough analysis and discussion of the research

data obtained during the interview process is then provided. This chapter concludes with a summary of the key concepts and findings related to employee engagement in a dynamic advertising agency.

4.2 Results of thematic content analysis

The notes and recordings from the interviews were used as the main sources of data for thematic content analysis. Figure **7**7 shows a graph of the key elements of employee engagement that were identified during this study.

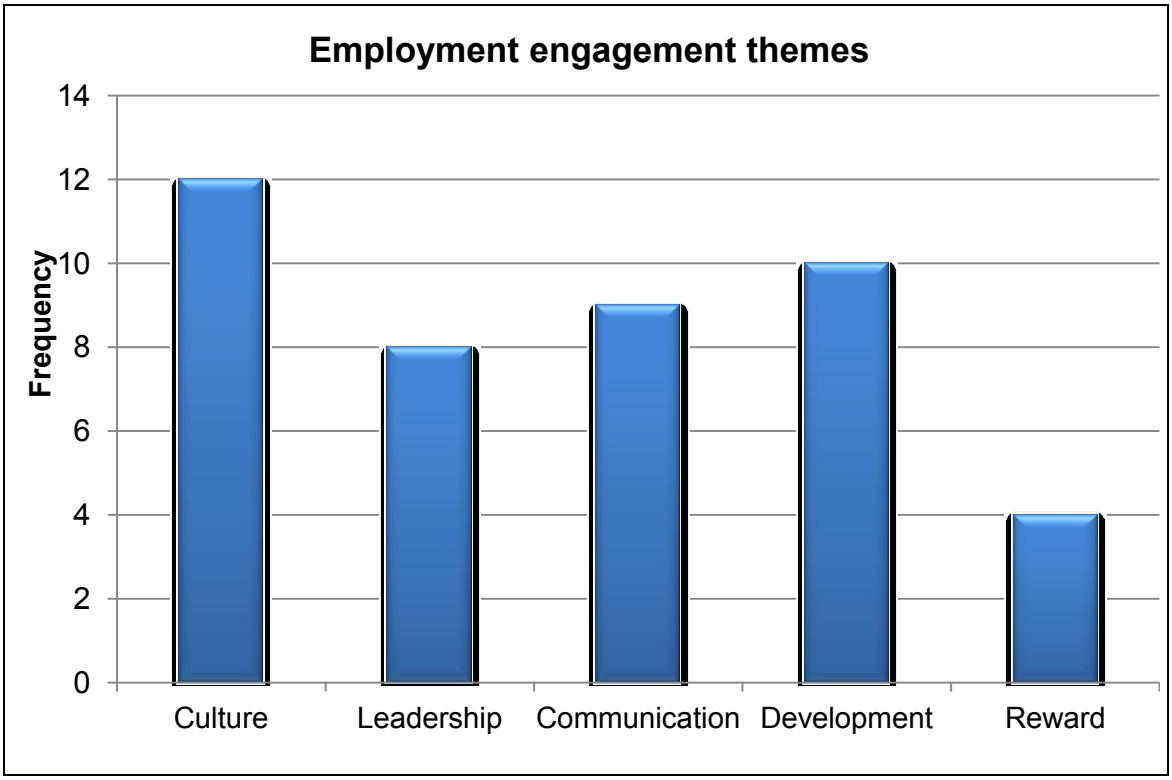


Figure 7: Key themes of employee engagement

The identified themes are similar to those found by other researchers as discussed in the literature review (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Seijts & Crim, 2006b).

4.3 Demographic profile of respondents

The following section discusses the demographics of the respondents. As previously stated, the research sample was made up of 12 employees and the

company CEO. The demographics of the respondents were examined in terms of race, age, gender and tenure at Quirk.

4.3.1 *Race*

Figure 7 shows the racial makeup of the sample that was interviewed for this research.

Although employment equity statistics could not be obtained from the company the racial makeup of the interviewed sample as well as observations made during site visits seem to suggest that Quirk employs a diverse workforce, however the company's racial profile is not representative of the racial distribution of the country.

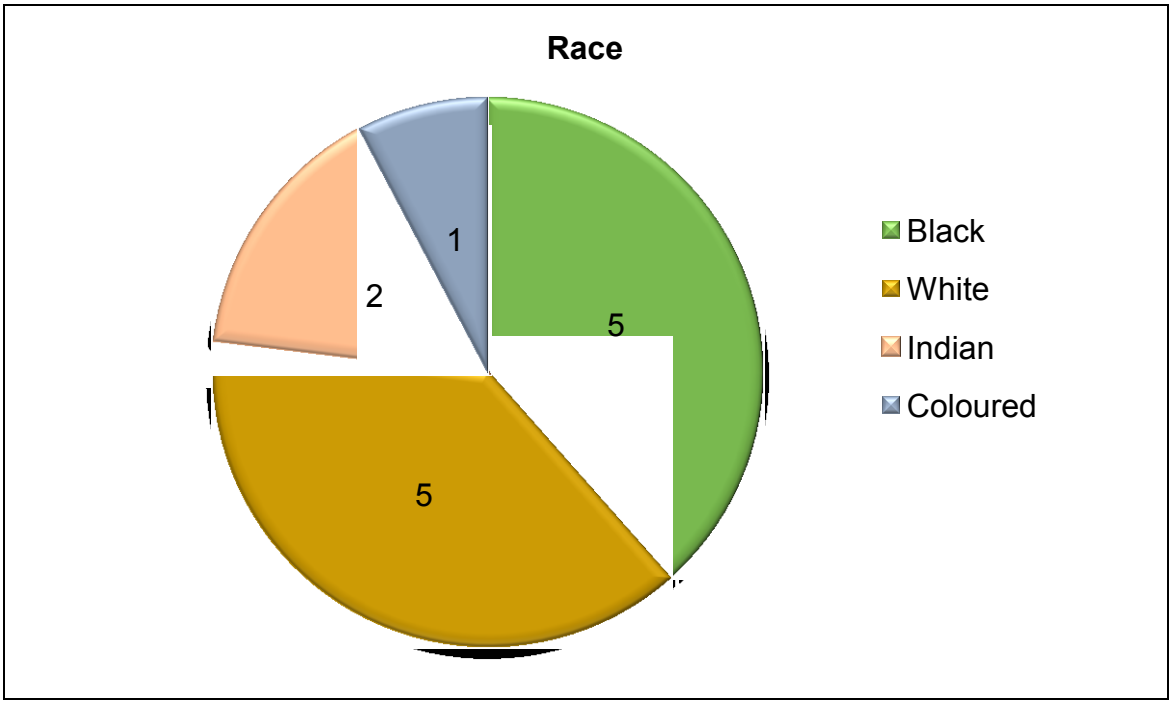


Figure 7: Racial makeup of the respondents

4.3.2 *Gender and age*

The research sample was comprised of eight males and five females.

Table 1 shows the age distribution of the research respondents. The majority of the respondents were below the age of 25, which contributes to the company

being dynamic and innovative. The young sample is also a true reflection of the youthful and energetic culture experienced at Quirk.

It should be noted, however, that the young age of the respondents could also be indicative of short job tenure or high employee turnover. This was not expected as Quirk's employees seem to be highly engaged (as will be discussed in the following sections), and according to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) engagement is negatively related to turnover and employee intention to exit the company.

Table 1: Age group

Age (years)	Frequency
20-25	8
26-31	3
31-36	1
>36	1

4.3.3 *Years of service*

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the respondents' tenure at Quirk.

It was noticed that only two of the respondents had worked for Quirk for more than five years. This is also a true reflection of the whole workforce at Quirk as the staff turnover is very high. This was an unexpected result as discussed in section 4.3.2.

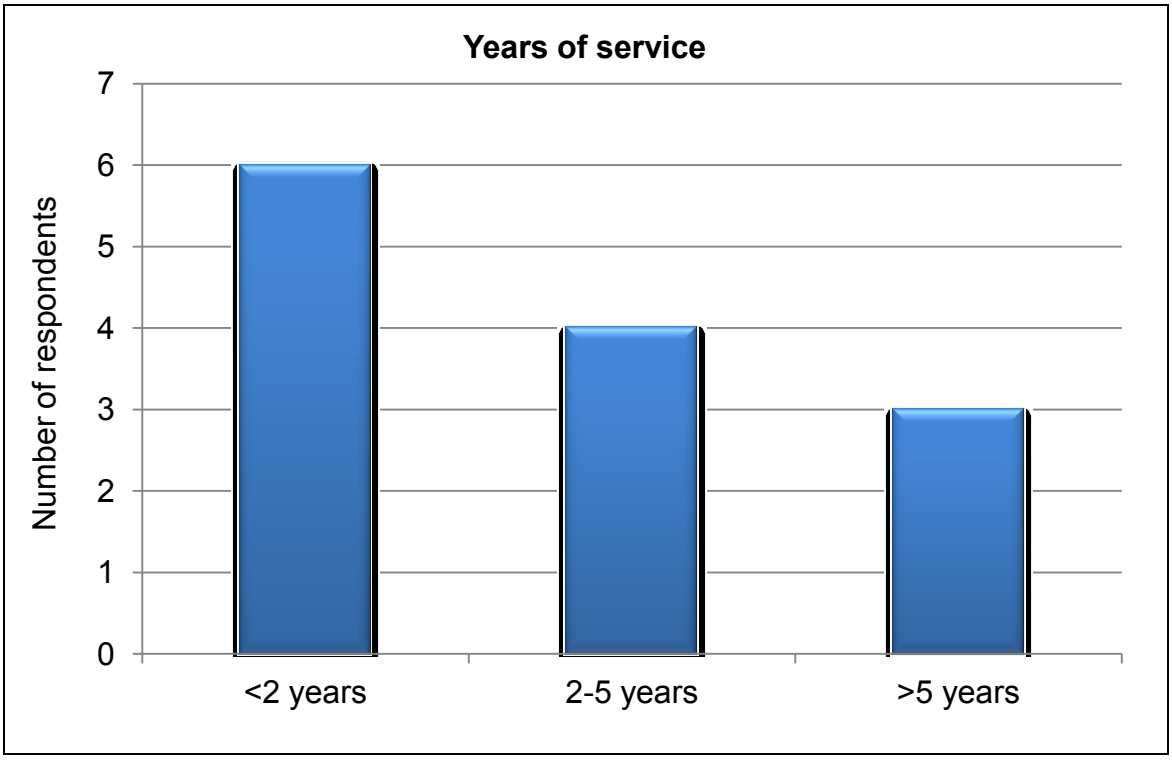


Figure 8: Number of years that respondents have been in the employ of Quirk

4.4 Findings and discussion of the key elements that foster employee engagement

4.4.1 *Introduction*

The research question posed in this study is as follows:

What are the key elements that foster high levels of employee engagement in a dynamic South African advertising agency?

This section of the report discusses the five key employee engagement themes that were identified as part of the research. The themes are:

- Culture
- Leadership
- Communication
- Development
- Reward

These themes are discussed in this section according to order of importance as perceived by the employees and the CEO of Quirk.

4.4.2 *Findings and discussion relating to culture*

All the respondents ranked culture as the most important factor in ensuring a sense of engagement at Quirk. The respondents were passionate about their organisational culture and felt it was a crucial factor in their retention. Quirk encourages and promotes a family-like culture and a relaxed environment for their employees to work in. This is demonstrated by the following comment provided by Respondent 1:

"When I come to work, it feels like I'm at home because the people that I work with are like my family." (Respondent 1)

As seen in section 3.2.2 (case site), Quirk's office design and layout are such that they promote a youthful and energetic atmosphere; upon entering the organisation, one is greeted by bright colours and stylish furniture. The office is designed so that no matter what level you are in, you sit in an open plan structure. One respondent who is a junior in the organisation remarked that:

"I sit with the MD, we are all equal and it makes him approachable." (Respondent 1)

The dress code is also different from the standard uniform or professional formal dress code. At Quirk the employees are free to express themselves and wear what they want and feel comfortable in, while respecting their colleagues.

"I have never worn heels since I have started working here. I wear what I like! You should see Rob, if he were to come in here you wouldn't even know it was him because he would probably be dressed in shorts. I love it because I am able to also express my true self through my clothes." (Respondent 4)

Pertaining to the family-like culture, it was noted that the employees naturally know each other's families and regularly meet outside the workplace.

"My boss knows my whole family and I know his, we have had a few lekker braais at each other's houses." (Respondent 3)

Another interesting fact that was discovered was that most respondents have very close friends in the organisation, most of whom they met at Quirk.

"My best friend works here so it makes work easier." (Respondent 1)

These findings are supported by an article that appeared in the Harvard Business Review by (Coleman, 2013), who stated that many elements go into creating a culture, one of elements which is people. People in the organisation need to understand and embrace the values of the organisation and this in turn creates a culture which people are able to embrace and stay in.

It was discovered that the employees spend a lot of time with each other outside of the workplace because very close friendships have been developed in the organisation

"We are actually all going for drinks this Friday, you can join us if you want!" (Respondent 4)

These responses indicate that Quirk has gone into great detail to create an environment in which their employees are able to perform beyond expectations. Quirk has flexi-time available for some employees, which allows them to work remotely and whenever they want, as long as they produce what is expected of

them. This is in support of the literature, where Seijts and Crim (2006a) stated that in order for employees to be engaged, leaders need to give them the opportunity to vary the pace of their jobs. One of the respondents had not slept all night because he had been working on a project, but when asked why he came to work when he could have been sleeping because the flexi-time option is available to him, he said he would rather be at work than at home because he has more fun at work. From this it is evident that the work/family/life culture at Quirk succeeds in motivating employees to regard their work environment not just as a table and desk environment, but as an environment in which they can feel at home.

"The social times are too amazing. And I love the light-hearted atmosphere here because it makes you want to come to work." (Respondent 6)

The employees also have their own language for certain terms, which they refer to as "Quirky terms". As an example, the employees refer to each other as "Quirkstars". This is evident in the way they help and encourage each other.

"It goes beyond the popcorn stands and the open bar, people at Quirk stay because of the people." (Respondent 11)

Upon interviewing the CEO of Quirk, Rob Stokes, he did mention that culture plays the most important role in the organisation. He stated that there are some employees who can be engaged but not fit in with the culture and employees who fit in with the culture but are not engaged, but when the two aspects complement each other it leads to a much better working environment:

"I believe in the saying that culture eats strategy for breakfast; if you have a strategy and no culture it could totally fail. I believe so much in engagement because I want employees who are present not only physically but mentally as well." (Rob Stokes)

From this statement alone the importance of culture is emphasised not only for a work environment, but for a family-like environment at work which the CEO is trying to establish.

This is also supported by the study done by Seijts and Crim (2006a), which mentions that leaders must practically illustrate that they value their employees. This is also alluded to by Thompson and Prottas (2005), who concluded that supervisor support, co-worker support, work family culture and flexi-time reduce employee turnover intention.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that employees at Quirk as well as the Chief Executive Officer regard culture as being one of the most important elements leading to high engagement at Quirk. This is clearly identified by the energy that was observed in the premises of the organisation.

4.4.3 *Findings and discussion relating to leadership*

Eight out of the 12 respondents spoke about leadership at Quirk. It was perceived from the interviews that Quirk is an organisation that has successfully grasped the importance of leadership, which is thanks to its CEO. When asked about leadership he responded by saying:

"My vibe is to build a company that I would love to work for. I want people to be led in such a way that they have a purpose. Purpose for me is the number one thing that leads to engagement." (Rob Stokes)

The respondents that mentioned leadership shared Rob's sentiments. All of the respondents mentioned that at Quirk the expectations are clear and that there is clarity in what they are expected to achieve. Seijts and Crim (2006a) stated that in order for employees to be engaged, leaders need to not only communicate a clear vision to employees, but also convey the correct information and feedback. Because Quirk encourages flexi-time the employees are also given the freedom to manage their own time and workflow, therefore the line managers are able to trust their employees to complete their allocated tasks. The line managers were also described as nurturing, which makes it easier for the employees to communicate when help is needed.

"My line manager is actually like a mentor. I want to be like him in a few years' time as I grow at Quirk." (Respondent 12)

The managers also encourage team work, which succeeds at Quirk because of the culture in the organisation that encourages a family-like atmosphere. This correlates with the literature that states that in order for employees to be engaged, leaders must encourage employees to work together in teams and collaborate (Seijts & Crim, 2006a).

The employees also mentioned that Quirk line managers encourage their subordinates to take on more work as a challenge.

"Sometimes I feel like I get thrown in to the deep end but I feel like my manager gives me the floating tool so that I am able to keep my head up and not sink. I am supposed to be doing small projects but because my manager has confidence in me and encourages me to push further. I am able to take on more serious projects and when they're completed I feel so proud of myself because I can't believe I accomplished that. It's a really nice feeling and it has helped me in terms of my career growth." (Respondent 9)

The literature alludes to this by stating that leaders need to provide employees with more challenging tasks in order to engage them (Seijts & Crim, 2006a). This is also mentioned in Kahn (1990; 1992), where it is stated that psychological meaningfulness can be attained when employees are assigned challenging and varying tasks that allow for the use of different skills, personal decision-making and the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution. In developing his model, Saks (2006) found that these job characteristics were positively related to job and organisational engagement, i.e. employees who are given challenging and enriching tasks are more likely to have higher engagement levels.

The line managers at Quirk also contribute to the family culture, which makes it easier for the employees to express themselves and be open to feedback. This is also encouraged through the various and frequent team building activities that the teams at Quirk engage in.

"My line manager is great. He has built me as a person both in my professional environment and my personal environment." (Respondent 9)

The JD-R model in Figure 2 shows that job and personal resources are related, and that personal resources can independently predict work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Employees who are optimistic and have high levels of self-efficacy, resilience and hope can easily utilise their job resources and be more engaged in their jobs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Another common element that arose with regards to leadership was that due to the culture, leadership is mainly a coaching style that is practised amongst the employees. Line managers and subordinates sit with each other in an open plan environment and Quirk has a no door policy. This encourages a better relationship between the line managers and their subordinates.

According to some of the respondents, the advertising environment is one that needs employees to be highly innovative. This is strongly encouraged at Quirk by enabling the employees to present their ideas regularly. An illustration of this is a concept that the CEO implemented in the organisation two years ago, called 'Bring Your Brain To Work Day'. When asked to elaborate further he explained that amongst other things he wanted to achieve with this concept, one was to encourage employees to discuss their ideas so that they could be shared right through the organisation. This enables the employees to be more comfortable expressing themselves and their opinions, which in turn makes them feel like they are contributing to the company. For Rob, it is a chance to illustrate that although leadership is important, it need not be a bottom down approach all the time. Leadership at Quirk encourages employees to share their ideas, receive input and as a result implement great ideas with the assistance of the organisation, colleagues and management. This allows employees to hone their innovative skills, work as a team and possibly direct the paths of their careers. These findings are also supported by the literature which states that in order for employees to become more engaged, leaders need to give them the opportunity to contribute to the success of the organisation (Seijts & Crim, 2006a).

To conclude, the results show that both the leaders and the employees at Quirk recognise that leadership is an important aspect in employee engagement. The organisation makes sure that employees are engaged in this regard by mainly focusing on the value of employees' input towards the success of the organisation, encouraging teamwork and collaboration, and providing employees with more challenging work.

4.4.4 *Findings and discussion relating to communication*

Nine out of 12 employees spoke about communication in the organisation. Rob also spoke about communication when talking about creating a company that he would like to work for.

"I wanted to create an organisation that promotes transparency and honesty. And I wanted to give all employees a genuine voice in the organisation."

Rob prides himself in being open in his company:

"I have a no door policy because I want everyone to be able to communicate with me. I am very passionate about transparency. The employees are encouraged to sit at Board level and every six months the whole organisation votes for a president."

"At Quirk everything is transparent and you never have to worry about missing information." (Respondent 6)

Another respondent explained that:

"Feedback is not an issue here at Quirk, we get regular feedback and because we are in a culture where hierarchy is not a big factor, it is easy to receive and to give."

This creates the perception that the culture at Quirk enables easier communication between colleagues, line managers and the organisation as a whole.

Seijts and Crim (2006a) stated that in order to engage employees, leaders need to be able to communicate a clear vision to them. The literature also alludes to this, stating that for an employee to be able to perform at their best, clarity needs to be given regarding expectations. This facilitates feedback as well as engagement of the employee.

"Increased communication in this organisation has enabled me to understand why I am here, I have my self-worth increased because I feel that there is transparency and there is nothing that I miss. It makes me feel a lot more connected here." (Respondent 6)

Feedback is an important aspect of communication. In the engagement model presented by Gruman and Saks (2011), it is noted that in the discussions pertaining to performance, feedback is critical in order to foster engagement as it increases the trust relationship between the employer and the employee.

"Communication has been a very vital part of Quirk, having undergone some changes in acquirement recently. Change can be a very difficult process and when communication fails, that would have made it more difficult." (Respondent 1)

Communication when times are difficult can be the most challenging, yet Quirk has managed to execute it well. A respondent spoke about a recent time when her friend in the organisation had to be retrenched. The process was difficult, yet through each and every step the employees knew what part of the process they were experiencing and how it would impact them. The respondent went on to mention that this assisted very much because they knew where they stood and could easily make alternate arrangements and plans.

In the engagement management model presented by Gruman and Saks (2011) it can be seen that across all components of performance, agreement, engagement facilitation and feedback all require good communication. The literature states that in order to foster engagement and in turn improve the performance of an individual, there needs to be clear understanding and communication in the performance agreement. The performance agreement includes aspects such as negotiating goals and expectations. In order for this to be successful, communication is vital.

The next stage of the model speaks to engagement facilitation, which incorporates aspects that enable employees to perform their tasks. These facilitations include coaching, support and training, and facilitators require a communication relationship to exist between the employer and employee. The next part of the model speaks to the performance feedback and appraisal aspect; the literature states that performance feedback increases the trust relationship between the employer and the employee, and therefore one can generally conclude that communication is vital for all these aspects to be able improve employee engagement and in turn improve the performance of an employee.

Colquitt (2001) defined distributive justice as an employee's perception of the fairness of decision outcomes, while procedural justice is defined as the fairness of the processes and procedures used to determine the actual value and distribution of resources. Saks (2006) found that employees who believe that their organisation is just and fair are more likely to respond by also being fair in how they perform their roles in the organisation.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) stated that according to social exchange theory, when two parties obey the rules of exchange the result will be a greater level of trust, loyalty and mutual commitment. For this reason it is expected that engaged employees will be in high-quality relationships with their colleagues and management, and are more likely to have positive attitudes and speak well about the organisation (Saks, 2006).

Based on the findings it is evident that communication is vital at Quirk, and it is understood that for employees to remain engaged, it must remain so. This is done by allowing employees to have a transparent view of the financials of the organisation, allowing employees to be able to voice their opinions (even having an employee sit on the Board), and making sure that all changes relating to employees are communicated to them.

4.4.5 *Findings and discussion relating to development*

Ten of the 12 respondents spoke about development. In addition to their work expectations being made clear, Quirk enables their employees to meet the demands of the tasks and work allocated to them.

From the interviews it was established that Quirk enables development in a number of different ways. The first and most important is the concept of The Red and Yellow School. The idea stemmed from Rob realising that Quirk employees did not fully understand digital advertising, so he wrote a textbook on it. After some time this developed into actual courses offered in a learning institution, which Quirk later acquired and named The Red and Yellow School. Quirk employees are given the opportunity to further their studies at no cost at this school, which is also open to the public. The respondents became very excited when speaking about The Red and Yellow School:

"Imagine working for a company that gives you free schooling and enables you to do better and grow? It's amazing being here." (Respondent 6)

Another enabler of development at Quirk is the line managers' willingness to give employees opportunities to work on projects that are more advanced, which is done to build their capabilities. This also gives employees exposure to a wider scope of work, resulting in them acquiring more skills.

"I feel like I can do more you now, I have learnt so much in a short space of time here." (Respondent 12).

This is a factor that makes employees engaged, as stated in the study conducted by Seijts and Crim (2006a), who claimed that to be more engaged, employers must provide employees with more challenging work. This was also mentioned by Kahn (1990; 1992), who stated that psychological meaningfulness can be attained when employees are assigned challenging and varying tasks that allow for the use of different skills, personal decision-making and the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution. Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R model backed this up, identifying work pressure as one of the important job demands that lead to higher levels of employee engagement; the

fact that employees at Quirk are exposed to high levels of challenging work makes them more engaged.

Quirk also has an internship programme that runs over an 18 month period. Rob shared his sentiments regarding the development of his employees:

"I want to make them masters of their own destiny. It's related to purpose. If someone has a purpose each day they come in here, then they definitely will be engaged. And the more engaged a person is, the better they perform."

Rob also encourages personal development through the sustainability programmes that he urges employees to not only participate in, but to found. This is evident from the way his employees relate to one another; there were no employees who seemed like they were at Quirk with no purpose, which could be seen in their responses when they spoke about their specific job descriptions.

As mentioned, employees are given the opportunity to vote for the company president every six months, who becomes a Board member. This also enables the employees to develop their careers. From this, it is evident that Quirk is serious about making their employees part of the family.

Contribution is also a factor in development, as employees are given the opportunity to contribute to the success of the company by assisting in decision making, especially because the employees are represented by a president who sits on the Board. In order to capture the essence of social support that links to contribution, Saks (2006) included two other variables in his model, namely perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS). The first variable refers to an employee's belief that their organisation values them and genuinely cares about their wellbeing, while the second refers to an employee's belief that his/her supervisor values their contribution (Rhoades et al., 2001). Saks (2006) used the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory to hypothesise that employees who had higher POS and PSS were more likely to be engaged in their jobs and organisations. His study found support for this hypothesis regarding POS, i.e. high levels of POS lead to

engagement, however his study did not find support for a relationship between PSS and engagement.

The importance of development can also be linked to the engagement management model. Quirk is passionate about performance which is why employee engagement is an important concept in the organisation. Gruman and Saks (2011) stated that in a performance agreement there needs to be negotiation when setting goals and discussing job performance. Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that this is practised at Quirk. Further, when it comes to performance discussions pertaining to goal setting, this is done in an atmosphere that is conducive.

Engagement facilitation is also clearly evident at Quirk based on the feedback received. The line managers who coach and mentor the staff clearly indicate that the organisation does make it a priority to provide their employees with all the tools required to perform their expected tasks. The training aspect of facilitation is achieved by providing employees with free education at The Red and Yellow School. It is evident that Rob personally wants to develop each and every employee at Quirk in order to equip them to be masters of their own destiny.

4.4.6 *Findings and discussion relating to rewards*

Only four out of the 12 respondents spoke about reward in the interviews. One major monetary reward that Quirk employees are given is profit share; the company gives 20% share of their profit to employees each year. The monthly, quarterly and annual recognition awards also excite some of the employees. An individual's level of engagement is directly related to their perception of the benefits they obtain from their role in the organisation (Kahn, 1990). Based on social exchange theory, it can be expected that when employees receive appropriate rewards and recognition, they will feel obliged to be more engaged in their role and organisation (Saks, 2006).

Some of the recognition awards that Quirk gives include, but are not limited to, Quirk Star of the month, the Passion for Digital Award, and the Internship Ladder.

"Recognition and reward makes us feel like we are worth something here, like we are doing something right in the organisation and especially the ones that come from the executives." (Respondent 1)

There seemed to be a sense of avoidance when speaking about the monetary aspect. One respondent mentioned that although a lot of the rewards and recognition may not be monetary, the value is much more.

"The free schooling, the sabbatical, people here may say that we don't pay as much as corporates but when you think about it, it's way more." (Respondent 6)

This statement stemmed from the fact that some employees feel that Quirk does not pay as much as corporates do, which is the main reason why the company has a high employee turnover. When speaking to a respondent with an HR background, she mentioned that the reason employees do not stay for more than three years in Johannesburg, resulting in the high staff turnover at Quirk, is because they are being poached by corporates, especially in the banking industry. These corporate companies have their own in-house digital marketing and offer more than Quirk pays.

"It is very unfortunate. Quirk recruits, does intensive training and next thing the employee is lost to a bank because the salary was not competitive. Profit Share is not enough. But don't get me wrong, we are market-related in the industry." (Respondent 4)

Another respondent who comes from the corporate environment but prefers to be at Quirk regardless of the pay, mentioned that:

"People stay at Quirk because of loyalty. They stay because it is a great environment to work in and that they have made new friends who are like family here." (Respondent 1)

Rob believes that profit share is a dynamic way to equip employees with power in the organisation. He is very passionate about his staff and the people that work for him; he believes that when people are equipped with the power to be masters of their own destiny it gives them purpose, which is what drives engagement in his organisation.

"The advertising industry is highly competitive with very little differentiation. When two brands are similar what matters is the soil." (Respondent 6)

It is evident that there is a misalignment regarding the importance of paying well and engaging employees. The responses from Rob and the employees indicate that although the salaries of the employees at Quirk are market-related in the advertising industry, in most instances Quirk does not lose their staff to other marketing agencies but to the corporate environment. The employees who avoided speaking about rewards, especially in monetary form, did so because they felt that the salaries at Quirk are not enough to make them stay on at the company.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine the key elements that contribute to employee engagement in a dynamic advertising agency, as well as to analyse how the advertising agency exercises engagement in the organisation.

This chapter concludes the research report and is made up of three sections. The first section summarises the research findings and their implications for employee engagement in South African organisations. In the second section, the researcher provides recommendations to other organisations. The chapter then concludes by giving suggestions for further research.

5.2 Conclusions of the study

5.2.1 *Demographic profile*

Although minor, differences were experienced between the ages of employees. This finding is important to the organisation as according to the literature, the younger employees should have different engagement instruments applied to them.

Based on the limited interviews and comparisons that could be drawn, it is anticipated that race and gender do not necessarily influence the needs of employees.

The few differences in the findings is important as it lends weight to the argument that when reviewing and designing employee engagement initiatives, the organisation can focus on the entire employee population as opposed to a specific group of individuals. However, this does not mean that an individual's needs and ambitions can be ignored by the organisation.

5.2.2 *Culture*

The employees at Quirk, as well as the CEO, regard culture as being one of the most important elements that lead to the high engagement at the company. This was clearly identified by the energy that was observed at the premises of the organisation. This is supported by the manner in which employees at Quirk behave and the different work lifestyles that they are exposed to, such as flexi-time and an all-day recreational centre. This was reinforced by the employees' and the CEO's responses, as well as a number of the different literature findings that have contributed to the research on culture.

5.2.3 *Leadership*

The results pertaining to leadership show that both the leadership and the employees at Quirk recognise that leadership is an important aspect in employee engagement. The organisation makes sure that employees are engaged in this regard by focusing on the value of employee input towards the success of the organisation, encouraging teamwork and collaboration, and providing employees with more challenging work.

5.2.4 *Communication*

Research has shown that communication is vital if employees are to stay engaged. This is done at Quirk by allowing the employees to have a transparent view of the financials of the organisation, allowing the employees to be able to voice their opinions, having an employee sit on the Board, and making sure that all changes related to employees are communicated to them.

5.2.5 *Development*

The line managers that coach and mentor the staff clearly indicate that the organisation does make it a priority to provide their employees with all the tools required to perform their expected tasks. The training aspect of facilitation is achieved by providing employees with free education at The Red and Yellow

School. It is evident that Rob personally wants to develop each and every employee at Quirk in order to equip them to be masters of their own destiny.

5.2.6 *Reward*

It is clear that there is a misalignment regarding the importance of paying well and engaging employees. The responses from Rob and the employees indicate that although the salaries of the employees at Quirk are market-related, in most instances Quirk does not lose its staff to other marketing agencies but to the corporate environment. The employees who avoided speaking about rewards, especially in monetary form, did so because they feel that the salary at Quirk is not enough to make them stay.

5.3 Recommendations to executives

The main recommendation that can be made from this study is that the executives at Quirk need to relook the salary component of their employee engagement initiatives, as it seems that they have been focused on salaries related to the industry. Now that big corporations are setting up their own in-house digital advertising agencies, it has been easy for them to employ Quirk employees based on a much better salary package alone. Engagement needs to incorporate monetary value as well.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The research conducted at Quirk on employee engagement does not limit it to the marketing and advertising industries alone. Future research should not only look at advertising agencies; other emotionally demanding industries in South Africa should be investigated to see how certain companies ensure their employees are engaged, or how they can incorporate what Quirk has done to increase levels of employee engagement in their specific industry.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening statement to respondent

The researcher began the interview by introducing herself and describing the aim of the research and the explanation of employee engagement. It was explained upfront that any information shared by the respondent would be in the public domain should it be published, however the individual's names would be kept anonymous.

Questions addressed to employees

The questions are contextualised from the literature review.

1. What do you know about employee engagement and how have you experienced it at Quirk?
2. How do you feel about working at Quirk and the contribution you make in the company?
3. How is working for Quirk different in the industry that you are in?
4. How do you feel about your specific day to day tasks that you have been employed to do in the company, especially when you have achieved more than you expected of yourself?
5. The Quirk environment - please describe it from the head office level to the cleaners?
6. How do you feel rewarded for your contribution in the company?
7. What do you feel the team work and collaborative effort culture is like at Quirk and why do you say so?

Questions addressed to CEO

1. How would you describe employee engagement?
2. What are the practices that you put in place to make sure that employees are engaged in your company?
3. What are the major elements or contributions that you feel play a major role in EE?
4. How is culture at Quirk maintained throughout the whole organisation and how do you determine whether employees are engaged or not?

5. Why do you think EE is important in the advertising industry as a whole?