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Conceptualising and exploring the meaning of employee engagement: an exploratory study

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A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by coursework and Research Report in the field of Industrial Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

12 October 2009

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university

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Gillian Moira Griffith

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate academic and practitioner understandings of the term employee engagement. The sample consisted of 13 academic participants from Industrial Psychology/Human Resource departments of universities across South Africa and 8 practitioner participants from organisations and consulting firms across the Gauteng region. The aim of the research was to determine the similarities and differences between academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement, to determine employee engagements relationship with other well-known constructs, namely, affective commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour, and to determine the uniqueness and importance of the construct employee engagement. Participants were emailed a questionnaire comprising of both open-ended and close-ended questions. It was found that academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement were similar and reflected what is said in both the academic and practitioner literature. Both academic and practitioner participants used similar words to describe the concept that are indicative of something extra that a person feels towards his/her work or organisation that results in the person working hard and passionately resulting in positive consequences for both the individual and the organisation. Both academic and practitioner participants also found employee engagement to be different to, or include small aspects of other well-known constructs such as affective commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour. Both academic and practitioner participants found employee engagement to be an important construct that organisations should address due to it's various positive organisational and individual consequences. It was concluded that further research of the construct is necessary so that engagement can be better understood, interpreted and utilised in both the academic and practitioner arenas.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Employee engagement has become an extremely popular topic in recent years even being labelled "a human resource craze" (Endres and Mancheno-Smoak, 2008, p.69). It is seen as the 'silver bullet', a magical formula to enhance employee performance (Corace, 2007). Employee engagement has been stated as critical to the success of a business (Bashinsky, 2004). Employee engagement brings clear competitive advantage (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004) and the Gallup Research Group has shown that employee engagement is statistically related to positive organisational outcomes such as productivity, employee retention and customer satisfaction (Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008). Similar relationships have not been found within other related constructs such as job satisfaction (Fisher & Locke, 1992) (as cited in Little & Little, 2006). With such statements it seems impossible to question the validity of the concept employee engagement.

However, despite these positive statements, there are also negative ones, highlighting the contradictions found within the term. For example, Ketter (2008) notes that many experts claim employee engagement is not a new concept. Engen (2008) states that nobody really knows for sure if the time, money and effort used to increase engagement really generates the kind of results CEO's are looking for. Along with this, employee engagement is heavily marketed by HR consulting firms (Macey & Schneider, 2008) and has been marketed as a practical rather than an academic concept (Little & Little, 2006). Macey & Schneider (2008) state that the academic community has been slow to follow the employee engagement craze leaving the research on employee engagement to be lacking in rigorous testing of the theory underlying the construct. There is a large discrepancy between corporate interest in employee engagement and academic writing and research (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) did a search of the keyword 'employee engagement' on both the internet and in *PsychInfo*. The keyword 'employee engagement' yielded over 2 million hits on the Internet whereas the keywords 'employee engagement' and 'work engagement' yielded only 61 scientific articles and chapters in *PsychInfo* (Bakker & Shaufeli, 2008).

The concept of employee engagement is therefore still highly fragmented and has little academic underpinning (Smythe, 2007). There is also still wide debate about what actually constitutes employee engagement (Smythe, 2007). Research on employee engagement undertaken over the past few years has defined the term differently and has therefore come up with different key drivers and implications (Soldati, 2007). This could be due to employee engagement being a 'hot topic' within corporate circles and often those employees and employers who think they understand the topic, still have difficulty in articulating the term (Soldati, 2007). Simpson (2008) provides a similar argument stating that although engagement has been branded an important work-related factor, the definitions and measurements of engagement at work are poorly understood.

Along with having a practitioner influence, Little and Little (2006), who provide one of the first comprehensive critiques of employee engagement, proposed four other problems that emerge in relation to the various definitions of the employee engagement concept. These are whether engagement is a behaviour or an attitude, whether engagement is an individual or group level phenomenon, the unclear relationships between engagement and other related organisational behaviour concepts and various measurement issues that aid in obscuring the true meaning of the concept. Some authors, for example Macey & Schneider (2008) state that further development of the construct is needed whilst Little and Little (2006) note it is important to first determine how employee engagement relates to and augments existing knowledge and thereafter establish whether future research is warranted and if so, what type of research on employee engagement would be needed.

Therefore in light of Little and Little's (2006) critique, and others, the aim of this study is therefore to explore understandings and meanings of employee engagement focusing on practitioner and academic perspectives. The focus on both academic and practitioner perspectives is due to the aforementioned differences of employee engagement within these two arenas. From this exploration, the aim of the current research is also to determine how academic and practitioners relate employee engagement to other well known constructs and to determine if academic and practitioners find employee engagement to be a unique important concept that should be addressed by organisations thereby warranting further research.

This research report will start with a chapter in which the literature on employee engagement will be reviewed. A chapter explaining the particular methodology used in this research will follow this. Thereafter the results of the research will be reported followed by a chapter on the discussion of these results, relating them back to the literature. Finally the report will be concluded with a short chapter summing up the aims and findings of the research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The literature review will explore various contradictions and discrepancies within the research on employee engagement. This will include a discussion on the development of employee engagement as a construct, which will be followed by an exploration of the various definitions of the term, differentiating between practitioner and academic writings. Thereafter different measurements of employee engagement will be discussed followed by a discussion on employee engagement's relation to other well-known organisational behaviour constructs, namely, organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour.

2.2. Development of the construct, employee engagement

The Gallup Research Group coined the term employee engagement as a result of 25 years of interviewing and surveying employees and managers (Little & Little, 2006) whereas Simpson (2008) states that Kahn's (1990) study on personal engagement was the earliest of the engagement at work constructs. There is therefore different views on the origin of employee engagement but this may however be a reflection of the different terms used to describe a construct, that is employee engagement compared to personal engagement. Employee engagement has been widely written about in the management literature and popular press (Little & Little, 2006). Therefore literature on employee engagement has had a practitioner influence (Bhatnagar, 2007). Saks (2006) notes that because most of the literature is found in practitioner journals it has a basis in practice rather than in theory. Little and Little (2006) state that this could be the attraction of employee engagement to consulting groups and their client organisations, that is employee engagement has been marketed as practical and is not an 'academic' concept. Various authors have mentioned that because of this practitioner influence there is a shortage or dearth of academic literature on the topic (Robinson et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement has also been referred to as a 'fad' (Saks, 2006; Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008) and as being 'old wine in new bottles' or a new word for an old thing (Little & Little, 2006; Ketter, 2008).

Management theory is inundated with fads and plagued with contradictions (Carson, Lanier, Carson & Birkenmeier, 1999). Little is known about the production of fads but it is most often associated with a consultancy entity and usually there is some point at which a fad demonstrates sufficient effectiveness in diverse settings to evolve from being a fad to something of more permanence (Carson et al., 1999). Organisations tend to adopt these fads, making them more popular, for various reasons such as a desire for reputation and status, or a way to tell the world that they are progressive (Carson et al., 1999). Employee engagement being labelled a 'hot topic' or a 'buzz phrase' could be conducive to the term being a 'fad'. However, research on employee engagement has been conducted over the past 18 years and seems to be increasing (see Table 1) which could be conducive to the term evolving into something of more permanence.

This various research on employee engagement has linked the construct to increased positive organisational outcomes such as productivity, retention and customer satisfaction (Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008), it has identified top drivers of engagement (Ketter, 2008) and nearly all major consultancy firms offer assessment tools that identify drivers and programs to increase employee engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). However there are still questions as to the connection between engagement and performance (Engen, 2008) and whether or not employee engagement is a redundant concept within existing research (Little & Little, 2006). There are also those who view engagement as a 'costly, fluffy distraction' and that it is impractical and a waste of time (Engen, 2008). In the presence of such discrepancies an exploration of the development of the concept could prove to be useful by examining what research has been conducted and what is currently known about the term. A useful tool through which an exploration of employee engagement can be conducted is Reichers and Schneider's (1990) three-stage model of the evolution of constructs.

Reichers and Schneider (1990) propose that concepts in the organisational sciences follow a predictable developmental sequence made up of definable stages. Reichers and Schneider (1990) developed a three-stage model of the evolution of constructs, which is related to Kuhn's (1970) beliefs about the evolution of scientific paradigms.

Thomas Kuhn offered a powerful description of how belief systems change (Cannon-Bowers, Salas and Pruitt, 1996). Research is guided by ideological paradigms, which tend to focus a scientific community in a specific way (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1996). These paradigms prescribe the type of experiments used, the questions asked and even the subjects that are considered important (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1996). Paradigms therefore have a constricting effect as research is conducted and interpreted so that it is consistent with the particular paradigm instead of venturing into unknown areas and sources (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1996). However sometimes certain problems can arise within accepted paradigms and a crisis develops resulting in a new paradigm eventually emerging (Cannon-Bowers et al, 1996). Old data is reinterpreted to fit in the new paradigm and researchers will deny their previous ways of thinking causing the new paradigm to be as constricting and biased as the previous paradigms (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1996). Reichers and Schneider's (1990) model follows this type of process and consists of three definable stages, namely, introduction and elaboration, evaluation and augmentation, and consolidation and accommodation. These three stages will be discussed relating them to the evolution of employee engagement.

The first stage of Reichers and Schneider's (1990) model is introduction and elaboration. Within this stage a concept is invented, discovered or borrowed from another field of organisational behaviour. Borrowing refers to the transposing of an old idea into a new field. This old idea is then modified to suit its new field or context. This stage is characterised by articles which attempt to legitimise the new concept. This includes explaining the concept's definition, its importance and its ability in integrating and understanding previously vague ideas. During this stage researchers and authors focus on operationalisations of the concept and tend to treat the concept as a dependent or independent variable. Articles that discuss the conceptualisation and operationalisation of employee engagement appear from 1990 up until current research (Kahn 1990; Kahn 1992; Maslach, Shaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Shaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002; Saks, 2006; and Macey & Schneider, 2008). Table 1 also illustrates the vast number of articles that are characteristic of stage 1. Some view the notion of employee engagement as still being relatively new (Macey & Schneider, 2008) or that it has only been in recent years that employee engagement has become a popular term (Saks, 2006; Little & Little, 2006; Endres &

Mancheno-Smoak, 2008). Many articles have focused on conceptualising or operationalising employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova & Bakker, 2002) and examining various antecedents and consequences of engagement (Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007; Kim, Shin & Swanger, 2008; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006).

The second stage of Reichers and Schneider's (1990) model is termed evaluation and augmentation. This stage is characterised by critical reviews of the concept. These critical reviews include and are not limited to issues such as faulty conceptualisation and inadequate operationalisation. In response to these critiques of the concept, other authors will attempt to overcome these criticisms and augment preliminary findings. This stage is also characterised by articles that support the uniqueness, and distinctiveness of the construct to other similarly related constructs. The limitations of the earlier conceptual and empirical work are acknowledged and authors develop new and improved conceptualisations of the construct and offer new empirical studies. Stage two is therefore characterised by both critiques of the concept and attempts to display the uniqueness of the concept. There are articles that explain the importance of employee engagement and its relation to many positive organisational outcomes (Luthans and Peterson 2002; Corace 2007). There are also many articles which differentiate employee engagement from other related concepts such as organisational commitment (Little and Little, 2006; Saks, 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; and Macey & Schneider, 2008), job involvement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks 2006; Little and Little, 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; and Macey & Schneider, 2008) and organisational citizenship behaviour (Little and Little 2006; Saks 2006; and Macey & Schneider, 2008). Little and Little (2006) provide one of the first comprehensive critiques of employee engagement raising many issues associated with employee engagement.

The third and last stage of Reichers and Schneider's (1990) model is termed consolidation and accommodation. During this stage criticisms of the construct seem to disappear and articles simply state what is and what is not known about the concept. One or two definitions of the concept are accepted and only a few operationalisations of the concept are used. Both the antecedents and the consequences of the concept are well known. The inclusion of a concept into a field can sometimes be characterised by the use of the concept in general models of

individual or organisational behaviours. Sometimes the concept's history will be revived but it is usually at this time that researchers and authors move on to new younger concepts and the cycle starts again. Gubman's (2004) article 'From engagement to passion for work: the search for the missing person' proposes that there may be something more than engagement, namely true passion. Starling (2007) states what he calls true involvement is needed rather than employee engagement. These articles could be an attempt to leave employee engagement and to move onto a newer, younger concept, an indication of stage three. Stage three is also characterised by simple statements of what is and what is not known about the concept with the use of one or two definitions and operationalisations. Bakker and Schaufeli's (2008) article could be an example of this as they identify and discuss three main approaches to employee engagement.

From this discussion on Reichers and Schneider's (1990) three-stage model it could be argued that the concept employee engagement, within the academic literature, is currently in the second stage. From table 1 it can be seen that most articles are characterised as being in stage 1 with only a few being characterised as being in stage 2. Reichers and Schneider (1990) do acknowledge that the boundaries between the stages can be 'blurred' which often causes difficulty in attempting to place a concept in a certain stage. Although there are critiques of employee engagement there are still attempts at providing comprehensive frameworks of employee engagement (e.g. Macey & Schneider, 2008). Also many articles, in attempt to explain what employee engagement is, distinguish it from other well-validated constructs while the main focus of their article is on the antecedents or consequences of employee engagement. These could therefore be examples of how the boundaries between stages can be 'blurred' causing difficulty in placing a concept into a certain stage. From Table 1 it can also be noted that although there have been claims that academic research is lacking in employee engagement, there seems to be an increase in most recent years. Although there have been statements suggesting that employee engagement is either a 'fad' or a waste of money and time, the number of research articles exploring and examining various aspects of the term could be an indication that employee engagement is something different and that the term is not going to easily fade into the background or be replaced by a different concept in the near future.

Table 1: The development of the engagement concept

Stage	Date	Authors	Title	Primary Emphasis	Measuring Instrument
1	1990	Kahn	Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work	Explored the conditions at work in which people personally engage and disengage	Qualitative
1	1992	Kahn	To be fully there: psychological presence at work	Develops the concept of psychological presence to describe the experiential state enabling organisation members to draw deeply on their personal selves in role performances	None
1	2001	Rothbard	Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles	Develops a model of engagement in the multiple roles of work and family	Work Engagement Survey Items (untitled) (engagement operationalised as attention and absorption in work)
1	2001	Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter	Job burnout	Expands the work on engagement to include a focus on the positive antithesis of burnout, work engagement	None
1	2002	Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker	The measurement of burnout and engagement: a two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach	Factorial structure of new instrument to measure engagement and MBI-GS is assessed and relationship between burnout and engagement is examined	New instrument (UWES)
1	2002	Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova & Bakker	Burnout and engagement in university students: a cross-national study	Examines burnout and engagement in university students from Spain and the Netherlands	UWES
1	2002	Harter, Schmidt & Hayes	Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: a meta-analysis		
1	2003	Sonnentag	Recovery, work engagement, and proactive behaviour: a new look at the interface between nonwork and work	Examine work-related outcomes of recovery during leisure time	UWES
1	2003	Rothmann	Burnout and engagement: a South African perspective	Discusses measuring instruments, causal models, and interventions of burnout and engagement	None
1	2003	Storm & Rothmann	A psychometric analysis of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale in the South African police service	Validate the UWES for the South African Police Service (SAPS) and to determine its construct equivalence and bias in different race groups	UWES
1	2004	Shaufeli & Bakker	Job demands, Job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: a multi-sample study	A model is tested in which burnout and engagement have different predictors and different possible consequences	UWES

1	2004	May, Gilson & Harter	The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work	Builds on Kahn's (1990) ethnographic work by exploring the 3 psychological conditions on employees engagement at their work	Measure developed for the study (untitled). 13 items, reflect each of the 3 components of Kahn's (1990) psychological engagement: cognitive, emotional and physical engagement
1	2006	Cartwright & Holmes	The meaning of work: the challenge of regaining employee engagement and reducing cynicism	Concerned with redressing the balance and the organisational need to recognise the meaning and emotional aspects of work	None
1	2006	Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen & Shaufeli	Burnout and work engagement: do individual differences make a difference?	Examine whether burnout and engagement could be differentiated on the basis of personality and temperament	UWES
1	2006	Bakker, van Emmerick & Euwema	Crossover of engagement and burnout in work teams	Hypothesised that both engagement and burnout may transfer from teams to individual team members	UWES
2	2006	Little & Little	Employee engagement: conceptual issues	Explores the construct of employee engagement by focusing on it's definition, it's relationship to other well validated constructs, the positives and negatives of its research and the application of the construct to organisational outcomes	None
1	2006	Rothmann & Jordaan	Job demands, job resources, and work engagement of academic staff in South African higher education institutions	Investigate the work engagement of staff in selected South African higher education institutions as well as the impact of job demands and job resources on their work engagement	UWES
1	2006	Saks	Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement	Test a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and organisation engagement based on social exchange theory	Saks' (2006) Job and Organisation Engagement Scales (new measure: untitled)
1	2007	Bhatnagar	Talent management strategy of employee engagement in Indian ITES employees: key to retention	Investigate talent management and its relationship to levels of employee engagement	GWA
1	2007	Avery, McKay & Wilson	Engaging the aging workforce: the relationship between perceived age similarity, satisfaction with co-workers, and employee engagement	Relationship between employee age, perceived co-worker age composition, and satisfaction with older and younger coworkers on engagement	GWA

1	2007	Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen	Job demands and resources as antecedents of work engagement	2 Year longitudinal study investigating the experience of work engagement and its antecedents among Finnish health care personnel	UWES
1	2008	de Mello e Souza Wildermuth & Pauken	A perfect match: decoding employee engagement-Part II: engaging jobs and individuals	Characteristics of engaging jobs and individual personality traits that engaged individuals are more likely to exhibit	None
1	2008	Kim, Shin & Swanger	Burnout and engagement: a comparative analysis using the Big Five personality dimensions	Focused on burnout and engagement and their relationships with the Big Five personality dimensions	UWES
1	2008	Macy & Schneider	The meaning of employee engagement	Conceptualising employee engagement in terms of psychological state, behavioural and trait engagement	None
2	2008	Dalal, Brummel, Wee & Thomas	Defining employee engagement for productive research and practice	Addresses shortcomings of Macey & Schneider's (2008) conceptualisation of employee engagement	None
1	2008	Pugh & Dietz	Employee engagement at the organisational level of analysis	Rationale for why it would be important to conceptualise engagement at the organisational level of analysis	None
2	2008	Endres & Mancheno-Smoak	The human resource craze: human performance improvement and employee engagement	Help practitioners recognise the difference between two 'faddish' terms, human productivity improvement (HPI) and employee engagement and for researchers to more completely define such terms	None
3?	2008	Simpson	Engagement at work: a review of the literature	Examine current state of knowledge about engagement at work	None
1	2008	Salanova & Schaufeli	A cross-national study of work engagement as a mediator between job resources and proactive behaviour	Investigates the mediating role of work engagement and job resources (i.e. job control, feedback) and proactive behaviour at work	UWES
1	2008	Seppala, Mauno, Feldt, Hakanen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen & Schaufeli	The construct validity of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: Multisample and longitudinal evidence	Investigated the factor structure and factorial group and time invariance of the 17-item and 9-item versions of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale	17-item UWES & 9-item UWES
1	2008	Bakker & Schaufeli	Positive organisational behaviour: engaged employees in flourishing organisations	Editorial which introduces a special issue of the Journal of Organisational Behaviour on positive organisational behaviour (POB)	None

1	Article in Press	Pienaar & Willemse	Burnout, engagement, coping and general health of service employees in the hospitality industry	Examined the relationship between burnout, engagement, coping and general health of employees in hospitality in a South African city	UWES

(Note: Table 1 is not an exhaustive list of academic articles on employee engagement, also it can be argued in which stage each article is in)

2.3. Definitions and conceptualisations of employee engagement

Various authors have recognised the inconsistencies and differing interpretations of the construct employee engagement. For example: Simpson (2008) states that although employee engagement has emerged as an important work-related concept, the definitions and measurement of engagement at work are poorly understood; Macy and Schneider (2008) state that both academic and practitioner parties are rife with competing and inconsistent meanings of the construct which can be due to the bottom-up way employee engagement has evolved within the practitioner community; both Little and Little (2006) and Endres and Mancheno-Smoak (2008) mention that different interpretations of employee engagement are a result of the Gallup Organisation research spending the majority of their work explaining the meta-analytic techniques used to find the relationships between the items in their questionnaire and the business unit level outcomes rather than spending time defining and validating the construct. The confusion in a definition of a concept is however not an unfamiliar stage in the development of a concept, it is similar to the manner in which burnout was first attributed as being a pop psychology concept (Macey & Schneider, 2008). The following paragraphs explore various meanings and definitions of employee engagement in both the practitioner and academic literature.

2.3.1. Practitioner Interpretations

As mentioned previously the academic arena has been slow to jump onto the 'practitioner engagement bandwagon' (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.4). Research found in different outlets has had little consideration for testing the theory underlying the construct. Practitioner literature focuses on employee engagement as a positive work-related outcome that an organisation needs to employ in order for them to reap

the benefits of decreased turnover, increased commitment and retention and increased productivity (Seijts & Crim, 2006; Ketter, 2008). Much research has emerged from the Gallup Organisation but as mentioned previously their lack of focus on defining the construct has led to numerous misinterpretations by various authors. The Gallup Organisation uses the term 'employee engagement'. Gallup researchers, Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002) define employee engagement as 'the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work'. This definition focuses on the employees' work and uses other related constructs to explain the concept. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes' (2003) (as cited in Simpson, 2008) model of employee engagement identifies four antecedents that are necessary for employee engagement to occur. These antecedents are: clarity of expectations and basic materials and equipment that is provided; feelings of contribution to the organisation; feeling a sense of belonging to something other than oneself; and feeling as though there are opportunities to discuss progress and grow (Simpson, 2008, p.9). These antecedents are reflected in the Gallup Organisation's measure of employee engagement, namely the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA). Other various interpretations of employee engagement have been found with differing and contrasting elements.

Seijts & Crim (2006) define an engaged employee as someone who is fully involved and enthusiastic about his or her work, which is similar to Harter et al's (2002) definition. Lucey, Bateman & Hines (2005) as cited in (Endres & Moncheno-Smoak, 2008) interpret the GWA as measuring how each individual employee connects with both the company and the customers. This definition lacks the element of enthusiasm or satisfaction with work rather focusing on one's connection with the company and customers. DDI (2005) (as cited in Little & Little, 2006) use the definition 'the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do. DDI's (2005) definition also refers to the work of the employee that is 'what they do' and includes the element of feeling valued. Another major consultant/researcher, Towers Perrin, define engagement as 'the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, beyond the required minimum to get the job done, in the form of extra time, brainpower or energy (Vance, 2006, p.3). This definition incorporates energy and extra effort, similar to Saks (2006) notion of 'going the extra mile'. Wellins & Concelman (2004) define employee engagement as 'the illusive force that motivates

employees to higher levels of performance (as cited in Little & Little, 2006). Wellins and Concelman's (2004) definition refers to some unknown force that increases one's motivation.

Researchers from the Institute of Employment Studies, Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) define employee engagement as 'a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee' (p.2). This definition emphasises a positive attitude towards the organisation and highlights an important aspect of engagement in that it is a two way process. Hewitt Associates' definition of employee engagement, 'the state of emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation or group producing behaviour that will help fulfil an organisation's promise to customers-and in so doing, improve business results' (Vance, 2006, p.3) also refers to a connection to the organisation rather than one's work. This definition also uses a related concept, commitment, which could further confuse engagement with other well-validated constructs. Other authors also use the term commitment when referring to employee engagement. For example: Flemming, Coffman & Harter (2005) as cited in (Little & Little, 2006) used the term committed employees as a synonym for engaged employees.

These definitions found in the practitioner literature, mostly stemming from consultant or research organisations, clearly highlight the fact that definitions of employee engagement vary greatly across different organisations (Vance, 2006). These definitions differ on one important component that is engagement with what one does or one's work and engagement with one's organisation or group and its values. Elements that emerge within these various definitions include engagement encompassing a positive attitude, enthusiasm, energy, motivation and a connection with either the job, organisation or group. Some definitions also use the term commitment or involvement, which, as stated previously, may influence the confusion surrounding the construct. Macey and Schneider (2008) note commonalities to various definitions of employee engagement. These include it being a desirable condition, it has an organisational purpose, and it includes involvement, commitment,

passion, enthusiasm, focused effort and energy. Macey & Schneider (2008) highlight that it encompasses both attitudinal and behavioural components. Macey and Schneider (2008) advocate that the antecedents of such behaviour lie in the conditions of ones work and the consequences of such behaviours are thought to be of value to organisational effectiveness. Macey and Schneider (2008) note that this lack of precision with regards to employee engagement does not mean that the construct lacks practical or conceptual utility but suggest that it would benefit from being framed as a model that simultaneously embraces both the psychological state and the behaviour it implies (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Other researchers/authors also call for an emphasis on defining the construct. For example Endres and Mancheno-Smoak (2008) encourage researchers to more completely define the term and for practitioners to define their terms within their scope of work so that results may be more readily measured and therefore more meaningful.

2.3.2. Academic

Simpson (2008) identified four lines of engagement research, namely employee engagement, personal engagement, burnout/engagement and work engagement. As discussed previously employee engagement was coined by the Gallup Organisation and refers to one's satisfaction, involvement and enthusiasm for his or her work. The other lines of research incorporate developed theories underlying the construct. Parallel with the practitioner literature, these theories are also different and incorporate various elements. These other three lines of research will now be discussed.

Kahn (1990) introduced the term personal engagement and disengagement. He provided a theoretical conceptualisation of engagement in a study - which focused on psychological presence during particular moments of role performances. Kahn (1990) defines personal engagement as the 'simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence and active, full role performances' (p.700). Whilst in engagement, employees will express themselves cognitively, physically and emotionally (Kahn, 1990). When a person is engaged they are understood to be physically involved, cognitively vigilant and emotionally connected (Simpson, 2008).

Personal disengagement is thereby the withdrawal and defence of the employee's preferred self, which results in a lack of connections, personal absence and incomplete role performances (Kahn, 1990). Whilst in disengagement employees will withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's (1990) premise was that employees will express their preferred selves on the basis of their past psychological experiences of self-in role. Kahn (1990) proposed that three psychological conditions would determine the extent to which an individual will express his/her preferred self in a performance role. These three psychological conditions are psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability. Psychological meaningfulness is a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of self given in their work role performances (Kahn, 1992). Psychological safety refers to a feeling that one is able to show one's self without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status or career (Kahn, 1992). Psychological availability refers to a sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment in time. Kahn's definition therefore focuses on one's physical, emotional and cognitive involvement and connection to their work role, which is determined by the three psychological conditions.

In 1992, Kahn expanded his work and offered a comprehensive theoretical model of psychological presence. The focus of his study is on what it means to be fully present in a role so that that an individual's feelings, thoughts and beliefs are accessible within the context of that role performance. Four dimensions of psychological presence are defined and illustrated. These dimensions are: people feel and are attentive, are connected, integrated and focused in their role performances (Kahn, 1990). Therefore if an individual finds meaning, has the necessary resources and feels safe within their work role, personal engagement will result and the individual will be said to be 'fully' present (Kahn, 1992). Although a comprehensive theoretical model is described, it lacks a proposition on how to operationalise the construct.

Kahn's (1990; 1992) definition of employee engagement has been used by other researchers. For example: May et al. (2004) built on Kahn's theoretical and empirical work. May et al. (2004) explored the determinants and mediating effects of Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions on employee's engagement in their work.

Rothbard's (2001) study also uses Kahn's (1990; 1992) definition of employee engagement and focuses on two competing arguments, depletion and enrichment, about the effects of engagement in multiple roles.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) expanded their concept of burnout to include an erosion of engagement in the job (Maslach, Shaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Engagement was understood as being an opposite to burnout, on a continuum, with engagement at one end and burnout at the other (Simpson, 2008). This development reflected the trend of moving towards a more 'positive psychology' (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002). Maslach & Leiter (1997) (as cited in Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002) state that engagement is characterised by involvement, energy and efficacy that are considered as direct opposites to the three dimensions of burnout, namely cynicism, exhaustion and a lack of efficacy. Within this definition the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) can be used to measure both burnout and job engagement, with the opposite scoring pattern of the three components of burnout implying engagement (Simpson, 2008). Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002), however, took a different perspective and proposed that although burnout and engagement are opposite concepts, they should be independently measured with different instruments.

Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) agree, conceptually speaking, with Maslach and Leiter (1997), that engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout. They, however, suggest that an employee who experiences low burnout may not necessarily be experiencing high engagement. Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) therefore define and subsequently operationalise engagement separately from burnout. Shaufeli & Bakker (2001) (as cited in Shaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002) identified two underlying dimensions of work-related well-being, namely, activation and identification. Activation ranges from exhaustion to vigour whilst identification ranges from cynicism to dedication. Another dimension, absorption, which is a characterisation of engagement, was also identified. However whereas engagement is characterised by vigour (high activation) and dedication (high identification) and burnout is characterised by exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low identification), the third dimension of burnout, reduced professional efficacy, is not a direct opposite of engagements third dimension, absorption. These two dimensions are rather conceptually distinct aspects that do not lie at two end points of some underlying

continuum (Shaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002). Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002, p.74) therefore define work engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption'. This definition focuses on engagement as a state of mind that is related to one's work.

Other than these four lines of research identified by Simpson (2008), other academic researchers have also provided both definitions and operationalisations of employee engagement. For example: Saks (2006) tested a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and organisation engagement. This follows from the conceptualisation of engagement being role-related (Saks, 2006). Members of an organisation have two important roles, namely, their work role and their role as a member of the organisation. Saks' (2006) model acknowledges these two important roles by including both job and organisation engagement in the model. Job engagement is therefore the extent to which one is psychologically present in one's work role while organisation engagement is the extent to which one is psychologically present in their role as a member of their organisation. Saks (2006) further uses social exchange theory to try and explain why individuals will respond to the conditions proposed by Kahn (1990) with varying degrees of engagement. Saks (2006) argues that employees will repay their organisations for resources received by changing their level of engagement. Saks (2006) therefore uses social exchange theory to provide a theoretical foundation to explain why individuals vary their degree of engagement in both their work and organisation. This reflects Robinson et al.'s (2004) explanation of employee engagement involving a two-way process between employee and employer.

Macey and Schneider (2008) draw on various literatures in an attempt to demonstrate the different uses of the term engagement. They show that the concept is used at different times to refer to psychological states, traits and behaviours. Macey and Schneider (2008) consider an overall framework of engagement. They propose that engagement as a disposition, that is trait engagement, is regarded as an inclination to experience the world from a particular viewpoint, for example positive affectivity characterised by feelings of enthusiasm. They propose that this trait engagement is reflected in psychological state engagement, defined as an antecedent to behavioural engagement. Behavioural engagement is defined in terms of discretionary effort or a form of extra-role or in-role behaviour (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Macey and

Schneider (2008) do not choose a specific definition of engagement to be true or right. Pugh and Dietz (2008) note that Macey and Schneider (2008) frame the construct of employee engagement at the individual level of analysis and provide rationale as to why it may be valuable conceptualising engagement at the organisational level of analysis. Pugh and Dietz (2008) argue that because some of Macey and Schneider's (2008) antecedents and consequences of engagement are at the organisational level of analysis, and performance at a unit level rather than an individual level is more of a barometer for success, it would be useful to conceptualise engagement at the organisational level of analysis. This argument may hold true for other authors conceptualisations of employee engagement as many other authors also conceptualise employee engagement at the individual level but talk about organisational antecedents and consequences.

Dalal, Brummel, Wee and Thomas (2008) suggest that Macy and Schneider's (2008) attempt to demarcate the concept may have just added to the confusion. Dalal et al. (2008) suggest this is due to their conceptualisation of the psychological state of engagement and their use of the term engagement encompassing disposition and behavioural constructs. Dalal et al. (2008) state that, a state, refers to within-person variation occurring over a short period of a week, hour or minute. Dalal et al. (2008) therefore suggests that calling the construct state engagement is misleading as it obscures true state engagement, that is, day-to-day or hour-to-hour within person variability in energy and absorption. Dalal et al. (2008) also note that most studies of engagement measure it as a trait, that is focusing on differences between people, and that there are no studies that measure it as a state. Dalal et al. (2008) also advise against naming a construct in terms of its antecedents and consequences. Dalal et al. (2008) suggest that Macey and Schneider's (2008) state engagement is better referred to as engagement that has both trait and state-like components as well as engagement being a cognitive-affective construct and not a dispositional or behavioural one. Trait engagement and behavioural engagement should rather be referred to as dispositional antecedents and behavioural consequences of engagement.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2008) also provide an attempt to consolidate the meaning of employee engagement. They discuss three approaches to employee engagement that they have found exist. First, it is conceived as a set of motivating resources such as

recognition, support, feedback, and opportunities for skill development and learning, which is consistent with Macey and Schneider's (2008) antecedents of engagement; second, it is conceived in terms of commitment and extra-role behaviour, it is this approach that is conducive to putting 'old commitment wine in new engagement bottles' (p.151), which could be consistent with Macey and Schneider's (2008) consequences or behavioural aspect of engagement; and third, engagement is defined independently from job resources and positive organisational outcomes as a 'positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work related well-being that is the antipode of job burnout' (p.151).

Both Macey and Schneider (2008) and Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) provide important attempts at consolidating the construct engagement as it allows readers to be aware of the different uses of employee engagement and reflects the fact that varying definitions of employee engagement across both practitioner and academic literature incorporate different elements of the construct such as behaviours, attitudes or states of minds and traits. Pugh and Dietz (2008) raise another important issue with regards to conceptualising employee engagement, namely that it is done at both the individual and organisational level of analysis. A third important element highlighted by different authors' definitions is whether engagement is referring to one's engagement with one's work role, with a group or with the organisation.

Further reviews of the engagement literature and research on the topic could facilitate the development of the construct into Reichers and Schneider's (1990) third stage of their model where one or two definitions of the term are accepted and both the antecedents and consequences of the term are known. Until then it would be important for both academics and practitioners to be clear about the type of engagement they are talking about (Macy & Schneider, 2008).

2.4. Measuring employee engagement

A number of measures have been developed in the academic literature to assess employee engagement. Each measure reflects the author's specific conceptualisation of the construct. As mentioned previously nearly all the top consulting firms have also developed their own measure of employee engagement. The items from these

measuring instruments reflect the researcher's or consultant company's definition of employee engagement. Therefore when comparing items from the measuring instruments it can, at times seem as though one is measuring two completely different constructs. A number of measuring instruments of employee engagement will be explored looking at the various items. This will further highlight the differences within the construct.

As mentioned previously, the Gallup Organisation, through years of interviewing and surveying employees and managers derived statistical items that measure employee engagement called the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) (Little and Little, 2006). The instrument was developed through studies of work satisfaction, work motivation, supervisory practices and work-group effectiveness (Harter et al., 2002). The GWA was designed to reflect two broad categories of employee survey items namely those that measure attitudinal outcomes and those that measure or identify issues that are within a manager's control - antecedents to attitudinal outcomes (Harter et al., 2002). The GWA is operationalised according to Bakker and Schaufeli's (2008) first approach to employee engagement, that is, as a set of motivating resources. This is a widely used engagement measure even within the academic literature (e.g. Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Bhatnagar, 2007).

Luthans and Peterson (2002) state that Gallup has empirically determined employee engagement to be a significant predictor of positive organisational outcomes such as retention and productivity however it would be desirable to link this empirical evidence to an already established theory in management research (Bhatnagar, 2007). Luthans & Peterson (2002) also note that an alternative theoretical framework can add further understanding and convergent validity to Gallup's empirically derived employee engagement. Luthans & Peterson (2002) propose that the work done by Kahn (1990; 1992) can be used for this purpose. By using Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement studies have found that employees who are personally engaged are more satisfied and productive than those who are disengaged, which Luthans & Peterson (2002) note is similar to what Gallup has found using the GWA. Luthans & Peterson (2002) therefore conclude that after a conceptual comparison of the GWA and Kahn's (1990) theoretically derived dimensions of engagement, that is, people feel and are attentive, are connected, integrated and focused in their role performances, there

seems to be conceptual fit. Luthans & Peterson (2002) state that this provides the theoretical grounding for a better understanding of employee engagement and a way to measure it using the GWA. Luthans and Peterson (2002) propose that a theoretical framework would provide further validation, understanding and testing of Gallup's conceptualisation of employee engagement.

Along with the Gallup and the Gallup Workplace Audit there are many other consultancies that claim to improve a company's level of employee engagement. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) claim that virtually all of the major consultancy firms offer their own assessment tools that identify the drivers of employee engagement and thereafter, specific programs to increase levels of employee engagement. For example, Towers Perrin use their own model of engagement to help a company understand employee engagement and how they can improve it. Mandala Consulting use a BeQ^{TM}, the Benchmark of Engagement Quotient to measure employees perceptions on four perspectives, namely, individual, group, organisational and societal perspectives (www.mandalaconsulting.co.za)

Measures of employee engagement also exist within the academic literature with these measures being based on the author's theoretical framework of the concept. As mentioned earlier, due to the measures being based on different theoretical frameworks, the measures at times seem to tap into different issues. The measurements of employee engagement that the current author found are those by Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002), May et al. (2004) and Saks (2006).

As mentioned earlier, Shaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) developed a new instrument to measure employee engagement based on their theoretical model that engagement is the positive opposite of burnout. The measure, called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Shaufeli and Bakker, 2004) consists of 17 items, which measure Shaufeli, Salanova et al.'s (2002) three underlying dimensions of employee engagement, namely vigour (six items, e.g. At may work I feel that I am bursting with energy), dedication (five items, e.g. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose) and absorption (six items, e.g. Time flies when I am working). These three dimensions are opposite to those of burnout, which are exhaustion, cynicism and reduced efficacy respectively. Psychometric analyses have revealed another two items

to be weak and therefore some studies have used a 15-item version (Seppala , Mauno, Feldt, Hakanen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen & Schaufeli, 2008). A shorter 9-item version (UWES-9) has also been developed; with vigour, dedication and absorption being assessed by 3-items each (Seppala et al., 2008).

The UWES has been translated into many languages and used among different occupational groups (Seppala et al., 2008). The psychometric properties of the UWES have however been less explored (Seppala et al., 2008). It is uncertain as to whether the theoretically based three-dimensional structure of the scale remains the same across different occupational groups and across different measurement points (Seppala et al., 2008). The assumed stability of the work engagement construct still remains without strong empirical evidence (Seppala et al., 2008). The UWES is commonly used within the academic literature (e.g. Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen & Schaufeli, 2006; Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2007; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008) as well as in South African academic studies (e.g. Storm & Rothmann, 2003; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006; Pienaar & Willemse, 2008). The questionnaire items tap into constructs similar to involvement and satisfaction but include an extra emotional, energetic or affective tone (Macy & Schneider, 2008). The items focus on one's energy and enthusiasm for work as apposed to the GWA which focuses more on one's job resources or aspects that may facilitate one to do one's work such as having the equipment to do the work and having a best friend at work.

May et al. (2004) built on Kahn's (1990) work on employee engagement and explored the determinants and mediating effects of the three psychological conditions of employee engagement, namely meaningfulness, safety and availability. May et al. (2004) therefore developed their own measure, which consists of 13 items which reflect Kahn's (1990) three components of psychological engagement: cognitive (e.g. Time passes quickly when I perform my job), emotional (e.g. I get excited when I perform well on my job) and physical engagement (e.g. I stay until the job is done). May et al. (2004) note that three separate and reliable scales each representing one of the three conditions did not emerge from an exploratory principal components factor analysis of 24 items and so instead an overall scale with fewer items that had good reliability and represented some balance across the three forms of engagement was

used. Schaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) state that absorption is characterised by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work. There seems to be an overlap between the UWES subscale absorption and May et al.'s (2004) subscale cognitive. For example an item from UWES subscale absorption is 'Time flies when I am working' and an item from May et al.'s subscale cognitive is 'Time passes quickly when I perform my job'. Schaufeli, Salanova et al. (2002) state that vigour is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience when working. Therefore there also seems to be an overlap between the UWES subscale vigour and May et al.'s subscale energy. For example an item from the subscale vigour is 'At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy' and an item from the subscale physical is 'I exert a lot of energy performing my job'. The current author was unable to find other studies using this personal engagement scale.

Saks (2006) also developed his own measure of employee engagement for use in his study on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Saks (2006) differentiated between job and organisation engagement and his measure therefore consisted of two six-item scales measuring job and organisation engagement respectively. A principal components factor analysis resulted in one item being removed from the job engagement scale. These items were developed to assess one's psychological presence in both their job and organisational role (Saks, 2006). The 5 items measuring job engagement seem to focus on one's cognitive presence in one's job role. For example, 'Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time' and 'My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job' are reflective of cognition similar to that of May et al.'s (2004) cognitive items and Shaufeli, Salanova et al.'s (2002) absorption items. Saks' (2006) job engagement items do not seem to encompass other facets of engagement or psychological presence. The 6 items measuring organisation engagement seem to focus on how one's organisation makes them feel energised and dedicated. For example 'Being a member of this organisation is very captivating' and 'Being a member of this organisation is exhilarating for me' both tap into how being a member of an organisation fuels one's excitement and energy. This discrepancy within this measurement of engagement could relate to Saks' (2006) conceptualisation of engagement. Saks' (2006) defines engagement as being psychologically present in both job and organisation roles. This follows on from Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement as being

psychologically present, however Saks (2006) does not explain what he mean's by psychological presence. Saks' (2006) measure of engagement also includes the items 'I am highly engaged in this job' and 'I am highly engaged in this organisation' both of which seem to be a bit vague as engagement is what one is assessing. The current author was unable to find other studies using this job and organisation scale developed by Saks (2006).

If one cannot define employee engagement then one cannot know what is being measured resulting in the implications being very vague (Macey & Schneider, 2008). The empirical research that does exist on employee engagement provides little consideration for rigorously testing the theory underlying the construct (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Macey and Schneider (2008) state that most measures of employee engagement are a potpourri of items representing one of four different areas: job satisfaction, organisational commitment, psychological empowerment and job involvement. Dalal et al. (2008) note problems with engagement items and suggest that this predictor contamination may be responsible for the incremental validity of employee engagement over job satisfaction when predicting performance. Macey and Schneider (2004) also comment on the durability of engagement and suggest that items of measures should ask how often one experiences specific engagement feelings and how long these feelings persist, as this will determine whether engagement is transient in nature or has an element of durability.

As can be seen from these discussions on the various academic and practitioner measures of employee engagement, the measure used depends on how one theoretically defines and conceptualises employee engagement. Some measuring instruments have items that are similar, indicating that the same component of engagement is being assessed whereas others seem to focus on completely different areas. Although the GWA and UWES are the two measuring instruments with the most research and are commonly used within the academic literature, they are still fraught with problems and critiques. It is important that one's conceptualisation of employee engagement is thorough so that measuring instruments will actually assess employee engagement and not other related constructs or only partial aspects of the concept. Differing measuring instruments on employee engagement that assess different aspects or issues will result in different predictors, consequences and

implications of employee engagement. As well as the measurement of employee engagement, another problem identified by Little and Little (2006) is employee engagements relationship with other well known constructs. The current author has identified three other well-known constructs that employee engagement is often distinguished from. These other constructs will now be explored, comparing and relating them to employee engagement.

2.5. Related constructs

Authors within the academic literature often differentiate between employee engagement and other related concepts in organisational behaviour when attempting to define what employee engagement is. As mentioned before there has been minimal academic research on employee engagement despite the concept becoming so popular over recent years and employee engagement has also been defined in many different ways (Saks, 2006). Therefore employee engagement can tend to have the appearance of being somewhat 'faddish' and can often sound like other better established, well known constructs such as organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006). Little and Little (2006) state that many definitions of employee engagement invoke other well known constructs but do not explain how employee engagement is related to them. Gubman (2004, p. 43) differentiates employee engagement from satisfaction stating that engagement means 'a heightened emotional connection to a job and organisation that goes beyond satisfaction'. Employee engagement has often been defined as an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation (Saks, 2006) or an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work (Harter et al., 2002). These definitions, among others, use other well validated constructs to define employee engagement and it is therefore easy to understand how confusion on the meaning of employee engagement arises. Macy and Schneider (2008) state however that some practitioners view employee engagement has having evolved from previous work attitudes and that this newer concept adds interpretive value that extends beyond that of previous traditional concepts.

Authors also use their own definitions of employee engagement to explain its distinctiveness from other related concepts. Kahn (1992) articulates the concept of

psychological presence and its four dimensions. Kahn (1992) also states that employee engagement is a multidimensional construct as employees can be cognitively, emotionally or physically engaged. Robinson et al. (2004) explains that engagement is a two-way process. Organisations need to work to engage the employee who in turn can decide the level of engagement he/she will offer the organisation. Robinson et al. (2004) state that many believe employee engagement is one step up from commitment.

Kahn (1992) notes that research has always focused on how employees are pushed, both externally and internally, to perform productively to meet organisational goals and requirements. Research in this context has focused on the concepts of job involvement, organisational commitment and central life interests to try and understand the attachments that people form with both their job and organisation (Kahn, 1992). Little and Little (2006) state that it is important to understand if employee engagement behaves like these better known, well established concepts in order to decide if the concept of employee engagement is really needed. However if employee engagement does add something new and different into understanding the motivation of employees then more rigorous academic research should be conducted in order for both its practical application and theoretical soundness to be strengthened.

Saks (2006) proposes that although the concept of employee engagement often overlaps with other constructs, it has been defined as a distinct construct in the academic literature that consists of emotional, behavioural and cognitive aspects, which are all associated with the employee's performance. Saks (2006) notes that employee engagement is most notably distinguishable from the constructs organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and job involvement.

Therefore, for the purposes of the current research employee engagement will be related and contrasted to these three organisational behaviour constructs. These three constructs are often referred to in the literature when either defining employee engagement or justifying the uniqueness of the construct. Comparing and contrasting employee engagement to these three organisational behaviour constructs will add to

the exploration of how understandings of employee engagement are similar or different to other well known and established constructs.

2.5.1 Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment was a major focus of research during the 1990's (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002). Organisational commitment is now recognised as a multi-dimensional construct with its antecedents, consequences and correlates varying across different dimensions (Meyer et al, 2002).

Tayyab (2007) notes that the two most widely used definitions of organisational commitment are those provided by Mowday et al. (1979) and Allen and Meyer (1996). Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) note that although there are various approaches to the definition of organisational commitment there are certain trends such as a focus on commitment related behaviours and to define it in terms of an attitude. An example Mowday et al. (1979) gives of commitment related behaviours is 'behaviours that exceed formal and/or normative expectations', again similar to the definition of engagement that it involves 'going the extra mile'. Allen and Meyer (1996, p.252) define organisational commitment as a 'psychological link between the employee and his or her organisation that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organisation'. This definition resonates with engagement in that it is a psychological link or connection with the organisation and that both commitment and engagement lead to retention of employees.

Allen and Meyer constructed a three component view of commitment in which the psychological link between employees and their organisation take on three distinct forms, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Of the three, affective commitment is most similar to engagement as it refers to identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Maslach et al. (2001) state that engagement is characterised by involvement, energy and efficacy whilst Kahn (1990) states that a person can be emotionally, psychologically and cognitively engaged in a role. Buchanan (1974) as cited in (Ashman, 2007) extends the definition of affective organisational commitment to include an affective attachment to the goals and values

of the organisation and to one's roles in relation to goals. Robinson et al.'s (2004) definition of employee engagement includes one having a positive attitude towards the organisation's values whilst Kahn's (1990; 1992) definition of personal engagement focuses on one's roles that they perform. Allen and Meyer (1990) constructed a measure for their three-component view of commitment, which includes a measure for affective commitment. This measure for affective commitment will be used in the current study.

Along with these similarities between definitions of organisational commitment and employee engagement, some practitioners define engagement in terms of commitment (Macy & Schneider, 2008). The Corporate Executive Board defines engagement as the extent to which an employee is committed to someone or something in his or her organisation (Macy & Schneider, 2008). Macy and Schneider (2008) regard commitment as being a facet of state engagement. On a similar note, Vance (2006) identifies commitment as one of the key ingredients of employee engagement. Saks (2006) notes that employee engagement differs from organisational commitment as commitment refers to one's attitude or attachment to the organisation whilst engagement is not an attitude but rather the degree to which one is attentive and absorbed in the performance of one's roles. Maslach et al. (2001) state that employee engagement is distinct from organisational constructs such as commitment as commitment refers to one's allegiance to their organisation whereas engagement focuses on the work itself. This point illustrates, again, the discrepancies within the definitions of employee engagement as some authors, for example Saks (2006) differentiate between job and organisation engagement. Robinson et al. (2004) identify an important part of engagement, that is, its two-way nature and the extent to which engaged employees are meant to have an element of business awareness, which is not evident in organisational commitment and therefore although engagement contains elements of organisational commitment it is by no means a perfect match.

2.5.2. Job involvement

Job involvement has been of interest to researchers and psychologists since Allport (1943) first proposed it as a type of job attitude (Reeve & Smith, 2001). Job involvement also suffered from a lack of precision and a clear definition in the early

stages of its development (Macy & Schneider, 2008). Lodahl and Kejner (1965, p.25) defined job involvement as the degree to which a person's work performance affects his self-esteem. Early definitions of job involvement had a common core of meaning. They described the job-involved person as someone for whom work is an extremely important part of their life and someone who is affected personally by their entire work situation, that is, their colleagues, the company and the work itself (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). In opposition to this, people who are not involved in their job do not see work as an important part of their psychological life and the core of their self-image is not affected by the work they do nor how the work is done (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Lodahl and Kejner (1965) developed a job involvement scale seems to be the preferred measure among researchers (Reeve & Smith, 2001). This scale is therefore used in the current study.

As with organisational commitment, authors also define engagement in terms of job involvement. Harter et al. (2002) equate engagement with both satisfaction and involvement. Paullay et al. (1994) as cited in (Little & Little, 2006) define job involvement as the degree to which an employee is engaged in, preoccupied with and concerned with his or her job. In the employee engagement literature, Wellins and Concelman (2004) use the term job ownership as a synonym of engagement (Little & Little, 2006). Salanova et al. (2005) as cited in (Macy & Schneider, 2008) state that contemporary definitions of employee engagement see job involvement as part of engagement but not equivalent to it. The distinction between the job or the organisation as the reverent of engagement is important because the task/job is the reverent within job involvement. Again this highlights discrepancies within definitions of engagement as Saks (2006) differentiates between job and organisation engagement and Kahn (1990; 1992) uses the more general term of work roles. May et al. (2004) define job involvement as a result of a cognitive judgment about the ability of a job to satisfy needs and is closely related to one's self image, and suggest employee engagement is an antecedent of job involvement as those individuals who experience engagement in their work roles will come to identify with their job. Saks (2006) explains the difference between job involvement and employee engagement by stating that employee engagement involves how individuals employ themselves in the performance of their job roles and that engagement involves the use of both emotions and behaviours and not only cognitions. Maslach et al. (2001) mention that job

involvement is similar to the involvement aspects of engagement at work but does not incorporate the effectiveness and energy components.

2.5.3. Organisational citizenship behaviour

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) has been extensively researched (Lee & Allen, 2002). Organ (1990) as cited in (Moorman & Blakely, 1995) define organisational citizenship behaviour as behaviours performed on the job that are discretionary, are not formally recognised by the organisational reward system but still promote the effectiveness of the organisation. Discretionary refers to the behaviour not being part of the job description but rather a personal choice, therefore the omission of such a behaviour is not seen as punishable (Elanain, 2008). Behaviours that do not directly lead to individual benefits but support the interests of the group or organisation are often performed by individual employees (Moorman & Blakely, 1995). In other words organisational citizenship behaviour refers to a group of behaviours that are not part of the formal job description but are helpful to the company (Moorman & Blakely, 1995). Moorman and Blakely (1995) developed a scale to measure OCB. It is a four dimensional scale which is based on Graham's (1989) dimensions of OCB and also contains items referenced from Organ's (1988) dimensions. This scale is used in the current research.

Macey and Schneider (2008) state the behaviours of OCB fall under the category of 'doing something extra', which is consistent with the 'folk' definition of engagement as 'going the extra mile'. Smith, Organ and Near (1983) talk about the three types of behaviour that Katz (1964) identified as essential for a functioning organisation. The third behaviour identified was an innovative and spontaneous activity that goes beyond role prescriptions. That is a company cannot rely solely on prescribed behaviour but rather needs daily continuous acts of helpfulness, cooperation, suggestions, goodwill, altruism and other such, what is termed, citizenship behaviours (Smith et al., 1983). Citizenship behaviours are thought to be influenced by both employees' thoughts and feelings about work (Lee & Allen, 2002). A conceptual challenge Macey & Schneider (2008) raise when considering OCB as engagement is deciding whether engagement refers exclusively to 'going above and beyond'. Macey and Schneider (2008) suggest that defining engagement in such a way is limiting as it

relies on the frequency of opportunities available where such behaviours can be shown. Saks (2006) makes an important note that although OCB involves voluntary and informal behaviours that benefit co-workers and the organisation, engagement focuses on one's formal role performance and not voluntary and extra-role behaviour.

As mentioned previously with regards to organisational commitment, Robinson et al. (2004) identify an important component of engagement in relation to OCB. OCB does not involve a two-way process and again although engagement may contain certain aspects of OCB it is by no means a perfect match (Robinson et al., 2004). However Organ (1988, 1990) as cited in (Lee & Allen, 2002) suggests that employees who are treated fairly are likely to exhibit citizenship behaviours in order to maintain an equilibrium between them and the organisation whereas those employees who feel they have been treated unfairly will withhold citizenship behaviours. This could relate to Kahn's (1990) psychological condition of meaningfulness, as employees will personally engage when they feel they are getting a good return of investment of their given self. Organ (1988, 1990) as cited in (Lee & Allen, 2002) suggests that employees use citizenship behaviours to maintain an equal ratio as it is safer than involving formal work duties. Little and Little (2006) note that OCB is an outcome of the attitudes of job satisfaction and organisational commitment and is similar to the definitions of engagement of being respectful and helpful to colleagues and willing to go the extra mile.

From the preceding paragraphs, it appears that many authors describe or define engagement in terms of other organisational constructs such as organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour which may fuel the debate regarding the uniqueness of the construct. Many authors, however, are able to distinguish engagement from these other organisational constructs although these differentiations are a reflection of the specific definition of engagement used. This further illustrates the point that if employee engagement could be better conceptualised, the uniqueness of the concept compared to other related constructs would be easily seen and understood.

2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, employee engagement has become a popular topic amongst practitioners. It has been found to be related to many positive organisational outcomes and is seen as an important part in attracting and retaining employees. Due to the practitioner influence on employee engagement there is a lack of research on the topic in the academic literature although this seems to have increased in very recent years. There are various definitions of the concept in both the academic and practitioner literature, there seems to be an unclear relationship to positive organisational outcomes in the practitioner literature and it has an unclear relationship to other related constructs such as organisational commitment, which has led to the misuse of the concept (Little and Little, 2006). It becomes important to determine if employee engagement is a meaningful concept and adds to existing management literature or if it is just a 'fad' (Little and Little, 2006). Therefore analysing both academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement could add to the knowledge of how employee engagement is understood as well as whether or not employee engagement is a meaningful concept and warrants further academic research to strengthen its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications.

2.7. Research questions

- To what extent are academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement different or similar?

- How are practitioner and academic understandings of employee engagement related to organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour?

- Do academics and practitioners feel that employee engagement is a unique important concept?

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the various literatures on employee engagement. In this chapter the methodology of the research will be discussed. This will include a discussion and explanation of the research design, the procedure that was undertaken in order to carry out the research, the participants that formed part of the research, how the data was collected, how the data was analysed and finally various ethical considerations pertaining to the research.

3.2. Research Design

This research does not seem to fit perfectly into one type of research design or strategy. It can however be argued to be exploratory and cross sectional in nature. Exploratory research is used predominantly for relatively new or unknown areas of research (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1991). Although the area of employee engagement has been studied for a few years now, research on the topic has resulted in mixed definitions and understandings of the concept especially between human resource consulting firms and academic researchers (Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008). The research is undertaken from a novel perspective but is informed by past research findings. It is the purpose of this research to therefore explore the different understandings of employee engagement in hope to gain further clarity on the concept.

This research is undertaken from predominantly a qualitative perspective. Although it elicits both qualitative and quantitative data it cannot be classified as a mix-methods or a triangulation type of research as it did not use multiple sources of data and methods (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004). The research used surveys with only one sample. Close-ended questions do not provide the participant with an opportunity to fully explain why they feel the way they do and do not allow the provision of interpretations that were not expected of the researcher (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004).

It was therefore necessary to use open-ended survey questions which allowed the researcher to obtain answers that were unanticipated and allowed participants to respond from their own unique perspective (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004), which was necessary to gain knowledge on how the participants understand employee engagement and thereby answer the research questions. Quantitative data was elicited through close-ended questions, which were used to provide further information regarding the participant's views and understanding of employee engagement. Both types of data, qualitative and quantitative, can be productive for exploratory purposes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.3. Procedure

Data was collected through the completion of questionnaires. The questionnaire was composed of three parts, namely, biographical questions, open-ended questions and close-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of biographical details for statistical purposes and these included: gender, age, home language, race, educational history, job title and work history. The questionnaire also stated the email address to which completed questionnaires could be emailed to as well as the postal address to which completed questionnaire could be posted. The questionnaire also asked if a future contact of the participant would be possible and if so, could the participants please give their preferred email address.

It was imperative to the study that two sets of participants completed questionnaires, namely academics and practitioners. All questionnaires were emailed individually to each academic and practitioner participant. The questionnaire was sent as an attachment in an email. The email to each prospective participant briefly explained the purpose of the email, the purpose of the study and asked each individual if he/she could complete the attached questionnaire. The questionnaire contained a cover letter, which further explained the purpose and reasoning for the research as well as addressed certain ethical considerations.

Academic email addresses were obtained from the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology South Africa's (SIOPSA) May 2008 edition of staff members of Southern African University departments of Industrial and Organisational

Psychology booklet. This booklet includes seventeen South African universities/university campuses as well as the University of Botswana and the University of Namibia. The questionnaire was emailed from the researcher's private email account to each academic found in the booklet. Two months after the questionnaire was emailed to each academic the researcher sent another reminder email to each academic excluding those participants who had already completed and returned the questionnaire either via email or post.

Practitioner email addresses were obtained through contacts via a snowballing technique. Snowballing involves contacting a single person who is relevant for the topic being investigated in order to gain information on other similar persons by asking the contact to identify further people who could make up the sample (Strydom & Venter, 2002). The researcher asked individual contacts who either forwarded the questionnaire on to relevant parties or gave the researcher the relevant practitioner's email address. The researcher also browsed websites pertaining to employee engagement, contacting relevant parties mentioned on the website. The questionnaire was sent from the researchers personal email account as an attachment. The questionnaires sent directly from the researcher were also accompanied by a letter similar to that of the email sent to the academic participants.

3.4. Participants

The sample needed for the research consisted of two parts, namely academics and practitioners. These two different samples were needed in order to answer the research questions and make a comparison between these two different groups of participants. These two groups were chosen due to the difference in both use and meaning of employee engagement within these two circles. Within practitioner circles employee engagement has become somewhat of a new management 'fad' whereas it has only recently entered the academic arena with now, a growing number of theoretical articles on the construct, many of which question the additive value of the construct to existing literature. Seeing the different use of the term within these two arenas it was intended, by the current researcher, to compare how the term is understood and conceptualised by practitioners and academics. Firstly academic participants were needed which included any individual working in the

Industrial/Organisational Psychology Department of a university. Secondly practitioner participants were needed which included any individual working in an Organisational Psychology or Human Resources field. Eighteen questionnaires were completed and returned by academics. Five of these questionnaires were unusable due to incompletion of the questionnaire. Eight practitioner questionnaires were returned. Within these eight at least two close-ended questionnaire sections were answered incorrectly. This was noted by the participant's comments under the 'Comments' heading. It was the researcher's initial thought to exclude these questionnaires but both give useful, insightful information in the open-ended sections of the questionnaire and were therefore included. There are therefore 21 participants in total. This is a small sample size especially for the generalised nature of this research however this small sample size is due to the limited scope and resourcing of the research. The sample is also only limited to domestic participants. Also due to the sampling method used, a response rate cannot be calculated.

Looking at table 2: the majority of the academic participants were male (n=8). There was a wide variety in age, which ranged from 31 to 69 years. The majority of the sample was white (n=11) with Afrikaans as a home language (n=9). All 13 participants have a postgraduate degree. Over half the participants have been in their current field for more than 6 years and over half of the participants have been in their current organisation for more than 6 years.

Table 2: Descriptive summary of biographical questionnaire for academics

Variable		Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	8	61.54	61.54
	Female	5	38.46	100
Age	31	1	7.69	7.69
	33	1	7.69	15.38
	35	1	7.69	23.08
	37	1	7.69	30.77
	41	1	7.69	38.46
	50	1	7.69	46.15
	51	1	7.69	53.85
	52	1	7.69	61.54

	53	1	7.69	69.23
	62	1	7.69	76.92
	63	1	7.69	84.62
	64	1	7.69	92.31
	69	1	7.69	100
Home Language	English	3	23.08	23.08
	Afrikaans	9	69.23	92.31
	Siswati	1	7.69	100
Race	White	11	84.62	84.62
	Black	1	7.69	92.31
	Indian	1	7.69	100
Educational History	Postgraduate Degree	13	100	100
Years in Current Field	4-6 years	3	23.08	23.08
	>6 years	10	76.92	100
Years in Current Organisation	<1 year	1	7.69	7.69
	4-6 years	2	15.38	23.08
	>6 years	10	76.92	100

Table 3: Summary statistics for academic variable age

Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
49.31	12.92	31	69

Looking at table 4: half of the practitioner participants were male (n=4). There was quite a wide variety in age, which ranged from 24 to 45 years. The majority of the sample was white (n=6) with English as a home language (n=5). All 8 participants have a postgraduate degree. Just under a half of the participants have been in their current field for more than 6 years (n=3) and a quarter of the participants have been in their current organisation for more than 6 years (n=2).

Table 4: Descriptive summary of biographical questionnaire for practitioners

Variable		Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	4	50	50
	Female	4	50	100
Age	24	1	12.5	12.5
	25	1	12.5	25
	28	1	12.5	37.5
	29	1	12.5	50

	30	1	12.5	62.5
	37	1	12.5	75
	38	1	12.5	87.5
	45	1	12.5	100
Home Language	English	5	62.5	62.5
	Afrikaans	3	37.5	100
Race	White	6	75	75
	Indian	2	25	100
Educational History	Postgraduate Degree	8	100	100
Years in Current Field	<1 year	2	25	25
	4-6 years	3	37.5	62.5
	>6 years	3	37.5	100
Years in Current Organisation	<1 year	2	25	25
	1-3 years	2	25	50
	4-6 years	2	25	75
	>6 years	2	25	100

Table 5: Summary statistics for practitioner variable age

Mean	**Standard Deviation**	**Min**	**Max**
32	7.29	24	45

3.5. Data Collection

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: a biographical questionnaire, open-ended questions and close-ended questions.

The biographical questionnaire consists of various questions relating to the participants biographical information. Although this information is not necessary to answer the research questions, it was asked for statistical purposes. There was no reason for the current researcher to assume that factors such as race and gender would have any effect or bearing on academic and practitioner opinions of the term employee engagement.

The open ended questions consisted of six questions related to the participants' personal views on employee engagement including the meaning of employee engagement, the participants experience or interest in employee engagement, and if

employee engagement is an important concept for organisations to address (see appendix 1). The open-ended questions were constructed to facilitate the answering of all the research questions.

The close-ended questions consisted of various measuring instruments. There are a number of measures of employee engagement that each differ in terms of how the theorist has conceptualised employee engagement. The current researcher has found four measures of employee engagement. The current researcher identified three other constructs that have been compared and contrasted to employee engagement, namely, organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006; Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Therefore one measuring instrument for each construct was used along with the four measures found for employee engagement. The items from all the measures were randomly listed. The participant was asked to indicate to what extent each item is indicative of their understanding of employee engagement on a five-point likert scale. An option 'Don't Know' was given for any item the participant may be unsure of. Participants were also asked to write any comments they may have regarding each individual item under the appropriate column. Some items were slightly adapted so as to ensure a consistent format. The majority of items are written in the first person, therefore a few items were adapted from the third person to the first person. For example, 'Always meets or beats deadlines for completing work' was adapted to 'I always meet or beat deadlines for completing work'. The quantitative scales were effectively used in a qualitative manner. The items of the individual scales were not totalled and were not, in effect, used as a measuring scale. The reliability of the scales is therefore not relevant for the study. It was not the purpose of the current researcher to relate participants' opinions to factors like internal reliability. The reliability of each scale is however given for information purposes.

The four measuring instruments used for employee engagement were: the 9-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Seppala et al., 2008). Alpha coefficients for the three scales vigour, dedication and absorption of the full version of the UWES are .68, .91 and .73 respectively (Shaufeli et al., 2002). The 9-item version has good construct validity and has been recommended for future research (Seppala et

al., 2008). (Please see Shaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006 for further research on the UWES-9).
Item example: 'I get carried away when I am working'

Job and organisation engagement scales (Saks, 2006), which consist of 5 and 6 items respectively. The alpha coefficients for these scales are .82 for the job engagement scale and .90 for the organisation engagement scale (Saks, 2006).
Job engagement item example: 'Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time',
Organisation engagement item example: 'Being a member of this organisation is very captivating'.

May et al.'s (2004) engagement scale, which consists of 13 items. An alpha coefficient for this scale is .77 (May et al., 2004).
Item example: 'Time passes quickly when I perform my job'.

Gallup organisation's Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA), which consists of 12 items. The current author was unable to find an alpha coefficient for this measure but it has been found to be both reliable and valid.
Item example: 'I know what is expected of me at work'

The measuring instrument used for organisational commitment was Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment Scale, which consists of 8 items. An alpha coefficient for this scale is .87 (Allen & Meyer, 1990).
Item example: 'I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation'.

The measuring instrument used for job involvement was Lodahl and Kejner's Job Involvement Scale (1965), which consists of 20 items. Ramsey, Lassk and Marshall (1995) found an alpha coefficient of .79 for this scale.
Item example: 'For me, mornings at work really fly by'.

The measuring instrument used for organisational citizenship behaviour was Moorman and Blakely's (1995) Organisational Citizenship Behaviour Scale, which consists of 17 items. Elanain (2008) found an alpha coefficient of .89 for this scale.

Item example: ‘I perform my job duties with extra-special care’ (slightly adapted item).

3.6. Data Analysis

Firstly, descriptive statistics were analysed to summarise and describe the biographical details (Table 1). These biographical details included gender, age, home language, race, educational history, job title and work history. This table is reported in the methodology section under the heading, participants. Biographical information was used for statistical purposes only and was not relevant to answering the research questions.

For the close-ended data, participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point likert scale to what extent they think each item is indicative of measuring employee engagement, with 1 indicating not all indicative and 5 indicating extremely indicative. For the purposes of analyses, an answer of 1 or 2 was taken as not indicative, an answer of 4 or 5 was taken as very indicative with an answer of 3 taken as indicative. It was not the purpose of the study to use these items for statistical purposes but rather to facilitate the answering of all the research questions. Items were therefore, firstly re-categorised under the particular construct they measure, namely employee engagement, affective commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour. The items under each construct were then studied for emergent patterns. Academic and practitioner participants’ answers were compared and contrasted under each individual construct.

The open-ended questions were analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). It minimally organizes a data set in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a widely used qualitative analytical method in psychology but there is no agreement on exactly what it is and how one would go about it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this reason it is often seen as having no particular stamina as a qualitative method. However it is a flexible method, can be used to highlight similarities and differences across the data set, is quick and easy to learn and is an accessible method for researchers with little or no experience of

qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Providing a thematic description of an entire data set may lose some depth and complexity but it is useful when working with participants whose views on the topic are not known (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore it thematic content analysis was seen as an appropriate method for analysing the data.

Firstly the researcher familiarised herself with the data from the open-ended questions. The entire data set from the open-ended questions was coded identifying particular features of the data that were found to be interesting. This data was then searched for common themes: employee engagement as a positive attitude, employee engagement as a behaviour, positive organisational outcomes, positive individual outcomes, employee engagement related to other constructs and the organisation engaging the employee. Academic and practitioner responses were compared and contrasted under each theme as this was pertinent to answer all the research questions.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The invitation to participate addressed the ethical considerations of the study. Participants were alerted to the fact that anonymity could not be ensured due to the use of email. Anonymity could also not be ensured for participants who were approached through personal contacts. The invitation to participate also stated that within the questionnaire it is asked of the participant if a future contact would be possible and if so to please give their preferred email address. If participants agreed to a future contact their anonymity would be impossible. Participants were however ensured that their completed questionnaires would be handled with the strictest confidentiality, as only the researcher would have access to the completed questionnaires.

Participants were informed that they would be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged if they chose to partake in the study. The participants were also informed that submission of a completed questionnaire would be taken as their informed consent. Participants were not of a vulnerable group and were not deceived in any way. The researchers contact details were given if the participant had any further queries regarding the research.

3.8. Conclusion

The research undertook a novel approach incorporating both a qualitative and a quantitative design. The sample comprised of two groups, namely academics and practitioners. The close-ended questions were studied for emergent patterns whilst thematic content analysis was used to analyse the open-ended questions. Various ethical issues that were relevant to the research were addressed.

Chapter 4
Results

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have addressed the literature on the topic of employee engagement and the methodology that was undertaken by the current researcher to answer the research questions. This chapter is going to address the results that emerged from the questionnaires. Due to the nature of the research design, the results were analysed in two different ways. The close-ended items of the questionnaire were studied for emerging patterns whilst the open-ended questions of the questionnaire were analysed using thematic content analysis. In this chapter, the results for the close-ended items will be presented followed by the results from the open-ended questions.

4.2. Results for close-ended items

Items from four employee engagement measures, namely, UWES, GWA, Saks' Job and Organisation scales and May et al.'s engagement scale, as well as items from Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment scale, Lodahl and Kejner's Job Involvement Scale (1965), and Moorman and Blakely's (1995) Organisational Citizenship Behaviour Scale were randomly presented in a questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item was representative of employee engagement. They were also asked to give any comments they had in relation to each item. For the purpose of the questionnaire, the items were randomly presented. For the purpose of analysis and the results section the items have been placed under their appropriate constructs, namely employee engagement, affective commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour. These items were not used for statistical analysis purposes but rather to determine how participants view employee engagement in relation to other constructs. Each construct is therefore looked at separately to establish any emerging patterns or trends regarding how indicative of measuring employee engagement the participants found each item to be.

The first line of numbers in each table represent the number of academic participants (n = 13), the second line of numbers in each table represents the number of practitioner participants (n = 6).

4.2.1. Employee engagement

Table 4: Results for employee engagement items

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
At my work, I feel bursting with energy	1 0	1 1	11 5	0 0	▪ What causes the energy is still unknown ▪ As long as it is positive energy ▪ Need not necessarily be due to nature of work?
At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day	0 0	2 0	9 6	2 0	
I am highly engaged in this job	0 1	3 0	9 5	1 0	▪ What does engagement mean to the 'ave' person required to respond on this question ▪ Engage is what we want to assess
Being a member of this organisation is exhilarating for me	2 1	3 0	8 5	0 0	▪ I think this measures more commitment and loyalty. Exhilarating is not such a familiar word - depending on who you administer the questionnaire to. Maybe take a more known word like exciting ▪ Exhil-to high language.
I avoid working overtime whenever possible	6 4	2 0	1 2	0 0	▪ Shows low employee engagement
I am rarely distracted when performing my job	0 0	4 0	9 5	0 0	▪ What do you mean by distraction, other colleagues etc - does not mean I am then disengaged
Being a member of this organisation makes me come 'alive'	1 0	3 1	9 4	0 0	▪ Maybe being a member of this team - like in a specific job and not the organisation

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I am enthusiastic about my job	0 1	0 0	13 5	0 0	▪ What elements of the job can be difficult to answer
I am really not into the 'goings-on' in this organisation	6 5	4 0	3 1	0 0	▪ This shows employee engagement is low
At work, my opinions do seem to count	2 0	3 0	8 6	0 0	
I am highly engaged in this organisation	0 0	3 0	9 5	0 0	▪ Engage is what we want to assess ▪ Vague ▪ 'Engage'?
I am immersed in my work	0 0	3 0	10 6	0 0	▪ Maybe another word for immersed?
I am proud on the work that I do	1 0	4 0	8 6	0 0	
I avoid working to hard	6 1	3 0	1 2	1 0	▪ Low employee engagement
I exert a lot of energy performing my job	1 0	0 0	11 6	1 0	
I feel happy when I am working intensely	1 1	1 0	10 5	1 0	▪ What if I work on a short term project that is nice?
I often think about other things when performing my job	7 2	4 0	2 4	0 0	▪ What if I have personal problems? ▪ We all do.
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right	3 1	3 1	7 4	0 0	
I get excited when I perform well on my job	1	4	8 6	0	
I have a best friend at work	9 3	2 1	2 2	0 0	• Better - close friends (best friend is school girlish)
I know what is expected of me at work	3 0	2 1	8 5	0 0	
I really put my heart into my job	0 0	1 0	12 6	0 0	

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I often feel emotionally detached from my job	6 3	3 0	4 3	0 0	
I get carried away when I am working	1 0	2 0	9 6	0 0	
I stay until the job is done	1 0	2 0	9 6	1 0	
I take work home to do	2 0	3 1	8 5	0 0	• Might be due to external pressure
Being a member of this organisation is very captivating	3 0	1 1	8 5	0 0	▪ Captivating, maybe another word? ▪ Captivating - language register.
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	1 1	4 1	8 4	0 0	▪ No proof that such an individual is engage. Some people just use the company
My job inspires me	0 0	2 0	11 6	0 0	▪ Inspires me to what?
The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important	4 1	3 0	6 5	0 0	
My own feelings are affected by how well I perform my job	1 1	2 1	10 4	0 0	▪ What has this to do with engagement
There is someone at work who encourages my development	5 1	2 1	5 4	0	▪ Not related
This job is all consuming; I am totally into it	0 0	3 0	10 6	0 0	▪ Into it?
Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else	2 1	4 0	7 5	0 0	
Time passes quickly when I perform my job	1 0	0 0	12 6	0 0	
My supervisor or someone at work really cares about me as a person	5 1	4 0	4 5	0 0	
One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organisation	1 1	2 0	9 5	1 0	▪ Vague? What things? ▪ What things.

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
My associates/fellow employees are committed to doing quality work	5 1	0 0	8 5	0 0	▪ You cannot talk on behalf of someone else
My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job	9 2	1 1	2 3	0 0	▪ Low employee engagement
In the last year I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow	1 1	3 0	9 5	0 0	
In the last six months, someone at work has spoken to me about my progress	3 1	3 0	6 5	0 0	▪ Not always relevant ▪ Not related
Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time	0 0	1 0	11 6	0 0	▪ Into? Wrong lang register
In the last seven days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work	2 1	3 0	7 5	0 0	▪ Not always relevant ▪ Not related
I really 'throw' myself into my job	0 0	1 0	12 6	0 0	

It appears that employee engagement items are viewed as measuring employee engagement. Most of the items that have 15 or more participants stating that the item is very indicative of employee engagement refer to one being involved in their work or organisation, to time passing quickly and to one being energised or excited by their work or organisation. It also appears that most of the items that are viewed as not being indicative of employee engagement are those items that indicate low employee engagement. That is, those items that are phrased negatively, and indicate a reversed score are items that are not being viewed as being indicative of employee engagement. This is also noted by various comments participants have made, for example ‘this shows employee engagement is low’. Other items that seem to be recognised as not being indicative of employee engagement are those that refer to a type of resource, for example, a supportive supervisor, or having a friend at work. excepting for one or two items, for example ‘My supervisor or someone at work really cares about me as a person’, where more academics find it to be not indicative

of employee engagement, there does not appear to be a distinct difference between academic and practitioner indications of each item. a similar number of academic and practitioner participants find the other items to be either indicative or not indicative of employee engagement. for example, 11 out of 12 academic participants, and 6 out of 6 practitioner participants find the item, 'Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time' to be very indicative of employee engagement.

4.2.2. Affective Commitment

Table 5: Results for affective commitment items

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation	1 2	5 0	7 4	0 0	▪ I think this measures loyalty as well. More about the organisation than the job itself. But I'm not really sure
This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me	3 0	1 0	7 3	1 1	▪ Not sure what is meant here?
I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation	4 3	3 0	6 3	0 0	▪ That would be a reversed score
I don't feel a strong sense of belonging to this organisation	4 3	1 0	7 3	0 0	
I don't feel like part of the family at my organisation	5 4	1 0	7 2	0 0	▪ My family do not pay me to be family - work pay me to work
I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own	3 0	3 1	4 5	1 0	
I enjoy discussing my organisation with people outside	5 1	3 0	4 5	1 0	▪ What if I talk negative?
I think that I could easily become attached to another organisation	6 1	1 0	5 5	0 0	▪ I have often thought about moving to another organisation, I would move to another org if I could ▪ Low employee engagement

The items seem to be viewed as being indicative of employee engagement. However, with the employee engagement items, the majority of both academic and practitioner participants viewed the items as being very indicative of employee engagement and one can easily distinguish those items that are being viewed as indicative of employee engagement from those that are not. This pattern does not seem to appear with the affective commitment items. Although many participants are viewing the items as being indicative of employee engagement, there are also a number of participants who are viewing the same items as being non-indicative of employee engagement. For example, 8 out of 13 academic participants and 2 out of 6 practitioner participants viewed the item 'I don't feel like part of the family at my organisation' as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement, whilst 5 out of 13 academic participants and 4 out of 6 practitoner participants viewed the item as being non-indicative of employee engagement. Similar to the employee engagement items, those items that are negatively phrased and indicate a reversed score, are items that are viewed as being non-indicative of employee engagement. These are again noted by various comments made, for example 'low employee engagement'. Therefore affective commitment items are not distinctively seen as being non-indicative of employee engagement. This may indicate that participants recognise affective commitment items as measuring employee engagement.

4.2.3. Job Involvement

Table 6: Results for job involvement items

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
For me, mornings at work really fly by	1 1	2 0	10 5	0 0	▪ Why mornings? Shiftwork? ▪ Days fly by
I am very much involved personally in my work	0 0	2 0	11 6	0 0	
I avoid taking on extra duties and responsibilities in my work	6 4	2 0	5 2	0 0	▪ What if it is just not possible to do so due to a heavy work load. No indication of disengagement then ▪ Shows low employee engagement.
I feel depressed when I fail at something connected with my job	5 0	3 1	3 3	0 0	

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I have other activities more important than my work	7 5	2 0	4 1	0 0	▪ So what, work-life balance ▪ Shows low employee engagement.
I live, eat and breathe my job	1 0	3 1	9 5	0 0	
I used to be more ambitious about my work than I am now	5 2	2 1	5 3	0 0	▪ This is age related
I used to care more about my work, but now other things are more important to me	5 1	4 2	4 3	0 0	
I usually show up for work a little early, to get things ready	1 1	4 0	7 5	0 0	
I would probably keep working even if I didn't need the money	2 0	1 0	10 6	0 0	
I'll stay overtime to finish a job, even if I'm not paid for it	2 0	0 0	11 6	0 0	
I'm really a perfectionist about my work	0 1	5 0	8 5	0 0	▪ Some people will be perfectionist even if they hate their job
Most things in life are more important than work	7 2	2 1	4 3	0 0	▪ Many things ▪ Low employee engagement
The most important things that happen to me involve my work	1 1	3 1	9 4	0 0	▪ This can be because of engagement or unengagement, can be seen in a positive or negative way. A confusing item ▪ Some/many of the.
Quite often I feel like staying home from work instead of coming in	4 1	1 1	5 3	1 1	▪ Low employee engagement
Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking ahead to the next day	3 0	4 1	6 4	0 1	▪ Is this engagement or just stress?? ▪ Could be stress.
Sometimes I'd like to kick myself for the mistakes I make in my work	6 1	2 1	5 3	0 1	▪ Hope he learns from his mistakes after he kicked himself

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
To me my work is only a small part of who I am	6 2	3 1	4 2	0 1	▪ Balance? Depends on career stage; I'm not sure, this one sounds a bit in the air ▪ Low employee engagement
The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job	1 0	3 0	9 5	0 1	▪ Some of my
You can measure a person pretty well by how good a job s/he does	2 2	4 0	6 3	1 1	▪ Personal pride is no guarantee of engagement ▪ I'm not sure how this links to engagement.

It appears that items that are viewed, as being very indicative of employee engagement by the majority of the participants, are those items that relate to being involved in and enjoying one's work, being prepared to stay overtime and complete the work. This could be related to employee engagement being seen as 'going the extra mile' or doing something a little extra as well as a cognitive connection with one's work. Similarly to both the employee engagement and affective commitment items, those job involvement items that some participants see as not being indicative of employee engagement are those items that are negatively phrased and reverse scored or seen as low employee engagement. This again is seen by the various comments made by participants, for example, 'shows low employee engagement'. Most of the job involvement items are viewed by the majority of the participants as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement.

4.2.4. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

Table 7: Organisational citizenship behaviour items

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
For issues that may have serious consequences, I express opinions honestly even when others may disagree	6 1	1 0	5 4	1 1	▪ What is the specific construct here supporting the engagement issue ▪ Assertiveness, can't you be engaged even if your not assertive, like a scientist working alone

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I actively promote the organisation's products and services to potential users	3 0	3 0	7 6	0 0	
I always go out of my way to make newer employees feel welcome in the work group	2 0	6 0	5 6	0 0	
I always meet or beat deadlines for completing work	1 1	3 0	9 5	0 0	
I defend the organisation when other employees criticise it	3 0	3 0	6 6	0 0	
I defend the organisation when outsiders criticise it	4 0	1 1	8 5	0 0	
I encourage friends and family to utilise the organisation's products	4 1	2 1	7 4	0 0	
I encourage hesitant or quiet co-workers to voice their opinions when they otherwise might not speak up	5 1	2 1	5 3	1 0	▪ Why would I do that, engage or because I want to stir?
I frequently adjust my schedule to accommodate other employees' requests for time off	6 1	3 2	4 3	0 0	▪ How does this relate?
I frequently communicate to co-workers suggestions on how the group can improve	2 0	5 0	6 6	0 0	
I go out of my way to help co-workers with work-related problems	4 0	2 1	7 5	0 0	
I often motivate others to express their ideas and opinions	6 1	2 1	5 4	0 0	
I performs my duties with extra-special care	1 0	2 0	10 6	0 0	

Item	Not Indicative	Indicative	Very Indicative	Don't Know	Comments
I rarely miss work even when I have a legitimate reason for doing so	2 0	3 0	5 5	0 0	
I show pride when representing the organisation in public	4 0	3 0	6 6	0 0	▪ Does not apply to many people
I show genuine concern and courtesy toward co-workers, even under the most trying business or personal situation	4 1	3 1	6 4	0 0	
I voluntarily help new employees settle into the job	6 0	2 1	5 5	0 0	▪ Not always possible

It seems that the majority of the items are viewed as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement. However, similar to the affective commitment items, for a few of those items that are viewed as being indicative of employee engagement there are also a number of participants who view the same item as to be non-indicative of employee engagement. For example, 7 out of 13 academic participants and 4 out of 6 practitioner participants viewed the item 'I encourage hesitant or quiet co-workers to voice their opinions when they otherwise might not speak up' as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement, whilst 5 out of 13 academic participants, and 1 out of 6 practitioner participants viewed the item as being non-indicative of employee engagement. Similar to the job involvement items, a few items that are seen as being very indicative of employee engagement by the majority of the participants are those items that relate to being involved and working hard and putting something extra into their work. Therefore organisational citizenship behaviour items do seem to be viewed as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement.

Participants seem to view employee engagement items as very indicative of measuring employee engagement. This is especially so with items that refer to one's energy, enthusiasm, excitement and involvement with their work. Affective commitment items also appear to be seen by participants as being indicative or very indicative of measuring employee engagement. Both the job involvement and

organisational citizenship behaviour items are viewed as being either indicative or very indicative of employee engagement. However, within the employee engagement items, many of the items are seen by the majority of participants as being very indicative of employee engagement and one can easily distinguish those items that are viewed as very indicative from those that are view as non-indicative of employee engagement. This occurs within the affective commitment items although to a lesser extent but does not seem to occur within the job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour items. Within all constructs, a similar pattern occurred where items that were viewed, as being non-indicative of employee engagement, were most often those items that were negatively phrased and indicated a reverse scored item. There did not seem to be a difference between academic and practitioner perceptions within any of the different construct items. That is, for each item, excepting a few, if the majority of academic participants found the item to be very indicative of employee engagement then so to did the majority of practitioner participants.

4.3. Results for open-ended questions

Participants were asked to answer a number of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were analysed using thematic content analysis. Therefore the different themes that emerged from the participant's answers to the open-ended questions are presented below. Academic and practitioner responses are compared under each appropriate theme. Participants' answers to the open-ended questions are attached as an appendix (please see appendix 2).

4.3.1. Theme 1: Employee engagement as a positive attitude

Both academic and practitioner participants referred to employee engagement as a positive attitude. Academic participants' explanations of employee engagement encompassed attitudes with both the job/work/work-based activities and the organisation/employer being the referent. The major difference between academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement was that the majority of academic statements of employee engagement as an attitude referred to one's job/work/work-based activities whilst practitioner statements of employee

engagement as an attitude referred more to one's organisation. Here are some illustrative quotes.

'A fulfilling connection with one's work activities' - Academic

'From a layman's perspective employee engagement would refer to the degree of involvement or attachment to work or work-based activities' – Academic

'This is the extent to which the employee identifies with and his/her employer and strives to achieve organisational objectives' - Academic

'It has something to do with employee commitment or affiliation with an organisation. Also deals with whether employees are motivated and passionate about the organisation where they work i.e. they feel engaged, and tuned in' - Practitioner

4.3.2. Theme 2: Employee engagement as a behaviour

Both academic and practitioner participants referred to engagement as a behaviour. The theme of behaviour includes all types of behaviour such as intentional, observable and 'extra'. Participants referred to employees acting in a way that furthers the mission of the organisation, and in ways that result in both personal and organisational goals being achieved. Below are some illustrative quotes.

'Active participation in vision and mission fulfilment' – Academic

'When employees have choices in their role at work that results in them acting so as to further the vision and mission of the organisation' – Practitioner

'I would imagine it relates to how committed an employee is to their employer, how willing they are to 'go the extra mile', and how they relate to the values and mission of the organisation' – Practitioner

4.3.3. Theme 3: Positive organisational outcomes

Soldati (2007) mentions that due to the different definitions and interpretations of employee engagement, research has resulted in different key drivers and implications of the concept. Also within the practitioner literature, employee engagement is constantly related to positive organisational outcomes. Both academic and practitioner participants stated that employee engagement will result in various positive organisational outcomes. These outcomes included retention, a critical competitive advantage, sustainable delivery, and talent management. There was not a visible difference in academic and practitioner thoughts regarding positive organisational concepts. Both groups state that engagement is an important concept to address as it impacts retention, productivity, and that it provides organisations with a critical competitive advantage with a few participants mentioning the war for talent. Below are some illustrative quotes.

'Employee engagement is perhaps the most important predictor of work performance. It explains a significant amount of variance in both individual and organisational performance' - Academic

'… it impacts on performance and sustainable delivery.' - Academic

'Definitely; companies need to ensure that their employees feel engaged, as talent retention and management is linked to this construct, and this war is on for talent in a country like SA' – Practitioner

'Engagement is perhaps the only factor which can be leverage as a competitive edge to retain talent and to ensure that people give you their hearts and minds.' - Practitioner

'… it has an impact on all transformational HR and people practices - performance management, talent management, retention, recruitment etc. You can determine the level of commitment and can develop strategies accordingly.' – Practitioner

4.3.4. Theme 4: Positive individual outcomes

Academic and practitioner participants also identified engagement relating to positive individual outcomes. Academic participants made more references to positive individual outcomes. It is an important concept to address. Many articles provide various important consequences of employee engagement. Employee engagement is mostly measured at the individual level, resulting in either engaged or disengaged employees, which further results in positive organisational outcomes. Identifying what an engaged employee is, in terms of personal characteristics and attitudes may lead to further developments in strategies on how to increase engagement amongst employees. A notable difference between the two groups of participants was that a few academic participants made reference to employee engagement being part of positive psychology. No practitioner participants made reference to engagement encompassing positive psychology. Below are some illustrative quotes.

'… for work satisfaction and productivity' – Academic

'If organisations pay more attention to employee engagement, employees will be more motivated to stay within the organisation and will not leave when provided with extrinsic motivators such as pay etc.' - Academic

'… since it would imply an able (as a prerequisite) and committed, satisfied, low intention to quit, psychologically empowered, high task performing employee (as consequences of engagement with feedback loops to engagement).' – Academic

'Given the whole drive of positive psychology, engagement presents the positive side of work-related experience.' - Academic

'I think an employee's level of engagement can predict aspects such as burnout, commitment, involvement, etc.' – Practitioner

4.3.5. Theme 5: Employee engagement related to other constructs

Authors within both the academic and practitioner literature often use other well-validated psychological constructs such as organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour in order to explain what

employee engagement is. This exacerbates the confusion surrounding employee engagements distinctiveness and uniqueness in comparison to these other constructs. The majority of both academic and practitioner participants referred to employee engagement as either being related to other constructs, as including other constructs and also not only including but going further than such other constructs. Academic and practitioner participants also made very interesting comments that are reflected in the literature regarding the need for a better, more holistic definition of employee engagement as well as for a simple measure which may help to clear up any confusion in both the academic and practitioner arenas surrounding the concept of employee engagement. It is interesting to note that only one academic and one practitioner participant stated that employee engagement is the same thing as other constructs. Below are some illustrative quotes.

'It is not only commitment, but commitment together with energy focused in the right direction.' - Academic

'… from a definition and a conceptual point of view these constructs are different. It is also clear that some schools of thought are USA-based while other are based in Europe. The challenge however in my view is to find some common ground between these research streams by way or means of an integrative conceptual definition.' - Academic

'It goes beyond commitment to include elements of organisational citizenship behaviour.' - Academic

'There is no authoritative universal dictionary that prescribes the definitions of constructs. There probably will be conceptual overlap between these constructs as they were created over time to explain employee behaviour.' - Academic

'Engagement is the practical (way of life) expenditure of your discretionary effort in the work situation. It would therefore include concepts such as commitment and job involvement.' - Practitioner

'… the concept of engagement from an academic point of view is definitely not clear. Research on the topic can clear this misunderstanding up and also provide measurement instrument which can add value to our profession.' - Practitioner

'To me there is a link to affective commitment as both engagement and affective commitment has to do with the heart.' – Practitioner

4.3.6. Theme 6: The organisation engaging the employee

Robinson et al's. (2004) definition of engagement encompasses an important component, that is, engagement is a two way process. Therefore not only will the employee engage with his/her job or organisation but the organisation must work at engaging their employees. In light of the various definitions of employee engagement it is important to note these differences amongst the participants. One academic and one practitioner participant made reference to not only the employee being engaged but also the organisation engaging the employee. Below are some illustrative quotes.

'Two approaches: 1. How much the employee engages or feels passionate about their job and employer 2. Management engaging with employees' - Academic

'Employee engagement also means treating people as individuals and being aware of their needs, ambitions and difficulties.' – Practitioner

4.4. Conclusion

Participants seemed to view items from all four constructs as generally being indicative of employee engagement. Those items that were seen as not being indicative of employee engagement were items that are negatively phrased and this pattern occurred throughout all four constructs. There were a few items from the constructs that were seen as being very indicate of employee engagement and these items usually referred to one being involved with their work or doing something extra. There did not seem to be any difference between academic and practitioner participants on their views of the items from the four constructs.

Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have addressed the literature on the topic of employee engagement, the methodology used in the study and a presentation of the results from the study. This chapter is therefore going to discuss the results found in the study in relation to the literature on employee engagement. The discussion of the results will be presented under the three research questions. Thereafter theoretical and practical implications of the study will be discussed, followed by the limitations of the study and lastly future recommendations for the study will be given.

5.2. To what extent are academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement different or similar?

Many authors have recognised that there are inconsistencies and differences amongst practitioner and academic interpretations and understandings of employee engagement (Little & Little, 2006, Macey & Schneider, 2008). This could be due to various reasons such as the fact that engagement has been marketed as a practical rather than an academic concept (Little & Little, 2006) resulting in a large discrepancy between corporate interest in employee engagement and academic writing and research on the topic (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). It was therefore considered important to compare and contrast academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement in order to determine if there is in actual fact a large difference within this and to possibly provide evidence for further research on employee engagement.

The clarity of the term engagement and the way it made its way into the literature is not clear. This confusion surrounding the term is reflected in the participant's understandings as their definitions encompass a wide variety of aspects, many of which have been stated in the literature. However, although engagement is sometimes an unclear term, rife with varying definitions and interpretations, all the participants saw value in employee engagement and were able to state a fairly meaningful

definition of the term. Even participants with little or no experience in the area of engagement were able to define the term in a meaningful manner encompassing its various aspects. It is interesting to note that one academic participant and one practitioner participant used definitions found in the academic literature to describe engagement. Both these participants have a great deal of experience in engagement, including research, and therefore may have been familiar with the different research on employee engagement and thereby it's various definitions and conceptualisations.

Within Little and Little's (2006) framework, one of the four problems identified within definitions of employee engagement is whether it is an attitude or behaviour. The participant's understandings of employee engagement encompassed both an attitude and a behaviour. Little and Little (2006) state that authors do not distinguish between attitudes and behaviours, thereby also mixing examples of both in their definitions of employee engagement. Both academic and practitioner participants described employee engagement with reference to attitudes. Little and Little (2006) state that an attitude is an affective response to an object or situation. It is important to note that all attitudes used to explain employee engagement by the participants were positive. This emphasises the importance of employee engagement forming part of the branch of positive psychology. These attitudes included both the work/work-based activities and the organisation as the referent although practitioner participants seemed to refer to the organisation to a larger degree. Both academic and practitioner understandings encompassed positive aspects relating to absorption or energy. These positive attitudes used to describe employee engagement seem to refer to a deeper, possibly more intense feeling. Not only does an employee enjoy their job but they are experiencing feelings or emotions with regards to their job or organisation that are encompassing a higher level of emotions. Words used to describe employee engagement are passionate, motivated and energised. For example participants stated '… also deals with whether employees are motivated and passionate about the organisation where they work' and 'energy and commitment are both directed towards goal achievement'. These descriptions of employee engagement reflect Kahn's (1990; 1992) emotional engagement as well as Shaufeli, Salanova et al.'s (2002, p.74) definition of engagement as a 'positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind'. These attitudes are also reflected in the practitioner literature, for example, Harter et al.'s (2002) definition includes one's enthusiasm for work and the research

group Kenexa's definition includes the extent to which one is motivated (Vance, 2006). Both the academic and practitioner participants made reference to engagement involving an employee relating or identifying with the organisation's values and objectives. Related to this, both academic and practitioner participants also mentioned that engagement is a 'good fit' between the employee and his/her job and organisation in terms of values, principles, goals etc. Many practitioner definitions of employee engagement include this aspect. For example DDI explain engagement as the extent to which employees enjoy and believe in what they do (Vance, 2006). This is also similar to Allen and Meyer's (1996) definition of affective commitment, which is an identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the organisation. This illustrates the confusion sometimes found between engagement and commitment. This point will be expanded on later in the chapter. It can therefore be seen that definitions in both the academic and practitioner literature make reference to engagement encompassing an attitude. Although academic and practitioner explanations of engagement comprised of similar attitudes such as passionate, motivated, and enjoyment, academic understandings seemed to encompass a wider variety of positive attitudes including descriptions such as dedication, inspiration, vigour, immersion, and personal fulfilment or a fulfilling connection with one's work.

Both academic and practitioner participants described engagement with reference to behaviours. Little and Little (2006) state that behaviours used to describe employee engagement can be either intentional behaviours, which are based on attitudes or it can be actual behaviours. Macey and Schneider (2008) explain engagement as a directly observable behaviour but state that engagement is not the entire scope of behavioural work performance and it therefore becomes difficult in deciding how engagement differs from the usual work behaviours. Macey and Schneider (2008) state that engagement usually refers to something extra or special and it's therefore common to describe engagement as discretionary effort seen as extra time or energy. Therefore behaviours used to explain employee engagement can include intentional behaviours, directly observable behaviours and behaviours that incorporate 'going the extra mile'. An important difference between academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement in regards to behaviour was the aspect of 'going the extra mile'. This only came up within the practitioner understandings. Hewitt Associates and Towers Perrin make reference to this in their definitions of

employee engagement. Hewitt Associates refer to engagement as exerting extra effort whilst Towers Perrin refer to engagement as being the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work (Vance, 2006). Engagement has been labelled the 'silver bullet', that something extra, (Corace, 2007) and it is therefore interesting that academic participants did not refer to engagement as 'doing something extra' or 'going above and beyond'. This explanation of engagement is similar to Organ's (1990) (as cited in Moorman & Blakely, 1995) definition of organisational citizenship behaviour, which describes OCB as behaviours performed on the job that are discretionary. This again illustrates the confusion that sometimes occurs between engagement and other well-known constructs. This will be expanded on later in the chapter. Little and Little (206) state that behavioural intentions may be based on attitudes. Therefore the positive attitudes of employees, for example being energised and motivated, could result in positive behaviours of the employees, for example, working towards the organisations goals and mission and putting in extra effort to ensure these goals and mission can be achieved. Hewitt Associates refer to engagement involving employees commitment resulting in behaviours that will help fulfil an organisation's promises to it's customers (Vance, 2006). Both academic and practitioner participants referred to engagement as an employee acting or working in a way that furthers the mission of the organisation and results in personal and goal achievement. Therefore participants may be making a connection between attitudes and the resultant behaviour of employees holding those particular attitudes.

Another interesting aspect of employee engagement that both the academic and practitioner participants made reference to is that of engagement encompassing a two way process. Researchers from the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), Robinson et al.'s (2004) definition of employee engagement includes the organisation having to develop and nurture this engagement, which will require a two-way relationship between the organisation and the employee. Saks (2006) expanded this aspect using the social exchange theory, advocating that, in simple terms, the more the organisation gives the employee the more the employee will want to return this by increasing their levels of engagement.

Therefore it seems that the academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement are very similar encompassing an attitude, behaviour, and the two-way

process of the organisation engaging the employee. Within the attitudes mentioned, both the academic and practitioner participants used similar concepts, such as passion, motivation and enjoyment. However the academic participants used attitudes to describe employee engagement to a much larger degree than the practitioner participants. They included dedication, fulfilling connection, immersion, and enthusiasm. Both academic and practitioner participants referred to employee engagement as an employee identifying with, relating to, or having a good fit, with the organisations values and objectives. Within the behaviours mentioned to describe employee engagement, an important difference was that practitioners' understandings included the aspect of 'going the extra mile'. Employee engagement is often referred to as having something extra, and it is therefore surprising that only one participant mentioned this aspect. Another important difference is that the academic participants mainly used the employees' job/work/work-based activities as the referent of engagement whereas the practitioner participants seemed to use the organisation/employer as the main referent of engagement. In the literature both academic and practitioner definitions of employee engagement use the job or the organisation as the referent of engagement. Saks (2006) is the only academic researcher who has explicitly differentiated between job and organisation engagement.

Both the academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement incorporated aspects from one definition of employee engagement or another. Participants did not seem to explain engagement in terms of resources for engagement but rather focused on the attitudes of an engaged individual and the resultant behaviour. The different aspects used by participants to explain their understandings of employee engagement may therefore be a reflection of the different aspects used in both academic and practitioner definitions of employee engagement. This could illustrate that due to varying definitions of the construct, it may be poorly understood or misinterpreted. This highlights the fact that employee engagement should be more definitely defined, even if this definition is to be complex and include various aspects such as attitudes or behaviour. Further research into employee engagement could better validate possible resources, consequences, particular attitudes and behaviours resulting in a well researched holistic definition of employee engagement. Although the academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement differed on

important aspects, the fact that many similar attitudes and behaviours were mentioned could be an indication that people, both academics and practitioners, are aware of this concept and that it may incorporate something extra and something different, compared with other psychological constructs.

5.3. How are practitioner and academic understandings of employee engagement related to organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour?

Authors within the academic literature often use other well-validated psychological constructs such as organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour in order to explain what employee engagement is. Little and Little (2006) state that many definitions of employee engagement invoke these well-known constructs but do not explain how employee engagement is related to them. Macey and Schneider (2008) and Saks (2006) state that employee engagement is a distinct construct that adds interpretive value to these already validated constructs. However Little and Little (2006) state that it is important to understand if employee engagement behaves like these other constructs to determine if the concept of employee engagement is really needed. This research question was answered using two sets of data. The first set of data is the open ended questions and the second set of data is the close ended questions in which the participants were asked to state how indicative they thought each item was of measuring employee engagement. The open ended data will be discussed followed by the close ended data.

Within the open-ended questions there did not seem to be a distinct difference in academic and practitioner participants understanding of employee engagement in relation to other well-known and accepted constructs. The majority of participants stated that employee engagement is different to other constructs such as organisational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour. Many participants, both academic and practitioner, stated that employee engagement is either related to these other constructs or includes these constructs. Some participants stated that employee engagement is different to these other constructs and attempted to explain why they think this is so. Participant's definitions of engagement also invoked well-known constructs, with many participants using

words like commitment and involvement in order to explain what engagement means to them. Participant's definitions of engagement also tended to include aspects that sounded like other well-known constructs. For example, some participants explained engagement as an employee who identifies with his or her organisation, which is similar to Allen and Meyer's (1996) definition of affective commitment. This seems reflective of the literature as some authors state that employee engagement can often sound like other well-known constructs where as other authors state that employee engagement adds interpretive value that extends way beyond any other construct.

Organisational commitment can be referred to as one's identification with, involvement in and emotional attachment to the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1996) whereas a job-involved person is someone for whom work is an extremely important part of their life and someone who is affected personally by their entire work situation, that is, their colleagues, the company, and the work itself (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). From these definitions of these other constructs it can be understood why employee engagement may be seen as being related to these constructs. Both invoke an attachment to either the job or the organisation that incorporates a deep involvement and personal meaning. An engaged person is seen as being deeply connected to his/her job or organisation, taking pride in what they do or where they work and having their work or organisation affect them in a positive way. Many participants stated that these other constructs formed part of employee engagement, with some participants stating that employee engagement extends further than these other constructs. In the literature many definitions of employee engagement incorporate these other constructs, which may add to the confusion surrounding the relationship between the two. The Corporate Executive Board defines employee engagement as the extent to which an employee is committed to something in the organisation (Vance, 2006) whilst Macey and Schneider (2008) include commitment as part of what they refer to as state engagement. Although the results of this research are varied, it reflects what has been stated in the literature. This highlights the problem that the ambiguous relationship between employee engagement and other constructs such as organisational commitment and job involvement is affecting academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement.

From the close ended data it was determined that both academic and practitioner participants viewed employee engagement items as measuring engagement. The only items that were not recognised as measuring engagement were those that referred to low engagement and those that referred to a resource for engagement to occur. Both academic and practitioner participants also viewed affective commitment items as measuring engagement, again with the only items not recognised as measuring engagement being those that refer to low engagement. Within job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour items, the majority of items were seen as measuring engagement although there was not a large distinction in numbers between items being indicative and not indicative of measuring engagement. Those items that were seen as being very indicative of measuring engagement were those items that referred to being involved in one's work, enjoying one's work and putting something extra into one's work. This data and the subsequent emergent patterns are important for two reasons. Firstly the data further supports claims that engagement invokes other well-known constructs whilst not explaining and delineating the relationships between engagement and these other constructs. This further confuses the meaning of engagement for both academics and practitioners. Secondly it highlights the problem surrounding the measurement of engagement. There are numerous measurements or scales for engagement from both the academic and practitioner arena. As discussed within the literature review, on closer inspection of these various items they do not always seem to be measuring the same construct. It is important that scales used to measure engagement are well validated and reliable. A better understanding and interpretation of engagement could facilitate this measurement, which could result in proven resources or antecedents and consequences of engagement.

5.4. Do academics and practitioners feel that employee engagement is a unique important concept?

Employee engagement has been linked to increased positive organisational outcomes such as productivity, retention and customer satisfaction (Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008). Many articles also identify top drivers of engagement (Ketter, 2008). Along with this, nearly all major consultancy firms offer assessment tools that identify drivers and programs to increase employee engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). However, Soldati (2007) mentions that due to the different definitions and

interpretations of employee engagement, research has resulted in different key drivers and implications of the concept. It therefore becomes important to determine if employee engagement is a meaningful concept and adds to existing management literature or if it is just a 'fad' (Little and Little, 2006).

The majority of both academic and practitioner participants stated that employee engagement is an important concept because of its relationship with various positive organisational and individual outcomes. These outcomes stated by participants are similar to those found in the literature such as attraction and retention of employees and bringing the organisation a clear competitive advantage to win 'the war for talent'. Practitioner participants mentioned the war for talent and a focus on employee retention and work performance. This could possibly be due to a practitioner's nature of work where there is a constant focus on helping companies implement strategies to ensure the attraction and retention of the best workers so that the companies can reap the related benefits. Another difference within academic and practitioner responses is the mentioning of employee engagement forming part of positive psychology by the academic participants. The focus in psychology has generally been negative states rather than positive (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach et al. (2001) stated that increased attention has started to be given to the study of human strengths and optimal functioning. This new area of study referred to as 'positive psychology' is now seen as an alternative to the predominant focus on pathology and deficits (Maslach et al., 2001). Engagement is also seen as the positive antithesis to job burnout (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002). Positive psychology may have more of an emphasis within the academic literature therefore resulting in the academic participants mentioning this facet of engagement.

However, although there are claims that employee engagement results in positive organisational outcomes (Ketter, 2008; Wildermuth & Wildermuth, 2008) there are still those authors that are sceptical of these claims and question the connection between engagement and performance (Engen, 2008). There are also questions regarding whether or not employee engagement is a redundant concept within existing research (Little & Little, 2006). Ketter (2008) notes that many experts claim employee engagement is not a new concept and others have stated that it is 'old wine' in new bottles (Saks, 2006). Engen (2008) states that nobody really knows for sure if the

time, money and effort used to increase engagement really generates the kind of results CEO's have in mind. The academic community has been slow to follow the practitioner movement regarding employee engagement leaving research on employee engagement to be lacking in rigorous testing of the theory underlying the construct. This is another area which emphasises the fact that further research is needed on employee engagement to strengthen and validate these claimed relationships between employee engagement and positive organisational outcomes. This research could also determine if, employee engagement is a concept worth pursuing by organisations in terms of scarce resources such as money and time.

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of the research have both theoretical and practical implications.

This research undertook a novel approach incorporating both a qualitative and a quantitative design. The aims of the study were to compare and contrast academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement including engagements relationship to other well known constructs and whether or not academic and practitioners feel employee engagement is an important, unique concept that should be addressed by organisations. Although academic and practitioner understandings were different on a few aspects, they were to a large degree very similar indicating that employee engagement is a construct that elicits something more and extra than other well-known constructs. Their understandings of engagement also indicated that the construct is an important concept that results in various positive consequences.

The results of the study therefore support further research of the construct. Academic and practitioners working in the field of organisational psychology and human resources see employee engagement as an important concept that organisations should address. Their understandings of employee engagement are indicative that it is seen as something different and imperative to address. Although with any organisational initiative resources are needed for implementation. It is therefore necessary for further research on employee engagement, including its relationship to both possible antecedents and consequences. Validation of these relationships can be influential for organisations in their decisions on employee engagement strategies. Employee

engagement has a practical influence but sound academic research is needed to validate the relationships surrounding employee engagement.

There are various measuring instruments of employee engagement with only a few comprising of validation studies. It is important when measuring the concept that a validated and reliable measure is used. It is also important that measures of employee engagement are, in actual fact, measuring the same thing. This therefore comes down to producing a common definition of the concept. If the concept is more clearly defined, it would be better understood and implemented with resources being used in the right direction. It has been seen that employee engagement is a wide concept encompassing various components. Therefore research should be conducted to develop a holistic, comprehensive definition of employee engagement that could be widely employed.

5.6. Limitations

There are numerous factors that could have influenced the study and thereby the researchers conclusions.

One of the theoretical implications of the study is that it takes a novel approach. However this can also be seen as a limitation. It incorporated both qualitative and quantitative elements with a self-developed questionnaire consisting of open and close-ended questions. As mentioned in the methodology chapter both qualitative and quantitative studies have advantages and both types of data can be productive for exploratory purposes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However when using a novel approach it becomes difficult to relate the study to previous research. Using both qualitative and quantitative data may also bring some ambiguity to the results.

Qualitative analysis was used, namely thematic content analysis, which as stated previously, has both advantages and disadvantages. The close-ended questions were not statistically analysed but were instead looked at for emergent patterns to add further information regarding the research questions.

Questionnaires included both open-ended questions, and close-ended questions. Questionnaires run the risk of having questions left unanswered or misinterpreted (Delport, 2002) which both occurred. A few questionnaires were still used for analysis even though participants had incorrectly answered the second part of the questionnaire. These questionnaires were used as these participants provided rich data regarding the research questions. Questionnaires were emailed which does not allow the participant anonymity. It is possible that this may influence participant's responses, as they are not anonymous to the researcher. Mailed questionnaires usually result in a low-response rate (Delport, 2002). Questionnaires were in English. This presupposes that each participant is proficient in the language used, namely, English. However as participants were either working within a university or corporate environment it was assumed that all participants would be proficient in English. The researcher constructed the questionnaires and should have therefore pilot-tested the questionnaire so that any errors of whatever nature could have been rectified (Delport, 2002). This however was not conducted due to time constraints.

A larger sample size would add to the richness of the data and the interpretations concluded. The difference in sample size between the academic and practitioner sample may have influenced the conclusions drawn when comparing the two samples. A purposive sample was used, as it was imperative that the study consisted of both academic and practitioner participants. A type of snowball technique was used to gather practitioner participants where one participant is requested to identify further people who make up the sample (Strydom & Venter, 2002). Due to the methods used for data collection it was not possible to calculate a response rate.

5.7. Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research would include using interviews as a data collection method so that richer, deeper information can be obtained from participants regarding their understanding and thoughts on employee engagement. A wider sample could be used focusing on participants who are very familiar with employee engagement, for example individuals either working specifically with employee engagement or individuals who have published on the topic.

Future research, focusing on various understandings and definitions of employee engagement could attempt to develop a common, comprehensive, holistic definition of employee engagement.

Future research could focus particularly on employee engagement and its relationship with other well established psychological constructs, providing a richer, more meaningful analysis of this area. Focusing on employee engagements similarities and differences with other constructs could further validate the uniqueness of the concept.

Future research could focus on the measurement of employee engagement, aiming at developing a well validated, theoretically sound employee engagement scale. This could include comparing and contrasting already developed scales of the construct.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Employee engagement is a popular topic within management and practitioner circles. It has been claimed to result in various positive organisational outcomes, be a clear competitive advantage for organisations and play an important part in the war for talent. It has had a practitioner influence and therefore much of the research on employee engagement is found in practice rather than in theory. Many authors have stated there is a dearth of research within the academic arena however academic research on the topic has seemed to increase within very recent years. However despite this increase in research the literature is still rife with discrepancies and criticisms. Employee engagement has been defined in different ways resulting in the concept being poorly understood but still widely used. This lack in clarity in the definition has also resulted in problems with regards to measuring the concept. There are a few academic measuring instruments that claim to measure employee engagement and nearly every major consulting firm has its own measuring tool. It is difficult to discern due to various definitions, if each tool is measuring the same aspect. Along with an unclear definition, authors have claimed other problems within the concept such as poorly validated relationships with the supposed positive consequences of the concept, poorly defined relationships with other well-established constructs, and many claiming that it is not a new concept but rather a redefining of an old familiar concept.

Due to these praises and criticisms of the topic, and its different reception within the academic and practitioner arena it was the purpose of this study to research both practitioner and academic understandings of the topic. This was conducted in the hope of answering some of the questions surrounding the topic stated by various authors, including its relationship to other psychological constructs and whether or not, the people who may or may not be affected by the concept, determine the concept to be a unique, important concept that is imperative for organisations to address.

The results of the study indicated that both academic and practitioner understandings are very similar. The wide variety of words used by the participants to describe

employee engagement is reflective of the many varying definitions of the concept in the literature. Differences within the understandings of employee engagement may be a reflection of the particular experiences and objectives of the participant's work and businesses. That is academics focus on employee engagement being a positive construct and the practitioners focus on many positive organisational outcomes of employee engagement. Within the understandings of employee engagement similar words were used to describe the concept that are indicative of something extra that a person feels towards his/her work or organisation that results in the person working hard and passionately resulting in positive consequences for both the individual and the organisation. With regards to employee engagement's relationship with other well established psychological constructs it was found that both academic and practitioner participants see these constructs as forming a small part of employee engagement or employee engagement being something more and extra. All participants claimed employee engagement to be an important factor in influencing many positive organisational and individual outcomes, being an important competitive advantage and being an imperative topic for organisations to address. Therefore despite its criticisms and various definitions both academic and practitioners see it as an important concept that goes above and beyond any other construct.

The construct would therefore benefit from further research and investigation. This further research could aim at developing an integrative holistic definition and conceptualisation of employee engagement and thereby a valid and reliable measure of the construct. Further research could also aim at defining and investigating engagements relationship with other well-known constructs. Through these aims, employee engagement's relationship with various antecedents and consequences can be validated.

Chapter 7
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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Hello,

My name is Gillian Griffith and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am currently conducting for the purposes of obtaining my Masters degree in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

My research is focusing on employee engagement, specifically academic and practitioner understandings of employee engagement. Employee engagement has been defined in various ways with there being a lack of academic research on the topic compared to practitioner publications.

Participation in this research will involve answering the attached questions which should take approximately 30 minutes. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete this questionnaire. Due to the possible use of email it is not certain that you will remain anonymous. However the strictest confidentiality can be assured as only I will have access to the completed questionnaires. Your responses will also be looked at only in relation to all other responses in order to establish trends. Biographical questions are asked for statistical purposes only.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please answer the attached questions as honestly and carefully as possible. Completion and submission of the questionnaire is regarded as consent to participate in the study. Once you have completed the questionnaire, please email it to the given email address. It can be chosen to send the email from an unknown address in order to remain anonymous. Alternatively completed questionnaires can be posted to the given postal address. In doing so, no one will have access to your completed questionnaire but myself. Please note both the corresponding email address and postal address will be given on the first page of the questionnaire. On the first page it is also asked if a future contact from the researcher will be possible for the purposes of further explanation and discussion of your answers to the questionnaire. Results of the research will be emailed to all participants.

Your participation in the study would be greatly appreciated. This research is aimed at providing insight into the current understandings of the construct employee engagement.
Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact either myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Karen Milner.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Griffith
Organisational Psychology Masters student
0795244876 / gilliangriffith@hotmail.com

p.p.
Dr. Karen Milner
karen.milner@wits.co.za

- Please email completed questionnaires to gilliangriffith@hotmail.com
- Alternatively, completed questionnaires can be posted to P.O. Box 552, Kyalami Estate, 1684
- Would a future contact be possible? (if yes, please provide your preferred email address) _____

Questionnaire

Biographical Questions

(Please note these are asked for statistical purposes only and are not intended to offend in any way)

Please mark the answer that best describes you:

Gender: Male ☐
Female ☐

Age: _____

Home language: _____

Race: _____

Educational History:

Highest Qualification:

Grade 10 or below ☐
Matric/Grade 12 ☐
Certificate ☐
Diploma ☐
Undergraduate Degree ☐
Postgraduate Degree ☐

Job title: _____

Work history:

How many years have you worked in your specific field? _____

How many years have you worked at your current organisation? _____

Open Ended Questions:

The following questions relate to your personal views on employee engagement. Please answer the following questions as honestly and as in depth as possible:

1. What does employee engagement mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you have experience and/or interest in the field of employee engagement? If yes, please give a brief description of your work/experience/interest in employee engagement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you believe employee engagement is different to existing concepts such as organisational commitment or job involvement? If so, in what way?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Are you familiar with any measures for employee engagement, organisational commitment, job involvement, or organisational citizenship behaviour? If so, which ones?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Do you think employee engagement is an important concept for organisations to address and why?

_____

_____

_____

6. In your opinion, does employee engagement add meaningful knowledge to existing research? If so, in what way?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Scale Items:

The following table is a list of items taken from various scales/measures.
Please indicate to what extent each item is indicative of your understanding of employee engagement. Please note it is not asking of your personal engagement but rather to what extent do you think each item is a good measure of employee engagement. This rating ranges from 'not at all indicative' to 'extremely indicative'. There is a column marked 'don't know' if you are uncertain as to whether the item is indicative of your understanding of employee engagement. Items may be positively or negatively associated with employee engagement. Some items have been adapted slightly to ensure a consistent format. Please write any comments, thoughts or opinions regarding each item in the appropriate column.

Rating Key:

1 – Not at all Indicative

2 – Slightly Indicative

3 – Indicative

4 – Very indicative

5 – Extremely Indicative

Rating Key:

1 – Not at all Indicative 2 – Slightly Indicative 3 – Indicative 4 – Very indicative 5 – Extremely Indicative

Items	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Comments
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy							
2. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day							
3. I am highly engaged in this job							
4. Being a member of this organisation is exhilarating for me							
5. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation							
6. Being a member of this organisation makes me come 'alive'							
7. For issues that may have serious consequences, I express opinions honestly even when others may disagree							
8. I am really not into the 'goings-on' in this organisation							
9. I actively promote the organisation's products and services to potential users							
10. I always go out of my way to make newer employees feel welcome in the work group							
11. I always meet or beat deadlines for completing work							
12. I am enthusiastic about my job							
13. At work, my opinions do seem to count							
14. I am highly engaged in this organisation							
15. I am immersed in my work							
16. I am proud on the work that I do							
17. I am rarely distracted when performing my job							
18. For me, mornings at work really fly by							
19. I am very much involved personally in my work							
20. I avoid taking on extra duties and responsibilities in my work							
21. I avoid working overtime whenever possible							
22. I avoid working to hard							
23. I feel depressed when I fail at something connected with my job							
24. I defend the organisation when other employees criticise it							
25. I defend the organisation when outsiders criticise it							
26. I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation							
27. I don't feel a strong sense of							

Rating Key:

1 – Not at all Indicative 2 – Slightly Indicative 3 – Indicative 4 – Very indicative 5 – Extremely Indicative

Items	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Comments
belonging to this organisation							
28. I don't feel like part of the family at my organisation							
29. I encourage friends and family to utilise the organisation's products							
30. I encourage hesitant or quiet co-workers to voice their opinions when they otherwise might not speak up							
31. I enjoy discussing my organisation with people outside							
32. I exert a lot of energy performing my job							
33. I feel happy when I am working intensely							
34. I frequently adjust my schedule to accommodate other employees' requests for time off							
35. I frequently communicate to co-workers suggestions on how the group can improve							
36. I often think about other things when performing my job							
37. I get excited when I perform well on my job							
38. I go out of my way to help co-workers with work-related problems							
39. I have a best friend at work							
40. I have other activities more important than my work							
41. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right							
42. I know what is expected of me at work							
43. I live, eat and breathe my job							
44. I often feel emotionally detached from my job							
45. I often motivate others to express their ideas and opinions							
46. I get carried away when I am working							
47. I performs my duties with extra-special care							
48. I rarely miss work even when I have a legitimate reason for doing so							
49. I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own							
50. I really put my heart into my job							
51. Being a member of this organisation is very captivating							
52. I show pride when representing the organisation in public							
53. I shows genuine concern and courtesy toward co-workers, even under the most trying business or personal situation							

Rating Key:

1 – Not at all Indicative 2 – Slightly Indicative 3 – Indicative 4 – Very indicative 5 – Extremely Indicative

Items	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Comments
54. I stay until the job is done							
55. I take work home to do							
56. In the last six months, someone at work has spoken to me about my progress							
57. I used to be more ambitious about my work than I am now							
58. I used to care more about my work, but now other things are more important to me							
59. I usually show up for work a little early, to get things ready							
60. I voluntarily help new employees settle into the job							
61. I really 'throw' myself into my job							
62. I would probably keep working even if I didn't need the money							
63. I'll stay overtime to finish a job, even if I'm not paid for it							
64. I'm really a perfectionist about my work							
65. In the last seven days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work							
66. I think that I could easily become attached to another organisation							
67. In the last year I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow							
68. Most things in life are more important than work							
69. My associates/fellow employees are committed to doing quality work							
70. My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job							
71. The most important things that happen to me involve my work							
72. My supervisor or someone at work really cares about me as a person							
73. One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organisation							
74. This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me							
75. Quite often I feel like staying home from work instead of coming in							
76. Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time							
77. Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking ahead to the next day							

Rating Key:

1 – Not at all Indicative 2 – Slightly Indicative 3 – Indicative 4 – Very indicative 5 – Extremely Indicative

78. Sometimes I'd like to kick myself for the mistakes I make in my work							
79. My job inspires me							
80. The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important							
81. My own feelings are affected by how well I perform my job							
82. There is someone at work who encourages my development							
83. This job is all consuming; I am totally into it							
84. Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else							
85. Time passes quickly when I perform my job							
86. To me my work is only a small part of who I am							
87. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job							
88. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work							
89. You can measure a person pretty well by how good a job s/he does							

Appendix 2: Results for open-ended questions

Table 1: Practitioner Results for open ended questions

	Age	Years Experience in Field	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
John	29	6	I would say I do have an interest, as my work is all about helping individuals reach a state of flow at work, to be motivated, to get meaning and to be placed in the correct positions, with the correct team dynamic	It is a term I have not heard often, but I would imagine it relates to how committed an employee is to their employer, how willing they are to 'go the extra mile', and how they relate to the values and mission of the organisation	All these terms are probably related to the same overall construct, but I would imagine there is a slight difference to employee engagement than the other related terms	It is crucial, due to challenges in the new world of work. The war for talent means that it is difficult to hold onto good people, and the nature of work is far more cognitive than in the past, meaning that it is difficult to measure the contribution and effort staff put into their jobs
Joe	25	6mnths	It's related to one's success in the role - not measured and subjective. If there is no employee engagement, we actively push them on	Two approaches: 1. How much the employee engages or feels passionate about their job and employer 2. Management engaging with employees. Ambiguous terminology	No, same thing.	We don't measure it, therefore use staff as contractors. If they engage, employ permanently. If not, terminate. Very subjective. Would be great to have a simple measure. Easy to 'see' though.
Mark	30	3.5	I have not directly worked in this field although through the work I do it often comes up with employees. In my own company it is an important concept in terms of attaining their commitment etc. However, I have never really referred to the concept as 'employee engagement'.	It has something to do with employee commitment or affiliation with an organisation. Also deals with whether employees are motivated and passionate about the organisation where they work I.e. they feel engaged, and tuned in.	I think that it is probably similar and that it comes down to semantics. It's probably just a modern coining of an old construct although I may be wrong. Like I said I have not specifically encountered this term in my career	Definitely; companies need to ensure that their employees feel engaged, as talent retention and management is linked to this construct, and this war is on for talent in a country like SA. The companies that address employee engagement will have a significant competitive advantage. I am not familiar with the theory behind employee engagement, but I'm sure that it does to the extent that it differs from commitment, job involvement etc.

	Age	Years Experience in Field	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Ruth	28	6	No	When employees have choices in their role at work that results in them acting so as to further the vision and mission of the organisation	Yes, I think it is different in that it brings in the element of decision making and autonomy as a personal motivating factor	
David	45	26	Yes, both in the academic field and the organisational field	The application of the self on an emotional, cognitive and behavioural level to ensure business and personal success. According to me engagement consist therefore out of many 'constructs' ranging from relationships to competence to do a specific task	Yes. Engagement is the practical (way of life) expenditure of your discretionary effort in the work situation. It would therefore include concepts such as commitment and job involvement.	Engagement is perhaps the only factor which can be leverage as a competitive edge to retain talent and to ensure that people give you their hearts and minds. For organisations it is very easy to match or even beat you with salaries and other benefits. Yes the concept of engagement from an academic point of view is definitely not clear. Research on the topic can clear this misunderstanding up and also provide measurement instrument which can add value to our profession.
Jane	24	7mnths	Training in the SAEWHES Questionnaire developed by Ian Rothmann. There's a construct in which measures engagement.	How much do you enjoy your work and why, what motivates you to do your work	Yes, engagement is a bit different is how much you you're your job, do you enjoy it, do you have a passion for what you are doing etc. commitment and involvement can still be done even if you don't really you're your job.	Yes. I think an employee's level of engagement can predict aspects such as burnout, commitment, involvement, etc. Yes, I think so. A lot of research is done on burnout and I think engagement can predict burnout or commitment etc.

	Age	Years Experience in Field	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Sarah	38	6	Working in HR and OD more specifically we are constantly looking at engagement via different surveys, target groups discussions etc. Interventions are also put into place to try and increase engagement e.g. moving away from a performance based organisation into a culture/behavioural driven organisation as a way to 'live' our values and to set the example so that employees can buy-in.	To me it means the buy-in from an employee into the values and beliefs of the company in other words I can relate with what the company advocates and can associate with their views and beliefs.	To me there is a link to affective commitment as both engagement and affective commitment has to do with the heart. An employee needs to identify and believe in what the company stand for before he/she/can/will commit and that can only be done if the individual's value system is in line with that of the company.	Yes, without engagement people come to work because they 'have' to which means they are not committed to e.g. safety, production etc in the sense of they are not taking ownership, they are here to do a job and go home - I believe without engagement employees will not add value to the organisation's goals and vision, will not transfer knowledge to youngsters etc because they are there to get a salary and that's that. Something like 'if you want loyalty buy a dog' type of attitude. It will provide management and especially the older guys, a more in-depth picture of why people are behaving 'different' from what they would expect. Earlier years the view was more to a 'rolling stone gathers no moss' and people stayed at one company for the security. Nowadays if employees are unhappy and no engagement takes place, they simply move on. Research will definitely assist managers in reviewing their company goals and drivers.

	Age	Years Experience in Field	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Jill	37	14	Part of my focus area is on implementing the employee value proposition and talent management	Employment engagement is when there is a good fit between the employee and employer (values, attitudes, job etc.). It is the emotional and intellectual commitment that the employee has to the org and this has a direct impact on productivity and retention.	I believe that they are inter-related and need to be aligned. All separate initiatives that are not under the same umbrella can be more detrimental	Yes - it has an impact on all transformational HR and people practices - performance management, talent management, retention, recruitment etc. You can determine the level of commitment and can develop strategies accordingly.

Table 2: Academic results for open ended questions

	Age	Years Experience	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Dave	31	6	Yes, research. Have supervised post-grad students and published on the topic	An optimal state where employee efforts are aimed at org. goals; which are in alignment with personal goals. Energy and commitment are both directed towards goal achievement.	It is not only commitment, but commitment together with energy focused in the right direction.	Yes, it provides an avenue of meaningful interventions in employee attraction, retention and development. Given the whole drive of positive psychology, engagement presents the positive side of work-related experience.
Emma	50	20	Yes, research. Consulting in organisations	Being motivated and inspired to do my job creatively - enjoying my job	Yes, however closely related. Engagement leads to commitment and greater job involvement.	Yes, inspired people leads to greater productivity and QWL. Enhancing organisational practices regarding employee motivation.
Clive	37	15	No experience, but I might be interested in employee engagement in the military environment. I might want to look at its relationship with concepts such as 'esprit de corps' and cohesiveness	A fulfilling connection with one's work activities	Yes it is. Employees committed to an organisation might exhibit less engagement with their work activities. So, employee engagement should focus on the engagement with work activities rather than the org.	Yes. Employees might join organisations with unrealistic expectations which may manifest in poor performance in the day-today work activities. Yes, especially when linking it to performance management and appraisals.

	Age	Years Experience	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Kyle	69	13	My first major job was the selection of people for a variety of posts in a large public company in this country. This lead to the management of HR activities of the company in another country and eventually to chief executive role in that company and number of others. In all these posts finding and motivating the optimum level of people skills was the major challenge.	Finding a person who will best 'fit' a particular job and organisation and where the 'fit' will be such that it leads to a situation where the employment will result in benefits for both employee and org. over time. This will involve an analysis not only of the particular job but also of orgs. Culture and prospects as well as aims, ambitions, competencies and skills of the individual. Employee engagement also means treating people as individuals and being aware of their needs, ambitions and difficulties.	Finding the 'right' people for all the roles in a business is obviously a key task. But having employed a person, the main task then moves to facilitating the continued optimum performance and commitment of that person. This involves interalia, monitoring performance and abilities to adapt to changing circumstances and determining whether individuals are bale to cope with different situations and challenges.	It is crucial because competent employees are the critical competitive advantage in all organisations. Employee engagement is a wide and difficult topic and needs constant research to keep abreast of circumstances which are subject to constant change.
Rick	53	25	Depending from which prospective you are looking. I am currently working with Hakanen (from Finland) on a chapter on the JD-R model as predictor of employee engagement that will be published in a book on Work Engagement under the editorship of Bakker and Leiter. The book will provide an overview of research on work engagement. I have also conducted research locally on related constructs such as work, job, career, organisation, union and professional involvement and commitment. I am currently working in an international, collaborative research project on work identity.	Employee engagement (according to Demerouti, Bakker et al, 2001; Shaufeli & Bakker, 2003) refers to one end of a bipolar continuum that represents the degree of vigour and dedication as opposed to the other end of the continuum called burnout which in turn refers to the degree of cynicism and exhaustion. From a layman's perspective employee engagement would refer to the degree of involvement or attachment to work or work-based activities.	Yes, from a definition and a conceptual point of view these constructs are different. It is also clear that some schools of thought are USA-based while other are based in Europe. The challenge however in my view is to find some common ground between these research streams by way or means of an integrative conceptual definition.	Employee engagement is perhaps the most important predictor of work performance. It explains a significant amount of variance in both individual and organisational performance. It has become an important predictor and criterion variable in a wide range of studies and has the potential (as an intangible variable) to explain with other tangible variables a significant amount of variance in organisation performance.

	Age	Years Experience	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Steve	62	35	Only in so far as it is an area that could/should be taught to org psych students	This is the extent to which the employee identifies with and his/her employer and strives to achieve organisational objectives. It goes beyond commitment to include elements of organisational citizenship behaviour.	It goes beyond commitment to include elements of organisational citizenship behaviour	Given the high turnover and lack of loyalty shown by people entering the workplace, it is essential that this area be explored and further developed.
Kate	51	25	My job is to influence people to get their employees to engage as part of HR and organisational behaviour training	Employee commitment, empowerment, motivation, eagerness to get involved and stay involved, good working relationships, ethical behaviour	Employee engagement includes these concepts	Yes, because it impacts on performance and sustainable delivery. Losing employees is costly and non-performance is an economic disaster and breaks down relationships. It adds to existing research in terms of talent management.
Dan	64	35	Mostly from a leadership development angle. I do short courses in relate fields.	Active participation in vision and mission fulfilment	Not necessarily - very much the same	Yes, for work satisfaction and productivity
June	41	4	I used to be very dedicated to my work and used to do it with passion. I used to encourage employees around me to become passionate about their work especially when I was in management. I used to try and make the work interesting for them by teaching employees new skills so that not only did they become multi-skilled but they started enjoying their work and would look forward to coming to work. Also when employees are aware of how they fit into the organisation and how their role impacts the organisation, employee engagement increases	An employee who is passionate about his/her job. Someone who is dedicated to his/her job.	Employee engagement includes organisational commitment	Yes it is. Especially in South Africa with the skills shortages experienced currently, employees leave the organisation due to obtaining higher pay and for better opportunities. If organisations pay more attention to employee engagement, employees will be more motivated to stay within the organisation and will not leave when provided with extrinsic motivators such as pay etc. Organisations will also be saving time and money in providing training to new employees.

	Age	Years Experience	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Ben	52	28	No	Being engrossed/immersed in one's work, being energised by it, finding personal fulfilment in work, being proud about what one achieves at work, feeling successful	Yes, they could be constitutively defined in a manner that makes them connotatively distinct from commitment although inter-related, job commitment could be positively related to the degree to which the job offers the opportunity for engagement (possibly as a function of specific person characteristics?) Job involvement seems a little less easy to separate from engagement? Psychological empowerment is another construct that should be constitutively separated from engagement. Constructs do not exist as such and do not carry a given meaning; there is no authoritative universal dictionary that prescribes the definitions of constructs. There probably will be conceptual overlap between these constructs as they were created over time to explain employee behaviour. They might need a bit of repackaging as we distinguish more subtle variations/facets of working man's attitude towards, feelings about and interaction with his work and the organisation he works in?	Yes since it would imply an able (as a prerequisite) and committed, satisfied, low intention to quit, psychologically empowered, high task performing employee (as consequences of engagement with feedback loops to engagement). It most likely would also serve contextual performance as a spillover effect of feeling good about oneself and one's job? It would require inspirational, empowering and job-redesigning (in the Hackman & Oldham sense) leadership. Not really familiar with engagement research.

	Age	Years Experience	Experience/Interest in Employee Engagement	Definition of Employee Engagement	Distinctiveness of Employee Engagement	Other Impact/ Added Value
Jess	33	5	It is my subject field as I teach organisational behaviour.	Your loyalty and commitment to the company	I do believe that it is on a deeper level than other the normal organisational commitment or job involvement (which usually only mean a commitment towards your own job and not the organisation as a whole)	It will show the employees' attitude towards the organisation. I am just not sure how practical it is since the organisational environment changes very fast which makes employees and their career paths more fluid. Secondly organisations (on their part) do not always show a high level of commitment towards the employee which have an impact on the trust in the relationship. If you could help employees to be more engage towards the organisation, they will probably be less likely to leave the organisation. This on itself can have positive as well as negative implications for the organisation.
Craig	63	35	I have worked in earlier years on the psychological contract - lectured on this	The identification of the employee with the org. and the emotional bonding between the two.	A bit different from org. commitment because it emphasises the psychological contract/bond between employee and org. Commitment is more specific with regard to task outputs. Engagement is under concept which includes bonding with org. - not only with task.	Very important. Reasons: younger employees less committed/identify less with org. More difficult to get employees to engage with org. than 10 yrs ago. It is imperative that employees engage with the org. if the org. wants to perform well and if we want to grow the economy in SA.
Chloe	35	12	Yes, I have completed my PhD on work related wellbeing (burnout and engagement). My further interests in this regard is to develop intervention (i.e. Intervention research) in this field.	To be energised by the work and the work environment. Show commitment, dedication and enthusiasm to get the job done.	Yes, to be engaged is a different process which involves more than just commitment and involvement.	Yes, most organisations only tend to address the negative side of work wellness (burnout) in the form of stress workshops etc. Whilst focussing on engagement and the simulation thereof might be more important e.g. happiness, hope etc. Much has been said about burnout and stress, but still not enough regarding engagement.