



Sculpting global leaders

The impact of Leadership on employee engagement at a telecommunications Organisation in Johannesburg

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

Johannesburg, 2023

Protocol number: [WBS/BA2468103/986](#)

DECLARATION

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

Ntobeko Amanda Ncube

Signed at Midrand on the 26th day of February 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and will to do this programme, and for keeping me and holding my hand through it all. I am also grateful to have such a supportive family that hugged me when I was tired and down and encouraged me to keep going. Thank you so much for your love and support, I really appreciate it.

I would also like to acknowledge my friends that were my cheerleaders, thank you so much for having my back and allowing me to be absent from special events so that I could focus on my school work.

I would like to give a special mention to the below people for their support, guidance and assistance

- ❖ Dr Matshabaphala, my supervisor – thank you for your time, support and guidance throughout my research and for motivating me to complete it.
- ❖ My colleagues, Nelisa, Chris, Mmogo and Nabelani for always being so willing to step in and take care of my work duties in my absence.
- ❖ My company for affording me this opportunity and supporting my career development.
- ❖ My study group Thapelo, Babongiwe, Sphiwe & Tshego for your support and assistance in this journey.
- ❖ My partner, Nkosana Ndlovu for being so supportive through this whole programme and for being my biggest cheerleader, thank you.
- ❖ Agenia and Nonhlanhla Ncube, my moms, thank you so much for the love, support and encouragement. Thank you for making sure I was always taken care of. I appreciate it more than words can express.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Nominated journal: South African Journal of Business Management

Supervisor: Dr Manamela Matshabaphala

Word count †: 30 887

Supplementary files: References

ABSTRACT

This research paper examined the impact of leadership on employee engagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg. The study focused on the impact of leadership at the pinnacle of technological advancements while working in a hybrid model. The digitalisation of organizations, accelerated by the Covid 19 pandemic, has resulted in a shift in leadership and how they interact with employees, necessitating the study. The objective of the study is to understand the factors that lead to employee disengagement in these technology times and hybrid ways of work, understand the current leadership trends and also look at some of the factors that will effectively increase engagement. The telecommunications industry is critical in ensuring that in these times people and business are able to connect to conduct business anywhere in the world and have the capability it takes to deliver on this connectivity in South Africa and the rest of the world. The study therefore seeks to assist the telecommunications company to improve on engagement levels of their staff, who are their key resources in helping the company achieve their strategic goals.

This was a qualitative study that utilise semi-structured interviews to collect data from the sample size selected from the company. A stratified sampling method was used to select participants that would be able to represent a certain group in the organisation in order to get representation. The data was analysed using axial coding which is basically the process of linking code (categories and concepts) to one another using a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning.

The results indicated that there are key areas of improvements such as strategy communication, recognition, ensuring work life balance and enabling career growth. The trends showed that there are global trends around challenges in burnout and work life balance, a general shift in leadership requirements and identified capabilities that future leaders must have. There were also indicated strides that the company has taken like their focus on driving engagement and a passion for growing the company making employees feel like they are part of a bigger cause.

Table of Contents

THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT A TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANISATION IN JOHANNESBURG	1
DECLARATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION	4
ABSTRACT	5
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH	10
1.1 Background	10
1.1.2 Context of the study	12
1.2.1 Research Problem Statement	13
1.2.2 Research objectives	13
1.2.3 Research questions	14
1.2.4 Significance of the study	14
1.2.5 Overview of the research report	15
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Employee Engagement	16
2.3 Theoretical Framework	18

Theories of leadership -----	19
2.3.1 Participative Leadership Theory -----	19
2.3.2 Leader-Member Exchange Theory -----	21
Conceptual Framework -----	23
2.3.3 Connected Leadership-----	23
2.3.3.6 Summary -----	29
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND METHODS -	30
3.1 Introduction -----	30
3.2 Research Strategy -----	30
3.3. Research Design -----	31
3.4. Research Procedure and Methods -----	32
3.4.1 Research data and Information collection Instruments -----	32
3.4.2. Research target population and selection of respondents -----	33
3.4.3. Ethical Considerations when collecting the research data -----	34
3.4.4 Research data and collection process -----	35
3.4.5 Research data and information processing and analysis-----	35
3.4.6 Description of the research respondents -----	36
3.5 Reliability & validity -----	38
3.6. Research Limitations -----	39
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS -----	40
4.1 Introduction -----	40
4.2 Research Question 1: What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg? -----	40
4.2.1 Lack of clarity on the strategy & deliverables -----	41
4.2.2 Inadequate recognition and career growth.-----	43
4.2.3 Impact of work life balance -----	45

4.3. Research question 2: What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?	47
4.3.1 Shift in leadership role	48
4.3.1.1 Increased trust and less micromanagement in delivery	48
4.3.1.2 Need for more personal engagements/ increased empathy	50
4.3.2. Increased burnout & wellness challenges	52
4.3.3 An increase in workload & expectations post hybrid implementation	55
4.3.4 Defined skills & capabilities for future leadership	56
4.3.4.1 Futuristic & Purpose led	57
4.3.4.2 Heightened level of emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness	58
4.3.4.3 Effective communicator	59
4.3.4.4 Technologically advanced	60
4.4. Research question 3: What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at the telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?	62
4.4.1 Empowerment	63
4.4.2 Work Life Balance	65
4.4.3 Create a collaborative space	66
4.4.4 Shifting to Coaching & transformational leadership	70
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS	73
5.1 Introduction	73
5.2 Conceptual Framework	73
5.3 Analysis and interpretation of the results	74
5.3.1 Discussion of Research Question 1: What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?	74
5.3.1.1 Lack of clarity on the strategy and direction.	74
5.3.1.2 Inadequate recognition and career growth	75
5.3.1.3 Impact of work life balance	77
5.3.2. Discussion of Research Question 2: What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?	78
5.3.2.1. Shift in the leadership role	78

5.3.2.2 Increased burnout & wellness challenges -----	79
5.3.2.3 Required Leadership Capability of the Future -----	81
5.3.3. Discussion of Research Question 3: What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg? -----	84
5.3.3.1 Empowerment -----	85
5.3.3.2 Work Life Balance -----	85
5.3.3.3 Creating a collaborative space -----	86
5.3.3.4 Utilising coaching & transformational leadership Style -----	87
5.4 Leadership Milestones -----	89
5.4.1 Passion for company growth -----	89
5.4.2 Driving Engagement -----	89
5.4.3. Mindset shift -----	90
5.5. Areas of Improvement -----	91
5.5.1 An increased focus on Wellness -----	91
5.5.2 Proactive discussions on career development and growth -----	91
5.5.3. Aligned view of leadership -----	91
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS -----	93
6.1. Introduction -----	93
6.2. Summary -----	93
6.3 Conclusions -----	95
6.4 Limitations -----	97
6.5 Recommendations -----	97
6.6 Conclusion -----	99
6.7 Recommendations for future academic research -----	99
REFERENCES -----	100

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Background

This paper explores the impact of leadership on the levels of employee engagement in the organisation. Leadership is one of the most studied topics in organisational sciences, and employee engagement one of the more recent over the last two decades (Carasco-Saul et al., 2014). Leadership plays a critical role in organisations as well as on individuals and their performance. A leader has the obligation to ensure that they provide their followers with clear direction in order for the followers to be effective and move together toward a common goal (Jiatong et al., 2022). In the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world that organisations exist in today, leaders must support the careers as well as the psychological health of their employees (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021).

They equally need to inspire, connect and strengthen them in order to reduce burnout thereby increasing their engagement in the organisation (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021). Various studies have validated that leadership behaviour, as well as leadership style, has an impact on the levels of employee engagement (Rahmadani & Schaufeli (2020); Popli & Rizvi (2016) and Carasco-Saul et al., (2014). Carasco-Saul et al., (2014) quote the work done by Michael Hay in 2002 in his paper on "Strategies for survival in the war for talent" on 330 companies in 50 countries that indicated that employees left their jobs because they were not happy with their boss and not their work. Marcus Buckingham's quote from his book titled "First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently" (2016) therefore also surfaces on "People leave managers not companies". It is therefore imperative that each organisation looks after its management seeing that they can influence the retention of employees.

In their study of the drivers of engagement, Popli and Rizvi (2016) discovered that leadership has a conceptually important influence on employee engagement. Wang & Walumbwa (2007) also agree that leadership is one of the single biggest contributors impacting perceptions in the organisation as well as employee engagement. Sutton

(2020) continues to outline that a consistent top driver of employee engagement is senior leadership's ability to build excitement around an organisation's future.

Various literature focus at differentiating the leadership styles in trying to understand which style influences employee engagement the most, in fact a study done by DeCuyper & Schaufeli, (2017) showed that various leadership styles i.e. ethical leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership as well as empowering leadership all were positively correlated to work engagement with ethical leadership and transformational leadership having the highest correlation. Notably, transformational leadership is the most investigated leadership style (Rahmadani & Schaufeli (2020); Popli & Rizvi (2016) and (Jiatong et al., 2022).

For this study the construct of positive leadership will be used, a fairly new concept that seeks to understand an integrative view on all the leadership styles including transformational, authentic, charismatic, ethical, servant, benevolent, humble as well as engaging leadership, acknowledging that they all play a role in employee engagement (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021). Positive leadership style is essentially those leadership styles aimed at having a positive impact on employees.

Recent socio-economic and technological advances in company environments have permitted new ways of working based on flexible work arrangements and significant use of information technology that allows employees to work at any time and in any location (Iannotta et al., 2020). These methods are commonly referred to as "smart working" techniques. Furthermore, the organisational impact of work digitization, exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic's rapid transformation, has created a shift in leadership looking at how leaders then manage in the digital world (Spagnoli et al., 2021).

People who couldn't work at the employer's office before Covid 19 can now get jobs and do their jobs without going to the office. Some examples are parents of disabled children, people who live far from where they work, professionals, and well-known experts (providing services as part of additional work). Some of the benefits of being able to work from home include: (a) being able to keep work and family life in balance; (b) being able to balance work and personal life (including family life) by spending more time with loved ones; (c) not having to travel from home to work and back every day, which saves time and money; and (d) protecting the environment (Wontorczyk & Ronowski, 2022).

Lewis (2021) argues that while technology such as zoom, Microsoft teams, and WebEx has been instrumental in getting teams to collaborate via different platforms, and helped managers to be able to track output it cannot bridge the gap completely. Leaders need to be focusing on continuous engagement and ensuring that followers feel that they care about them. Lewis (2021) further asserts that technology in the form of surveys and feedback measures can be used to create data points that leaders can use to improve on organisational culture and employee experience.

This experience of “forced” transition, therefore, creates a gap in literature with regards to managing employees either on smart ways of working or in the remote working model. The paper seeks to investigate the factors of leadership that will effectively increase employee engagement in this era of leadership where they are managing employees in a smart working model.

1.1.2 Context of the study

The Covid19 pandemic conceivably more than any other event in human history has demonstrated the critical importance that the telecommunications industry plays in keeping businesses, governments, and societies connected and running (International Finance Corporation, 2020). People across the globe have had to rely on technology for information as well as working from home. Arguably even before the pandemic, the technological advancements in companies have put the spotlight on the industry to succeed in ensuring that the economy is able to thrive using their services. The industry consists mainly of digital infrastructures such as fibre, towers, active networks and data centres; they operate mobile, fixed broadband and cloud computing and they have applications such as fixed-line telephony, video and e-commerce (International Finance Corporation, 2020). The telecommunications industry saw an influx in the use of both voice and data sparked by the pandemic and quickly had to ensure that their infrastructure was adequate to deal with the traffic.

It is imperative therefore to discuss the leadership impact on engagement within this particular industry as their engagement levels also impact company performance. The particular telecommunications company chosen is a South African-based company (Company X) with a footprint in Tanzania, DRC, Mozambique, Lesotho and Kenya.

Company X has about 7554 employees in their South Africa operations. The landscape of the telecommunications industry in South Africa is highly competitive with Vodacom dominating market share at 42.5%, MTN at 30%, Telkom 14% to name a few wanting to get more market share and grow their base. 1.2 Research conceptualisation

1.2.1 Research Problem Statement

The dearth of leadership, caused by confusion on the leadership side about how to lead more diverse, more technical, multigenerational employees at the pinnacle of technological advancements, creates a challenge for both employees and leaders in developing the right engagement strategies for employees, leading to the problem of employee disengagement.

Various comments have been made about technological improvements and, in particular, the impact of the pandemic on how employees have experienced leadership. Some factors identified include a lack of direction from leaders and employees being left to figure out their work; employee burnout due to the number of hours worked to keep up with the workload; and, finally, micromanagement in some situations because leaders were unable to see their employees.

The research therefore aims to explore the factors leading to the problem of leadership deficiencies that lead to employee disengagement at the telecommunications company in Johannesburg. Furthermore the study was done to understand how the current leadership in this telecommunications company is impacting its employees.

1.2.2 Research objectives

- To investigate leadership factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in JHB.
- To present the findings on the impact of leadership on employee engagement at a telecommunications organisation in JHB
- To interpret and analyse the findings on the impact of leadership on employee engagement at a telecommunications in JHB

- To recommend strategies for leadership that will essentially lead to employee engagement at a telecommunications organisation in JHB

1.2.3 Research questions

- What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?
- What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?
- What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at the telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

1.2.4 Significance of the study

While the South African economy has slowed in recent years, with 1.2% growth expected for the 2015-2020 period, the telecommunications sector's contribution to the country's GDP has increased marginally (Accenture Strategy, 2019). While this growth is welcome, given the telecommunications industry's critical role in driving economic growth and improving South Africans' well-being, more needs to be done to strengthen the sector and expand service reach. Improving telecom operators' competitiveness will be critical, and digital technologies will play a key role (Accenture Strategy, 2019). The disruption of possibly disengaged employees causes a threat to the telecommunications achieving what they need to for themselves as well as the country, it is therefore vital that they understand the impact of their leadership on employee engagement.

Understanding the impact of the particular problem will assist the organisation relook at the leadership they currently have and assess if it is fit for purpose. Understanding how people envision the next level of leadership also gives understanding on what is most likely to keep employees engaged going forward. As discussed in the literature section below, engaged employees' impact on productivity, they give extra care to their work and are happy to go the extra mile for the organisation's success.

1.2.5 Overview of the research report

This research paper is divided into several chapters that discuss the impact of leadership on employee engagement in depth. The first chapter provides context, background, and the research study's objectives. The second chapter provides a literature review on the topic, referencing previous studies, and introduces the conceptual framework. Chapter 3 examines the research methodology used in the study to collect data and insights. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the findings derived from participant responses. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the results discussion and analysis, and Chapter 6 summarises and concludes the research study while also making a few recommendations to the organisation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In any research that one does, it is important to show understanding of the arena of the topic that they are researching, what has been done and the gap that remains to be explored. According to Hart (2018), the purpose of research is therefore to contribute in some way to the understanding of the topic. He goes on to define a literature review as the critical examination, analysis, and synthesis of existing knowledge relevant to the study subject. Another important element noted by Jesson & Lacey (2006) is that besides summarising current knowledge a literature review should also generate and refine new ideas in the research.

The literature review seeks to give an overview of the employee engagement and its importance within the standing and operation of any organisation, people are essentially the engine of an organisation. For the purpose of this study, three theories will be unpacked to outline on how leaders and leadership influence employee engagement

2.2 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement, which is interchangeably used with work engagement has sparked a lot of interest in the last two decades given that it has been linked to higher organisational performance (Joshi & Sodhi, 2011; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014 & Antonio, 2016). According to Harter et al (2002), employee engagement is highly positively connected with organisational success. The level of employee engagement determines how competitive businesses are, so most organisations are making it a point to ensure that they focus on increasing engagement (Zhao & Sheng, 2019). Raising employee engagement has been recognised as a vital approach for organisational success especially considering the current environment of increased global competition and decreased growth prospects (Popli & Rizvi, 2016).

According to Chaudhary et al., (2022) employee engagement is characterised as an employee's level of commitment and contribution in their organisation. When an employee is highly involved they are cognisant of the role they play in achieving company

objectives and motivate their colleagues to succeed. Engaged employees want to develop themselves and improve on their roles as well as contribute to the organisation positively. While employee engagement is a well-researched topic in literature, there is still no single and largely accepted definition (Chaudhary et al., 2022). Schaufeli et al. (2002), described engagement specifically as "... a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74).

Cook (2008) defines engagement as how positively an employee thinks about, feels about, and is proactive in attaining organisational goals for customers, colleagues, and other stakeholders. What all definitions seem to have in common is that employee engagement is a good and satisfying work-related state of mind that helps individuals to be totally immersed and devoted to their work, as well as intrinsically motivated and stimulated, potentially benefiting both the employee and the business. In a moral sense, and in a more operational sense, their company (Busse & Regenberg, 2018).

The pioneer of employee engagement was Kahn (1990), an ethnographic researcher who described that engaged employees put in a lot of effort into their work because they identify with it, additionally, they have an emotional connection to their organisations this then resulted in engagement is assumed to produce positive outcomes, both at the individual level (personal growth and development) as well as the organisational level (performance quality (Schaufeli, 2012).

Various investigations look into engagement strategies (Joshi & Sodhi, 2011; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014), a consistent driver that is agreed upon to have a significant contribution is leadership, the view is also supported by Wang & Walumbwa, (2007). Leadership has a positive effect especially through giving feedback and coaching. Leadership is a crucial situational aspect in an employee's work setting, with a considerable impact on the employee's psychology, attitudes, and conduct.

While it is important to understand engagement and how it's defined, it is equally important to understand employee disengagement and the highlighted attributes that cause the effect. Kahn (1990) in his study on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement interviewed summer camp counselors and employees of an architecture firm about their times of engagement and disengagement at work. He then defined disengagement as the decoupling of the self within the role, which involves

the individual withdrawing and defending themselves while performing the role (Kular et al., 2008). He argued that employees who were disengaged displayed incomplete role performances that were effortless, automatic, or robotic. Consequently he discovered three psychological conditions associated with work engagement or disengagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He contended that in each role situation, people asked themselves three fundamental questions: (i) How important is it for me to incorporate myself into this performance? (ii) How safe is it to do so? (iii) How available am I to do so? He discovered that workers were more engaged at work in situations that provided them with more psychological meaning and safety, as well as when they were more psychologically available (Kular et al., 2008).

Maslach et al., (2001) present an alternative model of engagement from the 'burnout' literature, describing job engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout, noting that burnout is characterized by the erosion of engagement with one's job. They opine that workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness, and values, according to Maslach et al. (2001), lead to either burnout or engagement. They contend that job engagement is linked to a manageable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work environment, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. Engagement, like burnout, is expected to mediate the relationship between these six work-life factors and various work outcomes.

According to Aslam et al. (2018), major sources of employee disengagement include managerial actions such as acts of unfairness, above-the-rule practices, work overload, and organizational injustice. Their study found a positive relationship between employee disengagement and organisational injustice, politics and work overload. Bhebhe (2020), in his study affirmed that management actions such as clear performance management, providing required training and rewarding people accordingly for work done was the major reason for disengaged employees. Having defined the fact that leaders are key in how engaged employees are whether positively or negatively, it is important to

understand the leadership frameworks that have been presented to assist leaders to positively engage employees.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Various leadership frameworks have been looked at with regards to what positively contributes to employee engagements, the researcher will look at participative leadership theory, contingency leadership theory as well as connected leadership as the conceptual framework.

Theories of leadership

2.3.1 Participative Leadership Theory

This particular theory is referred to as the theory with two names, it is also sometimes referred to as democratic leadership. The theory dates back to the 1930s and 1940s noted by Kurt Lewin during his research in leadership; he is the one that helped identify the value of this style in organisations based on interviews with business leaders and employees. At that point two professors defined participative leadership: John Gastil characterised it as distributing responsibility among members, empowering group members, and assisting the group's decision-making process while Edwin Locke further broadened the concept to any power-sharing structure in which workplace influence is shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchically unequals. (STU, 2018).

Based on the problem statement participative leadership theory presents itself as one of the relevant and involving leadership theories where both the leader and the employee take decisions together. The theory can aid in understanding how this theory contributes to leader impact in influencing engagement positively.

According to some academics, participative leadership is one of the most humanistic leadership styles (Lythreathis et al., 2017). Participative leadership has been defined as a shared influence and joint decision-making between a leader and their follower (Lam et al., 2015). The intention is to give followers autonomy in discretion, involvement in problem-solving as well as making decisions (Lam et al., 2015). Demirtas & Karaca,

(2020) highlight that the theory is based on Kurt Lewin's classical three-style model consisting of authoritarian (autocratic) leadership participative (democratic) leadership and delegative (laissez-faire) leadership according to Lewin participative leadership is a balance between autocratic and "laissez-faire" (allow to) leadership. Huang et al., (2009) assert that participative leadership is a way to empower practising managers, it may influence followers' work by generating trust in their immediate supervisor.

Employees can use participative leadership to influence internal and external strategy, safeguard organisational responsiveness, and hold managers accountable. Employees perceive the system as more fair when they engage, which minimises the risk of treating corporate responsibility as a public relations tactic. Employees are more open in their interactions with their peers and other stakeholders as a result of this empowerment. They may see the genuine benefits of these participatory behaviours for themselves – morally – and their organisation – operationally (Rok, 2009).

The act of participative leadership is quite intentional in that the leader has to share or relinquish a certain amount of control over decision-making (Lam et al., 2015). The extent to which employees perceive their leaders as participatory leaders capable of effectively motivating employees' performance is determined by whether employees observe behavioural clues that are consistent with the leader's initial participative-like behaviour. Although participative leadership is one of the slower decision-making styles, when a decision is taken jointly, harmony is generated within the company, and both employee morale and the support they feel within the organisation are improved (Lythreatis et al., 2017).

As a result of spending time developing positive interactions with employees, there is a positive impact on employee engagement. A participative leader conveys an encouraging message to employees, allowing them to work creatively. Employees can produce innovative new ideas and solutions by participating in a variety of job tasks. Work involvement necessitates high levels of positive energy and attentiveness (Chan, 2019). Furthermore, in his study Chan (2019) on whether or not participative leadership had an impact on engagement highlighted that there was indeed a positive relationship, that participative leadership enhanced both engagement as well as job satisfaction. Additionally, Huang et al., (2009)'s study on finding out whether participative leadership impacted performance found a positive link between the two, thus similar to engagement,

participative leadership yields positive outcomes in employees in terms of delivery in their roles.

Usadolo (2020) did a study within the agriculture environment to ascertain the impact of participative leadership on extension officers' engagement. The study measured engagement based on Schaufeli's constructs of vigour, dedication and absorption and found that there was a positive relationship with all three, basically meaning that participative leadership does indeed imply high engagement levels on the employee's side.

The challenges that have been sighted around participative leadership is that it can only work if the followers given the autonomy are competent, in a scenario where the team is not at the level where they can make the right decisions then they cannot be let to do the job independently. Should they be left to do so they can make mistakes that can cost the organisation money and result in the leader not being able to extend the autonomy which translates to development for them (Lam et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Leader-Member Exchange Theory

George Graen developed the leader-member exchange theory (LMX), which was initially known as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory in the 1970s. The role theory, which served as the basis for the VDL's premise, proposed that employees' roles develop through informal processes (as opposed to formal processes such as job descriptions), and that employees' immediate supervisors were extremely influential in employees achieving clarity in their roles. Researchers in the field of leadership were able to postulate, based on role theory, that the process of employees defining their roles was characterised by a sequence of supervisor-employee interactions and therefore leader-member exchange (LMX) was conceptualised (van Breukelen et al., 2006).

Over the years LMX has gained a lot of traction due to some researchers suggesting that it has a link to performance (Aggarwal et al., 2020). LMX focuses on the relationship that the leader and member have and that the intensity of the relationship can either lead to positive or negative changes in an employee (Mumtaz & Rowley, 2019). The leader basically develops a relationship with employees that either classifies the employees as the in-group or out-group, leaders develop high-quality relationships with select group

members and facilitate them by going above and beyond official requirements by providing mentoring or empowering them, while others receive fewer incentives (Mumtaz & Rowley, 2019). A high-quality LMX increases the amount of information sharing, trust, competence, dedication, role clarity, job satisfaction, and lowers stress whilst low-quality LMX causes low levels of interaction, restricted support, formal relationships, counterproductive behaviour, psychological disengagement, employee turnover, decreased job satisfaction, and increased job stress (Aggarwal et al., 2020).

According to the LMX theory, leaders judge their direct reports based on their competence, agreeableness, mindfulness, openness and locus of control while the direct reports assess their leader based on reward stance, agreeableness, transformational leadership as well as meeting follower supervisor expectations (Aggarwal et al., 2020). What differentiates LMX theory from other theories is its focus on the relationship between line and the employee as opposed to looking just at leader traits or employee traits (van Breukelen et al., 2006). It investigates more the quality of the exchange relationships.

Kim & Koo, (2017) assert that with the LMX theory, leaders' good behaviours can foster employee indebtedness by developing a favour exchange. This favour exchange makes employees feel obligated on multiple levels, including trust, control over organisational resources, competency, and consideration. The study done by Kim & Koo (2017) with hotel employees indicated that quality LMX had positive effects on engagement and innovative behaviour. The study also done by Agarwal et al., (2012) complemented existing research on work engagement as a result of LMX.

A key focus on looking at the LMX theory in this research is that the theory already moves the leader-employee relationship from one where the leader closely manages the employee but an employee has a certain degree to practise their own discretion in decision making. It is a good trait to have when we talk about managing teams under the smart way of working.

According to van Breukelen et al., (2006) the LMX theory has been challenged for potentially legitimising inequities between members of the in-group and the out-group however the authors argue that while the LMX theory, and notably its forerunner, the Vertical Dyad Linkage theory, suggested the possibility and potential of leaders

distinguishing between their subordinates, they neither legitimised nor counselled such a distinction. The idea with the LMX theory is that leaders try to develop those quality relationships with all their direct reports given that subordinates should be provided equal opportunities to contribute to common work goals, with their abilities objectively assessed rather than through biased favouritism.

Conceptual Framework

2.3.3 Connected Leadership

Hayward (2016) introduced a shift in the leadership discipline in the 21st century that moves away from the model of hierarchical command and control to leading through influence. Not much literature exists on this new outlook of leading through influence as it is still being explored by researchers however Hayward (2016)'s book on the topic has been used as the main source of the theory. He outlines that there are five interrelated factors that make connected leadership a success.

- i) Purpose and direction
- ii) Authenticity
- iii) Devolved decision making
- iv) Collaborative achievement
- v) Agility.

The first factor which is also the foundation describes an understanding of the common goal that people exist to fulfil within an organisation. All employees must have a clear view of the strategy and how they plan to achieve it as a team. Authenticity as the second factor speaks to leaders acting in line with the standard of ethics as well as building relationships based on respect and trust. The fairness in judgement engages and encourages employees to also build connected relationships in the rest of the organisation. Devolved decision-making, like participative leadership theory, involves sharing the decision-making power within the organisation. This takes into account who is closest to the customer and will be able to make the best decision for them. The fourth-factor talks to effective teamwork where great performance is attained through close working of the team in end-to-end processes. Agility, the fifth factor, requires that

employees be able to adapt to the changing circumstances and have a culture that allows them to experiment and learn fast without blame (Hayward, 2016).

Marsh (2019) emphasises that leadership is the foundation of any organisation and that it is vital to remember that an employee's experience with their manager accounts for 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores. With the advent of the gig economy, employees have become equivalent to customers in that they shop around for the leadership qualities that they believe are best for them. She defines a connected leader as someone who has a high level of self-awareness, comes across as human, and is not afraid to be vulnerable. A connected leader works with their team and welcomes open communication and input from them.

Marsh (2019) also covers three elements i.e. trust, vulnerability and positive relationships that based on psychology and neuroscience help a leader to be connected. Trust, she asserts, creates bonds where there is a united front to how employees regard work as opposed to us versus them mentality. As such, building that trust with the team is one of the fundamentals of an effective leader. She also indicates that another sign of being a connected leader is showing vulnerability. Being authentic and vulnerable allows people to connect at a human level and allows leaders to be bold in sharing that side allowing direct reports to have deeper relationships with them and loyalty. The last element is around positive relationships that are needed for a leader to foster to ensure innovation in the team, positive relationships enable employees to feel valued and understood and hence will also give the psychological safety to innovate and experiment with new ideas. Positive relationships are also one of the top measures of employee engagement.

Jarche (2016) highlights that connected leaders inspire networked individuals via compassion, empathy, and trust. Most traditional managerial control systems are rendered obsolete by transparency. As ambiguity and complexity increase, so do the skills of connected leaders. The mental models that guide their behaviour are stuck in a state of beta constancy. The goal of connected leadership is to make the network as a whole smarter so that the leader may be more effective as a result (Jarche, 2016).

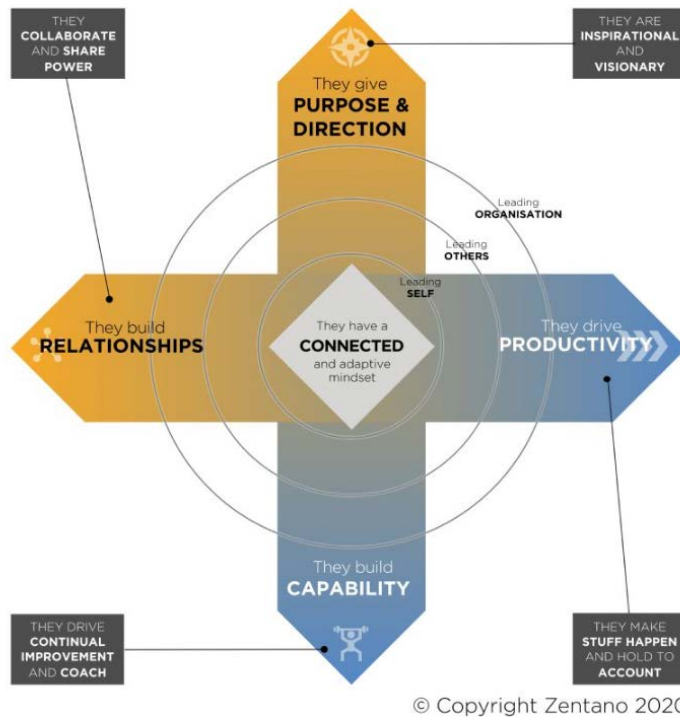


Figure 1: Connected Leadership framework (Zentano, 2020)

Zentano (2020) drew up a framework to show the different aspects of a connected leader, figure 1 shows those elements. They highlight the connected leader being one that can offer purpose and direction, drive productivity, build capacity as well as build relationships. They drive the point that connected leaders start by leading self, leading others and then the organisations.

Mullaney (2021) asserts that with all the unprecedented changes both with the Covid 19 pandemic as well as technology changes in organisations leaders must adapt and make themselves more accessible and transparent while ensuring that they are able to deepen connections with stakeholders. They must also embrace the use of digital and social media tools as a method to reach people.

Mulleaney's (2021)'s study basically asked over 6500 employees and over 5200 readers of financial publications across 13 different countries how they would like Corporate leaders to communicate with them. The general view across the countries was employees expect their leaders/CEO to be digitally present to be able to communicate

in the platforms that employees are already on for instance Workplace, Slack or Yammer. They also expected leaders to through social media communicate with the public on the company and be able to comment on elements that were happening in the country. They also found that employees wanted to work with a leader/CEO that uses social media as well as be able to investigate their social media presence to understand more about them before starting with a company.

The use of Zentano (2020)'s 4 constructs will be used to further explore the topic of connected leadership and how these constructs positively influence employee engagement.

2.3.3.1 Purpose and Direction

According to Alexander (2015), over the last few years there has been a growing view of the importance of purpose within organisations, Individuals are increasingly looking for meaning in their lives and because they spend a significant number of hours in the office they naturally look to work for that meaning. One of the themes that emerged in Alexander (2015)'s study to explore the definition of purpose in business indicated that meaningful work created value therefore organisations that offer this chance to make a difference have more engaged, effectively committed and motivated employees. Motivation theorists and humanistic psychologists both agree that people have an innate need for meaningful employment. This is seen in the work of various author such as Alderfer (1972); Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman (1959); Maslow(1943); McClelland (1965) McGregor(1960); and Rogers (1961). Connected leaders are able to connect these dots for employees to understand their value in realising the purpose of the organisation. It is the role of the leader to inspire, excite and motivate employees around this cause.

Connected leaders also give direction for the team to be able to understand what needs to be achieved. Gawley (2021) makes an important distinction between 'direction and directions' stating that great leaders are able to give an overall view of where the team needs to go and good leaders give directions. Directions provide a detailed map of how to execute the tasks while direction leaves it to the individual to draw up a view of how they will get to the bigger picture. Leaders who give just the direction empower their direct reports creating a happier and much more engaged workforce. Joshi & Sodhi

(2011) indicate that job content has been identified as an essential component influencing intrinsic motivation. It is in the organisation's greatest advantage to shape the dimensions of the work in a way that is appealing while also contributing to the organisation's short and long-term goals. Employees need autonomy to be able to fully engage in their work how they see fit, autonomy is also directly linked to higher levels of engagement. A connected leader is therefore able to provide both purpose and direction to their teams.

2.3.3.2 Drive Productivity

In today's fast-paced business and work environments, leaders must skilfully balance employee productivity with employee well-being by fostering the correct work culture. Leaders must play a strategic role in aligning their teams to both their goals and the company's vision whilst being mindful that they need to do it in such a way that employees are motivated and in the right frame (physically and mentally) to execute on them (Kumar, 2022).

In her study, Kumar (2022) highlights that one of the trends in looking at productivity and performance management is that there is a shift in power that is being called the "great resignation". The top-down command and control leadership style is no longer applicable; however a more collaborative approach is being used to foster deeper engagement and relationships based on trust. Another trend is that the age of performance reviews that discuss a long list of key performance indicators and have a focus on specific numbers that give employees anxiety when the number is not met is long gone. What is relevant now is that a leader has real-time conversations in the form of monthly and quarterly in-depth catch-ups as well as 360 reviews that look at both the 'what and how' an employee achieves their deliverables.

Connected leaders understand that productivity and well-being are interlinked and therefore a focus on well-being helps with productivity. Leaders, therefore, need to practise compassionate leadership daily, this entails listening and asking the right questions in order to fully understand an employee's situation. With the unprecedented times brought about by the pandemic, connected leaders realise that people are human first and it is important to identify that in order to get the best out of people (Kumar, 2022).

2.3.3.4 Build Capability

It is quite important for leaders to help their teams respond to the rapid changes or be able to approach tasks that would normally be outside of their skill sets. With the recent changes around digital transformation, it is important that the workforce as a whole re-skills and be ready for the roles of the future as the current roles transform (Content Group, 2018). Connected leaders understand that training is more than just the acquisition of a new skill to just be better at the role but also the seed to innovation in the organisation as well as strategic thinking in preparation for the future. Training courses provide individuals with new tools and techniques; promotes further learning and a great networking platform (Content Group, 2018).

Another component of building capability is around coaching of direct reports, this has become a key element which unleashes potential in individuals. Coaching management is inclusive, involved and allows for participation compared to the traditional command, control and compliance paradigm. Organisations in the ever-changing world of management have acknowledged the value of building a coaching culture as this gives all levels in the organisation a platform to enhance their skills, values and attain their goals (Baker et al., 2021). This also reinforces the idea that the optimum relationship to have in the future is one in which the leader and the direct report are inclusive and collaborative rather than hierarchical.

Hunt and Weintraub (2007) coined the term "coaching manager," describing it as business leaders who support their team members to adopt new behaviour and thinking strategies through coaching/mentoring, who create a conducive environment for growth through allowing innovative problem solving combined with an authentic concern in the supporting other people. Zentano (2020) in their framework also outlines that connected leaders in building this capability coach their teams.

2.3.3.5 Build Relationships

Key to the framework of connected leadership is the leader's ability to build and manage healthy relationships. An effective leader uses these relationships to influence in order to achieve a common goal. Ready (2019) highlights that in the digital economy, mastering personal relationships that build trust and create a collaborative work

environment is key to being an effective leader. With the war for talent currently in place technologists and digitally survey professionals shop for the work environments that suit them therefore companies need to work hard to build mutually beneficial relationships that will make employees pick them.

The concept of shared leadership also comes into play when connected leadership is discussed. Sanfilippo (2021) discusses that the digital revolution is creating the kind of leadership model that decentralises power, where instead of putting all the power and influence in the hands of one person the 'boss' , power is spread out among a group of people. Shared leadership creates a culture of empowerment and joint accountability while ensuring that there is sharing of information across all levels regardless of the leader's title.

2.3.3.6 Summary

A review of the literature solidifies the gravitas of leadership impact on employee engagement and the urgency in moving the right model of leadership with the ongoing digital transformation. The participative and LMX leadership theories were originally being looked at as solutions to aid the challenge but some concerns were outlined in getting to the right levels of engagement for employees. Connected leadership theory as the presented framework provides an all-inclusive view of all the leadership aspects needed in the future and also touches on the valid views of both participative leadership and leader-member exchange theory

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 of this research paper essentially outlines the research techniques that were used in the study to answer the three research questions posed in chapter 1;

- What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?
- What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?
- What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at the telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

The chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, design, procedure, and analysis techniques that the researcher utilised to gather, prepare, and assess the research supporting data. The reliability and validity measures used to make sure the research is reliable and transparent in its methodology are also covered in length in this chapter.

3.2 Research Strategy

Quantitative and qualitative research are two major approaches utilised for data exploration. Quantitative methods operate on the use of numbers and figures during collection and analysis of data to test or prove theory and use statistical models in an attempt to explain observations (Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative methods collect data in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2013). Philipsen and Vernooy-Dassen (2004) define quantitative methods as the study of the nature of phenomena, including their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the points of view from which they can be seen, but not their range, frequency, or place in an objectively determined chain of causes and effects. Quantitative methods systematically use a predetermined set of procedures to answer the question which relates to the study of people, phenomena, cases, social situations and processes in their natural settings in

order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world (Tuli, 2010). The researcher had the objective to understand the experiences of individuals with leadership and their impact on employee engagement therefore the qualitative methodology.

Leadership involves a process influencing a team of individuals towards the objective of archiving a defined goal both at individual and organisational levels (Belias and Koustelios, 2014). The management function of leadership relates to effective management of human resources and social interactions within the organisation hence critical in the determination of organisational outcomes and performance (Saleem, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the interaction between leaders and their team members as effective human resource management is associated with better employee engagement.

In-depth interviews are ideal for collecting data for this paper as the researcher has the opportunity to understand employees' perspectives, and experiences regarding their leadership and how it influences their engagement. The research methodology requires the researcher to actively listen and participate to gain an in-depth insight of the study and explore ideas without bias that can help answer the research question. Therefore, both the subject and the object of his research (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). The researcher conducted interviews with the employees of telecommunications Company X in different leadership levels to obtain a multi-perspective insight to employee engagement. The study does not seek to prove any theory rather it seeks to generate a general understanding of the dynamics of employee engagement based on leadership they experience.

3.3. Research Design

There are five types of qualitative research designs: narrative theory, phenomenology theory, grounded theory, ethnography theory, and case study theory (Sauro, 2015). There is limited knowledge on the association between employee engagement and team leadership in telecommunications industry in a South African context in the age of 4IR transition therefore it is ideal to use the grounded theory for this study. The grounded theory is appropriate when there is limited knowledge on the subject of research, the aim

of the theory is to develop an explanatory theory which unearths better understanding of the research inquiry through the use of the data obtained in the study (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Grounded theory is inductive, developmental, and represents views of the participants relative to a substantive area of interest and results in a systematic set of conceptual hypotheses from data; the resulting substantive theory is action oriented and provides a conceptual framework to create systemic change centred on a substantive area (Glaser, 1992, p. 15).

The theory is based on actual facts, which indicates that the study and creation of hypotheses occurs after the data has been acquired. Its primary purpose is to construct theories about social processes, i.e. to produce higher level understanding based on or derived from rigorous data analysis which is useful in observing human interactions. Busse, Kach and Wagner (2017) argues that when empirical reality is changing due to the development of a new phenomenon in this case 4IR, the fit with traditional theoretic models might be altered hence must be investigated as unknown events. The researcher conducted interviews using open ended questions and used in the study to investigate the impact of leadership on engagement in these times of transition to the 4IR using a method (grounded theory) framed by the participants' perceived experiences and enabled rigour in the data analysis.

3.4. Research Procedure and Methods

The actual process of gathering, processing, and analysing the data is covered in this section. Section 3.4.1 discusses the data collection tool, Section 3.4.2 the target population and selection method, Section 3.4.3 the ethical considerations that were taken into account when collecting the data, Section 3.4.4 the research data and collection process, Section 3.4.5 the reliability & validity of the study, and finally Section 3.4.6 the research limitations.

3.4.1 Research data and Information collection Instruments

Bryman (2012) emphasises that there are two widely used data collection instruments, namely the observation schedule and the interview schedule; the study used an interview schedule, specifically semi structured interviews. This entailed a series of questions that

the researcher used to extract insights from participants. McIntosh & Morse, (2015) outline that the advantage of semi structured interviews is that participants are free to respond to these open-ended questions however they see fit, and the researcher is free to probe these responses. The semi-structured aspect of this method is defined by the framework and the flexibility of the responses. It is unique among interview methods in terms of the degree of topic relevance it provides while remaining responsive to the participant. The one-on-one platform allowed respondents to seek clarification before answering questions, and the researcher to also probe to ensure that they completely comprehend input from participants, allowing the researcher to obtain deeper data/answers from participants

3.4.2. Research target population and selection of respondents

3.4.2.1 Research target population

The population sample of the study was twenty (20) employees out of a population of 4546 employees from the telecommunications company X's South African Operations . These employees had been with the company for a minimum period of two years in order to share in-depth insight on their leadership experience and engagement levels. To gather a range of opinions and experiences throughout the organisation, multiple staff levels were selected, including junior level (H bands), middle management (G bands), and executive level (E & F bands) in various departments. Company X has six levels, including the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Essentially, four levels were examined, with the two excluded, namely I band and SLT, due to I bands being too junior (generally interns) and SLT due to availability at that level. The study covered not only employees but also people leaders of the organisation in order to understand both employee and management experiences.

3.4.2.2 Population Sampling

The researcher utilised stratified sampling, probability sampling method which is conducted through division of the population using job level, each population member represents one strata (job level) (Parsons, 2014). The researcher being in the Human Resources department (HR), had access to the various levels and was able to accurately

select the number of people required in each stratum. Simple random sampling is utilised to sample representatives of each strata level to serve as measures for each subpopulation. Stratified sampling is inherently diverse as it ensures that a member of each strata is represented in the final population sample and all population members have equal opportunity to be part of the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

3.4.3. Ethical Considerations when collecting the research data

In any study involving human participants, it is crucial to follow accepted ethical guidelines to ensure their safety. Given the in-depth nature of a qualitative study, ethical concerns have a greater bearing on the research (Arifin, 2018). The study endeavoured to firstly get consent from the telecommunication company X to get authorisation to do the study with its employees. Once the authorisation was granted by the Regulatory office the researcher proceeded to get consent from the participants, to advise them about the purpose of the study as well as how their data will be used and who will have access to the information. Prior to the interviews the researcher sent out the consent forms, the permission letter from the company that detailed the purpose of the study. The participants were required to read and advise of their comfortability with all the details before signing the consent form. Furthermore participants in the consent forms were informed of their right to opt out of the study at any given point should they wish to do so and there is no obligation to continue.

In the study participants were required to share their experience of leadership as well as their engagement levels, elements that they might not freely share with their own leadership. It was therefore important to ensure that their identity is protected should they agree to be part of the study. In publishing the report, handling and storing the data absolute confidentiality was maintained by the researcher.

The name of the telecommunications company was kept confidential and not published as part of the research paper. There was no physical, social or psychological harm that was exerted on any of the participants. The results obtained from all the data sources will be presented honestly, accurately and as transparent as possible.

3.4.4 Research data and collection process

Twenty employees at the specific telecommunications organisation who agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews served as the study's data source. They were interviewed using the Microsoft Teams platform, which is what they now use at work. The interviews were scheduled with the participants according to their availability and well in advance. The interviews were 45 to an hour long based on how in-depth the participants wanted to go through with the questions. The researcher maintained a balance in allowing candidates to fully express their views and also ensuring that they stay within the domain of discussion and allocated time frame. Literature on leadership impact on employee engagement was used to supplement the feedback given by participants to answer the research questions posed by the study.

3.4.5 Research data and information processing and analysis

3.4.5.1 Research data and information processing

Data processing is the process of transforming collected data and translated into usable information. The process involves organisation, validation, processing, consolidation and retrieval. The interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams video call for further analysis. The interviews were then listened to after and transcribed to text format. Transcripts are the captured information of the study, they contain the representations and opinions of the population sample and allows for further analysis as they are decontextualized conversations that can be analysed through a fresh eye without any bias (Van den Berg, 2008).

3.4.5.2 Research data and information analysis

The information from the interviews was recorded in Microsoft Excel categorised in each question, to better understand the response to each question which is the open coding process (Vollstedt and Rezat, 2019). To develop a grounded theory, the emerging relationships between the explained concepts need to be integrated into an principal framework with one core category hence the analysis of the key themes, axial coding was used, which is basically the process of linking code (categories and concepts) to one another using a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning linking the open

codes from each question (Sauro, 2015; Vollstedt and Rezat, 2019). Axial coding is needed to investigate the relationships between concepts and categories. The emergent connections between the explored notions must be included into a broad framework, which in this case is connected leadership, with a single core category, in order to create a grounded theory (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019).

Thematic analysis was used to recognise merging themes in relation to the inquiry subject and can serve as an extension of the grounded theory as it involves a critical review of interview response to establish the appropriate coding and generation of themes from the data codes (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Chapman, Hadfield and Chapman, 2015). Themes are structured patterns/meanings generated inductively resulting from data set analysis that attempt to satisfy the research question rather than a summary of findings which is useful when the human factor is involved (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Theoretical sampling forms part of grounded theory studies and will be used to gain a deeper understanding by exploring the data again after initial data analysis to obtain additional data/themes (Ligita et al., 2019).

3.4.6 Description of the research respondents

Table 1 shows a view of the participants to give some insights into the sample representation. The view gives a view of their gender, area of expertise, whether they are a people leader or not, their tenure in the company and their level in the organisation. When it comes to levels, telecommunications company X essentially has 4 main levels, i.e. H&I bands being the junior staff members, G bands that are middle managers and the Executive level consisting of Managing Executives (E Band) as well as heads of departments (F bands). The diversity of the sample size being from different parts of the business allowed the researcher to get a wider range of views.

Participant	Date Interviewed	Gender	Company Tenure	Area of Expertise	People Leader	Level
P1	10 November 2022	Female	4 years	Robotics & Automation	No	H

P2	4 October 2022	Female	2 years	Executive Assistance	No	H
P3	11 October 2022	Female	2 Years	Data & Analytics	No	H
P4	21 October 2022	Female	4 years	Learning & Development	No	H
P5	26 October 2022	Female	4 years	Talent Acquisition	No	H
P6	6 December 2022 & 19 January 2023	Female	2 years	Finance Operations	No	H
P7	14 November 2022	Male	2 years	Data Science	No	G
P8	5 October 2022	Male	4 years	Mergers & Acquisitions	No	G
P9	10 October 2022	Male	5 years	Data Science	Yes	G
P10	10 October 2022	Male	12 years	Finance	Yes	G
P11	17 November 2022	Female	7 years	Ethics	No	G
P12	6 October 2022	Female	4 years	HR	No	G
P13	21 October 2022	Female	2 years	Risk	No	G
P14	26 October 2022	Female	4 years	HR	No	G
P15	31 October 2022	Female	14 years	Data & Analytics	Yes	E
P16	2 November 2022	Female	8 years	Internal Audit	Yes	F
P17	9 November 2022	Female	4 years	Digital Automation	Yes	F

P18	14 December 2022	Male	4 years	Finance	Yes	F
P19	29 November 2022	Male	2 years	Financial Services	Yes	F
P20	2 November 2022	Male	23 years	Supply Chain & Logistics	Yes	E

Table 1: Interview Participants

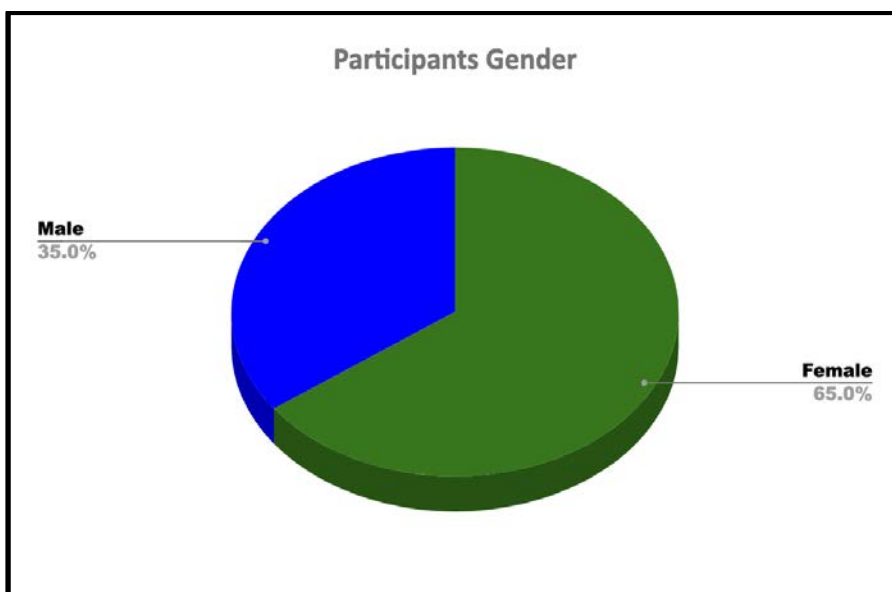


Figure 2: Demographics of the participant's gender

3.5 Reliability & validity

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of responses to numerous coders of data sets. According to Bryman (2012), judging reliability involves three variables; i) stability, which indicates whether the measurement is stable over time ii) internal dependability determining whether the index's key indicators are consistent iii) inter-observer consistency, an indication that the observer has been consistent in their approach to observing or, if there are multiple observers, whether or not they observe in the same way.

There are a number of definitions for validity, but the most common is that it is a state of being well-founded (justifiable), relevant, significant, and logical (Bryman, 2012).

In the study the researcher ensured reliability and validity by recording the interviews via Microsoft teams and using the transcription tool offered by the platform to transcribe the files. The researcher then went over the digitally transcribed files while listening to the interviews to ensure that language nuances that might be missed by the tool were captured correctly, for example names of people or anything that might have been said in vernacular; this was done in order to accurately capture the feedback of the respondents. The interview schedule allowed the researcher to consistently ask the same questions to all participants and collate as well as analyse the data with precision.

The sample ensured that it had both representation of employees and also managers (people leaders) in order to get both views and experiences .This allowed the researcher to deduce if the employees and line managers had similar experiences regarding the topic of leadership impact on engagement

3.6. Research Limitations

The limitations of the study included focusing on only one Telecommunications Company to represent the telecommunications industry; richer data could have been attained if more telecommunications companies were included. Furthermore the availability of respondents to sit in the 45 to an hour for the interviews, especially at a higher level like at executive level . In most cases the sessions had to be moved a few times when the respondents' diaries got urgent meetings.

Due to the load shedding challenge currently happening in South Africa some interviews happened while respondents were on load shedding and therefore impacting the quality of the audio recordings.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research results of the case study conducted at a telecommunications company to understand factors that affect employee engagement. The researcher conducted a series of 20 interviews of employees in different job levels through Microsoft teams as the by asking a series of questions in an attempt to fully understand influences of work engagement. The researcher presented an introduction to what the study was about and mentioned that their identity was confidential and gained consent to proceed and record the interview. All interview questions were categorised to fulfil the objectives of the study and allow for thematic analysis.

4.2 Research Question 1: What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

This research question sought to first understand the challenges that employees face that may lead to employee disengagement. Participants were asked to draw on their own experiences and provide feedback based on interactions with their own leaders. The questions provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on their responses and main points. The research question was addressed by the following questions highlighted in the interview schedule;

- ❖ What do you think are some of the factors that lead to employee disengagement?
- ❖ What elements do you think negatively impact your engagement?

Table 2 shows a view of the themes that emerged from the questions

Number	Theme
--------	-------

1	Lack of clarity on the strategy & deliverables
2	Inadequate recognition and career growth.
3	Impact of work life balance and Micromanagement

Table 2: Research question 1 themes

4.2.1 Lack of clarity on the strategy & deliverables

The study was conducted after Covid 19 pandemic and each participant had experience with working remotely over the course of the pandemic. The participants expressed several changes in their line of work with regards to strategy as the pandemic required businesses to come up with new ways to do business hence a shift in business goals. Leaders had the goal to make their teams work effectively during this period as all work was conducted virtually. The modality of leadership inherently changed for leaders when their work moved to the virtual environment. However, the majority participants in this study felt like the leadership did not provide them with essential resources to understand organisational goals and define their roles to fulfil the mandate (deliverables). Hence, they did not understand how they fit in the larger scheme of things as they felt like organisational goal posts kept on changing and they couldn't seem to catch up as new protocols and work technologies were being introduced. The participants mentioned that their leadership was giving them directives on what to do and the how and the why part was not mentioned.

One participant said;

“Not being transparent as a leader especially with regards to the strategy or with the direction that the company needs to follow. Not being transparent in ideation of problems in terms of all you have to do is here is a problem to solve it. You want to be engaged in a sense of how does this become a problem or rather how

did this problem come about for me to solve it? and those types of things. So, you just feel as though you are the delivery person”.

The extent of the lack of clarity was observed by participants during the meetings as they are part of day to day functions of every organisation. Participants mentioned that even though they were involved in long meetings the leaders failed to articulate the strategy and their participation in trying to understand the strategy was futile. They also mentioned that employee engagement is a function of both the individual/employee and organisational forces.

Another participant mentioned;

“Our disengagement can come from leaders' inability to articulate to the team what good looks like, what winning looks like, what the strategic objectives of the organisation are. If individuals feel that they do not even understand the strategy and therefore their contribution to the achievement of the strategy is limited”

Participants further extended that the leaders had no adequate feedback structures that allowed them to ask questions on the strategy if the leader was not fought coming with the information. They advised that leaders mainly pushed teams to get the deliverable out more than getting teams to understanding why they do the work they do .

One participant stated that

“when people cannot connect with the purpose, so I am doing a lot of work but actually I do not know what I am doing it for, so I do a lot of work but don't see the end result or outcome of it so I am starting to get disengaged because there is no purpose in what I am doing”

Participants indicated that transparency is critical during remote/hybrid work as employees working remotely depend on their leader for consistent reward and workload allocation and career development opportunities The strategy must account for the need of the individual and team however the participants were not involved in discussions surrounding strategy hence affecting engagement.

One participant stated,

“If an employee does not know what is expected of them and if the employee feels discouraged, demotivated and they are not involved”

Another participant said,

“if people do not have clear accountabilities, like if they don't actually have a very clear view of what they are accountable for. If you are just pushing tasks to them that is quite boring, they need holistic accountability for something”

The results indicated that participants required clear set goals to archive rather than being delegated tasks that they do not understand. Employee engagement is a function of actively participating in activities that advance career growth hence overall work fulfilment.

4.2.2 Inadequate recognition and career growth.

The participants to extent very great extent expressed that a poor reward system delayed their career growth as they were not motivated to participate in work activities and pushed themselves to produce quality work. Hence, this somehow contributed to lack in performance limiting their chances of career advancement such as promotion leading to less engaged employees. The leaders take their ideas and do acknowledge their contribution to the whole team hence it can be challenging to be engaged as one feels like a machine demotivating participation.

One participant said

“I mean they, they (organisation) want people to be innovative right? I also want people to be creative and proactive. When they do that, we need to encourage them to do more of that. We leaders need to recognize and encourage the right behaviours and attributes. If people are showing up in the right way, they need to recognize that and promote that by rewarding those right behaviours”

The participants highlighted that their teams' leaders are their direct link with the organisational management, therefore they should engage employees with the right support such as recognition of their efforts so that they feel and be acknowledged that they are valuable for the company. Providing recognition enables one to perform better

at work and be productive as their efforts are not going to waste enabling employees to achieve set goals for the team. The leader has to cater for the different personalities in a team and reward according to each one's capability. The participants highlighted that the rewards are not always monetary but a verbal, team message is adequate as a form of reward which motivates one to do their work.

A participant said

“Definitely employee recognition is key it be rewarding the employee in terms of stretching them to do more of what you believe they're doing, as it could be their strong characteristic or it could be them exposing them to new experiences such as attending to more strategic initiatives or projects”

In the period of remote work participants highlighted that they have an increased workload compared to pre-pandemic times it would have been pleasant for the team leaders to acknowledge this and provide incentives for performance. Some participants highlighted the lack of recognition while putting so much effort considering how the work environment change has demanded a lot of effort from the workforce

Another participant mentioned that

“When I'm talking about rewards I'm not talking about rewards from a financial point of view like you're getting recognition star awards. But even a thank you is recognition, right? And for reward, you know that I'm being recognized for my contribution that is fulfilling to employees recognizing their effort.”

Participants highlighted that they need support and opportunity to advance their careers in terms of obtaining further education or creation of workshops that enable them to advance their skills. However, when they needed to advance their education they faced challenges in fulfilling their goals such as needing clearance to advance education and limited study time.

One participant mentioned,

“Providing employees with tools to really succeed is a typical example. The growth platform is important for us to really showcase it. Obviously support

without comparing, but it's also important for employees to know that they own their own career and the organisation must help them in the process of succeeding”

Another participant went on to say,

“I have work experience but cannot qualify to do an MBA. I believe my leader should advocate on my behalf when I apply for such things to gain admission. You know, I think there shouldn't be level restrictions to access education. Team leaders must at least be able to motivate one to gain access, from a management level to say we believe that an individual can still do this and work at the same time. Now I am stuck here because my job level does not qualify for an MBA but when I want any senior position they require an MBA but at the same time you cannot study it because you are still a specialist. So, it has an impact on my career growth.”

Participants highlighted the need for their leaders to help them grow in the roles they did and to help them understand their contribution so they can link that to the value they provide

One participant said

“I think every single human being wants to feel like they're valued on a team and they want to feel like they're going somewhere. Just like every day you have key deliverables. You want to make sure that you reach those key deliverables and human beings wants to feel like they're reaching somewhere with the right support”

Inadequate reward system leads to employee demotivation as their efforts are not acknowledged which further extends to affect career growth as employees will not be fully engaged in their work and miss opportunities for advancement.

4.2.3 Impact of work life balance

Working from home introduced the office into the home space which has an effect on the day-to-day activities of an individual. There is no compartmentalisation of activities,

participants expressed dissatisfaction when it came to the issue of work-life balance. Employees noted that they are failing to put an end to work. They are always anxious about receiving urgent meetings, looming deadlines and increased workload as well as never ending work meetings hence it's a perpetual cycle of never-ending work. Organisations were undergoing unprecedented change as the world was under lockdown therefore the workforce was required to implement change in uncertain times.

A participant stated,

“To move from physical to online with the whole world didn't know what online meant. You know, then I had three kids that were all doing home schooling when nobody knew what home schooling was. Then we had work work, the boundaries of what to do and how much to do were still a bit blurry”

One issue that bothers employees in particular are never ending meetings which contribute to a high workload. Most of the meetings can be communicated via email and save meetings for more important things and save time by actually doing work than planning on doing work. The time spent on meetings can be utilised for other purposes such as research and strategy planning to improve work outcomes. The constant meeting then meant employees spend the day in meetings and by night they needed to do their work impacting their family life

One participant mentioned that,

“Today I spoke with so and so and so and so I got what I wanted out of it or they got what they wanted out of the situation. But I'm finding like a lot of people just come to a meeting. They didn't discuss something and set up another meeting then they'll discuss. OK, let's meet next time to discuss this, like Oh my gosh, another meeting. So how do we then train our managers or train our people to be very purposeful in their communication and engagements? I don't know. There's even a thing or training. That could be done because that way we are wasting time”

Hybrid work is new to many leaders based on the response of the research participants, this meant that leaders were not familiar with managing teams remotely which led to constant checking-in of employees. Participants felt that leaders that were generally

transactional in their management style became even more administrative in managing the teams . One participant highlighted their experience;

“It was hectic literally, during COVID 19 you had to have a log sheet and state what you did every hour. If you leave for longer hours you were in trouble. It was just horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible. I would say it is some type of dictatorship, you know it's my way or the highway. I'm not allowing other employees to voice out their opinions, not allowing everybody to engage to collaborate properly”

Participants felt that both the hybrid way of working and the different ways of work contributed to them not being able to balance or even separate their work from personal life

4.3. Research question 2: What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

The purpose of this research question was to better understand the current state of affairs regarding the impact of leadership on engagement. Based on the participants' responses regarding their current levels of engagement and where they plotted their current leaders in terms of what would be required in the future, four trends were identified.

The research question was addressed by the below questions on the interview schedule;

- ❖ Have you seen a shift in leadership in the last 24 months?
- ❖ What kind of leadership do you think is required in today's time (technological advancement & smart/hybrid ways of working)?
- ❖ Considering this view described, would you say your leader personifies this?
- ❖ What have they mastered and what do they still need to master?
- ❖ How does the current leadership impact your engagement?
- ❖ In the last 24 months do you feel you have received clear direction from your leader on what needs to be executed?
- ❖ Have you experienced burnout in the last 24 months?
- ❖ What do you think could have been the cause of the burnout?

- ❖ In the last 30 days have you and your line manager had a wellness discussion?
- ❖ Do you currently receive any coaching or mentoring from your leader?
- ❖ Do you often experience positive emotions when working (e.g. happiness, enthusiasm & enjoyment)?
- ❖ Do you feel you positively contribute to your organisation's purpose as an employee?
- ❖ Would you recommend your place of work as a great place to work at?

Table three shows a view of the trends identified regarding the questions asked

Number	Trend
1	Shift in the leadership role
2	Increased burnout & wellness challenges
3	Increased workload pressure & tighter deadlines post Covid 19
4	Defined skills & capabilities for future leadership

Table 3: View of trends identified

4.3.1 Shift in leadership role

80% of survey respondents said they had seen and experienced a shift in leadership in the last twenty-four (24) months, and that leaders altered their management style in response to the demands of the lockdown that occurred at the start of Covid 19, leading to hybrid working. There appeared to be a clear consensus that there is a shift in what is required in leadership, with three main themes associated with this shift.

4.3.1.1 Increased trust and less micromanagement in delivery

Respondents advised that in the last 24 months they experienced leadership to trust them more with the work and projects that needed to be delivered. The line managers

did less micromanagement and left employees to deliver on what they agreed on. The shift according to participants was a forced transition given the Covid 19 pandemic and the new ways of work that organisations were pushed into. Some of the verbatim is recorded below from different participants;

“In the department I went in before covid it was more about micromanagement and then when covid took place, because you know people don't have powers, where we have to work from home they can't see so they started being easy on us. There was no micromanagement, they couldn't control the way we were controlled in the office. There was a shift because when we basically came back to the office they were already used to not micromanaging us”

“I don't think managers are like micromanaging, they are like run with whatever you need to do as long as it's delivered and the delivery is at the standard way you need to be delivering”.

“I think there has been a huge shift in terms of the trust relationship with regards to employees and their leaders. Before covid there was a culture of, you know, a traditional culture of we need to be in the office at a certain time. We need to be present, they need to see us, we need to see them then they know is in the office doing ABC whereas you know covid happened and i think the trust element came into play for a lot of leaders.”

“I mean there has been paradigm shift from a mind shift in terms of understanding that now people can work from home, you don't have to micromanage people and I mean people can also attend meetings so work gets done as the right collaboration can be done even regardless of where people are sitting”

“But I think most importantly its around trust as well, an important element Amanda, where we saw leaders who maybe ordinarily they wouldn't trust someone with managing something but finding themselves having to trust me, whether they like it or not or whether they think I can do it or not but you see trust now being part of the way we engage between leaders and followers.”

“Broadly speaking I think with the covid time there was probably a lot of uncertainty which meant a lot of daily catch ups, stand-ups a lot of intervention and as we have gotten into the rhythm of hybrid working/ remote working I feel like there is more trust in the sense

of things are getting done we don't need to have daily catch ups to check where you are with this and that'

While a lot of people reported the freedom to do their work how they see fit some also indicated that for some line managers, smart/hybrid ways of work made them more micromanagers checking up on if the team was really working on assigned projects and constantly requiring meetings for employees to give them feedback on the work. Some of the participants indicated the below;

"During times of covid, managers who were very manager focused became more management focused, more dictatorship type of rule, 8 o'clock meeting everyone needs to be there, close the day meeting everyone needs to be there, that kind of thing. But I also saw some managers transform to be leaders".

"I think that in some aspects there is a little bit more micromanagement, a little bit of a fear of letting go from a visibility, instead of seeing someone do something, you trust that they will be seated in the office and you can check in. So I have seen that some managers are doing frequent check-ins".

Participants indicated that as part of the move to hybrid working, they felt that the shift to more outcome based performance was necessary. Where they could just produce the piece of work to their managers to check and give them feedback on their delivery.

4.3.1.2 Need for more personal engagements/ increased empathy

Participants seemed to indicate that they needed leaders, as part of their engagement levels, to not only communicate with them at a work level but rather to also take a keen interest in people's personal lives, views and aspirations. To understand the different circumstances the members in their team faced as this was not the same for each team member. They felt that in order to fully understand them as employees in a work context they needed to engage on a more personal level and understand the different circumstances faced by each employee. Some of the participants mentioned the below

" It's almost like you feel like all you have to do is deliver but there is no interest in sort of your aspiration, for instance no one paying attention to what it is that x wants to do,

what is it that x inspires to do , those types of things. So the lack of engagement from the leadership on a more personal level.”

“I guess there’s a bit more of support because you are able to say, Ok I can't do this now, I have got a family emergency. You’re comfortable with saying that unlike before it was a bit of “should I”. You dread to have those conversations with your line manager to say I have an issue with my son or I need to take my son to the doctor. It would be like I really need to put this out there but now I think people are more supportive, there is a bit more of empathy as well.”

‘Healthy communication with your team, know where they are, understand the kind of, i'll just say personal or home issues that they are having because that also does impact the load on them working’

“How do you help your team to have psychological safety because we are human first? Before we are employees. So when I come to work, I don't leave my baggage at the door and become just an employee, which I'm still myself. And as a person or as a human being. There's what we call the wheels right of my life, which does not only constitute of my career.”

“ So emotional intelligence will lead to you being more approachable, because I have found that the people I have better relationships with, when they have personal problems it's easier for them to be able to say “I can't do this now “ so it's a heightened level. The more personal relationships I have with the team members so I don't know if it's a personality thing over leadership-type perspective. Like a more personal touch to leading”.

“ It is the empathy that I received when I was at my lowest in my personal space, even though everything else around me felt it was failing, X company was that anchor or constant that was going great”

“I saw a lot more maturity as well, people become a lot more mature about how they engage with other people. The more humanistic approach started to kick in as opposed to very transactional management style. You know when you had situations Amanda of a family member who had covid and you didn't know what the situation with them was. I saw people step up and say ‘hey how is your mum and how is your dad or how is your

sister whose got covid and constantly check on people to say are you okay, do you need help , can I send something, do you have a mask , can I send sanitizers . Those things were not always there from a caring perspective or from an empathy perspective.”

An Executive also reported that in leadership “you cannot be a good leader without being a good human being”. The essence of the views seems to be that leaders need to engage at a humanistic level before anything.

4.3.2. Increased burnout & wellness challenges

As participants discussed their work over the last 24 months, a trend of burnout and wellness challenges also emerged. A lot of participants highlighted that they had suffered from burnout

Figure 3 shows a view of participant’s response on whether they had experienced burnout in the last twenty four months

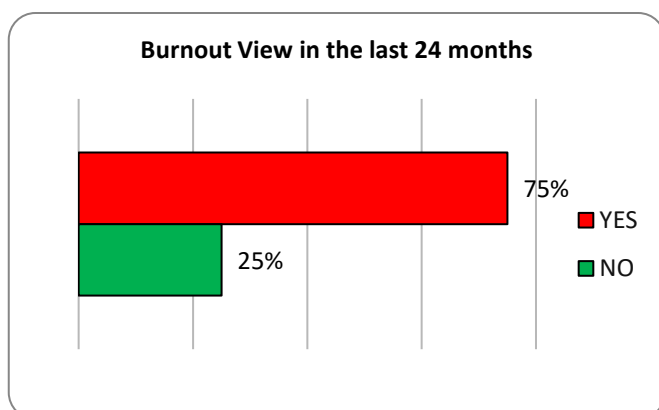


Figure 3: Burnout stats in the last 24 months

75% of the respondents advised that they had experienced burnout, indicating the below four main reasons for the burnout

- 1) Balancing work and school
- 2) Increase in workload/ demand
- 3) Tighter deadlines
- 4) Exhaustion (mental & clinical)

“Respondents indicated the below in this regards

“I had clinical exhaustion, so 2020 when I was doing VAEP we were the first group to move from physical to online when the whole world didn't know what online meant. You know, I had three kids that were all doing home-schooling when nobody knew what home-schooling was. Then we had work work, but the boundaries of what to do were still blurry”.

The participant above makes mention of VAEP, an acronym for Company X's advanced executive program that is done via Gordon institute of business science. It's essentially a one (1) year programme equivalent to first year of an MBA.

“Yes I think it would be an increased workload, just getting to the end of the year syndrome. Right now everything that needs to be done before the december holiday”

“Yes at the beginning of 2020, I was overwhelmed by the news reports and a few people left the team without any replacements, I had to step up and do a Job of a senior and Junior, I was mentally drained to the point of being physically sick, I had constant headaches, unbearable anxiety & I could not sleep without medication due work stress.”

“Ye I have probably experienced emotional burnout. In terms of what we do. But probably not as severely as where I was at least trained. So having come from an investment banking environment, I think there the burnout was really physical, doing 100 plus hours a week, it takes its toll on you, but here's a different burnout, which is more mental in nature. Mental and emotional in that there was so much change that we're going through. I think just the magnitude or the amount of change that was going on can burn you out emotionally because it's a. It's a very anxious time for a lot of people. So I'd say yeah, I have, but I'm probably. A lot more equipped now for it.”

“Some months, yes. There's just a lot of work so I man the health and safety portfolio single handedly so , it's a lot like it's across all regions, so it's it becomes so much I just can't sometimes but I just breathe through it. Yeah, I have got burnt out but I breathe through it, yeah”

“Yes, I have on my end the burnout was coming from just balancing work and school and I think there was a time where work was very hectic. I think we had a hectic one month

in preparation of our big strategy get away or something like that. So I'm part of the planning Committee for that and I'm really hands on on those types of things, so I think school is hectic, work was hectic and at that time."

"I have had burnout primarily because my work demand has increased in my space that is one. Secondly I am studying and this programme is quite intense I must say and thirdly my son just started school and so that is another pressure point I have that I did not have last year or the other year. Another pressure point is that with my previous leader we had a synergy in terms of you look after the Exco members and I look after the employees but I am finding myself with the current leader not being comfortable to deal with things that I would ordinarily be shifting to her when it comes to ethics related matters relating to leaders. So having to pick up that as well..."

Some of the feedback indicated by respondents touched on the fact that in the last twenty four months people have taken less leave due to the stated increase of workload and pressure which therefore impacted their ability to recharge. One of the participants identified that with the pressure of work and people not being able to recharge they saw an influx in mental health issues in their areas where people suffered from anxiety and depression more than pre- Covid 19.

The 25% that reported that they did not experience burnout in the last twenty four months seemed to indicate that they managed to pace themselves well and felt that the pressure was definitely there but for them it was the right amount to motivate them to do more.

One of the participants mentioned

"The time I enjoyed the most was when I was not sleeping, the beginning of covid was my career highlight. I probably was in the middle of burnout but I loved it."

While the majority of respondents expressed some burnout, when asked whether they had had any wellness meetings with their managers in the previous 30 days, 79% said no. Thirty days is thought to be the time it takes leaders and their personnel to have their monthly meeting. Figure 4 displays a summary of the responses. Most participants highlighted that even though they have regular conversations with their line managers, wellness discussions were not part of that discussion.

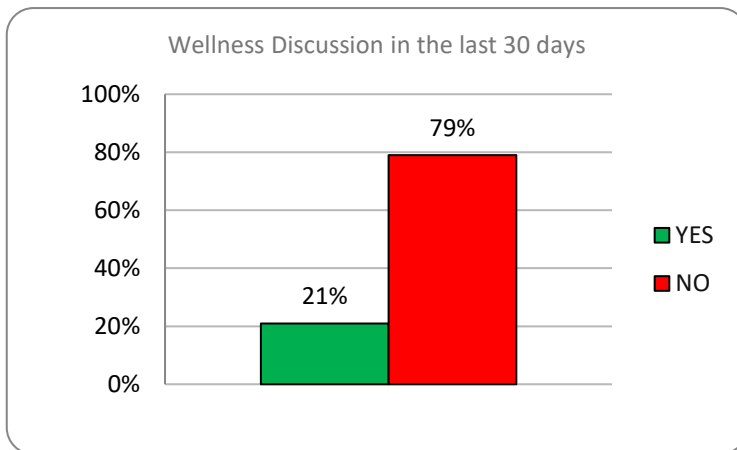


Figure 4: Wellness discussion statistics

4.3.3 An increase in workload & expectations post hybrid implementation

Participants seemed to indicate that not only is there more pressure with all the disruptions that come with hybrid/ smart ways of working there are a lot of changes in how people are conducting business meaning more work load and expectations. One of the participants indicated the below

“And just reflecting back to Covid right I think it's taught us a lot of things. From a work perspective and how effective organisations can be. And it's really shifted from the leaderships' thinking in terms of how do they lead people in a virtual and in hybrid mode .I think when we look at HR, HR is always seen as very operational, but we also need to be seen as very transformational and very strategic in that during Covid we've really needed transformational leaders. ‘

‘There's more and more pressure now on employees in the work environment, because of these disruptions. So how do you then lead your team through those changes? How do you help your team build resilience”

One of the respondents in speaking about the attitude leaders needed to have in these times mentions the sort of precedence created around increased working hours when people are working remotely as opposed to when they come into the office. They mention approach & attitude of the leader needs to be right

“ Approach in a situation or scenario that it's not a case of sure this is your remote working day but I am going to structure your day that I am going to at least get 12 hours out of you. Why would a remote day warrant tighter timelines and pressures than a day in the office. And a day at the office could probably start at eight (8) you in traffic for an hour, get here at 9 but leave at 4:30 and do another hour in traffic but for the most part you have only connected from 9-4:30. Whereas a remote working day would probably start at 7am and end at 10pm”

“Yeah, no, it's definitely that. The pressure in terms of deliveries. And I suppose that has to do with the strategy that the leadership has set for the company that needs to deliver certain things. But like I said, it just feels like there's just too much pressure in terms of deliveries. Tighter deadlines, yeah, in a lot of work, pretty much.”

Participants seemed to indicate that although they are back to business as usual in the new normal the capacity of work that is expected of them has increased significantly from before Covid 19 and that this standard of work load seems to be the new expectation. Leaders have seen the output that has been delivered in the last 24 months and seem to want employees to continue with that same delivery. One of the participants indicated the below;

“Yes and because everybody else is taking it on. Like even the managers that started expecting more without saying, I expect you to do 20 things now as before Covid you doing 10. It almost becomes all if everyone is doing it. Maybe I'm the one who's wrong, but actually everybody else is thinking the same thing. And not actually saying that our capacity remember used to be 10 units of production. Now you ask only for all of us to do 20 and nothing else has changed. You know, yeah. In the ecosystem, it's not as if life has become easier, therefore we can do more type of thing.”

4.3.4 Defined skills & capabilities for future leadership

Post the leadership that participants have been exposed to in the last 24 months, most of them seemed to have looked at and almost clear on what kind of skills and capabilities are needed by future leaders that they want or felt was relevant in the times that we are in now . Four (4) main characteristics came up as the most cited by the majority of the participants

1. Futuristic and purpose led
2. Heightened level of emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness
3. Effective communicator
4. Technologically advanced

4.3.4.1 Futuristic & Purpose led

The majority of participants stated that they needed a leader who understood what was going on in the world around them, understood how things were changing, and had some idea of how they could adapt and take the team on the journey with them. Some were linked to strategy in some way, which was really understanding the company and where it is going, but some said it has to go a step further to also understand the context of what the company's future looks like. Some respondents articulated the below

“A leader who's able to clearly communicate and articulate what's required to take the company forward, the strategy of the team, needs to be crisp. Everybody needs to know what it is that the organisation is working towards.”

“I would say one purpose led and I'll get into what purpose led is, and 2nd the partnership mentality. So I think we're very finite amount of capacity in what we can do in a day, and even as a company, what we can spend on human capital is very finite, so there's a lot more collaboration which is needed between you know seniority levels and between intercompany right and I think if at the base of what we're doing is the goal, and I think the purpose for us is, you know, connecting the next 100 million people, It's because, you know, once we've done that, we enable a number of things in any economy, which usually faster you know, a better outcome for the citizens”

“I think when I look at leadership right, I look at somebody that really provides a clear guidance in terms of things that need to be done, and someone that really sets out the strategic leadership attributes in as much as making decisions based on strategic goals where the mission, the vision of the organisation and where it going.”

“When I think of the word leadership. Especially in this digital era that we live in, I think of a person who can strategically think of future outcomes, and can think of future solutions.”

“Because as a leader or my view of a leader is someone who's able to set an example and stick to it. It's someone who has the capability to lead and. Always has the vision for what's next, as much as you know, you can be working on something today, but a leader will always be a step or two ahead of you as a person in their team in terms of planning. Or maybe future prospects or ways in which the team can improve as well as identifying certain skills within that person's respective team.”

4.3.4.2 Heightened level of emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness

Respondents also identified soft skills that they felt were important in defining how leaders engaged going forward were around emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness. This they said was important for leaders to engage at a maturity level that will be required to take the workforce forward and had also seen the importance of these traits post Covid 19.

Some of the respondents indicated the below

“I think I would say empathy, so that would probably be the most important. Just to be able to understand the situation that people are in and to empathise with that would help that leader too. You know, take into account that person's situation, whether it be outside of work or in the work environment.”

“First of all, as you would say, leadership starts with you right, so I think the leader needs to have like a sense of some self-awareness. Understanding why am I here? What do I bring to the table? How am I going to align this with the vision of the team or the vision of the company and just be very clear about that to the people.”

“I was talking to one of the MEs who's a woman and she was saying during Covid, x had set up a meeting at 7:30 and at half past seven she actually had to put on her headphones while she was putting her kids to sleep. And she didn't stop it because, well, there were a lot of MEs in that call, but she rolled with the punches. But she then realised it or not that's it x just woke up one day and tried to sabotage her but he was eating dinner that the wife had cooked, you know and so in his mind he didn't realise that there are other people in a different scenario than what I am. So having people working from

home or in a hybrid requires us to appreciate that other people's home dynamics bring a different level of operating.”

“But also because of the context of the past two years where people have had challenges where we've been struck with a lot of disasters, I think you equally need an empathetic leader. The leader would be able to also listen and understand the plea of employees and where they are coming from.”

“And then I think also self-awareness for leaders. You need to be very much aware how you're showing up. As a leader, how are you perceived by your employees? That's why 360, we always encourage/request feedback from your team, right? Because it's sometimes how you perceive yourself versus how you are perceived by your team may be two different things.”

4.3.4.3 Effective communicator

Another piece that formed the view of leadership was around communication, participants stating that leaders, in order to be good at managing in these times needed to be great at communicators. This not just for the clarity of expectations only but also using it to take people with them in the journey of the future. Some of the participants indicated the below.

“ I think a lot of communication clear understanding in terms of what needs to be done, how it needs to be done by a leader”

“ I think you need to be good at communicating that vision into bite size chunks that people can actually follow and understand and comprehend and they see their purpose in that vision. Like I realise that often that ooh sherbet I didn't take people along that's why they are like aaah or disengaged. So its making sure you have a clear vision , you can communicate it in such a way where people see where they fit in”

“First of all, is that you'll need to trust your team that they are capable of doing their work without being watched. And then it's your trust influence and then again have constant communications like constant stand-ups. You know, we don't think we need to be in. In in the office space, in order for us to engage”

“ There is a balance of the hard practical things but I think more of it comes down to the soft skills and how leaders kind of create the relationships they have with employees in order to make sure communication fundamentally is taking place in a very clear effective way and its bi-directional. So it's not about talking to an employee but engaging with an employee”

4.3.4.4 Technologically advanced

Participants also indicated that given the times we operate in of technological advancements that its almost required for future leaders to have that skill in some shape or form. They indicated that if leaders were to take people forward in these times they themselves needed to be competent. Participants' views were noted below;

“I think in today's day & age you need to be a leader that understands tech , I think you can't shy away from knowing about AI, machine learning , robotics. I think you have to be technologically advanced as a leader, you want to be at the forefront of technology.”

“For me it should be a leader that thinks of diversity and inclusion. Inclusion for all inclusion in terms of solutions, Inclusion in terms of employees, that's how they need to think. They need to have the key digital skills, things like they need to have digital analytics in mind, big data in mind, agile in mind. All these necessary essential IT related applications in mind they need to be an IT leader at heart. They need to fully understand technology, where we are heading, who we are. Those are the core foundations that I feel they have to have.”

“I mean, right now with technology we need to be technology savvy and all our communication is based on technology. Sometimes we don't even meet. I am sitting in South Africa and my leader is sitting in Kenya and if one misses an email, we will backtrack. We need to have communication skills to help us efficiently to manage our time and be up to date with communication sent through”

“So because of the role we in, I think we sometimes have a full set of information and there's a lot of data and you can analyse it, right? Being able to be analytical and come to a rational conclusion or to look at somebody's analysis and then come to a conclusion is one.”

Having mentioned these characteristics that they felt were needed from the future leaders, participants then highlighted whether or not their current leader personified the view they had described. The below graph shows a view of participant's feedback

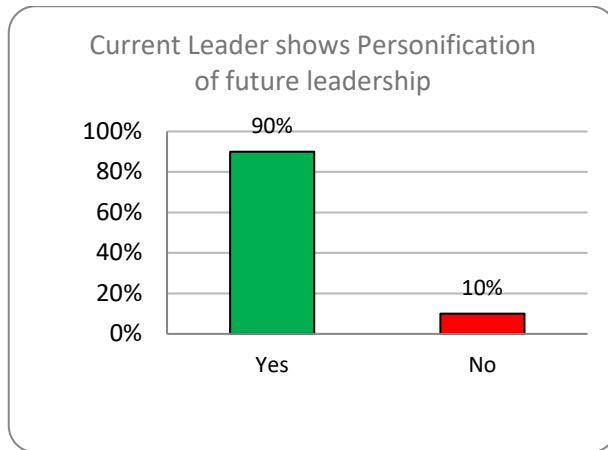


Figure 5: View of personification of future leadership traits

90% of the population sample believed that their current leader has the necessary traits that it will take to lead in the future while 10% said that their current leaders did not. When participants were prompted on what they leaders still needed to get right to be future ready candidates highlighted that a lot of leaders were still in the transition phase of changing and adapting and still needed to master that. Others indicated that leaders still needed to connect more with their employees on a personal level outside the work components. Other elements that came out were around leaders solidifying conversations around development as well as being more involved in the areas that they lead.

When participants were asked how their current leader influences their engagement, 63% said positively, 21% said negatively, and 16% said their line managers had no influence on their engagement either positively or negatively. Most neutral respondents indicated that they either did not have enough engagements with their leaders to have an influence, particularly at the senior level, or that their engagement levels were linked to their own self-motivation.

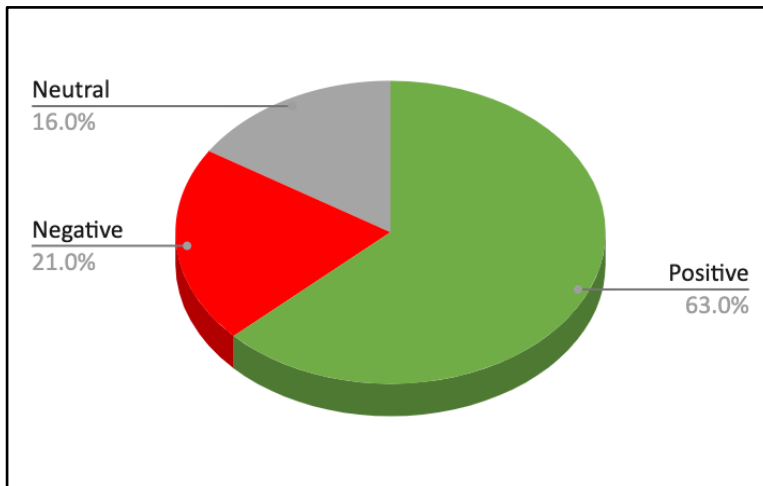


Figure 6: Engagement statistics

4.4. Research question 3: What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at the telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

The last research question was around understanding what employees felt are some of the strategies that could be used by leaders to increase engagement. The participants were encouraged to advice on things that spoke to them individually, that they felt would positively impact their engagement and really make a difference

Feedback from three questions from the interview schedule informed this research question

- ❖ What elements do you think positively impact on your engagement as an employee?
- ❖ what can leaders do to effectively increase employee engagement in this smart working model
- ❖ What kind of leadership style should be enacted to facilitate the development of a smart working philosophy?

In collating the feedback from the participants four (4) main themes were picked up shown in the below table

Theme number	Theme name
1	Empowerment
2	Work life balance
3	Creating a collaborative space
4	Shifting to coaching & transformational leadership style

Table 4: Research question 3 themes

4.4.1 Empowerment

Participants reflected on their journey over the last 24 months and indicated that one of the things that will have a significant impact on their journey moving forward is being empowered in their roles. They stated that Covid 19 pushed leaders to relinquish some of their hold on work that they deemed to be more strategic and give it to the team, but that more work was still needed in giving the team autonomy and support in performing their roles.

They also highlighted that they needed leaders to be more than just executives within the organisation but to be technical leads that could help them thrive in doing their roles and give them support when they need it. One of the participants indicated the below;

“We need people that are on the ground, who are part of the people, who are involved. So this distinction to say strategic, operational and all that nonsense I think it's not going to be applicable in the future.”

As part of being empowered in their roles they advised that they needed to understand how their work impacts strategy and having meaning out of their work as well as feeling that when they put forth their ideas as people who do the work on the ground they are heard and their feedback is taken into account. A participant described the below

“I think an environment where its ideas are valued and interrogated as opposed to instructions. So I think if we kind of opened up and said, hey, we're supposed to do these

10 things and you encourage debates, logical debates where the conclusion is not this is this way because I said so”

Some elements mentioned by participants spoke of being trusted enough to give input to how their work should be done as opposed to being told. They highlighted that their voice being heard and their input being valued was also a key element to their engagement. One of the participants indicated the below

“ I think the last one is accountability of work streams, when people feel like they own something there is a lot more engagement on it. I own it and at the end of the day, you know, the wins are ours, the losses are mine, that's not a problem but give people what they can own and feel empowered to do”.

“Involve the team in decision making because we are the ones who do the work. So I think sometimes we are side-lined. But we know exactly what needs to be done in order to improve. You know the business itself and also I think it helps because you learn from different teams, you learn from different fields of work, you know.”

They also indicated that they are positively engaged when they have meaningful work and can see how it makes a difference to the organisation and to others. One of the participants indicated the below

“Firstly I think my work is meaningful, I see it around me where my management and the levels below me are wanting to engage with me because they understand that I have a role to play in the organisation . So I know I am a valuable contributor and that you know, my role here is valued. That for me is super important. Secondly I get to understand that the work that I do is meaningful and I know that when I do this work how it translates to me being able to help others whether it's a supplier or underprivileged community”

Participants mentioned that another element they would like to see that will empower them was around their leader's support. This was not only in the roles they were in but also looking at their overall wellbeing, career wise as well as mental and psychological safety. Participants felt that their direct line managers/ leaders should be their advocates and support that ensured that within the organisation they protect the interests not only of the organisation but that of their teams as well. One of the participants voiced out their expectations on leaders below

“Like I said in these new ways of working, it comes with a lot of pressure. I'm sure you've seen the increase in mental illnesses. You've seen people becoming more and more depressed or admitted to mental institutions. It's because of the pressure. So for me, empathy for me, endurance, resilience and helping your team to navigate through that change becomes very important, so creating that again. We go back to psychological safety in that it's ok if you're not, well, it's ok. Take care of yourself because people are going through so much you need to make them feel it. You know as an employee sometimes you feel guilty even for being sick, so you need to be able to make them understand it's OK for you to be sick. You didn't choose to be sick, you are sick, so it's ok. Focus on your health. Get better, you know we're here to support you, people need that more than ever”

Overall, participants indicated that leaders who have a holistic view of their teams and empowers them, i.e. understanding what their growth in the organisation looks like and whether or not they play a role by supporting; if they have a view of their employees' wellness and if they support them and do they technically assist in their employees' work, are the leaders who will be able to positively engage employees in the future.

4.4.2 Work Life Balance

Respondents reported that the telecommunications company reconsider their employees' work-life balance as another engagement strategy. They claimed that Covid 19 and, more broadly, new ways of working increased pressure and workload, and that people were working longer hours, not taking leave, and simply not getting enough time to recover between projects. Burnout was mentioned as one of the reasons for disengagement when some of the reasons were articulated. Participants stated that balancing the scales would undoubtedly increase their engagement. one of the participants indicated the below

“What's happened over the past two years with Covid we've always been high achieving. But the concept of time and the respect for time has just moved over the past two years and I think for me, that is one of the things. That would lead to disengagement, where you don't have time for you, where you don't have time to recharge. Where the demands of work are such that they are impacting on personal life”

Participants also expressed a desire for flexibility in terms of delivering work in these times, stating the new hybrid ways of working and their status as the future of work. Most organisations have advised its employees what hybrid working means for each of them. Some organisations have split it into percentages (%) where employees come into the office a certain percent. This particular organisation has put into policy a 60/40 model of hybrid working with employees coming into the office 60% and working from 40%. Employees need to communicate which days they will be in the office with one (1) day mandated as a team day where all the team members come in and get to engage with each other. Participants indicated that they would like a say in how that arrangement currently is. One participant indicated the below

“If I'm not given the flexibility right? So when I say flexibility so yes we all working from home I think for me it's more of and it's probably just an indirect thing, right? if it happens I work on weekends and I decide on a Monday that I wanna sleep because I've been working on weekends. I must be given that flexibility, not that it's there, but if it does not happen, this will impact my engagement”

One participant indicated that they personally saw an opportunity for the organisation in looking at reducing the number of days that employees work to maybe four instead of the five. They advised that taking time out could essentially be beneficial for employees and the focus linked to output and not the number of hours in the office.

4.4.3 Create a collaborative space

Remote working was something new for many organisations, both leaders and employees were trailblazing this new work order. The employees have been working remotely for two years and have put forward suggestions that can enable them to work effectively in the remote working environment. Successful remote work is a collaborative effort within team members and the leader has to capitalise on the different strengths of the team member allocated to them to achieve the desired goal. There are conditions that participants mentioned for a successful collaborative effort that will be discussed below as merging themes

Understand what kind of communication style your people prefer

Communication is a key component for creating an effective working environment, it is the basis of information transfer to fulfil team objectives. In hybrid working communication is computer mediated with the aim of continuing commitment of employees to organisational goals. Spatial and psychological distancing means that the leaders need to mitigate this communication gap to fully engage team members with their work. The participants mentioned that leaders should be able to communicate with team members in a way that they understand each other, for example some team members prefer phone calls while others find emails easier to understand and quickly process and put resources in action hence participants suggested that leaders should be able to use information technology (IT) effectively to aid communication leading to better employee engagement

Participants mentioned

"I mean, right now with technology we need to be technology savvy and all our communication is based on technology. Sometimes we don't even meet. I am sitting in South Africa and my leader is sitting in Kenya and if one misses an email, we will backtrack. We need to have communication skills to help us efficiently to manage our time and be up to date with communication sent through"

"I think I would say, improvement on the communication style or how we communicate certain things to individuals. So, why I'm saying that just to expand a little bit further is. Not making any assumptions about anything, so I feel like if there's communication, there will be no room for assumptions in thinking that certain things are obvious. This so I think if we communicate or rather if leaders could communicate certain things much better to until there's no room for any assumptions and we clarify everything. So, I think that possibly could be the level of improvement that I would I would require."

Effective communication allows work to flow well because everyone understands what needs to be done one participant mentioned the following pertaining inconsistent communication

"You end up working longer hours because now whereas if you had a more heightened level of communication you would have said OK as to which one do you think I should

focus on? If the manager is not conscious because I'm getting so many requests coming my way. Right? I'm now taking them on and then sending them down to more people to other people in my team. And now my team is running press”

Therefore, teams will have increased workload as they will have to waste time doing unnecessary tasks while important tasks are not executed leading to delayed fulfilment of deliverables. When the leader is catering for different team members it ensures continuity of work as everyone will be in the loop of what is happening and everyone can be able to assist even though the other team member is not available no one is isolated

“My understanding is different from yours. So, you have to make sure you are able to align your teams working in all these different portfolios. You need to find a way to pull it all off. That together. Firstly, for you to be equipped and aligned with what's happening. Your role is high level if you're not in the trenches. That's why you have a team too. Also, when you pull things together, it's. It's also helps with knowledge sharing and alignment of the rest of the team, so that if person A is not here, there is business continuity”

Participants also indicated that for effective communication the leader must possess good people skills so that they will be able to identify which communication style (analytical, functional, intuitive, personal) is effective for each team member as it affects employee engagement. Understanding the different personalities is essential as it can be challenging to decipher the tone and meaning behind written communication message which is vastly used in remote working environment, one participant mentioned

“So yeah, I think let's take it to people skills, good management style and also being a little bit more social. The social part is just so that you understand the type of people that you work with or that you are leading. So, I think that that's something that a lot of people are missing”

Clear communication enables leaders and team members to build trusting relationships, as open communication allows team members to fully express themselves and allows for constructive criticism and effective information exchange which is essential to archive considering that team members are working remotely

“Yeah, uhm. Let's discuss our expectations up front. Have effective expectations of a role, let's agree and let's define allow me to say these are my developmental areas and

maybe assist me in planning, in, driving towards those and making sure that I am fully whether I attend training. In order to sort of manage those developmental areas, but at the same time I think the openness and, in the communication, thereof. Uhm and feedback, right? If I send you something it would be great to come back and say to me, look, I think you've missed this point and you have got this right, so I think giving feedback and open communication is what is needed."

Willingness to listen and process the feedback without reacting

Successful organisation relies on the constant refinement of processes for favourable outcomes which depend on feedback loops that implement change. Participants indicated that the leaders should utilise feedback obtained from discussions as pointers to initiate change. One participant indicated that the lack of appropriate response to change led to employee disengagement

" So you'll see, for example, we do a Spirit speed survey. And I think we've had quite a few which were maybe not favourable. Now what I would expect to happen from that is now you've got feedback, or at least you've got an indication that you should look closely into something. Once you've done that, there's an expectation that something would be done by. Right, but you kind of say we complained about this thing. It persists and then you go through another cycle and it persists in another cycle. Then eventually somebody is there to believe that, oh, whether I say things are good or bad, the outcome is the same, right? Nothing really. Changes, and I think then the short answer would be, employee disengagement is when an organisation is unable to change."

Participants have comments on how their work environment can be improved including communicating with a leader on how they can improve their leadership style, however employees require open communication to be able to articulate their concerns and seek help.

"The leaders have to answer who we are, what are the skills that are the best in the market and obviously it puts you on your toes, but you need to think differently in a hybrid work environment. Want to retain these people? What is happening? How do we retain them? What is important for these individuals? So staying close to the people and understanding what keeps them engaged so it then means organisations have to come

back to their employees and take that feedback and assess ourselves as an organisation to retain these people?"

Participants expressed that they are required to accept feedback on their leadership style and not experience negative consequences as the feedback will allow the leader to work with the team efficiently. The importance of feedback in leadership is that it enhances a leader's credibility as they will be able to act on the right information as well as the team member. The participants expressed that, considering that remote/hybrid work is relatively new it is essential for a leader to be self-aware and correct their shortcomings and improve team efficiency.

"You need to be very much aware of how you're showing up. As a leader, how are you perceived by your employees? That's why 360. We always encourage request feedback from your team, right? Because it's sometimes how you perceive yourself versus how you are perceived by your team. Maybe two different things. Hmm, right, that helps you to know your strengths and areas of development and don't shy away to say I because you want to grow, right? So, you're asking for honest feedback, so it should not be taken in a negative way. It should be, it's my opportunity to grow because you want to be the best leader. Even so, if you're not open to feedback as a leader, but you are happy to give feedback for me there, there's a gap there."

4.4.4 Shifting to Coaching & transformational leadership

Participants in the study mentioned coaching leadership or transformational leadership or both as their preferred leadership style. The two appeal to the participants as they are based on considering the team member as an important component for a successful entity for success through a collaborative effort to balance leadership and teamwork. A participant commented on coaching leadership as a suitable leadership style for better employee engagement during hybrid working stating

"Coaching leadership because when you're giving direction right to coach people, I don't know how to explain this but I always feel. Well, just give me that direction. Tell me what your expectations are. That's what I mean by coaching, because I believe that I am capable or I need to be professional enough for me to have. I don't expect you to, you know, to lay all things down for me and write things down for me, I can do that myself. I

can take what you're giving me and connect the dots and you know and we then have a solution”

On transformational leadership,

“Having a transformational leader for me. That's the one thing, one that really adapts to change a leader that's really willing to provide direction. A leader that is motivating. A leader that really guides employees when it comes to strategic goals or implementing any projects or plans. So, I think for me it's a leader, not one necessarily that would hold my hand, but one that would really guide me in terms and motivate me to really become a better version of what I am right now. So definitely I think for me what stands out is a transformational leader”

The leadership style that appeals to participants is the one that sees leadership as a service with the leader asking themselves how to make things easier and better for my team members with all team members having an opportunity to contribute and having an impact on the team with transparency and less hierarchy. However, participants indicated that the known leadership styles do not combine all the features of what they need in leadership one participant stated that

“A good leadership style, I cannot really pinpoint what it is, but I have one as I said for me I know it if I get it. If I want to become like you, I look at you as somebody that I want to become, to me it means that you are that good leader. That's what I'm talking about. If I look at person X and I say one day I want to be like this person or I feel inspired by the type of or maybe just the way you carry yourself. The way you speak to people. The way you solve problems. The way you think, for me, it's that what I would call a good leadership style is just good qualities about a human being. Yeah, if I look at you, I just want to become like you. You inspire me. Maybe level of mentorship as well. Somebody who is a mentor as well that for me I think provides very good leadership.”

Participants indicated that they need leadership that is in touch with the human needs such as personal interests which inspire long-term development of their careers hence an understand people's motivations that can be used to achieve organisational goals hence both personal and organisational goals are met with the foundation being with relation with people one participant indicated that

“Being able to listen as a leader, being able to sit down with your team, solicit ideas from the team. And even if you've got your vision, sit with the team and engage with the team, make sure that the team understands where you're trying to get to. But more than that, the team becomes a part of that solution. So, for me, it's engagement, it is really, communicating with the team, getting ideas from the team, making sure that they are with you they feel that their voice is part of the solution for the future”

The challenge to be able to define the right leadership required is due to the ever-changing nature of leaders and team members hence a series of learning, adaptation and innovation which occur in teams providing a platform for collaborative exercise backed by the support of their leaders hence organisations are always in an intermediate process that can change direction as observed during the pandemic. Hence, employee engagement is essential as it determines the motivational process to achieve desired goals in an ever-changing environment. One participant indicated that human resources should be prioritised and kept agile in day-to-day business operations as they are the agents for change

“Why am I here? I ask the purpose. Everything we're doing, I ask why? I think I'm better at figuring out where we should be heading right? And I think at every period we should ask why. The leadership style that is needed, probably requires a lot of flexibility and a lot of learning, right? So, I mean, I'm not sure if it would be useful for me to give examples of leadership styles as it is a collection of different ideas”

And proceeded to mention that

“I think Covid is supposed to show us that people matter more than pretty much anything, right? So, the people are actually all you've got. That shift, and I'm not sure it's something you can train. I think it's something that you can cultivate in somebody and there still is a place for your, as I say, engineered type of roles, but if you talk about inspiring or influencing organisations, you need people-centric leaders.”

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The results of the research presented in Chapter 4 are discussed and analysed in this chapter. The analysis entails contrasting the findings of the research with the conceptual framework and the literature. Principles and trends from Chapter 2 of the literature review were also compared with the findings. This chapter focuses on a concise summary of the analysis and interpretation.

The structure of the chapter entails the discussion of the conceptual framework summary and thereafter looking at the different research questions that the study aimed to answer.

5.2 Conceptual Framework

Hayward (2016)'s introduction of a connected leader presents an updated way of looking at the kind of leadership that will shift the dial of how leaders positively engage employees. March (2019) in defining the connected leader emphasises that self-awareness, being humanistic and not being afraid to be vulnerable are key attributes needed for leaders in the next era. March (2019) further asserts that trust, vulnerability and positive relationships that are based on psychology and neuroscience help a leader to be connected.

Jarche (2016) highlights that connected leaders inspire networked individuals via compassion, empathy, and trust. He indicates that the goal of connected leadership is to make the network as a whole smarter so that the leader may be more effective as a result. The research findings of this study concur with attributes described in connected leadership as most of the participants stated the same attributes as required in leadership that will enable them to be more engaged.

Given the understanding based on various studies that leadership behaviour and style impacts the retention of employees, organisations need to be deliberate on the leadership culture they enact in the organisation in these times. Zentano (2020) indicates that one of the important elements of building capability in connected leadership is

around leaders' ability to coach their teams. The participants used in the study affirm this statement highlighting that the fitting leadership style that will be relevant in the remote working/ technology time is coaching leadership style.

5.3 Analysis and interpretation of the results

5.3.1 Discussion of Research Question 1: What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

5.3.1.1 Lack of clarity on the strategy and direction.

Connected leadership seeks to appeal to humanity by getting in touch with the aspects of the individuals that enables them to be fully engaged in their work and operate with the highest determination (Hayward, 2015). To effectively work employees need a clearly defined strategy to follow to archive the desired organisational goals as it is the roadmap of what is required from the employee to execute their tasks effectively (Engert and Baumgartner, 2016). However, in this report the participants highlighted that their leadership did not communicate strategy in an effective manner that enabled them to be fully engaged with their work. The observation indicated a gap between the formulation and the implementation of the strategy as the employees did not understand what is required of them. The observation indicates that the leader was not in touch with the team perceptions on strategy. The mismatch indicated that the leaders were not effective in strategic communication, which is the backbone of successful organisations,

Pereira, Durão and Santos (2019) argues that transformation of knowledge to information that can be utilised by employees is the primary capital for any organisation. Effectively communicating strategy allows employees to adequately meet their job requirements/expectations and significantly seek opportunities for personal and professional growth, hence most research firms and consultant agencies have argued that employee engagement is closely linked to business outcomes as knowledgeable employees will go above and beyond when doing their work giving the company a competitive advantage on other companies in the sector (Vance, 2006).

It should be noted that the remote/hybrid working environment is relatively new in many organisations the change during pandemic times brought about a complex interaction of the leader and the employer with both parties trying to figure out the appropriate action to take for successful business outcomes (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020). Many organisations/leaders were not prepared for the change hence there was a delay in effectively setting up structures to deal with the change as well as the nature of the pandemic as most people thought that the pandemic was going to last a few weeks at most, however it lasted for two years which meant that organisations were refining their processes which can be challenging to communicate with the employees and keeping them up to date for effective implementation (Pereira, Durão and Santos, 2019).

Organisations that effectively communicated strategy gave employees confidence through connected leadership by utilising technology to understand the needs of the employer (Chanana, 2021). Employees have to appreciate the change in working environment as they are in their homes, conflicting work- and non-work-related demands and the mental perspective of dealing with the pandemic has the potential affect their levels of work engagement (emotionally and relationally) (Adisa, Ogbonnaya and Adekoya, 2021; Kundu and Nag, 2021). Refining the process of communication remains the leverage point to organisational success as all processes will be executed with desired detail to meet organisational goals (Kreps, 2021).

5.3.1.2 Inadequate recognition and career growth

Hybrid working meant that the leaders required a lot of effort from the employees as the businesses were shifting goals and trying to make business work during the pandemic. In this study participants highlighted that leaders did not reward their efforts accordingly, the sentiments were not based on monetary reward but employees wanted recognition for their efforts like a “thank you, you did a good job” considering the tight deadlines and all-day meetings with no defined break times. The observation highlights that the leaders were not appealing to the extrinsic factors (promotion, pay, benefits, and recognition) that drive motivation to do work hence a barrier to employee engagement (Amabile, 1993). The results of this study are consistent with Engidaw (2021) study which stated the extrinsic motivational factors are more effective than intrinsic motivational factors, therefore organisations/leaders should utilise appropriate motivational techniques for

each employee to promote engagement. However, Manzoor, Wei and Asif (2021) place superior emphasis on intrinsic (psychological reward) factors of motivation and acknowledge that extrinsic factors do have a significant role play in employee engagement. Therefore, both extrinsic and intrinsic factors complement each other for improved employee engagement.

In a South African context a study conducted in a medical device company, intrinsic factors of motivation were superior to extrinsic factors however the 13th cheque seemed to motivate employees to be engaged in their work (Smith, Joubert and Karodia, 2015). Motivation of employees is essential to create a work setting that has employees that have the zeal to work, interested, enthusiastic, loyal to create a sense of responsibility and the ability to attain organisational and personal goals (Palaniammal, 2013). The results of this study highlighted weak interpersonal relationship between leader and employee as the leader could not motivate the employees to do their work with enthusiasm, Hausknecht and Holwerda (2013) argued that interpersonal behaviours affect productivity which is directly correlated with related to employee engagement, hence leaders need to observe different interpersonal behaviours displayed by each employees to be able to influence productivity. It should be noted that physical interaction plays a key role in fostering interpersonal relationships which is missing in a hybrid working environment which can be a key contributor to poor interpersonal relationship building (Whillans, Perlow and Turek, 2021). Extensive use of information technology for communication may not deliver the message of appreciation coupled with fewer bridges of communication available in the physical space is a negative consequence of remote working for the leader as they are not fully in touch with the employee as observed in many digital spaces (Yang et al., 2022).

Reduced employee engagement has a consequence on the overall growth of one's career as one will be doing what is just required of them coupled with lack of recognition, one's career suffers as there will be delays in promotions and nomination for bigger projects. These were the sentiments shared by the participants in the study in relation to their career projections. Career growth is essential psychological achievement, if this is not satisfied employees suffer a psychological loss which leads to less dedication to their work hence less engagement (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday, 2004). The subject of

career growth is closely related to the subject of clear strategy as indicated in the previous section. The employee will know what is expected of them and work towards attaining the goal to the best of their capabilities.

5.3.1.3 Impact of work life balance

The shift from office to home working came with the challenge of balancing work and home demands, in this study employees admitted to struggling to balance work and home aspects of their lives. Employees felt the need to separate their work and life however hybrid work introduced a cycle of never-ending tasks as team members could send emails at any time of the day to maintain the competitive edge of organisations. Work-life balance creates a positive environment for the employee as it promotes workforce productivity which in turn enhances employee engagement (Vu, 2020). Therefore, a connected leader needs to understand the family situation of their team members and devise a working plan that is beneficial for both the organisation and the employee to enhance business outcomes (Hayward, 2015).

The telecommunication industry is undergoing rapid transformation which challenges the telecommunications employees to work faster, more effectively, and efficiently which requires organisational support (Sahni, 2019). Organisations that have a supportive work life policy which have flexibility in the working hours have better employee engagement which helps employees focus and adapt to work changes quickly (De Klerk, Joubert and oak, 2021). Majority of the participants did prefer working from home and after the pandemic they did not want to go back to the office exclusively hence hybrid working will be the new normal and it is essential for organisations to consider these sentiments as they are key in determining employee engagement as it will promote the work life balance.

It has to be acknowledged that organisations have not been able to investigate extensively the effects of hybrid working on work-life balance to develop strategies for efficient work that satisfies the employee (Oakman *et al.*, 2022). The lack of solutions during this period has led to some inefficiencies in running organisations which has led to loss of revenue as employees less efficient are less engaged with their work. Work life

balance is closely linked to the employee wellbeing as an individual is a player in different sectors of life therefore any ill in the system will lead to disengaged employees.

5.3.2. Discussion of Research Question 2: What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

In this research question the trends that were uncovered are aligned to both literature and connected leadership. Two of these trends essentially speak to leadership behaviour and the leadership capabilities identified by both participants and the literature.

5.3.2.1. Shift in the leadership role

Participants basically identified that the old ways of working where employees and their leaders simply connected on a work level would not be enough in these times of technology advancements and hybrid way of work. They identified a shift in how leaders engage with their direct reports. This shift was mainly characterised with more trust and increased personal engagements. Participants said they wanted leaders to know them beyond just the day to day work they did in the organisation. Some even characterised this as knowing their personal space i.e. their family set up and the challenges they face there given that they do not leave those pieces of them outside their work space. This they said deepens the relationship with the line manager and even fostered more trust. Marsh (2019) talks about trust and vulnerability citing that a leader needs to have these to be connected. She highlights that vulnerability in fact shows a leader's human side, shows strength of character and a certainty in self. Leaders have traditionally been taught that such vulnerability is a sign of weakness but participants indicated that they wanted to connect with their leaders at a human level first.

The researcher also observed this to be a need when interviewing participants that most of them felt that their line managers cared more about getting deliverables done more than they did the individual. One participant talked about previously dreading to have conversations around taking their son to the doctor with their line manager. It says that the relationship has not extended to employees being able to share more about their personal life. While that is said participants did indicate that the Covid 19 pandemic was

a big help in accelerating those conversations, post Covid 19 in the now hybrid era, leaders are more understanding of such situations though the researcher understood that it's not all leaders but the most seem to have shifted to a more relaxed way of managing as long as they are getting output.

Ready (2019) highlights that leaders in today's digital economy must be competent at forging personal connections that inspire trust and teamwork. Participants expressed a desire for their leaders to regard them as key partners in the delivery of work, rather than simply delivery people for organisational goals. According to Hayward (2016), this is discussed under devolved decision making, where the connected leader has a strong belief in others, which allows them to believe in their abilities to do a great job given that they are experts in their field. Participants expressed that they expected leaders to be good at sharing the end goal and allowing them to run with the smaller decisions on how to get to that end goal.

5.3.2.2 Increased burnout & wellness challenges

According to Soman & Shroff (2021) the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting hybrid working model have resulted in an increase in mental health issues among employees worldwide. In this study 75% participants indicated that they had experienced burnout and some characterised that burnout to cause anxiety to the point where they could not sleep. Some said they had suffered clinical exhaustion that caused other issues for them. One participant mentioned that there have been quite a lot of mental health issues in their space post Covid 19. History suggests that every pandemic causes a significant decline in mental health. People in all parts of the world are having more anxiety, anger, worry, and ambiguity, as well as post-traumatic stress disorders. Changes in work schedules, challenging workplaces, competing needs at home and work, job loss, and other things, like losing loved ones in the pandemic or being afraid of financial instability, have made the mental health crisis worse this time (Soman & Shroff, 2021).

Participants advised that while they experienced burnout, in their one on ones with their leaders that generally happen monthly they did not have any wellness conversations that would assist them advise on the burnout and discuss wellness strategies with their line managers. The researcher observed that this speaks to the fact that leaders have not

yet incorporated the wellness of their direct reports as something that they are responsible for. Kumar (2022) advises that connected leaders that want to drive productivity must skilfully balance employee productivity with employee wellbeing by foresting the right culture. Soman and Shroff (2021) go on to say that the relationship between mental health and the workplace is two-way: work affects a person's mental health, and an employee's mental health affects the overall morale at work. As a result, addressing mental health issues has become a top workforce-health concern for employers, necessitating a holistic and systematic approach to addressing these challenges.

Participants also reported that post Covid 19 the general expectation of how much work was expected from employees increased and this was across the board within the organisation. The rationale being that people were able to produce this increased amount of work during lockdown. It is the researcher's view that the main driver for this was that people were scared to lose their jobs as they were seeing in the market or in their own households, most reported that they worked nonstop with very little breaks in between. One participant advised that when that happened they had to manage themselves to ensure they took enough breaks for themselves. Another participant indicated that the problem still exists as individuals are expected more on the days that they work remotely than when they actually come into the office.

Osborne (2021)'s study has reported that employees working from home are spending longer time at their desks with very limited breaks and shorter lunches. She reported that employees in the UK and Netherlands have increased their working week by 25% logging off at 8pm. The article basically documents that because of less travel time with remote/hybrid work, people are even setting up meetings after working hours in order to meet certain deadlines as all meetings are online. This was also seen in the participants' responses when one participant narrated a day when one of the employees had to attend a meeting at 7pm while trying to put her kids to bed. The trend of increased hours of work and wellness challenges is worldwide and therefore it is most critical that businesses must therefore foster a work culture in which employees can thrive and flourish rather than simply survive. Employee wellness-focused organisations are expected to have higher employee retention rates as well as the potential for long-term growth and development (Soman & Shroff, 2021).

5.3.2.3 Required Leadership Capability of the Future

When asked about the capabilities of the future that leaders needed to have in order to be able to engage their teams positively participants gave a view that is quite aligned to that of a connected leader. They advised that the attributes that leaders would need to have are purpose led, emotional intelligence, effective communication and technologically advanced.

5.3.2.3.1 Purpose led

Participants indicated that they needed a futuristic leader, someone that is purpose led. They indicated this purpose led individual to be someone that has a broader perspective of the future than only knowing what is happening now. Someone who could assist the team shape themselves for the future.

According to Alexander (2015), studies on culture, leadership, value alignment, commitment, employment engagement, meaningfulness, and spirituality have been conducted in order to better understand the relationship between people and business. The findings show that companies with a strong social responsibility agenda do well in business, that engagement is high, and that people's personal values are linked to their work. As leaders, connecting the dots between what people do and how it connects to the world generally makes them more committed and engaged in what they are doing. The researcher observed from the participants that when people do not see the end goal of what they do they are more likely to be engaged. People want to feel like they are part of something bigger and that the pieces of work they contribute to the organisation makes a difference.

Participants indicated that they expect the leader to always be a step further in planning and understanding the future of that particular discipline, where it's headed and future trends and guiding the team towards it.

5.3.2.3.2 Emotional Intelligence

Radha et al. (2018) indicates that emotional intelligence emphasises the importance of self-awareness and knowledge in understanding others. Emotional Intelligence (EI) addresses the emotional, psychological, social, and survival components of intelligence.

It entails understanding oneself and others, connecting with others, and adapting to and coping with one's immediate circumstances. Like Goleman Radha et al. (2018) outlined five important components in emotional intelligence namely self-awareness, self-control, internal motivation, empathy and social skills. Participants recognised two of these to be quite critical for them.

Self-awareness: is defined as the ability to recognize and comprehend one's own moods, feelings, and motivations, as well as how they affect others. Self-assurance, realistic self-evaluation, and a self-deprecating sense of humour characterise self-awareness. Self-awareness requires the ability to monitor one's emotional state as well as detect and categorise emotions (Radha et al., 2018). Participants indicated that they needed leaders to firstly understand who they are and what role they play in the lives of the teams they lead. They advised that self-awareness is important as without it the team might be negatively impacted.

Empathy: The ability to understand another person's emotional makeup. A talent for treating people based on their emotional responses. In an educational setting, empathy is frequently believed to involve or lead to compassion, which indicates concern, care, or a desire to soften bad feelings or experiences in others (Radha et al.,2018). Participants indicated that for leaders to really create effective connections with their teams they need to practise more empathy, understand their direct reports to be able to empathise with certain situations that might be going on whether it's outside or inside the work space. The researcher observed that with everything that has happened in the last 24 months, the pandemic, changes in ways of work and also for some changes in the home life as well, employees are anticipating leaders will be more empathetic in their approach. Most participants elaborated that empathy was definitely one of the attributes that leaders would need in the future in order to create better engagements and trust in the team . Holland (2019) concurs this notion stating that leaders that prioritise EI in their leadership style cultivate good interpersonal connections, which fosters a climate of trust, commitment, and safety.

5.3.2.4 Effective Communicator

The ability to effectively communicate at all levels of the organisation is a critical skill for leaders in today's world. Leaders must develop dynamic and innovative communication

strategies to include all members of multicultural teams and get the most out of each team member (Matthews & Thakkar, 2012). In this study participants felt that the communication between them and their leaders needed to improve, that leaders needed to communicate more than just the deliverables that need to be done. They also needed to communicate the vision, and also include their people in the journey there. One participant spoke about the fact that they are not included in the planning phases of strategy when they are the ones that do the work, even getting the details of the full strategy was not easily shared or communicated by leaders.

Farrell (2014) emphasises that transparency is essential in effective communication as it allows for sound decision making at all levels. One of the participants even indicated that the communication needs to be bi-directional in the sense that it's not only the leader telling their direct reports what to do but also listening to what the employee has to say. Listening to understand is critical in communication, the leader must obtain accurate information without bias, cultivate a curious mental posture, and be able to decode verbal and nonverbal messages (Schein & Schein, 2021). The researcher observed that when it comes to communication the leaders of company X are good at laying out the tasks of the day to day work but are not good at sharing the strategy in its broader view and also advising their teams how they fit into that picture. This then leaves employees feeling as if they are executors and not key partners in delivering for the organisation. This in turn demotivates the employees and reduces engagement. Participants are seeing that in these hybrid model times and technology advancements the connected leaders that will thrive are those who will be able to articulate the strategy with conviction and connect the dots for the team in how they fit into that picture.

5.3.2.5 Technologically advanced

Organisations today face a technological tidal wave. The Internet of Things, robotic process automation, 3D printing, block chain, augmented reality, and virtual reality all promise to make things faster, cheaper, and more autonomously, thanks to artificial intelligence. Leaders have no choice but to adopt these technologies as soon as possible (World Economic Forum, 2018). Participants indicated that they expected their leader to be at the forefront of this technology tide, helping them to understand what it means for their future roles and how they upskill themselves

Leaders must as a matter of urgency create psychological safety around the digitization of roles and them losing their jobs or being rendered obsolete by technology. One of the participants that generally deals with automation in their role said that for them one of the reasons that causes disengagement is that people are really resistant to technology, when they are doing a process half the time is spent on convincing people that it will not result in job losses. World Economic Forum, (2018) emphasises that one of the principles in the application of new technology is that it must be human centric. This means that an organisation uses technology to boost human qualities of judgement, contextualisation, creativity and social interaction. In essence using technology as an enabler as opposed to being a replacement for human achievement. The researcher also observed that while a lot of participants highlighted that they want their leaders to be at the front of this technology tide, they too are not clear on what this would entail but wanted their leaders to have those answers to guide them.

Participants also indicated that leaders themselves needed to be comfortable with technology use. They indicated that with hybrid work and people not being necessarily situated in the same workspace, leaders needed to be able to communicate in various platforms like using Whatsapp. They needed to be able to approve proforma invoices from wherever they are by just using their phone. Mulleaney (2021) affirms this feedback in the study that they did across 13 different countries and ascertained that employees expect that their leaders be digitally present and are able to communicate from those platforms. They also found that employees wanted to use those platforms to find out about leaders even before starting with the company.

5.3.3. Discussion of Research Question 3: What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?

From the feedback provided by participants four main strategies emerged as being critical to positive employee engagement. This entailed empowering employees, attaining a healthy work life balance and shifting the leadership style to a more transformational and coaching style.

5.3.3.1 Empowerment

Bhatti et al., (2021) covers the concept of empowering leadership that they characterise as granting equitable power sharing, providing equal opportunity for all employees in decision-making, and demonstrating trust in employee expertise. They advise that an empowering leader gives their team job autonomy and psychological safety for people to be able to share their knowledge without fear. In the study participants indicated that for them empowerment would be key in increasing their engagements. They covered as part of the empowerment autonomy in their roles to make decisions as they saw fit in their area of expertise. They argued that they would like leaders to trust them more with the delivery of their roles and give value to their ideas that they bring to the table. The connected leadership framework also advocates for the concept of shared power, where the leader is responsible to give the team a big picture or vision and the employee decides for themselves how they will get there.

Meyerson & Dewettinck, (2012) reinforces that organisations that are committed to employee empowerment are able to motivate and retain their employees, despite the fact that it is a complex management tool that must be nurtured and handled with great care. Employee empowerment is a motivational technique that, when implemented properly, is intended to improve performance by increasing employee participation and self-determination. Employee empowerment is concerned with building trust, motivating employees, making decisions, and breaking down barriers between management and employees. Participants indicated that they did not think that the often made distinction between strategic work being for leaders and operational work being for the teams will work in future. They suggested that a more collaborative approach to delivery would be more engaging as a way of work in the future. Sanfilippo (2021), in articulating the connected leader, also concurs with this notion stating that shared leadership does not only create shared accountability but also ensures the sharing of information across all levels in the organisation.

5.3.3.2 Work Life Balance

Work Life balance was also mentioned by participants as another engagement strategy. They indicated that over the last 24 months people in general have gone through so

much with the pandemic as well as the introduction of new ways of work. Workload was also advised to have increased and people were basically spending more time doing work. Therefore an introduction of balance between the amount of time spent on work versus the amount of time people spent recuperating and spending time with their families would be a win for the organisation in terms of engagement levels. Jaharuddin & Zainol, (2019) investigated the impact of work-life balance on job engagement and turnover intentions and confirmed that there is a positive relationship with both, so the higher the work life balance the more engaged individuals. Similarly the higher the engagement the less likely an individual would think about resigning or looking for a new job. Indicating the importance of work and personal life balance.

Jaharuddin & Zainol (2019) further indicate that many organisations in recent history have developed a strategy of rewarding long hours and organisational commitment, resulting in work-life conflict which leads to employee exhaustion and stress. In the study participants indicated that over the last 24 months they have seen work requirements increase and that people have normalised the expectation of this increased work and keep on trying to keep up with doing more which has to some extent resulted in the burnout indicated in the trends regarding employee engagement. Kumar (2022) advises in discussing how connected leadership drives productivity that connected leaders understand that productivity and wellbeing are interlinked therefore focusing on wellbeing is actually by default focusing on productivity.

5.3.3.3 Creating a collaborative space

An additional key element mentioned by participants as an engagement strategy was around creating space where individuals can thrive having the two way communication leeway with their leaders as well as the safety for them to give feedback to their leaders without facing negative consequences. Participants indicated in research question 2 that the future/connected leader must be an effective communicator. They also elaborated that in order for a leader to create a collaborative space communication should come first. EnovaPoint (2022) discusses the importance of two way communication in the organisation, defining it as communication between two parties that is shared back and forth. It is the exchange of information and feedback between a sender and a receiver. Two-way communication can be verbal or nonverbal, and it can take various forms, but

it is never a monologue. For communication to work, one of the participants indicated that it cannot be communication to just the employee but needs to be two way where the leader also gets feedback from the employees.

EnovaPoint (2022) further discusses that the foundation of two-way communication is empowerment and trust. It fosters a culture of trust among employees, improves job satisfaction, which promotes employee retention and gives employers an advantage in the talent market, boosts employee engagement, which has been statistically proven to result in higher job productivity, and strengthens team bonds. A part of the two way communication is that the leader also has to receive feedback from their teams that might not always be positive. Some participants alluded to the fact that they would like to be able to give leaders feedback without facing negative consequences or the feedback being used against them in their performance reviews. The researcher observed that participants could be speaking from past experiences with their leader where giving feedback had an undesired effect for them.

Eurich (2018) also highlights that there is the right way for leaders to unpack critical leadership that they receive from their teams. They discuss that it's normal that leaders after getting critical feedback can feel defensive, angry, and self-conscious but they should not stay too long in those feelings as they make them ineffective. Leaders who solicit critical feedback are regarded as more effective by their superiors, employees, and peers, whereas those who seek primarily positive feedback are regarded as less effective (Eurich, 2018). So leaders need to be able to appreciate any feedback as it essentially is beneficial to them. Participants also confirmed that it is an engagement strategy for them if the leaders know how to communicate and also receive feedback.

5.3.3.4 Utilising coaching & transformational leadership Style

The two leadership styles that participants indicated would be engagement strategies for them speak to some of the feedback they have indicated as engagement strategies already in capabilities for the future that leaders needed to have. They indicated that coaching and transformational leadership would be the best leadership styles to us in times of technological advancement & hybrid model.

The essence of coaching leadership entails business leaders who guide their teams to acquire new behavioural and thinking strategies, create an environment of growth by allowing innovative problem solving and are authentically concerned about their people's development (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007). This speaks to being able to get guidance from the leader but also having the space to develop problem solving skills through autonomy of work. Baker et al. (2021) reinforces that the most optimum relationship to have in the future is where the leader and the direct report are inclusive and collaborate rather than being hierarchical. Participants indicated that in future they expected their leaders to collaborate more with them, be it on strategy or discussions around development. Coaching is being seen as a requirement for leaders going forward that makes an effective leader. Baker et al. (2021) further elaborates that To support the coachee's learning and development, the coach and the coachee should work together on an equal footing. A coach's role is also to provide a powerful learning platform in which the coachee discovers new variations that broaden their worldview.

The participants have also indicated transformational leadership as an engagement strategy. Transformational leaders generally articulate an appealing vision of the future, provide followers with opportunities to see meaning in their work, and hold them to high standards (Hay, 2006). This speaks to the characteristics required by some of the participants around leaders being able to articulate the vision and helping individuals get meaning from their work. Hay (2006) elaborates that transformational leadership is based on the leader and their follower's changing values and beliefs and that the relationship is based on raising each other's achievements, morale and motivation levels. This also speaks to the feedback from participants that they do not just want to be seen as people that just deliver work but also be seen for what they bring to the table by their managers identifying their potential and sharing with them growth opportunities that would make them thrive. The researcher observed that these two styles speak the most about the transformed relationship between a leader and their employees where it's made up of more collaboration, clear development interest from leaders, shared vision and engaging from a human level and not from a hierarchical stance.

5.4 Leadership Milestones

While participants did articulate what they think could get better for the future they also highlighted some milestones in their leadership. When asked the question if their current leader personifies the view they had given on what kind of leader will be needed in the future 90% said yes. The mentioned milestones are discussed below;

5.4.1 Passion for company growth

The participants mentioned that they had confidence in the leaders of the company, including the CEO of the company, in that they were passionate about company growth. They felt that the company was doing well and that even during Covid 19 they did not have to face any retrenchments or salary cuts. They only experienced this from what they were seeing in the market and some in their households. One participant mentioned the inspirational work they did during Covid 19 of donating supplies to the medical field, stating that while the company is a telco and does not have anything to do with the medical field they got involved. Others mentioned that they are shareholders themselves and wanted to see the company do well. It is the researcher's observation that while there was a noted trend of burnout, most participants highlighted that one of the reasons was around the shift of expectations with leaders pushing the bar higher to ensure the success of the company. In the connected leadership theory this speaks to the purpose piece of being part of something greater and being able to be part of a success story.

5.4.2 Driving Engagement

As part of the interview schedule participants were asked if they are currently engaged in their roles and 85% reported that they were. It is the researcher's observation that company X seems to have a focus of ensuring that people are engaged. Participants also mentioned that they do engagement surveys where they are able to give feedback on the various aspects. Furthermore 63% reported that their leader positively impacts their engagement suggesting that the leader does a fairly big share of making sure employees are engaged. Other statistics indicate that employees were relatively happy with their work environment as shown in Table 8. The table shows a view that 84% of the participants would recommend their company as a great place to work at, 95% felt

that they had a positive contribution to the organisation, 95% said that they experience positive emotion when working and 50% said that they were currently receiving coaching. The researcher observed that based on the responses the participants were relatively happy with their workspace. The below figure shows the different statistics on participants' responses.

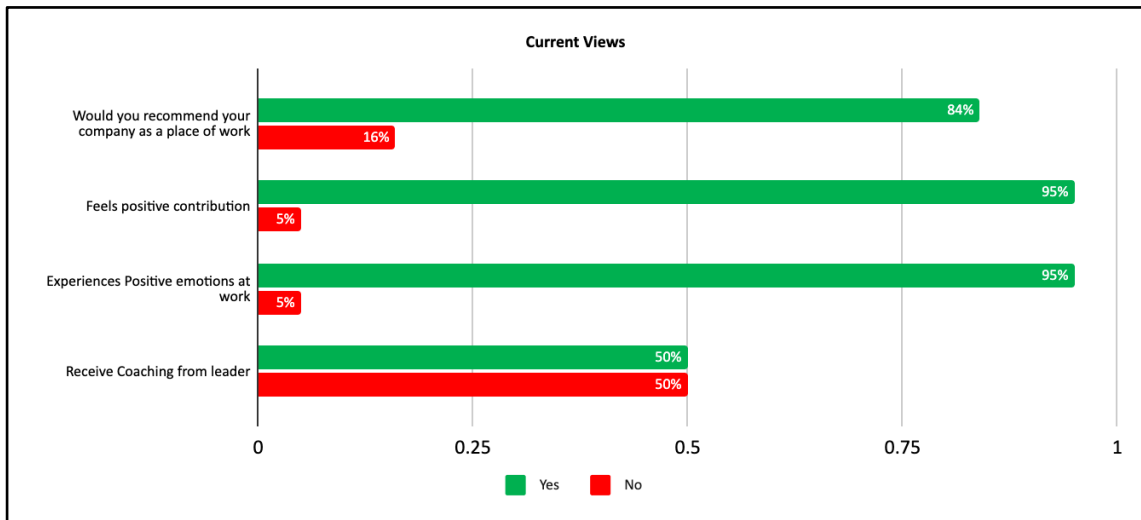


Figure 7: Current views of participants on the organisation

5.4.3. Mindset shift

Participants reported that over the last 24 months they saw their leaders have a shift in terms of mindset. Covid 19 seemed to be an accelerator for them to realise that people are generally capable of doing their roles with minimum supervision and that was translated with trust. Participants reported that they experienced leadership to be less critical of how their team's time was spent as long as the output was produced at the end of the day. The shift speaks to the fact that even leaders realise that the pre-Covid 19 way of managing would not work post Covid 19. Some participants reported that they had autonomy over their day to day and could then try and structure it to a suitable manner. The mindset shift alone shows a good acceptance or acknowledgement of doing things differently going forward from leadership.

5.5. Areas of Improvement

5.5.1 An increased focus on Wellness

Soman & Shroff (2021) have already stated that the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting hybrid working model have resulted in an increase in mental health issues among employees worldwide. While it's certainly a relatively new phenomenon it's something that organisations need to have a clear plan on. Company X does not seem to have mechanisms that check on statistics on wellbeing or burnout given that the matter impacts quite a big number of their employees (based on the participants' sample that had a 75% burnout rate and had other wellbeing challenges). The company must improve on its levers on how they monitor these challenges amongst employees. Leaders need to be able to distinguish between pushing their team to achieve great things and simply loading the team with too much to the extent that they don't cope.

5.5.2 Proactive discussions on career development and growth

A frustration from participants was around not having a clear view of their career growth. It is the researcher's observation that these conversations are not happening regularly for participants or employees to understand where they fit in the future according to leaders. Having a clear career path helps employees to be more loyal and committed to the company if they also see that the company is committed to them. Growth does not always need to be in the form of a promotion, participants touched on being able to do certain programs like an MBA that the leader needs to motivate for. Leaders need to be in a position where they can articulate what the career projection looks like for their direct reports and there needs to be transparency around this view by leaders giving the feedback and the direct reports being able to work on the identified gaps that will get them to the next level.

5.5.3. Aligned view of leadership

While the participants articulated their experiences with their leaders, the researcher observed that experiences were mainly based on the individual leader being either great

or not great. There was no organisational thread of how leaders of company X should conduct themselves or the leadership culture of the organisation, what is acceptable and not or how leadership wants to be perceived in the organisation. The challenge of not having a unified culture that is enabled from the highest level of the organisation is that the organisation leaves it to each leader to determine how they want to lead and some might not use that privilege correctly. It is important that the organisation defines the leadership values and culture that they expect from each leader. This will then enable that regardless of what teams employees exist in they see the values and culture that the organisation stands by.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This study researched the impact of leadership on employee engagement in a telecommunications company in Johannesburg. The study had a specific focus on leadership impact in these times of technological advancements as well as hybrid working model adoption. Employee engagement is critical in ensuring company growth and productivity in the organisation hence it is important to focus on this impact in order to enhance engagement. The chapter summarises the overview of the study, the results, analysis as well as offers some recommendations for the organisation to possibly consider to increase their leadership impact on engagement.

6.2. Summary

The study's goal was to look into the leadership factors that will effectively increase employee engagement in the hybrid model. The study looked at how leadership is currently impacting employee engagement. In Chapter 2, the literature was reviewed, which included the conceptual framework of connected leadership and its benefits in employee engagement. This study employed a qualitative research strategy, with Telecommunications Company X serving as the case study.

Semi structured interviews were used as the data collection tool for the study with twenty of the employees of company X as the sample size. The participants constituted of the three main levels across the organisation i.e. junior staff (H bands), middle management (G bands) and Executives (F & E bands). The stratified sampling method used is generally diverse as it ensures that a member of each strata (level) is represented.

A clear limitation of the study is that only one company within the telecommunications industry was used to acquire data for the study. Given the hybrid model that the organisation has adopted like many other companies in South Africa interviews were conducted via Microsoft teams and unfortunately with the energy crisis faced in the country load shedding impacted the quality of some of the recordings. Reliability and

validity in the study were attained by firstly making sure that all interviews were recorded via Microsoft teams. The interviews were then further transcribed using the Microsoft tool and validated by the researcher to ensure that the transcriptions got names and any vernacular used in the interview correct.

Table 5 presents a summary of the research questions as well as their results.

Research Question	Chapter	Answer/Results
What are the factors leading to the problem of employee disengagement at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg	4 & 5	Lack of clarity on the strategy was noted as a concern. Lack of visibility on strategy hinders employees from understanding organisational purpose and where they fit in in that big picture. Similarly getting recognition for work done well and going over and above for the organisation was seen to be an improvement area. Not having clear career growth conversations also created an issue as people did not have a view of what their future looked like in the organisation. Lastly the impact of work life balance was seen as a serious concern. With the introduction of hybrid people have not been able to fully rest and recuperate with the separation of work and personal life being not being distinct, people have gotten more work and are working longer hours to deliver
What are the trends regarding employee engagements at a telecommunications organisation in Johannesburg?	4&5	A shift in the role of leadership that requires them to trust their teams more and build personal relationships with deeper connections was observed as one trend. An influx of burnout and wellness challenges was noted as a worldwide phenomenon also existing in company X. There was also a noted framework that participants already indicated as the leadership capabilities needed for the future. These capabilities consisted of being purpose led, emotionally intelligent, an effective communicator and being technologically advanced.
What are the employee engagement strategies for consideration at the telecommunications	4&5	Employee empowerment was seen as one strategy speaking to giving employees pockets of decision making, supporting and motivating them to elevate in their roles..

organisation in Johannesburg?		Work Life balance was recognised as another engagement strategy of giving people an opportunity to create for themselves a life outside of work. Another key strategy was around creating a collaborative space for employees to thrive by enabling a two-way communication platform where a leader can give guidance and constructive feedback at the same time creating psychological safety for employees to give them feedback that also helps them become better leaders.
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Table 5: Summary of the research questions and answers

6.3 Conclusions

The researcher raised the issue of the dearth in leadership caused by confusion on how to lead in the pinnacle of technological advancements where the hybrid model of working is the future of work. Not being clear on the right and relevant engagement strategies then leads to the problem of disengagement. The researcher therefore aimed to understand the factors that lead to employee disengagement. Lack of clarity on the strategy, inadequate recognition from leaders on work done, lack of work life balance and unclear development plans were recognised as the most pressing issues identified by participants. This is also in line with the framework on connected leadership done by Zentano (2020) on what leadership factors leaders need to be focusing going forward , the above factors were covered in that framework.

Given that employee engagement is positively connected to organisational success, disengaged employees imply the inverse that organisations might possibly fail to achieve their strategies. The levels of employee engagement will dictate how competitive the organisation is within its industry and the telecommunication industry is quite competitive at the moment in South Africa. It is therefore important that leadership resolves any disengagement factors. The results of the study confirm that the lack of attributes highlighted in connected leadership i.e. being able to give purpose & direction, knowing how to drive productivity, being able to grow people and build capability and knowing how to collaborate and practise devolved leadership through building relationship can indeed cause disengaged employees.

In chapter 2, the researcher reviewed existing literature that made clear a few elements. Firstly amongst all the engagement strategies in literature, researchers agree that the most significant contributor is leadership, hence a focus on leadership yields the most returns. The leadership theories i.e. participative leadership and leader member exchange (LMX) theory were both on the right track in terms of getting to progressive leadership that is seen in the connected leadership framework. Participative theory covered the issue around power sharing between the leader and the employee while LMX spoke to the relationship between the leader and employee, both theories are covered in the concept of building relationships in connected leadership. The researcher noted that the concept of connected leadership introduced by Hayward (2016) presents an all-inclusive framework for leadership going forward in the future that was also confirmed by participants in what attributes are needed in the future.

The results indicate that while participants are clear on the skills and capabilities needed in the future, they are equally confident that their leaders have what it takes to develop themselves today to get to that level. This is evidenced by the 90% indicated to the question if participants felt their leaders personified the skills of the future. The trends highlighted also indicate that the challenges faced by this organisation in increasing leadership impact on engagement are not unique to them. Global trends are showing various factors like burn out and wellness challenges, they are also seeing the shift in what was required from leaders' pre- hybrid model and today are going to be somewhat different which were both identified in this study. Trends like emotional intelligence have been highlighted as important in leadership before but studies as well as participants indicated that it would be a critical skill going forward stating that that empathy and self-awareness would be key in achieving higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Participants were also able to indicate some engagement strategies that leaders could look at to possibly increase engagement at the height of technology advancements and hybrid model way of working. Empowerment came up as one of the first where they looked at leaders trusting their employees more and giving them the space and autonomy be “leaders of self” in how they execute their roles and also having their ideas they bring through being considered and used in the formulation of the bigger strategy. Work life balance was seen to be a critical one, not just for the company but for the world in general. The companies that will be able to get the balance right will be able to not

only retain their employees but be able to attract key talent in the market as well. The results indicated that it was a key element for most of the participants to be able to balance the requirements of work and personal life.

A key element was also around having a conducive environment to be able to thrive will doing work where there is a two way communication of being able to get constructive feedback from the leader and psychological safety to give the leader feedback. The last strategy given was around the leadership style that will have the most impact with coaching leadership style and transformational being put forth as the best to go with in these times. Coaching talks to collaborative & feedback based leadership while transformational speaks to inspirational motivation with intellectual encouragement which are both highlighted in the connected leadership framework proposed by the researcher as the ideal framework going forward.

6.4 Limitations

The researcher used a case study approach that only collected information from one telecommunications company in Johannesburg, the results may differ from other telecommunications companies.

Due to the adopted hybrid model in the company currently all the participants indicated a preference to conduct the sessions via Microsoft teams which limited the researcher's ability to observe non-verbal behaviour.

The energy crisis in South Africa that has resulted in load shedding was also a challenge given that some interviews happened while respondents were load shedding thereby impacting the quality of the audios.

6.5 Recommendations

Organizational leaders must ensure that the strategy is shared and understood by all. The CEO and Chiefs of the specific area may cascade the main goals and vision, but each leader of a function must be able to go through this with their teams to understand what role that function plays in achieving the specific goal. This should be an interactive

session with the employees, where they can share their ideas on how to achieve these goals.

The organisation needs to relook at the top down model of communication and introduce a two-way communication approach that allows both employees and the leader to give each other feedback. At a practical level part of the year end process of doing performance reviews needs to include a leadership assessment where employees can give input on leaders in how they have led the team that financial year. This will encourage clear development plans for leaders in applying the leadership values and culture of the organisation.

Given the worldwide shift that organisations are having to do to adapt their management of employees, it is important that the organisation looks at a leadership charter speaking to the kind of leadership they would like to have in the organisation. The charter would need to be shared in leadership forums with a clear view of what values and behaviours leaders need to portray in the organisation. Disciplinary action needs to be also instituted against leaders that are not living by the values and behaviours stated in the charter.

In order to manage burnout, the company should also invest in a monitoring system that tracks the amount of time employees spend working on their laptops. Since the standard working hours in South Africa are currently forty (40) hours per week, the company can set the maximum amount of work that employees can do, for example, sixty (60) hours. A monthly report can be generated and distributed to leaders to ensure that they manage and hold discussions as needed. The system should include mechanisms to ensure accuracy and prevent data manipulation, such as showing people as working when they are simply logged in.

Furthermore, human resources needs to equip managers to understand mental wellness and how it impacts their teams. As a human resource function they serve to support however it is the duty of a manager to probe in the monthly one-on-ones if their teams are coping or facing any challenges that require the intervention from the company in the form of support from their wellness programme. The organisation needs to allocate at least two programmes per year to be done by all people leaders on wellness and keeping themselves abreast of what is happening as far as the topic is concerned. This will allow

for better support to employees and being able to recognise areas of intervention from the leader's perspective.

Finally, line managers must be able to have transparent and open conversations about growth and career advancement. This can be done as part of the performance review feedback process, where leaders discuss with employees what gaps need to be addressed, if they are considered talent, if they are being considered for succession, and what elements they need to improve on.

6.6 Conclusion

The study conducted does highlight a real need for organisations to relook at their leadership model and what leadership capabilities are going to be enablers in positively engaging employees. The results do indicate that there are clear areas of development that need to be looked but also that there have been some milestones to move this organisation in the right direction. The telecommunications industry is quite instrumental to South Africa at the moment in ensuring that they keep people and business connected as the world becomes a global village.

6.7 Recommendations for future academic research

There is a need for a similar study to be done focusing on more than just one company but across the full telecommunications industry spectrum. This will allow data to be compared in different companies and give richer insights. Such a study could include larger population and sample size. It would also be worthwhile for future researchers to conduct the same study in a different setting, context, location, and culture, for example, in a non-telecommunications space and ideally outside of South Africa, to confirm if leadership experience is consistent on a global scale and to test the emerging theory of connected leadership.

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