

Rethinking Engagement: How Managers Frame and Make Sense of Communication
Strategies, Practices, and Challenges

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Abstract

This study analyzes how some managers frame and make sense of engagement within organizational contexts. It aims to comprehend how their lived experiences of engagement shape their reflexive thoughts, perspectives, and strategies on a daily basis. To generate relevant data, this study used a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten managers in Ontario, Canada. It made use of a thematic analysis to develop patterns and better understand common perspectives. The results showed a variety of approaches to engagement with no unanimous way of framing it as well as some paradoxes when looking at how managers make sense of this concept. Some managers seem to put forward more tangible words such as *care*, *involvement*, and *success* instead of explicitly evoking engagement. More specifically, from a communication perspective, this study has found that framing and communicating engagement seems to be a complex challenge for managers. They seem to make up their own meaning of engagement, which can greatly vary among individuals.

Keywords: Engagement, Managers, Framing, Sensemaking, Thematic Analysis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Before the global coronavirus pandemic changed the world in 2020, during June 2019, Canada experienced its lowest unemployment rate since 1976. This not only benefited the economy itself, but many employees also gained more power to seek new job opportunities (Evans, 2019). In turn, this power pushed organizations to improve retention rates and ensure that employees remained satisfied. Existing research has supported this claim, and scholars have also found that employee engagement has a positive effect on retention (Book, Gatling, & Kim, 2019).

Accordingly, organizations and managers must better appreciate the concept of engagement to achieve higher retention rates and more engaged employees (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). This requires a more thorough understanding of managers' roles in organizations to better grasp their influence and authority when it comes to engaging employees. It is not sufficient enough to only recognize the importance of engagement for organizations; we argue that managers have to be more engaged and attuned themselves by fostering a communicative approach that connects the dots between the organization and employees.

According to Macey and Schneider (2008), engagement within an organizational context can be defined as “a desirable condition [that] has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy” (p. 4). This condition is necessary for the organization's long-term existence because it allows it to position itself globally and achieve performance excellence (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015). In addition, and as outlined in Chapter 2, engagement is theorized as processes that involve communication exchanges between all organizational actors involved. In other words, engagement is seen as part

of human communication (Johnston & Taylor, 2018), which is constructed through the shared meaning-making between stakeholders and their organizations (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

In this study, we focus on how some managers frame and make sense of engagement by highlighting their lived experiences of it and analyzing how they foster a communication-based approach. Scholars have argued that well-received internal communication by employees is crucial when increasing engagement levels; it is best received when it comes directly from a manager (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). In addition, managers play a critical role in fostering engagement because not using appropriate and explicit communications strategies could affect productivity, morale, and profitability (Xiong & King, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to gain more insight into how some managers frame and make sense of engagement by underscoring their reflexive thoughts, experiences, and realities. The following section will further explain the necessity of analyzing these managerial and communication issues.

Problem Statement

There is extensive literature on the issue of employee engagement; however, there seem to be only a few qualitative studies that focus on individuals' lived experiences (e.g., Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Reissner & Pagan, 2013). These scholars have argued that the lack of understanding this concept stems from a relative homogeneity in the methods used conducting research in this area, with quantitative studies contributing a significant majority. In addition, looking at mostly quantitative data prevents an in-depth and more subjective understanding of the employee engagement experience; only a few studies have taken a meaning-making approach from the employees' perspectives (Lemon, 2019). Several attempts have been made to include the managers' views in this complex matter (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013); yet, as seen in Chapter 2, the literature has not adequately looked at how managers frame and make sense of

engagement. In addition, only a few studies have examined the influence of communication strategies on individuals' lived experiences of engagement activities in an organization (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). For instance, some studies show that even though management has recognized the problem of disengagement, engagement is still at a low level in many organizations (Saks, 2019). This is a significant problem for organizations because it leads to lower productivity and higher turnover rates, and employees tend to also dislike going to work. As Gopal (2003) stated, "The root of employee disengagement is [often] poor management" (p. 3), showing that engagement should not be viewed as the problem of individuals, but as an organizational matter that managers need to address by communicating more effectively with their employees (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015). The problem of effectively communicating what engagement entails within an organizational context regularly arises in day-to-day work. Many organizations seem to require employees to be engaged (Burnett & Lisk, 2019), making it a prominent issue to explore.

Thesis Statement

This thesis analyzes the issue of engagement from a manager's perspective. It sheds light on various communication strategies and managerial approaches when it comes to implementing engagement with internal stakeholders, specifically employees. Furthermore, this research wishes to better understand the many ways managers experience this concept within organizations. Current literature does not fully incorporate lived experiences, perspectives, and views when it comes to understanding managers' thoughts. Therefore, more research seems necessary to include these reflexive aspects, allowing us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how managers both frame and make sense of the strategies and approaches put forward.

Significance of the Study

Increased productivity, additional motivation, and lower turnover rates are just some of the added values that highly engaged employees bring to an organization (Little & Little, 2006). Even though several studies have focused on the employee (Purcell, 2012), it appears that managers are also key drivers in an organization; their input seems essential when understanding engagement. Thus, it appears that organizations need a more thorough understanding of how engagement can be looked at by fully taking into account the manager's standpoint (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). Practically speaking, we argue that managers from various organizations will be able to use the results of this study in numerous ways: by gaining a deeper understanding of the crucial position of a manager toward engagement; by implementing more explicit communication strategies in their organizations; and by better connecting the individual employee to the organization's mission and values.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters that will provide a thorough understanding of engagement by exploring the issue's context, background, theoretical framework, methodological approaches, analysis, discussion, and conclusion. Following this introductory chapter, a review situates the issue of engagement in the existing literature. This chapter also introduces the chosen conceptual framework, which helps to better understand the interview data. Chapter 3 serves as a description of what methodological approaches have been utilized to generate the data. These include an explanation of all methods, such as the use of qualitative research with semi-structured interviews and the use of a thematic analysis. In addition, it also includes the strengths and limitations of the chosen methods. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth analysis of the interview data. It helps (1) to better understand what managers expressed during

the interview process and (2) to highlight how they framed and made sense of engagement by contextualizing their responses. Chapter 5 serves as a discussion of the data and helps to further consider the given responses in a broader context. Lastly, this thesis ends with a conclusion that highlights the main findings discussed in the previous chapters as well as a closing statement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review provides a template to examine the studies, issues, and approaches addressing engagement through a managerial lens. It builds on three relevant streams of literature that have been identified in academic resources: communication management, human resources management, and psychology. All three streams show different perspectives to gain insight into how engagement is viewed and researched within the respective discipline. While this issue has indeed been explored in the communication management literature (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013), there is little investigation about communication approaches that lead to a better understanding of the relationship between the broader organizational context, the manager, and employees' levels of engagement (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

Specifically, the three streams have found that management and internal communication play a significant role in fostering engagement, which can both lead to workplace inefficiency if not used adequately (Karanges et al., 2015). These studies have indeed analyzed what managerial strategies employees prefer, how managers and organizations alike view engagement as a crucial part of their business outcomes, and what antecedents need to exist. A majority of studies have used a quantitative approach analyzing individual perspectives, perceptions, and ways to define engagement (e.g., Koyuncu, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2005; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010; Wiley & Lake, 2014); while only a few studies have used a qualitative approach to examine the importance of internal communication approaches, managers, and employee engagement (e.g., Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Lemon, 2019; Mishra et al., 2014). The next paragraphs will draw on these academic texts in communication, human resources, and psychology literatures divided into five major sections: the concept of engagement, practical approaches, the need for engaged

workers, job and organizational engagement, and the communication of engagement as a management issue.

Engagement as an Emerging Concept

William Kahn (1990) is recognized as one of the most prominent researchers to specifically develop a scholarly definition of the term 'engagement.' He defined it as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). In his qualitative study on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement in an organizational setting, Kahn concluded that three conditions were associated with being either engaged or disengaged: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He found that if employees felt that a particular situation was meaningful to them and offered safety, as well as them being more psychologically available, it resulted in higher engagement levels.

Other scholars following Kahn attempted to develop various definitions; however, there does not seem to be a "universal" approach that researchers and organizational managers seem to agree on (Burnett & Lisk, 2019; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). The concept has gone through multiple stages of conceptualization with a major focus on the psychological aspects of analyzing behavioral patterns in employees. Moving on from Kahn's definition, the term gained traction in 2001, when Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter assumed that engagement was characterized by involvement, energy, and efficacy; they also described the concept as the direct opposite of burnout, a popular term used in psychological literature. While some scholars have focused on the employees' active behaviors, others have included performance, the motivation to care for their organization, or simply exceeding someone's expectations in their approaches. According to Saks (2006), "Engagement has to do with how individuals employ themselves in

the performance of their job” (p. 602). While this psychological perspective focuses on employees in an organizational setting, Shuck and Wollard (2010) took a different approach and defined it as a process of positively motivating employees, leading to fulfilling organizational outcomes. They not only put the focus on the people who motivate others, but, in comparison to Saks, they also included organizational outcomes instead of job performance. In contrast, Little and Little (2006) took this a step further and stated that the willingness to reach a long term sustainable competitive advantage is a characteristic of an engaged employee. This shows that employees are involved in the tactical and strategical practices that the organization cares about. Furthermore, some researchers agree that high levels of engaged employees provide significant organizational benefits; ‘they go the extra mile’ by doing more than what is expected of them (Taneja et al., 2015).

Common to these psychological perspectives is the significance of job resources and demands instead of only focusing on personal characteristics. Still, the conflation with well-established constructs, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and involvement, means that it remains an ambiguous and contentious concept (Burnett & Lisk, 2019).

Finding one commonly accepted definition has shown to be problematic among many researchers. This academic challenge has directly translated into the organizational setting where organizations and managers aim to analyze engagement outcomes (Kang & Sung, 2017). To find a common measurement approach, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was developed (Schaufeli, González-Romá, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002), a survey widely used in quantitative research to measure and compare engagement. In their study, Schaufeli et al. defined it as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, it refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-

cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior” (p. 74). However, while the UWES is one of the most popular measures, some scholars have argued that it does not adequately consider the differences between burnout and low engagement (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016). This criticism has raised concerns over the ability to utilize a quantitative measurement, which adds to the issue of not being able to commonly agree on a universal definition (Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2014). One can assume that this quantitative tool might also cause limitations in future studies based on the challenge to clearly define/measure it.

For this study, Macey and Schneider's (2008) comprehension of engagement in an organizational setting will be mobilized to better understand related issues from a manager's perspective and to take into account both the academic and practical perspectives. This view describes engagement as “a desirable condition [that] has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy” (p. 4). While this is a rather broad approach to defining and understanding engagement in the workplace, it does incorporate previously mentioned approaches by other scholars, thus making it an appropriate point of reference for our research. It is described as a sum of various terminologies that help to better understand this concept.

Overall, existing literature has shown that most sources focus on behavioral patterns from an employee's standpoint, thus taking a rather psychological perspective. This seems to be a popular and consistent approach over time. However, it appears as if the way to a well-defined engaged workforce is challenging. The question of whether engagement is a trait, a behavior, a communication apparatus, or a state of being remains open. Lemon and Palenchar (2018) added that engagement is an ideograph or simply an unclear word. Still, many have acknowledged the

importance of managers to actively engage the workforce. Yet the differences in these definitions remain noticeable as the inability to agree has also become manifested in the organizational setting where managers do not seem to mobilize a universal definition, which directly translates to communicating this issue to employees. For this reason, the next section will provide an overview of more practical approaches to engagement by focusing on how engagement is framed in organizational settings. This will help to better grasp the ways managers use this terminology in their everyday work experiences.

Practical Approaches to Framing Engagement in Organizational Settings

Even though the terminology of engagement might sound compelling for managers to use, the meaning and interpretation of this concept remain wholly unclear (Burnett & Lisk, 2019). In the past, it was often confused and interchangeably used with the term *productivity* (Schwartz, 2015): Engaged employees usually worked longer hours and were therefore considered more productive. However, this interpretation has changed as research has begun to point out that someone can be productive but still report low engagement levels. Similarly, someone can be very engaged but can have very low productivity levels (Fuller & Shikaloff, 2017).

In organizations, the inability to clearly frame engagement becomes problematic. The terminology means different things to different organizations (Taneja et al., 2015). Some associate it with being satisfied on the job, being committed on the job, or being emotionally connected to the job or the organization. It appears that many scholars and practitioners alike have yet to find a unanimous framing approach (Johnston & Taylor, 2018). Consequently, it seems that organizations and managers find it challenging to accurately measure and define their own engagement outcomes; they use engagement, commitment, and satisfaction

interchangeably; yet, there is a distinct difference between all of them (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004).

In their comprehensive analysis of the meaning of employee engagement, Macey and Schneider (2008) provided an extensive overview of the various kinds of literature of the terminology. According to them, many managers tend to avoid using the term at all, and instead, prefer to focus on its positive consequences. They argued that managers still initiate surveys to determine how engaged their workforce is and to get actionable implications from them; however, if people do not know what they are precisely measuring, the action implications will certainly be vague, unclear, and not achievable. These findings are similar to those of other scholars who tried to find an appropriate framing approach (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Saks, 2006). In contrast to the mostly quantitative studies, Lemon (2019) conducted 21 interviews and focus groups with 56 individuals to examine practical framing approaches of employees. She found that the majority of participants saw engagement as an interaction between employees as well as the manager's ability to listen and communicate with employees. This shows that manager communication and direct contact with employees is one possible way to better understand engagement, according to Lemon. The following two sub-sections will further portray how the word *engagement* has been used in comparison to satisfaction and commitment, two of the most common alternatives.

Engagement and satisfaction. When looking at engagement as satisfaction, Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) used the terminology of “satisfaction-engagement” in their study about employee engagement, satisfaction, and business outcomes. They determined that engagement can be seen as “the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (p. 269). It seems as if this approach does not clearly distinguish between

satisfaction and engagement since they were used as one terminology several times throughout the article. For instance, they stated, “Through longitudinal designs, the lag between employee satisfaction-engagement changes and business-unit outcome changes can be more fully understood” (p. 276). This shows that studying satisfaction-engagement as a whole seems to be inconsistent with other study results.

In their study about work engagement among women managers and professionals in a Turkish bank, Koyuncu et al. (2005) measured engagement as a direct assessment of satisfaction in regards to the manager, organization, job, and work environment. Their study collected responses from 286 female managers and looked at the connection between engagement and satisfaction. The study confirmed the constructive relation between these two, but it did not use it as an interchangeable terminology as Harter et al. (2002) did, thus allowing a separate analysis of the two concepts. In support of this, Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) found that engagement can be framed as “the energy, effort, and initiative employees bring to their jobs” (p. 80), which is different from satisfaction, focusing on the “the extent to which they feel that the company meets their expectations at work and satisfies its implicit and explicit contracts with them” (p. 80). Their study about employee motivation surveyed 385 employees of a financial organization and an IT firm. In short, an employee can feel satisfied with their job, yet he or she can still show no signs of engagement or performance that would be above typical expectations, thus allowing a separate analysis and practical use of the two terms.

These sources show that while the majority of literature seems to agree that engagement and satisfaction are closely related, they should be treated as separate concepts. However, it also appears that satisfaction is used to define engagement, making this difference hard to utilize in

the practical work environment. Not only does there seem to be a close connection between engagement and satisfaction, engagement and commitment also seem closely related.

Engagement and commitment. When looking at engagement as commitment, Robinson et al. (2004) stated in their study on the various drivers of employee engagement, “Engagement contains many of the elements of both commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), but is by no means a perfect match with either. In addition, neither commitment nor OCB reflects sufficiently two aspects of engagement – its two-way nature, and the extent to which engaged employees are expected to have an element of business awareness” (p. 8). In other words, commitment can be seen as a part of engagement, yet it does not represent the full scope of engaged behavior. Saks (2006) mostly agreed with this and stated that organizational commitment differs from engagement because it focuses on a person’s attitude and attachment towards their organization. Engagement, on the other hand, is supposedly not an attitude; it “is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles” (p. 602). However, while scholars seem to clarify the differences between commitment and engagement, several studies exist that discuss commitment as a concept but do not make a distinct separation (Cafferkey, Harney, Dundon, & Edgar, 2017; Xerri & Brunetto, 2013). For instance, Ocen, Francis, & Angundaru (2017) stated that committed employees “perform well and engage in behaviours helpful to the organization” (p. 5). This approach closely uses engagement to define commitment; however, it seems that engagement is distinctly positioned from organizational commitment since the focus tends to be on the work rather than on the organization. Thus, disagreement still persists in regards to clear differences between these two. The problem, it appears, lies in the linguistic use of describing behavior that might not be clearly identified as commitment or engagement, which directly translates from the academic literature

to the practical use of framing these approaches and using them in the workplace.

The various approaches of looking at engagement by using the language of satisfaction or commitment show that academics, managers, and organizations alike are uncertain of how they should frame and communicate this complex concept in an organizational context. Common goals are that it is a desirable condition, that it has an organizational purpose, and that some form of involvement is included. Yet it still seems to be unclear how exactly these behavioral components are visible in the organizational work environment. While the existing academic literature seems to agree that there are some slight overlaps between all these terms, several sources do not seem to find distinct differences, which could lead to issues in the organizational context (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Nimon, Shuck, & Zigarmi, 2016). That is why we need to investigate this issue further and instead of focusing on quantitative results, examine the lived experiences of organizational participants. In addition, academia and organizations alike commonly use the language of engagement and agree that employees need to be engaged to perform at higher levels, which will be further discussed in the following section.

The Need for Engaged Workers

The importance of said-to-be engaged employees has been widely discussed among scholars and practitioners alike (Bailey et al., 2017; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013) although there does not seem to be one universal definition or approach for this. For instance, in their study about the culture of engagement, Taneja et al. (2015) stated, “Engaged employees work to improve the overall performance of the organization and uphold its values” (p. 46). They further claimed that increased engagement was necessary for the lasting existence of the organization because it allowed them to position themselves globally and achieve performance excellence. Employees are viewed as the resources that provide a competitive advantage to any organization;

thus, it should be in the organization's interest to foster engagement, both emotionally and intellectually (MacLeod & Clarke, 2011).

Some studies have taken a more in-depth approach and looked at achieving a competitive advantage through engagement. For instance, it seems that organizations should focus on their business strategies, which can increase motivational levels for overall organizational success (Taneja et al., 2015). In their 2008 study of analyzing work engagement, Bakker and Demerouti supported this statement. By reviewing qualitative and quantitative studies on work engagement, they found that companies have started to recognize the importance of engaged employees as an antecedent for direct business outcomes, such as productivity, innovation, and performance. However, while the reason many organizations exist is to make a profit, Lane and Kent (2018) argued that stakeholders, similar to employees, are simply viewed as an entity to be managed, ensuring that an organization can reach its goals. In other words, this interpretation is rather linear, and it does not include shared experiences, perspectives, or lived realities of employees, making it a complex concept of experiencing organizational life.

While it might seem obvious that organizations would want to have engaged employees, some sources explicitly state that this is not necessary or that engagement is not a term that should be used in organizations contrary to popular belief (Sackett, 2019; Sharp, 2019). For instance, Myler (2015) claimed that enough money has been spent on trying to engage the workforce, yet with little success as levels seem still to be low. Similar to this, Tobak (2012) claimed that employee engagement was not important at all. Having worked as a former senior executive in the technology industry, Tobak shared in this more practice-oriented article that it has become a popular term in the organizational context and that management simply wants to be part of this phenomenon. He further criticized that managers and organizations do not

measure the right factors, do not make the right changes, and do not follow up on ideas, which leads to not achieving high engagement outcomes. However, the organization would still appear to do something beneficial for their employees when soliciting feedback via engagement surveys.

The dark side of engagement. While most studies have looked at the benefits of having an engaged workforce, a dark side of engagement has also emerged from studies that take a rather negative approach of looking at engagement. For instance, in their 2019 study on positive and negative outcomes of job engagement, Wang, Law, Zhang, Na Li, and Liang found that engagement is positively related to knowledge hiding, territorial behavior, and pro-job unethical behavior. They conducted several surveys where participants were asked to respond to organizational behavior questions. In addition, their supervisors also rated the employees' behaviors. Wang et al. concluded that managers need to be more aware of potential negative outcomes of engagement and reduce those negative behaviors. In support of this, Halbesleben, Harvey, and Bolino (2009) took a critical standpoint and determined that engagement is associated with higher work interference with someone's family. Employees feel as if they have to get involved in extra-role work behavior in order to look engaged. Other scholars (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzi, 2014; Rothbart, 2001) have found similar results and argued that the engagement conversation creates unrealistic expectations for employees leading to significant problems when it comes to work-life balance. Therefore, engagement does not seem to be an issue that positively affects the employees and the organizations; the dark side of engagement needs to be considered when examining this issue further.

Overall, management literature has shown that most academic sources favor the importance of an engaged workforce. These studies have indicated that it could increase business

outcomes and overall productivity, thus arguing a need for engaged workers. However, it seems as if some practitioners do not see the value and investment to reach this goal and also point out the negative effects of engaged behavior, both for the employee and the organization. This stands in contrast to the multitude of surveys that have been conducted over the years, which have shown that engaged employees are a necessary part of every successful business. Engagement surveys have become a norm for many organizations to monitor processes and outcomes, respectively. The following section builds on this by looking at how the various kinds of literature have distinguished between job and organizational engagement.

Job and Organizational Engagement

While the more than 60 existing definitions (Sharp, 2019) of engagement have focused on various behaviors and traits, the majority have looked at rather general ways of describing this concept in an organization. However, a few sources (Purcell, 2012; Saks, 2006) have begun to specifically look at how someone shows engagement regarding their job in contrast to how someone shows this within their role as a member of the organization.

Job engagement. Job engagement mainly focuses on the individual and his/her job task. As Saks (2006) determined, "Job engagement is associated with a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work" (p. 603, as stated in Maslach et al., 2001). The concept puts forward how an employee engages in connection with the job by analyzing how the position creates a meaningful work experience for the employee (Rich et al., 2010). In their quantitative study with 245 firefighters and their supervisors, Rich et al. (2010) found that increased job engagement led to higher productivity. In support of this, Roberts and Davenport

(2002) concluded that employees who were more engaged in their jobs, personally identified more with the work and were also motivated by the work itself.

Organizational engagement. Organizational engagement refers to an employee's attachment to their organization. "It reflects the extent to which an individual is psychologically present in a particular organizational role" (Saks, 2006, p. 604). In his study of limits and possibilities of engagement, Saks received survey responses from 102 employees who worked in various organizations. To determine differences between organizational and job engagement, participants had to answer questions specifically related to their job or questions that focused more on their organizational involvement. In other words, employees indicated how they felt about job-related issues versus how they saw themselves as a member of the organization, which goes beyond looking at job-specific aspects. Saks found that there was a meaningful difference between job and organizational engagement. This was the first study to determine that job and organizational engagement were related but still distinct from one another. Participants experienced significantly higher job than organizational engagement scores. In addition, Purcell (2012) stated that organizational engagement recognizes the firm as "a social entity, a source of identification beyond the job" (p. 7). He concluded that if an organization provides high-perceived organizational support to its employees through management, their organizational engagement outcome would also be higher. Therefore, it seems that if the employee feels that their manager is attentive and interested in the individual, outcomes are positively reflected. However, Purcell (2012) also stated that he found the notion of organizational commitment more helpful than engagement since it has been studied more in comparison to organizational engagement, which only a few researchers have focused on.

While only limited studies distinguish between job and organizational engagement, it is

necessary to look at this concept as two distinctive aspects because they can impact an employee's overall engagement level in various ways. If an employee feels engaged with his or her job, a lack of organizational engagement could significantly reduce how someone sees his or her role as a member of the organization, thus creating a lower overall engagement outcome. In addition, as stated by Purcell (2012), organizational engagement goes beyond job engagement, and the organization as an entity plays a significant role. However, some of the existing literature does not specifically state (1) what kind of engagement they refer to, and (2) they use these terminologies interchangeably. For instance, in a report published by Formato (2011), the title states, "Organizational Engagement Review." Based on Saks, Purcell, and others, this would focus on the engagement that employees show within an organizational area and not within their jobs. While the report also speaks about an Organizational Engagement Index, it mostly uses the general language of engagement (instead of organizational engagement), but the report also describes it as organizational engagement. For instance, it states, "[t]he concept of organizational engagement is complex and diverse in its definition. For some, it may mean the extent to which individuals are satisfied in their position, while for others, it may reflect an individual's retention outlook" (Formato, 2011, p. 1). In other words, Formato used a job-related engagement example to define organizational engagement. This exemplifies that the terminology of organizational engagement is not widely used in the academic literature. One could argue that more in-depth studies should be conducted in this field. Similarly, instead of following the existing literature with another quantitative study, Reissner and Pagan (2013) took an in-depth approach and looked at how management communication activities can impact engagement outcomes. Their qualitative approach put a focus on the communication of the manager, an issue that will be further discussed in the next section.

The Communication of Engagement as a Management Issue

Beck and Harter (2015) stated that while many people become managers, not everyone should be one, arguing that the talent to be a manager is scarce but needed as building blocks of high performance. They stated that knowledge and skills develop over time; however, people need to possess the right innate talents to become managers. Therefore, these authors suggested that talent and characteristics are needed to succeed as a manager (and engage employees), yet only a few individuals naturally possess these. Gallup also estimated that the cost of poor management, leading to decreased productivity and disengaged employees, is between US\$960 billion and US\$1.2 trillion per year (Comaford, 2018). The following two sub-sections will further investigate how internal communication and management engagement can influence engagement, thus allowing a better understanding of how communication is crucial when fostering engagement.

Internal communication. According to Frank and Brownell (1989), internal communication can be defined as transactions that occur between groups and individuals at various levels and in different areas of specialization. Several communication scholars have addressed the relationship between engagement and internal communication, suggesting that optimal engagement is a consequence of good internal communication (e.g., Karanges et al., 2015). Taking a managerial approach to analyze internal communication is not a recent trend in the literature. In 1992, Grunig stated that organizations should approach employee relations the same way they foster relationships with other stakeholders. "Excellent programs of employee communications are based on the concepts of strategic management, an integrated communication function, and the managerial role, and the two-way symmetrical model of public relations" (p. 536). In 2001, Grunig further argued that positive employee communication could

lead to quality employee relationships in addition to supportive employee behaviors toward the organization.

Research has found that managers should effectively use internal communication approaches to increase employee engagement, thus establishing a positive relationship between internal communication and engagement (Karanges et al., 2015; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). For instance, Welch and Jackson (2007) found that employees felt more engaged if the manager helped them understand the goals of an organization. Similarly, internal communication, which encourages employees to share suggestions and thoughts, can lead to a higher level of engagement when inspired by a direct supervisor, according to Karanges et al. (2015). Foster (2017) stated that the role of a manager is likely to be the most significant one when it comes to performance (and engagement) in an organizational setting. In her analysis of engagement and productivity, she argued that communication between a manager and employees is necessary to avoid stress, reduced productivity, and disengagement. Relatedly, in their case study about reframing leadership assessment and development, Wiley and Lake (2014) gathered opinion data of 47,236 employees. They found that what employees most wanted from their managers was “to be inspired, respected, and rewarded” (p. 222). Mishra et al. (2014) added to this by stating that management’s lack of attention to internal communication with employees results from managers oftentimes focusing on external publics to achieve a competitive advantage instead of focusing on employees as one of their key publics. It seems as if organizations in which management has openly communicated and fostered engagement scored higher in inspiring, respecting, and rewarding employees while also achieving higher engagement levels. While internal communication seems to be a crucial factor in fostering engagement, the various streams

of literature have also identified that it is particularly significant for a manager to be engaged to replicate this behavior for employees, which will be further discussed in the following section.

Management engagement. Joubert and Roodt (2015) defined management engagement as a “positive, fulfilling work-related shared state characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption which emerges from the interaction and shared experiences of different managers and their interactions on ‘management level’” (p. 2). They also argued that management engagement has not been studied adequately in the existing literature. In their study about different levels of engagement, they conducted a quantitative study with 425 managers and concluded that individual, team, and management engagement levels existed, which ultimately could affect the overall engagement climate in an organization.

While it seems clear that managers can have a significant impact on employees' engagement outcomes, it also appears that some managers seem dissatisfied in their organization, which can then influence their own engagement strategies. Considering managers as the drivers of change in an organization, Nielsen and Rial Gonzales (2015) did not focus on the challenges managers face, but instead, on the role of engaged managers. In their publication about enhancing management engagement, they reviewed existing literature and concluded that managers needed to be engaged themselves in order to engage employees. They could show this by welcoming suggestions, acting as leaders, and being role models for others. Smythe (2008) previously found similar results. He stated that managers and leaders needed the “appetite” and “ability” (p. 20) to engage employees in everyday decision-making, meaning that they should share their power with employees. In contrast to these quantitative studies, Reissner and Pagan (2013) conducted a qualitative study on generating engagement in a public-private partnership with 25 individual interviews and three group interviews. They disagreed with previous studies

and stated that this concept is by no means a straightforward process, meaning that organizations can offer opportunities for employees, but they cannot force them to engage. Second, the study found that employees appreciated honest and continuous communication, which allowed a better understanding of the organization.

While the majority of research has focused on the importance of the manager as a key driver to increase engagement among employees (and most of the research is conducted through a quantitative approach), this is a rather broad approach. It is necessary to look at the manager to better understand their views, realities, and perspectives to create a better organizational framework that fosters engagement.

Managers' Lived Experiences

This thesis aims to analyze managers' lived experiences about engagement to help close some of the existing gaps in the literature. Similar qualitative research on this topic has examined the importance of internal communication approaches, managers, and employee engagement (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). While there seems to be only a limited number of scholars who have taken a qualitative approach looking at managers' lived experiences (e.g., Antonacopoulou & Psychogios, 2015; Barnard & Simbhoo, 2014), existing studies have shown that this approach seems suitable to obtain in-depth and detailed responses to better understand perspectives and opinions. For instance, Donohue (2020) found that looking at lived experiences allowed a phenomenological understanding of managers' experiences focusing on managers' narratives and strategies used in the workplace. Similar to this, Martin, Lord, and Warren-Smith (2018) used the lived experiences approach to better understand six women's perspectives on how gender is expressed in the context of organizational learning.

When looking at engagement and lived experiences, one of the limited studies that have used a qualitative approach to analyze managers' experiences, is Mishra et al.'s 2014 study. They conducted interviews with six communication professionals and found that all six mentioned engagement as one of their top priorities. The managers also believed that it was important for the organization; however, they faced many challenges in the organizational setting when trying to foster engagement. Similarly, in their qualitative study with 32 participants from various organizations in the United States about the nature of engagement, Lemon and Palenchar (2018) examined employees' lived experiences and analyzed each narrative to better comprehend the participants' experiences. Some of their findings included that "(1) employee engagement experiences occur from non-work-related experiences at work, (2) employee engagement is freedom in the workplace, (3) employee engagement is going above and beyond roles and responsibilities, and (4) connections build employee engagement experiences" (p. 147). In other words, the results show that these dimensions of engagement can be experienced differently by the participants. They further defined these experiences as 'zones of engagement' and argued that more empirical qualitative studies are needed to better understand employees' lived experiences.

Overall, it appears as if the academic literature seems to agree that managers' communication approaches are pivotal when it comes to employee engagement. It seems to be stronger when communication is continuous and constructive (Mishra et al., 2014). Employees appear to depend on the organization, but more specifically, on the manager and their communication approaches. Many sources pointed out that managers have a significant effect on engagement outcomes, which then also impacts the organization. While it seems clear to appreciate the importance of the manager, it is also crucial to examine the manager's perspective

more and gain insight into how they experience being the intermediate between the employee and the organization. It seems as if some managers seem to receive unclear communication from their organizations, which can then impact their own strategies of fostering engagement (Mishra et al., 2014).

The existing literature allows us to have an understanding of qualitative studies that have examined perspectives from employees in an organizational setting. However, these scholars also expressed that more research needed to be done to gain a better understanding of thoughts and lived experiences. Therefore, this study will build on this premise by using managers as the central research object to examine how they understand the world around them while producing meaning and making sense of what is happening to them; thus, adding to the existing literature by examining more in-depth perspectives and understandings of this complex concept. The following section will provide more information on how both sensemaking and framing will be used as the conceptual framework to better guide the generated data.

Conceptual Framework

This study will mobilize framing and sensemaking as the conceptual framework. This will help to better understand individual perspectives when it comes to managers' lived experiences regarding engagement. This approach will allow us to look at (1) how managers frame their understanding of engagement in the workplace and (2) how managers make sense of strategies, behaviors, and relationships that exist within the organizational setting.

Framing. Goffman (1974) was one of the first scholars to develop the wide-ranging concept of framing. He saw it as a way to help people organize what they see in their everyday life. Frames are the "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21), meaning that they help transform meaningless events into something meaningful.

In their 1996 book, *The Art of Framing*, Fairhurst and Sarr defined framing based on Pondy (1978), Weick (1979), and Entman's (1993) approach as "the ability to shape the meaning of a subject, to judge its character and significance. When we share our frames with others (i.e., the process of framing), we manage meaning because we assert that our interpretations should be taken as real over other possible interpretations" (p. 3). Framing relies on leaders' thoughts, and it depends on the language they choose to achieve communication goals. In the daily work environment, employees can adapt leaders' intended meanings (Bean & Hamilton, 2006), thus closely following their leadership in the organization. Based on Bateson (1954), no communication, verbal or nonverbal, can be understood without framing. Entman (1993) added to that by stating, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In other words, making a selective choice of someone's reality and making this a more prominent issue during communication. While framing seems to be an appropriate approach to analyze how managers view engagement, it is also necessary to include how they make sense of their responses during the interview process; a related concept that will be discussed in the following section.

Sensemaking. Sensemaking is defined as a constant process of reflection, action, and acquisition (Kolko, 2010). It is an "action-oriented cycle that people continually and fairly automatically go through in order to integrate experiences into their understanding of the world around them" (p. 15). For managers, sensemaking is a critical organizational activity (Weick, 1995). For them, these sensemaking activities are key tasks that significantly impact organizational strategic change and decisions (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). As Weick (1993) argued,

“The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs” (p. 635). In other words, sensemaking provides “clear questions and answers” that lead to decision making (p. 636).

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking consists of seven properties: identity construction, enactive of sensible environments, plausibility, social, ongoing, retroactive, and cues. He summarized them as “[o]nce people begin to act (enactment), they generate tangible outcomes (cues) in some context (social), and this helps them discover (retrospect) what is occurring (ongoing), what needs to be explained (plausibility), and what should be done next (identity enhancement)” (Weick, 1995, p. 55). Thus, sensemaking seems to be happening all the time, but it is not always easy for people to notice.

Communication is a central aspect of sensemaking and organizing. “The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 58). This shows the close connection of sensemaking, language, and communication.

When looking specifically at managers, by sharing their stories and narratives of their work environment, managers can provide a deeper knowledge of the immediate context, but they can also share how and what they do in practice by providing a rich set of narratives supporting their sensemaking competence (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

This thesis will make use of framing and sensemaking as the conceptional framework. This will allow us to gain insight into managers' thoughts and perspectives and how they experience the concept of engagement in their daily work environment. It enables us to look at their narratives, organizational positions, and communication to understand how they frame and

make sense of their experiences. As Marzano, Fuller, and Quine (2016) stated, “Frames involve values and beliefs and allow people to make sense of, and interpret, events, experiences or issues” (p. 238).

Mobilizing both sensemaking and framing allows us to look at both concepts together since some aspects of framing involve sensemaking. For instance, Gamson (1989) stated that one needs framing as the central and organizing idea for making sense of relevant events. In 1992, Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson found that framing helps make the world make sense. This conceptual framework assumes that the world does not exist in raw form; instead, we can construct it using “prefabricated vocabularies.” Therefore, sensemaking and framing will ultimately help us to analyze in-depth responses to better understand managers’ lived experiences within an organizational context.

Research Questions

As previously stated, using framing and sensemaking as the conceptual framework will add to the mostly quantitative scholarly work by taking a more specific lens of analyzing this issue. Consequently, the following research questions have been developed to guide this study and allow a precise and detailed approach of looking at how managers experience engagement:

RQ1: Which frames are brought forth by managers when addressing communication strategies, practices, and challenges?

RQ2: How do managers make sense of the notion of engagement?

Conclusion

The literature shows that studies have examined several framing approaches, the need for engaged workers, the role of the manager, the meaningful difference between job and organizational engagement, and the importance of communication. Based on the existing studies,

there seems to be a lack of qualitative research that focuses on individuals' lived experiences (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Reissner & Pagan, 2013). Therefore, there seems to be a gap in studies that could look more thoroughly at engagement through a manager's perspective and how communication plays a constitutive role in an organization. It seems as if the existing literature has yet to put a focus on lived experiences of managers and how they frame and make sense. This research extends the understanding of the complexity and dynamics surrounding this important concept.

Our study will thus investigate how communication is crucial in managing such an issue as engagement, but also how it represents a challenge for both managers and organizations.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative study to analyze managers' perspectives and understandings regarding engagement practices in the workplace. The chosen approach allows for a deeper understanding of their experiences working with and managing employees. It also provides new insights into how managers' narratives show perceived engagement and how they frame and make sense of it.

This chapter's components include detailed descriptions of the research design and methodology (overview of the study design, methodology selected, sampling and participants, data collection, approaches to data analysis, and strengths and limitations).

Overview of Study Design

To better understand the many ways managers frame and make sense of engagement practices within an organizational setting, I collected data by conducting qualitative research. In a communication context, qualitative research is convenient when "seeking knowledge about the fundamental characteristics of a phenomenon being studied before theorizing about it. This knowledge often surfaces through close contact with subjects of a study, allowing the researcher to understand their points of view about and experiences with the phenomenon" (Tucker, Powell, & Dale Meyer, 1995, p. 385). In other words, using qualitative research allowed me to talk to several individuals and to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and realities.

Specifically, I conducted several semi-structured interviews, which will be explained in this chapter. To further support this, I mobilized a thematic analysis to organize the data, a process that helped to group responses and to better analyze the various narratives from managers.

Methodology Selected

Similar to what Tucker et al. (1995) stated, Stake (2010) determined that a qualitative method can be used when trying to explain and analyze a phenomenon by looking at the experience of a person in certain situations. Because the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of managers in an organizational setting, a qualitative research approach appeared to be the most appropriate choice. Qualitative researchers aim to understand people's own frames of reference and experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014). This approach allows conducting in-depth analyses of phenomena by highlighting the many ways by which individuals act in a particular setting. Therefore, qualitative research generates data that can be utilized to analyze individual's lived experiences and perspectives from a managerial point of view. More specifically, and to gain detailed responses and shared lived experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Overall, ten managers agreed to take part in the interview process, which will further be discussed in the following section.

Data Collection

This study used a semi-structured interview method. These types of interviews are well suited to analyze attitudes, beliefs, values, and motives (Richardson, Dohrenwend, & Klein, 1965; Smith, 1976). One of the several advantages includes enabling reciprocity between the participant and the interviewer (Galletta, 2012), which ultimately allows to improvise and ask follow-up questions based on given responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This also gives space for participants' individual verbal expressions. While pre-developed questions were used to guide the interview, various follow-up questions were asked to better understand a manager's narrative.

The majority of questions were open-ended and focused on the managers' lived experiences and perspectives on engagement in an organizational environment. All interviews

happened in a place that seemed comfortable to the managers – mostly in their own office space or a conference room where no one else would disturb the meeting. These face-to-face interviews allowed synchronous communication in time and place (Opdenakker, 2006). To understand how participants expressed and formulated their narratives, most of the interview questions were structured in a way that welcomed narratives of lived experiences, opinions, and specific situations that managers could recall.

The interviews were held in-person between January and March 2020, and each of the conversations was recorded electronically using my personal iPhone. Each participant took part in one interview, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes on average.

Sampling and Study Participants

In June 2019, I started reaching out to possible interviewees in Ontario by email communication. The email contained general information about the study, its purpose, requirements, and time constraints. Using various online business directories (Ontario.ca; occ.ca; Canada.ca; forbes.com), I found managers who agreed to participate. In addition, in December 2019, I made a post in a social media business group asking for participants, which helped to gain more responses from interested managers in the Ottawa area. By choosing to recruit participants from various organizations, this study uses a nonprobability sampling design where purposive sampling was used. This kind of method is based on “the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information” (Etikan, 2016, p. 2). Thus, this sampling method allowed me to recruit participants who fulfilled the criteria for this research.

After obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa in December 2019, I began scheduling interviews for the following three months. Each participant received a consent form prior to their interview, which had to be read and signed by the interviewee.

This study's primary participants were ten managers who worked for the private or public sectors in Ontario, Canada. Of these participants, five worked for the public sector while the other five worked in the private sector (see Appendix A for more detailed information regarding the participants). All participants were required to have been working full-time in a managerial position at their respective organization and to have been actively (face-to-face) involved with supervising employees in order to be able to speak about perceived engagement. Of the participants, half worked within the same public organization, but within different departments, while the other half worked for a variety of private businesses in Ontario. The sizes of these organizations varied; however, while an equal size would have been optimal, all participants were able to speak about how they foster engagement without making any connections to the actual size of their organizations, thus, putting the focus on the team they worked in. It was also necessary that they spoke English since all interviews were conducted in that language; however, it did not have to be their native language. Eight women and two men agreed to participate in the research process.

For this study, I argue that interviewing ten managers in Ontario has allowed for various perspectives on engagement practices within an organizational context. All ten managers shared various approaches on how they framed and made sense of engagement, and while future research could be conducted with a higher number of participants, this study can provide interesting narratives of lived experiences and unique perspectives. This allowed for the creation

of meaningful themes and analyses of the content they shared in their interviews, which will be discussed in the following section.

Approaches to Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

To analyze the data, I chose to utilize a thematic analysis to understand common themes and issues among managers' narratives. A thematic analysis is defined as a method to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows theoretical freedom in which the researcher can use a rather flexible approach to provide a detailed and complex analysis of data. Generally, this approach aims to link similar codes to themes to provide a deeper description of meaning in a reasonable way (Riessman, 2007). This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This procedure allows for an in-depth analysis of the data by closely examining themes that have emerged from coding the content.

After conducting each interview, I transcribed each one to better analyze the given responses. For the first interview, I listened to the recording several times and transcribed the content. However, after doing this, based on time constraints, I decided to use an online software (trint.com) to do a preliminary transcription of the interviews. While this was helpful in getting a broad understanding of the content, several parts were misunderstood by the software, which led me to listen to the recordings multiple times to fix these errors and ensure accurate transcriptions of each interview.

After the transcription of the data, I started the coding process. According to Boyatzis (1998), recognizing an important moment and encoding it is necessary before a process of interpretation takes place. Consequently, this study uses an inductive coding approach (Boyatzis,

1998). Themes were drawn from the raw data, meaning the managers' narratives, rather than from pre-developed ideas. The closeness of the codes to the raw data allows an increase of the possibility of high inter-rater reliability (Pain, Chadwick, & Abba, 2008). In addition, coding is very sensitive to the raw information (Boyatzis, 1998). I started the coding process in the order of the interviews conducted, allowing me to reflect on the data in greater detail. Coding was used to aid understanding of the various perspectives of the participants and in analyzing their combined experiences. The coding was done manually by re-reading the data multiple times and looking for common themes that arose throughout the various narratives. Finding meaningful sets of data was the goal of the coding process. This selective coding process helped find emerging categories, and it allowed me to find several themes that would best represent the data.

For this study, I argue that conducting a thematic analysis was helpful in mobilizing the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 2. For instance, the narratives that emerged from the interviews allowed us to provide an innovative perspective on analyzing this issue. A thematic analysis helped to find commonalities within the managers' narratives, which led to further discussions of framing and sensemaking approaches in relation to how the issue of engagement is viewed by managers within an organizational context. The themes that have emerged from the data show the similarities and differences in narratives, which I argue, is an appropriate approach to analyze the given interview data.

Strengths and Limitations of Proposed Research Methods

The research methods proposed for this study proved to be very useful in analyzing the data gathered throughout the interviews. By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to follow the same frequency of questions, but this approach also allowed me to ask individual follow-up questions and gain more insight into managers' perspectives. As most of the current

literature mobilizes quantitative research methods, this research adds an in-depth analysis of the manager's lived experiences on how to deal with engagement in an organizational context. By choosing ten managers in Ontario, individual perspectives can further be explored. However, while it is important to add qualitative research data to the existing literature, based on the number of participants, it is possible that further research needs to be conducted to determine whether the obtained results would also be appropriate for other managers. Yet it is still important to examine this issue with a qualitative approach. In addition, due to the length of the limited study, results collected over a longer period of time would provide more in-depth results.

There is also the risk that study participants slightly modified their behavior during the interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes which allowed managers to fully explain their thoughts and ideas; however, at times, it also seemed as if some of them wanted to ensure that they were presenting themselves in a very "positive" way and it seemed to be hard for some of them to acknowledge problems and issues. Thus, possibly conducting several interviews with each participant and investing more time might reduce this apparent bias to obtain more balanced results.

Additionally, some of the managers worked for the public sector while others worked in the private sector. This is mainly due to the difficulties of finding individuals willing to participate in the study. While I did not notice significant differences in responses – which could have been based on the disparity in working in the private or public sector – one could argue that focusing on one sector could be more beneficial in obtaining in-depth results. However, after looking at all the data, most responses focused on a microenvironment within the organization, meaning that managers mostly looked at their teams as the decisive environment, followed by senior management. The organizational purposes, broader goals, and specific traits common to a

sector were not mentioned during the interviews, thus allowing us to assume that this difference did not significantly impact the responses managers gave.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the research methods used to explore the research questions introduced in Chapter 2. A discussion of the overview of the study design, methodology selected, sampling and participants, data collection, approaches to the data analysis, and strengths and limitations showed the specifics of how this study was conducted. It also provided rationales for the choices that were made. These various approaches serve as the foundation of the following chapters, where an in-depth analysis of the gathered data, a discussion of the data, and an overall conclusion of this study will be provided.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter presents the results and analyses of ten interviews I conducted with managers in Ontario, Canada, between January and March 2020. Chapter 3 provides detailed information on what methods I used to present the following analyses. Using a thematic approach to look at the data helps to better understand the notion of engagement from a manager's perspective.

The chapter comprises four themes that emerged throughout the interviews: (1) the framing of employee engagement, (2) manager engagement, (3) employee engagement, and (4) the organization's engagement. These themes allow us to gain insight into managers' views through their narratives, strategies, and challenges put forward. Within each theme, subthemes have been developed to exemplify specific ways in which managers discuss, mobilize, and portray the notion of engagement in their respective organizations. The analyses focus on managers' lived experiences, reflexive thoughts, and daily practices, and aim to provide a better appreciation of the practical implications of engagement in an organizational setting. The subthemes allow us to analyze the different strategic approaches and apparent priorities that seem to exist based on organizational roles: managers, employees, and the organization as a whole. These complementary declinations will help gain various insights into how managers understand and discursively mobilize the notion of engagement.

The following graph shows an overview of these developed themes. It shows the four main themes and the respective subthemes that further provide a detailed analysis of the data. The themes were developed after careful consideration of the existing literature and review of each interview transcript. In addition, the themes represent ways in which managers frame and

make sense of engagement in an organizational context and show how their experiences vary and concede.

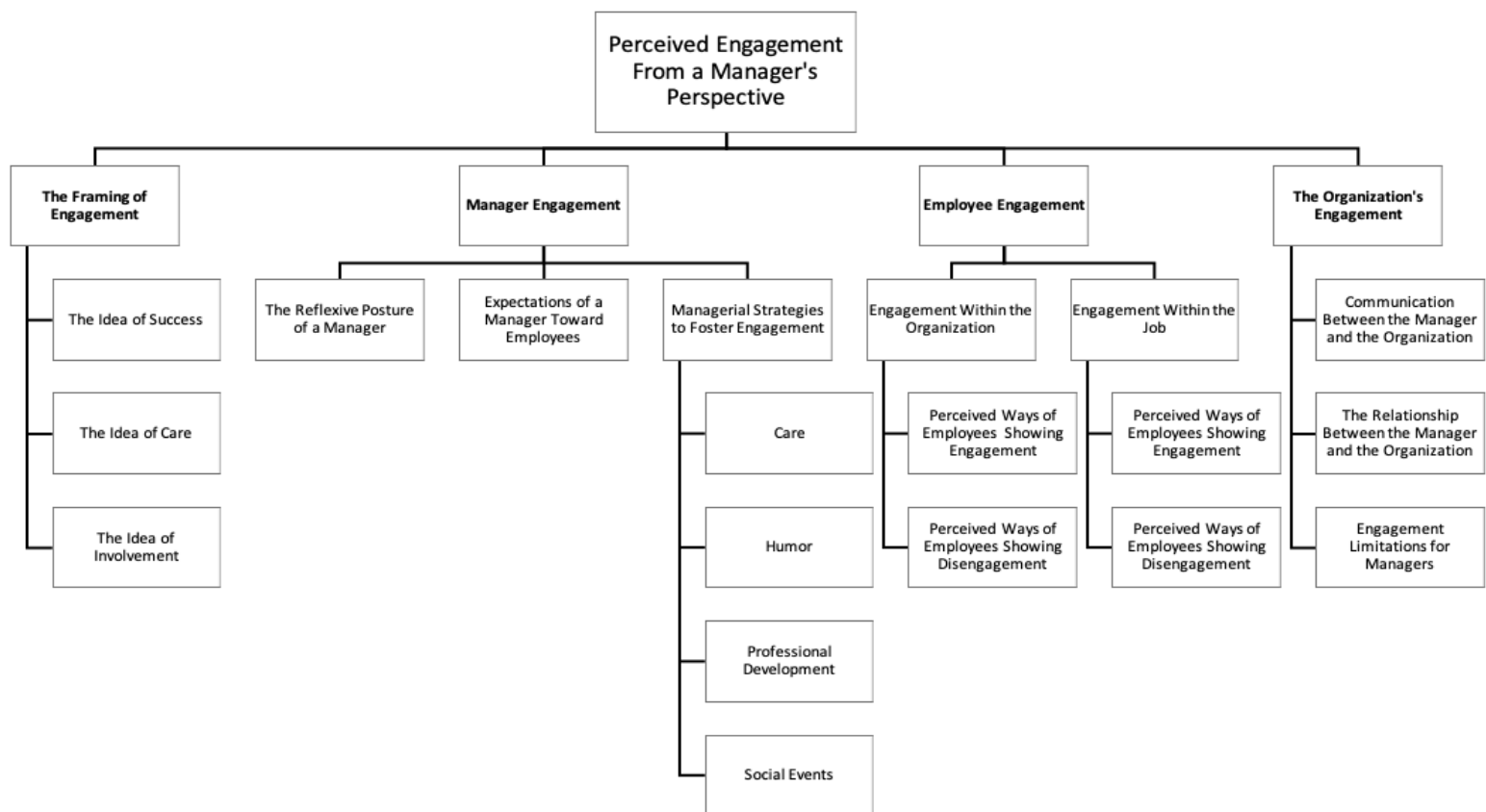


Figure 1: Overview of the Developed Themes

The Framing of Employee Engagement

During the interviews, I asked managers to share their thoughts and considerations about the broad notion of engagement and the many ways to envisage it. The first part of the analysis will specifically show how managers frame engagement and how they try to communicate this issue to their employees. The data shows that managers mostly agreed that engagement is crucial not only for employees but also for the organization's overall functioning. During each interview, managers proposed to frame engagement based on how they felt individuals talked about it in their organization.

As discussed by Fairhurst, framing is based on three components: language, thought, and forethought (2005). The language component helps to focus, clarify, and remember and retrieve information; the thought component helps decide what and how to frame; and the forethought component helps to “exert a measure of control over spontaneous communication” (p. 168). Specifically, according to Fairhurst, managers have to understand their own roles of meaning and co-constructors of reality.

The data shows that there does not seem to be one overall framing approach managers agree on about engagement, which aligns with the literature explored in Chapter 2. Managers offered a broad spectrum of definitions and meanings, which ranged from ascribing it to a single employee to the connection with the entire organization. Specifically, some managers narrowed engagement to only include a particular person and their job. In contrast, other managers encompassed the employee, team members, and the impact the organization can have on the overall engagement of employees.

The way some managers talked about this issue shows that they do not seem to explicitly use the word *engagement* when speaking to their employees; however, many stated that an engaged or committed employee was a crucial element for them. Most prefer to use words they believe could be defined more easily, such as care, presence, or involvement. Almost every manager interviewed had to take a moment to think about what could be considered a suitable framing approach to engagement, and some of them did not seem to be fully convinced of their answers, as we will see with some examples throughout the analysis.

When discussing the framing of employee engagement from a manager's perspective, the three main subthemes that emerged during the interviews were success, care, and involvement. It is interesting to see that, while most managers' discourses mobilized these three subthemes,

some also took a rather general approach without discursively evoking any specific category to talk about engagement.

For instance, during one of the interviews, Lana framed engagement as:

The measurement of your output. It asks whether you are meeting your strategic and operational deliverables within your financial resources. You can compare that data to other organizations to judge the level of engagement. You can use surveys to collect feedback to identify potential issues or enablers.

This way of framing engagement appears to be very technical and based on the notion of measurement. Lana seemed confident when providing this answer – her tone of voice was pretty assertive – and she was able to give a direct response. While other managers focused on the employee as a human being, she emphasized “operational deliverables” that are essential for her. She also mentioned that engagement is measurable by looking at the data from other organizations or surveys, in contrast to the other managers, who did not mention any form of measurable outcomes during the interviews. This approach focuses more on quantitative results rather than including specific human character traits.

When looking at how some managers frame employee engagement, it is also important to include how (and if) they communicate this engagement to their employees. As previously mentioned, most managers interviewed did not use the term engagement in their daily practices. As Celina stated, “Yeah, well, that's because maybe that's what the broader picture is. But on the day-to-day basis, that's not the term that's being used.” Four other managers provided similar statements and admitted that engagement is not a term they use. Mary said, “I wouldn't say engagement is being used. I wouldn't say that's the term I use. But I say care or I wanted to say loyalty, but just more care for the organization.” This presents an interesting paradox that

emerged from the narratives. Some managers expressed that they wanted engaged employees and that engagement was still an important issue in their organization; however, they did not use the language of engagement to communicate this with their employees. Relatedly, the following analysis will take a closer look at some communication approaches and various ways managers make sense of engagement in their workplace.

The idea of success. Throughout the interviews, one of the most prominent ways of framing engagement was by directly establishing a connection to the notion of success. This way of linking it to success included an employee's personal achievement at their job and the broader success of the organization. Managers who used this terminology defined engagement practices as accomplishments in the workplace.

During the interview process, Mary expressed that engagement was related not only to the business's success but also to someone's own success. She explained:

Work engagement... It's not a term we use often here. I guess someone who is engaged is interested in the success of the business (...) their co-workers. They're concerned with the success of management as well as their own success.

After explicitly stating that she refrains from using the term work engagement, Mary states that engagement means success on all levels – from the employee to the co-workers to the “business” and to the “management.” Based on the statement, we can see that she seems to create a distance from her own opinion to that of the organization by using the word “we.” Instead of sharing her perspective, she speaks in the name of the organization as her “given” authority as a manager allows her to do so. Nevertheless, she uses the words “I guess,” showing that she does not seem to be completely assertive to share a definitive way to define engagement. However, following this hesitation, Mary does provide a definition showing that engagement begins with an interest

in the success of the business, followed by team members, and lastly, an employee's own success. This aligns with how she has presented her answers throughout the entire interview – the success of the business is most central when describing traits of an engaged employee, thus giving a role to people in order to bolster the organization. The implication of engagement is visible on multiple levels, and it goes beyond showing interest; it includes being concerned, and therefore, for Mary, it is a practice of taking ownership of the success of the business. However, according to her, engagement is crucial for a successful business even though she never defines success and what it means to her. It appears that she uses it as a discursive tool without being explicit about what it means.

In contrast to Mary, Celina referred to character traits, feelings, and contributions when framing employee engagement. She expressed:

Somebody who feels that they're contributing to the broader goals and success of the team and of the organization. And that they, you know, also feel that their skills and expertise are adding value. So they really feel like, you know, we're all in this as a team together and we're contributing something valuable to come to the greater project or whatever.

As Celina states, engagement seems to be connected to how employees sense that their skills and expertise represent added value. Celina expresses that an engaged employee contributes to the “broader goals and success” of the team and organization, but that it is also necessary to feel valued on various levels. Working together with other people helps to be successful and, ultimately, to be engaged at someone's job, according to her. By saying “we're all in this as a team,” Celina puts forward that she includes herself in this approach, an inclusion that exemplifies her views on the togetherness expressed. For her, how someone “feels” is important; however, she also does not mention whether an engaged employee should only “feel” valued or also actively show that they are engaged. Thus, she sees engagement as a self-defined

phenomenon by putting subjectivity and motivation on employees' shoulders. In contrast, other managers, who have used the idea of success, preferred to mobilize it as a discursive tool to show engagement with a sole focus on the organization's success.

Based on these interviews, we can see that some managers seem to find it crucial that employees are concerned about success on various levels, whatever this notion of success implies. The data shows that two other managers also made a connection between engagement and success. They discussed the importance of substantially contributing to the organization – a way that supposedly allows managers to recognize and evaluate an employee's value. This shows that the apparent success of the entire organization is included in this approach of framing employee engagement, showing the direct link between the two. In order to achieve this (organizational) success, employee engagement would thus represent an added value to many, even if the framing of it is somehow blurry, highly interpretative, and mostly oriented toward the organization. Instead of looking at engagement through the notion of success, some managers saw it more as caring for their employees in their narratives.

The idea of care. Several managers did not explicitly make the connection between engagement and success; instead, they used the word *care* to talk about what engagement meant to them. The notion of caring for other team members, the organization, or the job itself has been prominent throughout several interviews and has been mentioned by seven of the ten managers at some point. When specifically unpacking this idea of caring, we can see that engagement is first and foremost framed from a human-centered perspective.

During the interview process, Tara mobilized the notion of care in her discourse, becoming her most prominent language attribute. When trying to envisage engagement, she expressed:

Care at every level, definitely. Yeah, it's a really good word, but yeah, I think we used a joke that we had on my old team, and I've said it a few times. Our motto is humans, humans, humans. It's like we're people. (...) you come. You do your job. You get some satisfaction from it, whether it's satisfaction from being with colleagues or whether it's satisfaction from you really like coding or whatever. But there's something about you coming in. You get some sort of satisfaction. You're here for more than the paycheck.

According to Tara, care has to be visible at every level in the organization in order for employees to be engaged. She mentions that she prefers this language instead of “employee engagement” because it has a direct connection to humans to the point of becoming a motto about “humans, humans, humans.” She is able to acknowledge that employees are people and that satisfaction is an essential element, in her perspective, through the job itself but also by creating relationships with others. Tara exemplifies this by reminding that “it’s like we’re people,” emphasizing that everyone should remember that there is more than only coming to work and doing someone’s job. However, she also tries to express that physical presence in the office is crucial “by coming in,” which raises the question of whether employee engagement would be as easy to foster when working from home. Overall, for Tara, there is more to engagement than looking at the outcome or measurable success; the human matters every day, from the organization’s point of view, but also from the personal view of an employee.

Charlotte supported this view; she expressed that, “Um, yeah, I guess I see it [engagement] just by going above and beyond. Um, like when staff members (...) you think it's because they clearly care and not because they're getting a paycheck from it.” While she refers to engagement as “going above and beyond,” she explains that engaged employees are willing to go this extra mile because they care, yet she does not seem exactly sure whether it is the appropriate answer as to why people would go the extra mile. She uses caring as a fundamental way that

employees would take to be engaged, beyond the paycheck, once again putting the burden of being engaged to the sole initiative of people. We can see that there is a bit of ambiguity when it comes to clearly defining engagement and to speak in the name of employee by the use of “you think” and “I guess,” thus revealing that her interpretative stand is far from assured. If care is a way for some managers to establish a connection with the notion of engagement, the idea of involvement is also a discursive apparatus that is mobilized to do so.

The idea of involvement. Throughout the interviews, several managers mentioned the idea of involvement to encapsulate what engagement means to them. The verb ‘involving’ implies “the act on an instance of involving someone or something” (Merriam-Webster dictionary), thus emphasizing the idea of someone’s participation in a project or an activity. In contrast to the subthemes of success and care, involvement seems to include a more action-driven motto based on practices. In other words, and unlike success, being involved is not limited to how employees might feel, but more how they would take action, accomplish something and communicate about it.

For instance, Amanda mentioned:

People are like present. And people want to participate in other extracurriculars within work. Like there's a call out for, you know, United Way or there's a social committee or they're engaged like they're happy to be there. They want to do stuff. They engage with other employees that don't just come in, sit it through a laptop and not have anything to do with anyone else.

Through Amanda’s narrative, engagement appears to imply that employees would want to participate in other activities than work, such as social committees, inferring that “they’re engaged like they’re happy to be there.” Instead of using the specific terminology of engagement, she uses “involvement.” She focuses on the extracurricular activities (referring to

the United Way) and apparent opportunities for employees to get socially involved. This way of framing engagement does not include any language of success or organizational goals that should be followed. Instead, Amanda seems to believe that engagement is about connecting with other people and participating in committees or extracurricular activities. It seems important to her that employees are “happy” when wanting to get involved.

Christos, on his side, framed engagement as implying an action-oriented component in the organizational structure:

In the context of workers, you know, employees committed to their work, committed to their organization and involved, so it's not just a commitment, but it's also an action element. So there's different ways to be involved. You can be involved in networks. So there are different ways to be engaged, today in particular. January twenty-ninth is “Bell, Let's Talk” day. So people are raising awareness about mental health, for example. So to me it's a commitment, but there's also an action involved.

To begin with, we can see that Christos starts by evoking the notion of being committed, a closely related, if not an interchangeable term with engagement. He talks about being involved and then, about practical ways to be engaged. These terms seem to work as almost synonyms for him as his discourse shows coherence to explain that it is mostly the action that is at the center of what it means to be involved/committed/engaged. For instance, he exemplifies this idea of being active by referring to the “Bell Let's Talk” day, a social mental health campaign that raises mental health awareness in Canada. According to Christos, engagement is thus deeply connected with commitment, which has also been indicated in previous research studies, as outlined in Chapter 2. There is a multitude of ways to demonstrate engagement by being involved outside of the job in Christos words. He makes it clear that it is important for engaged employees to actively show this kind of social involvement. This narrative shows that engagement would not

rely on a simple and unique definition as this manager evokes multiple related terms to talk about it.

Throughout the interviews, we see that some managers frequently make use of the term engagement as they believe it is necessary for an employee to do more than what their job requires, to care for the success of the organization and to generally get involved; however, in the daily work environment of managers, it seems that this term is not often used as preferred language. When trying to explain this phenomenon, according to the managers interviewed, success, care, and involvement are more tangible and definable words to concretely translate what the practical implications related to engagement are. Overall, the data shows that when asked about what engagement meant to them as managers and how to frame it, some took a rather general and ambiguous approach while others provided more specific definitions. To specifically look at the importance and role of the manager, the following section will provide an analysis of how managers saw their own responsibilities when discussing engagement.

Manager Engagement

During the interviews, several managers discussed and reflected on their own role in fostering more engagement. While most managers stressed that they felt as if their role was the central piece of engagement, Amanda was the only one who differed the pressure of being responsible for engagement by stating: "Employee engagement is not just the responsibility of the manager. It's really the responsibility of the people who are at the top of the organization who actually put into practice what they preach." While our overall analysis focuses on managers' perspectives and narratives toward various declinations of engagement, such as employee engagement, this theme focuses specifically on the engagement of managers themselves and the ways they think about their own practices. Three subthemes have emerged from the interviews:

reflexive posture, expectations, and strategies that they expressed they use to actively show their engagement to employees.

The reflexive posture of a manager. When it comes to managers' engagement, a reflexive posture refers to the importance that some managers have attributed to their own role when fostering engagement. As we will see in the following, several narratives show that some managers believed that they are the only ones to ensure that employees are engaged while others stressed that it is more of a team-centered approach working towards a common goal. For instance, during one of the interviews, Amanda, when asked about her role and engagement, expressed:

Oh, my gosh. Yes. Oh, my gosh. Yes. Because nobody else will do it. Right. Of course, it's the manager. So it's really sad when there are managers who have kind of checked out for whatever reason. Like they've either hit their head against the wall too many times and they become disengaged or they have hit a limit and maybe they can't move forward in their career at this department.

We can see that Amanda believes that it is the manager's responsibility to foster engagement of employees by taking this postulate as a given when saying, "of course, it's the manager." She says that "nobody else will do it," indicating that it must be the manager, according to her. In addition to stating the central role of a manager, she also suggests that some managers "become disengaged" and illustrates her argument with the image of someone hitting their head against the wall to show the challenge of implementing it. Based on her statement, it seems that she does not see herself as one of those managers. Accordingly, she considers it to be "really sad" if some managers do not take this responsibility. However, it remains unclear whether Amanda actively wants to engage or whether she only does it because "nobody else will do it."

In contrast, Tara took a different approach by actively including the employees in the process. She stated that:

Employees are a huge part of it. I don't know what I would term the ratio because obviously I try to steer the ship. But if they're not receptive to it, then there's only so much I can do (...) Yeah. Yeah. Because I set the tone. But if you have people who are not receptive, it can derail the whole thing, which is also why if we're looking to hire anyone on the team, the whole team meets with them.

Instead of just focusing on her task as a manager, Tara acknowledges that employees must be involved as they play a “huge part of it.” We can nonetheless see that she thinks she is in charge of engagement by evoking leadership metaphors like “steering the ship” and “setting the tone.” Tara reiterates that it all depends on the employees and their possible receptivity for the process of engagement not to “derail the whole thing.” Moreover, she openly discusses her limitations even though she believes she is in control “there's only so much I can do (...) Yeah. Yeah. Because I set the tone.” For her, it starts in the recruitment process when the team meets with a prospective employee instead of only the manager. In contrast to Amanda, it seems central for Tara to take a more team-oriented approach instead of putting all the pressure and responsibility on the manager. Engagement is framed as a key issue as she appears to set the tone from the beginning; she is aware of her own restraints but still points out that she is the lead.

Overall, the data shows that some managers think that it is their sole responsibility to foster more engagement toward employees; however, some also suggest that the entire team should be included in the process even if many suggested that their role would be central. These approaches show variations in how managers see their own role toward engagement in their organization. The data has also shown that the practical implications of engagement seem unclear for several managers as they could not give a straightforward answer that would identify

who is responsible and what it implies; instead, they only expressed what they assumed was the “right way” to talk about their own engagement.

Managerial expectations toward employees. One aspect that the existing literature on engagement has shown is that employees seem to adapt their behaviors to their employer's expectations (Hamel, 2012), yet they need to be communicated clearly. The interview data seems to have confirmed that managers do not seem to explicitly communicate what they expect from their employees, that is, their “belief that something will happen” (Cambridge dictionary). Several times, managers interviewed have expressed that senior managers and the organization should adapt and agree with their own way of fostering engagement, thus creating a difference between the manager and the organization in terms of responsibilities. In contrast, some managers actively talked about the expectations they have toward employees with them. For instance, Tara said, “Oh, yeah. I'm very clear about that. We do expectations at our meetings. We talk about what our commitment to each other is.” This shows that, similar to other statements, Tara does not actively use the term engagement – she uses the related term *commitment* instead – but she explicitly states that expectations are voiced in a clear matter to employees. She said that she talks with employees to ensure that they can express their expectations. This more explicit communication approach toward what is expected from employees and their engagement shows that she believes that her approach is very clear and understandable for employees.

In contrast to this more open approach, Lana shared a different perspective. When asked whether employees were aware of her expectations in terms of their engagement, she only responded by saying “yes.” After this, the researcher asked how she could know that exactly. Her response was: “I lead by example,” which seems to represent an ambiguous posture as employees are presumably only aware of her expectations by looking at her engagement as such.

This shows that Lana seems to expect her employees to “copy” her ways of doing without telling them what they are supposed to do. We can see that this could create many challenges for employees because they might (1) not know that they are supposed to mirror her actions and (2) they might also want to take different approaches to being engaged to the organization. Lana, however, seemed confident in her answer – again, her tone was assertive – but did not explicitly recognize this possible “problem” of misunderstanding or implicating bias she projected as a manager. She said that she knew that employees were aware of her expectations by nevertheless providing an answer that was not showing any clear expectations.

During another interview, Charlotte acknowledged that employees were probably not aware of her expectations. When inquiring about her expectations and whether those are clear to the employees, Charlotte said:

I don't think so. Okay. I think that's probably what leads to a lot of the stuff that we're talking about. Okay. And I think even where it is clear, I feel we don't have a high enough expectation of them knowing it. Like we take the, “I don't know excuse” a lot for things that are even clear.

In contrast to other managers, Charlotte openly acknowledges that she does not believe that employees are aware of her expectations by stating, “I don't think so.” Charlotte seems aware that the excuse of “I don't know” is often made to toss the problem of expectations away. For her, it seems that even said-to-be clear messages from managers are not well communicated because “we don't have a high enough expectation of them knowing it.” Overall, it seems as if Charlotte recognizes the difficulties that expectations bring in the workplace – especially communicating about them – but she nevertheless does not seem to offer any possible solutions during the interview.

Managerial strategies to foster engagement. During the interviews, several managers mentioned the importance of how they engaged employees. When looking at the data, four subthemes emerged from this angle, representing various communication strategies or organizational facets that enable to translate this willingness to be more engaged and to enact engagement: care, humor, professional development, and social events.

Care. One of the most frequently mentioned themes by managers throughout the interviews to foster and communicate engagement was the notion of care. Some managers did not only seem to prefer using the language of “care” over engagement, they also said that they should openly care about their employees. This can be seen as a strategy to build a human-centered connection with employees, a strategy that would lead to an increase in engagement outcomes.

For instance, Amanda expressed that, “I understand that, you know, if they're having a bad day and they need to take a day off early to kind of get their head back into the right space, then that's OK.” Amanda acknowledges that employees are humans with good and bad days and that they sometimes need to focus on themselves. This rather flexible approach seems to be an appropriate strategy for Amanda as she acknowledges that this can happen to anyone and that she understands if situations like these arise.

Tara expressed her understanding of caring by providing an example of how some managers try to accommodate their employees and how they changed their own expectations to support them in overcoming challenging situations:

But my proudest moment has to do with an employee. Her father died by suicide and he lived far away. And she'd gone to visit him because he wasn't doing very well. And the week that she came back, he died. And so it was very, very difficult for her. And there's no family support (...) And one day she had a panic attack in the office and she never had a

panic attack before. (...) So instead of writing her about that sort of thing, we talked about what would be best for her. And so she decided to take a couple of months off. And that was no problem to me. It was a challenge for me, but I wasn't gonna talk to her about it being a challenge because she needed to take care of herself. That was my priority.

This story from Tara seems to display a caring and emotional approach from her as she recounts this being her “proudest moment.” We can notice that this example of caring, which is consistent with some other examples in this subtheme, contains much more storytelling details than other strategies. We can observe that Tara evoked that she went “above and beyond” for this employee as it represented a professional challenge as a manager, a challenge that she nonetheless did not disclose in order for her employee to “take care.” Tara appears to have shown her sensitive and caring approach by actively communicating with this employee – “we talked about what would be best for her” – on what to do and what was supposedly best for her. She accepted that the employee could take a couple of months off and Tara acknowledges that the selfcare of the employee was her priority. Tara explicitly acknowledges that this has been a challenging but also the proudest moment when it comes to expressing care and understanding in stressful situations. This statement supports her overall impression of caring for her employees in order to foster engagement, “And for me, I care about the people I work with because they're human beings.”

Data from the other interviews support these findings when it comes to translating the notion of engagement through the practice of caring as a strategy for some managers. However, based on other narratives from interviewees, we can also notice that the attitude of caring is not always only a straightforward productive strategy; it appears it can become a burden to some managers to try to always care for employees as a way to encourage them to be more engaged. Some managers have mentioned that they were not only available to answer personal and professional queries during work hours, but also during their free time on weekends. Based on

the interviews, this attitude of caring and being present at all time seems to foster better relationships with employees, yet managers also gave the impression that they felt as if they had to go above and beyond to show that they are giving their full attention. Therefore, while employees might appreciate this attentive caring – as discussed by Bammens in his 2015 study about the role of organizational care – it also seems to create more pressure on managers as one could argue that the idea of care would not officially be part of their job descriptions. Based on some managers' narratives, we can therefore notice that this willingness to be attentive to employees' needs appears to create a paradox: by fostering more engagement through care, some managers voiced their feeling of having to do too much to sustain this attentiveness. If caring is a valuable attitude in some of the managers' toolboxes to enact their own engagement toward employees (and the organization), showing a sense of humor also seems crucial to others.

Humor. Some managers did not mention this willingness to adopt a caring attitude toward employees as a communication strategy to enhance engagement, but instead, they appeared to prefer to show a sense of humor. Displaying this, implying that some people might find something to be funny or comical, is apparently helping some managers to connect with employees in a less formal way. This strategic approach enables many of them to create better relationships and to make the work environment less stressful. More specifically, humor can be defined as a “cognitive-perceptual process that leads to an emotional response (mirth) and expression (laughter) in a social context” (Martin, 2007, as cited in Dikkers, Doosje, & de Lange, 2011, p. 5).

For instance, during one interview, Amanda mentioned: “So I try to make work a little bit fun, like I like to joke around a little. We go out, you know, have coffees. And I check in with my employees all the time. I try to be extremely flexible with work arrangements.” With this,

Amanda seems to still focus on the work as well as the professional aspects; she tries to make the work itself a little fun by “joking around.” In addition, we can also see that it is essential for Amanda to socialize with employees by going out for coffee, checking in with them, and being flexible with work arrangements. Amanda puts forward that influencing the work environment in a more fun manner is important to show her engagement. Similar to other managers interviewed, building a good relationship with employees is crucial, and by looking at Amanda’s narrative, it is possible to notice a similar willingness to use humor as a strategy to disclose more engagement.

Lucas also mentioned the use of humor during his interview; however, he focused more on his own attitude to explain it. “OK, well, I don't take myself too seriously, that's one of the things that I do. It's important. Um, I, uh. I ask for open feedback.” Instead of trying to make the work more fun like Amanda, Lucas appears to think that he is not “too serious,” a way for him to put forward openness, asking in return “for open feedback” from employees. We can see that he considers himself as a not-too-serious manager, which can help with engagement, according to him. While he mentions that humor is one of his strategies, he does not further clarify what employees are asking for open feedback. We can wonder whether some employees might not feel comfortable sharing open feedback with a manager who thinks he is not too serious. However, Lucas seems to be confident that the combination of humor and open feedback would work when connecting with employees and allowing them to be more engaged. Another strategy put in place by some managers to enhance their own engagement is support for professional development.

Professional development. A manager’s communication strategy toward engagement does not only have to be channeled through the attitude of caring or by using humor. Some

managers talked about how offering opportunities and professional development to their employees can help to show engagement. These benefit not only the employee who takes up the offer, but also the manager who can give the employee more specialized tasks that make use of the new knowledge.

Jane discussed this incremental approach to work during one of the interviews, and said, “Yeah. So we have meetings and I have one every week with Alina who reports to me. So I just spent half-an-hour with her. But I spend it every week to make sure that we're on track in terms of the workload and other assignments.” Based on this statement, we can see that Jane says she takes time to set up one-on-one meetings with her employee to make sure that Alina “is on track” in regards to workload. We can see that, through professional meetings, Jane believes that she can create more engagement; she further states in the interview, “no she wouldn't be as engaged as she is now [without those meetings].” While this may include a form of caring about the employee and the workload, it is more focused on getting the work done in a professional matter.

Similarly, Lana also believed that providing professional opportunities for employees is critical in her approach to make sure they are more engaged. She expressed:

I encourage all my employees to submit forms to take new trainings for their career that we discuss every quarter, every single quarter. I also discuss with employees when we have a need (...) I also encourage each employee, speak to them alone, ask them about their career goals and try and follow through in picking trainings that they will take that quarter.

As we can see, it seems crucial for Lana that employees take advantage of training opportunities so that they can advance their careers; she can be a part of that way of doing by encouraging them to do so. It seems as if she also actively checks whether employees have made use of the available opportunities like “new trainings.” She also shows her own engagement by openly discussing any needs in the organization, “We discuss every quarter; I also discuss with

employees when we have a need.” We can see that she appears to take the lead in identifying issues and sharing these with her department, a posture that is somehow fairly coherent with the role of a manager. It seems as if Lana has various ways of not only encouraging her employees but also communicating with them by “speak(ing) to them alone, ask(ing) them about their career goals.” Overall, for Lana, it appears as if providing professional opportunities represents a win-win strategy: she encourages employees to follow their goal, a form of engagement toward them; and employees ought to feel professionally supported, a strategy that may cultivate more allegiance toward the organization. But beyond this straightforward encouragement, other managers also evoked social events as a productive way to boost engagement.

Social events. Some managers expressed showing their engagement by planning social events where employees can build relationships less formally. During the interviews, some managers discussed that it was important that employees felt connected and that they worked well together as a team.

For instance, Lucas shared how offering team meetings was a way to show his engagement:

So I'll focus on team outings, you know. So we went to the Supreme Court for no other reason. Then suddenly you're in the judicial arm and the Canadian government system and you're outside of the office. And it provides a new perspective on the work that we do, knowing that one day some of our files may be there.

We can see with this excerpt that Lucas says he initiated a Supreme Court visit for “no other reason” and that he believes that these types of outings are important to establish relationships within the team. Since Lucas works for the public sector, one can argue that this “social event” could rather be seen as a professional development event. While he suggests that there is no other reason other than being outside of the office, he admits that “it provides a perspective on

the work that we do.” This shows an apparent misconception about what he thinks he is offering and what the event might look like to some employees. Overall, he seems to frame his own engagement strategy toward employees with this offering of an outing, yet it is not clear whether employees would see this as a social event that ultimately connects them closer together.

For Jane, on her side, it seems that it is important to organize events within the workplace that can create a sense of community among employees. She expressed:

We have social committee events. I don't think they're especially good at engaging employees on the whole. Hmm. Some of the departments do pizza parties and celebrations. The one that we're really good at engaging is Halloween. We are bonkers here about Halloween. The departments dress up. Almost every department dresses up like over the top. They decorate their areas and they dress up in character costumes. We have a trophy that we give out.

The organization Jane works for has apparently created a social committee to improve engagement and connect employees. However, Jane genuinely admits that she does not believe that they are good at what they do. Instead of focusing on how she chooses to engage employees, she speaks on behalf of the whole organization (“we”) even though she was asked what conditions she herself creates to foster engagement. According to her, the organization focuses on positive occasions to celebrate throughout the year, and they believe they do a good job with this. Jane appears to change her language to a less formal tone when saying that they are “bonkers here about Halloween.” She sounded excited and proud to share that every department dresses up, they decorate the areas, and there is a trophy they give out. We can also see that this sounds like a major event.

The data shows that the practical strategies managers use to both show some engagement toward employees as well as to foster it from them differ from one another. Some managers were

able to provide specific examples of what they have done concretely, while the majority of managers was not able to share how they would show their own engagement. This exemplifies that some managers either did not actively engage enough with their employees or were not aware of their own actions in the workplace. Many managers acknowledged the importance of concretely showing their engagement, yet they did not seem able to express and share how this was done in their daily work routines.

Employee Engagement

Managers interviewed did not only share their own practices and communication strategies to cultivate engagement in an organizational setting, they also described how they perceived the level of engagement from employees. This theme looks more specifically at employees' engagement behavior. When looking at the data, two subthemes emerged from this angle: engagement that occurs as a member of the organization and thus on a broader organizational level (i.e., social implication, collegiality, etc.) and within the scope of their specific job tasks. Consequently, the following section will focus on analyzing how managers discussed how they felt employees displayed engagement/disengagement.

Engagement within the organization. Employees' engagement at the broader organizational level will give insight into how managers perceive the ways people may display engagement in the workplace. This attitude of engagement in the workplace goes beyond the job tasks and can be framed and analyzed on an organizational level, as outlined in Chapter 2. For instance, some managers described how they felt employees interacted with colleagues, how they supposedly cared about the organization, or how they represented the organization to customers. These are thus not directly connected to someone's job tasks or performance outcome, but

instead are related to the organization's culture or overall approach, including someone's perceived engagement.

Perceived ways of employees showing engagement. For many managers, and in an ideal world, it seems that employees ought to be doing more than simply the expectations related to their jobs. The interviewees evoked a wish that employees would have a better understanding of what is critical to ensure the success of the organization. For instance, Christos focused on the story of an employee and how this employee could impact the organization. "Someone who's engaged really gets involved. So maybe if a photocopier is out of paper, the employee recognizes that, 'hey, if I refill the photocopier or the printer with paper, then there's some organizational benefit.'" For Christos, the action of getting involved appears central in his way of recognizing an engaged employee. These employees happen to look beyond their jobs and see what they can do within the organization, a managerial view of high performance that appears to have gained attention in the existing literature (Purcell, 2012; Saks, 2006). In Christos' view, this can be something as small as changing the paper in the photocopier, yet he acknowledges that an employee must recognize this to benefit the organization as a sort of sacrifice. We can see that small gestures are essential according to him and his managerial view. Thus, Christos envisages that employees should be aware of smaller administrative tasks that can be changed or improved instead of just focusing on getting their job done, as doing the former shows some engagement toward the organization.

While Christos looked at aspects that pertain to the organization, Mary framed what could be perceived as an engaged employee but as acting outside of the organization:

And so I think engaged employees are doing stuff with the organization outside of what's expected of them, outside of their work hours, outside of what we ask of them and what their clients ask of them (...) I have seen one girl that if ever there is a Facebook chat

going on, what recommendations want, whatever, she'll always put, you know, us, our name out there. She'll be pushing the organization where it doesn't benefit her in any way.

For Mary, it seems that an engaged employee is able to “doing stuff... outside of what we ask of them,” stressing by this utterance that she foresees engagement as the extra mile to accomplish for employees. According to Mary, it seems essential that employees are “pushing the organization where it doesn't benefit her/him in any way” in a sort of voluntary act on behalf of the organization. Again, this managerial view about engagement seems to put the burden of the performance on employees in order to make sure the organization profits from this. Nevertheless, Mary appears to acknowledge that it does not benefit the employee directly by expressing, “She'll be pushing the organization where it doesn't benefit her in any way.” However, we can see that management seems aware of her actions, which can ultimately benefit her in advancement, for instance. For Mary, an engaged employee should be aware of the organizational goals and act as a representative in any way possible. In other cases, some managers expressed ways they perceived an employee would show less engagement or even disengagement.

Perceived ways of employees showing disengagement. Several managers did not have any difficulties identifying what could be considered as a less engaged or even “disengaged employee.” This seems to have been one of the easiest topics to discuss for many interviewees.

On her side, Tara tried to define what the implications of a supposedly disengaged employee were: “Somebody who isn't demonstrating respect for the team and supporting each other. I think an unengaged employee is also somebody who tries to stir the pot and to create drama.” For her, a disengaged employee would not treat coworkers with respect and would not be supportive, yet she does not provide any specific examples of what this disengagement might

imply. Instead, Tara uses a metaphor to illustrate her saying by stating that it would be “somebody who tries to stir the pot and to create drama” an assertion that is somehow difficult to directly associate with the action of being disengaged. She nevertheless does acknowledge how a single employee can presumably affect the team's relationship and working atmosphere.

Similar to this, Lana stated during another interview:

There's one other thing other than the output. Yeah. It's complaining. Oh, it's toxic. There is nothing worse than that. An employee who complains. (...) A loudspeaker of complaining. These employees are difficult. They are difficult because oftentimes it initially starts and people want to make them feel better. And you think that it's going to make them feel better, but maybe they just like to complain (...) You know. Yes.

For her, an allegedly disengaged employee would be someone “who complains,” going as far as qualifying this attitude as being “toxic.” She stresses that employees who complain are challenging to handle “There is nothing worse than that.” She further states that the complaint does not only include an employee and a manager; it includes several other people who try to “want to make them feel better.” However, getting involved makes a single complaint an organizational matter, which then includes the person who complained, coworkers, and manager(s).

Overall, the data shows that several managers focused on employees' engagement that included aspects beyond what could be considered job tasks in their narratives. They seemed to expect employees to act as an active way (i.e., taking the initiative for the organization) while keeping the organization's success in mind, even though they did not define what success looked like. Similar to this, it also seemed important for some managers to address disengagement as it can influence, according to them, other employees and the organization. Thus, while some managers focused on the broader picture of engagement in an organizational setting, some

managers specifically looked at how they perceived employee engagement within someone's job tasks.

Engagement within the job. Employees' perceived engagement within their job tasks includes specific traits and ways of doing that some managers have observed within the given job requirements. For instance, and according to many managers interviewed, it seems that some employees happen to go above and beyond in their job tasks as their performance outcome is essential, or they apparently take pride in their work, as we will see through the following data.

Perceived ways of employees showing engagement. According to many managers, employees that are considered engaged would show various characteristics and traits while working. For instance, Amanda said, "If people take pride in their work. If people show up every day, and they don't mean just coming into the office. People are like present." For her, the job is apparently more than just doing work that is expected of the employees; they are supposed to "take pride" in what they do every day. Coming to work would not be the same as enjoying it, according to Amanda, which would make employees more engaged because they have an interest in what they do. Other managers have agreed with this statement and described an engaged employee as someone who is committed to their job and someone who tries the best they can in their given roles.

Charlotte followed this thinking and believed that an employee should be an active individual in regards to their job:

I think people for me who are looking for opportunities and not coming in and doing the job description. So looking for work opportunities to do more like extra work or, yeah. Um, so I think that's one area where we are. Um, unfortunately in this agency, again, there's not a ton of room to grow and develop and there's lots of people who want that at their work.

This statement shows that Charlotte speaks about people (i.e., employees) by arguing that they would be engaged by actively looking for opportunities within their jobs, somehow placing much of the burden of engagement on their shoulders. According to her, it would not be enough to do what is expected but excel in this behavior and go above and beyond. We can see that it seems natural for her that she expects employees to do extra work even though it is not part of their job descriptions, which is how she identifies an engaged employee. According to her, there would not be much room for growth and development, which people usually want in their jobs. It seems as if this has a direct impact on how engaged employees are, which can be the reason why she sees engagement as doing extra work because people usually do not do this in her organization.

Perceived ways of employees showing disengagement. Similar to engagement on the broader organizational level, some managers also described how they identified possible disengagement when it comes to job-related tasks. They shared how they perceived employees who would not perform as expected.

During the interview, Mary discussed how she was able to recognize disengagement and how she understood this issue:

When they're not interested in helping sort of step out of what's expected of them. So if they are expected to do like A, B and C, that's all they'll do in that. And if they're not giving their clients all that, they should be, and they know they're capable of it. There might be something going on at home. There might be, you know, other personal issues. But I can tell when that is starting to happen.

It seems as if Mary creates a connection between expectations and engagement. According to her, employees have to take the extra step to not only fulfill these expectations but also look for more opportunities. Disengaged employees do not show this kind of behavior in her view and

only focus on the necessities in their jobs. She also describes the relationships between clients and the awareness that employees should have in terms of being able to perform better and “giving their clients all that,” yet fail to do so. We can see that Mary tries to identify reasons for this way of doing, evoking a possible scenario outside of the organization’s control, such as personal issues. She believes she is aware if someone is disengaged by saying “I can tell when that is starting to happen.” In the interview, she sounded convinced that she could identify this attitude in its beginning phase. However, one can argue that this might not be accurate for every employee since disengagement can also be a prolonged and subtle process that is not visible right from the beginning. Nevertheless, Mary voices that she knows her employees and their attitudes very well and can recognize changes in patterns early on.

Similarly, Tara concentrated on the job task, yet she focused on results and not how an employee was doing the job:

So I'm very focused on results and not process. So I've been like, I don't care where you work, how you work, as long as I mean, I care how you work (...) If you've got something and need to work from home, I don't care. Like as long as we're delivering results. (...) So that's a big challenge.

This statement shows that, for Tara, results are more important than the process of work itself, the “how” someone is achieving a specific goal. In contrast to Mary, Tara does not seem to be able to identify disengagement early on since she states that she rather looks at “results and not process.” We can see that she focuses on the employee and reasons why employees have to change their daily working routines, but disengagement for her does not show during the working progress “I don’t care where you work.” She acknowledges that her behavior is a challenge if an employee does not deliver the expected results and she cannot provide a solution to this problem. Overall, she acknowledges the difficulties but is not able to make changes.

These two illustrations show how some managers seem to perceive job disengagement as mostly a question of not going the extra mile. Throughout the interviews, several managers have found disengaged employees very difficult to handle, and individual approaches have been used to address specific issues that the employees might have. While dealing with disengaged employees seems to be a challenge, many managers also have expressed that they have no problems addressing these issues with the employee.

When looking at employees' engagement on the broader organizational level and employees' engagement within their jobs, the data shows that some managers separate these two when describing an engaged or disengaged employee. Specifically, some managers took several approaches when sharing how they recognize an engaged employee, which can be based on the fact that employees are different in every organization. However, it can also show that engagement means something different to every manager, based on their own framing and sensemaking approach. Therefore, we can see that an engaged or disengaged employee can be perceived differently, showing how difficult it can be to assess the issue and how it is interpreted very differently based on the manager's perspective and understanding of engagement. While these understandings of engagement seem challenging in the workplace for managers, the organization's engagement also plays a significant role when analyzing and understanding managers' perspectives when it comes to engagement.

The Organization's Engagement

Throughout the interviews, several managers discussed and provided insight into how they viewed the engagement of the organization they work for. In contrast to the previous categories focusing on employee and manager engagement, this theme allows us to look at the perspectives and practices organizations push forward, according to the managers. The

organization's engagement thus shows how managers perceive the relationship between their role to engage (employees) and what the organization does/does not do to help facilitate this. Higher-level senior managers and the owners of the organizations exemplify representatives when talking about the organization.

The following section looks at the three most commonly mentioned themes by managers during the interviews in regards to the engagement of organizations: communication, relationships, and limitations. Overall, managers had a rather "negative" and critical appreciation about their organization's engagement practices. Some felt that the organization's objectives tend to focus more on talking about the issue rather than implementing proposed action items. This section thus provides insights on how managers talked about and expressed this imbalance between the idea of engagement and its practicality during their everyday work experiences.

Communication between the manager and the organization. The following analysis will take a closer look at what managers think about the communication practices mobilized by organizations in regards to engagement. It will thus focus on managers' views, insights, and their own interpretations of these issues. It seems that talking about engagement has been a prominent practice in many organizations; however, some managers acknowledged the lack of practical implications to increase engagement among employees. In addition, some managers felt as if they did not get adequate support from their organizations. Even though organizations are prone to enhance their workforce to be engaged, it seems challenging for some managers to put this into practice due to lack of support. According to some, this lack can lead to decreased engagement levels and an apparent disconnect between the organization and the manager, which could ultimately affect a manager's capacities in engaging employees. In contrast to the

relationship between managers and employees, it looks like some organizations use the word *engagement* when displaying their communication strategies.

During the interview process, Mary expressed, “Well, it's been written down as prerequisites to hire. However, it's just, I think, it's assumed that you want engaged employees.” According to Mary, the communication of engagement does not start when working for an organization, it already begins during the recruitment process as an implicit given. We can see that public communication about the need for supposedly engaged employees exists; however, Mary also states that it is more “assumed that you want engaged employees.” This not only shows that Mary has to heavily rely on peoples' own understanding of knowing how to be engaged, but she also acknowledges that it is not communicated publicly in her organization. Through her discourse, we can see that Mary does not seem to put too much thought into how potential employees understand the organization's engagement expectations. There is no written communication about specific expectations, thus this lack does not allow new employees to fully understand how the organization wants them to show engagement.

In contrast to Mary, Amanda provided more precise information on how the organization manages engagement:

No, they say it. I just think they don't act on it. Yeah. I feel like every president that we've had. So this is our third that we're on now. Our senior managers are like, yeah, we're all about employees. (...) And I can honestly say that in the last five years that I've had this job and nothing's changed for employees, it's still same old, same old. We get a lot of lip service from the senior ranks saying, you know, we care. Employees are so important to us. But then the actions say something different.

Amanda directly includes the organization's president as well as the failures of past presidents in her assessment of what is missing in regards to how to address engagement from an organization's perspective. She criticizes that senior management openly expresses that they care

about the employees and that they are essential for the organization; however, when it comes to engagement, the organization does not seem to act in the interest of the employees, according to Amanda. While she acknowledges that the organization does communicate with “lip service” about engagement, she mentions that nothing has changed within the past five years. Amanda does not seem to believe that senior management cares, even though they say so. Based on this statement, we can see the frustration that has been built over time when it comes to the real involvement of the organization regarding engagement. She acknowledges different perspectives, but also seems to be disappointed that communication is so limited. For her, it seems as if talking about engagement is not enough; it only makes her feel negative about the organization; it seems she is saying that the organization has been talking about engagement for so many years, yet it has failed to actively show caring behavior regarding their employees.

Throughout the interviews, some managers have openly expressed their frustration about the organizations they work for when it comes to implementing engagement. The data shows that the most challenging aspect has been the disconnect between communicating about engagement and actively executing engagement. This seems to be causing a lot of issues and stress for some managers because they want the organization to stand by their words and show employees that they do care, not just when they talk to them. They are concerned that even issues that seem the easiest for the organization to deal with do not get the required attention, which could cause managers to not suggest more complex and challenging engagement strategies to the organization. It is interesting to note that managers are often associated with being the “official” and legitimate voices to talk in the name of organizations. Yet many managers interviewed dissociated themselves from organizations by attributing to them the burden of actively putting in place strategies to implement engagement. This begs the question of who should be accountable regarding the implementation of engagement within organizations. When looking at this issue, the relationship between the managers and the organization needs to be considered, which will be analyzed in the following.

The relationship between the manager and the organization. Relationships between the managers and the organization have shown to be rather complex and complicated, and seniority is apparently a significant factor when discussing engagement. According to Jablin and Krone (1994), organizational relationships are influenced by various differences in communication, which also affect employees' satisfaction and productivity. The following section uses this to understand managers' opinions and experiences better when it comes to the relationships they have with the organization.

In regards to this, Mary stated:

So there is sometimes.... Like a push and pull between, say, the owners and managers, me, where they're less willing to give because they think that they shouldn't need that....

They're a little bit more old school mentality. Then... I'm trying to fight with them to say, no, this is a new generation of workers. They don't work that way. And you need to keep them happy or else you're just going to have a high turnover and you're going to be starting from scratch all the time. And for us, that's drastically decreased our success.

Mary tries to describe the challenging relationship with the owners based on her experiences as a manager. We can see that Mary sees this relationship as a struggle, a constant “push and pull,” where one party makes suggestions and the other refuses, creating what seems to be a complicated relationship. She admits that she acts in the interest of the employees while the organization is “old school” and not aware of what employees want these days in terms of engagement practices. We can see that she acknowledges that the organization does “not work that way” but that it is essential to keep employees happy. By using the word “fight,” it is clear that there are two opposite parties and that she has been constantly trying to convince the organization of the necessity of engaging employees. For her, it is important enough to be “fighting” about. We can see that this relationship is characterized by constant challenges,

different opinions, and the willingness to convince the other party that their approach is the correct one. She also references herself as the managers, meaning that she is the one who has to represent managers when communicating with the organization.

Instead of focusing on the constant “fight” that Mary has with the owners of the organization, Amanda took a different approach to describe the relationship between her and the organization in regards to engagement. She said, “Wow, that is kind of hard. If we sat down and I think we could agree. Me and my senior management team, like my present ADM, I think we would have a lot of similarities in how we feel that we can engage in place. The difference is I'll do it (...) Why is everything so secretive?” It seems as if Amanda finds it rather hard to talk about this issue of who would be responsible to implement engagement. This description shows that there could be similarities between managers and the organization if they actually sat down together; however, it seems that they have failed to come together and discuss engagement as a serious matter. Their relationship seems positive with common goals but, based on Amanda's experience, she feels as if the organization is “secretive” and that they do not share all information needed for managers to improve engagement outcomes. Based on this statement, we can see that even though Amanda seems confident that they do have many things in common if they were to sit down and discuss issues, she does not believe that their relationship is strong enough to convince the owners to act.

These excerpts portray the challenges when looking at relationships managers have with the organization regarding engagement strategies and the accountability that goes with it. Based on the data, it seems as if the organization wants to make a profit while some managers feel as if they actively need to care and be a voice for the employees. Throughout the interviews, the data has shown that several managers feel as if the relationship with the organization could be

improved. While some managers expressed that they have a good relationship with senior management to discuss engagement issues, others expressed that they are too disconnected to use their managerial role to affect change and to push forward with better approaches to engagement, which can ultimately result in several limitations based on their organizational role.

Engagement limitations for managers. Several managers mentioned that they encountered numerous limitations when it comes to actively promoting engagement in their organizations. They discussed how the organization limits their ability to not only engage employees but also develop better practices for the organization. The data shows that managers see themselves as key drivers, and they want to have the most engaged employees; however, the organization does not support them the way they should in the eyes of managers. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that almost every manager felt limited in their capacity to engage.

Mary addressed this concern and stated:

I think when it comes to certain employees, there's only so much I can do in my role because I might want to change the pay structure and I might want to.... So, I mean, more suggestions to the owners when I see someone disengaged or see someone potentially going to leave because something that's not going well or they're not in line with the team or kind of thing. So I think that I can change someone's engagement, but I only have certain limitations.

Mary directly acknowledges clear limitations for managers by saying that there is only so much she can do. She can change some of the engagement attitudes in employees, but other issues, such as pay structure, are out of her control, and she is not able to come up with solutions on her own. The owners would have to acknowledge this matter to help stop people from leaving their jobs. We can see that this is a significant issue for Mary; however, she seems powerless in terms of what she can do about it. We also see that she uses the word “suggestions”; it is possible that

suggestions might not be powerful enough to overcome the structural limitations she implies.

Based on Mary's statement, we can see that she might want to have more power when it comes to finding ways to increase engagement within the organization, expressing "there's only so much I can do in my role"; however, she feels as if she cannot change existing practices due to the limitations the organization is creating.

Charlotte took a more detailed approach when talking about her limitations. She said:

Then there's, of course, some management saying like, well, you know, we try something, we do this, you know, there is a way to give feedback, but if you're just picking apart how we did it. Right. You know? Right. So there's a little bit of that frustration I think on some of the times that we tried. And it doesn't really encourage you to try more.

According to Charlotte, "some management" tried to change something, raising the question of who is included in this narrative, herself being one. She is thus using "some management" in a way to distance her from how engagement seems to be handled (i.e., in a bad way), partially rejecting her own accountability in the process. Nevertheless, it seems that several managers have tried to change engagement practices by evoking "we tried," this time including herself in the management. However, senior management seems to criticize efforts, which shows that the managers' limitations are reached fast. She uses the word "Right?" almost as if she was asking for reassurance whether her opinion and experiences are valid. In general, it appears as if these managers she mentioned have tried several times to overcome limitations, but they have not succeeded yet. It makes the managers feel as if they do not want to try again to convince senior management that engagement practices should be improved. It also seems as if Charlotte has acknowledged the power of senior management, and she does not feel encouraged enough to keep on trying by expressing: "And it doesn't really encourage you to try more." There seems to be a difference in power roles between managers and senior managers. According to her, this not

only limits potential success for the organization, but it also makes the manager feel as if their input is not significant enough.

The data shows that several managers throughout the interviews felt frustrated and did not seem to understand why the organization limits them in several ways to enhance better engagement. While some managers have received feedback on their ideas, other managers were left in the dark, and their suggestions have remained unanswered. This can lead to managers being less engaged, which can potentially also cause them to decrease their engagement efforts in regards to their employees. Through the data, we can observe ways some managers experience these organizational limitations, which shows that there needs to be better communication between the organization and the manager. This might suggest that managers feel as if they are not being taken seriously and that their ideas cannot be considered a priority for the organization, which portrays a paradox to how managers are seen. They seem to be the voice of an organization; however, the organization is the limit when it comes to mobilizing engagement strategies in the workplace. Managers cannot fully act as a voice or representative of the organization because it seems as if the organization does not let them realize their engagement practices.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As seen in the previous chapter, the many ways to frame engagement in an organizational context play an essential role in making sense of this notion from managers' lived experiences. Specifically, how managers communicate engagement with their employees, how they reflect on their own engagement, and how their relationship is defined with the organization were revealed throughout the interviews.

We learned that the notion of engagement comes with several paradoxes since it seems unclear to some managers how to specifically frame it. We also saw that managers tried to make sense of engagement in order to foster it and to be engaged themselves. These results are generally consistent with the findings of the literature review outlined in Chapter 2; however, they also add more subjective perspectives, reflexive thoughts, and experiences that allow a better understanding of this managerial issue.

For instance, several did not seem to use the terminology of engagement in their daily practices. Several managers admitted that they did not clearly communicate their expectations to the employees; instead, they assumed that employees knew what was wanted of them. Overall, this seems problematic as managers put their own understandings of engagement on the employees who might have different ways of seeing this issue.

In addition, the interviews revealed that there are several ways of making sense of engagement within an organizational context. Specifically, some managers talked about their own engagement as an important factor to foster it; however, others discussed that engagement is a team approach which should not be put solely on the manager. Throughout the interviews, we could also see that managers used various approaches (communicating engagement through the

notions of care, humor, professional development, and social events) and that they seemed to specifically prefer one over the other.

The various positions in an organizational setting as well as relationships with other internal stakeholders have also shown to be challenging. While managers are seen as the voice of an organization, many admitted their own limitations, thus putting senior management and owners of an organization as the main contributors to allow change.

The following discussion will refer back to the research questions, the methodology, and how the analysis provided in Chapter 4 have led to the following discussion of this study. First, the question of how managers frame engagement within an organizational context will be examined in greater detail, followed by how managers make sense of the notion of engagement.

Framing Engagement as a Fundamental Approach

Throughout this study, the data collected during the interviews empirically support the difficulties of finding one appropriate way of framing engagement, as discussed by Macey and Schneider (2008) and Taneja et al. (2015). For instance, instead of using this specific terminology, several managers discussed that they preferred to use words that are more definable in a practical environment (i.e., the organization). These included the notion of care, the success of the organization, and being involved as an active employee. Thus, some managers preferred to use words that allowed them to give practical examples of someone who, for instance, cares about the organization. While these terminologies represent what engagement meant to the managers, they also show that there are very different approaches of how engagement is seen on a day-to-day basis.

However, several managers also admitted that even though they did not use the word *engagement*, having an engaged employee was a crucial aspect for them. It seems that the burden

of being engaged is the sole initiative of individuals instead of creating organizational awareness and clear expectations that could lead to better communication, behavior, and knowing what engagement means. The following section will further discuss these variations.

Job versus organizational engagement. The interviews have shown that, for some managers, engagement only includes a particular person and their job while other managers emphasized including employees within the organizational environment. For instance, some managers described engagement as going above and beyond at their job while others focused on employees having an interest in the organization's overall success. These are significant differences in how managers view this issue. The existing literature in Chapter 2 specifically looked at these various meanings of engagement, as discussed by Saks (2006). One could argue that this could lead to a better understanding in the academic literature as well as the day-to-day practices. Several managers seemed to find that it was important to separate those two areas. None of them used the terminology of job or organizational engagement, but their framing approaches focused on either the job-related outcomes or on being an organizational member. This seems inconsistent with most research that has not distinguished between these two and has taken a rather general approach of looking at engagement. Therefore, this study argues that engagement should not be looked at one overall theme because there does not seem to be a universal framing approach, which is supported by the following section of measurability.

Measurability. The problem of not having an agreeable definition of engagement also leads to the question of whether engagement has any measurable outcomes. While most quantitative studies, as outlined in Chapter 2, use the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale to determine how engaged a particular workforce is, some scholars, such as Byrne et al. (2016) questioned and criticized the validity of this questionnaire. In support of this, most managers in

this study did not discuss any form of measurable outcomes during the interviews. The lack of mentioning those could be a result of not knowing how to successfully measure engagement. For instance, one manager mentioned she might want to start engagement surveys in her organization in a few years, but when asked what exactly she wanted out of it or what those results would mean to her, she did not know how to address this. It sounded as if she simply wanted to follow the trend of having engagement surveys. This seems consistent with recent reports (Sackett, 2019; Sharp, 2019), seeing the word *engagement* as a trend or fancy terminology that would make the organization look better, yet there is no real meaning or benefit from this. Therefore, consistent with Cole et al. (2012) and Saks and Gruman (2014), the measurement of engagement as a broad terminology still seems unclear even though the word *engagement* first appeared in the 1990s. These problems have shown to be of significant importance for managers, supporting the inability to clearly frame engagement and foster this in an organizational context.

In addition to how to measure engagement, there also seems to be a difference in recognizing an individual's engagement behavior. While some managers particularly pointed out the notion of caring, others discussed that it was crucial for them to see that employees take visible action. The interviews have shown that caring and showing a certain interest in the organization's success are more related to how an employee might feel; the notion of involvement actively seeks employees to show that they are engaged. For instance, some managers said that engaged employees sat on various committees, helped other co-workers, or represented the organization outside of work on social media. Thus, communicating and advertising seems to be an important aspect for these managers. However, it did not seem clear whether a certain approach seems more appropriate than the other since all managers had specific visions of how they saw an engaged employee. Specifically, the literature in Chapter 2

pointed out that engagement and commitment are oftentimes used interchangeably. Yet some research has also shown that there is a distinct difference between these two. In this particular study, a few managers used the word “committed” when being asked about engaged behavior, which supports the existing literature, showing that there is a need for a clearer definition of what these two words mean. However, it does not seem that this difference was of any significance for the managers who repeatedly used the word “commitment.” This shows that while the academic literature has already begun to more specifically define and separate engagement from other terminologies, it seems hard for managers to do this in their day-to-day work environment.

Overall, the data gathered through the interviews has shown that while it was expected that managers take various approaches to frame engagement, it was surprising that most of them seem to use one specific word, for instance caring, which they use on a day-to-day basis instead of engagement, but yet putting the same meaning on it. The academic literature presented in Chapter 2 seems to agree with this, yet it has not shown that managers are likely to prefer using just one word that is more easily definable and reachable in their opinion. In addition, it was unexpected that several managers took a very broad approach to define engagement while other managers seem to know exactly how to frame this.

Based on the interviews, it seems that, in the practical field, engagement is a very interpretive and somehow blurry concept that differs from organization to organization and from manager to manager. Thus, the interviews have shown that even within an organization, there seem to be many framing approaches that managers expect others to know without clearly communicating that. The findings of this study are significant in that they provide insight into managers' lived experiences and the practical problems that arise by not knowing how to specifically frame engagement. As the interviews have shown, the inability to do so does not

stop with the manager, it directly translates to miscommunication with the employees, misunderstandings with the organization, and managers feeling powerless when trying to foster engagement.

Overall, the managers' narratives have shown a wide variety of how they frame engagement based on their personal experiences. It seemed clear during the interviews that most of them were able to somewhat discuss definitions and their thoughts on engagement; however, it was unclear how many of them made sense of it in an organizational environment, which will be discussed in the following section.

Making Sense of Engagement

As mentioned in Chapter 3, and according to Kolko (2010), sensemaking is an “action-oriented cycle that people continually and fairly automatically go through in order to integrate experiences into their understanding of the world around them” (p. 15). In terms of this research, managers have expressed how they experienced engagement in their day-to-day work, how they saw and reflected on their own engagement practices, and how the relationship with the organization played a significant role in fostering engagement. The way managers made sense of this notion seemed to primarily be based on their framing approach. The managers who had issues defining what engagement meant to them, also continued to provide rather unclear answers throughout the interview. In addition, it became clear that while engagement means something different to each manager, they all found it to be a crucial component of operating a successful business and being an effective manager.

Throughout the interview data, various discussion opportunities emerged by looking at managers' reflexive thoughts, their own understanding of engagement approaches and strategies,

and their sensemaking process of organizational relationships, which will be further elaborated on in the following sections.

Reflexive thoughts. The interview data and analysis have revealed that most managers pointed out that they felt as if it was their role as the central part of the organization to foster engagement. Some of them believed that they were the only ones to ensure that employees are actually engaged while only a few stressed that this has to be a more team-centered approach in order to be successful. It emerged from the data that the ones who put responsibilities solely on themselves also experienced some issues with the organization. For instance, some managers who felt that it was a crucial part of their job to foster engagement had difficulties agreeing with the organization in terms of not only addressing engagement, but also creating practical implications and following through with those. Managers who took a more team-centered approach were more likely to have a rather positive relationship with the organization, where communication with each other seemed to be a crucial part.

However, overall it seemed that most managers had difficulties discussing this issue with the organization and finding common ground to implement changes. The interview data has also shown that managers who took a more specific approach of defining engagement were also more likely to reflect and express the importance of their own role. Thus, it seems that it was easier for managers who had an understanding of engagement to make sense of it and connect their own engagement with how they view this issue. Nevertheless, all managers acknowledged their own importance to some degree. However, putting this thought into action has shown to be problematic in the organizational context.

The results have shown that it is necessary to understand engagement approaches and communication strategies as they occur. Throughout the interviews, we learned that managers

used several ways of trying to engage the workforce. While these seem appropriate in the eyes of the managers, they transformed these thoughts about the best engagement strategy on to the employees. For instance, some managers indicated that humor was one strategy they commonly used. While they made sense of this behavior, and it seemed evident to them when they used this strategy, it remained questionable whether employees would feel the same way. Thus, this creates a paradox or disconnect of how managers make sense of their own behavior and how these actions are perceived by employees.

In addition, the most prominent strategy for managers was the notion of care. Managers made sense of this by expressing that if employees felt cared for, they would have higher engagement outcomes. What managers did not seem to openly express was the feeling to constantly act and care, as discussed in Chapter 4, which is not part of their job description and can lead to a feeling of doing too much without actively noticing it. While they want employees to be engaged through their own strategy of caring, this strategy also appears to be problematic if managers do not know how to appropriately make use of this.

Overall, it seems as if managers are more focused on non-job-related aspects, such as caring and humor instead of more specific components, such as professional development. The ways managers made sense of their own engagement also directly connect to how they framed engagement. Managers who used the language of caring in their framing approach also pointed out that it was important for them to show this to their employees. Thus, the way they frame and how they see an engaged employee not only translates to someone else, but it is also important for them to act based on their own definition of this concept. For instance, managers who described an engaged employee as someone who cared also used the notion of caring when describing their own engagement, wanting to show that their behavior can be considered

engaged. Therefore, their sensemaking approach comes full cycle by first defining engagement, then acknowledging this behavior in employees, and lastly, their own engagement practices; it seems as if everything is based on their framing approach, which is how managers make sense of engagement in the organizational context. In addition, it is also significant to look at the organizational relationships to understand how this can impact managers' sensemaking approaches.

Making sense of organizational relationships. A common pattern that was revealed during the interview process was that managers thought that senior managers and the owners should adopt and agree with their own way of fostering engagement. Managers not only thought that their role was essential, they also believed that the actions following their thoughts should be based on their own sensemaking approach. However, this was not the case for many of the interviewees. They experienced frustration when it came to the organization because they believed that they did everything they could but failed to receive organizational support. For instance, some managers expressed that senior management or the owners did not care about their suggestions, there was no implementation of ideas, and the managers seemed to reach their limits fast. Thus, relationships with the organization can be considered to be rather complex and complicated, yet managers seem to have acknowledged their own limitations. As previously mentioned, this portrays a paradox of how managers see themselves as the voice of the organization, and how the organization might see them. This becomes problematic as managers experience a disconnect between how they view and try to make sense of engagement, yet the process of putting this into action is stopped, thus limiting the managers.

These results appear to be somehow unexpected because managers are usually portrayed as being the voice of the organization and being an essential part of making sure that they

manage employees appropriately. Yet this discussion has shown that several limitations exist. However, it also seems expected from a senior management level point of view because investing in engagement could be seen as time-consuming and owners as well as senior management need to see visible results that will ultimately affect the success of the business.

These results are significant because they explore and portray the unique perspective that implies that engagement is a significant issue for managers. They want to have an engaged workforce; however, looking at other perspectives within the organizational context, this approach might look different based on tangible outcomes. Nevertheless, it is important to fully understand managers' perspectives on fostering engagement, including their lived experiences that display their strategies, challenges, and the way they understand engagement in an organizational context to further develop specific and practical implementations on this issue.

One can argue that there is a need for more communication between managers and the organization as well as between managers and employees to ensure that everyone understands engagement on the same level. Therefore, the results of the study matter as they show that managers seem to have a different way of making sense of engagement; while they want to put their thoughts into action and create engagement plans, organizational limitations can be seen as a complex and major barrier.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This empirical study portrayed the many ways some managers framed and made sense of engagement within an organizational context. By conducting interviews with managers, this study uncovered several strategies, challenges, and more explicit ways of framing engagement to analyze managers' understanding of this notion. The chosen approach allowed an in-depth analysis of how engagement can differ from organization to organization, but also how it varies among managers. It showed that, consistent with recent research, there is a need for better understanding lived experiences and thoughts that individual members of the organizations have. While the majority of research, as outlined in Chapter 2, is quantitative, this study adds empirical research to the field by using a framing and sensemaking approach to understand and analyze managers' perspectives. The study found that while all managers interviewed agreed that engagement is a crucial issue for them and the organization, the majority acknowledged that they did not actively make use of the word *engagement* when communicating with their employees. Instead, they used words that are, in their opinions, easier to define, such as *care*, *involvement*, or *success*.

This framing approach further led to how managers made sense of engagement practices by analyzing how they saw their own role and how the relationship with the organization is crucial. We could see that most managers found themselves to be the most important element in fostering engagement, while relationships with the organization have mostly been described as complicated. This led to the assumption that managers wanted engaged employees; however, and in accordance with the existing literature, measurable outcomes were not very clear, thus making it harder for the organization to see and acknowledge a clear purpose of investing in engagement practices. Recent literature has also discussed the term engagement of being just a fancy word

that organizations like to use because they feel that this is something they should do, yet they are not clear about how to use this terminology appropriately and how to communicate it within the organizational context. That is why the findings of this study are significant because they further support the statement of not knowing how to use engagement. Managers in this study seemed uncertain at various points, some of their examples were rather short, and they were not able to elaborate on what engagement really means to them.

In conclusion, this study has found that framing and communicating engagement seems to be a complex challenge for managers. They seem to make up their own meaning of engagement, which can greatly vary among individuals. We argue that the general terminology of engagement might be too ambiguous to use in the organizational context. These findings seem to be consistent with Walton's 1996 approach of pragmatic ambiguity, which arises when the issue is not specific, and the context does not provide the information needed to clarify the statement. Consequently, and based on the interviews conducted for this study, opening up the meaning of engagement can be helpful for the managers and the organization since managers used various other words that seem to be better suited in an organizational context, such as *care*, *success*, or *involvement*, which has been widely discussed in this study. Thus, the spectrum of engagement appears to be rather broad based on someone's own understanding. The following section will build on these arguments by looking at several recommendations for future research studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has presented several new perspectives and findings of engagement, there are several recommendations and suggestions for future research. First, this study included participants from the public and private sectors, and while this approach was the most suitable

one to recruit participants within the given timeframe, future studies could possibly focus on one of these sectors to analyze whether this might play a role in altering the results. Second, due to time constraints of this thesis and the lack of responses to recruitment emails, studies could try to have a higher number of participants, which would further allow to include various experiences and thoughts on this topic. While having ten participants was sufficient enough to gain an understanding of how they experience engagement, more participants could also mean that additional perspectives will be discovered. Third, while this research used a framing and sensemaking approach to analyze lived experiences, several other studies have used social exchange theory to gain insight into how the relationship between managers and employees work in terms of engagement. While choosing a similar methodology, changing the conceptual framework could result in different data and highlight the importance of building relationships within an organization. Lastly, future research might also include managers as well as the employees to see whether a manager's perception of their engagement approaches and strategies is perceived the same way. For instance, if a manager thought that humor was a way of engaging individuals, employees could be asked whether they recognized the humor and whether they found it helpful in fostering engagement outcomes.

Overall, future studies could take a specific approach to analyze engagement within an organizational context. More emphasis should be placed on the meaning of this terminology by conducting more qualitative studies that take a more in-depth look at people's perceptions, thoughts, and lived experiences. These will be helpful to better understand engagement in the upcoming years and to create a clearer understanding of what it means to each organization and each manager.

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Appendix A: Participant Reference Table

	Name	Organization	Title	Time at Organization	Location
1	Mary	Private Sector	Manager	10 years	Manotick
2	Amanda	Public Sector	Change Management Manager	18 years	Ottawa
3	Tara	Public Sector	Strategic Manager	5 years	Ottawa
4	Lucas	Public Sector	Applied Procurement Policy Manager	8 years	Ottawa
5	Lana	Public Sector	Planning, Reporting, Engagement, and Strategy Manager	1.5 years	Ottawa
6	Christos	Public Sector	Acting Manager	5 months	Ottawa
7	Jane	Private Sector	Human Resource Manager	3 years	Woodstock
8	Celina	Private Sector	Project Operations Manager	4 years	Ottawa
9	Anna	Private Sector	Program Supervisor	7 years	Ottawa
10	Charlotte	Private Sector	Program Supervisor	10 years	Ottawa

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. The interviewee's definition of engagement/disengagement.
2. The way the interviewee talks about engagement in the organization.
3. The conditions the interviewee creates to engage employees.
4. The interviewee's opinions about communication strategies that work best when dealing with engaging employees.
5. Barriers and challenges that the interviewee has experienced when engaging employees.
 - a. How did the interviewee deal with these situations?
6. The interviewee's understanding of their own role when it comes to engagement.
7. The importance of engaged employees from the interviewee's perspective.
8. The view of employees as the most essential resources in an organization.
9. The interviewee's understanding of having a competitive advantage as the most important business goal.
10. Moments where the interviewee might have to be strict when it comes to engagement.
11. The interviewee's perspective on the organization's involvement in engagement practices.