Hearing the Voices of Frontline Employees in the Retail Industry on Engagement in the Workplace

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions frontline employees working in New Zealand retail sector have on the concept of employee engagement and the role managers play in enhancing employee engagement so those working in frontline roles consider retail as a career option. This thesis topic stemmed from my personal experiences of working in retail where I observed how critical employee engagement was for organisational success and encouraging employees to choose retail as a viable career option. A qualitative methodology drawing on narrative inquiry shaped the research design with the data taken from ten, in-depth semi-structured interviews, providing insights to augment what is already known on this important topic.

The findings reveal that there is a significant gap between the employees' expectations, understanding and awareness of the engagement concept in the retail industry, and the retailers' views, methods and plans to develop and embed this concept among frontline employees. Participants spoke of the important role of managers in creating engagement in the retail sector and how they can better align employee's expectations so they might consider retail as a career.

The research argues that the managerial level needs to be trained about the employees' physiological aspects and that managers need to develop a greater depth of knowledge and relevant managerial practices in order to create a positive workplace environment.

The recommendations specifically suggest that for employees to see retail as a viable long-term career path Managers need to look for ways to improve employee involvement and participation in decision making, internal communication and the work environment.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Samaa Kadry Mohamed

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Employee engagement is a central theme in business; hence it is of crucial importance to employers. However, the exact impact of engagement on both employers and employees is still fairly ambiguous in academic literature (Macey & Schneider, 2008). One of the pioneers in investigating the concept of employee engagement, Kahn (1990), undertook qualitative research in order to explore the dimensions of employee engagement (the relationship between employees and their tasks), focusing on employees' interactions with their work-related tasks and responsibilities. In contrast, most research studies have since used a quantitative methodology to decipher and measure the impact of employee engagement on organisational performance, as opposed to exploring the overarching impact of an organisation's environment and management style on employee engagement (Handa & Gulati, 2014; Maya & Kavitha, 2015).

The current research seeks to address this gap by exploring what engagement means to frontline employees who are working in the retail industry in New Zealand. Frontline employees refer to all employees who provide customer service every day in retail stores, even if their job roles are different. The reason for choosing the retail sector is its significant level of growth measured on a global scale (Foster & Harris, 2005; Reinartz, Dellaert, Krafft, Kumar, & Varadarajan, 2011). Indeed, while the retail industry is employing a high number of staff every year, it is also confronted with a high rate of employee turnover compared to many other sectors such as transport, education and agriculture (DeConinck, 2009; Shari, 2007; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018; L. Williams, 2018). This raises questions about the future of employee engagement in this sector. Against this backdrop, this study aims more specifically to give frontline employees a voice to elucidate their perspectives and gauge their level of awareness about managerial actions, to engage them in a meaningful way.

1.1 Research Origins

I used to work as an Area Manager in the retail industry, at one of the most prominent franchise organisations in Saudi Arabia, which represented 90 international brands in the Middle East. Over the four years, I managed 75 employees in different locations, who represented diverse ethnic groups, ages, and genders. They worked in three positions, Store Managers, Assistant

Store Managers and, mostly, Sales Associates. Their main role was to work on the sales floor to serve the customers, although there were some additional roles for the Store Managers and the Store Managers' Assistants. The three positions were classified in the organisation as frontline employees. Over the time I spent managing the team, I noticed that their perceptions of engagement with the organisation and to the retail sector differed based on their ideas about myself as a manager, the workplace environment, the safety level and the type of responsibilities under their job description. Also, the organisation's development system and promotion scales seemed to have an impact on their engagement, which directly linked to their qualifications and background experience. Additionally, I noticed that their familial state, such as being single or married or working away from their families, was an additional factor that could play a part in their engagement.

Further, I observed that other area managers had different management styles and different perspectives on what employee engagement actually meant. They used different methods to engage their team members, such as celebrating the employees' success in achieving the target, or choosing the employee of the month, or sending them to professional training, which created variations in the level of employee engagement within the organisation. Observing this, I developed many questions about frontline employees' awareness of their managers' actions to engage them and their understanding of the term 'employee engagement' itself. I wondered if the managers' styles could impact employee engagement and if the meaning of engagement confused the managers themselves. Many questions came to the fore; is there an easy way to read the employees' reactions before reaching the disengaged level, which may lead to employee turnover? Is there a type of knowledge that could help the managers to engage their team even with their different management styles? Does the diverse customer base in retail stores play a role in employee engagement in the workplace?

Kahn (1990) suggests that employees' engagement cannot be created without physical, cognitive, and emotional performance. His research focused on disengaged employees' behaviours where employees tend to avoid connecting their own personality to their role requirements, which creates an absence of them, physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2017; Smith & Macko, 2014). Kahn's theory explained the three pillars of "*Employee engagement: meaningfulness, safety and availability*" (1990, p. 692).

Kahn (1990) emphasises that employees' engagement stemmed from the employees' awareness about their work meaning, the safety in the workplace and the availability of needed resources (Kahn, 1990).

Based on Kahn's findings and other research in this area, which agreed by (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018), the current research project explores the different factors that play a part in employee engagement. Through narrative inquiry, the current research aims to give a group of frontline employees a voice to talk about their different perspectives around their level of engagement and what it means to them. It also explores how employees understand their managers' actions to engage them.

1.2 Research Rationale

Frontline employees carry out a critical job in retail stores. They deal with the customers, product, money, property, and their managers on a daily basis. In doing so, they face different types of risks and pressures such as frequent expectations to relocate to different departments and/or product lines, safety issues like dealing with shoplifters, carrying heavy items and using ladders to display products. For these and other reasons, the retail industry faces a high turnover as a result of the fact that many employees see retail jobs as a temporary stage (for example, a university student), within their career path to gain money and/or work experience, and after that, they change their direction to a different career that is perhaps for students, more related to their area of study (DeConinck, 2009; Shari, 2007; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018; L. Williams, 2018). These movements among the staff generate a high cost, due to the ongoing process to hire new employees and train them. These movements among the staff, generate a high cost, due to the ongoing hiring process, the wasted time and effort in training staff than having to retrain new staff (Azanza, Moriano, Molero, & Mangin, 2015; DeConinck, 2009).

Many retail organisations offer part-time jobs with low-wage rates, no benefits, no autonomy, and minimal opportunity for promotion as one way to manage their costs (C. L. Williams & Connell, 2010). This short-term strategy tends to affect the quality of customer service and the retailers' image. The development of employee product knowledge and the professional skills in customer service, require a high level of ongoing training to deal with all the variables on the sales floor, such as changing seasons, the diversity of customers, visual standards and operating in a competitive market (Ali, Lodhi, Raza, & Ali, 2018). Thus, losing well-trained

employees at the level of frontline roles can usually be considered a significant loss even if there is a healthy potential pool of talent available to fill their vacant positions. Employee engagement is a critical factor to control cost structures and improve customer service standards in the retail sector. This research will contribute to understanding more about employee engagement in the retail sector in New Zealand. It will focus on the employee engagement concept from the frontline employees' point of view in order to explore a range of factors which will help managers to engage their employees in the retail industry and consider this sector as a future career path.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question of this research is; **How do frontline retail employees understand and interpret the role and actions of managers in creating a culture of career engagement?**

This research will explore answers to the following sub-questions:

- **What are the understandings of frontline retail employees around the concept of engagement in the workplace?**
- **How do frontline retail employees perceive the role of managers in creating a positive culture to enhance employee engagement in the workplace?**
- **How does employee engagement affect the career paths of frontline retail employees?**

1.4 Chapter Outline

This thesis is structured in the following way: The first chapter introduces the purpose of the research and the rationale behind the research questions. It clarifies the contribution of the thesis in relation to the research topic.

Chapter Two is a literature review, which presents a different point of view around the research topic, how the main concepts of employee engagement were formed and where we are now based on selected research and perceived knowledge.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology. It discusses the methods applied in collecting and analysing the data, the selection criteria of participants and the ethical issues that have been taken into consideration during data collection. It also discusses the stages of data analysis.

Chapter Four discusses the findings that came from the data analysis. This discussion links the findings with the literature around this topic.

Chapter Five presents the research conclusion and reflects on the researcher's point of view. It also discusses the challenges faced by the researcher during the research journey. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the research and future research suggestions in relation to the topic based on the research's findings.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

"Everyday people occupy roles at work; they are the occupants of the houses that roles provide." (Kahn, 1990, p. 692)

In the quote above, Kahn (1990), a key researcher on employee engagement, uses the image of a house to describe workplaces where the occupant employees undertake a variety of roles. Through both their physical presence and the degree of psychological commitment shown while undertaking their roles, employee engagement or disengagement is generated. This chapter begins by exploring the historical view of the concept of employee engagement. This is followed by a discussion of the model of employee engagement including various components of the model of engagement (Kahn, 1990).

In the second half of this chapter, career paths in the retail sector are explored in relation to the concept of employee engagement, while being cognizant of the research questions.

2.2 The Concept of Employee Engagement Overview

The concept of employee engagement developed by Kahn (1990) is based on the notion of the 'self in role' theory, which refers to the behaviour of people, e.g. pulling themselves to their tasks or pushing away from their tasks during work role performances (Pallak & Perloff, 1986). Kahn clarified this point of view by stating that "*People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform, even as they maintain the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles they occupy.*"(1990, p. 692). This statement concurs with that of Alderfer (1972), who linked the employee's performance to individual physical, cognitive, and emotional participation. The physical aspect represents the energy exerted by the employees to perform their work. The cognitive aspect covers the employee's opinion about the organisation, the managers and the work environment. The emotional aspect covers the employees' perceptions about their physical presence and cognitive aspects of their tasks and how these perceptions impact on their attitudes during work. (Alderfer, 1972; Kahn, 1990).

Based on the three aspects *"(physical, cognitive and emotional)"* Kahn (1990, p. 700) described employee engagement as the state of the employee's presence in the workplace psychologically and physically. Kahn's definition links the employees' presence to their behaviour and emotions. Thus, disengaged employees generally avoid being associated or

connected to the workplace and co-workers (Handa & Gulati, 2014). Other researchers "*define employee engagement as positive behaviour*" *(Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74)* that employees show while performing their tasks, for example, vigour, commitment and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These positive behaviours are also called a passion for work (Truss et al., 2006).

Conversely, Hill (2008) described engagement in the workplace as a type of good relationship between the employees and their managers due to their effective ongoing interaction. On the other hand, Hill highlights that the ineffective daily interactions that could lead to disagreement or misunderstanding have a direct impact on the employees' morale. These ongoing notions of frustration, directly affect employees' commitment and engagement (Hill, 2008). Hill noted that many employees decide to resign their employment after a conflict with their managers, even if the employee was fully engaged in work (Hill, 2008). Based on these findings, Hill (2008) highlights that employee engagement can happen by hiring and selecting the right managers who can create positive work relationships with different types of employees, as well as employing the right person in the right position. These findings are similar to those reported by Macey and Schneider (2008), who suggest that a transformational leadership style has a direct impact on the employees' behaviour and psychological state. Transformational leadership emphases on transforming the employees to support each other and the organization as a whole, giving the employees more responsibilities and opportunities to add value (Sarros & Santora, 2001).

The study by Macey and Schneider (2008) that linked the transformational leadership theory to employee's engagement opened the door to more research to study employee traits and feeling. Maya and Kavitha (2015) and Tupou, Harrison, and Nelson (2011) argued that the concept of employee engagement stems from employees' personal traits and feelings about their organisations and whether they believe that their work matters and has meaning. James, McKechnie, and Swanberg (2011) linked the concept of employee engagement to social exchange theory, which assumed that relationships are made up of a certain amount of give and take (benefits and costs). These benefits and costs are not always equal, which determine whether we choose to continue in this relationship. In this regard, James et al. (2011) emphasise the role of the managers and supervisors in creating a positive environment to engage employees through exchanging the benefits and costs fairly and effectively.

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Moreover, James et al. (2011) highlight the enormous cost of disengagement and emphasise the importance of improving the level of understanding factors that influence employee engagement or disengagement. These two theories (social exchange theory and transformational leadership theory) give the concept of employee engagement new dimensions. Table 1 below summarises the different factors that affect engagement based on the reviewed literature.

Employee Performance Concept
- Individual physical, cognitive, and emotional participation. (Alderfer, 1972)

Self in role theory
- Individuals pulling themselves to their tasks or pushing away from their tasks during work role performances (Pallak & Perloff, 1986)

Employee Engagement Concept Definitions
- the state of the employee's presence in the workplace psychologically and physically (Kahn, 1990).
- a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).
- Passion for work (Truss et al., 2006).

Employee Engagement Factors
- The ongoing interaction between employees and managers (Hill, 2008).
- Hiring process (Hill, 2008).
- Transformational leadership style (Macey and Schneider, 2008).
- The organisation's environment and work has meaning (Maya and Kavitha, 2015; Tupou, Harrison, and Nelson, 2011).
- Creating a positive environment through social exchange theory and leadership theory (James et al., 2011)

Table 1: Difference Factors that Impact Engagement

In all the studies reviewed here, the literature does not appear to clarify the responsibilities of management to enact policies and practices that encourage employee engagement. (Handa & Gulati, 2014). The focus of previous research has been on employees' performance rather than on studying the work environment and the role that employers and management play that contribute disengagement (Gutermann, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Boer, Born, & Voelpel, 2017; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018). Still, there is no clear agreement on the concept of employee engagement. Research takes a top-down or managerialism perspective to understand the meaning of employee engagement, with a limited number of researchers looking at the issue from bottom-up or employees/subordinates perspective (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

2.3 Psychological Conditions in Employee Engagement

The employees' psychological conditions are important and have been considered as one of the main components that influence the employees' internal motivations (J. Richard Hackman,

1986). May, Gilson, and Harter (2004, p. 14) mentioned that Kahn's research focused on three questions that people asked themselves when they perform their roles: " *(i) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance; (ii) How safe is it to do so?; and (iii) How available am I to do so?"*. By analysing the answers of these questions, Kahn generated the following determinants for "*these psychological conditions (meaningfulness, safety and availability)" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700)* as mentioned above, which are considered central components in Kahn's definition of employee engagement. Many researchers have studied the three components since Kahn's original work in order to identify the factors that drive or influence employee engagement (Handa & Gulati, 2014; Kahn, 1990). The next sections will provide a brief review of these three components.

2.3.1 Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness has been identified as a significant factor contributing to employee engagement (May et al., 2004). Kahn (1990, p. 703) describes it as the "*feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical cognitive, or emotional energy*". Many researchers define meaningfulness as the value and purpose of the job (J. Richard Hackman, 1980; May, 2003; Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). In order for work to be meaningful, it must contribute to employees' personal growth and motivation, while a lack of meaningfulness could lead to employee disengagement (Aktouf, 1992; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997).

Another perspective on meaningfulness suggests that rewarding interpersonal interactions between co-workers create greater meaning in the work environment (Locke & Taylor, 1990). A later study proposed that employees who are treated with self-respect and appreciated for their work are able to find a sense of meaningfulness in their workplace (May et al., 2004). The qualitative research was done by Isaksen (1995) and Kahn (1990) and the quantitative methods of May (2003) confirm the relationship between rewarding co-worker interactions and meaningfulness. Kahn (1990) also suggested that, for some employees, may contribute to providing meaningful work experience and an enjoyable workplace, which agreed by (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018).

2.3.2 Safety

Safety in the workplace is defined as individuals believing that they have the ability "*to employ and express their true self without fear*" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). In a safe environment, people

understand the boundaries of what acceptable behaviour is. By contrast, unsafe conditions exist when situations are unclear and unforeseen threats may exist (May et al., 2004). The conditions that support psychological safety in workplaces have received little attention from researchers especially in relation to the impact on meaningful work experiences (2004) and most of the recent research focused on Health and safety in food department in retail (Wertheim-Heck, Vellema, & Spaargaren, 2015; Zierold, 2016). However, several studies point to the behaviours of managers and co-workers, suggesting that when managers are trustworthy and supportive, a sense of feeling safe at work is likely to exist among the employees. If a manager is supportive and not controlling, they can have a significant impact on the employee's perceptions about the safety of the workplace environment (Edmondson, 1999; May et al., 2004).

Additionally, interpersonal relationships among employees who have trustworthy and supportive personalities, play a significant role in enhancing psychological safety in the workplaces (Kahn, 1990). Effective trust is a part of the emotional relationship between employees who express concern for the welfare of each other (Edmondson, 1999). The quality of relationships in the work team affects employees' shared beliefs about their potential mistakes, which could be held against them by their managers. This, in turn, creates a high level of psychological safety and enhances employee engagement (May, 2003; May et al., 2004) and support. Kahn (1990) points out those employees who stay within the boundaries of proper behaviour feel safer in their workplaces.

2.3.3   Availability and Engagement

Availability in relation to engagement is defined by Kahn (1990) as an employees' belief about their ability to engage themselves in their workplaces physically, emotionally and cognitively. Employees "*bring their physical, emotional and cognitive resources to their workplaces*" (May et al., 2004, p. 18) to do their tasks and to engage themselves with the work environment. Most jobs require physical exertion, which could demand some challenges that sometimes result in injuries (May & Schwoerer, 1994). There is no doubt that employees vary in their ability to meet these physical exertion demands based on their health situations. Also, emotional demands vary based on the type of job and the work environment, as well as the cognitive demands, which could vary from one organisation to another and from one job to another (May et al., 2004). Kahn (1990) model of employee engagement does not discuss these variations in the

employee's physical and emotional capabilities in great depth. However, Kahn generally argues that some jobs require more effort than the employee's ability, which makes the employee feel overwhelmed, unable to think clearly and stressed by role overload. Conversely, having these resources (physical, emotional and cognitive) will produce better availability and engagement (May & Schwoerer, 1994).

2.4 Engagement Driven Factors

According to Perrin (2003), employee engagement cannot be driven by paying the employees more. Markos and Sridevi (2010), argue that most incentives contributing to employee engagement are non-monetary. Rather, engagement is created through strong leadership and opportunities for employee development, autonomy and accountability. This links to Lockwood (2007) suggestion, that employee engagement is influenced by the organisation culture, management style, the level of respect and trust and the quality of communication within the organisation's hierarchy. The better the organisation uses these methods; the more engaged employees will become.

Furthermore, Lockwood (2007) claims that employees who see their organisations are good employers are more successful in being actively engaged and in creating a positive environment where employees feel valued and respected. However, Smith and Macko (2014) suggest that further research is necessary to better understand the factors that drive employee engagement. Many researchers support the view that employee engagement can be produced and driven in the workplace by a number of organisational factors developed and fostered by employers and management (Kular et al., 2017). However, another perspective looks at the employees and considers what they bring to the workplace based on their psychological state, evidenced by their enjoyment of and enthusiasm for work (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kular et al., 2017).

Several studies consider both perspectives when examining employee engagement in workplaces. For example, Perrin (2003) stated that emotions and rationality are the integral factors of the employee engagement concept, as they are core elements of the psychological component. The emotional factor is directly linked to employees' satisfaction with the organisation's environment and their perceptions regarding the value they add to the workplace. The rational factor is related to the employees understanding of their work and how this work

relates to the organisation's objectives (Kular et al., 2017). Suhartanto and Brien (2018) state that there is much evidence proving that the employees are significantly engaged in their workplaces when there is flexibility with their working hours and involvement in work-based decisions.

Moreover, some researchers consider employee involvement and organisation culture as a central principle towards influencing employee engagement; the sharing of ideas and Notions of security contribute to employee engagement (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007; Ferguson & Carstairs, 2005). Beardwell and Claydon (2007) claim that the concept of employee engagement stems from the shared interests of managers and employees, which must be aligned with the organisation objectives accordingly. Thus, any conflict or misalignment of these interests could affect employee engagement. Kular et al. (2017) found that positive organisation culture improves the employees' behaviours and their belief in the organisation's objectives, which create a real desire to work. In addition, Kular et al. (2017) suggest that effective management style requires two-way communication, with a high level of focus on employee development, internal co-operation and accessible human resources policies at all levels of management. Konrad (2006) posits that high involvement and autonomous work practices that result in high workplace performance.

Additionally, management control is considered one of the psychological conditions that impact on employee engagement (Johnson, 2004). Therefore, a management style, which creates a supportive work environment through caring about the employee's needs that provides effective feedback and encourages employees to raise their voice about their concerns that improve employee skills and develops their knowledge, is deemed essential. Managers work to help the employees feel safer and more settled in their roles (Baruch, 2004). This management style drives employee engagement on an individual and intergroup level. There is no doubt that managers play a crucial role in improving engagement levels (Kular et al., 2017). Baruch (2004) claimed that, when the managers support and serve the employees around them, the work environment becomes highly engaging. Similarly, Blizzard (2003) states that employee engagement tends to be based mainly on the relationship between the employees and their managers while Kahn (1990) note that the root of disengagement in workplaces is the poor relationship between both sides (employees and managers).

2.5 Employee Engagement Measurements

Measuring or assessing employee engagement has been a subject of consideration in research (James et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). James et al. (2011) suggested job satisfaction and organisational commitment as measurements of employee engagement. Also, Volpone, Avery, and McKay (2012) added further measures by exploring the impact of diversity and performance appraisals on employee engagement and considered the different sensitivity of different genders. Boichuk and Menguc (2013) took a different approach, exploring the dissatisfied employee's voice. Most of the research included turnover as a measurement of engagement (Ali et al., 2018; Azanza et al., 2015; Bassi & McMurrer, 2016; Gutermann et al., 2017; Smith & Macko, 2014). These studies linked employee turnover to Human Resources practices, leaders' style, and the coaching process. The majority of studies claim that employee engagement has an impact on employee turnover (Perrin, 2007; Smith & Macko, 2014), yet, Smith and Macko (2014) counter this by claiming that employee turnover is not an accurate indicator or measurement of employee engagement. Smith and Macko (2014) state that there is a lack of evidence linking turnover with employee engagement because most of the turnover "*reports mix employee attractions data with employee retention data*" (2014, p. 62).

2.6 Why it is Important

James et al. (2011) suggest that employees who have a high level of engagement tend to be less stressed in the workplaces and satisfied with their personal lives and rarely use their sick days and stay longer in their organisation. However, the ways for employers and managers to facilitate this level of engagement are still not clear within the extant literature (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Kahn's employee engagement model explores multiple levels (individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup and organizational) and describes it as a swirling intersection with the engagement components (meaningfulness, safety and availability), where the employees make the choice to remain employed or resign (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's research utilised qualitative methods to examine the dimensions that shape employee engagement and focused on employees' interactions with work-related tasks and responsibilities. Figure 1 below summarises the components of Kahn's engagement model.
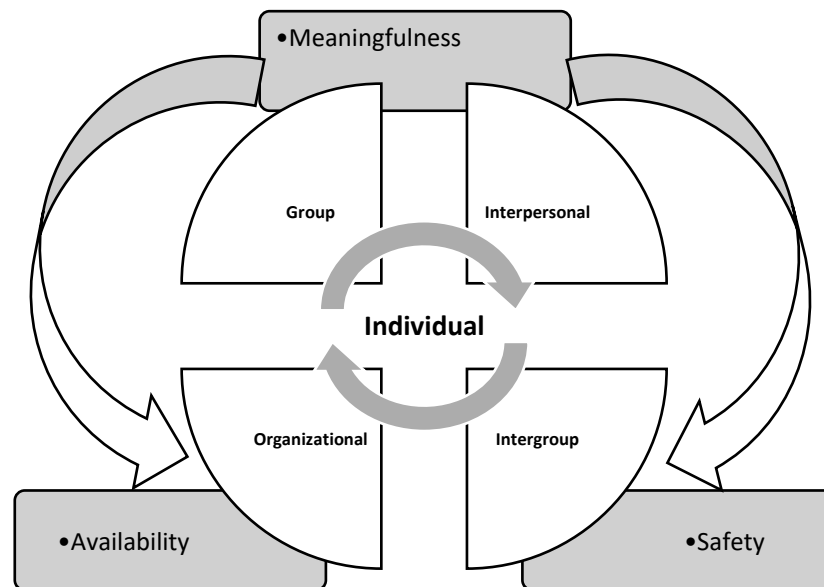
Figure 1: Kahn's Engagement Model

Since then, much of the research has utilised a quantitative methodology to measure the impact of employee engagement on organisational performance, rather than exploring the impact of leadership on employee engagement. Therefore, this research seeks to address this gap by examining what engagement means to front-line employees and how managers influence or facilitate employee engagement. This research will focus on the retail industry in New Zealand. Retail is a growing industry sector, yet faces a high turnover of front-line employees compared to many other sectors such as transport, education and agricultural (DeConinck, 2009; Shari, 2007; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018; L. Williams, 2018).

2.7 Employee Engagement and Careers

Contemporary career research has focused on the changing nature of careers, moving from a more traditional and linear focus to more non-linear career types (Baruch, 2004; Chawla, Dokadia, & Rai, 2017). The linear career model is described by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) as progress within the same organisation to get higher authority and responsibility based on employee development over time. In contrast, a protean or boundaryless career is more self-directed than organisationally based and career planning practices are driven more by the individual (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Hall, 2002). While there has been a more recent critique of the boundaryless career concept (Briscoe et al., 2006; Chawla et al., 2017; Lockwood, 2007) aspects of the boundaryless career, in contrast to the more linear career path, remains a relevant concept in contemporary careers research

(2017). Chawla et al. (2017) discuss this change when individuals take a more proactive role in career development as a natural development in career planning practices based on individual's taking greater responsibility for achieving individual career aspirations.

Additionally, Ussher, Roche, and Cable (2015) identified the development of a boundaryless career focus as 'career commitment' which reflects a high level of self-directed career. Ussher et al. (2015) suggest that employee engagement in career planning has a positive relationship with career commitment, in which individuals might move across "*industry (sector); occupation and professional association; region (from local to national); ....and organisation.*" (Baruch, 2004, p. 60). Based on this argument, the link between employee engagement, career commitment and multidirectional career paths are strong (Kahn, 1990; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018; Yeh, 2013). However, there still seems to be limited research that argues employee engagement affects career paths (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018).

2.8 Why Retail Industry?

According to Peterson (2007) and Smith and Macko (2014), the retail industry is vulnerable to increased turnover due to the high pressure that employees experience in their roles. This includes night/evening shifts, intense foot traffic during the weekends and holidays, and relocation or transfers based on business needs. The retail sector is diverse and includes a broad spectrum of small to large organisations. Additionally, Handa and Gulati (2014) highlight that customer service in the retail sector is the prime factor in determining profitability and business survival, and in providing this quality of service, front-line employees have to show a high level of effort, abilities, and appropriate behaviour. Thus, high levels of employee performance are expected in order to achieve excellent customer service and retail outcomes (2014). Suhartanto and Brien (2018) suggest that social exchange theory has a relevant framework to explore the connection between employee engagement and performance, identifying the importance of trust, loyalty, and commitment as critical components of that relationship. The model of engagement in the retail industry can be represented in four main components (engagement type, engagement process, employees' characteristic and the work outcome) (James et al., 2011; Peterson, 2007; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018).

2.9 Employee Engagement and the Retail Career Path

Nicholson and Arnold (1989) found that the career move from education to employment has three stages: preparation, encounter and adjustment. Hurst and Good (2009) further explain the three stages: The preparation stage is about the readiness to change and the steps which can be taken to make this change possible. The encounter stage deals with unexpected situations due to a new work environment and identifies the appropriate approach to coping with these new situations and demands. The adjustment phase is about evaluating any misfit between the individual's need and the change which has been taken in the first phase, in order to absorb the new demands or move on to another work-role which could be a better fit. These stages are illustrated in Figure 2 below.
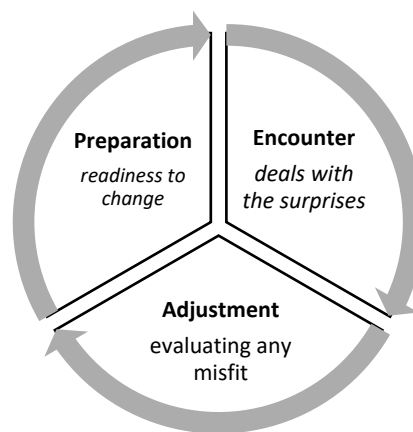
Figure 2: Career Transition Process

This transition process is often complex in retail-related careers because the retail industry usually employs more than the average number of younger workers (James et al., 2011). Many of these young employees are students who take part-time jobs to be able to focus on their study. Those students tend to spend much time, resources and effort to get their higher degrees; hence, they have high career expectations for their future which they see as related to their studies (Wood, 2004). Research claims that when work roles are parallel with employees' expectations, employees became satisfied with their job and career choices. Jobs in retail, however, are not fully understood by students (Hurst & Good, 2009). Accordingly, students often develop negative perspectives about a career in retail (Hurst & Good, 2009; Swinyard, Langrehr, & Smith, 1991).

Furthermore, many young people accept working in the retail sector as an essential experience for their potential future career (Hodkinson, 1995). Hurst and Good (2009) mentioned that students who have retail work experience are unlikely to choose a retail career as a future career after graduation. That is why Hurst and Good (2009) emphasised the importance of understanding "the students' career expectations and perceptions" (2009, p. 572) to influence their career choice in retail. Lowe and Schellenberg (2002) highlight the challenge that employers face in gaining the commitment from younger employees who are working for the first time, as they bring their own values and expectations without previous experience about the workplace demands, which agreed by (Kong, Wang, & Fu, 2015).

Therefore, the organisations which adjust their human resources policies and strategies to be able to deal with new young and inexperienced employees as well as experienced employees at the same time, are more likely to engage a range of experience and age cohorts in the workplace (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2002). Thus, it would seem that if the retailer understands what the different. between the level of flexibility and the factors that influence career choices, in addition to understanding the relationship between the pre-entry expectations and career decision-making they will engage their employees (Lowe & Schellenberg, 2002). If the retailer understands the different generations expect in their retail career, they will enhance employee engagement and this will minimise turnover in the retail industry (Hurst & Good, 2009).

Knight and Crutsinger (2003) found that employees who plan retail as a future career expected to find an enjoyable work environment, good pay and opportunity to grow and develop. Knight and Crutsinger (2003) emphasise that, on the one hand, poor management can lead to unmotivated employees and increased employee turnover due to disengagement, while, on the other hand, strong management skills, e.g. (encouragement, feedback and appreciation) plays a significant role in improving satisfaction and reducing stress which leads to enhanced employee engagement and retention (Hurst & Good, 2009). Employee engagement is developed by an organisation's conditions to gain employees' commitment, loyalty and energy (James et al., 2011).

2.10   Conclusions

Kahn (1990) describes the concept of employee engagement as a 'self in role' process, which gives the employee a chance for both "*self-expression and self-employment*" (Kahn, 1990, p.

694). Kahn explored the concept of employee engagement as a physical state linked to the psychological state. These two states define the employees' actions during their work performance and develop a relationship between the employees and their role, managers, organisation and industry. These relationships are ongoing interactions and vulnerable to disagreement or misunderstanding, which could affect employee morale and feelings (Hall, 2002). Other researchers have attributed positive employee engagement to selecting adaptable employees and highly skilled managers, who delegate the responsibility to the HR department in general (Castanheira & Story, 2016; Hill, 2008).

Macey and Schneider (2008) offer another perspective suggesting that employee engagement is improved more rapidly when there is a transformational leadership style which leverages the employee's psychological state, behaviours, and traits. The authors found that employee engagement is influenced by the organisation's purpose, considering both "*attitudinal and behavioural components*" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 4). According to this finding, Macey and Schneider (2008) situate the responsibility for employee engagement at the organisational and managerial levels, suggesting that it is the managers' actions and the organisations' instructions that create a framework for potential employee engagement.

In other contributions to this literature, several researchers have focused on measuring employee engagement to explore the impact of disengagement on job quality. James et al. (2011) see employee engagement as an outcome behaviour that can be measured, using organisational commitment and career satisfaction to determine levels of engagement. Volpone et al. (2012) took a different approach, using a diversity lens to focus on aspects of culture and gender and later added performance appraisal as an additional measurement. More recently, turnover has been included in the measures to find the levels of engagement (Ali et al., 2018; Bassi & McMurrer, 2016; Gutermann et al., 2017; Smith & Macko, 2014).

There appears to be a broad consensus that employee engagement is the desired outcome based on a leader's actions and an organisation's objectives which are articulated and measured through organisational policies and practices (Gutermann et al., 2017; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018). Nevertheless, Boichuk and Menguc (2013) went back to the original concept developed by Kahn when he states "*people's attachment and detachment to their role varies*" (1990, p. 694). Boichuk and Menguc (2013) explored the dissatisfied employee's voice by

focusing on the levels of commitment over time. Their study made a significant contribution to the concept of employee engagement by focusing on the employee's needs instead of focusing on organisational practices. Thus, drawing on the discussion so far, employee engagement is an emotional and motivational feeling, which gives employees a sense of commitment and belonging to their role, managers, workplace and industry.

This research will continue exploring the concept of employee engagement using a qualitative methodology to draw out the employees' voice, enabling employees to reflect on how management styles and managers' actions enhance their engagement. The expected contribution from this research is to give managers and organisations generally and retailers specifically, more insight into employees' perceptions about how engagement is enacted in the workplace. This contribution will help managers to create a positive environment that contributes to enhanced levels of employee engagement. Further, it will address a gap in the literature by highlighting perceptions around workplace engagement from the employee perspective and provide a useful counterpoint to much of the research that focusses on engagement as a top-down process and outcome-oriented process.

Developing higher levels of employee engagement and reducing turnover is a complex issue. This research contributes by acknowledging that there is a range of systemic factors contributing to poor outcomes and turnover in the retail industry while the extant literature mostly focuses on measuring the employee engagement, engagement concept in the workplaces and causes of employee disengagement, this research points to the complexity of the issue and by giving voice to the employee experience, it addresses not only a gap in the literature but it also highlights that managerial initiatives and output focus have been missing a valuable determinant or influence in the employee voice.

The next chapter explores the research process and methodologies carried out to answer the research questions. It describes the ethical considerations that have been taken into account during the data collection.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

3.1 Introduction

"People sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them, stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, these stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives."

Bell (2002, p. 208)

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical landscape that underpins this research, in particular framing the rationale for why I was drawn to narrative inquiry. The purpose of this study was to explore what engagement means to frontline employees who work in the retail industry in New Zealand. The statement from Bell (2002) clarifies that as a methodological approach, narrative inquiry is about close contact with people to hear their stories, which could be the first time they have had the opportunity to talk about themselves. People build and tell their stories based on their understanding of themselves and the circumstances around themselves, including the consistent experiences that have shaped their current identities. Narrative inquiry considers stories as an important source of data; whereas the participants may think what they have to say is unimportant. Bruner (1991, p. 6) states that "*Narrative is an account of events occurring over time.*" Narrative inquiry explores the relationship between the assumptions that shaped those stories and provides *"a window into people's beliefs and experiences"* (Bell, 2002, p. 209). It allows researchers to present the full experience with all its complexity and richness. Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool as a research approach (Mumby, 1996).

Canagarajah (1996) and Clark (2010) argue that the use of narrative function in research gives the chance to participants share their knowledge of experience. Narratives let researchers elicit information about people that they do not know themselves, and it allows the researcher to analyse the people stories and bring the deep "*hidden assumptions to surface*" (Bell, 2002, p. 209). However, the time required to analyse the qualitative data, makes it inappropriate with a large number of participants. The narrative inquiry requires a close interaction between the researcher and the participant, which illuminate the researcher and the participant by the end of the research (Bell, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The ethical considerations are very important in qualitative research, due to the influential relationship which is created between the researcher and participants. The ethical considerations usually put both of the researcher and

participants in a safe area and make the relationship during the research process clearer and comfortable (Bell, 2002; Payne, 2000).

Moreover, when researchers take the participants' stories and place them in the body of the research, it is "*can never be entirely free of the researcher's interpretation of their lives*" (Bell, 2002, p. 210). However, with knowledge about these limitations, narrative inquiry helps the researcher to obtain in-depth knowledge about the research topic. In this research, I decided to draw on the narrative inquiry methodology to gain in-depth knowledge about frontline employees' experience in the retail sector.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The choice that researchers make around their ontological and epistemological approach influences which methodology and methods they will use to better understand the phenomenon to be explored. Ontology is concerned with the existence and the relationship between people and society in the world. The central ontological assumption in this research is that reality is a form of subjectivism. This means that reality is created and understood in several ways based on the individual's perceptions and experiences and that these may change in an evolving time and context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

Closely linked to ontology is an epistemology which is concerned with the source and the limits of knowledge. There are two seeming polarised epistemological positions: the quantitative, objectivist position and the qualitative, subjectivist position. Each epistemological position or theory of knowledge is underpinned by a set of assumptions and beliefs that a researcher brings to the research (Creswell, 2013). This research draws upon the qualitative, subjectivist view commonly referred to as the interpretive paradigm that considers that reality has multiple faces and subjectivity is influenced by the research context (Crossan, 2003).

The Interpretative paradigm is based on the idea that individuals construct their reality based on their understanding of the social interactions of people and their reactions to the environment they inhabit (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). This approach assumes that there are many possible interpretations of these social interactions and the data generated (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

3.3 Methodology and Methods

This research used the qualitative and interpretative approach in the form of narrative inquiry to explore participants' stories about their careers and work experiences (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Narrative inquiry as explained earlier in this chapter is applied in this research to give voice to the participants to express their views on engagement and their career experiences (Bruner, 1991). Narrative inquiry as a form of qualitative research which is highly contextual, and as such, is conducive to allowing participants to talk about their career journey, using in-depth interviews to gather their career stories. Narrative inquiry does more than just capture a snapshot or cross-section of events to show how and why things happen. It aligns well with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that frame the research design, that reality is recognised in the form of subjectivism (Gray, 2018).

The method of collecting career stories using in-depth narrative interviews is the most appropriate method for capturing the detailed experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This method helped in observing the participant's emotions while they are telling their stories. In this research, ten participants who are working in retail sectors with minimum of two years' experience as frontline employees. The 'career story' interviews were audio-recorded, using interview guidelines incompatible with the literature review and ethical considerations. One pilot interview was carried out to ensure that the questions were coherent and easily understood and covered the scope and purpose of the research (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to talk openly about their experiences and perceptions relating to the research questions. Three of the participants chose to be interviewed over the phone, which was a challenge in terms of the recording process and transcription. But by using audio editing software, which was specifically designed to remove distortion from the audio recording, this challenge was resolved.

Furthermore, based on Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) recommendations, the researcher used a research diary was used to record any thoughts, ideas, insights and additional questions as they may arise throughout the interview. Figure 3 outlines the steps implemented to collect the primary data.
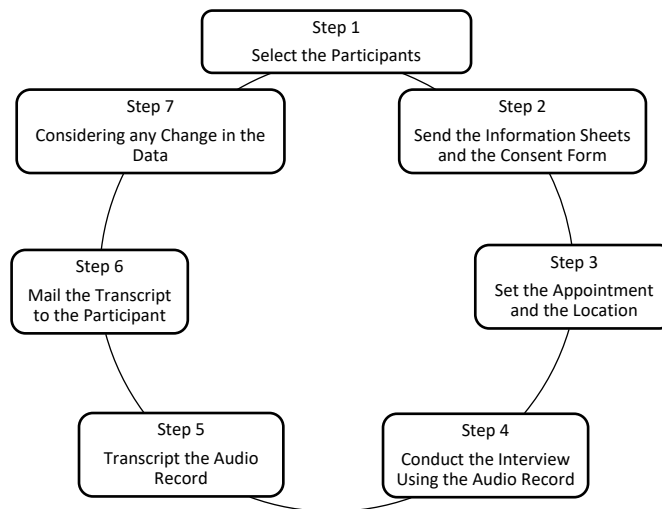
Figure 3: The process of collecting primary data

3.3.1 Recruitment and Selection

A purposeful selection process was carried out to identify potential research participants. The following criteria were set down.

- Participants must be: Working in the retail industry
- Have more than two years' experience in retail as frontline employees
- Older than 20 years.

The research sought to get a cross-section of voices in terms of diversity characteristics such as gender, age, nationality and years of experience. This aim was to better reflect the retail industry in New Zealand which is demographically; very diverse compared too many other sectors (James et al., 2011; Quach, Jebarajakirthy, & Thaichon, 2017). As an international student, I found the recruitment of possible interviewees quite challenging.

Most of the participants came from personal contacts. In addition, the snowball approach and social media were used to reach other potential participants (Gray (2018); Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016).

Ethical considerations demand that the participants' identity remains confidential so codes were created to represent them. The first two letters represent the first letters of their names and surnames. The (IN) represents the first two letters in the word (INTERVIEW). The number represents the sequence of the interviews. Table 2 shows a brief profile of the ten participants who were interviewed for this research.

Participants Code	Gender	Age	Years' experience in Retail	Nationality	Original Study/ Profession	Retail field	Business size in Retail
TH-IN1	Female	21	4	Malaysia	Pharmacist	Pharmacy	National
AS-IN2	Male	38	14	Pakistan	IT Engineer	Supermarket	Multinational
AH-IN3	Male	26	2	Egypt	Education	Carpets	Local
SI-IN4	Female	25	5	New Zealand	Hospitality	Cosmetics	National
OM-IN5	Male	30	12	India	Accountant	Supermarket	Multinational
DI-IN6	Female	42	10	Fiji	Business	Warehouse	National
NA-IN7	Female	32	12	Egypt	Pharmacist	Pharmacy	Local
CA-IN8	Female	42	18	New Zealand	Environment	Food	National
RO-IN9	Male	38	3	New Zealand	Rugby player	Sport	International
AK-IN10	Male	36	8	England	IT Engineer	Technology	Multinational

Table 2: Participants Profile

3.3.2 Ethical Considerations

According to Hair, Money, Samouel, and Page (2007, p. 70) "*Research ethics refers to the moral principles guiding research*". This statement describes research ethics as a set of ethical or appropriate guidelines to build a good relationship and level of trust with the participants to enable them to give voice to their experiences and concerns. As noted earlier the choice of narrative inquiry meant the research ethics, involved careful consideration of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions that underpin the research design (Payne, 2000). The ontological assumption in this research is that reality is recognised in the form of subjectivism (Gray, 2018). The epistemological assumption is aligned with the ontological one, which assumes that reality has multiple faces and subjectivity is influenced by the research context (Crossan, 2003). The theoretical assumption embedded the granted assumptions that the researchers accept and use during the research process (Payne, 2000). Accordingly, the ethical considerations covered these different assumptions to ensure that the findings reflected what the participants had conveyed.

The researcher also had agreed to adhere to the ethical principles set out by the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEC). These focus on four ethical principles which are; avoid harm to participants such as physical or mental harm, gain "*informed consent of the participants, respect the privacy of the participants, avoid deception*" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 63).

To avoid harm includes physical harm such as being present in unsafe places or using harmful tools. Psychological harm includes not embarrassing the participants or giving a negative reaction to their accounts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Participants were asked to choose an open safe place to conduct the interview or if not available the option to conduct the interview at the university was offered. Also, participants were able to select a time for the interview based on their availability, and the mode they preferred face to face interview or telephone interview.

The principle of informed consent means that sufficient information is given to the research participants to correctly understand what they will be involved in to facilitate making an informed decision. Also, it is essential to provide them with a reasonable time to make their decision about participating. For this research potential participant were given two weeks to reply and sign the consent form which had been sent to them by email with the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) about the researcher and the research. As Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) stress, the participants have the right to know and understand the purpose of the research and how their information will be handled. This kind of clarity helps in creating a trust situation between the participants and the researcher which allow the participants to respond openly and effectively.

The third ethical principle considered in this research is to respect the participants' privacy by guaranteeing confidentiality i.e. that their names and any unrecorded information will not be used in the research, (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016; Payne, 2000). This principle was stated in the Consent Form (see Appendix C)that the participants signed.

The fourth principle is to avoid deception. This implied being honest as to the purpose of the research and using the participants' words honestly and checking with them what they meant after transcription to ensure that their words will be used accurately (Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016): Creswell (2013). Participants had the opportunity to review the transcription of their interview and change or delete anything they were uncomfortable about or clarify what was said.

3.3.3   Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were conducted face to face with seven participants and three participants were interviewed by phone. The duration of the interviews ranged between 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured and open-ended format using an interview

guide (see Appendix E). The guide was developed to cover three different periods of times (past, present and future). The interview contains 15 questions and started with the greeting section. By the end, there was a closing section to express appreciation for the time that the participants had offered to this research. Each stage aimed to deeply understand the participants' feelings about their career stories in relation to their term of engagement in their workplace.

The first part of the questions focused on the participants' past career stories and asked them to express their feelings at that time, then to discuss those feelings critically. This supported the second part, which focused on their present career and how it is linked in one way or another to their choices in the past. The second part of the questions guide covered their thoughts about choosing retail as a career path and their understanding of the term engagement. Also, it covers the safety and risk potentials in the workplaces in the retail industry. This part explored the participants' perceptions in relation to the main components of engagement that have been discussed in the literature review (meaningfulness, safety and availability) (Kahn, 1990).

The third part focused on the participants' future views about their career. Parts one and two were like brainstorming to prepare the participants to talk about their future openly; this third part covered the reasons behind shifting a career path or staying in it. Also, this part closed the circle of the three stages by asking the participants whether they are enjoying their current job. This question aimed to get them to put all that they talked about in one sentence.

By the end of each interview, participants were asked to express any thoughts or share any stories that they would like to add. This was a chance to have more of an opportunity to talk about some stories that they felt like talking about, and that they had remembered during the interview.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 158) state, "*Usually recorded in a small notebook, jottings are intended to help you to remember things that you want to include when you write the more complete notes.".* Based on this advice, a research notebook was used to record any notes about the participants' reactions and body language, and to help in the process of data analysis at a later stage.

3.4 Analysing the Data

Huberman and Miles (1994) state that the collecting of data, data analysis, and writing often occurs simultaneously during the research process. Indeed qualitative researcher is a process "*requiring a form of 'learning by doing'*" (Fielding & Lee, 1991: cited in Dey, 1993, p. 6). In this research, the data analysis went through an iterative rather than a linear approach, which is considered a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

Although a timeframe was put in place to finish all interviews, this time frame could not be followed exactly because some potential participants withdrew from the research and some others did not meet all the participant criteria. So it was hard to find the required number of participants during the time planned. Accordingly, the data analysis began in parallel with more interviews being conducted. The first interview was a pilot that was transcribed immediately before conducting any further interviews. Based on this pilot interview and after reviewing the transcript, the question sequences were rearranged in the interview guide to make it more effective. After reviewing the final draft of the interview guide, invitations were sent to all the potential participants. There were twelve initial participants, but they finally became six.

These six interviews were conducted over two weeks, which was within the time frame of collecting data. But it was very difficult to find four more participants to meet the minimum number required of participants based on the research proposal. It took a month to see the rest of the potential participants, and that was outside the time frame of collecting data. So, to avoid wasting time, the six interviews that had been done were transcribed and the transcripts reviewed. The analysis process went through four steps as below:

- Transcribing the interviews
- Reading and Editing
- Coding and Creating Themes
- Themes Analysis

3.4.1   Step One: Transcribing the interviews

The computer was the primary tool to deal with the data using Nvivo 12 in this research. All records have been saved in the computer and uploaded to Nvivo. Nvivo is a transcription tool that didn't give a 100% accuracy rate because it is an electronic tool, so it was necessary to

review all transcriptions and compare them with the audio recordings to ensure that all data is correct before starting the analysis process. This manual checking process took time, but it was still more efficient than transcribing the records manually from the beginning (Reinle, 2019).

3.4.2   Step Two: Reading and Editing

In the second step, all transcripts were read several times to gain more familiarity with the content. The notes which were taken during the interviews process were compared with the content of each transcript. All key ideas were noted in a research notebook. The first structure of the codes and themes noted and the initial common notes between the participants identified (Clarke & Braun, 2018). The number of codes initially was 66, but they ended up being 45 in the next step.

3.4.3   Step Three: Coding and Creating Themes

In this step, coding was done through Nvivo 12 as one of the most popular software used to analyse qualitative data (Gray, 2018). The 45 initial codes were reviewed and changed several times based on the process of collecting the data which was going on in parallel with the process of data analysis. Then constant comparison was begun to maintain the connections between these codes so as to develop a theoretical framework. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 81) " *Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the 'the world', 'reality', and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent* ". In this step, a theoretical framework was built based on the meanings behind the words, even if the words are not directly related to the key themes. The process of understanding the data and engaging with the meanings beyond words was conducted at two levels. Level one involved checking the themes with the codes to ensure that they were linked and all the available data identified. At level two, the themes were checked to consider their validity in relation to the data set. By this stage, the thematic map was generated and ready for the next step.

In this stage, some necessary extra reading was done to make the literature review more comprehensive and in line with the findings based on Creswell (2013) suggestions. This additional reading was due to the emergence of new experiences and themes in the participants' stories which had not been initially discussed in the literature review. The key

themes identified after no more variations were apparent through reading the data and listed to be analysed in the next step.

3.4.4   Step Four: Themes Analysis

The process of drawing the final answers for the research questions took place in this step. The identified themes were refined determined by the number of times they appeared in the interview data. The overall stories' themes were recognised and linked to the main research questions. Each statement by each participant was compared to the theme's assumptions and linked to the other statements under the same theme. Also, the participants' characteristics were considered during data analysis to show the variations in response and reactions based on the different circumstances in each story, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

3.5 Conclusions

Narrative inquiry facilitates the creation of a close relationship between the researcher and the participant as experiences and stories are shared (Bell, 2002). In this research, the narrative inquiry was considered as an appropriate methodology to get information from the people's stories. This research aims to explore the frontline employees' voice, thus narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology as it enables the researcher to elicit the participants' experiences via an in-depth and iterative research interview process.

This chapter outlines the ethical considerations, which are a very important aspect of conducting qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The main ethical principles followed in this research were to avoid harm to participants, respect their privacy, and avoid deception and personal assumptions. These principles create a level of trust between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

There are ten participants in this research study and the process of data collection involved seven steps to ensure that all ethical considerations had been met. The participation selections were made based on specific criteria to create effective participation. A brief profile of the participants' was given in this chapter to show the diversity among the participants in terms of gender, ages, ethnicity and education background. Finally, this chapter outlines the stages of data analysis and the challenges faced while conducting each step. The next chapter discusses the themes and the findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 4 : Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the themes that have been identified in the data analysis to answer the key research question, which is:

How do frontline retail employees understand and interpret the role and actions of managers in creating a culture of career engagement?

The sub-questions of this research, as mentioned before in Chapter One, are:

- **What are the understandings of frontline retail employees around the concept of engagement in the workplace?**
- **How do frontline retail employees perceive the role of managers in creating a positive culture to enhance employee engagement in the workplace?**
- **How does employee engagement impact on the career paths of frontline retail employees?**

The next section gives more detail on the demographic profile of participants and experience within the retail sector.

4.2 Participants Profiles

1. **TH-IN1:** She is a student in pharmacology, and she used to work in retail during her study time. She started as a part-time employee in sports clothing shops and then got an opportunity to do full-time work in the retail department of a pharmacy. She is originally from Malaysia and has New Zealand citizenship. She is 21 years old, and she started work when she was 17. She has four years' experience in retail and likes dealing with different customers every day.

2. **AS-IN2:** He is from Pakistan and was employed in the retail sector while studying. His dream at that time was to graduate and work as an IT engineer. After graduation, he found that market demand in Pakistan is in retail more than IT. So, he decided to shift his career, and he studied MBA to be able to prove himself in his work. He worked in an international brand in Pakistan and then moved to New Zealand. It was easy for him to find a job in a multinational brand because of his extensive experience in retail with an

international company. He is 38 years old, and he has about 14 years' experience in the retail sector. He had a chance to be promoted in Pakistan to be a department manager, but when he moved to New Zealand, he went back one step to get the local experience.

3. **AH-IN3:** He is a PhD student in New Zealand, but he used to work as a lecturer in one of the best universities in Egypt. He is working in a local store selling carpets and rugs. He found himself overqualified to work as a frontline employee in a local store, but he needs to do this job during his study time to reduce the cost that he is spending from his savings fund. He has no future thoughts about his career in retail, and he believes it is just a temporary job until his graduation. He is 26 years old, with two years' experience in retail.

4. **SI-IN4:** She is a New Zealander who came from a hospitality background. She started her work in retail when she was a student, and then she found that this is the career she prefers. So, she stopped her study in hospitality to do a full-time job in retail. She has five years' experience in a different national retail company in the cosmetics field, and she is 25 years old.

5. **OM-IN5:** he used to work in retail when he was a student in high school. He worked in one multinational company for 12 years. Now he is looking to finish his PhD degree to shift his career to accountancy. He used to be a part-timer in the retail industry and was never interested in being promoted or getting a full-time job. He is 30 years old.

6. **DI-IN6:** she likes to deal with different customers every day and to build a good relationship with them. She used to work in retail for ten years, and now she thinks that after a few years she will retire. But for now, she will not leave her career in retail; she could change the company but will not move out of the retail sector. She has ten years' experience and is 42 years old.

7. **NA-IN7:** she is a pharmacist, who worked in retail when she was a student. After graduation, she worked in her family business in a pharmacy. She is handling the retail department in her family business and has her online retail business as well. She believes that retail is an important sector and it is essential to know how to be a good retailer or an employee in the retail industry. She has 12 years' experience and is 32 years old.

8. **CA-IN8:** she started working in the retail food sector when she was in high school. She continued her work in retail to fund her during her university study. She was looking to

graduate and work in her profession as an environmental engineer. But after graduation, she found that her field has no demand in the work market, so she kept working in retail and then was promoted to be a manager, with part of her job being in HR. She has 18 years' experience and is 42 years old.

9. **RO-IN9**: He used to be a rugby player, and after he reached the age when he couldn't play anymore, he found that working in retail sports shops kept him attached to his passion. He started as a frontline employee, and after a short time, became a supervisor and then a store manager. He applied what he learned as a player in his retail work to build a strong team working as one unit to achieve the store goals. He found it is very close to what he used to do as a member of the rugby team. He believes this background helped him to be promoted and to achieve a good career in retail. He has three years in retail, and he is 38 years old.

10. **AK-IN10:** He was working as an IT engineer in Egypt until he moved to England to study for a master's degree. He was looking for a job to support him to cover his living cost, so he worked in the retail food sector for four years. After graduation, he found a job in his field as an IT engineer, but his passion for retail pushed him to keep working in retail in electronic devices, which is related to his main profession. Then he decided to open an online retail store to be able to make a balance between his part-time job as an IT manager and his work as a retailer. He believes that online retail business is the future of retail. He has eight years' experience and is 36 years old.

The next section identifies and discusses the key themes and the sub-themes that came to the fore from analysis of the interview transcripts. In order to support the findings identified in this chapter, illustrative participant quotes are used and written in italics.

4.3 Themes

The key themes that emerged from the data analysis are categorised under four main parts, each part covering the sub-themes in the form of an inverted pyramid. The key themes and the sub-themes follow the intended objectives of the interview questions. Figure 4 shows the direction of the data analysis process and the structure of the key themes and the sub-themes.
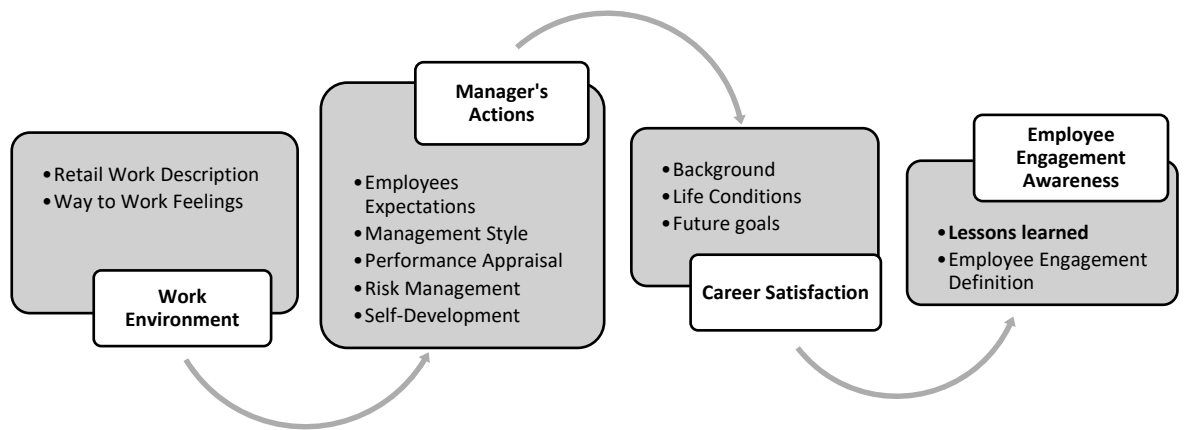
Figure 4: Data Analysis Process

4.3.1   Work Environment

According to the literature reviewed in chapter two, the retail work environment is challenging in most cases, due to the work requirements, such as having to work on public holidays or working in different locations or the requirement to work night and early morning shifts (Peterson, 2007; Smith & Macko, 2014). These adverse expectations were endorsed by the participants who spoke off the difficulties they faced as frontline employees in retail, such as the number of working hours, the on-call availability and being away from home and family for some time.

> *"The only day we really had off is Christmas Day...... otherwise, my job requires huge hours every day...... if the store operating 20 hours a day you kind of need to be around and available in case anything happens, and this is quite stressful...... the longest time away from home. I mean six weeks is a long time. Yeah. Not eating the food, you used to. Yeah, not hanging out with your mate". (CA-IN8)*

> *"You stay in different hotels, staying away from your bed. I want to be at home with my family". (SI-IN4)*

Also, one of the participants mentioned that the work environment is not very enjoyable when she was working in a 'smelly' department.

> *"I worked in the seafood department in a supermarket. So, I go home smelling of like chromium to fish or garnish smelling of like seafood". (CA-IN8)*

These views on the work environment melded with the way participants described their experiences of retail work below.

4.3.1.1 Retail Work Description

Fifty percent of participants described their job in retail as hard because of the type of tasks they had to do on a daily basis.

> *"It's not an easy job to do". (RO-IN9)*

> *"The job needs physical effort. So, lifting heavy stuff is one of the most annoying things....... Sometimes I'm tired physically and mentally. So, I'm just letting go......we are getting a new shipment and we would get carrying rugs all the time. So, it is almost like a labour work more than a retail job......I sometimes feel its meaningless job...... I mean if you're doing something repeatedly and it's the same thing, in my point of view it lacks the meaning". (AH-IN3)*

> *"You just do the same thing every single day". (TH-IN1)*

> *"It was not too much different, so it was just mostly coming and going". (OM-IN5)*

> *"It is a hard job". (AK-IN10)*

> *"It just hard in the retail". (DI-IN6)*

And two participants do not want to be promoted to avoid more stress:

> *"I really don't want to take too much stress in my head". (DI-IN6)*

> *"I'm not impressed by money and managing people. So, it's a personal thing". (AH-IN3)*

However, two participants were extremely positive about their work experiences and the environment in retail.

> *"Since I started my job in retail, it was a really good time. It was a great learning for me to see what the nature of the market. It was really beneficial...... It was a great journey going on obviously; it was a bit of new experience for me. It was giving an extra edge in my CV...... to meet the biggest advantage of doing the sales job is to make those relationships with the customers. Yeah. Yes. That is the main outcome". (AS-IN2*

> *"I liked it and then I'm really enjoying it. I enjoy talking to people I enjoy that connection that you have in retail that you see new people every day and they tell you their stories because you're more likely to open up to a retail person that you're not going to see them again, you're just passing by ...... So, I really enjoyed it. And then I ended up doing it as a career...... I didn't think I'd be good at retail but*

because I'm very talkative, it turns out to be an ideal job for me. Because I like talking to people and I like interacting with people so when they come in, I really enjoy directing them. So, I found that there is a challenge every day, and I expect this. Which is why I don't get disappointed when I get challenged here. And as long as I'm challenged, I am not disconnected". (NA-IN7)

Additionally, most of the participants who had some negative feelings about their work in retail also had some positivity.

"It kept me busy kept me moving and always interacted with different people because every customer is different. So, I really look forward to that later part of my career......You need to interact with people. And interact with them positively so. Throughout the day you're quite happy". (OM-IN5)

"There's always like positives because I like face to face customers. I like helping customers. That's all positivity. I like my team, they're really good. I like training them ...... I like retail because of sales. I mean it's always a good feeling when you help the customers that you know they're satisfied. That's what motivates me to stay there I guess yeah. So, I enjoy doing it. Like on a daily basis I enjoy it". (SI-IN4)

"I think I would choose retail. Yeah, and I would choose the retail because I would find it fun". (TH-IN1)

"There is a daily challenge in retail work, which make it sort of fun. I believe it is the industry of the future, especially the online retail sector". (AK-IN10)

"It was simply selling and offering rituals to customers. Customer interactions stocking shelves baking fruit and vegetables and all that type of stuff...... I learned how to deal with customers, sometimes they were grumpy but most of the time they are happy. Also, I learned how to count money, be on work on time, and be presentable to look good when you get in front of customers. So, it was a great way to start". (CA-IN8)

"I love talking. That's the main thing. Taking and getting to people. All those speeches made a lot of friends. I have customers who come and ask about me to serve them...... Even if someone just come to the store and says "hello, how do you do?" this is nice. Oh, it's just about the relationship we've built with customers". (DI-IN6)

"I love working. Yeah. At retail, I've learned to love it. Does that make sense? I've learned to understand and admire what they do". (RO-IN9)

Only one participant who was strongly disengaged did not show any positivity. Based on these statements, the participants have been divided into four categories:

- Fully Engaged: (AS-IN2) and (NA-IN7)
- Average Engagement: (OM-IN5), (SI-IN4), (TH-IN1), (AK-IN10), and (DI-IN6).
- Low Engagement: (CA-IN8) and (RO-IN9)
- Fully Disengaged: (AH-IN3)

Each category describes the work conditions using different adjectives based on their experience in the retail industry. These adjectives show their feelings about their work and their level of engagement to the industry, which will be discussed deeply in the following themes. Table 3 illustrates the work conditions under each level of engagement.

	Fully Engaged	Average Engagement	Low Engagement	Fully Disengaged
Negative Work Conditions		*same thing every single day (TH-IN1)* *staying away from home (SI-IN4)* *not too much different (OM-IN5)* *It's just hard (DI-IN6)* *hard job (AK-IN10)*	*huge hours every day, long time away from home, smelling of like seafood (CA-IN8)* *not an easy job (RO-IN9)*	*needs physical effort, lifting heavy stuff, annoying, it is like labour work, meaningless, repeatedly (AH-IN3)*
Positive Work Conditions	*great learning, really beneficial, great journey going on, new experience, giving an extra edge in my CV, relationships with the customers (AS-IN2)* *talking to people, see new people every day, interacting with people, I get challenged here (NA-IN7)*	*it is fun (TH-IN1)* *face to face customers, helping customers, Teamwork (SI-IN4)* *interact with people (OM-IN5)* *the relationship we've built with customers (DI-IN6)* *sort of fun, daily challenge (AK-IN10)*	*a great way to start (CA-IN8)* *I've learned to admire what they do (RO-IN9)*	

Table 3: Work Conditions in Different Level of Engagement

The most negativity comes from the repetitive work and being away from home or the long work hours, which make the work hard; while the positivity came from having challenges. Also, the interaction with customers is one of the most enjoyable factors among the participants, and they describe this as the fun side of their job. Thus the main finding here is that, even if the work conditions are hard, the participants still enjoy working in retail because of the interaction with customers and meeting different people every day which can mean, no one day is the same. Nevertheless, if the work conditions involve more physical effort than just dealing with people, the work is not perceived as unenjoyable, This frequent physical work participants found annoying and can make the work meaningless from their point of view. Without human interaction and mental challenges, the work environment was viewed as unfavourable.

4.3.1.2 The Feelings on the Way to Work

There were two contrasting emotions expressed by the participants about their work environment, which were entirely in line with the positive and negative factors that have been discussed before about the work conditions. The participant who was categorised as fully disengaged stated that he is not excited and some days he is just bored, and when been asked about the reason behind those feelings, the answer was:

> *"Some days I'm OK but not excited definitely because some days are really tough".*
>
> *(AH-IN3)*

This answer corresponds with his situation where the work conditions required more physical effort than mental challenges. This is not surprising given this participant is a PhD student in Engineering, who is used to the mental challenges required from his study. However, on occasions when the work requirements in his retail job were changed to align more with his academic field of study, his feelings became more positive.

> *"Yesterday the owner bought a huge wardrobe with several shelves to hold the rugs and he asked me to assemble some parts then started rearranging the shelves. It was physical work of course but it was nice". (AH-IN3)*

This statement highlights the importance of the relationship between an employee's skill set and the work requirement, which could play a part in improving an employee's feelings towards the job even if work conditions are still arduous.

Conversely, the two participants who are categorised as fully engaged were extremely excited and motivated by their job roles.

> *"I always enjoy my life enjoy my job because my duty is that…… So actually, I don't bother much about what I feel what I know that I don't allow myself to overcome any situation on my job. You can say this is my style. Yeah, it's just the motivation, so I love my job and usually, I am very excited". (AS-IN2)*

> *"When I've started to find more motivation and inspiration to go to work, this is when I started enjoying my job. As long as I'm challenged in my job. I don't get bored or burnt out. I don't get it. I go every day when I wake up every morning without an alarm, and I go every day. I show up to work every day. Although I'm tired on Sundays because I'm working long hours, I still show up as long as I'm being challenged". (NA-IN7)*

The other seven participants were quite positive even if they have been categorised under average engagement levels.

> *"The plenty of time I've been excited about going to work and energised". (CA-IN8)*

> *"Quite happy". (RO-IN9)*

> *"I feel good". (OM-IN5)*

> *"I feel satisfied and good". (AK-IN10)*

And some of them were more open to express their feelings by talking about their expectations to have a pleasant work environment.

> *"It could be better". (SI-IN4)*

> *"I don't know, most of the time I don't feel like I'm growing. I need a good team, but I also need to be challenged to love my job". (TH-IN1)*

> *"I'm quite satisfied". (DI-IN6)*

The statements lead to the next theme, which will focus on the Managers' actions.

4.3.2   Managers' Actions

As mentioned in the Literature review, Managers play a significant part in creating a positive work environment and increasing the level of employee engagement. Hill (2008) and James et al. (2011) state that one of the critical factors in creating a positive work environment is the relationship between employees and their managers. May et al. (2004) focused on the level of trust between the Managers and their employees to build a strong level of engagement. Several

studies support this by focusing on the link between employee engagement and managers' actions (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007; Ferguson & Carstairs, 2005; Johnson, 2004). By analysing the data in this research, five sub-themes were identified in this regard.

4.3.2.1 Management Styles

Although some participants were extremely engaged and others were at an average level, all participants had gone through complex situations with their managers. But, their way of expressing these situations varied in intensity, a reflection of their engagement level, as has been identified earlier. Listening to their accounts it was clear that the employee's perception about their managers' style impacts on the individual employee experience and feelings about work. Management style could be related to the Managers' personality or their way of handling varying issues on any given day (Antonioni, 1998; Sarros & Santora, 2001).

The participant who is fully disengaged described his female manager as *"An unappreciative person who is very picky" (AH-IN3).* He generalised this description, based on his experience with different female managers in Egypt and New Zealand.

> *"The manager sometimes gives us meaningless jobs…… in my point of view; it's meaningless just because the shop is empty and no customers. So, she asked us to do something because she doesn't feel that we have to do something at least…… the owner and the manager listen to us but sometimes it would be meaningless to discuss something especially if they are very convinced…… Sometimes, she asks me to go bring good coffee for her, which is not part of my job. So, I don't like that. I mean that's something I don't like…… she is not appreciative…… in my experience working with women, they usually don't appreciate. I used to volunteer in Egypt. I worked with women as well. So yes, I experienced that before. They are just very picky more than men. Especially, when they are managers". (AH-IN3)*

Also, the two participants who are considered to be fully engaged in the previous theme faced some perplexing situations with their line managers. but they were less intense in their statements.

> *"During my manger's visit to evaluate my store, my manager told me that there is nothing to show, you have to do a lot in this market. Actually, after that day, I did not try to do anything in that market because I was really demotivated after this evaluation". (AS-IN2)*

"My manager was a little bit like micromanaging. So, she would always like... we have to go back to her to get this or that, to give discounts or to give something away. That was difficult". (NA-IN7)

The first statement highlights the importance of understanding what an employee is trying to achieve and showing appreciation, whereas the second statement, alludes to the issue of micromanagement by a female manager which suggests a lack of trust.

The participants who have low engagement highlighted more negative management styles. One of them faced forms of bullying by her male boss. She thought that the reason for his actions could be his personality by using his position to feel strong as a male. She highlighted the fact that he used to do this with her and another female employee, and in the end, both of them resigned.

"In my early 20s, I was bullied by my boss. And this went on for quite a while. But then luckily or unluckily another lady started. She was a little bit more senior to myself, so he stopped bullying me, and he started picking on her. So, I had a bit of a break, which was great. But then of course when she left because of him he came back to bullying me, you know. So, I left. Life's too short to be picked on and just constantly bullied and harassed by him. So, both of us left. I think looking back if I was older and wiser, I probably would have done something about it. But when you are quite young and naive you just take the easiest path. The easiest path is just to get up and leave. Yeah, we were quite young. So, both I and the other lady resigned within a month. I don't know why he was like that. Maybe his management style or his personality is a rationale. To make himself feel that he is so strong. So, you know all those things make it very hard". (CA-IN8)

The second participant in the low engagement category talked about the lack of communication which caused some employees to leave. He spoke about the manner leaders use to express their ideas, and how body language also plays a significant part in how the employees' respond and understand the information.

"Some conflicts lead many employees to leave. You know, you can't just take those people to read your mind. And as a leader, you shouldn't expect the staff to understand your verbal communication way. It's the way your body language talk. Yeah, the way you stand the way the energy that you give off. So that's all part of communication. I found many people were ready to leave. So, I just asked the managers to set a meeting. So, the manager and the senior managers sat down, and we had an open conversation. And I was just glad that we all got a conversation. We all got to have our meetings and to move forward as the team. Yeah. If there is an

issue, we need to talk about it. "Because if we don't, then this is going to go back to what had happened before". (RO-IN9)

The last category of participants who are highly engaged, ironically also have negative experiences as well, under a management style which was at times unrealistic, demanding and discriminatory. In addition, participants spoke of the lack of training, their powerlessness and lack of two-way communication and, managers not leading by example.

"We had one of the managers who were making me so upset. There was no respect. Probably my skin colour. She was just giving so much work to me. That was just unbelievable. She could hire three staff to do what I am doing. And she was asking to do on my own. So, I think the skin colour was making a problem. I was just about to leave that shop. Yeah, I was almost 99% going but before that, she went on maternity leave. So, I know that she is going to go for months. I. Was just about to give my resignation and talk to my HR. Yeah. Because they need to understand these things. She used to push. And pull over. She gave me a lot of work. So, I was exhausted. Some days my hands were so painful. I couldn't speak. Yeah, I was so sorry that I couldn't talk to her how I was feeling because of the way she treated me...... she will back next year. But let us see what will happen. There are more opportunities for me nowhere so I will not worry about things that still not coming up". (DI-IN6)

"While I'm working in a different department we had to learn on the job. So different styles. I guess this works differently for different departments". (OM-IN5)

"The manager was draining us as students, he knows that we need income and he can pay us less than the minimum wage". (AK-IN10)

"It's that ethical conflict about what I believe in versus what the manager believes and so I think that's what makes me unhappy. I think not being able to voice my ideas in certain situations makes me uncomfortable". (TH-IN1)

"I don't get any support from her. No support at all. She always likes to push us to make sales but she's aware there are no customers. I feel like she needs to come and visit us more and get an idea of what we're going through. She comes and visits my store every few weeks she doesn't know, she doesn't support us. She's just expecting too much of the store because it's location. We've done everything and there's not much we can do. I need her support about, what I could do better as a store manager myself. Like just to lead me as leadership to do better. I get none of that, but I don't even know how I'm doing a good job or a bad job because she's never there. Oh yeah. So, she never there". (SI-IN4)

Based on all the ten participants statements, the Management style has a critical impact on the employees' engagement, as do the working conditions. The data analyses show that the work conditions' are just as important as the management style in the way they impact on the employees' feelings and engagement level. If both are positive, they could lead to higher engagement or if negative, full disengagement. If one aspect is lacking then this creates a medium level of engagement and if both aspects are lacking i.e. a positive management style and good work conditions then disengagement is likely to result. Table 4 illustrates the relationship between the management styles and the levels of engagement according to the participants' statements.

Negative management styles	AH-IN3	CA-IN8	RO-IN9	AK-IN10	DI-IN6	OM-IN5	TH-IN1	SI-IN4	AS-IN2	NA-IN7
Engagement Level (red →→→ green)										
Unappreciated	(red)								(red)	
Micromanagement	(red)									(red)
Bullying		(red)								
Lack of communication		(red)	(red)							
Draining				(red)						
Discrimination					(green)					
Lack of training						(green)				
Not listening							(green)			
Not leading by example								(green)		

Table 4: The Impact of Management Style on the Engagement Level (■Weak Engagement,   ■Strong Engagement)

The table shows that applying several negative management styles is more likely to cause employee disengagement. Each management style discussed further in the next part.

4.3.2.1.1   Appreciation

The lack of appreciation is considered in this research as the most negative management style. This finding agrees with Kahn (1990) principles around psychological meaningfulness, which should be enhanced by the "*promotion of dignity, self-appreciation, and a 'sense of worthwhileness"* (1990, p. 705) interactions between people. Kahn (1990) stated that lack of appreciation could destroy the sense of psychological meaningfulness. The same concept was enhanced by Sarros and Santora (2001) in their findings, about the importance of developing leaders' appreciation of employees' efforts, along with understanding the employees' contribution on the workflow.

4.3.2.1.2 Micromanagement vs Leadership

The micromanagement style has been identified by Chawla et al. (2017) as one of the negative styles that young employees hated. Young employees here refer to those who were born in 1985 or later, which is in line with (AH-IN3) and (NA-IN7) average age who shows that they do not prefer this type of management style.

4.3.2.1.3 Bullying vs Respect

The third negative management style is bullying, which is also considered as a negative work experience that has a direct impact on the employees' engagement levels by (Azanza et al., 2015; Kular et al., 2017). This, as noted by several researchers, is one of the main factors that affect employees' involvement and engagement (Ali et al., 2018; Jinuk & Semi, 2017; Kular et al., 2017; Sarros & Santora, 2001; Smith & Macko, 2014; Tupou et al., 2011).

4.3.2.1.4 Draining vs Facilitating

Brain drain refers to the number of skilled employees who leave their jobs due to the low wages and benefits (Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005). Management style, which exhausts the employees' brains and bodies, lead to organisation brain drain. This supported by Azanza et al. (2015), who mentioned that organisations need leaders who are able to engage and motivate their employees and "*reduce organizational brain drain. As such, authentic leadership may help to retain employees via the promotion of identification with others in the workgroup or increased work engagement.*" (2015, p. 956).

4.3.2.1.5 Discrimination vs Fairness

May (2003, p. 10) defined discrimination as "*treating one person differently*". In this research, one participant (DI-IN6) believed that she had been treated differently by her manager because of her skin colour. This type of discrimination led her to consider resigning, but when her manager went on maternity leave, she decided to stay. However, she stated that she would take this step if the same manager returned from maternity leave. This story shows the power of discrimination on employee engagement which in this case, linked to the employee's appearance. This type of discrimination is explored by Warhurst and Nickson (2007, p. 111) who describe it as "*pernicious prescriptions based on what is identifiable 'lookism': employment discrimination centred on employee appearance*". Warhurst and Nickson (2007) agreed on the

importance of appearance among the frontline employees in retail, as long as the required appearance can be enhanced by training. Otherwise, if expectations are out of the employees' control, such as the skin colour, it is considered as discrimination. Volpone et al. (2012) explored the impact of discrimination on psychological engagement, based on relative deprivation theory. Volpone et al. "*suggests that minorities might be more sensitive to fairness concerns because these groups have extensive histories of experiencing discrimination*" (2012, p. 253). This theory aligns with the feelings expressed by (DI-IN6) who understood her manager's actions as a type of discrimination because of her skin colour.

4.3.2.1.6   Training

L. Williams (2018) mentioned that the lack of training caused 21 percent of employee turnover. This finding illustrated by (OM-IN5) who found it is difficult to get the required training when he was a new employee. Tupou et al. (2011) linked new employees' emotions to staff training and highlighted the importance of training to engage employees in the retail industry. Also, Kular et al. (2017) stated that staff training makes the employees feel that "*they have control over their destiny at work*" (2017, p. 16), which is considered as a key aspect of employee engagement.

4.3.2.1.7   Listening

Listening to employees is an essential skill of managers to hear employee's voices and to understand their needs. Kahn (1990) states that employees who are not able to express themselves do not feel safe and are less engaged. Boichuk and Menguc (2013, p. 207) concur stating that "*wilfully listening to employees' problems and providing help*" encourages employees to voice their ideas. The importance of listening and hearing what employees have to say was confirmed by (TH-IN1) who described her unhappiness at an ethical conflict because she could not voice her concerns.

4.2.2 1. 8   Lead by Example

Leading by example is identified as one of the managers' roles: to guide and engage their followers. This is mentioned the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977: cited in Gutermann et al., 2017)   The social learning theory is explained as a learning process done by observing the role model silently (Gutermann et al., 2017). Gutermann et al. (2017) mentioned that employee engagement can be enhanced from the managers to the employees based "*on*

the idea that leaders can function as role models for their followers" (2017, p. 300). These arguments support the finding of the link between the lack of 'lead by example' and the disengagement level of some participants.

Outlined above are the eight negative management styles that have been identified as having a direct impact on the employees' engagement. , Conversely, eight positive management styles can enhance the level of engagement. Table 5 summarises both management styles.

Negative Management Styles	Positive Management Styles
Lack of Appreciation	Appreciation
Micromanagement	Leadership
Bullying	Respect
Draining	Facilitating
Discrimination	Fairness
Lack of Training	Training
Not Listening	Listening
Lack of 'Lead by Example'	'Lead by Example'
Lead to Full Disengagement	**Lead to Full Engagement**

Table 5: Management Styles Features

Six attributes in workplaces that can lead to either employee engagement or disengagement are: "*workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values.*" (Maslach et al., 2001: cited in Kular et al., 2017). These six attributes or work characteristics support the management styles that are identified above. Each attribute represents one or more of the management styles of characters. Figure 5 shows the link between the six areas in the workplaces and the positive management styles.
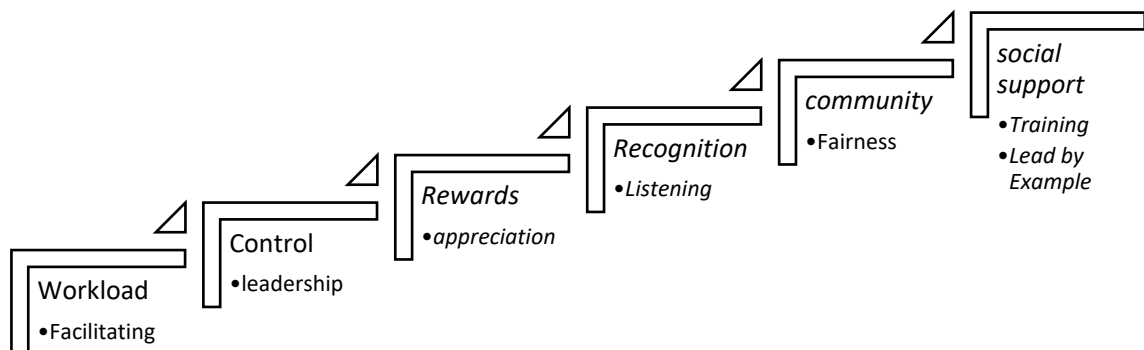

Figure 5: The Six Areas in the Workplaces and the Positive Management Styles

There is no doubt that management style informs managers' actions (Robert, 2012). Those actions are understood by employees in different ways based on their backgrounds, ethnicity, values and beliefs, in addition to their age, gender and years' experience. The next part will explore the participants' expectations from their managers, which are influenced by each participant's background and individual characteristics.

4.3.2.2 Employees Expectations

The participants' expectations from their managers in this research varied, based on their levels of engagement. The participant who was considered to be fully disengaged did not care about engagement. He was completely critical of the environment he experienced. His expectations reflect the poor work conditions and management style in his workplace, which he described as a kind of '*honest environment'* from his point of view because of the belief that all employees in retail are temporary employees. He was adamant that the Managers know this, so they do not care about building a conducive environment to foster engagement. His position shows that in his employment situation he has accepted the poor conditions and is not willing to create positive expectations to improve his engagement level.

> *"In my situation, we are all temporary. It's a shop, there is no system it's not an organization. I mean it's just a shop. I mean some managers just create a fake atmosphere about engagement. By saying 'You're part of our team' or 'Welcome to the family' and bullshit like that and I don't like that'. I prefer honesty. Yeah, I prefer the old black and white classic way of dealing with it. But I should get paid more". (AH-IN3)*

Positive expectations were expressed by most of the other participants. They expected many actions which help shape a positive management style. The positive management characteristics have been identified in this research and are reflected in the participant statements below:

4.3.2.2.1   Motivation

The concept of employee engagement builds on the motivation construct, which is defined by (Schaufeli et al., 2002: cited in Azanza et al., 2015) as "*a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (2015, p. 958)*. Accordingly, fifty percent of the participants spoke about their managers' actions that can be motivational.

"When someone says to me that 'you are doing a really good job'. It really motivates me a lot…… And believe me; it really matters for me because that gave me motivation for the next year…… When someone says, 'that you are doing a good job' you actually do 100% more". (AS-IN2)

"They can motivate the staff". (DI-IN6)

"Motivation is very important; it makes you able to give more effort". (AK-IN10)

Some participants did not mention the motivation term, but they still described it by talking about the work environment.

"I expected them to create an environment where everyone was like yeah that's cool". (RO-IN9)

"I expect the positivity which always like I'll always love being here". (SI-IN4)

A positive work environment is linked to motivation by many researchers and is considered as a central element to enhance the culture in the workplace (Ali et al., 2018; Handa & Gulati, 2014; Pounders, Babin, & Close, 2015; Quach, Jebarajakirthy, & Thaichon, 2017; Tupou et al., 2011).

4.3.2.2.2   Respect

The respect relationship between the managers and employees was defined by Ali et al. (2018) as a kind of trust that enhances the role of leadership exchange in the workplaces. This type of relationship is characterised as a sense of obligation and trust. Ali et al. (2018) observed that the quality of this relationship plays a significant role in increasing employees' satisfaction and level of engagement. The same findings were noted by two participants who believed that respect is essential. For example, (RO-IN9) linked trust to respect.

"When you build respect and trust your people, all the rest of their stuff will be ok. Yeah…… we all had mutual respect for each other, and we all understood our roles……. If respect is mutual, everything else will fall into place". (RO-IN9)

And (DI-IN6) noted,

"Managers and employees need to respect each other". (DI-IN6)

4.3.2.2.3   Communicate Openly and Effectively

Effective communication includes many other expected actions, such as sharing information, advice, feedback, interaction and guidance. (Maya and Kavitha (2015). One participant saw.

> *"Sharing the information is an important part". (DI-IN6)*

Kular et al. (2017) agreed on the relationship between effective communication and the opportunity for employees to share their views openly.

> *"I think to have that relationship, where you can be open with your manager to be accepting and say, yes, we can do this or that.". (TH-IN1)*
>
> *"They could. Open up and talk to the managers". (AK-IN10)*
>
> *"I come from a sporting background and you know I've been involved with a lot of successful teams. And I think the manager must be able to communicate openly and effectively. Yes. Hopefully, that makes sense". (RO-IN9)*

Also, some participants expected good and reliable advice that can be offered by their managers to support and evaluate their performance, which is part of effective communication.

4.3.2.3 Performance Appraisal

Research by Volpone et al. (2012) focused on finding the relationship between performance appraisal and employee engagement, assuming that conducting performance appraisal influences employees' level of engagement. Volpone et al. (2012) found that "*more favourable appraisal reactions corresponded with more favourable psychological diversity climate perceptions; thus, higher levels of engagement.*" (2012, p. 252). This finding has not been supported by other research based on the literature review. In this thesis, only one participant mentioned that the appraisal was conducted differently based on the employee's work experience in the organisation.

> *"Performance appraisal conduct, depending on how long they've been in the company. Employees with 12 months they have a different appraisal than six months. And the person that's been working five years plus has different one as well. So, it depends on your experience". (OM-IN5)*

Still, fifty percent of participants agreed that performance appraisal is a periodic procedure that organisations do to raise salaries or to promote some members.

> *"It is just related to the salary more than performance". (OM-IN5)*
>
> *"So, you feel like it's just a kind of process you have to do it and you have to answer yes". (RO-IN9)*
>
> *"It is to promote some members and increase their salary". (AK-IN10)*

"We usually do a performance appraisal every six months. Well, they want to see where they are at the moment and what they could improve for the next six months". (SI-IN4)

"We do a performance review. It's to increase somebodies' pay because they're doing well at that job. But right now, we're not doing it. So, we don't have that opportunity. I think they've cut the performance review completely because they can't do anything. But in my previous job, we didn't use to have performance reviews. And our manager would kind of give us an update of what we could do better and things like that". (TH-IN1)

Four participants indicated that appraisal is not conducted in their workplaces. According to the participants' statements, the impact of appraisal on employee engagement is notably weaker in comparison to Volpone et al. (2012) findings. Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Taylor (2000) ascribe the weak relationship between the appraisal and engagement to the way that managers conduct the appraisal *"In some sales organizations the performance appraisal is treated as a bureaucratic exercise required by some "higher-up" executive. As such, sales managers may essentially conduct appraisals in an arbitrary and perfunctory manner"* (2000, p. 77). This statement supports the participants' notes about the performance appraisal. However, as noted above, four participants do not know how this process is conducted. As research has shown, organizations should focus on developing the process of the performance appraisal and training managers about the purpose behind this process, as this will gradually enhance the employees' performance and level of engagement (Gutermann et al., 2017).

4.3.2.4 Risk Management

Risk management is related to the condition of psychological safety that has been explored earlier in the literature review. Kahn described this condition as "*contexts in which people feel more or less safe in taking the risks of self-expression and engaging the processes of change*" (1990, p. 708). Kahn's research indicates that psychological safety condition for employees is influenced by the management style (1990). This finding is supported by many researchers (Gutermann et al., 2017; James et al., 2011; Kular et al., 2017; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018). The participants in this research agreed that risk management has an impact on their positive and negative feelings in the workplaces. However, they have a different point of view on defining and understanding the terms (safety and risk). One participant thought that risk management is about making decisions.

> *"Sometimes you have to take that risk. Risk comes from the decision and sometimes you take some hard decisions...... the challenge is coming from this risky decision". (AS-IN2)*

And another participant thinks that risk management is about making a profit and avoiding loss

> *"At many stages, business is at risk of loss". (NA-IN7)*

Also, four participants talked about risk management in the way of interacting with the customers who could be shoplifters or mentally sick.

> *"Risk is always a possibility...... There were a few burglars that tried to come in and took some money and six cigarette trees were stolen.". (OM-IN5)*

> *"There's always a risk......definitely yeah. I've had mental health customer want my number or want a relationship with me and consistently keep coming and wanting to talk to me and that makes me feel really like scared because I don't know how to react to a mental health patient who can get really aggressive. I'm standing up for myself and not just going to work because it's a job. I want to be safe in my environment and I will not come to work if this person is going to keep following me". (TH-IN1)*

> *"I had people in my previous job. And even now they try shoplifting. Yeah, so it's a risky business". (SI-IN4)*

> *"If someone steals something just let them go". (RO-IN9)*

And four of them linked the risk to the work environment and managing health and safety issues. They saw the physical work they were expected to do as opening them to risk.

> *"The health and safety are very important to be managed. In one of the companies I worked in, some employees had been fighting to fix big ceiling shelves. But by the time I left the company I don't think anything had happened...... I think the managers were thinking maybe the easiest way was to tear down the warehouse and rebuild it. I don't really know the true answer, but there was one of the reasons that they talked about it, that it was too expensive to fix it than rebuild it...... Yeah, I would occasionally go there, but imagine you get to work in the warehouse every day, and you were worried about it. Yeah. It'll be quite stressful". (CA-IN8)*

> *"I got injured actually several times oh because of this job...... And sometimes yeah. My back hurts when I carry really heavy stuff, I mean next day I am completely tired, and my back and my muscles are hurting". (AH-IN3)*

> *"At some time, I think even displaying the items could be. Risk". (DI-IN6)*

> *"When the staff lifts the 20-kilo bags of onions or the 20-kilo base of potatoes, it is probably a major health and safety issue. We had really big sharp knives to use to cut the vegetables. This kind of risk. Oh yeah". (AK-IN10)*

Based on these statements, the frontline employees in the retail industry identify the risk management under four categories, making decision, loss and profit, customer's interactions and health and safety. However, all participants who defined risk management as 'customer's interactions or health and safety' thought that managers and organisations are doing a reasonable job to keep them safe.

> *"In general, the manager and the owner of the shop is a little bit careful when it comes to that. Sometimes if they think, this is risky. They tell me not to do it or at least to wait or take a break. So yeah I mean they care anyway". (AH-IN3)*

> *"The managers were really interested to make you safe". (CA-IN8)*

> *"The managers are careful with health and safety standards. They even say that health is the important thing". (DI-IN6)*

> *"The managers always look after the employees. Employee safety". (OM-IN5)*

> *"Organization is really caring about safety issues. I think they're pretty good at this. I think they're pretty good.". (RO-IN9)*

> *"The organization working on training to make the employees aware of the health and safety issues". (SI-IN4)*

> *"My manager told me if there is an issue just call me or call the police or something. So, we found some things we could do in case it got out of hand, but nothing can guarantee that your safety will be a promise". (TH-IN1)*

These findings highlighted that organisations and managers are considerate about the safety issues which can be visible to the public community, such as physical or moral harm by shoplifters or some equipment. But they do not focus on the safety issues associated with the organisations' policies or management system, which could limit the employee's performance or put more stress and pressure on them, such as achieving set targets. All these categories do not appear to have a serious impact on the employees' engagement. Evidence of this finding is that the two participants who defined the risk management as 'making decisions and loss of profit' were in the fully engaged group and the other eight participants who were less engaged or fully disengaged found that managers and organisations are recognising their legal obligations to ensure employees safety.

4.3.2.5 Self-Development

Many researchers linked employee commitment and engagement to the provision of training and self-development opportunities (Ali et al., 2018; Azanza et al., 2015; Kular et al., 2017). Managers play a significant role in developing employees' skills. The theory of authentic leadership suggests that "*authentic leaders enhance followers' engagement by strengthening the identification of the group members with each other and with the organization, and by promoting hope, trust, optimism, and positive emotions*" (Avolio et al., 2004 cited in Azanza et al., 2015, p. 956). This statement was supported by all the participants whether they got the expected development support from their managers or not. For example, the participant who is fully disengaged mentioned that his work in retail does not reflect his professional skill-set in any way, which aligns with his disengagement.

> *"It doesn't make me feel I'm doing something, something that defines me. I feel like anyone can do my job. So, it's not adding value to me. Yeah, even the minimum wage I earn, which is already spent before the weekend. Doesn't have any value either". (AH-IN3)*

The two participants who are fully engaged proudly talked about the value they got during their working time in retail, which corresponds to their level of engagement.

> *"Since I started my career in retail, it has a great reflection and development in my life. I know what I'm doing in my work and what I am doing to my family". (AS-IN2)*

> *"The training to manage the team was a turning point for me, as it came with bigger responsibility, which means, enjoying the challenge, but it also means that I'm much stressed all the time and very forgettable* [laughing proudly] *that's one of the side effects. Very forgetful. Yeah". (NA-IN7)*

The other seven participants were less excited but showed some appreciation of what they had learned from working in retail, even if it is not related to their tertiary study. They found the skills they have got from their work, such as interpersonal communication would help them in their future goals.

> *"I have learned a lot of merchandising". (DI-IN6)*

> *"I learnt a lot about myself while working at that job which I thought I would never do. It develops the quality of open communication and to ask because I think some people think that I am shy about asking. This skill has nothing to do with my studies but helped me to approach anyone. So, this really really helped me". (OM-IN5)*

"So, it was just a path that happened, and I think it's important. So yes, I wouldn't change without all the skills I learnt from retail jobs to carry on". (CA-IN8)

"I learned to speak with people openly and more honest than I was". (RO-IN9)

"Five years ago, I was still a beginner. But throughout five years now I've actually learned a lot. Like I've grown a lot as a person as well. I've learned so many, like management skills and how to better myself". (SI-IN4)

"I work hard on myself and I was always keen to learn new things. And what are the procedures so because every company has different values so every new thing, I learnt I just bring it to the next company". (AK-IN10)

"I've finally developed the courage to voice my opinions and I think the real shift comes when you find value in your own skillset and your own ability to deal with people and customers. That's when you know that you should stand up for yourself and you should just be bossed around you know because you're just an employee or you're just a student". (TH-IN1)

The most critical point identified from these statements and supported by (Kahn, 1990), is that frontline employees are looking to get some useful skills to improve their personality and their personal life. Developing these skills enhances their engagement or what Kahn (1990) terms psychological courage that enables the employees to express themselves. This self-development leads to improving their career satisfaction, which will be discussed further in the next part as a third key theme in this research. There is no doubt that the managers' actions determine the perceptions of employees regarding their organisation and enhance their engagement level (Ali et al., 2018). Also, Smith and Macko (2014) argue that the productive relationship between the managers and employees has a significant impact on employee engagement and reduction of turnover rates.

4.3.3 Career Satisfaction

Career satisfaction defined as "*an individual's feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment with their careers*" (Seibert et al.,1999, cited in Ussher et al., 2015, p. 27). Career satisfaction has a positive relationship with the employees' self-efficacy and positive outcome (Gutermann et al., 2017). The participants show a varying level of satisfaction based on their engagement level. The one who is fully disengaged found that everyone is not satisfied, at least, that what he feels. *"No one is satisfied with his job".* (AH-IN3)

The rest of the participants who have varying levels of engagement were satisfied with their career but to different degrees. They highlighted many essential elements that impacted on their overall satisfaction.

4.3.3.1 Career Stability

The career path is characterised by stability when it is "*long-term employment relationships*" (Baruch, 2004, p. 69). This long-term relationship can be to a company or industry. AS-IN2 mentioned

> *"I'm very much satisfied because I did not change my life. I thought I'm going to be*
>
> *a salesperson in 2008 and I am a salesperson". (AS-IN2)*

This stability in career path improves his level of satisfaction and engagement to the retail industry.

> *"Satisfaction is really important. Satisfaction comes after every week, after every*
> *day. If you think that day was satisfying, it means you are satisfied with your job and*
> *you are satisfied with your credit score. It means you are doing a good job.*
> *Satisfaction is important. And I am very much satisfied with the things I have done*
> *in my life". (AS-IN2)*

Also, DI-IN6 supported this element by saying

> *"I'm quite settled in here that makes me more comfortable....... I like working. I like*
> *what I'm doing at the moment. I love it. I love that place". (DI-IN6)*

4.3.3.2 Company Type

The type of company is another element that played a role in enhancing frontline employees' career satisfaction. Some participants classified the companies they work with as multinational or international companies, which is considered by them as an advantage. One participant talked about the type of products that the company offers, as a reason to make her satisfied.

> *"I only work for multinational companies up to this point. That's a really huge*
> *benefit for me. So, all these things give me a lot of satisfaction......obviously, when*
> *you're working with a multinational company, every country whenever or wherever*
> *you go they know which company you are talking about......working in multi-*
> *national companies in my career gives me advantages level in my career". (AS-IN2)*

"I was working for a company making a difference. I was definitely engaged with this company because of the great stuff they made. They made a difference in people life". (CA-IN8)

"I'm quite satisfied because it is a good company to work with. It is a national company but has a good system". (DI-IN6)

"This is not a big organization not at all. The last one was an international brand". (SI-IN4)

Accordingly, the company type includes the kind of products, the company system and the organisation's grade, all of which reflect on the employees' career satisfaction.

4.3.3.3 Being Valuable

Being valuable or worthwhile in the workplaces has a significant impact on employee engagement according to Chawla et al. (2017) and (Kahn, 1990). And this is supported by the participants in this research:

"Nowadays, I enjoy my job more. Because I have started to find the value in it. Well, I feel like I've started to add value to people's lives when they come, and they had a good experience. Because my retail job is related to health.". (NA-IN7)

"If I'm being challenged and if I'm being given opportunities to do different things that would determine how satisfied I am with my job". (TH-IN1)

These statements show that employees need to get a chance to add value in the workplace to be satisfied with what they are doing.

4.3.3.4 Tertiary Study Background

In addition to the previous elements, participants noted the relationship between their field of study and the type of retail work they were doing, created a sense of satisfaction as they felt that the time spent in studying was justified and worthwhile.

"I worked in retail and then became a student and then I worked in pharmacies and then became a pharmacist so as my career progressed, I started enjoying it more and more and more and now I really do enjoy it". (NA-IN7)

"I discovered myself when I started selling the electronic devices, which is close to my main field as IT engineer". (AK-IN10)

Additionally, the online retail business opened the door to the employees to be engaged in retail and apply their passion. Technology is increasingly playing a significant role in the retail sector

however there appears to be no research investigating the impact of technology on frontline employees' engagement. Two participants NA-IN7 and AK-IN10 highlighted how an internet business had opened the door for them to interact effectively with customers, which could be considered a way to harness engagement in the retail industry.

> "I just started an online business. It's still in the field of health and well-being. So, it's still related to people's health. Just looking at different business opportunities related to retail……it's challenging and I like the challenge…… I'm satisfied. I definitely want to try and budget better. But I also am very satisfied with it. I like my job I enjoy my job. My satisfaction and my happier life are when I'm connected with a lot of people at the same time it's not required that physical prowess. I can always connect to people on my phone I've always connected with people via text messaging. I can be anywhere in the world and connect to people……that's great that's the great advantage of online business". (NA-IN7)

> "I opened my online shop, which is for electronic devices and IT services. It is perfect for staying in retail market connecting with everyone, using my main study background. Online business is the future of retail". (AK-IN10)

Both statements show that they have chosen the type of product which is related to their tertiary study background. Both found an online business as a way to keep them engaged in the retail industry.

4.3.3.5 Income

Income is one of the critical elements although not the main element. It needs to be present but less important if the other elements (see figure 7 below) are present.

> "It's not even covering the living costs it's just reducing the expense". (AH-IN3)

> "I enjoy my job, so it's hard for me to turn away from it but at the same time I need to manage myself my stress levels better……I'm really satisfied with where I am now. If I was looking at it in terms of income, my income is definitely at a good level. So, in terms of my income, I am satisfied as well". (NA-IN7)

> "The salary would be better. The salaries that I'm getting paid. But, I'm quite happy". (DI-IN6)

4.3.3.6 Teamwork

Teamwork can play a part in creating a favourable work environment based on the participants' interviews in saying this little of the literature reviewed appeared to w discuss the impact of teamwork on career satisfaction or employee engagement.

> *"I am satisfied if I can go to work and I'm happy with the team". (TH-IN1)*
>
> *"Officially I'm connected to my whole team more than the organization". (DI-IN6)*
>
> *"I really enjoy my staff". (NA-IN7)*

These statements show that teamwork could improve career satisfaction and can enhance the work environment. But this element needs to be supported by the other elements to be effective. According to the participants' statements, career satisfaction needs six elements to be improved. Figure 6 summarises the elements needed to enhance career satisfaction and employee engagement.

| Stability | Adding Value | Related to Study | Type of Company | Reasonable Income | Teamwork | Career Satisfaction |
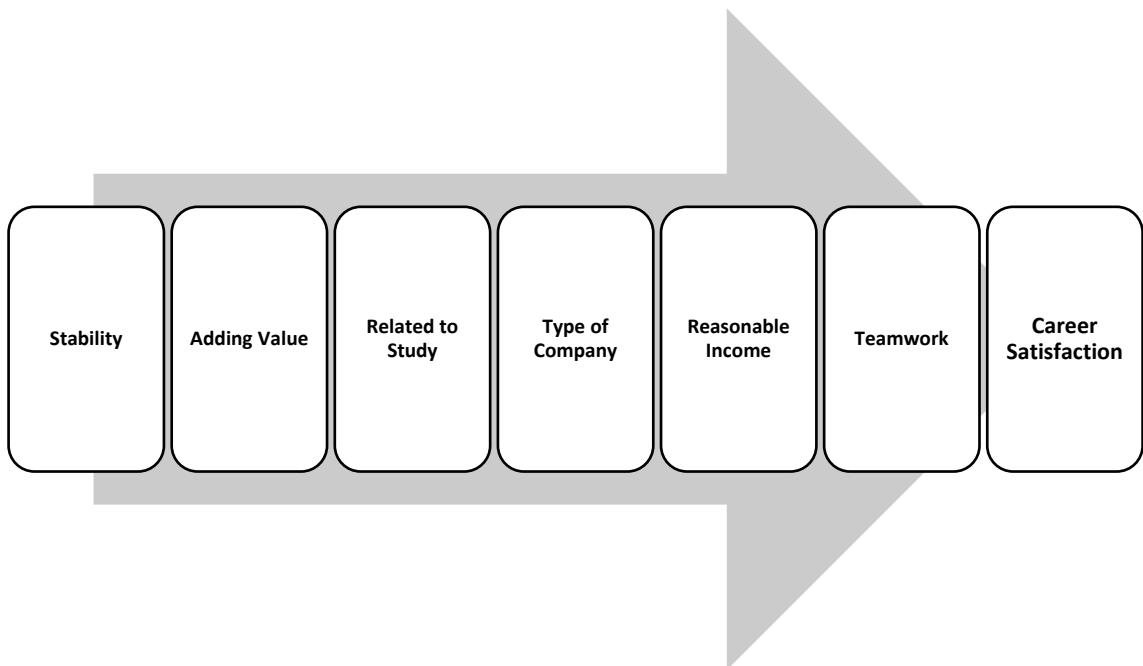
Figure 6: Career Satisfaction's Elements

Additional to these elements consideration needs to be given to how the employees' background and culture played a role in the emotions and interactions with the work environment. Quach et al. (2017) focused on this point and suggested more research to be conducted in this area to investigate the employees' attitudes regarding the use of aesthetic labour and interactions in a retailing environment. Also, life circumstances impact employees' choices, which sometimes force them to take directions they might not otherwise have chosen,

For example, the participant who is fully disengaged found his job in retail was the only option to earn a living after a year and half of searching for a job.

> *"I spent a year and a half to find a job and I applied to different shops several times and I wasn't accepted. In New Zealand, most of them don't tell you sorry we got someone for the position. Companies need full-time dedicated engineers or engineering-related jobs. And all the other alternative is to work as labour, which requires huge physical effort more than what I'm doing. Which I cannot. So, this job was the most suitable one for the moment. It's not only about whether the job is convenient or not. It's about whether I can find an alternative or not. I know I am overqualified, but I have no choice". (Ah-IN3)*

Another participant who is fully engaged was really satisfied with his job in Pakistan in one of the international retail brands, but he had to resign to be with his family after his wife got a scholarship in New Zealand. But he was fortunate to find a job in New Zealand in the same field in another international company. He believes that it was an advantage for him to have work experience with an international company in Pakistan before arriving in New Zealand.

> *"My wife actually got the opportunity to do a PhD at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. So, for that reason, I had to resign from my job which I've really been to work for. I only worked for them for two and a half years and I had to leave that job for the sake of my family. So that was certainly a big decision for me. But obviously in the end Family Matters first for me…… when I arrived as an immigrant, everyone told me it very difficult to find a job, but because of my experience with an international company, within one week I got a job offer from an international company in New Zealand". (AS-IN2)*

One other participant who has a low level of engagement came from a sports background. He changed his career because of a physical injury which forced him to retire early and go to a retail job in a sports company where he could get a chance to stay in touch with the rugby players and the sports community.

> *"My situation in my career changed because of this turning point in my life as a player. So, I was kind of forced to find work because I had to retire early from playing sports. It was so bad injury. You know I never really thought that will happen. So, I need to find a job in the real world, which something that I'd never thought I'd had to do this. So, I felt the sporting company is an opportunity to join a company which has a sporting ground. It gives me the opportunity to use my strengths as a sports player maybe". (RO-IN9)*

Those statements show that frontline employees who have a different level of engagement can be impacted by external life factors that are out of their hands (Williams & Connell, 2010). Thus, the employees' future goals can reflect their career satisfaction after these life experiences conflict with their preferred choices.

4.3.3.7 Future goals

The future goals for the participants reflect their level of satisfaction after exploring all the previous factors. For example, the participant who is fully disengaged wants to finish his PhD, and until this is achieved, he will stay in his job even if it is not his preferred choice. This means he took the retail career as a temporary stage to earn money.

> *"I'm just focusing on finishing my PhD and its work with my retail job…… I'm not here for a better salary or expected bright future. I'm just here to discover things and finish my PhD". (AH-IN3)*

The other participant who is fully engaged did not dream of working in retail when he was a student, but after graduation, he found the retail market has lots of opportunities and he enjoys it.

> *"My career story started in Pakistan in 2005; at that time my dream was to become a software engineer. And I didn't really want to go abroad. I really want to serve my country in Pakistan at that time. This was my dream. But now I will not go to turn the engine direction, because I have, I enjoy my job". (AS-IN2)*

NA-IN7, who is also fully engaged, wants to stay working in retail industry through the opportunities the online business model has opened up,

> *"My future goals I would like my online business to supplement or to replace my income because that means that I don't have to be present in the place where we keep making an income. It's not an hourly rate anymore so I don't have to do an hour's work to get paid. So that's the difference between that online business and a traditional business". (NA-IN7)*

Also, AK-IN10 wants his online shop to grow and serve more people, which could allow him to turn his current job from full time to part-time to focus on his own retail business.

> *"I want to expand my online business and change my full-time job to part-time. So, I can focus". (AK-IN10)*

The other participants were varied in their dreams and upcoming goals:

"I'm planning on moving to Melbourne next year to extend my career there with my family". (SI-IN4)

"I want part-time to spend time with my daughter. We're so lucky to have her". (CA-IN8)

"I could get a part-time job. So, 20 hours like that. Go back to the office work or something just like administrative work...... I'm not thinking of retail. I've found a few administrative rules which I can do. I'm going to take an easy job. Because my kids are all educated now, and I don't have to worry about earning more money". (DI-IN6)

"I always wanted to get back to what I've studied. Because I spent time studying. So, I thought I might shift to what I've studied". (OM-IN5)

"I could shift to what my family used to do, my wife as an associate principal. My mom's a teacher. My mother in law is a teacher. My sister was a teacher. Yeah. I need to get back to the community and I love being around kids and teach them". (RO-IN9)

"I hope that I'd be able to work in a big company, probably somewhere not in New Zealand. Probably, somewhere in the States or Europe where I can know millions of people. I would love to be in some way pharmacy-related because I've spent so long studying it". (TH-IN1)

The participants' future goals can be divided into five categories, shifting career-related study, engaged to retail with fewer hours, shifting to online retail business or engaged to retail and Growing. Table 6 represents the participants' future goals linked to the engagement level.
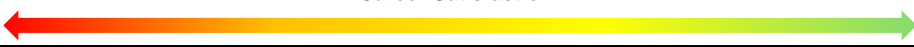
	Career Satisfaction									
Negative management styles	AH-IN3	CA-IN8	RO-IN9	AK-IN10	DI-IN6	OM-IN5	TH-IN1	SI-IN4	AS-IN2	NA-IN7
Shifting Career-Related Study	🟥		🟥			🟥	🟥			
Shifting Career with Reducing Hours		🟥			🟥					
Shifting to Online Retail Business				🟩						🟩
Engaged to Retail and Growing								🟩	🟩	

Table 6: Participants' Future Goals Linked to Career Satisfaction Level (🟥 Weak Satisfaction, 🟩 Strong Satisfaction)

These findings are almost identical to the engagement classifications that have been identified in the first theme (Work Environment), which shows a clear positive relationship between career satisfaction and employee engagement level. The next key theme explores employees' awareness and the meaning they give to engagement in the workplace.

4.3.4 Employee Awareness

The fourth and last key theme in this research explores employees' awareness of the meaning of the employee engagement concept in the workplace. An interesting point is that all participants except two were not aware of the term 'engagement in the workplace'; they thought it was about customer engagement. The two participants who did have an idea of the concept of employee engagement gained their awareness from their tertiary studies, not from their managers or organisations.

> *"Yeah, I studied project management and industrial psychology. So yeah I know that engagement in the workplaces is between humans inside the system." (AH-IN3)*

> *"I never heard about it until I was studying H.R". (CA-IN8)*

However, the participants' views reflect their engagement levels even if they were not aware of the term itself or the concept. Their understandings of the term engagement are shown in their thoughtful statements.

4.3.4.1 Lessons learned

A participant who was fully disengaged concluded his feeling in one sentence to reflect how much he does not belong to the place that he is working for.

> *"I'm just selling my soul for someone and that's hurting, I just feel like WHAT I'M DOING HERE!" (AH-IN3)*

Another participant who was considered 'low engagement' noted that working in retail was not her main plan.

> *"I always thought I'd do environmental stuff in some ways because I was studying it. I went to London to look for an environmental outlook but no jobs. Very few very low paying even here in New Zealand". (CA-IN8)*

In fact, the participants shared many experiences they learned from their time working in the retail sector. They shared the lessons they discovered over time. Those lessons and

experiences showed how the frontline staff reads the different factors and how the managers' actions could engage or disengage them.

One of those thoughts mentioned by AH-IN3, who is fully disengaged, was that managers do their best to make the staff busy all the time, even if they give them illogical tasks or ask them to do things, not in their job descriptions.

> *"I understand the psychology behind what the managers ask. We get money per hours and they want to see us busy, even if there is nothing to do. She could ask me to bring her a coffee which is not my job". (AH-IN3)*

Another participant AS-IN3, who was fully engaged, found it is hard to find a job either in his country, Pakistan or in New Zealand as an immigrant. This could be one of the reasons that increased his level of engagement to the positions he got in retail.

> *"I found it is really difficult for me to find a job after graduation. The reason was that there was no such market in Pakistan. Also, there is no serious market here in New Zealand for immigrants". (AS-IN2)*

Additionally, the second participant NA-IN7, who is fully engaged, found that it is hard to separate one's personal life from their professional life. However, that challenge did not affect her level of engagement, as she mentioned several times that she likes to be challenged all the time. This leads to an important finding that while they may struggle to find balance in their life, this did not deter from their level of engagement to their work, especially if they achieved some work-related goals.

> *"It's really hard to separate your personal life from your professional life. As much as we'd like to say we're professionals and we keep them separate. That's almost impossible. But I believe if I can manage my personal life, I'll be able to manage my professional life". (NA-IN7)*

The participants, who were in a medium level of engagement, either low or high, discussed some essential points they learned during their work in retail. For example, CA-IN8 mentioned that working in retail is an essential stage to get the basic skills which will help an employee to find a higher salary rate in the future with different careers. This statement was supported by OM-IN5, who stated that 90 percent of the frontline employees in his company are students who want to earn experience and cover living costs until they graduate.

"I think working in retail is where you get your base skills from. And then you move off into something that's higher paying. More freewheeling hours, Monday to Friday nine to five". (CA-IN8)

"Working in a retail store, what I have observed over the last couple of years, mostly students. Wanted to work flexible hours. They are 95 percent came from the university or school". (OM-IN5)

Also, (DI-IN6) found that whatever the organisation's category, the managers are the main reasons for employee turnover, due to the lack of a productive relationship with the employees.

"Whatever your feelings to the company or the organisation. If you are not feeling compatible with your line manager, you will leave". (DI-IN6)

In addition to what has been discussed, RO-IN9 believes that most of the managers are excellent in handling numbers and documents but are unable to communicate effectively with their staff. He believes that this skill is hard to teach. AK-IN10 concurred with this point.

"That's what I see, a lot of managers nowadays are really good at their back-office work, and they understand the numbers. But they can't communicate with their staff members. That's where they lose their connection". (RO-IN9)

"The managers lose their good members as a result of silly mistakes that could be treated with some wisdom and good communications". (AK-IN10)

Two other participants discussed their growing level of maturity as one of the factors that helped them to choose their way. They saw this as facilitating better decision-making in their lives. SI-IN4 found that she can evaluate the positions and offers she gets based on the company size and growth opportunities. TH-IN1 found that she became more confident in expressing herself and raising her voice to select what was best for her. This level of growth creates personal confidence which enhances their engagement.

"The company was small, but then it became so big within a year. So, it could be fun to be with a big company but starting with a small company in some cases create a rooted relationship with the place". (SI-IN4)

"I think the hardest part was getting around expressing what I wanted from my job. And I think that was just because of the age, I was young, so I just follow instructions. But as you develop more and more experience, working with different people you can put your foot down and say, 'NO I WANT THIS, TO GO THIS WAY'". (TH-IN1)

Based on participants' lessons and the things they have learned, the next section of this chapter explores definitions of the concept of employee engagement, even if participants had never heard the word used.

4.3.4.2 Employee Engagement Definition

The participants gave many interesting definitions of the concept of employee engagement. Table 7 illustrates the participants' understanding of the concept of employee engagement by the end of the interviews after discussing their career stories.

Engagement Level	Participant	Employee Engagement Definition
Fully Disengaged	AH-IN3	*"Engagement is usually happening when the **manager** himself want to create this kind of **home feeling** to the employees, so he can **improve their productivity** by **feeding them** a feeling that they **belong to the place**".*
Low Engagement	CA-IN8	*"Engagement means trying to get the* employees **involved** *and **step in** and **makes things better**".*
	RO-IN9	*"It is Just **caring** of how you **look after the employees** and not just **treat them as a source of dollar value**".*
High Engagement	AK-IN10	*"Engagement is to make the employees **involve** and **have a sound with no fear**".*
	DI-IN6	*"It is about **providing training** and **some developing**".*
	OM-IN5	*"Engagement can be the **service** or the **relationship** between Customers and employees. Can be between two departments. It can be **cooperation** between the two teams".*
	TH-IN1	*"I think engagement is about **collaborative decision making** where you **reach a mutual understanding** of what needs to be achieved. I mean, it is what the **managers** and the employees want and **decide together** to **reach a certain objective**. That's what I see is engagement".*
	SI-IN4	*"It is to **show** the employees how **they could be better** or what **they can improve**. It's more about how to **give** them **clear tasks"**.*
Fully Engaged	NA-IN7	*"It means **getting new ideas** from the employees, **encourage** them to **improve work performance** and to **express their opinions** and **treat them as the biggest assets** for the business. It is about **keeping** the employees **interested**".*
	AS-IN2	*"It is about **sharing information** with the team members".*

Table 7: Participants' Definitions of the Concept of Employee Engagement

The keywords in those definitions can be divided into three parts, the Method, the Impact and the Result. Figure 7 shows the components under each category to create a favourable work environment with the required level of employee engagement.
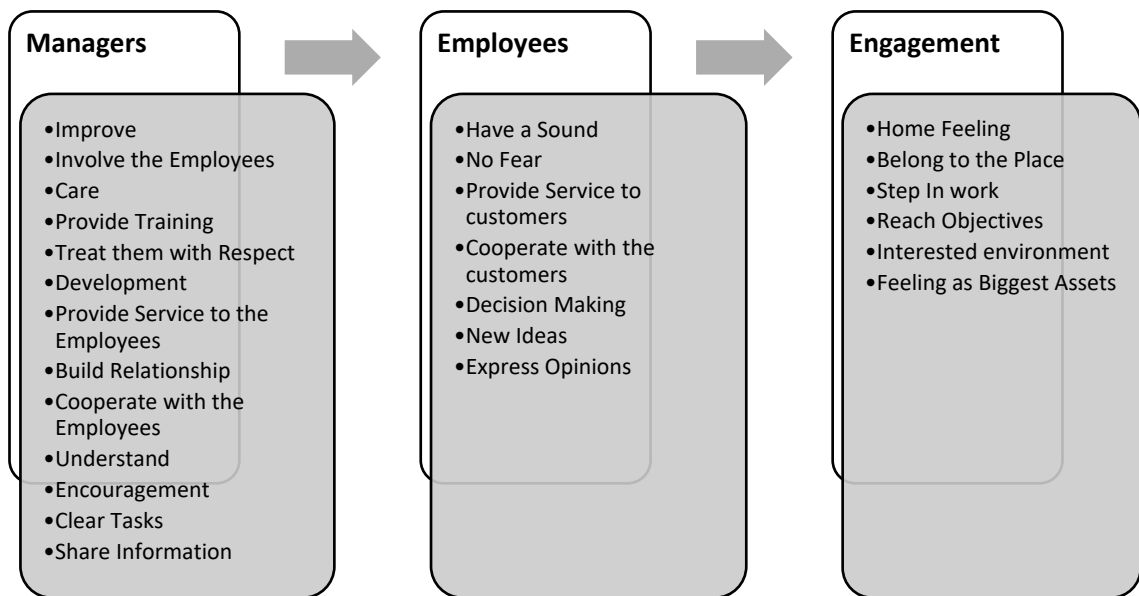
Managers	Employees	Engagement
•Improve •Involve the Employees •Care •Provide Training •Treat them with Respect •Development •Provide Service to the Employees •Build Relationship •Cooperate with the Employees •Understand •Encouragement •Clear Tasks •Share Information	•Have a Sound •No Fear •Provide Service to customers •Cooperate with the customers •Decision Making •New Ideas •Express Opinions	•Home Feeling •Belong to the Place •Step In work •Reach Objectives •Interested environment •Feeling as Biggest Assets

Figure 7 Employee Engagement Components by the Participants

From what participants said there is no doubt that managers are the primary source for creating employee engagement in the workplaces and they need to develop many skills in order to enhance the level of engagement among employees. The definitions, perceptions and understandings proffered by the participants illustrate how frontline staff understands the managers' actions and what would be their expected outcomes. Those outcomes gradually enhance their level of engagement, even if they have never explicitly heard about engagement from their managers.

4.4 Discussion

Work conditions in retail are one of the most critical elements that affect frontline employees' engagement in the retail industry. When the work conditions lack challenge and customer interaction, employees feel that the work environment is not enjoyable, especially if the physical effort required is high. This finding highlights the main element of an efficient frontline employee's job, which is a combination of challenge and interaction, with a reasonable level of physical effort. This equation enhances the level of engagement, even if the work conditions

require some unplanned hours or some travel because these unexpected circumstances create a challenge in itself.

The second finding in this research focused on the vital link between the frontline employee and his/her study background. For example, if the frontline employee is from an engineering background, it is important that tasks associated with rational thinking that engineering demands, be incorporated in the role this person holds. This type of relationship between the tertiary study background and the work tasks enhances the meaningfulness component, which has been discussed in the literature review and argued by (Kahn, 1990). The employee, who spent years studying in a university setting whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level, needs to feel that those years provided worth and can be used in the workplace. This feeling enhances the level of employee satisfaction, which is then reflected in the level of engagement. Thus, the managers in retail sectors and the retailers should create some tasks related to the employees' study background to enhance their career satisfaction level. This mission will be more straightforward if those involved in human resources try to select the employees who have knowledge related to the products which the organisation offers.

The third finding emphasises the critical link between management style and employee engagement, which is discussed by many researchers (Ali et al., 2018; Antonioni, 1998; Handa & Gulati, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Kular et al., 2017; Sarros & Santora, 2001). The management style has a strong relationship with the gender of the manager and the employee. This research noticed that when the manager and the employees have a different gender (e.g. male or female), this can create a lack of trust or a degree of confrontation to show the power, especially from the managers over the employee. This mode of treatment frustrates employees and gradually erodes employee engagement, even if the work conditions are suitable in terms of daily challenges and customer interactions. The conflict between managers and employees due to gender variation need to be resolved by developing the managers' communications skills and gender and diversity awareness. Lindblom, Kajalo, and Mitronen (2016, p. 273) suggest "*that retailers should place more importance on their leadership development and training*" to enhance the managers understanding of themselves and the staff they interact with.

In addition to gender issues, the managers' lack of appreciation is one of the implications that was identified in this research, which has a significant and adverse impact on levels of

employee engagement.decreases the employees' engagement. This finding was agreed by many researchers (Hutzschenreuter, Kleindienst, & Greger, 2012; James et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Sarros & Santora, 2001; Tupou et al., 2011). Managers need to express their appreciation when an employee has done a good job and focus on creating an effective rewards system. Added to that, a micromanagement and discriminatory style, as well as demonstrating a lack of respect flexibility and employee development opportunities, can all negatively affect the core of employee engagement. Managers need to develop a range of communication, diversity and other related skills before they take on the responsibility of managing frontline employees. It is important that managers understand the tools and practices that enhance employee engagement in the workplace and therefore reduce employee turnover levels (Azanza et al., 2015).

A fourth finding is about the employees who have already reached high levels of disengagement as it is very challenging to re-engage these employees. They could stay in business for some time until they reached their personal goals, then they will leave. While their performance may be challenging to enhance and they may not feel a sense of belonging in the workplace, it does not mean that employers and managers ought to stop trying to address engagement issues. This finding shows the importance of managers continuing to work on strategies and actions to avoid losing employees. Indeed Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 87) note that "*absenteeism, job turnover, poor performance, and low quality of services*" will continue when managers do not invest in practices to address disengagement in the workplace.

Managers' actions with their employees need to recognize the demographic differences between staff. For example, employees and/or managers age, ethnicity, years of experience, and gender can all have an impact. Young employees' perceptions of the managers' actions in retail are usually characterised by higher degrees of anticipation than the older employees'. ('Young employees' refers to employees who are younger than 40 years old). Hurst and Good (2009) confirmed that most young employees in retail develop negative perceptions of a retail career due to the work conditions and poor management. This research concurs with that finding and highlights the significant role of the managers' actions towards the younger employees in building strong engagement in the retail industry in the long term.

In addition to those findings, this research found that performance appraisal has a low impact on employee engagement due to wrong or inappropriate appraisal processes by the managers. This research recommends more training in the organisations to enhance the managers' understanding of the reasons and actual processes involved in conducting the performance appraisal. By improving the managers understanding of performance appraisal, employee engagement will be enhanced gradually (Gutermann et al., 2017).

This research found that most organisations and managers care about the visible safety issues, while physiological safety issues such as stress and pressure are not well understood and as a result are not considered such a priority. However, physiological safety issues do not have a serious impact on employee engagement, according to this research. But for further study, there is a need for more qualitative research to examine the effect of the stress and pressure on employee engagement and how this fits in with current health and safety requirements (Wertheim-Heck et al., 2015; Zierold, 2016) and the health and wellbeing of individual employees.

Employee self-development is another factor that the organisations and managers need to focus on to enhance employee engagement and commitment. The retail industry is recognised by most of the participants as a good opportunity to get the necessary work skills, and it should be the best opportunity for the retailer to gain employee's engagement to the industry, given the presence of decent work conditions and an effective management style. If the employees get the basics skills from the retail industry and have a high level of engagement, this may lead to longevity of staff and career stability (Baruch, 2004).

In addition to the above findings, this research suggests that more close monitoring of the retail industry is necessary to ensure that all organisations, whether local or international, are providing the same level of employee protections and rights in line with relevant employment and health and safety legislation. The government role to develop appropriate legislation and provide a framework complementary with the retail industry responsibility to do the actual development and training to develop management knowledge, understanding and workplace practices and in particular those practices relating to enhancing employee engagement, reducing employee turnover and how this impacts on business performance (Smith & Macko, 2014).

Along with the above findings, this research indicates that governments need to increase the minimum wage to ensure that the hard work required in such industries as the retail sector is worth the physical and mental effort that frontline employees provide on a daily basis to cover their living costs. This point is argued by C. L. Williams and Connell (2010) as one of the elements that impact on recruiters who select middle-class, well-educated workers but pay them low wages for the jobs they are employed to do.

This research identified that frontline employees are not aware of the meaning of employee engagement due to the lack of effort from managers and organisations to provide for and engage them. However, they were able to deduce the meaning of the concept of employee engagement from their managers' actions and from their expectations based on the lessons they have learned during their time working time in the retail industry. Frontline employees in the retail industry want to feel that they are part of the organisations' entity via the effective communication they have with their managers. They want to grow with the business and be a valuable asset that cannot be lost easily.

The last finding in this research, show that there is a negative relation between the boundaryless careers and employee engagement, due to the self-direction based on the work environment. This finding agreed with Ussher et al. (2015) who suggest that employee engagement in career planning has a positive relationship with career commitment.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter illustrates and discussed the participants' stories in relation to the research question. The key themes, which have been identified and discussed in the previous sections explored the participants' experiences in the retail industry, including perceptions of their career satisfaction. The key finding in this research to answer the main research question is that that frontline employees link the work conditions and the managers' style in handling day to day issues to build their engagement level whether positively or negatively. However, most of the participants in this research had never heard of the concept of employee engagement in the workplace. Frontline employees believe that managers are the primary source for creating a positive culture in the workplace, even if the work itself is tough. They believe that managers are able to enhance employee working conditions, but acknowledge that this will not happen if the managers are not well trained. The retail industry is one of the main career choices for frontline

employees. A greater focus on management training and skills and utilisation of technological developments is important to enhance employee engagement. This research suggests that when employees are engaged then they are more likely to consider a longer-term career path in that particular organisation or industry. Thus the online retail market may also offer retail employees another route for employee engagement and career development.

Chapter 5 : Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the findings of this research and indicates the contribution of this research to the body of knowledge. It also reflects on the research challenges that the researcher went through while undertaking this research journey limitation and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

5.2 Overview of the Research

The objective of this research was to explore the perceptions of frontline employees in the retail industry, in order to hear their voices as a way to understand some of the reasons behind the low level of employee engagement, which causes a high turnover in this industry. In doing so the research sought to shed light on the role of managers in enhancing the level of employee engagement among frontline employees and how frontline employees understand managers' effort in this regard.

Narrative enquiry has been chosen in this research to allow the researcher to explore the participants' career stories and to be involved in those stories. The qualitative research method enabled the researcher to hear the participants' voices and to highlight their statements about their experience in the retail industry concerning the research topic.

The main finding in this research is that frontline employees in retail do not know the concept of employee engagement. This seems due to a lack of effort by their managers and organisations to build engagement in the retail sector. However, this research found that employees need the right work conditions and a conducive management style for this to be achieved. The right work conditions refer to day to day challenges and busy interactions with the customers. This kind of environment can exist by involving employees in decision making and proper marketing to facilitate the interaction with customers, which will create an effective return on business outcomes. Moreover, management styles can be improved by providing managers with proper training on communication skills and monitoring of employees' feedback about their managers' performance. This will give them space to be heard and create an open environment where everyone's' voice matters.

This research explored frontline employees' understanding of the concept of employee engagement, even if they had never heard of the term itself in the workplace. The research found that managers need to make much more effort to enhance the level of engagement among frontline employees by focusing on improving employees' skills and appreciating their work. The research found that creating tasks related to employees' fields of study has a significant impact on employees' engagement. Frontline employees in retail want to be in a safe, welcoming work environment so they can consider their workplace as a 'home away from home'.

Those charged with recruitment also have a role in enhancing the engagement level in the retail industry by employing individuals who are interested in the type of products that the retailers provide. This interest can be measured by exploring the individuals' study background or by discussing activities or other employment they have done in the past such as sport or art. The research found that there is a strong relationship between employee engagement and employees being able to pursue their passion (e.g sport, technology) in the workplace.

In addition to the above findings, the researcher found that retailers must increase wages of frontline employees to offer them a reasonable level of income with a clear image of an ongoing career pathway to enhance their engagement and make retail an integral part of their future career planning.

5.3 Contributions to Theory

This research highlighted several essential points and identified some significant findings that can contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of management in the retail industry. The research created a more experiential, personal understanding of the way that frontline employees are thinking about their managers and the organisation's effort to engage them. The research highlighted the importance of hearing employees' voices in a positive way which can create a productive relationship between employees and their managers.

The research identified key elements that can help the managers to improve the engagement level by combining challenge and customer interaction with a reasonable level of physical effort to create excellent work conditions for frontline employees.

This research would enable the managers to gain a better understanding of the link between employee engagement and management style and work conditions and lead to a better understanding of the factors that impact on employee engagement

5.4 Limitations

This research has many useful insights. However, there were some significant limitations, the number of participants being one. The method of 'snowball' recruitment was not as effective as had been planned. Most of the participants were recruited through social media and due to the criteria used to select participants and time constraints, ten were seen as appropriate for the purpose of a masters thesis. Further, most of the participants gained their retail experience in New Zealand so the findings cannot be generalised to other countries.

The second limitation is the language barrier between the language of academia and some participants, including the researcher who come from different parts of the world with English being their second or in some instances, third language. , This created a challenge in making the questions clear enough to the participants during the interviews to meet the research purposes. This language barrier also limited some participants' fluency in expressing their perceptions openly with the researcher often having to seek clarification.

In addition to the above, the limited time frame made it difficult for the researcher to read more of the literature as this was a time-consuming task given she to had to negotiate and interpret academic terminology that was often confusing and contradictory. Thus there could be more themes that have not been identified from the collected data.

5.5 Future Research

The concept of employee engagement in the retail industry still requires more studies to examine gender, ethnicity, and age (and other demographic characteristics) among frontline employees and their managers. It is suggested that an intersectional approach may provide some more in-depth and interesting insights on the subject of employee engagement in the workplace.

Also, it is recommended that further research includes examination of more possible employee engagement drivers in local business to explore further the impact of working conditions in small

businesses. It would also be beneficial to conduct a similar study to this one on a much larger

scale in the New Zealand retail sector.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

14 March 2019

Barbara Myers
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Barbara

Re Ethics Application: 19/61 Exploring front-line employee voices on engagement in the Retail Industry

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 13 March 2022.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: ksh_2000@hotmail.com; Irene Ryan

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

5th February 2019

Project Title

Exploring front-line employee voices on engagement in the Retail Industry

An Invitation

Hello, my name is Samaa Mohamed, I am a student at AUT University, Faculty of Business, Economics and Law completing my master's degree through Management Department. I wish to invite you to participate in this research study which contributes toward the completion of my thesis as part of my Master's degree. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time, prior to the completion of data collection.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is exploring aspects of engagement in the retail industry, to better understand how front-line employees understand the concept of engagement in the workplace. Another purpose is to explore employee perceptions of leadership style and leader actions in relation to workplace engagement and share insights on how leaders and organizations within the retail industry can better understand and engage front-line employees.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as a possible research participant as you meet the selection criteria (working in retail industry in the fashion field, have 2 or more years' experience and are 20 years or older).

What will happen in this research?

The research project involves 10 to 12 face-to-face interviews conducted by myself as the researcher, and you as the participant. Should you choose to participate in the research process, you will be invited to attend an interview lasting 1-1.5 hours to talk about your career experiences. The interview will be held in a location mutually agreed upon. The data will be recorded by a voice recording device. All data will be kept in a secure location. . I will be the only person to have access to the recorded interview. The anonymous transcript may be shared with my supervisors, Dr Barbara Myers and Dr Irene Ryan for guidance in the data analysis process. All data collected will be stored securely at AUT.

What are the discomforts and risks?

I do not expect any risks to come from your participation in this research. You are free to talk about your career experiences to a comfort level which suits you. You may stop at any time or ask to move on from a particular subject. If at any time you feel you are outside your comfort zone, or upset in any way. You also have the right to stop the interview or delay it for another appointment. The interview will be held in offices at AUT or any public space you feel comfortable with.

What are the benefits?

The benefit of participating in this research is to give you an opportunity to provide data which has the potential to increase the knowledge base in the retail management and careers. It will also assist me as it contributes towards the completion of my Thesis as part of the AUT MBus program.

How will my privacy be protected?

As mentioned above, the details of the interview will remain confidential. You will not be identifiable in any way. You have the option to obtain a copy of the transcript resulting from this interview, by selecting the appropriate option in the 'Consent Form'.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no financial costs. The interview could take 1-1.5 hours of your time. Transport time to the interview location and getting comfortable may extend that time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Participants will be given two weeks to consider their participation in this research. You may accept or decline prior to this time frame.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

I will provide a consent form at the time of interview, or prior as requested, for you to sign and return to me.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will be given the option of receiving a copy of the summary of findings on completion of the research study. You also may choose to receive a copy of the transcript once the interview has been transcribed, these may be obtained by selecting the appropriate option on the 'Consent Form'.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Barbara Myers, barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz, 64 9 921 9999 ext. 5366.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , +64 9 921 9999 ext.: 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Samaa Mohamed

ksh_2000@hotmail.com

nmg1912@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Barbara Myers   **Dr Irene Ryan**

+ 64 9 921 9999 ext. 5366   + 64 9 921 9999 ext. 7852
barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz   iryan@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *7 March 2016*, AUTEC Reference number *16/52*.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: Exploring front-line employee voices on engagement in the Retail Industry
Project Supervisor: Dr Barbara Myers (Primary) and Dr Irene Ryan (Secondary).
Researcher: Samaa Mohamed

○   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the

    Information Sheet dated ....

○   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher (Samaa Mohamed). If individual quotes are used in the final report, names will be changed to maintain confidentiality.

○   I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○   If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○   I agree to take part in this research.

○   I agree that my contact details may be stored and used for post-thesis applications by the researchers and supervisors involved in this study.

○   I wish to receive a copy of the summary of findings once completed (please tick one):   Yes○   No○

○   I wish to receive a copy of the Transcript once available (please tick one):   Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 March 2016, AUTEC Reference number .....
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

29 January 2016   page 1 of 1

Interview Guidelines

Project title:	*Exploring front-line employee voices on engagement in the Retail Industry*
Project Supervisor:	**Dr Barbara Myers (Primary) and Dr Irene Ryan (Secondary).**
Researcher:	**Samaa Mohamed**

Date/Time:

People present:

Introduction.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. Please remember that there is no one right or wrong way to answer the questions and tell your stories. These are your stories. It is your perception about your career experiences that I am interested in.

Before we start I just want to check that you are comfortable. *(Bathroom location, water/coffee, phones off or on silent etc)*

Go through the consent form and sign (if not already signed) .

If you wish to pause or stop the discussion at any stage please feel free to do so. It is not a problem and we can restart again when you are comfortable or not at all if that is what you wish.

I anticipate that the interview may take up to an hour approximately *(or whatever is the time frame you have indicated)*.

Before we start do you have any questions or concerns?

Questions will be semi-structured and open-ended relating to the topics below.

- In your own words and in your own way please tell me about your career story so far.

  Prompts.

- Tell me about a time or an example of when you were going to work and felt excited and energized about it?

  o When you look back at this time/example, why do you think you felt excited and energized like this?

- Tell me about a time or an experience when you felt unhappy or discontented at work (*this could be at the same workplace or a different workplace to the happy or positive story you have shared above*)

  o When you look back at this time/experience, why do you think you felt like this?

- What about experiences that you have had with any of your managers over your career? Can you recall any positive and negative experiences?

  o Tell me about these stories, how you felt and why you felt positive/comfortable or negative/uncomfortable/fearful.

- What are your expectations from managers in general?

  o What sort of things does a manager need to do to make you feel positive/comfortable and energized at work.

  o What sort of things might a manager do to make you feel negative, fearful or disconnected at work. These may be conscious or unconscious actions.

- Looking back on your career so far what are some of the exciting and positive turning points? (*a positive turning point is an experience or happening that leads to change, development, growth or opportunities*)

  o What happened? How did you feel? Why was it a positive thing?

- Looking back on your career so far what are some of the disappointing and negative turning points (*a negative turning point is an experience or happening that limits your career development, growth or opportunities*)

  o What happened? How did you feel? Why was it a negative thing?Tell me about things limited your career path?

- How satisfied are you with your career in the retail industry at the moment (now)?
  - Why or why not? Tell me more about this *(prompt..explore how they feel, examples, reasons etc)*
- If you think back approximately 5 years, how happy are you now in your career compared to then?
  - Why are you happier and more positive? Tell me more about this.
  - Why are you less positive and unhappy? Tell me more about this.
- We have talked about the role of managers in terms of your career and whether you feel positive or discontented at work. Now I would like you to think about other organizational factors that may influence or impact on how you feel about your work and career.
  - What sort of things might happen in an organization that do not relate to your manager but they make you feel positive/comfortable and energized at work *(examples to illustrate…what and why do you feel like this)*
  - What sort of things might happen in an organization that do not relate to your manager but they make you feel negative, uncomfortable or disconnected at work *(examples to illustrate…what and why do you feel like this)*
- Now we will focus on your future career. If you were to write an imaginary story about your ideal future career (a positive story), what would that story look like? Tell me your story. You can think about it in terms of 5 years out from now or much later. What would your career look like? *(Get the career story first and then use the following as back up prompts after the participant has shared their dream career)*
  - What can your manager do to help you move towards these career goals?
  - What can your organization do to help you towards these career goals?
  - What can you do to help towards these career goals?
  - What might stop you or limit you on this ideal developmental career path *(probe: manager, organization or you)*
- Have you ever heard from your managers about the term engagement in the workplace? Tell me about that and any experiences or examples that relate to this term?

- o What is your understanding of the term 'engagement' in the workplace.
- o What do think is the understanding of your colleagues of the term 'engagement' in the workplace?
- o Do you think your organization tries to engage the staff? Why/why not? Examples?
- o What are your expectations about the meaning of this term engagement?
- Do you love your job at the moment/currently?
  - o Why? What needs to happen to make it even better?
  - o Why not? What needs to happen to change or improve this situation and to make you feel positive?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make around the topic of engagement and your career that you feel we haven't covered. You are welcome to raise anything.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time. Just a reminder that this is a confidential process as outlined in the consent form.

If there is any thing that you think of after our interview ends that you would like to have included in your comments and stories today, you are very welcome to email me.

Thank you again for your time, your stories and insights. It has been a privilege for me to share these stories and insights. Best wishes in your career.