Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian ICT Organisations

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Abstract

Employee engagement is widely recognised as a driver of organisational performance, yet dominant engagement frameworks are grounded in Western assumptions that may not translate into collectivist and hierarchical cultures. This study explores employee engagement in Fijian workplaces by addressing two research questions: *(1) What are the current employee engagement strategies used in Fijian ICT workplaces?* and (2) *How do Fijian cultural dimensions affect the effectiveness of these strategies?*

Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach grounded in Talanoa principles, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with twelve ICT professionals in Fiji. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Five global themes were identified: recognition and growth, motivation and fairness, trustworthy leadership and collaborative culture, cultural belonging and inclusion, and organisational constraints.

The findings reveal that employee engagement in Fiji extends beyond transactional incentives to encompass fairness, relational trust, and cultural respect. Participants valued practices such as inclusive celebrations, communal support, and flexible arrangements more than individualised rewards. Engagement was experienced as relational and collective, shaped by expectations of respect, reciprocity, and belonging. However, structural challenges, including pay inequities, limited career pathways, and high turnover, constrained engagement despite strong cultural foundations.

The study contributes to theory by demonstrating the role of culture in shaping how engagement is understood and enacted. It challenges dominant engagement models and calls for contextual frameworks that integrate Indigenous values, communal reciprocity, and relational leadership. Practically, the findings offer guidance for designing culturally responsive engagement strategies in Fiji and other collectivist contexts, highlighting the importance of aligning organisational practices with local meanings of respect, fairness, and community.

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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 used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), 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.

M Dewakar

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Ethics Approval

This research was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), approval number **25/116**, on **22 May 2025**. The study was conducted in accordance with AUT ethical guidelines, and all participants provided informed consent before participation.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement is frequently framed in both scholarly and practitioner literature as a panacea for organisational success, promising improved performance, employee wellbeing, and retention (Byrne, 2022; Saks et al., 2022). Yet beneath this promise lie assumptions that rarely withstand scrutiny. Dominant engagement frameworks, celebrated in global HR discourse, are deeply rooted in Western organisational contexts that privilege individual autonomy, open voice, and formalised HR systems (Hofstede, 1984; McSweeney, 2002). These assumptions become fragile when transposed into culturally collectivist, hierarchical, and resource-constrained settings.

Employee engagement is generally understood as the extent to which employees invest themselves cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally in their work roles. Kahn's (1990) foundational work conceptualised engagement as the expression of the self through physical, cognitive, and emotional presence at work, shaped by psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Later definitions extended this understanding by describing engagement as a positive, work-related state marked by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). However, engagement is not the same as job satisfaction, motivation, or organisational commitment. While these concepts are related, engagement involves a deeper and more active connection between employees and their work, their organisation, and the social context in which work is performed (Saks, 2006; Saks et al., 2022). For this reason, engagement must be understood not only as an individual psychological state, but also as a relational and organisational experience shaped by leadership, fairness, recognition, communication, belonging, and cultural expectations.

In Fiji, work is not merely an economic transaction but rather a social and cultural practice embedded in relationships, communal obligations, and respect for hierarchy (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Raisele, 2021). Engagement is therefore shaped not only by organisational policies but also by legacies of colonialism, Indigenous knowledge systems, ethnic plurality, and cultural norms that govern how employees speak, relate, and belong (Lal, 1992; Ramesh, 2016). When engagement strategies fail to recognise these realities, they risk misinterpretation, disengagement, or even harm, as the effects of organisational practices on engagement are moderated by societal cultural values (Rafferty, 2025).

This is important because engagement strategies are often designed around assumptions of individual achievement, direct communication, formal recognition, and employee autonomy. These assumptions may not always align with Fijian workplace realities, where respect for hierarchy, communal relationships, family obligations, ethnic diversity, and culturally appropriate communication practices may shape employees' experiences of engagement.

For example, employee voice may not always be expressed through direct feedback or open disagreement, particularly in settings where harmony, respect, and relational sensitivity are valued. Similarly, recognition may be more meaningful when it affirms collective contribution, belonging, and fairness rather than only individual performance. Therefore, examining employee engagement in Fiji requires attention to both organisational practices and the cultural meanings employees attach to those practices.

Despite growing global interest in employee engagement, the lived experiences of employees in Small Pacific Island Developing States remain absent from the literature (Crookes and Warren, 2022). Fiji, in particular, is under-represented, with existing research relying heavily on imported models that do not account for local meanings and structural constraints (Naidu and Chand, 2014).

This study responds to that absence by amplifying Fijian voices. Using a qualitative, culturally sensitive approach, it explores how engagement strategies are understood, experienced, and negotiated within the Fijian ICT sector, and how cultural dimensions shape their effectiveness. In doing so, the research challenges universalist assumptions. It contributes contextually grounded insights that speak not only to Fiji but also to broader debates on engagement, culture, and the decolonisation of organisational knowledge.

This study is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: What are the current employee engagement strategies used in Fijian ICT workplaces?

RQ2: How do Fijian cultural dimensions affect the effectiveness of these strategies?

To address these questions, this thesis adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design informed by Talanoa principles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve ICT professionals in Fiji, and the data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it allows employees' lived experiences, cultural meanings, and workplace interpretations to be explored in depth rather than measured through externally imposed categories.

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the research topic, explains the research problem, presents the research questions, and outlines the thesis structure. Chapter Two reviews the literature on employee engagement, beginning with the meaning and theoretical foundations of engagement before examining key drivers, cultural influences, the Fijian context, Pacific and Small Island Developing States literature, and gaps in existing research. Chapter Three explains the methodology, including the research philosophy, qualitative design, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the role of Talanoa. Chapter Four presents the findings from the

interviews through the global themes developed from participants' accounts. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and literature, with particular attention to how Fijian cultural dimensions shape engagement. Chapter Six concludes the thesis by summarising the study, outlining theoretical and practical contributions, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting future research directions.

By situating employee engagement within its cultural, historical, and relational context, this thesis argues that engagement cannot be meaningfully understood without listening to those who live it.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to employee engagement, with particular attention to how engagement is understood, theorised, and applied in culturally diverse organisational contexts. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the conceptual foundation for the study and to identify the gaps that justify examining employee perspectives on engagement strategies in Fijian ICT organisations.

The chapter begins by examining the meaning and theoretical foundations of employee engagement. This includes discussion of engagement as psychological presence at work (Kahn, 1990), as a positive work-related state involving vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and as a reciprocal relationship shaped by organisational support, fairness, and social exchange (Saks, 2006). These perspectives are important because they show that employee engagement is not simply job satisfaction, motivation, or commitment, but a broader concept shaped by employees' experiences of work, leadership, recognition, communication, and belonging.

The chapter then considers the key drivers of employee engagement, including leadership and management practices, organisational culture and communication, rewards, recognition, and career development. While these drivers are widely recognised in the global literature, their meaning and effectiveness may vary across cultural and institutional settings. Therefore, the review critically considers whether engagement strategies developed in Western organisational contexts can be directly applied to workplaces shaped by collectivist values, hierarchical relationships, communal obligations, and relational forms of communication.

Following this, the chapter examines the influence of culture on employee engagement. This discussion is important because culture shapes how employees interpret leadership, fairness, employee voice, recognition, and belonging. In particular, the chapter considers the limitations of imported engagement models and highlights the need for culturally responsive approaches that reflect local workplace realities.

The chapter then situates the discussion within the Fijian context. Fiji provides an important setting for this study because its workplaces are shaped by Indigenous iTaukei values, Indo-Fijian traditions, colonial history, ethnic diversity, respect for hierarchy, and communal relationships. The chapter also considers literature on employee engagement in Pacific and Small Island Developing States, where structural constraints, limited HR capacity, labour mobility, and resource limitations may influence the design and effectiveness of engagement strategies.

Finally, the chapter identifies gaps in the existing literature and explains the justification for the present study. In particular, it highlights the limited empirical research on employee engagement in Fiji, the under-representation of Pacific voices in engagement scholarship, and the need for qualitative research that centres employee perspectives. Overall, this chapter argues that employee engagement in Fiji should be understood through both engagement theory and local cultural context, rather than through the direct application of universal or Western-centric models.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of Employee Engagement

2.2.1. Definitions and Conceptual Distinctions

Employee engagement has become a key concept in organisational behaviour, yet it is still not fully comprehended. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) note that engagement has been defined, theorised, and measured in multiple ways, leading to a lack of consensus that complicates research and practice. While the phrase is widely used, the variations in its conceptualisation frequently obscure major disparities in underlying assumptions.

Kahn's (1990) foundational framework continues to be influential, as it identifies three fundamental psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability, which are the foundation of personal engagement. This approach views engagement as an experience phenomenon linked to individual perception and situational circumstances. Its significance to Fiji stems from its emphasis on psychological safety, which overlaps with collectivist principles stressing social harmony and adhering to authority. Indigenous Fijian knowledge systems are deeply relational and mediated through protocols of respect, hierarchy, and community embeddedness (Ramala and Ruwhiu, 2024). Within such contexts, concepts such as workplace safety may therefore be interpreted and enacted through culturally situated norms rather than solely through formal regulatory frameworks.

Conversely, Schaufeli (2018) presents a definition that leans towards a positivist perspective, defining engagement as a continuous state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. This concept supports the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which facilitates scientific measurement but may exclude culturally specific interpretations of commitment and motivation. This raises critical considerations for Fiji: can Western-developed engagement scales truly reflect the complexities of employee experience in a Pacific Island setting?

Saks (2006) adds another dimension by employing Social Exchange Theory (SET), which asserts that engagement is reciprocal; workers put effort when they sense organisational support and fairness. Social Exchange Theory emphasises mutuality, trust, and open-ended relational obligation rather than calculative transactions (Cropanzano et al., 2017). These

features closely align with collectivist frameworks, in which loyalty and support are embedded within enduring social relationships and cultural norms. In the Fijian setting, where family and community values are essential to workplace relationships, SET provides a culturally appropriate perspective, but one that requires contextualisation.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) refined the theoretical foundation by introducing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which proposes that engagement occurs when organisational resources, for example, autonomy, support, and feedback and balance job demands such as workload and emotional strain. Tawk (2021) connects this concept to High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) and says that strategic HR efforts may increase engagement by creating resource-rich settings. The JD-R model's versatility allows for adaptation to a variety of professional and cultural contexts. However, its implementation in Fiji would need careful adjustments to account for limited resources, hierarchical decision-making, and communal work dynamics.

Analytically, these theories show multiple pathways to engagement, including psychological, behavioural, and organisational factors, but they additionally highlight significant discrepancies. Kahn's model highlights the importance of individual agency, whereas SET and JD-R focus on relational and systemic factors. This distinction is important for Fiji because it affects how engagement strategies are planned and assessed. Prasad et al. (2024) argue that eengagement frameworks established in cultures that prioritise individualism and performance may not adequately reflect the relational and community-focused values prevalent in many Fijian workplaces.

Furthermore, the lack of research validating these frameworks within the Pacific context highlights a major gap in the existing literature. While the JD-R paradigm provides strong empirical evidence in Western contexts, its relevance in Fiji is primarily hypothetical. This gap emphasises the need for empirical research like the one proposed in this thesis to evaluate and adapt engagement strategies in underrepresented cultural situations.

2.2.2. The Evolution of Engagement Theory

The evolution of engagement theory indicates its increasing strategic relevance to organisational success. Initial conceptualisations prioritised employee wellness and motivation; however, contemporary research has reframed engagement as a catalyst for innovation, adaptation, and long-term sustainability.

Saks and Gruman (2014) explored SET, positing that engagement is an attitudinal result impacted by perceived organisational fairness, leader-member interaction, and human resource management approaches. The subsequent research by Saks and Gruman (2020) provided a critical examination of engagement research studies, highlighting their limited emphasis on contextual and cultural factors, calling for a more holistic,

interdisciplinary framework. This critique holds significant relevance for non-Western contexts such as Fiji, where cultural variables play a crucial role in recognising workplace behaviour.

Albrecht et al. (2021) broadened the JD-R paradigm by including the concept of meaningful work, suggesting that perceived purpose boosts intrinsic motivation, resilience, and overall engagement. This reframing aligns with emerging empirical trends that emphasise job crafting and employee voice as mechanisms of engagement. In culturally rich contexts such as Fiji, where employment is often linked to community identity and social responsibility, the concept of meaningful labour may take on new meanings, including contributing to extended family wellbeing, upholding communal obligations, for example, supporting village or religious activities, enhancing collective reputation, and fulfilling culturally grounded expectations of reciprocity and relational loyalty. This perspective is consistent with Tuimavana's (2020) analysis of the iTaukei concept of self and success, which emphasises relational identity and collective advancement over individual achievement. In this sense, meaningful work may extend beyond individual fulfilment to encompass social contribution and collective identity, warranting further contextual research.

Critically, these models increase our understanding, but at the same time, they also raise concerns about cultural imperialism in organisational theory. The prevalence of Western frameworks poses a threat to the recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge systems and organisational strategies. In Pacific nations such as Fiji, where communal cohesion and relational obligations frequently take priority over individual goals, imported frameworks require adaptation to prevent theoretical and practical conflicts. Therefore, the development of engagement theory is not merely a matter of timeline; it embodies a transformation in ideology, illustrating changing beliefs regarding the factors that drive individuals in the workplace. For Fijian organisations, this evolution presents both an opportunity and a challenge to adopt evidence-based practices without eroding cultural integrity.

2.2.3. Relevance to Fiji

Although there is a significant amount of engagement studies conducted worldwide, there is a notable lack of empirical studies specifically focused on Fiji. This scarcity limits both theoretical refinement and practical application in the region.

Raisele (2021) provides a unique perspective on Indigenous workplace engagement, emphasising the importance of communal labour practices, spiritual values, and relational accountability. The Fijian concept of *solesolevaki* (i.e., communal cooperation) illustrates how engagement is often enacted through collective contribution rather than individual

initiative. This fundamentally challenges the Western emphasis on personal agency and suggests alternative indicators of engagement more appropriate for the region.

This further emphasises the importance of organisational justice within Fijian public sector workplaces. Slack et al. (2020) found that perceptions of fairness, supervisory support, and leader acknowledgement were significantly associated with employee motivation, performance, and positive organisational outcomes in public sector contexts, reinforcing the critical role of equitable and supportive leadership in fostering employee engagement. These outcomes align with SET but underscore the need to incorporate culturally specific dimensions of reciprocity and leadership. Eti-Tofinga et al. (2017) demonstrate that Fijian organisational leadership operates at the intersection of customary hierarchical norms and modern governance frameworks, highlighting the coexistence of formal and informal systems of authority. This conflict challenges the implementation of Western frameworks, which frequently rely on egalitarian or individualistic frameworks. For instance, the JD-R model assumes a degree of job autonomy that may not be present in hierarchically structured Fijian organisations.

Analytically, this indicates a notable research gap: although the fundamental constructs of engagement may be universal, how they are expressed varies significantly. Culture acts as a filter that shapes how engagement is understood, experienced, and evaluated. Therefore, any attempt to implement engagement strategies in Fiji must begin with cultural diagnosis, not model replication.

This research aims to connect theoretical models with the actual experiences of Fijian employees through empirical evidence. By contextualising engagement within Fiji's distinct cultural, economic, and organisational context, it seeks to enhance both local practices and the advancement of global theoretical frameworks through culturally sensitive research.

2.3. Key Drivers of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is shaped by various organisational, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. While global scholarship has consistently identified leadership, organisational culture, communication, and rewards as critical drivers (Dalain, 2023), their effectiveness is mediated by cultural context. In collectivist societies such as Fiji, where social cohesion, hierarchical authority, and limited infrastructural resources are embedded in organisational life (Slack and Singh, 2018), these drivers demand nuanced, locally responsive interpretations.

2.3.1. Leadership and Management Practices

Leadership is one of the most effective mechanisms for increasing employee engagement, but its effectiveness is mediated by cultural assumptions and leadership frameworks. Eti-Tofinga et al. (2017) characterise leadership as a culturally embedded and context-

dependent process of influence, demonstrating that leadership effectiveness in Fijian organisations is shaped by culturally grounded norms regarding authority, relational obligation, and socially constructed expectations of appropriate leadership behaviour. In Fiji, where hierarchical respect (*vakaturaga*) and communal accountability shape workplace relations, leadership effectiveness may depend less on charismatic individualism and more on relational legitimacy and culturally recognised authority. Eti-Tofinga et al. (2017) demonstrate that leadership within Fijian cooperatives is embedded in customary hierarchical norms and communal expectations, where authority derives not only from formal organisational roles but from culturally recognised moral standing and relational trust. This implies that employee engagement in Fiji is more likely to be fostered when leaders embody culturally legitimate forms of authority, rather than relying solely on individualised transformational behaviours that prioritise vision, autonomy, or personal achievement.

In contrast, transformational leadership, which articulates a compelling vision and fosters intrinsic motivation, is positively associated with engagement (Jiatong et al., 2022). This style encourages employees to internalise organisational goals and align personal meaning with collective purpose. Similarly, ethical leadership contributes to engagement by building trust, stimulating creativity, and encouraging voice behaviour (Li et al., 2023; Haque and Yamoah, 2021). Meta-analytic research by Li et al. (2021) confirms that the influence of leadership on engagement is culturally dependent, with leader flexibility to power distance and uncertainty avoidance being crucial factors.

However, these leadership models are rooted in Western, individualistic paradigms. Their direct implementation in collectivist and high power-distance societies, such as Fiji, might be challenging. In the context of Pacific Island nations, leadership is often relational, communal, and based on moral legitimacy rather than charismatic influence (Besnier, 2004; Ravenswood et al., 2016). Leadership effectiveness in this context entails integrating into social networks rather than standing out, which frequently necessitates respect and modesty.

Servant leadership, characterised by empathy, stewardship, and prioritisation of community wellbeing (Winston and Fields, 2015), is more aligned with the Pacific worldview. Neubert et al. (2022) demonstrate that servant leadership is highly effective in collectivist societies because it resonates with shared responsibilities and relational obligations. In Fijian organisations, where authority may be respected but also expected to nurture the collective, servant leadership can complement and enhance engagement better than transformational leadership alone.

Moreover, Rockstuhl et al. (2012) reveal that employees from collectivist cultures respond more positively to relational leadership styles than to autonomy-focused empowerment. This

finding challenges the universal applicability of empowerment-based leadership strategies in Fiji and supports hybrid models that integrate both motivational and relational elements.

From an analytical standpoint, this raises a critical tension: while transformational leadership may catalyse engagement in Western contexts through vision and autonomy, its emphasis on individual achievement and assertiveness may alienate employees in collectivist cultures. Conversely, leadership strategies that emphasise mutual care, respect, and collective success could potentially result in increased engagement in Fiji.

Engagement strategies in Fiji must therefore be underpinned by culturally appropriate leadership development. Training programmes should emphasise relational intelligence, cultural humility, and inclusive practices that respect traditional authority while fostering psychological safety. Culturally adaptive leadership is therefore not only normatively aligned with Pacific relational values but is also supported by cross-cultural empirical evidence demonstrating that leadership effectiveness is culturally contingent and particularly responsive to collectivist orientations (Eti-Tofinga et al., 2017; Neubert et al., 2022). While direct engagement studies in Pacific contexts remain limited, existing evidence suggests that alignment between leadership style and socio-cultural expectations enhances relational trust and employee outcomes.

2.3.2. Organisational Culture and Communication

Organisational culture encompasses the shared beliefs, values, and norms that guide employee behaviour and expectations within a workplace. Williams (2022) characterises culture as both a binding force and a source of identity, shaping how members interact, make decisions, and experience meaning at work. Serpa (2016) argues that organisational culture functions not only as an internal governance system but also as a determinant of strategic performance. These conceptualisations emphasise the link between culture and engagement: in organisations where values align with employee expectations, engagement flourishes.

However, these cultural models frequently presume free communication and a low power gap, which are not universal. Communication patterns in hierarchical, collectivist societies are shaped by respect for authority and relational norms that prioritise harmony over confrontation. Soemantri et al. (2022) demonstrate that in such contexts, feedback and dialogue are often expressed indirectly to preserve social cohesion. In the Fijian setting, Eti-Tofinga et al. (2017) and Nabobo-Baba (2006) illustrate how customary hierarchy and relational accountability structure interpersonal interactions, suggesting that communication is mediated through culturally embedded protocols of respect rather than open contestation. Edmondson and Lei (2014) emphasise the importance of psychological safety for fostering engagement; however, in cultures that prioritise avoiding critique to maintain group harmony,

this safety may be limited or expressed in alternative forms. Morrison (2014) demonstrates that engagement increases when employees are encouraged to voice their ideas and concerns. But Raisele (2021) illustrates that in Fijian settings, the iTaukei tradition of *solesolevaki* promotes community collaboration and tacit coordination over explicit dissent. This traditional structure emphasises harmony and relational hierarchy, making direct feedback culturally inappropriate. Consequently, it is essential to redefine 'voice' within engagement strategies to incorporate culturally appropriate ways of expression, including consensus-building, storytelling, or mediated dialogue. This contrasts with Western models that equate engagement with assertiveness. In Soemantri et al.'s (2022) review of feedback culture in Asia, they demonstrated that collectivist societies favour communication styles that are relational and respectful, avoiding confrontational approaches. Applying this to Fiji, it is evident that psychological safety must be redefined: not as the ability to openly disagree, but as the guarantee of being heard through relationally sanctioned channels.

Verčič and Vokić (2017) indicate that effective internal communication cultivates a collective identity and shared values within an organisation. In Fiji, interactions that are informal could potentially have a greater influence than those conducted through formal channels. Slack and Singh (2018) emphasise this aspect by outlining the Fijian public sector's dependence on communal practices and relational networks for effective coordination and problem-solving.

Laverack and Brown (2003) suggest that participation in multicultural settings such as Fiji necessitates awareness of ethnic, linguistic, and class differences. Facilitating communication in such settings means adapting language, tone, and mode of delivery to reflect audience expectations. Hofstede (2001) also warns against cultural homogenisation, even within collectivist contexts, reminding us of that Indo-Fijian and iTaukei communication norms may diverge, affecting how engagement strategies are received.

Taken together, these insights call for a culturally attuned model of organisational communication, one that avoids imposing Western-style openness and instead supports locally meaningful forms of dialogue. Engagement strategies must therefore acknowledge that in Fiji, communication effectiveness is not about volume or transparency, but about harmony, respect, and contextually grounded trust.

2.3.3. Rewards, Recognition, and Career Development

Rewards and recognition systems play a vital role in fostering employee engagement by signalling organisational support and reinforcing desired behaviours. Albrecht et al. (2015, 2021) argue that perceptions of fairness and meaningful reward systems, including promotion opportunities, verbal praise, and performance recognition, are critical antecedents to engagement. However, the form and meaning of rewards are shaped by cultural

constructs, leading to significant variations in what is deemed meaningful or fair across different contexts.

In collectivist cultures like Fiji, there is a notable focus on group achievement and social harmony, prioritising these aspects over individual recognition. Brun and Dugas (2008) emphasise the motivating influence of symbolic acknowledgement, such as public recognition, peer appreciation, and ceremonial incentives, especially in non-Western societies. Basirico and Bolin (2016) argue that in these contexts, symbolic rewards frequently hold greater emotional significance compared to material incentives. This carries significant consequences for the design of engagement strategies: Fijian employees are likely to experience higher satisfaction from recognition that strengthens social connections and collective identity rather than from individual financial incentives.

Professional development also substantially influences employee engagement. The provision of growth possibilities indicates a long-term commitment to employees and encourages a sense of accomplishment. Thaman (2015) underscores the importance of education and capacity building in Pacific Island nations, suggesting that development pathways not only support economic resilience but also enhance motivation and self-worth. In Fiji, where external opportunities may be limited, especially in rural areas, internal development routes become crucial.

Chang et al. (2015) illustrate this through a postgraduate training programme for health professionals in the Pacific. The initiative effectively mitigated workforce shortages while enhancing morale and engagement by offering contextually relevant learning opportunities. Importantly, the programme was backed by local mentorship and culturally appropriate support systems, highlighting the importance of aligning development initiatives with Indigenous knowledge systems and organisational structures.

However, professional growth frameworks based on Western concepts of vertical mobility may be less effective in Pacific settings. Athanasou and Torrance (2002) assert that Pacific professional paths are frequently influenced by domestic responsibilities, community expectations, and relational obligations rather than individual aspiration or competition. For Indo-Fijians, upward mobility may be driven by educational achievement, whereas for iTaukei individuals, role fulfilment may be more closely tied to collective wellbeing.

This divergence challenges the assumption that linear career progression universally drives engagement. Instead, in Fiji, engagement may be strengthened through horizontal enrichment, community leadership opportunities, or involvement in culturally significant projects. Kurtessis et al. (2017) note that perceived organisational support is a key mediator between development and engagement, which suggests that the process of recognising how support is shown matters as much as the tangible outcomes. Analytically, this highlights a

recurring theme across the literature: the need for culturally contextualised strategies. Recognition and development practices must reflect not only organisational goals but also employee values rooted in cultural identity. In Fiji, this means designing inclusive engagement strategies that honour relational obligations, communal success, and culturally resonant expressions of value.

Taken together, rewards and development pathways are not merely tools of motivation but signals of cultural competence and mutual respect. Their success in engaging employees depends on how well they resonate with shared meanings and social expectations in Fijian workplaces.

2.4. Cultural Influence on Employee Engagement

Understanding employee engagement in Fiji necessitates a culturally sensitive and critical approach. Fiji is a complex, multi-ethnic culture affected by historical migration, colonial legacies, and deeply ingrained community customs (Ramesh 2016). Indigenous iTaukei, Indo-Fijians, and other Pacific and immigrant cultures make up the nation's labour force, each impacted by unique cultural histories and sociopolitical experiences that define their worldviews, communication preferences, and workplace expectations (Lal, 1992). This diversity means cultural backgrounds fundamentally influence how employees experience and express engagement, interpret their roles, connect with work, and demonstrate commitment. However, although some theories seek to capture this diversity, conflicts and gaps exist between universal engagement frameworks and the unique cultural characteristics of Fiji, emphasising the importance of contextually grounded research.

2.4.1. National Cultural Dimensions and Workplace Engagement

Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions offer a foundational yet contested framework for examining national cultural tendencies in relation to workplace behaviour. Although Fiji was not part of Hofstede's initial dataset, the framework is frequently applied to infer cultural tendencies in comparable collectivist and high power-distance societies, including Pacific Island contexts such as Fiji. Empirical research confirms similar patterns in Fiji, where communal harmony, collective decision-making, and respect for hierarchical authority shape organisational behaviour (Eti-Tofinga et al., 2017). Eti-Tofinga et al. (2017) highlight the collectivist orientation of Fijian workplaces, emphasising that group cohesion and relational obligations often take precedence over individual achievement, contrasting with Western individualistic engagement models.

However, critical scholarship questions Hofstede's model for its reductionist and static perspective of culture, which risks emphasising diverse social realities into ongoing national traits (McSweeney, 2002). Hofstede's concept of cultural homogeneity across nations ignores intra-national variation, such as ethnic, socioeconomic, and generational distinctions

seen in Fiji. Furthermore, the model's emphasis on ideals overlooks the dynamic cultural practices and emerging identities influenced by globalisation and local activity. These challenges suggest that although Hofstede's paradigm provides a valuable tool, it should not be applied blindly, as it fails to acknowledge its limits in representing Fiji's cultural hybridity and fluidity.

Slack et al. (2020) demonstrate how the acceptability of hierarchical leadership influences communication and workplace dynamics, promoting collaboration and loyalty in public sector environments. Collectively, this study indicates that employee engagement in Fiji is rooted in social and institutional environments that emphasise shared purpose and clear authority. However, the current Western literature on involvement, which is based on principles of open communication and empowering individuals, may not fully cover these issues. According to Adegbaju (2018), while collectivist and hierarchical societies establish loyalty and harmony, they also restrict the open and direct communication techniques recommended in Western models, indicating a cultural paradox that challenges the transferability of such models.

Budhwar and Sparrow (2002) emphasise that these cultural orientations present practical challenges for HR practitioners in the implementation of standardised engagement tools such as 360-degree feedback, open-door policies, and individual performance bonuses, which may conflict with norms emphasising discretion and group cohesion. Slack et al. (2020) demonstrated empirically that perceptions of fairness and leadership support significantly influence employee engagement in Fiji, with employees responding positively to leaders who prioritised relational care, ethical conduct, and employee well-being. These findings reflect the importance of relational and collectivist orientations in shaping engagement within the Fijian public sector. This highlights a key shortcoming in conventional human resource management: the idea that engagement drivers are universal, neglecting culturally particular interpretations of respect, voice, and incentive.

McSweeney (2002) also disputes Western HR standards by saying that in collectivist societies, silence or indirect communication typically means loyalty and respect instead of disengagement. This finding shows a significant gap in engagement research: the failure to recognise culturally contextual interpretations of employee behaviour leads to misunderstanding and poor management reactions. Thus, without cultural adaptation, engagement strategies risk not just being ineffective but actively compromising motivation and cohesiveness.

Overall, Hofstede's model is a good place to start when trying to understand culture, but it is not very effective in the Fijian context since it is too deterministic and does not pay enough attention to how cultures change over time. The literature calls for moving beyond simple ideas of individualism vs collectivism and towards more complex, context-sensitive ideas

that see culture as a resource for creating inclusive engagement strategies instead of a barrier.

2.4.2. Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian Values in Organisational Life

At a more basic level, Fiji's two largest ethnic groups, the *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijians, have unique but overlapping cultural values that influence engagement in intricate ways. The *iTaukei* believe in ideas like *vanua* (the connection between land, people, and identity), *veiwekani* (relationships), and *veiqaravi vakavanua* (traditional respect and service), which influences community and organisational life (Raisele, 2021). These principles foster strong relationship accountability and collective responsibility, which frequently appear as a strong dedication to group objectives, informal mentorship, and peer support. However, Gibson (2019) indicates that similar cultural norms may suppress dissent and innovation, since customary respect inhibits employee voice, particularly in sectors where cultural harmony is prioritised, raising issues about how engagement is operationalised in the real world.

In contrast, Gillion (1977) describes how the Indo-Fijian population, which was deprived of land ownership and institutional authority during colonial control, turned to education, unionism, and economic progress as alternative forms of empowerment. This perspective is more closely related to merit-based and formal recognition systems seen in Western HRM models. Nonetheless, Reddy et al. (2003) show that Indo-Fijians also have to deal with significant familial and communal commitments, which shows that they have both individualistic and collectivist ideals that defy neat categorisation.

According to Mahadevan et al (2020), cross-cultural management practices frequently mirror dominant cultural norms, which might marginalise alternative viewpoints and contribute to the exclusion of people who do not fit these standards. This makes developing inclusive engagement strategies particularly difficult, especially in complex multicultural contexts. Rockstuhl et al. (2011) state that cultural intelligence (CQ) is an important talent for leaders who work in places with a lot of various cultures because it lets them change how they act and make choices to fit with what people from other cultures anticipate. Their findings show that culturally adaptable leadership, which is based on CQ, may work better than strategies that only use general or emotional intelligence. Although the authors do not expressly address engagement strategies, their findings suggest that culturally aware leadership encourages the development of strategies that are sensitive to diverse cultural perspectives.

For instance, Gillion (1977), highlights that Indo-Fijians' historical isolation from land and institutional control drove them to pursue education and economic growth as individual paths to success. In contrast, iTaukei cultural norms prioritise communal acknowledgement, relational accountability, and group celebration above individual success (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). In contrast, engagement strategies that rely only on collective rewards may fail to

drive those who value personal acknowledgement and equal compensation for work, thus resulting in lower engagement and performance Pearsall et al, 2010). This contradiction highlights a fundamental research gap: few models successfully balance relationship and achievement motives in culturally diverse workplaces. Budhwar and Sparrow (2002) argue for hybrid strategies integrating individual recognition with team-oriented acknowledgements, as well as mentoring systems that respect hierarchy while promoting merit-based growth. However, literature seldom puts these ideas into action or tests how well they work in Fiji. This shows that there is a need for empirical studies to culturally examine hybrid engagement models.

In the absence of such an equilibrium, organisations jeopardise the establishment of cultural silos and compromise the engagement they aim to cultivate, a matter of significant relevance in Fiji's multi-ethnic work environment.

2.4.3. Cultural Celebrations and Inclusive Engagement

In collectivist and relational cultures, engagement is frequently enacted through shared rituals, symbolic practices, and communal recognition rather than solely through formal HR mechanisms. In the Fijian context, cultural and religious festivities serve as relational engagement practices that reinforce belonging, mutual recognition, and collective identity. Islam and Zyphur (2009) argue that organisational rituals function as mechanisms of social integration, strengthening identification and emotional attachment. In Fiji, where public celebrations such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas, Easter, and Girmit Day hold deep communal significance, recognising these events within workplaces affirms employee identities and strengthens relational trust. Kumar (2012) demonstrates that cultural and religious festivals play a significant role in sustaining collective identity, social cohesion, and communal belonging among Indo-Fijians, suggesting that organisational acknowledgement of these events reinforces employees' sense of recognition and relational connection.

Downey et al. (2015) suggest that acknowledging cultural diversity enhances emotional engagement by validating employees' social identities, thereby reinforcing psychological connection to the organisation (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2023). In this sense, cultural celebrations operate not merely as symbolic gestures but as relational signals that the organisation recognises and respects communal belonging. This is particularly significant in multi-ethnic contexts such as Fiji, where identity is closely tied to religious and cultural heritage.

However, the effectiveness of such practices is contingent upon authenticity and equity. Mahadevan et al. (2020) caution that superficial multicultural initiatives risk reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than fostering inclusion. Similarly, Sriskandarajah (2003) argues that uneven recognition of cultural groups in Fiji may exacerbate ethnic tensions. These

critiques suggest that engagement through cultural celebration must be co-constructed with employees and grounded in principles of reciprocity and fairness. When embedded within genuine relational practices, such initiatives can strengthen inclusive engagement; when implemented superficially, they risk symbolic tokenism that undermines trust.

2.4.4. Cultural Misalignment and the Limits of Imported Engagement Models

Shuck et al. (2011) critique prevailing Western engagement models for prioritising individual autonomy and self-direction, which may be incompatible with collectivist and relational cultures like those in Fiji. Feedback systems that require self-promotion or direct critique might be culturally uncomfortable or threatening, as noted by Rockstuhl et al. (2011).

Leadership development frameworks that emphasise flat hierarchies and servant leadership may clash with iTaukei employees' expectations of authoritative, paternalistic leadership (Eti-Tofinga et al., 2017). Participatory leadership may be seen as evading accountability rather than empowering, highlighting a significant disconnect between foreign leadership ideals and local norms of culture.

Lenberg et al. (2019) suggest that perceiving engagement as a universal construct with standardised factors risks mismanagement and disengagement. Budhwar and Sparrow (2002), on the other hand, support localised HRM practices that adjust engagement to the historical, institutional, and cultural context.

This misalignment entails redefining engagement in Fiji to include elements that are mostly missing from engagement literature in the West, such as group commitment, relational accountability, and contribution to the common good, in addition to individual enthusiasm. Instead of merely importing Western models, this redefinition calls on HR professionals and academics to create culturally aware, context-specific engagement frameworks.

In Fiji, culture plays a key role in defining, enacting, and experiencing employee engagement rather than serving as a backdrop. Western engagement frameworks are challenged by national tendencies towards collectivism and high-power distance. Uniform approaches are made more difficult by the coexistence of iTaukei and Indo-Fijian values, necessitating unique and hybrid engagement strategies.

Cultural festivals provide underutilised but powerful opportunities to promote inclusiveness and emotional connection, but they must be conducted in a real, participative manner to prevent tokenism and division. The research warns against the irrational adoption of imported engagement models, which may lead to misalignment and employee disengagement.

It is important to have an approach that is culturally sensitive, collaborative, and nuanced, based on what people in Fiji really experience.

The next part will look at how these cultural dynamics connect with the larger structural and economic constraints that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face when adopting successful employee engagement initiatives.

2.5. Employee Engagement in the Pacific and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Context

Employee engagement literature in the Pacific and other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) remains limited, despite an urgent need for an understanding of the different socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors that affect engagement strategies in these regions. Although Crookes and Warren (2022) focus on psychological research, their findings reveal an overall neglect of Pacific SIDS in global studies, a phenomenon that may also extend to organisational studies. This lack of representation restricts the applicability of dominant engagement ideas in these contexts and risks promoting culturally restricted views on workplace behaviour. Bridging this gap is crucial for developing contextually grounded engagement strategies that reflect the lived realities of Pacific SIDS.

Although widely referenced frameworks like Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) is prominent in the international literature, researchers have pointed out their Western-centric roots and emphasised the importance of testing these theories in diverse cultural settings. Studies in regions such as South Korea and China demonstrate efforts to change and evaluate these models outside the Western setting (So et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). However, Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as Fiji, are significantly underrepresented in this discourse (Crookes and Warren, 2022), raising questions about the models' uncritical application in contexts where workplace norms and cultural dynamics differ dramatically. This section investigates the current literature on employee engagement in Pacific Island nations, compares it to research from around the world, finds important gaps in the context, and puts the discussion in the context of the study's research questions.

2.5.1. Structural and Economic Constraints in SIDS

Pacific Island nations, such as Fiji, encounter structural vulnerabilities characterised by economic reliance on external sectors, constrained resource bases, and significant exposure to external shocks, which constrain organisational capacity to implement and sustain formal HR practices (Briguglio, 2016a, 2016b). These macroeconomic stressors consistently impact organisational priorities and human resource practices, particularly in relation to engagement strategies. In this context, more informal, cultural ways of interacting often take precedence over structured engagement strategies. As Nabobo-Baba (2006) points out, Fijian frameworks for knowing and learning are based on relationality, communal values, and respect for traditional authority structures. These Indigenous epistemologies shape how

engagement is enacted and interpreted within workplaces by framing commitment as relational, collective, and grounded in reciprocity rather than in individual performance metrics or formal appraisal systems.

In contrast to Western contexts, where employee engagement is frequently linked to performance metrics and bottom-line outcomes (Saks, 2006; Bakker and Albrecht, 2018), organisations in Pacific SIDS such as Fiji appear to place a greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships and cultural norms, reflecting Indigenous epistemologies of relationality and collective responsibility (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). This variance highlights a significant gap in the literature, whereas much is published on strategic HRM and engagement in rich countries, less is known about how resource-constrained environments influence engagement strategies. The implication is that strategies effective in resource-rich settings may be misaligned or unsustainable in countries like Fiji.

2.5.2. Public Sector Dominance and Bureaucratic Challenges

Another recurring theme in the existing research is the prevalence of the public sector in SIDS economies and the resulting implications for engagement (Lal, 1992). In Fiji, the government is one of the largest employers (Lal, 1992). However, public sector environments are characterised by firm hierarchies, constrained professional development opportunities, and cases of political interference (Rahman et al.2016). The presence of these factors may lead to a decrease in staff motivation and hinder the implementation of innovative engagement strategies.

Organisations in the private sector, especially international firms that work in tourism (Gibson, 2019) and banking, typically use more systematic ways to get employees engaged, such as employee surveys, recognition programmes, and leadership development schemes. However, such strategies are frequently imported and not tailored to local norms, resulting in decreased effectiveness or employee disengagement. The contrast between public and private sector engagement strategies reveals an unequal environment in which formal procedures exist but are inconsistently implemented and culturally misaligned. This inconsistency highlights a gap in the existing literature regarding the adaptation of engagement strategies to the specific public service settings in SIDS.

2.5.3. Cultural Congruence versus Imported Models

A major concern raised by various academics is the lack of coherence between engagement frameworks based on Western perspectives and the culturally collectivist paradigms common in Pacific Island nations. Many foundational engagement frameworks based on assumptions of autonomy, personal achievement, and individual well-being reflect individualistic cultural values (Kular et al., 2008; Truss et al., 2013), which may conflict with the more communal and relational values prevalent in Pacific cultures. However, as Connell

and Brown (2005) and Nabobo-Baba (2006) highlight, Fijian (especially iTaukei) culture is anchored in communal identity, social obligation, and hierarchical respect. Rather than assuming engagement is driven by individual autonomy and competitive achievement, the Fijian context reframes engagement as a relational and collective construct, embedded in social obligation, shared identity, and culturally legitimate authority. In these contexts, engagement is more affected by social cohesion, group recognition, and inclusive decision-making processes than by individual rewards or autonomy.

Wang (2016) states that research has shown that the things that make employees more engaged vary in diverse cultures. Nabobo-Baba (2006) found that in the Pacific context, Indigenous Fijian knowledge systems emphasise communal values, relational learning, and respect-based leadership as foundational elements of social organisation in iTaukei society. These cultural backgrounds support the idea that strategies for getting employees to work together that focus on team-based recognition and culturally grounded leadership are more likely to work than models that are too general or too focused on individuals that come from Western cultures. For instance, a comparable pattern was identified in a New Zealand study by Hapeta et al. (2019), which demonstrated that the integration of Māori storytelling practices into a provincial rugby team markedly improved players' well-being, leadership, and sense of belonging. Even though the team setting is not a real workplace, it is a lot like workplaces where group identity and cohesion are important for morale. These findings align well with the Fijian context, highlighting the significance of communalism and the respect for traditional leadership. Therefore, it is possible that programmes that use Fijian cultural practices like storytelling, community gatherings, or rituals could boost morale and engagement more than Western-style rewards based on performance. This supports up the idea that engagement strategies need to be rooted in culture for them to succeed.

Nonetheless, there is little critical research into how these culturally appropriate practices are designed or evaluated. While subjective testimony suggests they are more effective, empirical research on their impact on performance, retention, and satisfaction is limited. This lack of comprehensive evaluation represents a methodological gap, indicating the need for engagement indicators that are culturally responsive and customised to the Pacific setting.

2.5.4. Human Resource Capacity and Professionalisation

A further challenge pertains to the professionalisation of HRM practices in the Pacific. Numerous organisations, especially smaller or rural ones, operate with constrained HR capacity, frequently merging roles and lacking formal training (Bryant-Tokalau, 2018). Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) note that Pacific workplaces depend on informal, relational communication such as Talanoa, prioritising trust and communal relationships over formal procedures. This cultural setting means HR functions tend to be reactive rather than

strategically planned. Thus, professionalising HRM in the Pacific necessitates not only skill development but also the adaptation of practices to align with Indigenous communal values.

Conversely, in numerous Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, employee engagement is integrated as a fundamental HRM function, reinforced by specialised teams, diagnostic tools, and permanent strategies (Guest, 2014). This formalisation contrasts with the less institutionalised HR practices commonly found in Pacific organisations. The Pacific context lacks such institutional infrastructure, resulting in fragmented implementation and limited sustainability of engagement strategies. These findings suggest a structural gap in HR capability that interferes with the institutionalisation of engagement strategies. This structural limitation complicates the use of international engagement models, which require strategic HR infrastructure.

2.5.5. Comparative Insights from Other SIDS

Jayachaya and Lee (2014) note that economic instability, skill shortages caused by migration, and public sector dominance create major labour challenges in Caribbean SIDS. Similar conditions in Pacific SIDS may cause institutional barriers that limit workforce development and the professionalisation of HR practices. Moreover, evidence from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates that employee engagement strategies often experience contextual misfit when adopted from external models, highlighting the challenges of implementing standardised HR frameworks in varied cultural and institutional settings (Brewster et al. 2018).

For instance, Jayachaya and Lee (2014) discovered that imported HR strategies from international corporations caused employee dissatisfaction when they failed to consider local cultural differences, such as respect for age, gender roles, and community responsibilities. These findings reflect issues highlighted in Fijian scholarship, in which difficulties in the urban informal sector, such as small-scale, unregistered businesses and casual labour arrangements operating outside formal HR regulation, emphasise conflicts between formal employment frameworks and local socio-cultural contexts that influence economic participation and workforce dynamics (Reddy et al., 2003), thereby reinforcing the overarching critique that engagement frameworks must be contextually attuned. Even though Pacific and Caribbean SIDS have a lot in common, few studies look at both areas together. This absence represents a comparative gap in the literature that could yield important insights for theory-building and practice.

The evidence presented in this discussion highlights that the design and effectiveness of employee engagement strategies in Pacific SIDS are influenced by a complex interplay of economic, institutional, and cultural factors. A consistent pattern is observed in which engagement strategies are often adopted without adequate contextualization, leading to

limitations imposed by structural factors like resource scarcity and bureaucratic inactivity. Moreover, there is an obvious tension between the collectivist values inherent in Pacific societies and the individualistic principles that form the foundation of many mainstream Western engagement frameworks.

These ideas highlight important findings for this research: context is crucial. Understanding and improving employee engagement in Fiji necessitates a deep engagement with Pacific-specific realities. The literature identifies ongoing gaps, such as the scarcity of empirical research from Pacific contexts, insufficient cultural adaptation of existing engagement theories, and the underdevelopment of local HRM capabilities.

As a result, this review strengthens the justification for conducting research that focuses on Fijian employee perspectives, with a specific emphasis on cultural interpretation and perception building. It also supports the qualitative approach of this study, which aims to get real-life experiences rather than impose externally established criteria or classifications.

While some research has been done to investigate the cultural relevance and contextual fit of engagement strategies in Pacific Island settings such as Fiji, there is still a major analytical gap in recognising their actual impact. Theoretical coherence and cultural alignment may not necessarily result in successful outcomes. It is essential to examine how strategies for engagement affect critical organisational indicators, including staff retention, discretionary conduct, and performance, especially in situations of institutional instability and resource limitations. Furthermore, recent global changes, accelerated technology, and evolving employee values have also changed the landscape of engagement, which is why we need to pay more attention to how adaptable and sustainable these strategies are. These evolving dynamics necessitate a closer examination of the practical ramifications and new patterns of engagement, particularly in multicultural, resource-constrained countries such as Fiji.

2.6. Evolving Outcomes and Emerging Trends in Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been acknowledged as a vital determinant affecting corporate outcomes, including performance, retention, and discretionary behaviours. Harter et al. (2002). However, as Andrlić et al. (2023) demonstrate, engagement is not static but continuously transforms in response to external shocks. A systematic review of studies from the COVID era suggests that mental health support, resilience interventions, empathetic leadership, and adaptations to remote work have surfaced as new factors influencing engagement. This reflects how socio-economic upheaval and technological changes transform historical contexts and practices of engagement. This section critically analyses these outcomes and emerging trends, with a focus on their relevance and implications for organisations operating in culturally diverse, resource-constrained contexts, such as Fiji.

2.6.1. *Engagement and Organisational Performance: Contextual Nuances and Limitations*

A significant body of empirical research connects employee engagement to positive organisational outcomes, such as higher productivity, creativity, and customer satisfaction (Bailey et al.2017). This research often views engagement as an individual psychological state that leads to improved performance. For example, Saks (2019) emphasises engagement's importance in encouraging discretionary effort and innovation. Nonetheless, while these benefits are well established in Western and developed countries, their applicability to Pacific Island economies like Fiji is less clear. Crookes and Warren (2022), in their qualitative study with university staff in Fiji, point out that concepts of wellbeing and satisfaction are influenced by culturally specific values, including community ties and spiritual fulfilment, which differ significantly from Western ideals.

The Fiji Skills Strategy 2023 (Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, 2023) underscores how persistent workforce shortages and infrastructural limitations compel organisations to prioritise employee engagement primarily as a compensatory mechanism, rather than as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. This focus on internal capacity-building emphasises the resource limitations of Fijian organisations and prompts questions about the long-term effectiveness of such engagement strategies in structurally challenged environments. Supporting this, Prasad and Pathak's (2024) research of Fiji's retail sector demonstrates that workplace training, when linked with local socio-cultural norms, may enhance employee engagement and organisational citizenship conduct, both of which are crucial indicators of perceived organisational performance. Nonetheless, the translation of these outcomes into tangible, enduring organisational success is still ambiguous, suggesting that performance is significantly influenced by the practical application of engagement within the unique cultural and economic framework of Fiji. This, in turn, underlines the need for customised models that are locally designed and move critically beyond universal solutions, challenging assumptions often found in dominant Western frameworks.

2.6.2. *Retention and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour: Cultural Mediation*

Engagement's positive effects on employee retention and organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) are widely acknowledged (Shahzad et al., 2024; Christian et al., 2011). However, the Pacific region's high labour mobility, which is influenced by regional migration and economic opportunities abroad, complicates retention (Stahl and Appleyard, 2007). Such cross-border labour mobility challenges the assumption of stable, long-term psychological contracts and requires a deeper comprehension of loyalty within transnational settings. Moreover, OCBs are deeply rooted in cultural values. *In Fiji's collectivist society, where cooperation and mutual support are culturally accepted, engagement-driven*

community behaviours are likely to generate greater social capital benefits (Prasad and Pathak, 2024). However, the extent to which engagement influences OCBs may differ across ethnic groups and workplace contexts, suggesting a nuanced relationship between cultural expectations and organisational dynamics.

2.6.3. The Impact of Global Disruptions: Post-Pandemic Shifts and Technological Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited worldwide changes in work arrangements, wellness priorities, and technology adoption, revealing both an opportunity and limitations in employee engagement (Foster, 2022; McLean, 2022). Hybrid and remote work models, which are recognised for enhancing freedom and work-life balance in many settings (Dhadiwal and Londhe, 2025), face significant implementation issues in Fiji due to infrastructure deficiencies such as unreliable internet connectivity and poor digital literacy, particularly in rural areas (Rahman and Naz, 2006). This digital gap risks compounding differences in engagement experiences and outcomes, emphasising the significance of targeted infrastructure investments and inclusive digital initiatives.

Moreover, De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021) argue that the pandemic's heightened emphasis on mental health and burnout indicates a significant broadening of the conceptual parameters of employee engagement. While traditional literature emphasised enthusiasm and dedication, current discussions highlight wellbeing as an essential component of continuous engagement (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). In Fiji's collectivist culture, characterised by heightened familial and community roles during crises, organisations that adopt culturally aligned wellness initiatives and flexible policies demonstrate greater success in enhancing workforce resilience. As Pandit, Evans, and Gill (2024) observe, “effective mental health care in Fiji must recognise and incorporate the vital role of extended family networks and communal support systems, which are fundamental to resilience and recovery in times of crisis” (p. 117). This emphasises the need for workplace strategies that are accustomed to Fiji’s distinct social context to maintain employee wellbeing and organisational stability. This evolution in engagement models requires organisations to implement comprehensive solutions that address both psychological and sociocultural factors. In Fiji's collectivist setting, for example, addressing the relationship between familial ties, community support, and occupational well-being, it is vital to establish wellness initiatives that actually create employee sustainability.

2.6.4. Integrative Perspectives - Strategic and Institutional Implications for Fiji

Taken together, these findings and trends indicate that employee engagement in Fiji cannot be comprehended using Western-centric, individual-focused frameworks. Instead, the convergence of cultural diversity, economic and structural limits, and technological

constraints necessitates a strategy that contextualises engagement within wider socio-cultural and infrastructure frameworks. Saks and Gruman's (2014) assertion to prioritise engagement strategically is particularly relevant in contexts such as Fiji, where resource limitations require customised engagement models. However, Fiji's institutional environment raises significant challenges to the effective implementation of engagement strategies (Sanday 2015). Many organisations, especially those in the public sector and informal economy, lack strong HR systems and formal policies to systematically enhance engagement (Naidu et al.2013). The lack of well-developed organisational frameworks limits the capability to transform engagement plans into sustainable practices, leaving such strategies heavily reliant on individual leadership or external donor programmes that frequently lack long-term sustainability.

Moreover, infrastructure inadequacies, including inconsistent internet access and low digital literacy, represent not only technical challenges but also indicators of broader institutional underinvestment in digital equity. This situation risks exacerbating existing inequalities, particularly for employees in rural or marginalised communities, and undermines the effectiveness of modern engagement tools and remote work models (Reddy et al.2022). Framing these limits as institutional failures reveals the underlying causes of engagement gaps, stressing the critical need for broad policy reforms, such as strengthening national digital infrastructure, formalising HR capability standards, and embedding equity-focused labour protections, rather than relying solely on isolated organisational interventions.

Furthermore, ethnic and socioeconomic differences based on Fiji's colonial heritage, as well as post-independence political instability, complicate the implementation of inclusive engagement strategies (Loga et al.2022). These differences, frequently evident in professional hierarchy and informal networks, might result in unequal access to engagement opportunities and create hostility towards organisational initiatives regarded as favouring one ethnic group over another (Naidu, 2013). In these instances, engagement cannot be separated from power dynamics and historical grievances; it must be viewed as a means of bridging social capital rather than just increasing productivity.

Addressing these multi-level constraints necessitates a reconceptualization of engagement as a cultural and organisational effort. Structural changes in legislation, training, and digital infrastructure must promote culturally significant actions, including participatory decision-making, communal recognition rituals, and communication that includes everyone (Farrelly, 2011). Importantly, engagement strategies must also reflect Fiji's ethnic plurality and ensure equitable representation in leadership, decision-making, and professional development initiatives (Naidu, 2013).

Nonetheless, significant gaps remain in understanding how these evolving factors interact over time and across Fiji's diverse organisational landscape. For example, how do digital engagement encounters contrast between Indigenous iTaukei and Indo-Fijian employees? What organisational enablers are most efficient in ensuring equitable engagement in both formal and informal sectors? Addressing these questions is essential for developing locally grounded, inclusive models that can foster sustainable employee engagement and resilience in Fijian workplaces.

2.7. Gaps and Justification

Despite the increasing global interest in employee engagement, the literature highlights significant gaps in knowledge and practice, especially in the context of the Pacific Islands, notably Fiji. The ICT sector's integration into global technological and regulatory systems (Hassall, 2005), combined with documented HR capacity challenges in developing economies (Vosikata, 2023), suggests that Fijian ICT organisations may be especially susceptible to adopting externally developed engagement frameworks without sufficient cultural adaptation.

2.7.1. Lack of Pacific-Centred Empirical Data

One of the most noticeable gaps is the lack of Pacific-generated data on employee engagement. Crookes and Warren (2022) underscore that psychological and organisational research frequently neglects Pacific Island nations, resulting in theoretical disparities that marginalise non-Western experiences. This imbalance affects both academic research and practical HRM strategies. Current research depends on cross-national comparisons or anecdotal evidence instead of comprehensive, context-specific analysis (Naidu and Chand, 2014; Bryant-Tokalau, 2018). Consequently, there is a lack of empirical evidence that policymakers and practitioners require to create engagement frameworks that are culturally aligned with Pacific values and work cultures.

2.7.2. Absence of an iTaukei Engagement Model

While there is growing recognition of the importance of cultural congruence in HRM, no comprehensive model of employee engagement grounded in iTaukei epistemology currently exists. The iTaukei worldview, which prioritises communal wellbeing, interdependence, and respect for traditional authority (Nabobo-Baba, 2006), is absent from mainstream engagement literature. This absence represents a theoretical and practical oversight, especially considering that Indigenous Fijians (iTaukei) are the predominant ethnic group in Fiji's labour market. Despite qualitative research recognising the significance of community traditions like Talanoa and storytelling in cultivating trust and involvement (Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba, 2012), these findings have not been developed into a coherent engagement

framework. Without such a model, organisations risk implementing misaligned methods that unintentionally reduce rather than boost employee engagement and well-being.

2.7.3. Misapplication of Western-Centric Frameworks

Another significant issue lies in the transfer of Western engagement frameworks to Fijian organisations. Research in other SIDS contexts, such as the Caribbean, has also documented the inadequacy of imported models that overlook local values related to kinship, age hierarchy, and community (Bissessar, 2001; Brewster et al., 2018). These findings highlight challenges in Fiji, where organisations often implement externally developed engagement tools such as individual performance incentives or leadership development programmes without adapting them to the collective workplace cultures. The outcome is a mismatch between strategic objectives and employee expectations, leading to disengagement or resistance (Farndale et al., 2015). The continual dependence on universalist methodologies not only constrains efficacy but also sustains post-colonial inequalities within organisational practices (Mueller and Carter, 2005).

2.7.4. Lack of Inclusive and Locally Relevant Models

A lack of inclusive engagement models that represent Fiji's multi-ethnic workforce is evident. Although research has recognised the impact of cultural factors on workplace behaviour, there is a lack of systematic exploration regarding the differing experiences and interpretations of engagement among Indo-Fijian and iTaukei employees. For example, research from similar diverse contexts, such as India, demonstrates that organisational citizenship behaviours, which are the behavioural outcomes of engagement, differ across ethnic groups. This variation can be attributed to various communal expectations and the consequences of historical marginalisation (Panicker et al.2018). In the absence of disaggregated data or comparative analysis, engagement strategies may standardise employee needs and perpetuate structural inequalities. Future engagement models must disaggregate ethnic data and explicitly account for differentiated experiences to prevent universalising assumptions and to ensure inclusivity that is culturally and historically grounded. An inclusive model would require attention not only to cultural values but also to power dynamics, trust-building, and equitable representation in decision-making.

2.7.5. Justification for the Present Study

This study is justified by both theoretical and practical considerations. This study explores the underexamined domain of employee engagement in Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) by focusing on Fijian perspectives in the ICT sector to analyse engagement strategies. It addresses the pressing requirement for culturally informed and locally pertinent engagement frameworks to guide policy and practice. Employing qualitative methods, it documents nuanced lived experiences frequently overlooked by Western-designed

quantitative surveys and assists in decolonising organisational knowledge by disputing universalist models through Indigenous perspectives. By generating context-specific data from Fiji's diverse ethnic population, the study challenges popular engagement theories like the JD-R framework and Kahn's theory by evaluating their applicability in culturally rich but structurally constrained settings. It also examines the development of a culturally integrated engagement framework that aligns with Indigenous values, including relationality, collective identity, and respect-based leadership. This dual focus on critique and theory-building extends the literature and offers practical pathways for inclusive, sustainable engagement in Fijian workplaces.

2.8. Conclusion

This literature review has critically examined the diverse and intersecting factors influencing employee engagement within Fijian workplaces. Through an analysis of theoretical models, cultural critiques, and Pacific-specific evidence, several key themes emerged: the inadequacy of universally applied Western engagement frameworks, the centrality of culture in shaping organisational dynamics, and the urgent need for contextually grounded, inclusive engagement strategies. Furthermore, issues such as infrastructural limitations, hierarchical norms, and the dual influence of Indigenous and Indo-Fijian values underscore the complexity of designing effective engagement initiatives within Fiji's ICT sector, which operates at the intersection of global technological integration and deeply embedded cultural traditions.

Despite growing recognition of cultural diversity in global HRM discourse, empirical and practice-based research remains limited in the Pacific region. The review highlighted gaps in theoretical applicability, a lack of Fijian-centric models, and a limited understanding of how engagement strategies operate within resource-constrained, multi-ethnic settings. These observations affirm the need to integrate Indigenous knowledge, respect traditional leadership systems, and account for both structural constraints and cultural expectations.

In light of the identified gaps, cultural tensions, and theoretical limitations, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the current employee engagement strategies employed in Fijian ICT workplaces?
2. How do Fijian cultural dimensions impact the effectiveness of these strategies?

By exploring these questions through a culturally sensitive, qualitative lens, the study seeks to contribute meaningful insights to both local practice and global theory development.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate employee engagement strategies within Fijian organisations, including the research design, philosophical foundations, ontology and epistemology, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations.

The study investigates two primary research questions:

1. What are the current employee engagement strategies employed in Fijian ICT workplaces?
2. How do Fijian cultural dimensions impact the effectiveness of employee engagement strategies?

The chapter begins with a critical reflection on my positionality, a key element in qualitative research, where the researcher is not a detached observer but an active participant in constructing knowledge (Austin and Sutton, 2014). As a researcher with lived experience in both Fijian and New Zealand contexts, my positionality inherently shapes how I approach these questions. This perspective informs the methodological decisions outlined in the following sections, guiding the choice of qualitative methods and the interpretive lens through which the data will be analysed. Rather than seeking one-size-fits-all strategies, this study focuses on the lived experiences of employees within their unique cultural and organisational settings, valuing subjectivity, reflexivity, and the co-creation of meaning.

3.1. Why am I doing this Research?

My positionality is central to this study. Born in Fiji and based in New Zealand, with experience across Pacific and Western work cultures, I recognise that my cultural background, values, and professional history shape how I conduct the research and interpret results. As a Fijian Indian woman with experience in human resources, administration, and support services in both countries, I have seen how organisational strategies, cultural values, workplace relationships, and perceptions of fairness and inclusion influence engagement.

My dual cultural identity positions me as both an insider connected to Fijian culture and an outsider to the specific organisational contexts studied. This hybrid standpoint supports deep empathy with participants while maintaining the analytic distance required for rigorous interpretation. Working in cross-cultural teams and navigating hierarchies influenced by collectivist and individualist values, I observed that concepts such as support, recognition, and inclusion are interpreted through cultural upbringing and social norms. These experiences led me to explore engagement as culturally situated and personally constructed.

This research is both personally and professionally meaningful. Moving between diverse environments has heightened my awareness of how less visible elements, such as tradition, hierarchical respect, gender expectations, and ethnic dynamics, shape employees' willingness to engage and thrive. During one interview, one of my participants (Mere) noted that younger employees cannot just talk back to senior staff because hierarchy and respect must always be observed. Such moments underscore that engagement is shaped not only by workplace policies but also by deeply ingrained cultural traditions that influence how employees participate and express themselves.

Existing literature provides valuable insights, but most derive from Western organisational contexts. As Wickert et al. (2024) argue, this limitation restricts the transferability to culturally diverse settings. Research centring Fijian employee voices remains scarce. For example, Gibson (2019) shows how local cultural dynamics shape empowerment in the Pacific. By foregrounding Fijian perspectives, this study responds to an important gap in both scholarship and practice.

Finally, my commitment to social justice and cultural inclusivity informs this work. Meaningful engagement is not only a managerial objective but also a matter of dignity, enabling people to feel seen, heard, and valued at work. This study aims to inform culturally responsive engagement strategies that honour the diversity of Fiji's workforce.

3.2. My Worldview

My worldview is based on the belief that reality is not fixed or objective, but diverse, adaptable, and influenced by people's experiences and interactions. I do not undertake this study to find a universal truth about employees' engagement. Instead, I focus on how individuals create their own understanding of engagement through their words, and how culture, context, and organisational factors shape those meanings and relationships that surround them.

This aligns with a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm. As Burleson (2013) explains, constructivism acknowledges that people actively create their own social realities by applying interpretative frameworks to their experiences. According to Yuan (2017), in naturalistic inquiry, the researcher is not a neutral observer but a crucial instrument for collaboratively developing knowledge. This emphasises the significance of transparency, reflexivity, and responsiveness to context in qualitative research. Building on this, interpretivism recognises that meaning is not only created by participants but also interpreted by the researcher, a process of co-construction that is inherently reflexive, subjective, and embedded within specific social and cultural contexts (Ide and Beddoe, 2024).

In this paradigm, knowledge is not merely discovered but actively constructed through discussion, empathy, and engagement with participants lived experiences. Therefore, the researcher's role is not to stay impartial or detached but to be transparent about how they influence the study process and to interact ethically and respectfully with participant experiences.

As a Fijian Indian, I directly encountered the interaction between collectivist norms and professional ambitions during my upbringing. In community environments, concepts such as loyalty, respect for elders, group acceptance, and avoidance of disagreements influence everyday life. These principles inevitably dominate the Fijian? organisations, shaping employees' reactions to leadership, motivation, conflict, and feedback.

For instance, an Indo-Fijian employee would associate engagement with security and stability, whereas an iTaukei employee may view it in terms of relational harmony and spiritual connection. Western concepts of performance-based rewards or individual recognition may not hold the same importance in Fijian workplaces, as they can disrupt team cohesion and weaken the collective values that underpin organisational life. This tension shows that engagement cannot be understood solely through Western models, as their underlying assumptions do not always align with Fijian cultural realities. This argument is supported by Prasad and Pathak (2024), who identified that employee commitment in Fiji's retail sector is based on collectivist values, including group harmony and loyalty. This indicates that individualised reward systems derived from Western models may jeopardise cohesion instead of promoting engagement.

Recognising this complexity is vital for understanding the multifaceted dynamics of engagement in Fijian workplaces. Smith (2019) emphasises the need to prioritise Indigenous knowledge systems and resist the dominance of Western research frameworks in her call for decolonising methodologies. Her insights support my commitment to investigating engagement in a way that resists the imposition of Western, individualised models and instead foregrounds values that are meaningful in Fiji, such as communal harmony, spirituality, and respect for relational obligations. This meant approaching engagement not simply as a managerial outcome, but as a lived experience shaped by cultural logics of belonging, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing, consistent with Smith's (2019) call to centre Indigenous knowledge systems and decolonising practices.

Throughout this research journey, I am dedicated to reflexivity, which involves ongoing self-awareness and critical reflection. Considering Pillow's (2003) argument for uncomfortable reflexivity, I engage with this process as a critical analysis of my role, assumptions, and power dynamics within the research relationship, rather than viewing it as a therapeutic self-disclosure. This is especially important in cross-cultural and postcolonial contexts, where

positionality cannot be separated from historical and social factor dynamics. For example, gender expectations may affect how freely women share their experiences, respect hierarchies may lead participants to soften critiques of leaders, and ethnic differences between iTaukei and Indo-Fijian employees shape how engagement is defined and experienced (Vaioleti, 2006; Smith, 2021).

As a researcher, I understand that my background, values, and experiences inevitably influence how I interact with participants, interpret their narratives, and create meaning. To support reflexivity, I made brief notes during and after interviews to record insights about the research process. For instance, when my first interview did not last as long as I expected, I reflected on the brevity, conducted additional reading, and incorporated more follow-up questions in later interviews. In another case, when a participant went off-topic, I noted this in my field notes and adjusted by gently redirecting the discussion. These short memos enhanced transparency and helped me remain critically aware of how my positionality could influence stages of the research, such as question framing, response interpretation, and findings articulation. By continually practising reflexivity in this way, I aimed to uphold the research's integrity and remain mindful of the co-constructed nature of knowledge.

I see transparency as crucial for establishing trust and credibility with both readers and participants. By openly sharing who I am, my reasons for conducting this research, and my worldview, I aim to build an authentic basis for the study. I believe that acknowledging and critically engaging with subjectivity does not undermine the research; rather, it enhances it by adding authenticity, depth, and human perspective.

Anae (2019) emphasises that research in Pacific contexts requires both cultural awareness and a thorough understanding of historical factors. A decolonial ethic compels researchers to avoid extractive practices and instead build relationships based on respect, accountability, and care. In this study, this meant recognising that the participants were not only sources of information but also co-creators of knowledge whose opinions influenced the discussions and analysis. Rather than focusing solely on efficiency or data extraction, I aimed to create a relational environment aligned with Pacific ethics. This involved attentive listening, allowing sufficient time to build trust, and adapting my questioning to fit cultural rhythms, including pauses and storytelling. Accountability also extended beyond the interview itself. A summary of the findings will be shared with participants to ensure reciprocity upon completing the analysis. In this way, my methodological approach reflects Anae’s (2019) call for research that not only acknowledges Pacific histories but actively resists reproducing colonial dynamics by prioritising relationships, care, and participant ownership of knowledge.

3.3. Research Philosophical Assumptions

This research is based on the philosophical foundations that support qualitative inquiry. Key to these foundations are ontology and epistemology, which direct the research process by shaping the development of research questions, guiding the selection of methodology, and influencing how findings are interpreted (Scotland, 2012). Making these assumptions explicit enhances transparency in how knowledge is conceptualised and understood during the study.

Ontology, or assumptions about the nature of reality, shapes how social phenomena are understood. Tuli (2010) explains that ontology relates to the nature of reality and what can be said to exist in the physical and social world, and that ontological assumptions determine how researchers conceptualise and understand reality. Tuli's concept sets the boundaries of what is known and influences how knowledge is constructed in social scientific research. A key aspect of ontological investigation involves discussing the existence of social phenomena as objective entities independent of human experience, versus their status as social constructs arising from human interaction and interpretation (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This research adopts a constructivist ontological perspective, believing that reality is multifaceted, subjective, and shaped by human experiences and cultural contexts (Schwandt, 2000).

In the Fijian setting, for instance, what constitutes support or recognition at work may vary significantly between iTaukei and Indo-Fijian employees, reflecting their distinct socio-cultural histories, value systems, and communal obligations. The constructivist perspective recognises that these culturally embedded interpretations are not universally stable nor intrinsically comparable without an understanding of the broader cultural contexts in which they originate.

Constructivist researchers aim to investigate the various meanings and interpretations that participants attribute to their experiences, rather than seeking to discover a single, universal truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This approach recognises reality as subjective and co-created through the interaction between researcher and participants. Guba and Lincoln (1994) emphasise that in constructivist research, findings are not just discovered; they are actively constructed throughout the study through the interaction and shared interpretation of meanings by researchers and participants. This perspective aligns with my positionality as a Fijian Indian woman with lived experiences in both Fiji and New Zealand, enabling me to collaboratively construct knowledge with participants while being critically aware of my own influence on the study's interpretations.

Epistemology concerns the nature and scope of knowledge, including how knowledge is created, validated, and understood (Giacomini, 2010). It also explores how researchers

come to know what they know and questions whether the social world can be investigated using the same methodologies as the natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This study uses an interpretivist epistemology that aligns well with a constructivist ontology.

According to interpretivism, knowledge is created by interpreting human experiences, and the context in which those experiences occur affects their meaning (Schwandt, 1994). Rather than attempting to define and distinguish social reality from its cultural and relational context, interpretivism emphasises the importance of grasping participants' viewpoints, acknowledging the complex nature of their experiences, and placing these realities within wider social, cultural, and historical frameworks. In practice, this indicates that employee engagement is not viewed as a fixed set of organisational metrics, but rather as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon that employees interpret through their cultural values, workplace relationships, and personal histories. For instance, younger employees might frame engagement in terms of opportunities for career growth and learning, whereas older employees may highlight long-term stability and organisational loyalty as central to their sense of engagement (Rašticová and Hinzmann, 2024).

This interpretivist perspective is intrinsically reflective, acknowledging that the researcher is not a passive spectator but an engaged participant in the collaborative creation of meaning throughout the research process (Van der Walt, 2020). As a researcher, therefore, my role involves empathetically interacting with participants, analysing their narratives from the perspective of my cultural background, and being open about how my positionality influences these interpretations. By acknowledging this co-construction of meaning, this research aims to authentically portray participant voices, recognising their distinctive situation and lived experiences.

Together, the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology provide a coherent philosophical foundation for this research. They justify the choice of qualitative, exploratory methods, highlight the value of cultural sensitivity, and support an approach where knowledge emerges through dialogue, reflexivity, and mutual understanding between researcher and participant.

3.4 Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach to explore employee views on engagement strategies in Fijian ICT organisations. Unlike quantitative methods that break down experiences into measurable data, qualitative research captures the complexity of how individuals create and interpret meaning in their daily lives (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Tuli, 2010). This approach was especially fitting for studying engagement, as it is influenced not only by metrics such as turnover and productivity, but also by personal experiences of belonging, recognition, and cultural values.

An exploratory approach was necessary because research on engagement in Fijian workplaces is still limited. Exploratory methods are useful when topics are not well-theorised, as they focus on discovery rather than testing hypotheses. They allow ideas to develop naturally from participants' accounts instead of forcing pre-existing categories (Thomas, 2006). This adaptability was vital for understanding engagement in Fiji, where workplace practices blend with cultural traditions and relational norms that may not fit neatly with Western models (Anae, 2019; Vaioleti, 2006).

To implement this design, semi-structured interviews served as the main method of data collection. A consistent guide ensured alignment with the research aims, while open-ended questions permitted participants to highlight what was most important to them. Interviews were seen as purposeful conversations in which knowledge is co-constructed (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). In line with Pacific relational values, the interview process was guided by Talanoa principles (Vaioleti, 2006). For example, interviews began with informal relationship-building and open conversation before transitioning into structured questions, allowing participants to share experiences in a culturally comfortable and respectful setting, which promoted authentic dialogue based on reciprocity and respect. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face in Fiji or online, depending on participant preference.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was chosen over other qualitative methods as it offered the most flexibility for addressing the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019). Although grounded theory is a rigorous method, it primarily focuses on developing entirely new theories (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), which was not the aim of this study, given that employee engagement already has well-established conceptual foundations. In contrast, discourse analysis would have restricted the focus to language use and power relations, providing less scope to explore both explicit engagement practices and their deeper cultural meanings (Fairclough, 2013). RTA provided a transparent yet adaptable framework for identifying patterns while considering both semantic and latent cultural insights, making it the most suitable approach for this research.

After data collection, analysis was conducted using RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019). RTA provided both rigour and flexibility, aligning well with the study's interpretivist approach. It facilitated an iterative process that moved between data, codes, and themes, allowing for the identification of both explicit meanings and deeper cultural insights. The trustworthiness of the methodology was ensured through the systematic application of Braun and Clarke's six phases (detailed in Section 3.5), alignment with the research questions, and the maintenance of an audit trail that documented coding and theme development.

Finally, researcher reflexivity was incorporated throughout the design. Short memos and notes were kept, capturing assumptions, decisions, and reflections on the researcher's role

and its potential influence (Creswell and Poth, 2016). To enhance rigour, a table with anonymised participant demographics and interview details is included in a later section, along with examples of how raw data were transformed into codes, organising themes, and overall themes. This demonstrates a clear link between participant voices and the study's findings.

3.4.1. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (appendix 4) were used as the primary method for data collection, aligning with the study's qualitative approach and enabling access to participants lived experiences. This method combined a guided structure with flexibility, providing space to explore emerging themes (Gioia et al., 2013). The interview guide (see Appendix 4) was designed to align with the research aims while avoiding leading or suggestive language. Open-ended questions focused on themes identified in the literature, such as leadership, communication, cultural values, motivation, and organisational development. As Cañibano (2019) notes, interviews are especially effective for exploring personal and contextual understandings of workplace phenomena, offering rich and detailed insights into employee engagement within complex organisational settings.

Participants were recruited through various channels, including LinkedIn adverts, social media posts, and word-of-mouth referrals. People/employees who were interested could register by scanning a QR code linked to a Google Form or directly contacting me via email. From this pool, twelve employees from Fiji's ICT sector were deliberately selected to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and job roles. The ICT sector was chosen due to its economic significance, progressive workplace practices, and the fact that a leading organisation within it had recently received the prestigious 'Great Place to Work' certification. The selection process followed ethical guidelines approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (EA1 Form, Appendix 5), with all participants providing voluntary written consent. Although remote interviews were initially considered due to geographical distances, I travelled to Fiji for in-person interviews to build rapport and capture contextual cues. Of these, nine interviews were conducted face-to-face, while three were held via Zoom due to illness during fieldwork.

Each interview, including an introduction and an informal conversation before the main interview, lasted between 40 and 50 minutes, was audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed using Microsoft Word transcription software. I manually checked transcripts against the audio to verify accuracy. After each interview, I wrote reflective memos to document the emotional tone, contextual details, and my own assumptions, supporting reflexivity and the identification of emerging patterns (Maxwell, 2013). Personally, conducting all interviews enhanced rigour through consistency and cultural sensitivity. As Ribbins (2007)

states, interviews are conversations with a purpose, and the semi-structured format offered both guidance and flexibility for participants to share culturally embedded experiences.

The potential for social desirability bias, where participants might answer in ways they think are expected, was acknowledged (Cohen et al., 2002). To reduce this, I framed questions neutrally, reassured participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and created a safe, respectful environment that promoted openness. Reliability was also supported by consistent memoing, short notetaking, and personally conducting all interviews. In the Fijian context, building rapport was especially important, and I used my cultural background to build trust. This involved starting interviews with informal conversations, listening carefully, allowing pauses that matched Pacific communication norms, and using suitable non-verbal cues to show respect and attentiveness. These strategies helped create a relaxed setting where participants felt appreciated and comfortable sharing honestly.

A purposive sampling strategy ensured that participants had relevant lived experience in the Fijian ICT sector (Etikan et al.2016). Unlike random or open-call recruitment, this approach targeted individuals who could provide deep, contextually relevant insights into engagement strategies. Data collection continued until no new insights were emerging, indicating data saturation and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives (Akyıldız and Ahmed, 2021). Eligibility criteria required participants to be 18 years or older, employed in the Fijian ICT sector, and proficient in English. Once eligibility was confirmed, participants were provided with an information sheet outlining study aims, participation requirements, benefits and risks, and confidentiality safeguards. They signed a consent form before taking part, which also emphasised the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw within two weeks, and the procedures for secure data storage. As a gesture of appreciation, each participant received an FJD $30 voucher.

The final sample consisted of 12 participants, all were mid-level managers: 9 males and 3 females, with 7 Indo-Fijian, 4 iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian), and 1 Chinese participant. Years in their current roles ranged from 2.5 to 17. Table 1.1 below shows demographic details, including gender, ethnicity, job title, tenure, and interview mode, to aid interpretation of the findings and ensure transparency in reporting. To ensure confidentiality, participants were all given pseudonyms. Consistent with Baker and Welter (2020), understanding these contextual factors was essential for interpreting the nuances in participants' responses and for situating their experiences within broader organisational and cultural dynamics.

Table 1.1 Participant Demographic and Role Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Job Role	Years in Current Role	Interview Mode
Bruce	Male	Indo Fijian	Team Leader - Business Markets	10	In-person
Jone	Male	ITaukei	Branch Manager	2.5	In-person
Mere	Female	ITaukei	Branch Manager	7.5	In-person
Ravi	Male	Indo Fijian	Software Engineering Manager	17	Zoom
Litia	Female	ITaukei	Senior Retail Sales Associate	6	In-person
William	Male	Chinese	ICT Sales Manager	5	In-person
Tomasi	Male	Indo Fijian	Acting Corporate Sales Manager	15	In Person
Sunil	Male	Indo Fijian	Head of Projects	13	In-person
Sera	Female	ITaukei	Team Leader		In Person
Anil	Male	Indo Fijian	Territory executive	6	Zoom
Arjun	Male	Indo Fijian	Senior Business Relationship Manager	15	In-person
Naveen	Male	Indo Fijian	Presales Manager	8	Zoom

Following recruitment and eligibility assessment, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews that examined participants' experiences with employee engagement strategies. The interview guide (Appendix 4) was structured around key drivers of employee engagement identified in the literature review. It included aspects such as leadership, organisational culture and communication, and rewards and development, while allowing participants the freedom to raise additional topics relevant to their experiences. Open-ended questions facilitated elaboration, whereas specific prompts were employed to investigate emerging concepts more thoroughly.

As part of this study, I travelled to Fiji to conduct the majority of interviews face-to-face, arranged at mutually convenient times and locations that emphasised participant comfort and privacy. Most sessions took place in quiet, neutral settings such as offices and meeting rooms, which minimised distractions and supported open dialogue. Conducting the interviews in Fiji also enabled me to build rapport more effectively and observe contextual cues that enriched the data. However, I conducted three interviews via Zoom due to being unwell during this time, ensuring all participants could still take part without compromising their comfort or the quality of the interview.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy. The audio was transcribed using Microsoft AI to generate first text versions. I then carefully evaluated each transcript while listening to the audio, fixing any inaccuracies to verify that the data correctly represented the participants' remarks. To safeguard confidentiality,

participant names were substituted with pseudonyms, but all other contextual elements were left untouched to ensure the data's validity. All materials, including recordings and transcripts, were securely saved on a password-protected device, with access restricted to me as the primary researcher.

Even though I followed rigorous procedures for recruiting, interviewing, and managing the data, I am aware that the data collection method had some limitations. While purposive recruitment facilitated access to participants with relevant expertise, it may have excluded individuals lacking professional or online network connections, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives captured in the study. As Stratton (2024) notes, “subjective purposeful sampling cannot fully represent the target population because it introduces unmeasurable sampling errors and biases" (p. 121).

Additionally, as the data is self-reported, responses may reflect participants’ perceptions rather than objective engagement metrics. Self-reported data are inherently susceptible to biases, such as recall errors and underreporting, which can influence the accuracy and reliability of the information collected (Johns and Miraglia, 2015). Participants may also be influenced by social desirability bias, consciously or unconsciously providing responses they perceive as more acceptable than their true feelings or behaviours. To minimise this, I assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity, emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers, and framed questions neutrally to avoid leading responses. I also built rapport by drawing on my Fijian background to establish cultural connection, beginning interviews with informal conversation, and using respectful listening practices consistent with Pacific norms, such as allowing pauses, avoiding interruptions, and signalling attentiveness through nonverbal cues. These strategies created trust and encouraged participants to share openly. In addition, I used probes to clarify responses rather than judge them and redirected off-topic conversations gently to maintain focus while preserving participant comfort. Despite these measures, social desirability bias cannot be eliminated in qualitative interview settings (Bergen and Labonté, 2020). These limitations are important to consider when interpreting the findings, as they may shape the nature and scope of the insights derived from the interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, thematic analysis was chosen as the primary method of analysis for this research. As noted earlier, thematic analysis was identified as the most appropriate method, enabling systematic coding and theme development, while also allowing for both semantic and latent analysis.

Thematic analysis facilitates systematic coding while being attentive to cultural and organisational contexts (Saldaña, 2021). Its precise yet flexible design enables thorough

pattern recognition while maintaining consideration for the organisational and cultural backgrounds of participants. Thematic analysis provided a transparent and reproducible process to transform raw qualitative data into meaningful insights, while also preserving participants' voices and nuanced interpretations. This made it the most suitable approach for the present research, as it enabled both the identification of common engagement strategies across Fijian organisations and the interpretation of how these strategies are shaped by cultural and organisational contexts, directly addressing the study's research questions. Building on this, the six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework were implemented as described below:

1. Familiarisation with transcripts: I carefully examined every interview transcript using the transcribing method described in Section 3.4 to fully understand the participants' perspectives. This reiterative reading enabled the identification of both explicit content, including references to mentoring or recognition, and the implicit cultural or contextual meanings that are embedded within the text. Recurring themes, unexpected claims, and points that suggested patterns throughout the dataset were noted.

2. Generating initial codes: A total of 303 were developed using Excel (appendix 3). These codes captured both semantic content (the explicit ideas and experiences participants expressed) and latent content (the underlying assumptions, values, or cultural meanings that were not stated directly but could be inferred through interpretation). For example, when participants spoke about career growth, mentorship, and public recognition, these were coded at the semantic level as explicit engagement strategies. At the same time, comments that reflected respect for hierarchy, emphasis on community, or expectations of collective leadership were interpreted as latent codes, since they pointed to deeper, culturally embedded understandings shaping how engagement was experienced. This distinction between semantic and latent analysis reflects the researcher's active interpretive role in qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

3. Searching for themes: Preliminary organising themes were established by grouping initial codes and identifying relationships and patterns among participants' accounts. This phase entailed progressing from individual statements to an examination of collective experiences and shared perspectives, thereby ensuring that themes were embedded in the data rather than influenced by prior assumptions.

4. Reviewing themes: Basic themes were thoroughly compared against the complete dataset to verify internal consistency and ensure each theme's distinctive qualities. During this iterative process, some basic themes were merged owing to overlapping

content, while others were adjusted to sharpen their focus. These refinements also informed the development of organising themes, which clustered related basic themes together, and global themes, which captured the overarching patterns across the data. This repeated cycle of refining at all three levels ensured that the thematic structure provided a coherent and meaningful representation of the dataset.

5. Defining and naming themes: Global themes were developed to directly reflect the research questions of this study, capturing the overarching patterns across participants' accounts. Labels were selected to represent both the language of the participants and their broader conceptual significance, consistent with Attride-Stirling's (2001) description of global themes as overarching constructs that summarise and interpret patterns across datasets. For instance, the global theme "Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture" encompassed organising themes such as autonomy, trust, and workplace flexibility. These organising themes were grounded in participants' experiences, such as Bruce's description, *"There's no micromanagement... Employees are given autonomy to manage their work,"* Anil's observation that, *"We do not give a daily report... that shows our manager trusts field staff,"* and Jones' comment, *'We get two relaxed days in a year … fully paid."* Collectively, these accounts illustrate how participants viewed autonomy and flexibility in Work not only as organisational practices but as central to sustaining engagement.

6. Producing the report: Lastly, themes were integrated into an analytical narrative supported by demonstrating quotes from participants. The second stage also included contextualising findings within the theoretical and cultural frameworks examined in the literature review, emphasising how participant insights corresponded with or expanded upon prior research.

Building on this stepwise framework, coding and theme development in this study followed a hybrid approach that combined deductive and inductive strategies. Deductive coding begins with a set of pre-determined concepts or categories, often drawn from theory or prior research, and uses them to guide the organisation of data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In this study, for example, the interview guide was structured around key drivers of engagement identified in the literature, such as leadership, organisational culture and communication, and rewards and development, and these concepts informed the initial coding framework.

In contrast to deductive coding, inductive coding is data-driven and facilitates the emergence of new themes directly from participants' narratives rather than being imposed in advance (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). For instance, while the interview guide was structured around

key drivers such as leadership and organisational culture, some participants spoke about the role of respect as recognition. Anil explained, "*It made me feel a sense of belonging in the organisation when I was recognised*," while Ravi noted, "*We have a recognition programme … employee of the month*." These accounts, though not anticipated in the initial framework, were developed inductively into a sub-theme of cultural respect and recognition, reflecting the importance of informal acknowledgements and everyday gestures of dignity in shaping engagement. Similarly, participants described flexibility in ways that extended beyond organisational policies to encompass communal responsibilities. As Sera explained, "*We have a church community... when there's a program, we all go and support*," highlighting how workplace engagement was experienced in relation to collective obligations. William further observed, "We have flexible working hours … and medical cover," while Bruce contrasted that "None of the companies have been able to offer flexible working hours." Taken together, these insights emerged inductively, underscoring how Fijian employee engagement is situated within cultural expectations of respect, communal responsibility, and group harmony, dimensions not fully captured by existing engagement models.

Applying Braun and Clarke's framework, a hybrid coding approach was adopted, integrating deductive codes derived from existing literature and the interview guide with inductive codes constructed directly from participant narratives (Elliott, 2018; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This method ensured that the research was focused on the perspectives of participants and their cultural nuances, while also contextualising the findings within the established literature on engagement. The transition from codes to themes in this study was structured using Attride-Stirling's (2001) model of thematic networks, which distinguishes between basic, organising, and global themes. At the first level, basic themes are the most specific and lowest-order ideas that capture recurring points in the data. They represent the raw material of the analysis and summarise simple observations. For example, Sera reflected, *"I started off as a cashier, and now I'm a team leader,"* highlighting a straightforward account of career progression, while Arjun noted, *"There's training provided for the staff. There are also certifications,"* pointing to opportunities for professional development. Even though these insights were constrained in scope when considered individually, therefore it necessitated consolidation into organising themes (e.g., career growth and development) and subsequently into global themes that addressed the study's research questions. During the intermediate phase of analysis, organising themes cluster related basic themes to show broader patterns across the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In this study, for example, several basic themes were consolidated into organising themes such as *"Trust and Relationships," "Motivation and Retention,"* and *"Work-Life Balance and Flexibility."*

Finally, at the highest level, global themes summarise the most conceptual and thorough findings. The study integrates various organising themes to better understand its fundamental concepts in relation to the research questions. As Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 388) explains, “Global Themes are macro themes that summarise and make sense of clusters of lower-order themes abstracted from and supported by the data”. For instance, one global theme that emerged was that “flexibility and work–life balance are central drivers of engagement in Fijian ICT organisations,” while another highlighted that *“employee motivation and retention are deeply influenced by trust, recognition, and cultural respect.”*

Considering the analysis in this structured way, considering basic themes as raw insights, organising themes as patterns, and global themes as general narratives enhanced the clarity of the audit trail while also reinforcing transparency and credibility. This structure allowed the analysis to remain grounded in participants’ voices while still drawing out higher-level insights. Two coding pathways are illustrated in Tables 1.2 and 1.3 to show how raw quotes were systematically developed into higher-order themes.

To illustrate this process, Tables 1.2 and 1.3 present coding pathways that trace how raw participant quotations were progressively refined into codes, organising themes, and ultimately global themes. Table 1.2 demonstrates the pathway for “*Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture”*, while Table 1.3 depicts the pathway for *“Cultural Diversity and Inclusion.”* These examples highlight the transparency and rigour of the analytical process.

Table 1.2 Coding Pathway for the Global Theme - Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture

Raw Data (Direct Quote)	**Code**	**Organising Theme**	**Global Theme**
“*There's no micromanagement... Employees are given autonomy to manage their work*.”- **Bruce**	No micromanagement	*Autonomy and Flexibility in Work*	**Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture**
“We do not give a daily report... that shows our manager trusts field staff.”- **Anil**	Manager trusts field staff	*Autonomy and Flexibility in Work*	**Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture**
“We get two relaxed days in a year … fully paid.” **Jone**	Relax Days	*Autonomy and Flexibility in Work*	**Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture**

Table 1.3. Coding Pathway for the Global Theme “Cultural Belonging and Inclusion

Raw Data (Direct Quote)	**Code**	**Organising Theme**	**Global Theme**
“*We’re covered by medical insurance … also for family members*.” **William**	Medical insurance extends to family	*Peer collaboration and team support*	Cultural Diversity and Inclusion

"He made sure that every staff have to address each other by first name … it removes hierarchy." **Mere**	First-name culture flattens hierarchy	*Perceived fairness and equity*	Cultural Diversity and Inclusion
"Even though we have not achieved the full KPI target, we were still rewarded with bonuses." **Tomasi**	Bonuses awarded despite incomplete KPI	*KPI alignment, bonuses, and appraisals*	Cultural Diversity and Inclusion
"We collaborate and improve … breaking barriers beyond culture." **Sunil**	Collaboration breaks cultural barriers	*Peer collaboration and team support*	Cultural Diversity and Inclusion

In addition to semantic codes, the analysis also identified latent themes that reflected underlying cultural meanings embedded in participants' accounts. Latent analysis involves moving beyond participants' explicit words to interpret the cultural and relational values shaping their statements. As Kleinheksel et al. (2020) note, latent content analysis uncovers meanings that are not immediately evident but require the researcher to interpret deeper assumptions and values. For example, while several participants spoke about "teamwork" and "cooperation" in practical terms, a latent reading suggested these comments were not only about task efficiency but also about cultural expectations of collectivism and communal responsibility. As Sera explained, "If one is doing a big sale, we all will help them finish it." Although this could be read semantically as teamwork, at a latent level, it highlights the cultural emphasis on collective outcomes and preserving group harmony. Similarly, discussions of leadership revealed latent meanings. While participants described practices such as open-door policies and recognition, these were interpreted not only as managerial strategies but as demonstrations of respect and relational acknowledgement. Mere explained, "He's very approachable... we can actually just go and talk to him anytime." Semantically, this reflects an open-door policy, but at a latent level, it signifies leadership's role in fostering dignity and relational belonging, which participants valued more than transactional outcomes.

These latent insights illustrate how employee engagement in Fiji is shaped by broader cultural logics of responsibility, respect, and relational harmony. By attending to these deeper meanings, the thematic analysis moved beyond surface-level categories to interpret how culture fundamentally influences employees' understandings of engagement.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Given my dual insider-outsider role described in Section 3.1, prioritising ethical considerations was essential to accurately reflect participants' views while safeguarding their rights and well-being. This research received approval from the Auckland University of

Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (EA1, 04 April 2025), see Appendix 5. Ethical considerations were central to the study's design, ensuring alignment with AUT's research integrity principles and New Zealand's Privacy Act (2020).

Given my dual insider–outsider role described in Section 3.1, ethical considerations were central to safeguarding participants' rights and accurately representing their perspectives. Ethical approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC, EA1, 04 April 2025; see Appendix 5), and the study adhered to AUT's research integrity principles and the New Zealand Privacy Act (2020). Participants received detailed information sheets (Appendix 2) and signed consent forms (Appendix 1) prior to interviews, with voluntary participation and the right to withdraw within two weeks of participation. Confidentiality was ensured through secure storage of data on password-protected AUT servers and the use of pseudonyms. In keeping with principles of reciprocity, participants received a koha voucher and, where requested, will be provided with a plain-language summary of findings within three to four months of thesis submission. Cultural sensitivity was prioritised throughout, with interviews conducted in participant-chosen settings and attentive respect given to relational norms, social hierarchies, and culturally appropriate communication practices. Building on these foundational principles, additional precautions were incorporated throughout the entire research and interview process to ensure integrity, participant safety, and cultural appropriateness.

Data management and security measures implemented were of paramount importance. According to AUTEC's conditions of approval, all data will be securely stored for a period of six years under the supervision of the designated authority (supervisor) before it will be destroyed (AUTEC, 2025). The recordings and transcripts from the interviews were securely stored on a device that required a password for access, ensuring that only the researcher could access them. Using pseudonyms and eliminating identifiable details from transcripts and reports ensured that confidentiality was preserved. The outlined strategies are consistent with established best practices in qualitative research, emphasising the importance of confidentiality in building trust between the researcher and the participant. However, as Saunders et al. (2015) highlight, confidentiality in practice often requires compromises to balance protection with the richness of the data.

Participant well-being and the minimisation of risk were prioritised. Interview questions were carefully composed. Participants were informed of their right to refuse any question, and they maintained the option to withdraw within two weeks following their interview without any repercussions. A short debrief was conducted at the end of each session, during which participants could ask further questions or raise concerns.

This research was conducted with a strong emphasis on cultural and contextual awareness, especially regarding the multi-ethnic workplace environment in Fiji. For example, iTaukei

participants often framed engagement around collective responsibility and relational harmony, as seen in references to grog sessions as safe spaces for dialogue and teamwork bonuses that rewarded collective effort. In contrast, Indo-Fijian participants frequently emphasised stability, loyalty, and career progression, highlighting how promotions, appraisals, and family benefits motivated them to remain committed to their organisations. The Asian participant similarly reinforced values of belonging and organisational support through practices such as family health cover. Despite these differences, a notable set of common themes became apparent across groups, especially confidence and trust in leadership, acknowledgement of contributions, inclusive celebration of cultural festivals such as Diwali, Eid and Christmas, and adaptable working practices. By recognising these cultural dynamics during both data collection and analysis, I ensured that the research process and interpretation of findings were responsive to Fiji's unique organisational and social context. Interviews were held in participant-chosen environments, such as neutral cafés or online platforms, to promote comfort and autonomy. Transparency and reciprocity were also addressed. Prior to participating, everyone who participated received a Participant Information Sheet and signed the consent form, ensuring that they were fully informed about the research aims and methods. Following the completion of the research, participants will get a summary of the findings written in simple language, permitting them to understand how their contributions influenced the outcomes and ensuring that the information generated is provided to the community.

Finally, potential power imbalances between the researcher and participants were carefully managed. The interviews were held in a non-hierarchical, courteous setting that promoted open discourse. As a Fijian Indian researcher, I was mindful of my insider-outsider position (see Section 3.1) and how it can impact relationships. Recognising that my dual position presented both possibilities for empathy and risks of assumption, reflexivity was considered essential throughout the course of this research. To address this, I kept a reflective notebook where I recorded my assumptions, decisions, and emotional reactions. This method increased transparency and rigour, in line with guidelines for reflective involvement in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). By clearly recognising my positionality, I intended that this would ensure that my findings were based on the participants' actual lived experiences rather than being influenced by my personal prejudices.

The implementation of these measures guaranteed adherence to high ethical standards, protection of participant rights, and the production of findings that are credible and culturally respectful. While ethical protocols were carefully developed and implemented, it is essential to identify the methodological limitations that could have influenced the research process and its findings. These limitations are discussed in the following section.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this study, which explored *employee perspectives on engagement strategies in Fijian ICT organisations*. The research was guided by two central questions:

1. What are the current employee engagement strategies employed in Fijian ICT workplaces?
2. How do Fijian cultural dimensions impact the effectiveness of employee engagement strategies?

The study focused on the lived experiences of employees in Fiji's ICT industry, demonstrating how engagement strategies are practised, understood, and culturally interpreted. In alignment with the constructivist and interpretivist paradigm detailed in the approach, the findings are not presented as immutable or objective facts, but rather as co-constructed interpretations formed through Talanoa-based discussions. By prioritising participant voices, the analysis ensures that employees' experiences remain central whilst analysing their points of view within a wider organisational and cultural setting.

The findings are presented in line with the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019), which emphasises the researcher's active and interpretive role in analysing meaning. As detailed in Chapter 3, the analysis followed the six phases of RTA, moving iteratively from familiarisation with transcripts to generating codes, clustering these into organising themes, and finally constructing global themes. Attride-Stirling's (2001) model of thematic networks was used to structure this process, ensuring that each global theme was firmly grounded in participant accounts and supported by intermediate layers of meaning that are basic and organising themes.

The master codebook appendix 3 produced unique **303 codes and 679 extracts**, which were clustered into **17 organising themes** and then synthesised into **five final global themes**. This represents a refinement from what were originally seven themes established in the initial phases of the analytical process. The decision on how to consolidate themes was grounded in methodological rigour and the guidance of supervisors, ensuring that a broad and diverse range of extracts thoroughly supported each overarching theme. By establishing a balance between breadth (coverage among participants) and depth (richness of supporting data), this method enhances the credibility of the analysis.

The five final global themes are:

1. Recognition, Rewards and Growth
2. Employee Motivation and Organisational Commitment

3. Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture
4. Cultural Belonging and Inclusion
5. Retention, Resources and Organisational Constraints

Each global theme is presented in a structured format to ensure transparency and consistency. It begins with “From Codes to Theme,” which provides a brief overview of how the theme evolved, illustrating the progression from raw codes to a coherent interpretation. This is followed by Illustrative Data Extracts, comprising carefully selected quotations from participants that capture both explicit practices and the underlying cultural logics shaping meaning. Next, the Interpretation offers a narrative account that conveys what participants expressed or appeared to mean, focusing on their perspectives and intentions rather than abstract theoretical analysis. Each theme is then explicitly linked to Research Questions (RQ1 and RQ2), highlighting its relevance to organisational engagement strategies and Fijian cultural dimensions. Finally, a Summary concludes the section by distilling key insights before transitioning to the next theme.

This systematic approach ensures that the analysis is both systematic and reflexive, while preserving the authenticity of the participants' viewpoints. This statement highlights an ongoing commitment to methodological rigour, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity, transparency, and a decolonisation of research methods.

The remainder of this chapter is organised around the five global themes. Each theme offers an insight into how engagement is both experienced and implemented within Fijian ICT organisations, highlighting the complex relationship between organisational behaviours and cultural values. The global themes highlight the strategies used to promote engagement, the cultural values that encourage employees' sense of belonging and commitment, and the organisational constraints that limit engagement effectiveness.

4.1 Global Themes

The findings are presented using a combination of tables and narrative interpretation to ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigour. The tables serve two primary purposes. First, they make explicit the analytical progression from initial coding to organising and global themes, thereby establishing a clear audit trail of theme development, as recommended by Nowell et al. (2017). Second, they enable participant-centred reporting by preserving the authenticity of employee voices through the inclusion of direct quotations at the core of the findings, while avoiding unnecessary duplication or dilution of meaning. Each table is systematically structured into three columns. The first column, Organising Theme, represents the intermediate category derived through the clustering of related codes. The second column, Illustrative Data Extracts, comprises four to six rigorously selected

quotations that capture both the breadth and depth of participant perspectives. The third column, Interpretation, offers a narrative account that conveys what participants said or appeared to mean, focusing on their expressed views and intentions rather than abstract analytical constructs. Preceding each table is an introductory narrative that delineates the definition of the global theme, explicates its implications for employee engagement within Fijian ICT workplaces, and specifies the total number of coded extracts supporting the theme. The number of organising themes is consolidated into that global theme.

This approach provides an acceptable balance between readability and accuracy. It ensures that there are sufficient data extracts that support each global theme, minimising fragmentation across too many sub-themes, and providing a clear pathway to assess from codes to interpretation. The implementation of tables provides clarity for readers, while the accompanying narrative/ interpretation underscores the analytical insights obtained through the input provided by participants.

The next sections provide the five global themes, beginning with Recognition, Rewards and Growth.

Table 4.1.1: Global Theme 1: Recognition, Rewards and Growth

This global theme shows that participants understood engagement as more than financial incentives. Engagement was part of a broader framework of acknowledgement, fairness, and professional growth. Recognition was described in both material and symbolic terms. While bonuses and KPI-linked commissions were acknowledged as important, participants also emphasised appreciation, visibility, and fair evaluation processes. Growth opportunities, including training, career development, and clear pathways for advancement, were also seen as essential for sustaining engagement over time. This theme draws on 163 data extracts and 50 codes, consolidated into three organising themes:

- KPI alignment, bonuses, and appraisals
- Fair and meaningful recognition
- Learning, upskilling, and career pathways

Taken together, these findings suggest that recognition in Fijian ICT workplaces was both transactional and relational. Employees valued tangible rewards but stressed that these only carried meaning when supported by fairness and opportunities for growth. Recognition motivated performance, fostered belonging, and reinforced confidence in the organisation's commitment to its people.

Organising Theme	**Illustrative Data Extracts**	**Interpretation**
KPI Alignment, Bonuses and Appraisals • 54 extracts • 18 codes • 11 participants	- *"getting more sales means more commission for me at the end of the day, yeah." (William)* -*"There's numerous ways in terms of rewards, so commission structure, there's annual bonuses." (Bruce)* - *"There's a number of things the company that first of all we have... works is based on the KPI is given to each employee if you are." (Ravi)* - *"So not only I will be so this week this staff goes, comes to work...higher targets try to achieve when we have given that extra push." (Litia)*	Participants described KPI-linked bonuses and commissions as strong motivators because they provided a clear link between effort and reward. Employees expressed that meeting sales targets or achieving KPIs gave them a sense of control over their earnings and reinforced the belief that hard work would be recognised. For many, these incentives created an immediate push to perform, often leading to extra effort such as working beyond normal hours or striving to exceed weekly targets. However, participants also highlighted the pressure associated with these systems. Several noted that while bonuses encouraged productivity, they also generated stress and feelings of being "pushed too hard," especially when targets seemed unrealistic. This pressure sometimes made employees question whether the rewards justified the strain. Importantly, participants emphasised that financial incentives only felt meaningful when appraisal processes were fair and transparent. When trust existed, bonuses were seen as genuine recognition;

	- "So, we have the appraisals as well. So, these appraisals are done ... performance based and then and their KPI and then the bonuses are allocated." (Anil) *- "I'm not at work, I'm but I'm still working.... rgets and stuff, there's an added incentive or push for my end." (Jone)*	when favouritism or inconsistency was suspected, rewards felt hollow and transactional. Overall, employees viewed KPI-based incentives as effective for short-term motivation but insufficient for sustaining engagement without fairness and clarity in performance evaluations.
Fair and Meaningful Recognition • 61 extracts • 21 codes • 11 participants	*- "I personally have been motivated as I have been recognised and want the employee of the month (Ravi)* *- "Promotions should be based on merit, not favouritism." (Sera)* *- "Sometimes appraisals feel unfair; feedback is not consistent." (Bruce)* *- "We just want a fair process where everyone is treated equally." (Bruce)* *- "happiness. And there's also a sense of victory for me as well that OK that I'm being recognised. So yeah, it was a happy moment." (Anil)* *- "We also have to be careful that we treat everyone with the same respect and with the same level." (Ani)*	Participants emphasised that recognition was most meaningful when it was fair and sincere. They valued promotions and appraisals based on merit, saying that clear and transparent processes made them feel respected and motivated. In contrast, when feedback was inconsistent or favouritism was suspected, recognition felt hollow and discouraged engagement. Several participants described moments of happiness and pride when their efforts were acknowledged, such as receiving an Employee of the Month award or verbal appreciation from managers. They explained that these gestures carried more weight than financial rewards, which were often short-lived. Symbolic recognition, like public praise or a thank-you message, was seen as lasting and culturally significant because it reinforced respect and belonging. Participants also highlighted that recognition was relational rather than transactional; it mattered because it showed care and strengthened harmony among colleagues. Overall, employees viewed fairness and heartfelt appreciation as essential for sustaining engagement. When both were present, they felt valued and included; when absent, even bonuses could not compensate for the lack of recognition.
Learning, Upskilling and Career Pathways	*- "Team needs growth where they lack qualification or experience, so we provide*	Participants described opportunities for learning and career development as essential for staying engaged. They valued training

• 48 extracts • 11 codes • 11 participants	*certification and trainings… it builds personal growth and professional development as well." (Naveen)* *- "I mean in terms of keeping employees engaged, we run strategic trainings to keep updated with the latest market trend and we also engage with CSR to try to engage in." (Sunil)* *- "So, if these things can be highlighted by the organization, I think there will be better paths within the organization, and it will help staff." (Anil)* *- "There's training provided for the staff. There are other benefits, such as educational benefits." (Arjun)* *- "A senior, I've been like already seven years, and because I started as a junior, so I take the juniors with me to learn. It's the little things that matter." (Litia)*	programs, certifications, and clear pathways for advancement, saying these signalled that the organisation cared about their future. Several participants explained that growth opportunities motivated them more than pay increases because they represented long-term security and professional progress. One participant noted that highlighting career paths would help staff feel more confident about their future in the company. Others mentioned educational benefits and regular training sessions as ways to keep employees updated with market trends. Mentorship was also important; senior staff spoke about guiding juniors and sharing knowledge, describing these small acts as meaningful for team growth. In contrast, participants said that when development opportunities were absent, they felt discouraged and even considered leaving. Overall, employees interpreted training and career progression as lasting forms of recognition, unlike bonuses that were quickly forgotten. These opportunities were seen not only as skill-building but as a sign of respect and investment in their potential, reinforcing loyalty and commitment.
In summary, participants emphasised that recognition is a complex process involving monetary incentives, symbolic appreciation, career advancement, and fairness in evaluations. While bonuses and KPI-linked incentives provided short-term motivation, their impact lasted only when paired with transparent processes and growth opportunities. Symbolic recognition and career pathways were particularly valued for fostering long-term engagement and loyalty. This theme shows that recognition in Fiji's ICT workplaces is deeply relational, combining fairness, appreciation, and opportunities for development.		

Table 4.1.2.: Global Theme 2: Employee Motivation and Organisational Commitment

This global theme explores how participants expressed the characteristics that supported their motivation and influenced their willingness to remain committed over time. While monetary incentives and recognition were recognised for their importance, it was stressed that motivation should be recognised as a relational and value-driven process**,** rather than merely a transactional one. Employees highlighted how feelings of pride, loyalty, and fairness influenced their everyday engagement and long-term career decisions. There are 101 extracts and 65 codes that make up this global theme. They are grouped into three organising themes:

- Long-term loyalty and career progression
- Self-motivation and commitment
- perceived fairness and equity.

Together, these insights illustrate that motivation was not only about external structures such as pay or promotions but also about the intrinsic and cultural dimensions of work. Many participants spoke of pride in being trusted, satisfaction in contributing to their teams, and loyalty toward organisations that treated them with fairness. Therefore, motivation and commitment extend beyond mere financial incentives. They are fundamentally connected to employees' perceptions of dignity, fairness, and a sense of relational belonging. This highlights that in the Fijian context, sustaining engagement requires a balance between practical rewards and the deeper cultural logics of trust, reciprocity, and respect.

Organising Theme	**Illustrative Data Extracts**	**Interpretation**
Long-Term Loyalty and Career Progression • 47 extracts • 24 codes • 12 participants	- *"So, I started in the organization six years ago. I started off as an analyst for two years; I have moved on as a territory executive." (Anil)* - *"To growth, career growth. So yeah, it has motivated me." (Naveen)* - *"I feel it does have a clear plan to have staff engaged as a values club that's been going on for about 15 years." (Bruce)* - *"I have started as a graduate consultant straight after university… I've grown up into*	Participants described loyalty as deeply connected to respect and opportunities for growth. Many shared stories of staying with their organisation for years, and some for over a decade. They chose to stay not because of higher pay, but because they felt valued and trusted. They explained that when the company invested in their development, they responded with commitment and long-term service. Several participants highlighted career progression as a key motivator, saying that moving from junior roles to senior positions gave them confidence and pride. Others mentioned that clear pathways for advancement helped them feel secure about their future. In contrast, when growth opportunities were limited, participants admitted feeling discouraged and even considered leaving. They stressed that loyalty was a conscious choice, shaped by fairness and recognition rather than inertia. For many, staying with

	different departments and different roles." (Ravi)	the organisation reflected a sense of mutual respect and trust, which they viewed as essential for engagement. Overall, participants saw career development not only as a professional need but as a sign that the organisation cared about them, reinforcing their willingness to remain committed.
Self-motivation and commitment • 27 extracts • 25 codes • 11 participants	*- "It makes me feel proud that the manager trusts me, especially with cash, with work, all those things." (Sera)* *- "Once my manager gives me something… I try and complete it before they even ask me again." (Anil)* *- "We're not just working for ourselves… we work because we have families relying on us." (Jone)* *- "Even when it's tough… I tell myself just keep going because at the end of the day it benefits others." (Ravi)* *- "The company entrusting me with this role really motivates me to do my best to show that I'm truly capable." (Bruce)* *- "It made me feel a sense of belonging in the organisation that recognises the good work I'm doing." (Anil)*	Participants described pride and trust as powerful motivators. They said being entrusted with responsibilities, such as handling cash or important tasks, made them feel valued and inspired to do their best. Several explained that when managers showed confidence in them, they worked harder, often completing tasks before being asked. Motivation was also linked to family and collective responsibility; participants noted that they worked not only for themselves but because their families depended on them. Even during difficult times, they pushed through challenges, telling themselves to keep going because the effort would pay off for important others. Many expressed that this sense of pride was tied to belonging and feeling recognised for good work strengthened their commitment. While intrinsic motivation kept them engaged even without rewards, participants admitted that acknowledgement mattered. Without recognition, pride faded, and motivation declined. Overall, employees viewed self-motivation as deeply personal yet relational, shaped by trust from leaders and the desire to support others. When combined with appreciation, this inner drive became a lasting source of engagement.
Perceived Fairness and Equity • 27 extracts • 16 codes • 11 participants	*- "Fair treatment across staff keeps people engaged favouritism makes people leave." (Sera)*	Participants repeatedly stressed that fairness was a non-negotiable foundation for engagement. They said equal treatment mattered more than pay, with some explaining that they stayed with their organisation despite better offers because they felt treated fairly.

	- *“I stayed even after a better offer because here, I feel treated fairly.” (Naveen)* - *“We all need equal chances … promotions must be for everyone, not just favourites.” (Ravi)* - *“Like, yeah, no one's actually left out. Like I mentioned, like, you know, no matter your sexual, your sexual preference or your, your, your ethnicity, your culture, your background, or even if you.” (William)* *“Everybody is treated equally, regardless your manager or you are normal stuff. So, when we talk to each other, the tone has to be normal.” (Naveen)*	Promotions and appraisals were expected to be based on merit, not favouritism, and participants emphasised that everyone should have the same opportunities. Fairness was described broadly, covering not only pay but also recognition, career progression, and everyday respect. Several participants highlighted that inclusivity extended to ethnicity, culture, and personal identity, saying that no one should feel left out. They also valued a respectful tone in communication, regardless of position. In contrast, favouritism and bias were seen as damaging, leading to disengagement and even turnover. Participants explained that unfair practices eroded trust and team cohesion, making other engagement efforts ineffective. Overall, employees viewed fairness as essential for loyalty and motivation. When fairness was present, they felt proud and committed; when absent, even financial incentives could not compensate for the loss of trust.
The findings demonstrated that employees’ motivation was anchored in loyalty, intrinsic pride, and perceptions of fairness. Participants repeatedly explained that they stayed committed to organisations that valued and respected them, even when outside opportunities were available. Motivation was not dependent on financial gain alone, but tied to dignity, relational trust, and equity. This theme, therefore, reveals that sustaining commitment in Fiji’s ICT sector requires more than incentives it rests on fairness and the cultural logic of reciprocity, which connects closely to the behaviours of leaders and colleagues.		

Table 4.1.3: Global Theme 3: Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture

This global theme reflects how participants emphasised the importance of leadership behaviours, trust, and collaborative work environments in shaping their engagement. Unlike recognition or rewards, leadership and collaboration were described as everyday experiences that either encouraged motivation or created disengagement. Participants explained that trust-based relationships with managers, open communication, and supportive teams were central to their sense of belonging and effectiveness. In many cases, the behaviour of leaders and colleagues directly influenced whether employees felt motivated, respected, or alienated. This theme is made up of 201 extracts and 57 codes across multiple participants, consolidated into four organising themes that are as follows:

- trust-based leadership and approachability
- autonomy and flexibility in work
- employee voice and open communication
- peer collaboration and team support.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that leadership and collaboration are not abstract values but lived experiences that directly affect day-to-day engagement in Fiji's ICT workplaces.

Organising Theme	**Illustrative Data Extracts**	**Interpretation**
Trust-Based Leadership and Approachability • 41 extracts • 9 codes • 10 participants	- *"It gives us a set of, and it also gives us a sense of that our managers trust us that we are doing that we are working and that we are doing what has been done. (Anil)* - *"People have that trust or have that much faith in me." (William)* - *"He's very approachable. Like, they are very approachable. We can actually just go directly to him without, you know, so it's pretty much like." (Mere)* - *"And in my organisation definitely I have seen like I have mentioned the way my team works with me, I don't have to follow up for anything because it says that the trust is*	Participants described leadership trust and approachability as qualities that shaped their everyday work experience. They felt most engaged when leaders were accessible, showed genuine care, and trusted them to manage responsibilities without constant oversight. This trust created a sense of confidence and pride, making employees feel respected and capable. Leaders who were approachable brought warmth to the workplace, creating an environment where employees could seek help without hesitation. Being able to reach out at any time, even outside normal hours, was seen as a sign of genuine support rather than rigid authority. Simple gestures, such as allowing flexibility for personal needs or checking in during illness, were interpreted as acts of compassion that strengthened belonging. Employees viewed these relationships as reciprocal, which meant that when trust given, was trust returned. When leaders demonstrated openness and fairness, employees responded with loyalty and commitment. In contrast, distant or

	there and I trust them and they trust me, even my manager." (Naveen) *- "Allow us to, you know, during working hours, do our personal stuff and all this, but as long as all our work is up to date, so there is trust with our manager." (Tomasi)* *- I can just call him, whether it's in the middle of the night or in the morning, and when i am stuck. It's how he actually made us feel. So, he's not the kind, not the kind of person that, OK. I'm calling from 8:00 to 8:00 to 5:00. That's it. No, we have built that that has trust and more like." (Mere)*	inflexible leadership left employees feeling undervalued and disconnected. Many participants compared effective leadership to family-like relationships, where guidance came with empathy and mutual respect. In this context, leadership was judged not only by results but by behaviours that nurtured trust and inclusion. These accounts show that trust-based leadership is a cultural expectation and a key driver of engagement in Fijian workplaces.
Autonomy and Flexibility in Work • 31 extracts • 14 codes • 12 participants	*- "Now we are allowed to work from home if we have got any issues at home or family members is sick or something else. So, we are allowed to work from home also now." (Tomasi)* *- "By my experience and everybody you see that I mentioned the flexibility in terms of work, you don't really have to clock in at 8. You can walk in at 8.39, the latest, yeah. And no one's backing up like you know why you're late, why and time knows breathing down your neck". (William)* *- "Based on some genuine reasons, then yeah, we allow employees to be with their families at certain times where they can work from home. Probably their kid is sick or*	Culturally, flexibility resonated with Fijian values of family and communal responsibility. Participants noted that when managers accommodated these needs, workplaces felt inclusive and humane. In contrast, rigid rules and micromanagement were described as demotivating and eroding trust. Autonomy was experienced not just as convenience but as a sign of confidence that deepened connection, pride, and engagement. Many explained that such flexibility made them feel respected and trusted as professionals. The absence of rigid supervision created space for creativity and ownership, while flexibility signalled care and empathy from management. Employees spoke with appreciation about leaders who believed in their capability to deliver, saying this trust motivated them to give their best. Participants described autonomy and flexibility as freedoms that brought balance and trust into daily work life. Employees valued being able to manage their own time, deciding when and where to work without fear of being questioned. This

	something. But they're still able to do the work." (Sunil) *- "Depends on anyone. Even for me. If I want to work from home for a particular day, I can do work from home as long as the productivity level is there". (Naveen)* *- "straight after COVID. Now our employees are also entitled to work from home as Datec has invested in a lot of technology whereby they can monitor us and a lot of cloud solutions where they take a break in city even in a small coffee shop in New Zealand and perform their day-to-day duties so. "(Ravi)* *- "but through COVID it was proven that all this flexibility around working from home remote offices, online meetings, video conferencing, keeping staff". (Bruce)*	freedom allowed them to take care of family needs, recover from illness, or simply manage responsibilities with confidence. Working from home or arriving later was not seen as neglect but as mutual understanding between leaders and staff.
Employee Voice and Open Communication • 43 extracts • 22 codes • 12 participants	*- "I've seen staff come and go right just because they have issues with them that they are not comfortable with other managers." (Litia)* *- "From when I started until now, I always improve on communication because communication is always the main." (Sera)* *- "I feel like there is something the manager should do, reach out to the staff. Have a one-to-one with them, talk about them, get to know if they're not comfortable." (Litia)*	Communication was described as the heartbeat of engagement. Employees believed that feeling heard, understood, and included made their workplaces stronger and more united. They shared that when communication broke down or when managers seemed unapproachable, people quietly withdrew or even left. Many expressed a desire for leaders to take the first step and check in on them, holding one-to-one conversations, and making time for personal connection. These gestures made employees feel visible and valued, reinforcing trust. Participants highlighted the importance of informal spaces such as Talanoa sessions, where conversations flowed naturally and hierarchy faded. These gatherings were seen as safe and culturally familiar, allowing employees to share openly about work and life.

	- *“I think my idea was to be a team talk or a Talanoa session. Each department or individual gets a chance to talk about something non-work related and get people to collaborate or share their personal experiences.” (Ravi)* - *Yeah, we do team building events. We try to keep meetings where it's not just meetings, it's a bit more than that, that they open up their employees that is talking. (Sunil)* - *“Put down from the HR from the top to bottom right. There are cases whereby employee feedback is taken, (Arjun)*	Team talks and casual meetings were described as moments of warmth that strengthened bonds and encouraged collaboration. When communication was two-way and genuine, employees felt respected and confident to voice ideas or concerns. In contrast, silence bred frustration and disengagement. For participants, dialogue was more than exchanging information. For them it was a shared understanding that every voice mattered. Overall, open communication created a sense of belonging, turning workplaces into communities where trust and loyalty could thrive.
Peer Collaboration and Team Support • 86 extracts • 12 codes • 12 participants	- *So, we built each other's probably self our team. Like what? Someone lacking or someone going through something with that team bonding we get to know what's that particular team member is facing it. (*Litia) - “*This is the motivating factor that allows everyone to be engaged and work together as a team*.” (Bruce) - “*On and off of within the organisation we have various people sit together. We try to engage with different groups, different departments to come together and basically share how things are done* “(Sunil) - “Tea *room at the back. So, we have breakfast together and then we just have tea together and we share some stories.”* (Jone)	Peer collaboration and collective support were described as core elements of engagement, with participants consistently framing teamwork as more motivating than individual incentives. When coworkers stepped in to help when workloads were excessive or checked in on someone's well-being, they were seen as signs of unity. Employees indicated that collaboration decreased stress, increased enjoyment in their work, and cultivated a sense of belonging. Engagement at the team level is frequently characterised as more genuine than initiatives originating from the top, as it is encountered daily and supported through informal reinforcement. Cultural practices of collective responsibility and support were evident, as employees emphasised “helping each other” as a natural expectation. Furthermore, collaboration was recognised as a crucial factor for enhancing productivity and served as a strategy for relational engagement, promoting trust, morale, and loyalty. Overall, these findings indicate that in Fiji’s ICT workplaces, team collaboration served as a foundational element of engagement,

	- "*Customers, when they see two different ethnic backgrounds working together, they feel like working with (Name of company hidden) company, knowing that these people are basically having a lot of decent prosperity between colleagues*."(Ravi) - "*Get a chance to make a real change to the company so we have a brainstorming team which looks at new technologies which is out there in the world and then Datec have to come up with a plan to see how that technology can be brought into (Name of company hidden) and can enhance our productivity*." (Ravi)	maintaining motivation despite the presence of organisational challenges.
This theme illustrated that leadership and collaboration were daily practices that directly influenced employee engagement. Trust-based leadership, autonomy, open communication, and supportive teamwork provided employees with a sense of belonging and motivation. Conversely, micromanagement, distant leaders, or a lack of safe communication created disengagement. The findings reveal that leadership in Fiji is assessed not solely on authority, but also on the dimensions of relational closeness, respect, and care. The roles of leaders and teams represent a fundamental aspect of engagement, seamlessly connecting to the significance of cultural belonging and inclusion.		

4.1.4. Global Theme 4: Cultural Belonging and Inclusion

This global theme highlights the essential role of cultural values, traditions, and collective belonging in influencing employee engagement. Participants emphasised how initiatives such as cultural diversity recognition, festival celebration, and participation in community-based rituals such as Talanoa and grog sessions foster inclusiveness and strengthen organisational bonds. Belonging was not framed simply as 'fitting in' but as being respected for one's cultural identity and having that identity reflected in workplace practices. The theme is made up of 119 extracts and 63 codes, consolidated into three organising themes that are:

- respect for cultural diversity
- inclusive festivals and celebrations
- community belonging through informal cultural practices.

Together, these insights reveal that employee engagement in Fiji cannot be separated from cultural belonging, as respect for tradition and collective identity are fundamental to how employees interpret value and inclusion.

Organising Theme	**Illustrative Data Extracts**	**Interpretation**
Respect for Cultural Diversity • 36 extracts • 32 codes • 10 participants	*- "The company contributes to regu regu and sevu sevu for staff funerals and births … it shows deep cultural respect." (Bruce)* *- "Here, everyone is treated equally Hindu, Muslim, Christian or iTaukei, everyone gets space to celebrate their beliefs." (Bruce)* *- "Even small gestures like greeting someone in their language make a big difference. It shows you care." (Sera)* *- "If we are talking to somebody of Indo Fijian descent, then we speak in the vernacular as for example, if somebody speaks in iTaukei language and we do not know the iTaukei language, there's not a communication barrier as well. So, this kind of thing. (Anil)* *- "So, if iTaukei staff probably have those*	Participants described cultural respect as central to feeling engaged. They spoke about workplaces that supported traditional obligations like *regu regu* (funeral contributions) and *sevu sevu* (birth ceremonies), saying these gestures showed genuine care and reinforced belonging. Employees explained that such practices made them feel valued beyond their job role, acknowledging the communal responsibilities that shape Fijian life. Small acts carried heavy weight. Greeting someone in their language or accommodating time for church commitments signalled inclusion and respect. Participants noted that when every faith and ethnicity had space to celebrate, the workplace felt fair and harmonious. These gestures were not seen as optional extras but as essential to creating trust and loyalty. In contrast, ignoring traditions or failing to accommodate cultural needs left employees feeling disconnected and disengaged. For many, cultural respect was as important as professional recognition. This shaped morale and strengthened emotional ties to the

	conference in church like at church, yeah and they got to be out from for three days or let's say a week. They also get the same." (Mere) *- "Some companies ignore our traditions that makes people feel disconnected." (Ravi)*	organisation. Employees described inclusive workplaces as family-like, where diversity was embraced and celebrated. In Fiji's ICT sector, valuing cultural identity is more than courtesy; it is a foundation for engagement and a reflection of organisational care.
Inclusive Festivals and Celebrations • 43 extracts • 13 codes • 12 participants	*- "The organization does its best to cater for that cultural festival and everybody is involved, so some examples would be things such as the Chinese New Year celebration we do, we do Diwali, eid Christmas, Easter. So, all these celebrations" (Anil)* *- "So, for example, if it's a Hindu festival like Diwali, then we have vegetarian lunches and things like that provided for everyone." (Anil)* *- "Say we're celebrating Diwali or eid whatever it may be an e-mail is sent out in terms of like a survey. Are you veg'ing? Are you nonveg? You know so everyone is included. (William)* *- "The company supportive. For example, if there's a festival for EID for the Muslims, right? Just an example am telling you. So, they have to go early to home to break their fast etc. So, the company allows that, the company respects that".* *(Arjun)* *- "That's another thing with this company. We celebrate all cultures when they EID my Muslim friends, they do their Lotu lotu".*	Participants described cultural celebrations as moments that brought workplaces to life and strengthened bonds across diverse backgrounds. They valued organisations that recognised multiple traditions such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas, Chinese New Year. These events made everyone feel included and respected. Employees explained that sharing food, decorating spaces, and dressing up together created joy and broke down barriers, turning the workplace into a community rather than just an office. These celebrations were seen as more than social occasions; they were affirmations that every culture mattered. Simple gestures, like sending out surveys to accommodate dietary preferences or allowing staff to leave early for religious observances, signalled care and fairness. Participants said these efforts made them proud of their organisation and deepened their sense of belonging. In contrast, when festivals were ignored or celebrated in an exclusive way, employees felt overlooked and disconnected. For many, inclusion during cultural events was as important as recognition for their work. This recognition shaped morale and trust. Celebrations also provided a welcome break from routine, reducing stress and encouraging team bonding. In Fiji's multicultural ICT workplaces, embracing cultural diversity through shared festivities was described as essential for unity, engagement, and a family-like atmosphere.

	(Litia)	
Community Belonging through Informal Practices • 40 extracts • 18 codes • 10 participants	*"Kind of like what we used to say will spill it. So, if you have any issues or if you want this or have grudges against someone, it would, hey, this is can you change this like we solve it on this kind of gatherings like you know" (Litia)* *- "For the iTaukei ve-yasana group, that's where I belong. If you ever need something, you just drop a message in the group and they will show up." (Jone)* *- "usually every end of the week, so we get together, sit down, probably have a big basin of grog or probably go out. So that's how she usually gets to know us better. Usually I'm not pretty sure, but in Fijian culture, like if you if you in around the basin of grog." (Litia)* *- "so, when we have a death in any of any of the staff family like in Fijian there have a remu remu. So, what we do is there's a collection." (Naveen)* *- "15 to 20 people, or they just saw the message and they just showed up. Mind you, half of these people he knew of them, but didn't interact with them the group and then it was like." (Jone)* *- "One example asking iIndo Fijian colleague of ours how did he feel when he attended Indian wedding and what was his feedback?*	Participants described informal gatherings as vital for creating trust and belonging. Talanoa sessions and grog circles were seen as safe spaces where employees could speak freely, share stories, and resolve issues without fear of judgment. Unlike formal meetings, these settings encouraged openness and honesty, making it easier to address concerns and strengthen relationships. Employees explained that these practices reflected Fijian traditions of collective sharing and support. Sitting together around a basin of grog or chatting after work was not just social but it was cultural, reinforcing the sense of family within the workplace. Many said these gatherings helped them understand each other's struggles and celebrate milestones, creating bonds that went beyond professional roles. Participants also highlighted the power of community networks, where a simple message could bring colleagues together to assist during personal or family events. These gestures made employees feel cared for and connected. For them, inclusion was not about formal policies but about everyday practices that honoured cultural norms and built genuine human connections.

	Or you know what was his experiences? I think having something like this would get a lot of people interested to talk about. (Ravi)	
Participants constantly stressed the connection between engagement and cultural adherence to traditions, the acceptance of inclusive celebrations, and the implementation of community practices like Talanoa and grog sessions, which fostered environments that promote a sense of belonging and build collective trust. Employees indicated pride and solidarity when these practices were present, but exclusion and disengagement when they were not. This theme highlights that cultural belonging is key to engaging with Fiji's ICT workplaces. The above paragraph underscores that inclusion is manifested through both the formal acknowledgement of diversity and the informal cultural practices, directly linking to the ways in which employees encounter structural challenges and pressures related to retention.		

4.1.5. Global Theme 5: Retention, Resources and Organisational Constraints

This global theme captures the obstacles and limitations influencing employees' choices to remain with or leave the organisations they work for, in conjunction with the organisational challenges impacting engagement. While previous themes addressed strategies that motivated employees, this theme shifts the focus from strategies that motivated employees to the structural, resource-based, and environmental pressures that constrained engagement and occasionally led to turnover. The theme is made up of 95 extracts and 68 codes, consolidated into four organising themes, which are as follows:

- pay, increments, and financial stability.
- high turnover and skilled migration
- lack of support and workload issues
- government and structural constraints

Collectively, these insights highlight that employee engagement cannot be understood only through positive drivers. It must also account for the structural constraints and inequities that undermine employees' ability to remain motivated and committed.

Organising Theme	**Illustrative Data Extracts**	**Interpretation**
Pay, Increments and Financial Stability • 28 extracts • 21 codes • 7 participants	- *"Sometimes we have to wait till mid-month if there's a system issue. When that happens, it's really hard for families to plan things." (Bruce)* - *"The cost of living keeps increasing, but salaries haven't changed much groceries and rent are eating half our pay." (Sera)* - *"Most of my colleagues, my friends, they've already moved abroad. Even for a basic job over there, the pay is almost double. So obviously it's hard to keep people here. (Tomasi)* - *" Since we are a private company, I mean comparing the private company to other companies with (company name hidden) we get increment every year and hearing I have*	Participants described pay and financial stability as central to their decisions about staying or leaving. Many spoke about the stress of waiting for salaries when system delays occurred, saying it made family budgeting difficult and created anxiety. Rising living costs added pressure, with employees explaining that groceries and rent consumed most of their income. Several compared locals pay to overseas opportunities, noting that even basic jobs abroad offered nearly double the salary, making migration tempting. While some appreciated annual increments, others expressed frustration over years without raises or clear salary bands. This lack of transparency left employees uncertain about their future and feeling undervalued. For many, pay was not just about money. Pay represented fairness and recognition of effort. When compensation fell short, loyalty weakened despite cultural ties and pride in their work. Participants said competitive and timely pay was critical for trust and retention. Without it, even strong engagement strategies could not

	cousins and all other brothers and sisters and they do complain about that Their company saying that it's the pay they don't have pay rises like us and all those things. So, when they try to look for other work, so usually it's the pay. (Sera) *- "For so many years I have worked, there was not any increment happening. And for the last five or six years now, we've seen every year the company gives us increments" (Sera)* *- "Like that. So, if things like that can be well documented in our contracts, our maximum what you call like bands and stuff, which we don't have at the moment, we don't have any fixed bands salary bands, and we do not have clear pathways for some of the roles. (Anil)*	outweigh financial strain, pushing skilled workers to seek better prospects elsewhere.
High Turnover and Skilled Migration • 27 extracts • 19 codes • 10 participants	*- "From when I started… that team that I started with… there were about 28, there is only three of us left." (Jone)* *- "There's a global whole general shortage in the country, which has had a lot of major organisations trying to get labour from Asian regions to work here." (Bruce)* *- "High turnaround of staff is going on because people are looking at the green up pasture, which is overseas… when they see that they have reached the end of their career… they choose to move out." (Naveen)*	Participants described high turnover and migration as one of the most difficult realities in their workplaces. Several shared stories of teams shrinking dramatically, with one noting that a group of 28 had dwindled to just three. Employees explained that once colleagues gained experience, overseas opportunities became irresistible because they offered better pay and career growth. This constant movement created instability. Those who remained spoke about the strain of rebuilding teams and the loss of trusted colleagues, which weakened morale and trust. Migration was not seen as a simple personal choice but as part of a larger pattern. Fiji competing in a global labour market where local salaries could not match offers from Australia or New Zealand.

	- "Better opportunities outside make people move. Some feel there's more room to grow overseas, so they leave." (Anil) *- "Turnover is a challenge, retaining mainly because there are some other businesses who pays very high salaries." (Sunil)* *- "There's a lot of brain drain happening from Fiji to overseas countries, so it's very hard to maintain staff." (Tomasi)*	Participants said that while cultural belonging and recognition mattered, these could not outweigh financial pressures and the promise of advancement abroad. For many, leaving was a practical decision rather than a lack of loyalty. Organisations that failed to address pay and progression faced an ongoing cycle of departures, making retention a persistent challenge.
Lack of Support and Workload Issues • 21 extracts • 13 codes • 9 participants	*- "When one person is on leave, the rest have to cover their duties. It's exhausting because the workload doesn't reduce." (Ravi)* *- "When I visit customers, I've seen some organisations where managers start shouting at people no matter what. The work environment plays a critical role." (Naveen)* *- "We raise issues about needing more help, but management says to manage with what we have." (Sera)* *- "Deadlines are always tight, and when things go wrong, we get blamed even if it's because of lack of resources." (Jone)* *- "Is in one of the reasons as well that our staff is if they can just leave this job and go to another job, they get more. They cannot handle the workload has been given and all." (Mere)*	Participants described heavy workloads and limited support as major barriers to engagement. Many spoke about the exhaustion of covering for absent colleagues, explaining that when one person was on leave, others had to take on extra duties without relief. Tight deadlines added pressure, and employees said they often felt blamed for delays even when the real issue was lack of resources. Requests for additional help were frequently dismissed, leaving staff feeling unheard and undervalued. Some shared that managers responded with "manage with what we have," which deepened frustration. Over time, this strain led to burnout and made employees question whether staying was worth it. Participants explained that recognition or training could not compensate for constant overload. When workloads were excessive and breaks impossible, engagement strategies lost meaning. For many, the lack of support signalled that their well-being was secondary to output. This sense of neglect pushed some to seek jobs elsewhere, where conditions felt more manageable. Employees stressed that without adequate staffing and resources, even the best engagement initiatives could not succeed.

	- "Even though it's a big organization, a lot of the times things that we suggest and things which we want to do is minimized because of certain budget constraints or money constraints." (Anil)	
Government and Structural Constraints • 19 extracts • 15 codes • 9 participants	*- "Because the company is so big… you cannot do changes overnight… there are a lot of inputs, movements, and approvals involved." (Ravi)* *- "Even though it's a big organization, a lot of the times things that we suggest and things what which we want to do is minimized because of certain budget constraints or money constraint" (Anil)* *- "Approval like it if in a month, maybe we have our own in terms of sales, we reach our sales what the government sorry not the gov't like the company like there there's like they set up like different budget OK you can take your team out for." (Mere)* *- "I think some policies put through it's not inclusive of all the staff." (Anil)*	Participants described structural barriers as a hidden weight on engagement. They explained that even when managers wanted to introduce new initiatives, progress was slowed by layers of approvals, rigid policies, and budget restrictions. Employees spoke about the frustration of seeing innovative ideas shelved because resources were tight or processes were too complex. Several noted that large organisations could not make changes overnight, and this reality often left staff feeling powerless. Suggestions for improvements were sometimes dismissed, not because leaders lacked interest, but because financial or procedural constraints made action difficult. While employees understood these limitations, they admitted it was discouraging when enthusiasm faded under bureaucracy. For many, these delays signalled that innovation and staff input were secondary to compliance and cost control. Participants said that without flexibility in systems and budgets, engagement efforts struggled to move beyond words. Structural constraints, though not personal, created a sense of stagnation that weakened motivation and trust.
This theme highlights the structural and economic challenges that undermine engagement. Employees stressed that low pay, delayed increments, and unclear salary structures created financial strain, often pushing skilled workers to migrate for better opportunities. High turnover weakened team stability and morale, while heavy workloads and lack of support led to burnout and frustration. Participants also noted that rigid policies, budget limits, and slow approvals restricted meaningful change, leaving staff feeling powerless. Even strong motivators like recognition and cultural belonging could not offset these pressures. Engagement strategies must therefore be paired with fair pay, adequate staffing, and flexible systems.		

4.2. Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings of the research, based on the lived experiences of 12 mid-level managers working in Fiji's ICT sector. The analysis, conducted using a reflexive thematic approach, examined 679 extracts and 303 codes, systematically organised into 17 organising themes and five global themes. This approach highlighted the diverse ways engagement was perceived and implemented within work environments. Participants' viewpoints were central, with each global theme supported by direct quotes that illustrated both common experiences and points of conflict.

The five global themes: 1) *Recognition, Rewards and Growth*, 2) *Employee Motivation and Organisational Commitment*, 3) *Trustworthy Leadership and Collaborative Culture*, 4) *Cultural Belonging and Inclusion and Retention*, and 5) *Resources and Organisational Constraints* demonstrate that engagement is influenced by a blend of organisational practices, interpersonal relationships, cultural values, and structural realities. Recognition, fairness, and opportunities for growth were identified as significant factors influencing engagement. Additionally, participants highlighted the critical role of cultural belonging, team collaboration, and intrinsic pride in shaping their motivation. Simultaneously, factors such as insufficient compensation, elevated turnover rates, excessive workloads, and broader organisational barriers restricted employees' capacity to maintain engagement.

Taken together, the findings collectively indicate that employee engagement in Fiji is characterised by multiple dimensions and relational characteristics. It extends beyond transactional incentives to encompass fairness, trust, cultural inclusion, and adequate resourcing. By foregrounding employee perspectives, this chapter provides a nuanced picture of how engagement is lived and understood in Fijian ICT organisations. The next chapter expands upon these findings by contextualising them within the wider literature, examining how the themes correspond with, or contest, established literature on employee engagement and the cultural elements of work.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the research findings, examining how employee engagement strategies in Fijian ICT organisations align with broader theories and cultural contexts. The discussion is structured around the study's two guiding questions. First, we interpret the current engagement strategies identified in RQ1, organising the analysis by key themes such as recognition and growth, motivation and fairness, leadership, communication, and collaboration. For each theme, we compare the findings to existing literature and global best practices. We will then explore the influence of Fijian cultural dimensions on the effectiveness of the strategies addressing RQ2. This will include subsections on Indigenous values and communal belonging, workplace hierarchy, the role of Talanoa and informal practices, and differences in leadership expectations.

The tone of this chapter remains reflective and critically engaged, examining how theories, such as Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands-Resources model, resonate with or fall short of explaining the Fijian context. A theoretical synthesis is subsequently presented, assessing the accuracy of existing theories in explaining the findings and determining if new insights grounded in cultural settings are discovered. The chapter concludes by examining the practical implications and providing recommendations for organisations and HR professionals focused on enhancing engagement in Fiji's ICT sector and comparable collectivist settings. This approach ensures the discussion not only summarises the findings but also challenges and broadens existing frameworks through a culturally grounded perspective.

5.2 RQ1. What are the current employee engagement strategies employed in Fijian workplaces?

5.2.1 Recognition and Growth

The findings revealed that recognition and opportunities for growth are essential components of engagement in Fijian ICT workplaces. Participants described a range of recognition practices that they valued, from formal rewards like bonuses and commissions linked to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to informal acknowledgements such as praise, Employee of the Month awards, and public appreciation of good work. Financial incentives were valued, but they were only effective when perceived as reasonable and accompanied by sincere appreciation. Similarly, career development opportunities, such as training, mentorship, and clear pathways for professional development, were viewed as critical for long-term engagement. Many participants linked their loyalty to the presence of continuous learning

and promotion prospects, indicating that growth and recognition are intertwined drivers. Findings show that effective recognition often involves providing growth, such as promotions based on merit, and opportunities to grow, signalling implicit recognition of an employee's value.

These findings are consistent with global research on engagement drivers. Employee recognition has long been recognised as an affordable, high-impact strategy for increasing engagement and retention. Harter's (2018) workplace studies indicate that employees who do not feel adequately recognised are twice as likely to leave within a year, whereas sincere and meaningful recognition enhances engagement, productivity, and loyalty. The fact that Fijian ICT employees emphasise meaningful recognition aligns with Harter's insight that the most effective recognition is individualised and authentic, not just monetary. Moreover, the importance of career growth in the findings aligns with contemporary motivation and meaningful work literature, which emphasises that opportunities for learning and advancement fulfil employees' intrinsic needs for competence and autonomy while enhancing the perceived meaningfulness of their work (Martela and Riekki, 2018). When organisations provide clear pathways for progression and skill development, employees interpret these initiatives as evidence that their contributions are valued and their future is being invested in, thereby deepening engagement. Several participants who were interviewed had stayed with their companies for 5, 10, or even 17 years, citing growth opportunities and skill development as reasons for their sustained commitment. In short, recognition and growth opportunities function as mutually reinforcing strategies for engagement.

A key aspect in the Fijian context is that recognition must be equitable and based on merit to be effective. Findings from this study demonstrate that while employees valued both financial and symbolic forms of recognition, these were only perceived as meaningful when appraisal and promotion processes were transparent and free from favouritism. Participants emphasised that when promotions or rewards are perceived as favouring certain individuals over merit, the potential positive effect on engagement is significantly decreased. While this finding may appear to sit in tension with assumptions about Indigenous or tribal value systems that prioritise kinship and relational obligation, it does not reject these values. Rather, it reflects the application of Indigenous leadership ethics within formal organisational contexts, where authority is expected to be exercised with moral restraint and impartiality. In such settings, favouritism is not interpreted as relational care but as an abuse of power that threatens trust and collective harmony. Participants' emphasis on merit-based recognition therefore signals a desire to protect relational balance and organisational legitimacy, rather than a departure from Indigenous cultural principles.

This emphasis on fairness also reflects broader Fijian cultural norms, where workplaces are embedded within close-knit relational networks and communal visibility heightens sensitivity to inequity. Cultural values such as *veidokai* (respect) and *veiwekani* (relational harmony) require leaders to demonstrate moral legitimacy through impartial and consistent treatment. In such contexts, recognition that is perceived as favouring personal relationships over merit risks disrupting social harmony and eroding trust, rather than strengthening engagement. Organisational justice theory suggests that fair processes, such as transparent criteria on how the awards or promotions were decided, are as important as the rewards themselves in shaping employee attitudes (Greenberg, 1987). Participants stated that when recognition was based on clear, fair rules, they felt truly valued and driven. However, when the procedure appeared biased or unclear, the recognition did not feel meaningful if they received it.

In Fiji's close-knit work cultures, any hint of nepotism or bias has the potential to compromise trust because organisational decisions are highly visible and socially interpreted within dense relational networks. In such environments, employees closely observe how rewards and opportunities are distributed, and perceived inequities are quickly magnified, affecting not only individual motivation but collective morale and confidence in leadership. For example, slack et al. (2020) found in a Fijian public sector that perceptions of equity and supervisor support positively influenced employee motivation and performance by strengthening trust, reinforcing a sense of being valued, and signalling that leadership decisions were morally legitimate. When employees perceived supervisors as fair and supportive, they were more willing to invest effort, remain committed, and contribute beyond formal role expectations.

My findings reinforce that fairness is the key. Recognition and rewards only boost engagement when delivered within an equitable framework. Therefore, even if recognition and growth serve as generally effective engagement strategies, their impact in Fijian ICT organisations are contingent on alignment with cultural expectations of fairness and respect. When recognition is perceived as equitable, it reinforces trust, strengthens relational legitimacy, and enhances collective commitment. Conversely, when recognition appears biased or relationally driven, it undermines trust and weakens the very engagement it is intended to foster.

5.2.2 Motivation and Fairness

Another key theme was how motivation connects to commitment, with fairness seen as the foundation. Participants discussed motivation as a construct influenced by interpersonal interactions. In addition to external rewards, motivation was driven by internal factors such as a sense of pride in one's work, commitment to the team and organisation, and being treated

with respect (Shkoler and Kimura, 2020). Many participants expressed gratitude for the trust that was placed in them by their leaders. Participants stated that being entrusted with important tasks or responsibilities was deeply motivating, as it affirmed their competence and reputation. This pattern reflects cultural values commonly observed in Fiji, where identity is deeply relational and work performance contributes to the family's good name, a principle consistent with Pacific perspectives outlined by Vaioleti (2006). Participants said that being trusted with responsibility at work carried moral and social significance beyond individual achievement. Participants also described feelings motivated by pride when entrusted with important tasks, interpreting this trust as an affirmation of their reputation and capabilities. Others explicitly linked their work effort to family responsibility, noting that they were *"not just working for themselves"* but for those who relied on them. In this context, motivation is shaped by an obligation to uphold relational standing and collective dignity, helping to explain why trust, respect, and fair treatment function as potent drivers of engagement in Fijian ICT workplaces.

Long-term loyalty also emerged as a common theme. Several participants said they had stayed with their employer for many years despite being offered better opportunities elsewhere because they felt a sense of reciprocal loyalty. The organisation had invested in them or treated them fairly, and they, in turn, remained committed. Crucially, fairness and equity were repeatedly described as *"non-negotiable foundations"* for sustaining motivation and commitment. Unfair treatment, bias, and inconsistent policies were frequently described as major barriers to engagement. For example, Sera noted that favouritism makes people leave. In contrast, William and Naveen emphasised that when everybody is treated equally, regardless of position or background, it fosters a sense of inclusion and fairness that encourages employees to contribute and remain committed.

The data illustrate that in Fiji's ICT sector, motivation is more than a transactional exchange. It is a moral and relational state maintained by fairness, respect, and a sense of belonging. This form of motivation is evident when employees describe feeling proud of being trusted with responsibility, working harder to uphold their reputation, and remaining committed out of loyalty rather than financial gain. The findings suggest that motivation is recognised not only through increased output but also through behaviours such as discretionary effort, long-term commitment, and a strong sense of responsibility to leaders, teams, and families. Conversely, this relational motivation weakens when trust is compromised by perceived unfairness, favouritism, or inconsistent treatment, and when excessive workloads or a lack of support signal disregard for employee well-being. In such cases, participants reported disengagement, emotional withdrawal, and intentions to leave, indicating that moral and

relational motivation is fragile and contingent on sustained experiences of fairness, dignity, and care.

The importance of fairness strongly supports a Social Exchange Theory (SET) perspective on engagement. As Saks (2006) argued, engagement can be viewed as a reciprocal exchange. When employees feel like the organisation cares about them and supports them, they work hard and are dedicated. The participants clearly stated this reciprocal logic. People thought of loyalty as a two-way street: when the company showed respect, fairness, and opportunities for professional growth, employees showed their loyalty by being committed and staying with the company for a long time. This aligns with SET's theory of a psychological contract characterised by reciprocal commitments.

Interestingly, the Fijian cultural environment seems to enhance specific elements of social exchange by intensifying reciprocity, trust, and affective obligation, such that fair and respectful treatment is returned not merely through task performance, but through sustained loyalty, discretionary effort, and long-term commitment. Fijian employees often spoke of trust and respect in almost familial terms, suggesting that beyond the formal contract, there is an implicit relational contract. If the workplace treats them with the same care and fairness as a family or community would, they feel obligated to remain loyal. This community-based motivation is something that conventional SET acknowledges, which is loyalty exchanged for support (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In the Fijian setting, this characteristic is not minor, instead it is a fundamental mechanism shaping exchange relationships. The strong focus on perceived fairness adds another theoretical layer, that of organisational justice and commitment. In my study, many employees remained with their organisation even when offered higher pay elsewhere because, as one participant put it, *"I stayed… because here, I feel treated fairly."* This underlines that affective commitment, emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation, can outweigh purely economic considerations when employees experience a just and respectful workplace.

Research by Loga and Chand (2020) found that in Fiji, perceptions of fairness and supervisor support significantly influenced employee motivation and performance. In my findings, fairness was broad. It encompassed equal opportunities for promotion, unbiased performance appraisals, consistency in how rules are applied, and even-handed respect in daily interactions. Colquitt and Chertkoff (2002) argue that perceptions of injustice significantly reduce task motivation, even when the work itself is meaningful or accompanied by positive incentives. Such fairness corresponds with Fijian cultural principles of equality and harmony (Vaioleti, 2006; Nabobo-Baba, 2006), where glaring inequities or favouritism disturb trust and undermine morale, and where maintaining balanced relationships and

consistent treatment is essential for collective functioning. In these contexts, fairness is not understood as identical outcomes, but as impartial processes, respectful interaction, and the visible avoidance of favouritism, all of which signal moral legitimacy. When these expectations are violated, inequity is experienced as relational disruption rather than individual disappointment, weakening trust, cohesion, and collective morale. This demonstrates that justice forms a foundational condition for sustained motivation.

According to the JD-R theory, job demands are aspects of work that require sustained psychological effort and deplete energy, whereas job resources support motivation and engagement (Bakker et al., 2023). In this sense, fair treatment and trust operate as key job resources, while perceived injustice functions as a psychological demand by introducing emotional strain and uncertainty that erode engagement. These insights underscore that fairness is fundamentally important, serving as a core resource for engagement. In its absence, even the most thoughtfully designed incentives and cultural initiatives fail to mitigate the motivational damage caused by perceived injustice. My findings confirm that fairness boosts loyalty and pride, which increases engagement, whereas unfairness fades away motivation and can affect other strategies negatively. In practice, this means engagement initiatives in Fiji must build a culture of fairness. For example, transparent promotion criteria, merit-based rewards, and consistent communication. Without this foundation, even generous engagement programs like bonuses and events would not be successful. A point that challenges any superficial use of engagement strategies without attending to underlying organisational justice.

Motivation and commitment on a broad scale result from a combination of extrinsic incentives, including pay and benefits, alongside intrinsic factors like meaningful work, recognition, and value alignment (Delaney and Royal, 2017). However, in the Fijian ICT context, the balance favours intrinsic and relational variables. While pay was certainly a factor, as evidenced by some participants seeking better pay abroad, those who remained did so largely for non-monetary reasons. They felt proud, trusted, and treated as part of a family at work. This challenges a one-dimensional economic view of engagement.

It also aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, 2023), which argues that meeting basic needs such as relatedness, competence, and autonomy promotes long-term motivation. My participants explicitly mentioned a connection, saying they feel a sense of belonging and competence, “my manager trusts me with cash/work, which makes me proud,” as key motivators, indicating these psychological needs were being met. Moreover, by linking their motivation to family or collective outcomes, such as not disappointing the team or supporting their community, Fijian employees indicate that their goal of engagement extends beyond

individual interests to encompass the self in relation to others. Building on this culturally grounded perspective, this finding extends mainstream theories by highlighting that engagement in Fiji is not only personal but relational. Western models place a strong focus on personal engagement. Hu et al. (2014) demonstrate that in Western contexts, work is perceived as a means of individual accomplishment, with employees placing significant importance on the sense that their work is meaningful to them (Albrecht et al.2021). In contrast, findings here reflect a combination of individual and collective motivation, highlighting that work is perceived as meaningful not just for the individual but also for their group or family, as evidenced by the expression that my work is meaningful to us. It suggests that frameworks like SET and JD-R, while applicable, should incorporate communal values effectively.

This requires a cultural recalibration of engagement theory in which reciprocity is collective rather than individual. Incorporating communal values into engagement theory, therefore, requires recognising that reciprocity in this context is collectively oriented rather than individually negotiated. Employees reciprocate fair and respectful treatment not merely through task performance, but through behaviours that protect collective dignity, including sustained loyalty, discretionary effort, and long-term commitment (Ahmed et al., 2023; Veukiso-Ulugia et al., 2025). The impact of this collective reciprocity is observable in how participants prioritised group reputation, relational harmony, and responsibility to others when describing their motivation and engagement (Imada et al., 2024). Engagement, in this sense, is maintained through moral accountability to the collective rather than through individual cost–benefit analysis, indicating that in Pacific contexts, reciprocity operates as a shared social process that extends beyond the assumptions of individualised exchange embedded in mainstream engagement theories (Marasli et al., 2025). Fairness, trust, and community pride have always been the driving factors behind motivation in Fijian ICT workplaces. These elements not only complement but also enhance the concepts of global engagement.

5.2.3 Leadership and Management Practices

The findings also highlighted the importance of leadership in shaping everyday engagement. Participants emphasised that accessible, reliable, and supportive leadership is essential for their engagement. Participants discussed specific practices, such as managers asking about employees' health during sickness and supervisors permitting remote work or family obligations, if job responsibilities are fulfilled. These kinds of actions showed that they cared about and trusted their staff, which led to respect and motivation. Participants also said that their ideal leader resembles a mentor or an elder family member rather than a remote authority figure. This preference reflects relational leadership expectations embedded in Pacific and iTaukei cultural contexts, where leadership legitimacy is grounded in care, moral

responsibility, and stewardship of collective wellbeing rather than distant authority or performance control.

Drawing on Nabobo-Baba's (2006) articulation of iTaukei ways of knowing, authority is culturally understood as relational and morally grounded, with elders positioned as guides and custodians of the collective. This provides a cultural basis for participants' preference for leaders who resemble elder family members, exercising authority through care, accessibility, and responsibility rather than domination. Such leadership was reflected in participants' accounts of leaders being highly approachable and contactable, illustrating how leadership is experienced as mentoring and relational support rather than remote control.

Furthermore, leadership was very closely tied to the way people talked to each other. Consequently, employees experienced a sense of value and connection when leaders demonstrated transparency, provided constructive feedback, and solicited input during one-on-one discussions or team Talanoa sessions. Another aspect was transparency and fairness in leadership.

Participants said they liked leaders who adhered to the rules and did not show favouritism. This supports the earlier point that fairness at the top leads to engagement at all levels. Fiji's workplace culture demonstrates a high-power distance, where hierarchical order is accepted, and managers are expected to lead decisively. However, the findings show that this authority is only considered legitimate when exercised with compassionate responsibility, consistent with iTaukei norms of *vakaturaga* (chiefly leadership as service) and *veidokai* (respect) (Meo-Sewabu, 2014; Nabobo-Baba, 2006).

This can be understood through research on Fijian leadership, which emphasises relational, communal, and care-oriented authority (Eti-Tofinga et al., 2017) and is consistent with broader cross-cultural frameworks linking collectivist orientations to the prioritisation of group harmony and relational obligation over individual autonomy (Hofstede, 2011). These cultural dimensions shape leadership expectations by prioritising group harmony and relational care over individual autonomy. This was evident in the findings, where employees described loyalty and motivation as rooted in fairness, trust, and a sense of belonging rather than financial incentives alone. Employees defer to authority but anticipate fairness, empathy, and relational closeness. When leaders fulfil these expectations by demonstrating care, trust, and moral responsibility, employees reciprocate with loyalty and discretionary effort. This dynamic also supports SET, which conceptualises engagement as sustained through ongoing reciprocal obligations between employees and their leaders (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2019). In Fiji, this exchange is deeply relational, embedded in cultural norms of

respect and reciprocity, rather than purely contractual, as shown by participants who stayed with their organisations for years out of loyalty and pride in being trusted.

The leadership behaviours discussed here are based on participants' accounts rather than direct observation. All 12 participants were mid-level managers who described their experiences with senior leaders and their own leadership practices. Therefore, the analysis reflects how leadership is perceived and enacted at the mid-management level, rather than constituting an observational study of leaders in action. Participants' accounts emphasised trust, fairness, and care as central attributes of effective leadership, aligning closely with ethical leadership scholarship, which highlights the role of moral conduct and relational trust in shaping employee outcomes (Malik et al., 2023). These perceptions also resonate with elements of transformational leadership discussed in the broader literature. Participants described leaders as approachable and supportive, often checking on employees' well-being and allowing flexibility for family obligations, behaviours they associated with fairness and care, which mirror ethical and transformational leadership principles.

Transformational leaders motivate and inspire employees by showing that they care about them and by clearly communicating a vision, which thus results in increased engagement (Jiatong et al., 2022). In my finding's, engaged leaders were effectively transformational. They built trust and demonstrated compassion, which made employees believe they were a part of the organisation. It was also noted that ethical leadership that stressed fairness, openness, and caring for employees was important. Such leaders established psychological safety (Qasim and Laghari, 2025). In situations where leaders applied rules consistently and communicated decisions transparently, employees were not simply following orders; the employees engaged willingly because they perceived fairness as stable and morally grounded rather than dependent on personal relationships or context.

These patterns also correspond with the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory. High-quality LMX relationships, distinguished by mutual trust, respect, and reciprocal support, consistently indicate enhanced engagement and commitment (Bauer, 2015). Many participants reported very high LMX-like relationships, for example, being able to call one's boss anytime or feeling one's manager "has your back", which translated into commitment and discretionary effort. What stands out, however, is how these styles of leadership are used in Fiji. In Western settings, engagement is frequently associated with empowering leadership that levels hierarchies, motivating employees to assume responsibility and voice their opinions irrespective of rank (Lee et al.2017). In Fiji's ICT companies, we see a hybrid approach. Leaders are moving toward empowerment.

Leaders are giving employees more freedom, flexible hours, and the option to work from home. Before COVID, this was almost impossible, but they are doing it in a way that fits with the culture and is still approachable and helpful. Participants noted that after COVID-19, many managers learned that flexibility around remote work could succeed in Fiji and even increase trust. As one of the participants said, *"Through COVID, it was proven that flexibility around working from home and remote offices could work for Fiji"* This shows a gradual shift, maybe a transformation of the centralised model, where the trust that used to come from personal loyalty now also supports giving people freedom. This kind of transformation helps engagement by bringing together the best of both worlds, which are high trust and care, which is a traditional value, and more freedom and voice, which is a modern practice.

Leaders in Fiji thus must be culturally bilingual, balancing respect for hierarchy with empowerment. Some organisations are already attempting this blending. For example, one participant described how their CEO insisted everyone be on a first-name basis to deliberately remove some hierarchy and innovation in a high-power distance setting. This contradicts the notion that hierarchical cultures are incapable of embracing egalitarian practices. Instead, it suggests that engagement strategies can creatively mix cultural norms with new management ideas. I perceived this blending of practices as part of a decolonising approach to management in Fiji, where Indigenous relational leadership principles are retained while useful global practices are selectively integrated.

In practice, this looks like leaders maintaining cultural norms of *vakaturaga* (chiefly leadership as service) and *veidokai* (respect), while introducing modern practices such as flexible work arrangements and open communication channels (Eti-Tofinga et al., 2017; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). For example, participants described CEOs encouraging first-name interactions to reduce hierarchical barriers, and managers hosting informal Talanoa sessions alongside formal meetings to foster trust and encourage open dialogue. This hybrid approach is reflected in leadership practices that integrate decisiveness with relational care, where leaders attend to employees' well-being, acknowledge family responsibilities, and invite participation through culturally familiar modes of interaction, thereby sustaining authority while strengthening relational trust.The trend appears to be gradual but growing in Fiji, particularly after COVID-19, as organisations experiment with remote work and participatory decision-making while preserving communal values. This evolution aligns with Indigenous leadership theory, which frames leadership as relational, morally grounded, and oriented toward collective well-being (Meo-Sewabu, 2014; Nabobo-Baba, 2006), and resonates with literature on relational leadership in Indigenous contexts (Henry and Wolfgramm, 2018). It suggests that Fijian organisations are moving toward a culturally

bilingual model of leadership, one that honours tradition while embracing adaptive practices for contemporary work environments.

5.2.4 Communication and Employee Voice

Communication emerged as both a distinct engagement theme and a connective thread among other themes. Participants emphasised the significance of transparent, reciprocal communication and genuine employee voice in fostering engagement. In practice, transparent and reciprocal communication in Fijian ICT workplaces is evident when employee voice is experienced as safe, relational, and responsive, rather than merely formal or symbolic. Consistent with Kahn's (1990) notion of psychological safety and SET, leaders who invite input, listen without punitive response, and demonstrate follow-through signal respect and moral legitimacy, which employees reciprocate through trust and sustained engagement (Saks, 2006).

Within a JD-R framework, such communication operates as a key job resource that reduces uncertainty and relational strain, whereas tokenistic voice mechanisms can function as demands that undermine engagement (Bakker et al., 2023). Participants agreed that voice only works when communication is real, safe, and two-way. Most of the participants said that even though there were formal ways to speak up, like an open-door policy or a suggestion box, they were often afraid to do so because they were afraid of being scrutinised or criticised. Arjun, one of the participants, said, "*Some employees think that although it's anonymous feedback, it will not be, because there are discussions afterwards*." The confidence that one can express ideas or concerns without negative consequences is not uniformly present.

On the positive side, the analysis showed that culturally tailored ways of communicating, like using informal forums like team talks or Talanoa sessions, worked well. One participant suggested having regular, informal Talanoa sessions where staff could talk about their lives and share stories in a relaxed setting. This would help them get to know each other better and feel more at ease. Others said individuals would *"spill it"* at weekly after-work yaqona (*kava*) gatherings, bringing up any problems or complaints in a friendly way. This helped people work out their differences and get to know each other better. Participants thought that these open discussions in a culturally familiar manner were a way to get around formal hierarchies and promote honest communication.

Additionally, employees appreciated when management actively solicited their feedback and then acted on it, even something as simple as surveying staff preferences for a team celebration and following through. In sum, effective engagement communication in Fiji means creating an environment where employees feel heard and respected. It is not enough

to say my door is always open. Leaders need to engage in culturally resonant communication practices, demonstrate listening, and show that feedback leads to visible action. Only then does employee voice translate into higher engagement, rather than frustration.

The importance of communication in engagement is well-known. Employees are more likely to be engaged when they can communicate clearly and openly and share their ideas (Jiang and Men, 2017). The Fijian context illustrates the cultural variation of communication norms. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that in collectivist and relationship-focused environments, employees frequently avoid confrontation, opting instead to articulate concerns via representatives or group-oriented communication channels (Kwon and Farndale, 2020). My findings mirror this. Employees felt more comfortable sharing in an informal group or via a team leader than in a formal meeting with the boss present.

While Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework does not provide Fiji-specific scores, it is useful for interpreting the broader pattern whereby cultures that value group harmony and respect for authority tend to discourage direct individual challenge (Hofstede, 2011). Peng and Tjosvold (2011) demonstrate that concerns about preserving dignity and relational harmony lead employees to favour conflict avoidance over direct confrontation. In the Fijian context, where respect (veidokai) and social cohesion are highly valued, similar dynamics may reinforce indirect and relationally mediated forms of voice. As a result, a Western-style open forum may not work if employees are hesitant that speaking up will upset the harmony or make someone feel bad. This means that ways to get people involved should be changed to fit the right cultural communication channels. Talanoa is a traditional Pacific dialogue process that is open to everyone, grounded in relationships, and focused on storytelling (Vaioleti, 2006). This is what the participants from this study desired in their workplaces: a setting was speaking up is not viewed as disagreement but as a normal way for everyone to share their ideas.

The data also highlighted the significance of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) as a prerequisite for engagement. Workers who thought their bosses would listen to them were more likely to be involved and willing to help. When safety was not present, employees often withdrew, resulting in disengagement and silent resignation (Kluger and Itzchakov, 2022). A key point to remember is that leaders can use cultural strengths to make individuals feel psychologically safe. These findings reinforce JD-R's conceptualisation of social support as a critical job resource (Van den Broeck et al., 2013) and align with Social Exchange Theory's assertion that reciprocal leader–employee interactions cultivate trust and sustained engagement (Ahmad et al., 2023). Such as Talanoa sessions, communal activities, and a

respectful tone, all help lower the intimidation barrier. This means that common ways of giving people a voice, like anonymous surveys or town hall meetings in the West, may not work as well in Fiji. They should be improved or changed by local traditions that promote communication that saves face and builds relationships.

Employees also highlighted that voice should be two-way and lead to action. They wanted not just to be heard but to receive feedback on their input and see changes. This touches on the idea of an employee feedback loop where employee input is acknowledged and acted upon (Ruck and Welch, 2012). Engaged workplaces often have mechanisms whereby employee suggestions lead to tangible improvements, reinforcing that employee voice matters (Mori et al., 2022). The findings showed that when employees said that their organisation asked for feedback, like how to celebrate multicultural events or make processes better, and then acted on some of those suggestions, it made them more engaged. This aligns with research on inclusive leadership, which finds that when leaders are open to input and act on it, employees feel more ownership and commitment (Bao et al., 2022). In Fiji's multicultural work environment, inclusive communication also means communication that is aware of other cultures. One participant said that even trivial things, like saying hello in someone's own language such as iTaukei or Hindi, made a big difference. This kind of cultural sensitivity in everyday communication signalled respect and made individuals feel seen for who they are, thereby enhancing engagement.

5.2.5 Teamwork and Collaboration

Teamwork and peer collaboration were highlighted as core elements of engagement by participants. Instead of emphasising individual accomplishments, they frequently framed positive work experiences in terms of the team or "work family." Employees reported increased motivation and a stronger sense of belonging when colleagues supported one another, such as stepping in to help when someone felt overwhelmed or checking on each other's well-being. As Loata said, “*So we built each other's probably self our team. Like what? Someone lacking or someone going through something with that team bonding, we get to know what that particular team member is facing it.”* This shows that team bonding allows everyone to know what each team member is facing, enabling empathy and mutual support, which in turn keeps people engaged and motivated (Kwon, 2024). Jone, an interviewee, noted that regular casual get-togethers, such as eating breakfast or tea together and sharing stories, were times that boosted morale and brought people closer together.

Interestingly, the multicultural composition of teams was seen as a point of pride and engagement, too. Ravi mentioned that when customers see colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds working side by side, it reflects a positive company culture and makes

employees feel proud to be part of an inclusive team. This suggests that diverse collaboration can enhance engagement by embodying the values of inclusion and unity that employees cherish (Elamin et al., 2024). Furthermore, the collaboration within the team demonstrated visible value in engagement, contributing to a reduction in stress levels among employees. Participants explained that in a collaborative environment, the pressure of tight deadlines or high workloads became more manageable because they help each other out and solve issues arising together. When there was team cohesiveness and mutual support, employees felt safe from organisational expectations and stayed engaged. When team cohesion and mutual support were present, employees felt shielded from excessive organisational expectations and remained engaged. On the contrary, when collaboration collapsed and work became compartmentalised, this relational buffer was removed, resulting in greater isolation and lower levels of commitment (Bowers et al., 2017).

These findings align closely with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. In JD-R terms, social support from colleagues is a key job resource known to enhance engagement and mitigate job demands, such as stress or workload (Jolly et al., 2021). The participants' testimonies suggest this. When one person was on leave or under pressure, others covering for them became an informal form of resource-sharing, preventing burnout and maintaining engagement. Job resources intrinsically motivate by fulfilling fundamental human needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence, hence enhancing employee engagement (Bakker et al.2023). In this study, teamwork enabled autonomy through shared problem-solving, belonging through strong group identification, and competence through trusted contribution to collective outcomes, explaining why employees found teamwork more motivating than individual incentives and remained engaged out of responsibility to the group.

The data collected confirms that employees said teamwork is more motivating than individual incentives because it makes work enjoyable and fosters a sense of not wanting to let the group down. In collectivist cultural contexts, individuals tend to define their identity in relation to the group, valuing belonging and shared purpose over individual autonomy Podsiadlowski and Fox (2011). This helps explain why, in Fijian workplace settings, group cohesion can carry strong meaning and significance for employees. The concept of *solesolevaki* in Fijian culture, which refers to cooperative communal work, reflects that working together toward a shared goal is culturally valued and personally fulfilling (Vunibola and Scheyvens,2019). This collaborative mindset was evident when participants described shared accomplishments and team celebrations. They experienced these moments as deeper and more rewarding than solitary achievements. Employees saw themselves as members of a team, and the team's accomplishments and sense of cohesion supported their engagement. The strong emphasis

on helping each other and the expectation of teamwork can be tied to Indigenous values of collective responsibility.

In Fiji, communities and individuals learn to place the welfare of the group ahead of personal interests. Indigenous Fijians come from collectivist cultures in which people are connected by birth to one or more in-groups, including extended families, clans, tribes, or community organisations. (Gibson, 2019). This norm, when translated into workplace behaviour, means helping each other is a natural expectation. Employees did not rely on formal team-building programmes. Instead, informal networks, such as the iTaukei employees' messaging group described by one interviewee, allowed anyone to ask for help and receive support. These networks ensured that no one faced a work problem or life event on their own. Such networks and norms improved engagement by increasing feelings of security and belonging. There is also a dimension of inter-ethnic collaboration that is especially meaningful in Fiji. Given the country's history of ethnic tension (Howard 2011), the workplace can be a small-scale version of reconciliation and unity. The findings suggest that organisations that encourage mixed teams and promote equality can strengthen employee engagement. One example is an organisation that introduced a first-name culture to reduce hierarchy and avoid ethnic divisions. Such practices draw on employees' pride in diversity and inclusion, creating a more cohesive and committed workforce. The focus extends beyond mere work tasks; it encompasses the significance of belonging to a harmonious work family that may transcend certain societal divisions, suggesting a broader implication. Engagement in Fiji involves a societal perspective, as employees frequently described their workplace as a model for collaborative efforts, suggesting a sense of moral satisfaction in that experience. This factor can serve as a significant, though frequently underestimated, driving force for engagement.

In summary, teamwork and collaboration stand out as foundational to engagement in Fijian ICT firms, functioning as both a motivational resource and a coping mechanism in the face of challenges. The collective orientation of Fijian culture means that any engagement strategy will be more effective if it leverages the power of the group. Employers can nurture this by facilitating team bonding activities, cross-department projects, and peer recognition programs where colleagues recognise each other's contributions. These approaches highlight the collaborative mindset of Fijian employees while sustaining their engagement, even in circumstances where compensation or workload may not be optimal. Participants observed that an integrated group sustained their motivation, even in the face of organisational challenges. Therefore, considering both cultural and practical aspects, fostering team cohesion equates to enhancing engagement.

5.3 RQ. 2 How do Fijian cultural dimensions impact the effectiveness of employee engagement strategies?

5.3.1 Indigenous Values and Communal Belonging

The values of Indigenous iTaukei Fijians are fundamentally rooted in community, tradition, and relational harmony. Practices such as communal work, kinship-based responsibilities, and collective purpose constitute the basis of their worldview (Vunibola and Scheyvens, 2019; Nainoca,2011). The findings demonstrated that these values have an influence on engagement strategies, often determining which strategies are effective and how they are implemented. One clear example is the way organisations incorporate cultural rituals and support communal obligations. Participants highly appreciated when their employers respected and actively participated in important life events and traditions. For instance, companies contributing to a *reguregu* (funeral contribution) or *sevu sevu* (traditional ceremony for events like the birth of a child) for staff members were cited as a powerful sign of respect.

Employees interpreted such gestures as the organisation living up to community (*vanua*) values. This recognises that an employee is not just a worker, but a member of a family and community that the organisation also honours. This strengthened employees' emotional engagement. This aligns with Esaki et al. (2023) findings that coworker support grounded in empathy and mutual assistance significantly predicted employee engagement and reduced burnout in human service organisations, reinforcing the importance of relational awareness and collective support as drivers of engagement. One interviewee noted that the organisation’s active participation in communal responsibilities demonstrates significant cultural respect and contributes to their sense of importance and belonging. In Western cultures, it is common for an employer to send flowers to express condolences at a funeral. However, in Fiji, there is an obligation to be involved in communal responsibilities during such times. This suggests that engagement strategies should encompass areas beyond the boundaries of the workplace. Supporting employees in their communal life through paid time off for community duties, and financial or in-kind support for ceremonies, enhances employees’ sense of belonging to the organisation.

Building on this, the same communal orientation also shaped how employees experienced recognition and success. Another indigenous value is the notion of collective achievement and shared success (Raisele, 2021). In the findings, recognition that was communal in nature, for example, team awards or group celebrations of success, was especially motivating. In iTaukei culture, individual accomplishments tend to be valued less than collective achievement (Raisele, 2021). This cultural orientation helps explain why some

employees in this study placed a high value on shared recognition, group celebrations, and team-based accomplishments. Engagement strategies that acknowledge the team or department, rather than singling out individual stars, can be more effective in the Fijian context. Kanemasu and Molnar (2013) demonstrate that collective identity and communal pride are central to Fijian social life, particularly in the context of rugby labour migration. This emphasis on group belonging and shared identity suggests that recognition practices that celebrate collective achievement may resonate more strongly than purely individualised reward systems. A participant noted that certain symbolic acts in the workplace created a collective sense of belonging. For example, all staff joining in a traditional kava ceremony to welcome a new employee or to mark the end of a project was more meaningful than a cash bonus quietly given to one person. Saxton and Barry (2026) illustrate how professional practice in Fiji is embedded within culturally grounded norms of relational obligation and social solidarity. Such alignment between institutional work structures and familiar communal values may strengthen employees' sense of belonging and commitment, suggesting an important pathway through which culturally congruent practices can enhance engagement.

Wittenberg et al. (2024) suggest that in collectivist contexts, engagement may be closely tied to shared identity and relational belonging, raising questions about the universal applicability of individualised engagement models. Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory, for example, conceptualises meaningfulness, safety, and availability primarily at the individual level. However, the findings indicate that within the Fijian context, meaningfulness is not solely an internal psychological assessment but is co-constructed through community contribution and shared responsibility. Engagement is therefore shaped by relational and cultural dynamics rather than purely personal evaluations. Employees described deriving motivation not only from personal achievement, but from knowing that their work supported the well-being of their family, team, or wider community, underscoring the centrality of relational purpose.

This orientation aligns with Indigenous knowledge systems in which meaning emerges through reciprocity and interdependence rather than individual accomplishment Veukiso-Ulugia et al. (2025). In this view, engagement is a relational condition sustained through shared obligation to family, team, and community, rather than a purely individual psychological state. Romm (2024) conceptualises this as a collective form of exchange, where commitment is maintained through moral obligation and mutual care. Consistent with this, the findings show that employees were most engaged when they experienced reciprocal care from the organisation, particularly through recognition of family and community obligations. While this aligns with Social Exchange Theory, it reflects an expanded form of

exchange in which reciprocity is embedded within a wider communal context rather than confined to a dyadic employee–organisation relationship (Ahmad et al., 2023).

In practice, this means some Western engagement interventions may require recalibration. For example, an engagement programme centred on competitive, individual rewards such as “Employee of the Year” may be less effective, or even counterproductive, as it risks undermining a supportive, equal team culture, as evidenced by the data collected in this study. By contrast, strategies that foster a family-like atmosphere, such as communal meals, collective celebrations, shared recognition rituals, or team-based bonuses, were described by participants as more meaningful and motivating, aligning with Indigenous relational values and generating stronger emotional engagement.

These points were reflected in my participants’ accounts. Employees in workplaces that supported work–family balance reported stronger engagement and affective commitment, indicating that when organisations acknowledge employees’ family roles and responsibilities, employees respond with greater pride and loyalty (Žnidaršič and Bernik, 2021). Participants such as Bruce, Loata, Jone, and Ravi expressed that success within their organisation is a shared achievement rather than an individual one, reflecting cultural norms where a harvest is celebrated by the entire community instead of solely by the individual farmer. This helps explain why practices such as inclusive festivals, kava sessions, and group outings had particularly positive effects. These were not perceived as optional social activities, but as affirmations of cultural identity and belonging. Participants emphasised that belonging meant being respected for who they are and seeing their cultural practices acknowledged in everyday organisational life. This demonstrates that engagement strategies are most effective when they are culturally congruent. The findings indicate that recognising employees’ cultural identities in workplace practices fosters a sense of belonging, which in turn encourages loyalty, commitment, and discretionary effort.

5.3.2 Hierarchy and Leadership Expectations

Fiji’s culture, particularly among the iTaukei majority, is traditionally hierarchical, where respect for elders, chiefs, and those in positions of authority (vakaturaga) is learned from an early age and guides social conduct (Orcherton et al.2021). In the workplace, this translates to employees often deferring to managers and expecting clear direction. Global cultural frameworks, like Hofstede’s (2011), indicate that collectivist societies typically display higher power distance. However, in Fiji, this orientation is more accurately interpreted through Indigenous cultural norms such as *vakaturaga*, which emphasises leadership as a role of social responsibility and service rather than simply authority (Meo-Sewabu, 2014). On the one hand, this hierarchy can improve the efficacy of specific leadership styles. As previously

noted, paternalistic leadership is consistent with employees' cultural expectations of what a leader should be. When leaders fulfil their expected role of leading, protecting, and mentoring, employees frequently respond with high loyalty and commitment (Zhou et al., 2024). On the other side, a purely hierarchical culture could hinder engagement initiatives that rely on empowerment and voice (Dai et al., 2022). If employees are accustomed to not questioning authority, they may underutilise feedback channels or hesitate to take initiative, which can constrain creativity and the sense of ownership that contribute to deeper engagement (Kim et al., 2019).

A considerable number of participants expressed their appreciation for managers who fostered a more informal atmosphere by dismantling traditional hierarchies. Examples included CEOs who encouraged the use of first names and managers who engaged with staff in casual settings, such as sharing drinks. These initiatives focused on reducing hierarchy by challenging the conventional social distance, which contributed to employees feeling more at ease and appreciated as equals during those instances. This suggests that while hierarchy functions as an accepted baseline cultural norm, it does not in itself generate engagement. Employees may anticipate and comply with hierarchical structures, but engagement is strengthened when leaders reduce power distance in day-to-day interactions through empowering and relational practices, thereby enhancing work meaningfulness (Lee et al., 2017). Their engagement increases when leaders balance this structure with approachability. Maintaining a respectful hierarchy, such as refraining from publicly undermining a manager’s authority, is essential to prevent discomfort. However, within that framework, fostering informal relationships and implementing an open-door policy can significantly enhance engagement.

However, the data also revealed that some degree of hierarchy is still accepted and even desired in certain contexts. In hierarchical and relational cultures, feedback processes are shaped by norms of respect, face-saving, and authority, such that feedback delivered through senior figures is perceived as more legitimate and less socially disruptive than peer-to-peer confrontation (Lee and Ding, 2023). It was observed in the findings that team members preferred to speak to management through a team leader rather than directly. This means engagement strategies that incorporate feedback or grievance mechanisms must consider the subtleties of hierarchical sensitivities. A solution might involve appointing a respected senior employee, who may not hold a managerial position but could serve as a team elder, to function as an advocate for employee concerns. This role would resemble that of a mediator, aligning with evidence that mediated voice enhances legitimacy and relational safety (Saundry et al., 2018; Kalter et al., 2018), while also reflecting the cultural norm of utilising chiefs or elders to represent collective concerns.

If not properly managed, hierarchy has the potential to limit engagement (Lee and Ding, 2023). Participants who encountered highly authoritarian managers, employing a command-and-control strategy without any compassion, indicated feelings of being undervalued and disengaged. There were mentions in the findings of managers shouting at people or enforcing rigid 8-to-5 rules with no flexibility. In a high-power distance setting, employees might not openly protest such behaviour (Morrison and Milliken, 2000), but disengagement can manifest in turnover or doing the bare minimum (Rusbult et al., 1988, Corbin and Flenady, 2024, Sinisterra et al., 2024). This helps explain patterns of skilled migration noted in my findings. Participants associated their decisions to leave with not just the prospect of higher pay abroad, but also with dissatisfaction stemming from inflexible leadership and restricted opportunities for advancement. My findings indicate that younger ICT workers, exposed to global work cultures, expect more collaborative and developmental environments. Thus, engagement strategies grounded in relational trust and professional development are consistently shown to be critical for employee retention, as trust mediates the relationship between organisational culture, leadership practices, and employees' intentions to stay (Osman et al., 2024; Xuecheng et al., 2022). In contrast, rigid and hierarchical organisational structures tend to erode trust and reciprocity, increasing the likelihood that employees will exit in favour of more supportive and developmental workplaces.

In summary, hierarchy in Fiji creates a unique set of expectations. Employees will not treat managers as peers, and they expect leaders to lead decisively, but they also expect those leaders to demonstrate humility and kinship. Respecting the cultural role of leadership means recognising that in Fijian workplaces, leadership is not understood merely as a formal position or managerial function, but as a relational and moral role grounded in responsibility, care, and collective stewardship. In collectivist and high power-distance contexts such as Fiji, leaders are expected to function as custodians of group harmony and legitimacy, exercising authority in ways that demonstrate fairness, empathy, and relational accountability rather than control or distance (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Meo-Sewabu, 2014). Engagement strategies are therefore most effective when they align with these expectations, supporting leadership practices that maintain hierarchical respect while fostering approachability and trust (Campos-Moreira et al., 2020).

The findings indicated that significant changes or initiatives were more successful when conveyed by a credible leader, which facilitated the establishment of trust and engagement. Simultaneously, the importance of relational closeness was highlighted, with leaders demonstrating personal interest, regularly checking in on staff, and engaging in grassroots activities recognised as crucial for maintaining engagement. This approach reflects a form of

relational leadership, where empowerment is enacted in culturally sensitive ways that do not dismantle hierarchy but moderate it through trust, care, and relational accountability. Drawing on Indigenous Māori leadership theory, Henry and Wolfgramm (2018) describe relational leadership as grounded in collective responsibility, moral legitimacy, and reciprocal care, rather than positional authority or individual control. In this model, leadership is sustained through relationships and service to the collective, with authority emerging from trust and social connection rather than formal power alone.

This framework provides a useful analytical lens for interpreting the tension identified in the findings between hierarchical expectation and relational engagement. Participants did not reject hierarchy, but they distinguished between authority that is merely positional and authority that is relationally legitimised. Leaders who relied solely on structural or despotic power were associated with disengagement, as such approaches erode psychological safety (Mehmood et al., 2024), whereas leaders who combined authority with humility and relational care were described as highly engaging, aligning with evidence that leader humility strengthens team effectiveness and relational trust (Rego et al., 2018). In this sense, relational leadership does not dismantle hierarchy but culturally redefines how it is enacted. It explains why hierarchy in Fiji does not automatically suppress engagement, nor does empowerment require flattening structures. Instead, engagement emerges when authority is humanised through relational legitimacy. This interpretation aligns closely with vakaturaga principles, in which leadership is understood as the stewardship and custodianship of collective well-being rather than managerial control (Meo-Sewabu, 2014).

Therefore, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of engagement strategies in Fijian ICT organisations depends not on reducing power distance per se, but on embedding hierarchical authority within culturally resonant practices of reciprocity, trust, and collective responsibility. Relational leadership, in this context, functions as the mechanism through which hierarchy becomes compatible with empowerment.

5.3.3 Talanoa and Informal Communication Practices

Talanoa is a Fijian and Pacific-wide term for an open, casual, and relational style of discussion in which stories, experiences, and ideas are shared to foster mutual understanding and connection (Hautzinger, 2024). It is typically practised face-to-face, and in a spirit of respect and trust, and in Fiji, it is often integrated into traditional ceremonies such as kava ceremonies (Vaioleti, 2006). In this study, Talanoa functioned in two analytically distinct ways. First, it was employed as a methodological framework to guide the interview process, enabling participants to share experiences in a culturally familiar and relational manner. Second, *Talanoa also* emerged from the findings as an informal workplace practice

that some participants described experiencing, while others proposed it as a culturally appropriate strategy to enhance engagement.

Findings show that incorporating Talanoa style practices in the workplace may enhance engagement by fostering inclusive and culturally familiar communicative spaces grounded in relationality and reciprocity (Veukiso-Ulugia et al., 2025). Participants who mentioned *Talanoa sessions* or similar informal team discussions indicated that these settings enabled employees to express concerns, frustrations, and individual experiences that they felt unable to raise in formal meetings. For example, several participants described reluctance to use formal feedback mechanisms due to fear of scrutiny or reprisal, with one noting that even anonymous feedback was perceived as traceable and therefore unsafe. In contrast, Talanoa spaces allowed employees to "spill" issues during informal *yaqona* sessions or relaxed group discussions, where challenges could be voiced indirectly through storytelling rather than direct criticism. These settings enabled participants to raise interpersonal tensions, workload pressures, or dissatisfaction in ways that preserved relational harmony and avoided public confrontation. Such narrative-based dialogue created a sense of psychological safety, allowing employees to speak openly as individuals rather than as subordinates being evaluated (Cammock et al., 2021).

The data collected shows that *Talanoa's power* lies in its emphasis on storytelling and empathy rather than direct debate or confrontation. In contrast to a conventional meeting where a manager seeks suggestions and gets little to no feedback, a Talanoa session could be structured to encourage participation by having all attendees sit in a circle, potentially outside the standard office space, and openly share their experiences or the challenges they encounter. This narrative, round-table style dialogue can surface insights that hierarchical meetings may suppress, particularly in high power-distance contexts where formal authority structures discourage open voice. Research on psychological safety suggests that employees are more willing to speak up in relational, non-evaluative settings that minimise status differentials and fear of negative consequences (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006). One participant's idea to have each department hold a *Talanoa about* non-work topics reflects the understanding that when people connect as humans, their engagement with work and with each other deepens.

In collectivist cultures, such as Fiji, indirect and story-based forms of dialogue are especially effective, as they allow concerns to be expressed without violating norms of respect or relational harmony, unlike formal meetings that often reinforce silence and deference (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa is also consistent with Fijian traditions of dispute resolution and consensus building. As shown from the data, employees engaged

in Talanoa and kava sessions to voice issues and settle conflicts informally, frequently more effectively than traditional HR channels. Implementing this approach in workplaces may encourage honest feedback and sharing of knowledge, thereby minimising silence driven by fear. A simple example from the findings involved utilising grog sessions at the end of the week to “spill” any issues, an informal debrief where problems were voiced and addressed in a friendly atmosphere. Employees appreciated these gatherings as they effectively mitigated the risk of disputes and contributed to the preservation of team harmony; however, reliance on Talanoa and other informal practices also presents limitations. While such forums enhance relational safety, research on employee voice cautions that informal and non-institutionalised channels can inadvertently reproduce silence by lacking accountability, documentation, and protection, particularly in high power-distance contexts where employees may continue to self-censor to preserve harmony (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Without complementary formal mechanisms to translate informal dialogue into action, Talanoa risks becoming symbolic voice rather than a sustained governance tool, suggesting that its effectiveness for engagement lies in how it is integrated alongside, rather than substituted for, structured organisational processes.

Alongside Talanoa, other informal practices such as shared meals, after-work sports, and prayer meetings also played a significant role in fostering engagement. In Fiji, many workplaces allow or organise morning or afternoon tea breaks where employees gather informally to chat, reinforcing a sense of community at work. According to the findings, these gatherings enabled employees to feel more connected and supported by replicating familiar patterns of family and community life. Participants described shared meals, cultural celebrations, and informal end-of-week gatherings as moments where employees related to one another beyond formal roles, exchanged personal stories, and offered mutual support. For example, inclusive practices such as providing vegetarian meals during Diwali or accommodating fasting and prayer during Ramadan signalled care and respect for employees’ cultural and religious identities, fostering feelings of belonging and pride in the organisation. One participant explicitly noted that acknowledging practices such as lotu (prayer) demonstrated respect and made employees feel valued. Such everyday acknowledgements contributed to stronger affective commitment by affirming employees as whole persons rather than solely as workers (Dik et al., 2024). Through these practices, the workplace was experienced not merely as an employment setting but as a socially embedded and emotionally supportive environment, which participants directly associated with higher levels of engagement and commitment.

The findings indicate that participants frequently refrained from utilising formal feedback channels due to concerns about judgment, while they expressed a sense of safety in sharing

during informal *Talanoa* sessions. Fiji's cultural context suggests that informal, relationship-based channels can be equally effective. Formal mechanisms such as feedback systems and reporting channels provide necessary structure and accountability; however, their effectiveness depends on the presence of relational trust established through informal, everyday interactions (Reynolds and Lander, 2024). Where trust has not been cultivated, employees may perceive formal systems as unsafe or symbolic, leading to disengagement or silence rather than genuine participation. Therefore, if a company wants to implement a new formal feedback system, it might first hold a few *Talanoa* circles about the idea of giving feedback, letting employees voice concerns or past bad experiences. This can surface and address cultural barriers like reluctance to criticise openly in a supportive way. Without this step, a formal system might be launched but then underutilised because the cultural inhibition was not dealt with.

The implementation of Talanoa in workplace settings serves as a method for decolonising organisational practices. The implementation of Talanoa in workplace settings can be understood as a decolonising organisational practice. Rather than relying solely on imported, Western communication models, Talanoa centres an indigenous Pacific mode of dialogue grounded in relationality, respect, and reciprocity (Vaioleti, 2006; Veukiso-Ulugia et al., 2025). This has important symbolic and practical value, as it signals that local ways of interacting and knowing are recognised and legitimised within the organisation. Such recognition strengthens employees' sense of cultural identity and belonging at work, which, as demonstrated in the findings, contributes to deeper engagement. An organisational Talanoa approach to employee engagement could be conceptualised, wherein regular storytelling sessions become a norm to convey staff feedback to management.

In summary, my findings suggest that Talanoa and other informal practices in Fijian ICT workplaces demonstrate that engagement is most effective when it is culturally congruent, relational, and emotionally resonant. These practices do more than facilitate communication, and they foster trust, inclusion, and a sense of shared identity. By humanising the workplace and aligning it with Fijian social norms, organisations create environments where employees feel seen, heard, and valued. The findings suggest that leaders who engage in informal, culturally appropriate interactions establish more profound connections that cannot be attained through formal mechanisms alone. Therefore, the integration of Talanoa and equivalent practices transcends mere cultural preference. Enhancing engagement in collectivist contexts is a strategic imperative.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Research

This study investigated employee engagement strategies within Fijian ICT organisations, guided by two research questions: first, what current employee engagement strategies are employed in Fijian ICT workplaces, and second, how do Fijian cultural dimensions impact the effectiveness of these strategies in the ICT industry. Using a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in Talanoa, twelve ICT professionals shared their lived experiences of engagement within their organisations. The findings demonstrate that engagement in Fiji is not a universal construct driven primarily by individual motivation or performance systems, but a culturally embedded and relational phenomenon shaped by communal values, hierarchical norms, and perceptions of fairness.

Five interconnected themes emerged throughout the data. Initially, recognition and growth played a crucial role in engagement, as employees placed importance on both financial rewards and symbolic acknowledgement. Nonetheless, the fairness, transparency, and accessibility of development opportunities were crucial for maintaining long-term engagement. Second, motivation and organisational commitment were driven less by transactional rewards and more by trust, relational respect, and pride in contributing to team and community outcomes. Third, leadership and collaboration were essential, with trust-based leadership, approachability, and team cohesiveness highlighted as significant engagement drivers. Fourth, cultural belonging and inclusiveness were extremely important, since inclusive celebrations, respect for traditions, and informal activities such as Talanoa promoted a sense of belonging, connection, and psychological safety. Ultimately, retention and resource constraints highlighted broader structural challenges. Consequently, low remuneration, migration problems, and restrictive administrative processes can undermine engagement, even when robust relational and cultural foundations are in place. These global themes demonstrate that the effectiveness of engagement strategies in Fiji depends less on formal design and more on cultural alignment and equity of experience.

6.2 Theoretical contribution

Although the study's findings can be explained by alignment with established engagement theories, no single explanation offers a comprehensive understanding. SET suggests that employees are more engaged when they believe the organisation and its leaders invest in them through genuine support, recognition, and fair treatment (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This demonstrates the key idea of SET, which is a mutually beneficial relationship based on loyalty and effort exchanged for resources and care (Cropanzano and Mitchell,

2005). Many participants in this study described a sense of reciprocity, which meant staying with a company because the company treated them well, or conversely, leaving when that psychological contract was breached by unfair treatment. This is consistent with Saks' (2006) argument that engagement is an outcome of social exchange. My study extends SET by showing that in a collectivist context, the exchange may involve group and cultural considerations. The employees weren't just responding to personal incentives, but to how the company respected their group identity. In a collectivist context such as Fiji, group identity is not peripheral but central to how employees interpret organisational care. As Alam (2025) demonstrates, wellbeing, recognition, and empowerment in Fiji are culturally embedded within collective identity and communal belonging.

This cultural orientation shapes how employees interpret organisational care, positioning engagement as a relational and group-based experience rather than an individualised response. In practice, respecting group identity involved acknowledging cultural obligations, valuing communal achievements, and creating organisational spaces where employees felt their traditions, relationships, and social responsibilities were genuinely honoured. For example, participants described how inclusive celebrations of cultural festivals, contributions to communal events like *reguregu* (funeral support), and team-based recognition signalled that the organisation understood and respected their collective values. These practices reinforced a sense of belonging and reciprocity, motivating employees to remain loyal and engaged. This suggests that engagement strategies in Fiji operate not only at the individual level but also through affirming cultural and relational identities, extending SET beyond dyadic exchange to encompass communal and cultural dimensions.

The JDR model also provides a useful lens. From the findings, several engagement-promoting factors were identified, including peer support, learning opportunities, autonomy, and supportive leadership. These are resources that fuel motivation and engagement, while certain constraints, such as high workload or lack of staff, act as job demands that drain engagement if not managed (Lesener et al.2019). For example, in the findings, heavy workload and covering for absent colleagues (a demand) was mitigated by dedicated team support (a resource), a dynamic JD-R explicit model. JD-R's premise that balancing demands with sufficient resources yields optimal engagement was corroborated (Jiang et al. 2023). Thus, companies that provided ample social and personal resources engaged staff even under high pressure, whereas a lack of resources contributes to strain and reduced engagement (Lesener, Gusy, and Wolter, 2019).

However, neither SET nor JD-R, as traditionally formulated, fully captures the cultural depth observed in this study. Western-origin engagement frameworks have largely emerged from

individualistic psychological traditions that prioritise autonomy and self-expression (Vaughn, 2019) and therefore may insufficiently account for communal forms of meaningfulness or culturally mediated expressions of psychological safety in collectivist contexts, such as Talanoa practices that foster relational trust and culturally grounded voice. My findings, therefore, challenge these frameworks by demonstrating that culture operates not as a background variable, but as a key mediator of engagement. For instance, SET explains the logic of reciprocation but does not specify the content of exchanges beyond generic perceptions of support or benefit (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In the Fijian context, however, the exchange clearly includes cultural respect and communal care, elements that do not typically appear in Western checklists of engagement drivers. Similarly, while the JD-R model is deliberately neutral about what constitutes a "resource," this study suggests that in Fiji, cultural acknowledgement itself functions as a critical job resource, comparable to autonomy or feedback in Western settings. Engaging employees, therefore, involves the provision of socio-cultural resources, such as time for communal obligations, an inclusive family-like workplace culture, and alignment with values of respect, rather than reliance solely on material or generic psychosocial resources.

It becomes apparent that no single existing theory fully accounts for the interplay of culture and engagement observed here. SET explains the presence of reciprocal commitment yet does not identify which culturally derived inputs carry the greatest motivational weight. Likewise, although the JD-R model captures the interaction between job demands and resources, it requires adaptation to operate within a hierarchical and communal context (Jiang et al., 2023). For example, the JD-R assumption that increasing job autonomy enhances engagement may not work where employees are not culturally adapted to autonomy. In such contexts, autonomy may require training and leader validation to be experienced as supportive, and in some cases may instead generate uncertainty or anxiety. Consistent with this, the study's findings revealed initial hesitation around empowerment, echoing Saffu's (2003) observation that the desire for empowerment is typically lower in high power-distance settings. Accordingly, while JD-R remains a useful framework, its application in Fiji must account for cultural moderators. High power distance may dampen the motivational effect of resources such as decision-making latitude, whereas collectivism may increase the impact of social support on engagement beyond what JD-R would normally predict. JD-R can therefore explain the demand–resource pattern in Fiji, but only if adjusted to recognise that culture shapes which resources carry motivational meaning, and which may be underutilised or experienced as stressful.

All of this evidence suggests the need for a more culturally grounded or hybrid engagement model. Elements of Social Exchange, Organisational Justice, communalism, and

paternalistic leadership, all interwoven in the Fijian context, were observed in this study. A theoretical discovery derived from this investigation may be summarised as relational engagement. A model whereby engagement is driven not just by job design criteria, but also by relationship quality and cultural value alignment (Panneerselvam and Balaraman, 2025). In this view, engagement emerges from multiple exchanges not only between employee and employer as in SET but also between the employee and their team (peer exchange), and between the organisational culture and the employee's cultural identity (Sfeir, 2022).

This study strengthens discussions about decolonising engagement theory. The necessity for cultural alignment is highlighted by Hofstede (2011), who points out that several popular organisational theories evolved from Western, individualistic contexts. Therefore, there is a risk of these theories being implemented in culturally unsuitable, context-removed manners when adapted to collectivist societies. This research's findings provide evidence that factors like communal belonging, respect for tradition, and paternalistic care are not peripheral but central to engagement in Fiji. This suggests that traditional organisational theories might not account for or anticipate engagement in collectivist or high-power context cultures. A standard engagement survey may overlook the question of whether employees perceive their culture as respected in the workplace. In Fiji, this aspect could be as significant as having a close friend at work.

Another theoretical contribution involves identifying the drivers of cultural engagement that have the potential to enhance current models. The elements encompass cultural respect or inclusion, communal support, and the concept of leadership-as-family. The presence of these drivers indicates that models like JD-R or SET, while necessary, are not sufficient. They should be expanded to include variables like cultural congruence, communal support, and power distance dynamics. The resulting hybrid theory would likely be better suited not only for Fiji but for any collectivist or high-context context where relationships and cultural fit are central to work life.

In sum, this discussion leads towards an integrative engagement framework that bridges the individual organisation duo with the communal cultural dimension. The study shows that applying a culturally grounded lens involves valuing local knowledge and practices. These yield a richer insight than force-fitting data into a standard Western model. We don't discard existing theories, but instead, we adapt and extend them. For practitioners and researchers, the implication is that mainstream models should be recalibrated to include cultural and communal factors as core components. Ultimately, engagement in Fiji's ICT sector appears as a culturally embedded construct which validates some mainstream ideas, such as the

importance of support, resources, and meaningful work. It also highlights the unique facets of cultural respect and collective pride that must be acknowledged in both theory and practice.

6.3 Implications for Practice

The following implications for practice are drawn primarily from participant accounts and interpreted alongside the literature reviewed in this thesis. Therefore, when this section refers to practices used by Fijian ICT organisations, these should be understood as practices reported by participants in this study, rather than as claims based on a full industry audit, organisational records, or independent verification of all Fijian ICT companies.

Firstly, engagement strategies must be adapted to Fiji's cultural context rather than treated as generic imports. For example, organisations should formally celebrate all major cultural and religious festivals, which are Diwali, Eid, Christmas, etc., as part of the annual engagement calendar. This goes beyond a token "Happy Diwali" email. It means organising workplace events, decorations, communal meals, and flexible scheduling around these occasions. Some leading ICT companies in Fiji already do this, sending a message of inclusion and making employees of each culture feel visible and valued. The result is often a boost in morale and a reinforced emotional commitment to the company. Another practical strategy is institutionalising communal support mechanisms (Okojie et al., 2023). Considering the importance of contributions to weddings, funerals, and other life events in Fiji, organisations might benefit from creating a specific fund or policy for communal contributions. Many organisations in Fiji currently participate in informal collections to support colleagues in need. Formalising or aligning these initiatives would reflect a strong organisational commitment to cultural values. Similarly, allowing employees to take bereavement leave for extended family or a day off for vital social obligations honours the communal element of Fijian life and is likely to increase loyalty to the organisation. Such flexibility is frequently met with gratitude and increased devotion.

The findings highlight that leadership style significantly influences engagement, indicating that prioritising leadership development through a cultural perspective is essential. It is crucial for leaders, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds or expatriates, to receive training in comprehending Fijian values and communication norms, such as the importance of mutual respect and the preference for informal methods of communication. Training might involve role-playing scenarios for conducting feedback sessions in ways that encourage reluctant individuals to open up, as well as strategies for managing Indo-Fijian and iTaukei team dynamics by taking advantage of each group's strengths. Coaching leaders to practice inclusive, fair, and compassionate leadership is paramount (Ramachandran et al., 2024). Simple habits hold significant value, such as warmly greeting staff each morning,

which serves as a meaningful gesture within Fiji's friendly culture. Engaging in conversations with employees during communal tea breaks and recognising everyone's contributions in meetings ensures that no one feels overlooked, ultimately fostering engagement. Managers must understand that promoting relatives or friends without merit will severely damage trust and engagement among other staff (Vveinhardt and Bendaravičienė, 2022), hence, there shouldn't be any favouritism. Organisations can enhance trust and collaboration by developing leaders who embrace a supportive, mentor-oriented approach, which in turn can lead to increased employee engagement and improved organisational performance (Susanto and Sawitri, 2022; Mazzetti and Schaufeli, 2022).

Findings indicate that communication strategies should integrate *Talanoa principles* to enhance engagement. HR could implement quarterly sessions in a casual but culturally relevant environment, such as community gatherings with refreshments, to facilitate open dialogue. These sessions can take place within teams or span across different organisational levels, where leaders engage in active listening without bias. Ensuring psychological safety is critical. Ground rules such as confidentiality, respectful listening, and a clearly stated purpose focused on learning and improvement rather than fault-finding will foster trust and participation. Anonymous channels should also be available for individuals who are still reluctant to speak up directly. The most important follow-up is that management addresses concerns voiced or at least provides an explanation (Liu et al., 2022). If employees see outcomes, even minor changes or an honest rationale for why something can't change, they will build trust in the process (Hubbart, 2022).

Given that some employees may still hesitate to voice concerns upward, organisations could also establish a mediated voice pathway. This involves choosing a well-respected, approachable figure, such as a senior staff member or an HR representative, to whom employees may securely direct their concerns. This individual may then gather information and convey issues to management while maintaining anonymity as appropriate. According to Abdulgalimov et al. (2020), mediated or anonymous voice channels can provide culturally acceptable, low-risk ways to raise issues, allowing employee voices to be heard while respecting hierarchical preferences.

Another implication is the need to integrate work-life balance in a culturally responsive manner (Chauhan and Rai, 2024). Flexible arrangements such as remote work or adjusted hours for village ceremonies or school events serve as important resources within the Job Demands–Resources model, reducing strain and improving engagement. This aligns with Social Exchange Theory, where perceived organisational care fosters reciprocal commitment (Saks, 2006). Findings revealed that employees interpreted occasional work-from-home

arrangements as a trust signal, reinforcing relational norms central to Fijian collectivist culture. Normalising flexible work arrangements within reasonable limits can reduce resentment, strengthen psychological safety, and improve retention by accommodating cultural and familial responsibilities. This is consistent with global evidence that such work enhances productivity and employee well-being when supported by organisational trust and clear norms (Criscuolo et al., 2023).

It is also evident that no engagement strategy can fully succeed if basic structural issues are ignored (Knox and Marin-Cadavid, 2023). This study's findings highlight the importance of competitive salaries and structured career development pathways in the Fijian ICT sector. While a single firm may not be able to match overseas salaries, companies can mitigate this by ensuring internal equity and compensation clarity, avoiding unnecessary disparities, providing regular modest increments that at least keep up with inflation, and maintaining transparent salary bands, as one participant suggested. One interviewee contrasted their firm's practice of giving annual raises with other firms that gave none. Even a small or consistent raise greatly improved morale. Thus, organisations should integrate financial well-being into engagement. Timely pay, fair wages, and small bonuses or profit-sharing can anchor employees' commitment, especially when combined with the richer relational strategies discussed.

Professional development is also vital (Miller, 2017). According to the findings, when employees perceive an absence of prospects for promotion, engagement decreases. Several interviewees mentioned that career limitations had motivated them to consider leaving, with younger Indo-Fijian professionals expressing a desire for swift advancement. HR should create visible career pathways through succession planning, talent development programs, secondments abroad with a return guarantee to discourage permanent migration, or at least open conversations about career aspirations (Rothwell, 2015). When employees feel their growth is being planned for, their organisational commitment rises (Al Balushi et al., 2022). While implementing these culturally grounded strategies, organisations must ensure they do not inadvertently reinforce negative aspects of culture. For instance, collectivism should never become an excuse for nepotism. Fairness and meritocracy must remain paramount, even within a family-like workplace culture (Wated and Sanchez, 2013).

There is also a balance to strike between respecting hierarchy and enabling voice. Companies may need to coach employees to gradually utilise voice mechanisms (Prouska et al., 2025). Combining anonymous feedback mechanisms with culturally familiar Talanoa style discussions can gradually build psychological safety and help employees transition into a comfort zone of openness. Employees who feel valued in all facets, professionally,

personally, and culturally, tend to have a higher commitment to their organisation. This directly benefits performance and retention (Jo and Shin, 2025). Engaged employees are more likely to go the extra mile and less likely to seek jobs elsewhere (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Some participants chose to remain, influenced by a sense of fairness and belonging, rather than opting for migration despite more appealing offers. Moreover, advocating for these practices strengthens the employer brand. Within Fiji's small ICT community, information circulates rapidly regarding the companies that foster a familial atmosphere for their employees. Those known for cultural respect and genuine care will attract talent, possibly even enticing back Fijians from overseas who miss a community-oriented workplace. It's diversity and inclusion with a local flavour, not just metrics, but a true embrace of employees' identities.

In conclusion, the practical message for organisations is that engagement is an ongoing relationship, not a checklist of activities. Moreover, in Fiji, fostering that relationship requires an in-depth understanding of the cultural dynamics within the organisation. It is essential that every engagement initiative, including rewards, communication, and leadership style, aligns with the core values of respect, community, and reciprocity. By doing so, organisations not only improve performance and retention but also contribute positively to the well-being of their employees and communities. This eventually leads back to the idea of enhancing engagement, as employees perceive their work and workplace as a positive influence in society. Fiji's approach to engagement can be characterised by a focus on mutual care. The organisation cares for employees like family, and employees in turn care deeply about their work and the company. This symbiotic model could serve as an inspiring template for other collectivist societies aiming to boost engagement in a way that stays true to their cultural soul.

6.4 Limitations

While carefully designed and ethically conducted, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged. Purposive sampling within ICT organisations provided a small but in-depth sample, which restricts representativeness across sectors and regions. Consequently, findings should not be generalised to the broader Fijian workforce without caution. Recruitment depended on trust and cultural appropriateness, introducing potential selection bias. Data collection was briefly delayed due to illness, underscoring small-sample vulnerability to interruptions.

As with reflexive thematic analysis, researcher positionality influenced interpretation despite ongoing reflexivity; insider–outsider positionality influenced both participant interaction and interpretation. Cultural familiarity with Fiji likely facilitated rapport, as participants may have

felt more comfortable discussing culturally grounded practices such as relational leadership, hierarchy, and Talanoa style communication with someone perceived as culturally familiar. However, this positionality may also have shaped interpretive emphasis, as certain relational and cultural nuances may have been more readily recognised and prioritised during analysis. At the same time, other perspectives may have been less visible. As with all interpretive qualitative research, findings reflect both participant accounts and the researcher's interpretive lens. Fiji's cultural diversity implies that engagement may be experienced differently across ethnicities and genders. Some subtleties may remain under-captured due to the small, purposive sample and Fiji's cultural diversity. Experiences of engagement may differ across ethnic groups, genders, and organisational roles, and certain perspectives may be underrepresented. Additionally, cultural norms of hierarchy and respect may influence how openly employee's express dissatisfaction or critique leadership, meaning some experiences may have remained implicit or less fully articulated during the interview. Finally, this study prioritised cultural and relational dimensions and did not quantify performance outcomes. The study's strongest contribution lies in how employees experience engagement rather than in measuring direct productivity effects.

A further limitation relates to the composition of the participant group. Although the study generated rich qualitative insights, all twelve participants were mid-level managers. This was valuable because middle managers occupy an important position between senior leadership and operational employees. They are often both recipients and implementers of engagement strategies and therefore provided useful insight into how engagement is experienced and translated within organisations. However, this also narrows the perspective of the study. Frontline employees, junior staff, senior executives, HR practitioners, and business owners may understand engagement differently. For example, frontline employees may experience engagement strategies more directly in relation to workload, supervision, voice, and recognition, while senior leaders may view engagement more strategically in terms of policy, retention, and organisational performance. Therefore, the findings should be read as reflecting the perspectives of mid-level managers rather than the full range of employee experiences in the Fijian ICT sector.

The gender composition of the sample is also a limitation. The participant group included nine male participants and three female participants. Although the study included women's perspectives, the imbalance means that gendered experiences of engagement could not be examined in sufficient depth. This is important because gender may shape access to recognition, leadership opportunities, career development, flexibility, psychological safety, and workplace voice. In the Fijian ICT sector, where women may already face cultural and structural barriers to progression, a more gender-balanced sample may have produced

further insights into how engagement is experienced differently by women and men. As a result, the findings should be interpreted cautiously in relation to gender, and future research should more deliberately examine women's engagement experiences in Fijian ICT organisations.

The transferability of the findings also requires careful consideration. This study is strongly grounded in the Fijian context, which is shaped by its own combination of Indigenous iTaukei values, Indo-Fijian histories, colonial legacies, ethnic diversity, respect for hierarchy, communal obligations, and relational communication practices. Some findings, such as the importance of relational leadership, cultural belonging, communal recognition, and talanoa-style communication, may resonate with other Pacific Island or collectivist societies. However, Fiji should not be treated as a direct proxy for all Pacific, Indigenous, or collectivist cultures. Other Pacific Island contexts, such as Samoa, Tonga, or Vanuatu, have their own cultural systems, histories, labour markets, and organisational structures. Therefore, the findings may be transferable where similar relational, hierarchical, and communal conditions exist, but they should not be generalised without attention to local context.

The study's sectoral focus also limits the direct application of the findings. The ICT sector was appropriate for this research because it is shaped by technological change, professional skill demands, global business practices, and workforce retention pressures. However, engagement may operate differently in other Fijian industries such as tourism, healthcare, education, banking, agriculture, manufacturing, and the public sector. For example, tourism may be more strongly influenced by customer-facing emotional labour and seasonal employment, while the public sector may be more shaped by bureaucracy, formal hierarchy, and policy constraints. Therefore, while the findings offer useful insights for understanding culturally grounded engagement in Fiji, their relevance to other industries should be treated as suggestive rather than conclusive.

Another limitation relates to the source of practice-based observations. In the implications for practice section, some discussion refers to what Fijian ICT organisations are doing or could do to strengthen engagement. These claims are primarily based on participant accounts and the interpretation of interview data, supported by the literature where relevant. The study did not independently verify organisational practices through HR documents, company policies, management interviews, or industry-wide surveys. Therefore, these practice implications should be understood as recommendations developed from participant experiences and scholarly interpretation, rather than as a comprehensive assessment of all Fijian ICT companies.

Taken together, these limitations do not weaken the contribution of the study, but they clarify its boundaries. The study's strength lies in its culturally grounded, qualitative insight into how mid-level ICT employees in Fiji understand and experience engagement. Its contribution is therefore analytical rather than statistically generalisable. It shows that engagement in Fiji cannot be fully explained through Western-centric models alone, and that culture, relationships, fairness, hierarchy, and belonging are central to how engagement is experienced. At the same time, further research is needed to test, extend, and compare these findings across different employee levels, genders, industries, and Pacific contexts.

6.5 Future Research Directions

Future research should examine the distinction between equality-based and equity-based engagement interventions, particularly in collectivist and relational contexts such as Fiji. Equality-based approaches typically apply uniform policies to all employees, whereas equity-based approaches recognise differences in cultural expectations, relational obligations, and access to opportunity. The findings of this study suggest that culturally responsive practices such as relational leadership, Talanoa-based communication, and communal recognition play a critical role in fostering engagement. Future studies could therefore evaluate the effectiveness of equity-focused interventions, including culturally grounded mentoring programmes, flexible arrangements that accommodate communal obligations, and recognition practices that acknowledge collective contributions. Comparative research designs, including quasi-experimental or mixed-methods approaches, could assess how equity-based versus uniform engagement strategies affect employee engagement, retention, and well-being (Nielsen et al., 2023).

Secondly, future research should develop and validate culturally grounded measurement tools, such as a Pacific Engagement Scale, to better capture engagement constructs relevant to collectivist and relational cultural contexts. Existing engagement measures, such as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, were developed in Western contexts and require validation across cultural settings (Heveri et al., 2025). Engagement is also shaped by relational and contextual factors (Saks, 2019), suggesting that existing measures may not fully capture culturally grounded dimensions of engagement identified in this study, such as Talanoa -based voice, communal recognition, and relational leadership. Future research could use scale development methodologies, including qualitative item generation, pilot testing, and statistical validation techniques such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, to establish reliability and construct validity. Comparative studies could then examine whether culturally grounded engagement scales provide stronger predictive validity for outcomes such as retention, organisational commitment, and well-being compared to imported Western instruments.

Third, future research should extend this work across different sectors, including tourism, public service, education, and manufacturing, to examine whether relational engagement patterns observed in the ICT sector are consistent across industries with different organisational structures and workforce compositions. Comparative studies across sectors would help determine whether cultural engagement drivers identified in this study are sector-specific or universally applicable across Fiji's economy. Additionally, cross-cultural comparative research with other Small Island Developing States, such as Samoa and Tonga, could explore whether similar relational and communal engagement patterns exist across Pacific contexts, or whether engagement practices vary based on cultural, economic, and institutional differences. Such comparative research could use qualitative comparative designs or mixed methods approaches to identify both shared regional patterns and culturally specific variations.

Fourth, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how employee engagement evolves over time, particularly during organisational change and leadership transitions, as longitudinal studies demonstrate that engagement is dynamic and shaped by evolving organisational and leadership contexts (Simbula et al., 2023; van den Heuvel et al., 2020). This study provides a cross-sectional perspective, capturing engagement at a single point in time. However, engagement is dynamic and may fluctuate in response to leadership behaviour, organisational restructuring, or external labour market pressures such as migration. Longitudinal research, including repeated interviews, panel surveys, or organisational case studies conducted over extended periods, would provide deeper insight into how relational leadership, trust, and cultural practices influence engagement, sustainability and employee retention over time.

Finally, future research should further centre Indigenous and decolonial research approaches that foreground iTaukei epistemologies and relational worldviews. This study demonstrates that engagement in Fiji is shaped by communal belonging, relational leadership, and culturally grounded communication practices such as Talanoa. Future research could apply Indigenous research methodologies, including Talanoa -based data collection and participatory research designs, to explore engagement from culturally grounded perspectives. Such approaches would enable deeper examination of how relational accountability, reciprocity, and communal responsibility shape engagement, and could contribute to the development of culturally appropriate engagement frameworks that move beyond individual-centric Western models.

Collectively, these future research directions would contribute to the development of culturally grounded engagement theory and practice, ensuring that engagement frameworks are better aligned with relational and collectivist cultural contexts such as Fiji.

6.6 Closing Statement

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that in Fijian ICT workplaces, employee engagement cannot be understood as a universal metric imported from elsewhere, but as a relational and cultural practice rooted in communal recognition, trust-based leadership, and everyday relationship-oriented practices. Designing inclusive and sustainable engagement, therefore, requires centring Indigenous and multicultural perspectives, embedding equity alongside equality, and aligning leadership, communication, reward, and development systems with Fiji's relational norms. When organisations approach engagement as an ongoing relationship, one that honours who people are, where they come from, and the communities to which they remain accountable, they are more likely to foster trust, cohesion, and long-term commitment, even amid significant structural constraints. Fiji's experience offers a clear message to global human resource management: meaningful engagement must begin with context, culture, and relationships, rather than one-size-fits-all models.

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1 Consent Form

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations

Project Supervisor: ***Betty Ofe Grant***

Researcher: ***Meenal Dewakar***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.
- ○ 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 they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (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 type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEC Reference number type the AUTEC reference number

8.2. Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date that data collection will start:

16th June 2025

Project Title

Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations

Researcher

Meenal Dewakar

Bula

You are invited to participate in a research study on exploring Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations. This study is being conducted by Meenal Dewakar from the Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. The research is supervised by Dr. Betty Ofe Grant from AUT's Faculty of Business, Economics, and Law. The study is being carried out as a requirement for the Master of Business (Management)

What is the purpose of this research?

Employee engagement is a key factor in organisational success, but most research in this area has focused on Western contexts and may not reflect the unique cultural values present in Fijian workplaces. In Fiji, factors such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and diverse cultural backgrounds play a significant role in shaping how employees experience and respond to engagement strategies. Therefore this study investigates the influence of Fijian cultural values on employee engagement and motivation in the workplace in Fiji and aims to explore the employee engagement strategies employed in Fijian workplaces and assess their effectiveness in relation to Fijian cultural values. Cultural values are shared beliefs and norms that influence how people behave and interact within their society. In Fiji, key cultural values include communalism, respect for hierarchy, and social harmony.

Fijian culture places importance on working together as a group (collectivism), respecting authority and elders (power distance), and maintaining harmony in relationships (social harmony). To better understand how different cultural factors play a role, this study will use Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, which breaks culture into specific areas. These include collectivism versus individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance (how people respond to change and rules), and long-term versus short-term orientation. The research will look at how these cultural dimensions appear in Fijian workplaces and how they influence what makes employees feel valued and motivated.

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

We are seeking input from people at different job levels, including junior employees, because every role provides important insight into how Fijian values influence people's feelings about work. Your voice matters.

Participants will be recruited from a range of organisations operating in Fiji, including both private and public sector businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations. These organisations may span industries such as tourism, education, health, retail, finance, and service sectors, where employee engagement strategies are actively applied.

1. You scanned a QR code that was advertised on LinkedIn or other social media platforms by the researcher.
2. After scanning the QR code, you met the inclusion criteria for the study, which likely included factors such as:
    - Being an employee in a Fijian organisation
    - Having experience with employee engagement strategies in your workplace

- Meeting employment duration requirements (being employed for no less than a year)

The researcher is inviting you to participate because your experiences and insights as an employee in a Fijian organisation are valuable for understanding how cultural values, especially collectivism and individualism, affect the efficacy of employee engagement strategies in Fiji. Your participation will contribute to the study's aim of providing insights for Fijian organisations to develop culturally appropriate engagement strategies.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To agree to participate in this research on "Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations", you will likely need to follow these steps:

i. Review the information provided about the study, which should include details about the research purpose, what your participation involves, and your rights as a participant.
ii. If you meet the inclusion criteria and are interested in participating, you will be asked to provide your informed consent.
iii. The consent process typically involves:
    - Reading a Participant Information Sheet that explains the study in detail
    - Signing a Consent Form, which formally indicates your agreement to participate
iv. You may have the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification about the study before giving your consent.
v. Once you have provided your consent, the researcher will arrange a time and place for the interview, which will likely take place in a coffee shop in Suva or Nadi, Fiji.
vi. Your participation is voluntary, and you should be able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Remember that by agreeing to participate, you are consenting to be interviewed about your personal experiences and insights regarding employee engagement strategies in your Fijian organisation. Your input will contribute to understanding how cultural values affect workplace dynamics and engagement in Fiji

Loloma

After completing the interview, you will be given a loloma (gift) as a gesture of appreciation for your time.

What will my participation involve?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be invited to a semi-structured interview in which you are going to be asked about your thoughts and experiences on employee engagement at your workplace, particularly as it relates to Fijian culture.
The questions are designed to be simple and respectful of your cultural background. We understand that different cultures in Fiji such as iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, and others may have different ways of working together and showing respect or motivation. Here's a breakdown of what you can expect:

Interview Format: The interview will be semi-structured, which means that there will be some predefined questions, but you will also be able to express your experiences and thoughts in your own words. The questions will typically investigate:

- The ways that Fijian cultural values, particularly collectivism, influence engagement at work.
- The significance of trust in promoting engagement among employees.
- Suggestions for increasing employee engagement in Fijian organisations.

These questions aim to help participants understand the influence of Fijian cultural values on employee engagement strategies, the importance of trust, and recommendations for growth.

Location: The interview will be conducted in person at a convenient location near to you, preferably a coffee shop or a meeting space. Online meetings aren't preferred but can be organised based on your preference and availability.

The interview is planned to take 60-90 minutes.

Audio Recording: With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded for precise transcription and analysis. The recording will be securely saved and only accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the freedom to refuse to answer any question and to end the interview at any moment without providing a reason.

Your contribution: Answer the questions openly and honestly, sharing your experiences and thoughts to the best of your abilities.

What are the benefits?

Participating in the research will allow you to share your thoughts on and experiences with employee engagement in the Fijian context, perhaps contributing to encourage the development of more successful and culturally appropriate engagement strategies for Fijian organisations. Your involvement also helps to complete the researcher's Master's thesis by offering useful expertise in qualitative research methodologies and maybe adding to the academic knowledge of employee engagement and cross-cultural management. Finally, the study results might provide insights for Fijian organisations looking to boost employee engagement and create more enjoyable work cultures. As a gesture of appreciation for your valuable time and insights, you will receive a small token.

What are the costs?

Your participation in this research will take around 60-90 minutes, including the interview. There are no other direct costs to you for participating. The interview will be held at a place that is convenient for you.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this research will be published in a *master's thesis.* This thesis will be available to the general public through the AUT library. Results may be published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Results may also be presented during conferences or seminars to wider professional and academic communities. You will not be identifiable in any publication.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The risks involved in this research are minimal. The interview questions will explore your personal experiences with employee engagement in the workplace and the influence of cultural values on engagementHowever, there is a very small chance that reminiscing about job events might cause slight discomfort. To reduce possible discomfort:

- You are allowed to skip any questions that you are uncomfortable answering.
- You may take breaks throughout the interview if necessary.
- You may withdraw from the research at any time without providing a reason.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymised in any research output.

What will happen to information about me?

All research data, including audio recordings and interview transcripts, will be securely stored on the researcher's AUT OneDrive at AUT Univesity 55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central, Auckland 1010.

The Data will be protected by multi-factor authentication and approved for storing all sensitivity levels of data under AUT's data governance protocols. In accordance with AUT guidelines, signed consent forms will be stored separately from the research data. Electronic copies of consent forms will be saved as PDF files in a restricted-access SharePoint folder managed by AUT, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. If physical consent forms are collected, they will be stored in a locked cabinet on AUT premises. Upon completion of the research, both data and consent forms will be retained for five years as per AUT's retention policy. After this period, electronic files will be permanently deleted from OneDrive and SharePoint, and any physical forms will be securely shredded to ensure complete confidentiality and compliance with ethical standards.

To safeguard your anonymity, your name will be substituted with a pseudonym, while the corresponding list is going to be kept separately by the researcher and supervisor.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have two weeks to consider this invitation. During this time, you may ask questions or discuss the research with others. If you do not return the consent form within two weeks, it will be presumed you do not wish to participate.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will be sent a summary of the research results if you request it at the end of the study.

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, *Betty Ofe-Grant, betty.ofe-grant@aut.ac.nz , +64 921 9999 extn 6871.*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Who 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:

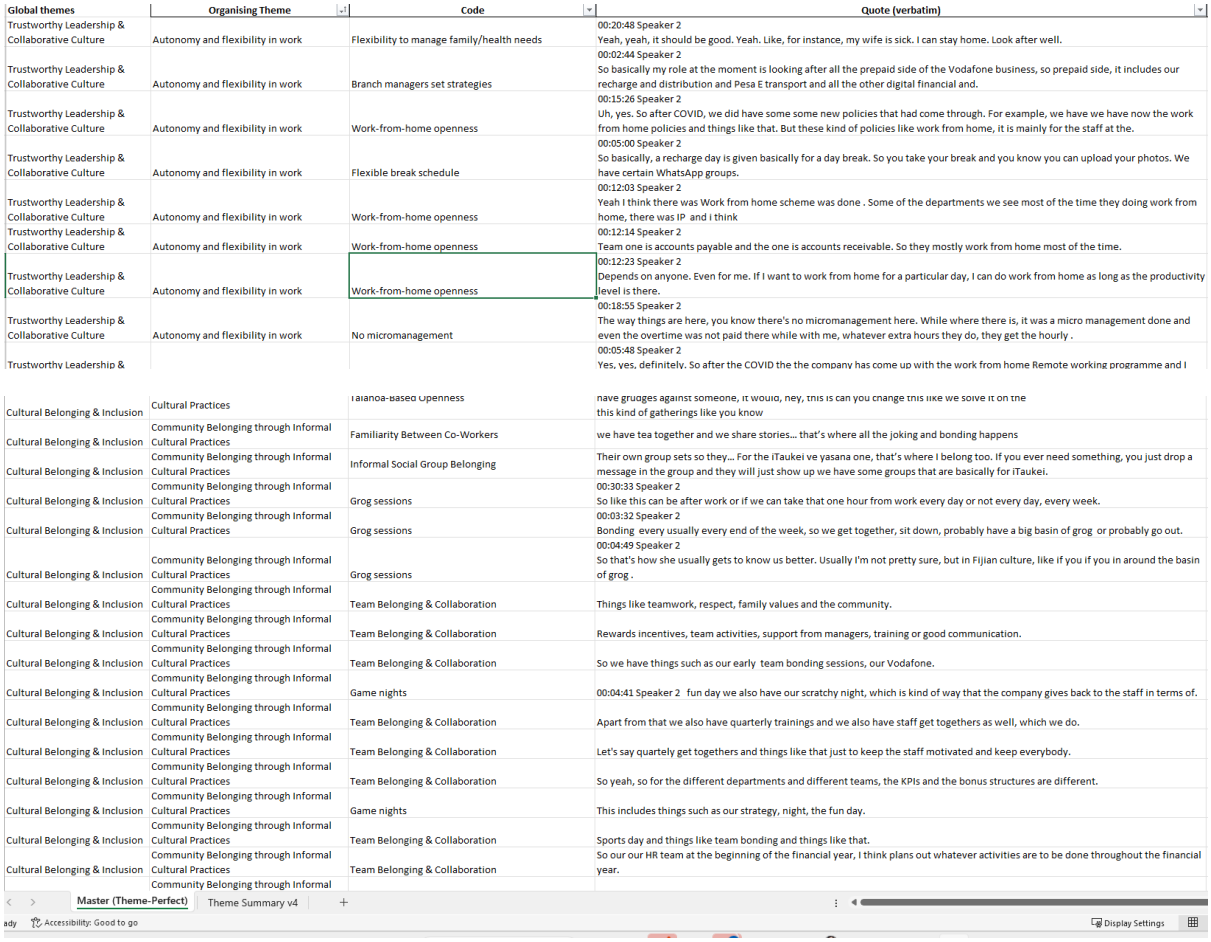
Meenal Dewakar, mdewakar@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Betty Ofe-Grant, betty.ofe-grant@aut.ac.nz, +64 921 9999 extn 6871.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEC Reference number 25/116 .

8.3. Appendix 3 Master Codebook Snippet



Global themes	Organising Theme	Code	Quote (verbatim)
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Flexibility to manage family/health needs	00:20:48 Speaker 2 Yeah, yeah, it should be good. Yeah. Like, for instance, my wife is sick. I can stay home. Look after well.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Branch managers set strategies	00:02:44 Speaker 2 So basically my role at the moment is looking after all the prepaid side of the Vodafone business, so prepaid side, it includes our recharge and distribution and Pesa E transport and all the other digital financial and.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Work-from-home openness	00:15:26 Speaker 2 Uh, yes. So after COVID, we did have some some new policies that had come through. For example, we have we have now the work from home policies and things like that. But these kind of policies like work from home, it is mainly for the staff at the.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Flexible break schedule	00:05:00 Speaker 2 So basically, a recharge day is given basically for a day break. So you take your break and you know you can upload your photos. We have certain WhatsApp groups.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Work-from-home openness	00:12:03 Speaker 2 Yeah I think there was Work from home scheme was done . Some of the departments we see most of the time they doing work from home, there was IP and I think
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Work-from-home openness	00:12:14 Speaker 2 Team one is accounts payable and the one is accounts receivable. So they mostly work from home most of the time.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	Work-from-home openness	00:12:23 Speaker 2 Depends on anyone. Even for me. If I want to work from home for a particular day, I can do work from home as long as the productivity level is there.
Trustworthy Leadership & Collaborative Culture	Autonomy and flexibility in work	No micromanagement	00:18:55 Speaker 2 The way things are here, you know there's no micromanagement here. While where there is, it was a micro management done and even the overtime was not paid there while with me, whatever extra hours they do, they get the hourly .
Trustworthy Leadership &			00:05:48 Speaker 2 Yes, yes, definitely. So after the COVID the the company has come up with the work from home Remote working programme and I
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Cultural Practices	Talanoa-Based Openness	have grudges against someone, it would, hey, this is can you change this like we solve it on the this kind of gatherings like you know
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Familiarity Between Co-Workers	we have tea together and we share stories... that's where all the joking and bonding happens
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Informal Social Group Belonging	Their own group sets so they... For the iTaukei ve yasana one, that's where I belong too. If you ever need something, you just drop a message in the group and they will just show up we have some groups that are basically for iTaukei.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Grog sessions	00:30:33 Speaker 2 So like this can be after work or if we can take that one hour from work every day or not every day, every week.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Grog sessions	00:03:32 Speaker 2 Bonding every usually every end of the week, so we get together, sit down, probably have a big basin of grog or probably go out.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Grog sessions	00:04:49 Speaker 2 So that's how she usually gets to know us better. Usually I'm not pretty sure, but in Fijian culture, like if you if you in around the basin of grog .
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	Things like teamwork, respect, family values and the community.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	Rewards incentives, team activities, support from managers, training or good communication.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	So we have things such as our early team bonding sessions, our Vodafone.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Game nights	00:04:41 Speaker 2 fun day we also have our scratchy night, which is kind of way that the company gives back to the staff in terms of.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	Apart from that we also have quarterly trainings and we also have staff get togethers as well, which we do.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	Let's say quartely get togethers and things like that just to keep the staff motivated and keep everybody.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	So yeah, so for the different departments and different teams, the KPIs and the bonus structures are different.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Game nights	This includes things such as our strategy, night, the fun day.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	Sports day and things like team bonding and things like that.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal Cultural Practices	Team Belonging & Collaboration	So our our HR team at the beginning of the financial year, I think plans out whatever activities are to be done throughout the financial year.
Cultural Belonging & Inclusion	Community Belonging through Informal		
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Awards nights & resorts	00:22:18 Speaker 2 So it's respectful of whatever is being celebrated as well, and it also gets a like all the staff get a chance to.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Awards nights & resorts	00:35:28 Speaker 2 Alright, thank you.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Recognition of multi-cultural values	00:13:04 Speaker 2 Work place right , So one thing I have noticed at our workplace, like we have what you call this, we do celebrate all religions activity or we call this cultural.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Recognition of multi-cultural values	00:15:17 Speaker 2 An example are there and we celebrate their whatever their functions or cultural activities happens around.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Belonging through recognition	00:21:43 Speaker 2 I think it's it's it's. It depends on the qualification as well. If people are qualified, they go, they do their masters certificate masters and they go through the Masters program. I think that makes a big difference in their life because that's where I mean you have different units.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Company support during crisis	00:27:15 Speaker 2 Yeah, I appreciate it. So yeah, so pretty much I like, yeah, appreciated about the how, how the company recognised my work, not just because, you know it's it's all because of the hard work that we've been doing and all right. So yeah.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Company support during crisis	00:09:46 Speaker 2 I think yes, everybody understands is we are here to work as teams to get the end result of the datec meeting its goals and expectations laid out by our stakeholders. And just to add in the beginning, I should have told you that datec is a public owned company.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Top performers & recognition	00:02:49 Speaker 2 The organisations to the goals we even provide funding for those trainings. We also have this quarterly top performers that we acknowledge we reward them.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Awards nights & resorts	00:11:03 Speaker 2 Any commitment that's pretty much understood that when there is certain activities that needs to be celebrated within for any particular culture extends throughout the organisation. So it's there is no discrimination or anything so.
Recognition, Rewards & Growth	Fair and Meaningful Recognition	Family and community engagement events	00:15:58 Speaker 2 I think like cultural events are being recognised, right? I think what what now could be done is creating opportunities for

Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Structural Labour Force Participation Constraints	But it's a fact that the native culture, which has the biggest labour force, are not working. So I mean, it has to come from a more national level to address this issue."
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Structural Challenges in the ICT Sector	Because the company is so big... you cannot do changes overnight... there are a lot of inputs, movements, and approvals involved.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Economic Pressures Limiting Engagement	We face constraints that leadership cannot always control, especially when the economic environment or government changes affect budgets.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Broader National-Level Constraints	Some things are at national level ...like taxes or labour laws ...so even if we want to change things internally, we just can't.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Dependency on External Systems	The ICT industry here depends on outside systems; when government processes are slow, everything from delivery to upgrades gets delayed.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Limited Organisational Autonomy	We can plan things, but it always depends on what the government decides ...approvals, budgets, or national restrictions.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	External Policy Barriers	Government procedures take too long ...approvals and policy updates delay projects that we're ready to roll out.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Infrastructure Limitations	We rely heavily on systems and infrastructure that are controlled outside the company. When that slows down, our work does too.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Structural Bottlenecks	In Fiji, you can't separate company performance from national systems ...things like import delays or bureaucracy hold us back.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	structural issues	00:15:55 Speaker 2 For example, I think some policies put through it's not inclusive of all the staff.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Government, structural issues	00:16:20 Speaker 2 While there were some policies after COVID, but I don't think that these policies were inclusive of all the staff. So yeah.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	structural issues	00:17:31 Speaker 2 Approval like it if in a month, maybe we we have our own in terms of sales, we reach our sales what the government sorry not the gov't like the company like there there's like they set up like different budget OK you can take your team out for.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Strict Policies	00:24:28 Speaker 2 I'm not pretty sure, but other companies, but we don't with racists, we have very strict policy.
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Government, structural issues	00:19:12 Speaker 2 I wouldn't want to suggest anything without offending any of the other cultural values that this current government is trying to impose.
Retention, Resources &			00:19:37 Speaker 2

Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Applying IT skills outside work	00:12:24 Speaker 2 They'll engage their loyal and bring their best to work. If there's someone in the company who feels like just cause he's an itaukei, there's no growth. Then the company is not seen as a good looking company from outside to other people. So I think they take this.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Staying and growing within the organisation	00:15:27 Speaker 2 So for myself, I decided to specialise in the official accounting business packages, so that's what I'm currently heading and there are other people who joined with me 16 years ago who is property manager for cabling and CCTV business, so.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Commitment, staying long-term	00:18:47 Speaker 2 Even if they even. Yeah, even if if they, even if they are planning not to join in but they see that there's certain level of people that are actually staying back or doing something taking their time out.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure linked to personal circumstances	00:02:17 Speaker 2 I am 31 years of age. I've been with the company for six years now, so the moment I'm with my parents, so basically I'm a single mom. Anything else?
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure	00:10:53 Speaker 2 no with this company. Six years I've been with Bondwell.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Cultural depth across partner/customer channels	00:01:35 Speaker 2 The market choas just across the road and the Kandava chaos is in Kandavu, that's three choas and also the setup in tarioke so I've been in this position for, well, I've been in management for the last two years, but I've recently taken up this posting at the beginning of this.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure	00:02:09 Speaker 2 Four years and yes, that's basically.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure	00:02:22 Speaker 2 Two 2 1/2 years now going on.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Need to refresh inclusivity of policies	00:04:49 Speaker 2 You can just one day we'll just stay home. You refresh and yeah. See you the next year.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Commitment, staying long-term	00:28:38 Speaker 2 Long term service, so not just that we.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure	00:03:07 Speaker 2 I've been employed for about 5 years.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Sustained tenure	00:17:18 Speaker 2 So we're looking for you to fight and I'm happy with it. That's why I'm back. Been back five years so.

Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Limited Organisational Autonomy	We can plan things, but it always depends on what the government decides ...approvals, budgets, or national restrictions.	K
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	External Policy Barriers	Government procedures take too long ...approvals and policy updates delay projects that we're ready to roll out.	K
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and Structural Constraints	Infrastructure Limitations	We rely heavily on systems and infrastructure that are controlled outside the company. When that slows down, our work does too.	F
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Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Government, structural issues	00:16:20 Speaker 2 While there were some policies after COVID, but I don't think that these policies were inclusive of all the staff. So yeah.	A
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	structural issues	00:17:31 Speaker 2 Approval like it if in a month, maybe we we have our own in terms of sales, we reach our sales what the government sorry not the gov't like the company like there there's like they set up like different budget OK you can take your team out for.	K
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Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Government, structural issues	00:19:12 Speaker 2 I wouldn't want to suggest anything without offending any of the other cultural values that this current government is trying to impose.	R
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Government, structural issues	00:19:37 Speaker 2 National level to get this.	R
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Budget constraints	We have certain budget constraints as well.	A
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Budget constraints	Even though it's a big organization, a lot of the times things that we suggest and things what which we want to do is minimized because of certain budget constraints or money contraints.	A
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	reduce superannuation	They paid even though they have was initiated by the government to reduce our superannuation fund, which is from the company which was reduced by 2%, but our company.	P
Retention, Resources & Organisational Constraints	Government and structural constraints	Cultural sensitivity shaped by national policy	I wouldn't want to suggest anything without offending any of the other cultural values that this current government is trying to impose.	R

Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Staying because personal needs are accommodated	00:09:59 Speaker 2 So those those level of engagement helps us to retain staff as well like they don't need to switch, switch off or basically they say like OK we cannot work because someone is sick and we we cannot continue working here.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Internal mobility and role advancement	00:02:31 Speaker 2 So I started in the organization six years ago. I started off as a business analyst and then after being a business analyst for two years, I have moved on as a territory executive.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Advancement bringing greater responsibility	00:09:29 Speaker 2 Yeah, after spending two years as a business analyst and then getting this opportunity, I think it was, it was a big thing for me. I had only spent two years in the organization and this role. It came in with a lot of responsibilities and.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Internal mobility and role advancement	00:02:24 Speaker 2 and I've basically been in this role for last four years. Previously I was in the field, so I was in the towers, I was mostly in the GSM site, look after the network operations. Then I have moved here then.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Birthdays & team games	00:02:42 Speaker 2 I was in the team for two years than I moved in as the manager for the team, so currently I'm managing the team
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Significant growth over long tenure	00:02:50 Speaker 2 Yeah, basically in eight years in digital, definitely it's a big growth
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Significant growth over long tenure	00:02:56 Speaker 2 For eight years, total 8 to 9 years, you can say now it's the 9th year going.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Benefits motivate families too	00:04:39 Speaker 2 So there are a lot of benefits when you look at to keep staff in terms of their growth in terms of the education and the internal promotions are given.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Career progression	00:07:19 Speaker 2 To growth career growth. So yeah, it is motivated me.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Recognition builds loyalty	00:07:25 Speaker 2 Loyal. Yeah, they have. In terms of loyalty. Yes, we also get our bonus every almost every year.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Birthdays & team games	00:22:28 Speaker 2 I think experience is there, no doubt about them. They know they are, but how to manage that team? How to be a team player that's that's a critical part. If you are not a team there no matter how much experience, years of experience in there, you cannot make a difference.
Employee Motivation & Organisational Commitment	Long-term loyalty and career progression	Scale makes change slow	00:08:17 Speaker 2 I have been in the company for over a decade now. What I can say there has been a change. There's been, I've. I've seen that. There's been a change from the time that I actually go. So there are arguments, people.

8.4. Appendix 4 – Interview guide/ Questions

INDICATIVE QUESTIONS

Researcher: *Meenal Dewakar*
Research Study Title: *Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations*

Note for Participants:
Thank you for taking part in this interview. This study is about understanding how Fijian organisations try to keep their staff motivated, connected, and happy at work this is what we call "employee engagement."
We're also interested in how Fijian culture including things like teamwork, respect, family values, and community plays a role in how people feel about work.
There are no right or wrong answers. Please share what you honestly think and feel. Everything you say will be kept private and used only for research purposes.

1. Can you tell me about any things your workplace does to keep employees motivated and happy at work?
   (This could be things like rewards, team activities, support from managers, training, or good communication.)
2. Have these things made a difference for you in your job? For example, have they helped you feel more motivated, loyal, or productive?
3. Have you seen any engagement strategies at work that didn't go well? What do you think was the reason?
4. Do you feel your workplace has a clear plan for keeping people engaged, or is it more just done as needed?
5. Have you noticed any changes in how your workplace keeps staff engaged for example, since COVID-19, or with new technology or leadership?
6. Fiji has many cultures iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, and others. How do cultural values, like teamwork, respect for leaders, family commitments, or community support, affect how people work or stay motivated in your workplace?
   (Can you give an example from your own experience?)
7. Do you think your organisation understands and respects these cultural values when trying to engage staff? Why or why not?
8. Should the same engagement strategies be used for everyone, or should they be adjusted to suit different cultural backgrounds?
   (For example, should organisations do things differently for iTaukei and Indo-Fijian staff if needed?)

9. How important is trust at work in your manager, team, or organisation for keeping you motivated and committed?

10. If you could suggest one thing your workplace could do to help people feel more motivated and connected, what would it be?
(Think about something that might work well for people from different cultures.)

11. What are some of the challenges your workplace or other organisations in Fiji might face when trying to keep employees engaged?
(How do you think these challenges could be managed in a way that respects everyone's background and values?)

8.5. Appendix 5 Ethics Approval Form (EA1 Approval Form)

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

22 May 2025

Betty Ofe-Grant
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Betty

Re Ethics Application: **25/116 Employee Perspectives on Engagement Strategies in Fijian Organisations**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 22 May 2028.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please store data for a period of 6 years and under the control of the supervisor (applicant).
2. Assurance that track changes are removed from the final version of the Information Sheet.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact the Secretariat at ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

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