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Employee Engagement – A key strategy to enhance competitive advantage

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Abstract

Employee engagement determines the effort an employee readily extends above and beyond the expected role in job performance. Engaged employees are a source of competitive advantage in the organisation as they are energetic, take initiatives which results into creativity, they utilize their creative personal judgment more effectively and provide open-minded and immediate service to customers. The chosen petroleum company for this study is one of the six 'supermajor' petroleum companies in the world, a leading international oil and gas company. The aim of this study is to examine if current employee engagement practices used Company X are effective and what factors hinder the application of these employee engagement practices and recommend effective practices that can be used to implement employee engagement as a strategic tool to gain competitive advantage. The population were 42 employees from five petrol stations that belong to Company X in Durban, petrol attendants, cashiers and supervisors responded to self-administered questionnaire which tested 5 parts; meaningful work, positive work environment, trust in leadership, hands on management and growth opportunities. The response rate was 74% and the questionnaire was pretested. The study found a positive relationship between trust in leadership and positive work environment and a meaningful connection between hands on management and positive work environment. The study can benefit all customers of Company X as their needs will be met and the employees will know what is expected from them in order to provide excellent service to customers. The company will gain market share, competitive advantage and save on training costs.

Key words: Competitive advantage, Customer service, Durban, Employee engagement

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List of Abbreviations

HRM - Human Resource Management

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

According to SAPIA (2017), the petroleum industry is one of the leading sectors in South Africa's GDP contribution and a major source of employment. It is mainly a customer focused business as it provides various petroleum products to the public, government and companies.

The chosen petroleum company for this study is one of the six "supermajor" petroleum companies in the world, a leading international oil and gas company (hereafter known as Company X). Company X offer customers with petroleum for transportation, energy for heat and light, oils to keep engines in motion. In the Southern Africa it operates in three African countries including South Africa. Company X's major business is the exploration, production, refining, trading and distribution of energy. In South Africa its focus is refining and marketing of oil and gas. The petroleum company has over 500 petrol filling stations nationwide; it is considered one of the largest petroleum companies in the country. Petrol filling stations are service-based businesses the key to their growth and stability is their employees. Service quality is ultimately linked to customer loyalty and retention. Customer loyalty is vital for companies seeking to maintain competitiveness and profit. Company X serves millions of customers daily; it operates 24 hours, 365 days a year. Engaged employees are then crucial for the survival of the company and to enhance competitive advantage.

In the ever changing, challenging and competitive global marketplace, organisations are beginning to understand the importance of employee engagement. Employee engagement is the level of dedication an employee has towards work and the organisation, the willingness of employees to work beyond expectation to achieve the goals of the organisation. Engaged employees align themselves with the vision and mission of the organisation, satisfy customer needs and become brand ambassadors of the organisation.

Engagement as a notion was first introduced by Kahn in 1990. Kahn (1990, p. 694) defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles, in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. Vosloban (2013, p. 760) agrees as he believes that “engagement is a personal decision, not an organization decision. Engagement is divided into three basic concepts: emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement. Employee engagement is about the behaviors that meet or exceed organizational goals”.

According to Ria (2012), employee engagement is a tactical method towards directing organizational excellence by way of enthusiastically engaging employees through an emotional connection facilitating organizational change and progress in career path.

Employee engagement is the level of commitment an employee has towards the company and values (Anitha, 2014). Srivastava (2016) defines employee engagement as the degree to which employees are willing to commit to something or someone in their organization, the amount of effort they put in, and the period they remain in the organisation because of that commitment. Psychogios (2013, p. 35) states that employee engagement is “everyone in the organization doing the right thing, the right way, at the right time – even when no one is watching”.

Engaged employees are a source of competitive advantage in the organisation as they are energetic, take initiatives which results into creativity, they utilize their creative personal judgment more effectively and provide open-minded and immediate service to customers. On the other hand, disengaged employees are harmful to the organisation as they cost an organisation in the form of low productivity, high absenteeism and turnover (Nawaz, Hassan, Hassan, Shaukat & Asudullar, 2014).

Employee engagement has a significant function in inducing the attitude of employees toward their work and the organisation and in generating zealous and stimulated workers who go all-out to work towards their personal goals and the goals of the organisation (Mehta, Chandani, Moksha, & Parul, 2016). Jain & Khurana (2017) concur as they believe that employee engagement is the employee’s commitment to the

organisation and their willingness to perform beyond expectation. Competitive advantage is what makes you better than the competition in your customer's mind; it differentiates you from the rest (Kimberly, 2017).

Bakker (2012) points out that 69% indicate that engagement is a challenge at their workplace while 82% indicate that the imperativeness for their organization to focus on employee engagement. The survey discloses that the most common outcomes in implementing employee engagement is the readiness to go an extra mile 39%, increase in production (27%), enhanced working relationships (13%) customer satisfaction (10%). The benefit of engagement exceeds improvement in communication; it increases profits.

1.2 Motivation for the study

According to the Gallup Report (2013), there is financial and personnel cost implications to the company and employees' due to disengaged employees. The level of absenteeism increase, the company's employment brand is tarnished as disengaged employees will not recommend the company to friends and family. Disengaged employees are actively looking for new employment, this then mean that the company will have to incur training cost for new employees. This also means that the company will lose experienced employees that the company has spent money training.

Engaged employees offer better service to their clients, and produce high quality products, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction. Happy clients will advertise the company to their friends and family and this will mean an increase in sales and profit for the company resulting in higher shareholder returns (Kruse, 2012). Companies with highly engaged employees generate higher profits, and higher sales and customer loyalty (Webb, 2011). This study is important to both employer and employees and all stakeholders of the company.

The findings of this study will benefit the customers of the petroleum company as their customer needs will be met, the employees of the petroleum company will also benefit as they will gain understanding of what is expected from them to provide excellent service to customers; meet company goals and increase their performance. The study

will provide Company X an opportunity to evaluate the current employee engagement practices they are utilizing to improve employee performance and engagement, gain market share and gain competitive advantage. The shareholders of the company will gain more profit, earning per share as when performance increases profit increases. Company X is an international company, South Africa will set a standard to other countries on how to engage employees and use it as a strategy to enhance competitive advantage.

1.3 Focus of the Study

The purpose for this study is to examine if current employee engagement practices used in Company X are effective and what factors could hinder the application of these employee engagement practices and recommend effective practices that can be used to implement employee engagement as a strategic tool to gain competitive advantage. The employment engagement practices will be reviewed. The issue of remuneration as a driver of employee engagement will not be considered.

1.4 Problem Statement

Research done by Writer (2016) exposes Company X as least performing in the petroleum industry. The petroleum company being studied was not amongst the top three companies in the petroleum industry that provide best service to customers. Company X operates in three African countries. The Ask Africa Brand Survey found Company X as the least popular brand amongst other petrol filling station brands (Writer, 2015). Research done by The South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SAcsi) in 2016 indicate that the brands and industries which showed a sharp decline in customer satisfaction levels included petrol stations, the amount of criticisms in this industry mounted to 1.4% and the complaints were concerned with service issues, the superiority of petrol and product obtainability. The South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SAcsi) is an independent national yardstick of customer fulfilment on the worthiness of products and services accessible to domestic customers in South Africa.

The index studied consumers of different petrol stations and the Company X appeared the least ideal option for customers.

The identified problem in this industry is decrease in levels of performance and the inability to satisfy customers, Company X is regarded as least popular or less used brand in the petroleum industry. There is no noteworthy difference in terms of petrol price between the assorted brands as the price of petrol is regulated, however customers observe the quality of service that they get from service stations differently. The onus is on employees to efficiently perform their duties for organisations to reach their goals and set the organization as the leader in its respective industry. Employee engagement is then a strategic tool to enhance competitive advantage. This study will ascertain the current employment engagement practices used Company X to establish its effectiveness. This study will learn how Company X can improve on current strategies being used to engage employees to gain competitive advantage. This study aims to answer the question; what factors hinder the implementation of employee engagement practices and are employee engagement practices used by Company X effective enough to gain a competitive advantage?

According to research by Gallup (2013) having engaged employees within the organisation attract more talented people to join the company while disengaged employees entice excessive costs such as training costs, increase absenteeism and low productivity. It is difficult to identify employees that are not engaged as they act busy, work just enough to prove they were at work for the day, this then make it hard to identify them as they also produce results. Further research need to be done on how to identify disengaged employees.

Companies need engaged employees that will add value to the organisation and aid in reaching company goals. The study will learn the current employee engagement practices that the oil company has installed and evaluate its effectiveness, the study will also establish factors that may hinder the success of these practices and implementation of employee engagement and develop suitable practices that will assist the company to implement more effective employee engagement practices.

1.5 Objectives and Research Question

- To ascertain the current employee engagement practices.
- To determine the effectiveness of the employee engagement practices in promoting competitive advantage.
- To recommend suitable / appropriate employee engagement practices.
- To establish the factors that hinders / affects application of employee engagement.

Research Question

- What factors hinder the implementation of employee engagement practices and are employee engagement practices used by Company X effective enough to gain a competitive advantage?

1.7 Methodology

The study is quantitative as primary data is collected with the aid of questionnaires. The population for this study is employees of petrol filling stations of Company X, these employees include petrol attendances, cashiers, supervisors or manager of the petrol filling station. Due to the nature of the jobs of petrol attendants and cashiers convenient sampling technique will be used as questionnaires will be given to petrol attendants, supervisors and cashiers that will be available. Permission to conduct this study has been granted by five petrol filling stations of Company X in Durban. The questionnaires will be pretested at the competitor's petrol filling station (Company Y).

1.8 Employee Engagement and Petroleum Industry

The Petroleum Industry is one of the prominent sectors in South Africa's GDP contribution and a main source of employment. It is a customer focused business as it provides various petroleum products to the public, government and companies. SAPIA (2017) reported that approximately 27 billion litres of petroleum products are sold annually; over 90% petroleum products are manufactured. Petroleum industry has 8.5% impact of the national GDP, creates 96 711 sustainable jobs and indirectly creates 692 706 employment opportunities and increases government revenue by R90 billion. SAPIA is an organisation that represents the main energy companies in South Africa.

Jain & Khurana (2017) discloses that world's top-performing organizations are aware that employee engagement boosts business outcomes and refer to employee engagement as the fundamental metric for organisations in the 21st Century. Manternach (2017) is certain that employee engagement is the key predictor of future business success.

A study within the petroleum companies in Thai displays a strong relationship between employee engagement and discretionary effort. The population for this study involved employees from nine organizations in Thai petroleum industry. The quantitative approach was used by means of questionnaires organised in four sections: employer branding, employee engagement, discretionary effort and employee expectation. The most significant findings of this study (Piyachat, Chanongkorn & Panisa, 2014):

- A positive connection between employer branding and employee engagement.
- A formidable affiliation between employee engagement and discretionary effort.
- A strong positive link between employer branding and discretionary effort.

- A constructive relationship between employer branding and employee expectation.
- An impressive association between employee expectation and employee engagement.
- A partial influence of employer branding on employee engagement through employee expectation.
- A limited bearing of employer branding on discretionary effort through employee engagement.

Petrol filling stations are service-based businesses the key to their growth and stability is their employees. Service quality is correlated to customer loyalty and retention which in turn results to higher profits for the organisation. In today's highly competitive environment it is imperative to keep engaged employees. "Engaged employees bring innovation and creativity, as they project a positive image of their organization in every aspect" (Dutta and Sharma, 2017, p. 137). Petroleum industry makes use of in-house training to refine the skills of their employees. According to Kumar, Singh & Kumar (2017) in-house training is regularly used to train employees as it is directly linked to employee tasks; it is also cost effective as organisations utilize qualified trainers who are readily available within the organisation. The study shows a positive relationship between in-house trainings and improvement of practices.

1.9 Chapter Outline

The chapter summaries the intention of this study which is to ascertain the employee engagement practices of Company X. The study will benefit all stakeholders of the petroleum company. The study aims at finding ways of making Company X the top performer within the petroleum industry and the most preferred by customers due to its service and products. The study will enable the petroleum company to examine their practices and improve where necessary. The survey study is conducted in the petrol filling stations of the chosen petroleum company. The next chapter (Chapter 2) will review literature on employee engagement, employee engagement practices, employee

engagement and competitive advantage, factors that hinder implementation of engagement practices. The methodology used to conduct this study will be discussed in Chapter 3. The analysis of primary data gathered during the survey will be disclosed in Chapter 4. Based on the findings of the study a detailed discussion will be in Chapter 5. Appropriate conclusion and recommendations will be presented, in Chapter 6.

1.10 Summary

The study assesses the employee engagement practices used by one of the leading petroleum company within the petroleum industry in South Africa. The petroleum industry in South Africa is one of the most significant industries as it provides products to other industries, businesses, and consumers of all income baskets, the industry is highly competitive. Petrol filling stations supply products and service to millions of consumers daily. Petrol filling stations need engaged employees as they are service-based business and customer focused. Engaged employees understand the goals and objectives of the organisation. Engaged employees offer better service to the clients and produce high quality products this then leads to customer satisfaction.

The employees of the petrol filling stations of Company X will be able to provide clarity and information that will aid in evaluating the employee engagement practices currently in use. These employees are in first contact with customers as their main duty is providing service to customers.

This study will examine the current employee practices used by Company X, determine its utility and look at factors that hinder implementation of employee engagement practises and recommend effective employee engagement practices. The employee engagement practices, employee engagement and competitive advantage and factors that hinder application will be reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section will review the literature on employee engagement, employee engagement practices, competitive advantage and employee engagement and look at factors that hinder implementation of employee engagement practices. Various models have been designed for employee engagement, for this study permission has been granted by Bersin (2015) to use his model that was used in his article titled, *Becoming irresistible, a new model for employee engagement*.

2.2 Employee engagement

According to Chadha and Sharma (2016, p. 835), employee engagement determines the effort an employee readily extends above and beyond the expected role in job performance. Balakrishnan & Masthan (2013) indicate that engaged employees are involved in ensuring that goals of the organisation are attained and are eager to endow discretionary effort to organisation. They expose the imperativeness of initiating opportunities of career growth, suitable leadership styles and work-life balance within the organisation to retain and engage employees.

Research by Hewitt Associate (2014) perceives that engagement is the demeanour in which individuals are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organisation. Engagement is regarded as the opposite of burnout. Engagement is categorized by vigour, participation, and effectiveness, the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions of tiredness, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Saks, 2012).

Engaged employees perform their duties with enthusiasm and feel emotionally linked to their organisation and they tend to be loyal and committed to achieving company goals. Psichogios (2013, p.35) state that “employee engagement is both rational and emotional connection employees have to your organization, combined with their willingness to give their discretionary effort”. Subrahmanian (2014) views employee engagement as the attitude and feeling the employee has towards the organization and its values. Saks (2012) is of opposing view as he believes that the connection to the company differs from engagement in that it means a person’s approach and affection towards their organisation. Engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles, engagement involves the active use of emotions and behaviours in addition to cognitions (Saks, 2012, p.602).

Employee engagement promotes organisational success (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). The way the employee perceives the organisation, the leadership of the organisation and how they feel about the organisation, its leadership and their colleagues have an impact on the amount of effort the employee will put in performing their duties therefore, employee engagement is considered as cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Srivastava, 2016).

Employee engagement is about how an organisation constructs an environment in which employees can offer more of their capability and potential. Engaged employees voluntarily perform beyond expectation and always do their best. Through employee engagement employees fully understand their role in a company and how it fits in the company’s vision and objectives, this then enables the goals and objectives of the company to be accomplished. Employee engagement involves making employees feel part of the company, clearly outlining goals of the company to employees, empowering and developing employees through skills development, constructive feedback and recognizing their achievements. The level of engagement determines whether employees intend to stay with the organisation, quit or even choose to work for the competitor. Disengaged employees are costly to the organisations as they produce inferior quality products, unproductive and ready to quit their jobs (Vosloban, 2013; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

According to Stoyanova & Ilieva (2017), engaged employees frequently show three general behaviours that enhance organisational performance:

- Say – the employee commends and speaks positive about the organisation to customers and possible employees
- Stay – irrespective of offers from other companies the employee opts to stay with the organisation
- Strive – the employee is uses discretion effort

Mehta *et al.* (2016) concurs as their study reveals a connection between employee engagement and intent to stay. Engaged employees give positive remarks about the organisation to colleagues and potential clients, they are willing to stay with the organisation despite opportunities available in other companies and they have the desire to exceed expected performance to achieve the goals of the organisation. Chandani, Mehta, Mall & Khokhar (2016) approve, as they indicate that engaged employees stay with the organisation and are ambassadors of the organisation. When employees receive benefits such as opportunities to develop their skills and well-defined career progress plans they elect to stay with current employer.

There are distinct categories of employees, engaged employees, not engaged and disengaged employees. Chandani *et al.* (2016) define engaged employees as those who work with enthusiasm to accomplish the goals of the organisation, whereas employees who are not engaged will partake but fail to demonstrate enthusiasm and energy towards the goal of the organisation, disengaged employees are those who are unhappy with their work and expresses their disgruntlement. Employees that are not engaged only perform what is expected of them or less, they do not put an extra effort and they do not feel any meaningful attachment to their company. Disengaged employees also have an impact to the production of their organizations. Survey by Bakker (2012) indicates that the most mutual concerns of disengagement were poor relations (29%), inferior output (25%) and a reluctance work beyond job description (17%). Increase in profit (8%) and absenteeism (7%) are amongst the lower rated results of disengagement. The study indicates that disengaged employees stay in the organisation and tarnish the image, relations and productivity of the company.

According to Markos & Sridevi (2012, p. 89), engaged employees are emotionally attached to their organization and highly involved in their job with a great enthusiasm for the success of their employer, going extra mile beyond the employment contractual agreement. Merisalo (2016, p. 10), is certain that “engaged employees are personally committed to an organisation that values employees and that delivers value to its customers. Disengaged employees usually have detrimental behaviour that influence customer service and negatively affect supplier relationships (Whittington, Meskelis, Asare & Beldona, 2017).

Competitive advantage is the leverage that the company has amongst its competitors. High employee engagement is beneficial as it improves employee retention, job performance and creates a competitive advantage (Merisalo, 2016). Employee engagement is regarded as an influential source of competitive advantage (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Research conducted by Anand, Banu, Badrinath, Veena, Sowmiyaa & Muthulakshmi (2016) indicate that variables such as job reward and recognition, opportunities, teamwork, immediate supervisor and communications are essential elements towards employee engagement.

2.3 Employee Engagement Practices

Employee engagement practices involves steps that the company takes in ensuring that employees are motivated, committed to their work and the company and understand their role within the company, normally the responsible department for this is the Human Resources Management (HRM). Numerous aspects should be addressed to increase levels of employee engagement. A study by Rothmann & Rothmann Jr (2012) reveal that organisations should ensure that employees are offered learning opportunities, provided with independence in their job and the organisation should endorse a culture of transparency, and effective communication between employee and supervisor. Career advancement and inclusion in decision making, promotion and remuneration should also be considered to increase employee engagement. Salanova,

Agut & Peiró (2012) believe that when employees are offered organizational resources such as training, autonomy and technology their level of employee engagement increases, and they offer better service to clients.

When organisation provides employees with resources and benefits, they repay the organisation by raising their level of engagement. Employees will select to involve themselves to different notches in response to the resources they obtain from the organisation (Saks, 2012).

There are many employee engagement models used by various scholars, for this study a model by Bersin (2015) will be used. The name of the model is “The simply irresistible organisation”. This model identifies five elements that drive employee engagement, which are meaningful work, hands-on management, positive work environment, growth opportunity and trust in leadership. Meaningful work involves providing employee autonomy when doing their job, selecting jobs that fit their skills, creation of small, consigned teams and offering employees an opportunity to relax. Hands-on management encompasses coaching employees, clearly defining goals, investing in management development and modern performance management. Positive work environment incorporates recognising and embracing diverse cultures, providing a flexible work environment and offering a humanistic workplace. Growth opportunity entails training and developing skills of employees, facilitated talent mobility, allowing employees to develop their career path and instilling a learning culture. Trust in leadership features leaders motivating and inspiring their followers, continuously investing on their followers, understanding the mission and vision of the company and ensuring that employees work towards the vision of the company and promoting a culture of honesty and transparency (Bersin, 2015).

2.3.1 Meaningful Work

It is imperative for employees to understand the meaning and significance of duties they perform as they are connected to the success of the organisation. Employee role is essential in the growth and success of an organization. The level of employee engagement increases when duties performed by the employee are considered

meaningful and important (Anitha, 2016; Anitha, 2014; Al Mehrzi *et al.* 2016). Employee engagement is connected to the degree to which employees find meaning in their given task (Venkatesh, 2015). Lee, Idris & Delfabbro (2017) find that work meaningfulness allows employees to find purpose and significance in their job, a sense of responsibility which leads to work being done efficiently. Their study finds a positive relationship between meaningful work and employee engagement.

Organisations are to provide autonomy to employees, listen to their opinions and ideas for them to perceive their work as meaningful and valued by the organisation. According to Srivastava (2016), when employees are permitted to make decisions related to their performance they become more productive. Bersin (2015) reveal that companies that promote enhancement of jobs, involve their employees in decision making, supports and give their employees autonomy make more profit.

Survey by Bedarkar & Pandita (2014) make known work life balance is a considered as a driver of employee engagement. When employees are offered an opportunity to balance out their personal responsibility and their work their level of employee engagement increases. This includes being provided with flexible work hours, work from home and be granted special leave like family and personal leave. They perceive that employees should be granted the liberty to make their work exciting as this creates an engaged work life atmosphere. Study by Lin & Ping (2016) in Malaysia on seeming job autonomy and employee engagement as a prognosticator of organisational commitment find that Malaysian employees prefer flexible working agreements and job autonomy, employees deemed flexible working hours as a feature that can improve employee retention.

Anitha & Aruna (2016) argue that Gen Y employees are more loyal to a meaningful job than an organisation. They define Gen Y as “a highly educated generation, born between 1980 - 2000” (Anitha & Aruna, 2016, p. 94). These employees expect greater job autonomy. Anitha & Aruna (2016, p. 97) define job autonomy as “the employees’ decision to have their own working style in carrying out a job”. According to Gözükarar & Simsek (2016, p. 74), “Autonomy causes individuals to feel responsible for achievements and failures”. Employees with high level of autonomy find job

aftermaths more meaningful as it is a result of their personal effort and this increases levels of employee engagement. Job autonomy is needed by employees as it fosters individual growth, optimum performance and emits a sense of job fulfilment that results in higher engagement. Sisodia & Das (2013) differ as their study concludes that job autonomy is effective to middle to senior management group and not effective to lower hierarchy group of employees, giving job autonomy to employees with low hierarch results in low job commitment. Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Kanwal & Ali (2013) recommend that managers should provide job autonomy to employees after assessing their performance as sometimes job autonomy can result in job dissatisfaction, need for job autonomy varies with the personality of an individual. According to Rana (2015), when employees are involved in decision making process and given the autonomy over how to conduct their daily routine and an opportunity to voice ideas, the level of employee engagement increases.

According to Wallace & Trinkka (2012), the fundamental aspects of the job itself motivate employees, as employees find their job meaningful and understand how their duties fit with the goals of the organisation. Dedicated and meaningful work permits employees to realise their worth within the organisation and this increases their level of engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Chandani *et al.* (2016) ascertain that successful organisations value their employees, consider the opinions of employees and involve them in when making decisions that affect their daily job, they respect employee contribution irrespective of the employee job level. Employees perform better when they understand what is expected from them to meet company goals. This increases employee engagement as employees value the impact of their efforts.

Managers who apply transformational leadership style have a habit of encouraging their subordinates to take up more autonomy in their work and this successively causes subordinates to grow an immense sense of engagement in their work. Leadership is considered as a significant drive of meaningfulness and engagement (Bersin, 2015).

2.3.2 Hands on Management

In the global and competitive work environment, organisations need leaders who lead with determination, lead with honour, have morals, ethics and who are willing to pull up

their sleeves and be involved in the daily operation of the organisation. Al Mehrzi & Singh (2016) establish that leadership of the organisation has a meaningful influence towards employee engagement and motivating employees. Armstrong (2016) emphasizes that line managers are the utmost important ingredient for enhancing employee engagement.

Hands on management communicate goals of the organisation and provide clarity on what is expected from employees. According to Mishra, Boynton & Mishra (2014), internal communication is beneficial to the organisations as it promotes trust between management and employees which in turn lead to better employee engagement. Bedarkar *et al.* (2014, p. 112) define internal communication as “an organizational practice, which effectively conveys the organizational values to all employees and thus, obtain their support in reaching organizational goals”. Belakrishnan *et al.* (2013) describes internal communication as the discussion of data both informal and formal amongst management and employees inside the organization. Their study identifies a positive relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. Internal communication plays a significant role in enhancing employee engagement. Lin *et al.* (2016) opposes as they think that leaders should first assess the commitment of employees before sharing internal data with them especially information that entails the strategies or trade secrets of the organisation. Sharing of information may damage the organisation as employees that are not committed to the organisation may share it with competitors. Examining the commitment of employees enables the organisation to share the right information with the right people which results in retaining high performing employees.

Hands on managers improve employee engagement by communicating regularly with their employees. Effective communication is fundamental to achieve company goals, increasing connection between employees and managers. Effective communication promotes transparency, and it is an indication to employees that managers are involved in the daily operation of the organisation. Effective communications also permit an opportunity where both employees and manager can constructively critique each other, this result to trust in leadership, improvement in performance and learning from each other. Leaders must be prepared to implement new and innovative techniques for employees to stay engaged. On the other hand, some employees may consider the constant communication between immediate supervisor and employees as bullying.

Oppression in the workplace is about ill-treatment process in supervisor-subordinate relations or in a work group, employees are subjected to recurring undesirable treatment by others. These actions cause embarrassment, and anguish towards the employee, disturbing performance, and creating a hostile workplace environment (Mathisen, Einarsen & Mykletun, 2012)

Employees regularly interact with their immediate supervisors this then mean that the leadership style of the supervisor has an impact in the level of engagement of the employees and it also affects the work environment. Immediate supervisors can be source of strain to employees; depending on the management style they can play a crucial role in assisting employees to cope with work stress, immediate supervisor can be regarded as role models to employees which then implies that employees imitate the supervisors. (Mathisen, Einarsen & Mykletun, 2012). According to Gözükarar & Simsek (2015) believe that transformational leadership style is appropriate when seeking to transform followers' attitude and inspire them to increase performance. Their study also reveals job autonomy as a vital job resource to improve the effect of transformational leaders on the level of engagement of an employee. Carter & Baghurst (2014) view servant leadership style generates employees who are committed and go all-out to deliver a notable customer experience. Servant leadership concentrates on the use of principles, improve customer satisfaction, and increase employee engagement while forming a matchless organisation culture where both supervisors' and subordinates unify to accomplish organisational goals without positional or authoritative power.

Employees tend to show more engagement when they received positive feedback, praises and attention from their immediate supervisor. Bersin (2015) believes that a simply thank you from the supervisor to his employees can increase engagement levels and assist in constructing an engaged team. Levels of employee engagement increases when the immediate supervisor demonstrate commitment to his work and subordinates, provides equal opportunities for progression and growth for all employees This gives employees a feeling of belonging recognition and appreciation (Chandani *et al.* 2016; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Wang & Hsieh (2013) agree as they state that when employees realise that they are supported and treated candidly, they increase their engagement at work. Wallace & Trinka (2009) support this as their study uncovers that employees who believe that the manager is concerned about their development and

eager to provide them with learning opportunities begets employee engagement. Managers are to show appreciation, support, treat their employees with respect to improve employee relations and increase employee engagement levels.

Transformational leadership is required in the competitive environment to enable employee engagement and increase productivity (Mozammel & Haan, 2016). According to Daft (2011, p. 362), “Transformational leadership is characterized by the ability to bring about significant changes in both followers and the organization. Transformational leaders have the ability to lead changes in an organization’s vision, strategy, and culture as well as promote innovation in products and technology”. There is an optimistic connection between transformational leadership and employee engagement, a negative association between transformational leadership and intention to quit, and a negative connection between employee engagement and intention to quit (El Badawy & Bassiouny, 2014). Mozammel *et al.* (2016) suggest that transformational leadership style has an influence on engagement among the employees precisely employee attitude and behavioural results. Leadership plays an essential role in inducing employee engagement (Venkatesh, 2015).

It is the duty of the manager to ensure that employees are engaged as engaged employees are less likely to quit their job (Baddawy & Bassiouny, 2014; Vosloban, 2013). Employee engagement is the vital variable that brings employee and the management closer. Employee engagement is essential for employee retention and loyalty (Anand, *et al.* 2016). Drivers of employee engagement are both employees and the employer. The way the organisation treats its employees encourages levels of employee engagement. The employer plays a bigger role in employee engagement as the employer should create an environment in which employees feel appreciated, part of the team; supported and have a clear direction of what is expected of them. When employees understand their role in the company they use discretionary effort (Anitha, 2014).

Hands on managers inspire and motivate their employees, clarify the correlation between the vision and mission of the organisation and employees’ daily duties for the organisational goals to be achieved. Hands on managers give clear communication, develop career plans that are beneficial to both organisation and employee, ensure that

employees clearly understand the goals of the organisation and employees have the necessary resources to perform their duties (Vosloban, 2013).

Osborne *et al.* (2017) disclose that employees that are provided with incentives are more engaged. These incentives include time off, off-site events, bonuses and non-financial rewards. Employee engagement is linked to the psychological familiarities of people who share their work procedure and comporment.

Hands on managers understand the importance of developing the skills and strength of employees. According to Harter & Adkins (2015), managers are to concentrate of developing and improving on the strengths that employees have than concentrating on fixing their infirmities. When managers focus on employee strength it increases employee level of engagement, allows employees to show off their natural talent and employee performance increases.

Managers play a dominant role in improving employee engagement. Managers are responsible for creating a positive work environment, communicate goals to employees, motivate employees and promote teamwork within the organisation. “Engagement occurs naturally when leaders are inspiring” (Anitha, 2014, p. 311). Successful organisations often brag about the usefulness of their brilliant leaders, they also believe that the bond between leaders and employees is a vital component for engaging employees (Osborne *et al.*, 2017).

2.3.3 Positive Work Environment

Work environment is a substantial influence that establishes the level of engagement of an employee. According to Anitha *et al.* (2016, p. 96), “work environment is an atmosphere where the entire situation, events and people influence the employees”. Kuliannan & Adjovu (2015) display a positive relationship between employee engagement and work environment. Study by Anitha (2014) show that good working

environment and team and co-worker relationship have positive relationship with employee engagement. Armstrong (2016) emphasizes that a positive work environment encourages high performance and effective discretionary behaviour.

Supportive teams, co-worker relations and support from management boost employee engagement and encourage innovation (Khan, 1990; Al Mehrzi *et al.*, 2016). Anitha (2016) agrees as she points out that positive work environment is a crucial factor that determines levels of employee engagement as employees spend most of their time at work, to be engaged their work environment must be of a supportive and caring nature. Leaders are to create a free and accommodating environment that also allows employees to be innovative.

Fauver, McDonald & Taboada (2015) show that organisations that promote positive work environment by being employee – friendly are more profitable and have higher value. Organisations with employee-friendly culture boosts employee motivations, encourages innovation which in turn increases performance and this can result to higher levels of employee engagement. Lin *et al.* (2016) are of different view as they believe that as employees become more tenured in an organisation it becomes hard for them to leave as they have developed friendships with colleagues, gained job security, have investments and benefits in forms of compensations and are familiar with current environment and may find it difficult to join new organisation and learn new people and new organisational culture.

Salanova *et al.* (2012) says that promoting an environment that supports engagement in the workplace present the organisations as irresistible to potential recruits. It is imperative for organisations to create a positive working environment as an individual's intention to stay in the job is a fitting measure to gauge the feeling of the employee towards the organization.

Employee engagement should be fused in the culture of the organisation. Daft (2014, p. 428) defines culture as “the set of key values, assumptions, understandings, and norms that is shared by members of an organization and taught to new members as correct”.

Brown, Bersin, Gosling & Sloan (2016) deem that culture is the sense of how things are done around here and engagement is how employees feel about how things are done around here. Anand, Banu, Badrinath, Veena, Sowmiyaa & Muthulakshmi (2016) reckon that the work-place culture and work-life balance policies and practices have an influence in increasing employee engagement which in turn increases productivity. Subrahmanian (2014) agrees as he believes that it is the responsibility of the organization to create a healthy work environment and an organisational culture that this beneficial to both employees and the organisation.

Popescu & Grigore (2012) believe that organisation culture is an internal work environment which guides relationship between employees and supervisors and it contributes towards the success of the organisation and the image of the organisation. “Organizational culture is a significant driver of employee engagement and includes management designing job well, providing support and setting goals for employees” (2007, p. 174). Lee *et al.* (2017) are of different view as their study show a negative relationship between hierarchical organisational culture and work engagement. According to Lee *et al.* (2017, p. 395) “hierarchical culture sets the rules and expected behaviours among employees with the guidelines to behave in a certain way”. Hierarchical organisations culture is top-to-bottom system of hierarchy where processes are systematic and top management make the final decision without being questioned and their word is final. Hierarchical culture makes tasks more bureaucratic and forces employees to obey unbending rules, which then mean that employees are not provided autonomy. Contrary to flat organisational structure where authority and control is distributed. This promotes efficient communication, enhances innovation, sharing of information and promotes a healthy working environment (Bai, Feng, Yue & Feng, 2017).

Promoting cultural proficiency of the entire organization means enhancing employee proficiency. Organisations should create an environment where employees are provided with an opportunity to communicate their areas of weakness with their managers for managers to provide guidance and input. This will result in improved communications, improved performance, and production of quality work and promote healthy work atmosphere. Employees are more engaged in an environment where managers regularly

communicate with their employees on performance and issues relating to employees. An encouraging environment is one where managers provide efficient leadership, clarify what is expected from employees and provide feedback and support to employees, where employees are rewarded for performance and their opinions are valued, and where there is ample scope for career development and growth opportunities (Armstrong, 2016).

2.3.4 Growth Opportunity

According to Bersin (2015, p. 157), “most engagement research shows that learning opportunities, professional development, and career progression are among the top drivers of employee satisfaction”.

Refining skills of employee has a positive effect to the organisation as it polishes employees and directs them towards achieving the goals and objectives of the organisation, it also advances employee performance and produces engaged employees (Srivastava, 2016). In the same vein, a study conducted by Nkosi (2015) revealed that training has a meaningful impact in increasing employee loyalty and commitment to the organisation, improving employee performance and retention.

Nawaz *et al.* (2014) holds the view that employee engagement excluding training does not produce anticipated results as employees should acquire practical skills, interpersonal skills and solid knowledge which will enable them to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. Training and developing skills of employees is vital for both the organisation and employee. The meaningful purpose of training and development is to ensure employees work efficiently and prepare for upcoming challenges in their job; this is beneficial to both employees and organisation (Khan, Abbasi, Wasse, Ayaz & Ijaz, 2016).

The benefit of training on employees is the increases chance of career advancement (Nkosi, 2015). Career development practices permits organisations to retain talented employees and promotes personal development. Career development is regarded as one of the vital tools of employee engagement (Anitha, *et al.*, 2016). Improving skills of employees through training and development increases levels of employee engagement

and commitment to the job and the organisation (Chandani *et al.*, 2016). Heymann (2015) debates that if employees are disengaged no amount of training can improve them or make them engaged. Disengaged employees destroy the bottom line and incite low morale amongst employees.

Jain *et al.* (2017) points out that training and development cultivate talent and satisfy unique needs of all employees, training and development is therefore regarded as solution to satisfying employees which in turn will promote elevated levels of employee engagement. Rana (2015) is in accord that training and development plays a crucial role in improvement and development of employee's competencies. Psychogios (2013) concurs that training is crucial in supporting the organisation to maximize performance.

Kumar, Singh & Kumar (2017, p. 114) "the success or failure of the organisation depends on the employee development and their skills performance towards specific job description." Their study found a positive relationship between employee development and employee performance, as investing in training promotes organisational success, improving skills and productivity of employees and gaining competitive advantage.

Training and development programs improve current skills and permits employees to learn new skills, consents employees to discover their strengths and weaknesses and promotes learning culture within the organisation (Khan *et al.*, 2016). Kumar *et al.* (2016) acquiesces as their study show a link between employee development and employee performance. They believe that trained and developed employees perform better; as a result, employee becomes more committed to the organisation. Dutta & Sharma (2017) show that capitalizing in training and developing employees reinforces the bond between employee and employee.

According to Silva & Dias (2016), there is a direct and progressive connection between organisational training and organisational obligation and there is a negative relationship between organisational commitment and intention to leave the company. Organisations are to put more effort in training their employees as it is beneficial for both parties, skilled and trained employees will not leave the organisation as they believe that the organisation invests in them because it cares about them (Fauver *et al.*, 2016). Investing in training and development programs plays a crucial role in improving organisational success and it gives the organisation a competitive advantage.

Merisalo (2016) state that within the health care network employees are more engaged when employees are satisfied with the level internal communication and sharing of knowledge, autonomy, and opportunity to grow. To improve employee engagement organisation are to foster training programs that focus on skills to incite employee performance and engagement.

Employee engagement is beneficial to both organisation and employees, when leaders provide proper training, and employee needs in return employees provide significant support to the organisation. Career growth and development is regarded as one of the interpreters of employee engagement. Training and career development are important components in employee engagement. Training improves precision and thereby influences performance and employee engagement. Training also boost the confidence of employees as it aids in reducing errors and performing duties better. A positive relationship exists between training and empowerment, employee engagement and employee creativity (Nawaz *et al.*, 2014).

2.3.5 Trust in Leadership

Employees who trust their leadership are more dedicated and committed to their work and this result to productivity. For leadership to be trusted by their employees that need to know what they are doing, lead employees to the direction that will enable them to achieve the goals of the organisation, that can only be done by leaders who know and understand the mission, purpose and vision of the organisation.

Petroleum industry is extremely competitive and requires strategic leaders. According to Daft (2014, p. 396) “strategic leadership means the ability to anticipate and envision the future, maintain flexibility, think strategically and initiate changes that will create a competitive advantage for the organization in the future”. Strategic leadership encourages employees to trust their leaders.

It is important for employees to understand the organisation’s purpose through its mission and vision, as this will enable them to understand the strategy and implement it.

Mission and vision are statements from the organizations that answer questions about who we are, what do we value, and where we are going. A mission statement communicates the organisation's reason for being and how it aims to serve its key stakeholders. Mission is the organisation's fundamental comprehensive drive and motive for existence. Leaders of the organisation need to fully understand the mission of the organisation as it plays a significant role in strategy planning and strategic leadership (Daft, 2014).

Leaders are to encourage transparency and honesty to increase employee engagement. Employees must be treated with fairness and respect. Wang *et al.* (2013) believe that acquiring employee's trust is a vital element of being an effective leader. Trust creates a relationship between organisation and employees and leaders. Trust is the most essential element of employee engagement

Vosloban (2013) mentions that when in attempt to increase employee engagement leaders should take note of the two very important elements of justice which are procedural justice and distributive justice. Distributive justice involves of the fairness used to reach an outcome. Procedural justice is when the participants in the process view the procedure as fair due to the process control they were offered.

According to Leary, Green, Denson, Schoenfeld, Henley & Langford (2013), dysfunctional management behaviour accompanied with impish personality negatively impact leader credibility. Elshaer & Augustyn (2016) find high quality management as a source of competitive advantage. Their findings indicate that top management leadership has reasonably the strongest direct effect on competitive advantage.

2.4 Employee engagement and Competitive advantage

Competitive advantage refers to unmatched performance compared to competitors in the same industry. According to Balakrishnan *et al.* (2013), there is a positive relationship between elevated levels of employee engagement and lesser staff turn-over rates, higher customer gratification and loyalty. Organisations are to implement employee engagement to keep up with competitors. (Nawaz *et al.*, 2014). “Competitive advantage occurs when an organisation successfully formulates and executes business strategies that are different from and more value than the strategies of its competitors” (Venter & Jansen van Rensburg, 2014, p. 167).

Employee engagement is an effective tool that can be used to gain competitive advantage (Bedarkar *et al.*, 2014; Psychogios, 2013; Anitha, 2014). Employees are the most valuable assets of any organisation (Ahmed, Ahmad & Joarder, 2016; Anitha, 2014; Bedarkar *et al.*, 2014; Chadha *et al.*, 2016; Kumar, *et al.*, 2017; Khan *et al.*, 2016) their commitment guarantees profit and lasting growth. Engaged employees advance the organisation to unmatched heights. Eldo, Vigoda-Gadot (2017) emphasize that employees have significant impact innovation, elasticity, competitiveness and success. Jain & Khurana. (2017, p. 2) adds that employees are considered as the intellectual capital of the organization. Using, this intellectual capital has now become a major source through which organization’s gain competitive edge in this dynamic business environment. According to Gallup Report (2012, p. 7), engaged workers are the lifeblood of their organizations.

Employee skills and willingness to go an extra mile to achieve the goals of the organisation cannot be copied by competitors. Employee engagement is a requirement for every organisation (Sharma & Garg, 2017; Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Engaged employees are concerned with providing good service, clarity and answers to questions that customers might have, this in turn improves customer satisfaction (Popescu *et al.*, 2012). Engaged employees go beyond the call of duty to perform their role in excellence (Anitha, 2014, p. 308).

Employee engagement is the level of commitment and involvement an employee has toward the company they work for and towards company values. Engaged employees

go an extra mile and they understand their role in company and their responsibility towards achieving the goals of the company, these employees can be strategically used to gain competitive advantage over competitors (Anitha, 2014; Rai, 2012).

Engaged employees prioritise organisation success, and create an exceptional customer experience. Engaged employees understand what is expected from them as they share the same insights about the quality of service they are expected to offer to customers, this promotes customer satisfaction. Organizations with engaged employees have consumers who regularly use their products, and increased customer usage leads to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Popescu *et al.*, 2012). Engaged employees promote customer engagement. Customer engagement focuses on the needs of customers. In order to accomplish profitability, increase in production, the company must ensure that its customers are satisfied (Sashi, 2012).

Engaged employees enable the organisation to produce more support and customer loyalty (Andrew & Sofian., 2012). An organisation that promotes employee engagement therefore gains competitive advantage. Engaged employees create customer loyalty as they provide excellent service to customers. Customer loyalty is important for companies in quest of preserving competitiveness and acquires profits (Salanova *et al.*, 2012). Engaged employees are the basis of any business and their involvement is reiterated in the way they serve customers (Andrew & Sofian, 2012).

In a highly competitive environment employee engagement is necessary as employees interact daily with customers. Engaged employees are pronounced as individuals who are highly productive and consistent (Mozammel *et al.*, 2016). Engaged employees are competent and innovative which in turn leads to customer satisfaction (Dutta *et al.*, 2017). Engaged and motivated employees offer customer satisfaction (Anand *et al.*, 2016). According to Osborne *et al.* (2017), organisations with engaged employees are more productive, they can satisfy their customers and gain more profit. Engaged employees are vital in shaping competitive advantage and can be used as a strategic tool to achieving goals of the organisation.

Subrahmanian (2104) states that employee engagement is beneficial and cost saving; employee engagement can be used to gain competitive advantage. Engaged employees are committed, stay with the organisation and this reduces absenteeism and cost of acquiring new employees. Engaged employees are mindful of their responsibilities, they motivate other employees to accomplish the goals of the organisation. Increase in the percentage of engaged employees indicates better positioning in the market, an increase in profits, and earnings per share (Manternach, 2017).

2.5 Factors that hinder application of employee engagement

Research done by Nkosi (2015) reveal that lack of skilled and trained employees can negatively affect day-to-day operations this results to customer dissatisfaction. Kumar *et al.* (2017) believe that training and development programs must be evaluated to ensure that they served the intended purpose. Evaluating training programs assist the trainer and organisation to identity problems examine usefulness and compare data with other training programs of similar nature. Organisation need to prioritize training employees and evaluating their training programs.

Organisations are to provide all necessary resources required by employee to perform their duties effectively. “Employees will choose whether or not to engage themselves in relation to the resources they get from their organization.

“This perception shows a reciprocal relationship between the supports organizations give to their employees and employee’s willingness to make the most of their individual and team performance” (Andrew & Sofian, 2012, p. 500). Organisations are to support their employees as it influences their behaviour, commitment towards their job and the organisation and their performance. Organisations need to prioritize increasing the level of engagement in the workplace as low employee engagement levels affect performance of employees which in turn disrupts satisfying the needs of customers. (Al Mehrzi *et al.*, 2016). Lack of support from the organisation to its employees will hinder

implementation of employee engagement. A study by Wang *et al* (2013) exposes lack of trust in leadership by employees as an influence in the absence of engagement.

Influence amongst co-workers plays an important role in increasing or decreasing employee engagement. When employees are disengaged it may be expected that during social collaboration at work they may encourage their co-workers to act and feel in a similar way. It is imperative for management to promptly identify disengaged employees and not wait for employees to feel unmotivated and less engaged before taking curative measures. Management should create a positive ambiance that supports engagement. Managers should develop and maintain a culture that supports employee engagement; this will result in making the organisation attractive to potential recruits who will contribute positively to the organisation (Salanova *et al.*, 2012).

Another factor that exceedingly hinders the application of employee engagement is managerial incompetence. Managerial incompetence is disturbing to employee engagement and job satisfaction, and contributes significantly to employee burnout. Bad management causes depression amongst subordinates, it causes costs to the company and medical and psychological costs to subordinates, reduces job satisfaction and commitment to organisation. Bad managers are a major health hazard as they are viewed as abusing subordinates. Bad management and abusive supervision characteristics includes failure to effectively communicate with subordinates, humiliating, disrespecting and belittling subordinates. These characteristics foster disengagement and retaliation. Companies are to identify leadership strengths and dysfunctional characters that influence employee engagement, job satisfaction and burnout (Leary, Green, Denson, Schoenfeld, Henley & Langford, 2013). According to Zhang & Liao (2015), abusive management effects subordinates' way of behaving, health, organizational fairness sensitivities, workplace comportment, performance, and family-related outcomes.

Companies tend to focus on the positive side and strengths of leaders and disregard the view that leadership weakness exists; strengths-only perspective can misguide the company. Leadership weaknesses such as dysfunctional characteristics are to be addressed to develop leaders.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on employee engagement as a concept, the role that HR plays in enforcing employee engagement practices. The chosen model looks at meaningful work, hands on management, growth opportunities, positive work environment, and trust in leadership as drivers of employee engagement. Employee engagement as a strategic tool to enhance competitive advantage was also reviewed. Engaged employees are the vital tool when it comes to enhancing competitive advantage. The factors that hinder the implementation of employee engagement in the work place were reviewed.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research is a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic; research is an art of scientific investigation (Kothari, 2014, p. 1). The main reason for conducting research is to find answers to questions by using systematic methods. Scientific process means an unbiased, rational and systematic system, a method to establish evident facts capable of being confirmed, a way wherein the researcher is directed by the rules of rational reasoning, a method wherein the investigation proceeds in an organized manner and a technique that suggests internal reliability (Kothari, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to determine if the current employee engagement practices used by Company X are effective enough to gain them a competitive advantage. Survey research design is used, and the questionnaire is the chosen Primary Data collection instrument. The purpose of survey research is to collect data representative of a population.

A Self-administered questionnaire was completed by the respondents and collected immediately after completing. The reason for delivering and collecting immediately is that it enabled a chance to explain the reason for the study and clarify issues on the spot to respondents. It assisted in assuring that the questionnaire was completed by the targeted sample, improve reliability of the data and to ensure that all questionnaires are returned.

This chapter will outline the methodology used to for the survey. Literature regarding on how to conduct a study will be reviewed. The reasons behind the choice of research methodology will be detailed. Research practice is a way to logically answer the

research question; it is the various steps taken in examining the research problem and the causes of the problem.

3.2 Aim of the study

The aim is to examine if current employee engagement practices used by Company X are effective to gain them a competitive advantage and what factors could hinder the application of these employee engagement practices and recommend effective practices that can be used to implement employee engagement as a strategic tool to gain competitive advantage. The employment engagement practices will be reviewed. The aim of is to answer the research question; what factors hinder the implementation of employee engagement practices and are employee engagement practices used by Company X effective enough to gain them a competitive advantage?

3.3 Research approach and design

According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016, p. 136) research design is the general plan of how you will go about answering your research question.

According to Sekaran & Bougie (2013, p. 95), a research design is a blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data, based on the research questions of the study. Research design is the theoretical composition on how research is conducted (Kothari, 2004). The study made use of survey research. Survey research designs are actions in quantifiable research that the scholars do a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to illustrate the approach, views, behaviors, or traits of the population. Survey research is used to evaluate tendencies, opinions, to follow up on analyses and for evaluations (Creswell, 2014). Fink (2013) concurs as he describes a survey as a method for gathering knowledge from or about the public to define, associate, or explain their knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Survey research can be conducted by means of gathering information via questionnaires or interviews, inventing ways to collect data achieve high reaction rate.

The design of this study was a quantitative approach which was done by using questionnaires as the data collection instrument. “Quantitative is predominantly used as a synonym for any data collection technique (such as questionnaires) or data analysis procedure (such as graphs or statistics) that generates or uses numerical data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p. 151). This design was selected because of its convenience and effectiveness in answering the research question. The chosen research strategy is survey. Survey strategy was chosen because it is economical, and it permits gathering of large amount of information from a large population. Data collected using a survey strategy can be used to create models and show correlations of variables. Survey strategy not only assist is answering research question efficiently, but it also come up with solutions. (Saunders, *et al.*, 2016)

This design can also be used to assess interrelationships among variables within a population and is best to explain and forecast functions connected with correlative research, thus, within the present study, the data collected was used to describe the population at a specific point in time. This type of research design is ideally suited to descriptive and predictive functions and, thus is well suited to achieve the aims and objectives of the present study.

The questionnaire tested five parts: meaningful work, positive work environment, hands on management, growth opportunities, and trust in leadership. Questionnaires were distributed to 5 petrol filling stations from 13 November 2017 to 17 November 2017. Permission was received from the Regional Sales Manager of Company X, and owners of the petrol filling stations to conduct the study. Questionnaires were distributed together with the informed consent form. The informed consent form explained the purpose of the study and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. The aim of the study was to ascertain if the current employee engagement practices used by Company X are effective to gain them a competitive advantage. The main function petrol attendants and cashiers in customer service, they are in first contact with customers. The questionnaire tested if employees found their jobs meaningful and if the environment they work under permits them to find their job meaningful and feel part of the company and allowed for career growth within the company. The questionnaire also

tested the relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors and if employees trust the work done by their immediate supervisors.

The choice of research paradigm is influenced by the context of the researcher (e.g. the country or university in which the researcher is based) as well as factors related to the characteristics of the research problem, the researcher and the research environment (Lewis & Sarah, 2015). As a result of this thesis' research problem and the context of the researcher and the environment, the choice was made to conduct research using the interpretive research paradigm. Understanding the research paradigm that is used assists in enabling an understanding of the researcher's underlying assumptions. It also contributes towards ascertaining the validity of research and whether appropriate research methods have been used (Myers, 2013). For this reason, the interpretivist paradigm is applied to this research work.

3.4 Research Setting

Company X is amongst six "supermajor" petroleum companies in the world, a top international oil and gas company. Company X offer consumers with fuel for transportation, energy for heat and light, oils to keep engines in motion, and the petrochemicals products utilized for items assorted as paints, clothes and packaging. Company X's major business is the exploration, production, refining, trading and distribution of energy. In South Africa its focus is refining and marketing of oil and gas. The oil company has over 500 petrol filling stations nationwide. Petrol filling stations are service-based businesses the key to their growth and stability is their employees. The oil company serves millions of customers daily; it operates 24 hours, 365 days a year.

The petroleum company is amongst six supermajor petroleum companies and currently not one the top three in the petroleum industry. Research revealed that the chosen oil company is the least preferred by customers. This study will benefit all stakeholders of the company to gain competitive advantage through employee engagement, improve

practices and examine factors that are causing the company to be low performer. There is intense competition within the petroleum industry. The price of petrol is regulated therefore the petrol service stations of assorted brands compete by location, engaged employees and brand loyalty. For customers to be loyal to the brand they need to be receiving a good service from that brand. This study will aid in ensuring that appropriate employee engagement practices are implemented to gain competitive advantage. Company X has a head office in Johannesburg and has regional offices in all provinces. The study was conducted in Kwa – Zulu Natal province in the city of Durban, the petrol service stations that were visited are in Durban central.

3.5 The Study Population and Sample

The analysis of this study was restricted to employees of Company X that work at the petrol filling station. The main targeted employees were petrol attendants, cashiers, managers / supervisor of the petrol filling station, the population is 75 employees, which are made up of 15 day shift employees in all 5 petrol filling stations; and 42 respondents were utilized in the final analysis.

3.5.1 The sampling criteria

Disproportionate stratified random sampling was used. “Disproportionate stratified random sampling is a probability sampling design that involves a procedure in which a number of sample subjects chosen from various strata is not directly proportionate to the total number of elements in the respective strata” (Sekaran *et al.*, 2013, p. 393). The chosen sampling criteria is appropriate for this study as petrol stations differ in number of employees. Disproportionate sampling conclusions are taken either when some stratum or strata are too small or too large, or when there is more variability alleged within a stratum (Sekaran *et al.*, 2013).

The sample was gathered using a non-probability convenience sampling method. A nonprobability sample means that the sample selected does not have a probable chance

of representing the target population; however it still allows the researcher to generalize from the non-probability samples about the population. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique whereby subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. This sampling method was used because it is the most convenient way of collecting data from the petrol attendants due to the fact that, out of the population, it was unknown what particular petrol attendants would be accessible on the data collection dates. Due to the fact that the targeted population is relatively small (N=42), the use of non-probability convenience sampling is acceptable as drawing a nonrandom sample will include a large proportion of the population nonetheless. This type of sampling method was also chosen for the advantages of being less complicated and less time consuming, in addition to being more economical.

Company X has over 500 petrol filling stations nationally; in KwaZulu-Natal the company has approximately 180 petrol filling stations. The company has employed approximately 400 employees in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The study was conducted in 5 petrol filling stations in Durban Central. There were 42 participants, consists of 33 petrol attendants, 4 cashiers and 5 supervisors.

3.6 Data Collection

Data was collected using administered structured questionnaires using socio - demographic characteristics and testing current employee engagement practices used by Company X, this was done by asking questions regarding Meaningful work, hand on management, growth opportunities, trust in leadership and positive work environment. Data was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

3.6.1 Primary data collection instrument

A questionnaire was chosen as data collection instrument. A questionnaire is a “preformulated written set of questions to which the respondent records the answers, usually within rather closely delineated alternatives” (Sekaran *et al.*, 2013, p. 147).

Diverse kinds of questionnaires include; self-administered questionnaires, internet-mediated questionnaires, intranet-mediated questionnaires, postal or mail questionnaires and delivery and collection questionnaires (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). For this study self-administered questionnaire was used and was completed by respondent, delivered and collected immediately after completion. The reason for delivering and collecting immediately was to be able to clarify issues on the spot and to ensure that the questionnaire is completed by the targeted sample, to improve reliability of the data and to ensure that all questionnaires are returned.

This data collection instrument enables gathering of large amount of information from many people in a brief period, it is also cost effective. Data collected through questionnaires can be examined more “scientifically” and objectively than other forms of data collection. The disadvantage about this data collection instrument is that the truthfulness of the respondent cannot be verified, and people interpret questions differently which in turn respond according to their understanding.

The Likert rating scale was used. The Likert scale is a scale designed to measure how strong respondents agree with a statement on a five-point scale with the following anchors: 1 strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

3.6.2 Primary Data collection procedure

The population is employees of the chosen oil company; the target population was petrol attendants, cashiers, supervisor/ managers. The petrol attendants and cashiers are work directly and have first contact with the customers. The Oil Company and owners of petrol filling station requested to remain anonymous.

Disproportionate stratified random sampling was used. There were 42 participants drawn from 5 filling stations in Durban, 33 petrol attendants, 4 cashiers and 5 supervisors. The participant has worked with the company for at least a period of 0 to over 5 years. The questionnaire administration process took 15 minutes.

To ensure reduction of error in the survey research a large sample from the population was selected and the research instrument used which a questionnaire was had clear, unambiguous questions and response options. Thorough administration technique was used to achieve large return rate, the questionnaires were collected as soon as the respondent has completed it.

3.7 Primary Data Analysis

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to analyze the data. This statistical software was preferred because it is software widely used to analyze quantitative data within the Social Sciences and was appropriate to use when taking into consideration the volume of data anticipated to be collected within the present study. The mean scores were calculated for each statement to obtain an overall mean score for all the respondents. The mean is a measure of statistical dispersion representing the average of the ratings received for each of the dimensions. This was done for each of the sections in the questionnaire, i.e. demographic and employee engagement practices and the two sections were compared to see the gap that exists, if any, for each of the items in the study. The Standard Deviation was calculated for each dimension per section i.e. demographic and employee engagement practices. The standard deviation was calculated to show how much variation there was from the average. A paired sample t-test was used to establish meaningful relationship amongst variables in the current study while comparisons between the categories of employee engagement data were made using cross tabulations (chi-square) as well as paired t test to establish the relationship.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

The statistician working with management science studies the estimation of reliability and validity is a frequent encountered. Measurement matters vary in the management sciences they are linked to the quantification of conceptual, indescribable and unobservable theories.

Research requires dependable measurement. Measurements are reliable to the extent that they are repeatable and that any unsystematic influence which inclines to make measurements different from occasion or circumstance is a basis of measurement error. Whenever a test or other measuring device is used as part of the data collection process, the validity and reliability of that test is important.

3.8.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent in which data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, p. 156). Reliability refers to consistency of measurement. Reliability is a vital contributor to validity but is not a sufficient condition for validity.

3.8.2 Validity

Validity is concerned with whether a test or instrument correctly measures what is being assessed or measured. Validity of the sample depends on two considerations that is accuracy and precision. Accuracy is the degree to which bias is nonexistent from the sample. Precision is measured by the standard error of estimate, a type of standard deviation measurement. The smaller the standard error of estimate, the higher is the precision of the sample. The type of validity that was used is content validity. "Content validity ensures that the measure includes an adequate and representative set of items that tap the concepts" (Sekeran & Bougie, 2013, p. 226)

The questionnaire had short, clear, unambiguous, and easy to understand statements and were all applicable to all employees. The questionnaire had a section at the top that explains the purpose of the study and which also delineated ethical issues. The questionnaire had clear instructions of how to complete it and it was returned immediately after completion.

3.9 Pretesting the Questionnaire

The pretesting of the questionnaire enables the researcher to determine the comprehension of questions by the participants and testing problems that may be encountered with the wording or instruments (Sekaran *et al.*, 2013).

The purpose of pretesting the questionnaire was to identify redundant statements or questions, irrelevant questions and to get rid of ambiguities, poor wording and uncertainty. Pretesting of the questionnaire permitted an opportunity to test for inter-rater reliability and receiving feedback on appropriateness of question stems.

The questionnaire was pretested on 11 November 2017 in a different brand oil company, one of the competitors of the chosen oil company for the study (Company Y). Permission was received from the owner of the petrol filling station to conduct a survey. Self-completed questionnaire data collection method was used; the questionnaire was delivered to respondents and collected immediately upon completion. This method was used because it allowed the researcher the opportunity to provide clarity to respondents on the spot, it also permitted the researcher to collect the questionnaire immediately after they are complete, and this then resulted in 100% response rate. The petrol service stations open 24 hours, and this enabled speedily conclusion of the survey. The participants understood the questions and were all willing to participate. There were no problems encountered therefore no change was made to the questionnaire.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents. Respondent were made aware that their participation in the survey was voluntary. It was clarified to respondents that they may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence and that there will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey. Company X requested to remain anonymous. Consent form was issued to respondents and they were assured that confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying the company and respondent as participants will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

3.11 Summary

The study focused on the petroleum industry, employees of Company X as a population of interest. Company X is regarded as the least option for customers according to research; the motive for selecting Company X was to establish the employee engagement practices they utilize, to identify what could hinder the application of employee engagement within the company and get an understanding of the level of engagement of employees. The owners of the petrol filling stations were affable and excited about the survey, this then made it easy for employees to open up and answer the questionnaire without fear. Participants were willing, welcoming and excited to be part of the survey. The chosen research methods and techniques allowed answering of the research question and finding of solutions where required possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide the analyzed data arising from the current study and present the findings. The results originate from the literature review detailed in chapter two and the crucial data gathered from the responses of questionnaire distributed. This quantitative research study sought to answer the ensuing research questions:

- To ascertain the current employee engagement practices.
- To determine the effectiveness of the employee engagement practices in promoting competitive advantage.
- To recommend suitable / appropriate employee engagement practices.
- To establish the factors that hinders / affects application of employee engagement

Research Question

- What factors hinder the implementation of employee engagement practices and are employee engagement practices used by Company X effective enough to gain a competitive advantage?

This chapter introduces the statistical evaluation undertaken in the current study. The results are presented in the manner were carried out. Foremost, the outcomes of the employee engagement and the graphic statistics of each of the measures will be narrated, as well as the Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the instruments used in the study. Meanwhile, this chapter also presented the results of Pearson product-momentum correlation coefficients in terms of the relationships discovered amongst the variables considered in this study. Finally, results obtained with the help of statistical tool (t- test) were reported. The current study employed series of analysis, which has been categorized according to the three research questions: current employee

engagement practices of Company X, factors affecting the implementation of employee engagement, effectiveness of the employee engagement practices. Based on the analysis undertaken, conclusions are outlined in this section.

4.2 Analysis and Presentation of Results

The research participants of the present study consisted employees from five different petrol filling stations of Company X, in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. For the present study, the response rate is acceptable as 74% of the entire population. Demographical information consists of socio-demographic characteristics used to classify the responses of the respondents as well as understanding the results obtained from this study. The graphical representation of the sample is presented below.

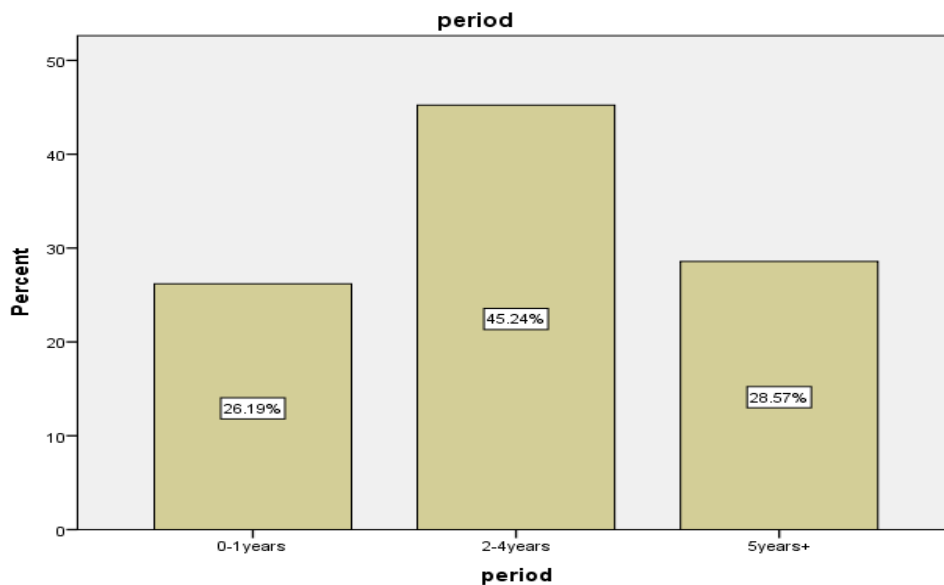


Table 4.2.1 Interpretation of work experience of participants

Most of the participants included of males (85.7%) compared to the number of females (14.3%), this is acceptable because more males are employed as petrol attendants compared to females. Higher percentage of participants in this study representing 61.9% falls within the age grouped 26-35 years while the least age group was those in the category of 40 years and above years representing 4.8%. The table 4.2.1 above highlighted that greater participants in this study were younger in terms of years of experience, accounting for a cumulative of 71.4% of participants being 2-4 years in experience. This implies that most of the participants in this study had been actively involved at their organization for almost 2-4 years (45.2%).

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	6	14.3
	Male	36	85.7
Age group	20-25	3	7.1
	26-35	26	61.9
	36-45	11	26.2
	45+	2	4.8
Period	0-1year	11	26.2
	2-4years	19	45.2
	5 years+	12	28.6
Position	petrol attendant	31	73.8
	Cashier	4	9.5
	Supervisor	7	16.7

Table 4.2.2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

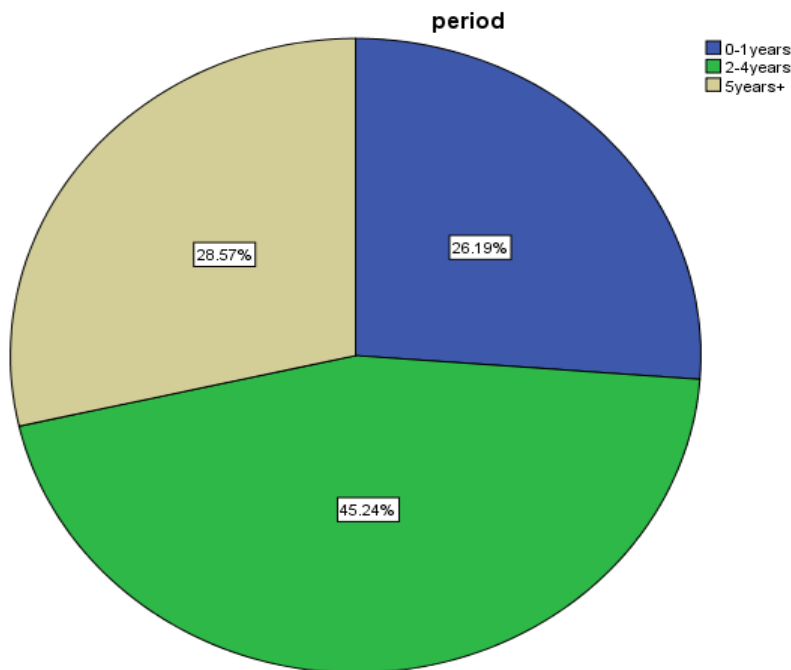


Figure 4.2.3: Graphical classification of Period experience of participants

Regarding the years of experience at the petrol station, many of the respondents, (45.24% participants) indicated that they had experienced for the last 2 to 4 years in figure 4.2.3 above. The number of respondents who had experienced above 5 years equivalent to 12, which is indicative of their experience in relating with the customers in the present current study.

The below table 4.2.4 tells us that, on average, females are more satisfy in their job than males. Considering the demographic for the gender category, the mean, median and mode are all similar, which means that the data set utilized are normally distributed. The dispersion of scores (see standard deviation column in the above table) is higher for men compared to women, indicating that men are more variable in job engagement as compared with women. On 95% confidence interval, the mean of male is more likely to fall within the range of the mean plus or minus 2 times standard error i.e. within the range of 2.59 to 3.19. For females, on 95% confidence interval it is likely to fall around 1.78 and 2.26

		Employee Engagement			
		Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Gender	Male	114.50	108.50	93.00 ^a	23.16
	Female	94.81	96.00	80.00 ^a	10.81

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 4.2.4: Descriptive Statistics Representation of Employee Engagement and Gender

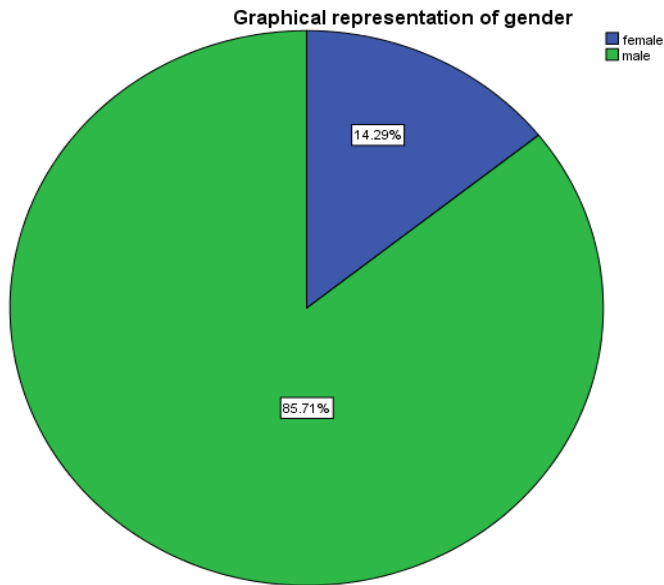


Figure 4.2.5: Graphical Representation of Gender Classification

The Figure 4.2.5 above highlighted the percentages of the respondent's gender. Most of the participants were male respondents (85.7%) while the minority belonged to a female category (14.3%). The relative even gender distribution is the difference between the 85.7% and 14.3% which represent 71%.

I am well equipped to provide excellent service to customers					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	12	28.6	28.6	28.6
	strongly agree	30	71.4	71.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2.6: Results on resources provided to employees

The result from the above table 4.2.6 highlight that, at least 71.4% of the respondent strongly agree that they are well equipped to provide better service to their respective customers. In that grouping, only 28.6% of respondents agree which may imply that they are not strong in their preparation to meet their customers and this may be attributed to so many factors that surround them in their place of work.

Table 4.2.7 below presents responses of the participants to a Linkert scale questions on their awareness of what is expected from employees to achieve expected results.

I know what is expected of to achieve results					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
	Agree	12	28.6	28.6	31.0
	strongly agree	29	69.0	69.0	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2.7: Results on awareness of expected results

The results showed that the higher percentage of the respondents are strongly agree with the expectation to achieve results followed by those who are only in agreement with the kind of preparation they make. This represents 28.6% of all the responses.

Count				
		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
I am well equipped to provide excellent service to customers	Agree	1	11	12
	strongly agree	5	25	30
Total		6	36	42

Table 4.2.8: Result on awareness of expected results and gender

The preparation on how well prepared the employee are and the gender perspective as indicated in the above table implies that there is a perfect positive association at 0.486 as well as meaningful relationship (0.016) between the two variables.

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.486 ^a	1	.016		
Continuity Correction ^b	.044	1	.834		
Likelihood Ratio	.532	1	.466		
Fisher's Exact Test				.655	.439
Linear-by-Linear Association	.475	1	.491		
N of Valid Cases	42				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.71.

b. Computed only for 2x2 table

Table 4.2.8 a: Chi-Square Test Distribution

Going through the result of crosstabs analysis, it appears that out of all the demographics variables, years of experience is the only demographics characteristics that we can see as factors influencing the employee's engagement in the present study while not all other predictors are associated with employee engagement are not significant. Here we found that the gender and the overall employee engagement show that, there is a perfect positive association at 14.746 while the relationship is not significant (0.677).

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.746 ^a	23	.657
Likelihood Ratio	22.068	23	.516
Linear-by-Linear Association	.150	1	.699
N of Valid Cases	46		

a. 48 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .22.

		Meaningful Work	Hands Management	Positive Work Environment	Growth Opportunities	Trust in Leadership
Meaningful Work	Pearson Correlation	1	.377*	.204	.223	.320*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014	.194	.155	.039
	Nobs	42	42	42	42	42
Hands Management	Pearson Correlation	.377*	1	.286	.617**	.622**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014		.066	.000	.000
	Nobs	42	42	42	42	42
Positive Work Environment	Pearson Correlation	.204	.286	1	.375*	.393*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194	.066		.014	.010
	Nobs	42	42	42	42	42
Growth Opportunities	Pearson Correlation	.223	.617**	.375*	1	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	.000	.014		.000
	Nobs	42	42	42	42	42
Trust in Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.320*	.622**	.393*	.631**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.000	.010	.000	
	Nobs	42	42	42	42	42

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.2.9: Pearson Correlations between all the items of Employee Engagement Practices

The above table 4.2.9 show a positive statistically significant as well as practically noteworthy correlation coefficient was found between meaningful work and hands on management ($p < 0.05$; medium effect). This finding indicates that higher levels of meaningful works are associated with lower levels of hands on management, meaning that when employees are given autonomy they find meaning in their work. Further, no statistically significant or practically significant relationships were observed between meaningful works and positive work environment or growth opportunities.

	Paired Difference					T	Df	Sig. (2 Tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Meaningful Work – Positive Work Environment	-.66667	8.54448	1.31844	-3.32931	1.99598	-.506	41	.616
Pair 2 Hands on management – Growth Opportunities	.76190	2.80078	.43217	-.11088	1.63469	1.763	41	.085
Pair 3 Hands on Management Positive Work Environment	-6.21429	8.30379	1.28130	-8.80193	-3.62664	-4.850	41	.000
Pair 4 Trust in Leadership Positive Work Environment	-5.42857	8.04907	1.24200	-7.93684	-2.92031	-4.371	41	.000

Table 4.2.10: Difference of means between employee engagement practices on the four dimensions

A paired sample t-test was used to verify statistically significant difference amongst the various employee engagement practices. The significance level was set at the conventional 5% level; that is $\alpha=0.05$. As is evident from above table, statistically significant differences at $p<0.05$ were recorded for all five categories. The results highlighted that there a meaningful relationship between trust in leadership and positive work environment as $p<0.05$ in addition, we found a significant connection between hands on management and positive work environment. This simply means that the leadership of the company together with immediate supervisor can create a positive work environment. In addition, work environment and in turn this enables employees to trust the work that is being done by their management. In addition, a statistical meaningful relationship was also observed between trust in leadership and hands on management. Finally, an inspection of the above Table shows that no statistically noteworthy or practically meaningful relationship was found to exist between positive works environment and hands on management.

An additional examination of the above table displays that a positive statistically significant as well as practically important correlation coefficient was obtained to exist between trust in leadership and growth opportunity ($p < 0.05$; medium effect). Therefore, this implies that higher levels of trust in leadership are associated with higher levels of growth opportunity within the work environment.

The relationships between various categories of employee engagement variables for the present study were assessed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. The correlations between the meaningful work, hands on management, positive work environment, growth opportunities and trust in leadership indicated in Table 4.2.9.

The Pearson correlation analysis above highlighted a strong positive correlation between hands on management and growth opportunities ($r = 0.617$, $p < 0.01$). The result also indicated a strong correlation between trust in leadership and hands on management as $p < 0.01$. In addition, other results show a moderate correlation between the other items of the employee engagement practices.

4.3 Reliability Analysis

4.3.1 Validity and Reliability of the Scale

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. It is considered to be a measure of scale reliability. A "high" value for alpha does not imply that the measure is unidimensional. Reliability and validity analysis were conducted for the employee engagement and the results are presented. A total of 42 participants completed the questionnaire. The reliability analysis showed that the data were reliable as the Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.661. Cronbach's alpha is a measure utilized to examine the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items. In other words, the reliability of any given measurement refers to the extent to which it is a trustworthy measure of a concept, and Cronbach's alpha is one way of determining the strength of that consistency.

Dimensions	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Meaningful work	5	0.699
Hands on management	4	0.645
Positive work environment	5	0.187
Growth opportunities	4	0.736
Trust in leadership	4	0.765
Overall score	22	0.771

Table 4.3.1.1: Reliability analysis Test for each item

Since the overall Cronbach alpha value is not that strong enough to justify the reliability of the current study, there is need to test for the reliability of each item so as to see which of the item contribute to the low value of the overall Cronbach alpha. In the light of that, we found that positive work environment has a Cronbach alpha that is insignificant. Previous studies indicated that a reliability coefficient of 0.05 signifies that 50% of the variance in the test scores depends upon the true variance of the items being measured, and 50% depends on error variance. The current study shows that the scale positive work environment item which is far less than 0.50 means that the item does not depends upon the true variance of the practices being measured and that means its inclusion does not play any significant value on the current study.

The reliability and validity measures for each of the twenty-two employee engagement practices within Section A of the survey questionnaire are presented in table above. To assess the reliability of the scale in this study, we obtained the coefficient alpha. The values less than 0.50 means insufficient reliability, while those above 0.70 are given regarded as a good reliability. In the case of our study, the Cronbach alpha value of

0.771 was obtained as the overall score of the employee engagement, which are well over the recommended value of 0.70.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.661	22

Table 4.3.1.2: Reliability analysis test for the overall items

The alpha coefficient for the five items is .771, signifying that the items have high internal consistency. In addition to computing the alpha coefficient of reliability, we might also want to investigate the dimensionality of the scale. To determine which items might be identical among our variables, there is need to obtain an average inter-item correlation. The inter-item correlation highlighted that the correlations was found within the recommended range of 0.15 to 0.50. Hence, it was concluded that there is confirmation of convergent validity as the variables in the scale are adequately correlated, yet not so highly correlated with measures from which they are meant to differ, indicating evidence of discriminant validity.

Moreover, Kruskal-Wallis Test was performed to compare the overall mean score for employee engagement among the different gender perspective of the participants. It was found that the overall mean rank was higher among the female under the meaningful work category followed by growth opportunities. However, the mean ranks were significantly different among the different gender in each of the employee engagement practices ($p=0.022$, 0.042 , 0.032 and 0.038) respectively except for gender who falls under the hands in management ($p=0.077$). Hence, gender was found to have impact on all the employee engagement practices as their mean ranks were similar ($p<0.05$). Results highlighted that the mean ranks for all the employee engagement practices were significantly different among the different group of the participants ($p<0.05$). This meant that gender was a significant variable for employee engagement.

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	p-value
Meaningful Work	Female	6	31.83	5.229	.022
	Male	36	19.78		
	Total	42			
Hands Management	Female	6	29.50	3.135	.077
	Male	36	20.17		
	Total	42			
Positive Work Environment	Female	6	30.75	4.118	.042
	Male	36	19.96		
	Total	42			
Growth Opportunities	Female	6	31.33	4.624	.032
	Male	36	19.86		
	Total	42			
Trust in Leadership	Female	6	30.75	4.301	.038
	Male	36	19.96		
	Total	42			

Table 4.3.1.3: Kruskal-Wallis Test for the Employee Engagement Survey against Gender classification

Results highlighted that the mean ranks for all the employee engagement practices were not significantly different among the different years of experience group of the participants ($p > 0.05$). This meant that years of experience was not a significant variable for employee engagement.

Ranks					
	Period	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	p-value
Meaningful Work	0-1years	11	15.27	.013	.911
	2-4years	19	15.63		
	+5years	12	15.30		
	Total	42			
Hands Management	0-1years	11	12.73	1.855	.173
	2-4years	19	17.11		
	+5years	12	13.35		
	Total	42			
Positive Work Environment	0-1years	11	14.27	.353	.552
	2-4years	19	16.21		
	+5years	12	15.33		
	Total	42			
Growth Opportunities	0-1years	11	12.41	2.212	.137
	2-4years	19	17.29		
	+5years	12	12.52		
	Total	42			
Trust in Leadership	0-1years	11	13.91	.621	.431
	2-4years	19	16.42		
	+5years	12	14.81		
	Total	42			

Table 4.3.1.4: Kruskal-Wallis Test for the Employee Engagement Survey against employee experience

Age group was not found to have any impact on employee engagement as the mean ranks are similar ($p > 0.05$)

	Age	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	p-value
Meaningful Work	20-25	3	10.55	.012	.912
	26-35	26	15.06		
	36-45	11	14.50		
	45+	2	10.32		
	Total	42			
Hands on Management	20-25	3	11.74	.012	.912
	26-35	26	15.06		
	36-45	11	14.50		
	45+	2	10.31		
	Total	42			
Positive Work Environment	20-25	3	12.62	.109	.741
	26-35	26	14.83		
	36-45	11	16.50		
	45+	2	11.58		
	Total	42			
Growth Opportunities	20-25	3	13.21	.001	.971
	26-35	26	15.02		
	36-45	11	14.83		
	45+	2	12.78		
	Total	42			
Trust in Leadership	20-25	3	13.50	.115	.735
	26-35	26	15.17		
	36-45	11	14.52		
	45+	2	12.81		
	Total	42			

Table 4.3.1.5: Kruskal-Wallis Test for the Employee Engagement Survey against Socio-demographics (age grouped)

Gender was not found to have any impact on both the construct as their mean ranks were similar ($p>0.05$).

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value
Meaningful Work	Female	6	31.83	46.01	.022
	Male	36	19.78		
	Total	42			
Hands Management	Female	6	29.50	60.00	.077
	Male	36	20.17		
	Total	42			
Positive Work Environment	Female	6	30.75	52.50	.042
	Male	36	19.96		
	Total	42			
Growth Opportunities	Female	6	31.33	49.00	.032
	Male	36	19.86		
	Total	42			
Trust in Leadership	Female	6	30.75	52.50	.038
	Male	36	19.96		
	Total	42			

Table 4.3.1.6: Mann-Whitney Test for the Employee Engagement Survey against Socio-demographics

Mann-Whitney test is a nonparametric hypothesis test used when there are two groups, a between-groups design and an ordinal dependent variable. This test is similar to an independent group's t-test; however the dependent variable is measured on an ordinal scale (ranked data). This test is used to test for significant differences between two conditions of an independent variable in an experiment where the dependent variable involves ranked data which is the case in our study. In this study, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference among the different

employee engagement practice items. The findings of our study affirmed that there was a difference, as $p < .05$ for all the employee engagement practice items except for hands management which is not significant.

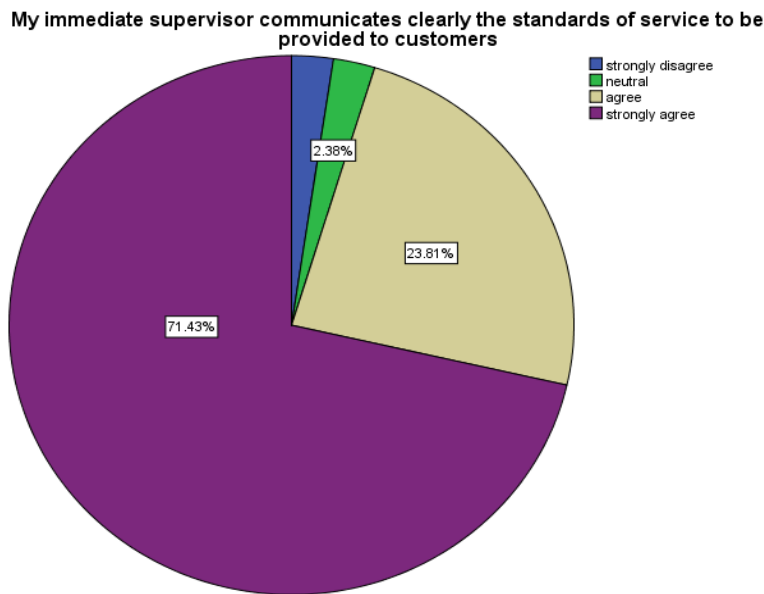


Figure 4.3.1.7: Graphical representation of communication that reveals standard to service customers

The pie chart above shows the frequency distribution of statements regarding hands on management. It was found that more are participants positively responded to statements compared to those who are neutral on their responses. For example, most of the participants (>70%) strongly agreed that the immediate supervisor communicate clearly outlines the expected standard of service that should be provided to customers.

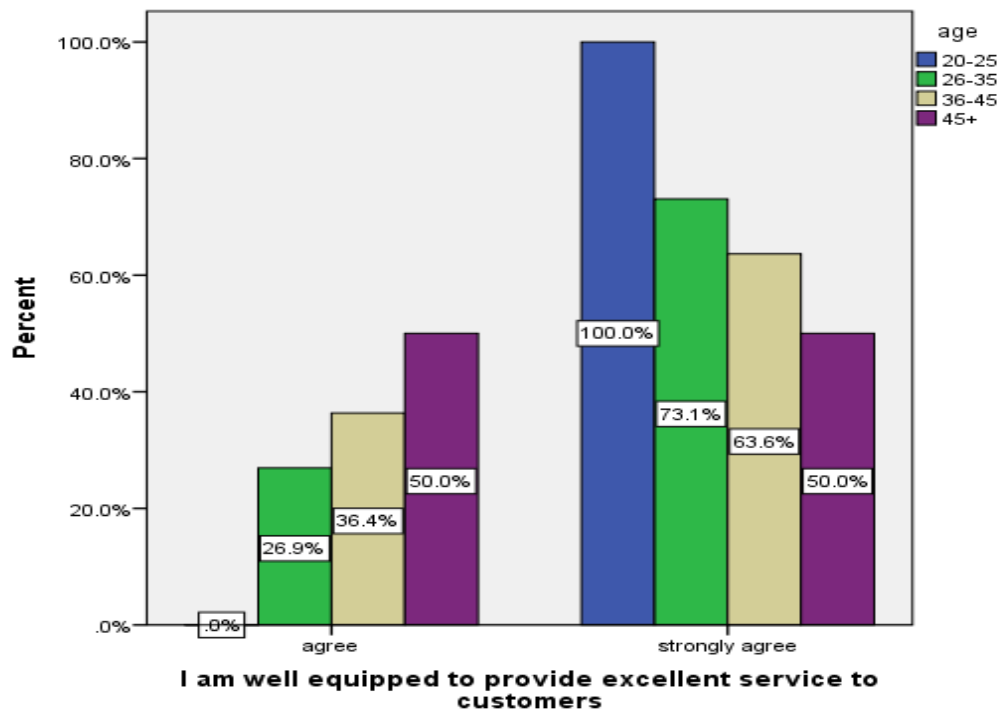


Figure 4.1.3.8: Graphical representation of resources provided to employees to assist in servicing customers

To determine the factors that affect provision of excellent service, five statements were asked. Results showed that more participants aged 20-25 years strongly agreed that 'I am well equipped to provide excellent service to customers' (100%), participants aged 26-35 years is also considered as a key factor (73%).

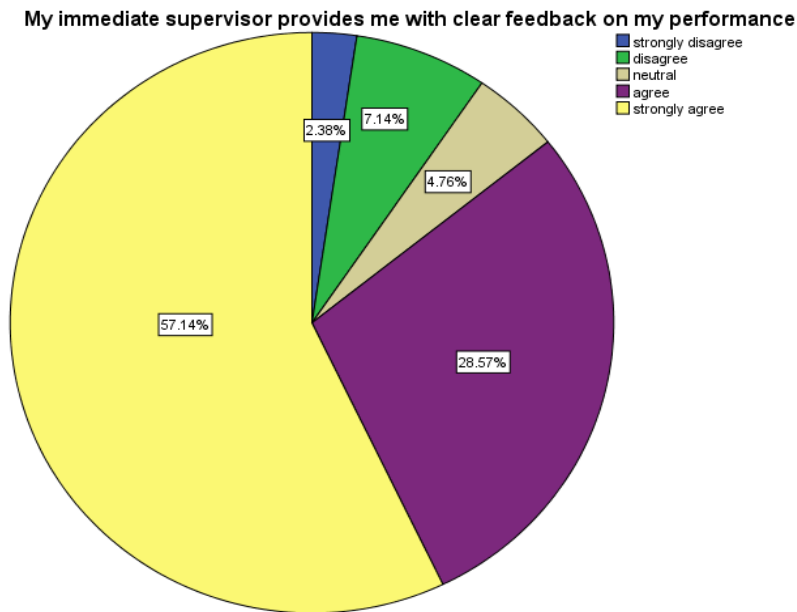


Figure 4.3.1.9: Graphical representation of supervisors providing feedback to subordinates

The pie chart placed above depicts the Likert scale responses to question raised on “my immediate supervisor provides me with clear feedback on my performance”. The chart highlighted that about 57.14% of the participants strongly agree that the immediate supervisor provides clear feedback on the performance while the least responses goes to the strongly disagree.

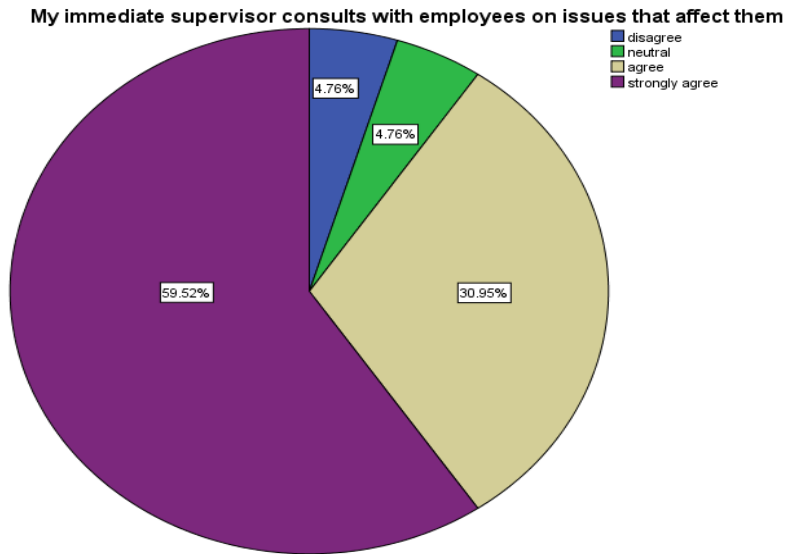


Figure 4.3.1.10: Graphical representation of relationship between supervisor and subordinates on operational issues

Most of the respondents in the sample (59.52%) strongly agree, followed by 30.95% indicating their responses as agree. Of the respondents, about 5% were between strongly agree and neutral. These results are illustrated in figure above.

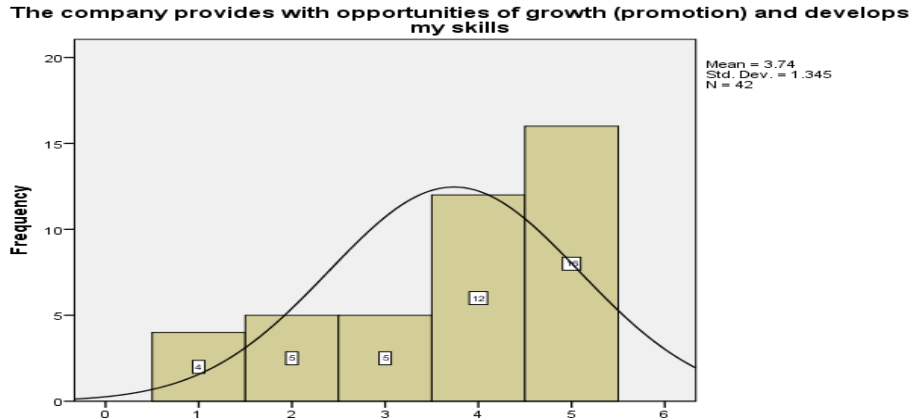


Figure 4.3.1.11: Graphical representation of Histogram depicting growth opportunities provided to employees

The histogram in figure 4.3.1.11 should be symmetric about zero and bell shaped, if the Normality assumption is valid for the current data set. Hence, this limit the level of regression that can be applied to the current data sets.

4.4 Summary

The presented result reflects the outcome of the survey done and the correlation of different employee engagement practices. The result show gives an indication of which employee engagement practices need more attention and improvement due to the answers received from participants. The results will assist in improving relations and finding solutions for problems within the company.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an overall outline of the results of this study, their consequences in terms of previous findings, and meaning in the context this study is presented. This study also explores their implications in the light of extant literature. This study sought to get perspectives from employee engagement as a key to strategy to enhance competitive advantage. The study was motivated by study conducted in 2015 (Bersin, J, 2015) the article used a model for employee engagement and the name of the model is “The simply irresistible organization”.

5.2 Discussion of Results

In this chapter, an overall outline of our results, their implications in terms of previous findings, and meaning in the context our study is presented meticulously. Furthermore, the chapter begins with the irresistible organization model. The present study has its objective in three-fold. Foremost, to ascertain the current employee engagement practices. Secondly, to determine the effectiveness of the employee engagement practices in promoting competitive advantage. Finally, to establish the factors that hinders or affects application of employee engagement.

A total of forty-two (42) questionnaires were filled-in by petrol attendants, cashier, and supervisors of Company X with a response rate of 74%. Much of the sample was of petrol attendants and most was males. In addition, there was almost an equal gender distribution among the young petrol attendants representing 52% and 48% of males and females respectively. Our study reveals that the average age for male petrol attendants was 24 years. Other factors came out from the present study as regarding hindering or

facilitating factors in employee engagement. Such as age, trust in leadership and meaningful work.

The high rate of unemployment in South Africa has caused young people to settle for any kind of job just so they earn an income. Even qualified young people end up working as petrol attendants to gain work experience and income. This affects the issue of job suitability, employees who are highly qualified for a certain position will not find their current job meaningful and suitable for them as they have acquired better skills at university level. This then affects the attitude and level of engagement that these young people will have towards the job itself and towards the company. Companies are to identify young people that are qualified and with different skills to their current jobs and involve them in youth development programs of the company and priorities them when employment opportunities that fit their qualifications and skills arise. This proves the findings from a study done by Anitha & Aruna (2016) indicate that gen Y employees are more loyal to a meaningful job than an organization.

In addition, the result highlighted that there is a close relationship between trust in leadership and positive work environment as $p < 0.05$ in addition, we found a meaningful relationship between hands on management and positive work environment. This simply means that management and immediate supervisor can create conducive work environment. In this study a positive work environment was tested by enquiring about the relationship between employees' and their immediate supervisors. The results then show that there is a good relationship between supervisors and their subordinates. This means that there is efficient communication where subordinates understand what is required to provide excellent services, subordinates are informed about their performance and measures to improve are discussed by both supervisor and subordinates, thereafter employees are recognized for their efforts and excellent work. Immediate supervisors and leadership of Company X can create a positive work environment which enables employees to enjoy working in the company and it also encourages teamwork. The results show that employees are given an opportunity to voice out their opinions and suggestions of how to improve work standards and find solutions to day to day stresses. When employees feel appreciated and involved in decision making they feel part of the success of the company and this increases level of engagement.

The results also showed higher meaningful work associated with lower level of hands on management. This means that giving employees' autonomy is beneficial for both employees and management. Company X should give their employees freedom and control when, performing their duties studies show that companies that promote enhancement of jobs, involve their employees in decision making, supports and give their employees autonomy make more profit. Company X should give their employees the autonomy, listen to their opinions and ideas for them to perceive their work as meaningful and valued by the organisation. These results are in agreement findings of other scholars (Srivastava, 2016; Bersin, 2015; Merisalo, 2016; Anitha, 2014 and Anintha & Aruna, 2016).

A positive work environment promotes a sense of belonging and maximizes interaction and teamwork and this increases levels of employee engagement. Positive work environment enables employees to voluntarily want to go an extra mile for the organization, make employees want to stay and be committed to the company. Positive work environment promotes innovation and a competitive advantage (Armstrong, 2016). When employees are working in a good environment they serve customers better, they have a smile on their faces and looking forward to going to work. Positive work environment can be used as a strategy to enhance competitive advantage (Anitha, 2016). Good working environment and team relationship have positive relationship with employee engagement and it encourages innovation. (Kuliannan *et al.*, 2015; Fauver *et al.*, 2015).

While period on which the participants have worked in the company is a factor that determines the performance of the employees, gender however does not have an impact. This continues to emphasize the importance of creating a positive work environment for employees. Employees will tend to stay longer and perform better when working in a positive work environment. Engaged employees tend to stay with their organization as they are committed to the organization and the job itself. Study by Silva & Dia (2016) found a negative relationship between organisational commitment and intention to leave the company.

The present study is in agreement with findings from previous studies conducted in other part of the world over the past years, on employee engagement practices (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016, Bedarka & Pandita, 2014, Bersin, 2015, Chandani *et.al*, 2016, Dutta & Sharma, 2017, Mehta *et.al.*, 2016; Vosloban, 2013; Elshaer & Augustyn, 2016) all these studies showed that employee engagement is a key strategy to enhance competitive advantage. From the results of the descriptive statistical analysis, participant age group 26-35 years constituted most respondents (61.9%) in our study, indicating that participant aged 26-35 years are the majority among the petrol attendants in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. The company is to prioritize the needs of these employees to ensure that they are engaged and willing to stay with the company. Young people show commitment to the company when there are growth developments and when given autonomy to perform their duties and when they find their job meaningful.

The second objective aimed to determine the effectiveness of the employee engagement practices in promoting competitive advantage. The employee engagement practices currently used by Company X are effect, the result showed that the company offers relevant training to employees and it is through training that employees can perform their duties effectively. Training has a positive impact in increasing loyalty and commitment to the organisation, improving performance and retention (Nkosi, 2015).

The result also showed that growth and personal development opportunities are provided to employees, it is also used as a form of reward to employees who meet targets, other benefits such as awards, prizes and monetary benefits are provided to employees. The results also showed that Company X creates a positive work environment for it employees and there is excellent communication and relations between supervisors and subordinates. This study found a correlation among all employee engagement practices that the questionnaire tested this can promote advantage. Also, findings from the regression analysis result affirmed that both job resources under the current study, among of such is organizational support (including relationships with supervisors) and growth opportunities shows positive relationship to work engagement. This is an indication that higher levels of organizational support and

growth opportunities have association with higher levels of work engagement; this is supported by previous studies (Srivastava, 2016; Armstrong, 2016; Salanova *et al.*, 2012; Nawaz *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2013).

The third objective of this study is to establish the factors that hinders or affects application of employee engagement. In examining the impact of the demographic characteristics variables on the employee engagement variables, the results obtained from the cross tabulation and paired sample t-test demonstrate a committed association among some of the variables.

Factors that may hinder the implementation of employee engagement can be turning a blind eye to high performing employees by not rewarding them; this also includes not providing feedback to employees about their performance. Company X should ensure that they develop a career path for their employees and instill a learning culture. Company X should evaluate their training programs and ensure that training program concentrate on paying attention to the unique needs of each individual especially employees that already have other skills (Jain *et al.*, 2017). When employee feel appreciated and their needs catered for by the company their level of commitment towards their work and company increases. This promotes trust in leadership, enhances a positive work environment and sense of belonging.

On the contrary, there was no meaningful relationship between positive works environment and hands on management. From this study, we found that the form of association between trust in leadership and growth opportunity are higher and vice versa within the work environment, an observation that supports previous studies (Kuliannan & Adjovu (2015); Bersin, Gosling & Sloan, 2016; Armstrong, 2016).

The other findings of this study highlighted the kind of correlation that existed between trust in leadership and growth opportunity as positive ($p < 0.05$). Consequently, this suggests that higher levels of trust in leadership are correlated with higher levels of growth opportunity within the work environment. In addition, a statistical committed relationship was also observed between trust in leadership and hands on management,

this is confirming findings by Wang et al., (2013), that hands on manager promote honesty and transparency which in turn will increase levels of employee engagement.

5.3 Summary

This chapter deliberates on outcomes of the survey conducted and meaning behind these results. These results provide Company X with a way forward on how to make employee engagement a strategy to enhance competitive advantage. There are findings from this study that agree with the previous studies and part is in contrary with the existing studies. These findings provide an indication of employee engagement level of employees from Company X and prove the effectiveness of the current employee engagement practices used by the company.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter ties up the aim of the study with the finding and concludes from what has been discovered. Recommendations on how to improve will be detailed, limitations of the study will be discussed and how they can be avoided in the future. This chapter will also look at recommendations for future studies.

6.2 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the current employee engagement practices used by Company X are effective to gain them a competitive advantage. The objectives of this study was to ascertain the current employee engagement practices, determine the effectiveness of the employee engagement practices in promoting competitive advantage, and establish the factors that hinders / affects application of employee engagement.

The results show that employees understand their role and find their work meaningful. The employees are well trained and equipped with all necessities that enable them to provide an excellent service to customers. There is a conducive and positive work environment; there is a good working relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors. The factors that can hinder implementation of employee engagement were identified in some petrol filling stations. The factors that were identified were that some employees felt that their immediate supervisors did not recognize them when they have done an excellent job. This could hinder engagement of an employee as when employees do not feel appreciated their level of engagement decreases. This could also affect the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Company X is one of the leading only companies in South Africa and has been in the petroleum industry for years. Company X can also look at positioning their petrol

stations at busy areas and target communities that do not have petrol stations; this will enable them to gain more customers.

6.3 Implication of this Research

This study contributes in confirming that employees that work in a positive work environment have a prominent level of engagement. The main drive of employee engagement is the management and leadership of the organization. This study unveiled a positive relationship between hands on management and growth opportunity; a strong correlation between trust in leadership and hands on management, a positive relationship between meaningful work and hands on management, trust in leadership and growth opportunity and trust in leadership and hands on management, hands on management and positive work environment. This simple means that when managers are more involved in day to day operations it creates a positive work environment. Hands on managers can identify employees that require more training and employees that deserve growth opportunities. All stakeholders of the company benefit from these findings as managers will understand the importance of being more involved, for subordinates this will enable an opportunity for growth, relevant training and recognition for excellent work done. The customers of Company X will also benefit as their needs will be satisfied as they will be serviced by engaged employees. Engaged employees go an extra mile to achieve the goals of the company, satisfy customer needs and they are brand ambassadors of the company.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is due to time not all petrol filling stations of Company X in Durban could be visited. Due to the nature of the job the petrol filling stations had to be visited during off- peak hours and during those off-peak hours some employees are on lunch. In the future this can be resolved by visiting the petrol filling station more than once since they open 24 hours.

6.5 Recommendations to solve the research question

The survey discloses a positive relationship between positive work environment and hands on management. The study also reveals a correlation between positive work environment and trust in leadership. It is imperative for managers are to take note of the importance of creating a positive work environment. Positive work environment enables employees to go an extra mile for the organization; it promotes a sense of belonging and encourages decent work relationship among employees and between employer and employee. It is commended that to create this positive work environment there must be efficient communication within the organization, the vision and mission of the organization must be clearly outlined to all employees. Supervisors should also share knowledge and information with employees and also recognize them for excellent work done by employees as this will contribute positively towards promoting positive work environment.

The employees of Company X are provided with training that enables them to provide excellent service to customers, most employees find their work meaningful and their skills are suitable for the jobs they do. However, there are employees whom their skills and abilities do not fit with their current job. Due to the high rate of unemployment in South Africa and inability of low income earners to send their children to University the youth find themselves taking any job just, so they can earn an income. According to Statistics SA, the unemployment rate is 27.7%, young people end up with jobs that they are not qualified to do. It is recommended that whenever Company X has vacant posts, employment opportunities and youth development programs within the company, employees in the petrol stations are the first to be informed and included. It will be beneficial for Company X to involve these employees as they understand the brand and have received training from the company.

In creating a positive work environment and good relationship with subordinates, management can make use of different leadership styles depending on the readiness of each employee. For employees that prefer to be given autonomy delegation style can be used where the leader provides little direction and give all the responsibility and implementation to the subordinate, this displays trust and promote good relations between leader and subordinate. Due to nature of the job and clarifying of expected results the leader can also make use of telling style which is more concerned with ensuring that the job gets done, this involves giving explicit directions on how tasks should be done. This will assist as subordinates will have a clear understanding of what is expected from them and give an opportunity for interaction between supervisor and subordinates and for subordinates to seek clarity where necessary. These leadership styles will cover all subordinates, those who prefer autonomy and those who prefer direction from leadership. Managers are to assess the readiness of their subordinates.

6.6 Recommendations for future studies

The study has assessed customer expectations and perceptions on petrol attendant's service delivery and service quality and identified the gaps that exist in service quality. Future research may be undertaken to balance the findings of this study by forming the service delivery model that petrol stations can employ to deliver the required services. The study was confined to the KwaZulu Natal, Durban. Future research should be expanded to many other provinces throughout South Africa.

Future research should be undertaken on customer satisfaction and service quality improvement. This study found that there is a significant different between the five service quality dimensions regarding customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. Therefore, further research involving an in-depth analysis of the reasons why customer expectations and perceptions differ, especially regarding the dimension on empathy should be conducted.

Future research should be undertaken on how to identify and engage disengaged employees. It is difficult to identify employees that are not engaged as they act busy,

work just enough to prove they were at work for the day, this then make it hard to identify them as they also produce results, even training disengaged employees does not improve or engage them. Disengaged employees entice excessive costs such as training costs, increase absenteeism and low productivity.

6.7 Summary

This study confirmed finding of a number of studies that have been conducted previously. The findings will assist in improving relations between supervisors and subordinates. All stakeholders of the company will benefit, the recommendations will assist in improving employee commitment and customer loyalty. Engaged employees are crucial for the survival and competitiveness of the organization. Disengaged employees tarnish the brand and discourages other employees. In order for companies to satisfy customer needs, achieve goals and enhance competitive advantage employee engagement should be part of their culture and be prioritized. This study also proved that money is not the most important motivational factor as issues of remuneration where not part of the study. It proved that a positive work environment, good relations between employer and employee can be used to motivate employees. The recognition of excellent work done by employees through non-monetary rewards and provision of growth and development through training can motivate and increase employee engagement. This encourages trust, increase employee engagement, and commitment to both the company and its leadership.

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