

# **Developing a labour relations model of employee engagement in a unionised environment**

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## PREFACE

The preparation of this thesis is in the format of a collection of articles and includes two chapters of a co-authored peer-reviewed monograph, titled *The Art of Engaging Unionised Employees*, by Springer Nature in 2019, and two research articles to be published in peer-reviewed academic journals. The chapters are presented autonomously; they follow a common theme and are connected to the research objective. Each chapter is therefore presented with an individual reference list. The literature and empirical studies are divided into specific chapters, although the two research articles also include literature components to accommodate the author guidelines of the journal for which it was prepared. The literature review is presented in Chapters 2 and 3 and represents a summary of the peer-reviewed monograph. These chapters critically evaluate and interprets the body of knowledge that exists relating to the current research on employee engagement to provide the theoretical basis for the research and to identify the antecedents and circumstances that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment. The empirical chapters in the form of two journal articles are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and report on the development and statistical analysis of a measurement and structural model. Article 1 (*Measuring employee engagement in a unionised environment: Development and validation of an engagement scale*) was submitted to the African Journal of Employee Relations for review and publication. Article 2 (*Engagement levels: A structural equation modelling approach*) was submitted to the International Journal of Environment, Workplace and Employment (IJEWE), for review and publication. JH Nel the PhD student; supported the conceptualisation of the study, intensive literature overview, data analysis, conceptualising and writing the monographs and the two research articles and finalisation thereof. Prof. BJ Linde, the co-author provided critical peer review in-put into the monograph, support in the conceptualisation of the monograph and research articles and peer review during the writing of the articles and finalisation of the articles.

## **DECLARATION**

I, Jan Hendrick (Jaco) Nel, identity number 6701295061086 and student number 24748692 hereby declare that this research submitted to the North-West University, for the Philosophiae Doctor study in dissertation format: *The development of a labour relations model of employee engagement in a unionised environment*, is my independent work; and complies with the Code of Academic Integrity, as well as other relevant policies, procedures, rules and regulations of the North-West University; and has not been submitted before to any institution by myself or any other person in fulfilment (or partial fulfilment) of the requirements for the attainment of any qualification.



1 June 2020

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Mr Jaco Nel

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Date

I hereby declare that I have approved the inclusion of the monograph chapters and two (2) research articles as mentioned in the preface and that my role in this study complies with what is described in the preface. I hereby grant permission that these articles may be published as part of the PhD thesis of Jan Hendrick Nel.



15 June 2020

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Prof BJ Linde

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Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research project would not have been possible without the support of my family. I acknowledge and thank my wife, Adele, and my children, Devon and Andrea for the support during this journey. Adele and Andrea your sacrifices and encouragement gave me the strength to persevere throughout this time.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Bennie Linde, my Promotor. Thank you for your dedication, patience and willingness to share your knowledge with me. It is a privilege to be associated with you and to have been your student.

## **SUMMARY**

The concept of employee engagement has gained widespread international attention since the 1990s in response to the emergence of a global economy characterised by intense competition, resulting in increased pressure on businesses to raise quality, reduce costs and increase productivity. In response to this continuous competition, human resources professionals are challenged to develop strategies that increase individual and organisational performance. Employee engagement is embraced as one such strategy. The appeal of employee engagement is that it proposes reciprocal and mutually beneficial employment relationships between employers and employees, which is a key factor for an organisation's success and its ability to circumvent the traditional trade-offs and tension existing between employer and employees within the human resource and industrial relations domains. A wide range of theoretical models has been developed to determine which approaches have the greatest potential to engender high levels of engagement. However, most models examine the relationship between antecedents and outcomes at an individual level and do not consider the collective context of an organisation where there is an interchange between union and non-union members influenced by collective forms of representation.

Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is as important as engagement in an environment without strong union presence due to the interdependence between union and non-union members and their collective perceptions about the organisation. It is further suggested that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts, and that the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant since union members' dissatisfaction can spread to their co-workers leading to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation as a whole. It is within this context that a theoretical framework was developed that considers the collective context of an organisation and has the potential to measure and improve engagement levels in a unionised environment. The theoretical framework provided the basis for the development of the conceptual model that was constructed around the individual and collective relationships between groups in an organisation. The premise of the conceptual model is that engagement-enabling dimensions (antecedents) influence an individual's psychological experience of work, in turn influencing engagement levels that lead to positive work behaviour. The model, grounded in the theory of engagement

and industrial relations, outlines how eight antecedents influence an individual's psychological experience of work, which, in turn, influence engagement levels and leads to positive individual and business outcomes.

The antecedents and outcomes of the model provided the theoretical basis for the development of the measurement model. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to explore the factorial structure of the model, using the principal component analysis (PCA). In order to establish and confirm that the final measurement model fitted the underlying data satisfactorily, and supported construct validity and reliability, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the measurement and structural model. Further analysis of the measurement model was conducted to appraise the validity of the hypothesised paths of the model and test the mediation of engagement by making use of the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. The overall results of the CFA indicated a satisfactory model fit. The results of the SEM indicated positive relationships between job design and engagement, collaborative partnerships and business outcomes, job design and individual and business outcomes, and that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes. The originality/value of this paper includes that it builds on existing engagement research and thereby advances the understanding of the construct within a collective context.

## **Key terms**

Antecedents; conceptual model; employee engagement; engagement scale; individual outcomes; levels of engagement; measurement model; organisational outcomes; outcomes; theoretical framework; levels of engagement

## **ACRONYMS**

AGFI:	Adjusted goodness-of-fit index
ASTD:	American Society for Training and Development
AUSSA:	Australian survey of social attitudes
AVE:	Average variance extracted
AWIRS:	Australian workplace industrial relations survey
CFI:	Comparative fit index
CIMO:	Context, interventions, mechanisms and outcomes
CMIN/DF:	Normed chi-squared
CR:	Composite reliability
CFA:	Confirmatory factor analysis
EOR:	Employee organisation relationship
EFA:	Exploratory factor analysis
GFI:	Goodness-of-fit index
HPWO:	High performance work organisations and environments
HRM:	Human resource management
ISA:	Intellectual, social, affective engagement scale
JDR:	Job demands resource model
KMO:	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
LBI:	Leadership behaviour inventory
LME:	Leader member exchange

NFI:	Normed fit index
OCB:	Organisational citizenship behaviours
PCA:	Principal component analysis
RMSEA:	Root mean square error of approximation
RMSR:	Root mean square residual
RNI:	Relative noncentrality index
ROA:	Return on assets
SEM:	Structural equation modelling
SET:	Social exchange theory
SHRM:	Society for Human Resources
SOE:	State owned entity
SPSS:	Statistical Program for Social Sciences
TLI:	Tucker-Lewis index
UWES:	Utrecht work engagement scale
$\chi^2$ :	Model chi-square
WERS:	Workplace employment relations study

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The first mention of employee engagement to appear in management literature was in a 1990 Academy of Management Journal article, “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work” (Kahn, 1990). Kahn’s (1990) conceptual work was the first to provide a foundation for the theoretical development of employee engagement. Kahn’s (1990) further pursuits for an understanding of the self-in-role process, and the roles people occupy at work, led to Kahn (1990) creating the term *engagement*. Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Engagement has been described as the conditions that lead to engagement, while others suggest that engagement is a personality trait, and some view engagement as a state of motivation, which reflects Kahn’s (1990) conceptualisation of engagement (Whittington et al., 2017).

The meaning of engagement might be easily identifiable in practice, but difficult to define, and no widely accepted definition of engagement is currently in use (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli, 2013). Engagement has been beset by disagreement about its nature, since it was conceptualised by Kahn (1990), due to its overlap with other traditional concepts (Schaufeli, 2013). The most apparent overlap is with job-related attitudes, job behaviour and behavioural intentions, health and well-being, and personality traits (Schaufeli, 2013). This inconsistency resulted in a confused approach to understanding and developing strategies around employee engagement within organisations (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012). Regardless of the lack of consensus, practitioners and academics agree that the consequences of employee engagement are positive, as employees’ active commitment and involvement are imperative in the organisational performance and competitive advantage of an organisation.

Organisations trust that by managing a range of variables, known as antecedents of engagement, they can effectively manage the consequences of engagement and increase the engagement levels of its employees (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The

majority of the antecedents reflect the three psychological conditions identified by Kahn (1990) in his foundational theory, namely meaningfulness, safety and availability (Crawford et al., 2014). The theme underlying Kahn's (1990) research is that individuals' perceptions of the organisation, job and personal characteristics affect the experience of the three psychological conditions, which, in turn, guide the individuals' decisions to engage more completely in their work roles (Crawford et al., 2014). The consequences of high engagement levels are promoted to be what most organisations are pursuing, as it can lead to enhanced employee performance, and, in turn, higher profitability, revenue generation and organisational growth (Bailey et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Holbeche & Springett, 2003; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Engagement and employee retention have emerged as leading concerns for organisations, and those that actively enhance employee engagement will accomplish something that their competitors will find difficult to replicate (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). Employee engagement has the potential to enhance both individual well-being and organisational performance, circumventing the traditional trade-offs and tension that exist between employer and employees within the human resource and industrial relations domains (Truss et al., 2013).

Although the concept of engagement has become increasingly mainstream in management over the past decade, it has been reported that engagement is on the decline worldwide and that there is a deepening disengagement among employees (Saks, 2006). According to Gallup (2017), 85% of employees are disengaged, which is concerning to organisations as disengaged employees are not just unhappy at work; they are actively acting out their unhappiness. Donais (2010) and Tyler (2009) further suggested that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts and that the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant since union members' dissatisfaction can spread to their co-workers and can lead to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation as a whole (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013). Research between the internal organisational context and collective forms of representation and its impact on engagement levels is currently under-explored (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014). This phenomenon is questionable, as there is an increasing understanding that engagement interventions in an environment with a strong unionised presence require

a different approach to an environment with a homogenous workforce. Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is just as important as engagement in an environment without a strong union presence due to the interdependence between union and non-union members and the shared perceptions staff collectively share about the organisation (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013).

The lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of engagement may also affect how to measure engagement, but does not prevent researchers from measuring engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). A wide range of different models has consequently been developed to measure and to define the state of engagement since the conceptualisation of the construct engagement (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014). Research on engagement has exclusively focused on non-union employees, which is questionable because there is an increasing understanding that the development of employee potential cannot exclusively be focused on non-union employees (Donais, 2010). Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is just as important as engagement in a non-unionised environment, due to the correlation between engagement and positive individual and organisational outcomes (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013).

## **1.2 Background**

Employees often join unions in an attempt to increase satisfaction, but never achieve the same satisfaction levels as their non-unionised peers (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013). While workers join trade unions to benefit from their collective membership, there are very limited returns by way of specific outcomes or greater voice (Guest & Conway, 2002). According to Donais (2010), the reason for the higher disengagement levels among unionised employees is the relationship the union has with its employer. Furthermore, union members are more likely to remain with one organisation throughout their careers and their dissatisfaction will impact on the engagement levels of the entire workforce and impair any engagement efforts (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013). Employers see the value of engaging employees, but fail to successfully implement engagement strategies in unionised environments, leading to resentment as they realise that unions can directly influence the outcomes of engagement efforts (Donais, 2010). Despite the existence of several models to measure and define the state of engagement, they predominantly measure engagement at an individual level

and fail to take micro- and macro-contextual factors into account (Bailey et al., 2015). It is within this context that a theoretical framework was developed that considers the collective context of an organisation and has the potential to measure and influence engagement levels in a unionised environment. The framework was constructed around the individual and collective relationship between groups in an organisation and it reflects the synthesis of the evidence obtained during the literature review relating to the researched and validated antecedents and newly discovered additional antecedents that have the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment. The framework provides the conceptual clarification on employee engagement in a unionised environment and provides the theoretical basis for the development and validation of the measurement and structural model.

### **1.3 Clarification of key concepts**

The introduction and background identified that there continues to be a lack of consensus among academics and practitioners regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement from other constructs. Numerous definitions and frameworks of engagement were developed to define the existing understanding of engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). The existence of these different definitions and frameworks makes it difficult to determine whether efforts to improve engagement are successful as each study examines employee engagement under a different construct (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). This inconsistency resulted in a confused approach to understanding and developing strategies around employee engagement within organisations (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012). The further lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of engagement affects how engagement is measured, but has not prevented researchers from measuring engagement, and organisations believe that by identifying a range of antecedents of engagement, they can create a framework of engagement that will facilitate and predict high engagement levels, which, in turn, will have a positive impact on individual and business outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). These frameworks, however, only focus on individual-level engagement and fail to take micro- and macro-contextual factors into account (Bailey et al., 2015). Furthermore, they do not address issues of power and politics in the workplace, particularly in environments with a strong union presence. However, identifying which antecedents enable engagement behaviour is almost as difficult as

identifying one single definition of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This is mainly because within the practitioners' and academic literature, a multitude of different engagement drivers has been suggested. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on what drives high levels of engagement in organisations, no research has been done focusing on the antecedents that will increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. To address engagement in a unionised environment, there must be a clear understanding of the circumstances that influence engagement levels in an environment with a unionised presence, as union members present different challenges to engaging non-union members. Increasing the levels of engagement of employees in a unionised environment has become a priority for organisations and they view engagement as a framework for their wider employee relations strategies. Based on the introduction and background, the main constructs of the model, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, are elaborated on.

### **1.3.1 Labour relations model**

Due to its complexity, engaging unionised employees requires a thorough understanding of the nature of the employment relationship, as well as the functioning of the broader labour relations system. Dunlop (1958) made the first concerted effort to provide a theoretical framework for industrial relations as a discipline in his use of a systems approach. Dunlop (1956) argues that the industrial relations system encompasses the following components. Firstly, the actors who are involved in the employment (industrial) relationship include a hierarchy of managers and their representatives, non-managerial workers and their spokespersons, and government agencies. Secondly, these actors operate within the constraints of various environmental influences. Thirdly, a common ideology that must be sufficiently comparable and consistent to permit a common and acceptable role for each actor (Finnemore, 2009). Fourthly, the parties and power realities are a major feature of the model. The balance of power between the parties is in a constant state of instability, which is regulated by structures and processes for conflict resolution (Finnemore, 2009). The final component is the outcomes of the system, which culminate in either co-operation or conflict. The outcomes are grounded in the approaches of employer or countries according to the dominant characteristics of the labour relations system

and can include the concepts of unitarism, pluralism, Marxism, societal corporatism and state corporatism (Finnemore, 2009).

### **1.3.2 Employee engagement**

Although numerous definitions of engagement exist, the conceptualisation of engagement as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance” provides the theoretical foundation for the research (Kahn, 1990 p. 649). Kahn’s (1990) definition still provides the strongest theoretical rationale for understanding the motivational state approach to engagement (Whittington et al., 2017). The theme underlying Kahn’s (1990) theory of engagement is about the individual’s perception of the organisation, the job itself and the personality traits of the individual. These perceptions contribute towards the psychological experience of work and, in turn, guide the individuals’ decisions to engage more completely in their work roles (Whittington et al., 2017).

### **1.3.3 Unionised environment**

Organisations are defined by sets of relationships between interest groups and individuals who connect through activities, tasks, goals and missions (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). It is these relationships that affect how work gets done and how individuals and teams coordinate their efforts and knowledge to enable them to accomplish tasks (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Relationships are the nervous system of the organisations and the source of complex social interaction that defines the relational context of an organisation. This relational context includes relationships between co-worker, partnerships, affiliations, groups, teams, departments, divisions, hierarchical and peer relations. It is this context that shapes the extent to which individuals engage (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). This interplay between union and non-union members can be contagious due to the relational context. Fluctuating levels of engagement in organisations and differences between engagement levels of union and non-union employees put pressure on organisations to create inclusive measures that consider the organisational context of an environment that is influenced by collective forms of representation. A unionised environment is therefore defined as the shared

perceptions of union and non-union members of the organisation collectively, which, in turn, guide the individuals' decisions to engage more completely in their work roles.

#### **1.3.4 Antecedents and outcomes of engagement**

The antecedents of employee engagement are defined as conditions (engagement enabling factors) that precede the development of employee engagement. These antecedents should be in place before an organisation can realise the benefit of the engagement-related individual and business outcomes (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Despite the existence of common engagement drivers, different groups and individuals are influenced by different factors due to various organisational factors (Kular et al., 2008). Wollard and Shuck (2011) conclude that no one process model fits across all antecedents, and different organisations would create engagement in different ways but using different organisation-specific strategies and methods. Positive outcomes associated with employee engagement are numerous and varied due to different measurement tools used to assess engagement and the numerous definitions used to create those measurement systems (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). Practitioners and academics tend to agree that the consequences of employee engagement are positive, as employees' active commitment and involvement are imperative in the organisational performance and competitive advantage of any organisation.

#### **1.4 Research problem**

Despite organisations globally embracing engagement over the past decade, engagement is on the decline and a deepening disengagement among employees has been reported. It is furthermore suggested that companies with a unionised presence must pay special attention to engagement levels, as data suggests that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts. The impact of disengagement in companies with union presence is often more significant since union members' dissatisfaction spreads to co-workers and can lead to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation (Donais, 2010; Sheridan & Anderson, 2013; Tyler, 2009). Engagement models that define shared perceptions of union and non-union members collectively have been neglected through research, especially considering that disengagement in one group can spread to disengagement in another group. Organisations have subsequently resorted to a one-measure-fits-all approach

using generic models to define and measure employees' engagement levels, not considering the collective organisational context. Consequently, the evidence does not inform the interventions implemented, as it is not based on the shared perceptions of union and non-union members. Invariably, this leads to the implementation of engagement strategies not aligned with the organisational context and are destined to fail. Organisations have consequently blamed the failure to successfully implement engagement strategies on the union presence in the organisation. The perception that unions and their members actively undermine engagement efforts is counterproductive and leads to mistrust, making the implementation of engagement efforts in a unionised environment problematic. Differences between union and non-union members make engaging unionised employees more challenging due to the nature of the relationship between trade unions and their members. Unions may also use their collective bargaining power to influence engagement efforts in the workplace (Donais, 2014). Research examining the internal organisational context, collective forms of representation and the impact on engagement levels is under-explored, despite an increasing understanding that engagement interventions in a unionised environment require a different approach than a homogenous workforce. Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is equally important as engagement in an environment without a strong union presence due to the interdependence between employees and the shared perceptions of the staff about the organisation. Fluctuating levels of engagement and disproportionate engagement levels have put pressure on organisations to create inclusive measures that consider the organisational context of a unionised environment.

*Neglected engagement methods in organisations impact on workplace behaviour and the organisation's overall performance, which is further complicated in a unionised environment. Unclear antecedents and circumstances influencing engagement in a unionised environment have a detrimental effect on workplace relations and behaviour.*

## **1.5 Research question**

The primary research question that arises from the literature, background and problem statement, is:

- What antecedents and circumstances influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment?

The secondary research questions, arising from the problem statement and primary research question, are:

- How has engagement been defined and conceptualised within academic and practitioner literature?
- What do academics and practitioners recognise as conditions for high levels of engagement?
- What reported circumstances influence engagement levels in a unionised environment?
- What approaches and interventions have the greatest potential to create and embed high levels of engagement in a unionised environment?
- What could a valid model, which defines, measures and enables engagement in a unionised environment look like to increase engagement levels?
- How can engagement be measured on the relationship between employee engagement antecedents and performance outcomes?

## **1.6 Research objectives**

### **1.6.1 Primary objective**

1.6.1.1 The primary objective of the research is to determine the antecedents and circumstances that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment.

### **1.6.2 Secondary objectives**

1.6.2.1 To explore the development of engagement through a theoretical lens to gain a better understanding of the concepts, framework, antecedents and

outcomes of engagement through a systematic review of the literate and narrative synthesis of the evidence.

1.6.2.2 To identify propositions from a literature review to inform a theoretical model for engagement.

1.6.2.3 To propose a theoretical model for engagement in a unionised environment.

1.6.2.4 To report on the development and validation of a measurement scale, drawing from the theoretical model that measures employee engagement in a unionised environment.

1.6.2.5 Confirming the internal reliability and construct validity of the measurement model.

1.6.2.6 Testing the fit of the measurement and structural model.

1.6.2.7 To determine whether the pathways hypothesised in the structural model are significant.

1.6.2.8 Test the mediation influence of engagement on the model.

## **1.7 Research methodology**

### **1.7.1 Research model**

The empirical research model (illustrated in Figure 1.1) was compiled based on the background of the study and the problem statement. The model illustrates the constructs and the hypothesised relationships between the engagement enabling antecedents (independent variable), and individual and business outcomes (dependent variables), mediated by employee engagement (mediating variable).

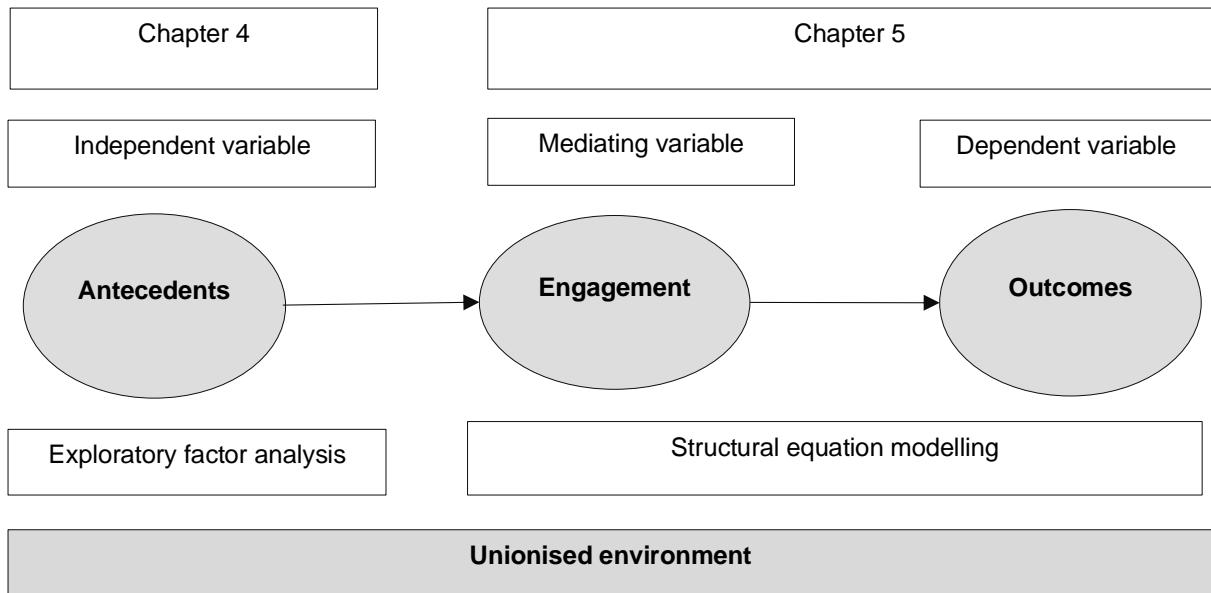


Figure 1.1: Research model

### 1.7.2 Outline of the study

The research method of this study includes a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the literature and an empirical study to achieve the primary and secondary objectives. The literature and empirical studies are divided into specific studies, although the research articles also include literature components stemming from the systematic review. The literature review is presented in Chapters 2 and 3, and critically evaluates and interprets the body of knowledge that exists relating to the current research on employee engagement to provide the theoretical basis for the research. The empirical chapters, in the form of journal articles, are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and report on the development and statistical analysis of the measurement and structural model.

Chapter 1 provides a contextual background for investigating the importance of developing a model for employee engagement in a unionised environment. This chapter also provides an outline of the research initiating questions and objectives of this study. Chapter 2 is the first literature study and provides a background to the origins and development of engagement through a systematic review of the literature to gain a better understanding of the concepts, frameworks, antecedents and outcomes of engagement. The objective of this chapter is to create the foundational framework for the development of a new validated model for engagement in a unionised environment. This chapter addresses the secondary objectives (1.6.2.1)

and gives theoretical substance to the process of developing a labour relations model of employee engagement. Chapter 3 is the second literature chapter and provides further contextual background, focusing on the synthesis of the evidence on the approaches and interventions that may have the greatest potential to influence engagement in a unionised environment. The objective of this chapter is to identify propositions to create a new framework, which will form the theoretical basis for the development of the measurement and structural models. This chapter concludes with the construction of a proposed theoretical framework grounded in the theory of engagement and labour relations. This chapter links secondary objectives 1.6.2.2 and 1.6.2.3 to the development and validation of the measurement and conceptual models.

Chapter 4 is the first research article and focuses on the development and validation of a measurement scale that measures employee engagement in a unionised environment. This chapter draws from the theoretical model developed in Chapter 3 and aims to report on the validation of a measurement scale, which was used in specifying the measurement and structural models. In this chapter, research objectives 1.6.2.4 and 1.6.2.5 are addressed. Chapter 5 is the second research article and focuses on an evaluation of the testing of the specified models through a structural equation modelling approach. The objectives of this chapter are; firstly, to analyse the fit of the measurement model; secondly, specifying the overall measurement model that underlies the structural model; thirdly, to determine whether the proposed structural pathway of the structural model is valid and significant, and to test the mediation of engagement. The following nine hypotheses were identified to reach the primary and secondary objectives of the research:

- H1:* Collaborative partnerships are positively related to engagement.
- H2:* Leadership behaviour is positively related to engagement.
- H3:* Job design factors are positively related to engagement.
- H4:* Engagement is positively related to individual outcomes.
- H5:* Engagement is positively related to business outcomes.

- H6:* The relationship between collaborative partnerships and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H7:* The relationship between leadership behaviour and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H8:* The relationship between job design and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H9:* The structural model provides a valid description of how the engagement antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement outcomes.

In this chapter, research objectives 1.6.2.6, 1.6.2.7, 1.6.2.8 and hypotheses testing are addressed. Chapter 6, the final chapter, focuses on the discussion of the findings, limitations and contribution to the development of the theory on engagement. The chapter concludes with a proposed labour relations model of employee engagement in a unionised environment that measures the shared perceptions of union and non-union members collectively and in so doing addresses the primary research objective of this study.

### **1.7.3 Research design**

The research design of a study reflects the strategy that will be used to find answers to the various research objectives. The design of this study consists of a theoretical model, measurement and structural model. The theoretical model provided the theoretical basis for conceptualising the measurement model, whereas the measurement model is used to determine and confirm the structure of the scale used to measure the latent constructs and assess the construct validity and reliability (Hair et al., 1995). The structural model measures relationships between latent variables and the number of unexplained variables (Shumacker & Lomax, 2010).

### **1.7.4 Literature study**

A systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence on employee engagement literature were conducted to provide a contextual background for the study in Chapters 2 and 3. This narrative evidence synthesis adopted the guidelines established by Briner and Denyer (2012) to determine the quality, relevance, transparency,

replicability and credibility of the research. The search strategy adopted a dual approach, as the focus of the review was academic in nature. The review of the literature was primarily focused only on academic works, including seminal publications, frameworks and models that informed the academic conceptualisation of employee engagement; and the second focused on a review of practitioners' literature. The data was collected through a structured search of the literature on engagement using an exact phrase search approach across several databases and different disciplines in the field of psychology, business management, economics, sociology, philosophy and industrial relations. The search was confined to literature that was published after 1990 when Kahn (1990) published his seminal work on engagement. The search strategy was further improved by citation tracking, scanning reference lists, endnotes and footnotes for additional material not identified by the databases.

The structured search yielded 382 sources from the various fields that were extracted and considered for data analysis using the context, interventions, mechanisms and outcomes (CIMO) method to map the issues, focus the question and test their logic (Denyer & Transfield, 2009). Using the CIMO framework led to the exclusion of 194 records because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The net result was that only 188 literature sources were eligible for further assessment. The 188 sources were critically evaluated against inclusion criteria and data was extracted from the included material as the basis of the synthesis. A further 58 sources were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Complete versions of the 130 sources were shortlisted to perform a narrative synthesis of the evidence. The approach to synthesising the data mirrors that suggested by Popay et al. (2006) in that it explored the relationships in the extracted data within and between studies. Emerging themes in the data were identified and clustered together to develop new insights into engagement in general, and within the context of a unionised environment to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of the theoretical, measurement and structural models.

### **1.7.5 Empirical study**

The study in Chapters 4 and 5 was quantitative in nature and the following section highlights the methods chosen to conduct the empirical analysis.

Chapter 4 was based on the recommendations of Boateng et al. (2018) and Hinkin (1998) for the validation of the measuring instrument. The specific objectives were to extract the dimensions to be tested from the construct under research, to identify the items of the dimensions for inclusion during the development of the questionnaire, to evaluate the factorial structure of the scale, to establish the internal reliability of the scale and to demonstrate the construct validity of the new scale. A structural equation model (SEM) analysis was conducted in Chapter 5. A SEM is a combination of exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression, and can be used as a confirmatory technique or for exploratory purposes (Schreiber et al., 2006). The following SEM stages proposed by Schumacker and Lomax (2010) were largely followed, namely model specification, identification, estimation, evaluation and modification. For model specification, two steps proposed by Weston and Gore (2006) were followed to stipulate the relationships that exist between latent variables. The first step is specifying the overall measurement model that underlies the structural model; and secondly, specifying the proposed structural model. The specific objectives were to evaluate the fit of the measurement and structural models and to determine the extent to which the proposed structural model pathways are valid and significant (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). A mediation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesised mediating effect of engagement in the model.

### **1.7.6 Sample**

The empirical study (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) was conducted among employees from a South African state-owned entity with a high level of union density. The organisation was selected considering the staff composition of the organisation and reflected the overall population for which the measurement was designed, as suggested by (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. A stratified sampling method was used, as the study population could be grouped into two sub-populations, namely union and non-union members. The responses exceeded the suggested norm of 200 for confirmatory factor analysis, as proposed by Hinkin (1998). The response rate exceeded the minimum norm of 10:1 respondent to items ratio proposed by Boateng et al. (2018). Consequently, the responses represented an adequate sample for further analyses. The detail of the

sample under research is discussed in each of the empirical chapters that reports on the development, validation and testing of the measurement and structural models.

### **1.7.7 Measuring instruments**

An online self-report questionnaire, consisting of two sections, was designed and piloted to gather data from participants to achieve the research objectives of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The first section comprised five demographic questions, the second section solicited responses on the behaviours that drive engagement (antecedents), employee engagement and engagement outcomes. All factors investigated in this study were measured on a seven-point Likert scale. The recommendations of Boateng et al. (2018), DeVellis (2003), Hair et al. (1995), Hinkin (1998), Lewis et al., (2005), and Mackenzie et al. (2011) were followed during the development and validation of the measurement scale. The dimensions and items of the measurement model were informed by the theoretical model, developed by Nel and Linde (2019). The model offered a logical foundation for identifying the empirical indicators for testing and validating the theory. The items that were chosen to measure each of the dimensions during the questionnaire development phase are discussed in detail in each of the empirical chapters.

### **1.7.8 Data analysis**

An outline of how the research was conducted is discussed in this section, although the detailed process of data analysis is discussed in each chapter.

A systematic review and narrative synthesis were performed to identify new insights into the construct under research to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of the model developed by Nel and Linde (2019). The theoretical model, in turn, provided the theoretical basis for the conceptualisation of the dimensions for the measurement model. The items relating to the specific dimensions were developed and the measurement model was specified. This method was used in the two literature review chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) to reach secondary objectives 1.6.2.1, 1.6.2.2 and 1.6.2.3. The measurement scale was considered a newly developed scale, and therefore an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using the principal component analysis (PCA) in the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS), with Oblimin rotation conducted to explore the factorial structure (Hinkin, 1998). Bartlett's

test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sample adequacy indicated that the sample size was adequate to conduct an exploratory factor analysis on the data. A decision was made on the number of factors to be extracted by using Kaiser's criterion. Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the internal reliability of the scale and subscales. Root mean square of the residuals (RMSR) evaluation was performed to test the dimensionality of the measurement model. The correlation structure of the dimensions was examined to establish discriminant validity and average variances (AVE) to determine convergent validity. This method was used in Chapter 4, the first empirical chapter, and was necessary to reach secondary objectives 1.6.2.4 and 1.6.2.5.

A structural equation model analysis was conducted to evaluate the fit of the measurement model and to determine the extent to which the proposed structural model pathways are valid and significant. IBM AMOS (version 25) and SPSS (version 25) were used for the analysis. According to Schreiber et al. (2006), a SEM is a combination of exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression and can be used as a confirmatory technique or for exploratory purposes; an approach that was applied with this study. The central tendency and normality of the factors were analysed before the maximum likelihood method was used to assess the model fit of the initial and final measurement models. The descriptive statistics describing the basic features of the data (central tendency measure of factors; mean assessment of normality; skewness; kurtosis) were used to analyse the data and provide an overview of the sample under study in both papers. To establish and confirm that the final measurement model fitted the underlying data satisfactorily, and supported construct validity and reliability, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the measurement and structural model. The model following model fit indicators was inspected to test the absolute and relative fit of the models: Model chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ); probability value ( $p$ -value); degrees of freedom ( $df$ ); normed chi-squared (MIN/DF); goodness-of-fit index (GFI); adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI); Tucker-Lewis index (TLI); comparative fit index (CFI); normed fit index (NFI); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) were used to measure the internal consistency of various constructs to determine the reliability and the degree of consistency exhibited. The composite reliability (CR) was also measured making the reliability analysis more robust. The convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted

(AVE). In order to conduct the discriminant validity, the correlation structure of the factors was examined. Determining the significance of the pathways hypothesised in the structural model was tested through regression analysis and significance of the path coefficients, using the maximum likelihood approach. A mediation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesised mediating effect of engagement in the model. Bootstrapping was performed to determine the significance of the relationships between the variables by inspecting the path coefficients. These methods were used in Chapter 5 to reach secondary objectives 1.6.2.6, 1.6.2.7, 1.6.2.8 and come to the hypothesised conclusions. The final objective, to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the results of the study to propose a labour relations model of employee engagement in a unionised environment, was used in Chapter 6 to reach the primary objective of the study.

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## **CHAPTER 2: EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

### **2.1 Abstract**

This chapter explores the origins and development of engagement through a systematic review of the literature to gain a better understanding of the concepts, frameworks, antecedents and outcomes of engagement to develop a foundation for a new framework to address the levels of engagement in a unionised environment. As there continues to be a lack of consensus amongst academics and practitioners regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement from other constructs, several definitions and frameworks of engagement were developed to define the existing state of engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). The existence of these different definitions and frameworks makes it difficult to determine if efforts to improve engagement are successful as each study examines employee engagement under a different construct (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). This inconsistency resulted in a confused approach to understanding and developing strategies around employee engagement within organisations (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012). Regardless of the lack of consensus, practitioners and academics agree that the consequences of employee engagement are positive, as employees' active commitment and involvement are imperative in the organisational performance and competitive advantage of an organisation. The lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of engagement also affects how engagement is measured but has not prevented researchers from measuring engagement and organisations believe that by identifying a range of antecedents of engagement, they can create a framework of engagement that will facilitate and predict high engagement levels, which in turn will have a positive impact on individual and business outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). However, identifying which antecedents enable engagement behaviour is almost as difficult as identifying one single definition of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This is mainly because within the practitioners' and academic literature a multitude of different engagement drivers have been suggested (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Although a great deal of research has been conducted on what drives high levels of engagement in organisations, no research has been done focusing on the antecedents which will increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. Increasing the levels of engagement of employees in a unionised environment has become a priority for organisations as industrial action by workers is on the increase.

## **2.2 Introduction**

Employee engagement has become one of the most popular topics in management and academia, because there is a strong body of research that indicates that engagement is a key factor for an organisation's success, sustained competitive advantage and profitability (Saks & Gruman, 2014). This trend is consistent with claims that there is a general decrease in the overall levels of employee engagement (Bersin, 2015). In addition to the overall low levels of engagement observed, engagement levels of unionised employees are even lower than those of their nonunionised counterparts (Crabtree, 2006). Concerns about the level of employee engagement are well founded, as it is estimated that the financial costs of disengagement are globally on the increase (Whittington et al., 2017). Not only does disengagement have negative financial implications, but also disengaged employees often engage in counterproductive workplace behaviour (Whittington et al., 2017). To sustain business success and counteract low levels of engagement, organisations are shifting their focus from materialistic capital to intellectual capital and employee engagement is viewed as one of the vehicles to achieve this shift (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014).

Schaufeli (2013) is of the view that the changes in the nature of work during the past four decades, and a renewed interest in the psychological contract, have created the background for the emergence of engagement in business. The major changes that took place in the world of work were due to the ongoing transition from traditional to modern organisations. This transition forced organisations to review, not only their business models, but also the capabilities of the people they employ. This left unionised employees vulnerable as unions struggle to respond to these changes (Anstey, 1997). Schaufeli (2013) mentioned that David Ulrich stated that human capital becomes increasingly important, since fewer people are required to do more. Organisations also require employees who are willing to invest in their jobs psychologically. These changes resulted in the "psychologisation of the workplace", which requires a substantial psychological adaption and involvement from employees (Schaufeli, 2013, p. 16). Schaufeli (2013, p. 16) elaborated that employees need "...psychological capabilities as modern organisations need employees that are able and willing to invest in their work psychologically". Engagement has been proposed as the vehicle to achieve this.

## **2.3 The history of employee engagement**

The first mention of employee engagement to appear in management literature was a 1990 Academy of Management Journal article, “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work” (Kahn, 1990). Kahn’s (1990) conceptual work was the first to provide a foundation for the theoretical development of employee engagement. Although much of today’s research refers to Kahn’s (1990) work as the theoretical underpinning of employee engagement, it took another decade before the theoretical ideas received significant support from other academics (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). Schaufeli (2013) suggests that the reason for the delay is due to the gradual changes in the world of work and the emergence of the positive psychology movement that has gained significant momentum since the 1990s.

Conceptually, Kahn began with the work of Goffman (1959), “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, who suggested that people attachment and detachment to their role varies depending on a person’s interactions during brief, face-to-face encounters. This attachment and detachment was the starting point for Kahn’s (1990) work towards defining the self in role of people. Although Kahn (1990) agreed with Goffman (1959), he suggested that a new perspective was needed to understand engagement in an organisational context. Kahn (1990, p. 694) believed that “employees act out momentary attachment and detachment in role performance at work”, a direct reference to Goffman’s (1959) interaction IST theory, but specific to the workplace (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

To gain further understanding of the varying levels of attachment individuals expressed towards their roles, Kahn (1990) examined several disciplines and found that individuals feel hesitant to belong to an ongoing group or system and thereby naturally tend to pull away from and move towards its membership. As a result, individuals seek to protect themselves from both isolation and engulfment by alternatively pulling away from and moving towards their membership. Kahn (1990) stated that the attachment and detachment of people are people’s calibration of self in role. Kahn (1990) termed these calibrations of self in role as “personal engagement” and “personal disengagement”. This means behaviour by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance. Kahn’s (1990) quest of understanding of the self in role process and the roles people occupy at work led to Kahn (1990) creating the term “engagement”.

Kahn (1990) undertook a qualitative study on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement and postulated that there were three psychological conditions related to engagement and disengagement at work. These psychological conditions are meaningfulness, safety and availability. Kahn (1990) found that people are more engaged at work in situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available. According to Rich et al. (2010), Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement is a multidimensional motivational construct that involves the simultaneous investment of an individual's physical, cognitive and emotional energy in work performance.

Kahn's conceptualisation of personal engagement would be the only literature on engagement until early 2001, when Maslach et al. (2001) began understanding why employees developed job burnout. The burnout antithesis approach is the second significant definition of engagement and defines engagement as the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). According to Maslach and Leiter, (2008, p. 498), engagement is the direct opposite of burnout and engagement is defined as "an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy". Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 47) argued that burnout and engagement are independent states, while maintaining that engagement is the opposite of burnout and defined engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption". Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) provided the earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding employee engagement and many of the contemporary conceptualisations of engagement are created from their original works (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

The only study to empirically test Kahn's model, May et al. (2004) found that all three of Kahn's (1990) original domains meaningfulness, safety and availability were significantly related to engagement. This finding suggests, "That the framework Kahn (1990) used in his conceptualization is foundational for the scaffolding of the construct" (Shuck & Wollard, 2009, p. 99). Harter et al. (2002) published one of the earliest consulting articles on employee engagement. Harter et al. (2002) drew data from a meta-analysis of business units across multiple fields of industry and was the first to study employee engagement at a business unit level (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Harter et al. (2002, p. 417) defined employee engagement as an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work". This definition added the expectation of an individual's

satisfaction level and altered the way engagement had been previously viewed (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). The satisfaction engagement approach was primarily designed as a management tool to improve job performance, but also had a significant impact in academia as it established meaningful links between employee engagement and business unit outcomes (Schaufeli, 2013). This article was the trigger for the rapid expansion of interest in the concept of employee engagement, as it was the first publication that suggested an employee engagement profit link (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

The first academic research to conceptualise and test antecedents and consequences of employee engagement was conducted in 2006 by (Saks, 2006). According to Saks (2006) as cited in Shuck and Wollard (2009), a stronger theoretical rationale for explaining employee engagement can be found in Social Exchange Theory (SET). Saks (2006) was the first to separate job engagement and organisational engagement into separate types of employee engagement. As a result, Saks (2006) defined employee engagement as a “distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance” (Saks 2006, p. 602). This definition is similar to that of Kahn (1990) as it also focused on role performance at work. This literature, according to Shuck and Wollard (2009), encompassed previous notions that employee engagement was developed from cognitive (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001), emotional (Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990) and behavioural (Harter et al., 2002; Maslach et al., 2001) components. Saks (2006) provided an important bridge between early theories of employee engagement, practitioner literature, and the academic community and was the first to propose an empirical model (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) commissioned a publication on employee engagement in 2006 with the aim of making the concept of employee engagement more accessible to SHRM members (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Shuck and Wollard (2009) in their critique of the publication stated that although the publication touched on key engagement concepts it was not clear and concise and lacked a single definition of employee engagement. Shuck and Wollard (2009), however, view the publication as notable as it marked the arrival of professional bodies into the employee engagement conversation.

Two years after the SHRM study, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) commissioned a study in association with Dale Carnegie Training to explore

employee engagement further (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). This study focused on the role of learning in the employee engagement construct, marking the first major research into the construct from a training perspective (Shuck & Wollard 2009). ASTD defined engagement as “employees who are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer’s success” (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). The results of the study showed a nexus with the “foundational work of Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) by creating meaningful work environments, providing opportunities for learning, and focusing on the experience of the employee” (Shuck & Wollard, 2009, p. 136).

Building on the work of multiple researchers, Macey and Schneider (2008) pioneered conceptual research in employee engagement. Macey and Schneider (2008) theorise that employee engagement develops from trait engagement, psychological state engagement, and behavioural engagement. Macey and Schneider (2008) drew from previous research and defined each as a separate engagement construct. From Macey and Schneider’s (2008, p. 25) perspective, employee engagement is defined by suggesting that “job design attributes would directly affect trait engagement, the presence of a transformational leader would directly affect state engagement, and the presence of a transformational leader would directly affect trust levels and thus, indirectly affect behavioural engagement”. In this theoretical model, the preceding state of engagement would build on the next, each developing a piece of the overall employee engagement construct (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). This contribution, which built on the work of Saks (2006), helped to clear the vague conceptual state of employee engagement by breaking the engagement construct into distinct parts, namely job engagement and organisation engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). In a seminal review of the foundations of engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2009) identified the major contributors to the overall development of the employee engagement concept of which an adapted summary appears in Table 2.1.

## **2.4 The psychology of employee engagement**

Positive psychology helps us to understand why engaged employee’s flourish and thrive as research supports the view that engagement is a distinctive positive concept (Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014). Positive psychology was born out of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2000) research on learned optimism. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), the aim of positive psychology is to focus on the strengths and positive aspects of flourishing individuals rather than on weaknesses. Youssef Morgan

and Bockorny (2014) argue that engagement must be understood within a positive paradigm, rather than an extension of negatively orientated models designed for treating pathologies. Engagement measures and their design remain, strongly influenced by positive psychology (Purcell, 2014).

Table 2.1: Seminal works of employee engagement (adapted from Shuck & Wolland (2010, pp. 96-97)

Article citation/author	Year	Contribution	Definition of engagement	Research type	Key concepts
Kahn <i>The needs satisfying approach</i>	1990	Publish early theoretical framework of personal engagement and disengagement. Defined engagement as a separate concept. Accredited with the first application and use of engagement theory to the workplace. Conceptualise that psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability were important to understand the development of engagement.	(Kahn, 1990, p.694) “Personal engagement as the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance”	Empirical: Ethnographic research.	Physical, cognitive, and emotional presence during role performance
Maslach et al. <i>The burnout - antithesis approach</i>	2001	The first major work on employee engagement after Kahn (1990). It is besides the needs satisfying approach the other early developmental theories on employee engagement. Maslach et al. (2001) conceptualised engagement as the positive antithesis to burnout.	Maslach & Leiter p. 498 (2008) defined employee engagement as an “energetic states of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one’s sense of professional efficacy” Schaufeli et.al. p. 47 (2002) defined engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterised by vigour,	Conceptual	Maslach; energy, involvement and efficacy Schaufeli; vigour, dedication and absorption

Article citation/author	Year	Contribution	Definition of engagement	Research type	Key concepts
			dedication and absorption”		
Harter et al. <i>The satisfaction engagement approach</i>	2002	Published the first study between employee engagement satisfaction and business unit outcomes (profit). One of the first to mention a profit linkage to employee engagement.	(Harter et al., 2002, p.269) defined work engagement “as the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”	Empirical: meta-analysis	Business outcomes associated with employee engagement
May et al.	2004	First published empirical research testing Kahn’s (1990) conceptualization of employee engagement.	(May et al., 2004, p. 12). Engagement is never explicitly defined though Kahn (1990) is referred to	Empirical: survey	Physical, cognitive, and emotional expression
Saks <i>Multidimensional approach</i>	2006	First explicit research to test antecedents and consequences to employee engagement. Prior to Saks (2006), practitioner research was the only body of work connecting employee engagement drivers to employee engagement consequences.	(Saks, 2006, p. 602) defined engagement as “a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance”	Empirical: survey	Cognitive, emotional and behavioural components
Vance <i>Multidimensional approach</i>	2006	Contribution to the HRD field the Society for Human Resources Management’s (SHRM). First major publication on employee engagement and commitment.	SHRM Never defined engagement.	Conceptual	Commitment
Vickers <i>Multidimensional approach</i>	2008	American Society for Training and Development’s (ASTD) first major publication on employee engagement.	(Vickers, 2008, p. 6) defined engagement as “Employees who are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer’s success	Empirical: survey	Connection to Kahn’s (1990) foundational work
Macey and Schneider	2008	The first to conceptualize trait, state, and behavioural	(Macey & Schneider, 2008)	Conceptual	Trait, state and

Article citation/author	Year	Contribution	Definition of engagement	Research type	Key concepts
<i>Multidimensional approach</i>		engagement as separate but related constructs. Presented organisational concepts that might nourish the development of engagement within organisations.	<p><i>Trait engagement</i> the “inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point” (p. 5)</p> <p><i>Psychological state engagement</i> defined as an antecedent to behavioural engagement (encompassing the constructs of satisfaction, involvement, commitment, and empowerment; (pp. 56)</p> <p><i>Behavioural engagement</i> is “define[d] in terms of discretionary effort” (p. 6).</p>		behavioural engagement

The changing nature of the modern workplace has put the traditional psychological contract under pressure and when the contract is breached, it results in employee cynicism (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). Employee cynicism is characterised by mistrust in the organisation, its management, and objectives (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). Andersson and Bateman (1997) have established a link between cynicism and reduction in organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB), which is a clear indicator of disengagement amongst employees.

Individual employees vary significantly in their level of engagement due to the changing nature of work and excessive demands put on them by organisations to increase profitability (Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014). Varying levels of engagement encourage increased interest in organisations to create an environment that can facilitate employee engagement as the positive impact of engagement on productivity and financial outcomes is well established (Harter et al., 2002). It is in this context that positivity can help enhance employee engagement and facilitate positive business outcomes at various levels of the organisation (Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014). Kahn (1990) provides the

strongest theoretical rationale for understanding the psychology of engagement than any other model, because Kahn (1990) is clear about the psychological conditions that are necessary for engagement as well as the antecedents that are the most important. Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement is consistent with the increased demands being put on employees to be more physically, emotionally and cognitively available as the nature of work continuously become more demanding.

According to Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2014), positivity is not new to psychology or management, as traditional theories and practices have recognised the importance of positivity. Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2014) are of the view that to understand positivity and what it has to offer to enhance engagement levels the traditional roots of positivity in psychology and management must be considered. Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2014) identified the traditional roots and foundations of positivity as the traditional motivation theories, job satisfaction, job design, positive reinforcement, positive and negative affect, transformational leadership and three recent positive movements with links to engagement as positive psychology, positive organisational scholarship and positive organisational behaviour. Positivity can affect the workplace and there is a realisation amongst organisations that positive employees promote engagement through various positive mechanisms (Youssef-Morgan & Bockorny, 2014). Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2014) postulate that positive managers, employees and organisations are necessary for promoting engagement.

## **2.5 The meaning of employee engagement**

There continues to be a lack of consensus amongst academics and practitioners regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement from other constructs (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The existence of these different definitions makes it difficult to determine if efforts to improve engagement are successful as each study examines employee engagement under a different construct (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). This inconsistency resulted in a confused approach to understanding and developing strategies around employee engagement within organisations (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012).

### **2.5.1 Predominant employee engagement definitions**

Shuck (2011) conducted an integrative literature review in 2011 to synthesise the state of academic research on employee engagement and identified four approaches to defining engagement, namely the needs satisfying approach, burnout antithesis approach, satisfaction engagement approach and the multidimensional approach. The needs satisfying approach was conceptualised by Kahn (1990) and he defined personal engagement as the “harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance” (Kahn 1990, p. 694). According to Kahn (1990), employees can be engaged on one dimension and not on the other and therefore, the more engaged the employee is on each dimension, the higher his or her overall personal engagement. The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees’ belief about the organisation and its leaders, and their working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about the organisation and its leaders, and their working conditions and whether they have a positive or negative attitude towards the organisation and its leaders (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012).

The burnout antithesis approach is rooted in the occupational health psychology (Schaufeli, 2013). Maslach et al. (2001, p. 417) conceptualised employee engagement as “a persistent positive effective motivational state of fulfilment in employees characterised by high levels of activation and pleasure characterised by high levels of activation and pleasure”. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) (as cited by Schaufeli 2013), engagement and burnout are the positive and negative endpoints of a single continuum. Engagement is specifically characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are considered the direct opposites of the three-burnout dimension, exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of accomplishment (Schaufeli 2013). This means that people who are high on engagement are inevitably low and burned out, and vice versa (Schaufeli 2013).

The satisfaction engagement approach is rooted in the positive psychology movement of the early 21st century and conceptualised by (Harter et al., 2002). Harter et al. (2002), the empirically based Gallup researchers, published one of the earliest and most definitive pieces of practitioner literature on employee engagement and were the first to look at employee engagement at the business unit level. The Gallup researchers defined employee engagement as an “individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 417). Like the definitions of other consultancy

firms, the Gallup engagement concept seems to overlap with well-known traditional constructs such as job involvement and job satisfaction (Schaufeli, 2013). However, the satisfaction engagement approach has had a significant impact in academia as well, as Gallup's research has established meaningful links between employee engagement and business unit outcomes (Harter et al., 2002).

The multidimensional approach emerged from a multidimensional perspective of employee engagement conceptualised by Saks (2006) which hypothesised that employee engagement developed through a social exchange model; Saks was the first academic researcher to suggest separate states of engagement, namely job engagement and organisational engagement. Saks (2006, p. 602) defined the multidimensional concept of engagement as "a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance". This definition was inclusive previous literature suggesting that employee engagement was developed from cognitive, emotional and behavioural elements and extended current thinking on the topic by developing a three-component model (Shuck, 2011). Saks's (2006) view suggests that for absorption to occur, an employee must readily have physical, emotional and psychological resources to complete their work. Conversely, if the organisation fails to provide the resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from the roles (Schaufeli, 2013). Thus, the amount of cognitive, emotional and physical resources that an individual is prepared to devote in the performance of their work role may depend on the economic and socioemotional resources received from the organisation (Kumar & Swetha, 2011).

Macey and Schneider (2008) extended Saks's (2006) model by proposing an exhaustive synthesis of all elements that have been utilised to define engagement (Schaufeli, 2013). Macey and Schneider (2008) suggest that each proceeding state of engagement (cognitive emotional behavioural) build on the next, eventually leading to engagement. Macey and Schneider's (2008) theoretical framework offers a series of propositions about trait engagement, psychological state engagement and behavioural engagement. They define trait engagement as a positive view of life and work and that this trait engagement gets reflected in psychological state engagement as an antecedent of behavioural engagement, which they define in terms of discretionary effort (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

## **2.5.2 Defining employee engagement**

There are according to Saks and Gruman (2014) two main definitions of engagement in the academic literature, namely Kahn's (1990) and Schaufeli's et al. (2002). Their definitions have some similarities and overlap, especially in terms of being a motivational state; they also differ in several ways (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kahn's (1990) definition is more encompassing as it includes the notion of personal agency and the argentic self (Cole et al., 2012), he also suggests something more distinct and unique as it pertains to placing the complete self in role. According to Kahn (1990), engagement is also a rational choice in which individuals make decisions about the extent to which they will bring their true selves into the performance of role. According to Saks and Gruman (2014), Kahn's immersive definition and conceptualisation is much deeper and more substantial than provided by Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) definition. The Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) conceptualisation and definition is too similar to burnout, although there is evidence that engagement is distinct from job attitude, and that it calls its distinctiveness into question (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) state that as Kahn's (1990) work evolved it took on a somewhat different lens. Kahn's (1990) work has shifted since its original conceptualisation to be less focused on the individual bringing his/her own interests and preferred roles to work and more about making the organisation and work, in general, the central focus (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). According to Bailey et al. (2015), the shift away from Kahn's socio-psychological construct of personal role engagement is notable. Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) speculate that Kahn's (1990) idea of engagement, focussed on the employee being able to express him/herself at work, became vague over time as Kahn's (1990) definition evolved. The most important issue in defining engagement is what elements to include and what elements to exclude from the definition of engagement (Schaufeli, 2013). Saks (2008) noted in his critique of Macey and Schneider (2008), who present an all-in collusive taxonomy that covers the entire range of concepts that have been associated with engagement, that engagement serves as an "umbrella term" for whatever one wants it to be. Schaufeli (2013, p. 19) proposed a more restrictive model that "considers work engagement as an experienced psychological state which mediates the impact of job resources and personal resources on organisational outcomes". Common to the various definitions is, however, the view that employee engagement is a desirable condition, has an organisational purpose and brings

involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focus, effort and energy to the workplace, with both attitudinal and behaviour components (Macey & Schneider, 2008). It is a mental state that produces certain behaviours.

“Employee engagement” or “engagement” is preferred for purposes of this research and the term employee engagement or engagement will be referred to as the engagement construct in this research. The reason for choosing employee engagement as a concept is because employee engagement not only refers to the relationship of an employee with his or her work but also includes the relationship with the organisation (Schaufeli, 2013). By including the relationship with the organisation, traditional concepts such as organisational commitment and extra role behaviour are included.

## **2.6 Employee engagement as a unique construct**

Engagement, according to Schaufeli (2013), is surrounded by disagreements over its properties since its advent. While it has been hypothesised that engagement is “a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with role performance” (Saks 2006, p. 602), when applied to organisational settings, the concept tends to exhibit considerable overlap with other related constructs. The most evident overlap is with job related attitudes, job behaviour and behavioural intentions, health and wellbeing, and personality traits (Schaufeli, 2013).

Some researchers argue that engagement is similar to work related constructs such as motivation, job satisfaction and organisational commitment; other researchers believe it is a distinct concept that can be differentiated from behavioural intentions and actual behaviour that reflects an employee’s commitment to an organisation and its goals (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 2004). The concept of engagement according to Schaufeli (2013) does not overlap to such an extent with other concepts that they are identical. Engagement reflects a genuine and unique psychological state that an employee might experience at work (Schaufeli, 2013). According to Rich et al. (2010), all these constructs tend to have an emotional, cognitive and deliberate element in common, therefore the natural overlap between them. Rigg (2013) is of the opinion that one of the main aspects that appear to set engagement apart is the impact of engagement on health outcomes.

## **2.7 Employee engagement frameworks**

In exploring the literature, it is clear that an engagement framework that links antecedents to individual performance outcomes in a unionised environment is underexplored. The major theoretical frameworks used will be analysed in order to develop a theoretical framework on how to more successfully engage employees in a unionised environment. This theoretical framework will be informed by existing theories and frameworks in the literature that has already been tested and validated and is considered as generally accepted theory in the literature (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Just as there are several definitions of employee engagement, several theories of engagement exist. Although a unique framework for engagement does not exist, a number of theoretical perspectives have been proposed with each emphasising a different aspect but cannot be integrated into one overarching conceptual model (Schaufeli, 2013). Four major theoretical approaches, according to Shuck (2011), define the existing state of engagement, namely Kahn's (1990) need satisfying approach, Maslach et al.'s (2001) burnout antithesis approach, Harter et al's (2002) satisfaction engagement approach, and Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach. An exploration of the different frameworks follows.

### **2.7.1 Need satisfying approach**

The needs satisfying approach first proposed the concept of engagement in the workplace (Shuck, 2011). The needs satisfying approach was conceptualised by Kahn (1990) as "personal engagement is the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances" (Kahn 1990, p. 700). Kahn (1990) assumes that employees become engaged when three psychological conditions or needs are met.

Kahn's model was first tested by May et al. (2004) and found that meaningfulness and, to a lesser degree, safety and availability were positively associated with engagement and the outcome variable intention to turnover. May et al. (2004) also corroborated Kahn's theorising that job enrichment and role fit were positively related to meaningfulness, whereas rewarding co-workers and supportive supervisors were positively related to safety, while adhering to co-worker norms and self-consciousness were negative predictors. Personal resources were positively related to availability, while participation in outside activities was a negative predictor.

In a sample of 245 firefighters, using Kahn's framework, Rich et al. (2010) provided empirical evidence that value congruence, perceived organisational support and core self-evaluation were related to employee engagement and that employee engagement was significantly related to the outcome variables, task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour. Using employees in multiple fields of industry and Kahn's framework, Shuck (2011) suggested that job fit, effective commitment and psychological climate were all significantly related to employee engagement and that employee engagement was significantly related to discretionary effort and intention to turnover. Overall, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relation to different employee outcomes in terms of engagement (Kumar & Swetha, 2011).

The needs satisfying approach, therefore "assumes that when the job is challenging and meaningful, the social environment at work is safe, and personal resources are available, the needs for meaningfulness, safety, and availability are satisfied and thus engagement is likely to occur" (Schaufeli 2013, p. 16). Saks and Gruman (2014) argue that Kahn's (1990) theory is more convincing as it specifies the psychological conditions that lead to engagement as well as the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions. Saks and Gruman (2014) furthermore argue that any theory of employee engagement should include Kahn's (1990) three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability.

### **2.7.2 Burnout antithesis approach**

Maslach et al. (2001) pioneered reaching across academic boundaries of employee engagement, conceptualising the concept as the positive antithesis to burnout. According to Maslach et al. (2001), job engagement is an expansion of the burnout construct, noting the engagement is the opposite of burnout. There are, according to Maslach et al. (2001), six areas of work-life that lead to either burnout or engagement. These six areas are workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values. Maslach et al. (2001) argue that job engagement is associated with sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice and meaningful and valued work. According to Maslach et al. (2001), job burnout is the result of mismatches in six critical areas of organisational life that is considered the major organisational antecedents of burnout. May et al.'s (2004) findings support Maslach et al.'s (2001) view that meaningful and valued work is associated with engagement. This approach suggests that mismatch

leads to burnout, while matches lead to engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). According to Schaufeli (2013), two schools of thought exist on this matter. The first approach views engagement and burnout as the positive and negative endpoint of a single continuum (Schaufeli, 2013). Work engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficiency, which are believed to be the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions, exhaustion, cynicism and lack of accomplishment, respectively (Maslach et al. 2001). The second alternative view considers work engagement as a distinct concept that is negatively related to burnout (Schaufeli, 2013). Besides concerns about the distinctiveness from similar constructs, a related problem has been the tendency by some researchers to view engagement as the opposite to burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

### **2.7.3 The job demands resource model (JDR)**

Many studies on work engagement used the JDR model as an explanatory framework, particularly researchers who believe that engagement is the antithesis of burnout (Schaufeli, 2013). The model was used to demonstrate that burnout could develop through different processes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). First, burnout is the result of high job demands, which leads to exhaustion. Second, a lack of job resources leads to disengagement from work (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The model assumes that work engagement results from the inherently motivating nature of resources, whereby the following types are distinguished.

The JDR model postulates that work engagement mediates the relationship between job and personal resources on the one side and positive outcomes on the other side; the motivational process (Schaufeli, 2013). On the other hand, a negative process also exists, the so-called health impairment process sparked by high job demand (Schaufeli, 2013). When job demands are high, additional effort must be employed to achieve the work goals and to prevent decreasing performance (Schaufeli, 2013). The additional effort comes at a physical and psychological cost, such as fatigue (Schaufeli, 2013). When recovery is inadequate or insufficient, employees gradually exhaust themselves and might eventually burn out (Schaufeli, 2013). The JDR model is the only model that specifically postulates that job characteristics may influence employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), the JDR model provides the best approximation of the relationships among work characteristics, health and wellbeing. Saks and Gruman (2014) question if the JDR model is truly a theory of engagement or

just a framework for classifying job demands and job resources as the basic premise of the theory is that the more resources an employee has, the more engaged he/she will be.

#### **2.7.4 The affective shift model**

Bledow et al. (2011) developed an affective shift model of work engagement according to which work engagement emerges from the dynamic interplay of positive and negative affect. The affective shift model proposes that engagement will only result from the experience of negative affect if a shift to positive affect takes place (Bledow et al., 2011). The affective shift model seeks to explain the observation that work engagement increase and decrease as a person moves through the day, shifting from one task to another and being exposed to various kinds of events during the day (Bledow et al., 2011). This model is based on the assumption that both positive and negatives affect have important functions for work engagement (Bledow et al., 2011). The model proposes that a core mechanism underlying the emergence of high levels of work engagement is a shift from negative to positive affect (Schaufeli, 2013). Bledow et al. (2011) argue that it is the dynamic interplay of positive and negative affect at work that produces work engagement. Bledow et al. (2011) refer to “the temporal sequence of negative affect followed by positive affect as an affective shift” (p. 1247). Bledow et al. (2011) clarify it further by stating that the higher the level of negative affect that is experienced and the higher the level of positive affect that follows, the more noticeable is the affective shift. Bledow et al. (2011), however, caution that an affective shift does not imply that people must first experience a negative effect and then only a positive effect as they are not two poles of one dimension, but two dimensions and people can experience both positive and negative affect within a time interval. The significance of this approach is that, for engagement, a shift from negative to positive affect is essential as work engagement implies the presence of positive affect (Bledow et al., 2011).

#### **2.7.5 Social exchange theory (SET)**

The models of Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) indicate the psychological conditions or antecedents that are necessary for engagement, but they do not clarify why individuals will respond to these conditions with varying degrees of engagement (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). According to Saks (2006), a stronger theoretical rationale for explaining employee engagement can be found in SET. SET contends that relationships at work evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments as long as all parties

involved abide by reciprocity rules (Schaufeli, 2013). SET argues that when employees receive particular resources from the organisation, they feel obliged to respond in kind to repay the organisation. Saks (2006) argues that one way for individuals to repay their organisation is through engagement. Saks's (2006) view suggests that for absorption to occur, an employee must readily have physical, emotional and psychological resources to complete their work. Conversely, if the organisation fails to provide the resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from the roles (Schaufeli, 2013). Thus, the amount of cognitive, emotional and physical resources that an individual is prepared to devote in the performance of their work role may depend on the economic and socioemotional resources received from the organisation (Kumar & Swetha, 2011). Kahn's (1990) conceptualising of engagement that employees feel obliged to bring themselves more deeply into their role performance as repayment for the resources they receive from their organisation parallel the Saks (2006) model of engagement.

Only Kahn's framework offers an empirically tested multidimensional, motivational framework reflecting latent conditions on an employee's willingness to engage, which is a limitation of other frameworks (Rich et al., 2010). Crawford et al. (2014, p. 57) state that "although scholars do not always explicitly use this framework to conceptually ground models of engagement, the majority of antecedent constructs studied reflect, to a great extent, these psychological conditions".

## **2.8 Measuring employee engagement**

According to Macey and Schneider (2008), measuring employee engagement is a smart business strategy to reach business objectives. It allows organisations to track business objectives and develop tools to effectively measure and manage predictors of employee engagement (Lockwood, 2007). The lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of engagement also affects how to measure engagement, but do not prevent researchers from measuring engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). A wide range of different scales are subsequently in existence to measure engagement (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014). Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) state that it is impossible to determine how many measurements exist as the number of practitioners continuously changes and their models are considered proprietary and are not published. There are, however, more established methods of measurements.

At least seven different scales have been developed to measure engagement, not including surveys that measure management practices and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The seven most prominent scales identified by Saks and Gruman (2014) are illustrated in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Engagement scales

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rothbard (2001) developed a 9-item scale, consisting of 4 items that measures attention and 5 items that measure absorption.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May et al. (2004) developed a 13-item scale based on the three components of Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement. May et al.'s (2004) scale includes 4 items to measure cognitive engagement, 4 items to measure emotional engagement, and 5 items to measure physical engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saks (2006) developed a 6-item scale to measure job engagement and a 6-item scale to measure organisational engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich et al. (2010) developed an 18-item scale that includes 6 items to measure each of Kahn's three dimensions of engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soane, et al., (2012) used a shortened version of the scale, which includes 3 items to assess intellectual engagement, affective engagement measures builds on Kahn's (1990) approach.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stumpf et al. (2013) developed a 2-dimensional measure of engagement for professionals in technically orientated work groups that measure felt engagement and behavioural engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schaufeli &amp; Bakker (2004) the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) that consists out of 17 items measure the vigour, dedication, and absorption dimensions.</li> </ul>

Most of the measures are based on Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, whilst the other measures have seldom been used (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

## 2.9 Antecedents of engagement

Organisations believe by managing a range of variables, known as antecedents of engagement, they can effectively manage the consequences of engagement and increase the engagement levels of its employees (Scarlett, 2013). Wollard and Shuck (2011) defined antecedents of employee engagement “as constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement and that come before, and organisation or manager reaps the benefits of engagement related outcomes” (p. 432). Antecedents to engagement should be in place before organisations can reap the benefit of an engaged workforce Rich et al. (2010) and Saks (2006) (as cited in Wollard & Shuck, 2011). However, identifying which variables enable engagement behaviour is almost as difficult as identifying one single definition of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This is mainly because within the practitioners' and academic literature a multitude of different engagement drivers has been suggested (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009).

A great deal of research has been conducted on what drives high levels of engagement in organisations, yet no research has been done focusing on the antecedents which will increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. Increasing the levels of engagement of employees in a unionised environment has become a priority for organisations as industrial action by workers is on the increase. Employers have embraced employee engagement and view it as a framework for their wider employee relations strategies to manage employee relations in difficult times. The purpose of analysing the data on the antecedents and outcomes of engagement is to determine which approaches and interventions that are already researched and validated have the greatest potential to create high levels of engagement in a unionised environment. The key antecedents associated with higher levels of engagement that will emerge from the review of the literature will be included in the theoretical framework to address the low levels of engagement in a unionised environment. Additional antecedents that will unfold from the literature will be utilised to close the gap in the knowledge base when developing the framework to address the low levels of engagement in a unionised environment.

Engagement is generally considered a mediating variable in which antecedent variables influence engagement, and engagement then leads to work outcomes and mediates the relationship between antecedent variables and work outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Since it is generally accepted that engagement has a positive effect on business outcomes, practitioners and researchers hypothesise what key engagement drivers can be leveraged to bring about increases in employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2014). This has led to an increase in research into factors like job design, leadership, organisational and supervisor support and human resources management practices (Crawford et al., 2014).

Kahn's (1990) foundational theory on the psychological conditions of engagement explains how antecedents' factors link with engagement through the three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability. Each of Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions has a distinct set of job resources and job demands that influence it. Bailey et al. (2015) conducted a narrative synthesis on the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement and found that the strongest link between positive antecedents and high engagement levels was in the area of job resources. This supported Saks and Gruman's (2014) view that various job resources, such as autonomy and performance feedback as well as a supportive environment, have frequently been found to be positively related to engagement. In addition to job resources and job demands,

leadership is also believed to play an important role in the engagement process (Bailey et al., 2015; Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Bailey et al. (2015) also found a link between individual psychological states, management practices, individual perceptions of the organisation, team and high engagement levels. Organisational interventions and activities had a weaker impact on engagement and job demands showed the lowest correlation with engagement, while hindrance demands are negatively related (Bailey et al., 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kular et al. (2008) suggest that despite the existence of common engagement drivers, different groups and individuals are influenced by different factors. The complexity of the concept was further proved in that some researchers suggest that aspects in the workplace produce engagement, whilst others suggest that engagement is something that the individual brings to the workplace (Kular et al., 2008). Antecedents identified by various authors are summarised in Table 2.3.

The antecedents of engagement can be grouped under two main headings, namely individual antecedents and organisational level antecedents. Wollard and Shuck (2011, p. 433) defined individual antecedents were defined as “constructs, strategies, and conditions that were applied directly to or by individual employees and that were believed to be foundational to the development of employee engagement”. Wollard and Shuck (2011, p. 433) defined organisational level antecedents as “constructs, strategies, and conditions that were applied across an organisations as foundational to the development of employee engagement and the structural or systematic level”.

Table 2.3: Antecedents associated with high levels of engagement

Author	Antecedents
Kahn's (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningfulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Job challenge</li> <li>◦ Autonomy</li> <li>◦ Variety</li> <li>◦ Feedback</li> <li>◦ Fit</li> <li>◦ Opportunities for development</li> <li>◦ Reward and recognition</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Psychological safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Social support</li> <li>◦ Transformational leadership</li> <li>◦ Leader member exchange</li> <li>◦ Workplace climate</li> <li>◦ Organisational justice</li> <li>◦ Job security</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Psychological availability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role overload</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Author	Antecedents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work role conflict</li> <li>• Family work conflict</li> <li>• Resource inadequacies</li> <li>• Time urgency</li> <li>• Off work recovery</li> <li>• Disposition</li> <li>• Personal Resources</li> </ul>
Maslach et al. (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable workload</li> <li>• Feelings of choice and control</li> <li>• Recognition and reward</li> <li>• Supportive work community</li> <li>• Fairness and justice</li> <li>• Meaningful and valued work</li> </ul>
Holbeche and Springett (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning</li> </ul>
May et al. (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningfulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Job enrichment</li> <li>◦ Work role fit</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Rewarding co-worker</li> <li>◦ Supportive supervisor</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Availability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Resources</li> <li>◦ Adherence to co-worker norms, self-consciousness and outside activities are negative predictors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Saks (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social exchange involving reciprocity or repayment</li> </ul>
Macey and Schneider (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual differences</li> </ul>
Xanthopoulou et al. (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job resources and personal resources</li> </ul>
Macey et al. (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the capacity to engage</li> <li>• Have the reason or motivation to engage</li> <li>• Have the freedom to engage</li> <li>• Know how to engage</li> </ul>
Rich et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value congruence</li> <li>• Perceived organisational support</li> <li>• Core self-evaluations</li> </ul>
Christian et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task variety</li> <li>• Transformational leadership</li> <li>• Leader member exchange</li> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Positive affect</li> </ul>
Bledow et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift from negative to positive affect.</li> </ul>
Kumar & Swetha (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual characteristics</li> </ul>
Bakker and Demerouti (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job design (Job demands resource model) JDR</li> </ul>

The literature suggests that negative antecedents such as dysfunctional leadership, poor communication, continuous quality improvement efforts, defiant behaviour, hindrance demand, bullying, adherence to co-worker norms, self-consciousness and abusive supervision are associated with lower levels of engagement (Bailey et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2014). Wollard and Shuck (2011) state that it is clear from exploring and examining

the various antecedents that antecedents are not process dependant, but rather functions that guide the conditions for high engagement to develop. Wollard and Shuck (2011) conclude that no one process model fit across all antecedents and different organisations would create engagement in different ways, using different organisational specific strategies and methods.

## **2.10 Outcomes of engagement**

One of the reasons that employee engagement has received considerable attention is that it is believed to be associated with important employee and organisational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that high levels of engagement can lead to enhanced employee performance (Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Holbeche & Springett, 2003; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Yalabik et al., 2013). Higher levels of engagement reduce turnover intention, enhance job performance, task performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, productivity, discretionary effort, commitment and customer service (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). High levels of engagement, in turn, have been associated with higher profitability, revenue generation, organisational growth and employee satisfaction. Although neither Kahn (1990) nor May et al. (2004) included outcomes in their studies, Kahn (1990) suggested that high levels of engagement lead to both positive outcomes for individuals as well as organisations.

Many consulting firms have claimed that a link exists between high levels of employee engagement and business success, of which the most convincing evidence for the link comes from studies that have been conducted by the Gallup organisation Schaufeli (2013) Blessing White and Kenexa (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014). A meta-analysis conducted by Harter et al. (2002) revealed that levels of engagement are positively related to indicators of business unit performance, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity, turnover and safety. The Harter et al. (2002) meta-analysis confirms the connection between engagement and business results, however, they reiterate that engagement is an individual level construct and if it does lead to business results, it must first impact individual level outcomes. It is the Harter et al. (2002) metanalysis that inspired organisations in creating an engaged workforce. Macey et al. (2009) found that in a sample of 65 firms from different industries, the top 25% on an average index had a greater return on assets (ROA), profitability, and more than double the shareholder value compared to the bottom 25% of firms. In a narrative synthesis of the literature, Bailey et al. (2015) found that there was a strong correlation between

engagement and job satisfaction and organisational commitment, a moderate correlation between engagement and turnover intention and burnout, and a weaker correlation between engagement and life satisfaction and general health.

As shown in Table 2.4, positive outcomes associated with employee engagement are numerous and varied. Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) are of the view that this is the case because of different measurement tools used to assess engagement and the numerous definitions used to create those measurement systems. Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) suggest that although there is not enough high-quality data to confirm that engagement alone drives organisational performance, there is enough data to show that engagement is better than disengagement. Practitioners and academics tend to agree that the consequences of employee engagement are positive, as employees' active commitment and involvement is imperative in the organisational performance and competitive advantage of any organisation.

Table 2.4: Positive outcomes associated with engagement

Author	Positive Outcomes
• Christian et al. (2011)	• Enhanced task performance
• Schaufeli (2013)	• Organisational commitment
• Alfes et al. (2013)	• Innovative work behaviour
• Harter et al. (2002)	• Enhanced business performance
• Bakker et al. (2012)	• In role performance
• Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2009)	• Daily work performance
• Rich et al. (2010)	• Organisational citizenship behaviour
• Salanova et al. (2005)	• Service climate and customer loyalty
• (Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013)	• Individual task performance
• Soane et al. (2012)	• Turn over intention
• (Torrente, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2012)	• Unit level team performance
• Xanthopoulou et al. (2009)	• Financial returns
• Yalabik et al. (2013)	• Job performance

## 2.11 Cost of engagement

George (2011) is of the opinion that high engagement levels might not necessarily be a win win situation for all involved and questions to what extent high engagement is always a constructive experience for employees. George (2011, p. 53) states that "the costs of high work engagement for employees deserve far greater attention than they have received to date and questions to what extent high engagement is always such a positive experience for employees". George (2011) cites rising levels of productivity associated with work intensification and income inequality and questions the legitimacy of

organisations deliberately soliciting high engagement levels but failing to reward workers appropriately.

Halbesleben (2011) in his commentary on engagement supports George's (2011) view that there is a strong possibility that engaged employees will experience an impaired work-life balance, family relationships and job crafting. Truss et al. (2013) also note that little consideration has been given to equality and diversity in relation to engagement and that the literature remains silent on how engagement interacts with gender and ethnicity.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

The objectives of the chapter were to explore the development of engagement through a historical lens to gain a better understanding of the concepts, frameworks, antecedents and outcomes of engagement and to develop a foundation for a new framework which may have the potential to increase engagement levels in a unionised environment. These objectives were reached through exploring the origins of engagement that led to the existing conceptualisation of the construct. Secondly, that there continues to be a lack of consensus regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement from other constructs and several definitions and frameworks of engagement exist to define the current state of engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). This lack of consensus does, however, not prevent organisations from identifying antecedents of engagement that can manage the outcomes of engagement, which in turn have a positive impact on the business outcomes. Thirdly, an analysis of the evidence on the antecedents and outcomes of engagement enabled the identification of researched and validated antecedents and outcomes associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment. Lastly, this understanding of the construct will enable the development of the most appropriate framework to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. The next section of the literature overview focusses on the circumstances that influence engagement levels in a unionised environment with the aim to bring into focus suitable propositions to develop a framework that has the potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in an environment with a union presence.

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## **CHAPTER 3: FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A UNIONISED ENVIRONMENT**

### **3.1 Abstract**

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a theoretical framework that has the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment. In order to address engagement in a unionised environment there must be a clear understanding of the circumstances that influence engagement levels in an environment with a unionised presence, as union members present different challenges to engaging non-union members. Donais (2010) and Tyler (2009) further suggested that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts and that the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant, since union members' dissatisfaction can spread to their co-workers and lead to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation as a whole (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013). Union members often join unions to increase satisfaction, but never hit the same satisfaction levels as their non-unionised peers (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013; Tyler, 2009; Wassel, 2013). This requires a clear understanding of the nature of the relationship between the employee and the organisation to address the engagement levels in a unionised environment. A systematic analysis of the themes in the literature on engagement and labour relations produced a critical narrative around the evidence on the approaches and interventions which, may have the greatest potential to increase engagement levels in an environment with a unionised presence. Eleven propositions emerged from the evidence synthesis. These propositions informed the development of the theoretical framework which considers the collective context of an organisation. The framework explains how the individual and organisational antecedent factors can be linked to engagement, and in turn lead to positive individual and organisational outcomes.

### **3.2 Introduction**

Although the conditions for high engagement have been studied (Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2011) studies to determine the conditions for high engagement associated with unionised employees are lacking. Wassel (2013) is of the opinion that engagement is just as crucial in a unionised environment as in any other workplace, due to the correlation between

employee engagement and overall job performance. Wassel (2013, p. 1) suggests that “companies with a unionised presence must pay special attention to engagement levels, as data suggest that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts” are. Data gathered by Tyler (2009) corroborates Wassel’s (2013) view that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts are. Employees often join unions in an attempt to increase satisfaction but never hit the same satisfaction levels as their non-unionised peers (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013). This should not necessarily be the case, as unionised employees can also be highly engaged (Donais, 2010). According to Tyler (2009), disengagement is not only a union phenomenon as it is also prevalent in both unionised and non-unionised groups (Tyler, 2009). According to Donais (2010), unionised employees, in a sense, are more engaged than non-union employees, because they are highly engaged in correcting injustices in the workplace through union activities. Their activity levels are generally higher, and their commentary about workplace systems more frequent and structured through bargaining systems (Donais, 2010).

### **3.3 The employee organisation relationship (EOR)**

A clear understanding of the nature of the relationship between the employee and the organisation—the employee organisation relationship (EOR)—is necessary to address low levels of engagement in a unionised environment. A stable and sound EOR enhances the possibility for increasing engagement levels, but it is exposed to organisational changes and also functions within the broader labour relations system, as well as the external environment. EOR is the main relationship in the labour relations system that establishes the foundation of the complexity and dynamics of the total labour relations system (Linde, 2015). According to Shore et al. (2004), EOR is an overarching term to describe the entire relationship between the employee and the organisation. It includes both micro concepts—the psychological contract, employee engagement, psychological empowerment and perceived organisational support—and macro concepts—the employment relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). Linde (2015) suggests that the psychological contract and employment relationship are the main concepts of EOR, since the identification and expectation of employment related promises are identified in the psychological contract, and the implementation and application of employment rules, policies and procedures to maintain these expectations are controlled by the employment relationship.

EOR theory has its roots in the social exchange and inducements contributions model, which involves a series of interactions that generate obligations to reciprocate (Coyle Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Three aspects are fundamental to social exchange, namely the relationship, reciprocity and exchange (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). A social exchange relationship starts with one party bestowing a benefit to the other, and if the other party reciprocates, a series of benefits exchange occurs, which creates mutual obligations between these parties. Evidence presented by Shore et al. (2004) indicates that EOR occurs at multiple levels in the organisation, and has multiple inputs from varying levels, including the job, group and organisation. According to Alcover et al. (2016), various research indicated with extensive empirical evidence that forms of exchange consistently predict a wide range of work-related attitudes and behaviours, such as identification, commitment, psychological attachment, trust, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, organisational citizenship behaviour, work effort and in role performance. These are all aspects essential to establish a viable environment for employee engagement. In the next section, the psychological contract and the employment relationship are highlighted as the main concepts of the EOR from an engagement perspective. Linde (2015) proposes that the concepts are discussed separately to take the interdependence of the constructs into account but also states that it is important to note that the two concepts cannot be entirely separated from each other.

### **3.3.1 The psychological contract and engagement**

The employment relationship is the perspective on the exchange relationship with employees, which is institutionalised through the legal employment contract (Lammerts et al., 2017). The formal legal contract only partially reflects the obligated exchanges between employer and employee and does not address all aspects of the employment relationship. This realises since an employment relationship is based on written, verbal and tacit agreements. The inability of the formal written employment contract to fully reflect the mutual agreements of the employment relationship influences the perceived psychological contract, which suggests that there exists an implicit contractual relationship between employer and employee, which is derived from a series of assumptions on both parts about the nature of the relationship (Leat, 2008). These assumptions, not being formal agreements, constitute a set of reciprocal arrangements and form the basis of a series of expectations that may have a degree of moral force Leat, 2008), forming the perceived psychological contract.

The most widely accepted definition of the psychological contract is that of Rousseau (1995) who defined it as individual beliefs, shaped by the organisation, regarding terms of an exchange arrangement between the individual and their organisation. The psychological contract provides a framework for recognising, interpreting and understanding of implied expectations of employees in the workplace, which extend beyond mere adherence to the terms of a contract of employment (Hall, 2015). Rousseau (1995, p. 112) states that a violation of the psychological contract refers to a failure to comply with the terms of the contract and identifies three sources of experienced violation, being “inadvertent experience, disruption and breach of contract”. The experience of violation is the same, whatever the source. Indicators and reactions of the experience of violation are visible in employee short term reactions (including job satisfaction levels, job insecurity and trust levels) and long-term reactions (including employee wellbeing and health) (Linde, 2015). Indicators and reactions also include labour related actions, such as strikes, excessive absenteeism, grievances, disputes and strong union activities.

These are important factors to take into account when engagement in the workplace is looked at. An employment relationship with an unbalanced and unfulfilled psychological contract would not create a good relationship to engage employees. This will furthermore create an environment for external influences on engagement levels, since such employment relationships are less controlled internally and more influenced externally. Such external social context influences on the employment relationship are beyond the reasonable control of the organisation and the internal influences are within the reasonable control of organisations (Linde, 2015). Changes in society and organisations also lead to the change in the psychological contract and the formation of a changed, or even new, psychological contract (Van der Smissen et al., 2013). Such a changed psychological contract also needs to be addressed in approaching the engagement of the employees.

Van der Smissen et al. (2013) underline that a shift in the old psychological contract focuses on job security, permanence, loyalty and fairness, whereas the emergent “new” psychological contract focuses on employability and flexibility. There has been renewed interest in the psychological contract, as with the construct of engagement since the 1990s due to various changes affecting the workplace (Guest & Conway, 2002). Hall (2015) mentions that the psychological contract seems closely related to other constructs including employee engagement. Robinson et al. (2004) emphasise the similarity of

engagement to the psychological contract in that it is unwritten, reinforced by trust, a reciprocal relationship between employer and employee and easy to break. Guest and Conway (2002) are of the view that the psychological contract can facilitate a new framework for engagement, as the traditional collective model is less relevant in many workplaces. This model can accommodate the rise in individualism and flexibility and can also address the core issues of the employment relationship of trust. Although the relationship between engagement and the psychological contract is unclear, it is postulated by Hall (2015) that high engagement levels require a strong relational contract. Sisson (2008) states that the psychological contract approach offers, at best, a partial framework for analysing the employment relationship as it deals with an important and often neglected dimension of the employment relationship.

### **3.3.2 The employment relationship and engagement**

According to Shore et al. (2004), the employment relationship is the key relationship between individual employees and employer. Relationships are the nervous system of the organisation in which engagement either thrives or wilts (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). The employment relationship is primarily an exchange relationship whose distinguishing feature is that it involves both monetary and managerial relations (Sisson, 2008). Additional features of the relationship are that it is intermediate and incomplete, as many of the benefits that employees receive from the exchange can be set (Sisson, 2008). The relationship is furthermore continuous or open ended in that the relationship is not a one-off exchange as in the case of labour service agreements (Sisson, 2008).

The employment relationship differs from other relationships in that it has an economic foundation, often impersonal, and is marked by negative attitudes from both employer and employee (Bendix, 2015). The net result is that it is a more complex relationship than other relationships, because its key elements are the simultaneous conflict and common ground elements that are built into any employment relationship (Nel et al., 2016). The heart of the conflict is built around the economic dimension of the employment relationship, the exchange of labour for monetary reward and employment security (Nel et al., 2016).

The employment relationship is a human one, like other relationships, and what makes those relationships functional promotes a sound employment relationship (Bendix, 2015). According to Bendix (2015), the employment relationship improves by mutual interest,

mutual support, trust, meaningful communication and shared goals and values. Nel et al. (2016) confirm that the employment relationship is multidimensional with an economic dimension at its core, entailing individual and collective dimensions (trade unions) as well as formal (employment regulations) and informal (the psychological contract) dimensions. However, only respect for individuality in the relationship can lead to personal satisfaction and meaningful relationships (Bendix, 2015). Traditional theory identifies three approaches, ideologies or frames of reference to the employment relationship, namely the unitary, radical and pluralist approaches (Nel et al., 2016). The unitary and radical approaches can be traced to particular ideologies, whilst the pluralist approach constitutes and attempts to achieve a compromise between different ideological positions (Bendix, 2015). To these traditional approaches, concertation, corporatism and worker control can be added, as it can be viewed as stemming from the three traditional approaches (Slabbert & Swanepoel, 2002).

### **3.4 Creating an employment environment for engagement**

Engaging unionised employees requires a thorough understanding of the nature of the employment relationship, as well as the functioning of the broader labour relations system due to its complexity. Dunlop (1958) refers to actors who are involved in the employment (industrial) relationship, which includes a hierarchy of managers and their representatives, no managerial workers and their spokespersons and government agencies. This is also referred to as the labour tripartite relationship, where these actors operate within the constraints of various environmental influences, parties and power realities, structures and processes for conflict resolution and outcomes (Bendix, 2015). The parties in this relationship establish rules for the workplace and work community through their interaction and within the micro and macro environmental constraints.

The labour relations system operating in a particular society is a product of that society (Bendix, 2015). All the different forces in that society will shape a country's labour relations approach and system in a unique way. Rapid changes in the socio-economic spheres of the society have major impacts on the employment relationship and the features that comprise them. The employer needs to incorporate these environmental influences, through the applied labour relations approach and system, when developing the employment relationship's structure and regulations.

### **3.4.1 Employment regulations**

The purpose for the employment relationship is the desire on the part of management and employees to exert control over each other. The employer uses rules, policies and procedures as regulations to commit the employee in certain workplace behaviour, associated with the inherent requirements of the relationship. These workplace regulations refer to labour legislation and employment regulations (Linde, 2015), which are dynamic and under frequent review to accommodate the changing context and shift in power relations at the workplace. Linde, Schalk and Linde (2008) developed and tested a model that explains the process of experiencing employment regulations. This model is based on the assumption that for an employee to experience employment regulations positively there should be clarity about the contents of the regulations and the employee must trust the reason for and the application of the regulations. For an employee to have clarity about regulations in the specific employment relationship, the policies, procedures and codes associated with them must be available to the employee, the employee must ascertain the contents of the regulations, and the employee must understand the contents and accept the rule or regulation as fair. Linde et al. (2008) also confirm the link between clarity in workplace rules, policies and procedures with trust in the management. It is essential for an employer to create a clear and understandable employment relation structure, through internal regulations, to develop a trusting environment where workplace engagement can be increased.

### **3.4.2 External influences on the employment environment**

The employment relationship does not exist in a vacuum (Leat, 2008). Delbridge and Keenoy (2010, p. 801) argue that “the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors which shape those practices”. These factors will, therefore, influence the way organisations engage their employees and how the unions respond to this. The direct work environment (micro-environment) and the wider society (macro-environment) form a dynamic and complex system that influences the management of work-related relationships. This interaction is demonstrated by the fact that the political system, which is based on a particular approach, will determine the labour relations system, which will internally influence the employment relationship (Bendix, 2015; Slabbert & Swanepoel, 2002). Labour relations systems that are emerging are based on economic and political pragmatism rather than on ideology alone (Finnemore, 2009). Linde (2015) emphasises that the constant change

not only influences employment relations, but also transforms a country's socio-political system, its culture, defining values and overall form. The parties consequently exercise their strategic choices within the labour relations processes to respond to impact with the environmental influences (Finnemore, 2009).

### **3.4.3 The changing nature of labour relations: opportunities and challenges for trade unions**

Most industrialised market economies have in the past decades experienced fundamental, long term, socio-political and economic changes. Not only have these changes impacted on the way organisations are engaging their employees in a unionised environment, they have also impacted every facet of society. These changes put greater pressure on employees who are challenging the classical views of the employee organisation relationship. The employee engagement construct is the best positioned one to challenge the requirements of the contemporary employee organisation relationship (Eldor & Vigoda Gadot, 2016). The role of the unions has also changed significantly over the past decades. Globalisation, a growing trend in outsourcing, legislative constraints and employer forms of participation have together reduced the influence on unions in the workplace (Wright, 2011). The way unions respond to these challenges and opportunities presented by the changing nature of work and employment relations will have to be considered in developing an engagement framework.

Manufacturers demanded an increased production volume until the 1960s, being able to sell everything they produced. The 1970s heralded the era of quality, as high quality, but low-priced Asian products entered western markets in significant numbers. During the 1980s production capacity exceeded demand and manufacturers offered an ever-widening range of products. In the 1990s the basis of competitive advantage has become even more complex. Today's marketplace demands that organisations compete on price, quality, innovation, delivery time, customisation and service. This drastic production market change resulted in significant influences on the employment relationship and the role of the trade union, resulting in a new labour relation order.

### **3.4.4 The emergence of a new global labour order**

Mass production is based on the innovations of Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford (Anstey, 1997a). The essential requirement of the mass production system was uninterrupted

production of standardised goods in large volumes to meet seemingly insatiable demand, based on a military style managerial system, hierarchical and bureaucratic and founded on functional specialisation and the division of responsibilities to ensure production. Central to the Taylorist method is job fragmentation, deskilling and the introduction of specialised sequential repetitive tasks which promote efficiencies and volumes (Anstey, 1997a). Assembly line workers were easily unionised as work was repetitive, machine passed, often unsafe, poorly paid and large numbers of workers were located in a single plant making for easier access for union officials. Strikes occurred frequently and employers were compelled by strong unions into bargaining arrangements to solve the conflicts (Finnemore, 1996).

What was of global importance was the need for developing new models of production, participation and representation, replacing the traditional institutions. Producer push mass production systems have internationally been replaced with consumer pull methods which emphasise flexibility in production (Anstey, 1997a). Customers increasingly expect to have their individual needs met and quality is rapidly becoming the prerequisite for customer satisfaction. Flexible lean production is characterised by continuous improvement aimed at eliminating waste, flatter structures through reducing the number of job grades, education and training of workers, teamwork, job rotation and self-management. Most importantly, the characteristics of the new workforce mandate that organisations must move towards participation. If workers cannot be guaranteed lifetime employment, then at least they want to be involved and have their opinions heard as long as they are in the organisation. One of the most popular forms of work reorganisation is team or group work (Nel, 1999).

### **3.4.5 Globalisation and employment**

These advances had a major impact on labour relations systems in the face of the emergence of a global economy characterised by intense competition (Anstey, 1997b). These advances were characterised by global investments, the rise of Asian competition, technological innovation, restructuring of businesses, new forms of work organisations, shift to reduce the role of the state as regulator, and swings in political power away from trade union interests (Anstey, 1997b). This led to the internationalisation of trade and capital and the term “globalisation” (Slabbert & Swanepoel, 2002). The accelerating challenge of globalisation was the most significant factor influencing the labour relations environment.

Organisations were suddenly subjected to vigorous re-examination and restructuring as a consequence of pressures and new forms of work organisation brought about by globalisation (Finnemore, 2009). Employment flexibility, lean manufacturing principles and high levels of engagement have been some responses to pressure induced by the changing economy, individual and organisational realities (Finnemore, 2009). The realities of global competition led to changes in the level and nature of employment across nations (Anstey, 1997b). Organisations had to adapt to the realities of the new work order and radical adjustments like the restructuring of organisations as a means of survival in the face of increased competition was required (Finnemore, 2009).

In their efforts to achieve competitiveness, organisations have introduced flexibility, which fundamentally affects the nature of work, its organisation, the workforce and the shape of modern business. One of these adjustments was a work paradigm that encouraged enterprises to distinguish between a core of skilled workers and a growing pool of unskilled workers on the periphery of employment who are dispensable (Webster & Buhlungu, 2004). Employment has become more volatile and fulltime employment is now a decreasing activity (Wickens, 1995). Functional flexibility (multiskilling) underpins flexible and more creative use of staff and requires intensive training and development programmes. In addition, there are strong pushes for flexible pay systems linking reward with performance. Privatisation, outsourcing, downsizing, flexible organisations and employment contracts have serious implications for employees, trade unions and traditional collective bargaining (Nel, 1999).

The growth of small businesses is accelerating as large companies divest themselves both of non-core activities and of people. The balance between managerial/professional and unskilled jobs is changing in favour of the managerial/professional, although with large companies reducing their middle management ranks, these new positions are likely to be in the more volatile smaller companies. Those who lack the necessary skills to be employable or self-employed will join the growing ranks of the unemployable. The emerging consensus is that the ability to create employment in the established industrialised economies will depend on a balance between high quality education and training, a dynamic labour market and ease of job creation (Wickens, 1995).

### **3.4.6 Problems for trade unions**

External factors characterised by intense competition and subsequent pressure on businesses to raise their quality, reduce costs and increase productivity has had a major impact on the nature of work and the employment relationship (Anstey, 1997b). These changes have created significant challenges for unions who grapple with the complexity, due to a growing trend in outsourcing and the growth in atypical employment, employer forms of participation and representation, and the imposition of legal constraints on the ability to stay relevant in the workplace (Wright, 2011).

The economic slowdown and the decline of manufacturing in these countries have shaken the stability of traditional economies. Trade unions have declined in density as they struggle to respond to internal reshaping imposed by an increasingly service based membership; to shift strategies from increasing wages to job security through training, development and productivity; to become partners in the struggle for organisational competitiveness, and to deal with the new managerial approaches and technology. The use of the strike weapon has declined across first world countries, as there has been a recognition that its use may not be functional in the context of the next world economy (Anstey, 1997b).

The new types of disputes are less concerned with the advancement of basic labour rights, power-driven exchanges over wages and conditions of employment and changes on the political front. They are centrally driven by organisational issues and the impact that the changes in these areas have on the nature of work, employment contracts, job security, collective agreements, consultation and collective bargaining processes. Traditional unions have so far failed to address the marginalisation of workers excluded from union membership, inequality and poverty brought about by globalisation (Webster, 2015). Globalisation has proved to be a double-edged sword for unions and employers alike (Finnemore, 2009).

The opportunities of foreign investment, new technology, access to global markets have been countered by aggressive competition, financial volatility and the economic meltdown experienced in the global economy in 2008 (Finnemore, 2009). This reality led to restructuring, closure of businesses and retrenchments, which placed significant demands on unions (Finnemore, 2009). Unions had to devise strategies to deal with the

major challenges in terms of political identity and stance, competitiveness, productivity, new forms of work organisation and reshaping of business organisations (Anstey, 1997b).

### **3.4.7 Labour relations during political transitions**

The late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s not only represented fundamental changes in global economics, but also represented a period of fundamental political change for many countries and democratisation appeared to be a worldwide trend (Wood & Coetzee, 2006). In protracted transitions, all the social role players (state, labour and employer) are forced into a series of strategic choices (Anstey, 1997b). From the beginning of industrialisation, unions have been formed to bring about political transformation in society (Finnemore, 2009). Unions historically have done this in three ways, namely forming a labour party, forming an alliance with a chosen party or supporting a party's electoral programme during elections (Buhlungu & Tshoaedi, 2012).

Globalisation and the orientation of governments towards neoliberal policies have severely hampered unions' ability to effectively influence social policy and the way it benefits its broad membership. It is, according to Anstey (1997b), not uncommon for unions to be pulled towards integration into the capitalist society once the political context changes towards the establishment of a democratic state. Unions' response to organisational and political challenges has a marked influence on the labour relations system (Anstey, 1997b). In general, unions are struggling to adapt to the new terrain of policy making in the new democracy (Anstey, 1997b). This involves more than simply a lack of capacity (Webster, 1998). It entails the difficulties of shifting from outright resistance to the state to a subtle combination of opposition with engagement and co-responsibility for particular policies as concertation depends on the capacity of the labour movement to represent its members (Webster, 1998).

The changes that occurred in the global economic relations and political systems over the last 40 years shed some light on the ambiguity that organisations need to manage in an attempt to secure worker commitment and motivation. The challenge for organisations is to "balance" these factors as they influence how organisations relate to their employees, and a unions approach to engagement (Tsui et al., 1995). The various internal and external factors that influence engagement levels in a unionised environment are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: External factors that influence engagement levels in a unionised environment (adapted from Tsui et al., 1995)

External factors	Internal factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government regulations</li> <li>• Socio-economic, cultural and political situation</li> <li>• History of the country</li> <li>• Nature of the labour force</li> <li>• Business environment and technology</li> <li>• Globalisation</li> <li>• Alliances</li> <li>• Trade union climate</li> <li>• Political role of trade unions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and values of employer and employee</li> <li>• Business strategy</li> <li>• Budgetary factors</li> <li>• Organisational structure</li> <li>• Ideology</li> <li>• Changing membership</li> <li>• Changing nature of trade unions</li> <li>• Trade union democracy</li> <li>• Job characteristics</li> <li>• Employment rules and regulations</li> <li>• Employment relationship</li> <li>• Role and function of shop stewards</li> <li>• Psychological contract</li> <li>• New forms of management</li> </ul>

### 3.5 Union worker dissatisfaction

According to Guest and Conway (2003), the mystery of unionised worker dissatisfaction is a simple and familiar one. The primary function of unions is to promote the interests and wellbeing of their members; yet union members are more dissatisfied than non-union workers (Guest & Conway, 2002). To become a member of a union, employees hand their individual bargaining rights over in favour of collective bargaining rights (Donais, 2010). They exchange their individual ability to negotiate with the employer for the strength of group negotiations (Donais, 2010). This requires union members to take sides between their loyalty to the employer and their loyalty to the union (Donais, 2010). The result is a struggle between employers and unions for the hearts and minds of employees (Donais, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that union members are less engaged than their counterparts (Donais, 2010). This led to unionised employees being socialised to see a separation in interests between themselves and their employer (Donais, 2010). The employee wants work that is safe and to receive fair pay and respect in the workplace. The company, on the contrary, wants to make a profit (Donais, 2010).

Guest and Conway (2002) explored the paradox of union worker dissatisfaction and concluded that even after controlling a range of workplace factors trade union members remain more dissatisfied than non-union members do. Guest and Conway (2002) postulate that the dissatisfaction may have something to do with being a union member. Guest and Conway (2002) identified various factors which they believe is the key reasons for union member dissatisfaction. Firstly, they identified the role of unions in raising the

political awareness and the expectations of their members and the union's failure to meet these expectations. Secondly, those union members feel that their voice goes unheard in the workplace. Thirdly, those workers in high union density workplaces receive different treatment, which results in a perceived anti union stance on the part of management. Lastly, while workers join trade unions to benefit from their collective membership, there are very limited returns by way of specific outcomes or greater voice. Chang et al.'s (2014) findings show that unionised employees are dissatisfied with employee involvement, health and safety, indispensability, time flexibility, workload flexibility, managerial trust and fair treatment, while non-union employees are dissatisfied with job security, pay exploitation and managerial sentiment towards unions.

### **3.6 The changing nature of union management relations**

A global shift in the nature of work resulted in a change in the nature and composition of the workforce (Bendix, 2015). This led to the emergence of employee engagement and employee voice as forms of direct employee involvement in the late 2000s to improve organisational efficiency and productivity (Gollan & Xu, 2015). Employees have higher education levels, are more aware of their rights and are increasingly demonstrating a concern for democracy, ethical, transparent management practices, and social responsibility (Bendix, 2015).

The paradox, however, is that there is still no noticeable shift in the ideological framework of business, as the free market system is still equated to capitalism (Bendix, 2015) and that labour relations are more formalised and controlled through labour legislation than ever before (Salamon, 1998; Venter, 2003 (as cited in Linde 2007). The employment relationship still rests on traditional pluralism and the institutionalisation of conflict, which empowers management and the unions, but leaves the employee powerless (Bendix, 2015). Gollan and Xu (2015) suggest that parties to the employment relationship should make a paradigm shift and look beyond the adversarial relationship and embrace new models underpinned by workplace cooperation.

This paradigm shift will make it possible to change the way employers and unions engage and create opportunities for employers to alter their relations with unions and employees (Yarrington et al., 2007). The replacement of the traditional industrial relations model with new management strategies, such as engagement, partnerships, collaborations, employee voice, and high-performance work organisations represent a significant change

the management of employees (Yarrington et al., 2007). Engagement provides the ideal opportunity to go beyond this traditional adversarial approach Townsend et al. (2014) and Yarrington et al. (2007) regard a good union employer relationship as one which was well established and considered ongoing.

### **3.7 Factors associated with good union and employer relationships**

Mainstream academics and practitioners (Harter et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2011), have identified multiple antecedents for high engagement. There are, however, additional antecedents, which might also influence engagement in a unionised environment in addition to the antecedents identified by mainstream academics and practitioners. The additional antecedents, which emerged from the literature, are discussed in the next section.

#### **3.7.1 Strategic narrative**

MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 31) defined strategic narrative as a “strong, transparent and explicit organisational culture which gives employees a line of sight between their job and the vision and aims of the organisation”. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) emphasise the role of leadership in setting out this strategic narrative, ensuring that employees understand the narrative and can see how their role contributes to it.

#### **3.7.2 Trust and integrity**

Dromey (2014) identified six areas of engagement drivers that will preserve employee engagement, of which trust was particularly important. Trust is a key element of the psychological contract, and Robinson et al., (2004) emphasise the similarity of engagement to the psychological contract. There has been renewed interest in the psychological contract, as with the construct of engagement since the 1990s due to various changes affecting the workplace (Guest & Conway, 2002). The psychological contract can facilitate a new framework for engagement, as the traditional collective model is less relevant in many workplaces (Guest & Conway, 2002). This model can accommodate the rise in individualism and flexibility and can address the core issues of the employment relationship of trust (Guest & Conway, 2002). Donais (2010), who states that trust is key for successful union engagement, confirm this view.

### **3.7.3 Pluralist tendencies**

The notion of employee engagement essentially comes from a unitarist perspective (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Unitarism refers to “employer strategies of trade union avoidance based on and justified by an ideology of a unity of interests between employers and employees, being predominantly managerial in its emphasis and application” (Fox 1974, p. 135, as cited in Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The contemporary notion of management realism refers more broadly to the assertion of managerial rights, goals, and prerogatives without the need for meaningful employee involvement (Clarke & Newman 1997, as cited in Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). This is very different from the pluralist perspective, which “sees the organisation as a coalition of interest groups” over which management presides in an authoritative but not authoritarian manner, recognising employee rights (Fox 1974, p. 10, as cited in Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

According to Arrowsmith and Parker (2013), engagement does not need to constitute unitarist deception to win hearts and minds in pursuit of management goals, but rather “neopluralist” opportunity by employers to better understanding and managing the employment relationship. The pursuit of engagement may thus combine elements of “hard” (performance oriented) and “soft” (employee oriented) human resource management (HRM), which we interpret as a form of “neopluralism” (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The pluralist outlook involves a commitment to better understanding and managing the employment relationship within specific contexts, with a premium on analysis and action around employee concerns (Purcell, 2012, as cited in Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

### **3.7.4 Environmental factors**

Hyman (1987) suggests that regardless of any management strategy, factors that are both external and internal to the organisation and the employment relationship will ensure that the strategy never completely succeeds. That many “managerial strategies” may very well be little more than tactical decision making, rather than strategic, and that all strategies are routes to “partial failure” (1987, p. 30). Hyman (1987, p. 30) states that it is simply impossible to “harmonise the contradictions between forces and relations of production, between the production and realisation of surplus value”. There is a strong body of work that identifies similar arguments to suggest that workers have faced many years of uncertainty with partially successful, but nevertheless, these employees find

commitment to the organisations for which they work (Edwards et al., 2001, as cited in Townsend et al., 2014).

Delbridge and Keenoy (2010, p. 801) argue that “the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors which shape if not determine those practices”. More attention must be given to organisational contextual factors, which provide both opportunities and constraints for management’s ability to promote an internal context supportive of engagement efforts (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). The prospects for delivering engaged employees are significantly influenced by the organisational approach to people management as well as how this is influenced by the complex external and internal contexts, which local management navigates (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013).

### **3.7.5 Collaborative partnerships**

Kochan (2000), as cited in Townsend et al. (2014) argues that employees are increasingly dissatisfied with adversarial industrial relations and partnerships provide opportunities to go beyond the traditional adversarial approach. The interest in partnerships and collaboration points to an important shift from adversarial industrial relations to problem-solving outcomes among unions, managers and workers (Townsend et al., 2014). According to Townsend et al. (2014) is a collaborative partnership where there is cooperation or collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity between management, unions and employees. Core principles in partnerships are mutuality, dignity, respect, fairness, competitiveness, flexibility, joint and direct communication, and consultation (Townsend et al., 2014). The outcomes of collaborative partnerships can be determined through the relationships that managers, employees and unions share, employee engagement levels and reduction in turnover (Townsend et al., 2014). A sincere partnership with unions will have better results than employee engagement with a traditional adversarial approach with unions in the background (Townsend et al., 2014). Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) suggest that human resources practitioners, management must work in partnership with trade unions in pursuit of higher levels of engagement. Employers need to be committed to the partnership, as it is the key to creating relationship driven workplaces (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

### **3.7.6 Union involvement**

The road to employee engagement starts with engaging the union leadership (Donais, 2010). Employers must recognise that unions can help the company to increase employee engagement (Crabtree, 2006). Union involvement can improve the chances of successful engagement as the unique nature of the union's relationship with employees offers many advantages for employers seeking to engage unionised employees (Donais, 2010). These advantages, according to Donais (2010), are access to an established two-way communication network giving employees a "voice" which is a key component in engagement. The employer must demonstrate that it acts in the best interest of the employees by demonstrating trust and integrity, which requires involving the union (Donais, 2010).

The existence of democratic union structures and operations at the enterprise level provides ordinary union members with the opportunity to participate directly in exercising worker control over their elected shop stewards, and indirectly over the policies of the union and office bearers at the local, regional and national levels (Hirschsohn, 2011). Continued union growth and maturity led to the erosion of direct democracy and increasing reliance on representative democracy through elected shop stewards (Hirschsohn, 2011). It also resulted in a growing gap between workers and shop stewards and between workers and the leadership at enterprise, regional and national levels (Hirschsohn, 2011). As members have disengaged from daily union activities, "ownership" and control of the union has steadily shifted from members to elected representatives and officials (Hirschsohn, 2011). It is for this reason that it is imperative to involve the unions' elected representatives and officials, because they have the power to organise their members (Donais, 2010). Job satisfaction and process feedback on the success of engagement efforts can be elicited from the members by the union and will be likely to be accurate (Donais, 2010). Unions will be strong advocates for the programme if they believe it will have tangible benefits for their members (Donais, 2010).

### **3.7.7 The employment relationships**

According to Kahn and Heaphy (2014), organisations are defined by sets of relationships among people who coordinate the activities in the delivery of organisational tasks and goals. Relationships affect how tasks are completed, how individuals and teams collaborate, share knowledge, and accomplish organisational objectives (Bechky, 2006,

as cited in Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). The relational context includes groups and teams, departments, divisions, hierarchical relations, co-workers, partnerships and peer relations (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). People join collective efforts in the context of groups and teams, because an individual's efforts become enlarged as members join together to create, discover, learn and achieve what they could not do alone (Senge, 1990, as cited in Kahn & Heaphy, 2014).

According to Bendix (2015), the employment relationship will be improved by mutual interest, mutual support, trust, meaningful communication and shared goals and values. The relational context invariably shapes the extent to which people engage (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). However, only respect for individuality in the relationship can lead to personal satisfaction and meaningful relationships (Bendix, 2015). It is essential to develop sound employment relationships for workplace engagement. It is proposed that employers incorporate external influences in the development of internal employment structures. These structures should be in accordance with labour legislation and collective agreements. Furthermore, such an employment relationship should focus on the inherent requirements of the employees, to accommodate fair expectations. These expectations should be clearly made available to the employees and made understandable, which should increase trust in the employer. Union interaction should be incorporated in the employment relationship, according to the levels of representation that it has, where similar clarity and trust could be developed.

### **3.7.8 Employee voice**

When the concept first emerged, it was associated with trade union membership and collective bargaining (Rees et al., 2013). It is now seen as referring to a broad range of ways in which employees "have a say" in the organisation through formal or informal systems of indirect, collective representation, or through direct individual channels (CIPD, 2010, as cited in Rees et al., 2013). Morrison et al., (2010, as cited in Rees et al., 2013) refer to voice as the discretionary verbal communication of ideas, suggestions or opinions with the intent to improve organisational unit functioning.

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) identified "employee voice" alongside leadership, engaging managers and integrity as four pillars to support employee engagement. An opportunity for interaction between management and employees through broad means of communication gives employees a voice that enhances employees' propensity to engage

with the organisation (Donais, 2010). The opportunity for employees to have a voice in management decision taking is fundamental in creating a positive attitude and behaviour towards the organisation. (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 75) state that “voice becomes a building block for engagement” when ‘employees’ views are sought out, they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference.

Rees et al. (2013) find that there is a positive connection between voice and engagement. Research done by Rees et al. (2013, p. 2) revealed that the “direct connection between the perception of voice behaviour and engagement is mediated by both employees trust in senior managers and the employee line manager relationships”. Employee voice is more than the use of suggestion schemes, recognition and reward and getting employees to buy into corporate values, but about a two-way process where employees have an opportunity to give their views, ask questions and engage in dialogue with management (Purcell, 2014). In essence, voice relates to “employees’ ability to influence the outcomes of organisational decisions by having the opportunity to advance their ideas and have them considered” (Purcell, 2014, p. 237). Voice should, therefore, be an alternative to managerial unilateralism (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009).

Purcell (2014) states that good employment relations practice includes avenues for employee voice to ensure that opinions of groups affected are taken into account. Engagement can be improved through enhancing employee voice, especially in the work of employee representatives interacting with managers on strategic and policy issues (Purcell, 2014). When embedded voice practices at enterprise level, led by frontline managers, coexist with top level consultative committees, run by senior managers, the effect is greater than on individual practices on their own (Purcell, 2014). A good voice practice in a collective setting requires “a right to be informed of planned measures in advance and to have an opportunity to express an opinion prior to implementation” (Purcell, 2014).

This requires the establishment of a consultative committee where employee representatives, drawn from recognised trade unions or directly elected by fellow employees, or both, meet with senior managers to discuss planned business, changes, as well as issues raised by employees (Purcell, 2014). Trade unions have always shown a degree of ambivalence towards consultative forums, since they prefer collective bargaining and fear that some employers will use consultative forums as a replacement for unions (Purcell, 2014). According to Dromey (2014), collective voice is just as

important as listening to individual employees. Understanding what the workforce as a whole is thinking is vital for employers, which generates an opportunity for trade unions to recast their relevance as the primary source of collective voice willing not just to fight for members, but to work together for the success of the business or service.

### **3.7.9 Employee participation**

Changes in the nature of work resulted in employee participation evolving since the 1980's when it was primarily a human resources management approach (Gollan & Xu, 2015). The topic has had a resurgence since the global financial crisis, which not only reshaped industrial relations, but also impacts on employees (Gollan & Xu, 2015). Employee participation is a form of industrial democracy, which was made possible through trade unionism and collectivism (Cressey, 1995). It is aimed at direct employee involvement to improve organisational efficiency and productivity (Gollan & Xu, 2015). The concept evolved further with employee empowerment gaining prominence in the 1990's, high commitment and performance took over in the early 2000's, and employee engagement in the 2010's Wilkinson et al. (2010) and Gollan and Xu (2015) state that the major shifts in employee participation reflect the major shifts that took place since the 1980's in the industrial relations landscape. According to Knudsen et al. (2011) is the rationale behind participation, industrial democracy, social integration and organisational efficiency. According to Anstey (1997a), employee participation is a great motivational tool, because it gives people a degree of control, and provides scope for personal growth (Anstey, 1997a). These are in themselves intrinsic rewards, which flow from the performance of a job within a participatory environment (Anstey, 1997a).

Terms like participation, engagement and involvement are at times used interchangeably, whereas the meanings and forms that the term "employee participation" can take vary across disciplines (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Knudsen et al. (2011, p. 384) state that employee participation essentially encompasses "all forms through which employees take part in decisions regarding their job and their workplace". "Forms of employee participation can be direct or indirect, formal or informal workplace arrangements" (Knudsen et al., 2011, p. 384). "These various forms of participation differ in the scope of decision making, the degree of influence workers have over management, and the organisational level at which decisions are made" (Gollan & Xu, 2015, p. 4). Some forms of participation give the employees a voice, which may range from a modest role in decision-making to employee involvement in organisational governance (Gollan & Xu,

2015). The spectrum of participation is determined by each form of participation's depth as well as its scope (Knudsen et al., 2011). The depth may vary from the mere information sharing with management, to consultation and joint talks and negotiations, to self-determination (Knudsen et al., 2011). The scope of participation according to Knudsen et al. (2011, p. 384) stretches "from operational matters (related to the job/task), through tactical matters (related to work organisation, technology and pay systems, etc.), to strategic issues (related to company missions and goals, investment and reinvestment, etc.)". The worker participation model that gives unions the most influence at enterprise level in the west is probably the codetermination and works council system in Germany (Anstey, 1997a).

Institutionalised participation takes strategic engagement some steps further because it provides a stronger form of stakeholder rights in the company than strategic engagement does (Anstey, 1997a). It can be seen as a way of transforming the workplace by extending democracy and citizenship rights into it (Anstey, 1997a). The characteristics and outcomes related to employee participation can be contingent on many contextual factors, such as regulatory condition, sector, industrial relations climate, organisational and employee characteristics, motives of actors, employer control and union strength (Gollan & Xu, 2015).

### **3.7.10 Human resources management practices**

Organisations must move beyond the routine management of annual engagement surveys and must entrench engagement in all human resource management (HRM) practices (Albrecht et al., 2015). HRM practices focused on engagement directly influence the psychological experiences of safety, meaningfulness and availability at work, and can facilitate and improve employee engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015). In order for engagement to deliver its claimed benefits, it needs to be explicitly embedded within an integrated system of HRM policies, practices and procedures (Guest, 2014). Bowen and Ostroff (2004, cited in Truss et al., 2013) suggested that employee engagement might finally provide the key to understanding how effective HRM practice may lead to higher individual and organisational performance.

The concern with linking HRM and performance has, however, been challenged for its unitarist view of organisational life (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010). Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) argue that the pursuit of higher engagement levels may represent a "neopluralist"

turn in the values and practices of human resources management (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). This involves much more than simply offering transactional human resources related services to management in pursuit of a “unitarist” agenda, even if the process is largely based around mutual gains. It offers an opportunity to reconcile “soft” (employee centred) human resources practices to “hard” (performance orientated) goals (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Efforts to foster high levels of engagement can be driven either from a will to gain competitive advantage (“hard” engagement) or, conversely, from a desire to improve working conditions and the employment relationship (“soft” engagement) (Truss et al., 2013).

Albrecht et al. (2015) emphasised that engagement needs to be integrated as a focus across all facets of the employer employee relationship. This means that engagement needs to be strategically embedded and supported across the total human resources value chain. This offers HRM the opportunity to systematically engage with its core constituencies in the pursuit of a clear contribution to workplace motivation and performance (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

### **3.7.11 Leadership and line manager behaviour**

Alfes et al. (2013) found that employees’ perceptions of line manager behaviour are positively related to levels of employee engagement. Rees et al. (2013, p. 2780) also found that there is a “direct connection between perceptions of voice behaviour and engagement is mediated by both employees trust in senior management and the employee line manager relationship”. Northouse (2001) in Dhivya and Sripirabaa (2015, p. 140) defines leadership as “a process whereby one individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. Dhivya and Sripirabaa (2015) place leadership into various categories of which leader member exchange (LMX) is one. According to them, the LMX process is unique as it refers to the quality of the relationship between the parties. High quality LMX relationships are categorised by a high degree of interaction, support and trust. Christian et al. (2011), Crawford et al. (2014) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) all established that there is a positive relationship between LMX and engagement levels.

The interaction between managers and employees represents a significant source of engagement (Soane et al., 2012). However, the role of leaders must be seen within the job context as work roles are the channel for engagement (Soane et al., 2012). The JDR

model is a useful conceptual model for understanding how a job resource, such as supportive leadership, may relate to employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The first premise of the JDR model is that in every job there are certain job demands and job resources (Schaufeli, 2013). Job demands are “physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive or emotional) effort or skills” and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Two recent studies according to Baxter (2013) lend support to leadership as a job resource and how it fits into the JDR model.

### **3.7.12 High-performance work organisations and environments**

The effectiveness of high involvement work practices on engagement levels and positive organisational outcomes are well documented (Konrad, 2006). Employees who are involved in conceiving, designing and implementing workplace and process changes are engaged employees (Konrad, 2006). High-performance work organisations (HPWO) practices can develop the positive beliefs and attitudes associated with employee engagement, and these practices can generate discretionary behaviours that can lead to enhanced performance (Konrad, 2006).

Kirkman et al. (1999, p. 8) define HPWO as “an organisational system that continually aligns its strategy, goals, objectives, and internal operations with the demands of its external environment to maximise organisational performance”. The notion behind the concept of the HPWO is that it can deliver reasonable advantage because it enables firms to deliver increased performance because of socially consensual management practices (Stewart & Danford, 2008). Inherent to socially consensual management practices include the linking of organisational goals mediated by partnership arrangements, whether formal or informal (Stewart & Danford, 2008).

Lawler (2001) identified four interlocking principles for building an HPWO work system to ensure its effectiveness and that the various principles will work in synergy to ensure high engagement levels. These components are to provide employees with the power to make decisions, information about the business, knowledge of work and rewards tied to business results (Kirkman et al., 1999). Lawler (2001) suggests that the implementation of HPWO environment requires that every major feature of the organisation needs to be redesigned. This requires the participation of all employees in the redesign of the

organisation. This degree of participation generates a positive attitude amongst all employees towards a change in high involvement (Konrad, 2006). Kirkman et al. (1999) are of the opinion that HPWOs utilise five components to various degrees to dynamically adjust to its environment. These components are self-managing work teams; employee involvement, participation, empowerment; total quality management; integrated production technologies and the learning organisation (Kirkman et al., 1999).

The key concepts and themes that emerged from the literature review on the approaches and interventions that may have the greatest potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised context were organised around key antecedents. These newly discovered antecedents discovered in Chapter 2 and 3 that will inform the framework are summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Antecedents associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment

<b>Article Citation/Author</b>	<b>Antecedents</b>
• Albrecht et al. (2015)	• Human resources management practices
• Gollan and Xu (2015)	• Employee participation
• Knudsen et al. (2011)	
• Arrowsmith and Parker (2013)	• Pluralist tendencies
• Chang et al. (2014)	• Job security • Managerial sentiment towards unions • Fair pay “non pay exploitation”
• Townsend et al., (2013)	• Collaborative partnership • Managerial strategies
• Purcell (2014) • Rees et al., (2013) • Dundon et al. (2004)	• Employee voice
• Alfes et al., (2013)	• Line manager behaviour • Human resource management practices
• Jenkins and Delbridge (2013)	• Labour relations system and context
• Hirschsohn (2011)	• Trade union democracy
• Donais (2010)	• Union involvement • Communication giving employees a voice • Safety • Fair pay • Respect • Trust and integrity • Involving union representatives
• Francis et al. (2013)	• Conversational practices
• McLeod and Clarke (2009)	• Strategic narrative • Engaging managers • Employee voice • Integrity
• Stewart and Danford (2008)	• Union involvement
• Shuck and Albornoz (2008)	• Opportunity to learn
• Soane et al. (2012)	• Management practices

Article Citation/Author	Antecedents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yarrington et al. (2007)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Employee voice</li> <li>• Respect for rules of the relationship</li> <li>• Individual professional credibility</li> <li>• Role of managers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Pluralist tendencies</li> <li>◦ Line manager dynamics</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Konrad (2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-performance work organisation and environment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holbeche and Springett 2003</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest and Conway (2002)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Individual</li> <li>◦ Collective</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting expectations created by members</li> <li>• Equal opportunities</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyman (1987)</li> <li>• Salamon (1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External and internal factors to the organisation</li> <li>• Micro and macro environment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linde (2007)</li> <li>• Shore et al. (2004)</li> <li>• Bendix (2015)</li> <li>• Finnemore (2009)</li> <li>• Anstey (1997a)</li> <li>• Rousseau (1995)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee organisation relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Psychological contract</li> <li>◦ Employment relationship</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finnemore (2009)</li> <li>• Slabbert and Myburgh (2000)</li> <li>• Slabbert and Swanepoel (2002)</li> <li>• Anstey (1997a,b)</li> <li>• Adler (1998)</li> <li>• Webster and Von Holdt (2005)</li> <li>• Buhlungu and Tshoaeedi (2012)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The labour relations system</li> </ul>

### 3.8 Framework for engaging unionised employees

#### 3.8.1 Findings

The aim of this evidence synthesis is to systematically analyse themes in the literature study to produce a critical narrative around the evidence in order to bring into focus suitable propositions to develop a framework to address the low levels of engagement in a unionised environment. The approach to the evidence synthesis was founded on the recommendations of Briner and Denyer (2012), for conducting a systematic review using a narrative approach that adhered to the principles of quality, relevance, transparency, replicability and credibility. The evidence synthesis was guided by the following five questions.

### 3.8.1.1 How has engagement been defined and conceptualised within the academic and practitioner literature?

The purpose of addressing this question was to identify suitable concepts, frameworks and practices to develop a theoretical framework in a unionised environment. Data from 103 sources was extracted and 48 sources were included in the evidence synthesis to determine how to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. In the analysis of the literature, seven predominant definitions of engagement were identified; three of these definitions have been operationalised in six engagement scales. Kahn's (1990) personal engagement definition views engagement as people employing and expressing themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance. His definition has been operationalised in the form of quantitative personal engagement scales developed by (May et al. 2004; Rich et al., 2010; Soane et al., 2012).

The second stream of research views engagement as a positive effective-motivational state of mind directed towards work tasks (Maslach et al., 2001). Work task engagement is founded on the notion that engagement is on the positive end of the burnout antithesis (Schaufeli, 2013). Building on the notion of work task engagement, the "Utrecht Group" developed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) that consists of 17 items measuring the vigour, dedication and absorption dimensions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The multidimensional approach emerged from a multidimensional perspective of employee engagement conceptualised by Saks (2006, p. 602), who defined the multidimensional concept of engagement as "a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance". Saks (2006) developed a six-item scale to measure job engagement and a six-item scale to measure organisational engagement.

Stumpf et al. (2013) developed a two-dimensional measure of engagement for professionals in technically orientated workgroups that measure felt engagement and behavioural engagement. It examines the relationship of engagement to five workgroup outcomes namely, innovation, performance, satisfaction with the organisation, career success and intention to stay.

Shuck and Wollard (2010) conducted a historical analysis of engagement and they identified several inconsistencies and consistencies from the various definitions. The two main inconsistencies are a lack of clarity about where the decision to become engaged develops and the types of engagement (Shuck & Wollard 2010). Kahn's (1990) original theory of engagement focused on the employee being able to express him/herself at work and became vague over time towards a more organisationally centred term (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014).

A wide range of theoretical frameworks has been used to define the state of engagement of which the needs satisfying approach conceptualised by Kahn (1990) still provides the strongest theoretical rationale for understanding the psychology of engagement, compared to any other model. Kahn (1990) has been clear about the psychological conditions that lead to engagement as well as the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions, compared to other constructs (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

According to Bailey et al. (2015), the foremost theoretical framework used to define engagement as a psychological state is the JDR framework. The JDR framework distinguishes between resources and is based on the view that both job and personal resources serve to energise people and foster high engagement levels and that high job demands sparks a health impairment process that inhibits engagement (Schaufeli, 2013).

The second most widespread theory used in the literature is SET, which is based on norms of reciprocity (Bailey et al., 2015). It is argued that employees with positive perceptions of how their employer views them would be more likely to respond by investing personal effort into their work in the form of raised levels of engagement (Alfes et al., 2013). This process revealed the complexity and indistinctness within the academic literature relating to the definition, meaning, modelling and operationalisation of engagement (Schaufeli, 2013).

### 3.8.1.2 What do academics and practitioners recognise as conditions (antecedents) for high levels of engagement (outcomes)?

The purpose of addressing this question was to identify the antecedents and outcomes of engagement that has already been researched and validated and that will have the greatest potential to increase the levels of engagement in a unionised environment. This process identified a number of strategies or conditions that precede the development of engagement as well as the individual and organisational benefits of engagement.

Data from 24 sources was extracted and 7 sources were included in the evidence synthesis to answer this question. No academic literature addressing the antecedents and consequences of engagement in a unionised environment was discovered during the search. The synthesis of the results showed that engagement is considered a mediating variable in which antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement in turn leads to individual and organisational outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). A number of individual and organisational antecedents have emerged from the synthesis that point towards approaches that influence engagement levels. Bailey et al. (2015) conducted a comprehensive narrative synthesis on the antecedents and outcomes of engagement and found that job resources, individual psychological states, positive perceptions of leadership and line management, as well as a positive perception of the organisation and team has a “similarly strong impact” on engagement which will guide the final framework. The literature suggests that negative antecedents such as dysfunctional leadership, poor communication, continuous quality improvement efforts, defiant behaviour, hindrance demand, bullying, adherence to co-worker norms, self-consciousness and abusive supervision are associated with lower levels of engagement (Bailey et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2014).

The outcomes of engagement were examined under two main headings, namely individual performance related outcomes and organisational related outcomes. The outcomes were classified under the same headings for the purposes of the conceptual framework. The synthesis of the evidence on individual outcomes revealed that engagement was most strongly correlated with job satisfaction and organisational commitment, in role and extra role performance, life satisfaction and general health (Bailey et al., 2015). The synthesis of the evidence on organisational outcomes revealed that engagement was most strongly correlated with customer satisfaction, turnover intention, safety, productivity and profitability (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

The synthesis of the literature revealed that the literature is mostly silent on the negative consequences of high engagement levels. The literature search on the negative consequences of engagement revealed mostly comments and articles relating to this topic. The most significant comments were from George (2011), Halbesleben (2011) and Truss et al. (2013), in which George (2011) and Halbesleben (2011) were of the opinion that high engagement levels might not necessarily be a constructive experience for employees.

### 3.8.1.3 What circumstances influence engagement levels in a unionised environment?

The third question addressed the relationship between employees and organisations, as well as the impact of environmental factors on engagement levels in a unionised environment. Data from 140 sources was extracted and 49 sources were included in the evidence synthesis to answer this question. The evidence indicates that the EOR is an overarching term describing the relationship between the employee and the organisation and that it includes the concepts of employee engagement, psychological empowerment and the psychological contract (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Although the “psychological contract and psychological empowerment could be considered a pattern of the EOR they do not exhibit a high level of employee activation and mutual exchange relationship simultaneously” in a connected manner (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016, p. 10). This holistic pattern is, however, evident in engagement, and engagement may provide a better explanation of the contemporary EOR (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). Employee engagement has the potential to redefine the optimal EOR (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016, p. 20).

Evidence suggests that the SET provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the EOR and that it seems closely related to other constructs, including employee engagement (Hall, 2015). Evidence further suggests that there are various related points between engagement and the psychological contract, in that both are unwritten, reinforced by trust, and are reciprocal relationships that can be violated (Robinson et al., 2004). The employment relationship, as part of the EOR, is the primary exchange relationship between the individual employee and employer (Shore et al., 2004). It is a complex relationship because it simultaneously features elements of conflict and commonality of interest (Nel et al., 2016). At the heart of this relationship are the employee, trade unions, employment regulations and the psychological contract (Shore et al., 2004). The employment relationship is key to the functioning of the broader labour relations system, which consists out of the various actors within the constraints of various environmental influences (Finnemore, 2009). The inherent characteristics of the employment relationship is a desire by the actors to manage the relationship by means of employment regulations that manifest themselves in legislations, policies, procedures and codes (Linde, 2007).

The evidence suggests that despite literature examining different approaches to managing the employment relationship, debate exists about the means to provide fair,

just and profitable workplaces due to the “contested terrain” (Edwards, 1979, as cited in Townsend et al., 2014). Hyman (1987) suggests that the contradictory objectives of consent and control in the employment relationship operating within unpredictable external environments means that there is no single best way of managing the EOR. Contextual “factors that are both external and internal to the organisation and the employment relationship will ensure that the strategy never completely succeeds and that many ‘managerial strategies’ may very well be little more than tactical decision making, rather than strategic” (Hyman, 1987, p. 29).

The synthesis of the evidence indicated that this complexity is driven by a number of economic, legal, market, structural, technological, social and individual changes, which occurred since the late 1980s in many countries. These factors fundamentally affected the nature of work, organisations, the workforce and the shape of modern business (Wood & Coetze, 2006). These factors and the unions’ response to it affect an employer’s choice of forms of EOR focussing on employability and flexibility (Tsui et al., 1995). These factors, according to Tsui et al. (1995), shed light on the paradox that organisations need to manage. This paradox, according to Tsui et al. (1995), stems from the fact that organisations simultaneously depend more on their employees, ask more from them, while offering less in return. The challenge for organisations is to “balance” these factors, as they influence how organisations relate to their employees to drive engagement (Tsui et al., 1995).

### 3.8.1.4 What approaches and interventions have the greatest potential to create and embed high levels of engagement in a unionised environment?

The purpose of the fourth question was to identify antecedents in addition to the antecedents already researched and validated that have the greatest potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. Data from 99 sources was extracted and 29 sources were included in the evidence synthesis to answer this question. Data gathered showed that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts and that employees often join unions in an attempt to increase satisfaction, but never hit the same satisfaction levels as their nonunionised peers (Sheridan & Anderson, 2013; Tyler, 2009; Wassel, 2013). The synthesis of the results shows that there are significant differences between union and non-union employees, and that engaging unionised employees presents different challenges to engaging nonunionised employees. Although it is commonly accepted that unionised employees

are less engaged than their non-union counterparts, the synthesis of the results shows that studies to determine the conditions for high engagement associated with unionised employees are non-existent. In line with the question to identify what approaches and interventions have the greatest potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment, the synthesis identified several antecedents that are specifically associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment, as illustrated in Table 3.2.

The additional antecedents identified are strategic narrative, trust and integrity, pluralist tendencies, environmental factors, collaborative partnership, union involvement, the employment relationship, employee voice, employee participation, HRM practices, leadership and line manager's behaviour and HPWO. These antecedents, together with the job resources, individual psychological states, positive perceptions of leadership and line management, as well as a positive perception of the organisation will be combined into several propositions for the development of the framework.

### 3.8.1.5 What could a framework for engagement in a unionised context look like in order to increase engagement levels?

The purpose of addressing this question was to develop a framework to address the low levels of engagement in a unionised environment based on the evidence discovered during the systematic review of the literature. Data from 16 sources was extracted and 1 source was included in the evidence synthesis to identify the antecedents that have demonstrated to have the biggest potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. There is disappointingly not much academic research on this topic and the only source included was from practitioners' literature.

The evidence relating to the individual and organisational antecedents within the general workforce (prevailing antecedents) and the antecedents associated with high levels of employee engagement in a unionised environment (additional antecedents), were synthesised to determine the elements to be included in the overall framework. The prevailing antecedents and the additional antecedents are illustrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Prevailing antecedents and additional antecedents discovered associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment

Prevailing Antecedents	Additional Antecedents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job challenge</li> <li>• Autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources management practices</li> <li>• Employee participation</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Fit</li> <li>• Opportunities for development</li> <li>• Reward and recognition</li> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Transformational leadership</li> <li>• Leader member exchange</li> <li>• Workplace climate</li> <li>• Organisational justice</li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Role overload</li> <li>• Work role conflict</li> <li>• Family work conflict</li> <li>• Resource inadequacies</li> <li>• Time urgency</li> <li>• Off work recovery</li> <li>• Disposition</li> <li>• Personal resources</li> <li>• Sustainable workload</li> <li>• Feelings of choice and control</li> <li>• Recognition and reward</li> <li>• Supportive work community</li> <li>• Fairness and justice</li> <li>• Meaningful and valued work</li> <li>• Meaning</li> <li>• Job enrichment</li> <li>• Work role fit</li> <li>• Rewarding co-worker</li> <li>• Supportive supervisor</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Social exchange involving reciprocity</li> <li>• Individual differences</li> <li>• Job resources and personal resources</li> <li>• Have the capacity to engage</li> <li>• Have the reason or motivation to engage</li> <li>• Have the freedom to engage</li> <li>• Know how to engage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pluralist tendencies</li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Managerial sentiment towards unions</li> <li>• Fair pay “nonpaid exploitation”</li> <li>• Collaborative partnership</li> <li>• Managerial strategies</li> <li>• Line manager behaviour</li> <li>• Human resource management practices</li> <li>• Labour relations system and context</li> <li>• Trade union democracy</li> <li>• Communication giving employees a voice</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Trust and integrity</li> <li>• Involving union representatives</li> <li>• Conversational practices</li> <li>• Strategic narrative</li> <li>• Engaging managers</li> <li>• Union involvement</li> <li>• Opportunity to learn</li> <li>• Management practices</li> <li>• Employee voice</li> <li>• Respect for rules of the relationship</li> <li>• Individual professional credibility</li> <li>• Role of managers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Pluralist tendencies</li> <li>◦ Line manager dynamics</li> </ul> </li> <li>• High-performance work organisation</li> <li>• Meaning</li> <li>• Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Individual</li> <li>◦ Collective</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting expectations created by members</li> <li>• Equal opportunities</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• External and internal factors to the organisation</li> <li>• Micro and Macro environment</li> <li>• Employee organisation relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Psychological contract</li> <li>◦ Employment relationship</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The labour relations system</li> </ul>
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Table 3. 4: Outcomes associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment

Organisational Outcomes	Individual Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Turnover intention</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Profitability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job satisfaction</li> <li>• Organisational commitment</li> <li>• In role performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Job Performance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Extra role performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Organisational citizenship behaviour</li> <li>◦ Innovation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Life satisfaction</li> <li>• General health</li> </ul>

The evidence relating to the individual and organisational outcomes associated with high levels of employee engagement in a unionised environment were also synthesised to determine the elements to be included in the overall framework. These outcomes are illustrated in Table 3.4. The conceptual framework, which is discussed in detail in the next section, illustrates a pathway, linking the antecedents to employee engagement and performance outcomes which were discovered during the synthesis of the evidence.

### **3.9 Propositions of a conceptual framework of engagement**

After systematically analysing the literature on engagement, 11 propositions emerged from the evidence synthesis that will increase the engagement levels in a unionised environment. These propositions are the following:

1. That individual characteristics shape people's predispositions towards engagement or disengagement and are antecedents to engagement (Kahn, 1990). The systematic review of the literature suggests that individual psychological states like experiencing meaningfulness, safety and availability could be antecedents to engagement. The synthesis of the literature revealed that individual characteristics like, a proactive personality, optimism, conscientiousness, trait and self-efficacy are prominent antecedents of engagement (Bailey et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Wollard & Shuck, 2011).
2. That a key component of employee engagement is integrity and trust. Despite its importance, organisations experience a decline in the levels of employee trust towards managers (Davis & Landa, 1999; Massey & Pyper, 2005; Pate et al., 2007; Choorman et al., 2007, allas cited in Chang et al., 2017). Not only is there a decline in the levels of trust, but unionised employees also trust managers less than nonunionised employees (Chang et al., 2017). Demonstrating integrity and trust requires the involvement of unions in the process of engaging employees. Trust is a key element of the psychological contract which can facilitate a new framework for engagement. Employees rely on the union's assessment deciding whether an employer is acting with integrity and if they can trust an employer's motives (Donais, 2010; Guest & Conway, 2002; Macleod & Clarke, 2009; Yarrington et al., 2007).
3. That job design related factors are a critical element of employee engagement (Bailey et al., 2015). Kahn (1990) proposed three main psychological conditions that influence

people's engagement and disengagement at work. The dimension of psychological meaningfulness involves a sense of return on investment of the self in work role performance (Kahn, 1990). Individuals who experience meaningfulness felt worthwhile, useful and valuable (Kahn, 1990). Psychological meaningfulness is highly influenced by the task characteristics of a person's job and these task characteristics that promote meaningfulness are tasks that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, autonomous, challenging, role fit, and involve feedback, opportunities for development, reward and recognition (Kahn, 1990).

4. The prospects of delivering engaged employees are significantly influenced by a set of complex internal and external realities unions face, which management must navigate (Donais, 2010; Hyman, 1975; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Salamon, 1998). Engagement needs to be understood in the context of a changing work environment affected by issues such as globalisation, economic downturn, technological advancement and organisational restructuring (Anstey, 1997b; Chang et al., 2017). These changes have led to the erosion of union power and enabled organisations to drive increased efficiency and productivity, which is often a trade off with employee welfare resulting in adversarial employee attitudes towards organisations (Sapelli and Halevi, 2009, as cited in Chang et al., 2017).
5. That employers should see the organisation as a collaborative partnership between all interest groups. A sincere partnership with unions and employees will have a positive influence on engagement efforts compared to the traditional adversarial relationship between parties. (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Stewart & Danford, 2008; Townsend et al., 2014). Attempts to engage employees without the involvement of the unions will lead to scepticism about the real motives behind any engagement attempts and unions might actively oppose any engagement efforts if employers circumvent them and engage directly with union members (Donais, 2010).
6. That it is paramount that employers understand that the success of any engagement strategy requires an adequate understanding of the trade unions' role, as collective organisation in the employment relationship. Unions have various and often competing functions in society, which may lead to unpredictable decision making on issues of interest to the employers. Involving elected union representatives in engagement efforts is likely to improve as they devote a great deal of time communicating with their members and access to this network is beneficial for

employers seeking to engage employees (Donais, 2010; Yarrington et al., 2007). The unions can play a significant role in the process feedback mechanisms as they are ideally situated to relay their members' readiness to adopt engagement efforts (Donais, 2010).

7. Employers must recognise that unions have the power to influence engagement efforts and that unionised employees place a high value on "voice" in their workplace, a key component of engagement. Communication gives employees a voice which is a key component of any engagement efforts and that engagement can be enhanced when employees' views are sought through their representatives on strategic and policy matters (Donais 2010; Dundon et al., 2004; Guest & Conway, 2002; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Purcell, 2014; Rees et al., 2013; Yarrington et al., 2007).
8. That engagement must form a key part of the entire EOR by embedding it into the total HRM value chain. The EOR shapes the extent to which people engage with engagement activities. HRM practices which are focused on the three psychological conditions of safety, meaningfulness and availability can directly facilitate and improve employee engagement. This then provides HRM practitioners with the opportunity to combine performance- orientated and employee orientated HRM practices in their pursuit of engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015; Alfes et al., 2013; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014)
9. That leadership and line managers must create a transparent and explicit organisational culture in which unions are empowered to understand the strategic narrative and how they contribute to engagement efforts. Engagement initiatives often rely on line managers' direct involvement with teams and their sentiments towards employees and unions. The literature indicates that transformational leaders bring about a feeling of identification and passion with one's work, which may then have positive effects on engagement (Christian et al., 2011). The quality of LMX also positively affects members' positive emotions and attitudes (Christian et al., 2011). According to Crawford et al. (2014), high quality LMX promotes psychological safety because it represents a supportive and trusting relationship, which enables employees to perform their daily tasks without fear of negative consequences to their career or selves. Transformational leadership and LMX is not only a significant basis of engagement, but also related to the levels of engagement (Alfes et al., 2013; Arrowsmith and Parker, 2013; Donais, 2010; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Townsend et al., 2014; Yarrington et al., 2007).

10. That engagement is positively associated with enhanced individual and organisational performance outcomes. The enhanced individual performance outcome indicators referred to are job satisfaction, organisational commitment, in role and extra role performance, life satisfaction and general health (Bailey et al., 2015Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Holbeche & Springett, 2003; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Yalabik et al., 2013), whilst enhanced organisational performance outcomes indicators are customer satisfaction, turnover intention, safety, productivity and profitability (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Harter et al., 2002; Macey et al., 2009; Salanova et al., 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).
11. That the conceptual framework provides conceptual clarification on employee engagement in a unionised environment to address the low levels of engagement amongst unionised employees as a basis to positively influence competitive advantage. The premise of the engagement framework is that job design factors, individual characteristics, trust and integrity, collaborative partnership, employee voice, HRM practices, and leadership and line manager behaviour are linked to engagement through the three psychological conditions (Kahn, 1990), which in turn influence individual and performance related outcomes.

### **3.10 Framework of engagement**

After systematically analysing the literature on engagement, 11 propositions emerged from the evidence synthesis which has been used to create the conceptual framework on how to increase the engagement levels of employees in a unionised environment. This framework stays true to Kahn's (1990) original work to place the conditions that have the greatest potential to raise the engagement levels in a unionised environment into the conceptual framework. The framework employs Kahn's (1990) theory on the psychological conditions of engagement to explain how individual and organisational antecedent factors can be linked to engagement through the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability. Engagement in this framework is a mediating variable between the antecedents, the psychological conditions and engagement outcomes. The framework illustrates how the antecedents extracted from the propositions influence engagement levels and engagement, in turn, leads to positive individual and organisational outcomes.

The framework in Figure 3.1 illustrates how job design factors, trust and integrity, individual characteristics, collaborative partnerships, employee voice, human resources management practices, leadership and line managers' behaviour influence and individuals psychological experience of work, which in turn drives work behaviour (Kahn, 1990).

## Framework of engagement in a unionised environment

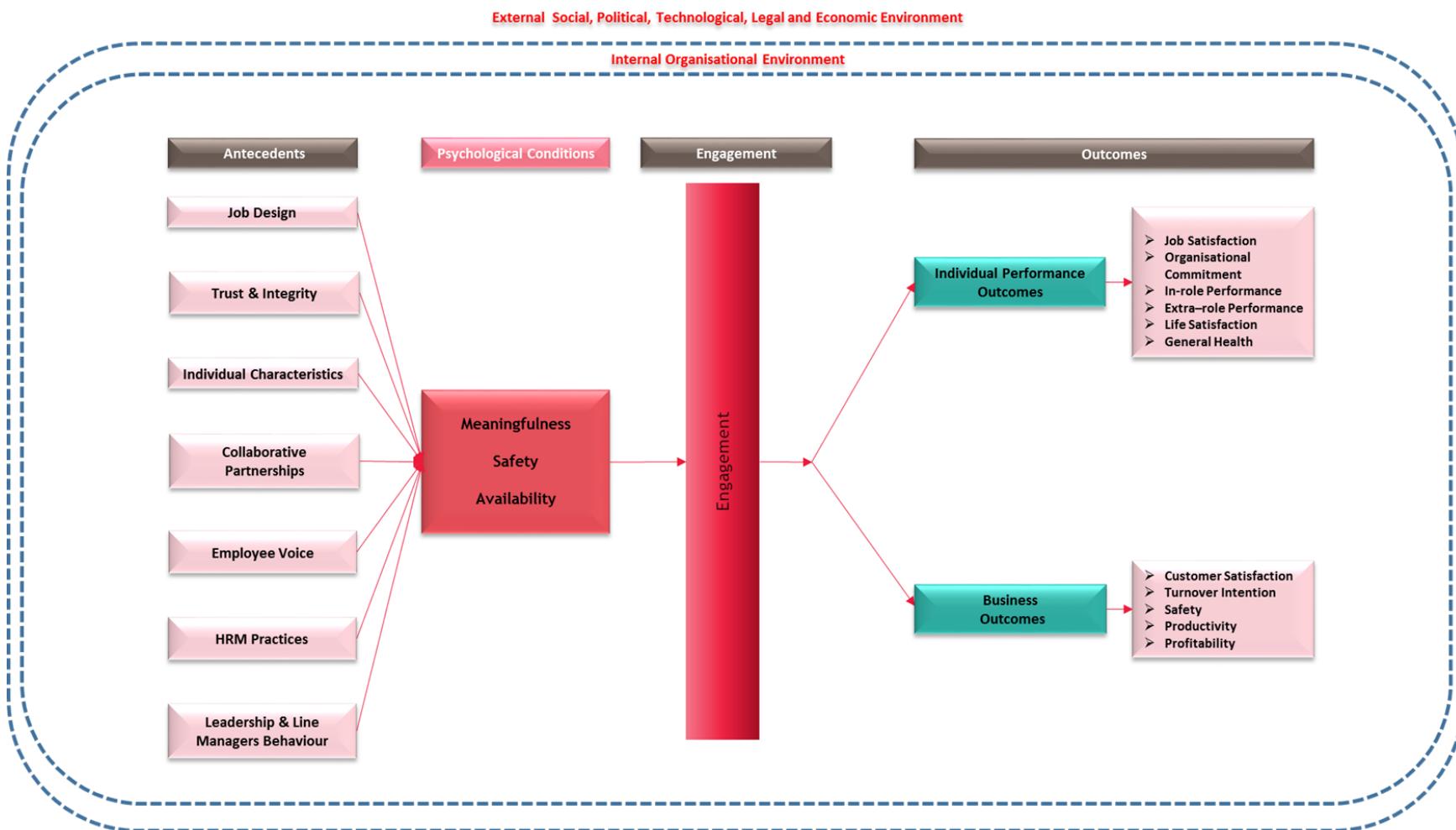


Figure 3.1: Employee engagement framework

### **3.11 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to propose a theoretical framework that has the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in an environment with a union presence through a systematic analysis of the themes in the literature on engagement and labour relations. This objective was met, firstly, by identifying eleven propositions which informed the theoretical framework through the evidence synthesis. The propositions reflect the synthesis of the evidence on the researched and validated antecedents and newly discovered additional antecedents that have the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment. Secondly, the framework, which considers the collective context of an organisation, explains how the antecedents extracted from the propositions influence engagement levels and engagement, which in turn leads to positive individual and organisational outcomes. Finally, the framework illustrates how eight antecedents (engagement enabling dimensions) influence an individual's psychological experience of work, which in turn influences engagement levels and leads to positive work behaviour (Kahn, 1990). These eight dimensions provide the theoretical basis for the development of the measurement model in the next chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 4: MEASURING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A UNIONISED ENVIRONMENT: DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF AN ENGAGEMENT SCALE**

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#### 4.1 Abstract

**Background:** Organisations are increasingly challenged to develop strategies to manage their human resources in difficult times, and one of the strategies proposed is embracing and measuring employee engagement. A great deal of research has subsequently been conducted in organisations on the predictors of engagement, and several validated instruments are consequently available to measure engagement. Most of these instruments, however, measure individual-level antecedents and there are no validated measurement instruments available that consider the impact of the collective organisational context, where there is an interchange between union and non-union members on engagement.

**Objectives:** The author consequently set out to develop and validate a scale measuring employee engagement in a work environment with a strong union presence.

**Method:** Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to determine the factorial structure, and Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the internal reliability of the scale and subscales.

**Results:** The validated measurement model employs three engagement measurement factors, namely collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design factors. Although all the factors showed high levels of importance towards employee engagement in a unionised environment, collaborative partnerships were deemed to be the most important engagement enabling factor obtained from the results. The originality/value of this paper includes that it is the first study to validate a scale measuring engagement in a unionised work environment, building on existing engagement research and thereby advancing the understanding of the construct.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement; engagement scale; theoretical framework; measurement model; engagement factors

## 4.2 Introduction

Organisations are challenged to identify factors that can increase the engagement levels of its employees as a strategy to circumvent the traditional trade-offs and tension that exist between employer and employees within the human resource and industrial relations domains (Truss et al., 2013). The appeal of employee engagement is that it proposes a reciprocal employment relationship between employers and employees, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that is a key factor for an organisation's success, sustained competitive advantage and profitability (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

The conceptualisation of engagement, as stated by Kahn's (1990, p. 649) as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performance". This provides the strongest theoretical rationale for understanding the motivational state approach to engagement (Whittington et al., 2017). The theme underlying Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement is about the individual's perception of the organisation, the job itself and the personality traits of the individual. These perceptions contribute towards the psychological experience of work and, in turn, guide the individuals' decisions to engage more completely in their work roles (Whittington et al., 2017).

In general, representatives of organisations believe by managing a range of variables, known as antecedents of engagement, they can effectively manage the outcomes of engagement and increase the engagement levels of its employees (Scarlett, 2013). High levels of engagement, in turn, can lead to enhanced employee performance, and, in turn, higher profitability, revenue generation and organisational growth (Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Holbeche & Springett 2003; Macey & Schneider 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Organisations pursuing high engagement levels among employees will accomplish something that their competitors, without such initiative, will find difficult to replicate (Kumar & Swetha, 2011).

Although organisations have globally embraced engagement over the past decade, it has been reported that 85% of employees are disengaged (Gallup, 2017). This concerns organisations as disengaged employees are not just unhappy at work; they

are actively acting out their unhappiness. Donais (2010) and Tyler (2009) further suggested that unionised employees are less engaged than their non-union counterparts and that the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant, since union members' dissatisfaction can spread to their co-workers and can lead to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation as a whole (Sheridan & Anderson 2013). According to Townsend et al. (2014), research between the internal organisational context and collective forms of representation and its impact on engagement levels is under explored (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014), which is questionable, because there is an increasing understanding that engagement interventions in an environment with a strong unionised presence require a different approach than in an environment with a homogenous workforce. Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is just as important as engagement in an environment without a strong union presence due to the interdependence between union and non-union members and the shared perceptions staff collectively share about the organisation (Sheridan & Anderson 2013).

Measuring employee engagement is a smart business strategy as it allows organisations to track business objectives and develop tools to effectively measure and manage predictors of employee engagement (Lockwood, 2007). The lack of consensus surrounding the meaning and definition of engagement also affects how to measure engagement but does not prevent researchers from measuring engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). A wide range of different scales have consequently been developed to measure engagement (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014). At least seven different engagement scales have been developed to measure employees' psychological experience of work, not including surveys that measure management practices and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Despite the existence of several scales, they predominantly measure engagement at an individual level, whereas a scale measuring the shared perceptions of union and non-union members collectively does not exist. Organisations have subsequently resorted to a one-measure-fits-all approach and use generic measurement scales to measure employees' engagement levels and not taking the collective organisational context into consideration. The consequence of this is that the measurement evidence does not inform the interventions, as it is not based on the shared perceptions of union and non-union

members, nor does it speak specifically to any of the groups in the organisation. This invariably leads to the implementation of engagement strategies that are not aligned with the organisational context and are destined to fail. As a result, organisations have blamed the failure to successfully implement engagement strategies on the presence of unions in the organisation. The perception that unions and their members actively undermine engagement efforts is counterproductive and leads to mistrust, which makes the implementation of engagement efforts in a unionised environment problematic.

### **4.3 Theoretical background**

The purpose of this article is to validate a scale to measure employee engagement in a unionised environment, drawing from the theoretical model developed by Nel and Linde (2019). The model, illustrated in Figure 4.1, was constructed around the individual and collective relationship between groups in an organisation and it reflects the synthesis of the evidence obtained during the literature review relating to the researched and validated antecedents and newly discovered additional antecedents that have the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment. The model illustrates how eight antecedents (engagement enabling dimensions) influence an individual's psychological experience of work, which, in turn, influence engagement levels and lead to positive work behaviour (Kahn, 1990). The eight dimensions that provide the theoretical basis for the development of the measurement scale are discussed in detail below.

#### **4.3.1 Environmental factors**

Delbridge and Keenoy (2010, p. 801) argue that "the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social economic, political and cultural factors which shape – if not determine – those practices". It is essential that more attention be given to organisational contextual factors, which provide both opportunities and constraints for management's ability to promote an environment supportive of engagement efforts (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013). The prospects of delivering engaged employees are significantly influenced by the direct work environment and the wider society; this forms a dynamic and complex system that influences the managing of work-related relationships (Linde, 2007).

### **4.3.2 Job design**

According to Bailey et al. (2015), factors relating to job design are critical elements of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) proposed that individuals who experience a sense of meaningfulness felt worthwhile, useful and valuable, because it involves a sense of return on investment of the self in work role performance (Kahn, 1990). Psychological meaningfulness highly influences the task characteristics of an individual's job. The task characteristics that promote meaningfulness are tasks that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, and include feedback on performance, where there are opportunities for development and role fit is present (Kahn, 1990).

### **4.3.3 Trust and integrity**

Dromey (2014) identified six areas of engagement drivers that will preserve employee engagement, of which trust was particularly important. Trust is a key element of the psychological contract, and Robinson et al. (2004) emphasise the similarity of engagement to the psychological contract. There has been renewed interest in the psychological contract, as with the construct of engagement since the 1990s, due to various changes affecting the workplace (Guest & Conway, 2002). According to Guest and Conway (2002), the psychological contract can facilitate a new framework for engagement, as the traditional collective model is less relevant in many workplaces. This model can accommodate the rise in individualism and flexibility and can also address the core issues of the employment relationship of trust (Guest & Conway, 2002).

### **4.3.4 Individual characteristics**

According to Kahn (1990), individual characteristics shape people's predispositions towards engagement or disengagement and are antecedents of engagement. These individual characteristics, including a proactive personality, optimism, conscientiousness, trait and self-efficacy, are prominent antecedents of engagement (Bailey et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Wollard & Shuck 2011). Bailey et al. (2015) also found a link between individual psychological states, management practices, individual perceptions of the organisation, team and high engagement levels.

#### **4.3.5 Collaborative partnerships**

Employees are increasingly dissatisfied with adversarial industrial relations, while partnerships provide opportunities to go beyond the traditional adversarial approach offers (Townsend et al., 2014). A collaborative partnership is defined as a partnership where there is cooperation or collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity between management, unions and employees (Townsend et al., 2014). The core principles in partnerships are mutuality, dignity, respect, fairness, competitiveness, flexibility, joint and direct communication, and consultation (Townsend et al., 2014). Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) suggest that human resource practitioners and management must work in partnership with trade unions in the pursuit of higher levels of engagement, and that employers must be committed to the partnership, as it is key in creating relationship-driven workplaces.

#### **4.3.6 Employee voice**

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) identified “employee voice” which, alongside leadership, engaging managers and integrity form four pillars that support employee engagement. The opportunity for interaction between management and employees through broad means of communication provides employees a voice that enhances employees’ propensity to engage with the organisation (Donais, 2010). MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 75) support this by stating that “voice becomes a building block for engagement” when employees’ views are sought out, they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference. Research done by Rees et al. (2013, p. 2) revealed that the “direct connection between the perception of voice behaviour and engagement is mediated by both employees trust in senior managers and the employee-line manager relationships”.

#### **4.3.7 Human resource management (HRM) practices**

In order for engagement to deliver the claimed benefits, it must be explicitly embedded within an integrated system of HRM policies, practices and procedures (Guest, 2014), while Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) argue that the pursuit of higher engagement levels may represent a ‘neo-pluralist’ turn in values and practices of human resources management. This approach involves much more than simply offering transactional human resources-related services to management in pursuit of a ‘unitarist’ agenda,

regardless if the process is based on mutual gains. It offers an opportunity to reconcile ‘soft’ (employee-centred) human resources practices with ‘hard’ (performance-oriented) goals (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

#### **4.3.8 Leadership and line manager behaviour**

Alfes et al. (2013) found that employees’ perceptions of line manager behaviour are positively related to levels of employee engagement. Furthermore, Rees et al. (2013, p. 2780) found that there is a “direct connection between perceptions of voice behaviour and engagement that is mediated by both employees trust in senior management and the employee-line manager relationship”. Leadership and line managers must create a transparent and explicit organisational culture in which unions are empowered to understand the strategic narrative and how they contribute to engagement efforts (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). Engagement initiatives regularly rely on the line managers’ direct involvement with teams and their sentiments towards employees and unions (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013).

#### **4.3.9 Engagement outcomes**

According to Saks and Gruman (2014), one of the reasons why engagement received considerable attention is that it is believed to be positively associated with enhanced individual and organisational performance outcomes. Enhanced individual performance outcome indicators are job satisfaction, organisational commitment, in-role and extra-role performance, life satisfaction and general health (Bailey et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Harter et al., 2002; Holbeche & Springett, 2003; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Yalabik et al., 2013), while enhanced organisational performance outcome indicators are customer satisfaction, turnover intention, safety, productivity and profitability (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2009; Salanova et al., 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

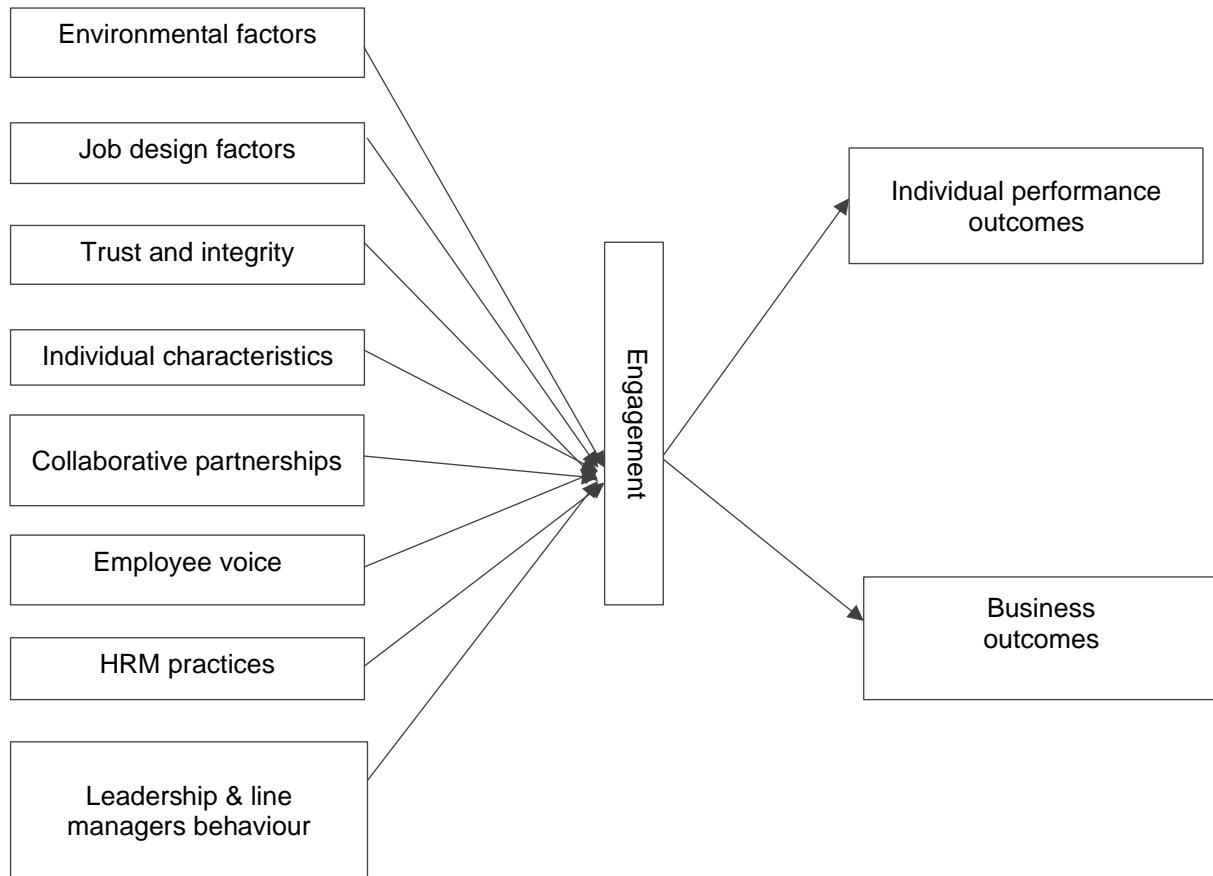


Figure 4.1: Theoretical model to measure employee engagement (adapted from Nel & Linde, 2019)

#### 4.4 Research objective

The primary objective of this article is to report on the development and validation of a scale that can be used to measure employee engagement levels in a unionised environment. The specific objectives were to extract the dimensions to be tested from the construct under study, to identify the items of the dimensions for inclusion during the development of the questionnaire, to evaluate the factorial structure of the scale, to establish the internal reliability of the scale and to demonstrate the construct validity of the new scale.

#### 4.5 Research methodology

During this step of the development and validation of the measurement scale, the recommendations of Boateng et al., (2018) were followed. In addition, the guidelines of DeVellis (2003), Hair et al. (1995), Hinkin (1998); Lewis et al. (2005), Mackenzie et

al. (2011) were also observed in connection with the measurement. According to Boateng et al. (2018), instrument validation consists of three main phases, namely item development, scale development and scale evaluation, which are addressed in this paper. Each phase of the process, according to Hinkin (1998), will contribute to increasing the confidence in the construct validity

#### **4.5.1 Item development**

##### **4.5.1.1 Specification of the construct domain**

The first step in the item development phase is to define the dimensions of the measurement model (Boateng et al., 2018; DeVellis, 2003; Hinkin, 1998; Mackenzie et al., 2011). During this step, the following dimensions were identified as measures of employee engagement, namely environmental factors, job design, trust and integrity, individual characteristics, collaborative partnerships, employee voice, HRM practices, and leadership and line managers behaviour. The dimensions were informed by the theoretical model developed by Nel and Linde (2019), which offers a logical ground on which empirical indicators can be identified and tested to validate the theory.

##### **4.5.1.2 Generating of sample items**

The next step in the item development phase was to identify the items to measure the dimensions. The items that were chosen to measure each of the eight dimensions are discussed below:

The environmental factor dimensions measure the impact of the direct work environment and the wider societal factors on engagement levels. This dimension consists of three sub-dimensions measuring aspects relating to job security, work environment, macro-environment and strategic narrative. Inclusion of the particular items was adapted from the Australian survey of social attitudes (AUSSA) (Wilson et al., 2005), the Australian workplace industrial relations survey (AWIRS) (Moorehead et al., 1997) and the workplace employment relations study (WERS) (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (UK), 2013). One new item was developed from this dimension that fits this conceptualisation.

The job design dimension measures how tasks, duties and responsibilities influence engagement levels. The dimension consists of five sub-dimensions relating to job design, namely task variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. The inclusion of these particular items was derived from the work design questionnaire (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

The trust and integrity dimensions are of particular importance, as the perceptions of the trust and integrity levels in an organisation are key for successful union engagement (Donais, 2010). The inclusion of the particular items was derived from AUSSA, AWIRS, Gabarro and Athos (1976), WERS, and May et al. (2004) to measure how the sub-dimension of psychological contract breach, honesty, managerial trust, fairness, integrity and co-worker norms influence engagement levels.

The individual characteristics dimension measures how individual characteristics shape an individual's predisposition towards engagement or disengagement. The dimension consists of five sub-dimensions, namely proactive personality, autotelic personality, trait positive affect and conscientiousness. The inclusion of the particular items was adapted from items developed by (Nienaber & Martins, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)).

The collaborative partnership dimension measures how a partnership between interest groups with collaboration for mutual gains influence engagement levels. This dimension consists of eight sub-dimensions, namely mutuality, dignity, respect, fairness, joint and direct communication, consultation and involvement. The inclusion of the particular items was adapted from the WERS and (Chang et al., 2014).

The employee voice dimension measures how involvement in decision-making gives employees a voice, which is a key component in influencing engagement levels. The employee voice dimension consists of four sub-dimensions, which are seeking the views of employees or employee representatives, responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives and broad means of communication. The inclusion of the particular items was derived from the WERS. One new item was developed from this dimension that fits this conceptualisation.

The HRM practices dimension measures how employee-oriented HRM practices can influence employee engagement levels, and consists of seven sub-dimensions. These

sub-dimensions are training and development opportunities, reward systems, career management, feedback mechanisms, employee assistance, justice and pluralism. Perceived HRM practice measures were based on the Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) HRM practice scale. Three new items were developed from this dimension that fit this conceptualisation.

The leadership and line managers dimension measures how the perceptions of leaders and direct managers' fairness, trustworthiness and credibility as role models influence engagement levels. This dimension consists of ten sub-dimensions, namely interaction, support, rewarding performance, building trust, empowering subordinates, facilitating learning, interpersonal skills, showing concern for others, inspiring people, honesty and integrity. Leadership and line managers' behaviours were measured using the framework developed by Burton et al. (2006) and the leadership behaviour inventory (LBI) developed by Theron and Spangenberg (2011).

The engagement outcomes dimension measures how willingness to invest additional effort and commitment to the job and the organisation is influenced by engagement levels. Engagement outcomes consist of an individual and business outcome sub-dimension. The individual outcome sub-dimensions are job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour on an individual level. The business outcome sub-dimensions are customer satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour on an organisational level and organisational commitment. The inclusion of the particular items to measure the individual performance outcomes was based on the intellectual, social, affective engagement scale (ISA), Soane et al. (2012) and the WERS. One new item was developed from this dimension that fits this conceptualisation. Hinkin (1998) recommend that items should be subjected to an assessment of content validity after they have been generated.

#### 4.5.1.3 Content validity assessment

The next step in the item development phase was to subject the questionnaire to a content validity assessment to obtain empirical feedback from a controlled sample of subject matter specialists to evaluate the appropriateness of the draft instrument (Lewis et al., 2005). Participants were requested to identify specific items that should be added or deleted from the instrument, as well as to make suggestions for

enhancement. Several items were re-phrased and deleted to ensure that the scale retained conceptually clear and parsimonious items.

#### **4.5.2 Scale development**

##### **4.5.2.1 Pre-testing questions**

At this stage of the scale development, a pre-test was undertaken to further purify the instrument, as recommended by Boateng et al. (2018) and Lewis et al. (2005). The respondents were requested to complete the online instrument and comment on the appropriateness of the instrument taking the context of measurement into consideration (Truss et al., 2013). The feedback from the pre-test participants was overwhelmingly positive and no further adjustments were made to the instrument.

##### **4.5.2.2 Scale construction**

The final scale consisted of two sections. The first section requested demographic information from the participants to identify a profile of the participants to confirm the reliability of the sample to the study population. These demographic details did not form part of the measure to be used for research analyses or for comparative research purposes, but to measure the sample representation of the chosen target population. The first section comprised five questions relating to age, tenure, term in position, qualifications and employment status. For this section, respondents had to select the appropriate option on the questionnaire. The second section solicited responses on the behaviours that drive and enhance engagement in a unionised environment. This section comprised 48 items representing the eight antecedent dimensions, six questions representing the two outcome dimensions and ten importance questions. The final scales composed a minimum of four items per dimension, which were required to test the homogeneity of items within each latent construct.

In this stage of the scale development process, the items that remained from the content validity assessment were used in creating the questionnaire to measure the construct under examination. The questionnaire was designed using a seven-point option scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) measuring the employee's perception of employee engagement. Boateng et al. (2018, p. 6) recommend a seven-

point scale for bipolar items, “i.e., those reflecting relative degrees of two qualities of an item response scale, e.g., completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied”.

#### 4.5.2.3 Study population

The study was conducted among employees from a South African state-owned entity with a high level of union density. The organisation was selected considering the staff composition of the organisation reflected the overall population for which the measurement was designed, as suggested by Mackenzie et al. (2011). The study population can be grouped into two sub-populations, namely union and non-union members. An online platform hosted by a third party was utilised to collect the data from 22 862 participants of whom 16 862 were union members. Participants were informed of the research and their participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. A response rate of 4.05% was achieved and all 926 responses (100%) could be utilised. The responses exceeded the suggested norm of 150 for exploratory factor analysis and 200 for confirmatory factor analysis proposed by Hinkin (1998). In addition, the response rate exceeded the minimum norm of 10:1 respondent to items proposed by Boateng et al., (2018). Therefore, the responses represented an adequate sample for further analyses. The respondents comprised 513 (55.5%) union members and 413 (44.59%) non-union members and make this study population relevant to the objectives of this study. Most of the participants (32.2%) were between the age of 36 and 45 years old. The variable on years of service ranged from six years to ten years (71.9%). The variable on, term in current position, indicated that most of the respondents (50.6%) worked in the same position for more than three years, have a tertiary education (96.9%) and are permanently employed (95.2%) by the entity.

#### 4.5.2.4 Item reduction analysis

Once all the data was collected, an item reduction analysis was conducted to ensure that only parsimonious, functional and internally consistent items were included (Boateng et al., 2018). One item was subsequently removed due to its similarity to another item.

#### 4.5.2.5 Extraction of factors

The data analysis for the development of the measurement scale followed a specific approach to reduce a large number of variables into a smaller set of variables (Hinkin, 1998). The scale was considered a newly developed scale, and therefore a factor analysis was conducted using the principle component analysis (PCA) in the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) to explore the factorial structure (Hinkin, 1998). The purpose of factor analysis was to establish the underlying dimensions between measured variables and latent constructs, thereby allowing the formation and refinement of theory, to provide construct validity evidence (Williams et al., 2010). (Williams, Onsman, & Brown, 2010).

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was determined by inspecting the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (Williams et al., 2010). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) analysis verified the sampling ( $n = 926$ ) adequacy (overall KMO = 0.98; all individual item KMO values  $> 0.8$ ). Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for principal component analysis ( $\chi^2_{(1081)} = 38718.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This confirmed that an EFA could be performed on the various datasets.

The inter-item correlations of the variables were examined prior to conducting the factor analysis (Hinkin, 1998). A 0.3 correlation coefficient cutoff is considered statistically meaningful due to the large sample size ( $n = 931$ ) (Hair et al., 1995). The correlation analysis was performed by creating an R-matrix of the 47 items. The R-matrix of the 47-item questionnaire, with ( $n = 931$ ) respondents (all complete data), showed that three items had very weak correlations with all other items and these three items were dropped before completing the principal component analysis. These items were:

- “The socioeconomic and political environment in the country concerns me”.
- “My job involves doing a number of different tasks”.
- “The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people”.

Parallel analysis was used to select three factors to extract. According to Williams et al. (2010), parallel analysis is among the best methods for deciding how many factors

to extract or retain. The Eigenvalues were also examined and if the Kaiser's criterion of eigenvalues of more than one ( $>1$ ) had been used, then a four-factor model would have been extracted. Inspection of the scree plot confirmed a three-component model as it supports theoretical distinctions between the factors to ensure a parsimonious and simple structure (Hair et al., 1995).

A three-component PCA was conducted on the 44 items after removing an additional four items, using oblique rotation (Oblimin). The initial analysis showed that six items did not load strongly onto any of the components (loading  $< 0.4$ ) or loaded onto two components and were removed from further analysis. These six items were:

“The work environment at my organisation is good”; dual loading.

“Mistakes are viewed as a learning opportunity in our organisation”; weak unitary loading.

“I am provided with sufficient opportunities for training and development”; weak unitary loading.

“I feel fairly rewarded for the amount of effort I put into my job”; weak unitary loading.

“Policies and procedures at my workplace are fair”; dual loading.

“I am provided with a satisfactory amount of recognition”; dual loading.

The analysis was repeated on the 38-item data, yielding a three-component model with good, single component loadings (loading  $> 0.4$ ) for all items.

#### 4.5.2.6 Factor analysis results

The results of the factor analysis are illustrated in Table 4.1. The three factors were labelled according to similar characteristics of the items based on the theoretical model and they are collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design factors. Table 4.1 demonstrates that each factor was well defined.

Factor 1, collaborative partnerships, is defined by 21 items, which all obtained a loading greater than 0.5. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.80 and can be considered as strong indicators of the collaborative partnership factor. These items

are fair treatment, joint and direct communication, meaningful consultation, broad means of communication and perceived safety. This is consistent with the theorisation that indicates that where a partnership exists with mutuality, dignity, respect, fairness and consultation at its core, engagement levels will improve (Townsend et al., 2014).

Factor 2, leadership and line manager behaviour is defined by nine items; all the items obtained a loading greater than 0.5. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.80 and can be considered as strong indicators of the leadership and line manager behaviour factor. These items are opportunities for development, interpersonal skills of managers, showing concern for staff, inspiring subordinates and integrity. This is consistent with findings that engagement levels are mediated by employees' trust in senior management, leader member exchange and the employee-line manager relationship (Crawford et al., 2014; Rees et al., 2013).

Factor 3, job design factors, consists of eight items, of which all the items obtained a loading greater than 0.4. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.5 and can be considered strong indicators of the job design factor. These items are strategic narrative, job identity, job autonomy, autotelic personality and disposition. This is consistent with literature that indicates that psychological meaningfulness and the characteristics of a person's job are positively related (Bailey et al., 2015; Kahn, 1990).

Table 4.1: Factor analysis results: Reduced pattern matrix

Item	$h^2$	Collaborative partnerships	Leadership and line manager behaviour	Job design
Job security	0.36			0.49
Strategic narrative	0.42			0.60
Task identity	0.62			0.78
Task autonomy	0.47			0.59
Feedback on performance	0.57		0.67	
Psychological contract breach	0.63	0.57		
Honest interaction with staff	0.69	0.63		
Trust in management	0.68	0.64		
Fair treatment	0.66	0.70		
Building trust	0.69		0.62	
Co-worker norms	0.39			0.44

Item	$h^2$	Collaborative partnerships	Leadership and line manager behaviour	Job design
Autolytic personality	0.71			0.74
Trait, positive affect	0.53			0.77
Conscientiousness	0.46			0.54
Collaboration for mutual gains	0.51	0.60		
Positive workplace conditions	0.71	0.62		
Treating staff with dignity	0.69	0.81		
Treating staff with respect	0.67	0.83		
Fair treatment of all staff	0.72	0.88		
Joint and direct communication	0.69	0.89		
Meaningful consultation with staff	0.77	0.96		
Involvement in decision making	0.70	0.69		
Consultative forums	0.70	0.82		
Reciprocation to employee voice	0.77	0.87		
Broad means of communication	0.75	0.93		
Perceived psychological safety	0.78	0.89		
Career management	0.63		0.55	
Feedback mechanism	0.56	0.52		
Employee assistance	0.52	0.40		
Pluralistic HRM practices	0.50	0.70		
Interaction with staff	0.79	0.72		
Supporting staff	0.61	0.61		
Empowering subordinates	0.60		0.56	
Opportunity for development	0.78		0.81	
Managerial interpersonal skills	0.83		0.88	
Showing concern for staff	0.84		0.93	
Inspiring subordinates	0.86		0.93	
Act with integrity	0.87		0.91	
<b>Eigenvalues</b>		<b>13.28</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>6.98</b>
<b>% of variance</b>		<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.12</b>
<b>Cumulative variance</b>		<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.65</b>

The pattern matrix illustrates the unique contribution of each item to each factor, as all items loaded onto a factor with loadings greater than 0.3. The relatively high factor loadings indicate a reasonably high correlation between the defined factors and their individual items.

#### 4.5.2.7 Scale evaluation results

The scale evaluation phase, according to Boateng et al. (2018), consists of the test for dimensionality, test for reliability and test for validity.

#### 4.5.2.8 Test for dimensionality

The test for dimensionality determines “whether the measurement of items, their factors, and functions are the same across two independent samples or within the same sample at different time points” (Boateng et al., 2018, p. 11). The most common technique for testing dimensionality is the chi-square test; however, other fit indices are usually more relied on in the valuation of model fit like the Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR) evaluation (Brown & Moore, 2013). An RMSR was performed to test the dimensionality of the measurement model. The model had a good fit (RMSR = 0.04, fit based on off diagonal values = 1) for the three-factor model confirming the scale’s dimensionality, as an RMSR factor below 0.08 is desired (Lewis et al., 2005).

#### 4.5.2.9 Test for reliability

The test for reliability, which is concerned with the internal consistency of a measurement model, was evaluated by examining the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). An alpha coefficient of 0.70 is regarded as an acceptable threshold for reliability (Boateng et al., 2018; Hinkin, 1998). The descriptive statistics in Table 4.2 indicate that components 1, 2, and 3 had overall Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.97, 0.85 and 0.95, respectively. Drop-one analysis did not result in any significant changes in Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ).

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics

	Factor	N	Mean	Range	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	r(Mean)	$\alpha$
1	Collaborative partnerships	19551	3.97	1-7	1.82	-0.09	-0.99	0.64	0.97
2	Leadership and line manager behaviour	7448	4.80	1-7	1.70	-0.56	-0.48	0.42	0.85
3	Job design	8379	4.20	1-7	1.92	-0.22	-1.08	0.69	0.95

#### 4.5.2.10 Test for validity

The validity of a questionnaire is determined by analysing whether it measures what it is intended to measure. The construct validity of the scale was evaluated by evaluating the extent to which the scale correlates with other measures designed to assess similar constructs (convergent validity) and the extent to which a scale is novel and distinct from other constructs (discriminant validity) (Hinkin, 1998). To conduct the discriminant validity, the correlation structure of the three factors were examined and are reflected in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Inter-item correlations

	Factor	1	2	3
1	Collaborative partnerships	1.00	0.75	0.58
2	Leadership and line manager behaviour	0.75	1.00	0.52
3	Job design	0.58	0.52	1.00

The results indicate high correlations (0.75) between the factors of collaborative partnerships and leadership and line manager behaviour. The two factors of collaborative partnership and job design show a meaningful relationship (0.58). Leadership and job design show the lowest correlations (0.52). These results confirm the discriminant validity of the factors. Collaborative partnership shows a high correlation with leadership and line managers' behaviour. This can be expected as it is also expected that leadership and line managers' behaviour influence the levels of collaboration in the workplace and *vice versa*; therefore, the variables were distinct from one another confirming discriminant validity.

The AVE was examined to establish the convergent validity of the scale. The AVE for collaborative partnerships was 35%, for leadership and line managers' behaviour the AVE was 53%, and for job design the AVE was 65%. The total variance explained by the three-component model was 65%, with components 1, 2 and 3 explaining 35% (Eigenvalue = 13.28), 18% (Eigenvalue = 4.47) and 12% (Eigenvalue = 6.98) of the variance, respectively. The findings therefore showed that more variance is explained by the latent factor structure imposed on the measure, compared to the error that remains in the items. This is an indicator of convergent validity indicating that the dimensions measure consistently and represent the construct of employee

engagement. At this stage, the new scale will be internally consistent and possess content validity.

## 4.6 Findings and discussion

Although the theoretical framework developed by Nel and Linde (2019) specified eight employee engagement enabling dimensions (antecedents), the results of the factor analysis yielded a three-factor model. The measurement model, Figure 4.2, was therefore modified to reflect the three factors and the factors are labelled as collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers behaviour, and job design factors.

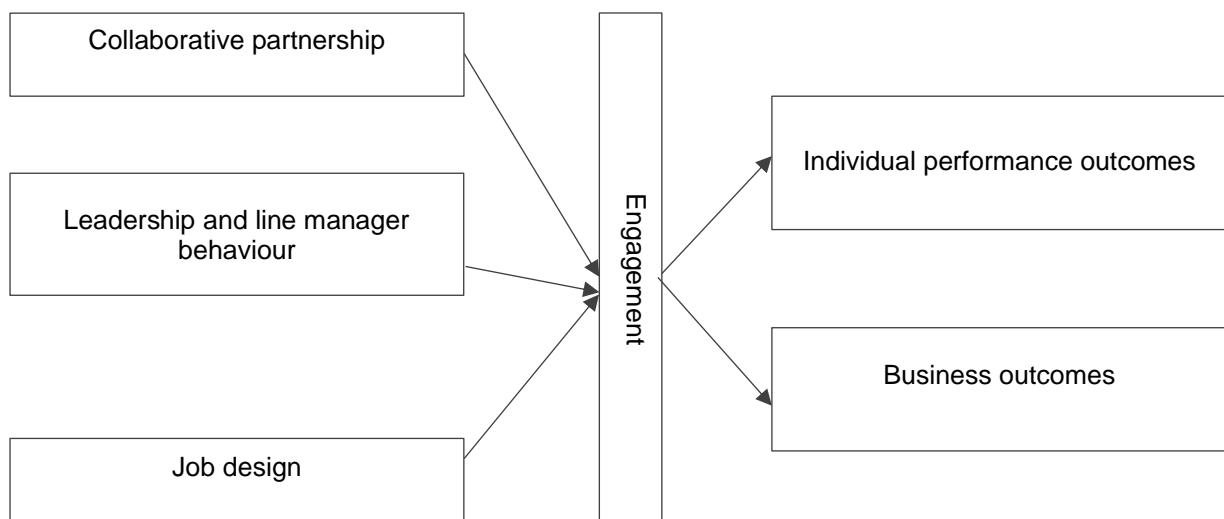


Figure 4.2: Modified measurement model

The newly adopted three-factor model, which emerged from this research, is consistent with Purcell's (2012) argument that, at the heart of engagement, are employees' feelings, beliefs and attitudes concerning their job, their co-workers, the customers, their managers, the organisation as a whole and especially the leadership of the organisation. The structures of the three factors are discussed in detail below.

### 4.6.1.1 Factor 1: Collaborative partnerships

Trust and integrity (4-items), collaborative partnerships (8-items), employee voice (4-items) and pluralistic human resources practices (5-items) were grouped together to form the new factor under collaborative partnerships. These dimensions and items can be considered a strong indicator of collaborative partnerships and are consistent

with the theorisations of Townsend et al. (2014), and Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) who suggest that collaborative partnerships are strongly influenced by a partnership where there is collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity between management, unions and employees in a unionised environment.

#### 4.6.1.2 Factor 2: Leadership and line manager behaviour

The leadership and line managers' behaviour factor consist of job design aspects (1=item), trust and integrity (1=item), HRM practices (1=item) and leadership and line managers relationship (6=items), which were grouped together to form the new factor. These items can be considered a strong indicator of leadership and line manager behaviour and are consistent with the theorisations of Alfes et al. (2013), and Crawford et al. (2014), who claim that leadership and line managers' behaviour are strongly related to a high degree of interaction, support and trust between leaders and members.

#### 4.6.1.3 Factor 3: Job design factors

Environmental factors, job design factors (4=items) and individual characteristics (4=item) were grouped together to form this new factor under job design. These items can be considered a strong indicator of the job design factor and are consistent with the theorisations of Kahn and Heaphy (2014), who argue that engagement is highly influenced by jobs that are experienced as meaningful. Individuals who experience meaningfulness felt worthwhile, useful, valuable and invest themselves in work role performance (Kahn, 1990). Psychological meaningfulness is enhanced by jobs that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, autonomous, have good role fit, yield perceived meaningfulness, and are moderated through the motivational potential of job design (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014).

A pertinent finding that emerged from the analysis is the high values for task identity and trait. This finding is, however, consistent with findings that an inter-relationship exists between job resources (a mixture of psychological meaningfulness and safety factors) and personal resources (factors of self-efficacy, organisational based self-esteem and optimism) even though each had a unique and strong relationships with engagement (Crawford et al., 2014). This finding is also consistent with Macey and

Schneider's (2008) proposition that the individual and the job exist in relation to each other.

It is suggested that the inter-relationships between job design factors and individual characteristics should be further explored in future studies. Furthermore, the extent to which individuals can be motivated to experience positive affect at work by tailoring task characteristics that promote meaningfulness should be further explored.

In summary, the study indicates that the scale is a reliable instrument that consists of three factors that can be considered as strong indicators of employee engagement levels in a unionised environment.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

The administration of the survey complied with ethical requirements. Prior ethical clearance was obtained from the university. The participating entity and individual participants consented to the study based on the disclosed purpose and principles of voluntary, anonymous and confidential participation. The demographic information received from the participants to identify a profile of the participants in confirming the reliability of the sample will not be used for comparative research purposes. The feedback will be provided to the participating entity where the data will be presented in aggregate form only to ensure that the confidentiality of the participants is maintained.

#### **4.8 Limitations and recommendations**

The study was subject to limitations, which require elaboration and should be considered for future research. Certain dimensions of the initial theoretical model produced multi-dimensionality during the EFA process, which resulted in some items being deleted and although the final study provided results that were highly acceptable regarding the reliability and internal consistency, it is recommended that future researchers do further analysis of the items. Although the scale proved to be internally consistent and possesses content validity, the quality of the factor structure was not quantitatively assessed. It is recommended that a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) be performed in a subsequent study to provide a confirmatory test of the EFA results.

Since it has been established that the measurement scale provides a construct that is a valid and reliable measure of engagement levels in a unionised environment, an analysis of the measurement model will still be conducted to evaluate the fit of the structural model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and to examine the relationship between collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers behaviour and job design factors and employee engagement levels and the outcomes of engagement. This will be conducted by testing if the proposed structural model pathways are valid and significant through structural equation modelling (SEM).

#### **4.9 Contribution**

The newly developed instrument contributes positively to the engagement theory and practice in that it is the first measurement scale validated to measure engagement levels in a unionised environment that considers the impact of the collective organisational context on employee engagement levels. The study, furthermore, indicates that the measurement scale is a reliable instrument consisting of three factors, which can be considered as strong indicators of employee engagement levels in a unionised environment. The measurement model is a priori model that can now be subjected to CFA to confirm the construct validity and structural equation modelling (SEM) to evaluate the fit of the measurement model (Schreiber et al., 2006).

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to validate an engagement scale to measure employee engagement levels in a unionised environment. Theoretically, engagement is a multi-dimensional, multi-level construct, reflecting latent conditions on an employee's willingness to engage, which was confirmed by the analysis (Rich et al., 2010). The current scale based on the theoretical framework developed by Nel and Linde (2019) provides evidence of construct validity and can therefore be considered to have a sound theoretical and empirical base.

The measurement scale can be regarded as valid, based on the results of the EFA and reliable and therefore be stated that the measurement scale measures what it is supposed to and can be administered to measure engagement levels in a unionised environment. The measurement instrument can consequently be considered as rigorous, concluding that all three factors (collaborative partnerships, leadership and

line manager behaviour, and job design factors) are key employee engagement enabling dimensions that can measure engagement levels in a unionised environment.

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## **CHAPTER 5: ENGAGEMENT LEVELS: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING APPROACH**

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Engagement levels: a structural equation modelling approach

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## 5.1 Abstract

**Background:** Employee engagement is embraced as an important outcome for organisational success, and several models were subsequently developed with the prospective to measure and elevate the engagement levels of employees. However, most of these models examine the relationship between antecedents and outcomes at an individual level and do not consider the collective context of an organisation where there is an exchange between various interest groups. A model to measure employee engagement was subsequently developed and validated by the author taking the collective context of a work environment, consisting of union and non-union members, into consideration (unionised environment).

**Objective:** Consequently, the author set out to evaluate the fit of the model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), evaluate the validity of the hypothesised paths of the model, and test the mediation of engagement by making use of the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique.

**Method:** Data was collected using an electronic web-based questionnaire comprising a scale developed to test the mediating role of employee engagement.

**Results:** The overall results of the CFA indicated a satisfactory model fit. The results of the SEM indicated positive relationships between job design and engagement, collaborative partnerships and business outcomes, job design and individual and business outcomes, and that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes. The originality/value of this paper includes that it builds on existing engagement research and thereby advances the understanding of the construct within a collective context.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement; engagement scale; measurement model; confirmatory factor analysis; structural equation modelling

## **5.2 Introduction**

Employee engagement has become one of the most widely held topics in management and academia since Kahn's (1990:692) conceptualisation of engagement (Nel & Linde, 2019). Saks and Gruman (2014) indicate that there is a strong body of research that indicates that engagement is an important factor for an organisation's success, sustained competitive advantage and financial prosperity. Management believes that by identifying a range of antecedents of engagement, they can create a framework of engagement that will facilitate and predict high engagement levels, which, in turn, will have a positive impact on individual and business outcomes. The antecedents of employee engagement are defined as conditions that precede the development of employee engagement, which should be in place before an organisation can realise the benefit from engagement-related outcomes (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). However, identifying engagement enabling variables is almost as difficult as identifying one single definition of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

A wide range of employee engagement models has subsequently been developed to define the state of engagement, which predominantly measures engagement at an individual level (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Engagement framework models that define the shared perceptions of union and non-union members collectively have been neglected through research, especially considering that disengagement in one group can spread to disengagement in another group. This phenomenon prompted organisations to focus on increasing the levels of engagement of all employees in a unionised environment (Nel & Linde, 2019). Sheridan and Anderson (2013) noticed that the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant since the interplay between union and non-union members can be related and the negative impact of disengaged union members on non-union members is often significant. The differences between union and non-union members, however, make engaging unionised employees more challenging due to the nature of the relationship between trade unions and its members, where unions may also use their collective bargaining power to influence engagement efforts in the workplace (Donais, 2010:1).

Engagement is generally considered a mediating variable in which engagement mediates the relationship between engagement antecedent and individual and business outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). According to Kular *et al.* (2008), the

complexity of the concept was demonstrated as some researchers believe that particular aspects in the workplace contribute to engagement, while others believe that engagement is a trait that the individual brings to the workplace. Nel and Linde (2019) conducted a narrative synthesis on the antecedents and outcomes, which has the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment.

The evidence on the antecedents and outcomes of engagement discovered during the systematic review of the literature informed a theoretical framework developed by Nel and Linde (2019), which provided the conceptual clarification on employee engagement in a unionised environment. The premise of the framework is that job design factors, individual characteristics, trust and integrity, collaborative partnership, employee voice, HRM practices, and leadership and line manager behaviour are linked to engagement through the three psychological conditions (Kahn, 1990:692), which, in turn, influence individual and performance-related outcomes.

### **5.3 Theoretical background**

A wide range of theoretical models has been developed to define the state of engagement since the conceptualisation of the construct by (Kahn, 1990:195). These models, however, only focus on individual-level engagement and fail to take micro- and macro-contextual factors into account (Bailey *et al.*, 2015:1). Furthermore, they do not address issues of power and politics in the workplace, particularly in environments with strong union presence (unionised environment) that are influenced by collective forms of representation. There is subsequently a shortage of research aimed at validating a model that measures the relationship between antecedents, engagement and outcomes in a unionised environment.

Fluctuating levels of engagement in organisations and differences between engagement levels of union and non-union employees put pressure on organisations to create inclusive measures that consider the organisational context of a unionised environment. It is within this context that Nel and Linde (2019) developed a framework that considers the collective context of an organisation and has the potential to measure and enhance engagement levels in a unionised environment. The theoretical framework provided the theoretical basis for the development of the conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 5.1, which was constructed around the individual and collective

relationships between groups in an organisation. The premise of the conceptual model is that engagement enabling dimensions (antecedents) influence an individual's psychological experience of work; in turn, influencing engagement levels leading to positive work behaviour (Kahn, 1990:692). The conceptual model can consequently be considered as grounded in the theory of engagement and labour relations.

## 5.4 Conceptual model

The proposed conceptual model (Figure 5.1) illustrates the hypothesised relationships between the three engagement enabling antecedents, i.e. collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors (independent variable), and individual and business outcomes (dependent variables), mediated by employee engagement (mediating variable).

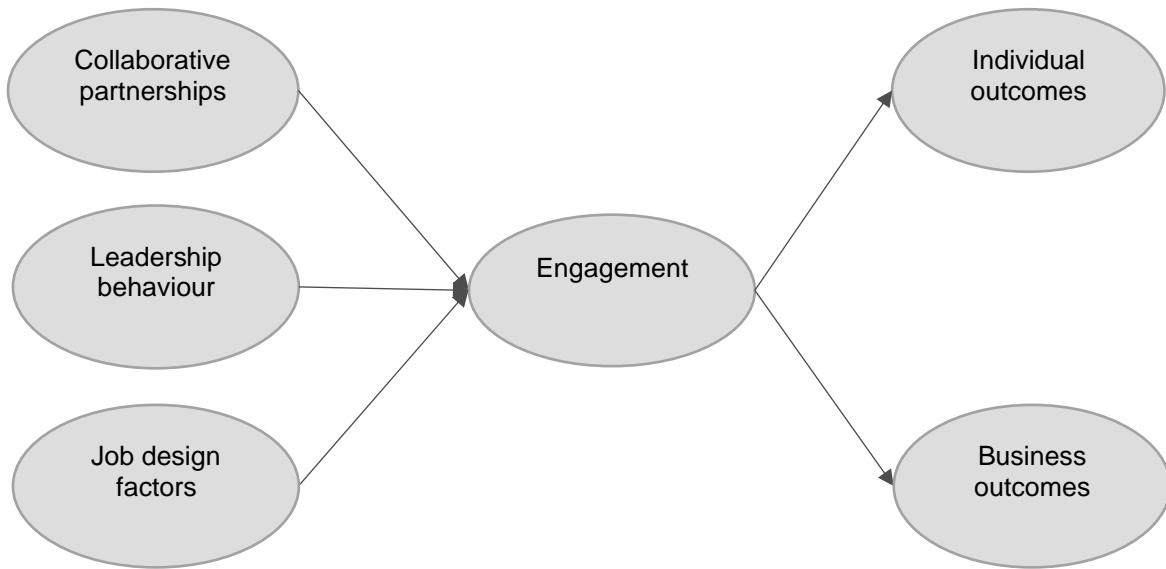


Figure 5.1: Conceptual model of employee engagement in a unionised environment (adapted from Nel & Linde, 2019)

### 5.4.1 Antecedents of employee engagement

#### 5.4.1.1 The relationship between collaborative partnerships and engagement

A collaborative partnership is defined as a partnership where there is cooperation or collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity amongst all interest groups in an organisation (Nel & Linde, 2019; Townsend *et al.*, 2014). The collaborative partnership factor was defined by the following dimensions, namely trust and integrity,

collaboration, employee voice and pluralistic human resource practices. This is consistent with the theorisation of Townsend *et al.* (2014) that indicates that should a partnership exist with these principles at its core, engagement levels will improve. It can consequently be hypothesised that:

*H1: Collaborative partnerships are positively related to engagement.*

#### 5.4.1.2 The relationship between leadership behaviour and engagement

Alfes *et al.* (2013) found that employees' perceptions of leadership and line manager behaviour are positively related to levels of employee engagement. The interaction between managers and employees represents an important source of engagement in the workplace (Soane, *et al.*, 2012), where the leadership and line manager behaviour factors are defined by job design, trust and integrity. This is consistent with findings by Crawford *et al.* (2014:57) and Rees *et al.*, (2013:839) that engagement levels are mediated by employees' trust in senior management, leader-member exchange and the employee-line manager relationship. It can consequently be hypothesised that:

*H2: Leadership behaviour is positively related to engagement.*

#### 5.4.1.3 The relationship between job design factors and engagement

Factors relating to job design are critical elements of employee engagement and individuals who experience a sense of meaningfulness felt worthwhile, useful and valuable because it involves a sense of return on investment of the self in work-role performance and that meaningfulness is highly influenced by the task characteristics of an individual's job (Kahn, 1990:692). The job design factor is defined by environmental, job design and individual characteristic dimensions. This is consistent with the findings of Crawford *et al.* (2014:57) that an interrelationship exists between job resources (a mixture of psychological meaningfulness and safety factors) and personal resources (factors of self-efficacy, organisational-based self-esteem and optimism), even though each had a unique and strong relationship with engagement. It can consequently be hypothesised that:

*H3: Job design factors are positively related to engagement.*

#### 5.4.1.4 The relationship between engagement and outcomes

According to Saks and Gruman (2014), one of the reasons why engagement received widespread attention from practitioners is that it is believed to be positively associated with enhanced individual and organisational performance outcomes. The engagement outcome factor is defined by the individual and business outcome dimensions. The individual outcomes sub-dimensions are job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour on an individual level. The business outcomes sub-dimensions are customer satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour on an organisational level and organisational commitment. It can consequently be hypothesised that:

*H4: Engagement is positively related to individual outcomes.*

*H5: Engagement is positively related to business outcomes.*

#### 5.4.1.5 Mediating effects of employee engagement

Engagement is generally considered a mediating variable in which engagement mediates the relationship between antecedent (engagement enabling factors) and individual and business outcomes (Nel & Linde, 2019; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The conceptual model in Figure 5.1 draws from Kahn's (1990:692) foundational theory that describes how people are more engaged at work in situations that offer them psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety and when they are more psychologically available. In Figure 5.1, it is also illustrated that collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors are linked to engagement through the three psychological conditions (Kahn, 1990:195), which, in turn, influence individual and performance-related outcomes. The model provides conceptual clarification on employee engagement in a unionised environment to address the low levels of engagement among unionised employees as a basis to positively influence competitive advantage. It can, therefore, be hypothesised that:

*H6: The relationship between collaborative partnerships and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.*

*H7:* The relationship between leadership behaviour and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.

*H8:* The relationship between job design and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.

*H9:* The structural model provides a valid description of how the engagement antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement outcomes.

## **5.5 Research objectives and hypothesis**

The objective of this paper is to conduct an analysis of the measurement model to evaluate the fit of the model through CFA and the validity of the hypothesised pathways of the structural model by making use of the SEM technique. The specific objectives were to test the absolute and relative fit of the measurement and structural model and determine whether the pathways hypothesised in the structural model are significant as well as to finally test the mediation of employee engagement.

## **5.6 Research methodology**

### **5.6.1 Research method**

The collection of the data was based on a survey method, where a rigorous questionnaire development process was followed that focused on content validity involving various subject matter experts. An emailed online self-report questionnaire, consisting of two sections, was subsequently piloted to gather data from participants. The first section (A) comprised of five demographic questions related to age, tenure, term in position, qualifications and employment status, to compile a profile of the participants confirming the reliability of the sample to the study population. These demographic details did not form part of the measure used for research analyses or comparative research purposes but were used to measure the sample representation of the chosen target population. For the first section respondents selected appropriate options on the questionnaire. The second section (B) solicited responses on the behaviours that drive engagement (antecedents), employee engagement and engagement outcomes.

### **5.6.2 Research sample**

The study was conducted among employees from a South African state-owned entity with a high level of union density. The organisation was selected considering the staff composition of the organisation reflected the overall population for which the measurement was designed, as suggested by Mackenzie *et al.* (2011). The participants were informed of the research and their participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. The study population can be grouped into two sub-populations, namely union ( $n_1 = 16\ 862$ ) and non-union members ( $n_2 = 6\ 000$ ). A response rate of 4.05 % was achieved and all the ( $N = 926$ ) responses could be utilised. The responses exceeded the suggested norm of 200 for confirmatory factor analysis proposed by Hinkin (1998). In addition, the response rate exceeded the minimum norm of 10:1 respondent to items ratio proposed by (Boateng *et al.*, 2018:1). Consequently, the responses represented an adequate sample for further analyses. The respondents comprised 55.5% union members ( $n_1 = 513$ ) and 44.59% non-union members ( $n_2 = 413$ ), making the research participants relevant to the objectives of this study. The largest group of participants (32.2%) were between the age of 36 and 45 years old. The years of service variable ranged from six years to ten years (71.9%). The variable on tenure in the current position indicated the majority of respondents (50.6%) worked in the same position for over three years, have a tertiary education (96.9%) and are permanently employed by the entity (95.2%).

### **5.6.3 Research measures**

All factors investigated in this study were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, where the value of 1 corresponds to “strongly disagree” and the value of 7 corresponds to “strongly agree” for measuring collaborative partnerships, leadership and line manager behaviour, job design factors, individual outcomes and business outcomes and where the value of 1 corresponds to “not at all” and the value of 7 corresponds to “very important” for measuring employee engagement.

The independent variables, collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design were measured using a scale developed and validated to measure engagement levels in a unionised environment. Collaborative partnerships consist of 21 items, which is consistent with the theorisations that collaborative partnerships are

strongly influenced by partnerships where there is collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity between management, unions and employees in a unionised environment (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013:2692; Nel & Linde, 2019; Townsend *et al.*, 2014). Leadership behaviour consists of nine items. These items are considered strong indicators of leadership and line manager behaviour and are consistent with the theorisation that engagement levels are mediated by employees' trust in senior management, leader-member exchange and the employee-line manager relationship (Crawford *et al.*, 2014:57). Job design factors consist of eight items, which is consistent with the theorisation that engagement is highly influenced by jobs that are experienced as meaningful (Bailey *et al.*, 2015:1; Kahn, 1990:692; Kahn & Heaphy, 2014:83). The mediating variable, employee engagement, was measured with eight items associated with Kahn's (1990:692) three psychological conditions that elucidate how individuals are more engaged in work situations that provide psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability. The dependent variables, individual and business outcomes, were measured by six items. These dimensions can be considered a strong indicator of the outcome variable and are consistent with the theorisation that high engagement levels are positively associated with enhanced individual and organisational performance outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The items, after refinement, are listed in Table 5.2, which indicates the Cronbach's alpha coefficients and factor loadings for all items and sub-scales.

## **5.7 Analysis**

A structural equation model analysis was conducted to evaluate the fit of the measurement model and to determine the extent to which the proposed structural model pathways are valid and significant. IBM AMOS (version 25) and the statistical analysis used SPSS (version 25) for the analysis, as it allows a researcher to test the significance and the strength of relationships between two or more latent variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). IBM AMOS was utilised as its covariance approach provides more robust estimations of model fit indices as well as a visual representation of the model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). According to Schreiber *et al.* (2006), a SEM is a combination of exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression and can be used as a confirmatory technique or for exploratory purposes; an approach that was applied with this study. The following SEM stages proposed by Schumacker and

Lomax (2010) were largely followed, namely model specification, identification, estimation, evaluation and modification. For the purpose of model specification, two steps proposed by Weston and Gore (2006) were followed to stipulate the relationships that exist between latent variables. The first step is specifying the overall measurement model that underlies the structural model; and secondly, specifying the proposed structural model.

## **5.8 Results**

The central tendency and normality of the factors were analysed before presenting the SEM results. The descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 5.1 to provide an overview of the sample under study.

### **5.8.1 Descriptive statistics**

#### **5.8.1.1 Central tendency measure of factors**

The midpoint of the seven-point Likert scale is 4, and therefore all mean values below 4 suggest most respondents tend to disagree with the statements. The value of 4 indicates a neutral response to the statements in the construct. Mean values above 4 reflect that most respondents tend to agree with the statements of the construct. The results presented in Table 5.1 below indicate that the majority of respondents tend to disagree with the statements of collaborative partnerships. Most of the respondents are somewhat neutral to the statements of leadership and line manager behaviour and agree with the statements measuring individual outcomes, business outcomes, job design and engagement.

#### **5.8.1.2 Assessment of normality**

Table 5.1 indicates skewness and kurtosis coefficients of all items appearing in the final model. Generally, values for skewness and kurtosis between -2 and +2 are considered acceptable to prove normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). Concerning the issue of normality, Field (2014) points out that for a sample size above 167, such as the one in this study, the central limit theorem stipulates that the assumption of normality has a negligible effect on the data analysis results. This

means that all items with skewness and kurtosis of below -2 and above +2 will not affect the overall results of data analysis.

Table 5.1: Descriptive statistics

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
1	Collaborative partnerships	931	3.92	1.48	1-7	-0.56	-1.10
2	Leadership behaviour	931	4.12	1.80	1-7	-0.90	0.58
3	Job design	931	4.86	1.38	1-7	-0.47	3.11
4	Engagement	931	6.25	0.93	1-7	1.31	1.36
5	Business outcomes	931	4.75	1.50	1-7	*	*
6	Individual outcomes	931	5.10	1.48	1-7	-0.72	*

Note: \*Did not render a valid result due to the small number of items

### 5.8.2 Measurement model

The purpose of the measurement model is to determine and confirm the structure of the scale used to measure the latent constructs and assess the construct validity and reliability (Hair *et al.*, 1995). Since the normality is supported, the maximum likelihood method to assess the model fit of the final measurement model was applied. The initial model was built to perform a CFA to test the absolute and relative fit of the measurement and structural model. Although this initial model suggests a significant Chi-square, there is a need to further examine model fit indices before concluding on the model fit. Chi-square is very sensitive to sample size, which may be the reason why most Chi-squares of large samples are often significant; as a result, the use of multiple fit indices was developed to provide a more holistic view of the goodness of fit taking into account the sample size, model complexity and other relevant aspects of the study (Hair *et al.*, 1995; Schermelleh-Engel *et al.*, 2003). The measurement model was, therefore, further refined by deleting the following items: feedback mechanism, employee assistance, feedback on performance, building trust, job security, strategic narrative, autolytic personality, conscientiousness, career management, empowering subordinates and turnover intention to address validity concerns and to meet the requirements of the current study. After the refinement, the final measurement model, represented by Table 5.2, remained with six latent variables and 40 observed variables. The final model ( $\chi^2 = 999.981$ ; p-value = 0.000; df = 925)

displayed satisfactory fit indices and meets the thresholds recommended by Hair *et al.* (1995): (CMIN/DF = 3.182; GFI = 0.890; AGFI= 0.874; TLI = 0.951; CFI = 0.955, NFI = 0.935, RMSEA = 0.048). The final measurement model was considered evidence of convergent and discriminant validity, as all factor loadings are above 0.5 and there is a moderate level of correlations (less than 0.8) between most of the constructs, as illustrated in Table 5.2 (Hair *et al.* 1995). Although this evidence suggests convergent and discriminant validity, further analysis was conducted to establish the validity of all the research instruments used.

#### 5.8.2.1 Convergent validity and reliability of the construct

Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) were used to measure the internal consistency of various constructs to determine the reliability and the degree of consistency exhibited (Boateng *et al.*, 2018:1). Composite reliability (CR) was also provided to make reliability analysis more robust. The cut-off value of both the Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability is 0.7, although 0.6 is acceptable with exploratory data reduction analyses (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988:74). The results of both Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability are presented in Table 5.2, which indicates good reliability as Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability coefficients are both above 0.7.

The convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), which is expected to be above 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 1995). This average variance extracted is confirmed by factor loadings all above 0.7, as shown in Table 5.2. Convergent validity is confirmed since average variance extracted of all constructs is above the recommended threshold, except for one construct (business outcome), which it has average variance extracted of below threshold (0.461<0.5).

Table: 5.2: Assessment of convergent validity and reliability of the final measurement model

Factor	Items	$h^2$	r	CR	$\alpha$	AVE
Collaborative partnerships	Psychological contract breach	0.79	0.773	0.971	0.972	0.653
	Honest interaction with staff	0.83	0.819			
	Trust in management	0.82	0.810			
	Fair treatment	0.80	0.794			
	Collaboration for mutual gains	0.70	0.687			

Factor	Items	$h^2$	r	CR	$\alpha$	AVE
<b>Leadership behaviour</b>	Positive workplace conditions	0.83	0.815	0.961	0.961	0.832
	Treating staff with dignity	0.82	0.809			
	Treating staff with respect	0.80	0.795			
	Fair treatment of all staff	0.83	0.823			
	Joint and direct communication	0.81	0.791			
	Meaningful consultation with staff	0.85	0.842			
	Consultative forums	0.83	0.811			
	Reciprocation to employee voice	0.87	0.859			
	Broad means of communication	0.84	0.828			
	Perceived psychological safety	0.87	0.858			
	Pluralistic human resource practices	0.68	0.663			
	Interaction with staff	0.88	0.866			
	Supporting staff	0.77	0.748			
<b>Job design</b>	Opportunity for development	0.87	0.84	0.819	0.809	0.536
	Managerial interpersonal skills	0.91	0.89			
	Showing concern for staff	0.90	0.89			
	Inspiring subordinates	0.93	0.91			
	Act with integrity	0.93	0.91			
<b>Engagement</b>	Task identity	0.75	0.676	0.931	0.931	0.630
	Task autonomy	0.62	0.556			
	Co-worker norms	0.85	0.756			
	Trait, positive affect	0.62	0.534			
	Organisational values fit	0.83	0.795			
	Collaboration	0.83	0.798			
	Employee voice	0.86	0.825			
	Human resource practices	0.81	0.783			
<b>Individual outcomes</b>	Employee assistance	0.64	0.617	0.791	0.781	0.562
	Leadership and line managers behaviour	0.75	0.719			
	Job satisfaction	0.81	0.776			
<b>Business outcomes</b>	Skills match	0.82	0.772	0.631	0.631	0.461
	Customer satisfaction	0.70	0.46			
	Organisational commitment	0.66	0.46			

The overall result indicates good reliability of all the scales involved in this study, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability coefficients are both above 0.7, except for business outcomes, which is acceptable (Chin, 1998:7). Table 5.2 also indicates that the factor loadings of all the constructs are above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 1995). Similarly, the average variance extracted from the majority of the constructs is also above the required cut-off of 0.5 (Chin, 1998:7). Only the construct business outcomes had an average variance extracted below the recommended threshold ( $0.461 < 0.5$ ). However, this can be marginally acceptable given that factor loadings of business outcome are all above 0.5, indicating that the factors are loading well.

#### 5.8.2.2 Discriminant validity of the measurement model

In order to conduct the discriminant validity, the correlation structure of the factors was examined and reflected in Table 5.3. Discriminant validity examines the degree to which the latent variables discriminate from one another, and is assessed through a comparison between the square root of the average variance extracted and the highest inter-construct correlation ( $r$ ) of the specific construct (Hinkin, 1998). The square root of the average variance extracted is expected to be above all the inter-construct correlation values (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). The results indicate that there is a discriminant validity concern, as illustrated in Table 5.3 below, for the following constructs: individual outcomes, business outcomes and job design based on the square root of the average variance extracted, which is below the inter-construct correlations.

Table 5.3: Correlation matrix to evaluate the discriminant validity

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	<b>Collaborative partnerships</b>	0.808					
2	<b>Leadership behaviour</b>	0.802	0.912				
3	<b>Individual outcomes</b>	0.672	0.614	0.750			
4	<b>Business outcomes</b>	0.692	0.583	0.957	0.679		
5	<b>Job design</b>	0.670	0.604	0.928	0.783	0.732	
6	<b>Engagement</b>	0.121	0.118	0.274	0.284	0.271	0.794

The results indicate high correlations between the factors of business outcomes and individual outcomes (0.957), as well as job design and individual outcomes (0.928). The high correlation between the factors of business outcomes and individual outcomes is expected as they originate from the same construct outcome; it is also expected that individual outcomes influence the levels of business outcomes in the workplace. It is proposed that individual outcomes and business outcomes are combined to form one factor in future research. The high correlation between job design and individual outcomes is also expected as this is consistent with findings that a theoretical relationship exists between job resources, individual characteristics and individual outcomes despite each having a unique and strong relationship with engagement. This is supported by Macey and Schneider (2008) and Bailey *et al.* (2015:1), confirming that job resources and job demands play an important role in the engagement outcome process. The constructs are therefore distinct from one another confirming discriminant validity. It can, therefore, be concluded that the relationships illustrated in the final measurement model fit the data satisfactorily. All the instruments used in the final measurement model are reliable and the convergent validity is supported within the context of this study. A discriminant validity concern was, however, reported, despite being theoretically supported. Given that the overall results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are satisfactory, a thorough analysis of the structural model can be conducted.

### **5.8.3 Structural model**

Given that construct validity and reliability have been established, the structural model illustrated in Figure 5.2 was tested. The purpose of the structural model is to test whether the hypothesised pathways in the model are significant. The hypothesised model implies that collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors have a direct relationship with engagement and that individual outcomes and business outcomes are mediated by engagement. The structural model was tested, using the maximum likelihood approach performed with AMOS 25 and illustrates standard regression weights and hypothesised conclusions.

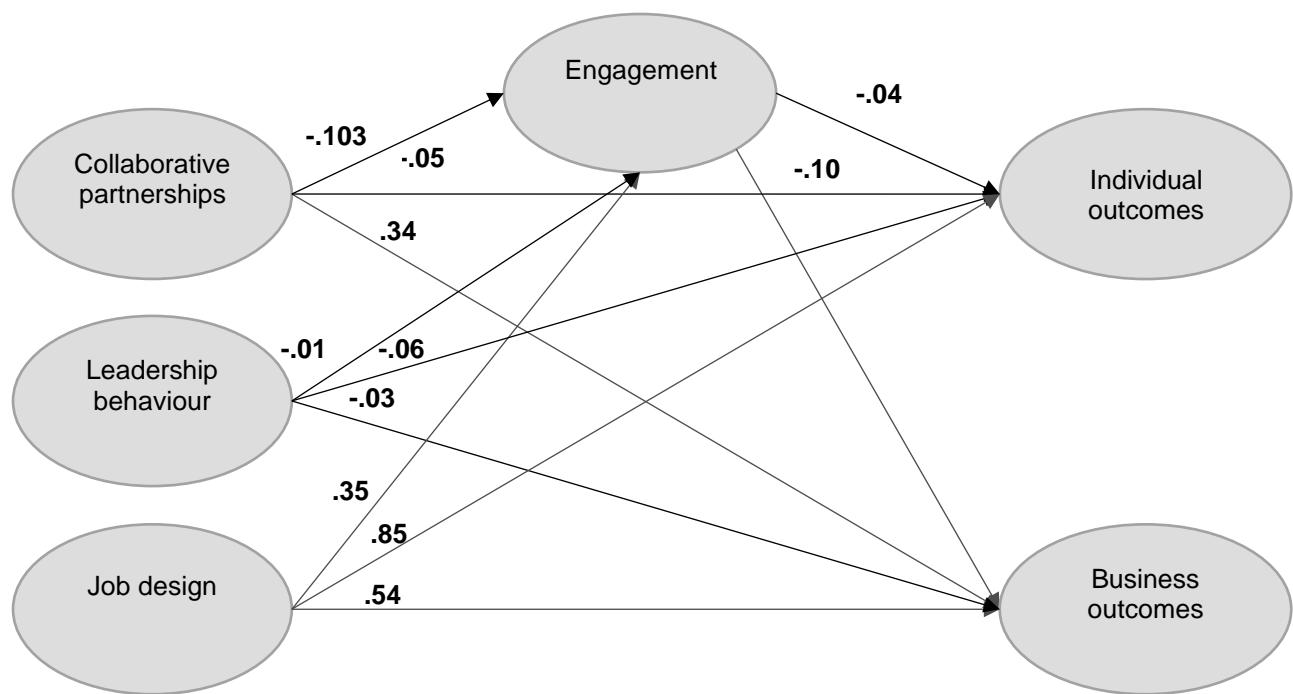


Figure 5.2: Structural model illustrating standard path coefficients

The structural model ( $X^2 = 1919.873$ ; p-value = 0.000; df = 704) displayed satisfactory fit indices and met the thresholds recommended by Hair *et al.* (1995): (CMIN/DF = 2.727; GFI = .905; AGFI = .890; TLI = .961; CFI = .965, NFI = .946, RMSEA = .043). The model explains 5.8% of the variation of engagement and 39.8% variation of business outcome and 59.6% variation of individual outcomes.

#### 5.8.4 Test of hypotheses

An examination of the structural relationships in the model was conducted to determine whether the hypothesised relationships in the conceptual model were supported by the data. Table 5.4 below presents the results of each relationship tested in the model and the outcomes of hypotheses tested.

Table 5.4: Standardised regression weights and hypothesis conclusion

Hypothesis	Relationships			p-value	$\beta$	Hypothesis results
H1	Collaborative partnerships	->	Engagement	0.126	-0.103	Not supported
H2	Leadership behaviour	->	Engagement	0.83	-0.013	Not supported
H3	Job design	->	Engagement	***	0.354	Supported
H4	Engagement	->	Individual outcomes	0.136	0.037	Not supported
H5	Engagement	->	Business outcomes	0.003	0.105	Partially supported
Not hypothesised	Collaborative partnerships	->	Individual outcomes	0.24	0.054	Non-significant and positive effect

Hypothesis	Relationships			p-value	$\beta$	Hypothesis results
Not hypothesised	Collaborative partnerships	->	Business outcomes	***	0.337	Significant and positive effect
Not hypothesised	Job design	->	Individual outcomes	***	0.849	Significant and positive effect
Not hypothesised	Job design	->	Business outcomes	***	0.545	Significant and positive effect
Not hypothesised	Leadership behaviour	->	Business outcomes	0.643	-0.028	Non-significant and negative effect
Not hypothesised	Leadership behaviour	->	Individual outcomes	0.184	0.55	Non-significant and positive effect

Note: \*\*\*  $p<0.001$

### 5.8.5 Testing the mediation of engagement

A mediation analysis was conducted on AMOS version 25 to test the hypothesised mediating effect of engagement in the model. Bootstrapping, with 5 000 bootstrap samples, was performed with a bias-corrected interval of 95%. The indirect effect (mediation effect), direct effects, and total effect of the results are presented in Table 5.5. The indirect effect refers to the mediating effect and the direct effect reflects the relationship of the independent variables (collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design) on the dependent variable (business outcomes and individual outcomes). The total mediating effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effects (Field, 2014). According to Baron and Kenny (1986:1172), three conditions must be met to establish mediation. Firstly, the independent variables (collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design) and the antecedents of engagement must relate to the mediator (engagement), employee engagement. Secondly, the mediator (engagement) must be related to the dependent variables (individual outcomes and business outcomes) and the outcomes of engagement. Thirdly, mediation can only occur when there is a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variable and when this relationship is no longer significant when controlling the mediator. Given that the direct effects of leadership behaviour and collaborative partnerships on engagement were not significant, and that engagement has a non-significant effect on individual outcomes ( $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ), the mediating effect of engagement could not be tested. As recommended by Field (2014), mediation cannot be conducted when the independent variable has a non-significant effect on the mediator and when the mediator has a non-significant effect on the dependent variable. The only mediating effect of engagement in the relationship is

between job design and business outcomes. Table 5.5 below presents the results of the mediation analysis and the outcomes of hypotheses tested.

Table 5.5: Path coefficients and effects for the mediation model

	Relationship	Mediating effect						Results	
		Indirect effect		Direct effect		Total effect			
		p-value	Estimate	p-value	Estimate	p-value	Estimate		
H6	Collaborative partnerships → individual outcomes and business outcomes	*						Not supported	
H7	Leadership behaviour → individual outcomes and business outcomes	*						Not supported	
H8	Job design → business outcomes	0.013	0.027	0.001	0,756	0.001	0.783	Partial mediation	

Notes: \* Illustrates a non-significant relationship between variables

## 5.9 Discussion

The model to measure employee engagement in a unionised environment in which a relationship between collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors and individual outcomes and business outcomes, mediated by employee engagement was hypothesised. The fit of the model through CFA and the validity of the hypothesised paths of the model tested the mediation of engagement by making use of the SEM technique. The CFA established that the final measurement model fitted the underlying data satisfactorily, and supported construct validity and reliability; however, a discriminant validity concern was reported. An analysis to determine the extent to which the proposed structural model's hypothesised pathways are valid and significant indicated the relationship between collaborative partnerships and engagement is statistically non-significant and has a negative effect on engagement; (*H1*) was therefore rejected. Although collaborative partnerships' unique influence on engagement was negative, this negative estimate should not be theoretically interpreted in a predictive sense, such as the less collaboration the higher engagement will be. The interpretation should rather be that with all the other engagement factors

in place, collaborative partnerships will not have a significant impact on improving engagement; therefore, the resulting negative correlation in this study should not be seen as a predicting factor for engagement. The relationship between leadership behaviour and engagement was statistically non-significant and had a negative effect on engagement; (*H2*) was therefore also rejected. The same reasoning and subject deduction can be made for leadership behaviour that the interpretation should be, with all the other engagement factors in place, leadership behaviour will not have a significant impact on improving engagement; therefore, the resulting negative correlation in this study should not be seen as a predicting factor for engagement. The relationship between job design and engagement is statistically significant and has a positive effect on engagement. The hypothesis that job design factors have a positive effect on engagement behaviour (*H3*) is therefore supported. This finding is supported by a narrative synthesis conducted by Bailey *et al.* (2015:1) on the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement and found that the strongest connection between engagement enabling antecedents and elevated engagement levels was in the area of job resources. This supported Saks and Gruman's (2014) view that various job resources, such as autonomy and performance feedback as well as a supportive environment have frequently been found to be positively connected to engagement. It is recommended that job design factors are considered important in any strategy to drive high engagement levels in a unionised environment, due to its link to psychological meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990:692). The relationship between engagement and individual outcomes is statistically non-significant but has a positive effect on engagement. The hypothesis that engagement leads to individual outcomes in a unionised environment (*H4*) is therefore not supported, although experiencing engagement has a positive effect on individual outcomes. The relationship between engagement and business outcomes was statistically non-significant and had a positive effect on business outcomes. The hypothesis stating that engagement leads to business outcomes in a unionised environment (*H5*) is not supported, although experiencing engagement has a positive effect on business outcomes.

Engagement is generally considered a mediating variable where engagement mediates the relationship between antecedent and outcomes (Saks, 2006). Since it is accepted that engagement has a positive effect on business outcomes, the author hypothesised that three antecedents will influence an individual's psychological

experience of work and, in turn, influence engagement levels leading to positive individual and business outcomes. The mediation analysis indicated the direct effect of leadership behaviour and collaborative partnerships on engagement, where non-significant and engagement has a non-significant effect on individual outcomes. The overall mediating effect of engagement could not be tested, as there was a non-significant effect between the independent variable of the mediator and between the mediator and dependent variables (Field, 2013). The only mediating effect of engagement is between job design and business outcomes. The hypothesis that the relationship between collaborative partnerships and individual outcomes and business outcomes are mediated by engagement (*H6*), the relationship between leadership behaviour and individual outcomes and business outcomes are mediated by engagement (*H7*) is therefore not supported. Table 5.5 illustrates that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes (*H8*), and could therefore only be partially confirmed. The overarching hypothesis that the structural model provides a valid description of how the engagement antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement outcomes (*H9*) could therefore not be confirmed. The finding that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes is supported by studies that found that job design aspects positively relate to engagement and engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and performance (Bailey *et al.*, 2015:1; Christian *et al.*, 2011:89; Crawford *et al.*, 2014:57).

Although not hypothesised, the effects of collaborative partnerships on business outcomes are significant, with collaborative partnerships having a significant positive effect on business outcomes. The same is observed for the relationship between job design and individual outcomes and the relationship between job design and business outcomes. The relationship between collaborative partnerships and business outcomes suggests that business outcomes are strongly influenced by partnerships where there is collaboration for mutual gains and reciprocity between management, unions and employees in a unionised environment (Nel & Linde, 2019). It is suggested that if management collaborates more with staff, the more engagement will increase, and it is in principle accepted that engagement has a positive bearing on individual and business outcomes (Crawford *et al.*, 2014:57). The relationship between job design and individual outcomes and between job design and business outcomes

suggests that business outcomes and individual outcomes are strongly influenced by jobs that are experienced as meaningful. It is suggested that if management provides meaningful jobs, engagement levels will increase, and it is generally recognised that high engagement levels have a positive effect on individual and business outcomes (Crawford *et al.*, 2014:57; Kahn, 1990:692).

### **5.10 Ethical considerations**

The administration of the survey complied with ethical requirements. Prior ethical clearance was obtained from the University. The participating entity and individual participants consented to the study based on the disclosed purpose and principles of voluntary, anonymous and confidential participation. Demographic information received from the participants was used to identify a profile of the participants, confirming the reliability of the sample and will not be used for comparative research purposes.

### **5.11 Limitations and recommendations**

The study was subject to limitations, which requires elaboration and should be considered for future research. The results indicate that there is discriminant validity concern for individual outcomes, business outcomes and job design in that the observed variables are statistically not distinct from each other. A probable explanation of the finding is that engagement is part of a wider domain of psychological constructs, although it theoretically differs from them, resulting in a cross-over between constructs (Fletcher & Robinson, 2014:273). The correlation between business outcomes and individual outcomes is confirmation of this argument, as they are from the same construct. It is also to be expected that individual outcomes influence the levels of business outcomes in the workplace. It is proposed that individual outcomes and business outcomes are combined to form one factor in future research. The high correlation between the factors of job design and individual outcomes is also to be expected as this is consistent with findings that a theoretical relationship exists between job resources, individual characteristics and individual outcomes. It is recommended that during the research design phase, other scales that are part of the wider domain of engagement are considered to ensure there is a difference between the latent variables representing different constructs (Schweizer, 2014). Schweizer

(2014) also recommends downscaling the complexity of the model to overcome the estimation problems frequently encountered during CFA. Although the structural model fitted the data well, the mediating effect of engagement could not be tested due to a non-significant relationship between the variables. The concepts of meaningfulness, safety and availability that presumably underlie the relationship between engagement and outcomes were not measured. It is, however, noted that the link between these concepts has been established by Kahn (1990:692) and May *et al.* (2004) and that the inclusion of these measures as mediators in the study, a more direct test of Kahn's (1990:692) theory of engagement, could have been conducted.

It is recommended that the structural model is modified, taking due care that the modified model contributes towards the underlying theory and whether it can be theoretically justified (Weston & Gore, 2006). Although the construct of engagement in a unionised environment was adequately conceptualised, it is a limitation that the analysis did not include a control variable. A probable explanation for the non-significant relationship between the variables is that the results are generalised, and it does not adequately consider the differences between union and non-union responses on the mediating effect of engagement in the model. It is, therefore, recommended that an independent t-test be conducted to analyse the influence of the diverse responses on the results of the study. This recommendation is supported by Kular *et al.*'s (2008) observation that despite the existence of common engagement development factors, different groups and individuals are influenced by different factors.

## **5.12 Contribution**

Although the research was primarily intended to test the theoretically derived hypotheses, the findings have practical contributions. The primary theoretical contribution is that the author provided a better understanding of the engagement construct within a collective context as it is the first research that has attempted to assess the mediation of engagement in an environment with a strong union presence (55.5% of the sample). Currently, research on engagement is primarily focused on individual-level engagement and does not consider the impact of various interest groups on engagement and to what degree the organisational context influences the extent to which individuals engage (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). The results of the research

support this concern and can form the basis for further research into the impact of the micro- and macro-organisational context on engagement in a unionised environment (Nel & Linde, 2019). The complexity of the employee engagement concept as a multi-dimensional, multi-level construct (Truss *et al.*, 2013) was strengthened in the research results. The research provides a more comprehensive explanation of engagement in a unionised environment and confirms the role played by collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design factors as antecedents to engagement in a unionised environment. The importance of job design factors and that the relationship between job design and business outcomes is stronger when there is engagement, regardless of the organisational context, were confirmed in the study (Bailey *et al.*, 2015:1; Christian *et al.*, 2011:89; Crawford *et al.*, 2014:57; Shantz *et al.*, 2013). This reiterates the importance of jobs that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, autonomous, have good role fit, which yields perceived meaningfulness, and are reiterated (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014).

Although certain patterns of relationships were not anticipated, it provides further opportunities for researchers to investigate. The research contributes positively to the engagement theory and practice in that it is the first empirical research conducted on engagement in a unionised environment and will be helpful in assisting both human resources practitioners and organisations to design a viable and integrated approach, supported by strong evidence-based research, to drive high engagement levels in organisations with a strong union presence (Guest, 2014). The key contribution of the study is a detailed conceptual model that is well-grounded in the theory of engagement and labour relations. This strong theoretical underpinning informed the path analysis of the study and provided the support for the inferences about the relationships among the constructs, which can be expanded on in future studies (May *et al.*, 2004).

### **5.13 Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to evaluate the fit of the model, evaluate the validity of the hypothesised paths of the model and to test the mediation of engagement.

Several models with the potential to increase the engagement levels of employees have been developed since Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement. However, most of these models examine the relationship between antecedents and

outcomes at an individual level and do not consider the collective context of an organisation where there is a high union presence (unionised environment). A model to measure employee engagement was subsequently developed and validated by the author, taking the collective context of a work environment, consisting of union and non-union members, into consideration. The results of the first objective, to evaluate the overall fit of the model, indicated that the final measurement model fit the data satisfactorily. Secondly, the results indicated a positive relationship between job design and engagement, collaborative partnerships and business outcomes, job design and individual and business outcomes, and that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes. Lastly, the only mediating effect of engagement is between job design and business outcomes. This result confirms the importance of job design factors and reiterates that the relationship between job design and business outcomes is stronger when there is engagement in a unionised environment.

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## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The goal of this study was to identify the antecedents and circumstances that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment. This was motivated by the problem that the unclear antecedents and circumstances influencing engagement in a unionised environment have a detrimental effect on workplace relations and behaviour. The research method of the study to achieve the objectives includes a systematic review of the literature and quantitative analysis of the research data. The following process was followed to achieve the study objectives, namely the development of a theoretical engagement model, the validation of a measurement scale, specifying the measurement and structural model and the evaluation of the structural relationship between variables, and finally the testing of the hypotheses. The study contributes to the engagement theory and practice in that it proposes a model grounded in the unique challenges of engagement in a unionised environment, which was not studied before.

Before the conclusions are discussed, a summary of the research results and objectives of the previous chapters is provided. Thereafter, the overall conclusions, which are based on the theoretical and empirical aspects of the research, are presented. Limitations, recommendations of the study and suggestions for further research follow the conclusions.

### **6.2 Summary**

Research on engagement, since the conceptualisation of the construct, has primarily focused on individual-level engagement antecedents and outcomes and does not explicitly consider the importance of the relationship between trade unions and their members and individuals on engagement (Barrick et al., 2015). It was evident from the literature that unionised employees are less engaged than non-unionised employees are, and the impact of disengagement in companies with a union presence is often more significant since union members' dissatisfaction can spread to their co-workers and lead to overall negative sentiments towards the organisation. Despite the existence of several models to measure and define the state of engagement, they

predominantly measure the relationship between antecedents and outcomes at an individual level and fail to take the collective organisational contextual factors into account. Engagement models that define the antecedents and circumstances influencing engagement in a unionised environment are unclear, and this phenomenon has a detrimental effect on workplace relations and behaviour. Understanding engagement in a unionised environment is equally important as engagement in an environment without a strong union presence, due to the interdependence between employees and the shared perceptions of the staff about the organisation. It was within this context that a theoretical framework was developed, which has been constructed around the individual and collective relationship between groups in an organisation. The framework provides the conceptual clarification on employee engagement in a unionised environment, and provides a theoretical basis for the development and validation of the measurement and structural model.

The purpose of this research project was to determine the antecedents and circumstances that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment. In Chapter 1, the contextual background for investigating the importance of developing a model for employee engagement in a unionised environment, as well as the method with which this purpose would be achieved, was discussed. This chapter also provides an outline of the research initiating questions and objectives of this study. Secondary objectives were also identified, and included:

- To explore the development of engagement through a theoretical lens to gain a better understanding of the concepts, framework, antecedents and outcomes of engagement through a systematic review of the literate and narrative synthesis of the evidence;
- To identify propositions from the literature review to inform a theoretical model for engagement;
- To propose a theoretical model for engagement in a unionised environment;
- To report on the development and validation of a measurement scale, drawing from the theoretical model that measures employee engagement in a unionised environment;

- To confirm the internal reliability and construct validity of the measurement model;
- To test the fit of the measurement and structural model;
- To determine whether the pathways hypothesised in the structural model are significant; and
- To test the mediation influence of engagement on the model.

This study was presented in article format to achieve these research objectives. The articles included two literature review chapters, which were published as chapters in a peer-reviewed monograph, and two research articles submitted for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals. The literature review chapters critically evaluate and interpret the body of knowledge that exists relating to the current research on employee engagement to provide the theoretical basis for the research, and to identify the approaches and interventions that may have the greatest potential to increase engagement in a unionised environment. The empirical chapters, in the form of two journal articles, report on the development and statistical analysis of the measurement and structural models.

Chapter 2, titled “Evaluating the evidence on employee engagement”, was the first literature review chapter that explored the development of engagement through a historical lens to gain a better understanding of the concepts, frameworks, antecedents and outcomes of engagement, and to develop a foundation for a new framework that may have the potential to increase engagement levels in a unionised environment. It was found that there continues to be a lack of consensus regarding the meaning and distinctiveness of employee engagement from other constructs, and several definitions and frameworks of engagement exist to define the current state of engagement. This lack of consensus does, however, not prevent organisations from identifying antecedents of engagement that can manage the outcomes of engagement, which, in turn, have a positive impact on the business outcomes. The analysis of the evidence on the antecedents and outcomes of engagement enabled the identification of researched and validated antecedents and outcomes associated with high levels of engagement in a unionised environment. This understanding of the construct enabled the development of the most appropriate framework to increase the engagement levels

of employees in a unionised environment. With this chapter, the first objective of the research was reached, while contributing to reaching the second and third objectives.

The next section of the literature overview focused on the circumstances that influence engagement levels in a unionised environment, to bring into focus suitable propositions to develop a framework that has the potential to increase the engagement levels of employees in an environment with a union presence through Chapter 3, titled “A framework to measure employee engagement in a unionised environment”. Eleven propositions were identified from the evidence synthesis that informed the theoretical framework. The propositions reflect the synthesis of the evidence on the researched and validated antecedents and newly discovered additional antecedents that have the potential to facilitate and predict high engagement levels in a unionised environment. The framework, which considers the collective context of an organisation, explains how the antecedents extracted from the propositions influence engagement levels and engagement, which, in turn, leads to positive individual and organisational outcomes. The framework that was illustrated in Figure 3.1 of Chapter 3 indicates how engagement-enabling dimensions (antecedents) influenced an individual’s psychological experience of work, which, in turn, influenced engagement levels and led to positive work behaviour. These dimensions provided the theoretical basis for the development of the measurement scale in the next chapter. Within this chapter, the second and third objectives of the research were reached.

Chapter 4, “Measuring employee engagement in a unionised environment: Development and validation of an engagement scale”, was the first empirical chapter and addressed the fourth and fifth research objectives. The purpose of this study was to validate an engagement scale to measure employee engagement levels in a unionised environment. Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factorial structure, and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were used to establish the internal reliability of the scale and subscales. Although the theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 4.1 of Chapter 4, specified eight employee engagement-enabling dimensions (antecedents), the results of the factor analysis yielded a three-factor model. The measurement model was therefore modified to reflect the three factors and the factors are labelled as collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers’ behaviour, and job design factors (Figure 4.2, Chapter 4). The exploratory factor analysis yielded

a three-component model with good single component loadings ( $> 4$ ) and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.97, 0.85 and 0.95 for the three components, respectively. Root mean square of the residuals (RMSR) evaluation was performed to test the dimensionality of the measurement model, and the results showed that the model proved to have a good fit (RMSR = 0.04). The correlation structure of the dimensions was examined to establish discriminant validity and average variances (AVE) to determine convergent validity. The examination of the correlation structure, illustrated in Table 4.3 in Chapter 4, confirms the discriminant validity of the factors. The total variance explained by the three-component model was 65%, with collaborative partnership (35%), leadership and line manager behaviour (18%), and job design factors (12%) explaining a total of 65% of the variance. Table 4.1 (Chapter 4) demonstrates that each factor was well defined, and that Factor 1, collaborative partnerships, was defined by 21 items, which all obtained a loading greater than 0.5. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.80 and can be considered as strong indicators of the collaborative partnership factor. Factor 2, leadership and line manager behaviour was defined by nine items of which all of the items obtained a loading greater than 0.5. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.80 and can be considered as strong indicators of the leadership and line manager behaviour factor. Factor 3, job design, consists of eight items of which all the items obtained a loading greater than 0.4. Five items obtained loadings greater than 0.5 and can be considered strong indicators of this factor. Through Chapter 4, the fourth objective of the research was reached and indicated that the measurement scale was a reliable instrument consisting of three factors, which can be considered as strong indicators of employee engagement levels in a unionised environment.

The second research article, titled "Engagement levels: A structural equation modelling approach", was presented as Chapter 5. The main purpose of this chapter was to examine the structural relationship among research variables, being collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors (independent variable), and individual and business outcomes (dependent variables), mediated by employee engagement (mediating variable) in a unionised environment. The following hypotheses were identified to achieve the primary and secondary objectives of the research:

- H1:* Collaborative partnerships are positively related to engagement.
- H2:* Leadership behaviour is positively related to engagement.
- H3:* Job design factors are positively related to engagement.
- H4:* Engagement is positively related to individual outcomes.
- H5:* Engagement is positively related to business outcomes.
- H6:* The relationship between collaborative partnerships and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H7:* The relationship between leadership behaviour and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H8:* The relationship between job design and individual outcomes and business outcomes is mediated by engagement.
- H9:* The structural model provides a valid description of how the engagement antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement outcomes.

The central tendency and normality of the factors were analysed to provide an overview of the sample under study and were displayed in the descriptive statistics table in Chapter 5. An analysis of the validity and reliability of the construct indicated good reliability of all the scales involved in this study, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability (CR) coefficients were both above 0.7, except for business outcomes, which was 0.631. Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 also indicates that the factor loadings of all the constructs were above the recommended threshold of 0.5. Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) from the majority of the constructs was also above the required cut-off of 0.5, as proposed by Chin (1998). Only the business outcomes construct had an average variance extracted below the recommended threshold of 0.5 at 0.461. However, this can be used as acceptable following the factor loadings of this construct that were all above 0.5.

The results indicate that there was a discriminant validity concern, as illustrated in Table 5.3 in Chapter 5, due to the high correlations between the factors of business outcomes and individual outcomes (0.957), as well as job design and individual

outcomes (0,928). The high correlation between the factors of business outcomes and individual outcomes was expected, as they originate from the same construct outcome, and it was also expected that individual outcomes influence the levels of business outcomes in the workplace. The final model represented by Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 displayed satisfactory fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 999.981$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ;  $df = 925$ ) and meets the thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (1995): CMIN/DF = 3.182; GFI = 0.890; AGFI= 0.874; TLI = 0.951; CFI = 0.955, NFI = 0.935, RMSEA = 0.048. The fifth and sixth (partially) research objectives were reached through Chapter 5.

The structural model in Chapter 5's Figure 5.2 displayed satisfactory fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 1919.873$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ;  $df = 704$ ) and met the thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (1995): CMIN/DF = 2.727; GFI = .905; AGFI= .890; TLI = .961; CFI = .965, NFI = .946, RMSEA = .043. The model explained 5.8% of the variation of engagement, 39.8% variation of business outcome, and 59.6% of individual outcomes. An analysis to determine the extent to which the proposed structural model's hypothesised pathways were valid and significant was conducted through regression analysis and an inspection of the significance of the path coefficients. The relationships between collaborative partnerships, engagement and leadership behaviour ( $H_2$ ) ( $p\text{-value}$  0.126;  $\beta$  0.103) were not supported. The job design factors have a positive effect on engagement behaviour ( $p<0.001$ ;  $\beta$  0.354), and the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) was therefore supported. The hypothesis that engagement leads to individual outcomes in a unionised environment ( $H_4$ ) was not supported (with  $p\text{-value}$  0.136;  $\beta$  0.037). The relationship between engagement and business outcomes was also not supported ( $p\text{-value}$  0.003;  $\beta$  0.105). The hypothesis that engagement leads to business outcomes in a unionised environment ( $H_5$ ) was not supported ( $p\text{-value}$  0.003;  $\beta$  0.105). The overall mediating effect of engagement could not be tested, as there was a non-significant effect between the independent variable of the mediator and between the mediator and dependent variables. The hypotheses that the relationship between collaborative partnerships and individual outcomes and business outcomes were mediated by engagement ( $H_6$ ) and that the relationships between leadership behaviour and individual outcomes and business outcomes were mediated by engagement ( $H_7$ ) were therefore not supported. The hypothesis that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes ( $H_8$ ) was only partially confirmed, as illustrated in Table 5.5 of Chapter 5. The overarching hypothesis

that the structural model provides a valid description of how the engagement antecedents influence engagement levels and engagement outcomes (*H9*) could therefore not be confirmed. Although not hypothesised, the effects of collaborative partnerships on business outcomes were significant, with collaborative partnerships having a significant positive effect on business outcomes. The same was observed for the relationship between job design and individual outcomes, and the relationship between job design and business outcomes. The relationship between job design and individual outcomes and between job design and business outcomes suggests that business outcomes and individual outcomes were strongly influenced by jobs that were experienced as meaningful. Through Chapter 5, the seventh, eighth and ninth research objectives were achieved and objective 6 was partially achieved.

As indicated above, the secondary research objectives of this thesis were achieved through Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. By achieving these secondary objectives, the primary objective was also achieved, namely “to determine the antecedents and circumstances that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment”. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the practical and theoretical implications of the findings of the study.

### **6.2.1 Discussion of findings**

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 clarified the constructs associated with the research and to integrate them through a literature study. The practical implications of the research were that it identified prevailing antecedents and additional antecedents to engagement to inform approaches and interventions that may have the greatest potential to influence engagement in a unionised environment. Possible reasons for union dissatisfaction were also identified and placed the research within the collective engagement context. This chapter gave theoretical substance to the process of developing a labour relations model of employee engagement. It provided a background to the origins and development of engagement through a systematic review of the literature to gain a better understanding of the concepts, frameworks, antecedents and outcomes of engagement. Furthermore, the application of employee engagement in a unionised environment was discussed, as well as its influence on identifying the antecedents and outcomes of engagement. After examining the most-often discussed antecedents and outcomes, several propositions were identified that

formed the theoretical basis for the development of the theoretical framework. The framework grounded in the theory of engagement and labour relations was proposed to positively influence the engagement experience in a unionised environment.

Chapter 4 was used to develop and validate a measurement scale that measures employee engagement in a unionised environment. This chapter reported the research sample's experience of engagement in a unionised environment. The practical implication of this research was that it investigated engagement levels in a South African state-owned entity (SOE). The SOE was used as the study population for this research. A further practical implication was that it identified dimensions that influence employees' experience of engagement in a unionised environment. It identified practical factors that can be considered strong indicators of engagement in a unionised environment. Through the results of this chapter, a measurement model was constructed to measure engagement in a unionised environment. The model was based on the theoretical model, developed in Chapter 3. The model introduced collaborative partnerships, leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design as factors that influence engagement in a unionised environment. Through the literature review, 38 items were identified as measures for the three factors. The theory linked the three factors directly to engagement. The measurement scale was regarded as valid and can be administered to measure engagement levels in a unionised environment. The measurement model is an *a priori* model that explained the relationship between the three antecedent factors to engagement and two outcome factors, which were used in specifying the measurement and structural models in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 reported on the evaluation of the measurement and structural models and to test the hypotheses identified in the chapter. The chapter combines the various constructs of this study in an employee engagement model that was the basis of this study. The practical implications were that the measurement model that underlies the structural model was specified. The model postulated a hypothesised relationship between the three engagement enabling antecedents, namely collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors (independent variable), and individual and business outcomes (dependent variables), mediated by employee engagement (mediating variable), collaborative partnerships, leadership and line

managers behaviour and job design as factors that influence engagement in a unionised environment. The final measurement model, after refinement, consisted of six latent variables and 40 observed variables. The results of the first objective indicated that the final measurement model fits the data satisfactorily. The results of the theoretically derived hypothesis provided a validated model to measure employee engagement in a unionised environment.

### **6.3 Overall contribution**

The overall conclusion of the study is divided into three parts, namely, practical conclusion, which focuses on the practical application of the results; theoretical conclusion, focusing on the research model and the influence of the results on engaging employees in a unionised environment; and empirical conclusion, which focuses on the research method and statistical analysis that were performed.

#### **6.3.1 Practical contribution**

Although the research was primarily intended to test the theoretically derived hypotheses, the findings have practical contributions. Firstly, this research was the first study to validate a scale measuring engagement in a unionised work environment, building on existing engagement research and thereby advancing the understanding of the construct and its practical inferences. Secondly, the results revealed that organisations can enhance individual and business performance by ensuring that all employees are collectively engaged. This highlight that engagement efforts cannot exclusively focus on non-union employees and that understanding engagement in a unionised environment was just as important as engagement in a nonunionised environment. Thirdly, by developing a model for engaging employees in a unionised environment, it is suggested that collective engagement requires a strategic and deliberate effort to foster the emergence of collective organisational engagement. As a result, the research provides insights and strategies to enhance employee engagement and help to create a culture of collective engagement within organisations. Fourthly, the research identified collaborative partnerships, leadership and line manager behaviour, and job design factors as key employee engagement enabling dimensions that can be utilised to measure engagement levels in a unionised environment. Fifthly, the structural model confirms the role played by collaborative

partnerships, leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design factors as antecedents that influence the engagement experience of employees in a unionised environment. This will help assist both human resource practitioners and organisations to design a viable and integrated approach, supported by strong evidence-based research, to drive high engagement levels in organisations with a strong union presence. The research furthermore confirmed that engagement is multifaceted, and organisations must utilise multiple actions to engage the various constituencies in a unionised environment.

### **6.3.2 Theoretical conclusion**

This study contributes to the engagement and labour relations literature and theory in many ways. The first, theoretical contribution is the introduction of the collective engagement concept where there is an interplay between the union and non-union members. This provides a better understanding of the engagement construct within a collective context, and confirmed that engagement is a multi-dimensional, multi-level construct, reflecting latent conditions on an employee's willingness to engage. Secondly, the study of engagement was extended to a unionised environment and addresses key conceptual limitations found in existing studies. Thirdly, engagement was highlighted as a key management strategy as a replacement of the traditional management approach to people management in an environment with a strong union presence. Fourthly, the measurement model is based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3 and provides evidence of construct validity and can, therefore, be considered to have a sound theoretical and empirical base. The measurement instrument can consequently be considered as rigorous, concluding that all three factors (collaborative partnerships, leadership and line manager behaviour, and job design factors) are key employee engagement enabling dimensions that can measure engagement levels in a unionised environment. This strong theoretical underpinning informed the path analysis of the structural model, and provided the support for the inferences about the relationships among the constructs. The fifth contribution is made by empirically investigating and validating the relationship among these constructs, namely collaborative partnerships, leadership and line manager behaviour, job design factors and individual and business outcomes. In the sixth place, the research provides a more comprehensive explanation of the role played by collaborative partnerships,

leadership and line managers' behaviour and job design factors as antecedents to engagement in a unionised environment. The results indicated a positive relationship between job design and engagement, collaborative partnerships and business outcomes, job design and individual and business outcomes. The results of the mediating effects among them confirmed the importance of job design factors and that the relationship between job design and business outcomes is stronger when there is engagement, regardless of the organisational context, were confirmed in the study, as previously proposed by various researchers (Bailey et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 2014; Shantz et al., 2013). This reiterates Kahn and Heaphy's (2014) reference to the importance of jobs that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, autonomous, have good role fit, which yield perceived meaningfulness and are reiterated. The research also contributes positively to research in that it exposed the unique challenges of engagement in a unionised environment that was not studied before. This will assist both human resources practitioners and organisations to design a viable and integrated approach, supported by strong evidence-based research, to explain how engagement operates in a unionised environment.

The final contribution of this research is that the results of this thesis also contribute to the labour relations theory by proposing a conceptual labour relations model of employee engagement in a unionised environment. The model was based on the open system framework and the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 5. The prospects of delivering engaged employees were significantly influenced by the direct work environment and the wider society, which forms a dynamic and complex system that influences the managing of work-related relationships. The importance of the environmental impact on engagement was illustrated by the high factor loading of the item that measured environmental influence on engagement. It is recommended that this finding is expanded on in the next version of the survey, and that additional items are drafted to assess this finding. The concept of power and its use by the parties is a key feature of this model. Different parties in the employment relations arena have held varying views on the quest for employee engagement. Unions seek a safe working environment and fair pay for their members, while management wants to maximise profits. It is therefore not surprising that the employment relationship still rests on unitarism and the institutionalisation of adversarialism, which empowers management and the unions, but leaves the employee disenfranchised.

This new model challenges researchers and practitioners to move beyond this traditional adversarial relationship and to embrace a new model underpinned by workplace collaboration. Furthermore, it proposes the replacement of the traditional industrial relations model with new management strategies, such as engagement, which represents a significant change in the management of employees. While workers join trade unions to benefit from their collective membership, there are very limited returns by way of increased levels of satisfaction. This is due to the unitarist approach to labour relations founded on the organisation's need to retain power and maintain control of production to maximise profits. The model proposes an ideological shift beyond the unitarist doctrine in pursuit of a pluralist outlook, which involves a better understanding and managing of the employment relationship.

The model links the three engagement enabling antecedents (input), namely collaborative partnerships, leadership behaviour and job design factors, and individual and business outcomes (output), mediated by employee engagement (conversion process). Engagement is the central construct in this multi-level model, and according to the model, engagement occurs within the context of the organisation between the various parties to the employment relationship. The model furthermore indicates that at an individual engagement level, engagement is facilitated by a positive relationship between job design and engagement, collaborative partnerships and business outcomes, job design and individual and business outcomes, and that engagement mediates the relationship between job design and business outcomes. This thesis supports previous research that highlighted the importance of jobs that are challenging, clearly defined, varied, autonomous, have good role fit, which yield perceived meaningfulness. The model supports the replacement of the traditional adversarial approach with employee-oriented management strategies, such as forging a collaborative partnership, with the union, voice, trust, integrity, pluralistic human resource management practices, positive leadership behaviour and job design factors have the most potential of engaging employees in a unionised environment.

### **6.3.3 Empirical conclusions**

The research was explorative where, after a systematic review of the literature and development of a theoretical model, confirmed engagement dimensions were combined with newly discovered dimensions in a research model, as indicated in

Figure 1.1 of Chapter 1. The questionnaire that was developed to assess the engagement levels in a unionised environment was confirmed as reliable and can be used in further research. The statistical analyses used in this study were factor analysis, descriptive statistics, correlations, model fit and regression through IBM AMOS (version 25) and SPSS (version 25). This was sufficient to accomplish the study objectives. It is, however, recommended that an independent t-test be conducted in future to analyse the influence of the diverse responses (union members versus non-union member) on the results of the study.

#### **6.4 Limitations and recommendations**

The study was subject to limitations, which require elaboration and should be considered for future research. Certain dimensions of the initial theoretical model produced multi-dimensionality during the exploratory factor analysis, which resulted in some items being deleted and although the final study provided results that were highly acceptable regarding the reliability and internal consistency, it is recommended that future researchers do further analysis of the items. Although the scale proved to be internally consistent and possesses content validity, the quality of the factor structure was not quantitatively assessed. The results indicate that there is a discriminant validity concern for individual outcomes, business outcomes and job design in that the observed variables were statistically not distinct from each other. A probable explanation of the finding was that engagement was part of a wider domain of psychological constructs, although it theoretically differs from them, resulting in a cross-over between constructs. The correlation between business outcomes and individual outcomes was a confirmation of this argument, as they were linked to the same construct. It was also to be expected that individual outcomes influence the levels of business outcomes in the workplace. It is proposed that individual outcomes and business outcomes were combined to form one factor in future research. It is suggested that the inter-relationships between job design factors and individual characteristics should be further explored in future studies.

Although the structural model fit the data well, the mediating effect of engagement could not be tested due to a non-significant relationship between the variables. It is proposed that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability that underlie the relationship between engagement and outcomes are included as

mediators in future studies. This will enable a more direct test of Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement. Although the construct of engagement in a unionised environment was adequately conceptualised, it is a limitation that the analysis did not include a control variable. A probable explanation for the non-significant relationship between the variables is that the results are generalised, and it does not adequately consider the differences between union and non-union responses on the mediating effect of engagement in the model. This recommendation is supported by the findings that, despite the existence of common engagement enabling factors, different groups and individuals are influenced by different factors.

## 6.5 References

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