

# ANTECEDENTS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

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This mini-dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Magister Artium in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University, Potchefstroom  
Campus.

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Potchefstroom

2009

## NOTE

- The reader must note that the publication and reference styles used in this mini-dissertation are in accordance with the instructions for publication (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This is in accordance with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University to use the APA style in all scientific documents since January 1999.
- In this mini-dissertation, the article option was chosen.

## PREFACE

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the following people, without whom this research project would not have been possible:

- I thank the Lord for His guidance and wisdom throughout this study and for blessing me with the ability and determination to complete this research.
- A very special word of thanks to my study leader, Prof. Ian Rothmann, for his inspiration and advice; for not giving up on me, as well as for his assistance with the statistical analysis.
- Thank you to Hester Lombard for her time and effort in consistently forwarding new articles from the North-West University Library.
- My father and mother deserve a special word of thanks because they never stopped believing in me.
- I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the management and employees of the participating organisation for their support and willingness to participate.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	ii
List of Tables	v
Summary	vi
Opsomming	viii
 <b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	9
1.2.1 General objectives	9
1.2.2 Specific objectives	9
1.3 RESEARCH METHOD	9
1.3.1 Phase 1: Literature Review	9
1.3.2 Phase 2: Empirical Study	10
1.3.3 Research Design	10
1.3.4 Participants	10
1.3.5 Measuring Instruments	11
1.3.6 Statistical Analysis	12
1.4. CHAPTER DIVISION	12
1.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY	13
CHAPTER REFERENCES	14
 <b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
RESEARCH ARTICLE	17
CHAPTER REFERENCES	53
 <b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
3.1 CONCLUSIONS	61
3.1.1 Conclusions regarding the specific theoretical Objectives	61
3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH	64

3.3	RECOMMENDATIONS	65
3.3.1	Recommendations for organisations	65
3.3.2	Recommendations for future research	68
	CHAPTER REFERENCES	69

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Description</b> <b>Research Article</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 1	Characteristics of the Participants ( $N=132$ )	37
Table 2	Descriptive Statistics and Product-Moment Correlations	42
Table 3	Regression Analysis with Psychological Conditions as Independent Variable and Work Engagement as Dependent Variable	44
Table 4	Regression Analysis with Antecedents as Independent Variables and Work Engagement as Dependent Variable	45
Table 5	Regression Analysis with Antecedents as Independent Variables and Psychological Meaningfulness and Psychological Availability as Dependent Variables	46

## SUMMARY

**Title:** Antecedents of work engagement in a financial institution.

**Key terms:** Antecedent conditions, psychological availability, meaningfulness and safety and work engagement

The industrialised world of today is characterised by transformation and concepts such as downsising, rightsising and restructuring have become a reality. South Africa is not excluded from this worldwide phenomenon. Economic and political changes as well as the shrinking labour market are also aggravating circumstances, which lead to increased job insecurity. This phenomenon might have a negative impact on employees' work engagement. Due to all these changes, most organisations have to survive in a competitive global economy. Their survival depends on their ability to satisfy customer needs, while achieving quality, flexibility, innovation and organisational responsibility by the engagement and commitment of employees.

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationships between antecedents (work role fit, co-worker relations, supervisor relations, co-worker norms, self-consciousness, resources and growth), psychological conditions (i.e. psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability, and psychological safety) and work engagement in a financial institution.

A cross-sectional survey design was utilised. Employees ( $N = 132$ ) in a financial institution, more specifically the branch-banking unit of FirstRand Group in the Free State Province, were included in the study. The Work Experience Scale and the Work Engagement Scale were administered together with a biographical questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data.

The results showed that psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability were significant predictors of work engagement. Cognitive, emotional and physical resources had the strongest effect on work engagement. Multiple regression analyses showed that psychological meaningfulness partially mediated the relationship between work role fit, co-worker relations, growth and work engagement. A total of 5% of the variance in

psychological meaningfulness and a total of 2% of the variance in psychological availability were predicted by work role fit. Psychological availability partially mediated the relationship between resources, self-consciousness and work engagement.

Recommendations for future research were made.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Antesedente van werksbegeestering in 'n finansiële instansie

**Sleuteltermes:** Antesedente kondisies, psigologiese beskikbaarheid, betekenisvolheid en veiligheid en werksbegeestering

Die geïndustrialiseerde wêreld van vandag word gekenmerk deur transformasie en begrippe soos “downsizing”, “rightsizing” en herstrukturering het 'n realiteit geword. Suid-Afrika is nie uitgesluit van dié wêreldwye verskynsel nie en sowel ekonomiese en politieke veranderinge, as die krimpende arbeidsmark, lei tot verhoogde werksonsekerheid. As gevolg van al die veranderinge is dit noodsaaklik dat die meeste organisasies moet kan oorleef in 'n kompeterende globale ekonomie. Die oorlewing van organisasies hang af van hulle vermoë om die behoeftes van die kliënt te bevredig en om terselfertyd ook kwaliteit, buigsaamheid, innovasie en organisatoriese verantwoordelikhede te bereik deur werknemers se werksbegeestering.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die verwantskappe tussen antesedente (werkrol-passing, medewerker-verhoudings, toesighouer-verhoudings, medewerker-norme, selfbewustheid, hulpbronne en groeigeleenthede), psigologiese toestande (psigologiese betekenisvolheid, psigologiese beskikbaarheid en psigologiese veiligheid), en werksbegeestering binne 'n finansiële instelling te bepaal.

'n Dwarssnit-opnameontwerp is gebruik. Werknemers ( $N = 132$ ) in 'n finansiële instansie van die FirstRand-Groep in die Vrystaat Provinsie het deelgeneem aan die studie. Sowel die Werkservaringvraelys en die Werksbegeesteringvraelys as 'n biografiese vraelys is afgeneem. Beskrywende en inferensiële statistiek is gebruik om die data te analiseer.

Die resultate het aangetoon dat psigologiese betekenisvolheid en psigologiese beskikbaarheid statisties beduidende voorspellers van werksbegeestering is. Kognitiewe, emosionele and fisiese hulpbronne het die sterkste effek op werksbegeestering gehad. Meervoudige regressie-analise het getoon dat psigologiese betekenisvolheid die verwantskap tussen werk-rolpassing, mede-werker-verhoudings, groei en werksbegeestering gedeeltelik medieer. Psigologiese betekenisvolheid het 'n totaal van 5% in die variansie van werkrol-passing voorspel, terwyl

slegs 2% deur psigologiese beskikbaarheid voorspel is. Psigologiese beskikbaarheid het die verwantskap tussen hulpbronne, selfbewustheid en werksbegeestering gedeeltelik gemedieer.

Aanbevelings ten opsigte van toekomstige navorsing is aan die hand gedoen.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation explores the relationship between work engagement, psychological conditions (psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability and psychological safety) and antecedent conditions thereof in a financial institution.

In Chapter 1 the justification for the research is discussed in terms of the problem statement, the aims of the research and the research method. The chapter is concluded with a brief overview of chapters.

### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Economic changes in the world of work have initiated an industrialised world that is characterised by transformation (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). This transformation has set new challenges and expectations for organisations, forcing them to engage in “downsising”, “rightsising” or restructuring, or all three simultaneously, in an attempt to survive in difficult economic conditions. It almost inevitably implies the rationalisation of jobs. These terms are viewed as being synonymous with retrenchment – a concept feared by so many workers. Changes in work cause feelings of insecurity about the nature and future existence of many employees (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999).

Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) are of the opinion that the impact of the changing world of work is perhaps most evident in changes in the psychological contract. In the new psychological contract employees are expected to give more in terms of time, effort, skills and flexibility, whereas they receive less in terms of career opportunities, lifetime employment and job security (Büssing, 1999; Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & Van Vuuren, 1991).

The landscape of financial institutions has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. The traditional transactional purpose of branches has changed forever and has been replaced by long term loyal customer relationships. A new level of sophistication has emerged and branches are being transformed globally into sales and service locations with the goal of

driving growth and delivering superior customer service. It means that the financial sector needs to identify employees who are engaged and motivated in what they are doing. Individuals must be able to engage the cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions of themselves at work (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

Fay and Luhrmann (2004) and Newell (2002) indicate that the workplace has changed over the past decade and most organisations have to survive in a competitive global economy. Their survival depends on the ability to satisfy customer needs, while achieving quality, flexibility, innovation and organisational responsibility by means of the engagement and commitment of employees (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) indicated that by creating positive work environments where people feel valued and appreciated, organisations are more likely to foster the employee's commitment and performance needed for organisational success. It enables people to perform to their maximum potential.

South Africa does not escape this worldwide phenomenon; this country's economic environment also has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. Globalisation has forced local companies to compete with the best in the world, leading to fierce competition, cost savings and reduction of the labour force. The once stable, predictable and controlled environment has become complex, out of control and unpredictable. The industrial era is superseded by an era of information or knowledge and workers shifted from production to information (Moses, 1998). It is therefore important for managers to cultivate work engagement, given that disengagement or alienation is central to the problem of workers' lack of commitment (Bleeker & Roodt, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

According to Makgetla (2001), changes in the South African labour market in the last decade have not only been limited to the economic environment, but have also been affected by political change. It is evident that the political change is still in the introduction phase as Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) is gaining momentum. Economic and political changes, as well as the shrinking labour market, aggravate job insecurity, which might just have an effect on employees' work engagement.

Due to all the above-mentioned changes, large companies had layers of middle management ripped out or re-deployed, which had several negative consequences (Colin Hall, 2005):

- a) Senior managers and employees at all levels found they had many more responsibilities than ever before;
- b) With downsizing and retrenchment, the unwritten loyalty contract that had existed between companies and workers disappeared. Many people no longer saw their job as a life-long opportunity. As a result they decelerated, wondering if they would be next in line to be fired, and
- c) Employees at lower levels experience, in the face of increasing work demands and demands from clients for excellent customer service, an inability to make things happen. Employees at lower levels will have to take more responsibility, be given more decision-making authority, and be given more authority over the deployment of resources and day-to-day operations.

However, this means they need to be engaged in their work as well as experience psychological meaningfulness, safety and psychological availability and physical, emotional or psychological resources to engage at a particular moment (Kahn, 1990). Engaging employees involves the expression of the self through work and other employee-role activities.

According to the First National Bank Limited philosophy the emphasis moves away from valuing a job grade to replacing it with valuing an individual's overall performance. In recent years FNB went through significant restructuring to enable its continued competitiveness in the market. Their philosophy reveals a direct link between the philosophy of how business should be conducted and the nature of restructuring that has taken place. The concept of ownership within a sales and service culture is how the company endeavours to increase its profitability and market share. Part of this philosophy reads as follows: "We create an environment in which an employee can secure his or her own employability, inside or outside the organisation. We seek win-win relationships with all stakeholders. We follow the spirit, not the letter of agreements. We believe that our staff members are our single most important resource. We will not operate in a market unless it has people who share our values. We recruit and empower self-starters, holding them accountable and rewarding them appropriately" (Leadership and Development Program. Ownership, p. 67). Employees need to grow by taking greater responsibility, become more self-managed, willing to contribute

more, show more creativity and develop their full potential. In doing so, they contribute to the organisation, which values and recognises such contributions.

The financial environment sells products to customers in different segments according to their needs. Due to the increasing demands from customers for excellent customer-experience-expectations, it is clear that the organisation is moving into an “experience economy.” It increases the demands on the employees, as they need more personal, emotional and cognitive energy to stay engaged and deliver quality service and quality experience to the customer. There are three important elements to creating an environment from which good customer experience or energy flows (Hall, 2008):

- a) The expectation of the customer just before the experience starts, his/her mood as he/she walks in;
- b) How much time one has to work on this expected experience with the customer, and
- c) One’s own energy levels and ability to read one’s customer’s energy (Hall, 2008).  
The customer’s energy will spiral up when they recall their experience as positive but it will spiral down in disappointment, anger and unhappiness if their experiences are negative. High-energy level employees who are engaged in their work will work together and high-energy customers will return time and again.

FNB needs to create the conditions for high-energy individuals to become engaged in their work. In return, such intervention would create high-energy service, which will create highly energised and satisfied customers. According to Kahn (1990), engaged employees become physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert, and emotionally connected to others when performing their jobs. This can only happen if an organisation focuses on developing “personal energy”, balancing one’s personal life, authentic relationships and belonging to a group, which has a real sense of direction and worthwhile personal purpose.

These objectives might also affect an individual’s psychological experiences of his/her work and might lead to feelings of distress and eustress (see Nelson & Simmons, 2003; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006). Distress is defined as a negative psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of negative psychological states (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). Eustress, on the other hand, is a positive psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). Eustressed workers

are engaged, which means that they are enthusiastically involved in and pleurably occupied with the demands of the work at hand (Kahn, 1990).

Dr Lynette Steele, director of Vibrance-Unleashing dynamic energy ([www.vibrance.co.za](http://www.vibrance.co.za)), who is a medical doctor and a specialist in energy medicine, writes: "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century offers us the exciting opportunity to make a paradigm shift in our understanding of the world and ourselves. Over the previous two to three decades there has been a subtle, yet significant, movement away from the reductionist view of reality, to an understanding of the connectedness and connection between everything, a holistic systemic view. Each organ, each system and each emotion carry a certain frequency that has an influence on the whole because of the proven connection between body, mind, emotions and spirit. In the systemic view this also implicates our actions, decision-making and our relationships. Managing personal energy can create health, wellness and balance within, but more importantly it can extend further to heal relationships through balanced and inspirational leadership."

Spirituality in the workplace refers to an individual's search for self-fulfilment, meaning and purpose in life. It is connected to an individual's personal values and desire to make a difference and to create a meaningful world (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004; Neck & Milliman, 1994). A spiritual workplace is considered to be characterised by the harmonisation of an individual's work role with his/her personal values and has been associated with increased organisational commitment, greater job involvement and work satisfaction and a greater tendency to remain in an organisation (Milliman, Czapleuski & Ferguson, 2003). FNB needs to look holistically at its approach to motivate employees to become involved and engaged in their work environment. The organisation needs to create a balanced and energetic work environment or a premise from which employees' will directly benefit. As a result, they would automatically become more passionate, engaged and experience psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability.

Work engagement can be described as a person's involvement in his or her job. Individuals, who are highly engaged in their jobs, identify personally with the job and are motivated by the work itself. They tend to work harder and more productively than others and are more likely to produce the results their customers and organisations want. Engaged employees report that their jobs make good use of their skills and abilities, are challenging and

stimulating and provide them with a sense of personal accomplishment (Roberts & Davenport, 2002; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006.). Disengaged employees become disconnected from their jobs and hide their true identity, thoughts and feelings during role performances (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement involves the expression of the self through work and other employee-role activities (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

According to literature, antecedent conditions can have an impact on psychological processes, which lead to work engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). For the purpose of this research, antecedent conditions include work role fit, co-worker relations, supervisory relations, resources available, norms at work, self-consciousness, insecurity and personal growth.

The studies of both Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004) explain the relationship between antecedents conditions on the one hand and work engagement on the other in terms of three psychological conditions, which is psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability. These psychological conditions might influence the degree in which one engages in his/her role at work.

Psychological meaningfulness deals with how valuable a work goal is in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards. Individuals, who feel that their work role activity is personally meaningful, are likely to be motivated to engage themselves more fully in their work. Fried and Ferris (1987) as well as Renn and Vandenberg (1995) indicated that meaningfulness is linked to internal work motivation. Kahn (1990, p. 703-704) defined psychological meaningfulness as "a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy." Psychological meaningfulness occurs when individuals feel useful and valuable, and is influenced by job characteristics, work-role fit and rewarding interpersonal interactions with co-workers.

Psychological safety should lead to engagement at work because it reflects one's belief that he/she can apply him/herself without fear of negative consequences. Employees therefore take more risks, which express their true selves. Individuals in these work environments should actively engage their interest in their tasks and try novel ways of doing role-related tasks (Amabile, 1983). Employees in an unsafe environment are likely to disengage from their work and be wary of trying new things. Kahn (1990, p. 708) defines psychological

safety as “feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.” Supporting and trusting supervisory and co-worker relations lead to feelings of psychological safety.

Psychological availability refers to “the sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to engage at a particular moment” (Kahn, 1990, p. 714). Individuals must believe that they have the necessary physical, emotional and cognitive resources in order to immerse themselves in their roles if they are confident that they have the energy to do so (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991).

The financial industry is going through rapid changes due to economic changes, urbanisation and increased demands on higher education. All banking employees need to be FAIS (Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act) compliant. The consequences are that if the staff members, who are supposed to give financial advice, are not compliant according to the National Credit Act or any other bank related acts, these individuals stand the chance to lose their work within the next financial year. This has led to higher competitiveness and rivalry between the different financial institutions. Currently, this industry experiences huge business pressures to expand into new markets, boost margins and to grow market shares. It requires more emphasis on cross selling to customers and being able to provide excellent customer service that will exceed the customer’s expectations. The financial staff experience high job insecurity due to various reasons such as high workload and poor interpersonal relations (Parker, 2005; First Pioneers; training program.). These conditions are due to the fact that their sales targets were increased in order to stay market related within the financial industry. The employee has to invest more in his/her job in terms of time, effort, skill, and flexibility, whereas employees receive less in terms of career opportunity, lifetime employment and job security. Due to all these expectations and demands, management needs to cultivate psychological conditions at work where staff members would feel that their contribution is meaningful, where they feel safe to become autonomous and to be who they are and consequently become more involved in their work. It would lead to work engagement, given that disengaged or alienated employees are central to the problem of employees’ lack of commitment (Bleeker & Roodt, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employees need to be equipped with tools to build and capitalise on their strengths in order to maintain excellent performance (Rothmann, Mostert, & Strydom, 2006).

Sears, a retail giant in the United States (see Parker, 2005; First Pioneers: training program), ascribe the satisfaction of their customers to “happy” employees who fuel overall organisational performance. Their view is that if their employees are happy, smiling and enjoying their work, they will perform well and subsequently the customer would enjoy the experience. If they are miserable, their customers would be equally miserable. The content of the employees’ feelings therefore would ultimately influence the feelings of their customers directly. Many organisations turn their employees into quality terrorists in the manner they treat their employees. Research reinforces the fact that staff members’ attitude correlates highly with customers’ attitude which is why “world-class” organisations put a premium on staff satisfaction. Their work life is used as a driver of external customer satisfaction and business results (see Parker, 2005; First Pioneers: training program). Committed, motivated and productive people have a sound relationship with the organisation that employs them. It has a direct rub-off effect on the way in which they treat their customers. These people are a valuable asset to the organisation. Poor relationships become the breeding ground for negative attitudes and poor commitment for which the customer ultimately bears the brunt. Such employees are costly liabilities to the organisation. Bob Head, MD of the United Kingdom’s revolutionary Egg Bank, made it quite plain when he said: “If you want happy shareholders, if you want happy customers, you have got to have happy people working for you”. (See Parker, 2005; First Pioneers: training program.)

Previous studies regarding work engagement from Storm and Rothmann (2003) focused on the relationship and validity of measuring instruments, the relationship between burnout and work engagement (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007), and the effect of job demands and job resources on work engagement (Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006). Research done by Brown (1996) regarding job involvement has neglected to investigate the role of psychological conditions identified by Kahn (1990) and May et al. (2004).

This study attempts to explore work engagement and psychological conditions by trying to understand the mediating effects of conditions such as psychological meaningfulness, availability and safety on work engagement in a financial institution.

Based on the above discussion, the following research questions could be formulated:

- How are work engagement and its antecedents conceptualised in the literature?

- Do relationships exist between antecedent conditions, psychological processes and work engagement?
- Do psychological conditions mediate the relationships between antecedent conditions and work engagement?

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between antecedents, psychological conditions and the engagement of employees in a financial institution.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To conceptualise work engagement and its antecedents from the literature.
- To investigate the relationships between antecedent conditions, psychological processes and work engagement.
- To determine whether psychological conditions mediate the relationships between antecedent conditions and work engagement.

## **1.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

The research, which is submitted for the purpose of this mini-dissertation, consists of two phases, namely a literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.3.1 Phase 1: Literature review**

In phase 1 a complete review regarding the following will be done:

- Antecedent conditions
- Psychological conditions
- Work engagement

The results will be used to conceptualise the above-mentioned constructs and to determine the relationships between them.

### **1.3.2 Phase 2: Empirical study**

Phase 2 consists of the following steps in the form of descriptive research:

### **1.3.3 Research design**

A cross-sectional survey design is used to collect the data and to attain the research objectives. A cross-sectional design is useful to examine groups of subjects in various states of development simultaneously, while the survey describes a data collection technique through questionnaires (Van Zyl, 2003). This design can be used to assess interrelationships amongst variables within a specific population. This design is ideally suited to the descriptive and predictive functions associated with correlations research (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1997).

### **1.3.4 Participants**

A stratified, random sample is drawn from the employees in a financial institution in the Free State Province, ranging from tellers to first line management and branch managers. The questionnaires were given to 132 employees, who attended courses at the First National Bank training centre. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained. The research focused mainly on employees from the branch-banking unit. All job groups and educational levels ranging from semi-skilled to professional were included. The respondents were mainly represented as follows: Females (66,7%), African (45,5%), White (42,4%), South-Sotho speaking (28%) and Afrikaans speaking (47,7%). The majority of participants had less than 1-year working experience at the institution (23,7%).

### 1.3.5 Measuring instruments

Due to the significance of work engagement to the individual, it is important to have a standardised instrument to measure work engagement. Two measuring instruments are used for the purposes of this study, namely the Work Engagement Scale and the Work Experiences Scale (May et al., 2004).

The *Work Engagement Scale* that had been developed by May et al. (2004) is used to gather information about how employees react to different aspects of their work environment and their work situation. The items used for the scale comprises a 5-point agreement-disagreement Likert format that varies from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Kahn's (1990) three concepts of work engagement, namely cognitive, emotional and physical engagement was included in the items. Structural equation modelling was used to test the factorial model of work engagement. The results showed a one-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 42,27$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2,11$ ; GFI = 0,95; AGFI = 0,90; RMSEA = 0,08) was superior to a three-factor model. The one-factor model included eight items, comprising all three aspects of engagement (cognitive, emotional and physical) as indicated by May et al. (2004).

The *Work Experiences Scale* of May et al. (2004) has not been used in a South African context and for the purpose of this study all the subscales are included. Psychological Meaningfulness is measured by using 6 items (e.g. "The work I do is very important to me"). Psychological Safety is measured by 3 items (e.g. "I am not afraid to be myself at work"). Psychological Availability was measured by 5 items (e.g. "I am confident in my ability to think clearly at work"). The alpha coefficients for the psychological conditions, varied between 0,71 and 0,90 in the study of May et al. (2004). Work role fit was measured by 4 items, rewarding co-worker relations by 10 items, supportive supervisor relations by 10 items and co-worker norms by 3 items. Resources were assessed by averaging 8 items and outside activities were measured by a single item. Three items, which measured job insecurity, were added to the questionnaire.

A biographical questionnaire is used to gather information about the demographic characteristics of the participants. Information that is gathered included the following:

Demographic area, gender, marital status, home language, age, educational qualifications, job category, job title, years in current institution and years in current job description.

### **1.3.6 Statistical analysis**

The data analysis is conducted with the help of the SPSS Program (SPSS Inc., 2003). Cronbach alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) and confirmatory factor analysis are used to assess the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995). Descriptive statistics (e.g. means and standard deviations) are used to analyse the data. Pearson correlation coefficients are used to specify the relationship between the variables.

Pearson correlation coefficients are computed to determine the relationships amongst the variables. A cut-off point of  $p = 0,05$  is set for the statistical significance of the results. Effect sizes (Cohen, 1988; Steyn, 1999) are used to decide on the practical significance of the findings. Effect sizes indicate whether obtained results are important (while statistical significance might often show results that are of little practical relevance). A cut-off point of 0,30 medium effect (Cohen, 1988) is set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

Multiple regression analyses are used to determine the proportion of the total variance of the dependent variable that was explained by the independent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

## **1.4. CHAPTER DIVISION**

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction;

Chapter 2: Research article; and

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

## **1.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the background to and justification of the research were discussed, followed by a description of the problem statement and the formulation of the general and specific objectives. The research design and method were discussed, followed by the chapter division.

Chapter 2 consists of the research article.

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## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

# ANTECEDENTS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between work engagement, psychological conditions and antecedent conditions in a sample of employees ( $N = 132$ ) in a financial institution. A cross-sectional survey design was used. The Work Engagement Scale and the Work Experience Scale were used. The results confirmed that psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability were significant predictors of work engagement. Cognitive, emotional and physical resources had the strongest effect on work engagement. Multiple regression analysis showed that psychological meaningfulness partially mediated the relationship between work role fit, co-worker relations, growth and work engagement. A total of 5% of the variance in psychological meaningfulness and a total of 2% of the variance in psychological availability were predicted by work role fit. Psychological availability partially mediated the relationship between resources, self-consciousness and work engagement.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die verwantskap tussen werksbegeestering, psigologiese kondisies en antesedente daarvan by werknemers ( $N = 132$ ) van 'n finansiële instansie te ondersoek. 'n Dwarssnit-opnameontwerp is gebruik. Die Werksbegeesteringsvraelys en Werkservaringvraelys is afgeneem. Die resultate het aangetoon dat psigologiese betekenisvolheid en psigologiese beskikbaarheid betekenisvolle voorspellers van werksbegeestering is. Hulpbronne soos kognitiewe, emosionele en fisiese hulpbronne het die grootste effek op werksbegeestering gehad. Meervoudige regressie-analise het aangetoon dat psigologiese betekenisvolheid slegs vir 'n gedeeltelike mediasie in die verhouding tussen geskikte werksrol, medewerkerverhoudings, groei en werksbegeestering verantwoordelik is. Slegs 'n totaal van 5% van die variansie in psigologiese betekenisvolheid en 2% van die variansie in psigologiese beskikbaarheid is deur geskikte werksrol voorspel. Psigologiese beskikbaarheid is slegs vir 'n gedeeltelike mediasie in die verhouding tussen hulpbronne, selfbewustheid, en werksbegeestering verantwoordelik.

**Key words:** Antecedent conditions, psychological processes – psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability and work engagement

In recent years, there had been a great deal of interest in employee engagement. It was claimed that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organisational success, and financial performance (Bates, 2004; Baumruk, 2004; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Richman, 2006). It had been reported that employee engagement was on the decline and that there was an increasing disengagement amongst employees today (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). It had also been reported that the majority of workers today, roughly half of all Americans in the workforce, were not fully engaged or they were disengaged leading to what had been referred to as an “engagement gap” that was costing the United States billions of dollars a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Kowalski, 2003).

Economic changes in the world of work have set in motion an industrialised world that is characterised by transformation (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Such transformation has raised new challenges and expectations for organisations, forcing them to engage in “downsizing”, “rightsizing” or restructuring (or all three simultaneously) in an attempt to survive in difficult economic conditions. For many employees these changes in their working life cause feelings of insecurity about the nature and future existence of their jobs, which might have a direct influence on how engaged employees are at work. It is increasingly becoming a challenge to understand why some employees are engaged in their work environment while others are more disengaged.

It seems that as a result of these changes in the workplace and society as a whole, individuals are becoming increasingly frustrated and disenchanted with work and are looking for the opportunity for greater self-expression and fulfilment instead (Bunting, 2004). The only option for the older worker might be to withdraw from the labour market, whereas the remainder might choose to reduce their work effort and consequently diverting their energies elsewhere or reappraise their employment opportunities and job requirements. Since employees entering the workforce are better educated than those leaving (Kompier, 2005), evidence suggests that younger workers are increasingly questioning the nature and meaning of work. During studies done on more than 10 000 young people, Bibby (2001) found that the respondents considered interesting work (86%), a feeling of accomplishment (76%), friendly and helpful colleagues (63%) and adding something to people’s lives (59%) as or more important than pay (66%) and job security (57%). It therefore seems that people are seeking a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their extended working lives (Guevara & Ord, 1996). As a result engagement has become the search for the “Holy Grail” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cracking the code to employee engagement – learning how organisations can win the hearts and minds of their employees – remains a complex yet critically important challenge facing organisations as they strive to reach the highest levels of performance in changing and competitive environments (Mercer, 2008). Substantial research undertaken by management and behavioural sciences supports the theory that when employees are engaged, service quality, customer satisfaction, employee retention, productivity, and financial performance improve (Mercer, 2008). By contrast, when employees are alienated or disengaged, organisations experience declines in all of these areas (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). The traditional “career ladder” is shrinking as organisations become flatter. Without vertical mobility, employees need lateral experiences that promise challenge and growth. To fulfil this need, organisations must expand their definitions of advancement and offer diverse sets of career paths. This means providing opportunities across divisions, business units, geographical areas, and even professions, thus establishing a transparent and fluid internal job marketplace. By encouraging greater mobility, organisations inspire a more engaged workforce and promote greater strategic flexibility (Deloitte Research, 2004).

Lack of engagement is endemic and is causing large and small organisations all over the world to incur excess costs, underperforming on critical tasks and creating widespread customer dissatisfaction. In the Netherlands it is estimated that mental absence, when the employee’s mind is elsewhere other than at work, is valued at thirty thousand dollars per employee per year (Hubert Rampersad, 2006). Research has shown that the average American worker wastes more than two hours a day, excluding lunch. Companies spend as much as 759 billion American dollars on salaries annually, for which they receive no apparent benefit (Malachowski, 2005).

Research that has been done by the Gallup Organisation in many parts of the world shows that in any population, i.e. in a church, school, a community or in corporate companies of any size, over 75% of all the members are “disengaged”. People arrive at school, church or work but leave their energy at home or they bring their negative energy with them and infect everyone else (Hall, 2005). Disengaged people are easily identified. However, to engage their energy is not so easily done.

Currently FNB branch banking has a problem retaining highly energised and engaged employees due to numerous reasons, i.e. economical changes, incorrect performance review

methods being followed, extremely high turnover due to different reasons, low morale, ineffective recruitment processes, inaccurate placement of employees which leads to low productivity and subsequent resentment, anger and low self esteem.

FNB branch banking experiences a situation where employees receive training, only for a huge number of trained employees to leave the organisation in the first three to four months after receiving training at the Knowledge Centre. Some of the reasons being: “the job was not what I hoped it to be or thought it to be”. The consequences are that a huge gap of product knowledge exists at the branches; current employees are overworked with visible irritation, frustration, low morale and anger. People are negative and play the blame-game, do not give their full participation and refuse to be held accountable for their actions. It can be said that low personal energy, low or negative energy in any organisation, is as infectious as a virus. It does not take too long to infect the customers and low negative energy customers are a nightmare for any financial institution (Hall, 2005). At this stage management is in the process of attempting to identify the reasons for the high turnover rate of both long-term employees as well as newly appointed employees in the organisation.

Engaged employees go beyond knowing what the mission is: they believe in the mission and understand what is needed to achieve it. In a study entitled *Driving employee performance and retention through engagement*, the corporate leadership council (Smart Practice, 2006) defines engagement as “the extent to which employees commit (both rationally and emotionally) to something or someone in their organisation, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment.” It seems that commitment might play a vital role in work engagement.

People can be compared to a very sophisticated vehicle, a complex set of systems; sensory, nervous, digestive, and analytical systems; all interconnected and interdependent. We are not capable of getting out of bed in the morning when our batteries are flat, or if our energy is depleted. However, unlike a car we can run each other’s batteries flat. Negative energy shorts, sparks and burns out and positively energised people get tired of always having to jump-start others. Collin Hall (2005), indicates that engaged employees are willing human energy that gets things done far quicker, better and cheaper than power and punishment. However, one cannot buy human energy or engaged employees; one needs to develop and earn it. One part of such a strategy is to develop the business literacy of employees. They

need to know the business of the organisation and how the organisation makes money. Most importantly, they need to understand how their efforts advance the success of the company (Carney, 1999; Piersol, 2007). To be engaged, employees at FNB need to feel that they are valued partners. They need to be congratulated and shown something similar to emotional love, and they need to be fairly compensated with competitive benefits. Selecting employees for the right culture fit goes a long way to maintaining an engaged workforce. Most companies can perhaps benefit by following the example of the Southwest Airlines in America that looks for potential employees who have a servant's heart, will treat people with respect, and will fit into the culture of working hard to be the best and have a fun-loving attitude while not taking themselves too seriously (Hardage, 2006; Piersol, 2007).

To grow into a robust and engaged workforce, all individuals need to be groomed and developed to their full potential. Due to a subjective perception that management at FNB Free State Province is making use of favouritism and promotes only certain individuals, one would find a large number of disengaged employees in the different catchments. Internally, a great number of individuals could be identified to form part of the pipeline, in which a certain individual's potential is being identified and then put through a fast tracking development process. However, the right recruitment process and procedures should still be maintained and followed. This seems not to be the case. The consequences are that employees feel unappreciated and become distracted and de-motivated, which results in disengaged employees.

There are several benefits to people being engaged in their work environment such as to increase profits. Taco Bell has found a direct link between motivated employees, satisfied customers, and financial success (Wiscombe, 2002). Organisations with engaged employees have customers who use their products more, and increased customer use leads to higher levels of customer satisfaction. It is an organisation's employees who influence the behaviour and attitudes of customers, and it is customers who drive an organisation's profitability through the purchase and use of its products. Customers who are more satisfied with an organisation's products are less expensive to serve, use the product more, and hence are more profitable customers. The Linking Organisational Characteristics to Employee Attitudes and Behaviour study (Oakley, 2004) found that effective and good communication is instrumental to promoting engagement. They found that employee satisfaction is a key antecedent to employee engagement. More effective interaction between managers and employees with

regard to supportiveness and goal setting as well as job design, are also important drivers of employee engagement.

Studies have consistently demonstrated that people rate purpose, fulfilment, autonomy, satisfaction, close working relationships and learning as more important than money (Chalofsky, 2003; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). With the decline of neighbourhoods, churches, civic groups and extended families in developed societies; the workplace is now being seen as a primary source of community and a place to feel connected (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

The Corporate Leadership Council's research (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 2-4) has found that engagement - focused organisations are turning their attention to their employees' level of engagement. A Council survey of more than 50,000 employees at 59 member organisations in 27 countries and 10 industries demonstrates the real bottom line impact of employee engagement. It seems that highly committed employees perform up to 20 percentile points better and are 87% less likely to leave the organisation than employees with low levels of commitment. Two important rules were developed due to the Council's analysis. The "10:6:2" rule indicates that every 10% improvement in commitment can increase an employee's effort level by 6%. Every 6% improvement in effort can improve an employee's performance by 2 percentile points. The "10:9" Rule indicates that for every 10% of improvement in commitment there can be a decrease of 9% in an employee's probability of departure. These findings convey the importance of employee engagement on the business. Of concern is that the survey identified significant employee ambivalence about their organisations. The Council found that only 11% of employees demonstrate very strong commitment to their organisations, the "True Believer" (very strong emotional and rational commitment to their jobs, teams, managers, and organisation), while 13% are actively disengaged (the "Disaffected"), which means that they are poor performers who demonstrates minimum effort and exhibits strong noncommitment to their organisations, jobs, managers, and teams. The examination of the survey identified an opportunity: 76% of employees are only moderately committed (the "Agnostics") to their organisations, meaning that they exhibit moderate commitment to their work, teams, managers, and organisations. Organisations should therefore try to sway these "Agnostic" employees towards the "True Believer" level of engagement.

From the problem statement it is evident that the survival of organisations depends on the employee's ability to satisfy customer needs, achieve quality, be flexible, show more innovation and be accountable for organisational responsibilities, through the engagement and commitment of all the employees (Fay & Luhrmann 2004; Newell, 2002). Transformation in local governments is evident from promotions being put on hold, managers having to re-apply for their jobs, and moratoria being placed on appointing new personnel, all which has led to understaffing in most departments. These changes result in new demands on employees, who often have to manage without having the necessary resources (Rothmann, Jackson, & Kruger, 2003).

Welsh (1996) argues that this trend translates to more insecure work environments, with a wide range of effects on the employee's mental and physical health, which may include aspects such as engagement of employees. It has therefore become increasingly important for managers to cultivate work engagement due to the fact that disengaged employees and alienation are the reason for employee's lack of commitment (Bleeker & Roodt, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

According to May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), managers face challenges as they seek to understand and unleash the human spirit in organisations. The human spirit in this context refers to that part of the human being that seeks fulfilment through self-expression at work. If managers want an employee's human spirit to thrive at work, individuals must be able to immerse themselves completely in their work, i.e. being able to engage the cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions of themselves in their work.

In the last 20 years organisations have increasingly demanded that employees adapt to the changing needs of organisations. It is now perhaps appropriate to recognise and consider how organisations should respond to the changing needs of their employees. The aim of the present study is to explore the relationships between work engagement, the psychological conditions and the mediating effect of the conditions such as psychological meaningfulness, availability and safety and the effect these concepts have on work engagement in a financial institution.

## Work engagement

A mounting body of academic literature has provided a number of definitions for engagement. This study will primarily focus on Kahn's engagement model. However, reference will be made to Schaufeli's theory, which has similar components to that of Kahn's model. For the purpose of this study, work engagement is defined as "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; through engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally (similarly described as vigour, dedication and absorption) during role performances" (Kahn, 1990). According to Kahn (May et al., 2004) the self and role exist in a negotiable relation in which a person both drives personal energies into role behaviour (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression) (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Alternatively, personal disengagement can be defined as "the uncoupling of selves from work roles, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively or emotionally during role performance." The employee will act in a robotic kind of manner, just going through the motions of doing their jobs, rather than to internalise the work role and to actively enjoy every moment of their work. Kahn (1990) indicated that they become physically (vigour) uninvolved in tasks, cognitively (dedication) unvigilant and emotionally (absorption) disconnected from others in order to hide their true selves. Kahn (1990) elaborates on work engagement by saying it 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 (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performance."

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004, p. 295) defined engagement as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption". Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) define *vigour* as a positive affective response to one's ongoing interactions with significant elements in one's job and work environment that comprises the interconnected feelings of physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness. Vigour is in other words characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, as well as a willingness to exert effort and to persist even through difficult times. This can be compared with the physical component of Kahn's engagement model. *Dedication* can be compared to the emotional component of Kahn's model and is characterised by deriving a sense of significance from one's work, by feeling enthusiastic, proud of one's job and by feeling inspired and challenged by it. *Absorption* is similar to the cognitive component

of Kahn's model and is characterised by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it. Time passes quickly and one forgets everything else that is around (Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), compare absorption with the concept of "flow", an optimal state of experience where focused attention, a clear mind, accord in body and mind, effortless concentration, complete control, loss of self-consciousness, distortion of time and intrinsic enjoyment are experienced.

It has been stated by several studies that to feel engaged, people need to be able to express themselves and be self-employed in their own work lives. Kahn (1990) explains the term self-employed as driving personal energies in terms of physical, cognitive and emotional tasks. This can be explained as the effort (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975) that is displayed by an engaged employee at work. To express one is an indication of real identity, thoughts and feelings. Self-expression refers to creativity, the emotional expression, non-defensive communication and playfulness (Kahn, 1990). A combination of the above can lead to an individual who is engaged in his/her role as well as job description.

According to Maslach and Leiter (1997), engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy; the direct opposites of burnout as measured by the MBI-GS, namely exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy. Empirical studies reveal that some individuals, regardless of high job demands and a lack of job resources, do not develop burnout, but seem to find pleasure in hard work and dealing with job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These results gave rise to the concept of engagement, theoretically viewed as an antithesis of the burnout construct as set forth by the MBI-GS.

According to research done by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), a clear distinction can be made between work engagement, organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job involvement. Organisational commitment can be defined as an employee's association with the organisation that provides employment and the focus is on the organisation itself. However, with work engagement the focus is on the work itself. Job satisfaction refers to the fulfilment of an employee's needs and contentment, or another form of freeing employees from hassles or dissatisfaction. However, it does not encompass the employee's relationship with the work itself. Job involvement is similar to the involvement aspects of work engagement, but does not include the energy and effectiveness dimensions (Brown, 1996; Van Wyk, Boshoff, & Cilliers, 2003). Job involvement (Brown, 1996) and "flow"

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) are the most related to engagement. Job involvement can be defined as “the degree to which the situation is central to the person and his identity” (Lawler & Hall, 1970, pp. 310-311). Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) defines “flow” as the “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement.” According to Csikszentmihalyi “flow is the state in which there is little distinction between the self and the environment.” People lose their sense of conscious control/awareness of their “selves” as they meld with the activity itself. It seems that managers and supervisors tend to experience more flow than clerical or blue-collar workers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It seems that in a state of flow an individual tends to be more successful with challenging tasks than without the flow state.

Naudé and Rothmann (2006) indicated that engagement can be defined as an energetic state in which the employee is dedicated to perform excellently at work and who is confident in his or her effectiveness. Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimino, and Schaufeli (2000) defined engagement as an energetic state of employee dedication to work performance and confidence of their effectiveness.

Based on the research of Ryan and Deci (2000), it can be expected that social-contextual events, such as feedback, communication and rewards might have an effect on the intrinsic motivation of employees (which seems to be related to the concept of work engagement). Optimal challenges, feedback and freedom from demeaning evaluations contribute to intrinsic motivation. Positive performance feedback enhances work engagement, whereas negative performance feedback diminishes it. Feelings of competence together with a sense of autonomy (internal perceived locus of control) will enhance engagement. It is therefore important that people must experience feelings of competence or efficacy as well as being self-determined for engagement to be evident. Engaged workers possess personal resources, including optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience and an active coping style which help them to have an impact on and control the work environment successfully, which consequently leads to career success (see Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Luthans, 2008).

There are three areas that could be used to increase employees work engagement, namely career development, identification with the organisation and a rewarding work environment. Career development includes providing opportunities for employees to learn new skills and to develop themselves, to advance in the organisation as well as managing their careers. Identification with the organisation occurs when employees know that they will share in the

success if the organisation is financially successful, they consider their departments' goals to be their own goals, they are satisfied with their involvement in decisions that affect their work and they are proud of the quality of work they do. A rewarding work environment is characterised by a positive and fun working environment; employees having decision making authority with regard to their jobs, recognition for contributions, encouragement to look for new and better ways of doing things, and supervisors who create a motivating climate (Roberts & Davenport, 2002).

### **Psychological conditions and work engagement**

According to studies by Kahn (1990), the manner in which people experience themselves and their work environment, influences the moments of personal engagement and disengagement. People who experience meaningfulness have the ability to give to others and to the work itself in their job roles and they are able to receive from others without being taken for granted. Lack of meaningfulness could be connected to people that felt little was asked or expected of them and that they were not given the opportunity to prove themselves or receive any reward from their job roles. Kahn (1990) argued that people asked themselves three fundamental questions in each role situation:

- i) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance;
- ii) How safe is it to do so; and
- iii) How available am I to do so?

These three psychological conditions (psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability) can affect employees' engagement. In this study these three psychological conditions – psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability – will be explored in order to identify what their influence is on the level of engagement of FNB employees.

There is little theory available on how Kahn's theoretical framework contributes to the three psychological conditions and employee engagement at work. This study explores the relations amongst these elements that may help us to better understand why some employees psychologically identify with their work and others do not.

## *Psychological meaningfulness*

Kahn (1990) indicated that psychological meaningfulness can be interpreted as a feeling that individuals have that they are receiving a return on investment by means of their own physical, cognitive, or emotional energy. Dimensions that might help people to feel such meaningfulness are when they have purpose, they feel worthwhile, useful, valuable, fulfilled, experience autonomy, satisfaction, close working relationships and continuous learning. The experience of meaningfulness has been recognised by researchers as an important psychological state or condition at work (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980; May, 2003). According to Frankl (1992), people have a basic need to seek meaning in their work.

Meaningfulness can be defined as: “the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s own ideals or standards” (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; May, 2003; Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). According to Aktouf (1992), a lack of meaning in an individual’s work can lead to alienation or ‘disengagement’ in that individual’s work. Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason (1997) indicated that when an individual experiences work that is meaningful, he/she would experience both personal growth and would be more motivated to do his/her work. Havener (1999) indicated that organisations need to address and understand the deeper needs of employees in order to retain them and to keep them motivated as “talented people demanding meaningful work... Deny it, they leave” (p. 1). Baumeister and Vohs (2002) said that the essence of meaning is “connection”, which is linked to positive outcomes for both the individual as well as the organisation. A lack of meaning in the workplace has been considered responsible for the new phenomenon termed the “Quarter Life Crisis” (see Robbins & Wilner, 2001; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 202) where young people between the ages of 25 and 35 are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their jobs and are consequently leaving their current positions for more successful and fulfilling careers. Meaning represents the inter-relationship between the internal world of the individual and the external context of the workplace. Meaningful work, an important element in self-identity and self-worth, reflects the growing interest in the field of positive psychology, which emphasises the need to focus on actively developing the positive aspects of life and work rather than to only identify and address the negative aspects (see Seligman, 2002a). Seligman (2000b) indicated that meaningful life is concerned with doing something one believes in.

In this study the researcher will explore how work role fit and co-worker relations can influence psychological meaningfulness.

Meaningless work is often associated with apathy and detachment from one's work (cf. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). According to Seeman (1972), individuals are usually estranged from their selves in these kinds of conditions, and restoration of meaning in work is a method of fostering an individual's motivation and attachment to work. Findings from Britt, Adler, and Bartone (2001), indicate that engagement in meaningful work can lead to benefits from the work.

Based upon the above discussion the first set of hypotheses of this study is offered:

Hypothesis 1a: Psychological meaningfulness leads to work engagement.

Hypotheses 1b: Growth leads to psychological meaningfulness.

*Work role fit.* Shamir (1991) stated that work role fit between an individual's self-concept and his/her work role will lead to a sense of meaning due to the ability of the individual to express his/her values and beliefs. Shamir (1991) also stated that people are not just goal oriented, they therefore search work roles in which they can express their authentic selves fully in creative ways. May (2003) performed research in a manufacturing environment and confirms that work role fit does influence an employee's experiencing meaningfulness in that specific manufacturing environment.

*Co-worker relations.* Employees should experience more meaning in the work environment when they have rewarding interpersonal interaction with their colleagues (Locke & Taylor, 1990). Individuals will experience a sense of meaningfulness from their interactions when they are treated with respect, dignity and are valued for their contributions. The level of interaction an individual has with his/her co-workers will also foster a stronger sense of social identity, a sense of belonging and greater meaningfulness. The opposite, e.g. loss of a social identity that can be associated with meaninglessness, is also possible (Florian & Snowden, 1989).

The following hypotheses are formulated regarding the relationship between psychological meaningfulness, work role fit and supportive co-worker relationships:

- Hypothesis 1c: Work-role fit leads to psychological meaningfulness.
- Hypothesis 1d: Good co-worker relations lead to psychological meaningfulness.

### *Psychological safety*

Kahn (1990) defined psychological safety as: “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.” Individuals who are working in a safe environment will understand the boundaries surrounding acceptable behaviours. Psychological safety might lead to engagement, because it reflects one’s belief that a person can employ him/herself without fear of negative consequences. The opposite would occur in a work environment, which is ambiguous, unpredictable and threatening. Little research in literature to date has been done on psychological conditions of safety and its antecedents and outcomes.

Recent research based on psychological safety by Edmondson (1996, 1999) and research on trust in organisational behaviour (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998), will be used to explore the proposed connections. Edmondson (2004, p. 239) indicates that despite the important relationship between psychological safety and trust, trust does not accurately capture a particular dimension of interpersonal experience: a sense of how valued and comfortable an employee feels in his/her work setting. Edmondson (2004, p. 241) defined psychological safety as: “the perceptions that individuals have about the consequences of interpersonal risks in their work environment. It consists of taken-for-granted beliefs about how others will respond when one puts oneself on the line, such as asking a question, seeking feedback, reporting a mistake or proposing a new idea.” She argued that individuals would assess the interpersonal risks associated with a given behaviour against the particular interpersonal climate: “If I do X here, will I be hurt, embarrassed or criticised?” It was indicated that giving a negative answer indicated psychological safety, which would mean that an action, which might be unthinkable in one work group, might be acceptable in another, due to different beliefs about interpersonal consequences.

Edmondson (2004), states that psychological safety cannot be interpreted as a cosy environment in which people are necessarily close friends. It can also not be interpreted as an absence of pressure or problems. It describes a climate in which productive discussions take

place that enable early prevention of problems and the achievement of accomplishments and goals due to the fact that people are less likely to focus on self-protection.

The following hypothesis is formulated regarding the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement:

Hypothesis 2a: Psychological safety leads to work engagement.

*Supervisor relations.* Supervisory and co-worker relations; which are supportive, trustworthy as well as flexible with regard to the behavioural norms; lead to feelings of psychological safety (May et al., 2004). The concept of employees who experience support from their supervisors with regard to their own self-determination has been linked to an improvement in trust (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Edmondson (1999) indicated that a supportive supervisor who is not controlling at work would have subordinates who experience a sense of safety in the work environment. Managerial trustworthiness can be linked to five categories of behaviour: behavioural consistency, behavioural integrity, sharing and delegation of control, accurate and open communication and a demonstration of concern (Whitener et al., 1998). Managerial reluctance to loosen their control can send a message to their employees that they are not to be trusted, which might cause employees to be afraid of taking any chances or to overstep their boundaries. This fear will be strengthened when managers behave unpredictably, inconsistently or hypocritically (Kahn, 1990). He stated that employees need to feel that their authority figures are competent and secure enough within themselves in order to create a safe path for their subordinates to travel. The researcher expects that these trustworthy supervisory behaviours should lead to feelings of psychological safety as well as willingness from workers to invest themselves at work.

*Co-worker relations.* Trustworthy and supportive interpersonal relationships between employees at work should lead to psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). McAllister (1995) stated that the bases for interpersonal trust can be either cognitive or affective. The reliability and dependability of others are related to cognitive-based trust, where the emotional relationship between individuals is based on affective trust. This study will explore how supportive and affective trust-building co-worker relations could lead to heightened psychological safety and engagement.

*Co-worker norms.* Organisations are governed by attitudes, behaviour and the emotional dimensions of work (Hochschild, 1983). As long as individuals stay within the boundaries of appropriate behaviour they will experience psychological safety work (Kahn, 1990). Group norms are defined as: “the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate and regularise group member’s behaviours” (Feldman, 1984, p. 47). It is theorised that norms are enforced when:

- (i) they facilitate the survival of a group;
- (ii) make group member behaviour more predictable;
- (iii) help the group to avoid embarrassing interpersonal problems, and
- (iv) express the central values of the group and clarify what is distinctive about the group’s identity.

The normative processes associated with the unanimous control in self-managing teams, could have negative consequences for group members (Barker, 1993). He states that teams develop joint or unanimous control through:

- (i) a value-based consensus of ethical rational action at work;
- (ii) identification with these shared values and the transfer of authority to the team's value system;
- (iii) behavioural norms that are methodically developed based on these values;
- (iv) older team members' expectations for new members to identify with, and act in accordance with these norms;
- (v) peer pressure to enforce these normative rules; and
- (vi) the formalisation and sharing of these normative rules.

The researcher expects that if employees feel they ought to follow the normative rules in the group, it would lead to feelings of less psychological safety than when they feel they are allowed more flexibility in their behaviour. The following hypotheses are formulated regarding the relationship between psychological safety, supervisory relations, co-worker relations and co-worker norms:

Hypothesis 2b: Supportive supervisory relations affect psychological safety.

Hypothesis 2c: Co-worker relations affect psychological safety.

Hypothesis 2d: Co-worker norms affect psychological safety.

## *Psychological availability*

According to Kahn (1990), psychological availability can be defined as: “the sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to engage at a particular moment.” It indicates whether the individual is ready or confident to engage in his/her work role given the fact that people are also engaged in many other life activities. Factors such as the individual’s resources or work role insecurities might influence an individual’s beliefs, which might have a direct influence on his/her psychological availability.

The following hypothesis is formulated regarding the relationship between psychological availability and work engagement:

Hypothesis 3a: Psychological availability leads to work engagement.

**Resources.** When engaging themselves at work, individuals depend on their specific physical, emotional and cognitive resources to complete work related tasks. Different jobs require various and different kinds of physical exertion and challenges, which can result in injuries (May & Schwoerer, 1994). The less physical challenging jobs like sitting at a desk can also put tremendous stress on an individual’s back (Hollenbeck, Ilgen, & Crampton, 1992). Individuals vary in their stamina, flexibility and strength to successfully meet these physical challenges. Lacking these physical resources can lead to disengagement from one’s work role.

Emotional demands, as it is experienced in the services sector, require a lot of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton, 1991). Morris and Feldman (1996) state that continuous emotional demands could lead to the depletion of emotional resources (i.e. exhaustion), and continue by indicating that the frequency, duration, intensity and variety can decrease these resources.

Cognitive demands and resources vary by job and by person. Certain job roles require more information processing than some individuals could handle. The consequences are that these individuals become overwhelmed by the amounts of information they need to process and as a result their ability to think clearly diminishes. Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991) refer to the above situation as role overload. The expectation is that the presence of resources (physical,

emotional and cognitive) would lead to greater availability and engagement. Those individuals who experience an overload tend to withdraw or disengage from their work in order to replenish their energy levels (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skills variety, autonomy and learning opportunities are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). When employees receive physical, emotional and cognitive resources from their organisation, they feel obliged to repay the organisation with greater levels of engagement (Saks, 2006). According to Kahn (1990) the employee would therefore feel obliged to bring him/herself more deeply into his/her role performances as repayment for the resources they receive from their organisation.

*Work role security.* Self-consciousness has an influence on an individual's feeling of work role security (Kahn, 1990). Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) indicated that employees might experience a heightened self-consciousness about how others judge and perceive them. They would be distracted by the above behaviour because they focus on external rather than internal cues (Goffman, 1959).

Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are formulated regarding the relationship between psychological availability, resources, self-consciousness and growth:

Hypothesis 3b: Resources lead to psychological availability.

Hypothesis 3c: Self-consciousness leads to psychological availability.

Hypothesis 3d: Growth leads to psychological availability.

The three psychological conditions, which are explored, namely meaningfulness, safety and availability, will influence the degree of engagement in one's work function. Individuals would most definitely engage more readily in their work roles if they experience their work as meaningful to them.

Psychological safety should lead to engagement at work because it confirms one's belief that he/she can voice his/her opinion without the fear of negative consequences. It means that an individual would be more willing to take risks without fear of expressing their true selves. Amabile (1983) indicated that individuals should therefore engage their interests and true selves with much more action and creativity into their role related tasks. Unfortunately,

employees in unsafe environments with ambiguous, unpredictable and threatening conditions are likely to disengage from the work and would be more cautious to try new things.

Believing they have the necessary physical, emotional and cognitive resources, individuals would engage themselves more into their work roles. Individuals would also be willing to engage more into their roles if they are confident that they have enough physical, emotional and cognitive resources to do so (May et al., 2004). Whether it is through the satisfaction of basic needs or through the achievement of work goals, the outcomes stay positive and a fulfilling, positive work related state of mind is likely to occur.

Resources also refer to stimulating personal growth, learning and development. It therefore seems that resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands and to get things done, but they are also important in their own right (Hobfoll, 2002).

**Growth.** It is assumed that job resources can play an intrinsic motivational role because it can lead to an employee's growth, learning and development, or an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Growth opportunities refer to having enough variety and opportunities to learn, as well as independence in your work. Advancement means moving forward within your work and it includes remuneration, training and career opportunities (Rothmann, Mostert, & Strydom, 2006). Engaged employees would not experience a need to leave an organisation due to the fact that the organisation provides them with valued job resources that enhance learning, growth, and development (Houkes, Jansen, De Jonge, & Nijhuis, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker).

Finally, this study explores the concept of whether the three psychological conditions explain the effects of their determinants on the individual's engagement at work. Will these psychological conditions indicate how work environments can foster engagement of the human spirit at work? Previous research on both job enrichment and job involvement were not able to examine such psychological conditions (Brown, 1996; Fried & Ferris, 1987).

Based on the discussion above, the fourth set of hypotheses is offered regarding the relationships between the antecedent's work place characteristics/conditions, psychological conditions and work engagement:

- Hypotheses 4a: Psychological meaningfulness leads to the relationship between work role fit and co-worker relations and growth on the one hand and work engagement on the other.
- Hypotheses 4b: Psychological safety leads to the relationship between supervisory relations, co-worker relations as well as co-worker norms, growth and work engagement.
- Hypotheses 4c: Psychological availability leads to the relationship between resources and self-consciousness as well as work engagement.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data to reach the research objectives, where a sample was drawn from a population at a given time (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1997). This design could be used to access interrelationships amongst variables within a population. This design is ideally suited to the descriptive and predictive functions associated with correlation research (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1997).

### **Participants**

The participants included employees from a financial institution in Free State Province. The participants in this survey include employees and managers from the branch-banking sector in the bank environment. A random sample of 132 was taken from the employees. The biographical characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Characteristics of the Participants (N=132)*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	43	32,6
	Female	88	66,7
<b>Race</b>	African	60	45,5
	Asian	2	1,5
	Coloured	14	10,6
	White	56	42,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>99,9</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Divorced	2	1,5
	Married	58	43,9
	Single	72	54,5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>99,9</b>
<b>Language</b>	Afrikaans	63	47,7
	English	8	6,1
	Isi Xhosa	8	6,1
	S – Sotho	37	28,0
	Setswana	3	2,3
	Setswana & Sepedi	1	,8
	Tswana	6	4,5
	Zulu	3	2,3
<b>Area / Catchment</b>	Provincial	4	3,1
	Motheo / Xhariep	62	46,9
	Kopano	29	22,0
	Maluti	31	23,6
	Lesotho	5	3,8
<b>Qualification</b>	Grade 10 - 12	90	68,2
	Diploma	13	9,5
	Degree	11	8,8
	Post-graduate Degree	0	0
	Certificate in Banking	6	4,6
	Certificate	12	9,6
<b>Years experience</b>	Less than 1 year or 1 year	31	23,7
	More than 1 year	9	7,1
	2 - 5 years	28	21,4
	6 - 10 years	27	20,6
	11 - 20 years	20	13,4
	Longer than 20 years	9	7,1

As can be seen in Table 1, the study population was relatively balanced in terms of gender, and consisted mostly of African participants (45,5%) and White participants (42,4%). There was a relative balance between the single and married population in this study group. Most of

the participants fell in the Afrikaans speaking culture (47,7%) and the South-Sotho speaking culture (28,0 %); had a Grade 10 – 12 qualification (68,2%) and came from the Motheo/Xhariep area in the Free State (46,9 %). The majority of participants has less than 1 year's working experience (23,7 %) or have been working at the organisation for 2 – 5 years (21,4 %) and 6 - 10 years (20,6 %) respectively.

## Measuring instruments

The measuring instruments for this research are all described below. All the scales are based on a 5-point agreement or disagreement Likert format with 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*), unless otherwise noted. Two measuring instruments were used for the purposes of this study, namely the Work Engagement Scale and the Work Experience Scale (May et al., 2004).

Work engagement was measured by 13 items ( $\alpha = 0,77$ ). The items reflect each of the three components of Kahn's (1990) psychological engagement: cognitive (i.e. "Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else"), emotional (i.e. "I really put my heart into my job") and physical (i.e. "I exert a lot of energy performing my job"). Kahn (1990) originally theorised that there may be three distinct dimensions of engagement. A principal component factor analysis of 24 items were initially developed but for this study, however, an overall scale with fewer items, which demonstrated good reliability with some balance, were used across the three forms of engagement.

The psychological conditions, namely Psychological Meaningfulness, Psychological Safety and Psychological Availability were measured as follows: Six items ( $\alpha = 0,90$ ) drawn from Spreitzer (1997) and May et al. (2004) measured Psychological Meaningfulness (i.e. the degree of meaning that individuals experienced in their work-related activities). An example of an item is "My job activities are personally meaningful to me." Psychological safety was measured by averaging 3 items ( $\alpha = 0,71$ ) based on Kahn's (1990) work, i.e. "I'm afraid to express my opinions at work." These items assessed whether the individual felt comfortable to be himself/herself and to express their opinions at work or whether there was a threatening environment at work. Psychological Availability (i.e. the confidence an individual had regarding his/her ability to be cognitively, physically and emotionally available for work)

was measured by an average of 5 items ( $\alpha = 0,85$ ) based on Kahn's (1990) discussion, i.e. "I am confident in my ability to think clearly at work."

The antecedent conditions included work role fit, supervisory relations, co-worker relations, co-work norms, resources, self-consciousness, job insecurity and growth and were measured as follows: Work role fit was measured by an average of 4 items ( $\alpha = 0,92$ ), from May et al. (2004) which directly measured an individual's perceived fit with his/her job and self-concept (Kristof, 1996), i.e. "I like the identity my job gives me." Supportive supervisory relations were measured by an average of 10 items ( $\alpha = 0,95$ ), i.e. "My supervisor encourages me to develop new skills." The first six items were drawn from Oldham and Cummings (1996) and the last four items from Butler (1991). Co-worker relations were measured by averaging 10 items ( $\alpha = 0,93$ ) from May (2004). These items measured issues like whether co-workers valued an individual's input, valued who they are as individuals and whether they trust one another, i.e. "My co-workers value my input." Co-worker Norm Adherence (i.e. the degree to which an individual follows co-worker norms and does what is expected of him/her) was measured by an average of 3 items ( $\alpha = 0,61$ ) developed for this research, i.e. "I go along with the norms in my group of co-workers." Resources (i.e. the degree to which an individual possesses the resources to become available for engagement) was assessed by an average of 8 items ( $\alpha = 0,91$ ) that were developed for this research, i.e. "I can't think straight at the end of my workday." Self-consciousness was measured by an average of 3 items ( $\alpha = 0,83$ ), i.e. "I am afraid my failings will be noticed by others." These items measured public self-consciousness as opposed to private self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheir, & Buss, 1975). Growth opportunities refer to having enough variety, opportunities to learn and independence at work. Advancement means moving forward within your work and includes remuneration, training and career opportunities (Rothmann, Mostert, & Strydom, 2006). Growth was measured by an average of 3 items ( $\alpha = 0,86$ ), i.e. "Does your organisation give you opportunities to follow training courses?"

### **Statistical analysis**

The statistical analyses were carried out with the SPSS program (SPSS, 2005). Exploratory factor analysis was performed to investigate the factor structure of the measuring instruments. Firstly, a simple principal components analysis was conducted. The eigenvalues and scree plot were studied to determine the number of factors. Secondly, a principal factor analysis

with a direct oblimin rotation was used to extract the factors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). A principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was used where the factors obtained, were not related (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed to assess the validity of the measuring instruments. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationship between the variables. In order to analyse the data, descriptive statistics (e.g. means and standard deviations) were used to analyse the data. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to assess the relationships between the variables. With regard to significance, the value was set at a 95% confidence interval level ( $p < 0,05$ ). Effect sizes were used in order to determine the practical significance of relationships between variables. The level of statistical significance is set at  $p < 0,01$ . A cut-off point of 0,30, which represents a medium effect (Cohen, 1988), is set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

Multiple regression analyses were used to investigate whether job/personal characteristics (co-worker relations) predict the psychological conditions (e.g. psychological safety), and whether these conditions predict work engagement (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive statistics and correlations**

Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficient and correlation of the measuring instruments used are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Product-Moment Correlations*

Variable	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Psychological Meaningfulness	21,55	3,57	0,86	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Psychological Availability	20,97	2,86	0,76	0,39***+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Psychological Safety	4,31	1,76	0,03	-0,20*	-0,28**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Work Role Fit	14,79	4,25	0,92	0,68***++	0,40***+	-0,23**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Co-Worker Relations	32,25	8,34	0,95	0,30***+	0,34***+	-0,43**	0,26**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Supervisor Relations	36,27	9,23	0,94	0,28**	0,29**	-0,34**	0,34**	0,56***++	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Job Resources	22,43	4,75	0,60	-0,05	0,06	0,18*	-0,02	0,00	-0,04	-	-	-	-	-
8. Co-Worker Norms	6,72	1,84	0,63	0,23*	0,22*	-0,14	0,13	0,41***+	0,43***+	0,00	-	-	-	-
9. Self Consciousness	4,76	2,15	0,54	-0,10	-0,20*	0,06	-0,14	-0,08	0,09	0,20*	0,11	-	-	-
10. Job Insecurity	9,04	3,94	0,86	0,08	0,08	0,07+	0,04	-0,10	0,08	0,18*	0,18*	0,07	-	-
11. Growth Opportunities	28,51	7,15	0,90	0,49**	0,35***+	-0,43***+	0,57***++	0,49***+	0,60***++	0,20	0,31***+	-0,00	0,04	-
12. Work Engagement	28,57	3,28	0,65	0,28**	0,20*	-0,03	0,19*	0,21*	0,21*	0,29**	0,15	0,19*	0,11	0,23*

\*  $p < 0,05$  – statistically significant\*\*  $p < 0,01$  – statistically significant+  $r > 0,30$  – correlation is practically significant (medium effect)++  $r > 0,50$  – correlation is practically significant (large effect)

Table 2 shows the Cronbach alpha coefficients obtained from all the measuring scales, varying from 0,30 to 0,95. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of Psychological Safety ( $\alpha = 0,26$ ) is lower than the guideline of 0,70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), and is therefore excluded from statistical analysis.

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between Psychological Meaningfulness and Psychological Availability ( $r = 0,39, p < 0,01$ ; medium effect). There is also a statistically and practically significant, positive correlation between Psychological Meaningfulness and Work Role Fit ( $r = 0,68, p < 0,01$ ; large effect). Psychological Meaningfulness also shows a statistically significant positive correlation with Co-Worker Relations ( $r = 0,30, p < 0,01$ ; medium effect) and Supervisory Relations ( $r = 0,28, p < 0,01$ ). Psychological Meaningfulness shows a significant positive correlation with Co-Worker Norms ( $r = 0,23, p < 0,05$ ) and Growth ( $r = 0,49, p < 0,01$ ). There is a statistically significant, positive correlation between Psychological Meaningfulness and Growth Opportunities ( $r = 0,49, p < 0,01$ ) and Work Engagement ( $r = 0,28, p < 0,01$ ).

These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1a, b, c and d.

It was not possible to test Hypotheses 2 because the Psychological Safety Scale did not show an acceptable alpha coefficient. Therefore no analyses regarding this scale were possible.

Psychological Availability shows a statistically significant correlation with work engagement ( $r = 0,28, p < 0,01$ ). There is no positive correlation between psychological availability and job resources and a negative significant correlation exists between Psychological Availability and Self-Consciousness ( $r = -0,20, p < 0,01$ ). Work Role Fit shows a significant positive correlation with Psychological Availability ( $r = 0,40, p < 0,01$ ) and there is a statistically significant positive correlation between Psychological Availability and Co-Worker Relationships ( $r = 0,34, p < 0,01$ ). Job Resources indicate a statistically positive correlation with work engagement ( $r = 0,29, p < 0,01$ ), but not with Psychological Availability. Psychological Availability has a statistically positive correlation with Growth ( $r = 0,35, p < 0,01$ ; medium effect). Supervisory Relations shows a statistically significant correlation with Psychological Availability ( $r = 0,29, p < 0,01$ ) and Co-Worker Norms ( $r = 0,22, p < 0,05$ ) only shows a statistically significant correlation with Psychological Availability. It is therefore possible to support hypotheses 3a and 3d.

## Multiple regression analyses

Multiple regression analyses were carried out with Psychological Meaningfulness and Psychological Availability (which were measured by the Work Experience Questionnaire) as independent variables and Work Engagement (which were measured by the Work Engagement Questionnaire) as dependent variable (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Regression Analysis with Psychological Conditions as Independent Variable and Work Engagement as Dependent Variable*

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Beta</b>						
1	Constant	23,58	2,16	-	10,91	0,00	5,19	0,21	0,04	0,04
	Psychological Availability	0,23	0,10	0,21	2,28	0,02*				
2	(Constant)	21,41	2,30	-	9,30	0,00	5,57	0,30	0,09	0,05
	Psychological Availability	0,12	0,11	0,11	1,14	0,25				
	Psychological Meaningfulness	0,20	0,08	0,23	2,39	0,01*				

\*  $p < 0,05$  – statistically significant

The results in Table 3 indicate that approximately 3% of the variance in Work Engagement (as determined by the Work Engagement Scale) is predicted by Psychological Availability. A statistically significant increase in the  $R^2$  was obtained when Psychological Meaningfulness was entered into the regression analysis (change in  $R^2 = 7\%$ ). Table 3 demonstrates that Psychological Meaningfulness is the best predictor of Work Engagement.

A series of multiple regression analyses were performed to test whether work engagement could be successfully predicted by organisational conditions and to test whether psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability mediate the relationship between organisational conditions and work engagement. Three steps are recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), in order to test for mediation. The beta coefficients of different regression equations must be compared with each other, according to the above authors. Firstly, the mediator should be predicted by the independent variable. Secondly, the mediator and the independent variable should be able to predict the dependent variable, and lastly, the dependent variable should be regressed on the independent variable, controlling for the

mediator. Should all the steps prove significance, perfect mediation will hold when, controlling for the mediator, the independent variable does not predict the dependent variable (Olivier & Rothman, 2007).

Table 4

*Regression Analysis with Antecedents as Independent Variables and Work Engagement as Dependent Variable*

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Beta</b>						
	Work Engagement						1,71	0,36	0,13	0,13
1	(Constant)	20,56	2,43	-	8,44	0,00				
	Work Role Fit	0,06	0,09	0,10	0,70	0,48				
	Supervisor Relations	0,00	0,05	0,01	0,07	0,93				
	Co-worker relationship	0,04	0,05	0,11	0,81	0,42				
	Co-Worker Norm	0,10	0,20	0,06	0,52	0,60				
	Resources	0,20	0,07	0,30	2,76	0,00*				
	Job Insecurity	-0,03	0,08	-0,04	-0,35	0,72				
	Growth	0,00	0,07	0,02	0,12	0,90				
	Work Engagement						1,73	0,41	0,17	0,04
2	(Constant)	17,38	3,38	---	5,13	0,00				
	Work Role Fit	-0,07	0,12	-0,10	-0,59	0,55				
	Supervisor Relations	0,01	0,05	0,04	0,28	0,77				
	Co-worker Relations	0,02	0,05	0,06	0,46	0,64				
	Co-Worker Norm	0,09	0,20	0,05	0,44	0,65				
	Resources	0,21	0,07	0,31	2,90	0,00*				
	Job Insecurity	-0,04	0,09	-0,06	-0,54	0,58				
	Growth	0,00	0,07	0,01	0,10	0,92				
	Availability	0,03	0,12	0,02	0,23	0,81				
	Meaningfulness	0,22	0,12	0,27	1,79	0,07				

\*  $p < 0,05$  – statistically significant

The results of a multiple regression analysis with Work Engagement (as measured by the Work Engagement Scale) as dependent variable and Psychological Availability and Meaningfulness, Work Role Fit, Supervisory Relations, Co-worker Relations, Co-worker Norms, Resources, Insecurity and Growth (as measured by the Work Experience Questionnaire) as independent variables are reported in Table 4.

The results in Table 4 show that 13% of the variance in Work Engagement (as measured by the Work Engagement Scale) is predicted by Work Role Fit, Supervisory Relations, Co-

worker Relations, Co-worker Norms, Resources, Job Insecurity and Growth. The results in Table 4 indicate that Resources ( $\beta = 0,30$ ) statistically significantly predicted Work Engagement in Step 1. When Psychological Availability and Meaningfulness were entered into the regression equation in Step 2, only 17% of the variance in Work Engagement (as measured by the Work Engagement Scale) could be significantly predicted. The regression coefficients of Psychological Availability and Meaningfulness were too insignificant and it was only Resources ( $\beta = 0,31$ ) that statistically significantly predicted Work Engagement. Hypothesis 3b is accepted, whereas hypothesis 3c is not accepted.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis with Antecedents as Independent Variables and Psychological Meaningfulness and Psychological Availability as Dependent Variables*

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Beta</b>						
Psychological Meaningfulness					0,00	13,66	0,73	0,54	0,54
1 (Constant)									
Work- role fit	0,58	0,08	0,69	7,01	0,00*				
Supervisor relations	-0,03	0,04	-0,08	-0,81	0,41				
Co-worker relations	0,08	0,04	0,19	1,87	0,06				
Co-work norm	0,12	0,17	0,06	0,68	0,49				
Resources	-0,07	0,06	-0,09	-1,24	0,21				
Job insecurity	0,10	0,07	0,10	1,32	0,18				
Growth	-0,01	0,06	-,02	-0,23	0,81				
Psychological Availability					0,00	4,21	0,50	0,25	0,25
2 (Constant)									
Work role fit	0,25	0,08	0,37	3,07	0,00*				
Supervisor relations	-0,00	0,04	-0,01	-0,08	0,93				
Co-worker relations	0,06	0,04	0,19	1,51	0,13				
Co-work norm	0,15	0,17	0,10	0,89	0,37				
Resources	0,01	0,06	0,02	0,25	0,80				
Job insecurity	-1,12	0,07	-0,17	-1,71	0,09				
Growth	-0,01	0,06	-0,03	-0,26	0,78				

\*  $p < 0,05$  – statistically significant

The results of a multiple regression analysis with Psychological Meaningfulness and Psychological Availability (as measured by the Work Experience Questionnaire) as dependent variables and Work Role Fit, Supervisor Relations, Co-worker Relations, Co-

worker Norms, Resources, Job Insecurity and Growth (as measured by the Work Experience Questionnaire) as independent variables are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 demonstrates that 5% of the variance in Psychological Meaningfulness is explained by Work Role Fit, Supervisor Relations, Co-worker Relations, Co-worker Norms, Resources, Job Insecurity and Growth. Only the regression coefficient of Work Role Fit ( $\beta = 0,69$ ) was statistically significant in Step 1, not any of the other antecedent conditions' regression coefficients were statistically significant enough to predict Psychological Meaningfulness. Only partial mediation is possible therefore hypothesis 4a is rejected.

According to Step 2, Work Role Fit, Supervisor Relations, Co-worker Relations, Co-worker Norms, Resources, Job Insecurity and Growth explain only 2% of the variance in Psychological Availability. The regression coefficient of Work Role Fit ( $\beta = 0,37$ ) was statistically significant enough to predict Psychological Availability. It seems that only partial mediation is possible and therefore hypothesis 4c is rejected.

Due to the fact that there was no statistically significant information with regard to Psychological Safety it is therefore safe to state that Psychological Safety for the purposes of this study does not lead to the relationship between supervisory relationships and self-consciousness on the one hand and Work Engagement on the other. Hypothesis 4b is therefore rejected.

According to Table 5 mediation does not play a significant role in this study. In this study the mediator (Psychological Conditions) does not have an effect on the working conditions, such as Work Role Fit, Resources, Co-worker Relations and Growth. It seems that Work Conditions (Antecedents) directly leads to Work Engagement, without following a mediator route. If an individual therefore is role fit for the position and have enough physical, emotional and cognitive resources to make him/her more available, then that individual will experience work engagement.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study was to identify the relationships between Antecedent Conditions (Work Role Fit, Co-Worker Relations, Supervisor Relations, Co-Worker Norms, Self-

Consciousness, Job Resources, Job Insecurity and Growth), Psychological Conditions (i.e. Psychological Meaningfulness, Psychological Availability, and Psychological Safety) and Work Engagement in a financial institution. A series of multiple regression analyses were performed to test whether work engagement could be successfully predicted by organisational conditions and to test whether psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability mediate the relationship between organisational conditions and work engagement.

The results support the first hypothesis stated in this study, which indicates that psychological meaningfulness leads to work engagement and that work role fit, good co-worker relations and growth leads to psychological meaningfulness. In this study work role fit statistically significantly predicted psychological meaningfulness, which confirms the results of previous studies (May et al., 2004; Strümpfer, 1990). When people see their work as an opportunity to live themselves out, they will experience a sense of meaning (Brief & Nord, 1990; Shamir, 1991). According to this study it can be predicted that if people have the emotional, cognitive and physical resources available and they are positioned in the right job at the right time within the right organisation then they will be able to find meaning in their work environment. Therefore, due to meaningfulness employees will experience more engagement in their work environment. There was no mediating effect between work role fit and work engagement. Work role fit also positively predicted psychological availability.

According to Spreitzer, Kizilos, and Nason (1997), one must focus on providing meaningful work to employees to facilitate both their motivation and personal growth, which contributes to empowerment and employee involvement. Engagement in meaningful work can lead to perceived benefits from the work (Britt, Adler, & Barton, 2001), and has been linked to such variables as employee turnover, customer satisfaction-loyalty, safety, productivity, and profitability (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). For the purposes of this study it seems that there are practical as well as humanistic reasons why managers and organizations should be concerned with employee's engagement levels regarding their work.

Based on the findings of this research, it is suggested that management at FNB should consider ways to enhance meaningfulness by means of the promotion of human values. Maslach and Leiter (1997) indicated that leaders should model, mentor and coach employees about the values of an organisation as well as the implementation thereof. However, it would be much more effective and efficient if these human values could be determined during

recruitment already. When the correct procedures are followed during recruitment, management would be able to determine whether an individual is a “fit” with regard to the organisational culture, whether the individual would be a fit for the geographical area, fit for the specific job as well as the organisational values. It is recommended that the FNB should focus more on the elements of acquiring new employees or existing employees, deploying and developing them and connecting them with important others both inside and outside the organisation. By doing this the organisation will generate capabilities, autonomy, commitment, and alignment within key workforce segments, which in turn will improve business performance.

According to the first hypothesis good co-worker relations will lead to psychological meaningfulness. It therefore seems that employees who can count on good co-worker relations or support from their co-employees are more likely to feel that their work is meaningful and purposeful and that they are bursting with energy, which will assist them to work for long periods at a time.

Unfortunately it was not possible to support the second hypothesis in this study. Psychological safety was not a statistical significant predictor of work engagement. It was not possible to identify whether supportive supervisory relations, co-worker relations, and co-worker norms can affect psychological safety. This is inconsistent with the findings of May et al. (2004), where safety showed a strong relation with work engagement and partially mediated co-worker norms and work engagement.

Key people should be effectively developed and well deployed. The only way to do this is by developing effective workplace relationships. Workplace toxicity may trump other factors when it comes to employee morale and performance. In the first place the financial institution should look into the mirror. The number one reason people leave comes down to their relationship with their boss. FNB might want to kick off their talent strategies by first starting to examine the deployment and development of line management who has the task to lead and develop effective relationships with their employees. Provide the employees with the tools they need to get their job done in the most effective way possible.

The results in this study partially support the third hypothesis, which states that psychological availability leads to work engagement, resources lead to psychological availability, self-

consciousness leads to psychological availability, and growth leads to psychological availability. The results in this study were not able to confirm that psychological availability successfully predicts work engagement. Resources statistically significantly predicted the work engagement of employees working in a financial institution. The reason for this might be that having the physical, emotional, and cognitive resources to perform tasks at work, contributes to people's confidence and ability to be physically, emotionally, and cognitively present to perform your duties at work. FNB should move into the direction of growing their people by becoming a talent savvy organisation that support their key people on the issues they care about most: doing work that engages them, learning how to do it even better, encountering fresh challenges, and interacting with people in positive ways. By growing your people a company will increase its work engagement. Talent is becoming a scarce resource. John Boudreau at the University of Southern California and his research partner Pete Ramstad indicated that it is critical that human resources should start providing analytical insights and support to management to improve their talent decisions, not just implementing them (Deloitte, 2004, p. 2)

Due to several restructuring processes it is important that management in this financial institution should be careful not to overburden employees too much with cognitive, emotional and physical labour. The availability to manage one's work might prove to be difficult if an employee experiences excessive amounts of stress, emotional exhaustion or becomes injured while performing his/her duties at work. It may be suggested that employees should focus on themselves so that they would continuously develop new resources (e.g. new skills) and in this way increase their perception of availability. For future research it may be suggested that the financial institution should focus more on the development of commitment, such as commitment to the organisation, commitment to the team; and work attitudes, such as satisfaction and interpersonal trust and behaviours, as well as turnover and organisational citizenship. This might lead to a positive working environment where people feel less disengaged or alienated. As a result they might become more involved in their work roles.

Through effective communication with your people and by developing a relationship and knowing your people better will help supervisors and any line management to identify those with a low self-esteem or self-consciousness. Management can play an active role in coaching or mentoring such a person to become more autonomous in his/her working environment. This could be done through formal training. People who believe in themselves

are more able to handle any obstacle that comes their way with self-confidence, have better decision-making abilities as well as effective problem solving abilities. Employees, who experience autonomy, would automatically feel more engaged in their work than those with low autonomy. They would have more satisfied relations with co-workers and supervisors, would be more creative and display higher moral values, experience more security at work as well as in their personal lives, have social status, would be more accountable for their actions and experience overall satisfaction in a variety of work activities. Low levels of self-consciousness would assist employees to believe in their own abilities, therefore believing that they would be successful with any kind of task that is delegated to them. If management focuses more on enhancing personal empowerment within their employees via internal motivation, it might have a direct influence on reducing the current levels of work disengagement and consequent high turnover rate of employees in the organisation.

The findings in this study did not support the fourth hypothesis. The results indicated that mediation does not play a role in the relationship between work conditions and work engagement. Psychological meaningfulness and availability only had a partial mediating effect on work engagement, with psychological meaningfulness as the strongest predictor of work engagement. This study therefore only found partial support for the findings of May et al. (2004). It seems that Work Conditions directly leads to Work Engagement, without following a mediator route. If an individual therefore is role fit for the position and have enough physical, emotional and cognitive resources to make him/her more available, then that individual will experience work engagement.

A few limitations were present in this study. Afrikaans and South-Sotho were, two of the languages used most frequently in this study, while the questionnaires themselves were written in English. This could affect the way the participants understood the questions in the questionnaires and the way they responded to these questions. Results were obtained from a relatively small sample of employees in a financial institution in the Free State Province. More investigations into the mediating effects of psychological conditions such as meaningfulness, safety and availability on work engagement should be conducted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It seems that all three psychological conditions are important in order to successfully determine an individual's engagement at work. The present study in this financial institution has some limitations that should be explored in more depth. Further studies need to be conducted in various financial institutions in order to determine the mediating role that psychological conditions have to play to become engaged. It is recommended that further research into the role that working conditions (antecedent conditions) have to play in becoming more work engaged.

The scale, which measured psychological safety, was not sufficiently reliable to be used in this research. It would have been very interesting to see what the consequences of psychological safety are on the employees working in this specific financial institution. Therefore more research is needed regarding the measurement of psychological safety. To increase psychological safety in the work environment it is recommended that management should address the level of managerial or supervisory support. Subordinates will experience a higher sense of safety in the work environment if management are less controlling. Managerial reluctance to loosen their control can send a message to their employees that they are not to be trusted, which might cause employees to be afraid of taking any chances or to overstep their boundaries. If the behaviour of managers or supervisors is to be trustworthier it should lead to feelings of psychological safety as well as willingness from workers to invest themselves at work.

It is recommended that this financial institution should focus on developing more effective relationships with their employees, more specifically improving supervisory relationships and support. The current level of communication that exists between senior management and junior level employees is not effective. This might lead to feelings of incompetence and inadequacy that can have a direct impact on the levels of work engagement of employees. Management should be more sensitive to the emotional needs of employees, which will enhance personal development as well as healthy co-worker relationships.

To increase the work engagement levels among employees in the financial institution it is recommended that human resources managers in this institution should investigate the current work environment. Working conditions are important interventions, such as a fun work

environment, along with ensuring that key people are effectively developed and well deployed. FNB should focus their energy on acquiring and retaining critical talent – especially when talent is scarce. It is suggested that the financial institution should rather focus on internal recruitment and focus on growing and developing someone into a position or to deal with the internal politics by redeploying people from within. By focusing too much on external talent this can erode the commitment of internal candidates who perceive a bias against them, which will have a direct impact on their psychological safety. It is further recommended that individuals need more flexibility to try on new roles that will increase their self-esteem and autonomy, which might increase their levels of psychological availability.

It is recommended that future research should focus on the human complexity in the work place in order to study the mediator role that psychological conditions have to play in becoming more work engaged. It is recommended that researchers and leaders focus more on positive psychology to help employees and employers to attain healthy work environments where people experience more meaning, safety and availability that cause them to be fully engaged. This means that more research needs to be completed in different areas within the financial institution to have a broader understanding and analysis because this study sample was rather small. This will create positive results for the financial industry as well.

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## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with the conclusions drawn, based on the results of the empirical study, limitations are pointed out and recommendations for future research are made.

#### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn with regard to the specific objectives set out at the beginning of the study.

##### 3.1.1 Conclusions regarding the specific theoretical objectives

With reference to chapter 1, the relationship between antecedent conditions, psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability together with work engagement were conceptualised from literature. Antecedent conditions consisted of work role fit, supervisor relations, co-worker relations, co-worker norms, resources available, self-consciousness (job insecurity) and growth.

For the purpose of this research, Kahn's model for work engagement was used. According to Kahn's theory, work engagement consists of components of physical, emotional and cognitive engagement (Kahn, 1990). Schaufeli's theory of work engagement is similar to that of Kahn's theory – the physical component is the same as vigour, the emotional component is similar to dedication and the cognitive component is similar to absorption. However, the researcher focused primarily on Kahn's theory.

The first objective of this study was to conceptualise work engagement and its antecedents in a financial institution. For the purpose of this study, work engagement is defined as "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; through engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally (similarly described as vigour, dedication and absorption) during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, & Bakker, 2002).

Vigour can be seen as the physical dimension of work engagement that includes high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, as well as a willingness to exert effort and to persist even through difficult times. Dedication refers to the emotional side of work engagement where an employee has significance and pride in his or her work and experience high levels of enthusiasm and challenge in work-related tasks. Absorption, the third dimension of work engagement, refers to the cognitive dimension of work engagement and can be characterised by full concentration and being happily engrossed in one's work. It has been stated by several studies that to feel engaged, people need to be able to express themselves and be self-employed in their own work lives. Kahn (1990, p. 700) explains the term self-employed as driving personal energies in terms of physical, cognitive and emotional tasks. There are several studies in the literature that question the role that absorption has to play in the definition of work-engagement, which support the view that work engagement is only conceptualised by vigour and dedication (Naudé & Rothmann, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The second objective of this research was to investigate the relationships between antecedent conditions, psychological processes and work engagement. In this research only 5% of the variance in psychological meaningfulness is explained by work role fit, supervisor relations, co-worker relations, co-worker norms, resources, job insecurity and growth. Job resources statistically significantly predicted psychological availability. The employee's cognitive, emotional and physical resources had the strongest effect on psychological availability. According to May, Gilson & Harter (2004), managers should be cautious not to overburden employees too much with cognitive, emotional and physical labour. The availability to manage one's work might prove to be difficult if an employee experienced excessive amounts of stress, emotional exhaustion or became injured while working. It might be suggested that an employee should focus on himself/herself so that he/she would continuously develop new resources (e.g. new skills) and in this way would increase his/her perception of availability (May et al., 2004). Growth opportunities in the job and co-worker relations could be positively associated with psychological meaningfulness. Although engagement-focused companies have flattened their organisations, limiting the opportunities for traditional promotions and upward advancement, they allow employees to grow within a job through expanded training opportunities and to move laterally within the organisation (Mercer, 2008).

The third psychological condition, safety, did not exhibit a statistically significant effect in the study and could therefore unfortunately not be investigated. It proved to be unfortunate as it would have been interesting to identify the effect of supervisor relations, co-worker relations and co-worker norms on an employee's level of engagement in this specific financial institution. To be an effective supervisor, management should be able to direct as well as support their employees into the right direction. Currently, the financial institution uses a "Care and Grow" model to provide their employees with the needed means and abilities in order to be more competent and engaged in their work. However, it seems that there is still a lack of effective relationships between management and employees. Management complains that they do empower their employees but that the employees still do not take any accountability for their actions.

The third objective of this study was to determine whether psychological conditions mediate the relationships between antecedent conditions and work engagement. The results of this study indicated that two psychological conditions, i.e. meaningfulness and availability led to work engagement. However, psychological meaningfulness was the strongest predictor for work engagement. It confirmed previous results of studies on work engagement (May et al., 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2000). Work role fit was positively linked to psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability, which confirmed previous studies (May et al., 2004; Strümpfer, 1990). However, meaningfulness did not mediate the relationship between work role fit, co-worker relations and growth on the one hand and work engagement on the other. Availability also did not mediate the relationship between resources and self-consciousness on the one hand and work engagement on the other. It was inconsistent with the findings of May et al. (2004). One possible explanation for these findings might be that the reliability of the scale, which measures psychological meaningfulness and availability, was questionable in this study.

For the purposes of this study it seems that antecedent conditions have a direct effect on work engagement, without following a mediator route. According to the findings in this study it could therefore be assumed that effective working conditions will assist people in experiencing more work engagement.

### 3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The following limitations regarding this research were identified:

- The scale, which measured psychological safety, was not sufficiently reliable to be used. More research is needed regarding the measurement of psychological safety.
- Results were obtained from a relatively small sample ( $n = 132$ ) of employees in a financial institution in the Free State Province and with specific paper and pencil measuring instruments, which might probably have limited the generality of the findings.
- Another limitation in this research study is the possibility that some individuals might not have trusted the confidentiality clauses in the letter accompanying the questionnaires. This could have caused them to partially or fully answer the questions inaccurately in the fear that they would be identified.
- The measuring instruments are only available in English and they are not culturally sensitive or sensitive to problems related to language proficiency in the financial institution. This could have influenced the results of this study because these participants might misunderstand questions in the questionnaire.
- It should be noted that unique characteristics probably exist within the financial industry, such as a specific organisational culture, philosophy, values, security issues and climate, which might have influenced the participant's responses.
- Although the individuals who participated were from different job grades and business levels, the organisational culture within these levels could have influenced the participant's responses. Meaning that the results cannot be generalised to other business units within the financial institution. Therefore, there is a need for this kind of study to be repeated in other business units and sections within the FirstRand Group as well.
- A further limitation relates to the fact that participants were required to self-evaluate their abilities and feelings when completing the questionnaire. The problem with self-perception questionnaires relates to a subjective test that has an influence on the accuracy with which a participant may assess his / her level of knowledge, ability, and experiences. The validity of the results might change drastically if other individuals were asked to evaluate the participant's level of engagement. It is therefore recommended that objective measures be required to assist in the attainment of more accurate results.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are made for the financial institution in question as well as for future research.

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation**

This study explored the relationship between work engagement, psychological conditions (psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability and psychological safety) and antecedent conditions thereof in a financial institution. This study also explored the mediating effects of three psychological conditions on work engagement. Possible reasons for disengagement at work could be reversed, once we more fully understand the effects of these mediators. Future research in South Africa should focus more on the mediating effects of psychological conditions in various industries. It is important that researchers study the different antecedent work conditions and psychological conditions in order to be able to successfully predict work engaged employees in the financial industry.

According to these study antecedent conditions such as resources, work-role fit, and growth statistically significantly predicts people's engagement levels. Mercer (2008) has identified four stages that represent increasing levels of engagement within the organisation and correspond to particular psychological states. These four stages are satisfied employees, motivated employees, committed employees and advocate employees. Employees that are satisfied will perform in their jobs and are satisfied with the terms and conditions of employment. They are content to work alone and do not require a great deal of management oversight. The financial institution should assist those who are satisfied in their jobs but not willing team players to go "above and beyond" their efforts. The financial institution should focus more on those factors that relate to individual work enablers, such as adequate resources, work tools and equipment (Mercer, 2008). This will motivate employees to become more energetically involved in their work and in a highly focused manner contribute to the success of the organisation. Motivated people respond the best when meaningful work is delegated to them; fair performance goals are established; job expectations, priorities and feedback are clearly communicated; obstacles to optimal performance are removed; and skill development is provided. Committed employees have thoroughly internalised the values and behaviours of their company and have also developed a strong identification with the

organisation (Mercer, 2008). This means that they feel psychologically meaningful, safe and available and therefore they commit themselves to their organisation. They are loyal to the company and optimistic about the future of the organisation. They are openly ambitious and believe the organisation will enable them to perform to the best of their abilities. Above all, they have a sense of belonging to the organisation, feel valued and involved, and are thus resilient in response to any short-term setbacks or dissatisfaction. In this sense it is important that FNB needs to live up to these standards if they want to retain those individuals who are extremely talented and who want to move up the ladder of success.

Further research is needed to establish more fully the validity, reliability and usefulness of psychological safety. It is recommended that the questions in this research should more specifically have focussed on feelings of safety in the organisation. Questions such as: “Do you feel emotionally safe when discussing work related problems with your manager?” or “Do you feel comfortable to go to your direct supervisor if you are not sure how to handle a specific problem?” could have been added to the questionnaire.

FNB should recognise individuals and group performance and contributions in tangible and immediate ways, which will enhance an employee’s sense of the organisation’s appreciation and support of his efforts. As Mercer recommended: ‘It is time that organisations should realise that the current practices of competitive pay and cash bonuses are not, in and of themselves, engagement drivers, they should be structured so as to be internally fair and externally competitive and, therefore, not de-motivators’ (Mercer, 2008, p. 7).

FNB as an important financial institution should therefore help employees to internalise the importance of the company’s vision, mission and philosophy. Management need to reinforce the importance of the above in order for employees to understand why they are working for the company. If they then find that they do not fit in with the values, mission and philosophy of the organisation then indeed it becomes vital for these individuals to freely seek other opportunities.

It is recommended that a larger sample size in the financial institution should have been used. Unfortunately the study sample was limited to branch banking employees who attended training at the “Knowledge Centre: Central Region Campus” in the Free State Province.

Future research should also examine the general validity of these results in more than one province.

Another possible explanation for the results could be the extent in which the different subgroups have been exposed to the world of work. The greater a person's exposure to the world of work and to important work roles, the greater the possibility of being career mature – a situation which might have favoured the few individuals with longer years of experience. The larger number of candidates that took part in this study was young and more inexperienced people who did not yet fully “grow” into the financial organisation. Therefore many of the results are not based on fairness and huge amounts of experience.

Research is also needed in other business units and sections within the FirstRand Group in order to establish norms for work engagement, psychological processes/conditions, psychological meaningfulness, availability and safety. Larger sample sizes might provide increased confidence that study findings would be consistent across other similar groups.

Although FNB is a developing organisation as well as a listed company, which makes continuous development part of the employee's personal development plan, it is suggested that the correct job fit together with continuous personal development plans would lead to engaged employees. It is vitally important to emphasise that organisations cannot make everyone happy; in some situations, turnover is the price to be paid. However, voluntary turnover within critical segments of the workforces can put a company's strategies at risk.

### **3.3.3 Recommendations for future research**

Regardless of the limitations of the present study, the findings of this study can offer valuable suggestions for studies conducted in the future. It is recommended that further studies in the financial industry should focus on longitudinal studies. This will provide a broader understanding of the causes and effects of psychological conditions on work engagement especially what psychological safety is concerned. However, Montgomery, Peeters, Schaufeli, and Den Ouden (2003) suggest that longitudinal surveys should only be used in circumstances when its research power is necessary to obtain the most advantageous results.

It is recommended that future studies validate findings with regard to the equal comparison of work engagement, psychological conditions/processes, psychological availability, psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety in cross cultural groups. Cross-cultural comparisons would greatly enhance the validity of findings in terms of the multi-cultural South African context.

Research in the financial institution in South Africa should emphasise the importance of facilitating employees to understand the importance of having the right levels of energy in order to be more work engaged. The more positive energy your people have the more engaged they will be in their jobs and the better service they will provide. The result being that an organisation will have positive and highly satisfied customers as a result. Further research into this area will provide the financial institution with a broader understanding of the route and processes to follow to instigate a more positive and energised work environment.

It is suggested that further research should be done on the possible improvement of item content of the measuring instruments. The wording of some of the items should be modified in order to make it more appropriate for the South African context. As far as further research is concerned, more investigations into the mediating effects of psychological conditions such as meaningfulness, safety and availability on work engagement should be conducted.

Future research will contribute to the validity of the findings in this study, and most probably allow the FirstRand Group to realise the potential of investing in the psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability as well as engagement of their employees.

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