

The effectiveness of utilising social networking in driving employee engagement

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REMARKS

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ABSTRACT

Title: Effectiveness of Utilising Social Networking in driving Employee Engagement

Key terms: Social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging, organisational commitment

The use of social networks, as a business tool is becoming more and more frequent in this day and age. Companies are exploring various ways in which to optimise social media in gaining a competitive advantage. Social platforms give organisations the ability to communicate better with their staff, to market their products more effectively to potential customers and also to drive behaviour within the workplace.

Employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment can be considered as components of employee well-being. Companies are investing large amounts of resources to lower employee turnover by creating an environment that is favourable for the employee.

Within the call centre environment a well established technological infrastructure exists. This creates a setting that is very prone to launch a social media platform. The average age of employees is also quite young, which in most cases means that they understand and interact on social networks with ease. The applications for social media also seems to become second nature for younger generations and this also speaks volumes as to implement social network strategies within working environments.

The experimental research design included a pre- and post assessment with samples of 74 employees for the pre-test and 36 employees for the post test. A qualitative and quantitative approach was utilised in order to gain better insight of what employees define as social networks and what effect it has on employees. To measure the various constructs, the following instruments were utilised: Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

(UWES), a self-constructed Sense of Belonging Questionnaire and the Affective Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (AOC).

The results indicated that the exposure to a social network resulted in lower levels of employee engagement and lower levels of sense of belonging. The exposure to a social network however increased the levels of participants' affective organisational commitment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on the effect a social network platform has on employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment of employees within an insurance industry environment.

Chapter 1 contains the problem statement, research objectives and research methodology employed. This chapter starts out with a problem statement, giving an overview of previously related research conducted specifically on employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment, linking it with this research project and its research objectives. A discussion of the research method follows, with details regarding the empirical study, research design, participants, measuring instruments and statistical analysis. It concludes with a chapter summary giving an overview of the chapters that form the body of this mini-dissertation.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A work environment which is call centre based is predominantly mediated by telephone and computer based technologies. This enables the effective distribution of incoming calls to employees. Technology enabled platforms allow the employee-customer relations to occur simultaneously between talking on the phone and viewing relevant information on the computer screen. Call centre agents can also input, access and edit certain information whilst talking to the client (Holman, 2003:3). The global call centre environment is currently experiencing rapid growth in terms of number of call centres; this is also the case within South African borders (Visagie, 2007:7). It can thus be argued that any possible competitive advantage opportunity should be identified and developed.

In most businesses Social Networks are seen as being a negative force which wastes company time and resources (Baltatzis, Ormrod & Grainger 2008:76). The pilot project was seen as a possible solution in establishing what the influences of Social Networks are in terms of employees in a call centre environment. It was also

important to ensure that the project is developed in a way that is sustainable and also in a way that adds value to the business specifically with regards to employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment. Further, the exposure to a social network within the organisation may also contribute to a competitive edge for the organisation.

Social Network as a business tool is currently a very exciting prospect and also holds great future possibilities if it is implemented and maintained properly. Understanding the effect of social networks on employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment is the main focus for doing the study.

According to Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>. Date of access: 11 Nov 2010) there are more than 500 million active users on Facebook. Twitter projected that they will have 26 million users by the end of 2010 (<http://womeninbusiness.about.com/od/twittertips/a/twitter-statistics.htm>. Date of access: 11 Nov 2010). All this contribute to a realisation that social media is becoming increasingly popular amongst all ages.

The idea of this project is therefore to establish a way to turn a social media platform into a competitive advantage for the business by getting the employees more involved/engaged in the company and its future. According to DiMicco *et al.* (2008:16) social networks can add value to various different types of users, this also includes corporate companies. Ferreira and Du Plessis (2009:2) are of the opinion that the use of Social Network Technology can increase collaboration between individuals who share a common goal or interest and that this could ultimately also lead to increased productivity. Van der Merwe and Van Heerden (2009:70) also claim that by using opinion leaders and establishing interpersonal relationships, communication can be used to influence employees.

Within the organisation under investigation the main focus is to enhance safe communication between employees within the organisation across all boundaries, stereotypes and limitations; create opportunities to voice one's opinion without repercussions and to avoid the stereotypical hierarchy that exists in the company in terms of communication levels. The main focus of this research is to determine

whether the positive integration of an intra social network within a short term insurance organisation will result in employees experiencing higher levels of sense of belonging and organisational commitment and whether it ultimately enhances employee engagement.

The following research questions emerge from the above-mentioned problem statement:

- How are social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment conceptualised from the literature?
- What is the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment according to the literature?
- What is the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment in a sample of call centre representatives?
- What recommendations can be made pertaining to the use of social networks within the organisation with specific reference to employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment?

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.

1.2.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research is to determine whether the exposure to an internal Social Network will enhance employee engagement within a short term insurance organisation.

1.2.2 Secondary Objectives

The secondary objectives of this research are:

- To conceptualise social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment according to the literature.

- To determine the conceptualisation of social networks and its components as perceived by the participants working in a short term insurance organisation.
- To determine the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment prior to the exposure to an internal social network.
- To determine the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment after the exposure to an internal social network.
- To determine whether the exposure to an internal social network enhance the experience of employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment within a short term insurance organisation.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research.

1.3 RESEARCH METHOD

This research, pertaining to the specific objectives, 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 is given regarding the topic of the study. The sources that will be consulted include:

- Academic Journals: More than 70 electronic academic journals/articles.
- Internet: The Social Network Site (*Let's Connect*)
- Books: See Bibliography
- Previous studies done within the organisation: Job characteristics, emotional labour and work related flow in an insurance industry call centre – Swart (2007:6) and Visagie (2007:7)
- Other internet sources (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.)

Subjects that should be addressed will include:

- Doing an initial employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment study on employees involved in the research project, as well as after the project has been implemented (Quantitative).
- Understanding how employees perceive social networks and what they define as being components of social networking. Also understanding the role that employees perceive that the organisation should play in terms of enhancing social networks in the workplace (Qualitative).
- For the Literature study, academic articles derived from Ebscohost, Google Scholar, NWU Institutional Repository etc. would be utilised.

1.3.2 Phase 2: Empirical study

The empirical study consists of the research design, participants, measuring instruments, and statistical analysis.

1.3.2.1 Research Design

The aim of the research design was to ensure that all the criteria are met that a scientific study requires. It is also important to allow the researcher to track the study in terms of progress as well as allowing him/her to adapt to certain challenges.

A quantitative survey design (pre- and post-test experimental design) (Huysamen, 1993:15) is used to test the hypothesis of the study. In the simplest experimental design participants are measured in terms of a dependent variable (pre-testing), i.e. employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment, exposed to a stimulus representing an independent variable, i.e. social network. It is then measured in terms of the dependent variable (post-testing), i.e. employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment (Babbie, 2007:63). These evaluations formed the heart of the research project in measuring employee engagement, as well as sense of belonging and organisational commitment of the participants. The sample, drawn from the population, was therefore measured on three variables at two points, before and after the exposure to a social network and the relationship between the measurements was determined. Therefore, relationships between the variables are studied with a view to eventual planned

intervention. The research is thus descriptive and explanatory (Mouton & Marais, 1992:41).

As part of the pre-test, three qualitative questions were asked to determine how employees perceive social networks and what they define as being components of social networking and also to gain an understanding of employees' perceptions on the role that the organisation should play in terms of enhancing social networks in the workplace.

Descriptive research must be used to better understand the inner workings of a project of this magnitude, especially because it is a field which demands a high level of technical expertise. Babbie (2007:65) indicated that the purpose of descriptive studies is to describe situations and events. As indicated within this research the understanding of the participants with regards to social networks and the components thereof were determined. Explorative research was also utilised in a way that solutions to challenges could be sought to implementing the project.

The qualitative research paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding experience through the eyes of the participants (Giorgi, 1997:235; Leady & Ormrod, 2001:24; Struwig & Stead, 2001:101). The underlying epistemology in this research is interpretive (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994:230). The assumption is that reality is interpreted within constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Meyers, 2006:). The foundation of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Meyers, 2006:).

1.3.2.2 Participants

The participants could be defined as an availability sample of employees working in different sectors in the insurance industry. A total population of 250 employees was initially targeted in different call centre environments within a short term insurance organisation. Only 74 responses were obtained for the pre-test of which 74 responses (100%) could be utilised, for the post-test only 36 responses were obtained of which 34 responses (94%) could be utilised. The study population consisted mainly of female (59,50% pre-test and 61,10% post-test), white (75,70%

pre-test and 80,60% post-test) employees between the ages of 20 and 29 (44,60% pre-test and 44,40% post-test). The majority of the sample had a grade 12 (Std. 10) (55,40% pre-test and 61,10% post-test) qualification, and was employed at the company for between 1 and 5 years (59,50% pre-test and 61,10% post test).

1.3.2.3 Measuring Battery

Three questionnaires were administered in this study, namely the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002:87), a self-constructed Sense of Belonging Questionnaire and the Affective Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (AOC) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990).

A biographical questionnaire was developed to gather information about the demographical characteristics of the participants. Information gathered included age, gender, race, education, marital status, years employed by the company and years employed in current position.

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:89) was used to measure the levels of work engagement of the participants. The UWES includes three dimensions, namely vigour, dedication and absorption, which is conceptually seen as the opposite of burnout and is scored on a seven-point frequency-rating scale, varying from 0 ("never") to 6 ("every day"). The questionnaire consists of 17 questions and includes questions like "I am bursting with energy every day in my work"; "Time flies when I am at work" and "My job inspires me". The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the three subscales varied between 0,80 and 0,91. The Cronbach alpha coefficient could be improved (α varies between 0,78 and 0,89 for the three sub-scales) by eliminating a few items without substantially decreasing the scales internal consistency. Storm and Rothmann (2003:63) obtained the following alpha coefficients for the UWES in a sample of 2 396 members of the South African Police Service: Vigour: 0,78; Dedication: 0,89; Absorption: 0,78. Coetzer (2004:22) obtained among a sample of employees in an insurance company, the following alpha coefficients: Vigour (0,80); Dedication (0,87), and Absorption (0,69). Swart (2007:7) found in a sample of employees working in an insurance industry that only

one factor could be extracted from the UWES, explaining 58,11% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Work Engagement and the alpha cronbach coefficient of this factor was 0,93.

The *Sense of Belonging questionnaire* (SOB) is a self-constructed instrument. The responses are organised on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very often) to 5 (Never). Reliability and Validity will be determined during the study. The questionnaire consists of 12 items and typical questions included “My opinions are asked when decisions have to be made” and “I have friends at work”.

The *Affective organisational commitment scale* (AOC) is the short version of the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990:7) measuring affective commitment to the organisation. The response alternatives ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), and a high score reflects strong commitment to the organisation. Maré (2007:19) found in a sample of employees working in the gold mining industry of South Africa a reliability of 0,58 for affective organisational commitment.

1.3.2.4 Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out with the aid of the SPSS-programme (SPSS Inc., 2009). Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) were used to analyse the data. Cronbach alpha coefficients were employed to determine the internal consistency, homogeneity and unidimensionality of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995:315). Coefficient alphas contain important information regarding the proportion of variance of the items of a scale in terms of the total variance explained by that particular scale.

Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationship between the variables. In terms of statistical significance, it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0, 05$). Effect sizes (Steyn, 2000:2) served to decide on the practical significance of the findings. A cut-off point of 0,30 (medium effect, Cohen, 1988:14) was set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

T-tests were employed to determine differences between the groups in the sample. Effect size (Cohen, 1988:15; Steyn, 1999:12) was used in addition to statistical significance to determine the significance of relationships. Effect sizes served to indicate whether the results obtained were practically significant. Steyn (2000:3) indicated that the following cut off points for effect sizes as indicated by Cohen (1988:17) was set for the practical significance of differences between means:

- $|\Delta| = 0,2$: small effect
- $|\Delta| = 0,5$: medium effect
- $|\Delta| = 0,8$: large effect

1.4 CHAPTER DIVISION

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

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Empirical study

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 focused on the motivation for the research, the problem statement, objectives and research method employed in this study. This was followed by a division of the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 will focus on the literature review and the conceptualisation of social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the environment in which the research will be conducted, conceptualising social networks and understanding the components thereof will be discussed. Employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment will also be discussed to gain a better understanding about previous research on these factors and how they are conceptualised within the literature.

2.1 RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Call Centres can be described as an office equipped with telephones and computer systems which hold no significance without the people that operate the various forms of technology (Read, 2005:4). Call centres are also notorious for being high-pressure working environments that causes high levels of stress amongst employees (Knights & McCabe, 1998:163; McKinlay & Taylor, 1997:12). When considering the average annual turnover rates within the call centre environment as being 12,50% (Bulloc, 2000:10), it adds to the hypothesis of high-stress levels. When linking companies with customers, call centres play a pivotal role. Efficient call centres find balance between productivity and service quality as this ultimately leads to a satisfied customer (Visagie, 2007:7).

The theory that human beings are prone to form and maintain relationships, and establish interpersonal bonds is not a new concept (Donne, 1975:2). Donne (1975:5) famously continued on this statement by adding "No person is an Island". Freud (1930:15) declared in various ways that the need for interpersonal contact is essential to all human life, but most of his theories are derived from his sex-drive hypothesis. Maslow (1968:37) placed the need for love and belongingness in the middle of his motivational model and was considered to be more important than self esteem and self actualisation. Bowlby (1969:21, 1973:74) developed the attachment theories which place a lot of focus on the forming and the need to form relationships.

Baumeister and Leary (1995:499) elaborate on the belongingness hypothesis, in that all human beings have the urge to establish and maintain a number of quality and lasting relationships that have significant interpersonal value. They continue that in order to satisfy this drive two sets of criteria are involved. Firstly there is a need for emotional and enjoyable interaction between various people that needs to be reoccurring. Secondly, the interaction needs to happen within a secure and lasting environment where there is consideration for the affectivity of the individuals.

When referring to social networks in general terms it means the interaction of individuals together in groups (Baltatzis *et al.*, 2008:81).

2.2 SOCIAL NETWORKS

Boyd and Ellison (2007:117) define social network sites as a web-based service which gives individuals the opportunity to create a public or private profile within an enclosed system, to identify and declare connections with other individuals or groups and view and navigate through a list of other connections made by others within the same system. The nature and extent to which these connections can be made vary from site to site. Social platforms are created to permit people to follow the lives of other individuals which can be described as friends, acquaintances or family (Baltatzis *et al.*, 2008:76).

The numbers of social media users have grown exponentially since the year 2000 (Huberman, *et al.*, 2008:18). Web 2.0 technologies are used to facilitate interaction on social media. Web 2.0 alludes to the next generation of the internet; it is a more dynamic gateway - for mass collaboration - which enables individuals to develop, distribute and rate internet content by expressing themselves through created content (OECD, 2007). The accessibility of Web 2.0 and the virtual collaborations of new technologies have opened the door to online social networking and this has led to the surfacing of virtual communities (Baltatzis *et al.*, 2008:77).

Social networks have become quite common in the web era and can be described as an old medium that facilitates interaction amongst individuals and/or groups (Huberman *et al.*, 2008:19). Within a system that facilitates the mutual exchange of

information (Edwards & Wilson, 2004:11); users can save items like photographs and add labels or 'tags', to identify each resource (Klobas, 2006:7). Collaboration can also take place within the context of group formation, relationships – both formal and informal – and also regarding community development within the scope of social networking.

Cook and Tapscott (2008:5), Menzel (2007:7), as well as Newman and Thomas (2008:43) have done extensive research on Web 2.0 and explored the effects it has had on various businesses. Web 2.0 technologies include the use of Weblogs, Wikis, online social media and other virtual worlds. When implementing Web 2.0 within large organisations, it is sometimes also referred to as Enterprise 2.0.

Social networking is not a new phenomenon. Tapscott and Williams (2007:10) states that interaction between human beings essentially stimulates the formation of networks through social contact. These social networks fit in with Clayton Alderfer's ERG theory (Existence, Relatedness and Growth) (as indicated by Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007:238) on the relatedness and growth levels. Social needs and internal and external esteem needs of individuals are satisfied when engaging others. This ultimately adds to the motivation of employees within a workspace and ensures that the emotional levels of employees are being provided for. It is imperative that employees feel that they are adding value to the organisation (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003:9). This, in turn helps employees to also understand the rationale around being an engaged employee.

Cooperation used to take place on a much smaller scale between friends, family members and other acquaintances in family circles and neighbourhoods. Currently, interactions between colleagues and various parts of organisational structures rarely happen without the help of organisation information and communication technology (ICT). ICT has also added to the collaboration of staff on social networking platforms (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009:8). The uniqueness of social network sites stems from the observation that you are enabled to publicly articulate your social network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:87). Social network platforms offers the opportunity for employees to create their own personal profile, join networks and groups, share interests,

participate in discussions and engage in various other forms of digitally mediated social interactions (Vander Veer, 2008:15). Online social media now makes it possible to interact and network a great deal quicker and easier. It also allows a much larger expert audience which in turn has great advantages in terms of utilising human capital by facilitating the interaction of various networks and communities. By allowing social interaction on such a platform it increases what people know, how they achieve at work and how energy is spent within the organisational context, specifically within their scope of practice (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009:3).

Mintzberg (1975:54) argues that managers are vested with a formal authority within an organisational unit. This authority leads to status which leads to various other interpersonal relations. Furthermore, Mintzberg (1975:60) indicated that with these relationships access to information becomes much easier to obtain and this in turn assists managers to make decisions and plan strategy more effectively. Most social network platforms support pre-existing social relations. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) suggest that Facebook – currently a very popular social media platform - is used to maintain existing offline relationships or develop offline connections between individuals and groups. Although exceptions exist, meeting new people is not the main attraction for most users.

Maertz and Griffeth (2004:669) argue that all individuals are embedded in a web and social relations and that these relations guide their decision making process. Cucchi and Fuhrer (2007:19) agree with this and add that individual and organisational attributes are correlated to the centrality of the actors within the network. They also state that this can add value from a human resources point of view and that this is because centrality measures the level of individual involvement. In terms of managerial consequences social networks also add insight especially with regards to employee behaviour and conduct on the platform. Organisational issues can also be diagnosed when using social networks. Decision consequences and organisational issues can be diagnosed by managers when evaluating social media as involvement and interaction amongst staff members evolve (Cucchi & Fuhrer, 2007:21).

Research with regards to social media is important as it offers a thorough explanation into the behaviours and attitude of employees (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007:7). They continue that the strong social intra-organisational networks reduce turnover intention, because employees experience high levels of support from their co-workers. It is this support from their peers that creates a sense of obligation amongst staff and in turn results in employees being less likely to express their desire to quit their current role within the organisation.

Siddiqui (2009:31) declares that the internet has become an ever-present repository of knowledge since the commercial content were opened in the early 1990's. This also shows that training and e-learning should be encouraged throughout the world. Apart from using social media as a tool to educate and train, Genova (2009:17) declares that employees seek a place where they can unwind and play after work.

When looking at turnover rates and the effects that social networks have on it, Moynihan and Pandey (2007:8) indicated that those intra-organisational social networks reduce turnover, by making it less desirable to leave. In contrast with this Moynihan and Pandey (2007:8) continue by signifying that employees that have a functioning external social network can access job opportunities much easier and this increases their likelihood of leaving the place of employment. Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan (2005:609) continue with this trend and claim that the relational ties that people form whilst working together may be the ties that most often binds.

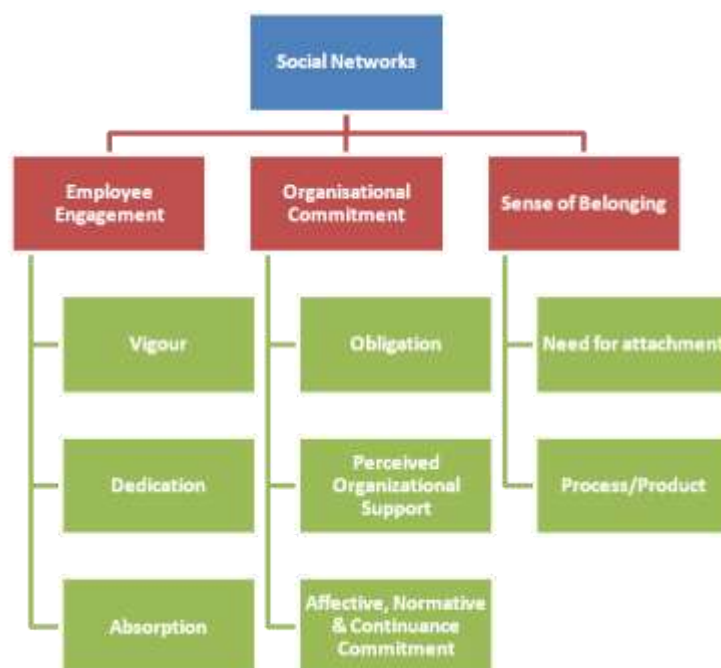
The social foundation that develops between employees consists of trust which is formed by working together as a team. Trust connects employees with the processes and content that they need to flourish within their work space and considering that people are the greatest asset of any organisation, it is imperative to create an environment where trust can develop (Lamont, 2009:31).

The main research objective within this study is to identify the effects of social media on employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment. Considering Figure 1, these elements are plugged into Social Networks to have a

better understanding of how it can be influenced by the medium, being an internal social network.

In terms of employee engagement; vigour, dedication and absorption will be observed. Organisational Commitment will be defined within the literature, but only affective commitment will be assessed in the questionnaire and with regards to sense of belonging, the need for attachment as well as the process and product will be looked at.

Figure 2.1: Effect of Social Networks, Employee Engagement, Organisational Commitment and Sense of Belonging



2.3 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Gebauer, Lowman and Gordan (2008:256) state that within an organisation the most essential thing that an employer can do is to unleash the employee’s full potential. They continue in saying that four out of five employees worldwide are not fulfilling their capability. The rationale, emotional and motivational levels are identified by Gebauer *et al.* (2008:256) as being the key contributors to employee engagement and these three levels are the main contact points between the employer and the employee. They also state that adherence to these levels will result in a willingness to surpass expectations.

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:88) define employee engagement as a work-related state of mind that is positive and fulfilling. They continued to cluster employee engagement within three characteristics – vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour can be explained as a mental toughness while working and high levels of energy, the eagerness to apply effort in one's work and the perseverance when faced with difficulty. Dedication is defined as a sense of meaning, enthusiasm, pride, inspiration and tendency to confronting challenges at work. Absorption can be described as being fully immersed and resolute in one's work, whereby time passes rapidly and employees find it difficult to be detached from work.

Engaged employees have a sense of energetic relations with their work activities. These employees consider themselves able to deal with the requirements of their jobs, unlike employees that suffer from burnout. Qualitative findings from Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker and De Jonge (2001:425) indicated that engaged workers are content and committed to the jobs. Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen and Schaufeli (2001:279) found a moderate positive correlation between organisational commitment and the three engagement dimensions that was stated by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:78).

Miller (2009) found that the cost cutting actions that were forced on U.S. employers in 2009, because of the economic downturn contributed to a sharp decline in the morale, organisational commitment and employee engagement. This was especially apparent in the case of top performers. In contrast, Buckingham and Coffman (1999:23) indicated that engaged employees increase productivity, reduces employee turnover and magnify customer focus with an estimate as much as 20%. From these results it appears that employee engagement, morale and organisational commitment is paramount to succeed as a business in these trying economical times.

According to Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen (2008:180) employee engagement relates to various elements. These elements include working overtime, positive work outcomes and good quality of health. More importantly they continue to state that a good quality of social relations adds to employee engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004:299) elaborate on this and stressed that job resources is a major element of

employee engagement in which social support from colleagues was defined as an example of job resources.

A qualitative study on employee engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2001:427) proposed that engaged employees will not neglect the social element of their life outside of their work environment. They found that engaged employees will spend time on socialising, community work, social empowerment and hobbies. According to Ferrer (2005:11), employee engagement can be observed as an alternative to assessing employee's commitment to organisations in a way that employees are more productive in the workplace.

2.4 SENSE OF BELONGING

Goodenow (1993:80) defines sense of belonging within a high school context as: *"the extent, to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment."* Osterman (2000:324) considers that the need to belong should be considered as a basic human motivation and that it can be defined as an all-encompassing desire to develop and maintain a minimum amount of lasting, significant and positive interpersonal relations. Hagerty, Williams and Oe (2002:793) defines sense of belonging as a basic human need and indicated that if there is an insufficient sense of belonging amongst individuals that this could lead to various social problems in terms of psychological functioning. Newman and Grigg (2007:14) argues that when staff members do not experience a sense of belonging within their workplace, that they will be more likely to engage in alienating, uncooperative, stubborn and self-defeating behaviour. As a result of this type of exclusion employees might experience an increased amount of isolation from other members of staff.

Sense of belonging can be seen as a major element of interpersonal relatedness and this can be specifically viewed as an experience of personal involvement within an environment or system within which individuals consider themselves to be an integral part of (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier 1992:175). Harter, *et al.* (2003:9) found that it is important for employees to feel a sense of contribution within an organisation. The experience and participation within an

environment, organisation or system contributes to a person's feeling of being an integral part of that system or environment (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995:12). The benefits not only stem as far as the employer, but also the employee, as an individual feels more at home with co-workers and this helps them to connect better with colleagues that have similar interests (Humphries, 2008). Belonging at work increases teamwork and collaboration amongst employees and this also helps staff to circumvent negative actions from other staff members (Newman & Grigg, 2007:14).

Giuliani (2002:87) views sense of belonging within a place attachment framework. This framework defines a product or outcome of sense of belonging, as well as the process to achieve the attachment. A product can be seen as the feeling attached to sense of belonging, an emotional bond with a specific place or organisation. It is the expression of feeling attached to, and belonging to a place at a specific point in time. The experience is multi-dimensional. The process element refers to the reasons for feeling attached. The occupation of a space by means of involvement with the local area and this is a continuous and dynamic process.

Baumeister and Leary (1995:501), allude to the hypothesis that sense of belonging is a core, fundamental, prominent and extremely persistent motivator. Emotional patterns and cognitive processes, both have various effects because of belongingness and these effects prove to be strong. Eikenberry (2007:8) adds to this by stating that a sense of belonging provides a context that includes meaning and value in our lives. It also provides a feeling of comfort and security.

2.5 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organisational commitment is defined as the attitude in the form of an individual's identification with a certain company as well as the involvement within the specific organisation (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982:24). Employee commitment can contribute to a large extent to the aspirations of a company, this includes employee job satisfaction, motivation, productivity and it was found to correlate negatively to absenteeism turnover (Herrbach, Mignonac & Gatignon 2004:1399; Kalleberg &

Marsden, 1995:340; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990:171; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002:34; Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974:607).

Perceived organisational support and organisational commitment to work behaviour can be largely contextualised within a social exchange environment (Blau, 1964:44). The social exchange theory as pointed out by Mossholder *et al.* (2005:610) proposes that when individuals feel as if they have gained or benefited from others that they are obliged to put in extra effort and be loyal to the specific person or entity. Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades (2001:45) provide additional empirical support that shows that individuals who feel a greater sense of obligation towards superiors are less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviour. According to Mossholder *et al.* (2005:611) the obligation felt by individuals drives social relations as the benefits of commitment create feelings of investment and encourages. Although there may not be a strong effect at a specific point in time, obligation felt towards co-workers could facilitate longer-term interpersonal exchanges, which could ultimately lead to better relationships and greater interpersonal connection. The social relationships that employees have with their colleagues and the sense of obligation towards their fellow workers appear to be the most relevant, especially when considering turnover intention amongst staff (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007:8).

Shore and Wayne (1993:777) suggest that the feeling of obligation amongst employees, rather than the sentiment of emotional attachment may be the foundation of citizen behaviour. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986:501) state that the social exchange view of commitment, that employees perceive organisations have towards them (Perceived Organisational Support - POS), creates feelings of obligation to the employer and this in turn enhances the employee's work behaviour.

Meyer and Allen (1991:67) and Mowday *et al.* (1982:39) have examined various organisational commitment theories, concepts and tests. Meyer and Allen (1991:68) extensively focused on two types of commitment – affective commitment (AC) and continuance commitment (CC). Affective commitment can be described as an emotional or affective attachment to an organisation, whereby the individual is strongly involved in, identifies with and enjoys the membership of the specific

organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991:69). Becker (1960:33) defines continuance commitment as the tendency to engage in consistent lines of activity. Allen and Meyer (1990:7) add that it is based on an individual's understanding of the implications if the activity is discontinued. Meyer and Allen (1991:71) add a third component in normative commitment (NC), this stems from a sense of obligation towards an organisation.

Employees that are more committed to an organisation are less likely to leave the company than the individuals that are uncommitted. Those that are more committed are reported to perform at higher levels and also tend to stay with the organisation for longer periods of time. This decreases turnover and effectively increases productivity and organisational effectiveness (Porter *et al.*, 1974:608). It is therefore critical to ensure organisational commitment which leads to an effective workforce.

Shore and Wayne (1993:776) argues that organisational commitment along with perceived organisational support can add value on two fronts for most organisations. Firstly, there are various benefits within social exchanges amongst employees and secondly it helps to shape the resources necessary for employees to carry out their responsibilities as members of the specific organisation. Ultimately this helps to explain the employees' psychological well-being. Merriman (2010:12) also found in a study in a higher education faculty, that statistical significant linear relationships exist between Organisational commitment and Sense of belonging.

When considering the empirical study, correlations will be drawn between Employee Engagement, Sense of Belonging and Organisational commitment with regards to the Social Network platform and how the exposure to an intra social network within the organisation can enhance the levels of employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment experience within a short term insurance organisation.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Within this chapter the work environment in which the research would be conducted were described. Chapter 2 also focused on the literature study and the

conceptualisation of social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment.

The work environment in which the research was conducted is in a short term insurance organisation within the insurance industry where call centres are optimised. Call centres are notorious for being high-pressure working environments that causes high levels of stress amongst employees (Knights & McCabe, 1998:170; McKinlay & Taylor, 1997:12). The theory that human beings are prone to form and maintain relationships, and establish interpersonal bonds is not a new concept (Donne, 1975:4) and the development of such relationships influences the manner in which employees deal with high-pressure work environments. Bowlby (1969:21, 1973:74) developed the attachment theories which place a lot of focus on the forming and the need to form relationships. Baumeister and Leary (1995:500) elaborate on the belongingness hypothesis, in that all human beings have the urge to establish and maintain a number of quality and lasting relationships that have significant interpersonal value.

Social Network platforms are seen as a possible application that can enhance interpersonal relations. Boyd and Ellison (2007:80) define social network sites as a web-based service which gives individuals the opportunity to create a public or private profile within an enclosed system, to identify and declare connections with other individuals or groups and view and navigate through a list of other connections made by others within the same system. The nature and extent to which these connections can be made vary from site to site. Social platforms are created to permit people to follow the lives of other individuals which can be described as friends, acquaintances or family (Baltatziz *et al*, 2008:77).

Gebauer *et al*. (2008:256) state that within an organisation the most essential thing that an employer can do is to unleash the employee's full potential. Schaufeli *et al*. (2002:80) define employee engagement as a work-related state of mind that is positive and fulfilling. They continued to cluster employee engagement within three characteristics – vigour, dedication and absorption.

Sense of belonging can be seen as a major element of interpersonal relatedness and this can be specifically viewed as an experience of personal involvement within an environment or system within which individuals consider themselves to be an integral part of (Hagerty *et al.*, 1992:176).

Organisational commitment is defined as the attitude in the form of an individual's identification with a certain company as well as the involvement within the specific organisation (Mowday *et al.*, 1982:41). Affective commitment, which will be measured in the following chapter, can be described as an emotional or affective attachment to an organisation, whereby the individual is strongly involved in, identifies with and enjoys the membership of the specific organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1991:7).

Chapter 3 will focus on the empirical study.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this chapter the results of the empirical research is reported and discussed in terms of the qualitative and quantitative results. The results are presented based on the proposed research questions as indicated in Chapter 1.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative survey design (pre- and post-test experimental design) (Huysamen, 1993) is used to test the hypothesis of the study. In the simplest experimental design participants are measured in terms of a dependent variable (pre-testing), i.e. employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment, exposed to a stimulus representing an independent variable, i.e. social network, and then the same dependent variables are remeasured (post-testing), i.e. employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment (Babbie, 2007). These evaluations formed the heart of the research project in measuring employee engagement, as well as sense of belonging and organisational commitment of the participants. The sample, drawn from the population, was therefore measured on three variables at two points, before and after the exposure to a social network and the relationship between the measurements was determined. Therefore, relationships between the variables were studied with a view to eventual planned intervention. The research is thus descriptive and explanatory (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

As part of the pre-test three qualitative questions were asked to determine how employees perceive social networks and what they define as being components of social networking and also to gain an understanding of employees' perceptions on the role that the organisation should play in terms of enhancing social networks in the workplace.

Descriptive research must be used to better understand the inner workings of a project of this magnitude, especially because it is a field which demands a high level

of technical expertise. Babbie (2007) indicated that the purpose of descriptive studies is to describe situations and events. As indicated within this research the understanding of the participants with regards to social networks and the components thereof were determined. Explorative research was also utilised in a way that possible solutions would be sought to implement in the project.

The qualitative research paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding experience through the eyes of the participants (Giorgi, 1997; Leady & Ormrod, 2001; Struwig & Stead, 2001). The underlying epistemology in this research is interpretive (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). The assumption is that reality is interpreted within constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Meyers, 2006). The foundation of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Meyers, 2006).

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

An availability sample of employees working in a short term insurance organisation was analysed. A sample of 74 employees participated in the pre-test. After the pre-test participants were exposed to an organisational internal social network for a period of 6 weeks the post-test took place. Only 36 employees of the initial 76 participants completed the post-test, resulting in a response rate of 49% during the post-test.

Table 3.1
Characteristics of the Participants

Item	Category	Pre-test Sample (N = 74)	Post-test Sample (N = 36)
		Frequency (Percentage)	Frequency (Percentage)
Gender	Male	30 (40,50)	14 (38,90)
	Female	44 (59,50)	22 (61,10)
Race	White	56 (75,70)	29 (80,60)
	Black	12 (16,20)	5 (13,90)
	Coloured	4 (5,40)	2 (5,60)
	Asian	2 (2,70)	0 (0,00)

Table 3.1 (continue)**Characteristics of the Participants**

Item	Category	Pre-test Sample (N = 74)	Post-test Sample (N = 36)
		Frequency (Percentage)	Frequency (Percentage)
Age	Younger than 20 years	1 (1,40)	0 (0,00)
	20 -29 years	33 (44,60)	16 (44,40)
	30 -39 years	23 (31,10)	10 (27,80)
	40 – 49 years	15 (20,30)	10 (27,80)
	50 years and above	2 (2,70)	0 (0,00)
Education	Less than Grade 12	2 (2,70)	2 (5,60)
	Grade 12	41 (55,40)	22 (61,10)
	Certificate / Diploma	21 (28,40)	6 (16,70)
	Degree	6 (8,10)	4 (11,10)
	Postgraduate	4 (5,40)	2 (5,60)
Marital Status	Single	29 (39,20)	12 (33,30)
	Married	41 (55,40)	24 (66,70)
	Divorced	4 (5,40)	0 (0,00)
Years at Organisation	Less than 1 year	11 (14,90)	4 (11,10)
	1 - 5 years	44 (59,50)	21 (61,10)
	6 - 10 years	9 (12,20)	2 (5,60)
	11 - 15 years	8 (10,80)	7 (19,40)
	16 - 20 years	1 (1,40)	1 (2,80)
	More than 20 years	1 (1,40)	0 (0,00)
Years in current position	Less than 1 year	21 (28,40)	9 (25,00)
	1 - 5 years	49 (66,30)	26 (72,20)
	6 - 10 years	2 (2,70)	0 (0,00)
	11 - 15 years	1 (1,40)	1 (2,80)
	16 - 20 years	1 (1,40)	0 (0,00)

The pre-test sample consisted mainly of white (75,70%) females (59,50%) in their twenties (44,60%) and thirties (31,10%), with a Grade 12 (55,40%). The typical number of years employed in the organisation is between one and five years (59,50%) and the typical number of years employed in their current position is between one and five years (66,30%).

The post-test sample consisted mainly of white (80,60%) females (61,10%) in their twenties (44,40%) with a Grade 12 qualification (61,10%). The typical number of employed in the organisation is between one and five years (61,10%) and the typical

number of years employed in their current position is between one and five years (72,20%).

3.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Based on the literature review, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

H₀: The exposure to a social network within the organisation will have no effect on the levels of employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment.

H₁: The exposure to a social network within the organisation will result in higher levels of employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment.

3.4 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

When conducting the qualitative research, three questions were asked. These questions were only asked as part of the pre-test. These questions aspire to give a better indication of what employees define as being a social network, what the components of social media is according to them and what role the organisations should play with regards to social networks. All 74 participants of the pre-test sample responded on the following open ended questions.

The first question focused on the definition and/or conceptualisation of social networks. The themes extracted are indicated in Table 3.2.

Table 3. 2
Defining Social Networks

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
a) Communication	20	26%
b) Interaction	16	21%
c) Socialising	11	14%
d) Relationships	9	12%
e) Information/Knowledge share	9	12%
f) Common Interest	6	8%
g) Meet new people	5	7%

- **Communication**

One of the major characteristics of social networks is the ability to communicate with the user. Baltatzis *et al.* (2008) concluded that Social Networks should be utilised as a communication tool within large organisations. 24% of the participants defined social networks as a communication tool. Typical responses included “*A group of people communicating with each other on a subject matter.*”

- **Interaction**

When referring to social networks in general terms it means the interaction of individuals together in groups (Baltatzis *et al.*, 2008). The participants (21%) echoed these sentiments in that they agreed that they perceived Social networks as a platform to stimulate interaction between individual and groups. Typical responses included “*A platform where you can interact with other people.*”

- **Socialising**

14% of the participants defined social networks as a mean to be able to socialise with their colleagues on an informal platform. Typical responses included “*It's where you get to socialize with friends and colleagues in an informal way.*”

- **Relationships**

The theory that human beings are prone to form and maintain relationships, and establish interpersonal bonds is not a new concept (Donne, 1975). Within the organisational setup the establishment and maintenance of relationships are very

important to employees. 12% of the participants conceptualised social networks as building relationships. Typical responses included *“Networking with your friends.”*

- **Information/Knowledge Share**

Siddiqui (2009) declares that the internet has become an ever-present repository of knowledge since the commercial content were opened in the early 1990's. Employees perceive a social platform as a place where they can share knowledge and gain insight into various topics. 12% of the participants showed information/knowledge share as part of social networks. Typical responses included *“A group or community of friends or colleges interacting on a platform to share news and views on topics. To share information and knowledge”.*

- **Common Interest**

Social media creates a platform for employees to have conversations with other employees about topic that interest them. 8% of the participants indicated social networks as having common interests. Typical responses included *“An online service that allows persons of common interests to connect and share blogs and interact with each other online”.*

- **Meet new people**

In a large organisation, employees interact predominantly with their own department and a social media platform creates an environment where employees can meet new people. 7% of the participants defined social networks as a mean of meeting new people. Typical responses included *“Meeting different people with different views”.*

Participants were also asked to indicate their perception on the main components of social networks. The themes extracted are indicated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3**Main components of social networks**

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
a) Individuals/Members/People	19	27%
b) User friendly/Accessible	13	18%
c) Communication	10	14%
d) Content creation & sharing	10	14%
e) Connecting with other employees	9	13%
f) Systems/Infrastructure	6	8%
g) Freedom of expression	4	6%

- **Individuals/Members/People**

Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social network sites as a web-based facility which gives individuals the chance to create a public or private profile within an enclosed system, to discover and declare connections with other individuals or groups. 27% participants shared this view and felt that the individuals creating content and interacting with other where the biggest components of social networks. Typical responses included *“Interaction among different departments and employees“*.

- **User friendly/Accessible**

The user-friendliness of Web 2.0 and the effective collaborations of new technologies have opened the door to online social networking and this has led to the materialisation of virtual communities (Baltatzis *et al.*, 2008). 18% of the participants expressed that there is a need for the platform to be easy to use and accessible for all users. It must be easy to be expressive. Typical responses included *“User friendly, not too complicated, easy to use“*.

- **Communication**

Currently, interactions between colleagues and various parts of organisational structures rarely happen without the help of organisation information and communication technology (ICT). ICT has also added to the collaboration of staff on social networking platforms (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). 14% of the participants indicated that effective communication is a characteristic of social networks. Typical responses included *“Ways to communicate in order for everyone to understand“*.

- **Content Creation & Sharing**

By allowing social interaction on such a platform it increases what people know, how they achieve at work and how energy is spent within the organisational context, specifically within their scope of practice (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). 14% of the participants indicated that a component of social networks is to create mutual understanding and to share information. Typical responses included *“A common communication platform, willingness to share information, group of people with a loosely defined interest”*.

- **Connecting with other employees**

Employees have the desire to interact and meet fellow employees. Connecting seemed to be very important for employees as they strongly expressed a desire to engage colleagues. 13% of the participants indicated connecting with other people as a component of social networks. Typical responses included *“Interaction, communication and respect”*.

- **Systems/Infrastructure**

To allow social interaction and knowledge sharing on a communication platform, a system/infrastructure is needed to facilitate the process. 8% of the participants indicated systems/infrastructures as a component of social networks. Typical responses included *“Computers and internet”*.

- **Freedom of expression**

A social media platform also creates a space for employee to freely express themselves and be opinionated. The opportunity to learn from about other employees and also sharing information about themselves was greatly appreciated by employees. 7% of the participants indicated the freedom of expression as a component of social networks. Typical responses included *“To get to know the staff members, their different religions and cultures”*.

Participants were asked to indicate their perception on the role of the organisation with regards to enhancing social networks. The themes extracted are indicated in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

The role of the organisation with regards to enhancing social networks

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
a) Connecting people	15	35%
b) System/training/infrastructure	13	30%
c) Input from Staff	3	7%
d) Create platform for employees to interact outside work environment	2	5%

- **Connecting people**

Tapscott and Williams (2007:10) argues that relations between human beings in essence stimulate the formation of networks through social contact. These connections were very important for most employees as they felt that it had an influence on the way they perceived work. Some 35% of the participants indicated that the implementation of social networks in the organisation contribute to their ability to connect with other people. Typical responses included *“By introducing this site, one will be able to connect to all regions, people you may have spoken to over the phone several times in business dealings but you have no idea who they are, what they are about etc.”*

- **System/training/infrastructure**

Within a system that facilitates the mutual exchange of information (Edwards & Wilson, 2004); users can save items like photographs and add labels or ‘tags’, to identify each resource (Klobas, 2006). A fraction of 30% of the participants indicated that it is part of the company’s responsibility to allocate the resources needed to interact on a social platform. Typical responses included *“The organisation needs to play a role by implementing a framework where staff can communicate with each other outside work responsibilities.”*

- **Input from Staff**

The application for social media was expressed by some employees (7%) to the extent that they perceive a social network to be a platform to gain insight and feedback from staff. Typical responses included *“Organisations need to define the need and business cases for social networks and help people to realise it as a tool.”*

Communication is often not seen as work and people feel afraid or too busy to engage in communication.”

- **Create platform for employees to interact outside work environment**

Employees (5%) also felt the desire to interact with their colleagues outside of the working environment. They expressed that this will help them to interact and collaborate better once they return to the work environment. Typical responses included *“Getting to know and understand your colleagues outside of the working environment is important. The organisation can enhance this interaction by allowing time and the opportunity to do so.”*

3.5 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

3.5.1 Measuring battery

Three questionnaires were administered in this study, namely the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), a self-constructed Sense of Belonging Questionnaire and the Affective Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (AOC) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990).

A biographical questionnaire was developed to gather information about the demographical characteristics of the participants. Information gathered included age, gender, race, education, marital status, years employed by the company and years employed in current position.

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) (Schaufeli, *et al.*, 2002) was used to measure the levels of work engagement of the participants. The UWES includes three dimensions, namely vigour, dedication and absorption, which is conceptually seen as the opposite of burnout and is scored on a seven-point frequency-rating scale, varying from 0 ("never") to 6 ("every day"). The questionnaire consists of 17 questions and includes questions like "I am bursting with energy every day in my work"; "Time flies when I am at work" and "My job inspires me". The alpha coefficients for the three subscales varied between 0,80 and 0,91. The alpha

coefficient could be improved (α varies between 0,78 and 0,89 for the three subscales) by eliminating a few items without substantially decreasing the scales internal consistency. Storm and Rothmann (2003) obtained the following alpha coefficients for the UWES in a sample of 2 396 members of the South African Police Service: Vigour: 0,78; Dedication: 0,89; Absorption: 0,78. Coetzer (2004) obtained among a sample of employees in an insurance company, the following alpha coefficients: Vigour (0,80); Dedication (0,87), and Absorption (0,69). Swart (2007) found in a sample of employees working in an insurance industry that only one factor could be extracted from the UWES, explaining 58,11% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Work Engagement and the alpha cronbach coefficient of this factor was 0,93.

The *Sense of Belonging questionnaire* (SOB) is a self-constructed instrument. The responses are organised on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very often) to 5 (Never). Reliability and Validity will be determined during the study. The questionnaire consists of 12 items and typical questions included “My opinions are asked when decisions have to be made” and “I have friends at work”.

The *Affective organisational commitment scale* (AOC) is the short version of the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) measuring affective commitment to the organisation. The response alternatives ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), and a high score reflects strong commitment to the organisation. Maré (2007) found in a sample of employees working in the gold mining industry of South Africa a reliability of 0,58 for affective organisational commitment.

3.5.2 Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out with the aid of the SPSS-programme (SPSS Inc., 2009). Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, measure of skewness and kurtosis) were used to analyse the data. Cronbach alpha coefficients were employed to determine the internal consistency, homogeneity and unidimensionality of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995). Coefficient

alphas contain important information regarding the proportion of variance of the items of a scale in terms of the total variance explained by that particular scale.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationship between the variables. In terms of statistical significance, it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0,05$). Effect sizes (Steyn, 2000) served to decide on the practical significance of the findings. A cut-off point of 0,30 (medium effect, Cohen, 1988) was set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

T-tests were employed to determine differences between the groups in the sample. Effect size (Cohen, 1988; Steyn, 1999) was used in addition to statistical significance to determine the significance of relationships. Effect sizes served to indicate whether the results obtained were practically significant. Steyn (2000) indicated that the following cut off points for effect sizes as indicated by Cohen (1988) was set for the practical significance of differences between means:

- $|\Delta| = 0,2$: small effect
- $|\Delta| = 0,5$: medium effect
- $|\Delta| = 0,8$: large effect

3.5.3 Results

A simple principle axis factoring analysis was conducted on the 15 items of the UWES on the total pre-test sample of employees in a short term insurance organisation. Analysis of the eigenvalues (larger than 1) and the scree plot indicated that one factor can be extracted, which accounts for 50,94% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Engagement.

The results for the factor analysis on the UWES are shown in Table 3.5. Loading of variables on factors, communalities and percentage of variance explained are indicated. To facilitate interpretation variables are ordered and grouped by size loadings. Labels for each factor are suggested in the relevant footnote.

Table 3.5**Factor Loadings, Communalities (h^2), and Percentage Variance for Principal Factors Extraction and Direct Oblimin Rotation on UWES Items**

Item	F₁	h²
I am enthusiastic about my job.	0,88	0,78
I am bursting with energy in my work.	0,84	0,71
I feel happy when I am engrossed in my work.	0,83	0,68
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	0,81	0,65
I find my work full of meaning and purpose.	0,78	0,61
I feel strong and vigorous in my job.	0,78	0,60
I am proud of the work that I do.	0,77	0,59
I get carried away by my work.	0,76	0,58
My job inspires me.	0,72	0,52
To me, my work is challenging.	0,71	0,50
In my job I can continue working for very long periods at a time.	0,67	0,45
I am immersed in my work.	0,64	0,40
Time flies when I'm working.	0,53	0,28
I am very resilient [*] , mentally, in my job.	0,45	0,20
When I am working, I forget everything else around me.	0,29	0,09
Percentage of variance explained	50,94	
F₁ Engagement		

Table 3.5 indicates that the principal analysis with an oblimin rotation resulted in one factor. Items loading on this factor were related to Engagement (e.g., 'I am enthusiastic about my work'; and 'My job inspires me').

A simple principal axis analysis was conducted on the 12 items of the SOB on the total pre-test sample of employees in a short term insurance organisation. Analysis of the eigenvalues (larger than 1) and the scree plot allowed for the extraction of three significant factors, accounting for 64,14% of the total variance. Next, a principle component factoring analysis was followed using a direct oblimin rotation to conduct further factor analysis.

The results of the factor analysis on the SOB are shown in Table 3.6. Loading of variables on factors, communalities and percentage of variance explained are indicated. To facilitate interpretation variables are ordered and grouped by size of loading. Labels for each factor are suggested in the relevant footnote. Non significant factors will be indicated with 0,00.

Table 3.6

Factor Loadings, Communalities (h^2), and Percentage Variance for Principal Factors Extraction and Direct Oblimin Rotation on SOB Items

Item	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃	h^2
I feel part of the team	0,85			0,83
I can rely on my colleagues in times of crisis's	0,81			0,62
I have a sense of belonging in my work environment	0,68			0,71
I have friends at work	0,63			0,44
I have interpersonal relationships with others in the work environment that is build on trust and mutual respect	0,30			0,32
My opinions are asked when decisions have to be made		0,94		0,81
My opinions are included when decisions are made		0,89		0,80
I am involved in departmental / team decisions that has an effect on me as an employee		0,77		0,62
I have a say on how decisions made influences my interests, scope of thinking and behaviour		0,59		0,61
My work is important			0,85	0,68
By doing my work efficiently, I contribute towards a greater goal			0,69	0,53
There is purpose in my work			0,66	0,71
Percentage of variance explained	39,07	14,79	10,28	

F₁ Interpersonal Relations F₂ Involvement F₃ Work Purpose

Table 3.6 indicates that the principal analysis with an oblimin rotation resulted in three factors. The first factor was labelled *Interpersonal Relations*. Items loading on this factor relate to having friends and good interpersonal relations at work that is built on trust and mutual respect. It also refers to feeling part of the team and being able to rely on others within the work context.

The second factor was labelled *Involvement*. The items loading on this factor relate to involvement of the individual in decision making practices and being asked his or her opinion on decisions being made.

The third factor was labelled *Work Purpose*. Items loading on this factor relate to the individual seeing the purpose in his or her work in terms of the contribution they make to a greater goal and understanding that their work is also important.

A simple principle axis factoring analysis was conducted on the 4 items of the AOC on the total pre-test sample of employees in a short term insurance organisation. Analysis of the eigenvalues (larger than 1) and the scree plot indicated that one factor can be extracted, which accounts for 53,87% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Affective Organisational Commitment.

The results for the factor analysis on the AOC are shown in Table 3.7. Loading of variables on factors, communalities and percentage of variance are indicated. To facilitate interpretation variables are ordered and grouped by size loadings. Labels for each factor are suggested in the relevant footnote.

Table 3.7
Factor Loadings, Communalities (h^2), and Percentage Variance for Principal Factors Extraction and Direct Oblimin Rotation on AOC Items

Item	F ₁	h^2
The organisation has a big personal importance to me	0,70	0,50
I enjoy discussing my organisation with people outside it	0,68	0,46
I have a strong sense of affinity to the organisation I work for	0,67	0,45
It often feels as the organisations problems are the same as my own problems	0,42	0,18
Percentage of variance	53,87	

F₁ Affective Organisational Commitment

Table 3.7 indicates that the principal analysis with an oblimin rotation resulted in one factor. Items loading on this factor were related to Affective Organisational Commitment (e.g., 'The organisation has a big personal importance to me'; and 'I have a strong sense of affinity to the organization I work for').

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies of the measuring instruments and the product moment correlations between the different constructs, used to indicate the relationships between variables in this study are provided in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8**Descriptive Statistics and product moment correlations coefficients between the different constructs**

Scale	Pre-test and Post-Test	Mean	SD	Alpha	Product Moment Correlations			
					1	2	3	4
1. Engagement	Pre-test (N = 74)	73,28	15,45	0,92
	Post-test (N=36)	70,34	15,08	0,95
2. Involvement	Pre-test (N = 74)	14,05	3,65	0,84	0,22	.	.	.
	Post-test (N=36)	12,84	4,52	0,93	-0,14	.	.	.
3. Work Purpose	Pre-test (N = 74)	13,58	1,60	0,70	0,44 ⁺	0,29 [*]	.	.
	Post-test (N=36)	11,76	3,33	0,92	0,09	0,34 ⁺	.	.
4. Interpersonal Relations	Pre-test (N = 74)	21,08	3,40	0,79	0,28 [*]	0,48 ⁺	0,51 ⁺⁺	.
	Post-test (N=36)	18,87	5,06	0,92	0,12	0,30	0,84 ⁺⁺	.
5. Affective Organisational Commitment	Pre-test (N = 74)	9,62	2,68	0,70	-0,47 ⁺	-0,26 [*]	-0,20	-0,42 ⁺⁺
	Post-test (N=36)	14,08	3,10	0,73	0,72 ⁺⁺	-0,23	0,01	0,12

* $p < 0,05$ + $r \geq 0,30$ (Medium Effect) ++ $r \geq 0,50$ (Large effect)

As can be seen in Table 3.8, acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients, varying from 0,70 to 0,92 on the pre-test sample and 0,73 to 0,95 on the post-test sample, were obtained. These alpha coefficients compare reasonably well with the guideline of 0,70 (0,55 in basic research), demonstrating that a large portion of the variance is explained by the dimensions (internal consistency of the dimensions) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All scales used in this study showed good reliabilities. In addition, it seems that in the pre-test sample there is a statistically significant positive relation (with a medium effect) between engagement and work purpose. This indicates that the higher the levels of engagement of employees, the more they experience work purpose. This relation is not applicable in the post-test sample that was exposed to a social network within the organisation.

There is also a statistically significant negative relation (with a medium effect) between engagement and affective organisational commitment and between interpersonal relations and affective organisational commitment in terms of the pre-test sample. Affective organisational commitment refers to the individual's enjoyment to discuss the organisation and the affinity and importance of the organisation to the

individual. The results indicated that prior to the exposure to an intra social network, that the higher the levels of engagement and the experience of interpersonal relations within the work context, the lower the levels of affective organisational commitment. Employees may therefore have been more reluctant to discuss their current organisation outside the context of the organisation.

In the post-test sample there is a statistically significant positive relation (with a large effect) between engagement and affective organisational commitment. In the post-test sample the experience of engagement results in higher levels of affective organisational commitment.

There is also a statistically significant positive relation (medium effect) between involvement and interpersonal relations and a statistically significant positive relation (large effect) between work purpose and interpersonal relations in the pre-test sample. The more involved employees feel within the organisation and the higher their levels of work purpose, the higher the levels of interpersonal relations and overall sense of belonging within the organisation. In the post-test sample there is a statistically significant positive relation (medium effect) between involvement and work purpose and a statistically significant positive relation (large effect) between work purpose and interpersonal relations.

The results therefore indicated that the exposure to a social network resulted in a positive relationship between employee engagement and affective organisational commitment. The relationship between employee engagement and work purpose disappeared after the exposure to a social network. The relationship between work purpose and interpersonal relations increased post-test although a large effect was also indicated pre-test.

T-tests were conducted to determine the comparative relationship between the pre-test sample and the post-test sample that completed the questionnaire after the exposure to the social network within the organisation. The Null hypothesis should be that pre = post. There are 3 possible alternatives (1: Pre > Post, 2: Pre < Post, 3: Pre \neq Post (unequal). The result of this comparison is reported in Tables 3.9.

Table 3.9**Differences between the Pre-test sample and the Post-test sample in a short term insurance organisation after the exposure to a social network**

Item	Pre-test Sample (N = 36)		Post-test Sample (N = 36)		p	d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Engagement	73,36	14,35	69,49	15,39	0,00*	0,37
Involvement	13,67	3,62	12,83	4,54	0,00*	0,21
Work Purpose	13,47	1,48	11,86	3,32	0,00*	0,64
Interpersonal Relations	20,89	3,50	19,03	4,96	0,00*	0,44
Affective Organisational Commitment	9,33	2,81	13,89	3,13	0,00*	1,56

* $p < 0,05$

As can be seen in Table 3.9, there are statistically ($p < 0,05$) and practically significant ($d > 0,20$, small effect) differences between the pre-test and the post-test sample in terms of engagement levels, involvement and interpersonal relations. After exposure to the social network the post-test sample's engagement levels are lower than prior to exposure to the social network. The participants' sense of belonging in terms of feeling involved in decision making and interpersonal relations in terms of feeling part of a team, having friends at work and interpersonal relations build on mutual trust and respect is lower after the exposure to a social network within the work context.

There is also a statistically ($p < 0,05$) and practically significant ($d > 0,50$, large effect) differences between the pre-test and post-test sample in terms of work purpose. After exposure to the social network the post-test sample's work purpose is lower than prior to the exposure to the social network. Work purpose refers to feeling that one's work is important and that one is adding value to the greater purpose. Participants may have with the exposure to a social network had less time to find purpose in their work.

There are also statistically significant ($p < 0,05$) and practically significant ($d > 0,80$, large effect) differences in terms of affective organisational commitment. The exposure to social networks resulted in higher levels of affective organisational commitment.

Based on the above results the null hypothesis cannot be rejected as the exposure to a social network in a short term insurance organisation only result in higher levels of organisational commitment.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the results of the empirical research is reported and discussed in terms of the qualitative and quantitative results.

During the qualitative research open ended questions were asked to give better insight into what employees' perceptions of Social Networks are. Employees mainly defined Social Network as being a communication tool (26%), they felt that the major component of social media is the individuals, members and people participating on the platform (27%) and they responded that the primary role the organisation should play with regards to social networks is to connect people (35%).

During the quantitative research three questionnaires were administered, namely the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2003), the Sense of Belonging Questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study and the Affective Organizational Questionnaire (AOC) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). A biographical questionnaire was also developed to gather demographical data regarding the respondents.

One factor was extracted from the UWES, accounting 50,94% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Engagement. Three factors were extracted from the SOB, accounting for 64,14% of the total variance. These factors were labelled Interpersonal Relations, Involvement and Work Purpose. One factor could be extracted from the AOC, accounting for 53,87% of the total variance. This factor was labelled Affective Organisational Commitment.

Acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients were found, demonstrating that a large portion of the variance is explained by the dimensions (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Results indicated that the research hypothesis could only be partially accepted and that the exposure to social networks only resulted in higher levels of organisational commitment.

In Chapter 4 the conclusions pertaining to the research questions, the limitations of the research and conclusions specific to future research and for the organisation are given.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide conclusions regarding the results obtained in the empirical studies of this research. Conclusions are drawn with regard to the research objectives. Furthermore, limitations that have been identified throughout the course of the study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for the organisation are made and research opportunities that emanate from this research are presented for future research.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this research was to establish whether social networks can be used effectively in enhancing work engagement, as well as the effect Social Networks have on organisational commitment and sense of belonging within a Short term insurance organisation. The following conclusions can be drawn based on the research questions.

The first objective was to conceptualise social networks, employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment from the literature. Social Network platforms are seen as a possible application that can enhance interpersonal relations. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as a web-based service which gives individuals the opportunity to create a public or private profile within an enclosed system, to identify and declare connections with other individuals or groups and view and navigate through a list of other connections made by others within the same system. The nature and extent to which these connections can be made vary from site to site. Social platforms are created to permit people to follow the lives of other individuals which can be described as friends, acquaintances or family (Baltatziz *et al*, 2008).

Gebauer, Lowman and Gordan (2008) states that within an organisation the most essential thing that an employer can do is to unleash the employee's full potential. Schaufeli *et al*. (2002) collaborated to define employee engagement as a work-

related state of mind that is positive and fulfilling. They continued to cluster employee engagement within three characteristics – vigour, dedication and absorption.

Sense of belonging can be seen as a major element of interpersonal relatedness and this can be specifically viewed as an experience of personal involvement within an environment or system within which individuals consider themselves to be an integral part of (Hagerty *et al.*, 1992).

Organisational commitment is defined as the attitude in the form of an individual's identification with a certain company as well as the involvement within the specific organisation (Mowday *et al.*, 1982). Affective commitment can be described as an emotional or affective attachment to an organisation, whereby the individual is strongly involved in, identifies with and enjoys the membership of the specific organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1991).

The second objective was to determine the conceptualisation of social networks and its components as perceived by the participants working in a short term insurance organisation. Participants mainly defined Social Network as being a communication tool (26%), they felt that the major component of social media is the individuals, members and people participating on the platform (27%) and they responded that the primary role the organisation should play with regards to social networks is to connect people (35%).

The third objective was to determine the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment prior to the exposure to an internal social network. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive relation (with a medium effect) between engagement and work purpose. This indicates that the higher the levels of engagement of employees, the more they experience work purpose. There was also a statistically significant negative relation (with a medium effect) between engagement and affective organisational commitment and between interpersonal relations and affective organisational commitment in terms of the pre-test sample. Affective organisational commitment refers to the individual's enjoyment to discuss the organisation and the affinity and importance of the organisation to the individual. The

results indicated that prior to the exposure to an intra social network, that the higher the levels of engagement and the experience of interpersonal relations within the work context, the lower the levels of affective organisational commitment. Employees may therefore have been more reluctant to discuss their current organisation outside the context of the organisation.

There was also a statistically significant positive relation (medium effect) between involvement and interpersonal relations and a statistically significant positive relation (large effect) between work purpose and interpersonal relations in the pre-test sample. The more involve employees feel within the organisation and the higher their levels of work purpose, the higher the levels of interpersonal relations and overall sense of belonging within the organisation.

The fourth objective was to determine the relationship between employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment after the exposure to an internal social network. Results indicated that in the post-test sample there was a statistically significant positive relation (with a large effect) between engagement and affective organisational commitment. In the post-test sample the experience of engagement resulted in higher levels of affective organisational commitment. In the post-test sample there was also a statistically significant positive relation (medium effect) between involvement and work purpose and a statistically significant positive relation (large effect) between work purpose and interpersonal relations.

The results therefore indicated that the exposure to a social network resulted in a positive relationship between employee engagement and affective organisational commitment. The relationship between employee engagement and work purpose disappeared after the exposure to a social network. The relationship between work purpose and interpersonal relations increased post-test although a large effect was also indicated in the pre-test.

The fifth objective was to determine whether the exposure to an internal social network enhance the experience of employee engagement, sense of belonging and organisational commitment within a short term insurance organisation. The results indicated that the exposure to a social network resulted in lower levels of employee

engagement and lower levels of sense of belonging. The exposure to a social network however increased the levels of participants' affective organisational commitment.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the management of the organisation and for future research are made in this section.

4.2.1 Recommendations for the management of the organisations

In terms of employee engagement, a social media platform has had little to no effect on employees but rather resulted in a decrease of engagement levels. Sense of belonging also showed a decline post-test. The results of the study showed that the major effect was on organisational commitment. Results also indicated that whereas engagement and organisational commitment had a negative relation pre-test, that post-test the relation was positive.

The outcome of the research on employee engagement can be explained by speculating that because employees spent time on a non-work related platform they were less engaged in work specific activities. The traditional conceptualisation of engagement indicates that employees experience levels of vigour, dedication and a total absorption in their work tasks while they are focused on their work at hand. When employees interact on a social network, they are not, as per the traditional understanding of engagement absorbed in their actual work tasks. However it may be recommended that the organisation explore other constructs of wellness that can be positively influenced by the exposure to social networks. The small sample could also have resulted in skew results and it is therefore recommended that the exposure to social networks and the positive outcomes thereof may be need to be explored on a larger scale.

Sense of belonging also deteriorated after the exposure to a social network. In terms of how sense of belonging were utilised within this research indicated a more face-

to-face interaction than a non-face platform. Further understanding of sense of belonging within the organisation could also be explored.

The exposure of social networks resulted in higher levels of organisational commitment. Research also indicated that employees that are more committed to an organisation are less likely to leave the company than the individuals that are uncommitted. Those that are more committed are reported to perform at higher levels and also tend to stay with the organisation for longer periods of time. Organisational commitment decreases turnover and effectively increases productivity and organisational effectiveness (Porter *et al.* 1974). In terms of the empirical results, the organisation needs to explore further the enhancement of organisational commitment as a result of the exposure to a social network as it may impact the bigger retention strategy of the organisation.

It could therefore be argued that various applications and functions that a social network adds to any organisation should be seen as a competitive advantage by management. The key to successfully introduce and utilise this platform should be pursued by the decision makers of the company as the uses for such a platform extend far beyond only influencing employee engagement, organisational commitment and sense of belonging.

4.2.2 Recommendations for future research

The effect of utilising a Social network platform within the workplace to optimise employee engagement, organisational commitment and sense of belonging should enjoy further research. The positive impact of the exposure to a social network on organisational commitment, opens up the possibility that it may also have an impact on other positive constructs such as employee wellness, retention and communication to name but a few. This needs to be further investigated.

It was found that there is a major need for more research regarding Sense of Belonging. It was very difficult to find any literature specifically pertaining to Sense of Belonging and given the high level of validity and reliability that the questionnaire achieved during this research project, it is worth exploring further.

More focus should also be placed on qualitative methods as great insight into the perceptions of employees can be gained. This is especially true in the case of Social Networks that is currently an unknown quantity within the workplace.

4.3 LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of the study was the short amount of time that the employees were exposed to the platform. A suggestion for future projects would be that the sample gets exposed to the platform for at least 6 months between pre-and post tests.

The uptake of employees on the social platform was another concern and it seemed that more focus should have been placed on training in terms of the platform as well as change management. For most employees the concept of social networks was rather new and this had implications with regards to the uptake of the platform. The lack of understanding of social media platforms was apparent when comparing different generations. The strangeness of the platform seemed to deter older generations from interacting.

Another issue may also be the completion of the questionnaires and the accuracy of the data. Employees work in an environment where time is literally money and therefore they may not spend a large amount of time when completing the questionnaire.

The project is based on a new form of technology that will be implemented within the company; challenges in terms of the technology also lend itself to challenging the research project.

The poor response to the questionnaire can also be seen as a limitation. The reason for this can be ascribe to the fact that the questionnaire had to be done on the platform. The reason a paper assessment was not done was to ensure that employees interacted on the platform. The decline in responses from the first response to the second response shows that employees had not fully understood the

platform or they might have lost their logon details to complete the questionnaire. This helped to ensure that only employees that truly used the platform completed the second questionnaire.

Lastly, the questionnaire was available only in English. Most of the respondent's first language is not English and this may have had an influence on the interpretation of some of the questions as well as some of the answers in the qualitative study.

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