

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:
A LEBANESE BANK CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of Staffordshire
University for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

February 2024

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family and friends, for their love and support.

And to my dad & mom, my first love and support in life. Although you are not here with me, I feel your presence every day and I wish you were with me now. Love you till the end of time!!!

Acknowledgements

The completion of this research could not have been possible without the grace of God and the support of my family and my professors. This journey was long, challenging, and demanding due to many factors: COVID, the economic and political crisis in Lebanon (the full collapse of the economy in 2019/2022), and especially my diagnosis with pancreatic cancer in January 2021, when I had to undergo a major operation and take heavy medication. Thanks to God, the Almighty, for His blessings throughout my life, my research, and especially throughout my sickness. With the mercy of God and the encouragement of my professors and my family, I decided to finish my thesis regardless of the challenging situation.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Jessey Pswarayi for her continual encouragement, support, and valuable feedback, without which I would have not been able to finalise this research. I am also truly thankful to my second supervisor, Dr. Jenny Gale, for her constructive feedback throughout the research period. I would also like to thank all the staff at Staffordshire University for their professional service. Many thanks also go to all the participants who dedicated some of their precious time to share with me their views, beliefs, and thoughts throughout the semi-structured interviews.

I would like to thank God for my late parents, who supported me throughout my life to become the person I am today (may their souls rest in peace).

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to my husband Fouad, my children (Aya-Lynn, Huda-Mia, and Ibrahim), my brothers (Ahmad and Bassem), and my friends for their love, prayers, care, spiritual support, and encouragement, which have been so inspiring and motivating to me throughout my research and sickness.

Abstract

The Lebanese banking industry has played a fundamental role in the Lebanese economy over the years. However, since 2011, Lebanese banks have started to face many challenges and changes due to globalisation, competition, and many other factors, leading to a major employee retention problem. Thus, the need to create a healthy and engaged workplace environment has recently started to gain the attention of most organisations in Lebanon. Yet to date, only a limited number of studies addressing employee engagement as a tool have been done in Lebanon. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to understand and analytically investigate the relevance of the concept of engagement in the Lebanese context. The second aim is to propose a functional managerial best practice model that might be useful to the LB Bank.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach

A pragmatic philosophical approach was adopted as a paradigm and an abductive qualitative approach was employed as the main research methodology of this study. Based on this, an explorative research design was used to understand employee engagement within the LB Bank workplace, and 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted at the LB Bank to inquire into the issues of engagement from employees' perspectives.

Findings

The key finding of this study was that 'wasta' is present in the LB context and has a strong influence on it. 'Wasta' is a cultural norm that is ingrained in the LB Bank, negatively affecting employee well-being, leadership practices, and the work environment, and thus in turn levels of engagement. A secondary finding supports the idea that employee engagement brings added value for the performance and productivity of the LB Bank despite the challenges that it might face from internal or external factors (such as 'wasta'). The study also demonstrates that to foster employee engagement, the bank should promote a healthy environment in which employees' fears, anxieties, and frustrations are managed and controlled, and that this cannot be done without alignment and coordination among all stakeholders. Yet, the study also demonstrates that engagement is not a 'cure all' solution to the problems impacting the loyalty and dedication of employees. It shows that the definition of employee engagement is complex and diverse, and that it can be perceived differently by participants based on their position and job role.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study establishes a direct linkage between employee engagement and 'wasta' and reveals that the presence of 'wasta' has a negative impact on employee engagement and the LB Bank environment. 'Wasta' is one of the major impeders to engagement since it is perceived as a promotor of unfairness, distrust, and lack of transparency at the LB Bank, thus leading to what is known as 'F.E.A.R' (effect on Family, Environment, Autonomy, and Recognition/Recruitment) among employees, negatively impacting the level

of engagement. Since 'wasta' is embedded in the bank's culture and cannot be avoided, the LB Bank must properly manage 'wasta' to promote engagement and ensure fairness, trust, and transparency.

Contribution to Practice

This study reveals that to promote engagement, all impeders of engagement, especially 'wasta', need to be properly managed. This cannot be done without the alignment of all stakeholders at the LB Bank (board, executives, senior or middle managers (SMs and MMs), and HRM (Human Resources Management), and by listening to the employee voice. A phrase is coined to explain the importance of alignment, stating that the bank needs 'the W.H.O.L.E ("With the commitment of HRM, the Organisation, Leaders, and Employees") to avoid the hole'. This motto simply declares that without the commitment, engagement, teamwork, and synchronisation of all parties, employee engagement will not emerge, leading to a hole in the system (metaphorically speaking). This slogan highlights in one sentence the holistic approach ('Top-Down' and 'Bottom-Up') needed to stimulate employee engagement at the LB Bank. Furthermore, the researcher has used the findings of this study and the existing theories to develop a toolkit, named 'I-PIC', that can be used by the bank leaders at the LB Bank to manage some of the hindrances to engagement – mainly 'wasta' – especially during periods of change.

Research Limitations

This research was conducted at one of the largest banks in Lebanon. Consequently, its outcomes cannot be generalised to other banks or firms characterised by different philosophies, backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs.

Keywords

Employee engagement, 'wasta', leadership, human resources management (HRM), alignment, employee voice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the purpose of this study whilst providing a summary of the overall structure of this thesis. The chapter consists of five sections. Section 1.1 gives a summary and reviews the motivations behind the study. 1.2 outlines the main objectives of the study. 1.3 examines the research questions of the study. Section 1.4 highlights the research design used for this study. 1.5 suggests possible contributions of the research to academia and its practical applications in the business world. 1.6 summarises the structure of the study and what to expect from each chapter.

1.2 Purpose and Background of the Study

Change is an unavoidable feature of life (Sharma, 2008). The world has been changing very quickly over the last 30 years (Drucker, 1988) due to many factors: the Internet, globalisation, mergers, acquisitions, adoption of new practices, adoption of new technologies, changes in economic factors, expanding social networks, and many other changes, all leading to a transformed world where it has become a very hard task for any organisation to make profits (Sharma, 2008; Kotter et al., 2021).

Lebanon is no exception. With the huge levels of economic, market, and political instability that Lebanese banks have faced, along with the intense competition within the Lebanese banking sector, the new regulations imposed on them, the fast changes in technology, and many other changes, the capacity to adapt quickly has become a necessity (El-Chaarani & El-

Abiad, 2020). Thus, banks need to be flexible, prepared, and well-structured if they are to improve productivity, performance, and profitability and gain competitive advantage in the Lebanese and regional markets. This is especially true of the LB Bank.

Thus, the banking industry in Lebanon has recently started to realise that evolution is vital for survival. New levels of innovation, creativity, quick responsiveness to changes, and speed in performance and delivery have become key factors for success (Federman, 2009; Kotter et al., 2021). As stated by Sharma (2008), the more quickly an organisation/bank is able to adapt to change and take necessary actions, the greater the likelihood that it will survive, because delays in responding to change may be very costly and damaging.

According to Hiatt & Creasey (2012), managing human capital and ensuring an organisation's commitment during organisational change are key elements in making that organisation successful and productive. However, as stated by Kotter (2012 & 2008), people (i.e., employees) do not generally like change and may resist it. Change impacts employees significantly. If it is not managed well, or if its effects are underestimated, it can have a negative impact on organisational performance (Kotter et al., 2021; Appelbaum et al., 2007; Passenheim, 2010). One of the most difficult aspects of change and the change management process is the need to 'take people with you' on the journey from one state to another. Hence, there is a need to foster commitment, loyalty, and engagement from employees so that they will 'buy in' to the new vision and accept changes to their work. Change cannot happen simply by changing strategic goals, methods, and

procedures, but must also involve implementing human resources practices such as employee engagement (Diefenbach, 2007). Aini & Djoko (2022) confirm that the more ready employees are to adapt to change, the more likely they will be to commit and remain loyal to their organisation.

As such, the concept of employee engagement is now being viewed by researchers and practitioners as vital for organisations to improve their performance (Albrecht, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Saks, 2019). They believe that employee engagement can help organisations develop a competitive advantage and make a difference (Wefald et al., 2011). Practitioners (such as Macey et al., 2011; Hewitt Association, 2004; Baumruk, 2004) have always linked employee engagement to job commitment, satisfaction, and involvement, viewing it from an organisational perspective. In contrast, some academics define employee engagement from an employee perspective (Wefald & Downey, 2009; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Despite these differences, both sides agree that employee engagement is a strategic concept for organisations and for employee well-being (Kahn, 1990) and accept that there is a major link between employee engagement and an organisation's results (Saks, 2019).

Most of the studies, theories, and frameworks on employee engagement have been conducted within Western countries. Thus, a knowledge gap exists in terms of the applicability of employee engagement to non-Western countries, particularly Lebanon. Today, Lebanon, especially at the LB Bank and in the Lebanese banking sector, is facing challenges that are taking place at every level due to globalisation, the economic and political situation, and changes in the worldwide banking regulations (such as FATCA, money

laundering laws, Basle III, and other regulations and restrictions) – and even changes in customers' expectations and needs. Thus, there has been a need to adapt to these changes quickly to meet market demand and expectations. Lately, the Lebanese banking industry has recognised that growth is necessary and that gaining a competitive advantage is vital for survival. Therefore, the need to offer quality service, along with the capacity for speed in performance and delivery, have become key achievement factors for banks (Federman, 2009). As mentioned by Kotter et al. (2021) and Sharma (2008), the more an organisation can adjust to change and take necessary steps in time, the more positive and less damaging the impact these changes will have on its performance and productivity.

In addition, Lebanon, especially the banking sector, has been facing a serious retention problem due to the lack of engagement of its employees, where qualified employees are leaving to join local competitors or to go abroad (Arzoumanian, 2018). Thus, employee engagement (Zaraket et al., 2018) is one of the concepts that has been highlighted as a tool to create a healthy working environment and to attract, maintain, and guarantee committed employees. However, the LB Bank has not yet seriously addressed issues of employee engagement: the concept is still new and has not garnered attention as a tool for employee retention and/or for improving an organisation's productivity in the Lebanese context (Arzoumanian, 2018; Dirani, 2006). In addition, only a few studies of employee engagement have been carried out in Lebanon to address it as an instrument to be used by organisations or individuals. Yet, investing in human capital to ensure productivity and efficiency has become a need, and employee engagement

as a concept has been identified as one of the most strategic schemes that an organisation can adopt, especially during periods of change and change management (Kruse, 2015; Kahn, 1990).

As mentioned earlier, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few publications exist, and little academic research on employment engagement has been done in Lebanon, especially for the Lebanese banking sector. In this study, the researcher's focus has not only been to understand what constitutes employee engagement, how it is perceived, and why it is needed at the LB Bank, but also to explore the hindrances to engagement in the LB Bank context and its impact on employees' performance and the bank's performance in general.

Employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Kruse, 2012; Saks, 2019; Alfes et al., 2013; Albrecht, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Kahn et al., 1964; Truss et al., 2014; Hewitt Association, 2004), motivation theories (Llorens et al., 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), leadership theories (Macey et al., 2011), and change management (Sharma, 2008; Drucker, 1988; Federman, 2009; Kotter, 2012) form the main scope of the literature review in this study. The basis of this study is to understand the theoretical aspects of employee engagement developed in Western countries, as well as to use an inductive approach to understanding the phenomenon of employee engagement in the LB Bank context.

Thus, the main aim of this study is to critically explore and analyse the applicability and importance of employee engagement in the LB Bank context, and then to develop a strategic framework that can be practically implemented and a management toolkit that can be employed to address

this problem. Therefore, the rationale of the study is to address the gap in knowledge that exists on employee engagement in Lebanon and to develop a model that can be used by the bank to facilitate, enhance, and maybe sustain and/or maintain employee engagement.

1.3 Research Objectives

To address the problem raised by this study and try to develop a conceptual framework, it is essential to determine an effective research goal. As mentioned earlier, a knowledge gap exists in terms of the applicability of employee engagement in non-Western countries, particularly Lebanon. Thus, the aim of this research is to investigate the importance of employee engagement and to explore and identify all the factors that might impact the level of engagement in the LB Bank context. To meet this aim, the following objectives were identified:

1. To critically review the literature on employee engagement and examine factors for its successful implementation.
2. To critically explore the significance of employee engagement within the LB Bank context.
3. To critically analyse the impact of employee engagement on performance and productivity within the LB Bank.
4. To critically determine the hindrances to employee engagement and assess the impact of 'wasta' on the work environment.
5. To develop a conceptual framework that can support employee engagement from a business perspective. Additionally, to develop a

strategical and operational toolkit that can be implemented by the LB Bank to address and foster employee engagement.

1.4 Research Questions

To gain insight into the research problem, the study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the hindrances negatively affecting employee engagement at the LB Bank? What factors act as antecedents to employee engagement in context?
2. How can 'wasta' impact employee engagement and the work environment?
3. Who are the major influencers of employee engagement at the LB Bank? How can the LB Bank improve levels of employee engagement within its organisation?

1.5 Research Design

The philosophical approach of pragmatism was adopted for the research in order to understand employees' responses, impressions, and feelings. This philosophy helped the researcher to interpret participants' responses as well as respond to the assumptions that are associated with the concept of employee engagement within the LB Bank context (Burrell & Morgan, 2017; Oates, 2006). As such, an abductive approach was employed to gather data that could help to develop the management toolkit and strategic framework. Hence, a qualitative research approach was used to address the set of research objectives and questions (Bell et al., 2022; Grix, 2002), with a focus on discovering the drivers of employee engagement at the LB Bank.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Sandelowski, 2002) as the most effective method to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' beliefs and opinions (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007; Bell et al., 2022) about engagement. Then, data collected from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns or meanings (Clarke et al., 2015). The details regarding the selected research methodology and approaches will be provided in Chapter Four of this study.

1.6 Significance for Practice and Academics

The aim of this research is to reveal the influence of employee engagement on the LB Bank's performance, an area that has been scarcely explored by existing research in Lebanon. In addition, the study also highlights the hindrances to employee engagement: mainly, the impact of 'wasta' on the work environment and on employee engagement at the LB Bank. It confirms that 'wasta' leads to a culture lacking fairness, trust, and transparency, negatively affecting levels of engagement. In addition, the importance of major stakeholders and their alignment is highlighted as a way to control the impediments to engagement (especially 'wasta') and to promote a healthy environment at the LB Bank. Finally, a tool is developed that might help LB Bank leaders promote employee engagement during change.

1.7 Structure of this Study

This thesis consists of seven chapters, excluding the abstract, references, and appendices.

Chapter Two: General Background

This chapter provides a good base for understanding the research problem in the context of the LB Bank. Here, the general background detailing the importance of and rationale behind this research is discussed. The chapter provides an overview of Lebanon, discussing four topics, including historical perspectives on the country, its political and economic aspects, the implications of cultural life on daily practices and the work environment, and an overview of the Lebanese banking sector in general.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter gives an overview of the political and economic environment of Lebanon and provides a brief overview of contemporary culture in Lebanon. It also examines the theoretical approaches, frameworks, and empirical research that have been done in the Western world and in Lebanon on employee engagement and its impact on organisational performance. Thus, this chapter provides an overview of the topic. It also conveys an understanding of the different theories that are relevant to employee engagement.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter justifies the research methodology and techniques adopted to investigate employee engagement in the LB Bank context. An explorative approach is employed following a pragmatic philosophical paradigm. As such, a qualitative method is discussed, making a case for its suitability for this research. The chapter also reviews the data collection method, the

sampling approach, and the analytical method used to assess the collected data.

Chapter Five: Findings Analysis

This chapter provides the key findings from the qualitative analysis of the collected data. It reviews the findings of the semi-structured interviews while emphasising the participants' perceptions and interpretations. The chapter also presents and analyses the findings. It concludes by corroborating the idea that most of the research findings from the literature were developed in Western countries.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion arguing for the relevance of employee engagement at the LB Bank as a way to improve productivity and efficiency. In addition, the discussion suggests how the current findings and the previous literature and studies on engagement demonstrate that the concept is not a 'cure all' solution and is not easy to implement. Rather, it can be costly and does not always warrant implementation or ensure the retention of employees during any change period.

Furthermore, it illustrates how 'wasta' can negatively impact the work environment as well as influences it by creating a toxic environment. It also emphasises the importance of alignment between major players to create a healthy environment full of fairness, trust, and transparency.

Chapter Seven: Recommendations, Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

This chapter draws together the main conclusions of this study and highlights the practical recommendations for addressing employee engagement at the LB Bank. It then demonstrates the limitations encountered by the research and discusses the areas that need to be explored for further research. Finally, it presents a reflection on the challenges faced by the researcher during the thesis-writing process. In this chapter, the researcher introduces a practical strategic tool that might help the LB Bank's senior managers and leaders to understand and manage employee engagement, especially during change. This tool should help the LB Bank's senior managers and leaders sustain productivity and high engagement levels.

From a practice standpoint, this research proposes:

- A management toolkit, 'I-PIC', that can contribute to practice. The toolkit contains mechanisms of management that can ensure high levels of engagement to keep the change process relevant and valid.

The stages of the I-PIC toolkit include:

- I - **I**dentify and **I**nitiate the change
 - P - **P**lan the change
 - I - **I**mplement the change
 - C - **C**elebrate, **C**ompensate, and **C**ontinue
- A conceptual framework summarising the impact of 'wasta' and the importance of alignment between stakeholders to promote employee engagement.

- A proposal that the bank needs the 'W.H.O.L.E to avoid a hole'. In other words, that without the commitment, engagement, alignment, and involvement of all internal stakeholders, employee engagement will not emerge.

Chapter 2: Lebanon, General Background

2. Introduction

Lebanon is tremendously diverse, religiously, politically, and culturally (Akl, 2021; Gordon, 2016). This diversity has presented major complications for the development of a stable political arrangement between the many sects in the country and has severely derailed the development of a single national identity. However, despite all the challenges that have arisen because of this segregation in thought, Lebanon has always defied the odds and managed to create some sort of harmonious way of life amongst its many social groups. Consequently, as mentioned by many Lebanese researchers (such as Akl, 2021; Dirani, 2006; Lahoud, 2008; Tlais & Kauser, 2011), Lebanon could serve as a model for multi-religious and multinational cohabitation.

To comprehend the dynamics of employee engagement in the LB Bank context, the researcher will now give a brief description of the history of Lebanon, its political and economic situation since the civil war, and the culture in general, and conclude with an overview of the LB Bank.

2.1 History of Lebanon

Lebanon is well known for its rich and complex history. It is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and its capital is Beirut. It is a small country (10,452 km with a total population of 6.8 mln) but diverse in terms of traditions and cultures (Farha, 2019; Macky et al., 2014). Over the past 500 years, many empires and nationalities have occupied Lebanon. It all started with the Roman Empire, then the Byzantines, Mamelukes, and then the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Lebanon for 400 years. After World War I, the

French regime took over, and then Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 (Farha, 2019; Macky et al., 2014). Consequently, for a limited period, Lebanon benefited from political and economic stability, which was shattered in 1975 by the Lebanese civil war, which lasted for more than 15 years. The Syrian regime occupied a large area of Lebanon, and many people emigrated over the years to the US, Brazil, Mexico, Africa, Australia, and several other countries during that period. Societally and politically, the diaspora and these occupations played a major role in shaping Lebanese culture (Lahoud, 2008).

Lebanon is fractured to this day, both by the years of civil war and by the strife between the religious sects. The aftermath of that war is clearly experienced through the lingering hostility between the sects and the unmistakable political divisions among them. The separation of the sects has generated corruption and a lack of transparency due to the different agendas of the warlords who still rule the country. This is perceived to impact employee engagement dynamics, as the recruiting process is highly reliant on nepotism, bribery, and personal agendas rather than merit (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007).

2.2 Lebanese Politics

After World War I, Lebanon was colonised by the French, who contributed towards changing the character of Lebanon from a very traditional society to a more Western one (Farha, 2019; Pharaon, 1993).

Since 1943, and after gaining independence, Lebanon adopted a democratic regime where Christians and Muslims shared power in parliament (Dirani,

2006). According to Dirani (2006) and Khalaf (1987), this democratic regime allowed Lebanon to witness stability and economic prosperity, especially in the tourism and banking sectors. This golden age did not last long. In the early seventies, tensions grew between the Christians and the Muslims because the Christians were threatened with losing power to the Muslims. The Christians wanted to deport the Palestinians, powerful allies of the Muslim party. This fight for power led to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 (Ochsenwald, 2020).

The civil war intensified during the 1980s. Israel invaded part of Lebanon, and Syria occupied and ruled another large part of the country because the Lebanese government was considered weak. The war dragged on until October 1990. Thereafter, the US, jointly with the Middle East, signed the Ta'if accord. The Syrians were then given the power and right to become directly involved in Lebanon's affairs. In addition, a power-sharing formula among the various religious groups was put in place (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007). Recruitment based on religion and sect was thereafter legally enforced. This led to rapid corruption and incompetence in the public sector (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007).

Despite all the wars they have witnessed, the Lebanese people have always been able to rebuild their country and rise from the abyss. The resilient nature of the Lebanese people is what makes them successful in their work. Demography, age, personal characteristics, educational status, rank, role status, group relationships, and other factors can have a direct impact on a person's level of commitment to work (Benkhoff, 1997; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mathieu & Farr, 1991; Bartlett, 2001). Given all the above, the researcher

believes that the resilient character of the Lebanese people has contributed positively to the success of the banking sector pre- and post-war. However, with globalisation, political instability, and the great opportunities that other countries are now offering to Lebanon's talented people, the question today is how to keep professional and qualified people committed to the Lebanese market, and specifically the LB Bank, and restrict their emigration to other Arab or Western countries.

2.3 The Lebanese Culture

Since 1992, the globalised migration of the Lebanese period has developed exponentially, with a diversified outflow of citizens meaning that almost 14 million Lebanese people now currently live abroad (Labaki, 2006). This diaspora has played a major role in the economic, social, and political development of Lebanon: the emigrant contribution has drastically fostered the development and growth of Lebanon as they send money back home or bring various newly adopted Western cultural practices back to Lebanon. In other words, the diaspora has brought Western culture to Lebanon.

The Lebanese people are known for their receptiveness and flexibility (Dedoussis, 2004). They are also known for their openness and their ready acceptance of diverse cultures (Dirani, 2006). This unique social structure demonstrates the non-traditional and westernised characteristics of Lebanese individuals, which differentiates Lebanon from other Arabic countries (Dirani, 2006). In general, Middle Eastern countries are dominated by a patriarchal political structure. Men are more present in the workforce than women (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). That is not the case for Lebanon. Here, women are active in society, having a major impact on the overall economy

of the country, especially in the banking sector (Sidani, 2005). Lebanese cultural diversity is showcased through language. Most Lebanese people are bilingual, if not trilingual. French, Arabic, English, and Armenian are widely used. In fact, many use a mixture of these four languages to communicate with one another. In Lebanese culture, family is very important. Despite the openness and the Western lifestyle that many citizens lead, family plays a major role and serves as a priority in people's daily lives and decisions (Dirani, 2009). Family trumps work commitment, and this has a direct impact on career development.

One of the many consequences of the civil war is that Lebanese citizens now identify themselves with their religion – or more precisely, their sect. There are three major religions that play an important role in Lebanese social identity: Islam, Christianity, and Druze. Within these religions, there are more than seventeen religious sects (Maktabi, 1999). Each sect has its own courts and administration for family law in terms of divorce, custody, and inheritance. Religious sects play an important role in Lebanese daily life, especially in the governmental institutions' hiring process, where recruitment is done by sect irrespective of qualifications, which ensures fair representation (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007). As for the private sector, the hiring process is more based on qualifications whilst ensuring diversification. This diversity of sectarian representation is needed in the workplace, and particularly in the banking sector in Lebanon, since personal relationships play a major role in business culture and people are likely to work with those they know and trust. Diversity therefore directly affects the workplace and Lebanese daily life (Lahoud, 2008).

Social networks, personal relationships, religion, and bribery play a major part in the daily life of Lebanese people, helping them to achieve their objectives. These practices are collectively known as 'wasta' (El Achi, 2019; Sfeir, 2020; Helal et al., 2023), an Arabic word that means to mediate or arbitrate between two parties to reach a compromise agreement or settlement (Cunnigham et al., 1993). It is a well-known practice in Lebanese culture and is used on a daily basis for social, political, and economic objectives. This practice, as illustrated by Loewe et al. (2007), is also used to secure many things, i.e., jobs, promotions, and salary increases, and to arrange social events. The practice is well-enforced in the Lebanese banking sector, and especially by high net-worth people and politicians when they want to do a favour for people in helping them to find a job (Sfeir, 2020; Helal, 2023).

The negative side of 'wasta' is that banks usually use it to bypass the standard selection process (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2012), and this ends up affecting the quality of hired people (Makhoul & Harrison, 2002). This then damages the bank's or organisation's image (Hutchings & Weir, 2006) and can indirectly have a negative impact on attracting and retaining talented staff (El Achi, 2019; Abdalla et al., 1998). Over the last 10 years, banks have tried to attract professional staff to meet market and customer demand, by developing and implementing structured recruitment processes. However, despite all this effort, this has not worked in some contexts because of 'wasta' and favourism, which cannot be eliminated, although its role in practice can be controlled.

From an educational perspective, Lebanon's workforce tends to be overeducated and overqualified vis-à-vis the requirements of the local market. With the increasing number of graduates over the last twenty years, because of the influence of 'wasta' culture and the scarcity of job availability to meet supply in the workforce, fresh Lebanese graduates and qualified people have started to explore job opportunities outside Lebanon (Nehme & Nehme, 2016), mainly in Europe, the US, and the Middle East. Furthermore, from an organisational perspective, managers still follow an authoritarian style in their daily practice (Dirani, 2006). Yet in recent years, the Lebanese workforce has become less receptive to this style of authority, as people are now more individualistic and westernised (Dirani & Kuchinke, 2011). To address this, westernised management and HRM practices have been imported and are now beginning to be practiced to a limited extent.

Therefore, several questions arise. How can human resources departments employ practices that ensure that their staff are engaged in an environment inclusive of individuals, yet which operate with a 'wasta' mentality? How can recruiters attract and motivate these talented and qualified people to engage with this challenging working environment? Has this westernised and individualistic approach impacted the working environment and employees' commitment to work? What is the impact of 'wasta' on employee engagement? Can employee engagement as a concept be used as a tool by the LB Bank to retain and maintain high levels of engagement in an organisational environment going through change?

2.4 The Lebanese Banking Sector

Before the civil war, Lebanon enjoyed prosperity in tourism, agriculture, and commerce, especially banking. During the '50s and '60s, due to financial stability, the banking secrecy law¹, and professionalism, Lebanese bankers were able to attract large depositors and businessmen, both from European countries as well as the Arabic region, leading to Lebanon being identified as “the Switzerland of the Middle East” (Pharaon, 1993). Since then, the banking sector has been the backbone of the economy and is well-known for being the most robust sector in Lebanon (Barakat, 2020).

The Lebanese banking industry has played a fundamental role in the Lebanese economy over the years. This has been driven by several comparative advantages, namely the law of secrecy and the availability of skilled personnel (El-Achi & Sleilati, 2016). Even during the civil war, this sector was able to survive and remain successful by maintaining its leadership role in the region in terms of service, product development, talented employees, and creativity (El-Achi & Sleilati, 2016; Afiouni, 2007).

The Lebanese economy is highly service-oriented and largely depends on the banking and tourism sector (Barakat, 2020). Tourism is currently facing many downturns due to regional political instability, which has led to safety concerns. The banking sector has faced many difficulties in maintaining a competitive advantage within the region.

¹ The law of banking secrecy in Lebanon was issued on September 3, 1956. It was the most thorough example of banking secrecy in the world, whereby a bank account's details cannot be disclosed either to private bodies or to public authorities regardless of their nature (official, judicial, administrative, or military) except in very rare cases.

The civil war had a negative impact on the Lebanese economy, especially on the LB Bank. For instance, many foreign banks that were operating in Lebanon left the country during the war. The economy became 85% dollarised. Most deposits at the banks were in USD and not in the local currency. Hyperinflation increased, depreciation of the currency was drastic, and many talented people left the country. When the war ceased in 1990, the history and good reputation of the banking sector prompted many foreign banks to return and start operating back in Lebanon. However, even though the Lebanese economy has witnessed various difficulties and problems, the quick recovery of the banking sector helped to attract new capital and funds to the country to rebuild Lebanon (Khatib, 2020). The quick recovery was due to the large depositors base, the law of secrecy, the good services, and the diaspora (estimated to be more than 15 mln), who continuously sent their savings back to Lebanon.

Today, the Lebanese banking system consists of 80 private Lebanese banks. Most foreign banks had left the country over the previous 10 years due to the high requirements imposed by Basle III, since foreign banks operating in Lebanon needed to fully provision their capital² in case they wanted to operate from Lebanon. The Lebanese banking industry offers private banking, investment banking, corporate banking, and commercial and retail services. It employs around 29,000 people. Over 80% are university graduates, with over 50% presentation of Lebanese women (Barakat, 2020).

² Basle III imposed on foreign banks operating in high-risk countries such as Lebanon the requirement that they fully provision their capital to be held against future losses to promote the bank's financial stability (Basle III law).

Over the last 20 years, in order to meet customer expectations and world requirements, Lebanese banking practices have been forced to move from traditional services to very sophisticated services (investment banking, IT base products, stock market products, and others). This is because of political instability, the regulations imposed worldwide on the movement of funds (compliance, risk criteria), regional and European competition, the rapid growth in technology, and the recent lack of confidence as a result of the corruption of the country's leaders (Barakat, 2020). To achieve stability, the need for and urge to hire motivated and dedicated employees has started to emerge, especially for talented people and the younger generation. Therefore, employee engagement as a concept has started to become an important topic (Peters et al., 2004).

2.5 Problem Identification

Banks today are facing many challenges, including rapid changes in technology and continuous new banking regulations. These regulations are imposed by worldwide policymakers (such as FATCA, money laundering laws, the Basle III law), and customers' expectations and requirements. Thus, Lebanese banks need to adapt to these changes. They need to invest heavily in technologies and create a good, sustainable platform for the future. They also need to create a working environment that can attract and retain employees and ensure their commitment. These factors have posed a major challenge to the LB Bank (Zaraket et al., 2018). The European and North American regions have made conscious efforts to adopt employee engagement as a tool by which they can address the need to adapt to change (Kruse, 2015). Yet, only a limited number of research studies in

Lebanon address employee engagement as a tool to help optimise change and the change process.

Will Lebanese banks be able to continue to attract more funds and gain a competitive advantage over regional banks? How can the LB Bank capitalise on the type of workforce it has and maintain its role in the labour market? Can the LB Bank manage to build and sustain an engagement with its employees' talents, and how? Can employee engagement as a concept support employee retention and improve the productivity and efficiency of the LB Bank? What are the major factors that drive employee engagement and can impact its levels of engagement in the LB Bank context?

Employee engagement has become a strategic program for organisations to attain both organisational and individual wellbeing. It is also now viewed by many studies as a tool for employee retention, creativity, and customer satisfaction and retention (Kahn, 1990). This study's objectives are to critically investigate aspects of employee engagement at the LB Bank, to examine the relationship (if any) between employee engagement, job performance, and organisational commitment, and to develop a framework or best practice to improve employee engagement in the LB Bank context. Thus, the literature review chapter starts by evaluating previous studies on change and change management, assessing their impact on organisations, and considering their relationship with employee engagement. This is followed by a critical analysis on employee engagement, the reasons for engagement, and the theories that have been undertaken to explore and position engagement.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3. Introduction

As mentioned in previous sections, there has been on-going change in Lebanon caused by globalisation, technological innovation, and social media. Most Lebanese firms, and in particular the banking sector, have started to implement changes by trying to convert from pure family businesses to hybrid businesses or corporations, so as to maintain or grow their market share. Such changes are of importance to the Lebanese banking sector as it aims to modernise itself by becoming more transparent within the domestic and international banking markets. Therefore, it is also important to address the term 'change' itself and its application within this context.

Lebanon, especially the banking sector, has been facing serious retention problems due to the lack of commitment of its employees, with the result that it is losing qualified employees to competitors abroad (Arzoumanian, 2018). Some banks are trying to find the reasons behind this and are trying to implement new HRM practices. Consequently, in 2017, Bank Audi SAL was the first Lebanese bank that, with the help of a consultancy firm, engaged in a survey that examined the level of engagement at the bank (Arzoumanian, 2018). From the survey, the average level of engagement was found to be above 50 percent. However, there were huge disparities in the level of engagement among employees. Arzoumanian (2018) used the results of this study to show the importance of the psychological contract on engagement. Being a quantitative study, the results were restricted to the questions raised in the survey, disregarding other possible insights or input. Therefore, it is

thought that a qualitative study might give employees a much-needed chance to express their concerns and beliefs. The objective of another survey conducted by Bank Audi Sal was to help the bank come up with a practical plan to challenge each driver and create a positive environment (Bank Audi Annual Report, 2017). However, the project is still in process and has been frozen by the bank temporarily since late 2019, first due to the Lebanese revolution and later due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the main objectives of the current research are to try, via an explorative qualitative approach:

1. To critically review the literature on employee engagement and to examine factors that can ensure its successful implementation.
2. To critically explore the significance of employee engagement in the LB Bank context.
3. To critically analyse the impact of employee engagement on performance and productivity within the LB Bank.
4. To develop a conceptual framework that supports employee engagement from a business perspective.
5. Additionally, to develop a strategic and operational toolkit that can be implemented by the LB Bank to address the issue and to encourage employee engagement.

Thus, there are various interconnected purposes of this literature review chapter. First, to give a detailed overview on the various definitions of employee engagement and its drivers. Second, to highlight the importance of employee engagement as a tool to help organisations/banks survive and

succeed. Third, and in order to develop a full understanding of the theories on employee engagement, to provide a conceptual discussion and critical examination surrounding the following theories: Job Demand Resource (JD-R), Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Organisational Role Theory (ORT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Leadership Theory (LMX).

3.1 Employee Engagement

The concept of 'employee engagement' recently gained importance and attracted interest in both the educational and professional environments (Albrecht, 2011). In the early '70s, concerns about effectiveness and performance started to emerge. Yet, since the beginning of the 21st century, problems caused by globalisation, increased competition, technology, and employee engagement have started to become important topics (Schaufeli et al., 2002) for both scholars and practitioners. As a result of these continuous economic, political, and technological changes, the need for employees to be psychologically and emotionally involved in the objectives and performance of their organisations has started to become challenging and vital. For instance, Osborne & Hammoud estimated in 2017 that the cumulative cost of disengaged employees in US companies was around \$350 billion. Yet, despite extensive studies having been conducted over the years, the definition of employee engagement remains controversial. Academics and practitioners have proposed different interpretations and protocols to explain engagement (Kular et al., 2008), though both academics and practitioners agree that there are significant connections and relationships between employee engagement and an organisation's results (Saks, 2019). They also agree on the importance of engagement leading to

competitive advantage in organisations across all levels (Wefald et al., 2011). Perceptions regarding the role of engagement in organisations have led academics and practitioners to explore the characteristics of engagement.

3.1.1 Employee Engagement Definitions

According to Truss et al. (2014), there is no single definition of engagement. In fact, Macleod & Clarke (2009) discovered more than 50 different forms of engagement, showing that employee engagement can take the form of work engagement, job engagement, and personal engagement, among others.

The most common definition of employee engagement among practitioners has always been linked to job commitment, satisfaction, and involvement. Macey et al. (2011), as well as Hewitt Associates (2004), link the definition of employee engagement to commitment, dedication, and pride in one's work; Hewitt Associates (2004) and Baumruk (2004) also suggest that engagement looks at employees' level in their work or in the organisation. For instance, engaged employees are those who are passionately and rationally committed to the organisation. As for Gallup (2008), employee engagement can be defined by the extent to which engaged employees are passionate about and have a profound connection to their organisation.

Academics, however, argue that practitioners' definitions of employee engagement were developed as commercial tools to align the organisation's objectives with a mission and vision statement in mind. As well as that, most of these definitions focus on the background of engagement rather than pay attention to defining the conditions and qualities of engagement (Wefald &

Downey, 2009; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Thus, the practitioners' approach adopts an organisational perspective, while academics view it from a theoretical perspective focusing on employees' perceptions.

Kahn's (1990) seminal work relating to employee engagement is considered one of the key contributors to identifying the conditions in which engagement can likely exist. Thus, Kahn suggests that it is a form of binding or connection that an employee has with their work role. As a result, Kahn argues that employee engagement leads to people expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally throughout their role performance. This entails adopting a specific mental state, i.e., 'being present at work'. Kruse (2012) also defines employee engagement as the 'emotional connection' and 'emotional commitment' the employee has towards their employment, the organisation, and its goals. He suggests that the level of emotional commitment influences employee performance. Nienaber & Martins (2020) define employee engagement as the psychological presence and involvement of the employee. Psychological presence energises employee engagement, which empowers employees to be available to implement strategy and achieve organisational objectives and thus organisational success (Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021; Nienaber & Martins, 2020).

Hence, the more engaged employees are with the company, the more they will perform well and be dedicated to their work, leading to better outcomes. It is important that psychological presence and energy are directed towards the assigned task, rather than physical energy (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). As such, the emotional elements of employee engagement need to be considered within any proposed model for the LB Bank within this current

study. Following Kahn's (1990) conceptual theory, models were developed to explain the implications of employee engagement (McBain, 2006), such as the burnout/engagement model by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Schaufeli et al. (2002) consider engagement to be "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Schmidt (2007) describes it as employee satisfaction and commitment, while Saks (2019) describes engagement as a psychological presence with two key mechanisms of 'attention and absorption' synonymous with personal engagement, work engagement, or job engagement (Welch, 2011).

In summary, the discussion above shows that it is challenging to settle on a single definition of employee engagement (Albrecht, 2011; Byrne, 2022; Vyas, 2023). Rather, the literature defines employee engagement as an emotional commitment to the organisation (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006) or the amount of effort and energy devoted by employees to their job (Frank et al., 2004). It has also been extended to include employees' motivation, influenced by their psychological condition, whereby employees feel devoted to and concerned about the company's performance and success (Truss et al., 2014). This relates to the art of engaging people with the organisation's strategy, their own roles, and the community, and affects their willingness to serve customers with passion and energy, leading to expected results (Zinger, 2015). It is from this perspective that employee engagement is defined within the LB Bank. This definition of employee engagement is also used to develop a proposed model that can be applied and practiced at the LB Bank.

3.1.2 Why Employee Engagement?

Current theory suggests that there is a link between employee engagement and company performance, in that when employees are committed to their jobs, this will result in positive organisational performance (Alfes et al., 2010; Zinger, 2015; Kruse, 2012; Sorenson, 2013; Cook, 2008; Clack, 2020; Balakrishnan, et al., 2013; Ashraf & Siddiqui, 2020). When employees are not engaged in their work, organisations lose a lot of money through absenteeism, lost productivity, and reduced turnover. Employee engagement can be considered one of the keys to a company's success because it is inseparably related to other factors, such as employee retention and efficiency (Clack, 2020; Balakrishnan, et al., 2013; Ashraf & Siddiqui, 2020).

In addition, Bakker et al. (2008) and Zigarmi et al. (2009) believe that there is a direct relationship between employee engagement and productivity as well as profitability for any organisation. Based on this perspective, the assumption is that engaged employees and highly dedicated people will try their best to satisfy their customers in order to achieve appropriate levels of customer satisfaction and retention. In agreement, Macey et al. (2011) argue that emotional involvement is essential in improving customer satisfaction, developing innovation, achieving better results, and increasing shareholder value. This view is supported by Kruse (2012) and further confirmed by Rothmann & Rothmann, Jr. (2010): that for an organisation to be successful, both in general and during change, its employees should be proactive and committed. Additionally, studies conducted by Gallup (2008) proved that there is a direct connection between employee engagement and the

customer. This study revealed that organisations with an engaged workforce will surpass their competitors on profits, productivity, and earnings per share (EPS).

Consequently, employee engagement has started to draw the attention of researchers as a strategic tool and become the main contributor to organisational performance, productivity, and profitability (Vyas, 2023; Byrne, 2022; Truss et al., 2014; Macleod & Clarke, 2009; Demerouti et al., 2001; Teng et al., 2007; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Zigarmi et al., 2009; Bakker et. al., 2008; Clack, 2020). When an employee is deeply emotionally, cognitively (very focused), and physically (willing to go the extra mile in terms of customer satisfaction and self-improvement) engaged, while actively supporting and sponsoring the organisation, there is a possibility of higher customer retention and satisfaction. This can then result in higher profits and growth (Kruse, 2012). Similarly, the Gallup (2012) research conducted across 192 organisations within different industries and countries revealed that employee engagement is a significant factor impacting company performance in terms of profitability, productivity, quality, and customer satisfaction (Sorenson, 2013). Rasool et al. (2021) confirmed that employee engagement produces cohesion in the organisation. It leads to increases in the well-being of employees and in their work performance. It brings sustainability to organisational performance. According to Shahid (2019) and Joshi (2022), organisations that disregard employee engagement might create a disengaged work environment, leading to reduced productivity and efficiency. Pertinently, Perrin (2003) surveyed 36,000 full-time employees from around 5000 companies in the US to find

their level of engagement and to assess its impact on their organisation's financial performance. Their analysis revealed a direct link between employee engagement and profit growth. Hewitt's (2005) study on engagement surveyed the financial data of 2000 organisations in over 50 countries over a period of four years (1999-2003) and found a direct correlation between employee engagement and organisational performance. In addition, the study highlighted that during these four years, when organisations focused on engagement they got better results.

Therefore, emphasis on employee engagement, as perceived by practitioners and academics, may help companies achieve better results, since it has become a significant element of measuring organisational achievement and success (Sorenson, 2013). Will this be applicable in the Lebanese context?

3.1.3 Employee Engagement in the Workplace

The ideal situation for any organisation is to have only engaged employees if it is to meet its goals and achieve competitive advantage (Hinzmann et al., 2019). However, according to Schaufeli et al. (2006) the levels of employee engagement can fluctuate. They can fluctuate over time due to changes in responsibilities, changes in management, organisational changes, structural changes, economic changes, and/or personal issues. They can be enhanced or worsened depending on the work environment (Albrecht, 2011). Finding the key factors associated with levels of employee engagement is needed to help management find the right tools to increase engagement levels that can improve the productivity and efficiency of the

organisation (Purcell, 2014; Mendes & Stander, 2011). When employee engagement is revealed and any actual and/or potential problems are addressed, the organisation will experience higher levels of productivity, greater team spirit, a healthier work environment, higher employee retention, and a more customer-focused environment, resulting in more profitable business results (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010; Stander & Rothmann, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Cook, 2008; Bakker et al., 2008; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Sun, 2019; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021).

A. Types of Engagement:

According to researchers such as Albrecht (2011), Cook (2008), Kruse (2012), and the practitioners (Reilly, 2014), the level of employee engagement varies from one person to another (Shahid 2019; Joshi 2022). It depends on an individual's and the organisation's context. This can be divided into four types of engagement and commitment:

- a) Highly Engaged: These employees are emotionally committed and highly dedicated and can go the extra mile to achieve the organisation's objectives. They work in a collaborative manner and present good team spirit, as well as add value to the organisation (Robinson et al., 2004; Brown, 2015).
- b) Moderately Engaged: These present a positive attitude towards the organisation while doing the required work but are not readily available to make any extra effort (Hewitt, 2011). Here, the key is finding which Human Resource Practices (HRP) can contribute towards making the employees more engaged and so better serve their clients. Thus, Brown (2015) found that moderately engaged

employees complete their jobs and duties, while highly engaged employees do so while making persistent efforts to progress and advance.

- c) Not Engaged or Disengaged: These employees do their work as expected without passion, energy, or interest. They consistently detach and isolate themselves from their position and responsibilities, cognitively and expressively (Kahn, 1990). They act like robots (Albrecht, 2011) who are present at work physically while their emotions and passions are not present when executing their work. In other words, they are like 'sleepwalkers', since they lack motivation and inspiration (Gallup, 2008). According to Govindarajo et al. (2014), organisations need to care of these disengaged employees to minimise the harm they can cause to the firm since they are unhappy, uncommitted, and not creative.
- d) Actively Disengaged: These types of employees are a source of destruction and damage to any organisation (Govindarajo et al., 2014; Nienaber & Martin, 2020). They are unhappy, keen to show it, and spend their time spreading their negative energy. This type of person can be one of the major factors contributing to a company's failure if they are not managed and contained at the right moment, since they are troublemakers who actively express their negative feelings, which can be harmful to the organisation (Branham, 2005; Reilly, 2014).

The cost of disengaged employees can be dramatic, both in terms of productivity losses and the performance gap (Nienaber & Martins, 2020). A question arises whether the disengaged and actively disengaged employees

should be removed from the company. The key is to find why they are disengaged and attempt to fix the problem (Govindarajo et al., 2014). Are they disengaged due to their psychological traits or due to organisational practices such as 'wasta' or absence of fairness and trust?

There is a belief that the number of non-engaged employees has been increasing in Lebanon since 2005. This is mainly due to the scarcity of work opportunities as a result of the worldwide recession, political instability in Lebanon, and the need for some organisations and banks to do restructuring and take cost-cutting measures to make and sustain profits (Bilan Banques, 2013). From this emerges the role of financial and non-financial drivers on fostering employee engagement.

B. Drivers of Employee Engagement

Even though the research has demonstrated the importance and benefits of employee engagement, there is still a constant challenge regarding definition and implementation that remains unanswered, since what motivates one person is not the same for another person (Alfes et al., 2010). The key is to understand how different drivers of engagement affect different employees, and also to consider the drivers that can help improve and ensure a holistic engagement. The other challenge is how to maintain the engagement of employees.

i. Financial and Non-Financial Benefits

Buckingham & Coffman (2005) and Armstrong & Taylor (2020) found that financial and non-financial benefits are equally important. Money is considered to be the first, basic, and most sensible step, but non-financial

benefits are key for maintaining and sustaining engagement. Penna (2007) researchers developed a 'hierarchy of engagement' similar to Maslow's model. At the base of the model are fundamentals such as money, working hours, conditions of work, and benefits that need to be met first. Once these needs are satisfied, the employee starts to search for learning development and promotion opportunities supported by a certain leadership style. Finally, when these stages are satisfied and achieved, the employee looks for the meaning of work (Penna, 2007). The Blessing (2006), Demirci & Erbas (2010), Petter et al. (2002), and Tensay & Singh (2020) all point out that autonomy, empowerment, and providing employees with support and recognition and a fair and just environment are key for improving employee engagement. In addition, Ugwu et al. (2014) highlight the importance of organisational trust and psychological empowerment on the level of work engagement, while Bakker & Demerouti (2008) include job and personal resources as precursors of work engagement. Looking at the drivers of engagement – communication, trust, a meaningful job, good and supportive direct leaders, career development, pride in the institution, and a positive teamwork environment – one can notice that leadership plays a critical role in encouraging employee engagement (Wang & Walumbwa, 2007; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Attridge, 2009; Wellins et al., 2006).

Those studies were conducted to identify the drivers behind employee engagement, with theories developed to create frameworks that help organisations (to be discussed later in this chapter), and were mostly done in Western countries such as in Europe and the US (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2019; Bakker, 2009; Macey & Schneider, 2008). The question to consider is

whether these same drivers behind employee engagement in Western countries would be appropriate for engagement at the LB Bank. This study therefore explores the drivers of employee engagement at the LB Bank to develop a framework that might help the bank to manage the challenges it is encountering.

ii. Influence of Managers and HRM on Employee Engagement

Employee engagement and company performance are positively correlated. The more employees are engaged, the better the organisation performs (Alzyoud, 2018; Zaraket & Halawi, 2017).

Influence of Leadership and Management on Employee Engagement

Researchers such as Macmillan-Kang et al. (2011), Meyer et al. (2011), and Kahn (1990), as well as consultancy firms including Gallup (2008), Penna (2007), Blessing (2006), and The Towers Perrin Talent Report (2003), have attempted to identify factors that can lead to employee engagement by creating conceptual models and prototypes for managers to adopt. For instance, Reilly (2014) found that the manager is the key factor in improving the engagement and commitment of employees, by being supportive and professional, and by creating a culture of engagement and open communication. Vance (2006), on the other hand, found that employee engagement is the outcome of a combination of two things, i.e., the employee's personal attributes (such as know-how, expertise, competence, skills, abilities, character, attitudes, and behaviour) and the organisational context (such as the environment, leadership, HRM practices, and the social and physical setting). Development Dimensions International (DDI, 2005)

mention that a leader must do five things to produce and foster a highly engaged environment: i. Make sure that efforts are aligned with strategy; ii. Empower; iii. Encourage and inspire teamwork and cooperation; iv. Support people in personal growth and development; and finally, v. Support staff and provide recognition when applicable and appropriate. This topic will be discussed thoroughly under 'theoretical perspective' (LMX).

[Influence of HRM Policies and Strategies on Employee Engagement](#)

Studies have shown that HRM practices and employee engagement are positively related (Saks, 2022; Karatepe, 2013; Alzyoud, 2018). The nature of human resources jobs has changed from being “reactive, prescriptive and administrative to being proactive, descriptive and executive” (Macky et al., 2014, p. 1963). Nowadays, one of the major roles of HRM is to develop a strategy and tools to motivate employees, attract and retain talent, and improve their engagement and commitment (Guest, 2017) in order to achieve an organisation's objectives (Aktar & Pangil, 2017).

HRM policies, strategies, and practices such as job description, training, work-life balance, empowerment, health and safety, career development, and health etc. should be developed to maintain good relationships with employees in order to retain and enhance their competence and talents, fostering a positive culture and creating a more motivated workplace (Saks, 2022; Collins & Clark, 2003; Wright & Kehoe, 2008; Lartey, 2021). These could also include the recruitment process, financial and non-financial rewards, training, job security, performance management, career development, as well as talent management. When these strategies are implemented correctly, the effects on employee behaviour will be rewarding

and will result in higher employee motivation, engagement, and retention (Aktar & Pangil, 2017; Baird & Meshoulam, 1988; Jiang et al., 2012; Gardner et al., 2011; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

C. Employees' Perceptions of the Workplace

It is also argued that it is not only by simply putting policies and strategies in place that an organisation achieves a good impact on employee behaviour, but also through the ways employees perceive these practices (Alfes et al., 2013; Gratton & Truss, 2003). Studies have revealed that employees' approach, attitude, performance, commitment, and actions demonstrate their expectations of the organisation and how they perceive HRM practices (Aktar & Pangil, 2017; Alfes et al., 2013). Khilji & Wang (2006) and Nishii et al. (2008) state that employee engagement has been adopted by some researchers as a mediatory tool to understand how employees perceive HRM practices. In other words, HRM strategies have been adopted by organisations as ways of securing employee motivation, commitment, engagement, and performance. Employees may, however, have varying perceptions of the meaning and purpose of these strategies. Researchers have often focused on employee engagement as a way of trying to understand these perceptions (Alfes et al., 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Rich et al., 2010).

In Lebanon, given the continual instability caused by war, the political and economic uncertainty, and the country's social and religious diversity, people tend to adapt easily to change and are resilient in the face of adversity (Aoun & Gibeily, 2007). Hence, the questions that might arise due to the instability that Lebanese people face on a daily basis are: how can Lebanese banks

and HRM practices ensure safety and stability for their employees if they are to retain those considered talented? Can employee engagement be a useful and effective tool? To what extent can employee engagement strategies work in difficult times when people are more fearful for their safety and security? Do engagement tactics work in such a context, or do they need to be re-modelled to fit the Lebanese context and the LB Bank?

3.2 Implications of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been practically associated with job satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Villara & Albertína, 2010), organisational commitment and the psychological contract (Saks, 2019; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), individual commitment, job performance, and productivity (Rich et al., 2010; Masson et al., 2008). This section will therefore deal with the essential elements affecting employee engagement directly or indirectly.

3.2.1 Job Satisfaction

According to Albrecht et al. (2021) and Pongton & Suntrayuth (2019), job satisfaction, meaningful work, and employee engagement have become the major focus of organisational research over recent years. It is the attitude an employee has towards their job (Spector, 1997) and indicates how happy and satisfied an employee is with their job (Villara & Albertína, 2010; Kennedy & Daim, 2010). These emotional feelings may be positive or negative (Locke, 1976) since employees are affected by different circumstances such as personal needs, job characteristics, working conditions, the organisational environment and culture, leadership style,

personal drivers, and many other factors (Martins & Coetzee, 2007). Since work performance is linked to employee job satisfaction, the more that employees are motivated and have positive feelings towards the organisation, the more committed they are to complete the job (Buchner, 2007) with greater productivity and efficiency (Kahn, 1990).

Towers Perrin (2003) relates employee engagement to job satisfaction. For instance, he defines employee engagement as the employee's enthusiasm and capacity to contribute to the organisation's success. Thus, the performance of any organisation, as stated by Saari & Judge (2004), depends on the level of employee satisfaction and dedication. Therefore, for ideal performance, an organisation requires its employees' full dedication, or, in other words, employee engagement. The more that employees are dedicated and engaged, the greater the productivity. Perrin (2003) suggests that two major factors affect engagement – the work itself and overall work experiences. The work itself involves the personal satisfaction, motivation, creativity, and affirmation an employee derives from being a productive, dynamic, and energetic element of the work environment, whereas the overall work experience consists of the relationship between the employee and the organisation. An employee can therefore enjoy their work (work satisfaction) because it is interesting and challenging, while still hate their actual job (job dissatisfaction) because of the way they are treated by managers, colleagues, or the organisation. There is an extremely subtle distinction between the two, but it may be considered an important one, especially in terms of engagement.

Now, with continuous change, globalisation, and a competitive environment, job satisfaction needs nurturing and sustaining; otherwise, the overall work environment will be affected. Thus, job satisfaction is a key element and one of the major priorities in any organisation, since having satisfied employees will contribute positively to the performance of any organisation.

3.2.2. Job Performance

Job performance is defined as tasks performed by an employee that can impact organisational goals directly or indirectly (Borman & Brush, 1993; Campbell, 1990). Theoretical researchers have found a positive link between employee engagement and job performance. When employees are highly committed to their work role, they will be physically, emotionally, and cognitively engaged to perform efficiently (Kahn, 1990; Truss et al., 2014). In other words, they will exhibit passion, loyalty, and devotion to their work. Conversely, when employees are detached and disengaged from their work roles, they tend to hold back their emotions and become passive, indifferent, and demotivated (Kahn, 1990). Most theories confirm that higher levels of engagement lead to higher job performance by encouraging positive attitudes and emotions from employees when doing their jobs and tasks (Parker & Griffin, 2011; Bakker & Bal, 2010).

3.2.3 The Psychological Contract

Tarmizi & Anggian (2022) highlight the positive relationship between organisational commitment and employee engagement. Therefore, attention and effort should be exercised by an organisation to improve employee

commitment and performance in order to impact directly overall organisational performance.

Blanchard et al. (2009) also revealed that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are positively associated with employee engagement. In a professional context, the basis of employee engagement is an organisational commitment comprising three psychological components: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and obligation commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Thus, organisational commitment refers to the psychological connection and affection an employee has towards their organisation (Saks, 2019). It is an important feature that ensures a stable workforce (Allen & Meyer, 1990). During implementation of change, employees with a high level of organisational commitment are more likely to willingly adapt, while developing a high level of organisational citizenship behaviour. This is an attribute expected of engaged employees (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Organisational commitment is perceived as the psychological connection between employees and the organisation to achieve organisational objectives (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Therefore, the more that employee objectives are allied to and associated with the organisation's goals, the more these objectives become reachable, influencing the employee to go the extra mile for the sake of the organisation (Cohen, 2003; Federman, 2009). Thus, when employees exert extra effort to achieve organisational goals, this is when organisational commitment occurs, positively affecting job performance, productivity, and employee turnover (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) and impacting all stakeholders (Porter et al., 1974).

Thus, the psychological contract has been regarded as one of the tools that can be used to ensure employee engagement with the organisation. The assumption is that the psychological contract helps employers align the organisation's objectives with employee expectations (Gratton, 2000). Therefore, the level of employee engagement is revealed when the psychological contract is fulfilled (Schuck & Wollard, 2013). This contract is a mutual agreement between the organisation and its employees where each party specifies their expectations. When an organisation breaches the psychological contract, employee engagement decreases (Schuck & Wollard, 2013). For instance, when an organisation fails to involve employees in the change process, their organisational commitment may decrease, as the psychological contract is perceived to have been violated (Sparrow & Cooper, 2011; Kotter, 2012). Here, the role of the psychological contract is to improve trust between employees and their managers, as it is expected to lead to greater organisational commitment and employee satisfaction (Shore et al., 1995; Allen & Meyer, 1990). For engagement to occur, attention is needed to create a positive psychological contract between managers and employees. In conclusion, an organisation's provision of a supportive work environment full of fairness and transparency is important to promote employee engagement (Saks et al, 2022).

Thus, at the LB Bank within the Lebanese context, this study will explore the importance of the psychological contract in fostering employee engagement.

3.2.4. Implications of Trust, Fairness, Transparency, and Communication on Employee Engagement

We see, then, that there is a direct relation between employee engagement and the workplace environment. The more the environment is healthy, and employee well-being is good, the better the employees' performance, impacting the organisation's results positively (Rasool, et al., 2021). The key elements for a healthy environment as discussed in the literature are:

a. Fairness, Trust, and a Safe Environment

As mentioned earlier, one of the key elements for the success of an organisation depends on its ability to secure the engagement of its employees by managing their needs. Chandani et al. (2016) highlight that some of the major factors impacting employee engagement and commitment are fairness, trust, and a safe environment, which can be promoted when equal opportunities for advancement and growth are being offered. In other words, fair and equal treatment for employees will foster and impact engagement levels positively.

Trust, fairness, and job security in the workplace have been important topics in the field of organisational behavior (Richter & Näswall, 2019; Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008; Fujishiro, 2005). The concept of trust and fairness has emerged as a leading field of research along with organisational commitment, employee loyalty, and employee engagement (Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023; Wang et al., 2019). The more an employee feels safe, and trusts their organisation, the more likely they are to show devotion and commitment, affecting the organisation's success positively (Brockner et al., 1997). By tapping into these needs, and by ensuring good communication

and showing appreciation, the employee will feel supported and valued; thus, engagement and motivation are enhanced (McManus & Mosca, 2015; Sharma & Kumra (2020). Goldman & Cropanzano, in 2015, pointed out that justice and fairness are two different but complementary concepts. Justice introduces the rules and procedures that are required, while fairness refers to how employees/persons perceive these regulations. Thus, a justice procedure can provide the voice, but employee perceptions of these rules may or may not be viewed as fair.

Thus, as stated by McManus & Mosca (2015), trust and the establishment of trust in an organisation are critical for developing and maintaining a healthy work engagement environment. But the most important element is to make sure that employees feel that these trust rules and the procedures in place exhibit fairness and provide job security. As confirmed by McManus & Mosca (2015), the absence of fairness and trust might directly impact the well-being of employees, leading to frustration and disengagement. Therefore, the key to promoting fairness and trust in the system is to have in place transparent and good communication, good and qualified leaders, and excellent HRM, all of which are capable of creating an environment that supports and values employees. In addition, they should be tailor-made and fulfil employees' needs in order to create the perception of fairness.

By creating an environment where employees feel supported and valued, they will be empowered and motivated to engage and do their best (McManus & Mosca, 2015; Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015; Sharma & Kumra, 2020). From this comes the role of transparency and communication.

b. Transparency and Communication

Carriere & Bourque (2009) and Pongton & Suntrayuth (2019) mention that there is a positive relationship between communication and employee engagement. The higher the levels of communication satisfaction, the higher the levels of employee satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. Communication plays a significant role in the corporate world (Kang & Sung 2017). The more transparent communication is, and the more it exhibits fairness and creates a trustworthy environment, the more willing people are to go the extra mile, leading to business success (Pongton & Suntrayuth, 2019). As affirmed by many researchers (such as Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Schmidt & Jackson, 2005; Wyatt Watson, 2008; Pongton & Suntrayuth, 2019; Mazzei et al., 2019), communication is vital for any organisation that wants to ensure a safe and healthy environment full of trust and transparency.

Thus, transparent and clear communication is crucial for understanding employee needs and for hearing their voices; it is considered to be a major prerequisite of employee engagement. Communication can be used by the organisation as a strategic tool to build a mutually trusting relationship among stakeholders since it helps people develop a sense of belonging (Mazzei et al., 2019). According to Mazzei et al. (2019), communication encourages a culture of transparency between employees and their managers. It permits employees to share their concerns and opinions with their superiors leading to alignment among all stakeholders. This ultimately creates an environment that fosters employee engagement. As Kang & Sung (2017) note, the perceptions employees have of the work environment vary

from one to another; thus, effective internal communication full of transparency and credibility is key to organisational success and for influencing employees' perceptions.

In addition, as mentioned by Almeida & Coelho (2019), communication can be regarded as a powerful tool that helps organisations to create their own corporate image and build a strong reputation to reinforce their competitive advantage.

c. Corporate Image

The importance of intangible assets, such as corporate image, has also been highlighted in the literature as one of the factors impacting employee satisfaction and engagement (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Osman et al., 2022). As defined by Gray & Balmer (1998), corporate image is the direct mental image that people have of an organisation, and most organisations' main concern is to promote a positive and favourable image to their stakeholders (employees, clients, board of directors, leaders, etc.). Consequently, many studies on corporate image (known as corporate branding) and its impact on employee engagement have been developed over the last ten years (Kazimoto, 2016), revealing that corporate image and employee engagement are directly related. If the reputation of the company is perceived as negative, employee retention, company profits, and performance will be impacted negatively (Gray & Balmer, 1998; Zameer et al., 2018).

As confirmed by Helm (2011), corporate image has a direct impact on employee self-esteem and job satisfaction, thereby affecting employees' emotional commitment. In addition, ISR's (2004) study recognised that a

company's image is one major factor that can impact employee retention and foster engagement. Easa & Bazzi (2020) also revealed the importance of employer branding and its impact on employee engagement and employee retention for achieving a competitive advantage. Kazimoto (2016) also states that branding can create a value proposition for an employee engagement strategy and support the external recruitment process of any organisation. To ensure a good corporate image, the organisation must work on the quality of the service and products they offer, promote a corporate culture full of fairness, trust, and transparency, and strongly support employee well-being (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Osman et al., 2022; Zameer et al., 2018).

In conclusion, lack of trust, the feeling of being unsafe, lack of transparency, lack of communication, and a poor corporate image, might all lead to a toxic environment where employees' wellbeing is impacted, leading to demotivation and frustration that directly affect employee engagement (Rasool et al., 2021). Thus, managing the workplace environment is key for employee engagement (Blessing, 2006; Zaraket et al, 2018; Demirci & Erbas, 2010; Petter et al., 2002; Albrecht, 2011).

This study will look at the importance of these factors for encouraging employee engagement within the Lebanese context.

3.3 Employee Engagement in the Lebanese Context and the Banking Sector

Even though employee engagement as a topic has gained a lot of attention around the world over the last decade as a tool to improve performance and productivity (Elewa, 2013), to date, Lebanon and Lebanese organisations have not actively considered or applied employee engagement initiatives as

strategic tools to retain talent and/or improve competitive advantage (Dirani, 2006; Arzoumanian, 2018): most of the employee engagement research, assumptions, and solutions have been done in the United States and Europe. Inadequate attention has been paid to the likelihood that employees in different cultures could be different (Elewa, 2013): i.e., what motivates employees in the Western world might be different from what drives engagement in the Middle East, mainly Lebanon. Hewitt (Qudurat TM, 2011) revealed a modest engagement rate of 54% in Gulf countries. Trends (2016) showed that the region is still unexplored as far as engagement is concerned.

Within Lebanon itself, research into employee engagement has not entirely been ignored; it is, however, limited (Arzoumanian, 2018; Dirani, 2006), with little attention paid to human capital investment and development. However, Dirani (2006) points out that despite the Western approach being used in the banking sector, and though efforts have been made to improve HRM practices in the workplace, employee engagement has not yet gained attention in Lebanon as a tool to improve retention and productivity. Most studies in Lebanon consider only two or three factors that determine employee engagement. For instance, Azoury et al. (2013) highlight that the level of engagement in Lebanon is directly related to reward and payment packages (whether in the private or public sector). They demonstrate that the psychological climate could directly impact engagement in Lebanese society, and show how HRM practices are important. El-Achi & Sleilati (2016) explored the importance of leadership and coaching on employee performance in the Lebanese banking sector. Ismail et al. (2019) looked at

the impact of engagement on company performance in the Lebanese context. Their study showed that creativity is important for improving job performance, but that this cannot materialise unless employees are engaged, committed, and satisfied. Research done by Chemali (2017) within a family-owned business in Lebanon showed that organisational commitment and job satisfaction are directly linked to employee engagement whilst negatively related to retention, thus clearly reflecting the fact that employee engagement is a two-way exchange of effort between employees and employers (Vyas, 2023). In addition, he disclosed that employees who are between 50 and 59 and have been with the company for more than 20 years are more committed than newly recruited persons. Arzoumanian (2018) identified the impact of psychological contracts on employee engagement in the Lebanese context and conducted a survey at one of the leading banks in Lebanon. Dirani & Kuchinkeb (2011) point out that satisfaction and commitment are correlated in the Lebanese context, and that learning whilst working is of added value to employees and bank performance. They state that a learning culture, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction are the main factors behind employee engagement in the Lebanese banking sector. It must be a priority for HRM to develop a culture that ensures these (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). They add that the more that employees are involved and empowered and evolve in their careers, the more commitment they show.

3.4 'Wasta'

As mentioned earlier, in the Middle East, and especially in Lebanon, 'wasta' (equivalent to nepotism in the Western world) has been an issue for some

time. 'Wasta' plays a very important role in employment decisions in the Arab world (Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008). It is also one of the most important components of Lebanese culture and heavily impacts the daily life of the Lebanese people (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011) in terms of job recruitment, political appointments, gaining privileges, obtaining resources, etc.

3.4.1 Definitions of 'Wasta'

There is no specific definition of 'wasta'; there are some dissimilarities and many similarities in understanding the word (Kassab, 2016). 'Wasta' is an Arabic word meaning 'intermediary'; it entails the use of personal connections to achieve certain objectives (Sidani & Thornberry, 2013). In the literature, 'wasta' refers to a person obtaining a favour from another person; it also involves exercising power, making interpersonal connections, information-sharing, etc. in order to get things done (Mohamed & Hamdi, 2008; Harbi, et al., 2017; Aldossari & Robertson, 2016; Cunningham et al., 1993) – in other words, a person with an 'advantage' offering to help another person. The competitive edge that a person gains is thus based on who they know and not on their capabilities or knowledge (Kassab, 2016). Therefore, 'wasta' is based on connections related to acquaintances, relationships, favoritism, and sectarianism (Afiouni et al, 2016). As mentioned by Al-thbah (2021), 'wasta' has a double-edged meaning: it can be a tool used by corporations, individuals, and the government for recruitment and for reducing the unemployment rate, while at the same time it can be a source of corruption. Many researchers have tried to understand the historical growth of 'wasta' in the Middle East in order to gain a better insight into the

concept and how over time it has become a form of corruption; however, no scientific evidence of this transition has been found as yet (Al-thbah, 2021).

Tlaiss & Kauser (2011) mention that 'wasta' is one of the most important factors of Middle Eastern culture, and Lebanon is no exception. Unfortunately, given the diversity of religion in Lebanon, sectarianism is particularly dominant in the Lebanese business world (Afiouni et al., 2016). Thus, 'wasta' has become an important factor in getting job offers (Dirani, 2006; Mohamed & Hamdi, 2008; Afiouni et al., 2016). Given the fact that the banking sector has been booming, that there is a high supply of people searching for work, and that there is a limited number of job offers, 'wasta' has started to play a key role in the hiring process, whereby a person is recruited regardless of their qualifications (Mohamed & Hamdi, 2008). Favouritism, social connections, political pressure, and many other factors play a major role in the filling of job vacancies. Hence, unsuitable candidates can be recruited, especially within the banking sector (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

The concept of 'wasta' in Lebanon is complicated since it sometimes has a direct impact not only on recruitment but also on the daily practices of organisations such as salaries, compensation, career development, promotion, and many other aspects, which directly affect the psychological contract and employee engagement (Kassab, 2016) and impact the internal corporate environment. The following section will elaborate on the impact of 'wasta' on corporate culture.

3.4.2 Impact and Implications of 'Wasta'

'Wasta' can have positive or negative impacts on the social environment. Positively, it can play a major role in securing jobs. It helps people use their connections to find a job; at the same time, it helps organisations find employees to fill their vacant positions through connections (Fernandez et al., 2000; Helal et al., 2023). However, the negative impact of the practice of 'wasta' is the recruitment of unqualified people, affecting the work environment and productivity of the organisation (Helal et al., 2023). 'Wasta' can be viewed as a form of corruption that has a negative impact on an organisation (Rawabdeh et al., 2020) since it can create a toxic environment where fairness, trust, communication, and transparency are absent, leading to frustration among employees that directly impacts their level of engagement (Saks et al., 2022).

As mentioned earlier, employee engagement is one of the most important factors with a direct impact on job and organisational performance (Dajani, 2015; Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023). Consequently, any organisation needs to consider what factors and elements might undermine its employees' engagement and find out how to resolve the situation to achieve a better engagement level (Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023). According to Alsarhan & Valax (2021), 'wasta' is one of these factors since it affects employee well-being negatively in terms of reduced job satisfaction, frustration, lack of motivation, and poor performance. According to Sfeir (2020), few studies have been done in the Middle East and Lebanon on the impact of 'wasta' on HR practices. In her study, she reveals that 'wasta' has a direct impact on HRM practices, especially the recruitment process. And according to a study

that he carried out in Lebanon, Kassab (2016) found that the influence of 'wasta' on employees might negatively impact the level of engagement and employee performance since it is considered a breach of the psychological contract, leading to demotivation and dissatisfaction among employees and contributing in turn to undermining the bank's success.

The problem with 'wasta' in Lebanon is that it creates discrimination, sometimes based on religion and sometimes on which political party you belong to. This creates a toxic environment (the glass-ceiling effect) in the workplace for less privileged employees and can irritate employees (Haddad et al., 2022). This glass-ceiling effect can create an environment full of unfairness, breeding distrust among employees within the organisation, negatively affecting their wellbeing (Haddad et al., 2022; Sfeir, 2022).

As mentioned earlier, to foster employee engagement, companies should promote a healthy workplace environment where fairness, trust, and transparent communication are in place (Chandani et al., 2016). The problem with 'wasta' is that it can favour less-qualified people over others in the recruitment and selection processes, in promotions, and possibly even in the awarding of financial benefits. Consequently, people with value, capabilities, and qualifications will be overlooked and become frustrated, impacting fairness and equality in decision-making (Almutairi, 2022). A further issue with 'wasta' is that people who have been employed based on their qualifications, rather than their connections, will feel insecure and unsafe. This also creates a toxic environment.

One can conclude that the practice of 'wasta' in organisations in Lebanon and the Middle East is a salient issue; therefore, organisations need to learn

how to manage 'wasta' in a smart way to minimise its impact on the work environment. This can be done by creating a fair and trustworthy environment where equal opportunities for career growth and financial benefits are offered, as well by ensuring transparent communication (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). This study will try to explore the impact of 'wasta' in the LB context and its impact on employee engagement.

3.5 The Theoretical Framework of Employee Engagement

Many theories and perceptions have been developed to address the concept of employee engagement. Thus, employee engagement has been described and rationalised by applying the theoretical perspectives of the SET framework and JDR framework (Sun, 2019). However, there is currently no exclusive theoretical framework for employee engagement (Sun, 2019). This is because the antecedent variables of employee engagement can have a direct impact on performance, as can the psychological contract. The antecedent variables can either be organisational factors, job factors, and/or individual factors (Barik & Kochar, 2017). In the current study, several theoretical approaches will be examined in order to establish and understand the antecedents of employee engagement and their effect on organisational performance. These are the individual performance and psychological contract; the Job Demand Resource (JD-R) Framework; social exchange theory (SET); the needs-satisfaction framework; self-determination theory (SDT); leadership theory (LMX); organisational role of theory; and the conservation of resources theory (COR). They are then applied within the context of the LB Bank. These are therefore discussed in turn.

3.5.1 Job Demand Resource (JD-R)

The Job Demand Resource (JD-R) describes how working conditions can influence employees' wellbeing and engagement (Kwon & Kim, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Llorens et al., 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). The model helps investigate how JD-R affects the level of employee engagement during organisational change, especially when an employee is feeling insecure and emotionally unstable.

The model proposes that each organisation has its own different working environments that can affect employee performance (Sun, 2019). These environments are categorised into two groups: (a) job demands and (b) job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006; Sun, 2019). They can be applied to any type of environment. Bakker & Demerouti (2014) explain that job resources and job demands are interrelated. Jointly, they stimulate personal growth, inspire creativity, encourage learning development, and create work engagement to improve the company's performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). However, without these personal resources, work engagement will not be observed (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

According to Demerouti & Bakker (2014) job demands are those social, physical, and psychological or organisational aspects of the job that require a high level of commitment and continuous emotional effort from employees through positivity, dynamism, self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem, and motivation. However, they can also result in burnout if they are not managed well (Schaufeli, 2017). Job resources are also identified through their

physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects that are crucial for meeting job demands, achieving work goals, and promoting growth and learning through autonomy, performance feedback, social support, training, and coaching. When these resources are offered, employees are more likely to be engaged and willing to go the extra mile to achieve organisational objectives (Schaufeli, 2017; Bakker et al., 2003).

According to Schaufeli & Bakker (2004), there are two psychological practices: energetic and motivational. Energetic practice can lead to burnout and exhaustion, especially when the job requires excessive energy (Hakanen et al., 2006). Motivational practice, on the other hand, promotes engagement when valuable resources such as autonomy, support from supervisors, training, and coaching are used to achieve the organisation's goals (Schaufeli, 2017). Some researchers also view this model as a source of burnout. They point out that when job demands are high and job resources are limited, the situation can become serious and even dangerous (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Thus, to avoid burnout, organisations must ensure that job resources meet job demands to create a positive and healthy environment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

Therefore, we can say that burnout is an energetic or health deficiency of the JD-R model (Bauer & Hämmig, 2014) that must be considered. The JD-R model is related to this study since it identifies how job demands can increase and impact engagement levels during periods of change and uncertainty due to employees' frustration. It is challenging and costly to accommodate and handle employees' frustration and anger (Beijer & Gruen,

2016). The JD-R model is generally used to investigate the background and outcomes of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2011). However, the JD-R model alone cannot explain the different levels of engagement among employees since it fails to take into consideration the influence of diversity and heterogeneous factors such as politics within the organisation, irrational reactions, micro and macro factors, or the complexity of situations faced by organisations and employees in the workplace (Bailey et al., 2017; Bargagliotti, 2012). Therefore, social exchange theory (SET) is used for this research instead to explain the relationship between employee needs and employers' requirements.

3.5.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET) helps understand workplace behaviours and employee engagement and what factors affect their engagement level (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017; Blau, 1964; AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). It is based on reinforcement theory (Homans, 1961).

SET has been defined as “the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons” (Homans, 1961, p. 13). The basic assumption of SET is that any relationship between two persons will develop into trust and loyalty when both parties stick to certain ‘rules’ of exchange (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013). Employment is one example of this exchange activity. When a bank provides economic benefits and social rewards to their employees, employees feel that they must give something back in return. This payback can be in the form of commitment to and engagement with the bank (Cropanzano & Mitchell,

2017; Saks, 2019). This exchange is a sociological approach that describes how the supply of resources by any organisation will prompt employees to have the urge to show engaged behaviours (Albrecht, 2011). It can also be described as a psychological connection between employee and employer that can be either positive or negative (AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013; Shiau & Luo, 2012) and can directly affect the level of employee engagement. This level changes based on how much employees feel the urge to repay their organisation (Saks, 2019; Aktar & Pangil, 2017). In other words, employees decide what level of engagement they are willing to give to their organisation based on the resources they receive (Sun, 2019). Since the employee engages voluntarily, engagement cannot be imposed on them or demanded by the employer. Rather, the employer needs to make employees want to be engaged by providing the needed resources.

A social reward that has been associated with SET is developmental HRM (Human Resources Management), which aims to develop the soft and technical skills of employees. It is also viewed as a resource that leads to affective commitment and engagement (Shore et al., 1995; Blau, 1964). These kinds of social rewards reveal the good intentions of the employer to which the employee will reciprocate (Bal, et al., 2013). Another social reward is delegating power and control from leaders to their employees, which results in employees feeling valued. As a result, more effort is expected from employees (Whitener et al., 1998).

Some theorists regard this theory as a heartless mathematical model (Miller, 2005). They criticise it for its selfish characteristics, as it ignores the personal perceptions of employees regarding rewards or punishments which might

have a direct impact on job engagement (Yin, 2018). For example, when leaders or managers perceive or feel that their subordinates do not adequately or sufficiently reciprocate or show their support, such perceptions can provoke conflict or lead to emotional frustration (Bakker et al., 2003) and vice versa. Employees might feel or perceive that their direct managers have failed to reciprocate as well. This can result to experiencing a sense of bitterness and anger, which may impact the stability and trust of the relationship between organisation and their employees.

The feelings an employee develops when expectations are not met have not been discussed under JD-R, though they have under the SET model (Rousseau, 1989; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Identifying and valuing the relationship between unmet employee anticipations and engagement enables organisations to create and manage an engaged workforce, as this relationship has a direct link between expectations and employee behaviour (Rigotti 2009). SET is one of the most important theoretical models for comprehending workplace behaviour (Doherty, 2010). This theory is also relevant to this current research through the need to establish the fact that the changes the LB Bank might need will be achieved at both the organisational and personal levels. Both levels are contextualised within the LB Bank social setting where financial transactions are exchanged and concluded.

As mentioned previously, employee motivation is a pre-indicator of organisational success. It is needed to establish an engaged workforce. Hence, understanding human motivation and its drivers is essential. Since

JD-R and SET do not consider aspects of human motivation, the need to understand self-determination theory (SDT) is discussed.

3.5.3 Organisational Role of Theory (ORT)

Organisational role of theory focuses on how the workplace environment affects the emotional and physical behaviour of an individual (Kahn et al., 1964). This theory suggests that roles are created by expectations and are associated with the positions in the organisation's environment (Qian et al., 2018). It concentrates on the way an individual accepts and plays a certain role based on the assigned task and their hierarchical position in the organisation (Madsen, 2002). An employee's behaviour is based on how their job develops. It emerges in a situation where duties and job obligations are not clearly defined and structured (Qian et al., 2018). Employees might fall into a state of role ambiguity (Biddle, 1986). According to Solomon et al. (1985), this lack of clarity and the presence of ambiguities in the job requirements will lead to frustration, tension, confusion, anxiety, and reduced innovation within the workplace (Kahn et al., 1964). Hence, they will result in employee dissatisfaction, disengagement, and lower performance (Kahn et al., 1964; Qian et al., 2018). Solomon et al. (1985) infer that the organisational setting should provide both explicit and implicit indications regarding the role that an employee has to play to avoid tension and dissatisfaction. This is of importance to the current research question in that it links the performance of the LB Bank with the performance of the employee, recognising that there are non-work-based elements at play. Parker & Wickham (2005) highlight those individuals who have other non-

work-based roles to enact and accept. This includes family-based roles, sport-based roles, and social-based work. They point out that there is a direct link between work-based and non-work-based roles. Organisational role theory has been critiqued for its difficulty in interpreting deviance when it does not resemble or match a pre-specified role. Another drawback of this theory is that it does not clarify or justify how role expectations have been formed and it does not elucidate when and how role expectations change (Parker & Wickman, 2005).

Therefore, at the LB Bank within the Lebanese context, understanding and determining the factors of employees' behaviour are fundamental to help maximise employee performance and engagement and to foster the formation of expectations and how they change (Parker & Wickman, 2005).

3.5.4 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) is about human motivation. It clarifies that the involvement of employees necessitates the fulfilment of basic psychological needs such as competence, independence, and relatedness (Albrecht, 2011). The theory identifies two main forms of motivation, i.e., intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Singh, 2016). Intrinsic motivation refers to an activity done for its own sake and extrinsic motivation is related to an activity done for instrumental reasons (Singh, 2016; Meyer & Gagne, 2008). The logic behind this theory is that human beings (by nature) have innate tendencies to doing things out of interest rather than obligation. According to this theory, satisfaction and fulfilment of the basics (competence, connection, and autonomy) will help the employee perform

better and adapt to change more easily (Thomas, 2009). Self-determination thus has an impact on motivation. It allows people to feel that they are in control of their decisions. Therefore, competence and capability are satisfied when people believe they have enough resources to accomplish their objectives. Autonomy is satisfied when individuals feel that they are empowered, independent, and can act freely, consistent with their values. Relatedness happens when they feel that they are valued and appreciated by others (Meyer & Gagne, 2008).

Even though self-determination theory is viewed as a motivational theory, it is not without its limitations. Conflicting results concerning the advantages and disadvantages of having autonomy show that it is a multifaceted phenomenon. Some researchers demonstrate that it is linked to positive outcomes (Reynolds & Symons, 2001; Zuckerman et al., 1978). Others show that it might not have an impact or can even have negative effects on the person involved (Schraw et al., 1998). Some studies suggest that choices can be either motivating or demotivating depending on whether an employee's need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met or not. For instance, a choice is motivating when the opportunities are consistent with the employee's objectives and interests (autonomy), are not too varied or multifaceted (competence), and are consistent and affiliated with the employee's values, culture, and beliefs (relatedness). Given the multiple elements involved, and the complications posed by each employee's needs, some studies actually regard choice and autonomy as hindering factors for employee engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This theory can thus add value to the current research, as it explains engagement; it also considers the psychological outcomes and status regarding employee roles that can emerge through lack of engagement, while helping to address employees' motivations in order to deliver the required changes. SDT can in this way be used to address relationships within the LB Bank. However, as autonomy is potentially a double-edged sword, in order for choices to be inspiring and appealing, researchers must pay attention to the context and culture of the LB Bank and the Lebanese banking sector whilst considering employees' needs, abilities, and goals.

3.5.5 Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

Employee engagement reports done by practitioners such as Merry (2013) and the SHRM (2014) have highlighted the importance of leaders' roles in promoting employee engagement. Also, in academic studies (such as Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Maslach et al., 2001; Turner, 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020), the role of leadership is emphasised as a major supporting factor for ensuring a healthy psychological environment at the workplace to encourage engagement. Many studies (Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Ghadi et al., 2013; Turner, 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020) indicate that leadership style and employee engagement are directly linked and that the characteristics of leaders, combined with organisational practices, have a direct influence on shaping the company's culture and in promoting an engaged environment (Kotter, 2012).

Most of the theories on leadership have identified leadership styles and practices. LMX theory was developed to introduce the vertical dyadic

interaction between leaders and their followers. The focal point of this theory is that leadership is based on the interactions between a leader and each group member (Lebron et al., 2018; Bauer & Green, 1996). The relationship between leaders and members can be either a high or low dyadic one (Tabak & Hendy, 2016). This directly impacts employee behaviour and commitment. For instance, a high-quality LMX entails positive interactions between leader and followers, including mutual respect, trust, job satisfaction, and constructive interactions. Followers are more devoted, positive, and willing to go the extra mile for such leaders (Lebron et al., 2018; Nahrgang et al., 2009; Aggarwal et al., 2020). Meanwhile, a low-quality LMX is characterised by limited reciprocal trust and a formal and stressed relationship. This leads to low job satisfaction, high work stress, and withdrawal behaviour from the employee's side resulting in the development of employee disengagement (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Aggarwal et al., 2020).

There are basic differences between two forms of leadership, i.e., the transactional and the transformational. Transactional leadership works on an exchange and reward system, whilst transformational leadership depends on the leader's capability to create an environment full of team spirit and a shared sense of purpose. For instance, the transformational style exhibits inspiration, authenticity, vision, support, and empowerment to employees. It creates a team spirit that has a direct positive impact on engagement (Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). In addition, the classical leadership style depends on a retaliation and rewards system that has a negative impact on employee engagement.

LMX and transformational leadership are positively linked since their main objective is to develop a unique relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Krishnan, 2005) to foster a positive work environment. Popli & Rizvi (2016) suggest that it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that the drivers of engagement are in place and enforced. These drivers include HRM practices, teamwork, a supportive working environment, rewards and benefits, performance management, and all other important job resources. In addition, the study by Papalexandris & Galanaki (2009) found that vision, inspiration, charisma, and entrepreneurial characteristics are key elements that leaders can use to impact their subordinates. To ensure engagement is achieved, leaders should have the competence to clearly articulate their vision, and the capabilities to mentor their employees effectively. Another study was carried out by Gozukara & Simsek (2015) highlighting the importance of transformational leadership for engagement, and the role of autonomy as a job resource for improving transformational leadership.

However, LMX theory still needs to be validated with more empirical research on the leadership engagement relationship (Shuck & Herd, 2012; Carasco-Saul et al., 2015) and by incorporating gender, age, culture, and the environment where leaders operate.

3.6 Conclusion

This study aims to understand how cultural and normative processes might affect employee satisfaction and commitment in the LB Bank context, especially the impact of change and 'wasta' on employee engagement. The current study also intends to reveal whether theoretical, academic, and

practitioner explanations developed in Western countries can be generalised to Middle Eastern settings, especially Lebanon.

Lebanese banks have started developing awareness on the importance of employee engagement to improve and sustain competitive advantage (Dirani, 2009; Arzoumanian, 2018). They need to capitalise on one of its main strengths and the cause of its competitive advantage, i.e., human capital. Introducing the concept of engagement among talented and young employees might help to achieve these objectives. This understanding is based on the perception that when an employee is committed and devoted, they perform better (Nielson et al., 2017). To ensure that employees are happy and engaged, there is a need to identify workplace resources at all levels (employee, team, manager, as well as organisational levels). Hence, this will help the researcher in this current study. Given the fact that there is a lack of previous research conducted within the Lebanese banking sector, the researcher will adopt a flexible approach, taking into consideration all the above theories to identify factors influencing engagement in the LB Bank context. This will help develop a model that can be implemented at a strategic level and actioned within different departments of the bank by supervisors and managers.

Despite the multiple definition(s) of employee engagement, no single theory can be applied to the LB Bank. Rather, all of the above theories and models are very useful for this current research to help build a framework for the LB Bank. For instance:

- The Job Demand Resource (JD-R) model is needed to highlight whether job demands at the LB Bank are met by the supply of job resources, to

avoid burnout, and to find out whether the scarcity of job resources has impacted the level of engagement. With the economic and political situation and the scarcity of resources, is the level of engagement affected?

- Social Exchange Theory (SET) is an excellent model that can be applied in the real world as it takes into consideration the work environment (culture and social values) and the interactions between people. The core of this theory is based on costs and rewards as individuals make some decisions based on certain expectations and various other decisions based on culture. Therefore, it will help us to understand how employees are interacting with the changes that are taking over. Furthermore, do 'wasta' and other cultural practices impact employee engagement and motivation?
- Organisational Role Theory (ORT) will help to analyse and interpret the impact of the work and non-work roles on employee behaviour (work/life balance). Understanding the determinants of employee behaviour in the workplace for improving employee engagement is important. Given the family culture, does the work role impact the life balance equilibrium?
- The psychological contract will help explain employee behaviour in the workplace and the impact of trust and fairness on employees. Does the breach of the psychological contract in the LB context impact employee engagement negatively?
- Self-Determination Theory (SDT): As JD-R does not directly consider the impact of personal resources on the energetic process or on emotional

exhaustion (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), SDT will allow a direct examination of employees' drivers without overlapping personal resources (Fernet et al., 2012), since there is some practical evidence that psychological resources such as perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness act as mediators between job resources and exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2012). Are these resources valid within the LB Bank context?

- The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) can be applied to the LB Bank context to examine how interactions between employees and their leaders impact engagement and commitment.

Merging these models in this current study will help deepen an understanding of the role of employee engagement in relation to job resources, work commitment, and burnout. By incorporating the theoretical concepts described above and weaving together the merits of each theoretical concept to build a new model, the study can examine how employee engagement in the LB context operates and assess its impact on productivity and efficiency, highlight the major hindrances of engagement to the LB Bank's performance, and identify who are the major influencers of engagement on the LB Bank.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4. Introduction

A research methodology comprises an organised and efficient description of the method that a researcher adopts with respect to the collection and analysis of data (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). It also explains how the data collected can be used to address and challenge the research question (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This section presents the framework of the research methodology used, explains the choice of research strategy, and shows how the methods and approaches apply to the current study on employee engagement at the LB Bank. The chapter also discusses pragmatism as a paradigm that informs the research methods of this project. As stated, the study was done at the LB Bank, where the researcher is a member of the senior management. Thus, the researcher is considered to be an insider participant since the research setting is the same as the researcher's working environment (Robson, 2002). There are pros and cons regarding insider researchers: the pros are that such researchers have easy access to participants and information and are familiar with the environment and the culture, while the cons are that there can be bias and subjectivity (Greene, 2014). However, with regard to this study, being an insider presented itself as advantageous in that the researcher has a holistic understanding of the critical issues under investigation, with unrestricted access to sensitive information and cultures that might otherwise be invisible and inaccessible to someone investigating from outside the LB Bank (Saiden, 2016; Coghlan, 2003).

Such accessibility might still have an impact on objectivity and may lead to some bias, since the researcher might suffer role conflict (Coghlan, 2003). Yet some researchers argue that for discussions of certain issues that are culturally focused, insiders may enjoy advantages because they are able to broadly understand the participants' concerns and views (Saiden, 2016). For this study, being an insider, and understanding the significance of the issues within the LB Bank, helped the researcher to secure the full consent, support, and cooperation of the participants during the interviews. While recognising the challenges and tensions of being an insider, it was important that these issues were closely monitored if the research was to achieve the desired outcomes by ensuring the rigorousness, privacy/confidentiality (identity protection using codes), trustworthiness, transparency, and transferability of the findings (Fleming, 2018). As far as participants were concerned, they were very happy to share their experiences, believing that doing so would improve the work environment at the LB Bank. They also found that the study gave them an opportunity to share their concerns and feelings.

This chapter presents the aim of the research question, and then provides a critical analysis of the methodological approach, main philosophical paradigms, research strategies, and techniques used in the research. Thereafter, the types of data gathered and techniques used to analyse the data are considered.

4.1 Research Objectives

There has been significant emphasis placed on improving engagement over recent years by the LB Bank as a tool to improve its efficiency, productivity,

and growth (Kruse, 2015). And, as discussed in the previous chapter, employee engagement is considered an important and strategic element for improving organisational performance and workplace achievement (Albrecht, 2011; Shuck et al., 2011; Saks, 2019).

Since the early '90s, and upon the signing of the peace process in Lebanon, the LB Bank experienced the beginning of major restructuring and underwent changes because of globalisation. These changes were observed throughout all levels of the organisation and took the form of change management: change of ownership, mergers, and acquisitions. In addition, more regulations were imposed worldwide on the banking sector after the 2008 crisis, requiring higher levels of expertise across the industry. There was an excess supply of professionals, and extreme competition among and between banks. These changes created a competitive environment affecting employees mentally both directly and indirectly. As a result, the LB Bank started to witness the movement of resources to local or external competitors and to experience low engagement among employees. Given the above, and the lack of increased research on employee engagement as a topic in Lebanon and the Lebanese banking sector, it was considered appropriate and relevant to explore these changes in this current study.

The primary aim of the current research was to develop a strategic model that could guide the LB Bank on how to optimise employee engagement as it faces ongoing changes and deals with this volatile period, to ensure sustainable productivity and performance. The research objectives were:

1. To critically review the literature on employee engagement and examine factors for its successful implementation.
2. To critically explore the significance of employee engagement within the LB Bank context.
3. To critically analyse the impact of employee engagement on performance and productivity within the LB Bank.
4. To critically determine the hindrances to employee engagement and the impact of 'wasta' on the work environment.
5. To develop a conceptual framework that supports employee engagement from a business perspective. Additionally, to develop a strategical and operational toolkit that can be implemented and used by the LB Bank to address and foster employee engagement.

4.2 Philosophical Paradigms

A research methodology is a method of recognising and measuring several methods and techniques that can be exploited in the research process, and of identifying the numerous data gathering methods and types of tactic and approaches that can be used (Amaratunga et al., 2002; Punch, 2006). Choosing the right method and tool is crucial to achieving the main objective of any research: mainly, finding an answer to an unsolved problem or question. Therefore, identifying an appropriate research philosophy is vital before starting any research project (Amaratunga et al., 2002). Failing to indicate which paradigm is used in the research might undermine the objectivity of the researcher (Lincoln, 2010), since the paradigm explains the

researcher's worldview and philosophies and clarifies their approach to inquiry (Morgan, 2014). According to Blaxter et al. (2010), the various research paradigms show that different approaches are suitable for different circumstances and environments; thus, no single definitive approach to research exists, as there are many forms that can be applicable to different situations in life.

There are four well-known social research paradigms disputed among social scientists: positivism, pragmatism, realism, and interpretivism (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). For instance, positivism supports the quantitative approach, constructivism/interpretivism promotes the qualitative approach, while pragmatism offers flexibility, allowing the use of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Consequently, it is important for the researcher to determine the appropriate paradigm to be adopted. Positivism and interpretivism are both at the outer edges of the social research field, realism comes in the middle, and pragmatism involves the concept of mixing methods which is more suitable for practitioners (Dalsgaard, 2014; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). When practitioners adopt pragmatism, the data collected is more meaningful (Ulrich, 2007) because the ultimate principle of pragmatism is that the analysis of data should come with actionable knowledge that is relevant to its context (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism focuses on actionable knowledge and on understanding real world issues by recognising the connection between experience, knowledge, and action (Patton, 2014; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). This philosophy uses an inter-subjective approach, taking into consideration both subjectivity and objectivity (Morgan, 2014). The pragmatic paradigm uses all methods in order to understand the topic under

investigation, to answer the 'why', 'what', and 'how' of the problem (Morgan, 2014).

As explained in the literature review chapter, employee engagement can be interpreted in different ways; therefore, the most appropriate philosophical approach to be adopted in studying employee engagement, as well as other organisational behaviours, has always been debatable (Amaratunga et al., 2002; Punch, 2016). However, the topic of the current research called for a pragmatic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Morgan, 2014), based on the following reasons. First, this paradigm claims that reality and knowledge are built on human experiences and needs, depending upon context (Dillon et al., 2000). This means that the researcher was able to understand, explore, and analyse human experience relating to the topic studied at the LB Bank. Second, since this paradigm allows for a level of freedom in choosing data collection methods – in other words, it does not dictate what methods must be used to collect and analyse data (Morgan, 2014) – the researcher had the flexibility to conduct qualitative interviews in a manner that permitted participants to relate their perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln, 2010). Third, pragmatism helped the researcher to understand the context, conditions, outcomes, and impacts of employee engagement at the LB Bank. This is because from a social perspective, people can go through the same experiences and incidents but interpret them in different ways based on their background, social surroundings, and understandings (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Fourth, pragmatism, according to Dewey (1938), is a tool for tackling real-world problems and providing actionable insights for addressing any problem. For this study, it could be

used along with a qualitative method to allow the researcher to focus on the practicality of using findings to address the real-world problem of employee engagement at the LB Bank. Finally, Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) also emphasise the usefulness and efficiency of pragmatism for addressing real-world challenges. With employee engagement as a research topic, pragmatism can provide a framework that encourages problem-solving. This philosophy helped the researcher comprehend some or part of reality, building a new understanding to come up with a route to or a framework for change in that part of reality (Dewey, 1938). This helped participants to generate interest in making improvements (Goldkuhl, 2012) and critically analyse present knowledge while at the same time explore the possibilities of discovering and formulating new knowledge. In summary, as action is at the center of pragmatic philosophy (Lindberg, 2020), and given its flexibility as a different approach, pragmatism was adopted for this research to help the researcher create socially useful knowledge and explore a new constructive understanding of employee engagement at the LB Bank (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Therefore, the qualitative data for this research was gathered with the help of semi-structured interviews, adopting an abductive approach in situ to assess the participants' views regarding employee engagement.

To give a wider picture for the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face to understand and analyse people's thoughts, experiences, behaviours, and opinions, to come up with new findings. Data analysis was pragmatic and conducted using a manual thematic approach.

More details will follow regarding data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.3 Research Approach

According to Saunder et al. (2019), when analysing data it is important to decide which research approach will be more useful and valuable, either the inductive, the deductive, or the abductive approach.

The inductive approach is informed by the interpretivist approach; it is qualitative in nature and generally refers to the use of interviews to gather the necessary data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This approach allows the researcher to be more interpretive and more flexible when collecting the data than the deductive approach (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). The inductive approach involves extrapolating themes and patterns based on the recorded evidence. It is usually considered more exploratory.

The deductive approach requires the development of a concept based on present theories, thereby formulating a research design for investigating assumptions (Wilson, 2010). A deductive approach is applied to a particular theory, and tests are conducted to identify and consider whether that specific theory should be applied to intended situations or not (Beiske, 2007).

The abductive approach relates to pragmatism, whereby the collection of data is used to explore phenomena, discover themes and patterns, and establish a framework to be tested. Thus it involves examining and studying reality in a certain context and coming up with new perceptions and beliefs (Dudovskiy, 2016). In other words, abduction entails alternating between discovery and justification (Lindberg, 2020).

Therefore, for this study, the abductive approach was employed since it permitted the researcher to fully understand the intricacies and difficulties of social life (Morgan, 2014). In other words, it made it possible to address the research questions effectively (Morgan, 2014). With the abductive approach, the researcher was able to choose the best way to collect and analyse the collected data by combining numerical and cognitive reasoning (Mitchell & Education, 2018). Thus, the main purpose for choosing abduction was to explore the data, try to find out a pattern, and come up with a new framework to be tested in the LB Bank context.

4.4 Research Methods

4.4.1 Qualitative versus Quantitative

Following the above discussion, based on the pragmatic/abductive approach, the qualitative method was chosen to enable the researcher to get answers to the why, what, and how questions relating to this highly complex and multifaceted topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). It was also needed to help the researcher build a constructive knowledge base useful for action and change (Goldkuhl, 2012).

The qualitative method is a practical research method where data is collected in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2013). The method involves mainly in-depth interviews, enabling the researcher to get a better understanding of the views and perceptions of the participants. This approach is about stories and narratives produced through asking questions, and by observing and examining verbal and nonverbal responses (Silverman, 2000). It allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of

each participant's point of view and to examine the self-expressions and understandings of each participant, with the aim of finding answers to questions on how social experience is shaped. It is true that subjectivity is the main feature of qualitative research (Bell et al., 2022). However, for the current study there was a need to gather employees' voices together, in order to come up with a new framework vital at a strategic level for the LB Bank.

The reason behind choosing qualitative research as a method was to see the world from the participants' standpoint and to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' emotional insights (Wolcott, 2008). By taking a qualitative approach, the researcher had the advantage of being able to understand the phenomena from different perspectives. A qualitative approach gives emphasis to the arguments and feelings of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Hence, it helps the researcher to produce new knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). In other words, it facilitates the discovery of the complexities of human behaviour in a simple, rich, meaningful, clear, and transparent way (Cohen et al., 2017).

The quantitative method, in contrast, deals with numbers, and stresses the measurement and analysis of relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Quantitative researchers argue that their method is more valid, since it encompasses a wide range of participants over a short period, whereas qualitative coverage is restricted to those people who are interviewed. However, for the purposes of the current research it was necessary to understand individuals' experiences, inner concerns and feelings, and to see how they interact with their different socio-cultural

environments (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The current study is not about testing variables or developing numerical support for an objective understanding of reality, or proving the validity of a hypothesis, but about exploring and understanding human reactions and perceptions and coming up with valid and authentic information based on those human experiences and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Employee engagement research has mostly been quantitative in nature, and most engagement studies have been based on the positivist paradigm due to the psychological nature of these studies. Kahn, in 1990, was the first to introduce a qualitative method as a tool for social research, namely, employee engagement. Ultimately, using a mixed-method approach may be most useful for producing valid and convincing results. More persuasive interpretations can be made and firmer conclusions drawn when both methods are used together. However, given the complexity of the situation in Lebanon, and the changes that have been observed in the culture and general social environment, understanding reality can be a hard task.

In conclusion, a qualitative method was needed to enable the researcher to get answers to the why, what, and how questions to this highly complex and multifaceted topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). This was mainly to explore the relationships and drivers behind employee engagement at the LB Bank, but also to understand why employee engagement is needed and how to make it a strategic focus for the LB Bank. The researcher's strategy was to get a deep understanding of the participants' emotional insights, interactive conversations, and subjective experiences before taking a step back to capture and reflect on a broader perspective (Wolcott, 2008).

4.4.2 Case Study

The researcher decided to employ a single case study adopting the pragmatist approach for the following reasons:

- There are few existing studies on employee engagement in Lebanon. Therefore, a single case study would offer an opportunity to explore the phenomenon within the LB Bank.
- The LB Bank is the largest bank in Lebanon. This would help the researcher investigate employee engagement at a prominent organisation that has a strategic presence in Lebanon.
- The study is explorative, helping the researcher to understand the complexities of employee engagement at the LB Bank. The objective is not to quantify engagement at LB bank but to understand and identify the hindrances to employee engagement.
- Case studies are usually used to generate hypotheses rather than thoroughly test them (Creswell, 2013). This study's main objective is to develop an in-depth exploration of employee engagement at the LB Bank and not to test a hypothesis.
- Finally, the researcher is interested in collecting data regarding the real-life situation of employee engagement at the LB Bank from the participants' perspective.

The use of this method has always been controversial (Zainal, 2007) for its lack of rigour and reliability since there are no standard rules to follow (Oates, 2006; Creswell, 2013). However, it is widely used in the social sciences since it enables the researcher to examine, explore, and investigate phenomena in their real-life context (Yin, 2014).

Thus, the case study method was selected since it enables the collection of a broader amount of information than other methodologies, allowing a better understanding of the phenomenon of engagement in a specific context. This helps the collection of data on contemporary rather than historical events and mostly answers the why, what, and how questions that are of interest to this research (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014).

4.5 Research Strategies

To understand employee engagement, exploratory research was conducted. Exploratory research is defined as a form of research that allows the formulation of initial insights into the nature of a problem and creates questions that must be determined by more extensive research (Marlow, 2005). It can generate additional knowledge that is useful and of high importance. In this case, it helped the researcher to explore the factors behind employee engagement in the LB Bank context. The major benefit of exploratory research design is that it permits researchers to study and interview participants in their natural environment (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

Several factors were considered when choosing this research strategy: i.e., the limited data available in the Lebanese context, the time limitations, and the topic itself. The researcher believed that exploratory research was the best approach to help her understand circumstances within the organisation. It enabled her, where applicable, to find new insights (Saunders, et al., 2019; Robson, 2002). Additionally, exploratory research allows unstructured data to be gathered from participants who share feelings and emotions connected

to a phenomenon (Bickman & Rog, 2008). The participants' views were needed for this study.

Descriptive and explanatory strategies were disregarded for the following reasons:

- Explanatory strategies attempt to draw meaningful and appropriate conclusions from the substantial amount of data that is readily available. This was not appropriate for this study. This study establishes fundamental relationships between the dependent and independent variables. In other words, explanatory research is said to be deductive and therefore takes a quantitative approach (Adler & Clark, 2014).
- Descriptive strategies are not feasible for this study because the objective of this research is to explore the concept of and factors behind employee engagement at the LB Bank rather than simply to describe what is happening.

4.6 Data Collection Methods

With the qualitative approach, the most widely used technique for collecting data is to conduct individual interviews (Sandelowski, 2002) using prepared questions to explore specific topics (Cook, 2008). It is an effective strategy for discussing the views or opinions of multiple numbers of people. It helps to see the subject under research from the point of view of participants and to understand why they perceive the subject in a particular way (King, 2004). It helps researchers to collect participants' beliefs, opinions, and understanding connected to a given situation (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007).

The participants are able to express their opinions and reflect on their experiences in response to the formulated interview questions (Morse, 1994; Macdonald, 2012).

Since the current study is exploratory, there was a need for flexibility in collecting data. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were considered an appropriate tool for this study. They gave the researcher the flexibility to investigate further where the participant's voice was of value. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews facilitate open discussion (Appendix I). As for the unstructured technique, it was also disregarded since the researcher wanted to avoid discussions that were not associated with the research topic (Willig, 2013).

One of the shortcomings of interviews is the risk that participants may want to present an ideal picture rather than demonstrate an authentic revelation of their exact point of view (Czarniawska, 2004). To overcome this, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and that participants were comfortable with expressing their thoughts and concerns openly. The discussion was interactive, and full of enthusiasm and sincerity. Due to the ability to use probing follow-on questions (being open-ended type questions) participants were able to answer the questions in a very proactive way, with different ideas and themes highlighted.

In conclusion, within the framework of employee engagement, this type of interview strategy was needed to understand the culture of the workplace from a social perspective, because with semi-structured interviews people tend to provide their own points of view (Kruse et al., 2003).

4.7 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a tool used by researchers to experience real-world situations and test the validity of the research design and approach before conducting the final study (Kezar, 2000). A pilot study is a pre-testing research instrument that has several objectives, mainly to help the researcher assess the feasibility of the study and to collect primary data with the aim of deciding on the method to be used and design the study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2010). Therefore, a pilot study was needed before conducting a full-scale study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2010) to:

- Provide awareness of the topic under research.
- Orient the researcher in order to identify the right questions that could be used.
- Check the clarity of the semi-structured questions, i.e., whether they were easy to understand.
- Have a clear vision of the techniques to be used.
- Rectify the errors, if any.

A purposive sampling method was chosen to select the interviewees and decide who should be the target population. Initially, the researcher was only interested in interviewing non-managers and middle managers. Therefore, the pilot study was conducted with three participants who were interviewed at the workplace. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. After the pilot study, the researcher understood that the study should also be done with senior managers to determine the gap that existed between the perceptions of employees and their senior managers regarding employee engagement. Moreover, the pilot study helped the researcher to understand

the topic under study, enhance her skills in interviewing, and improve her interactive personal skills. In conclusion, the importance of the pilot study and sampling method helped to enhance the overall quality and validity of the research.

4.8 Sampling Population and Sample Size

Pragmatism directed the researcher's sampling approaches by identifying useful practice-based knowledge, as well as safeguarding the sampling process and decision-making that led to knowledge generation and providing useful information that could be put into practice immediately.

The main purpose of this qualitative research was to understand the concept of employee engagement from participants' perspectives; therefore, it was imperative to select a representative sample. Sampling means selecting a group of people by utilising the researcher's ability to find the right interviewees in order to meet the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). Since the aim was to study a small sample in order to produce in-depth data, there was no need for a large sample size. There are two sampling techniques, probability and non-probability sampling (Pather, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Probability sampling is a random sampling technique and is usually representative of people or events in the whole population (Saunders et al., 2019). Non-probability sampling is a purposive sampling method where the researcher's judgement is used to select the sample participants (Saunders et al., 2019). In this qualitative exploratory study, the purposive non-probability technique was used to select participants (Saunders et al., 2019). This method allowed the researcher to produce valuable data in order to understand and explore the topic under

study at the LB Bank. Using this type of sampling technique, the objective was not to test a hypothesis, but rather to have an initial understanding of how employee engagement is perceived and comprehended by participants at the LB Bank.

The purposive sampling technique is known as judgmental sampling, since the representative sample is selected based on the researcher's judgement and their belief that participants are representative of the population under study (Babbie, 2020). This technique allows the use of a sizable number of individuals who can provide appropriate information about employee engagement (Van Manen, 2016). The participants were willing to participate and able to articulate their experiences and opinions, which helped the researcher to ensure the transferability and credibility of the outcome (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Spradley, 2016). According to Marshall et al. (2013), there is no concrete way to choose sample size using qualitative research. The number of samples is linked to the saturation levels of the information and the data obtained. That is, saturation is reached when no more themes emerge from the conducted interviews (Walker, 2012).

Since the LB Bank employs more than 3,200 people in Lebanon, the target population for the study to be interviewed comprised different levels of employees/stakeholders within the bank, since employees at different levels encounter different challenges.

The screens for participant eligibility were:

(a) having worked full time at the LB Bank for at least one year. The reason for such a selection was that the researcher wanted to ensure a range of

experience and to draw reflections both from fresh employees and more experienced employees.

(b) willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview and be open to sharing their feelings, concerns, and stories.

Taking into consideration the organisation chart at the LB Bank and the need to guarantee and secure the depth of data, and given the scarcity of data concerning this topic in the Lebanese context, the researcher initially selected a sample size of 10 participants to ensure diversification of data, gender, years of experience, seniority, and type of work. This, however, did not reach saturation point until 18 participants had been interviewed (on a one-to-one basis). These 18 participants were selected based on their role, experience, and gender to ensure diversity. (For more demographic information on all participants see Appendix II).

Participants	Selection Criteria
Five senior managers (two female/three male) willing to have more open and informal conversations (referred to as SM 1-5) were interviewed on a one-to-one basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Responsible for a line of business at the LB Bank + Responsible for a group of branches – network managers from different areas + Had a minimum of 10 years' experience in management
Five middle managers (four female/one male) were interviewed, ensuring diversification of gender, position, seniority, and years of experience (referred to as MM 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Must have directly managed and supervised a minimum of five employees + Must have at least three years' experience in management
Eight junior employees (four female/four male) were interviewed. A larger sample was needed to ensure diversification of age, experience, and type of job (clerical, frontliner, back office, human resources, accountant, and others – referred to as J1-J8).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Must have been at the LB Bank for at least a year

4.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis plays a fundamental role in research studies since it helps in reviewing the information collected (Zikmund et al., 2013) and in answering the research questions (Basurto & Speer, 2012).

Statistical analysis of qualitative data was used as a complementary method to qualitative analysis since the primary aim was to produce new knowledge that had been examined through qualitative analysis (Schmitz & Finkelstein, 2010). In addition, it was used to extract objective content for identifying themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This mixture of methods is in line with the pragmatism paradigm which dictates flexibility in data collection and analysis (Morgan, 2014).

By moving between data and by hearing the employees without modifying or interpreting the meaning, a thematic approach was chosen to analyse the qualitative data (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Thematic analysis was needed to investigate and identify recurring patterns or meanings from the data collected (Clarke et al., 2015). It was used to understand and interpret people's responses to create the basis of the qualitative interpretation (Percy et al., 2015). Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to be flexible, deal with large amounts of data, understand the data collected, and discover new concepts and thoughts during interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) that addressed engagement at the LB Bank (Clarke et al., 2015).

Data analysis was done in parallel with data collection, since the continuous interpretation of data helped the researcher to develop a critical understanding of the phenomenon. Through this process, and by using thematic analysis, the need to reveal patterns and/or themes in a structured

and organised way emerged (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Miles et al. (2018) suggest that data analysis should be carried out in stages to ensure that the analysis is done reliably through data reduction, data display, and concluding.

The reduction of qualitative data from the interviews was not an easy task. Therefore, reading and re-reading the transcripts and becoming familiar with the data on hand so as to come up with patterns was a crucial step in the data analysis (Clarke et al., 2015; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), allowing the researcher to get a full picture of participants' feelings and thoughts. A manual approach was taken in order to reveal patterns, themes, and sub-themes (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Reducing data was done by selecting, simplifying, summarising, and organising the interview transcripts and data using codes (Miles et al., 2018). Coding was needed to highlight patterns and to develop themes from the data on hand (Appendix III). An inductive approach was adopted to allow concepts to emerge from the data collected (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data relating to each question was organised to allow the researcher to explore discrepancies and/or relationships between data (Miles et al., 2018). Similar themes were grouped under the same codes. However, some of the data was interrelated and connected to more than one theme. Thus, the researcher used a multi-coded method to sort the data into different themes. By reducing the data, the researcher was able to pay attention to how often certain things come up in relation to specific issues. For instance, the unhappiness and dissatisfaction of the middle managers came across frequently. The codes were clustered into themes to build a framework for

employee engagement. For example, several codes were related to financial benefits, leadership, and culture.

The data was displayed using themes, percentages, tables, graphs, and direct quotations (Yin, 2010). This helped the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the data and to organise her thoughts by matching and linking the information, allowing her to reach an answer for the set objectives of this research and to translate the data into practical recommendations. It also assisted the researcher to build an understanding of employee engagement and of the factors affecting its level at the LB Bank (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). In addition, where necessary, direct quotes from participants were used to support and capture the essence of the themes and sub-themes.

4.10 Credibility and Transferability

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), credibility and transferability play a major role in qualitative research. Thus, reliability and validity are needed to evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative research. They also play a significant role in deciding how objective and robust the research is (Wahyni, 2012; Tracy, 2019).

Credibility relates to the trustworthiness and value of the findings where the participants authenticate the results of the research (Tracy, 2019). It also evaluates whether results and findings are reliable and reflect the correctness and authenticity of the data as derived from participants (Sinkovics et al., 2008), while transferability has external validity where the results can be transferable and generalised to other contexts (Tracy, 2019).

One of the major problems of external validity is the inability to apply the findings and results from a research study to a wider environment (Neuman, 2013).

To ensure credibility and transferability, the researcher created a mechanism using several strategies (Stavros & Westberg, 2009; Yin, 2014), summarised as follows:

- Clear and concise interview questions were prepared, as recommended by Yin (2014).
- In Lebanon, people speak both Arabic and English as well as French. The questions were therefore prepared in English. However, during interviews, participants had the choice to speak any language they wished. This helped them to be more expressive and transparent. It helped to avoid ambiguity and to ensure each question was fully understood.
- The researcher used probing follow-up questions to make sure that the participants' answers were fully and clearly understood (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
- The researcher was very conscious of avoiding any leading questions to avoid bias (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003).
- The face-to-face interviews took around 50 minutes (5 minutes introduction, 35 minutes discussing employee engagement, and 10 minutes rephrasing what had been discussed and highlighting the major points).

- In addition to the above, the researcher also kept notes of the reactions and feelings of the participants, as recommended by Draper & Swift (2011).
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then the transcripts were sent back to the participants for internal validation and to seek credibility.
- According to Maxwell (2013), transferability is the capacity to generalise the outcomes of the study beyond controlled boundaries while developing theories (Yin, 2014). In this study, as discussed previously, the selection from the population was mixed in terms of age, sex, and experience to ensure variety and a range of different views. And, last but not least, findings were validated with the theory to ensure external reliability (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

4.11 Ethical Considerations

It is very important to pay attention to the ethical considerations of the research when the research involves human participants. Cohen et al. (2017) suggest that a high level of ethical consideration should be maintained, pertaining both to the sensitivity levels of the questions asked and the time taken to complete the interviews, because interviews intrude into the lives of the participants.

For research done at universities, it is recommended that ethical codes and standards are adopted and respected throughout the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The current research follows the Ethics Guideline Procedures outlined by Staffordshire University. As per the academic

requirements of Staffordshire University, ethical approval is required, whether in the form of a fast-track or a full-approval process. Given the type of research, applying for a full ethics form was not needed since the research does not involve animals, vulnerable adults, or children. All the participants in the current study were over the age of 18. Therefore, the short form (Fast Track Ethical Approval Form – Appendix IV) was submitted and approved before data collection.

The ethical considerations that were taken into account are summarised as follows:

- All participants were above 18 years old and were recruited voluntarily.
- Transparency and clarity: The researcher clearly informed participants of the research topic, the purpose of the study, the reason behind choosing this topic, and the process of collecting the data, and assured participants that confidentiality of data obtained was a primary objective.
- Consequently, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix V) before the interview to confirm they were willing to participate in the research process and to get their approval to proceed. The consent form signed by each participant was coded. As a result, their identity could not be revealed, thus ensuring confidentiality (Siedman, 1977).
- One of the main ethical considerations in social science, since it deals with information related to people, is that the researcher should be honest and manage the data sensitively and professionally. That is,

not to use any information and/or results obtained for any personal purposes, and mostly not to share personal information with any third party collected under any conditions, in order to protect participants' privacy. The researcher informed all participants that their data would be kept confidential and anonymous. Burns & Grove (2010) describe anonymity as when participants cannot be recognised by or connected to their answers and replies. In this study, anonymity was guaranteed by assigning an alphanumeric code for each participant to avoid using names (Morse & Coulehan, 2015), and the code was saved on a password-protected computer. Thus, participants did not have any concerns regarding their privacy and anonymity.

- Withdrawal right: All social research concerns ethical matters since it involves collecting data from people and about people (Punch, 2013). Therefore, protecting the rights and wellbeing of those who genuinely agree to participate in research is a vital code of ethical research. At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They had the right not to answer if they did not feel comfortable in doing so. No one withdrew from the study since the subject under study was of interest to them.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methodology adopted to examine employee engagement within the LB Bank in Lebanon has been explained in detail. Additionally, the chapter has discussed the philosophical paradigm chosen, the research approach and design, as well as the method used. Then, it has explained how the participants were selected and how the data was

collected and analysed. Finally, it has assessed the validity and reliability of the research data whilst taking the ethical considerations into account.

Research dealing with social science is difficult, diverse, and heterogeneous since it deals mainly with human beings (Tuli, 2010). Consequently, the goals and basic assumptions set for doing social science research were considered based on the topic at hand. Therefore, based on the topic under study, the researcher selected the philosophy of pragmatism as a paradigm.

Given the philosophical approach adopted, the research was explorative, and a qualitative method was used as the appropriate method for this research. A pragmatic approach to data analysis was needed to give guidance to the researcher to understand the procedures or phenomena that develop subjective reality. It helped explain the level of engagement among the employees at the LB Bank and the experiences of the employees within this context.

Finally, as collecting data from and about people involves ethical matters (Punch, 2013), protecting the rights and wellbeing of those who willingly agree to participate in research is a vital aspect of ethical research. Thus, the ethical considerations were fully respected. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews were planned and prepared so as to take into consideration the Staffordshire Ethics code of conduct. Therefore, all participants were reassured that their data would be kept confidential and would not be shared (Silverman, 2000).

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate and interpret the data gathered from senior managers (SMs), middle managers (MMs), and non-managers at the LB Bank. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen participants to gather in-depth information and explore themes while taking a principled approach to data-collecting. This method allowed the researcher to discover and highlight how the participants perceive, feel about, and experience the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Once the findings have been illustrated, the researcher will develop them further in the discussion chapter.

During the analysis process, the qualitative data was grouped into meaningful themes to help answer the main objectives of this research. A thematic approach to analysis was adopted. This is a flexible tool that provides the researcher with useful, rich, and detailed data (Clarke et al., 2015). Six main themes were developed, and under each theme several sub-themes emerged. To facilitate the presentation of the findings, the use of a thematic map will be provided. Some direct citations from the participants' responses will be included. Each participant was given a code based on their position in the organisation.

Seven major themes emerged from the collected data through interviews:

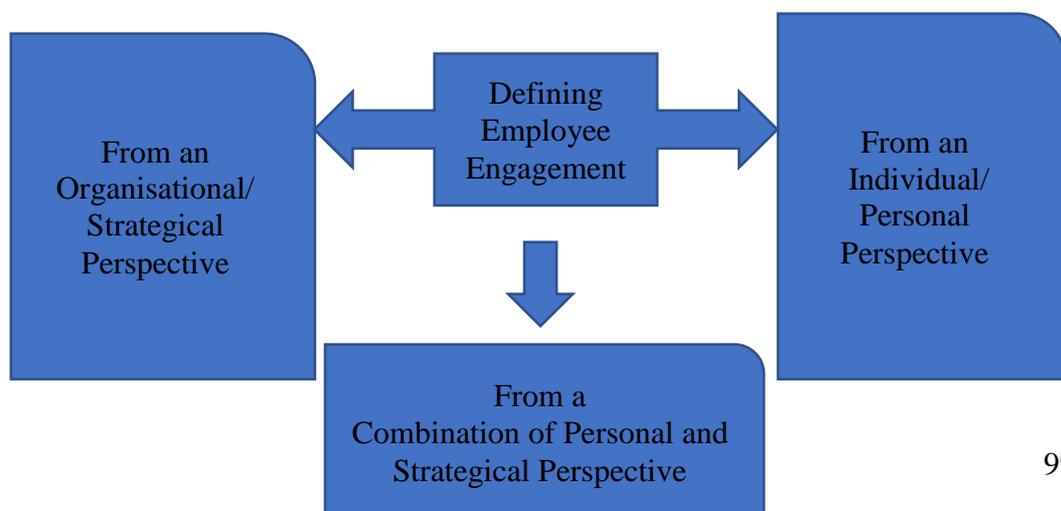
1. A definition of employee engagement.
2. The link between employee engagement and bank performance.
3. Levels of employee engagement at the LB Bank.

4. Factors behind employee engagement (external and internal).
5. 'Wasta' and its impact on employee engagement.
6. Change and employee engagement.
7. Major influencers of employee engagement.

5.1 Towards a Definition of Employee Engagement

The data revealed that there is no single definition of employee engagement, and that it is complicated and diverse. This is supported by the literature review (Byrne, 2022; Truss et al., 2014; Macleod & Clarke, 2009; Vyas, 2023; Nienaber & Martins, 2020). Instead, the main categories of employee engagement, as perceived by participants, emerged as: engagement from an organisational or strategical perspective; engagement from an individual or personal perspective; engagement from a blend of an individual and organisational perspective (Figure 5.1). This supports Berger & Luckman's (1966) argument that an interpretation of employee engagement is dependent on an individual's experience, social surroundings, understanding, and background. Appendix VI shows different narratives of employee engagement.

Figure 5.1 summarises how employee engagement was defined from three different perspectives.



5.1.1 Organisational or Strategic Perspective

The organisational and/or strategic definition of employee engagement emerged from the interviews with senior managers at the LB Bank. Most of the senior managers (four out of five senior managers) consider employee engagement to be a strategic tool used by the bank for its operational policy to achieve its long- and short-term goals.

The following excerpts typify how some of the managers defined the concept:

“Employee engagement is a process that can be used by any bank to an extent to make the employee passionate and put extra effort into their job” (SM1).

“Employee engagement is an operational strategy through which the bank can recruit skilled and experienced employees to manage the operational activities in an effective manner” (SM2).

“Employee engagement is a practice of connecting all employees emotionally with the goals and objectives of the organisation. It is formal and a consensus between employees and the bank, which involves shared and split commitments for achievement” (SM3).

“Employee engagement is a tactical tool that the bank can use to improve productivity and efficiency” (SM4).

The above quotes are supported in the literature: that employee engagement is a tool used at a strategic level both to improve performance and to pursue organisational goals (Cloutier et al., 2015; Zinger, 2015; Sun, 2019; Nienaber & Martins, 2020). It is the psychological presence and energy that empowers employees to implement strategies that can achieve organisational objectives and thus organisational success (Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021). It also involves the mutual agreement of all employees that they will attain the vision of an organisation

and ensure its future success (Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Mone & London, 2018).

Employee engagement is also viewed by senior managers as a strategic tool used by the bank to improve the retention rate of employees and enhance the customers' experience (Shahid, 2019; Joshi, 2022). For example, three of the senior managers (60%) related employee engagement to the degree to which the LB Bank has been able to retain staff and customers and so improve productivity and profitability. For instance, the definitions related to business operations and performance were outlined as follows:

“Employee engagement is [...] rooted [in the wish] to improve and enhance our service leading to customers’ satisfaction and retention. Thus, a more productive environment will prevail” (SM4).

“Gaining employee engagement is [...] rooted [in the wish] to make a productive environment at any organisation” (SM1).

Reference to staff and customer retention was also made by SM2, who stated that:

“The bank can use employee engagement to retain their employees for the long-term, to improve their efficiency and productivity towards the organisational objectives and improve their customer services in a most effective manner”.

In addition, SM5 stated that:

“The bank should make sure that the level of employee engagement is high to retain employees. This way it will help decrease the employee turnover. As a result, this will improve customer satisfaction and retention”.

Moreover, SM4 described employee engagement as:

“The art of making employees believe what the bank wants them to believe, so it is a tool that can be used to boost employees’ ego. It

also ensures that they are happy and satisfied. Hence, employees are more committed to the bank leading to high retention rate”.

The above responses of the senior managers are also supported in the literature and by practitioners who state that there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and employee retention: when employee engagement is demonstrated, employee retention will improve, leading to productivity and efficiency (Shahid, 2019; Joshi, 2022; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Balakrishnan et al., 2013; Hewitt Associates, 2004; Macey et al., 2011; Ashraf & Siddiqui, 2020; Clack, 2020; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021).

5.1.2 Employee Engagement – An Individual and a Personal Perspective

For middle managers as well as non-managers, the definition of employee engagement was viewed more from their individual and personal perspectives and interests. Eight participants (61.5%) revealed their understanding of employee engagement as being an aspect of emotional commitment, dedication, and devotion to their organisation. This shows the perception that an engaged employee is willing to go the extra mile to help customers and provide effective customer service. For instance, the evidence from some of the middle managers and non-managers who described their understanding of employee engagement highlighted that:

“Employees are devoted and dedicated to their work and organisation” (J5).

“Employees are committed and self-motivated” (MM1).

“Employees show a positive attitude, are willing to go the extra miles, [and are] happy and satisfied” (MM4).

“Employees are proud to be part of this bank” (MM5).

“It is a form where employees pay back the bank for what they are paid for. I explain the dedication and loyalty of employees towards their bank in terms of time and hard work” (J8).

“[Its is] when an employee is satisfied, happy, and productive, and willing to go the extra miles [...] keeping employees happy and involved is the best definition of employee engagement” (J1).

“When an employee is actively and emotionally involved” (J7).

The above excerpts demonstrate that employee engagement can be defined by workers’ devotion, their emotional involvement through pride at being part of the bank, and their willingness to go the extra mile to achieve the bank’s objectives. Therefore, it is a binding or ‘emotional’ connection that the employee has with their employing organisation and its goals (Saks, 2022; Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Kruse, 2012; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Sun, 2019).

5.1.3 Employee Engagement: An Individual and an Organisational Perspective

The data showed that 20% of senior managers, 25% of non-managers, and 60% of middle managers consider employee engagement from two perspectives: the personal perspective and the LB Bank perspective:

“Employee engagement is a concept that is needed to make employees more interested in their jobs and dedicated to the bank. It is a reciprocal relationship between the bank and its employees and vice versa” (MM2).

In addition, as stated by MM3:

“It is a process and a tool through which the bank can involve their employees in the business operations whilst ensuring transparency. The bank should respect the employees at all levels and create a sense of belonging for the employees. It is appropriate to make them feel that they are valuable to the bank regardless of their position”.

This was also confirmed by J2, who viewed that:

“The real meaning of true employee engagement is the emotional commitment of the employee towards the bank. While at the same time, it also implies the commitment of the bank towards its employees. It is the role of the senior and executive managers to make their employees happy and valuable”.

This was supported by SM5, who suggested that:

“Employee engagement is an effective tool to improve the performance of the lower performers in an effective manner. With the implementation of an employee engagement program, the lower performing employees can improve their performance in a wonderful manner”.

Here, employee engagement can also be viewed as a mutual and binding relationship between the employee and the LB Bank. It illustrates the devotion that an employee has towards the LB Bank, as well as the commitment the bank has towards its employees by providing job security, such as through a psychological contract.

From an individual perspective, employee engagement can be defined as being actively emotionally involved, dedicated, and willing to go the extra mile for the organisation (Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Sun, 2019). It also involves a mutual agreement and binding relationship between employees and the bank to achieve its mission and vision for future success. From a strategical perspective, it is a tool to improve the organisation’s performance and

ensure retention of its employees and customers (Clack, 2020; Mone & London, 2018).

In summary, the evidence shows that definitions of engagement will change depending on an employee's position in the hierarchy of the organisation. Considering all these perspectives, there appears to be a good understanding of engagement as a multifaceted concept that is also reciprocal in nature. For instance, MMs are closer to employees in the organisational structure and are more likely to develop their engagement through daily interactions. SMs, on their part, see it from a macro and strategic perspective.

5.2 The Link Between Employee Engagement and the LB Bank's Performance

As discussed in previous chapters, the data collected demonstrates and confirms that employee engagement and bank performance are interconnected, which has been discussed by academics and practitioners. When employees are devoted and committed, they produce better organisational performance, whereas when an employee is disengaged, they will not perform effectively, and the productivity and performance of the organisation will be affected negatively (Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021; Alfes et al., 2010; Zinger, 2015; Kruse, 2012; Sorenson, 2013; Cook, 2008).

Appendix VII shows how employees at the LB Bank context described the link between employee engagement and bank performance (Figure 5.2). For

instance, the following quotes reveal the way some managers perceive the link between these two concepts:

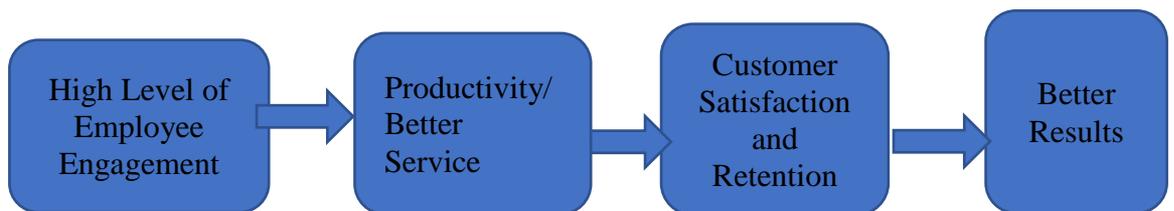
“Employee engagement is crucial for the performance of the bank. The more engaged the employees are, the better they perform. When employees are dedicated and creative they will take initiatives that result in positive outcomes” (SM3).

“The more people are engaged, the more productive they are, and the more they are willing to give and go the extra miles. This will lead to a productive environment that will influence better results” (SM2).

“When employees are demotivated, frustrated, and feel that like they are unfairly treated, they cannot perform properly, resulting in low productivity and efficiency. The impact is that they will fail to meet the objectives of the bank. This will affect the bank performance negatively” (MM3).

“As the level of engagement increases, a positive, enthusiastic and motivated environment will emerge, leading to constructive outcomes and results for the bank” (J5).

Figure 5.2: The link between employee engagement and bank results



The data shows that thirteen participants (more than 70%) believe that employee engagement and bank performance are directly related. The key objectives of any bank are client retention, loyalty, and satisfaction. Therefore, when employees offer good service and make sure that the customer is happy and satisfied, customer retention will emerge, leading to better bank performance and results. This was argued by MM3, that:

“When employees are committed they will be more devoted and give from their heart. This will lead to better service, client satisfaction, and retention. As a result, the bank’s objectives will be achieved”.

“If employees are demotivated, they will not be productive and efficient. Rather, demotivation will impact customer experience” (J5).

In this matter, employee engagement as a concept is important to the LB Bank if it is to improve performance by satisfying and influencing its employees in an effective manner (Crawford et al., 2010). Therefore, the LB Bank must consider employee engagement strategies in its managerial activities to achieve the desired level of performance. These observations and comments, mainly from SMs and MMs, highlight what the participants’ perceptions reveal about their personal experiences during their time at the bank and what leaders have observed and sensed among their employees. The perceptions reflect and support those outcomes from previous studies which show that employee engagement is a crucial element in the performance and productivity of a firm (Saks, 2006; Rothmann et al., 2010; Stander & Rothmann, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Cook, 2008; Bakker et al., 2008; Arifin et al., 2019). A study conducted in 2021 by Emmanuel Akanpaadgi & Felicia Binpimbu showed that when employees are engaged, good performance is a result. Nienaber & Martins (2020) point out that the costs of disengaged employees can be dramatic, both in terms of productivity losses and the performance gap.

The literature has also shown that engagement brings improvement in the work of employees by making them feel a sense of worth and belonging to the organisation (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). This makes employees more productive and creates a willingness in them to contribute more towards the

achievement of organisational goals (Sun, 2019; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Rasool et al., 2021; Clack, 2020). Sun (2019) found that employee engagement has a positive impact on employee performance, commitment, and behaviour as well as on organisational performance in terms of customer satisfaction and profitability. Employee engagement produces cohesion in the organisation. It leads to increased wellbeing and to enhanced work performance. It brings sustainability to organisational performance (Rasool, 2021). It could be argued that organisations that attempt to engage their employees are likely to make more profits. However, this depends on the extent to which engagement is taken seriously by the organisation and on how much it is supported by investment and resources; here comes the role of the psychological contract, which helps employers align the organisation's objectives with employee expectations (Gratton, 2000; Schuck & Wollard, 2013).

5.3 Level of Employee Engagement at the LB Bank

The data collected reveals that perceptions of levels of engagement vary from one employee to another and that this concept is subjective rather than objective by nature. Each person interprets the issue from their own perspective according to their position and job role (Shahid, 2019; Joshi, 2022; Alfes et al., 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Understanding how participants perceived the level of engagement at the LB Bank is needed to assess the situation. Table 5.2 reveals that 47% of participants believed that the level of engagement was above average, whilst 24% perceived it as below average (Table 5.1). The interesting point is that 60% of senior managers, as well as 50% of junior employees, perceived the

level of engagement to be above average, whilst only 20% of middle management perceived it like this (Table 5.2). Different views were expressed as follows:

“I have been working in this bank for the last 15 years. The level of commitment is above 60%. However, recently it is starting to decrease. Despite everything, I believe the engagement level is still above the market level, because of the low level of employee turnover, high demand to work at our bank, and the pride employees have to be part of this institution. A good example of a highly engaged employee is one who works extra hours, is devoted to delivering excellent service to the client, and is ready to go the extra mile for the bank. Usually, these are the talented people and they are assets to the bank” (SM2).

Table 5.1: Level of employee engagement as perceived by participants (per number and percentage).

Level of Employee Engagement	Senior Managers	Middle Managers	Non-Managers	Total	Percentage
Below Average	1	2	1	4	24%
Average	1	2	3	5	29%
Above Average	3	1	4	8	47%
Total	5	5	8	17	100%

Senior managers’ views were determined at a macro level and from the bank’s perspective. For instance, SM5 linked the recent low performance results of the bank to the low level of engagement. Again, this shows the link between engagement and bank performance. As for SM4, the level of engagement

“... is average. Since the number of moderately engaged and disengaged employees is increasing, leading to a decrease in the bank’s performance. As such, moderately engaged employees are

those people who are doing their job but without being willing to go the extra mile. And the disengaged people do their work with no passion and emotions”.

SM1 pointed out that the level of engagement was above average. The argument made was that it needed to be improved. Yet, engagement cannot be enhanced without the commitment of senior management. Here, SM1 was indirectly signifying the importance of the senior management role in managing the level of engagement. This is supported by the literature that highlights the importance of the relationship between employees and managers (Albrecht, 2011).

As far as junior employees were concerned, 88% (Table 5.2) described the level of engagement as average:

“... very good, as proved by the high retention rate” (J5).

“Definitely above average. We love this bank, we identify ourselves [with it]” (J8).

“... average, which means some people are highly engaged and some people are moderately engaged, they do their job with no extra effort” (J2).

Only 13% described the level as

“... below average. Some employees are disengaged. They are staying at the bank. However, they are waiting for an opportunity to move to any other organisation when an opportunity is revealed. Today, the recession and economic instability have led to low opportunity for moving. So, they are left with no option but to stay, impacting the environment” (J7).

In general, the most frustrated people were the middle managers. They believed that only 20% of employees are fully engaged (Table 5.2). 40% were doing their job properly but made no extra effort and 40% were

negatively engaged, negatively impacting the work environment. 40% of middle managers believed that the level of engagement was below average and they attributed this to other factors both internal and external. For instance, MM2 suggested that:

“The political situation and the challenges we are facing on a daily basis inside the bank and outside the bank are influencing a low engagement environment”.

While MM4 stated that the level was:

“Very low since people’s basic needs are not met because of financial as well as non-financial reasons. This leads to actively disengaged employees. Hence, directly affecting the work environment”.

The evidence reveals that 50% of the participants believed that the level of engagement was acceptable compared to other local banks. However, they admitted that they must work to maintain it at this level or even make it higher. They stated that the level of engagement 10 years ago was much higher. Therefore, employee engagement needed to be improved. The most interesting observation was that participants from different levels agreed that the level of engagement was decreasing, and that this should be confronted as soon as possible:

“Honestly, the level of engagement is above average because the bank is investing a lot in people through training, communication, and benefits given to employees. However, recently I am feeling that the level of engagement is starting to decrease; therefore, it is our job as senior managers to work it out. Another problem is that the number of moderately engaged employees as well as those disengaged is starting to increase. One of the main objectives of the bank is to transfer and move these people to being highly engaged before they become negatively disengaged” (SM2).

This view was also shared by one of the middle-managers, MM1, who suggested that:

“Employee engagement is more than 50%. However, the bank should work on employee engagement to sustain or improve it. The bank’s management and board are concerned about the level of engagement, and they are working hard to improve”.

In addition, MM5 suggested that:

“... It is above average; therefore, it needs to be improved. One way is to remove the actively disengaged people who are affecting the environment negatively”.

Table 5.2: Level of employee engagement as perceived by participants (per percentage).

Level of Engagement	Senior Management	Middle Management	Non-Managers
Below Average	20%	40%	13%
Average	20%	40%	38%
Above Average	60%	20%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%

J8 also perceived that the level of engagement is starting to decrease:

“The level of engagement recently is deteriorating. Management should challenge it quickly and make it a priority in the coming years since the higher the level of engagement, the better the environment, and the higher the productivity”.

This again confirms the perceived relationship between bank performance and employee engagement. Most of the participants stated that employee engagement should be a priority in the coming years since the higher the level of engagement, the better the environment. This in turn leads to higher productivity, positively impacting the performance and results of the LB Bank (Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011; Clack, 2020; Mone & London, 2018). The semi-structured interviews

revealed that the management and board of directors of the bank are concerned about the level of engagement, and they are working hard to improve it.

5.4 Factors Influencing Employee Engagement

Factors that have been highlighted as facilitators and inhibitors of engagement in the literature also seem to be relevant in the context of the LB Bank. This study has explored the perspectives of senior management, middle management, and junior employees. The data shows that there are internal and external factors influencing the behaviour, productivity, and engagement of the employees in the workplace. This is affirmed in the literature, that the level of engagement is impacted by both external and internal factors (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019; Sun, 2019; Saks, 2019; Purcell, 2014).

5.4.1 External Factors Affecting Employee Engagement

The data identifies several factors outside the organisation that influence the productivity and engagement of employees. These include the employees' personal life and their political and economic situation. If the employee is facing difficulties in their personal life (e.g. suffering from health problems, a divorce, grief, legal problems, or other social reasons), this will affect their performance negatively:

“When employees are facing personal problems at home, their efficiency and productivity will be decreased” (SM2).

Another external factor that may negatively affect the employee's performance is the political and economic situation that Lebanon is facing these days, as mentioned by MM2:

"Political and economic instability is affecting our daily life, indirectly affecting people's devotion to work".

As well, SM5 stated that:

"Life is becoming so difficult. Everything is very expensive. The instability we are living in is making employees distracted. This is affecting their dedication to work".

Fourteen participants, representing more than 70% of respondents, agreed that external factors are influencing the working behaviour of the employees in the workplace. But it is essential for the bank to take appropriate measures to help minimise their effect on employees. For instance, the bank can help and support employees to handle these negative situations by coaching them and showing them empathy and support from senior management, HRM, and their direct managers:

"External factors might affect employees' devotion to work; however, it is the role of the bank to help them overcome it" (MM2).

According to Sibson (1976), an organisation cannot control external factors. It can, however, to a certain extent take necessary actions and make appropriate decisions to help its employees manage and deal with these situations. Rather, it is important that the organisation helps their employees find a way to adapt to those factors.

5.4.2 Internal Factors

This study has identified two main internal drivers behind employee engagement, that is, financial and non-financial factors (as presented in

Table 5.3). The recurring arguments about the two drivers of engagement are explained below:

“Financial rewards and non-financial elements go together to ensure employee satisfaction and engagement” (SM1).

“Financial benefits are the basis for employee engagement. However, when basic needs are fulfilled, appreciation and non-financial needs are revealed” (SM5).

“Employees can be rewarded in both financial and non-financial forms. Financial rewards such as money, bonuses, and yearly packages are factors for appreciating the employee’s performance in a desired manner, but not the only ones” (MM3).

“Financial benefits are basic necessities. But after a period of time there are many other factors that play a role in improving employee engagement” (J3).

“It is through a combination of financial and non-financial benefits that the HRM department shall work by developing a fair and transparent system that meets employees’ expectations. It is a hard task, but it can be done” (MM1).

The findings above show that financial rewards alone are not enough to guarantee the appropriate level of employee performance. Both financial and non-financial factors are equally important in improving employee performance and commitment leading to improved results and increasing the bank’s performance. Therefore, a combination of both financial and non-financial benefits is needed to improve employee performance and commitment to the LB Bank (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019; Tanwar, 2017; Sun, 2019; Bustasar et al., 2019; Macey et al., 2011; Meyer & Gagne, 2008). The key is to highlight these factors individually and to understand how they can affect the level of engagement

in any institution and specifically in this case, the LB Bank. By highlighting these factors and understanding how they will affect employee commitment, the LB Bank can improve employees' levels of engagement.

The data also reveals that employee motivation and employee engagement are positively linked. When employees are motivated, and there is clear presence of motivation antecedents, then employees are more likely to be committed to, involved in, and engaged with their job (Shaheen & Farooqi, 2014). As such, the LB Bank needs to create a motivational environment that ensures engagement. Employee engagement is the energy that employees bring to the workplace (psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability), and employee motivation depends on incentives (intrinsic and extrinsic factors³) that are present at the workplace. When both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are available and enforced, engagement is demonstrated (Bustasar et al., 2019).

5.4.2.1 Financial Benefits Influencing Employee Engagement

Table 5.3, below, shows that the most important internal elements that have an impact on employee engagement at the LB Bank are financial rewards, including salaries, bonuses, and other financial benefits. All the participants stated that financial benefits are the basis for any employee to be satisfied and committed to the bank:

“Life is becoming so difficult. Everything is very expensive. If financial benefits are not enough to face the economic and political pressures,

³ Intrinsic factors are things such as interesting work, job appreciation, and job satisfaction, while extrinsic factors are such things as job security, a good salary, a career path, and appreciation.

employees will be frustrated, and this will lead to low productivity” (SM5).

“A financial reward is a basic need. It is not the only factor, but without satisfying basic financial needs, employee engagement as a concept will be non-existent” (J2).

“If you are not financially satisfied, even if you have autonomy and you are working with the best firm ever, you will not be committed as an employee. As long as an employee is getting a good income he has nothing to complain about” (MM2).

“Money is the start and the basis for human motivation and engagement because we work to earn money; however, when financial needs are fulfilled, the role of non-financial benefits arise, such as culture, fairness, promotion, and appreciation” (MM1).

Table 5.3: Key internal indicators that contribute to employee engagement as perceived by participants (in number and percentage).

Internal factors	Total	Percentage
Financial rewards: Total package and benefits including bonuses, incentives, medical and health insurance	18	100%
Culture and healthy environment	15	83%
Relationship with the direct supervisor’s leadership style: Feeling respected and heard by top management	15	83%
Safety & job security	14	78%
Transparency and fair environment	14	78%
Job satisfaction	14	78%
Teamwork	14	78%
Career development in terms of recognition, promotion, and clear career path	13	72%
Training and personal development (self-fulfilment)	13	72%
Communication	13	72%
Bank image	12	67%
Meeting employee expectations	12	67%
Autonomy and empowerment	10	56%

Financial needs were defined as follows:

“Basic salary, a bonus when good performance is achieved, and any other form of incentives, such as medical insurance” (J1).

“Financial benefits can be in the form of salary, a bonus, stock options, pension funds, and medical and health insurance” (SM2).

“When financial benefits do not meet employee expectations, management should expect a negative environment full of frustration and unhappiness. So, it is about meeting expectations and being fair” (J6).

When the financial needs of an employee are fulfilled, other non financial factors such as career planning, self-fulfilment, autonomy, transparency, and others start to play a major role in the commitment of the employees (Tensay & Singh, 2020; Demirci & Erbas, 2010; Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019). This is also confirmed by studies conducted by Watson (2008) and Penna (2007), indicating the link between benefits and engagement. Thus, one can conclude that the motivating factors mentioned in Table 5.3 are also important to ensure and improve engagement.

5.4.2.2 Non-Financial Benefits Influencing Employee Engagement

Table 5.3 illustrates that financial and non-financial rewards such as a positive culture, a clear career path, transparency, job security, professional development, self-fulfilment, open communication, leadership style, autonomy and empowerment, and bank image are key indicators that contribute towards employee engagement. These factors complement each other and work together to create a positive environment that improves employee satisfaction and engagement (Shahid, 2019; Joshi, 2022; Macey

et al., 2011; The Blessing White, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Zhang, 2022). It shows that non-financial factors are as important as financial ones and are helpful in motivating employees to do their best towards achieving organisational objectives (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005). Therefore, it is important to motivate employees if they are to become more engaged.

Culture and a Healthy Environment Influencing Employee Engagement

As per the literature, culture and a healthy environment have been directly linked to employee engagement since they encourage employees to identify themselves with the goals and values of their organisation. A positive culture that promotes teamwork, innovation, and employee growth and career development usually has committed employees (Pathan, 2022; Heskett, 2022).

The data shows that culture and the environment were cited by 83% of the participants as fundamental elements influencing employee engagement. Accordingly, if the environment is healthy and positive, and if resources meet job demands, then employees will be keen to contribute and cooperate in developing team spirit. Thus, creativity and productivity will flourish. JDR theory confirms that working conditions directly affect employee performance and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). As per the literature, this study confirmed that culture and a healthy environment were perceived by some participants as comprising good team spirit, a safe environment, job security, and an environment full of fairness and trust (Pathan, 2022; Heskett, 2022). This will be thoroughly discussed under 5.4.3.

Team Spirit

As per the literature, employee engagement emerges when interpersonal relations among employees are shown, leading to trust among them that fosters physiological safety (Mughal & Iraqi, 2020; Clack, 2021; Saks, 2019).

This study and the data on hand show that 78% of participants agree that teamwork is a key element in providing a better level of engagement at the LB Bank. It promotes cooperation among employees to help them achieve a certain goal (Clack, 2021; Mughal & Iraqi; Saks, 2019; Singh, 2016; Zhang, 2022) and requires employees to stand up and assist each other (Rasmussen & Jeppesen, 2006). This cannot happen unless the culture is healthy and positive:

“Culture is a crucial element in increasing engagement and promoting teamwork. By increasing team spirit, people tend to be more positive and happy. Hence, a more productive and positive environment will flourish” (SM3).

“A culture that promotes teamwork is a must since it will help create positive energy leading to a pro-active environment” (MM3).

“When a healthy environment is created, the learning process will improve; thus, employees will feel safe. Teamwork will be demonstrated and a productive environment will be established at the workplace” (J2).

Therefore, it can be concluded that a healthy environment full of team spirit has a significant impact on engagement (Baker et al., 2006). People by nature tend to be more productive, creative, and involved when working with other people than when working alone, as people tend to engage themselves within a group (Kahn, 1990; Clack, 2021). According to Albrecht (2011), working in a group can create an engaged or a disengaged environment;

therefore, providing a healthy environment in the workplace by promoting a positive team spirit can help ensure a productive environment full of commitment and devotion (Baker et al., 2006).

Career Path, Self-fulfilment, and Employee Engagement

Career planning and self-fulfilment have been recognised as major contributors to engagement (Mappamiring & Putra, 2021; Lartey, 2021). The data illustrates that thirteen participants understand that career path is a significant internal factor that can impact the level of employee engagement among talented employees. As such, the LB Bank needs to find new methods to inspire and encourage their employees, since recruiting and retaining good and engaged employees has become a problem faced by most banks (Cook, 2008).

SM2 expressed that:

“Talented people are more likely to move or change work if they don’t feel they have the chance to develop and improve within their organisation since they usually have more choices and opportunities”.

MM1 supported the above statement by stating that:

“A clear career path, that is transparency and professional development, is key for employee engagement, especially for talented people”.

The internal driver of career development is supported by the literature, which suggests that an organisation that emphasises employee development will likely have more engaged employees (Siddhanta & Roy, 2011). Self-fulfilment varies from one person to another. The LB Bank must find and diagnose the needs of each employee and coach them to help them

achieve self-fulfilment. The nature of the job can also be a driver that directly affects employee engagement (Siddanta & Roy, 2011). In line with this, more than 72% of the participants suggested that the job should be challenging, with clear objectives and autonomy in place.

Thus MM1 argued that:

“Employee engagement increases or decreases based on the position of the employee and their self-fulfilment in the Maslow hierarchy. For instance, if you are a senior manager, employee engagement is fulfilled by having autonomy and empowerment. In the case of middle management, the satisfaction comes from a clear career path and training, and from exposure as well as empowerment. For junior employees, it is about a fulfilling and clearer basic career path”.

MM1’s suggestion supports Albrecht et al. (2021) and Kahn (1990) that non-financial drivers are important to make the job meaningful and challenging for employees. As well, it supports the SDT theory which confirms that self-determination has a direct impact on performance and engagement (Turner, 2020; Schaufeli, 2021; Thomas, 2009; Albrecht, 2011).

Autonomy and Empowerment

Blessing White (2006), Demirci & Erbas (2010), Petter et al. (2002), and Tensay & Singh (2020) outline that autonomy, empowerment, providing employees with support and recognition, and providing a fair and justice environment are key for improving employee engagement. In addition, Ugwu et al. (2014) highlight the importance of organisational trust and psychological empowerment to the level of work engagement.

SM1 stated that:

“During change, transparency and communication are crucial. However, a little autonomy and empowerment is necessary and is

absent nowadays. Power is in the hands of executives only. They have to support their staff and involve them”.

This was also acknowledged by SM3, that:

“Delegation and empowerment are crucial to maintaining the engagement of employees at all levels. Commitment and the involvement of all parties at the bank is a must”.

Leadership Style and Employee Engagement

As confirmed in the literature, leadership significantly impacts employee engagement, and leadership style is a key factor that can affect an organisation’s culture and employee engagement (Mughal & Iraqi, 2020; Turner, 2020). In this study, 83% of the participants believed that employee engagement and leadership style are interrelated and have a critical influence on the relationship of employees with their direct supervisor. This has been revealed by participants arguing for the importance of leaders on employees’ performance:

“Leaders are considered as major players for establishing employee engagement in organisations” (J4).

“There is a strong relation between employee engagement and leadership since leaders are directly involved in developing the work environment. Therefore, leaders have to be flexible. They should be role models for their employees to promote engagement in the workplace” (MM4).

“Good leadership and fair benefits are the basis for enhancing employee engagement” (J2).

“Leaders play a crucial role in improving the work environment. They either promote a committed or an uncommitted environment” (SM5).

The excerpts show how people tend to engage mentally, emotionally, and cognitively when they feel that they are heard and when they feel that their opinion will make a difference (Albrecht, 2011). Thus, leaders should be inspirational, flexible, visionary, truthful, and supportive (Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022).

Regular interaction with employees is of importance to ensure that drivers of engagement are in place and can clarify any ambiguity, as well as check any discrepancies that may hinder supportive and helpful practices (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). In other words, leaders should speak regularly and honestly with their employees, listen to them to check if anything is missing, and be supportive and helpful (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). This supports the LMX theoretical framework, where transformational leaders are supposed to encourage empowerment and create a positive team spirit, which has a direct positive impact on engagement (Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Stresow, 2020).

Bank Image

According to Dhir & Shukla (2019), organisational image and employee engagement are related in bringing value: the better the image, the more engagement is perceived. This was confirmed in this study, in which 67% of participants saw the image of the LB Bank as being important. For example, SM4 revealed that:

“When the employee is working in a bad institution he will feel demotivated. So the image counts”.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of corporate image for employee engagement and retention. It was also pointed out that a bank's image can create a value proposition for employee engagement (Kazimoto, 2016; Easa & Bazzi, 2020); thereby building a brand name that displays some justice and integrity to enhance engagement. This is because employees tend to communicate better with organisations and leaders that are respectable, trustworthy, and fair, and which go by their word (Siddhanta & Roy, 2011). This perception supports the theory of the organisational role that focuses on the effect of the workplace on employee performance, engagement, and devotion (Rasool, 2021; Sun, 2019; Kahn et al., 1964).

Change and Employee Engagement

The data showed that the impact of organisational change is visible at the level of employee engagement. During the interview with middle management, the researcher noticed that four out of the five participants were frustrated with the changes that were happening, but were unable to relay the concerns of their employees to the top management. For instance, MM2 stated that:

“The problem we are facing, nowadays, is that top management is not willing to listen to the ground-level voice, they believe that change must be done, technology should be introduced regardless of the consequences. We feel that we are just a number”.

MM3 confirmed the above by saying:

“With these changes, we feel that we are left out and we are just a number, ‘a machine’, and not treated as managers in command. This is making us and our employees feel irritated and unengaged”.

This argument was supported by MM5, that:

“On a daily basis, new procedures are implemented; new difficult and unachievable targets are in place. We, as middle managers, are requested to execute them. No transparency, no clear communication, the environment is becoming so tough. The problem is that we have to convince our staff of things we are not convinced”.

The most interesting outcome of the data collected was that MMs revealed their fears and frustrations. SMs acknowledged that employee engagement was decreasing, but did not understand why. The question remained whether SMs and executives were interested in finding out why the level of engagement had decreased.

They confirmed that during change, the LB Bank is in need of employee involvement, and so the feeling that they are part of the organisation should not be disregarded. As affirmed by MM1:

“During change, the level of employee engagement usually decreases. This is in case employees are not well informed or involved in the vision and mission statement depicted by the new management. Therefore, to avoid frustration, executives, senior management, and middle management shall, in coordination with HRM, plan, prepare, and train people to adapt to changes in an effective manner”.

And in support, MM4 suggested:

“To have a high level of engagement during change, employees’ well-being should be the first priority. Doing this establishes a culture of collaboration and a positive environment”.

As pointed out by MM3:

“Making employees an important part of organisational change is crucial. As well as this, understanding their needs is an important strategy to keep them engaged. It will not only make them productive but also loyal and committed to the bank”.

This above supports Ismail & Abd's (2021) and Singh's (2016) arguments that building a culture of recognition and appreciation in the workplace is also a good strategy to engage those employees.

The view of six non-managerial participants (75%) was that the continuous changes were leading to demotivation (which will impact engagement) due to factors including lack of transparency, an unfair environment, and false promises, causing feelings of insecurity. Hence, evidence from non-managers included arguments that:

"Management are making false promises that they cannot meet. Given the present changes that are taking place, there is no clear vision of our future as employees" (J7).

"Discriminating among staff, unfair, and no transparent promotion and salary scheme is in place; a lot of changes that we are not aware of are making us doubt about the culture in place" (J2).

"The absence of vision and transparency during the change is making the level of engagement going down with time" (J3, J 5 & J8).

As well, there was disagreement on how leadership should be supportive, truthful, honest, and fair, especially during change. As quoted by J7:

"Our leaders should motivate employees when required and involve them in the decision-making procedure to promote engagement in the organisation".

The role of communication is also a key element in always supporting and guiding employees, especially during change. Leaders should help their teams to adapt to and accept change by being transparent. They should help them to perfectly manage their emotions and make efforts to reduce their anxiety. They should help individuals to cope with changing circumstances

and improve employee engagement in the workplace. Leaders should communicate with their employees and provide initial training to ensure that they accept the changes in an effective manner (Xu & Cooper, 2011).

As far as senior managers are concerned, 80% of them agreed that change affects the level of engagement. In addition, along with the bank's executives they are trying to find ways to improve it. As such, 60% of the senior managers expressed their frustrations about what is happening, especially about the lack of communication and visible transparency. As stated by SM1:

“The implemented bias system is leading to insecurity in our daily tasks and a toxic culture is being observed. People are treated unfairly in terms of financial benefits as well as non-financials. Despite the fact there is a standardised procedure, when applied there is a loophole in the system that should be addressed since it is leading to the frustration”.

The above was also stated by SM5, who argued that:

“There are large numbers of disengaged employees (who just work for a paycheck) who are affecting the work environment negatively, and the system is not recognising them because they are busy with implementing the change”.

All of the senior managers agree that employee engagement is mostly needed when significant organisational change is being done. This is in cases where successful change cannot happen without the collaboration of the involved stakeholders. Accordingly, creating a sense of urgency is the most important step towards gaining the support of management and employees. And this cannot be done without the commitment of the executives and senior leaders (Kotter, 2012 & 2008; McGonegal, 2020; Blumenberg, 2021). Creating a sense of urgency will inform the business

that change must happen, and that planning for change must start. As stated by SM2:

“This was exactly what happened at our bank. Our General Manager called for several meetings (off-site and on site) with senior management and explained the urgency of [the need for] change and moving forward. A clear SWOT analysis was done. A clear discussion of the current market was illustrated. A transparent sharing of financials and customer data was revealed, and most opportunities and threats facing the organisation were elaborated”.

Even though meetings were held to inform people about the changes, data showed that 60% of the senior manager respondents believed that these meetings do not work to the expectations of the executives since, as stated by SM3:

“These meetings were a one-way communication from top to bottom. This led to more frustration among people, which then resulted in lower engagement”.

Therefore, failure to listen to the needs and voices of employees leads to a decrease in the level of engagement. Thus, the role of communication is very important, particularly two-way communication, as argued by SM5:

“Executive managers were listening to their needs and trying to inform the ground-level, ignoring the needs of the majority of people. Therefore, they did not get the full support of people”.

The above narrative is supported in the literature: that listening to employees is very important when implementing any change (Hiatt & Creasey, 2012).

To elaborate on the reasons for a decrease in engagement, Table 5.4 below summarises the most frequent expressions used by the respondents. Eighty nine percent of the participants stated that poor communication and lack of transparency play a major role, whilst 83% believed that culture has an impact on engagement.

The literature supports the above findings, where 89% of the participants agree that during the change process, the employee has no responsibility for managing change (Albrecht et al., 2023; Kotter, 2012). It is the responsibility of management and executives to help people understand the objectives and the reasons behind the change (McGonegal, 2020; Blumenberg, 2021; Albrecht et al., 2023; Kotter, 2012; Kotter & Cohen, 2012). This is also to help them cope, as well as to give their best, so as to be able to meet the company's vision and mission statement (Albrecht et al., 2023; Kotter, 2012; Kotter & Cohen, 2012). Involving the people in the company's vision and increasing their level of urgency will make people feel safer about buying into the change and change process.

Table 5.4: Factors behind engagement (in numbers and percentages)

Factors that Lead to Disengagement During Change	Number of Participants	Percentage
Poor communication and lack of transparency	16	89%
Environment is not healthy, including lack of fairness, poor job security, and lack of teamwork	15	83%
Top management is not willing to listen to the ground-level voices	13	72%
Lack of a fair reward system	13	72%
Lack of empowerment and autonomy	10	56%
Job is no longer challenging, and no opportunities are available	10	56%
HRM is the voice of the board and not of employees	9	50%
Lack of personal motivation	7	39%
Personal issues in employees' lives	4	22%

5.4.3 'Wasta' and Employee Engagement

A healthy environment and employee well-being influence employees' performance, resulting in positive organisation results (Rasool et al., 2021). One of the major factors that directly impacts the work environment at the LB Bank is 'wasta'.

Data revealed that 'wasta' has influenced the LB Bank climate and culture negatively.

As stated by SM1:

"Favouritism, nepotism, and 'wasta' are affecting the bank negatively. This is evidence of people not being treated fairly. This has led to a toxic environment and demotivation of talented employees".

As confirmed by J7:

"The problem, in the LB Bank, is nepotism ('wasta') that has a heavy impact since high net-worth customers and politicians impose it to recruit people (sometimes not qualified) as a favour, sometimes leading to a toxic environment and frustration among people".

SM5 stated that the level of engagement is below 50% because:

"Some people are actively disengaged leading to a toxic environment. The employees are often recruited through 'wasta' because they are usually unqualified, unhappy, and not committed to the goals of the bank. They will be underperforming and this can impact the results and environment of the bank negatively. The results of the bank have not been as expected over the last two years. I believe the level of engagement is below average. However, when business results improve, it means that employees are more dedicated and that employee engagement is present" (SM5).

Moreover, some employees feel that 'wasta' is a source of unequal treatment.

MM5 supported the above statement by stating that:

“The reward system is not fairly developed; ‘wasta’ and favouritism are leading to frustration and demotivation. And the problem is that the actively disengaged workers are those who are incompetent, those who have been assigned by force or through their connections and can’t be fired or marginalised easily because of ‘wasta’.

This was also confirmed by SM1:

“I worked hard to earn my position, but it’s not your know-how that counts, it is who you are friends with”.

In addition, some view ‘wasta’ as a tool for career progress. This was confirmed by J5:

“I didn’t get promoted because another employee took the position because of his relationship with a manager, despite the fact that I have better qualifications.”

These findings are aligned with the literature that ‘wasta’ is perceived as a major contributor to a toxic environment, impacting directly the level of engagement and wellbeing of employees since it promotes an environment full of unfairness and insecurity (Almutairi, 2022; Al-Thbah, 2021; Mclaughlin & Rashid, 2017; Rawabdeh et al., 2020; Saks et al., 2022; Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023; Alsarhan & Valax, 2021). These findings validate previous studies about the fact that ‘wasta’ can create an environment full of discrimination, unfairness, and lack of trust (Haddad et al. 2022; Al-Thbah, 2021). They also confirm that ‘wasta’ can be perceived as a breach of the psychological contract leading to frustration and insecurity (Kassab, 2016; Aldossari & Robertson, 2016).

[A Fair, Safe Environment and Job Security](#)

Managing fear in the workplace is crucial as it provides job security, which plays a major role in workplace engagement. Safety, job security, and a fair environment are essential in ensuring improved employee engagement (The

Blessing White, 2006; Zaraket et al., 2018; Demirci & Erbas, 2010; Petter et al., 2002). The employee should be able to voice what's on their mind and to feel that they are operating in a stable, fair, and safe environment. When management is clear, realistic, and honest about their promises, employee engagement is the result. 78% of the participants suggested that employees need to feel that they are treated fairly and that there is no discrimination among colleagues. They emphasised the importance of fairness as a key element for engagement, as identified below:

“Culture is key for engagement especially if it ensures safety, fairness, and job security” (MM4).

“Financial benefit is a must and should be fair among people. But to increase engagement, the bank or any institution must treat people fairly, create growth opportunities and development, recognise employees, provide adequate training, show empathy, and most of all have open communication. These financial and non financial benefits are effective when they are combined” (SM5).

“Financial rewards are not the only things employees seek. They want stability to feel that they will not lose their job and to feel that they are working in a fair and safe environment (J7).

“Employees need to feel that they are treated fairly, they are being taken care of, and that they have a good support system that can help them manage their fear” (SM2).

“Fairness means equal financial benefits in terms of salary as well as non-financials in terms of holidays, vacations, personal leave, and life and medical insurance. This equality is crucial to ensure a healthy environment and an engaged environment.” (MM2).

The data revealed that six non-managers had a fear of losing their jobs and of being treated unfairly. These factors may comprehensively affect or partly affect employee performance. Albrecht (2011) agrees: people engage when

they feel safe and are treated fairly. Fairness is therefore a matter of how an employee experiences and perceives certain events. Some non-managers and middle managers showed their frustrations about the reward system in place. They described it as unfair. J3 declared that:

“... despite the fact the bank is helping people to overcome their personal problems, this is not helping to improve employee engagement since people are frustrated from the continuous change in the bank, the lack of autonomy, and the lack of transparency on financial rewards, which are leading to insecurity and a toxic culture”.

Therefore, when unfairness is perceived by employees, regardless of whether this perception of unfairness is legitimate or not, employee engagement will decrease, since employees will display negative behaviours (Idris & Tuckey, 2015; Beugré, 1998; Chandani et al., 2016; Matzler & Renzl, 2006; Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023; Wang et al., 2019).

Sharma & Kumra (2020) state that workplace and employee engagement are positively correlated: the more a workplace exhibits justice and fairness, the more employee engagement is fostered. From this, the role of transparency and communication can be identified.

Transparency and Communication

Communication is vital in ensuring a safe and healthy environment full of trust and transparency in any organisation (Sahar & Siddiqui, 2019; Wyatt Watson, 2008; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Mazzei et al., 2019). This was asserted by more than 78% of the participants. They strongly agree that communication plays significant role in influencing employee engagement.

MM2 stated that:

“Job security, fair treatment, and a clear career path are strategic elements to ensure a good culture and engagement, but they cannot reach their objectives unless communication is transparent and powerful enough to convince employees that the bank is treating them equally”.

SM5 elaborated:

“The bank should develop a clear performance management process, better job descriptions, coaching services, a constructive feedback setting, and a recognition and reward platform to develop a trustful, clear, and transparent environment at the workplace”.

MM5 pointed out that:

“Communication is key, especially during change, to establish transparency among the management and employees”.

SM3 reaffirmed that:

“Communication is a very important tool, especially with the daily instability we are living with these days. Honesty and transparency are crucial to help create a team of committed people to drive the change”.

The above quotes show that participants believed that smooth two-way communication is important for engaging employees (Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Mazzei et al., 2019). Transparent communication and trust are major drivers that help employees perceive whenever they are treated fairly and with respect. Accordingly, Schmidt & Jackson (2005) found that a balanced and engaged culture cannot be established without communication. Communication is about carrying information from the top to the bottom level and by carrying feedback from the bottom to the top (Bakker, 2015). Therefore, transparency and effective, open communication are essential for boosting employee engagement at the LB Bank and for developing a healthy workplace. Each manager (middle or senior) should ensure transparent

communication between them and their employees to improve engagement and to develop a learning environment at the workplace (Attridge, 2009; Mazzei et al., 2019). As such, Wyatt Watson (2008) argues that communication is the main driver for engagement. It is a tool used for listening to employees' voices and responding to their concerns, since disregarding an employee's voice might harm the LB Bank's productivity. When employees are able to communicate their concerns and are heard by management, commitment will follow (Qian et al., 2018; Purcell, 2014; Jha et al., 2019).

5.5 Major Influencers of Employee Engagement

According to Saks (2022), HRM and leaders are the main major influencers of employee engagement. The data revealed that the participants' positions help them perceive the how, who, and what factors which influence employee engagement within the LB Bank. As such, 60% of the senior managers who participated in the current research were convinced that immediate/direct managers⁴ and HRM are key to influencing engagement.

For instance, SM1 suggested that:

“Direct supervisors and HRM play a major role in ensuring engagement since they can see the loopholes in the system and bring it to the notice of senior and executive managers. For instance, the HRM role starts from recruitment, then moves to career path, and then to training”.

In addition, MM5 suggested that:

⁴ The direct manager is the direct boss who has subordinates and employees directly one level under him/her based on the bank's organisational chart.

“... It is above average; therefore it needs to be improved. One way is to remove the actively disengaged people who are affecting the environment negatively”.

In support, SM5 agreed that:

“HRM and the direct managers are the crucial elements in the game of employee engagement to ensure fairness, transparency, and a healthy culture. They should listen to the employees’ voices and try to relate them to the top managers to find solutions in cases of frustration.”

And SM3 stated that:

“The role of HRM and direct managers is crucial in ensuring a healthy environment and should play an intermediate part between the bank and employees. They have to listen the employee voice (frustration, fear, anxiety). HRM should listen to the employees’ needs and convey them to the top management”.

Thus, direct management (whether executives or senior or middle managers) and HRM are jointly fundamental influencers on employee engagement as they understand the gaps in the system (Saks, 2022; Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Ghadi et al., 2013; Turner, 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020). Direct managers spend time with their employees and know them better than others. Meanwhile, HRM plays a key role in improving the level of employee engagement because it works on the data collected by senior and executive managers and analyses the trend among the employees (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Therefore, HRM is central to influencing engagement as they are able to identify those gaps in the system and draw attention to the senior managers.

In addition, 20% of the senior management pointed out three key influencers that can directly affect employees’ engagement; these are human resources, direct managers, and the culture imposed by the organisation (Saks, 2022;

Macey et al., 2011; Zhang, 2022; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Ghadi et al., 2013; Turner, 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020). Their influence starts at the strategic level from the mission and vision statement imposed by the board before moving to management's efforts to meet the bank's objectives and to ensure that employees are committed and working hard to achieve these objectives. The role of human resources is to act as a contributor and facilitator ensuring that an alliance has been created between all the influencers. Thus, SM4 suggested that:

"Each one has a role to play, starting from the mission and vision statement that is imposed by the board and executives, to the management who have to meet the bank's objectives whilst making sure employees are committed and working hard to achieve them. Human resources has a role of being a contributor and facilitator to ensure alliance between all the influencers".

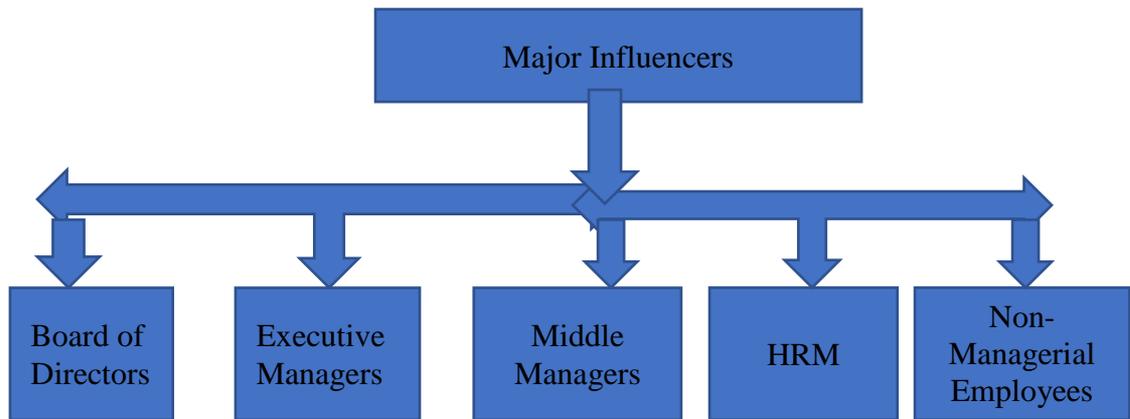
Furthermore, 20% of the senior managers believe that employees themselves play a key role in improving the level of employee engagement.

This was argued for by SM2:

"The most important influencer is the employee himself/herself regardless of his/her position. At the level of non-managers, some employees are, by nature, committed. For some, whatever you do they are always unsatisfied and ungrateful. As for leaders, if we are frustrated it will directly affect our subordinates and the whole environment".

The above excerpts demonstrate how employee engagement involves all major influencers concerned, starting from the board, and then moving to include executives, seniors, middle managers, as well as non-managerial employees. This is demonstrated in Figure 5.3 below.

Figure 5.3: Major Influencers of Employee Engagement:



These findings are aligned with the literature, in that in order for engagement to be successful, coordination and interaction between the major influencers are needed to lead to a positive culture (Saks, 2022; Macey et al., 2011; Turner, 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020; Bailey et al., 2017). The stakeholders must ensure that a proper and transparent system is in place so that no misunderstanding emerges, if they are to avoid frustration at the LB Bank.

Middle managers' feedback shows that 60% of them believe that HRM, along with the executive managers, plays a fundamental role in improving employee engagement during normal periods as well as during change. These managers' perceptions are that it starts from the mission and vision statement imposed by the board of directors and continues to encompass how executives and seniors implement it, with HRM making sure that everything is aligned.

For instance, MM4 suggested that:

“Executive and senior managers’ main objective is to make sure that the board of directors’ mission and vision statement is applied. HRM’s mission is to make sure that things are on track and that it is our voice to top management”.

And:

“These days the problem is that senior managers and executives believe that we are not capable enough to make good decisions. So they prefer to decide on what we will execute, which is so frustrating. HRM is the voice of top management rather than our voice. I believe the role of executives and HRM is to create a healthy environment that ensures a fair scheme and job security, promotes delegation and empowerment, supports employees, and coaches them to ensure we are doing the right things”.

The perception of this middle manager is interesting as it highlights the problem of the gap between rhetoric and reality. SMs may see themselves as positive enablers of engagement, but this is not how others might experience it at the bank. It alludes to the critiques expressed in some of the literature about engagement being a ‘management fad’⁵ rather than a real thing that is taken seriously and effectively implemented.

Further, MM2 suggested that:

“Empowerment is needed. Procedures and regulations in an organisation are vital. But rules and regulations have proved over decades that it [empowerment] is a source of blocked creativity and blocked initiative for some people, while holding back employee commitment, creativity, and initiatives. Today the culture imposed by executives and the board, and supported by HRM, is a culture that doesn’t promote any initiatives or creativity”.

Rather, engagement is hard to achieve in a culture that does not support it and where employees are not empowered (Zinger, 2015).

For MM3:

“Leaders – executives or seniors – play a crucial role in improving the work environment. They promote either a committed or an uncommitted environment. The leaders should be flexible, truthful, and supportive, speak regularly and honestly to their people, explain,

⁵ Examples of management fads: Management by objectives, Matrix management, Theory Z, Total quality management, Business process re-engineering, and others.

clear up any ambiguity, and mostly listen to them to check what is missing so as to be supportive and helpful. Also, HRM has a crucial role. Lately, we feel that engagement is decreasing, mainly because HRM is not playing its role. HRM's role is to give employees a clear vision of their career path and to communicate and ensure fairness and transparency, which is ambiguous these days with the changes. This is leading to a lot of frustration among people within different levels here at the bank”.

As revealed above, when leaders and HRM are not playing their role, engagement will be negatively affected. The role of the board involves setting the mission and vision of the bank. Executives' role is to communicate these clearly, making sure that an alignment exists among all parties involved. They should create a caring environment, and then empower people to get results and achieve the required mission. Here, transparent and clear communication plays a great role in influencing employee engagement. This was regarded by MM3 as:

“a smooth, two-way communication that is a must for engaging more and more employees”.

This involves carrying information from the top to the bottom level and carrying feedback from the bottom to the top. Therefore, transparency and effective and open communication are key elements to help boost employee engagement at the LB Bank to develop a healthy workplace (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). To achieve this, senior and executive managers' leadership style is a key element. This was also supported by SM3, who stated that:

“Establishing a strong leadership base full of transparency, openness, and clear communication is the most effective strategy to engage employees. Effective leaders design a clear succession plan, and team up the individuals to contribute to the goal achievement”.

The role of HRM comprises recruitment, job assignment, training, communication, and human resources development whilst supporting employees and allowing them to voice their concerns. MM2 argued that:

“These days HRM is becoming individualistic. It is true that they developed a system that helps needy people or sick people; however, their focus on a career path is minimal: they deal with employees sometimes in unprofessional way and they don’t communicate in a transparent way to make employees feel safe and see that they are treated fairly”.

By dealing with employees from their own perspectives, the executives’ and senior managers’ perspectives, HRM has been regarded as individualistic since its priorities are set from the point of view of the board and the LB Bank’s executives, while ignoring employees’ needs and fears.

Accordingly, 40% of middle managers argued that:

*“It is **us** who are responsible for the engagement. If we are positive, satisfied and content, it will reflect on our staff, and vice versa. This is the same for our direct managers. If they are engaged and happy, we will be engaged and happy. Consequently, our employees will be engaged and happy, leading ultimately to better services and good results” (MM1).*

In support, MM5 argued that:

“Simply it is “US”, I mean the managers (all levels of managers). We are liable because when we are frustrated, we reflect our mood to our staff and this impacts directly on their performance and engagement. It starts from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom. If our senior managers are treating us fairly and in a transparent way, ultimately I will be happy and will deal in the same way with my staff; otherwise, if I am frustrated it will reflect on my people. This will result in lowering the engagement of the people”.

The above citations reveal how frustration is a ‘silent killer’ of engagement at the workplace (Royal & Agnew, 2011). Therefore, leaders at all levels in the bank have responsibility and accountability to work on the environment

and the culture to oppose this enemy called 'frustration' (Royal & Agnew, 2011). This point was also validated by 40% of the senior management:

“Some of the executives and senior managers are frustrated. This directly affects the middle managers’ performance and consequently affects the non-managers. The role of the managers, regardless of seniority, should be to empower people, delegate, and give trust, which is absent these days” (SM3).

The joint responsibility of direct managers and HRM was also highlighted by 87.5% of the non-managerial employees, who stated that:

“Key influencers are HRM and the direct managers because they have the main power to secure employees’ financial needs, stability, and security” (J1).

“Immediate managers are key influencers as they frequently interact with the employees. They will either motivate and enhance engagement or demotivate and frustrate their staff. The direct boss should be an inspiration, a coach, a professional advisor, and a person with full knowledge that inspires his employees” (J2).

“Leaders of the bank (i.e., executives and direct managers) jointly with HRM are major influencers in improving the level of employee engagement. The managers’ role is to review the process developed by HRM for staff” (J7).

“Lately we feel that we are regarded by the top management as a number not as a human, with no clear career path and no empowerment at all. This is causing demotivation to some” (J5).

Based on the above responses by non-managers, this shows that HRM and direct managers play a fundamental role in the development of employee engagement and in attaining the organisational outcomes in the desired manner (Saks, 2022). The role of the HRM department and direct managers in each department begins from recruitment, improving career development, learning, and the training environment in the organisation (Saks, 2022; Truss

et al., 2014; Wang & Hsieh, 2013; Carasco-Saul et al., 2014; Xu & Cooper, 2011; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

This section has demonstrated that the managers and employees at the LB Bank are very insightful and have a good understanding of engagement. They know what it is, what factors contribute to it, and who influences it. They also understand the frustrations that pose a threat to engagement. They affirm what the existing literature says.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the qualitative findings obtained from the use of semi-structured interviews provide the following:

- an insight into employee engagement and its importance in achieving the LB Bank's objectives and goals.
- highlighting the major factors affecting employee engagement and those influencers behind it.
- a brief understanding of the impact of employee engagement – in general and during change – on the LB Bank's performance.

The data was classified into themes in order to answer the research questions, and then developed and deepened by key participants' citations and narratives. Four major themes that emerged from participants' responses can be summarised as follows:

- The concept of employee engagement is key to the LB Bank's performance. The higher the level of engagement, the better the service provided to the customer, resulting in greater customer satisfaction and positive results for the LB Bank.

- To improve the level of engagement, financial and non-financial benefits complement each other. When financial benefits meet employee expectations, non-financial rewards such as promotions, greater job security, flexible working hours, career development opportunities, and other fringe benefits should be provided by the LB Bank to increase employee performance effectively. Thus, the bank should use financial and non-financial rewards to motivate employees and improve their performance.
- 'Wasta' and employee engagement are directly associated. The presence of 'wasta' is impacting the working environment and the level of engagement negatively.
- Employee engagement cannot be fostered without the involvement of influencers, from the mission and vision statements set by the board of directors to the clerical employees. Individuals in their positions can directly or indirectly impact the level of engagement at the bank. Therefore, leaders should be careful to develop an environment and a culture through which safety is spread as well as try to minimise an environment filled with conflict, competitiveness, and unfairness.

In addition, the data collected also revealed some interesting observations:

- The perception of engagement and its levels varies from one person to another depending on who is involved.
- Middle managers revealed their frustration and dissatisfaction about their work environment.

- Senior managers explained that they are aware that the level of engagement is decreasing without having taken any action or measures yet.
- Employees, after satisfying their basic needs, are searching for stability, a meaningful job, safety, and a good supervisor.
- Motivation and engagement are perceived differently, even though a direct link between them is observed. When people are motivated, engagement is shown.
- The hindrances to employee engagement highlighted in the findings support the LMX theory, ORT theory, JDR theory, SDT theory, as well as SET theory, which focus on the effect of the workplace on employee performance, engagement, and devotion (Kahn et al., 1964; Turner, 2020; Khan et al., 2022; Kular et al., 2008; Saks, 2019; Ghosh et al., 2020; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020).
- Finally, the need for engagement as a concept is much needed during change and throughout the change process. During organisational change, frustration levels increase, and a negative and toxic culture will grow when people are not on board. Therefore, it is expected that the LB Bank will take into account these factors affecting engagement and attempt to recruit and gain the commitment of all the influencers.

In conclusion, some of the research findings support and confirm the literature developed in the West. However, there are other results not yet fully explored in the literature which will be addressed in the discussion chapter. One of the things that stands out is 'wasta', which plays a major role in the Lebanese context.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

6. Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings relating to the literature on employee engagement. It contains an overview of the implications that might be valuable for the LB Bank. It further answers the research objectives by developing a model that the LB Bank might use at a strategic level. This model might facilitate, enhance, and perhaps sustain and/or maintain employee engagement and motivation in the workplace.

The key findings are summarised as follows:

- The definition of employee engagement is complex and diverse.
- Employee engagement provides an added-value component for the LB Bank in terms of profitability and productivity, as well as for the retention of talent.
- There is a direct link between the level of engagement and the bank's performance.
- The level of engagement has been perceived differently by participants based on their position and job role.
- The drivers behind employee engagement can be external or internal. Internal drivers are the financial rewards that are fundamental to enhancing engagement; when met, non-financial rewards can be tackled.
- One of the major factors negatively impacting the level of engagement is 'wasta', which has a direct influence on the work environment and on the LB Bank's performance.

- Key contributors to and influencers on employee engagement are: the board of directors, leaders or and/managers, HRM, and employees. The role of management and leadership is key in promoting engagement and commitment.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the importance and limitations of employee engagement as a concept in the LB Bank context.

6.1 Employee Engagement Provides an Added Value Component to the LB Bank Context

The findings on the definition of employee engagement correspond with the literature previously developed. The researcher has discovered that the definition of employee engagement in Lebanon is complex and multifaceted as it depends on the perspective from which it is viewed. In addition, these findings confirm that employee engagement is needed to ensure customer retention and satisfaction.

6.1.1 Employee Engagement Definitions

Senior managers define employee engagement from a strategic perspective. This is from the bank's point of view as a business, rather than according to the employees' beliefs and interests. This is macro-based, meaning that there is a perception that employee engagement can be used as a strategic tool for customer retention and satisfaction to improve productivity and profitability. However, for some middle managers and non-managers, employee engagement is viewed from an individualistic and/or personal perspective, with others considering it from both sides: from the individualistic and organisational strategical perspectives.

These approaches have different meanings. First, an understanding of employee engagement changes according to an individual's perceptions, position, background, and experience (Kular et al., 2008; Truss et al., 2014). Second, the evidence shows that employee engagement is complex (Byrne, 2022). The complexity emerges from the reciprocal nature of the definitions presented. For instance, through dedication and commitment to the bank, and from the bank reciprocating by showing commitment to its employees by meeting their expectations, a positive psychological contract is developed (Tarmizi & Anggian, 2022; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Mutual expectations and trust are established between bank and employees (Arzoumanian, 2018) wherever more employee objectives are allied and associated with the organisation's goals (Sun, 2019; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Gratton, 2000; Frederman, 2009). The role of the psychological contract is thus to improve the relationship between the bank and its employees, leading to employee engagement and, as a result, organisational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Tarmizi & Anggian, 2022). Therefore, employee engagement leads to mutual obligation and investment: working together, employees and the organisation achieve the bank's objectives in the long term.

Based on the above discussion, one might agree that conflict does exist in the workplace and cannot always be avoided given the agreement or contract between employees and employers. This is in line with the JD-R framework, where employers are obliged to pay salaries, establish a good environment, and provide employees with the necessary resources to get the job done. On the other hand, employees must deliver, be accountable for their work on assigned jobs, and maintain a level of professionalism and

dedication. The key is to acknowledge that problems and conflicts will occur and to undertake ways to solve them.

In conclusion, the complexity of the definition of employee engagement as a concept is linked directly to the fundamental nature of the employment relationship and, sometimes, to the nature of competing interests and values. These competing interests are inevitable, given the asymmetry and power imbalance that exist between employers and/or managers and their employees. This is an outcome of the primary nature of the employment relationship and cannot be divorced from it.

6.1.2 Adding Value Through Employee Engagement Perceptions

The level of engagement is dependent on the individuals' perceptions and their involvement in decision-making at the LB Bank, as well as their position or job role. For instance, senior managers perceive the level of commitment and engagement at the bank to be high, whilst middle management perceives it to be low. The above results might suggest that middle managers are more often in daily contact with their employees and that they are more in touch with the ground-level employees than senior managers. They experience and have a clearer insight into different incidents and occurrences at the bank. Additionally, the findings reveal that middle managers are personally frustrated and dissatisfied with the work environment. They express their frustrations with the changes happening at the organisation, including the miscommunications as well as the different cultures that are changing. The results have also shown that senior managers are starting to feel that the level of engagement is decreasing.

However, ironically, they still do not understand the reasons behind this decrease. The interpretation of this could be that the same senior managers might consider themselves as 'positive' facilitators of engagement, even though this is not how this might be felt or experienced by others in the workplace. Thus, engagement is hard to achieve in a culture that does not support it and where employees are not empowered.

Perceptions about the level of engagement at the bank are based mainly on each employee's knowledge, position, and experience. For instance, two middle managers agreed with a senior manager on how the level of engagement at the bank is decreasing, which impacts the work environment. Accordingly, this might then impact the bank's productivity, growth, and profitability. It could therefore be argued that when the organisation engages its employees (through recruitment and retention of talent), it becomes more productive and profitable. The only problem is that it is dependent on the way engagement is perceived and how expectations are linked to it.

The imbalance of power and the degree of power by whom it is held are central to understanding these different perceptions. The potential for conflict (and therefore the potential for lack of engagement/disengagement) is endemic and inevitable. Therefore, it cannot be completely managed by the employment relationship that exists between employers and employees. People become frustrated when they do not have enough power, and those with power are easily able to dismiss the problem of decreasing engagement or to decide not to do anything about it. In other words, it is the employer or senior managers who are 'calling the shots' because they are empowered to have authority and control, whilst middle managers and lower-level

employees have limited power. The key is to empower people by creating a culture that gives space and autonomy to employees so that they can innovate, collaborate, and do things differently.

6.1.3 Added Value Through Customers' Satisfaction and Expectations

The findings show that satisfying customers and meeting their expectations is crucial for the LB Bank to achieve growth and profitability. The rationale for this view emerges from the rise in competition both within the Lebanese banking sector and regionally. As revealed in this study, customers have many choices; the result is that their expectations have also increased drastically over the last decade, leading to a more competitive environment. Hence, value is added through customer loyalty and dedication to products and services (Cook, 2008; Dirani, 2006). Cook (2008) suggests that organisations need to deal with customers in a customer-centric way. The customer-centric approach argues that customer loyalty depends on the customer experience. Therefore, the power of employees (especially the front-liners) plays a major role in the customer experience because employees' devotion, emotional involvement, and willingness to give their best will ultimately lead to customer satisfaction (Rasool, 2021; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Previous studies have revealed that the higher the level of engagement, the better the customer experience and level of satisfaction, leading to an increase in profitability (Baumruk, 2004; Hewitt Associates, 2004). The findings of my study, based on the data from three SMs and four MMs, support the link between employee engagement, customer satisfaction, the bank's performance, and employees' engagement. For

instance, SM3 argued that *“employee engagement is important for the bank’s performance since a loyal employee will go the extra miles to make their customers happy, making better results”*.

6.2 Employee Engagement and the Bank’s Performance

This section will discuss the practical and theoretical implications of the findings of this study concerning the impact of employee engagement on the LB Bank’s performance.

First, the findings are consistent with those studies conducted within the European and North American regions regarding the impact of employee engagement on an organisation’s performance (Clack, 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2013; Ashraf & Siddiqui, 2020). The data confirmed that when employee engagement is present, the LB Bank’s performance improves, since high levels of employee engagement will motivate employees, encouraging them to work together to achieve the bank’s goals.

Second, the findings confirmed that employee engagement is needed for the LB Bank to improve the well-being of employees, to ensure employee retention, and to sustain organisational performance. This implies that when employees are engaged, they will be more attached to their organisation, leading to increased employee retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), in turn impacting positively the LB Bank’s productivity (Rasool, 2021).

The questions that can be asked are:

- What are the factors that can promote employee engagement at the LB Bank?

- Who are the major influencers of employee engagement at the LB Bank?
Why and how?
- What tools or models are available to assist the LB Bank in promoting and ensuring employee engagement?

6.3 What Are the Hindrances to Employee Engagement in the LB Bank Context?

The understanding and perceptions around what influences engagement at the LB Bank are similar to those previously identified in the existing literature pertaining to organisations within Western business contexts. Therefore, the LB Bank needs to take advantage of the outcomes from those studies already conducted in the Western context (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2019; Bakker, 2009; The Gallup Business Journal, 2014; Akanpaadgi & Binpimbu, 2021; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; etc.).

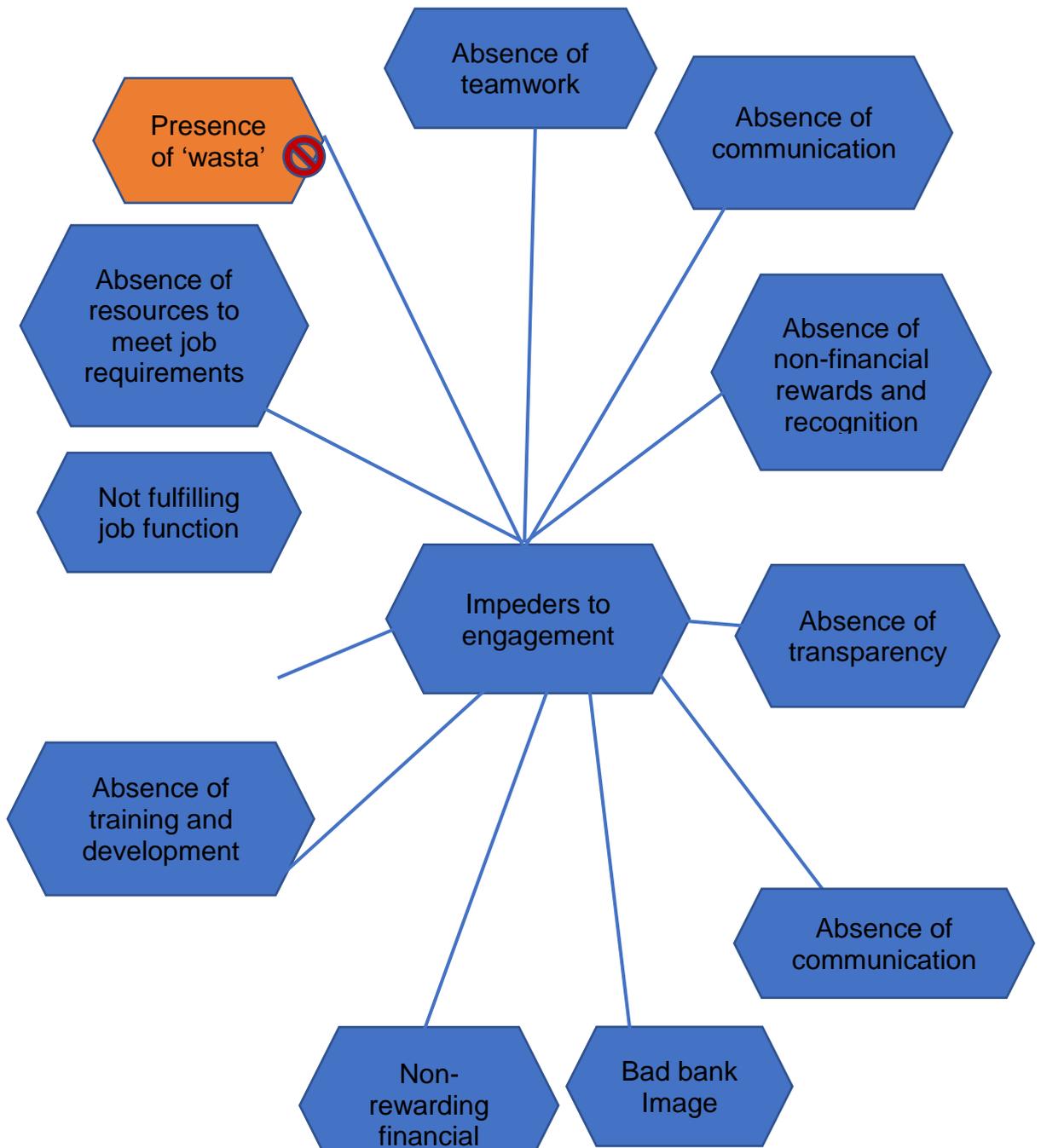
As revealed in this study, and as confirmed in the literature, hindrances can be either external or internal. External factors can be personal, such as health problems, divorce, or grief, or they can be due to economic and political instability (Sibson, 1976; Walters, 2010). These external factors cannot be controlled by the LB Bank; however, the LB Bank can find ways to help employees cope with these factors to make sure that their well-being is not affected.

As far as internal factors are concerned, they are controllable and manageable. Management should manage these factors properly to foster levels of engagement at the LB Bank and promote a healthy environment. Internal factors influencing employee engagement can be financial or non-

financial (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019; Tanwar, 2017; Sun, 2019; Bustasar et al., 2019; Macey et al., 2011; Meyer & Gagne, 2008). In line with Maslow's theories and other motivational theories, the findings support the fact that financial needs are the basis of self-fulfilment in the LB Bank context. When they are fulfilled, non-financial needs will prevail. Thus, both financial and non-financial aspects need to be addressed to help in promoting employee engagement at the LB Bank (Aktar & Pangil, 2017; Macey et al., 2011; Meyer & Gagnè, 2008).

The most practical implication to be drawn from the findings is that the major impeters to employee engagement listed in Figure 6.1 are in line with previous studies conducted within the European and North American regions (Barik & Kochar, 2017; AbuKhalifeh & Som, 2013; Bailey et al., 2017; Saks, 2019). However, the additional major hindrance highlighted during this study, which proved to have a direct negative influence on employees, the work environment, and on all the other factors, was 'wasta'. According to the findings, the key is to find a balance between practices and 'wasta' to control its harmful impact on employees and to minimise frustration among employees. All these impeters, and especially 'wasta', if not well-managed by the LB Bank, will lead to a toxic environment full of fear and instability, thereby impacting directly the well-being of employees, their level of engagement and motivation, and ultimately the LB Bank's performance and productivity (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1: The impeders to engagement



6.3.1 Employee engagement and the effects of 'wasta'

'Wasta': 'Wasta' is one of the major inhibitors to employee engagement, commitment, and motivation in the LB Bank environment. It is regarded by the participants as a promotor of an unhealthy environment. Most

participants perceive 'Wasta' as a sign of corruption and cronyism. It is viewed as a source of frustration and fear among employees since it promotes unfair treatment.

For instance, J7 argued that: *"Despite the fact that HRM is trying to minimise the perception that 'wasta' exists, we are feeling it on a daily basis, especially for promotion and salary adjustment. I feel threatened by the fact that I have to work double to prove and earn what I deserve"*. Hence, 'wasta' causes frustration among skilled employees because of its implications of injustice and unfairness, which can be harmful to employee engagement.

Yet, based on the findings of similar studies on 'wasta' and its impact on employee engagement (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016; Eseleni, 2017; Mclaughlin & Rashid, 2017), 'wasta' is also regarded as multifaceted. It is viewed as a way to secure employment and advancement in an organisation with a sense of job security. Yet participants also view 'wasta' as a key impediment to employee engagement as it develops a toxic environment resonant with injustice, demotivation, and frustration. This directly impacts the levels of retention, career advancement, and remuneration. Thus, one can argue that 'wasta' can be regarded as a main cause of breaches of the employee psychological contract (see Figure 6.2) since it impacts employee well-being directly.

One positive thing revealed by this research is that senior managers are now aware of the consequences of 'wasta' and are working hard to minimise its impact in order to promote a positive organisational culture. In line with previous studies, the current findings reveal that although 'wasta' is a

national cultural norm within Middle Eastern countries that cannot be removed, its effects can be minimised (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016; Eseleni, 2017; Mclaughlin & Rashid, 2017). The influence of 'wasta', according to the findings, is creating frustration and dissatisfaction among qualified and skilled employees at the LB Bank. This can have negative implications, developing a culture filled with conflict, unfairness, injustice, insecurity, and frustration which in turn can decrease the level of engagement among employees (Figure 6.2). The interesting part is that senior managers at the LB Bank are aware of the impact of 'wasta' now and are starting to consider taking steps to address it.

6.3.2 Employee Engagement and Teamwork

As revealed by 14 participants, teamwork is one of the key elements that effectively supports employee engagement. People tend to do well when working in groups (Pathan, 2022; Heskett, 2022). The findings of this study revealed that competition among staff and a lack of team spirit (in some departments) have led to an unhealthy environment, directly impacting productivity and efficiency. As established from previous studies, the presence of teamwork brings employee satisfaction due to a feeling of being safe (Clack, 2021; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020; Saks, 2019). Increasingly, there is a strong perception that when employees feel safe and fairly treated, productivity and commitment grow, thus improving customer satisfaction and leading to positive organisational outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Singh, 2016; Zhang, 2022; Pathan, 2022). On another note, as per the findings, 'wasta' inhibits teamwork spirit at the LB Bank since it creates

competition among employees. Therefore, the LB Bank should work on its organisational environment to strengthen teamwork and team trust, which can have a positive impact on individual and organisational productivity, employee performance, and commitment.

In conclusion, an absence of teamwork can create an environment full of competition among employees, leading to frustration and conflict that impact the work environment negatively. Similarly to 'wasta', a lack of teamwork can affect employee well-being, leading to frustration and insecurity; thus, negatively impacting their level of engagement (Figure 6.2).

6.3.3 Employee Engagement and Clear Career Path

This research illustrates that to inspire and encourage employee engagement in the LB Bank context, a clear career path should be implemented. Accordingly, some middle managers and senior managers agree that a clear career path with transparent procedures for professional development and a challenging job are crucial for engagement. Their belief is that by implementing a clear career path, employees will be challenged and ready to go the extra mile to provide an appropriate service to their customers as part of developing customer satisfaction (Mappamiring & Putra, 2021; Lartey, 2021). This accords with the knowledge found in the literature that an organisation that emphasises employees' development will likely lead to more engaged employees (Siddhanta & Roy, 2011; Mappamiring & Putra, 2021; Lartey, 2021). It is also confirmed that a challenging and meaningful job and clear opportunities for advancement and

development are key elements in motivating employees and fostering employee engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Figure 6.2: Impeders to engagement and their implications

Presence of these impeders		Toxic environment		
		Unfairness		
Presence of 'wasta'		Absence of creativity		
Not fulfilling job function		Employee frustration		
Absence of communication	Will create F.E.A.R resulting in	Injustice Stress	H E N C E	Decreased levels of employee engagement and motivation
Absence of teamwork		Demotivation		
Absence of training and development		Feelings of injustice		
Absence of growth opportunities/no clear career path		Job Insecurity		
Absence of non-financial rewards and recognition		Anxiety		
Bad bank image		Low level of retention		
Non-rewarding financial benefits		Conflict		
Absence of transparency		No initiative		
Absence of resources to meet job demand		Negative behaviour		
		Threat of losing job		

In addition, this research again corroborates the theory that the absence of a clear career path *might* have a negative impact on employees, especially those people in search of self-fulfilment and growth opportunities, as

suggested by SM2. As such, employees might feel unsafe and in a less meaningful role when there is an absence of opportunities and choices (Harter et al., 2002). Employees are more likely to leave the workplace and change work if they feel that they might not have an opportunity to develop and improve within their organisation.

Also, this study revealed that training is viewed by many participants as an enabler for engagement since employees believe that professional training encourages professional knowledge, growth, and development. Training and career growth were always mentioned together by participants as major factors promoting engagement and commitment; this is also in line with the literature (Semwal & Dhyani, 2017; Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). The impact of training and career development was mentioned several times by many participants (six non-managers and two middle managers). Thus, one can assume that promoting a culture that offers clear career paths, training, and professional improvement (where no favouritism exists) will foster employee engagement. As suggested in the literature, this will help employees feel secure and needed (Saks, 2022; Zaraket et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2001; Demirci & Erbas, 2010).

6.3.4 Employee Engagement and the Bank's Image

This study supports the idea that the reputation of the bank is also an important element affecting the level of engagement (Tower Perrin Model, 2011-2014). It shows that the bank's image has a positive impact on employee engagement since its status and branding in the Lebanese context inspire good feelings among employees and the belief that they have

received kudos (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Osman et al., 2022; Kazimoto, 2016). Thus, corporate image and employee engagement are directly related. As mentioned previously in the literature chapter, corporate image has a direct impact on self-esteem, and this was confirmed by the findings of this research. Therefore, the better the bank's position in the Lebanese market, the more employees will try their best to protect its image by making additional effort and by offering better service to customers. Such outcomes directly and positively impact their level of engagement.

The evidence from the current study illustrates that, in turn, the LB Bank's image is defined by the quality of service offered to customers, the fair and transparent benefits offered to employees, the position of the bank in the market, and, most importantly, the way the bank is perceived by its competitors and by the people in the Lebanese context.

6.3.5 Employee Engagement and Change

The findings show that during the period of change there was evidence of an increase in levels of anxiety, uncertainty, job insecurity, demotivation, and frustration due to instability and a lack of vision affecting employees' well-being. As a result, levels of engagement were observed to decrease. As discussed earlier, 100% of senior managers participating in this research agreed that employee engagement is mostly needed when significant organisational change is being executed. These SMs believe that successful change cannot materialise without the collaboration of all the involved stakeholders (Kotter, 2012; 2008). Thus, change and employee engagement are regarded in the current study as a combination of interrelated concepts

that should be taken into consideration by all stakeholders at the bank (employees, managers, and HRM) to ensure a healthy and engaged environment (Beijer & Gruen, 2016). Consistent with previous studies, the current findings show that *“people do not resist change, they resist the fact that they might lose their job and status due to change”* (MM5). In this case, fear of uncertainty and job insecurity might negatively affect the commitment of employees. The need to deal with change in a smart and serious manner is important for the LB Bank to survive and grow.

The findings as well the previous research and literature view change as a universal element that can have a negative impact within organisations if not well-managed, and the LB Bank is no exception (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013). However, further research in the LB Bank context and the Lebanese banking sector can be conducted to explore the impact of change on employee performance and commitment. This will help develop insights into how these ideas can improve performance and profitability.

6.3.6 Employee Engagement Through Recognition and Reward Systems

According to this study, most of the participants agreed that the LB Bank needs to implement a suitable reward and recognition system so that employees will continue to do good work. The study also confirms that there is a direct link between reward and recognition and the level of employee engagement.

The findings from this study also conform with existing evidence from previous studies that a lack of recognition in the form of financial or non-

financial rewards (salary, promotion, verbal appreciation, and/or written recognition) will hinder employee engagement, as without them an employee will feel unappreciated and disregarded (Heathfield, 2019; Meyer & Gagnè, 2008; Macey et al., 2011). When employees are pleased and content, and their needs are fulfilled, they tend to display motivation and a positive attitude; hence, commitment and engagement will prevail. This is in line with the JD-R framework, where job resources and job demands are interrelated (Won & Kim, 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Similarly, there is evidence from the findings that in cases where the reward or recognition schemes are perceived to be unfair, regardless of their legitimacy, demotivation increases and performance decreases, leading to a perceived decrease in employee engagement (Saks, 2019; Idris & Tuckey, 2015; Yin, 2018; Beugré, 1998). This perception directly impacts the emotions and psychology of employees. The frustrations that an employee develops when expectations are not met have been discussed under the SET model.

In conclusion, perceptions of whether the system in place is fair or not are important: some people will have their own interpretations of what is absolutely or relatively fair. However, the problem is that reward is also a cost to the bank that can certainly cause some tensions. If there is a link between engagement and bank performance, there is an issue of balancing investment in reward packages versus expected returns.

6.3.7 Employee Engagement and Communication

The evidence from the current findings shows that miscommunication, one-way communication, and lack of transparency can be the main hindrances to engagement, which leads to frustration among employees. This directly impacts the level of engagement through low levels of productivity and efficiency from employees.

There is evidence that transparent communication is the main driver of engagement. It is a tool used to listen to the voices of employees, answer their concerns, and reduce their anxieties and fears (Xu & Cooper, 2011). Furthermore, it supports the idea that to avoid frustration among employees and ensure an engaging and healthy environment, transparency and two-way communication are needed. These findings are associated with communication theory, where honesty, effectiveness, transparency, openness, positivity, and two-way communication (communication between employees and their managers) are key elements in promoting engagement, especially during change. Communication ensures and promotes a safe and fair environment (Kotter, 2012; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Schmidt & Jackson, 2005; Watson, 2008).

In conclusion, in line with previous studies (Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Royal & Agnew, 2011), the findings highlight that drivers of employee engagement derive from the culture and the work environment in practice. These include employees' well-being, good financial and non-financial benefits, fair and transparent recognition schemes, clear career paths, growth opportunities, interesting and self-fulfilling jobs, job security and safety, the bank's

reputation, team spirit, the availability of resources to meet job demands, and two-way communication (Bustasar et al., 2019).

It is clear from the findings that there is one major element that prevents things from working properly, impacting the work environment, the culture, team spirit, and transparency: namely, 'wasta'. 'Wasta' is double-edged sword: on the one hand it can be useful for recruitment; on the other, if practiced badly, it can create a toxic and frustrating environment. Therefore, the key is to find a balance between 'wasta' and practice to avoid a toxic environment. As revealed and discussed in chapter five, most of the participants are convinced that good and transparent leadership as well as good HRM practices will help in decreasing the negative impact of 'wasta'.

Taking into consideration the above discussion, one can conclude that the drivers behind employee engagement cannot be reinforced unless good leadership is present. As such, the promotion of engagement in the LB Bank context is linked to LMX theory and leadership (this will be discussed in detail later).

6.4 The Four Major Influencers in Promoting Employee Engagement

This study agrees with previous research that leadership and management are effective and relevant in promoting or reducing employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Robinson et al., 2005; Macey et al., 2011; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020; Zhang, 2022) as they provide antecedents of a healthy and motivational culture. Results suggest that employee engagement emerges when all parties/influencers are involved, since involvement and coordination among all parties are like chains that start from the vision and mission statement set by the board of directors, move to the direct managers

(whether executives, senior, or middle managers), from there to HRM, and finally to the employees. In other words, the influencers help to build a healthy culture that promotes and raises employee engagement with a view to improving the productivity and performance of the bank (Alzyoud, 2018; Heathfield, 2019; Zhang, 2022; Mughal & Iraqi, 2020). This was also confirmed through the findings, where most of the responses showed that HRM and direct managers play a fundamental role in the development of employee engagement.

As presented in chapter five, HRM, managers, executives, and board members, along with employees, play a vital role in fostering a fair, motivating, and transparent environment that will help the LB Bank to improve and promote employee commitment and engagement. The following section highlights and critically discusses the impact of influencers in promoting or suppressing employee engagement:

- a)** The role of the board of directors and organisational culture in advancing employee engagement.
- b)** The role of human resource management (HRM) in promoting employee engagement.
- c)** The role of management/leaders in endorsing employee engagement.
- d)** The role of the employee in supporting employee engagement.

6.4.3 The Role of the Board of Directors and Organisational Culture in Promoting Employee Engagement

The findings confirm that the role of the board of directors is to set the vision and mission of the firm and to communicate it clearly in a transparent way to employees. This will ensure that alignment exists among all parties and will help to create a caring, motivating, and healthy environment within the LB Bank workplace. This finding aligns with organisational role theory, which states that the workplace environment affects the emotional and physical behaviour of a human being (Kahn et al., 1964) and emphasises the importance of setting clear roles from management to ensure alignment. It also emphasises the role that the board of directors has in establishing the bank's culture and in making sure that both the executive managers and leaders are implementing it properly. However, with the current climate of continuous change and worldwide instability, building a solid culture full of safety, fairness, and trust is a challenging task (Mendes, 1996). Therefore, the board of directors' role in this context is to set up a flexible system that promotes stability in order to meet the basic needs of people (such as health, pension funds, transparency, and a trustworthy environment) to control fear and insecurity. Through this practice, the level of engagement might create a positive outcome leading to improved productivity and efficiency.

In addition, the analysis of the data agrees with previous studies and the literature in that current organisations are responsible for carefully taking into consideration the ways in which their offices are designed to support the culture and the vision they want to build and the behaviours they want to reinforce (Cancialosi, 2015). For instance, some theories from 1984,

supported by researchers from the Rocky Mountain Institute and Carnegie Mellon University, posited a direct relationship between improved productivity and having a friendly, 'green' environment (Cancialosi, 2015). In that case, open-space offices or the fresh approach were used by companies such as Google to support the values they wanted to encourage (Cancialosi, 2015).

6.4.2 The Role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in Promoting Employee Engagement

In this study, HRM plays a fundamental role in improving employee engagement as well as in enhancing performance and productivity to achieve positive company results. HRM's contribution to engagement starts with recruitment, then moves to job assignment, training, and work communication, and finally to human resources development processes.

The present study highlights the importance of the role of HRM practices in employee engagement, as described in the literature (Nishii et al., 2008; Alzyoud, 2018; Saks, 2022). Therefore, the current study demonstrates that HRM plays a role in controlling and influencing the drivers behind employee engagement. The findings illustrate that employee perceptions of HRM practices can also impact employee behaviour and emotional psychology directly. For instance, when employees perceive that HRM practices are neither clear nor transparent, and that they represent management's voices and concerns rather than the employee voice, this may result in disappointment and the demoralisation of employees. Further, this can also

develop some elements of discouragement, disengagement, and lack of interest in work.

The role of HRM has also been regarded as a mediator and a facilitator between employees and their direct and indirect managers at the LB Bank. The HRM role has been demonstrated to be essential in promoting a supportive environment for engagement and commitment. This view is supported by SM1, who suggested: *“HRM can see the loopholes in the system and bring it to the notice of seniors and executives”*. Thus, as corroborated in the literature, the role of HRM is to create the right culture and to ensure that the bank’s goals and objectives are aligned with individuals’ objectives. In this way, HRM creates an effective and transparent environment (Truss et al., 2014; Saks, 2022) to promote fairness and trust and to minimise fear of insecurity, leading to the improvement of employee engagement to achieve feasible levels of productivity and efficiency.

The evidence also shows that engagement occurs when the bank’s strategy is aligned with its practices and culture (Macey et al., 2011). This alignment and compliance with strategy is championed by HRM, which is involved with employee selection, career development, employment of fair practices, promotion of transparency, and clear reward and/or recognition systems. Hence, the alignment is also perceived to reduce employees’ disappointment by creating a positive and motivating culture. The questions that can be developed in this context are: How does alignment work? And what tools can ensure this alignment in the LB Bank context? These questions are also based on the findings, which show that HRM is bypassing

the managers and instead interfering with the daily management, thereby hampering managers' relationship with their employees.

In conclusion, this study shows the importance of the role of HRM in improving employee engagement in the LB Bank context. It supports the theory that the role of HRM starts from recruitment, moves to job assignment, training, work communication, and the establishment of a healthy and fair culture, and finally leads to human resources development. However, there is a thin line between the alignment that must be carried out by HRM and interference. This must be further studied in the LB Bank context to avoid conflict between HRM and managers.

6.4.3 The Role of Managers/Leaders in Endorsing Employee Engagement

The findings established that there is a direct link between leadership and engagement. Accordingly, 83% of participants suggested that their leaders play a vital role in improving their work environment by promoting either a committed or uncommitted environment (Kahn, 1990; Truss et al., 2014). Therefore, the results revealed that leaders need to be efficient in order to gain the trust of their team. When the management (i.e., either the executives, senior, or middle managers) show that they value, believe in, empower, attend to, and give fair treatment to employees, employees will feel safe, motivated, and committed. There is a perception that the level of engagement will thereby increase as well as lead to some better results (Heathfield, 2019). Leaders need to show some form of flexibility and become role models, promoting engagement (Kotter & Cohen, 2012) –

ensuring fairness and transparency – and shared control while allowing employees to influence important decisions, if they are to avoid the risk of having an unengaged workforce (Kular et al., 2008).

In conclusion, the evidence from the LB Bank increasingly supports and mostly agrees with the previous studies and literature and the LMX theory, all of which argue that leaders are key in promoting employee engagement. The results also support social exchange theory by showing that when trust is developed between two parties, loyalty will develop to influence engagement. Therefore, HRM needs to take care with the recruitment process of leaders and or managers.

6.4.4 The Role of Employees and the Employee Voice in Supporting Employee Engagement

The findings show that all employees (i.e., executives, senior managers, middle managers, non-managers, and clerks) play an essential role in promoting employee engagement within the LB Bank context. A bank with disengaged staff will ultimately lead to an unprofitable firm. This also demonstrates that listening to the employee voice is important. It helps each employee to feel safe, committed, happy and satisfied, and encouraged to go the extra mile to achieve the bank's objectives and outcomes. Since 1984, the employee voice has been regarded as part of trade union membership. However, over time the concept has broadened and started to become viewed as a way for employees to express and communicate their concerns, views, or opinions (Jha et al., 2019). Besides, it is viewed as an opportunity given to employees to be involved in decision making (Jha et al., 2019).

Accordingly, Purcell (2014) argues that when employees are able to communicate their concerns and be heard by management, they will remain positive, committed, and willing to put more effort into their work. In the LB Bank context, the employee voice has also been regarded as important. It is defined by participants as a situation where employees show that they feel safe, secure, heard by management, empowered, valuable, and treated fairly through financial and non-financial benefits. Most of the previous studies have focused on employee engagement from the employer's perspective (Truss et al., 2014). They miss the fact that when operational employees feel that their voice is unheard and disregarded, they will feel unsafe and unprotected. This might lead to a decrease in trust and an unengaged environment.

One of the outcomes of this research is that people engage when they feel safe (Albrecht et al., 2023). When employees are engaged, and productivity increases, the bank's performance may be impacted positively. Therefore, the issue of safeness within the LB Bank is related to the employee voice, through which they can voice their mind, ideas, and thoughts and feel that their presence adds value, especially during difficult situations (Albrecht et al., 2023). Safeness also denotes the stability of the working environment where job security is present and employees are valued. People tend to engage mentally, emotionally, and cognitively when they feel they are safe and heard. Therefore, the LB Bank should develop a system where the employee voice is heard and appreciated.

Empowerment, fairness, stability, respect, and trust are basic needs for employees, especially during recession and change management. When

these are in place, employees will be engaged to give their best to the bank and adapt to any changes or adversity (Macey et al., 2011). As is well known, 'it takes two to tango'; the same applies to employee engagement. It cannot be revealed and embedded if organisational engagement is not disclosed from the start, since it is more valuable than work engagement (Truss et al., 2014).

6.5 Conclusion

In summary, this study shows that most of the theoretical framework (discussed in the literature chapter, i.e., social exchange theory (SET), self-development theory (SDT), the psychological contract, JD-R theory, LMX, and ORT theory) on employee engagement can be applied to and used by the LB Bank as a basis to create a culture that improves employee engagement.

It also stipulates that to sustain employee engagement in the LB Bank context, two parties must be involved: 1) the board of directors, HRM, and leaders and 2) the employees (i.e., the operational staff). The involvement and commitment of all parties is necessary to successfully promote employment engagement since 'it takes two to tango'.

It also highlights the negative impact of 'wasta' on the work environment and how the role of leaders and HRM is key to promoting transparent communication, ensuring an environment full of fairness and trust.

It also postulates that the cost of disengaged employees at the LB Bank will have a direct impact on its overall productivity and performance. In addition,

those disengaged employees can extend their lack of interest and passion to the customers, thereby negatively impacting the customer experience.

There is also a suggestion that engagement adds value to products and services in the LB Bank workplace. Therefore, to promote engagement in the Lebanese context, the bank has to invest in its employees in terms of training, career development, rewards, and recognition. Having a good corporate image and a culture promoting a good teamwork environment, and offering employees a clear career path and training, will all help to promote engagement, but the LB Bank should accept the fact that people may leave for other opportunities, different career paths, or for personal reasons. All of these measures may be considered expensive; furthermore, one could argue that engagement strategies are not a magic potion, and therefore the bank needs to realistically consider inevitable barriers and limitations.

The question here is, then: how much is the Lebanese Bank willing to invest in these factors versus expected returns? Since engagement is not the magic solution for retention, loyalty, and productivity, the Lebanese Bank must acknowledge that employee attrition will occur, regardless of the investment it makes. Approaches need to be intelligent and sensitive to avoid naive assumptions about how engagement can 'add value'.

The evidence is that implementing a strategy to promote engagement is a complex and difficult task. The process is restricted by numerous impeders that are universal across different sectors, as discussed by most of the literature.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to critically investigate and analyse the relevance of the concept of engagement within the LB Bank workforce. In addition, the study also enables the development of a conceptual framework to further understand the concept of employee engagement in the Lebanese context. Lastly, the study intends to develop a practical managerial toolkit that can be implemented at the LB Bank.

This chapter has seven sections: Section 7.2 presents a summary of the research. Section 7.3 provides an analysis of the responses to the research questions. Section 7.4 highlights the recommendations and contributions to practice and knowledge made by the research conducted on employee engagement at the LB Bank. Section 7.5 acknowledges the limitations of the study. Section 7.6 makes recommendations and suggestions for conducting further research. Section 7.7 draws conclusions and offers reflections on the research.

In summary, this chapter presents practical recommendations that can help the LB Bank enhance the levels of engagement of their employees. Most of these recommendations are derived from the findings of this current study as presented in the previous chapters and thus represent the contribution to practice and knowledge which will be explored in detail as the chapter progresses.

7.2 Summary and Main Conclusions of this Study

This study was conducted to critically evaluate the perceptions and concept of employee engagement and its relevance to the LB Bank. Since only a small number of studies have been published in Lebanon about employee engagement, this current research makes a significant contribution to a recognised gap in both the literature and practice. It gives insights into how the knowledge of the theories of the employee engagement functions in a different cultural setting. The study demonstrates that employee engagement is needed at the LB Bank to enhance, maintain, and sustain the overall performance of employees and support their contribution to the bank's success. It shows that employee engagement is beneficial to the customer services offered by the bank, as an engaged employee will make greater efforts by going the extra mile to improve the services and products offered by the bank. This is expected to provide a positive customer experience. In support of the previous research, this evidence maintains that meeting clients' expectations and increasing their level of satisfaction is key for the LB Bank to achieve greater productivity and success. However, this can only be achieved when employees are engaged and emotionally involved.

One of the main outcomes from the study is that the definition of employee engagement is complex, subjective, and open to individual understanding. Thus, it is dependent on the way it is expressed or described, varying from one person to another. However, this also depends on an individual's position that they hold in the organisation, their education level, and their experience. These aspects have been noted as causing potential conflict

that cannot be easily managed and controlled. At times, this may result in negatively influencing the level of employee engagement. The imbalance of power among employees also plays a fundamental role in realising these different perceptions. Employees become irritated and disengaged when they are not empowered, with those holding more power dismissing the problem of decreasing engagement. This study also supports previous studies and literature which state that employee engagement should involve mutual expectations and trust between parts of the organisation, i.e., the bank and the employees, where employee ideas and goals need to be aligned with the bank's goals.

Last but not least, this study reveals that impeder to engagement can be financial or non-financial; however, 'wasta' is a key impeder to employee engagement that must be managed by all stakeholders to minimise its impact on the work environment.

In summary, the study highlights that employee engagement as a concept is complex, challenging, and not easy to implement. It also brings to attention the fact that the concept of employee engagement is not a 'panacea' (cure-all solution) to the problems of engagement, or a support to the degree of devotion, faithfulness, enthusiasm, and efficiency of employees. Rather, approaches need to be logical and sensitive to avoid inexperienced assumptions about how engagement can add value. It also demonstrates that despite the costs involved in implementing employee engagement as a concept, the LB Bank can adopt the concept, though it should accept the fact that employees might leave regardless of how much investment is made.

7.3 Answers to the Research Questions

Previous research on the Lebanese Bank performance has taken little notice of the role of employee engagement. To answer whether employee engagement as a concept is relevant to the LB Bank, three research objectives were discussed at the beginning of the methodology chapter. Consequently, the following main research questions were considered important:

- What are the hindrances negatively affecting employee engagement at the LB Bank? What factors act as antecedents for employee engagement in context?
- How can 'wasta' impact employee engagement and the work environment?
- Who are the major influencers of employee engagement at the LB Bank? How can the LB Bank improve levels of employee engagement within its organisation?

To answer these research questions, this study adopted the pragmatic philosophical approach and used an explorative research design to develop an understanding of employee engagement within the LB Bank context. The researcher selected the abductive approach in compliance with the interpretivist philosophy to identify the factors behind employee engagement and to locate the major influencers of employee engagement at the LB Bank. Since this study is exploratory, semi-structured interviews were considered to be an appropriate instrument, giving the researcher the flexibility to examine and inquire further whenever participants articulated something of value.

7.3.1 Research question one: What are the hindrances negatively affecting employee engagement at the LB Bank? What factors act as antecedents for employee engagement in context?

This research has revealed several issues that need addressing to improve the level of employee engagement. When these issues are addressed, the perception is that performance can be improved. An area of great importance regarding the findings of this research is how these issues link to the work environment. Hence, the research corroborates the argument that the diversification of Lebanese culture in social, religious, and educational terms plays a major role in influencing the work environment, especially in recruitment and career path ('wasta'). It also reinforces the concept that managing employees' fear involves promoting a healthy, fair, stable, respectful, and trustworthy environment. These are basic needs for employees to commit to and engage with the bank, especially during recessions and for the purpose of change management. Moreover, it shows that impeders' interventions can negatively influence the work environment and negatively impact the level of engagement. It also identifies those impeders to engagement at the LB Bank that might lead to fear and frustration among employees, and to a toxic environment. These impeders can be either:

- Internal: such as 'wasta' practices, absence of transparent internal communication, lack of career path and development, injustice, unfair rewards and recognition plans, and an absence of transparency,

or

- External: employees' personal problems (such as health and family issues), war, or political and economic pressures that are not controllable by the LB Bank.

As far as internal impeters are concerned, the findings of this study support the previous literature (Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Pongton & Suntrayuth, 2019; Mazzei et al., 2019) that drivers of employee engagement are derived from the culture and the work environment in practice. They comprise employee welfare, financial and non-financial benefits, non-discriminatory treatment, a transparent recognition system, clear career paths, job continuity, and good communication.

This research found that extrinsic rewards (i.e., bonuses, wages, profit-sharing program), and fringe benefits (insurance, allowances, and transport) are directly related to the level of employee engagement (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2019; Tanwar, 2017; Sun, 2019; Bustasar et al., 2019; Macey et al., 2011; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Tang et al., 2014). The more transparent, structured, and professional the bank is, the higher the level of engagement among employees. If employees are not pleased with the level of extrinsic rewards, or if they feel that they have been treated unfairly, they will probably perceive that management does not appreciate them. As a result, they will stop getting involved and no longer commit to the goals and vision of the LB Bank.

Another important outcome from the research is the relationship between intrinsic rewards (empowerment, clear career path, training, professional development, completing meaningful tasks, work environment settings, and appreciation) and the level of engagement at the LB Bank. For instance,

when employees feel empowered, appreciated, have autonomy, and are rewarded according to performance, they make greater effort by going the extra mile and showing commitment to the bank's goals and objectives. The practical suggestions will be discussed later in this chapter.

The external factors (mainly political, family problems, health problems, wars, and economic problems) are, however, beyond the control of the LB Bank, unlike the internal factors, which can be examined by the bank's leadership to ensure that the environment promotes safety, fairness, appreciation, and career development. Nevertheless, the LB Bank should find a way to support its employees and help them to face and cope with these external factors.

7.3.2 Research question two: How can 'wasta' impact employee engagement and the work environment?

Accordingly, the participants from this study, and as described in the literature, revealed that 'wasta' is a vital internal impeder to engagement, as it can cultivate an unhealthy environment full of fear and insecurity among employees in the workplace. This study shows a direct link between the level of employee engagement and 'wasta' (Lahoud, 2008; Loewe et al., 2007; Albdour & Altarawneh, 2012; Almutairi, 2022; Al-Thbah, 2021; Mclaughlin & Rashid, 2017; Rawabdeh et al., 2020; Saks et al., 2022; Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2023; Alsarhan & Valax, 2021; Abdalla et al., 1998).

The research findings indicated that the practice of 'wasta' at the LB Bank is affecting the work environment as it promotes fear among employees, the characteristics of which include fear of losing one's job, fear of not being

treated or paid fairly, fear of not being recognised, and fear of not getting promoted or rewarded. Such composite elements of fear negatively affect the culture and the psychological contract between employees and employers since it exposes aspects of favouritism within the LB Bank culture. Therefore, the key for the LB Bank is to find a mid-way point between the national culture of 'wasta' and the bank's interest in encouraging commitment and engagement among employees. In other words, the LB Bank needs to manage 'wasta' in a logical way and to control the internal impeders to engagement. This is because 'wasta' is a cultural way of life in the Lebanese workplace that is beyond the reach of any current evidence-based ideas.

Thus, the key is to manage employees' fear and its causes in context. If internal hindrances are not well managed by the bank, the environment can be strangled by fear and insecurity that will negatively affect the employees' level of engagement.

7.3.3 Research question three: Who are the major influencers of employee engagement at the LB Bank?

Based on the findings from this study at the LB Bank, the commitment of all stakeholders is needed, including employees. Thus, employees are also expected to create an engaged environment. As such, when leaders, HRM, and the board of directors are working equally and together it will create a fair and committed work environment that will manage the fears that employees might have. It is expected that when this happens, employees will be productive and willing to offer better service to customers and be more

proactive. Providing a positive work environment can also help retain employees or induce them to take more initiative by creating new ideas that can ultimately result in improving productivity, creativity, and efficiency, and hence generate more profit for the LB Bank.

Some significant links between employees' fears and their level of commitment were observed from the data. When the fear levels are high, the levels of engagement become reduced. It is then important that managing employees' fears is vital as part of employee engagement in the LB Bank context. To summarise the fear facing employees in the LB Bank context, the researcher provided a full explanation of the term fear ('F.E.A.R.')

F	Family	Fear of losing their job and not being able to support their family; needing stability and comfort.
E	Environment	Fear of working in an unfair and toxic environment.
A	Autonomy	Fear of being dependent and not empowered and autonomous.
R	Recognition/ Recruitment	Fear of not being recognised and rewarded fairly.

In order to manage this F.E.A.R, the participants from this study recommended that all stakeholders at the LB Bank need to be involved with decisions, from top down and vice versa. It is perceived that when the stakeholders work together they will establish an environment that supports employee engagement. Therefore, the responsibilities of the stakeholders are discussed in turn:

- At the bank level: As illustrated from the current findings and previous studies from the literature, the role of the board of directors is essential in promoting employee engagement. The board's responsibility begins with outlining the mission and vision of the bank. The mission and vision together act as the key strategy of the bank that guides how all the other stakeholders can become involved and contribute their energy to the organisation's culture, policies, and practices. In addition, it helps create an effective working environment that empowers all the workers to get expected results. Therefore, the suggestion is that the board of directors should enforce a policy where employees who are recruited through 'wasta' are not rewarded, promoted, or given responsibilities unless their performance is good; maybe this could reduce levels of disengagement among the workers.
- At the human resources management/personnel level, the findings illustrated that the role of HRM is strategic and key in promoting employee engagement within the LB Bank context. This argument is in alignment with the Ulrich model that emphasises the fact that HRM is a strategic partner in any organisation (Ulrich, 1996). The Ulrich Model emphasises the importance of the role of HRM as a strategic partner in working closely with business line leaders to identify competencies needed for any company's success. In addition to its strategic role, this model highlights the importance of HRM during change and in fostering employee engagement. With HRM being a major facilitator and business partner, its role starts from recruiting,

moving to training, compensating, planning, and organising to learning (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Guest & Woodrow, 2012).

The findings also showed that HRM's role is important in achieving organisational objectives, in creating a high-performance culture, and in ensuring an engaged employee environment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). According to the findings and the research previously developed (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Guest, 2017; Ulrich, 1996), HRM emerged as a key player in shaping a productive and efficient environment that fosters employee engagement. This starts by implementing a professional talent recruitment strategy, providing a training and development strategy that enhances employees' careers and skills, implementing a recognition program full of fairness, and creating a positive work environment while establishing transparent communication where everyone involved contributes their ideas. This way, developing an organised and professional human resources department in the LB Bank context that is aligned with and part of the bank's strategy can help to enhance productivity and promote engagement.

However, one of the main problems is 'wasta'. Unfortunately, 'wasta' cannot be eliminated from the LB bank culture even though it is impacting the psychological status of employees. Therefore, HRM needs to promote transparency by developing a logical and systematic scheme to cope with 'wasta'. This scheme should create a fair and non-toxic environment. This is not an easy task; however, it should be a priority for enhancing the level of engagement at the LB Bank. Since most of the

findings of this study on the role of HRM are in agreement with Guest (2017), Ulrich (1996), and Armstrong & Taylor (2020), one can argue that the LB Bank can try to use these completed studies in the LB Bank context.

- At the leadership level (middle managers/senior managers): In agreement with previous studies, the findings of this study show that employee engagement and leadership style have a direct link. This outcome supports the importance of leadership and its impact on employee engagement (hence, Appendix VIII presents the attributes that a good leader is expected to have). As such, the participants from this current study suggested that those attributes could help with supporting and improving a culture that promotes engagement levels among the LB Bank workers.
- At the employee level: Most of the participants from this current study highlighted that 'human capital' is significant for the LB Bank. In addition to human capital, the data also shows that employee voice is essential if the bank wants to improve engagement within its organisation. When the employees' concerns are disregarded or not taken into consideration by the leadership, most workers feel worthless and demotivated. In this way, the employees' levels of engagement and commitment to the organisation's goals and objectives will be affected. Therefore, employee voice can make them feel valued and may trigger them to expend their efforts willingly.

In conclusion, in order to manage employees' 'F.E.A.R', stakeholders need to work together to promote a working environment that engages all the

workers at the LB Bank. The ways in which all the stakeholders can work together (without complications of such practices as 'wasta') will now be assessed in the LB Bank context.

7.4 Recommendations and Contributions to Practice and Knowledge

The main practical contributions of this study to the LB Bank are summarised in the following two points:

7.4.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This study examines the empirical evidence that the researcher has collected, and it addresses stakeholders' views on employee engagement at the LB Bank. It contributes to an understanding of the ways in which the tenets of specific theories (JDR, SET, ORT, LMX, etc.) and frameworks that have already been developed on employee engagement in the Western world can be extended to the LB Bank. This study has established a direct linkage between employee engagement and 'wasta', revealing that 'wasta' is one of the major impeters to engagement since it is perceived as a promoter of unfairness, distrust, and lack of transparency at the LB Bank, thus leading to F.E.A.R among employees and negatively impacting the level of engagement.

7.4.2 Contribution to Practice

This study has revealed that to promote engagement, all impeters identified in Figure 6.1, especially 'wasta', must be properly managed. This cannot be done without alignment among all stakeholders at the LB Bank to ensure fairness, trust, and transparency. Thus, each stakeholder

must be accountable in order to foster engagement at the LB Bank. This starts from the top and moves down, from direct management (whether the board, executives, or senior or middle managers), through to HRM, and then to employees themselves; all stakeholders are jointly fundamental influencers on employee engagement, as they understand the gaps in the system. Consequently, for this study a conceptual framework (Figure 7) explaining employee engagement by linking the theories and the research findings at the LB Bank was developed. Furthermore, the researcher used the findings of this study and the existing theories to develop a toolkit, 'I-PIC', that can be used by the bank leaders at the LB Bank to manage some of the hindrances to engagement – mainly 'wasta' – especially during change.

A. Stakeholders Alignment: “The ‘W.H.O.L.E’ to avoid the Hole”

To summarise and explain the importance of stakeholders' alignment and its impact on LB bank, the researcher coined a phrase: the 'W.H.O.L.E to avoid the Hole'.

The study illustrates that the alignment of and coordination and interaction between major influencers of engagement will have a direct impact on the bank, leading to a an organisational culture of increased productivity and performance and positive levels of both individual and employee engagement. In 2018, Pass et al. pointed out the importance both of the alignment and accountability of each stakeholder in an organisation. According to them, each shareholder has a role to play. Consequently, Pass et al. (2018) developed a framework setting out the role of each stakeholder

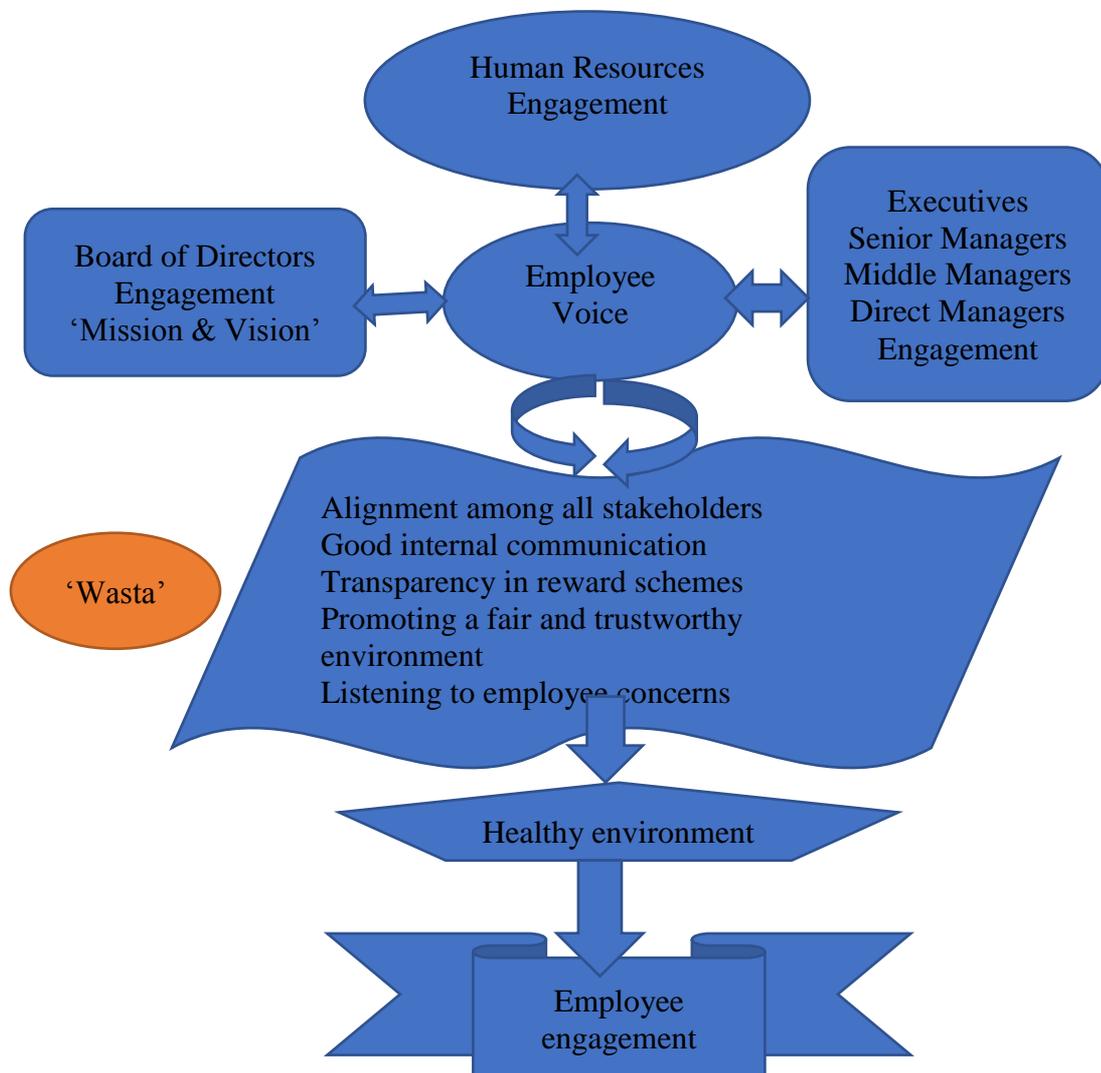
in fostering employee engagement. However, within Lebanese culture, the problem that will disrupt the alignment between stakeholders is the practice of 'wasta'. Taking into consideration Pass et al.'s (2018) study, the researcher set the research findings at the LB Bank within a theoretical framework (Figure 7 a & b), with the aim of helping managers at the LB Bank gain a better understanding of employee engagement, but also to recognise the threat posed by 'wasta'.

Figure 7a: If 'wasta' is not contained and properly managed, and if no alignment between stakeholders exists, a toxic environment will emerge:



Therefore, the bank needs the ‘W.H.O.L.E to avoid the hole’ – in other words, without the alignment of all parties at the LB Bank (board of directors, HRM, management/leaders, and the employee voice), engagement will not emerge, leading to a ‘hole’ in the system (metaphorically speaking). This slogan highlights in one sentence the holistic approach (a ‘Top-Down’ and ‘Bottom-Up’ approach) needed to stimulate employee engagement at the LB Bank (Bakker, 2015).

Figure 7b: shows that when alignment, transparency, and good communication exist, the impact of ‘wasta’ will be marginalised.



Thus, the bank needs to ensure that “the aspect of the ‘W.H.O.L.E’ to avoid a hole at the LB Bank is relevant”. The model of the W.H.O.L.E. is presented and analysed below:

- W-** **With** the commitment, engagement, collaboration, and coordination of all parties involved, employee engagement will be promoted
- H-** **Human** resources department and engagement
- O-** **Organisation’s** and board of directors’ commitment
- L-** **Leaders’** and management’s commitment
- E-** **Employee** voice and commitment

Some of the recommendations developed from the findings of both the literature and primary research are now discussed in relation to this idea.

- Yearly survey: HRM, the board of directors, and the leaders of the bank need to develop an engagement strategy that can be conducted on an annual basis. They will help evaluate and measure the workers’/employees’ perceptions on satisfaction, motivation, productivity, and engagement. The results from the survey can then be shared and discussed with relevant leaders and personnel. These people will then brainstorm the results with a view to proposing solutions that can be executed into action plans (Kruse, 2015). The survey results can be used as a baseline that can be discussed with all LB Bank internal stakeholders to identify where employees’ and the bank’s perceptions of existing gaps resonate. Focus groups or one-to-one interviews can be conducted at least monthly. Each focus group can be composed of workers from different levels within the LB Bank organisational structure, i.e., members of the executive board,

senior managers, middle managers (from head office, back office, and front office), and the HRM department. The role of the focus group is to collect data and come up with feasible, smart, and applicable proposals. The key objective is to listen to the employee voice, come up with proposals, and make sure each proposal is applicable, so that an implementation strategy can follow. Also, the gaps between stakeholders that stem from the perceived misunderstandings and miscommunication can be discussed.

- Managers/Leaders: They need to be accountable for improving employee engagement on a yearly basis. Leaders or managers can ask the workers for whom they are responsible about their engagement levels. According to Kruse (2015), the best strategy an organisation can adopt for employee engagement, instead of being top-down, is to be from the bottom-up. Therefore, leaders are not the problem-solvers, employees are. They should contribute to the solutions for their problems as they see fit (Kruse, 2015). Senior leadership, management, and HRM should not presume to have the best answers or solutions, especially for complex issues such as engagement, motivation, satisfaction, and commitment.
- Recruitment process: The senior leadership and management, including HRM, of the bank can work together to develop a recruitment strategy that acknowledges that human resources is the human capital that can support and make clear the vision and mission statement of the bank. Even if the LB Bank employs a recruitment framework, 'wasta' and personal relationships play a role in the

recruitment process. Therefore, this framework should be reviewed and re-assessed, paying attention to Lebanese culture, especially 'wasta'.

- Service quality: Consultants who are committed to delivering service excellency can be hired to champion quality issues.
- Innovation and creativity issues: Consultants specialising in that area can be employed. In addition, HRM can support the recruitment strategy by allocating workers to those positions or to jobs for which they are suitable to avoid de-motivation, anxiety, and stress (Pinder, 2014; Saks, 2022; Karatepe, 2013; Alzyoud, 2018). People tend to excel when they are given a role that fits their personality (Albrecht, 2011). For example, a sales job can be assigned to an extroverted person and not to an introvert. This will help individuals to show their true traits to satisfy the needs of the bank (Albrecht et al., 2021). This will make employees motivated, happy, and willing to go the extra mile within the LB Bank context.
- 'Wasta': 'Wasta' is unavoidable in Lebanese culture; therefore, senior leadership and management, including HRM, need to position those people recruited through 'wasta' where their existing skills complement the requirements of the job (Bacon, 2006). An assessment of their capabilities can be done to see where their qualities are suitable. This way, the bank's leadership and HRM can try to find the mid-point where 'wasta' culture and the bank's interests can function without compromising levels of engagement. For instance, a clear and professional job description, a performance

management process, and coaching services can be implemented. Such processes support the JD-R theory that describes how the work environment can impact employee behaviour.

- Training: The bank has invested a lot in training programs internally and externally over the years. However, the process of selecting candidates for training has been limited to certain personnel at the bank. In addition, the areas or topics covered in the training have also been aimed at particular jobs and responsibilities. As such, training has not been focused on workers' personal growth and development. Sibson (1976) suggests that training is important in ensuring that employees are performing well by enhancing their skills and expertise. Smith (1999) suggests, in similar fashion, that 'Knowledge is Power', i.e., providing people with quality information is key to bringing out the best in them in order to develop their independence, confidence, and productivity. This belief supports the self-determination theory whereby employees need to have a clear career path developed through continuous training if they are to improve their knowledge and so increase their commitment to meeting the organisation's goals (Semwal & Dhyani, 2017; Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). In addition, the training program should aspire to meet market demand and employees' needs.
- Reward system: Performance management has been applied at the bank for over four years. However, it lacks professionalism in the way it is practiced. In addition, the reward system does not include a positive reinforcement system in which the workers' efforts are linked

to elements of reward. It is important that leadership bases the reward system on individual merit, where performance is linked to job description. When implementing a meritocratic approach, the reward and performance systems need to be transparent so that employees can trust the systems and their leaders. This approach supports social exchange theory, which stipulates that employees will be motivated and ready to put extra effort into achieving the organisation's goals when they feel and perceive that they are valued and appreciated by the bank. Thus, when the bank ensures a good working environment full of fair recognition and opportunities for growth, and offers adequate financial benefits and non-financial benefits, employees must reciprocate with a certain standard of performance to help the bank achieve its objectives.

- Communication: This study has highlighted the importance of internal communication in motivating and supporting employee engagement. This finding is reinforced by the existing academic literature that communication plays a positive impact on the level of employee engagement (Ammari et al., 2017; Pongton & Suntrayuth; 2019; Mustamil et al., 2014). Accordingly, communication entails the sharing of:
 - Information concerning the strategies that explain the vision of the bank.
 - Data about the challenges faced by the bank and the expected solutions.

- A clear strategy for the HRM career development and training program.
- Clear strategies and policies that support the recruitment and reward management systems.
- Guarantees that the employee voice is listened to so that leadership can deal with employees' frustration. Therefore, the solution needs to find a practical way of following a two-way communication system.
- A clear organisational and hierarchical structure that supports the typical 'wasta' culture that has caused problems and complexity for the LB Bank management.

In conclusion, securing employee engagement *"is the root to making a productive environment at the LB Bank"* (SM1). The perception is that leadership acknowledges that individuals are motivated differently and that engagement is not about overwork; rather, it is concerned with putting people first so as to ensure commitment and satisfaction, and so that employees are emotionally, behaviourally, and cognitively present at work. This is all with the aim of achieving high levels of productivity (Albrecht, 2011). Conversely, if the practices are not well managed or planned, over-engagement, resulting in burnout, can lead to long-term negative health problems (Kular et al., 2008).

The strategic W.H.O.L.E concept has been developed to explain and summarise the 'Top-Down' and a 'Bottom-Up' approach to managing the F.E.A.R aspects found among non-managerial employees. In addition, in

order to avoid low levels of engagement (i.e., those aspects creating the 'hole'), the joint effort of all internal stakeholders, with attention paid to the 'employee voice' and employee relationships, can support engagement in the LB Bank workplace. This can also result in increased productivity and better performance of services for customers. Even though the W.H.O.L.E concept sets out how each stakeholder is involved within the organisation, employee engagement is a process that involves continuous interactions between LB Bank leaders and non-managerial employees.

B. The I-PIC: A toolkit for employee engagement in the LB Bank context

To critically investigate the effectiveness of employee engagement during the change process in the LB Bank context and to develop a comprehensive approach that is inclusive for all, a toolkit was developed for this study using the findings from the primary research and the previous studies on engagement. The 'I-PIC' toolkit is a strategic model that the senior leaders from the LB Bank can implement during a change period and overcome the main impeders to engagement. The model considers that the involvement of all the engagement influencers is relevant. The I-PIC toolkit will be piloted within a branch of the LB Bank to see how credible or appropriate it is, especially during this period of change and in the management of change.

The I-PIC toolkit includes essential components that can be chosen to manage change and ensure employees' commitment to the organisation and their engagement with the changes happening in it. I-PIC can be used by management daily or during change to encourage employee engagement.

The stages of the I-PIC toolkit include:

I – Identify and Initiate the change

P – Plan the change

I – Implement the change

C – Celebrate, Compensate, and Continue

i. **Identify and initiate the change:** Kotter (1996, 2008) and the data from the participants suggest that awareness of the need for change is key. Therefore, understanding the urgent need for change and to develop it is vital (Kotter, 2008). At this stage, people are not serious and are not feeling the urge to change; they are in complete denial (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). This stage is equivalent to Lewin's unfreezing theory, as it prepares the groundwork for change. This can be done through:

- Holding a meeting with stakeholders to explain the new strategy of the bank, especially through listening to the employee voice and concerns.
- Sharing the bank's mission and vision by middle managers, board of directors, and senior managers with the rest of the stakeholders to ensure their commitment. Once the vision is explained and the strategies are formulated, the implementation of change becomes simpler (Ponti, 2011).
- Explicitly discussing how managers will organise brainstorming sessions. The sessions will involve those people immediately affected by change and who are involved with change management. Together they will contribute on ideas and solutions before engaging with the change process.

- Listening to the employee voice – this will help understand the way people are responding to change and how they expect it to be conducted. This way, employees will be engaged during implementation. In addition, the employees will feel valued.
- Middle managers and senior leadership discussing and further reassessing problems that keep emerging as well as the board of directors regardless of what solutions may have been developed.
- Creating the belief and the urgency that change is relevant for the organisation's survival, and that employees are the resources that can make it happen.

Therefore, operational employees play a huge part in supporting the management of change. This stage is critical since change is not easy for some people to accept.

ii. Plan for the change (getting ready for change): Change creates uncertainty and fear at all levels of the organisational structure and hierarchy within the LB Bank. However, Ponti (2011) argues that leaders are more concerned about the failure of the change process. The findings revealed that the role of the bank's senior management is to manage employees' fear. When the fear is not managed and controlled, the buy-in and implementation of the change will be difficult. Therefore, it is important that all parties understand the reasons why change fails. This will help senior leaders and operational leaders develop a systematic plan or strategy that will help evaluate and assess points of failure (Ponti, 2011). As such, the researcher acknowledges that implementation can also consider the

concepts from the previous studies and literature about change management. For instance, Cawsey et al. (2012) suggest that in order to have a good plan for change, profiling employees undertaking the change and organising them into categories is recommended. Thus, 'change agents', who take a formal leadership approach to change, will be expected to take a lead. Similarly, 'change initiators', who identify the need for change and who act as the guardians and protectors of change, are relevant. In addition, 'change implementers' have the responsibility to make changes happen by plotting out the path, cultivating support, and reducing the resistance for all those affected by change. Then there are 'change facilitators', who become mediators between initiators, implementers, and recipients of change by providing support and guidance. All these roles will help 'change recipients', who are affected by the change process and are in need of change management support. This second stage (planning for change) requires a full performance management assessment (i.e., a 360-degree assessment) to identify the skills and knowledge needed for the change (Passenheim, 2010). When filtering is completed, there is a need to design and develop the guidelines, templates, and checklists for the change process regarding the systems, structures, training, and communications (Hiatt & Creasey, 2012). These guidelines can be customised to fit the vision and mission statement of the LB Bank.

- iii. **Implementing the change** (changing and sustaining behavioural change): Senior leaders' role (i.e., at the executive level) is to create

a shared vision and to help maintain and support change. They also tend to lead the change throughout the bank (Burtonshaw, 2008). Creating smaller teams to lead and facilitate the change is essential. During the implementation phase, the LB Bank must avoid losing qualified employees. It is important that answers are given to any questions that employees might have, and that all the phases of change are continuously explained. This will help alleviate fears and relieve stress. This also may help develop an awareness of what to expect, and finally to establish positive attitudes where people are willing to do whatever they are asked to do (Hiatt & Creasey, 2002). The key factors contributing to the implementation of change were developed from the findings and the previous study and literature (Kotter et al., 2021; Kotter, 2012; Schmidt & Jackson, 2005; McGonegal, 2020; Blumenberg, 2021; Albrecht et al., 2023; Kotter & Cohen, 2012; Beijer and Gruen, 2016 and many others).

- Provide direction by setting the rules, checklists, guidelines, and templates for the execution of change management (Hiatt & Creasey, 2002). Then, assign 'change initiators' and 'change implementers' (being the core team) to lead the change.
- Empower by motivating and creating a devoted team for the mission and vision to be completed.
- Communicate by conducting regular meetings with agent teams in preparation for any unforeseen changes. It is an art to identify the type of audience and to direct the leader to decide the topics that

can be discussed. By classifying the audience, leaders can tailor their communication appropriately.

- Prepare for the meetings and allow feedback and criticism. Transparency on issues and problems that were uncovered during implementation should be discussed. People's concerns can be addressed and listened to, and the plan can be adapted under execution as per the required situation even if some delays are required to ease the process.
- Manage conflict by establishing 'change facilitators' to reduce resistance and smoothen the process. Their role is to remove obstacles to avoid failure (Burtonshaw, 2008).
- Coach people to build capacity and talent. Training and close monitoring should be provided to lead and sustain the change.
- Engage employees, as employee engagement is the route to making a change successful. These findings are in compliance with the literature, which emphasises that employee engagement is becoming more crucial for ensuring the success of an organisation and stresses that organisations with high levels of employee engagement will outperform those with low employee engagement, especially during change.
- Motivate people by creating a challenging environment and a culture that recognises, appreciates, and provides some job security to employees. At this stage, management theories about motivation should be used to keep the momentum going and find out what urges them to outperform and succeed. As stated by

Kotter et al. (2021), creating short-term wins enhances self confidence among teams and members.

- Conserve or maintain by not declaring victory too early, in case disappointments happen later on in the process (Kotter, 2002) and workers return to previous behaviours as they abandon the new changes, i.e., by adopting a relapse and regress approach. The change can be anchored (Kotter, 2002) to develop the new behaviours, beliefs, and communication styles so that they become part of the new culture.

iv. Celebrate, Compensate, and Continue (Kotter, 2012, 2008; Kotter et al., 2021): Celebrate success by assessing and executing performance management practices on the outcomes while recognising accomplishments. This makes people aware of their success and may encourage eagerness behaviour to continue. Corrective measures can be implemented when needed. At this stage, compensation and rewards play a major role. Then, continuing and planning the next step towards a new change becomes the target.

In conclusion, this study confirms that most elements of the current theoretical framework (social exchange theory, self-development theory and JD-R theory, LMX and COR theory) on employee engagement are applicable to the LB Bank context as basic principles that can be used to create a culture that promotes employee engagement. The study also stipulates that there are two parties involved in ensuring commitment. On one end there are senior leaders and HRM, while on the other there is the

employee. Therefore, to succeed in promoting engagement, all parties or stakeholders need to be involved.

As such, the current findings helped the researcher develop a toolkit derived from many literature researchers (such as Kotter et al., 2021; Kotter, 2012; Schmidt & Jackson, 2005; McGonegal, 2020; Blumenberg, 2021; Albrecht et al., 2023; Kotter & Cohen, 2012; Beijer & Gruen, 2016 and many others). Senior leaders can incorporate this toolkit as part of their long-term strategy and then implement it throughout the departments of the bank for daily use during the change process. This may secure the commitment and engagement of the employees at the bank. If this toolkit, which I have given the name 'I-PIC' based on its principle characteristics, is to achieve its expected outcomes, all of the LB Bank stakeholders (especially those internal to the organisation) need to be involved. The joint involvement of stakeholders also helps with preventing a disengaged environment.

Lastly, as discussed earlier, the employee-employer relationship is complex. Employee engagement is a HR function/practice that can be employed by the LB Bank to increase productivity and efficiency. However, the practice is constrained by numerous impeters that are typical across different sectors, as confirmed by most previous studies. As such, employee engagement is needed by the bank as a long-term profitable strategy. Even though engagement is beneficial, it can also be challenging. While the bank has not developed solutions to solving the problems of engagement, the developed framework and toolkit presented in this study may offer strategies to support maximising the potential levels of engagement at the bank.

7.5 Research Limitations

Like any research, this study has some limitations that need to be highlighted to give a clear picture of the research and its contribution to knowledge.

The first limitation relates to the sampling method. Participants were recruited from one of the largest banks in Lebanon. Thus, the study was limited to one context or case study and so the findings cannot be applied to other banks within Lebanon. For instance, there is a possibility that smaller banks might have different engagement problems due to their size and available resources. Employees who participated in the interviews were mainly senior managers, middle managers, and non-managerial staff. Senior executives and board members did not participate in the sample. As a result, the whole population of the bank was not presented. The small sample size and the low diversity of participants can be considered to have created too small a study to fully reflect different opinions across the Lebanese banking sector and the Lebanon context. However, the limited number of participants is supported by qualitative method, which acknowledges that a small sample size can still develop an understanding and in-depth knowledge from the participants.

Second, given the fact that the researcher is a member of the senior management team, and given the nature of the research (i.e., qualitative, interpretive, explorative), there are possibilities that the researcher unintentionally showed bias and that participants might not have been fully transparent or genuine with their responses due to fear of retribution. Therefore, it may be challenging to draw unbiased and firm conclusions.

A third limitation is the possible loss of meaning in translation since some of the data collected during this study was translated from Arabic/French into English. Despite the efforts made to minimise the loss of meaning, it was unavoidable, since three languages are not always easy to link due to cultural differences, especially Arabic to English.

A fourth limitation hindering the progress of this study was time constraints. At the start of the study, the researcher had to balance professional responsibilities, research commitments, and family. At a later stage, in 2019, the political revolution in Lebanon began negatively impacting the banking sector, and this affected the progress of the research. Then, in January 2021, the researcher was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which led to further disruption and pressure that impacted the quality of research. With more time, it would have been feasible to collect more data that would have provided more robust and broader insights into the subject under research.

7.6 Recommendations for Further Research

This study establishes bases for further research as follows:

- 1) Further research is needed to investigate the relationship between HRM, senior leadership, and bank engagement and the culture of engagement through the change process. This can introduce aspects of empowerment, trust, and care, a safe operating environment, and an alignment of vision among all parties involved, including employees, in managing the F.E.A.R of employees.

- 2) The main assumption under consideration is that the implementation of employee engagement triggered by the vision and mission statement of the LB Bank can be analysed. The study can be extended to consider both top to bottom and vice versa (Bakker, 2015). As such, the assumption is that the findings can positively influence the commitment of both HRM and the senior or top management/leaders to enforce the mission and vision of the LB Bank. It is thought that improving the culture of the bank will lead to better employee engagement, which will result in improving the performance and profitability of the LB Bank.
- 3) The appropriateness, practicality, and feasibility of the proposed conceptual framework and the I-PIC toolkit need to be tested in different settings. This can open the door for conducting further research in this field of knowledge and practice.
- 4) As most of the previous studies on employee engagement have been conducted within multinational companies in the European and US context, future research can include other contexts (such as the Middle East) as well as smaller enterprises and privately owned firms. However, the immediate focus can be on the LB Bank to narrow the breadth of the contribution for a DBA research project. In narrowing the breadth, the gap in knowledge relating to the Lebanese Bank can be addressed with some initial findings, enabling others to address the Middle East region in regard to employee engagement.

7.7 Personal Reflections

Finishing this study has been a really challenging, stimulating, and inspiring journey. My academic and professional knowledge throughout the research period has been interwoven and I feel that I have matured intellectually, practically, and skilfully in diverse facets of my life. My personal and professional growth has indeed transformed. My capacity to reflect critically, to assess sources and to write research has significantly developed during this DBA journey. I started to reflect alone at work and in my home, receive feedback, and always try to answer the why, how, and what questions. This developed my critical thinking and analysis. This has helped me see things from a different perspective and to challenge my pre-set ideas and assumptions about reality. I also learned to be more flexible and objective in accepting people's perceptions on critical subject areas, since in general, life can be explained from subjective viewpoints that provide plurality and contradictions. Lastly, my study is going to be shared among the senior leadership and the HRM department to help them develop an understanding of the implications of change on employee engagement. Researchers may use this study as a case study to understand the complexity of engagement within the Lebanese banking context. As well, researchers may use the study as a basis for further research.

In addition, a study can be conducted which includes the political revolution that started in Lebanon on October 17, 2019, the collapse of the Lebanese economy and its banking sector, and the COVID-19 epidemic that impacted the whole world, by addressing the following questions:

- How much can the concept of engagement be sustained?

- How practical is this concept and practice during a crisis?
- To what extent is it applicable?

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Appendix II – Sample of Participant Data

Criteria for the selection of participants:

Participants	Selection Criteria
Five Senior Managers (2 female/ 3 male)	+ Responsible for a line of business at the LB Bank + Responsible for a group of branches – network managers from different areas + have a minimum of 10 years' experience in management
Five Middle Managers (4 female/ 4 male)	+ must have directly managed and supervised a minimum of five employees + have at least 3 years' experience in management
Non-Managers/ Juniors (4 female/ 4 male)	+ have been at the LB Bank for at least a year

Demographic information of the five Senior Managers:

Senior Managers	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Years of Experience	How Long at the Bank	How Long in the Current Position
SM1	Male	50-59	Postgraduate	more than 15 years	6-10 years	6-10 years
SM2	Female	40-49	Postgraduate	more than 15 years	more than 10 years	2-5 years
SM3	Female	40-49	Graduate	more than 15 years	more than 10 years	5-10 years
SM4	Male	above 60	Graduate	more than 15 years	6-10 years	2-5 years
SM5	Male	above 60	Graduate	more than 15 years	more than 10 years	more than 10 years

Demographic information of the five Middle Managers:

Middle Managers	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Years of experience	How Long at the Bank	How Long in the Current Position
MM1	Female	40-49	Postgraduate	More than 15 years	More than 10 years	6-10 years
MM2	Female	40-49	Postgraduate	More than 15 years	More than 10 years	2-6 years
MM3	Female	40-49	Graduate	More than 15 years	6-10 years	2-5 years
MM4	Female	40-49	Postgraduate	More than 15 years	6 to 10 years	2-5 years
MM5	Male	50-60	Graduate	More than 15 years	more than 10 years	6-10 years

Demographic information of the eight Non-Managers/ Junior employees:

Non-Managers	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Years of Experience	How Long at the Bank	How Long in the Current Position
J1	Male	50-59	Non-educated	More than 15 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years
J2	Male	50-59	Postgraduate	More than 15 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years
J3	Female	30-39	Graduate	More than 15 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years
J4	Female	20-29	Postgraduate	Less than 5 years	2-5 years	2-5 years
J5	Female	30-39	Postgraduate	5-15 years	6-10 years	6-10 years
J6	Female	20-29	Graduate	Less than 5 years	2-5 years	2-5 years
J7	Male	30-39	Graduate	6-15 years	More than 10 years	2-5 years
J8	Male	30-39	Graduate	5-15 years	6-10 years	6-10 years

Appendix III - Sample of the Coding Process

Frequency of key players that can play a significant role in improving employee engagement:

Codes	Frequency	Senior Managers	Middle Managers	Non-Managers	Quotations examples
HR	15	4	4	7	<i>“The Human Resource Department plays a key role in seeing the loopholes in the system”</i>
Direct Managers	12	4	4	8	<i>“Direct supervisors are the key players who play the most important role in improving the level of employee engagement”</i>
Senior Managers	11		4	7	<i>“Leaders and bank executives from all levels are responsible for ensuring engagement”</i>
Executives and Board	6	3	2	1	<i>“It starts from the mission statement of the board to the employee”</i>
Employees	7	1	2	3	<i>“It takes two to tango: employees, direct managers, senior managers”</i>

11	Is the nature of the research such that contentious or sensitive issues might be involved?		X	
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If you have ticked **Yes** to 9, 10 or 11 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. In relation to question 10 this should include details of what you will tell participants to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help). You may also need to consider risk assessment issues.

		YES	NO	N/A
12	Does your project involve work with animals?		X	
13	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups? Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students)	Children (under 18 years of age)	X	
		People with communication or learning difficulties		
		Patients		
		People in custody		
		People who could be regarded as vulnerable		
		People engaged in illegal activities (eg drug taking)		
14	Does the project involve external funding or external collaboration where the funding body or external collaborative partner requires the University to provide evidence that the project had been subject to ethical scrutiny?		X	

If you have ticked **Yes** to 12, 13 or 14 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. There is an obligation on student and supervisor to bring to the attention of the Faculty Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

If you have ticked **Yes** to 13 and your participants are **patients** you must follow the Guidelines for Ethical Approval of NHS Projects.

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the Faculty Ethics Committee.	X
Give a brief description of participants and procedure (methods, tests used etc) in up to 150 words.	
The questionnaire will be tested on all categories of employees (i.e. Managerial position, non-managerial and Senior management) in financial institutions in Lebanon (mainly Banking sector) to be able to see the difference in motivation as human being gain more experience. The Pilot Questionnaire will divided into 2 parts: part one will be done on an interview basis to be able to get feedback on the structure and design of the questionnaire and part two will be distributed through email to employees..	
I also confirm that: ii) All key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview are appended to this application.	X

<p>Or ii) Any key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview schedules which need to be finalised following initial investigations will be submitted for approval by the project supervisor/module leader before they are used in primary data collection.</p>	
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STUDENT RESEARCHER

Provide in the boxes below (plus any other appended details) information required in support of your application. THEN SIGN THE FORM.

Please

Tick Boxes

Signed Ghina Sabra Dandan ... Print Name... Ghina Sabra Dandan Date April 2014
(Student Researcher)

Please note that any variation to that contained within this document that in any way affects ethical issues of the stated research requires the appending of new ethical details. New ethical consent may need to be sought.

The completed form (and any attachments) should be submitted for consideration by your Supervisor/Module Tutor

**SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR
PLEASE CONFIRM THE FOLLOWING:**

<p>I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the Faculty Ethics Committee</p>	
<p>i) I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule)</p> <p>Or</p>	
<p>ii) I have checked and approved draft documents required for this proposal which provide a basis for the preliminary investigations which will inform the main research study. I have informed the student researcher that finalised and additional documents (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule) must be submitted for approval by me before they are used for primary data collection.</p>	

Please Tick Box

SUPERVISOR AND SECOND ACADEMIC SIGNATORY

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL (please delete as appropriate)

1) THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED USING AGREED UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES AND IS NOW APPROVED

2) THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE AS INVOLVING NO SIGNIFICANT ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, BUT FINAL APPROVAL FOR DATA COLLECTION IS SUBJECT TO THE SUBMISSION OF KEY DOCUMENTS FOR APPROVAL BY SUPERVISOR (see Appendix A)

Signed..... Print Name..... Date.....
(Supervisor/Module Tutor) Signed..... Print Name.....
..... Date.....
(Second Academic Signatory)

**APPENDIX A
AUTHORISATION FOR USE OF KEY DOCUMENTS**

Completion of Appendix A is required when for good reasons key documents are not available when a fast track application is approved by the supervisor/module leader and second academic signatory.

I have now checked and approved all the key documents associated with this proposal e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule

Signed..... Print Name..... Date.....
(Supervisor/Module Tutor)



Business, Leadership and Economics

PROPORTIONATE REVIEW APPROVAL FEEDBACK

Researcher Name:	Ghina Sabra Dandan
Title of Study:	The "H.O.L.E. concept": a proposed employee engagement model for the Lebanese Banking Sector.
Status of approval:	Approved

Thank you for forwarding the amendments requested by the Ethics Panel.

Action now needed:

Your project proposal has been approved by the Ethics Panel and you may commence the implementation phase of your study. You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site.

Signed: Date: 21.09.2018

Dr. Manjusha Hirekhan
Chair of the Staffordshire Business School Ethics Panel

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Manjusha Hirekhan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Appendix V - Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Sir/ Madam

Empowerment, delegation, rewards, centralisation v/s decentralisation, leadership skills, continuous investment in training, dignity and respect, and many other slogans have been discussed and tested over the last decades to determine the best solutions for attracting, motivating, and retaining talents as well as improving employee engagement.

Employee motivation and engagement are constant challenges. What is motivating to one person is not the same for another. The main questions that remain to be answered are: Why do employees leave? What are their expectations at work? Is it money? Are they psychological or emotional? Is it their boss? Is it the absence of career goals? How can you make employees engage with their organisations, especially during change?

The purpose of this semi-structured interview is to highlight the key factors that might contribute to employee engagement with their organisation. The researcher will be targeting all categories of employees (management and non-management) at the Lebanese bank under study.

All data will be anonymous and will only be used as part of my research for the programme of Doctor of Business Administration, Staffordshire University, UK.

Anonymity is preserved throughout the study.

Confidentiality and privacy of the results and data collected from the respondents are ensured.

Voluntary participation participation is voluntary. Interviews are totally voluntary, and any questions can be disregarded or not answered. Participants have the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time without prior notification.

Thank you

Ghina Sabra Dandan

Email: ghina_sabra@yahoo.com

Appendix VI- Definition of Employee Engagement in the Lebanese Banking Context

Appendix VI shows different narratives of employee engagement as viewed by employees in the Lebanese banking context.

Categories	No. of participants	% of participants
Employee is actively and emotionally involved in achieving the bank's objectives	11	65%
Employees are devoted	11	65%
Employees are proud to be part of this bank	10	59%
Engagement means transparency, empowerment, and getting people involved in decision-making to boost their performance	10	59%
Employees are self-motivated and committed	10	59%
Employees are happy and satisfied	10	59%
Employees are creative and heard by their management	10	59%
Employees feel valued, respected, and appreciated	10	59%
Employees are productive and passionate about what they are doing	10	59%
Employees are willing to go the extra miles to meet the bank's objectives	9	53%
Employees are committed to the bank's goals	8	50%
Employees show a positive attitude	7	47%
It is an operational strategy to improve employee performance	5	29%
Strategic tools to manage business operations	5	29%

Appendix VII- Links Between Employee Engagement and Bank Performance

Appendix VII shows how employees in the Lebanese banking context describe the links between employee engagement and bank performance.

Categories	No. of participants	% of participants
The more an employee is committed, the better service is offered, leading to customer satisfaction and retention	12	70%
A disengaged employee has a negative impact on the bank. This will affect other employees, consequently affecting the bank negatively	12	70%
Engagement creates an environment full of energy, positivity, and dedication leading to better results	11	65%
Employee engagement and bank performance are interrelated	11	65%
Employee engagement is crucial for increasing bank performance	10	58%
Employee engagement leads to creativity and devotion, and thus to better results	10	58%
Employee engagement is a sign of success through which the bank can boost productivity and performance	9	56%

Appendix VIII- Characteristics of a Good Leader in the Lebanese Bank Context

Some of the interesting findings that agree with the literature regarding the main characteristics of a good leader who can contribute towards fostering a good culture, leading to employee engagement, can be summarised as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a visionary and entrepreneurial character (Papalexandris & Galanaki, 2009)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a flexible leader and role model for their employees by choosing the right strategy at the right time (Stamm, 2009)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a good listener, truthful, fair, and honest (Stamm, 2009). Leaders should speak regularly and honestly with their people, explain things and clear up any ambiguities, and mostly listen to them to check what is missing so as to be supportive and helpful (Thomas, 2009)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value their people, believe in them, empower them when needed, listen to them and treat them fairly (Heathfield, 2019).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be supportive and help their team (promote teamwork), and accept and adapt to change during organisational change by being transparent (Kotter, 2012; Thomas, 2009),
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate clearly, and in a transparent way, the requirements of their job to meet the organisation's goals (Mendes, 1996; Kotter, 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge their employees to be creative, defend their ideas, and induce people to work harder and find the best solutions (Bacon, 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support their team when needed and enforce self-management by closely coaching them to improve engagement (Kotter et al., 2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep learning and stay up to date with the technology and the changes. People need to feel that their leader is knowledgeable, up to date, courageous, visionary, and professional. They need to trust their leader at all levels: ethical, personal, and professional (Bacon, 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be humble by seeking support from their team. For instance, involve their people in new employee selection. Ask them to coach new employees. Let them be their voice sometimes. Ask their people what they think. Give them assignments with some degree of risk; enable them to take decisions (Bacon, 2006)